

# RIBA

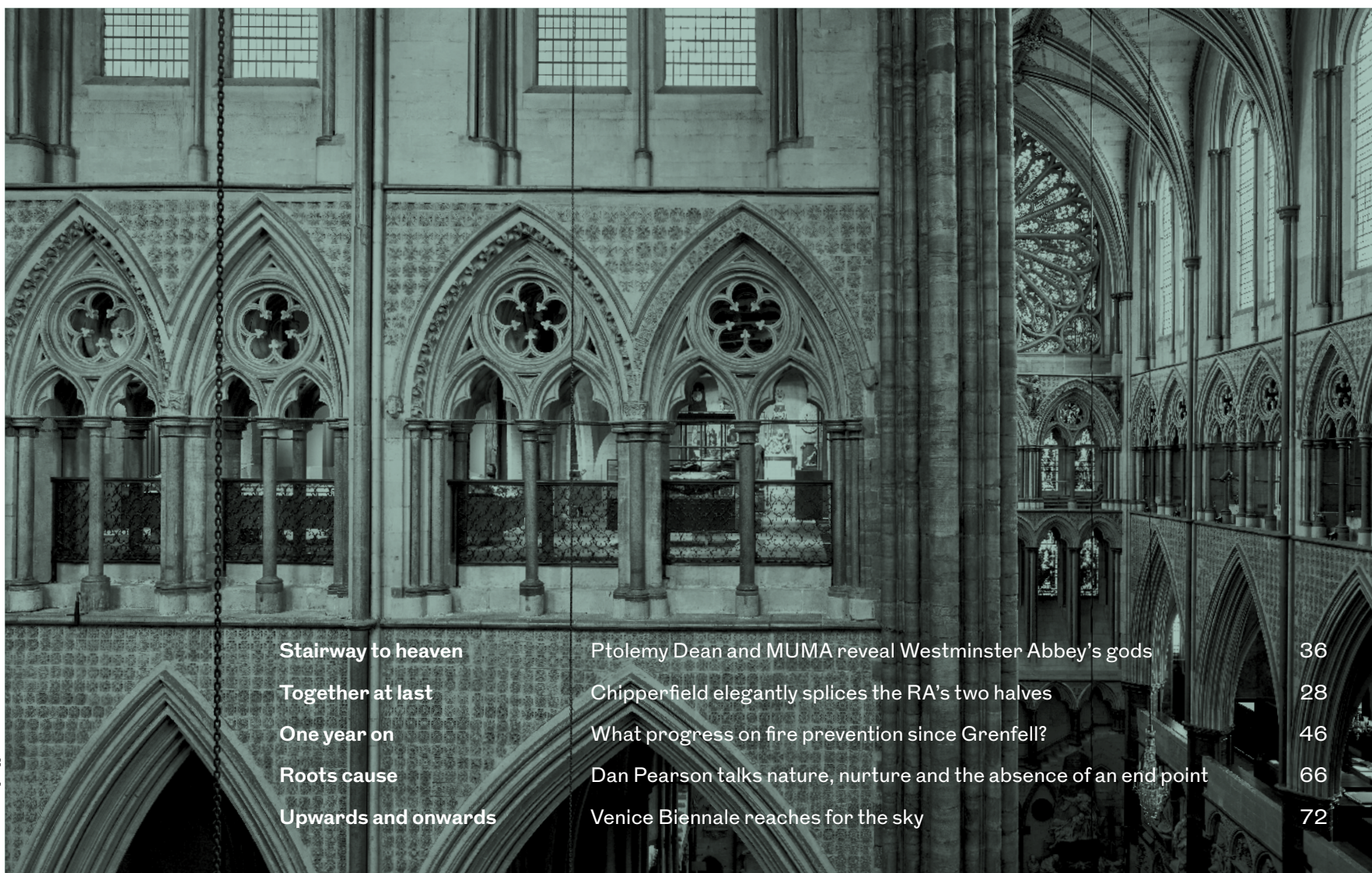
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The RIBA Journal

£15/€30/US\$35

# J

**July  
2018**



**Stairway to heaven**

**Together at last**

**One year on**

**Roots cause**

**Upwards and onwards**

Ptolemy Dean and MUMA reveal Westminster Abbey's gods

Chipperfield elegantly splices the RA's two halves

What progress on fire prevention since Grenfell?

Dan Pearson talks nature, nurture and the absence of an end point

Venice Biennale reaches for the sky

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ALAN WILLIAMS



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There are subtle links connecting some of our stories this issue

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SEAN YU



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**RIBA**  
**J125** YEARS

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# 1: Buildings

A barn in the city (P14), urban and rural housing (P20) and two fruitful interventions into differently historic buildings, that's what we have for you on our buildings menu this month. And it's delightful to note an admittedly tenuous thread between three of them. The award-winning housing in Salford (P08) is by Buttress Architects, the firm founded by a former surveyor to the fabric of West-

minster Abbey, the aptly named Donald Buttress. There, we look at the first external addition to the abbey since Hawksmoor in 1745 by the present incumbent, the no less happily named Ptolemy Dean (P36). Dean is the brother of artist Tacita Dean whose exhibition 'Landscapes' opens the new Royal Academy by David Chipperfield (P28). As ever, we bring it all together. ●

## ONLY ON RIBAJ.COM

'What I am obsessed with is that when you start to make an environment where people engage, you have the premises of wellbeing'

**Michael Mossessian**  
explains his approach  
to design: [ribaj.com/mossessian](http://ribaj.com/mossessian)

**Below**  
RA Collection Gallery, page 28.



## RIBA Regional Awards:

### corrections

**Yorkshire:** Mark Hopton of LDN Architects was Project Architect of the Year, sponsored by Taylor Maxwell.

**South:** The Sultan Nazrin Shah Centre, Worcester College, Oxford won Building of the Year, sponsored by Artifice Press.

**South East:** The Sibson Building by Penoyre and Prasad received the Building of the Year Award.

# Streets ahead

Timekeeper's Square and Carpino Place, by Buttress, are starting to stitch Salford landmarks together again

Words: Isabelle Priest Photographs: Daniel Hopkinson

Walking into Salford over the bridge from Manchester Piccadilly station, it is easy to notice how quickly the pace and atmosphere of the urban realm changes. The trendy bars, glassy offices, trams and pedestrian grain dissipate to be replaced by wide roads for fast-moving cars, generic 1980s buildings that could be residential or commercial and vast empty plots, not even hoarded off.

Despite this, all the former signals of a city centre are there – a neo-classical town hall from 1827, a grand Victorian 'Education Office' from an era when learning was

on the up, a royal-stamped hospital and a gothic cathedral – in an enfeebled form. The desertion and disconnectedness of these monuments make it feel like a city-sized game of chess – only the major pieces are left.

Timekeeper's Square, designed by Manchester firm Buttress, on a former 1960s slum clearance site is, however, the second of a number of new schemes in a masterplan drawn up by Glenn Howells Architects nearly a decade ago, intended to stitch these wavering landmarks back together.

The project sits north of Chapel Street,

slightly adjacent to the main thoroughfare, behind the former Manchester and Salford Saving Bank (now a partially boarded up accountant's office), and between Ellison Hadfield's cathedral and Robert Smirke's magnificent Georgian St Phillips Church. It has been developed by the English Cities Fund to create a place young families would be prepared to move to from the centre of Manchester for more space and garden, while remaining close to the bright lights.

As a result, the scheme is arranged to work with the existing heritage to encourage







#### IN NUMBERS TIMEKEEPER'S SQUARE

**3,327m<sup>2</sup>**  
gross internal floor area

**£5.6m**  
construction cost

**£1,683**  
construction cost per m<sup>2</sup>

**Above** At Timekeeper's Square, windows on gable ends are designed to encourage natural surveillance of the street.

**Opposite top** View of Carpino Place down South William Street.

**Opposite bottom** The new St Philip's Square is designed to create a communal centre at Timekeeper's.

## The scheme is arranged to work with the existing heritage to encourage community

community. A new public square packed full of artwork is the central focus, vistas between landmarks connect, and most of the homes, of which all are houses, lead from the garden gate into a private communal car and cycle parking courtyard (where people can meet putting out the bins, or over the fence).

The scheme promotes a very traditional high-quality typology and layout with York stone paving and black railings inspired by the church, but with contemporary coloured grey Weinerberger 'Smoked Branco' brick. The brick reinforces the communal identity and makes it feel distinct at an urban scale, though it could have been a tad more yellow. Of the 36 homes, every block has variation of type; from 2-4 beds over 2-4 storeys. Larger houses, just three at the back of the site, connect to a listed Georgian red brick terrace. Front gardens, kitchens facing the street and gable-end windows are prioritised for defensible space purposes – a feature pushed by the council because the area can still be rough. Nevertheless, gutters have been recessed, and window transoms and surrounds concealed to create minimal facades. There is nothing extravagant in the architecture, but the passion is in the detail, consistency and thoughtfulness regarding a scheme to help repair its setting and imbue a calmer character. Indeed, Timekeeper's was so successful in creating a pleasant place that the houses sold out off plan before foundations were laid, and English Cities Fund acquired a supplementary site to the south of Chapel Street, beyond the original Salford masterplan area, to do it all again.

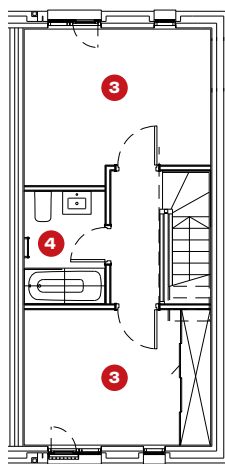
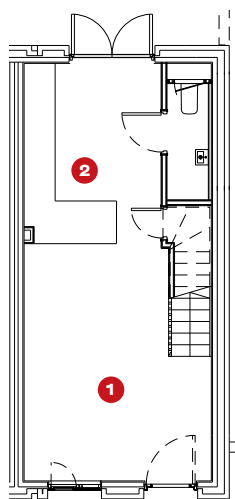
Named Carpino Place, this twin development replicates the Timekeeper's Square template almost exactly in smooth red, orange and purple brick. This slightly gaudy colouring derives from its harsher





Ground floor plan

First floor plan



- 1 Living space
- 2 Kitchen
- 3 Bedroom
- 4 Bathroom

**Left** Typical kitchen and living space.

**Above** View of Timekeeper's terrace facing the square, with rear private parking spaces.

## Credits

**Architect** Buttress  
**Client** The English Cities Fund  
**Main contractor** John Turner  
**Structural engineer** Integra Consulting  
**M&E engineer** Hannan Associates  
**QS & CDM advisor** Appleyard and Trew  
**Landscape architect** Hyland Edgar Driver  
**Bricks** Wienerbeger  
**Kitchens** Project Kitchens

IN NUMBERS  
CARPINO PLACE2,268m<sup>2</sup>

gross internal floor area

£4.5m

project value

£1,984

construction cost per m<sup>2</sup>

**Below** Carpino Place facing Oldfield Road. High inflation between the projects meant that although construction costs at Carpino were higher, the finishes are lower quality.

urban context along an arterial road, Glenn Howells' plot 1 Vimto scheme next door and the Islington Mill behind.

Laid out on a smaller 2500m<sup>2</sup> plot and completed three months ago, 22 houses form a perimeter around a new central parking courtyard, with iron and timber fencing details all kept the same. The development has pedestrianised South William Street too, planting on both sides to give a leafier, friendlier, more secluded and slower feel, yet metres away from the traffic – even if the street works are tarmac rather than stone.

The only discernible differences between Carpino and Timekeeper's are the roofs, which are pitched, and the windows. Juliette railings are removed, and the single French door at the front ground floor exchanged for ordinary casement, while one on the upper storey is now narrow. Although the former seem sensible and barely noticeable, the latter surprisingly disrupts the overall composition of the houses so they come off a bit plainer and more ordinary. But these adjustments don't feel like bad compromises given the necessity to meet a £1984/m<sup>2</sup> budget. What does matter is that the developer's confidence (and perhaps the contractor's) may have run away too much after such initial success. Lessons learned reportedly led to a quicker construction, but some aspects of the work are scrappy – bricks, for example, are laid jaggedly.

In all, however, these are two incredible schemes and it is a joy to see Salford being pieced back together at last. The quality of Carpino Place is not quite up to scratch but its placemaking is, and it is possible to imagine different communities sensing themselves at home both there and at Timekeeper's, yet still identifying as part of a larger, re-established and forward-moving whole. I'm looking forward to what's next. ●







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**Stair at the Fondazione Feltrinelli, Milan**

Photograph Danica Kus

Words Jan-Carlos Kucharek

Given that she's devoted a whole series of images to the study of the liminal space between floors, one can safely assume that Slovenian photographer Danica Kus has a bit of a thing about stairs; more specifically, those by Herzog & de Meuron. Kus has photographed the firm's work at the Tate Switch House and Madrid's Caixa Forum, among others. In this image, she concentrated on its spiral at the Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, a Milan-based research body dedicated to the

study of contemporary society. 'Staircases appear extraordinary to me – like the journey of life,' she says, explaining the impact of this one's dark, slow vortex. The basement that it descends to from a spacious lobby above was a constricted volume and the spiral's indulgence surprised her. But capturing it was, like the journey of life, beset with difficulties.

'The staircase was huge but the space was tight. I had to resort to a 17mm wide-angle lens which caused enormous distortion – until I managed to find the "sweet spot" where the room and stair form felt right relative to each other,' she recalls. Kus may have been reminded of a wreath of smoke as she pressed

the shutter – or not; either way, the shot is rendered in chiaroscuro.

Kus studied economics at Slovenia's Maribor University before moving to Brussels with her partner 18 years ago. It was only there that she discovered a passion for photography that she'd previously been quite unaware of.

'When I started to work in the red light of a darkroom it felt like entering another world,' she recalls. So perhaps her stated desire to photograph the grand spiral stair of H&dM's Blavatnik School of Government at Oxford would feel, in every respect, like coming full circle. Life's funny like that. ●



# Full beam

Feilden Fowles' timber barn shines in its urban context

Words: Eleanor Young Photographs: Peter Cook

In many a small once-rich village the mas-siveness of a tithe barn stands out as symbol of communal hope and plenty. There are few such symbols today: rebuilt churches have front doors squeezed in beside the flats that funded them, flimsy-looking new schools are secured by high fencing.

But on a tight sliver of site, in hailing distance of the bright blue of Grimshaw's former Eurostar terminal at London's Waterloo Station, is a remarkable symbol of generosity and gathering in. Here the enormous doors are thrown open to the excluded children of the city to experience the pastoral pleasures of feeding animals and growing your own food. As you emerge from the

darkness of the grimy railway arches you come across a play on wood, spinning out into a hexagon on the outsized gable end.

This energetic wooden edifice doesn't suggest a city farm. That form, drip-fed by small grants and busy volunteers, is pretty established: animal pens, concrete and straw gradually upgrading to sheds with maybe a Portakabin office and loos and some polytunnels. Perhaps a wholesome café set away from the mucking-out.

Waterloo City Farm is more invested in its place. Here the half-acre leased from Guy's and St Thomas' Charity is likely one day to be part of a redevelopment of St Thomas' Hospital. But with the completion of the







#### IN NUMBERS

**290m<sup>2</sup>**

barn area

**£143,000**

barn construction value

**£493/m<sup>2</sup>**

barn cost

**1,630m<sup>2</sup>**

total farm area  
(barn, studio, annexe,  
pens)

**£343,000**

farm construction value

**£210/m<sup>2</sup>**

farm cost

**Left** Four rows of columns spread the load evenly on the London clay. Supporting trusses and ties, like the suspended lights, seem as if they might have been summoned up for spatial delight.

**Opposite left** The larch timbers catch the light to give animation to what could otherwise be a blank wall.



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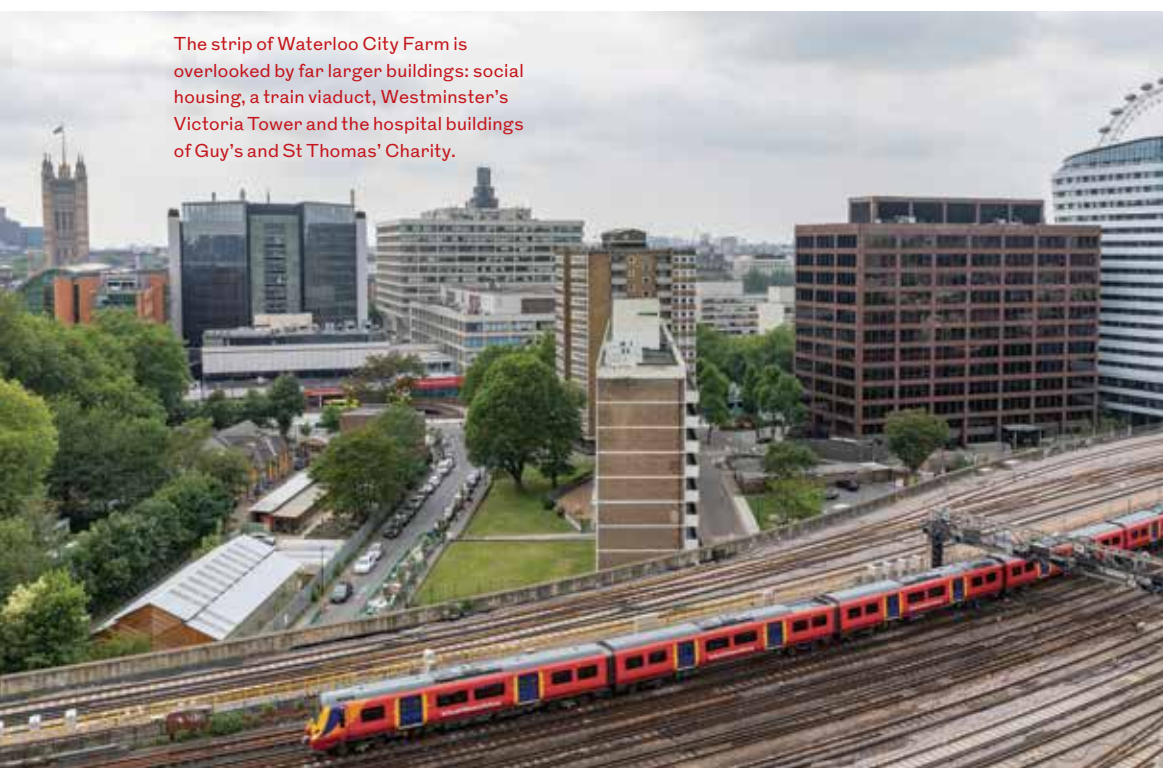
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The strip of Waterloo City Farm is overlooked by far larger buildings: social housing, a train viaduct, Westminster's Victoria Tower and the hospital buildings of Guy's and St Thomas' Charity.



