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PHILIP VILE

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We welcome comments! Write to us: [letters.ribaj@riba.org](mailto:letters.ribaj@riba.org)

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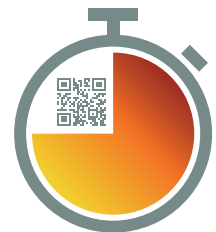
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# 1: Buildings

‘The arts are essential to any complete national life,’ said Winston Churchill at the Royal Academy in April 1938 when he was a mere backbencher. ‘The State owes it to itself to sustain and encourage them... ill fares the race which fails to salute the arts with the reverence and delight which are their due.’

Let’s hold that thought with this month’s selection of buildings, concerned as they are both with culture and

the art of living well. We have a small house, and a large pair of apartment towers, which go way beyond mere function. We have an exemplary regional theatre extension and a public library of national and international significance. And we have a place for growing old with elegance and style.

Architecture might not always reach the high notes but here, reverence and delight are in order. ●

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Stephen Cousins on the wonder of glulam  
[www.ribaj.com/timbertower](http://www.ribaj.com/timbertower)

## Below

Enjoying the new look at Bristol Old Vic, page 14.



PHILIP VILE



# City sanctuary

Noise and stress slip away as you step through the fence into Takero Shimazaki's hidden basin of concrete calm

Words: Isabelle Priest



View from the sunken courtyard through the dining area into the kitchen beyond.

**Right** Doors are stuck on the outside of the opening so from the opposite side the frame disappears.

Blink while walking up Tiverton Road in Queen's Park, north London, and you'll miss the new house. Positioned just after the railway bridge, its blank vertical weatherboarding runs almost seamlessly into the feather-board fencing of the neighbouring heavily revamped 1940s house. The height is continuous, only the width of the planks and tone of the timber changes – a silver grey rather than the very familiar fence brown.

Step over to the other side of the street, being careful on this peculiarly busy residential back road, and you'll see only ever so slightly more – a tiny composition of three elevations, layered and rising in height behind to a mini pitched block at the back, all the same silvery material.

This unassuming facade disguises a two-storey 100m<sup>2</sup> house squeezed and sunk into a slope on the site of a former garage beside a lane of other garages by the railway cutting – completely undetectable from the road. Like many end-of-terrace plots in London, the adjacent 1940s house included a single garage, and its owners, a writer and photographer, wanted to split it off from the main property and build a house for them to downsize into. Having failed to get planning permission from Brent council with another architect, in 2014 the couple approached Takero Shimazaki Architects on a word of mouth recommendation.

'All our work is referrals,' explains Shimazaki. 'They went to visit our Curzon Brunswick refurbishment and said they really enjoyed the atmosphere and tactile quality of the concrete. They asked whether we could design a house like that.'

Ultimately, external concrete proved too costly for the fixed budget, so the building is





**Client** Private  
**Architect** Takero Shimazaki Architects  
**Structural engineer** Foster Structures  
**M&E consultant** Jared Engineering  
**Approved building inspector** Integral Building Control  
**Main contractor** Martin Kelly Builders  
**Windows** George Barnsdale  
**Concrete floor** Midland Polished Concrete  
**Brass work** The London Blacksmith  
**Decorative steelwork** Alex Morton Services  
**Cladding** Eco Choice **Rooflights** Roofmaker

## This is architectural drama in a tight space

**Below** The pitched part of the ground floor is divided into the stairwell and a landing/study.

**Below right** Polished concrete floor, rough walls. The stair handrail aligns on the last step.



clad in weathered chestnut to give a similar *béton brut* effect. But it is fair to say, despite this compromise (the ambitions were as grand as 6a's Photography Studio for Juergen Teller), such is the thoroughness of the architecture in general that it would be relatively simple to guess what the original brief for the building might have included.

Entering through the fence door, you leave the noise and stresses of the wider city behind. The ground floor becomes first floor as you cross a walkway overlooking an unexpected courtyard opening up to the left, planted with a Japanese maple tree. The sound of trains whirring by and the occasional car transporter thundering along the tracks recede and you find yourself protected and enclosed by what is essentially a dug-out concrete tank. The arched repeats in the balcony's balustrade are reflected in the long windows encircling the courtyard.

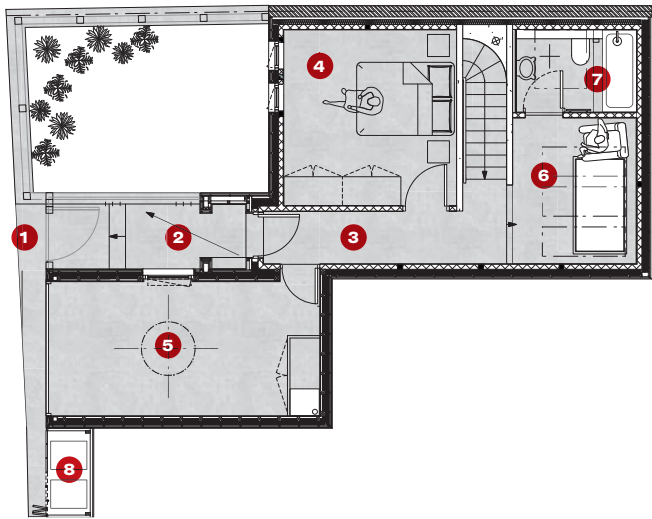
Ahead, through an arched porch with a large door behind, the interior continues in raw cast concrete. A long corridor lit by a large skylight at the end draws you towards the pitched volume at the back, used as a study or generous landing space, passing bedrooms to the left and right as you go. Single steps up and down as well as polished floors and rough walls add to the architectural drama in a tight space.

There are as few doors as possible to allow spaces and light to flow. Of the few there are, the frames are put onto the wall to create a deep opening and an invisible frame from the opposite side – as in Sigurd Lewerentz's St Mark's Church in Stockholm. A glass panel



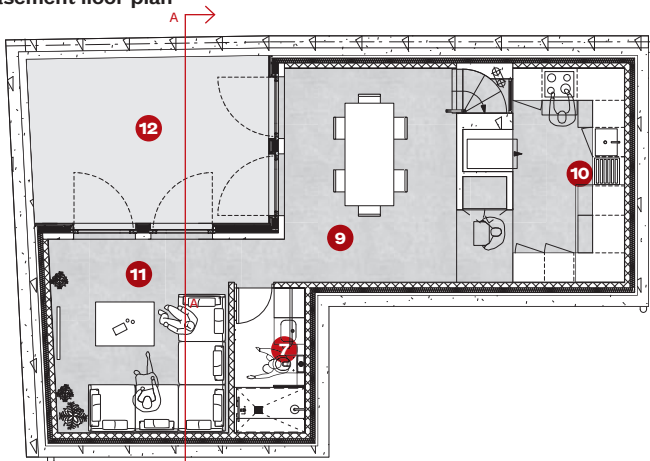
ANTON GORLENKO (2)

Ground floor plan



- 1 Street entrance
- 2 Walkway
- 3 Hall
- 4 Main bedroom
- 5 Secondary bedroom
- 6 Landing/study
- 7 Bathroom
- 8 Bin store
- 9 Dining area
- 10 Kitchen
- 11 Sitting area
- 12 Courtyard

Basement floor plan



0 1 3 5m



**Top right** From the street the house appears as layers of timber fencing.  
**Below** Looking down into the surprise courtyard from the walkway crossing to the front door from the street.

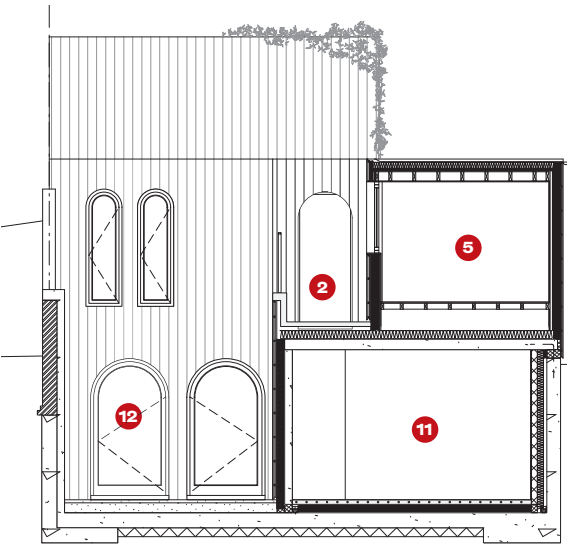


in the floor allows light from the skylights into the kitchen below.

‘I read *In Praise of Shadows* when I was a student,’ says Shimazaki. ‘The way it discusses light and shadow has always been an inspiration to me.’

Between the main bedroom and study a tall, narrow, full-concrete perpendicular stair with a fine bronze handrail leads down into the main living area, its end curving into the L-shaped space. The dining area and sitting room cosy around the courtyard for light, while the kitchen tucks behind the stair. An opening in the stair wall allows snatched views into the courtyard from the kitchen too, as well as borrowed light.

Turner’s *Interior of an Italian Church* (1819), with its high-up arched windows, provided inspiration on how to give the interior an atmospheric quality, showing how the space, depth, layers and facets of the walls can be defined by different light. ‘We used arches for spatial reasons more than



Section AA



The landing/study is lit by large skylights. Beyond is one of the two bathrooms.



a postmodern referential thing,' explains Shimazaki. 'The client didn't want a square box house, the arches help soften the building and volumes' – they also lead you to believe there is more beyond, another arch, a bit more space than there really is. 'You see a lot of that in Renaissance work in Italy where spaces are exaggerated by arches.'