#### Full site axonometric

- 1 Barn
- 2 Growing plots
- 3 Pens
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Studio
- 6 Courtyard garden
- 7 Annexe



#### Credits

**Architect** Feilden Fowles  
**Client** Oasis Waterloo Hub Jamie's Farm  
**Structural engineer** Peter Laidler, Structure Workshop (studio and farm)  
**Landscape design** Dan Pearson Studio (courtyard garden)  
**Barn timber frame and east gable** Timber Workshop  
**Cladding and classroom** Mansel Land  
**Studio timber frame** Timber Workshop  
**Cladding and fit out** Miles Builders  
**Lighting design for education barn** Re:Lit (of Michael Grubb Studio)

The galvanised doors roll open to a structure that quite distracts you from the straw bales

barn it has the appearance of more committed neighbour than that temporary permission would suggest.

This is the city follow-up base for Jamie's Farm, a social enterprise which takes children in danger of exclusion from their urban school to the countryside for a week for activities and therapy at farms around the country, or gives them a six-week version of the same in the city. It is also the base for architecture practice Feilden Fowles, whose co-founder Fergus Feilden is brother to the eponymous Jamie Feilden of Jamie's Farm. It is Feilden Fowles' pro bono design work that led to the neatly planned animal pens and to the elegant studio offices it leases, offering desk space for the charity administration looking onto a delicate Dan Pearson-designed garden. And now to the barn.

The way the barn sits across the whole site at one end gives it an enormous presence – while transforming the rest of the linear site into a more comfortably compact shape. The larch and corrugated glass-fibre form reaches up 6.1m and the galvanised doors roll open to a structure that quite distracts you from the straw bales: three-bayed, with tall Douglas fir columns creating a nave of diamond trusses which are beautifully awkward. The full-length 'transepts' of the outer bays have angled members that impinge just enough on head height to feel like there should be long tables under them at which to gather and sit. Slots at skirting height and between the cap of the roof and the lower plane keep air moving, letting in just the occasional gust of weather.

Early ideas for a steel portal frame were scuppered by the soft London clay beneath. The raft of concrete foundation needed the load spread fairly evenly across it, thus the bays. Instead of time-consuming mortice and tenon joints or individually drilling each screw hole for the joints Feilden Fowles has used ply gussets, each plate CNC-drilled (a



**Top left** Despite its small scale, the barn has a generosity in its simplicity, the patterns on the gable end falling into a comfortable unity.



**Below left** Feilden Fowles' spare, elegant studio was completed earlier – a low timber and steel building running along one edge of the site.

**Below right** The barn in use for teaching before the walls were added.

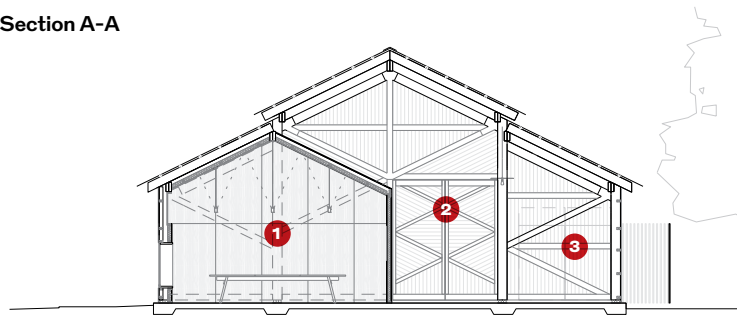
total of 1800 connections) if the meanwhile use should end, this also makes the structure more easily demountable. From the inside the huge doors are made more human with a condensed, smaller-scale version of the pattern on the outside.

In the corner is a galvanised crinkly tin enclosure, a watertight classroom. There is not attempt to seal the rest of the enclosure, it is an airy space. And light too thanks to the daylight filtering in through the glass fibre. Grant funding was tied to construction packages which meant that this sat first as a slab for some time, then as roof and structure before being enclosed over the last year, with the practice putting £20,000 into the build.

Despite the simplicity of the barn – no loos, only one window – the thought that went into it at all stages is palpable. And, as well as being covered learning space, this gives the opportunity to bring people together who might contribute by hiring the space to the charities running the farm.

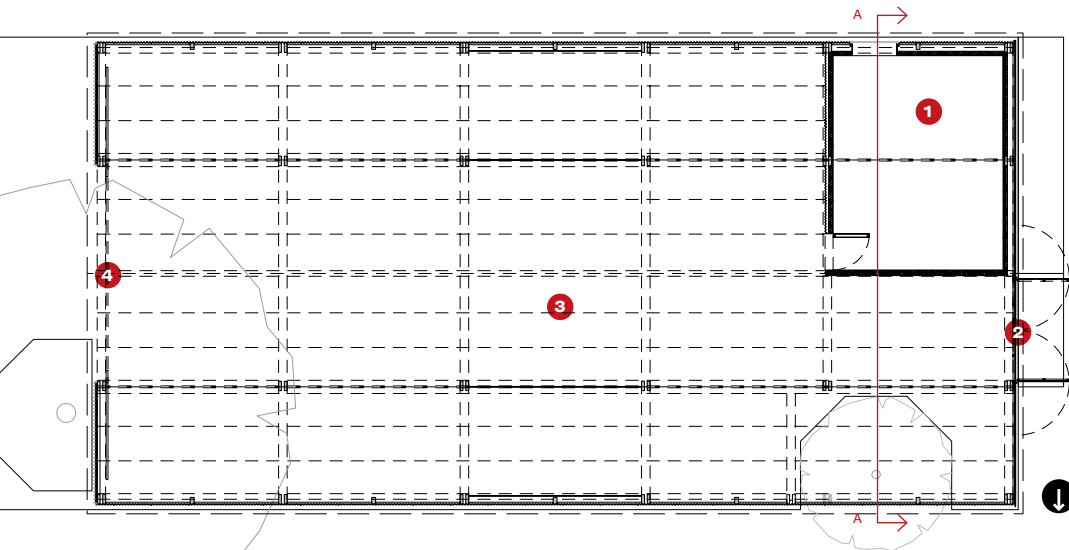
Animal security and the importance of creating a sanctuary in this intense urban environment means that most of the time the barn looks inwards towards its farm. But, like a tithe barn, it can be opened right up on either side – and if what is brought is not grain, then it is at least good things in another form. ●

Section A-A



- 1 Education room
  - 2 Street entrance
  - 3 Barn
  - 4 Farm entrance
- 0 1 2 3 4 5m

Plan





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# Room at the inn

Archio's homes rewrite the familiar story of a failing country pub – the regeneration supplying both funds and customers

Words: Eleanor Young Photographs: French + Tye

If the problems for cities are density and congestion, villages are troubled by supermarkets and farm shops luring shoppers away for their groceries and local pubs propped up by just a few stoic drinkers, exposing the grubby carpets and smoked-yellowed walls. Temple Cloud in Somerset was no exception. Its local Temple Inn was struggling – so a different approach was needed.

The housing around this, named Temple

Gardens, is the second project for Bath and Stratford Homes, the development arm of Red Oak Taverns which took on the pub – one of a batch of 30 – from liquidators. Temple Inn had been closed on and off for a couple of years and the 1,300 population of Temple Cloud meant that it was barely sustainable simply as a pub. Red Oak's plan is to make Temple Inn a place to stay and to eat as well as to have a pint. That meant building rooms

Cast stone window surrounds, asymmetric windows, dormers and guttering bring life and interest to the facades.



Differing plots and the layout give a sense of an older place that grew organically. Here the end of the terrace is visible (left) with the pair of larger houses behind and the converted barn (right).









## This makes Temple Gardens an extra part of the village, rather than a housing estate

as well as reroofing and refitting the pub.

Co-founder of Red Oak and the client at Bath and Stratford Homes, Mark Grunnell, explains the importance of using vacant land not just to create capital to reinvest in the business but also to make better places. 'It is important to us as a community pub business,' he says.

Temple Inn's Georgian facade faces a cross roads of the A37, an old route between Bristol and the South West and still busy with lorries whistling past the houses that line the road. Alongside it was a large car park plus an old barn housing a skittle alley and store, a pub garden and scrub land; a space of opportunity. Bath and Stratford Homes brought along small practice Archio, which it had collaborated with on a pub site in Warwickshire and which it continues to work with, to look at how to do more with the site.

Fitting homes onto the 0.34ha corner site was not going to be a problem but with 70 unremarkable dwellings by David Wilson Homes just completed across the road and a 17th century, grade II-listed pub on site, the



**Above** Inside the attic storey.

**Below** Gable ends face the road on the larger houses.

conservation officer wanted to ensure this development worked harder for the village. Archio was happy to respond. As we enter Temple Combe, its director Kyle Buchanan pulls out a little map to show some of his precedents and we trace them: strong window surrounds, long roof lines, asymmetric windows, dormers in the eaves, courtyards and cottage gable ends facing on the road.

The layout of the nine houses draws on these lessons and defies the sense of a single development. Two larger houses face their gable ends on to a quieter road, the barn is sawn into two interlocking homes and there is a short terrace of five houses (some three bed, some four) with their small gardens backing onto the field behind the site. Alongside the A37 runs a series of letting rooms for the inn, corridors road-side with plenty of sound insulation. The rooms look out onto (and protect) a little green, as the terrace and the homes in the barn gather around it. This is what draws it all together and makes Temple Gardens an extra part of the village, rather than a housing estate.

The layering of public and private is handled particularly well with the houses around this green. Letting rooms have a defensive hedge and border on one side of the green and the green itself is edged by stone walls which become seat or planter. A walkway takes people to their front doors and indented porches while front windows – some kitchens, some living rooms – are defended by brick planters. Paths and edges feel strong here. Roads and cars – and parking – are relegated to the side, giving the green a far more neighbourly







Victorian Coach House by award-winning architect Peter Williams. Ten linked CR-13 rooflights.

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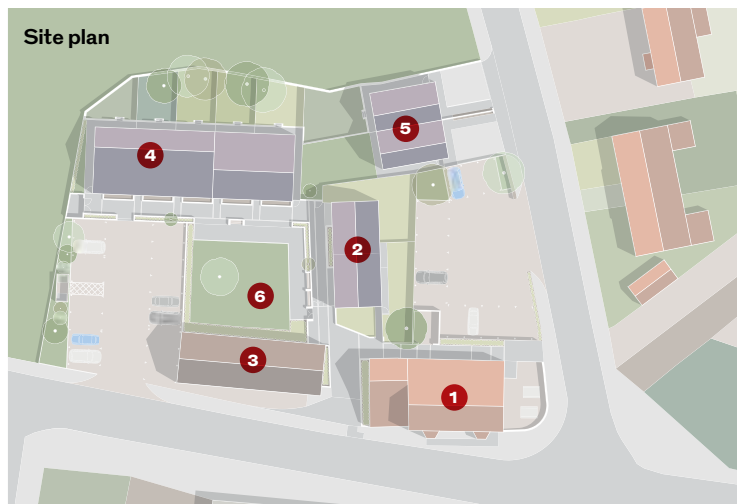


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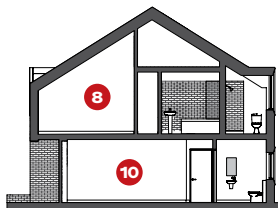
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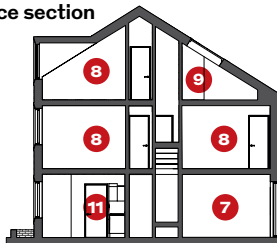




Terrace section A-A



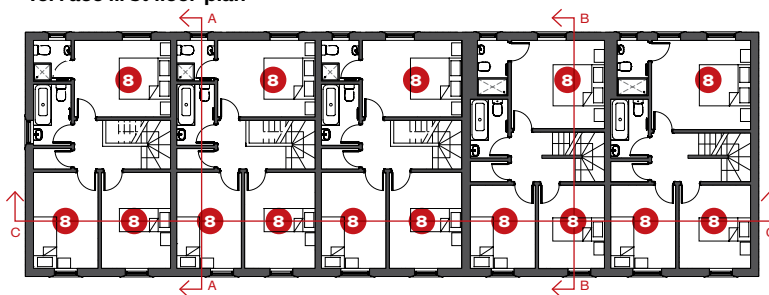
Terrace section B-B



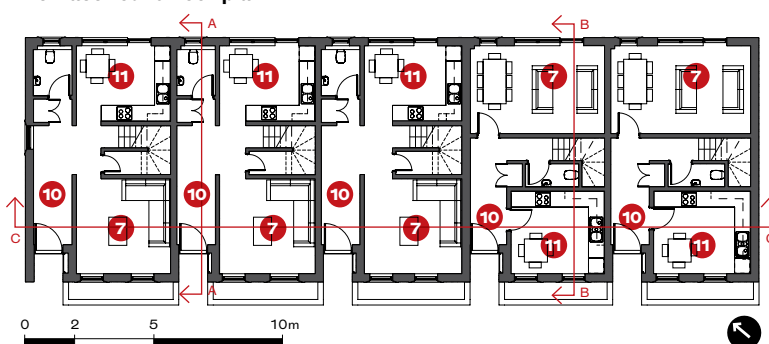
Terrace section C-C



Terrace first floor plan



Terrace round floor plan



- 1 Temple Inn pub
- 2 Barn (now housing)
- 3 Pub letting rooms
- 4 Terraced housing
- 5 Semi-detached housing
- 6 Shared central green
- 7 Living
- 8 Bedroom
- 9 Box room/ study
- 10 Hall
- 11 Kitchen

The edge of the village  
seen from the field.



feel (conversely the semi-detached pair have a more awkward relationship with each other and the street due to having parking right in front of the kitchen window).

You can tell this was a traditional contract by the stones and benches, by the characterful dormer windows and by the gutters. These are done elegantly and well. Gutters are semi-recessed into the brickwork, scoring lines down the facades in aluminium. And the materials make a major difference. The limestone of the pub frontage is taken up on the adjoining elevation, with a local limestone cladding the letting rooms with brick plinth, but elsewhere brick is used – argued as local thanks to the brickworks that was once over the road – with highlights of cast stone in the oversized window surrounds. ‘Which we spent, frankly, quite a lot of money on,’ says Grunnell. It is a difficult call. ‘We’re not very high end,’ he says. ‘Our houses are for sale at a similar price to a national housebuilders’.

From outside the houses look small but the immediate impression is of spaciousness as you step through the high front door.

**Below** Wide hallways, a 2.4m front door with fanlight and a view straight out the other side make the houses feel spacious.

#### IN NUMBERS

1,309m<sup>2</sup>  
total GIA

1,045m<sup>2</sup>  
residential

264m<sup>2</sup>  
letting rooms

9  
houses  
(five 3-bed, four 4-bed)

10  
letting rooms





Dormers and a slit window make the sort of bedroom you'd dream of as a child

**Above** The mixed terrace of two and three-storey houses.

**Below** A path edges the terrace and old barn taking residents from the car park and bike store to their front doors. To the right is the building housing the new letting rooms. A versatile brick wall, bench and planter obscure the green that is just visible from the pub (middle).

#### Credits

**Architect** Archio

**Developer** Bath & Stratford Homes

**Contractor** Ken Biggs Contractors

**Structural engineer** Entuitive

**Quantity surveyor** Ward Williams Associates

**Acoustic engineer** Acoustic

**Interior design** Pembroke Design & Jane Clayton & Co

**Environmental / M&E engineer** One Creative Environments

Ceilings are 2.5m high and hallways are wide (enough for a pushchair or bike, something Buchanan, as a father of young children, is alive to). Staircases in the new houses are generally in the centre of the plan, some top-lit to give an unexpected drama at the centre of the little houses. Bedrooms in attic storeys with dormers and sometimes a slit window to the side make for the sort of bedroom you would dream of as a child.

There is a sense that Archio may have smuggled in an extra window or two, without quite realising it was being generous. The box-room in one house, with barely any headroom, has a rooflight that would make it a tidy little study, elsewhere a rogue rooflight looks onto next door's tiles rather than out to the sky as it might. And the plan size of the semis (a ground floor of 43m<sup>2</sup>) means the scale between rooms favours those whose families spend more time in their bedrooms: at three storeys they have four bedrooms, but the kitchen and living room would struggle to hold guests as well as all the occupants, and have gardens that could barely squeeze in five deck chairs.

How the cheek-by-jowl village qualities will appeal to buyers has yet to be tested. But one of the compact three-bed terraces looking out at the field one way and a neighbourly green and a thriving pub the other, seems a pretty good entry point to village life – very different from the suburban development over the road. And for the pub owners with a long term stake as a next door neighbour and local business there is every reason to hope Temple Gardens will bring new life to Temple Cloud. ●





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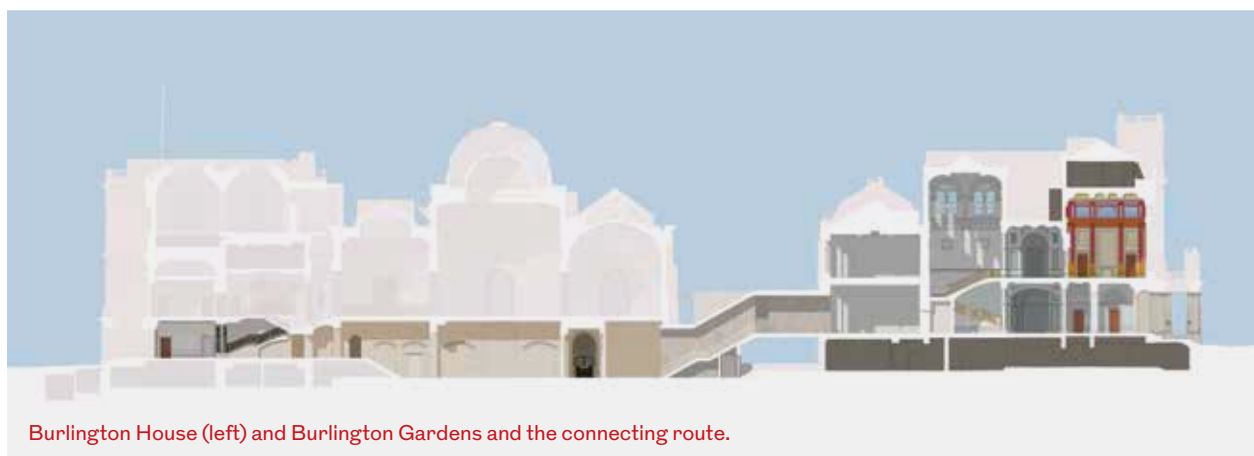
RORY MULVEY



# Speaking volumes

David Chipperfield's painstaking reorganisation and unification of the Royal Academy murmurs rather than shouts, but makes beautiful sense

Words: Hugh Pearman



Burlington House (left) and Burlington Gardens and the connecting route.