Indeed, although there is little expectation from the street that the building is anything more than a garage, passing the threshold takes you to a place that seems monumental and civic in spite of its scale. The rawness of the material has a monastic feel – a home closed off from the city, where everything is hidden. There are no windows to the street at all, only skylights. Inside, the house exists as a contrasting quiet basin of concrete calm. The spaces and materials promote creative intellectual internalisation and soul-searching. An outdoor shower in the pebble-laid courtyard maximises enjoyment of the seclusion. As the garden grows it will have a luscious green and fresh feel.

The owners had to sell the building when it was completed, and continue to live alongside, but fortunately a busy touring singer-song writer bought it to use as somewhere to escape to. It should do the job just fine. ●

**Above** The main bedroom has a mix of raw concrete walls and clay plaster.

**Below** The second bedroom with its window over the walkway and circular skylight.







### National Library of China, Beijing

Photograph Will Pryce

Words Jan-Carlos Kucharek

Will Pryce starts with an anecdote from his student days – of not getting any joy from the Royal College of Art Library and having to decamp to the then Round Reading Room of the British Library, which was still in use within the British Museum. Left on the table next to his was ‘Last Letters from Stalingrad’; and as one is inclined, he tells me, to find the books of others’ more interesting than your own, he spent his day absorbed in the last missives home of Hitler’s doomed 6th Army at the hands of the ‘encircling Bolsheviks’.

Only after he’d finished and looked around did it dawn on him that Marx had sat in the same place a century before and written *Das Kapital* – and a link in time was made between those terrified soldiers, Communism, and himself. ‘It made me think that libraries contain books, that books contain ideas and that sometimes ideas can be dangerous.’

Given that, his choice of China’s National Library in Beijing seems obvious – and not only because of its ‘highly dramatic’ central reading room. With its 60m span, it embodies all the traditional, lofty ideals of centralised knowledge but here blown up to an industrial scale. Pryce was fascinated by the exquisite polarisation being made evident; the scale

increasing by an order of magnitude, but the basic denominator, the book, still just a little larger than a human hand.

It’s a public library on the face of it, he muses, save for being subject to the censorship of another state, also inspired by Marx. Students may well be procrastinating here, but they won’t be doing it via Google or Facebook. That said, the common sense of collective industry engendered in the world’s libraries is also felt here. And he’s optimistic for the future: ‘What stops great collections from turning into Starbucks-style browsing is the fact that, if your research goes in a new direction, you can leave your seat, go to a shelf, and immediately seek it out.’ ●



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# Significant aside

When Bristol Old Vic decided it needed a serious reconfiguration, who to ask but Haworth Tompkins? Dramatic effect was a key element in the rewrite

Words: Rob Gregory



FRED HOWARTH (2)







**Left** Peeping in from the street: the balconies and levels of the foyer create their own theatre, Haworth Tompkins calls this a courtyard and it might well be seen as an extension of the street.

**Far left** The slim lines of Haworth Tompkins' new facade alongside the historic Cooper's Hall on Bristol's King Street.

## Prelude

As an experienced theatre architect, Steve Tompkins' reach is spreading around the world. We meet in my home city Bristol. Tompkins knows Bristol well, this year completing its Old Vic theatre and working here on his first postgraduate job three decades ago. But the conversation immediately jumps to Harvard and Malmo. Tompkins and his team, including long standing partner Roger Watts, are exporting their home-grown theatre expertise to the US and Scandinavia. 'There is no longer a default theatre audience', Tompkins explains as he describes the commercial tensions operating contemporary theatres, and how they are becoming universal. Which prompts the question: how can architects help theatre directors run successful venues that appeal to increasingly diverse audiences, without reverting to generic architectural solutions and generic theatrical productions?

## Cast

The answer lies in part in the ability to harness the creative forces that exist layer upon layer within theatre organisations, and to find a role within this complex cast of characters for the theatre architect.

'Facing up to dilemmas together' and 'sharing the definition of the problem' are two dynamics that Tompkins identifies as central to the development of successful creative fusion. Bristol Old Vic artistic director Tom Morris and chief executive Emma Stenning, who drove the project to completion, feel the same way.

Tompkins and I meet almost exactly three years since we were last in this building together, when I organised a lecture to celebrate Haworth Tompkins' Stirling Prize winning Everyman Theatre in Liverpool. Morris took to the stage to set the scene with trademark presence and enthusiasm.

'If anyone is building a theatre anywhere in the world, Steve Tompkins will be on the list of the architects they want to talk to,' said Morris, quoting world renowned director and producer Stephen Daldry. He then added his own words introducing Tompkins as 'Probably the most celebrated expert theatre architect in the world'. By this time the pair had already been working together for three years on the transformation of Bristol Old Vic – another much-admired character of international significance.

### Credits

**Architect** Haworth Tompkins  
**Main contractor** Gilbert-Ash  
**Theatre consultant** Charcoalblue  
**Structural engineer** Momentum  
**Service engineer** Max Fordham  
**Acoustic engineer** Charcoalblue  
**Quantity surveyor** Gardiner and Theobald  
**Contract administrator** GVA Acuity  
**Client representative** PM Plann





PHILIP VILE

## Set and plot

Bristol Old Vic is the oldest continuously working theatre in the English-speaking world, completed in 1766. Originally unlicensed, accordingly set back from the street frontage and accessed through a narrow alley and deep-set but daylight courtyard, the auditorium has survived largely intact. Over the years, however, successive alterations to the street frontage culminated in 1972 with a new foyer and studio theatre by Peter Moro, whose scheme incorporated the neighbouring historic Coopers' Hall as main entrance and circulation space. This brought major problems in relation to access, identity and revenue. It separated the audience in an incongruous way, with the route to the 'cheap seats' being via the grandeur of Cooper's Hall, while premium ticket holders seeking the stalls had to navigate changes in level and series of circuitous, cramped and dark foyers. Moro's carving up of Coopers' Hall also meant that it could no longer fulfil its historic purpose as a public room for the city.

Radical change was needed. The first stab was renovation of the theatre and its back of house spaces by ex-Moro architect Andrzej Blonski. Then in 2012, Haworth Tompkins won a competition to address access, identity and revenue with a scheme that proposed replacing the 1972 foyer and studio with a more welcoming and legible foyer, a new studio theatre in the lower half of Coopers' Hall and a reinstated grand public room as originally located on its upper level.

HAWORTH TOMPKINS



**Above** The facade and graphics on the front of the new foyer (top) speak a very different language to the 1970s brick it replaced (above).

### IN NUMBERS

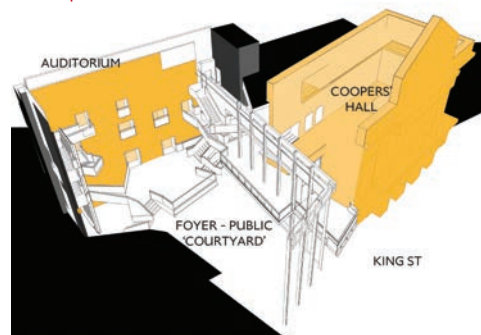
£9.3m

construction cost

2135 m<sup>2</sup>

gross internal area

**Below** How the foyer reconnects entrance and auditorium, while allowing the opening up of Cooper's Hall.



HAWORTH TOMPKINS

## Act 1 – Remove

Tompkins and his team built on the acts of provisional intervention, seen in their work on temporary projects for the National and Almeida Theatres with The Shed and installations at King's Cross and Gainsborough Studios. Recalling the intricate re-stitching at London's Young Vic and The Egg in Bath, they started by establishing what was the minimum they could do to unlock the hemmed in and suffocated Bristol's Old Vic.

This involved removing many layers of fabric, including the mostly 1970s brickwork, blockwork, concrete and plasterboard. When the original 1760s fabric was finally revealed, a number of existing openings were reframed with diamond cut concrete headers, while three new apertures were formed with their own crisp new lintels. Together they combine to form a relaxed composition of fenestration that enlivens the ritual of arrival and departure for audiences. To each side, as counterpoints to this masonry backdrop, two steel stairs crank as they rise to provide access and pause points that add further animation. Illuminated by a south facing rooflight that stretches between them, these proscenium-like structures frame the space and re-enact the immediacy of entry that the historic courtyard would once have given.

## Act 2 – Reinstall

With entry to the theatre consolidated into one smaller space, and the inefficient and prolonged ascent via Cooper's Hall eliminated,



this once grand space could be reinstated to its former glory. As it stands, while impressive in scale and proportion, with neutral decoration and furniture the room lacks the vibrant identity that exists in other key spaces. But, as dictated by operational advisors, this is required for the broad range of income-generating events that it now hosts. It has apparently had a transformational impact on the business plan, providing significant new income and the perfect backdrop to weddings and conferences alike. And beneath this, where visitors originally entered, a new studio theatre has been created in the carcass of the historic barrel store, providing a space of much greater distinction and quality, lit when permitted with natural light and ventilated with pleasing and comfortable low velocity air that has been cooled by passing through the labyrinth of concrete walls that sit below the new foyer.