The new architecture is everywhere around you at the RA, and at one point there is a radical intervention, but it is all so understated as to be almost unremarkable. Indeed, a cynic might wonder how on earth the Royal Academy managed to spend £56 million on something that – as a casual visitor – you might easily wander through without necessarily appreciating. But being wholly unshowy was exactly the aim. Architect David Chipperfield describes his work over several years at the RA as being like a doctor – prodding the patient, finding out where it hurts, and alleviating the pain in various places. Now the patient has finally been discharged.

Working with his long-term collaborator Julian Harrap on the conservation aspects of the project,

Chipperfield has essentially carried out a big reorganisation, applying an admirably clear masterplan to what was a chaotic, tribal place of sometimes conflicting demands. Placating the tribes – the different departments and interest groups within the RA – was even harder than physically wrangling the complex of buildings into submission and making new spaces within them.

The task looks simple on paper. The RA owns two large buildings. The first is of course Burlington House, facing south across its courtyard to Piccadilly, by various hands from the 17th century onwards including (for Lord Burlington) Colen Campbell and William Kent. Its later galleries and art school were built over what had been the house's gardens. The second is

The Wohl entrance hall at Pennethorne's Burlington Gardens building.

## Chipperfield sees the linking Weston Bridge as 'connective tissue', as if extracted from the two buildings

Burlington Gardens, a lavishly Italianate building designed by Sir James Pennethorne in 1866-70 as the main building for the University of London, and subject to various uses thereafter including the British Museum's ethnographic Museum of Mankind. This, as its name suggests, swallowed up the remainder of the gardens. It faces north to the Bond Street/Savile Row district. The RA took on the building in 2001 and has used it extensively since but it always felt like the annexe it was. Placed almost back-to-back with a forlorn strip of yard running between them, there was no physical connection between these two palazzos, even though the central staircases of both buildings are almost exactly on axis, placed orthogonally on a rectangular plot. Chipperfield has now made that link.

Obvious? Yes. Easy? No. The scheme as built is the third that the RA has considered in recent times. The first was an ambitious millennium-era project by Sir Michael Hopkins that would have glazed over the court, requiring considerable knocking-about of the first-floor galleries to make a route through. That was abandoned as too costly and impractical. The second, by the late Colin St John Wilson, was its opposite: a minimum-intervention project that found a way through along the edge of the plot. That attracted little enthusiasm and it died with its author. Another selection process was held, won by Chipperfield with a project, as he wryly points out, very similar to one he had proposed for the first competition won by Hopkins. This was the Goldilocks scheme: not too hot, not too cold, but just right. The RA's secretary and chief executive Charles Saumarez Smith, who arrived in 2007, was a veteran of two other large cultural buildings projects by Dixon Jones at the National Portrait Gallery and National Gallery. This was valuable client expertise for the RA with its roster of architect academicians – Chipperfield and Hopkins among them.

Chipperfield's Weston Bridge, which makes the leap across the yard to link the two buildings, is pretty much a built diagram in cast concrete and glass. He sees it as 'connective tissue' rather than a bridge, as if extracted from the two buildings. You enter its concrete maw from what was once two of the schools' studios, one of which is now a display gallery for students' work. Stairs and a lift raise it to a height which allows fire trucks beneath, whereupon it debouches in a new smallish gallery at the back of the Pennethorne

### IN NUMBERS

**£56m**  
total cost

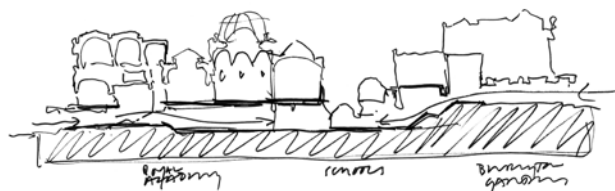
**£12.7m**  
Heritage Lottery  
Fund contribution

**£1**  
annual rent paid  
for the RA's lease

**8,813 m<sup>2</sup>**  
total floorspace of the  
expanded RA campus

**254m<sup>2</sup>**  
size of new  
RA Collection Gallery

**70%**  
increase in public space



**Above** Simple, yes?-

**Right** David Chipperfield RA provides some useful scale. Yes, it is the big window on his bridge.

**Below** Weston Bridge and The Lovelace Courtyard.







**Left** Collection Gallery.

**Below left** The revelation of the project is the reordered vaults.

**Below right** The Dorfman Senate Rooms landing.



SIMON MENGES

building, and from there you filter either side of the staircase into the main hall. The lift shaft element of the bridge enables a deft sidestep to allow for the metre or so difference between the central axes of the two buildings. It boasts one very large window overlooking the eastern end of the yard, now landscaped and given to the art students of the schools as an outdoor space. From this window you also glimpse the backs of the two buildings. Were it not for the need to take as little space from the schools as practicable, presumably the bridge could have been a bit wider: it feels it might sometimes be a pinch-point.

The bridge aside, most of the work has gone into the reinvention of the Pennethorne building with its prodigal amounts of circulation space. A run of what was originally lofty top-lit laboratories along the back – one with an acid-resistant stone floor – has become a group of galleries occupied by a Tacita Dean show for the opening, with Renzo Piano scheduled in soon. The big gallery at the western end now houses a permanent curated display of the RA's own collection. Two other small rooms contain exhibition spaces devoted to architecture. And the very high-ceilinged Senate Rooms at the front are restored by Harrap to a version



RORY MULVEY (2)





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## Critique The Royal Academy

### Credits

**Client** Royal Academy  
of Arts

### Architect

David Chipperfield  
Architects

### Conservation architect

Julian Harrap Architects

### Structural engineer

Alan Baxter

### Services and specialist engineer

Arup

### Landscaping

Wirtz  
International Landscape  
Architects

### Project management

Buro Four

### Cost management

Gardiner and Theobald

### Acoustics

Sound Space  
Vision

### Contractor

John Sisk and Son



### Above right

The Benjamin West  
lecture theatre.

**Below** Hercules  
occupies the vaults'  
former lift space.

The vaults are cleaned and unified with a Chipperfield 'slurry' which he describes as like make-up foundation powder

of their original gaudy colour scheme (elsewhere it is a symphony of pale greys). Finally, the eastern end contains a great new asset: a 250-seat amphitheatre for lectures, debates and presentations. This occupies the same position as the original University of London lecture theatre, long since lost.

The Pennethorne frontage has been restored and its previously daunting street frontage opened up to make more places for people to meet and sit. But for me the revelation is the rediscovery of the previously unseen vaults at the back of Burlington house.

To move between the two buildings from the Burlington House foyer you dive to either side of the stairs and then out the back, descending what were the original garden steps. This brings you to the vaults – the realm of the RA Schools with its corridor of casts, but also previously a place of pipes, cables, storage and the main art lift rising into the central rotunda above. The clutter is now all cleared away, the lift moved out of sight, the floor level lowered, the previously patched vaults cleaned and unified with a typical Chipperfield 'slurry' ultra-thin mortar mix (as previously used at his Neues Museum in Berlin) which he describes as being like make-up foundation powder.

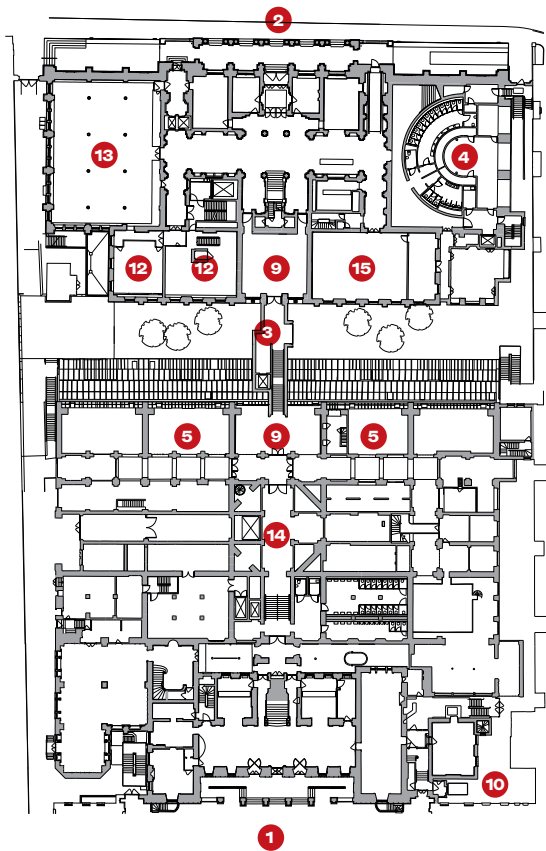
This result is a noble sequence of Stygian spaces, themselves used as a gallery to show how the RA used to teach art, with a huge classical statue of Hercules lurking in the space where the art lift used to be. As you pass through you can gaze to left and right into the world of the art students who you never used to see at all.



SIMON MENGES

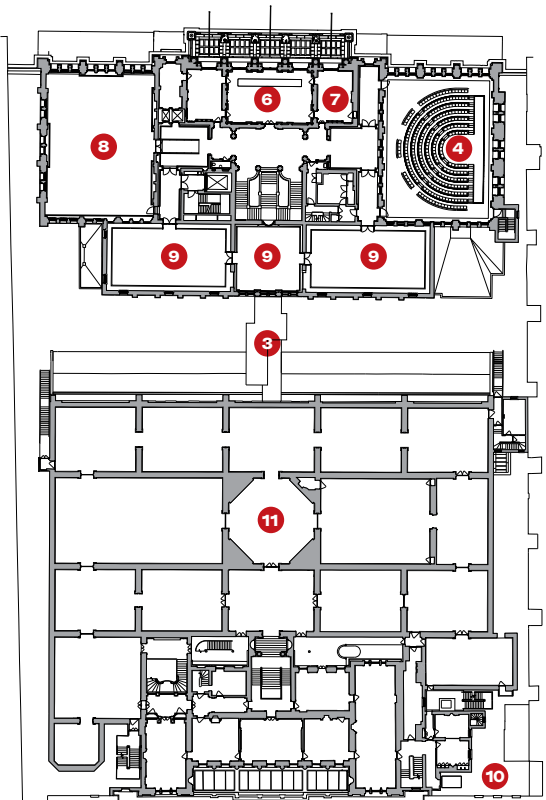
JAMES HARRIS

Ground floor plan



- 1 Burlington House entrance
- 2 Burlington Gardens entrance
- 3 Weston Bridge
- 4 Benjamin West lecture theatre
- 5 RA Schools
- 6 Dorfman Senate Rooms
- 7 Architecture studio
- 8 Royal Academy Collection Gallery
- 9 Gabrielle Jungels-Winkler Galleries
- 10 Keeper's House
- 11 Burlington House central octagon
- 12 Administration
- 13 Pace Gallery
- 14 Vaults
- 15 Clore Learning Centre

First floor plan



**Top** Gallery view of the opening Tacita Dean landscape exhibition.

**Right** Looking up at the ceiling in the Wohl entrance hall in Burlington Gardens.



Taken along with Long and Kentish's earlier completion of the tucked-away Keeper's House – with its (Chipperfield designed) restaurant and bar, Friends' Room and Academicians Room around a tiny courtyard garden – the Royal Academy is now a piece of city rather than a building, its latest design therefore more akin to urbanism than architecture. The public realm is much extended – you can walk all the way through it from Bond Street to Piccadilly and see a reasonable amount of the place without having to buy a ticket. The flexibility afforded by the new galleries means that there need not be awkward gaps between exhibitions. The lecture theatre ought to be a tremendous resource for discourse, debate and performance on art and architecture. There'll also be more architecture in the mix generally.

Those looking for a grand architectural statement in the new Royal Academy will look in vain. There is no British Museum Great Court equivalent here. But the quirks of the place are revealed and celebrated, and it is unified and expanded in a very assured manner. It presents all kinds of possibilities for new uses and activities. ●



DAVID PARRY

JAMES HARRIS



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# High church

Ptolemy Dean's access tower and triforium and MUMA's new gallery at Westminster Abbey continue a process begun by Wren to bring modern amenity to a medieval fad

Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek Photographs: Alan Williams



The Weston Tower is a response to the competing geometries of Poets' Corner Yard.

If the Surveyor of the Fabric of Westminster Abbey, Ptolemy Dean, is feeling the weight of history on his shoulders, he isn't showing it. For his new Weston Tower, which opened in June, connecting the abbey's Poets' Corner Yard at ground to the new Queen's Diamond Jubilee Galleries in its eastern triforium, is the first major intervention on the site since Nicholas Hawksmoor completed its Western Towers in the early 1700s. And, as with the design and fit-out of the exhibition by MUMA, it's a curious but satisfying melange of old and new, carried out, both architects argue, with the same sense of continuity as practised by Dean's predecessors – back to its first surveyor, Christopher Wren in 1698.

In fact, as Dean explains, the triforium only started to take on any semblance of its original intent when in 1699 Wren replaced the decaying high-pointed roof with a flat lead one and installed a floor above the ambulatory's gothic vault. High level gallery chapels such as these, constructed in the 1250s, were common in Norman churches in the 13th century but soon fell out of fashion. Until Wren's floor installation, despite two stone access stairs from the north and south transepts, it would have been impossible to walk up here without negotiating the deep interstices of the vaults. Used as a makeshift viewing gallery and latterly just for storage, it was only in 2006 when the current Dean of Westminster was talking to an archaeologist who felt that





the space should be revealed, that the idea of converting the attic to some useful purpose came about. With its magnificent views back along the nave and over the roof of the Henry VII Chapel to the Houses of Parliament, the new £23 million Diamond Jubilee galleries, bringing together key curated historical pieces from the abbey's collection, are the culmination of that thinking.

### Better access

Making the triforium accessible to all resulted in the Weston Tower, named after its primary donor Garfield Weston Foundation, nestled in the tight site of a former small toilet block between the south transept, ambulatory and Chapter House. The new stone-clad lift shaft, timber stair and hung steel glazed envelope is, Dean explains, 'contemporary gothic' – a direct response to the highly charged context; referential, historicist but in an uncanny way, startlingly modern.

Its look was a pragmatic response to the design brief. The shaft had to be concrete to rise seven storeys and big enough to accommodate wheelchairs and carers, the timber stairs wide and of minimum riser height to ease the ascent of the crowds expected to visit. Faced with the context and the brief, Dean says he let the building tell him what to do. 'We looked at a Scarpa-esque approach, but it was too big for a modern, minimalist solution. Too big not to be something; it had to play by the abbey's rules. With the lift shaft square, we settled on the octagon form – two squares rotated – which if you look around is very much a Westminster trope, present on the famous 13th century Retable as well as all over the Henry VII Chapel.' The strong geometry also clearly identifies the form, jostling with the competing geometries of Chapter House and Chapel, tucked behind Gilbert Scott's 19th century buttress. The tightness of the site also necessitated the construction of octagonal cantilevered raft foundations, the soil dug out and sampled until it reached the consolidated bed of Thorney Island gravel 2.7m down. The abbey's medieval builders had done the same, by instinct rather than scientific analysis.

The most distinctive aspect of Weston tower is its delicate glazed screen of thousands of individual leaded lights, inspired by Wren's plain, rectilinear Renaissance tracery; but their fineness required structural gymnastics to achieve it. Coupled



**Above** The positioning of artefacts in the triforium was predicated mainly on the avoidance of direct sunlight.

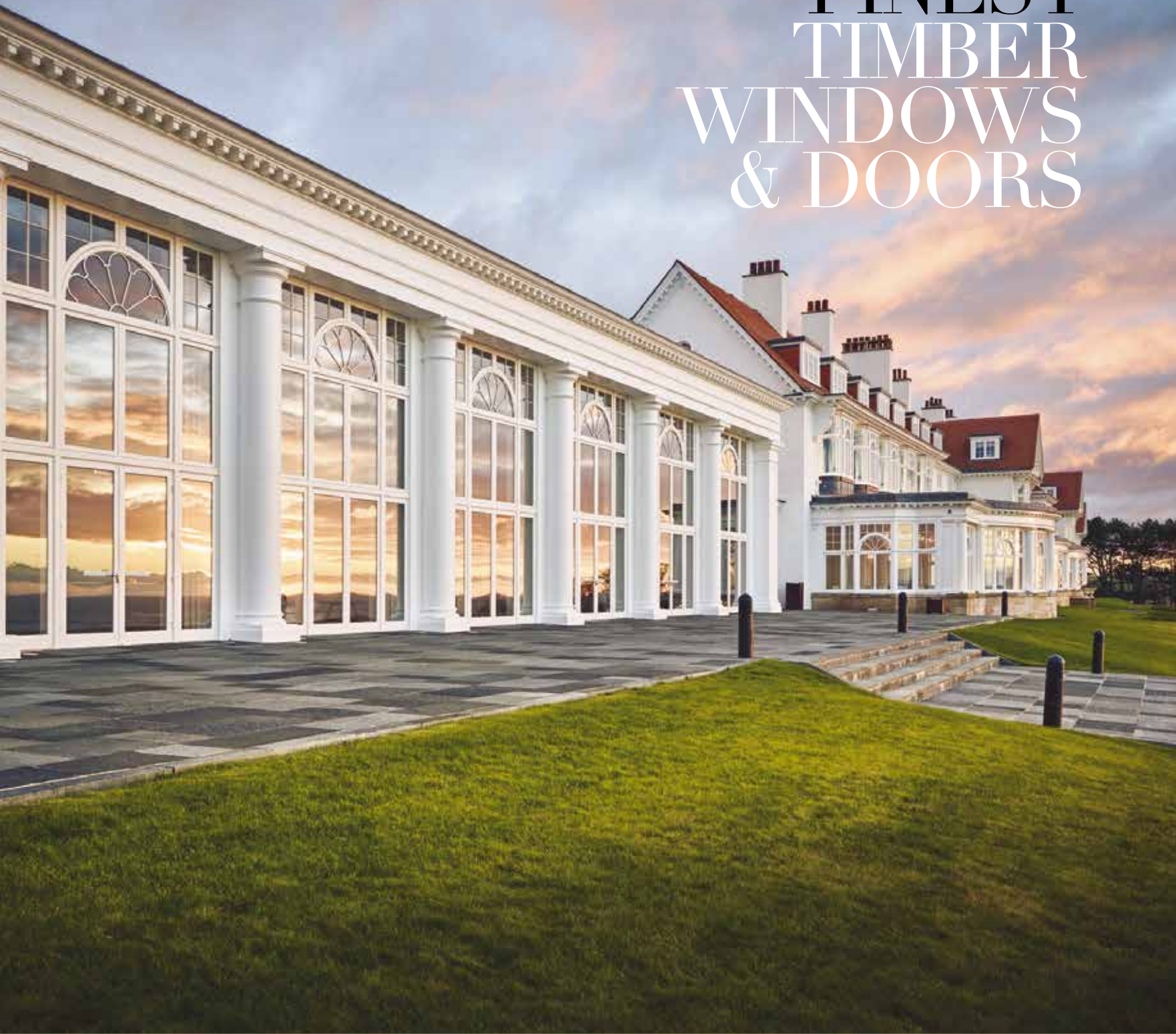
**Opposite left** Distant view of the Weston Tower nestling between transept, ambulatory and Gilbert Scott's 19th century Chapter House buttress.