**Above** The glulam frame of the foyer against the masonry fragments of history.

**Below** New openings and old make a relaxed composition.

### Act 3 – Reconnect

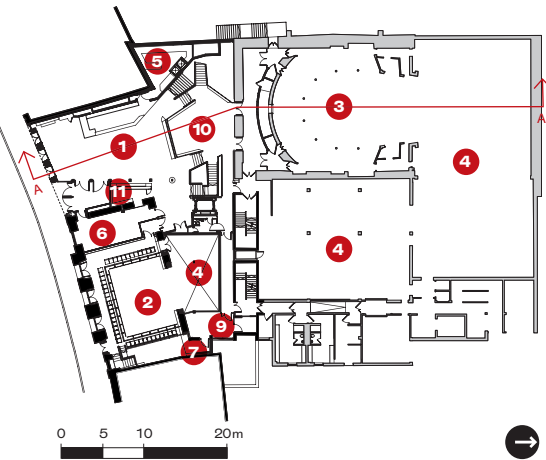
The scene was set for Act 3, with the large original courtyard liberated to provide a new type of theatre foyer. Described by Tompkins as a non-building, this new space is screened and sheltered by timber structures on three sides and above. To the south, a new three bay entrance screen opens onto the street, alongside an inflection that mimics the geometry of the theatre to form a recessed entrance. To the west, on axis as visitors turn and enter through the protected lobby, is a double height acoustic screen. Clad with oak laths that mask the less significant party wall and bend to conceal a new commercial kitchen, this element pulls back from the facade to reveal a retained chimney stack from the original terrace that would have been contemporary with the 18th century theatre. And to the east, above and behind you on entry, is a three stage open structure and jettied

FRED HOWARTH (2)

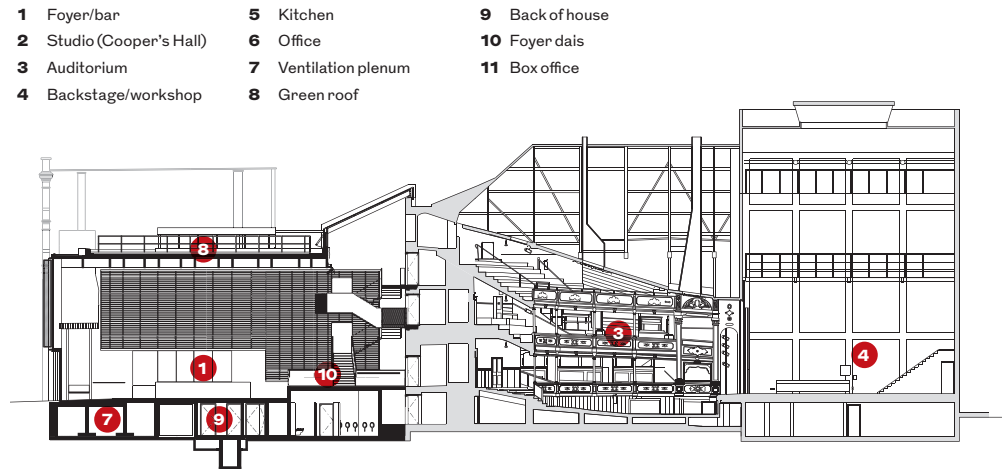




## Ground floor plan



## Section AA



balcony that forms an armature between new and old, containing lobby and box office on the ground floor, interval bar on first floor (including a second delightful balcony that opens above the main entrance) and a roof terrace for Morris' attic office, from where he can capture discreet views of the theatre's much enlivened daily comings and goings.

Above all of this sits the most conspicuous intervention, with Momentum's engineered diagrid roof amplifying the geometric complexities of the site that elsewhere have been played down. Beneath this sits a new bar and seating area, alongside a generous raised dais with removable metalwork, that can be transformed into a top lit performance stage framed by those proscenium-like stairs and masonry backdrop.

While other notable reviews have likened this space to a city square, due to its undeniable impact on how theatre and street engage, conversation with Tompkins reveals a stronger analogy between this space and the theatre it serves. With expertise and wit, Tompkins and his team have done two things. While addressing access, identity and revenue, they have opened up the site and, in the foyer, given the Old Vic a completely new contemporary performance space, complete with stage, backdrop, stalls, boxes, circles and decorated timber that echo the delights of this venue's Georgian set piece. Open from eight until late, layer upon layer of activity now plays out in a foyer theatre where actors, staff, diners, drinkers, laptop drivers, musicians, and business meetings co-exist for 16 hours a day. And of course, it won't be long until rehearsed theatre productions will take place here too.



Studio theatre in the base of the old Cooper's Hall. Above is a function room.

## Epilogue

Deserving of praise on its own terms, but perhaps more comprehensively significant as a hybrid of many other Haworth Tompkins projects, Bristol Old Vic has been radically transformed. Modest throughout, Tompkins prefers to focus on the people and the place, and if pushed describes a non-precious approach to architecture that – as with set design – leaves capacity for spaces to continually change. So it is little surprise that the client, Tom Morris, is extremely pleased.

'Steve is imaginative in an unusual and

surprising way,' he enthuses. 'When he designed these spaces he was not only imagining what the thing might look like; he was imagining a space that would facilitate the imaginations of the people who were going to be occupying and using it.

'This may be why and how his buildings are so successful – they arrest your eye, they captivate you when you see them, and somehow they leave space for you to imagine stuff inside them. And that is in my view what creates perfect theatre architecture.'

Rob Gregory is an associate at Purcell

FRED HOWARTH



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# Social climbers

With the local council staying firmly hands on, these two new 'luxury' apartment towers in east London will help subsidise regeneration of a vast postwar housing estate

Words: Hugh Pearman





**Left** All-round brickiness frames the view south to the City.

**Right** Seen from Shoreditch Park, the two towers act as a gateway to the reviving estate behind.



PETERLANDERS

Few things are as controversial as the regeneration of council estates. This is understandable when some high-profile examples involve seemingly naïve or complicit councils handing over their stock of homes – where real people in real communities live, remember – to developers for what turns out to be social cleansing. There have been enough examples of tenants and leaseholders being cynically priced out of their former locations to make this a continuing scandal.

But there are other ways to tackle the problem of finding ways to finance the necessary upgrade of often enormous estates dating from the postwar reconstruction boom which have reached the end of their design lives. Here is one: the Colville Estate in Hoxton, east London. This project works on the 'Robin Hood' principle – upmarket pads for the rich cross-subsidising housing

reconstruction for the poor. Only with Hackney council keeping control in a way that some other councils previously have not, although the savvier ones increasingly are.

Here architects Karakusevic Carson and David Chipperfield have collaborated, with the former masterplanning and designing phases of the whole estate renewal project of 928 homes in phases over 15-20 years, and the latter invited to jointly design the two hexagonal towers containing 198 apartments that now act as a gateway to the district.

A few years ago, the very idea that such a pair of 'luxury' residential towers would sprout here would have been laughable. This was and is one of those sprawling areas of social housing – serried ranks of 1950s walk-up slab blocks in the southern part and stumpy 1960s tower blocks in the northern part –

SIMON MENGES





## IN NUMBERS

**19,000m<sup>2</sup>**  
gfa

**£3,700**  
cost per m<sup>2</sup>

**£71m**  
total contract cost

**198**  
apartments

**16 and 20**  
storey towers

**900,000**  
bricks used

**Left** A gentle landscape mound forms a threshold between the towers and flows into the lobby of the darker one.

**Right** The entry lobbies are vaulted, forming caves of brick.

SIMON MENGES (2)



that looks like it was lifted straight out of an artist's impression of slum clearance in the 1943 County of London Plan. If you were a Londoner you might have skirted the edge of it on your way down the New North Road from Islington to the City, but there was no great reason to go there unless you lived there. Well, times have changed along with the physical character of all such City-fringe zones. And with a canal at the back and a park at the front, it has plenty of amenity space. So welcome to the development known as Hoxton Press, after a Victorian printworks that once stood here.

At the time of writing the quoted prices of available apartments ranged from £600,000 for a one-bed 55.5m<sup>2</sup> apartment on a fifth floor to £2.95m for a three-bed 141m<sup>2</sup> example on a 19th floor, with the penthouses yet to be marketed.

The towers are concrete structures clad in Belgian brick – dark red for the 16-storey one and dark grey for the 20-storey one. They are hexagonal partly (one assumes) to distinguish them from the rectilinear



**Above** Relationship between the towers is angled to reduce overlooking.

Apartment prices range from £600,000 to £2.9 million



1960s council tower blocks north of the canal, partly because of the planning efficiencies (especially the cores) that the geometry allows, partly to sidestep some tricky utility mains and partly so as to allow more south light through to the mid-rise blocks behind.

When I say they are clad in brick, they are very thoroughly clad, the brick skin wrapping round the balconies above and below and flowing into arched vaults in the foyers. This is demanding brickwork – stack-bonded in a way that requires invisible supporting stainless-steelwork, and in places invisibly changing from full-depth bricks to brick slips – the foyer vaults being an example – where the slips are mechanically fixed to a supporting armature and so act more like tilework.

Originally this was all intended to be done in large prefabricated sections but the winning contractor preferred to hand-lay the brickwork. It's reassuring to know that it was done by the same firm that delivered Herzog & de Meuron's perforated-brick Tate Modern extension, but given that the mortar is coloured to match the brick, so giving a monolithic appearance, you wonder if ordinary stretcher bond wouldn't have been