The sinuous metal tracery that winds its way up the facade is, Dean admits, a caprice, but he justifies it as a 'functionality of the soul'

with Dean's demand that mullions and transoms be as slender as possible, engineer Price & Myers settled on a radiating 'crown' of 203mm steel beams above the lift shaft and perimeter beams, its loads transferring down via eight 152mm universal channels which also house the drainage pipes for the steeply pitched octagonal roof. The glass screen was then 'hung' from these perimeter beams. With steel working best in tension, it achieved Dean's requisite delicacy, resting lightly on the dressed concrete upstand outside at ground, and on the timber roof of the new lobby accessing the south transept. The tracery even yielded security benefits. 'We had a blast consultant test the facade and it performs fantastically well,' Dean explains. 'The lead absorbs the blast and warps with only a few corner panes breaking – it seems a traditional solution to modern-day terrorism.' The sinuous metal tracery that winds its way up the facade counter-pointing the orthogonality is, Dean admits, a caprice in the way Digby Wyatt's intervention on the end structure at Brunel's Paddington train shed was. He justifies this whimsy as a 'functionality of the soul'.



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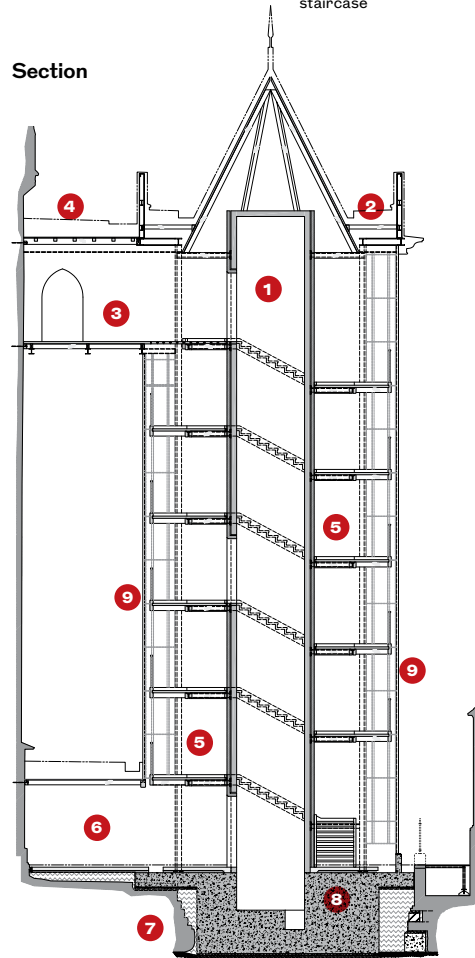


The roof crenellations and steel columns are clad in lead, detailed all the way up with protruding chevrons that permit ventilation in the void between steel and lead work and loosely referencing, says Dean, the lead-clad Octagon of Ely Cathedral. At half landing levels, 135mm deep, 100mm wide secondary steel tee-beams run from the columns back to the concrete lift shaft and perform the dual function of stiffening the columns along their length, allowing them to be more slender but also to support the air-dried English oak staircase at half-landings as it runs up the lift shaft. Even the facing to this tells a story, with Dean cladding it in the 18 different types of stone used to build the abbey. It's original chalky Reigate, the Burford that Wren reclad it in and the Chilmark that Scott used, Caen, Clunch, Purbeck grub, Kentish Ragstone, the Portland of Hawksmoor's West

**Left** Artefact positioning was used architectonically to draw visitors through the space. Heavy stone bases touch the new oak floor lightly. Planks defer to the run of Wren's original structure.

- 1 Concrete lift shaft
- 2 Steel 'crown'
- 3 Triforium gallery
- 4 Wren roof
- 5 New English oak stair
- 6 New lobby to transept
- 7 Original abbey foundations
- 8 New concrete foundations
- 9 Hung glazed screen to staircase

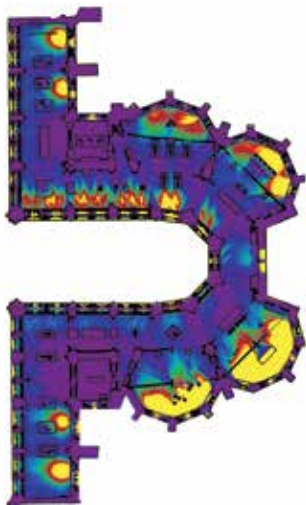
Section



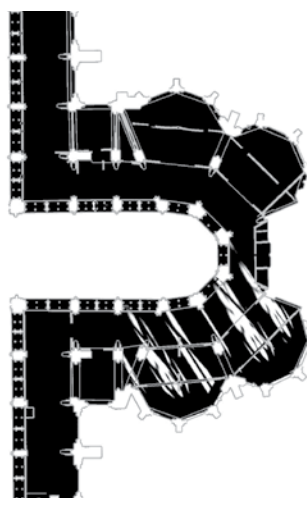
Towers. John Loughborough Pearson, 19th century architect of Truro Cathedral, even introduced Cornish granite to the mix. It seems the history of the Abbey is nothing if not a catalogue of the stones from which it is made, set in a capital that only offered London clay. 'The Reigate's so rare we had to dig it out of hole somewhere near the M23,' Dean quips, 'but the wall here expresses more about the provenance of the abbey itself and no slavish traditionalist would do that.'

### What's inside

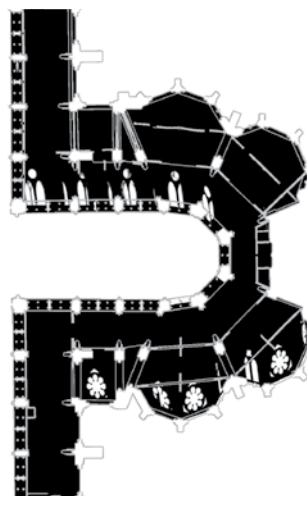
There's similar attention to detail evident in MUMA's 900m<sup>2</sup> triforium galleries, though perhaps in a more intangible way – skills perhaps honed in its design of the V&A's Medieval and Renaissance Galleries; there's certainly a similar level of deference to the existing building. 'When we first came up here with specks of dust floating around the space in the sunlight we realised that the most important exhibit was the abbey itself,' recalls MUMA's Stuart McKnight. 'We had to ask ourselves how do we arrange 300 objects in this space without undermining its otherworldliness?' The answer was to do the minimum necessary to make it suitable for the artefacts. And with many of them hundreds of years old it meant tailoring thematic curatorial demands with thorough investigations into the specific climatic nature of the triforium's spaces; a laboured process carried out with environmental engineer Max Fordham. The bottom line was to avoid mechanical conditioning of the space by encasing artefacts fully and then positioning them to



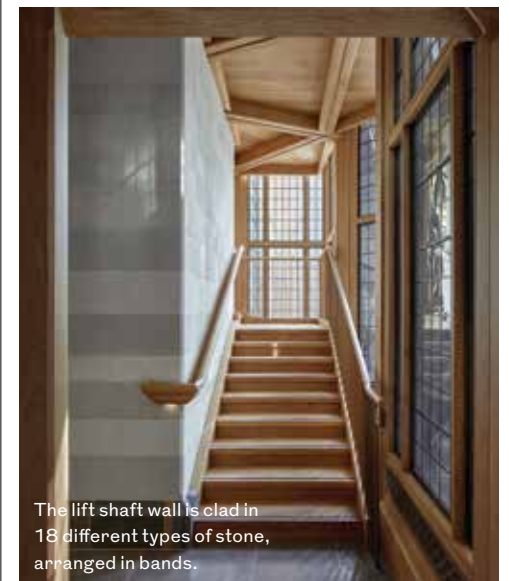
Annual Lux exposure



Sun penetration December



Sun penetration March



The lift shaft wall is clad in 18 different types of stone, arranged in bands.



The supine funeral effigy of Catherine de Valois will never suffer direct sunlight even in the centre of the space

**Above right** Decorative leadwork conceals the structural steel columns supporting 'the crown'. Drainage from the Weston Tower roof runs down alongside.

**Left** Steel held in tension accounts for the fineness of the seven-storey glass screen.

#### Credits

**Architect** Ptolemy Dean Architects

**Project manager** Gardiner & Theobald

**QS** Sawyer and Fisher

**Structural engineers**

Price & Myers (Weston Tower); The Morton Partnership (Triforium)

**Services engineer** Max Fordham Partnership

**Principal designer** Moran Architects

**Fire consultant** Exova

People

**Contractor** Daedalus

Conservation

avoid all exposure to sunlight; no mean feat in a space shot through with gothic windows.

MUMA's first move was to know what it was dealing with as regards the ambient temperature of the space, cognisant that it is okay for temperature to fluctuate as long as it doesn't do so rapidly. 'The walls are about five feet thick and when we monitored the diurnal internal temperatures we realised that the fabric performs well even at extremes, with a 10°C differential between internal and external temperatures,' says Max Fordham partner Laurence Owen. Clearly, the thermal performance of the glass was bad. Rather than adopting secondary glazing, which would have severely affected the look of the space, the team chose an in situ hand-applied solar control layer on the glass.

Also, since it's an open space and part of the abbey, it was important to ensure that relative humidity remained within acceptable parameters. Two heating and conditioning units have been placed within the triforium to do this, fed off the abbey's central heating system. These respond to a bespoke 'aspirating' sensor that Fordhams developed, connected to the fire alarm circuitry. 'It sucks a little of the air out of the gallery and passes it over a heat and relative humidity sensor, which then activates the perimeter trench heating if necessary. The aim is to keep the RH in the 40%-60% range,' says Owen.

But the real work for MUMA and Fordham was creating the complex virtual model of sun penetration of the space over a whole year to guide the positioning of objects. The galleries are arranged according to theme, but despite the apparent 'ease' of the space, each artefact's positioning is in fact the result of a complex Venn diagram of curatorial intent, sunlight study and the architect's aesthetic instinct. 'It was a matter of ascertaining where sunlight enters and where we had deep shadow and configuring exhibits to avoid one and take advantage of the other,' says McKnight.

So as you walk around, Hawksmoor's delicate line drawings enjoy the cooler shade of the nave and the supine funeral effigy of Catherine de Valois, wife of Henry V, will never suffer direct sunlight even though it stands at the centre of the space. Extreme situations such as early morning and late afternoon light are dealt with by BMS black-out blinds that actuate when necessary, but this will be outside gallery hours. The only thing visitors may register is the silent swish of MUMA's sexy pale leather curtains occasionally being drawn. 'We didn't really get involved in the tech and interpretation of the artefacts, but as architects, more with their shapes and forms, we had a strong visual response to the exhibits,' says McKnight.

Case design was by MUMA working with



engineer Michael Hadi, fabricator Glasbau Hahn and metalworker TP Aspinall. MUMA decided on Purbeck stone to ally with that of the abbey, but McKnight says they were very conscious that it should not feel 'grounded' 16m above the nave. So the Purbeck stone exhibit cases are raised on chromed steel cruciforms, reflecting the oak floor and dematerialising themselves in the process. Dark patinated mild steel cruciform sections support items such as stone capitals – the adoption of a Miesian form that's given added resonance by its setting. McKnight lauds the efforts of both engineer and fabricator – best evidenced in the sliding 'morgue drawers' that allow effigy and armour to be accessed out of the glass cases, imposing huge cantilever loads in the process; they glide in and out effortlessly.

Taken together, both stair tower and exhibition space have a pleasing naturalness and repose; it seems clear that Dean and MUMA worked together on the galleries in an iterative design process. Careful curation has created a space that, while full of exhibits, remains spacious and deferential to the ancient space it occupies. And as for Dean's new tower, he feels its 'busyness' is a suitable response to the complexity of its context. 'By being full of its stuff, as everything around it is full of stuff, I think it simply goes away and disappears,' he concludes. 'Sometimes more really is less.' ●





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# Findings from the Jacksons Fencing Education Report

Safeguarding schools includes robust and reliable perimeter fencing. A report from Jacksons Fencing looks at the challenges and offers solutions



Security around schools has become a big issue in the last couple of decades, with gates and reliable fencing considered critical to the safety of pupils and staff. Architects identified budget as the greatest challenge when specifying school fencing, according to findings from the Jacksons Fencing Education Report: Protecting the Future. With UK schools estimated to need 750,000 new places by 2025, school facilities face significant pressures on capacity and, as budget cuts further stretch resources, perimeter security and student safety standards appear to be slipping.

In light of this, perimeter security

**Above Jacksons**  
**EuroGuard Platform**  
**Fencing, Burntwood**  
**School, London.**

Architects identified budget  
 as the greatest challenge  
 when specifying school  
 fencing

specialist Jacksons Fencing conducted a survey collating the opinions of over 1,000 stakeholders within schools, including parents, teachers and architects. The firm's aim was to understand first hand why UK schools are struggling with security, and it has released its findings in a free-to-download report, highlighting alarming failings in many existing school security systems across the UK.

The report, the first industry-wide assessment of security in educational facilities based on original research in recent years, also attempts to offer a solution to falling security standards in UK schools.



**Right** Jacksons EuroGuard  
Regular Fencing, Kennington  
CE Academy, Kent.



The report highlights a raft of challenges facing schools, many of which stem from a lack of resources or simply not knowing where to find the right information regarding access control and perimeter security. If looking for guidance on installing security, 39% of heads surveyed admitted they wouldn't know where to go.

Of those questioned, 31% of teachers and 23% of parents agreed that their schools weren't designed with security in mind and, worryingly, over a quarter of parents either knew of children leaving the school site without authorisation or knew of trespassers gaining access to school grounds.

The report goes on to offer invaluable guidance to those responsible for a school's perimeter security; from the importance of LPCB security ratings and a clear breakdown of their application to introducing industry bodies such as Secured by Design championing in-built security solutions.

Insights from Jacksons Fencing highlight the importance of a thorough assessment, analysing risk, aesthetic and site usage, backed up by case studies of successful perimeter systems.

Jacksons Fencing has been designing, manufacturing and installing security fencing in homes, commercial sites and schools for decades, gaining expert knowledge of effective security and access control solutions. As well as offering RoSPA-approved, LPS 1175-certified and ISO 9001-compliant security fencing and access control solutions, Jacksons carries out design consultations and site assessments to ensure every school is as secure as it can be.

To download your free copy of this unmissable report, visit the company website (details below). For more information about security solutions for the education sector contact Jacksons Fencing (details below). ●

Over 25% of parents either knew of children leaving the site without authorisation or of trespassers gaining access



**Left** Jacksons Barbican  
Imperial Gates and  
Fencing, Northwood  
School, London.

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Build Aviator's estimating service gives the builder a material list that can be sent straight to its merchant

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# 2: Intelligence



Business, clients  
& services

## Alan Vallance



The RIBA's sale of its majority stake in NBS saw its seal (briefly) leave London for the first time in its history. Chief executive Alan Vallance explains what the £31.75 million it has gained will mean for the institute and its members, and describes a positive future relationship with its subsidiary

**What is the deal the RIBA has done?**

We've gone into partnership with LDC, the private equity company of Lloyds Bank, to get external investment into what was RIBA Enterprises and is now called NBS. We've done that by selling some of our equity.

**Why was the deal needed?**

Its prime purpose was to find a way to invest in RIBA Enterprises. The way it was constructed within a charity was fine, but it could only achieve its potential as a global player by getting investment. A secondary consideration was about the RIBA's own financial position.

**You've been doing this for some time?**

It's been going on for 15 months and has involved seven council meetings. It is the biggest financial decision in 184 years. We did a lot of work to give the council the evidence it needed, as ultimately it was their decision.

**What will the RIBA do with the investment?**

LDC has invested £31.75 million. That will be spent by the NBS to deliver a plan it is developing. There are huge opportunities in the US, Canada, Australia and to invest in technology. I would expect it to think about acquisition too. Whatever it does, we will sit at the table with LDC. I am on the board as a RIBA representative. We also intend to retire some or all the RIBA's debts. For the first time in at least five years we are in a position to think about investment for members' benefit too. We have aspirations to grow internationally and in the regions. Ben Derbyshire spoke about the federal model when he became president. We can make inroads on that. I am also keen to do more to digitise our offer.

**Will the RIBA have a controlling stake in the NBS?**

We have a significant minority stake, as does LDC. But we have retained some rights to say yes and no to things – for example, an agreement to protect the RIBA brand. The remaining stake is now owned by the management.

**How does the RIBA plan to replace the income it received from RIBA Enterprises?**

RIBA Enterprises provided nearly £5 million of Gift Aid money to the RIBA every year. The money from the equity sale will insulate us for several years, and our detailed business planning process starts imminently. We will still get NBS dividends, subject to tax, if awarded.

**So the deal doesn't mean there will be a discount on membership fees?**

The board was due to discuss subscriptions last month but as a voluntary membership body the RIBA must deliver value. If we carry on as we now are, we'll be fine for 40 years. We were never forced to sell anything, but were mindful that without alterations things might get tough.

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Intelligence is officially approved RIBA CPD. Look out for icons throughout the section indicating core curriculum areas.

Health, safety  
& wellbeingLegal, regulatory &  
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# Rebuilding trust

After Grenfell, clarity on standards is what we need, and what the RIBA will continue to press for



Jane Duncan

More than a year after the Grenfell Tower fire disaster the construction industry remains in a state of shock. The subsequent government cladding test programme revealed a large number of high-rise residential buildings with external wall systems that were deemed to be unsafe – and the industry is still struggling to fully understand the implications of the failures in our regulatory and procurement systems that led us to this situation.

The continuing media interest and publicity surrounding the fire and its aftermath has kept the issue at the top of the public consciousness, so it is vital that architects reconnect with their local communities, be brave in their response to the ‘race to the bottom’ procurement strategies, and collaborate proactively and visibly to retain and develop the trust in our professionalism which could be in some doubt.