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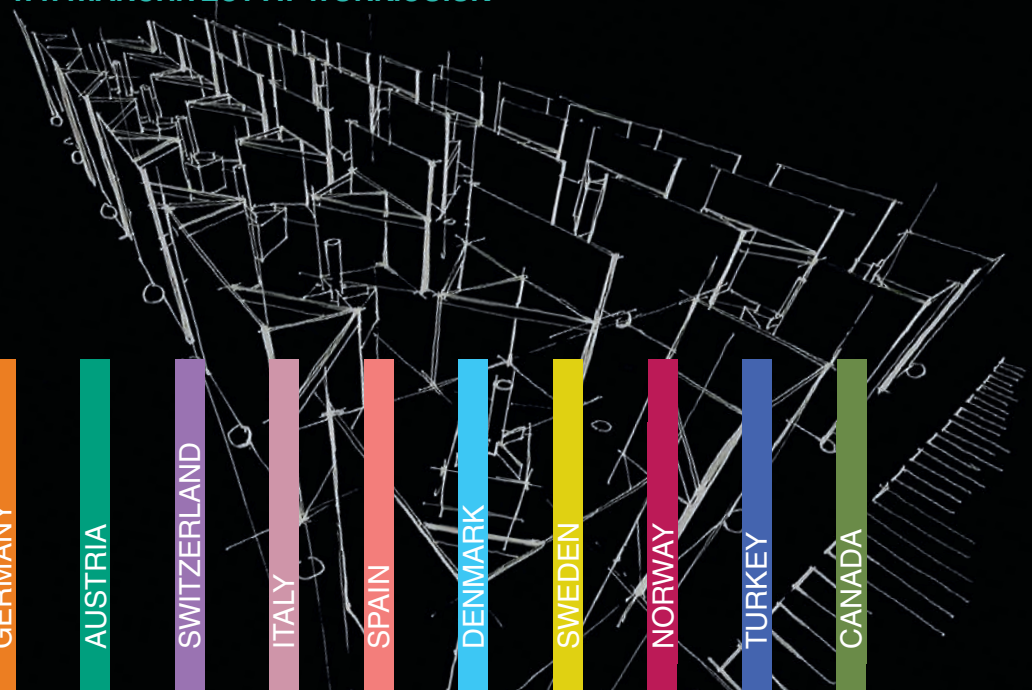
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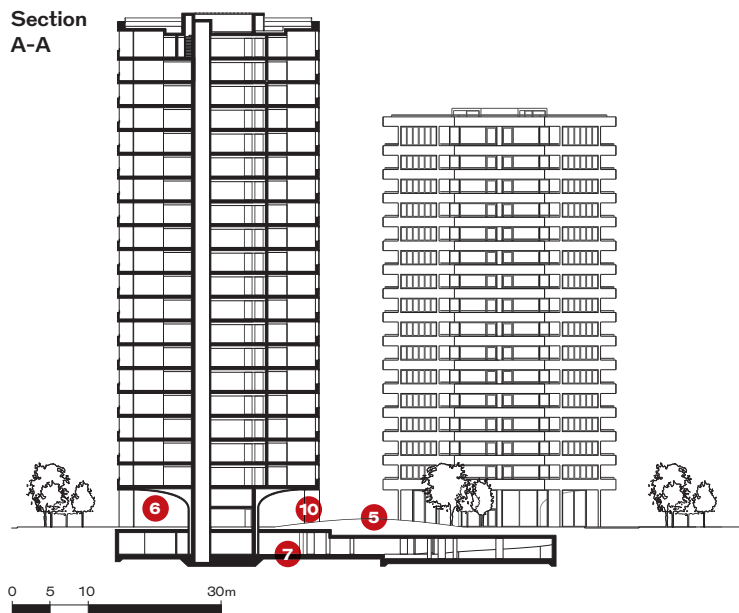
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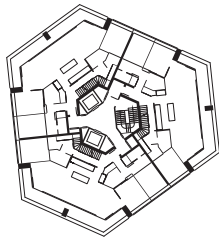




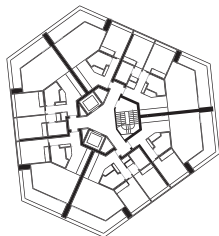
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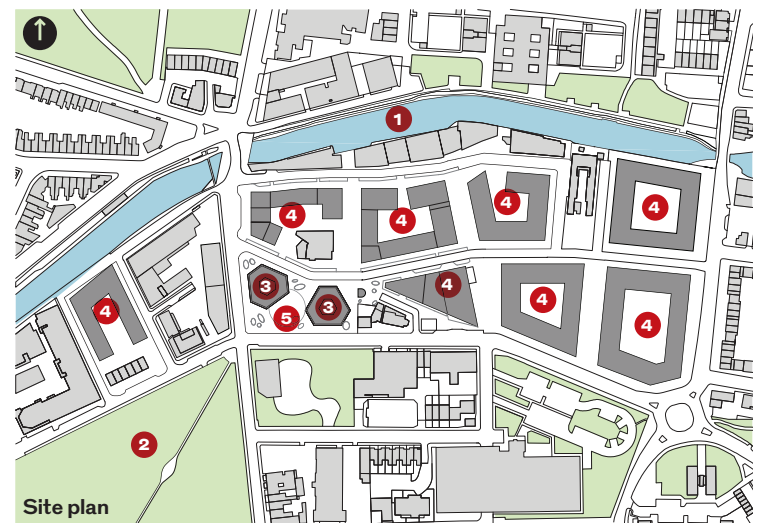
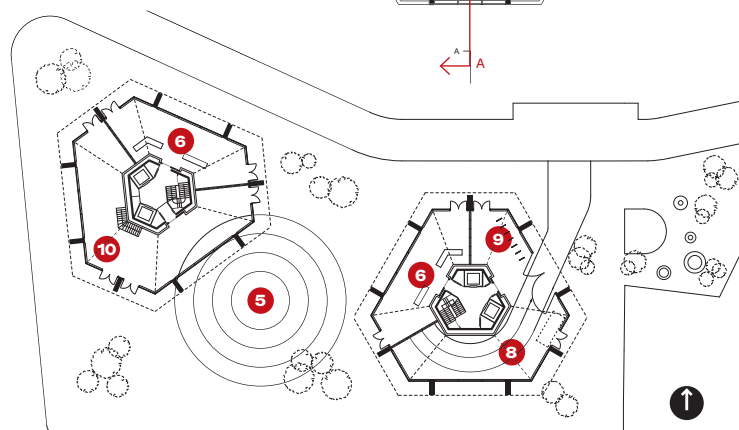
Penthouse floor plan