**Above** Tributes must be accompanied by practical action on safety.

‘The safety of the people shall be the highest law’  
– Marcus Tullius Cicero

In the words of Cicero: ‘The safety of the people shall be the highest law.’ If we were aware that a disaster of this nature could happen, what could have been done to prevent it? What can we now do to improve and implement our fire safety knowledge, and put the protection of lives firmly back in the forefront of our long-term design strategy?

Shortly after the Grenfell Tower fire, RIBA Council established an Expert Advisory Group on Fire Safety to develop the RIBA policy response and provide guidance for RIBA members. The Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety, led by Dame Judith Hackitt, was a key part of the government’s response after Grenfell, and the RIBA Expert Advisory Group put in a detailed submission to the review.

We hoped that the review would not only look at the issues within the industry but offer clear guidance to government on the changes needed to provide clear and unambiguous regulations on fire safety.

When the final report of Dame Judith Hackitt’s review was published on Thursday 17 May, the RIBA welcomed many of the overarching long term recommendations. The proposal to establish a Joint Competent Authority, bringing in the expertise of the HSE and the fire brigades, to oversee a new fire safety regulatory framework for higher risk buildings seemed a sensible step.

However, the detail of how this would operate remains sketchy, and the definition of ‘higher risk’ buildings to which it would apply was in our view too limited – at present just to multiple occupancy high-rise residential buildings over 10 storeys in height.

The RIBA Expert Advisory Group thinks that this should be applied to all residential buildings above five storeys, and extended to other buildings where people sleep and to many other higher-risk building categories. The very sensible call in the report for statutory duties for life safety to be allocated to the client, principal designer and principal contractor could be achieved simply by extending the scope of the CDM Regulations and applying this principle to all building projects.

The major concern of the RIBA was the refusal of the report to recognise the need for clear baseline prescriptive standards in relation to such matters as the use of combustible materials, sprinklers and means of escape.

In progressing the review, Dame Judith seemed to be convinced that an



'outcomes-based' approach with no room for prescriptive standards was preferable; her report perhaps misjudged the political and public need to create some specific short term actions and shied away from recommendations to ban combustible materials in the external wall construction on high-rise buildings, to require sprinklers in residential buildings and to set out specific provisions on alternative means of escape. Desktop studies, for which the RIBA had called for a ban, were simply rebranded as 'assessments in lieu of test'.

However, by lunchtime on the day of the report's publication this position was undermined by an announcement by James Brokenshire, secretary of state for housing, communities and local government, that the government would commence a consultation on banning the use of combustible materials in cladding systems. The government understood the need for the type of baseline prescriptive requirements that the RIBA Expert Advisory Group has consistently called for, alongside the Local Government Association and the Association of British Insurers.

The construction industry desperately needs clarity on the issues of combustible materials and sprinklers today; for one thing this is holding up the retrofit programme for those tower blocks which have been deemed at risk following the government testing programme. In the meantime and in the absence of true clarity, professionals will need to proceed with a precautionary approach in their advice to clients and refuse to specify combustible materials where this could affect life safety.

Dame Judith's report correctly placed significant emphasis on the need for cultural change, re-establishing the golden thread of responsibility, and calling for better levels of competence in the construction industry. At its July meeting, RIBA Council will be considering a proposal to strengthen the mandatory CPD requirements in relation to health and life safety and to introduce a five-yearly online health and life safety knowledge test for all UK chartered members.

Of course designing, constructing and managing buildings to be safe for all that use them is an ethical issue as much as it is one about regulation and design and construc-

tion process. Somewhere along the way there seems to have been a collective loss of perspective, where lowest cost and all that this implies, has replaced skill and care, quality and sustainability in selection of procurement routes.

'Fire engineering' approaches were allowed to develop that wrapped fire-safe design up in a fog of pseudo-science that provided a false sense of security. Common sense seems to have taken a back seat. Change will require a stronger regulatory system, clear and specific Approved Document guidance and an industry-wide commitment to cultural change, which must also embrace the role of the client in insisting that safety and quality is not compromised in the name of economy and efficiency.

Now is the time to be strong, to speak out, to go back to basic, long-established professional principles and put the safety of those who construct and use our buildings as our primary concern. As Martin Luther King Jr once said: 'Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.' ●

Jane Duncan is RIBA immediate past president and chair of RIBA Fire Safety Advisory Group



Local graffiti expresses strength of feeling after the Grenfell fire.

SARAH LEE

Health, safety  
& wellbeingDesign, construction  
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# Rules, regs and realism

Understanding and implementing regulations, and third party certification, is essential to fire safety

Mike Kirby

If we have learned anything from Grenfell Tower it's that architects need to have a thorough understanding of the Approved Document B (ADB) and, depending on the fire design route taken, of BS 9999 and BS 9991 from feasibility stage. We need to ask basic questions, such as: Are fire escapes positioned correctly? Will you be adopting a fire engineering route? We want simple guidance to help us at the early stages because at the moment there's so much out there that it's difficult to interpret it all in a holistic way.

Within a few days of the fire one of our directors asked me to prepare a practice guidance note on ventilated rainscreen cladding in light of the inferno. His request had me analysing the guidance in ADB more thoroughly and it is confusing. It talks about Class 0 'Surface Spread of Flame,' so does not necessarily concern the properties of the composite material as a whole. As things stand, the material itself can be combustible and still meet Class 0 requirements. Diagram 40 of ADB, in describing the 18m rule, refers to Class 0 and sits at the root of the confusion.

As ADB contains definitions of non-combustibility and limited combustibility and Class 0, we have to work with them. Non-combustible or limited combustibility materials are defined in Tables A6 and A7 of Appendix A in ADB, to national class (BS 476) and European class (BS EN 13501) respectively. However, a footnote in those tables states that the national and European classifications don't automatically equate. As

we get a lot of materials from Europe, and to avoid confusion, the firm now works solely with the European classification and looks for test results to BS EN 13501.

BS 8414 is a test standard for cladding systems and contains no pass or fail criteria. Such criteria are described in BR 135 but that means you have to look at two documents. BRE has carried out BS 8414 tests for a group of manufacturers which have allowed it to list the results on its website. However, such tests remain commercially sensitive for many and architects often need to get the reports direct from manufacturers and check them themselves. Some manufacturers may resist but we should insist on seeing a report or go to another company who will divulge it. It's critical to know the precise system tested, so that if it's specified the contractor can't deviate from it.

## Technical expertise

The biggest issue is dealing with contractor proposals for alternative materials and construction. Chapman Taylor employs technical staff like me to interrogate proposals and assess their suitability. I recommend that

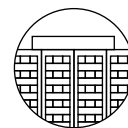
architects stick to specifying non-combustible or limited combustibility materials; when writing specifications I advise always using the word 'equivalent' rather than 'similar'. I believe that introducing sprinkler systems, including in refurbishments, would be a good thing. However adding such active systems, or passive ones such as a secondary escape, could affect financial viability.

More needs to be done with third party certification of materials and workmanship regarding fire. This applies particularly to firestopping and I've changed our specification to follow Association for Specialist Fire Protection guidance and to require certification of workmanship as well as materials. Reports have highlighted that Grenfell Tower's 'certified' 30-minute fire rated doors weren't fit for purpose, but at some point certification has to be trusted – you can't test every door. Before Grenfell, British Board of Agrément certificates for aluminium composite material (ACM) weren't helpful regarding fire performance, and I'd advise architects to thoroughly scrutinise BBA certificates with respect to both this and material properties



ISABELLE PRIEST





before selecting products. On-site workmanship remains a bugbear that's difficult to control and will only be dealt with by something like the return of the Clerk of Works role.

We've accepted desktops studies in the past but admit they can be questionable depending on who they're produced by. This needs to be rigorously addressed in much more depth – perhaps via a formal British Standard. Studies should be carried out by a fully independent testing organisation and published; this would accord with the Hackitt review's recommendation to put testing in the public domain but it brings us back to the realms of commercial sensitivity – if the client's paid for it, it has a say on whose sees it.

### Cost implications

The hard fact is that cost implications creep into the process. Non-combustible materials like mineral wool are up to 30% thicker than PIR and PUR, which affects the GIA, so a client that is driven by profit will tend towards the latter. That said, sprinkler systems might knock out a floor so choosing non-combustible cladding might be the better option in high value developments. In preparing the report Dame Judith has had pressure from all sides – insulation companies, the RIBA,

## The biggest issue is dealing with contractor proposals for alternative materials and construction

**Opposite** One year on: the issues, as well as the tower, loom large.

**Below** In 2015 this Dubai Marina Torch Tower incident followed a tower fire in Melbourne the year before. Both highlighted the susceptibility of ACM cladding to fire.

fire authorities, testing bodies, the Sprinkler Alliance. By not being prescriptive, the report's findings could give the market the leeway to decide the best way forward.

I've always said that you shouldn't scrimp on structure, waterproofing or fire safety – but above all fire. Architects need to rely on robust designs and not merely trust a certificate from building control as evidence of compliance – building control officers may be inexperienced and are not infallible. It seems each side expected the other to discharge responsibilities and something fell down the cracks. We need to be more vigilant in ensuring that our design intent is compliant and followed through. But it's not just building control – we need a conversation with clients and contractors too. One thing in the Hackitt report that caught my eye was that it was mainly architects and enforcement agencies accessing current approved documents – not contractors or project managers.

### Criminal liability

Judith Hackitt used to be head of the HSE and is suggesting criminal liability being applied to regulations as for CDM. While the Health & Safety at Work Act is part of criminal law I'm not sure the Building Act is, so how criminal liability will be brought to bear on it I don't know. The potential knock-on effects of changing fire policy are enormous and I sense the government won't react until after Brexit in March 2019 so as not to destabilise the construction industry. In the meantime, the RIBA could lead on this voluntarily although until it's legally enforced clients won't respond to it. That said, we've noticed some clients are becoming more risk averse, asking us to look at projects again and footing the extra cost to upgrade their specification, so the penny seems to be dropping.

Under the current framework, if a client wishes to demand reduced or compromised compliance against our professional recommendation we're going to have to insist that they instruct us and take full responsibility for the implications of that demand. Ultimately, the profession has to be more robust with clients and contractors, more rigorous and self-policing – that is the very least the Grenfell tragedy demands of us. ●

Mike Kirby is associate director in the technical group at Chapman Taylor's London studio, advising project teams on specification, technical, construction and building legislation issues



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Health, safety  
& wellbeingDesign, construction  
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& community

# Act now on safety

Don't wait for legislation: the industry must improve now

Eleanor Young

'You don't need to wait for legislation to behave in the right way,' concluded Dame Judith Hackitt, presenting her report Building a Safer Future at the RIBA conference Protecting Lives: Design and construction post Grenfell. Her words were a reminder that though government, institutional and culture change seems too slow to ensure safe buildings in the immediate future, there are other ways.

Changing the culture of construction, as Hackitt aspires to do, seems a huge task when you are presented with wider construction failures, even beyond Grenfell and the hundreds of similarly ACM-clad tower blocks. Professor John Cole led inquiries into Edinburgh schools after nine tons of wall collapsed into a playground at Oxbgangs Primary School just before it opened for the day in January 2016.

Cole's investigations showed drawings ignored as wall ties, including header ties, were installed dangling between the inner and outer leaves of walls, or sometimes just

left stashed on the sloping beam above. Also uncovered were 300 serious breaches in fire stopping in the 17 schools. Photos of uselessly placed wall ties in schools across Scotland (100 schools and 51 NHS properties) – built by numerous subcontractors and national contractors – show the level of the problem, which had led to at least five other (unreported) wall collapses. Cole had a raft of recommendations but the strongest is for clients to ensure quality assurance. Clients can't rely on major contractors, the novated architects contractors employ, independent certifiers or building control to pick up and condemn even the most visible, and potentially devastating, examples of poor construction.

Further evidence of widespread poor quality assurance systems came from the CIOB's Design Quality Commission. Its respondents overwhelmingly rated current quality management at all levels inadequate. This was one of the prompts for the Quality Risk Tracker which is being developed with the CIOB, RIBA and RICS. One of those behind it, Nigel Ostime, chair of RIBA Client Liaison Group, was clear that more money was needed in construction to reduce the risks raised at the conference, from barely-trained labourers paid by the brick not the wall tie, to the poor site training of construction workers and professionals and the demise of the clerk of works role. He suggested pre-fabrication could go some way to addressing this economic problem as well as issues of workmanship quality.

Hackitt's delivery at the conference had a sense of urgency. In line with her report she condemned the complexity of testing and unclear regulation. Her re-mapping of this suggests a far clearer and simpler path with a joint competent authority led by the HSE at

'Can we have any confidence at all in the industry to change itself?'

the top, giving stronger sanctions and tougher enforcement while working with building control and the fire service lending expertise. Clive Betts, chair of the parliamentary select committee which has scrutinised the report, lent his support to the recommendations but was clear that they should go further. 'They should be applied to construction as a whole, not just fire safety,' he said. 'Can we have any confidence at all in the industry to change itself?'

A working group is developing Hackitt's recommendation of a golden thread connecting planning, maintenance and management of complex buildings. 'Design and change management in this industry is very poor,' she said bluntly. Members of the audience pointed out that such a thread rarely existed even through the construction of a project. But the need is there.

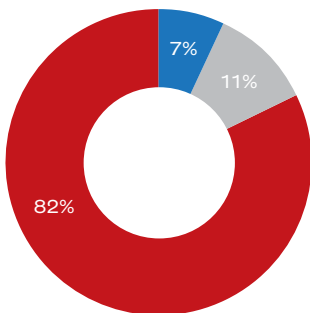
There were questions about where statutory checks focus, and the need for the principal designer to have an independent inspection role during construction. Cole said: 'There is no point in having drawings that comply with building regs if they never get built.' Presenting a proposed version of the fire overlay for the RIBA Plan of Work, Paul Bussey, AHMM senior technical consultant, showed it would try to keep the 'golden thread' during construction with the client's consultant team. Importantly, it also attempts to tackle the issue that it is buildings, not drawings, that kill, and has three checks by the fire service at preparation and brief (stage 2), technical design (stage 4) and in use (stage 7). This will be out for consultation over the summer.

Until that happens two recommendations from the conference really stick: construction professionals need to get out on site and build up their expertise early in their career – so they know the reality of site construction and what it demands. And those who design and construct buildings, at whatever stage in the process, need to take pride in what they do. With these small moves perhaps the culture change could get started. ●

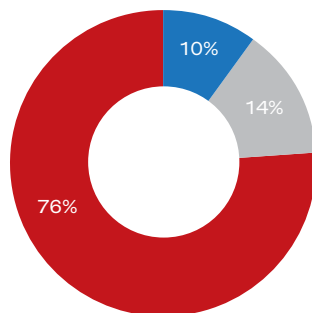
## Quality management in construction

Source: CIOB Quality Commission

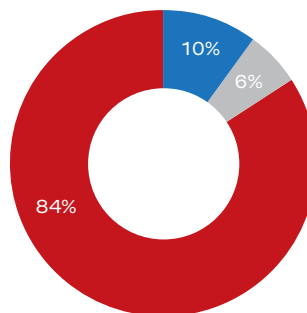
● No ● Don't know ● Yes



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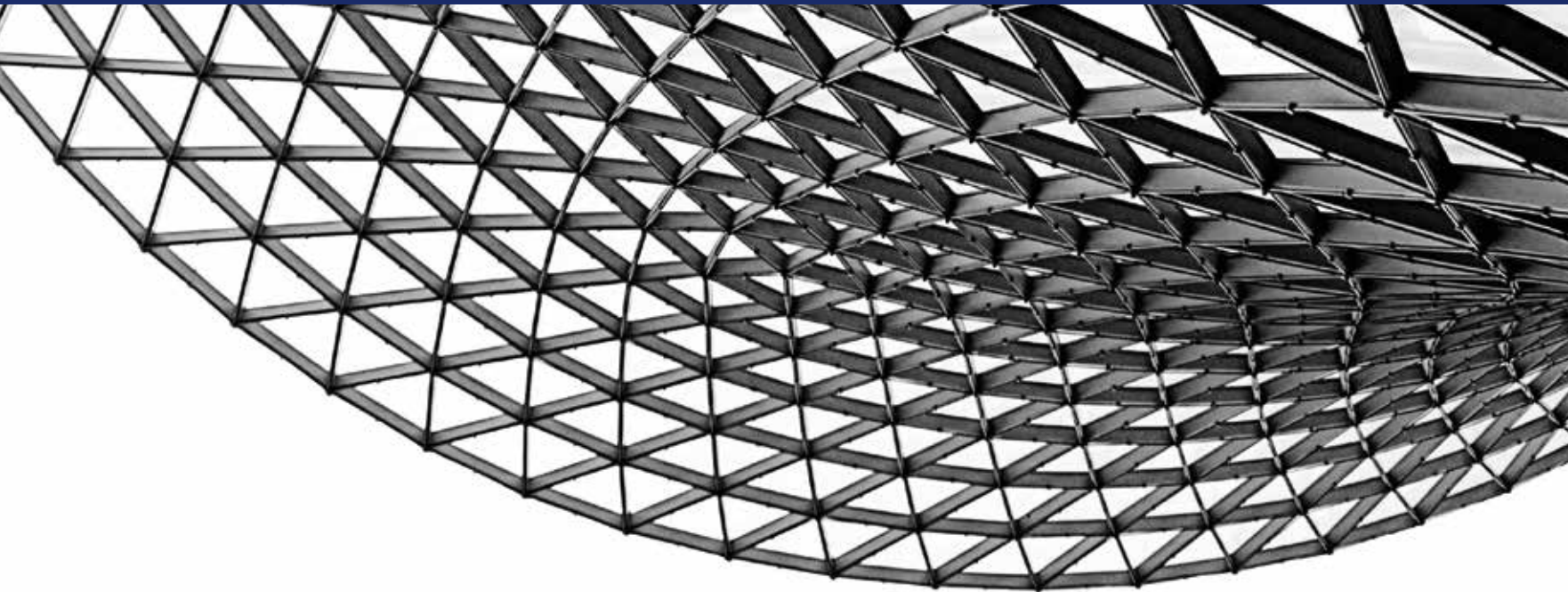
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Health, safety  
& wellbeing



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& community

# The end of high rise?

Lower rise housing schemes are on the agenda, alongside a more cautious approach to safety features in designs

Josephine Smit

Across London, there are more than 500 tall buildings in the development pipeline, containing more than 100,000 homes. From Barking & Dagenham in the east to Wandsworth in the west, high-rise has taken hold, according to New London Architecture and GL Hearn's Annual London Tall Buildings Survey, released in April.

Those high rise, high density schemes, like their counterparts in Manchester, Cardiff, and elsewhere, are helping to meet pressing demand for urban living. On the face of it, such developments are a world away from Grenfell Tower and its residents; they've got plush penthouses, winter gardens and communal roof terraces, and occupants on all tenures.

But Grenfell poses serious questions about our approaches to urban mid and high-rise residential development. And irrespective of the Hackitt review's recom-

mendations, some developers and investors have chosen their own course of action when it comes to fire safety. For such players, their focus on buildings and the people who occupy them might even see them bring the urban home back down to earth one day.

## Scrutiny and sprinklers

Increased scrutiny was an inevitable consequence of Grenfell. 'We're seeing specification reviews, while some are going straight to including sprinklers,' says Patrick Devlin, partner with Pollard Thomas Edwards. Certain client groups are taking a lead, he continues. 'Many of our most diligent clients are the people who are going to operate the building – the private rented sector and developers of third age housing.'

London housing association the Peabody Group reviewed processes and practices last summer. 'We did everything that was in the Hackitt review recommendations nine months ago,' says Dick Mortimer, execu-

Old Brewery gardens, designed by Assael on the former Boddingtons Brewery site in Manchester, has been in pre-planning for eight months.





tive director of development at Peabody. Its actions included resolving to install sprinklers on blocks of more than three storeys, and ruling out combustible cladding.

The group has seen its new developments grow in height, says Mortimer. 'We don't build 42 storeys, but over the past five or six years we have come to see six, eight or 10 storeys, and higher, as normal.' Now it is reviewing developments – existing, under construction and earlier in the pipeline. The cost of installing sprinklers in buildings under construction is between £1,200 and £3,500 to £4,000 per dwelling. 'Adding it during the contract is a lot more expensive, partly because we are having to alter the design,' says Mortimer. 'Within the next six months, we'll start gaining an understanding of the cost for new schemes.'

#### Good for everyone

Relatively few of Peabody's prospective buyers are asking about or demanding such features, although, adds Mortimer, 'we are getting questions for mortgage purposes on resales of shared ownership homes.' The housing association's driver is to do right by its residents, but for the build to rent sector, that also aligns with good business. 'The build to rent sector looks for a more robust materials specification to stand the test of time. We're specifying to maximise net operating income,' explains Alex Johnson, associate director with Assael. Johnson is working on three build to rent projects in London and Bristol, including Legal & General's Ferry Lane in Walthamstow, which rises to 16 storeys. He continues: 'Build to rent best practice promotes open plan layouts, underpinned by a mist or sprinkler system. Ours tend to have open plan layouts so would have sprinklers anyway.' The guidance for that comes from BS9991: 2015 Fire safety in the design, management and use of residential buildings.

Developer Prosperity Capital Partners has been installing sprinklers routinely, says its development director Ed Fowkes. 'It stops you having to put fire doors everywhere and so improves the experience of the building. It's part of our product.' That product is build to rent homes in city locations and student accommodation, with schemes typically ranging in height from seven to 25 storeys.

In Grenfell's immediate aftermath the industry was in a state of near-panic, says

We've changed our cost assumptions to take on board additional checking. Realistically that costs us parking spaces

Fowkes. 'We didn't know the answers. I went on one developer's site and saw all the insulation designated to go onto the building being cancelled, not because it didn't comply with Building Regulations, but out of fear.' A year on, the panic may have subsided, but there is still a lack of clarity. 'We've had a project on site where a question of compliance has come up, even though we have already built a similar building. Now we re-check everything. We can't take people's word for things.'

Its proposal to redevelop part of Manchester's former Boddingtons Brewery site with more than 500 homes in towers – named Old Brewery Gardens and designed by Assael – has been in design pre-planning for eight months. 'That was partly because every time we make a change, everyone in the team has to reassess the risk,' explains Fowkes.

All this has implications for development viability, he adds. 'In planning our schemes we've changed our cost assumptions to take on board additional checking. Because build costs are so high, we have to compromise elsewhere. We don't want to compromise on the experience of the building so we look to reduce costs in an area people will miss the least. Realistically it costs us parking spaces.'

With large institutional funds like Aviva buying Prosperity Capital Partners' schemes, ongoing safety, security and durability of the assets are paramount. 'Housebuilders will

build for a sale and run away – they're incentivised to go to the bottom line. We're in a very different position', says Fowkes. For this reason, the company is also funding research into the integration of whole life costing into BIM, a project being undertaken by the University of Cambridge.

#### What goes up...

Investors could be more influential in the future, says Yolande Barnes, director of world research at property consultant Savills. 'Grenfell is a symptom of what happens when towers age,' she says. 'The issue that may well come to the fore is how costly it is to manage and maintain massive tall buildings, because of instances of mismanagement and because the net income streams derived from property are becoming increasingly important.' Big institutional investors like pension funds are looking to the steady income stream that comes from dependable assets, specifically housing that is cost effective to maintain, attractive to tenants and durable. 'That's an important trend for architects,' stresses Barnes.

That could lead to increased use of whole life costing, but might it also herald a return to lower rise development? Architects see no signs of Grenfell driving such a change, but developers have for some time been toying with low rise, high density models – using offsite manufacture – to bring diversity to the urban offer. That has resulted in a string of branded houses, such as House by Urban Splash, Berkeley Homes' Urban House and Capital & Centric's shedkm-designed back-to-back concept, Nowhaus.

These developers might just be onto something. Barnes points to the US, where institutional investment in single-family homes has now overtaken that in multi-family apartment blocks. 'That's partly because the market allowed for easy purchase of houses after the 2008 crash, but it is also an indication of changing demand,' she adds. There could be a parallel here with the rise of eco-credentials in commercial buildings, Barnes contends, where market resistance has diminished in the face of mounting fears and evidence that space with low energy efficiency levels and green ratings is less lettable and commands lower rents. 'If investors find that the net income stream of lower rise housing is superior, a shift could happen quite quickly,' she warns. ●



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## Get your notices right

Timing and attachments are everything if you need to send notices over damages or reduced payments

**Doug Wass**

Contract administrators have to serve a plethora of notices under building contracts during a project. It is important to get them right as the financial consequences of mistakes can be material.

A recent case, *Grove Developments Ltd v S&T (UK) Ltd*, in which my firm represented the claimant, provides clarification for those serving pay less notices or the notices required under several JCT forms of building contract should the contractor be in delay and liquidated damages (LADs) are to be deducted.

### Pay less notices

If an employer wishes to pay less than the amount stated in a contractor's application for payment or a payment notice, it has to inform the contractor in a pay less notice. The Construction Act requires pay less notices to specify both the sum that the payer (in this case, the employer) considers to be due on the date the notice is served, and the basis on which that sum is calculated.

In *Grove v S&T*, the employer specified the basis of its calculation by referring in the pay less notice to the valuation breakdown in the previous payment certificate (which had been served too late). The contractor contended that the employer had to attach to the pay less notice any documents that it referred to, in order for it to be effective.

The judge disagreed – documents can be incorporated by reference into a pay less notice. As a result, copies of any documents referred to in a pay less notice do not have to be attached (although it is safer to do so where practicable). While this is a welcome decision, three things in particular are worth remembering. First, the documents need to be clearly identified (so that it is clear to a 'reasonable recipient' what is being referred to) and effectively incorporated; secondly, the underlying document must state the sum which is proposed to be paid and include a calculation showing how that sum was reached; and the document referred to should have been previously provided to the contractor.

### Liquidated damages notices

Under most JCT forms of building contract, before the employer can deduct or claim liquidated damages for delay, it must issue, first, a 'warning notice' stating that the employer may require payment of, or may withhold or deduct, liquidated damages; and secondly a 'deduction notice' confirming that it requires the contractor to pay liquidated damages and/or will withhold or deduct liquidated damages.

In *Grove v S&T*, the contractor argued that the contract (in this case an amended JCT Design and Build 2011) required the employer to leave enough time between service of the two notices for the contractor to read, understand and digest the warning notice before receiving the deduction notice. In this case, there had been only seven seconds or so between S&T's receipt by email of the two notices, which the contractor claimed made the deduction notice invalid.

The judge rejected the contractor's argument and confirmed that the period of time between the two notices is irrelevant, as long as they are received in the right order. Again, this is good news for employers and provides important clarity on the interpretation of JCT building contract forms.

Employers and those advising them must ensure that the notices required under the JCT building contract forms are sent sequentially, and in order. Despite this decision, it is also advisable to leave sufficient time between notices to ensure that there can be no debate over whether or not the contractor received them in the right order – for example, if the notices are to be served by post, they should be sent on separate days. ●

Doug Wass is a partner at Macfarlanes LLP

There had been only seven seconds or so between S&T's receipt by email of the two notices, which the contractor claimed made the deduction notice invalid

### IN PLAIN ENGLISH: DEEMED DELIVERY

Many contracts include provisions which clarify how parties communicate with one another and how notices are to be sent, to whom they should be addressed and when they are deemed to have been received. Deemed delivery or receipt is important where notices have to be provided within particular timescales. If a notice is not deemed to have been delivered until after the relevant deadline, it will be out of time. To provide a practical example – notices sent by post are generally deemed in contracts to be delivered two business days after being sent. So if a notice is sent by post on a Friday, it will be deemed to have been delivered on the following Tuesday (assuming there are no intervening bank holidays) even if it may have actually been delivered on the Monday or even the Saturday.



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When it comes to installing a new terrace flooring system on this scale, pre-installation preparation work becomes an essential part of the project. The Surface 360 team battled with various hurdles on this rooftop, including multiple floor-falls, to facilitate the erection of new signage struts and other large static obstacles. Fortunately, after precise planning and the use of its own specific height-adjustable pedestal and retention system, the Surface 360 team successfully levelled out and installed the high-end flooring finish, which you can see on this rooftop terrace today. The entire process took under three weeks.

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**Above** Levato Mono Timeless range fully installed.

**Below** Installation of 750m<sup>2</sup> coastal roof terrace in Ramsgate.

Once tiles are laid, the human eye cannot discern any replicated pattern – allowing a completely natural looking surface finish



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# The Oaf goes to Venice

Maria Smith's travel buddy brings his own clear-sighted magic to the Biennale



Maria Smith

I took the Oaf to the Venice Architecture Biennale. We flew business class because he said the only way he'd contemplate spending three days in the company of a toxic swarm of architects was if he maintained a constant prosecco buzz from free-at-point-of-use booze. The combination of a dehydration headache, the pessimistic taste of wine that's been open too long, and the unplaceable itch of mosquito bites arranged around the body such that at least one is always in contact with an irritant, gave the Oaf an equilibrate irreverence that allowed him to relish being from Another Profession, or so he said.

His annoyance briefly abated when he saw that our national pavilion was an ode to the great British scaffolder. In the Oaf's estimation, however, the installation fell short due to lack of such authenticating decoration as St George's flags and a banterbus audio-scape. His ire then grew as the blonde doling out the prosecco insisted on decanting it first into a jug like a hastily served chianti or watered-down ketchup in a greasy spoon. We ascended the stairs to the platform supported

by said scaffolding. I commented on the view. The Oaf remarked that the view was in no way enhanced by the hoards of pretentious mugs feigning interest in it and damned the chequered timber deck for revealing the egotistical hand of an architect and murdering what would have been perfectly adequate had the scaffolders been left to whack down some used boards and oil them with the drippings of bacon sandwiches and withdrawal sweat.

The heat being unbearable and the bar dry, I persuaded the Oaf to take a turn about the Giardini. He acquiesced on the proviso that we at no point stood still long enough for his treacherous eye to be drawn to any of the text lest he be so stunned but its vacuous pomposity that he be immediately and irredeemably turned to stone, to dust, or worse, into somebody that appreciated that kind of thing.

We thus made fast work of a handful of contributions. I lost the Oaf briefly to some slender haunches in the French pavilion and had to force his giraffe-like hands to loosen their grip on the two-by-twos as he wailed something about the pleasure of tension in an axially loaded member. The German pavilion employed a well worn but effective perspective trick whereby the visitor, on entry to the pavilion, sees a solid black wall that immediately dematerialises as you move forward. The Oaf of course relished in planting his heft in that single spot and a cantankerous grin on his hairy face, preventing others from experiencing the curator's intention and depleting the atmosphere generally. I dragged him over to the Australian pavilion in the hopes that the scent of aromatic grasses might calm him down a touch, which it did for about 10 seconds before he discovered the art of taking pictures of the perverts hiding in the shrubbery, as he put it.

As the day wore on, the density of architects increased, and an epidemic of queues formed across the Biennale site. Queues for prosecco, queues to catch a glimpse of a Danish starchitect, queues for the ladies' toilets, queues of ladies to use the men's toilets, and queues to avail oneself of an installation or two pertaining to free space. The Oaf threw himself whole heartedly into this new queuing truth. At one point he found a way to queue up to have a conversation with me. His sarcastic fervour for queues fortunately enabled our entry into what was to become the Golden Lion winning pavilion. A marvel of variously scaled ironmongery, the Swiss

His annoyance briefly abated when he saw that our national pavilion was an ode to the great British scaffolder

offering is a commentary on the bland décor of unfurnished rental accommodation. Some may say it strikes an ingenious balance between playful and poignant; in one breath both denouncing and championing the alleged selfie-obsessed subjugated generation by inciting them to post Insta stories of their standardised captivity. The Oaf said it was as interesting as watching a Swiss person hold a mechanical pencil and would be much improved spattered with the blood of a thousand spritz-distended architects.

Later that evening, we sat in a small bar in a little square by our palazzo. At the behest of a 120kg Finnish man that had struck up a friendly shouting match with us, the Oaf downed his beer and was served whisky under the table. The Finnish man professed to have an IQ of 170 and challenged the Oaf to a fist fight. The Oaf declined, explaining that he was here for the Architecture Biennale and thus was intellectually averse to anything so coarse as physical violence. ●

Maria Smith is a director at Interrobang architecture and engineering and Webb Yates Engineers, and is co-chief curator of the Oslo Architecture Triennale 2019



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# 3: Culture

## Sunset in Venice

Has the biennale had its day?



Hugh Pearman Editor

How do you present architecture to the world, other than by the obvious means of building if you can, and letting people form their own opinions? This is the perennial problem of architecture exhibitions and it is above all the question asked every two years when the Venice Architecture Biennale comes round.

It's a thankless task in some respects, being the director of that show – this time Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara of Grafton Architects, Dublin. Thankless firstly because – well, it's in Venice which always effortlessly upstages anything today's architects might attempt. Secondly because it gets increasingly hard to do anything that's not been tried before. There is the memory of all the previous biennales, back to 'the Presence of the Past' directed by Paolo Portoghesi in 1980, a key moment in the development of intellectual post modernism. It stayed a smallish, low-key, even introverted affair – the fourth biennale in 1986 directed by Aldo Rossi, for instance, was just – just! – an exhibition of the work of Dutch master architect Hendrick Petrus Berlage which wasn't even in the Venetian islands at all, but on the mainland.

In 1991 it adopted the form of the art biennales and went internationalist, in the

It becomes increasingly difficult to do something that's not been done before

form it has kept ever since. That was when I first attended. I can't remember what the display in the British Pavilion that year was about – they often tend to be forgettable. But I remember Jim Stirling in his blue shirt, white bush hat on his head, launching his little 'bookshop/boatshop', designed with Tom Muirhead, in the Biennale Gardens. It's still there and it is still very good, if lacking a purpose now that it is not used as a bookshop.

As everyone always is on first visiting, I was blown away by two permanent buildings: from antiquity the buildings of the naval dockyard at the Arsenale, and from modernity the Nordic Pavilion (1958–62) by Sverre Fehn in the Biennale Gardens, the canopy of all canopies, a building which dissolves its walls. That set such a high standard that there wasn't much point any other architect trying after that, though some have and Stirling/Muirhead did best.

In the exhibition it becomes increasingly difficult to do something that's not been done before: does the present offering 'Freespace' differ so hugely from Kazuyo Sejima's 'People Meet in Architecture' of 2010, for instance? There's been a shift away from the domination of starchitects showing off their wares towards the social aspects of architecture, something publicly much resented by one starchitect, Patrik Schumacher. But even that's old hat. Massimiliano Fuksas, himself a starchitect, directed 'Less Aesthetics, More Ethics' back in 2000.

Thus the binary nature of the Venice Biennale – and all architecture exhibitions really – goes on for ever. Displays of astonishing design virtuosity alternate with (or at times even combine with) calmer examinations of conscience, discussions on the social and environmental role of architecture. 'Freespace' – see my review, page 72 – is very laid back. Perhaps next time the biennale should be pruned back. Perhaps Rossi was on to something. Perhaps it's time to learn from the past again. ●

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The young women are shown taking back the spaces as they make caring gestures such as plaiting each other's hair, while wearing costumes relating to the harsh granite buildings around them

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# Wolfe's growl lacks bite

Tom Wolfe's architectural writings are fun but flawed



Will Wiles

'Manifestos are not gentle,' wrote the American author Tom Wolfe. 'They are commandments, brought down from the mountaintop, to the boom of thunder.' He was not talking about the work in which these words appear, the 1981 polemic on architecture, *From Bauhaus to Our House*. Instead, like almost everything else in that book, they are disparaging an architect – in this case Robert Venturi, for being insufficiently radical in his break with modernism in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*.

Accidental aspects of our milieu have much more influence over the formation of our ideas than we like to admit – chaotic influences such as the books or people that we happen to encounter. Wolfe's argument is steeped in the social life of well-heeled Manhattan, and at times it seems that the mistakes his acquaintances made in commissioning their own architect-designed houses have more influence over his thoughts than anything else.

In my own case, I realise how much I owe to the unknown person who stocked the shelves of the architecture section of Blackwell's art bookshop on Broad Street in Oxford, where I mispent much of my pocket money. Gentle or not, here are some indispensable features that will help your manifesto along: it should be cheap, slim and funny. From Bauhaus to *Our House* had all those qualities; I took that, rather than *Complexity and Contradiction*, home.

When Wolfe died in May, I read it again. Outside, there was the literal thunder of the extraordinary spring storm, but Wolfe doesn't

To keep the argument in the realm of taste and fashion, he has to exclude the social and economic reasons why extravagance lost some of its lustre

boom – instead he cackles along, blithely dismissing the whole heritage of European modernism, and the Americans who fell under its spell. Gropius, Mies and so on might have been all right for Europe – indeed, he doesn't seem at all interested in Europe – but they were all wrong for the United States. And while the broadside against modernism is a familiar literary form, Wolfe's angle is still quite refreshing, even after a third of a century. It's not that it's ugly, although he definitely regards it so; no, the problem is it's too restrained and polite.

Mid-century America, he argued, was the locus of the world, the new Rome; its wealth was immeasurable, its appetites 'enormous, lurid, creamy, preposterous'. But rather than sharing in this exuberance and excess, contemporary architecture had embraced a style evolved to provide inexpensive housing for European proletarians. He wanted 'a barbaric yawp across the roofs of the world', and received instead 'a cough at a concert'.

This all sounded good to me, 25 years ago. But there's a glaring flaw that wasn't obvious to me at the time. Wolfe is all about taste. From Bauhaus entirely rests on an idea of startling implausibility: that modernism supplanted the beaux arts and assorted other predecessor style because its princes, those wily Euros, managed to successfully bamboozle and browbeat every client in America. The corporate titans and behemoth winners of the new Rome collectively blinked, suppressed their preposterous appetites for a moment and said 'Well, you know best, Herr Gropius' and that was that. To keep the argument in the realm of taste and fashion, he has to exclude the social and economic reasons why extravagance lost some of its lustre after the Gilded Age.

If anyone knew how to flog a dodgy idea, it was Wolfe, and *From Bauhaus* is a reminder that humour is the sales executive of agreement – make someone laugh and there's a better chance you'll get them nodding along. He writes about the slavish adherence of young architects to Mies, and how they would make great sacrifices in order to own a Barcelona chair – including cancelling the diaper laundry service (this predates the disposable nappy). 'It got to the point where, if I saw a Barcelona chair, I immediately – in the classic stimulus-response bond – smelled diapers gone high.' And thanks to Wolfe, I've never been able to look at them the same way either. ●

Will Wiles is an author. Read him here every other month and at [ribaj.com](http://ribaj.com)

## CRITICAL DIFFERENCE

The reaction to modernism was at least a heterogeneous, interesting intellectual field, before Prince Charles intruded. 1960-61 produced Jane Jacobs' *Death and Life* and Lewis Mumford's *The City in History*, which feel like different eras, or different worlds. So too for 1981: just as Wolfe produced *From Bauhaus*, on the other side of the same city, Marshall Berman was finishing *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*.

# Get back to reality

Be clear who your audience is, and speak to it, to connect



Ben Derbyshire

Travelling across America, the global nature of architecture is everywhere. The same international stars seem ubiquitous, the profession's challenges are apparently universal, and everyone seems obsessed with the idea that more and better competitions will solve many of our difficulties (I'll come back to that). But what lessons are there to be drawn from the difference in approach to communicating the impact of the profession – especially comparing the Venice Biennale where I also stopped, with the Chicago Architecture Foundation?

Both organisations enable architects to present our work to a wide public. Both take advantage of their surroundings and the audiences they draw. But the Chicago Architecture Centre has lessons for us with its clear focus on making architecture accessible, enjoyable and stimulating to people outside that community.

The centre is building a new home in the base of Mies van de Rohe's last ever project, a classic tower overlooking the Chicago River at 111 East Wacker Drive. It is to be filled with a skyscraper exhibition, a model of downtown Chicago, a learning centre, auditorium and shop. From within, unobstructed curtain walling will make the city itself an exhibit.

But most striking is the Foundation's commitment to the use of plain English to explain the purpose of architecture. Its 450 volunteers are trained how to communicate to a lay audience and they provide a knowledgeable commentary on the tours of the city that the centre offers from its bookshop and from the river wharf where its boats are docked.

The foundation's director, Lynn Osmond,

The concerns of the profession can seem esoteric, our dialogue self-serving and exclusive

told me that no visiting architect may lecture there without submitting their presentation for scrutiny. She has seen too many audiences drift off as a red pointer dot hovers lovingly over an obscure detail that means everything to the presenter but precious little to them.

I enjoyed my first Biennale visit, where there is similarly immense pleasure and stimulation to be found in the great work on display. Nowhere else, I should imagine, comes close to the energizing atmosphere of so much talent in one place – and which is an augury for the car-free city of the future. And this too is an exhibition that addresses the public. Vaporetti plying the waterways have great scarlet billboards advertising the Biennale to all comers.

I found much that really matters at the Biennale, displayed to convey real meaning to a lay audience. But there was an unease too. The language of architecture is often impenetrable. The concerns of the profession can seem esoteric, our dialogue self-serving and exclusive. The problem occurs when we are unclear who our audience is, or when both professionals and lay people are present. As the seasoned commentator and lay enthusiast, Pat Brown, observed, much of the discourse she heard in such circumstances had little relevance to the lives of ordinary citizens affected by it.

And that serves as a useful reminder. When clinicians talk to each other their terminology will be precise and technical, such as to convey complex and sophisticated meaning appropriate to highly trained professionals. But at the bedside, they use plain English and take care to speak in lay terms. Dare I suggest our profession should pay more attention to this distinction? It may even be that our propensity to be drawn towards the arcane leads in itself to sophistry. Our desire to find uniquely interesting, original points tends towards obscurantism, so that in the end the language distracts us from issues that are relevant to the public we are supposed to serve?

I suppose I am posing the question: just who are we trying to impress? Each other, or the public whose wellbeing ought to be the outcome of our endeavours? Which brings me back to competitions. Remember, these are set and judged, often as not, by our peers. They surely cannot be the only model for delivering quality outcomes. I'd argue that it's equally, if not more, important that the consumer of our architecture be the arbiter of our success. ●

@ben\_derbyshire  
president@riba.org

## DISCIPLINARY SUSPENSION

On 14 December 2017 the RIBA Hearings Panel found that Igho Tabor of London was guilty of breaching the RIBA Code of Professional Conduct, in particular: Principle 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.3 and 3.5, in that she failed to comply with an adjudicator's decision and repayment schedule and failed to respond to a complaint/dispute appropriately. Further, the potential for a conflict of interest was created due to Ms Tabor's positions of responsibility including: project manager, contractor and architect. The panel found that the terms and conditions provided to her client were not sufficiently robust and she failed to adequately keep her client informed of the progress of a project. The panel decided that the appropriate sanction for this was suspension from membership for a period of 24 months with the requirement that Ms Tabor only be eligible for reinstatement following the completion of 35 hours of targeted CPD training.



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Creating the landscape that belongs requires a sense of a continuing evolution that has no conclusion. But for Dan Pearson, that is what's so satisfying

Words: Eleanor Young Portrait: Ivan Jones

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# The long view

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What would architects be like if they first studied what they designed with, the taxonomy, make up and exigencies of their materials? Then spent years placing them in the ground with their own hands and nurturing them into life as Dan Pearson did. As Pearson frees a tender new leaf of a sacred bamboo, in the courtyard garden he designed at the Garden Museum, the possibilities of following this path look tantalising; a way to truly master a craft.

You may have watched Pearson on TV, his voice warmly resonant on gardens and landscape, or read his writings over the years on the intimacies of gardens in the Observer and other broadsheets. Or have seen how his planting layers the concrete of the old structure and new volumes that became the Stirling-shortlisted Juergen Teller Studio ('We often do work on ugly buildings.' 'Do you do tough?' 'I do soft.'). At the achingly wonderful Maggie's Centre at Charing Cross Hospital, his design transports you from the harsh tar-

mac of a car park into lush understorey and weaves plant world, light and wall together. At King's Cross his strategy for Argent encourages people to feel the landscape, not just the streetscape. He has a rare gift, that few enough architects have, of making buildings belong.

Belonging accounts for much in the way Pearson designs. The position, ground conditions, soil, dry and damp, light and shade, define the planting. His writing hints at where plants belong, his designs demonstrate it. He has always looked to plantswoman and garden designer Beth Chatto as leading on this naturalistic planting, although he finds many more landscape designers share this approach, and spirit, in mainland Europe. At that fixture of the garden design calendar, the Chelsea Flower Show, naturalistic is now the norm. Does it matter that it has become a fashion? Pearson thinks not, though it might not extend to his own convictions about the wider importance of ecology – ponds to breed, meadows to feed. 'It doesn't need to be deep to

be useful,' he says. I sense less a concern about the nebulous good of the planet, but rather a more grounded belief about the resonance and balance of place at all levels.

Naturalistic doesn't mean returning to nature. The balance is delicate. At Juergen Teller's Studio there is a sense of wildness colonising the concrete walls. Pearson counselled Teller that the plants could indeed overwhelm to the point where light and even doors would be blocked. This is part of his gardener designer's skill, working with time and growth and decay too. With relief Pearson reports that Teller took on someone to corral his plants. This is, in fact, the very ordinary but fundamental starting point for Pearson's designs: How will they be looked after?

Pearson volunteers that his first question is about maintenance; it defines what he can do with the planting and design. Will the public landowner switch maintenance contractors to ones who will come in and prune all the shrubs into cubes? Will the keen and



'Do you do tough?'  
'I do soft'



**Left** Dan Pearson in  
the courtyard of his  
London studio.



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HUW MORGAN (2)

consultative project manager be replaced by labourers who have little experience beyond the family farm? These questions may be uppermost in his mind at the moment due to the 18ha Amanyangyun Resort in Shanghai China which opened at the start of the year. Here he surrounded historic villas with over 1,000 ancient camphor trees, all rescued from a reservoir site, to create an immediate sense of rootedness. But can a guiding hand for the continued evolution of the resort be sustained?

There is no sense of completion for Pearson. Plants demand continuity. He likes to go back a few times a year to gardens he has worked on, or to have Rose, the gardener from Maggie's Charing Cross, pick up the phone and try out ideas for replacement plants. Designing in three dimensions is hard enough but how do you design with time as well? It is less of a plan and more of a feel for the speed of growth and the comings and goings of the seasons. Pearson thinks of weeks, then seasons, then after 18 months of plants establishing themselves so people get the benefit,

**Above** Dry stone walls, hedgerows and meadows were part of a wider plan at the Coastal House in Devon. This wide-ranging approach was also taken at the Lutyens' house of Folly Farm where Pearson's landscaping improved the 4.5ha of habitat as well as taking on the garden in the spirit of its designer, Gertrude Jekyll.

**Below** Pearson has sited the Coastal House more comfortably and elegantly in its landscape near Dartmouth, and drawn out the best of the landscape, just as 6a has now done on the house.



the three year mark when the bare ground is hidden by perennials meshing together, and trees and shrubs start to assert themselves, then five years as they mature. At 10 years it is time to start making changes again. In the grand landscapes of Chatsworth, Derbyshire, where he has taken on Capability Brown's legacy, he was thinking in 15-30 year intervals. 'They are used to that at Chatsworth.'

But what time does to a growing place is hard to communicate. 'It is a spatial thing in your head,' he says. 'It's very difficult to convey to clients.' One client asked the studio to draw out the design for each season for the next five years but this would have been months of work. Instead Pearson sketches it with words. 'You need a conversation, where you can describe the important things and give the mood of a place in each season.' As he takes you through the year in an orchard you want to go and sit in the dappled shade, you're drawn to the springtime trees in blossom over a carpet of white narcissi, the long summer grass mown into paths pulls you



## Does Dan Pearson still do his own weeding? 'I need that to feel normal,' he says

with its sense of direction, and you can smell apples edging to ripeness, ready to fall to the clear ground plane of grass before the clean sculptural lines of the trees re-emerge in the winter. How long until you can walk through and lie in the shade? 'About 10 years.'

'There is a pleasure to waiting,' Pearson says. It is 10 years since he started work on the Coastal House, near Dartmouth in Devon. With these patient clients he has drawn a series of landscapes around the house extending out with meadows, hedgerow and woodland planting, eventually suggesting that architect 6a took on the house – which this year won an RIBA Award. He has collaborated with many architects but 6a and Pearson's studio seems to be a particularly happy pairing of sensibilities; they are also working together on what will become a sunken jungle of a home on a deep, narrow plot in Hackney using a basement inherited with the site. In Melbourne, for the same client Nectar Efkarpidis and his Molonglo Group, they are designing a tower together.

Like 6a, Pearson draws out the best of a place and tunes it, understanding the importance of compression and release, adding in concerns for growth, productivity and habitat. At the modernist experiment of Dartington Hall, he has taken on the masterplan starting with the worst stumbling block to appreciating the estate – arrival – before getting deeper into the gardens. At the huge Lowther Castle in the Lake District he is swirling the rose garden into new forms. At Lambeth Palace he is creating a sanctuary around Wright and Wright's sealed collection building, a 'body of water' that will give insects and amphibians a stopping off place in the city. While he loves helping people realise their dreams in private gardens, of course he wants to design more public spaces. 'We can make places better,' he says. I muse that perhaps the infrastructure is not something he is interested in but he can talk as intensely on drainage as on trees and ha-has – if less beautifully. Thus he talks of his hours spent on the



**Above** At King's Cross the studio worked on strategy with Townshend Landscape. It also did some public realm design, as here alongside Waitrose.

**Below** The concrete walls of the Juergen Teller Studio with their nascent planting, before it had time to colonise the studio.



contested and unrealised Garden Bridge not with regret but with acceptance: 'You could see there were holes in it.'

From the few short hours I spend with him it seems that Pearson needs little extra but is happy in himself: self sufficient, content, if only he can do the things he loves. In the little brick courtyard of his studio of nine people in Lambeth, the light cooled to green through the fresh new leaves of a katsura tree, I ask how his own gardens are looked after, this and the Somerset farm that he took on eight years ago. Does Dan Pearson still do his own weeding?

'I need that to feel normal,' he says. How does he find enough time as he travels the world on projects, still living much of the time in London? 'That is the most important question you have asked,' he says (as our meeting draws to a close). A protected day a week in Somerset, working alongside two helpers, is how it works now – just. He doesn't have an answer to finding more time – perhaps fewer projects abroad, but still in Europe. And in the US, Malibu is fascinating. It is not really a complete answer but, like so much else, it is all a question of balance. ●

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# In search of elevation

Everything's up in the air at this Venice Biennale. But what is it for, really?

Words and photographs Hugh Pearman

Stairways to heaven. Reaching towards the light. Infinity reflections. These recurrent tropes of the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale, to be found deployed by disparate nationalities and cultures, represent – what, I wonder? Freespace, they called it: that's the overarching theme for the exhibition as set by directors Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara of Grafton Architects. It's a fine concept, intended to emphasise that architecture is about so much more than ostensible function, goes beyond the walls of buildings into another realm of shared civitas, of human exchange. 'Citizens should demand architecture as a civic right,' they say.

As usual it is then up to individual nations and individual architects to interpret that theme. For those unfamiliar with the structure of the Venice Architecture Biennales, the directors are free to invite whoever they like to take part in the two main general exhibition areas: the medieval Arsenale buildings in the old naval dockyard, and the Central Pavilion in the Biennale gardens or Giardini. But aside from setting the theme, they have no control over the national pavilions – mostly for historic reasons in the Giardini but also dotted throughout the Venetian archipelago.

'Citizens should demand architecture as a civic right,' say show directors Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara

**Below** The Vatican chapel by Souto de Moura looks as if it could last for ever.





**Left** Alison Brooks' vertical cloister in her Arsenale installation, which plays with perspective and reflection – you have to lie on your back to get this view.

And finally there are all kinds of 'collateral events', piggy-backing on the main exhibition, all over the city.

That structure never changes so the success or otherwise of the Biennale all comes down to the strength of character of the directors, who must crack the whip as if at the circus but who must also command respect without the whip. To over-generalise somewhat, the weaker Biennales (and national pavilions) are those directed by academics and critics: the stronger ones by thinking practitioners. This is one of the stronger ones.

It is satisfyingly analogue, full of tangible stuff, with remarkable little electronica. In the Arsenale, Niall McLaughlin's manually-driven cosmological rotating capriccio of his own buildings – a Soanian imagined world – is a beautifully-crafted highlight, if somewhat self-indulgent. Australian architect John Wardle's 'Somewhere Other', which solidifies drawn perspective in eucalyptus-scented wood and includes viewing lenses, is excellent. Peter Cook, no less, declared it the best thing in the whole Biennale.

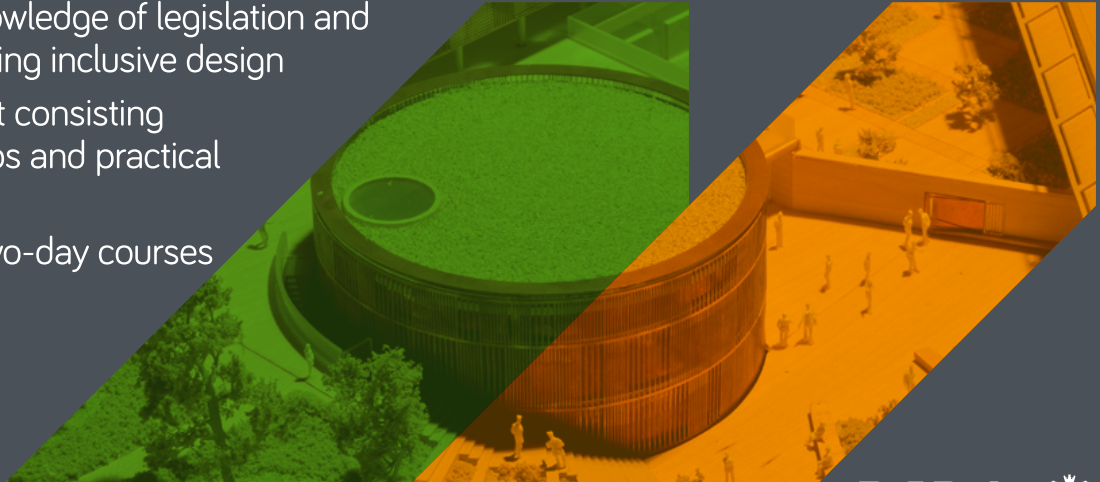
What's officially the best thing among the national pavilions is the Swiss offering which is indeed captivating: the concept is that this is an empty apartment you're being shown round (white walls, wooden floor) but it keeps messing with your head in an Alice-in-Wonderland way. Some rooms and doors are huge, kitchen worktops are way too high, other spaces and doors are tiny. This throws

**Below** McLaughlin's capstan-like rotating capriccio.



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the emphasis on your awareness of your own body in architect-designed space.

The Swiss may have won that category but the Brits (Caruso St John with artist Marcus Taylor) got themselves a special mention for 'Island'. This does what the Brits almost never manage in the claustrophobic compartmentalised British Council pavilion, which can engender mental muddle and over-complexity. 'Island' for once takes a single concept and carries it through. The pavilion is left empty. An open town square is made instead, elevated high above the

**Above** The ascent to the elevated 'town square' atop the British Pavilion.

building on scaffolding. You must labour up a long flight of temporary steps to get there and there's not nearly enough shade from the Adriatic sun and the serving of tea from an urn at 4pm is a bit whimsical, but this simple architectural gesture, opening up the pavilion to the lagoon, works. The pavilion below isn't necessarily empty anyway: events take place there. At the opening these included the RIBA-hosted 'Europa Super session' where a formidable selection of architects from across Europe discussed future practice (the spectre of Brexit being much invoked).

Others have much the same idea unfortunately, notably Hungary (same scaffolding stairs rising to a – smaller – platform hovering above the pavilion roof), Austria (more satisfactory timber stair-and-platform arrangement rising to just beneath the glazed roof) and China – with a very nice circular timber tower/auditorium in the its usual big space at the far end of the Arsenale, though that does not break through to the light.

Grafton's clarity of design comes through in the main Corderie (ropewalk) section of the Arsenale where the pair literally measure its length in metres and Venetian feet: the long walk becoming a giant tape measure. They leave the Corderie clear and uncluttered –

'The 'Happenstance' has a festive air – architecture as a child-oriented interactive thing, with pieces available so you can add to or alter it if you wish



**Left** Directors Grafton Architects left the Corderie free of clutter.



it's a similar story in the often chopped-about Central Pavilion – and both look all the better for it. Again, there is reach-for-the-light (to be exact, the Corderie's high windows) from some of the exhibitors. A sense of numinous yearning pervades.

If that is secular, it's quite the opposite at the 'pavilion' of the Holy See of Rome, the first time the Vatican has taken part in the Biennale. It has taken over the previously overgrown public gardens on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore and built 11 temporary chapels by leading architects ranging from Eduardo Souto de Moura via Sean Godsell to Norman Foster. In fact there are 10, with the 11th being a chapel-like exhibition pavilion for the drawings of Gunnar Asplund's Woodland Chapel in Stockholm. Godsell is the only one to make a tower, which opens up on all sides at the base to reveal the altar – his nave is open-air with a few offset benches. Godsell

wanted a bell in his tower for visitors to ring but it seems the Holy See frowned on that. Instead it functions like a taller James Turrell-like Skyspace.

These chapels are meant to last only as long as the Biennale but Foster's tensioned-timber offering looks well enough built to last for 30 years while Eduardo Souto de Moura's semi-sunken exercise in colossal stone slabs would probably last 2,000. In contrast, the pleasingly playful contribution by Barcelona's Flores & Prats in adobe style is a hollow plastered piece of scenery mounted on a timber frame – more in the spirit of the event, I think.

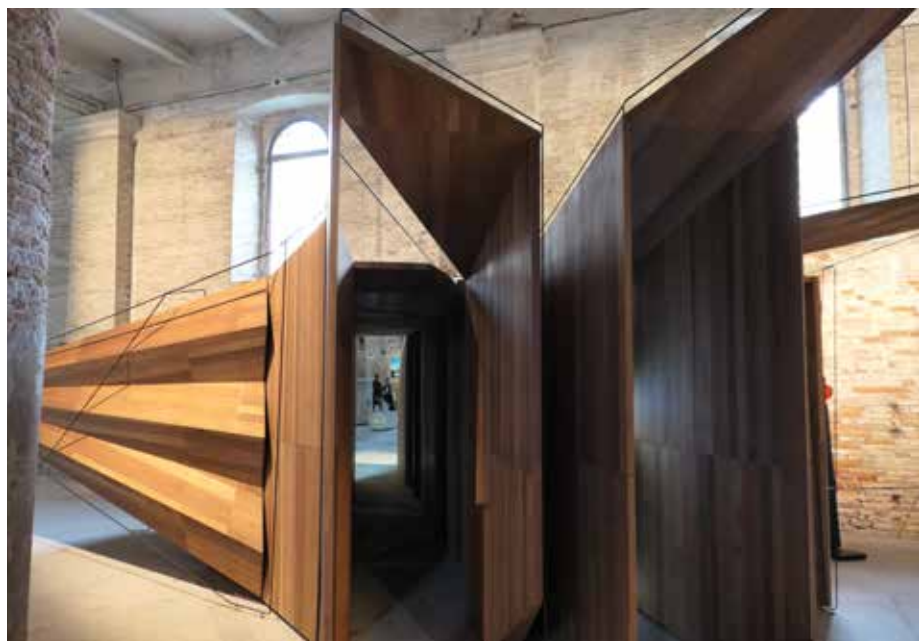
Ireland's thoughtful contribution considers the existing 'freespace' of its market towns and how they could be improved while Scotland's collateral event 'The 'Happenstance' in the gardens of the Palazzo Ca'Zenobio in Dorsoduro has a festive air – architecture as a child-oriented interactive thing, with pieces available so you can add to or alter it if you wish. Good to see a number of Scottish architects and artists joining forces on this adventure playground of the Lagoon.

As ever, you're left with the nagging doubt – what does all this effort achieve? It is essentially the profession showing off to itself, albeit in a relatively thoughtful, restrained way this time. Which is fine – a forum for international exchange of pure architectural ideas is valuable. Does it affect the outside world one jot? Unlikely. ●

**Left** Sean Godsell's Vatican chapel takes the form of an abstracted tower opening at the base.

'Freespace' the 16th Venice Biennale international architecture exhibition, runs until 25 November. [laBiennale.org/en/](http://laBiennale.org/en/)

**Right** Perspective made solid – John Wardle installation in the Corderie.





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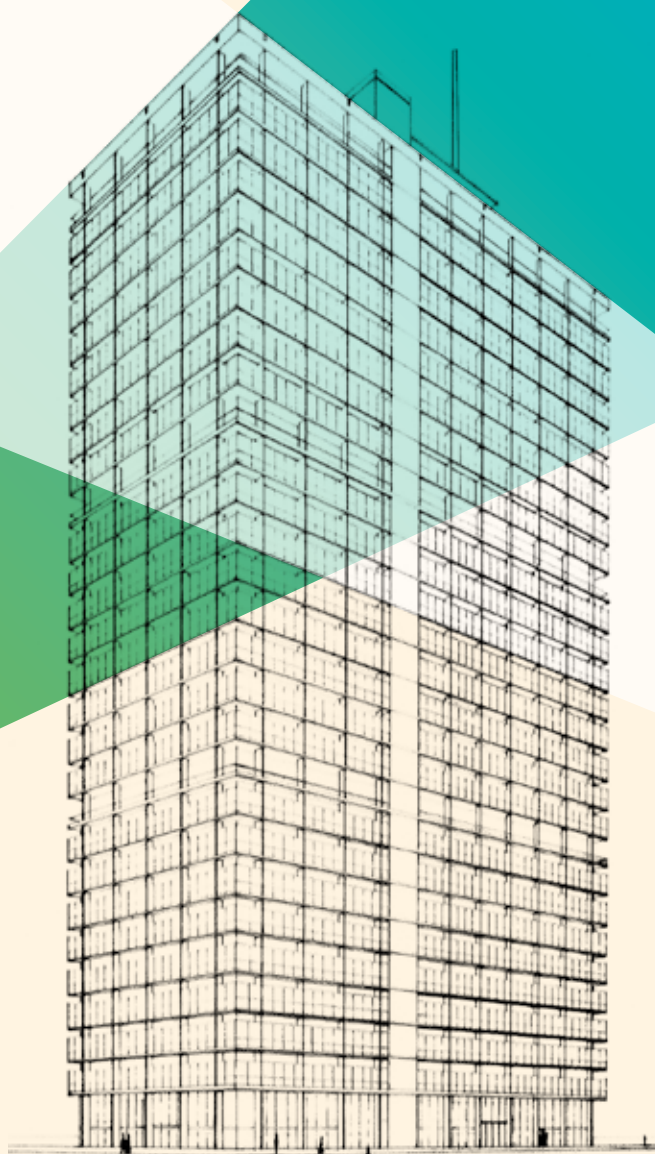
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# David John Whitehead

## 1961–2018

Generous mentor who covered the whole scope of design and construction, working for some of the best-known practices on many award winning schemes



David Whitehead's architectural career was distinguished by his work with some of the best known London practices over the last three decades, as well as the output of his own practice for 11 years.

He was a fully rounded architect with talents covering the whole scope of architectural design and

construction, playing a key role in a range of great projects, mostly award winners. His historical knowledge is revealed in his 2010 book, 'London, The Architecture Guide', co-authored with structural engineer Henning Klattenhoff, a major work covering 500 buildings.

He was dedicated to architecture, with exceptional skill in the delivery of projects, working tirelessly to refine construction details, converting architectural visions into buildable reality. He was a prolific draughtsman and drew beautifully. Sharing his time and knowledge generously, he was a mentor to many younger architects.

Born in Sheffield, he was ever a Yorkshire man with a wry northern wit and was a lifelong supporter of Sheffield United FC. He believed in the moral purpose of architecture and shared his opinions bluntly and honestly.

After studying at Liverpool Polytechnic his admiration of pure modernism took him to Powell and Moya, to work on Great Ormond Street Hospital. Then at Greenhill Jenner he worked on the Brixton Barrier Block and community based projects. With MacCormac Jamieson Prichard (MJP) projects included the Cable and Wireless College and Lancaster University Library.

Among the projects he completed in his own practice was the Poppintree Community Centre in Ballymun, Dublin, part of a major regeneration project.

In latter years he worked with Dixon Jones, with Muma on Manchester's Whitworth Art Gallery and Storey's Field Centre, Cambridge, and with Four Four Six Six

Architects on various residential projects.

A few words don't do justice to his career and achievements but most importantly he was a devoted son, brother, uncle and friend of many, who greatly enjoyed his bonhomie and will be saddened by his early parting. David died much too young after a period of illness. Below are appreciations from some he worked with in chronological order.

'David's drawings were exquisite, his design work inventive and uncompromising. Most memorable of all though was the caustic humour which he maintained throughout his life' – Peter Baynes, ex Powell and Moya

'David was a talented and knowledgeable architect who dedicated his life to delivering great buildings and nurturing many friends with kindness and his renowned wit' – Glaspole Graham, ex Greenhill Jenner

'David was a real architect, able to evolve an idea into built form. His tenacity and rigour were applied across the scale from one-off houses, to colleges, campus plans and urban design. David was a pleasure to work with, his wry humour and colourful waistcoats are sadly missed' – David Prichard, ex MacCormac Jamieson Prichard

'Add David's generosity to his exacting design sense and technical rigor and you had a complete architect. I'm lucky to have known David for nearly 30 years, at times as colleague or client rep, but always as a friend' – Ali Grehan, Dublin City Architect

'David was a very particular kind of architect, someone who could be completely relied upon at crucial points in a working drawing programme, that moment where competence and imagination come to the fore. He was also an engaging character whose presence enlivened the atmosphere in the office' – Jeremy Dixon, Dixon Jones

'It was always a joy to be in David's company - he was kind, intelligent with an affiliative, dry sense of humour befitting a true Yorkshireman' – Simon Usher, MUMA

'David was both unique and inspirational. For all his many eccentricities, he was a kind, loyal, funny, and highly knowledgeable man, who was a fantastic mentor and truly young at heart' – Daniel Welham, Four Four Six Six Architects. ●

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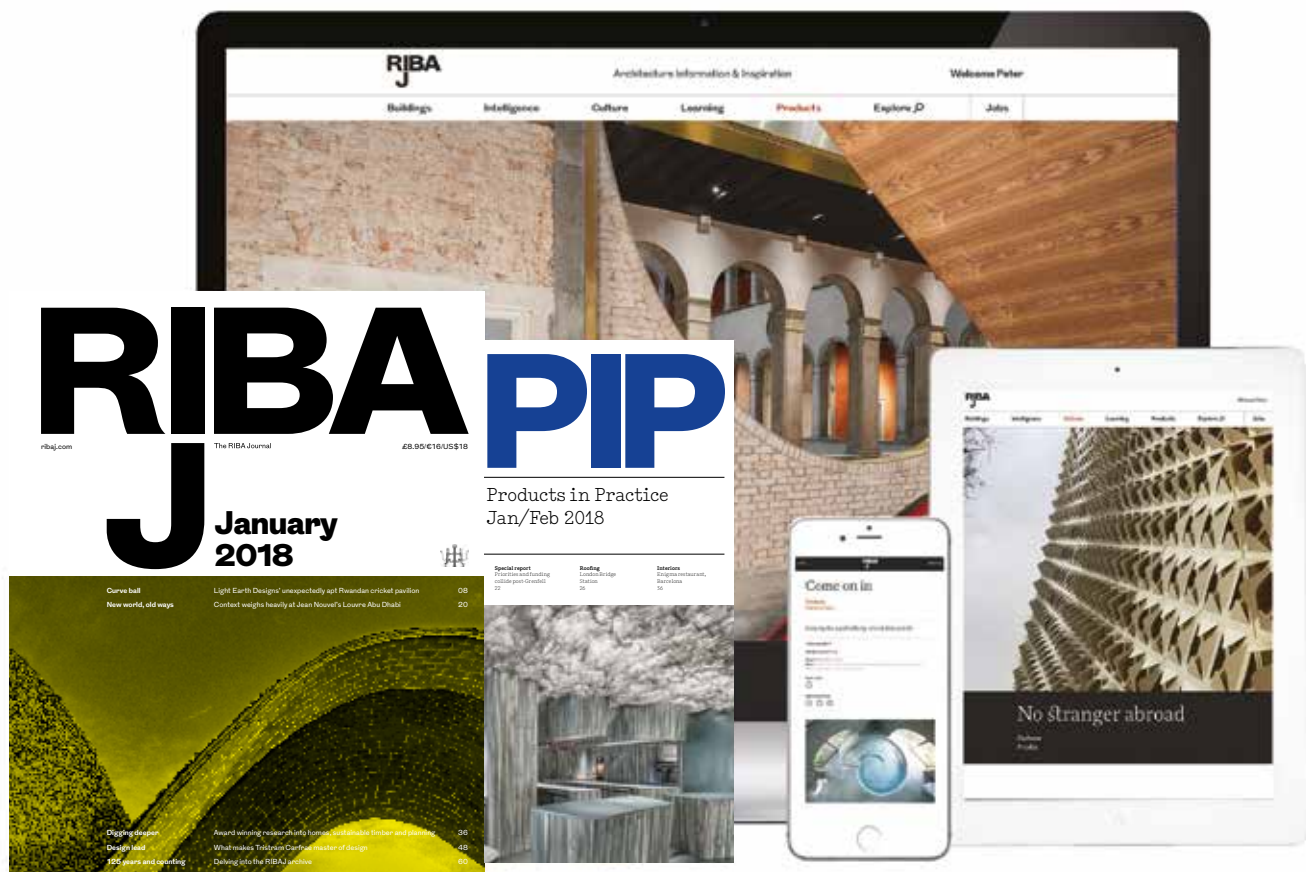
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# RIBA J125 YEARS

## Post-war rebuilding and modernisation hold sway

Hugh Pearman

The annual RIBA Conference, now replaced with smaller, more focused events such as Guerilla Tactics, used to be a really big number, held in various key locations around the UK and even (in its last iteration in the first decade of the 21st century) in places such as Paris and Venice. But in July 1962 the profession came together in Coventry. The theme was 'Building and Planning in the Motor Age'. The September Journal devoted eight pages to it though a perhaps related topic was seen as even more important – nine pages in the same issue were given to a discussion on prefabrication.

This is early in the Sixties – before the release of the Beatles' first LP – memories of the Blitz were still strong, bomb sites were everywhere, and Coventry had notoriously suffered more than most. Reconstruction was well under way. On 30 May that year, its new cathedral designed by Sir Basil Spence – the 'Phoenix at Coventry' as he called it in his own published account – had been inaugurated with Benjamin Britten's specially-commissioned War Requiem.

Not that RIBA President Sir Robert Matthew, himself a veteran of post-war

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Left They were meant to be discussing traffic in towns but they all wanted to see the canal restoration.

reconstruction with his Royal Festival Hall, mentioned the cathedral, and nor did anyone else in the RIBA report. Instead, he drew attention to another aspect of the city's rebuilding, and in a particularly revealing manner.

'Here in this city, in the aftermath of the Blitz, your City Architect and his team prepared the first design actually to be executed in this country for a pedestrian town centre. Indeed, Sir Donald Gibson's team had the foresight to begin to redesign the centre before the blitz. The blitz partially cleared the site but the architects had realised that reconstruction of the centre to meet the needs of a greatly expanded city was going to be necessary in any event...the Coventry plan, because it was never muscle-bound by formal design, had been flexible enough to change with changing needs, and was today accommodating vastly greater numbers of cars than were ever thought of in the 1940s without infringing the basic principles of the original conception.'

Here (as also seen in the County of London Plan of 1943, RIBA 125 archive page June 2018) is evidence supporting the old jibe that architects and planners destroyed more than the Luftwaffe in their modernising zeal. Now of course the 'new' buildings are themselves historic, and listed (Coventry Cathedral, railway station and most recently key buildings in Gibson's Upper Precinct, 1948-58, as praised by Matthew).

Guest of honour was minister of transport Ernest Marples, a controversial figure who brought us the M1 motorway, yellow lines and traffic wardens, frequently accused of conflict of interest because he owned a road-construction company and inaugurated the Beeching closure of railway lines. Even so, he warned against 'the Los Angeles solution'. Motorways had ruined that city, he pointed out.

Others referred to planner Colin Buchanan's warning that 'there were limits to the traffic capacity of any area if tolerable environmental standards were to be achieved.' A photo of delegates on a conference tour shows a yearning for a different kind of environment: a narrow boat piled high with delegates is seen making its way through a lock on the Stratford-on-Avon canal, then being restored. A reminder that the post-war years were not just about massive rebuilding, but also about a spirited conservation movement. ●



**Emmanuel House flats**  
**West Dulwich, London, 1970**

In 1967, the British architects David Hutchison, Graham Locke and Tony Monk visited Montreal for the Expo 67 World Fair. During their visit, they were impressed by Moshe Safdie's experimental Habitat housing complex of prefabricated concrete units, stacked to provide each flat with a garden on its neighbour's roof.

The firm subsequently began work on a block of 10 flats in West Dulwich, using it as an opportunity to experiment on a smaller scale with ideas picked up in Canada for the creation of economical mass housing. The project was built on the site of the former Emmanuel Church of 1878, which had been demolished to make way for a

smaller church and adjoining youth centre, designed by the same architects in 1965. Inspired by Habitat, the flats used a stepped section to provide private terraces of varying sizes for each flat.

The block provided what the Architectural Review described as 'a piece of drama in these otherwise staid streets' of Victorian semi-detached houses. Characteristically, the photographer Tony Ray-Jones, shooting for the Review in 1970, exploited the structure's unusual shapes and angles to further enhance the dramatic potential of his image. ●

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