Typical floor plan



Ground floor plan



- 1 Regent's Canal
- 2 Shoreditch Park
- 3 Hoxton Press towers
- 4 Colville Estate new phases
- 5 Landscaped mound
- 6 Apartment entrance lobbies
- 7 Shared car park
- 8 Ramp to car park
- 9 Visitor bicycle garage
- 10 Café/community space

perfectly fine here. The slightly uneven texture provided by the hand-laying is, however, a bonus.

The other immediately apparent quirk is the shallow mound that defines the pedestrian area between the two blocks. Intended by landscape architect Vogt to fulfil the role of a threshold and to respond to raised areas in Shoreditch Park opposite, the paving here is granite sets that flow from the outside into the foyers of the two blocks. Ambitiously, the taller of the two towers (the dark grey one) straddles one edge of this mound, which thus fades away in its foyer. Fine, except that the glazed foyer cladding frames and interior floor heating channels then have to somehow surmount the upward curve, which is awkwardly achieved. Given that the foyer space in this block is also earmarked for a community café, one waits with interest to find out how tables and chairs and servery will cope with the swelling floor.

The landscaped mound has almost mystical associations for English social housing projects, a subject thoroughly explored by FAT and Crimson architectural historians in 'A Clockwork Jerusalem' at the British Pavilion in the 2014 Venice Biennale. Here it is slightly unsettling but mostly successful, like a huge traffic-calming measure for pedestrians and cyclists. Making the Colville Estate permeable rather than hermetic is one of the aims of the Karakusevic masterplan.

There is the sense of sumptuous austerity in the foyer areas that one has come to expect from Chipperfield: just brick, concrete and glass. The ground floor of the red tower includes a bike store and the entrance ramp to the shared underground car park. This

**Credits**

**Architect** Karakusevic  
Carson and David  
Chipperfield  
**Landscape architect**  
Vogt  
**Commissioning client**  
Hackney Council  
**Development partner**  
Anthology  
**Structural/civils/  
services/sustainability/  
environmental/acoustic  
engineering** Aecom



**Right** Entering the apartments via the kitchens, with direct views out through the living rooms.

**Bottom right** The landscape mound flows into the café area of the taller block, causing the floor to swell slightly.

ought to make everything feel cramped but it does not, and the sinuous ramp is treated as a feature rather than as an afterthought.

Upstairs in the apartments – all of them dual-aspect thanks to the hexagonal plan – one is in the world of the developer interior but here done with something of the same restraint and sense of quality. The lobbies are finished in dark wood with trompe l’oeil ‘cube’ tiled floors. High ceilings, flush skirtings rather than the nasty nailed-on kind. Bathrooms made as offsite pods. Sliding space dividers. No corridors, you just emerge into the space, typically via the kitchen and thus to the big view opening up from the living room. These are very large floor-to-ceiling glazing sections, something that is not apparent from outside because of the balcony upstands forming bands around the towers. And the balconies themselves are broad enough, set within the overall envelope of the buildings, to feel like enclosed rather than exposed spaces.

Paul Karakusevic describes the procurement method as ‘sophisticated design and build’ with a complete specification handed to the contractor and a high level of supervision. And while there is a boutique private developer involved, Anthology, this is far from the capitalist takeover of entire estates that has got such a bad name elsewhere.

How this cross-subsidy model will evolve now that councils’ borrowing cap has been raised by the government is anybody’s guess. But the mix of tenures now emerging on the densified Colville Estate, of which half will be social rent (100 more such homes than previously) and shared ownership, and half market sale, is arguably closer to the mixed-community ideals of the 1945 Attlee government than the low-income monocultural enclaves that eventually evolved.

This can be argued for ever: but these new sentinels of Shoreditch Park, distinctly reminiscent of Barbican-era design, are no bad legacy of a moment when new funding sources could help enable high-quality social housing. ●



IONA MARINESCU

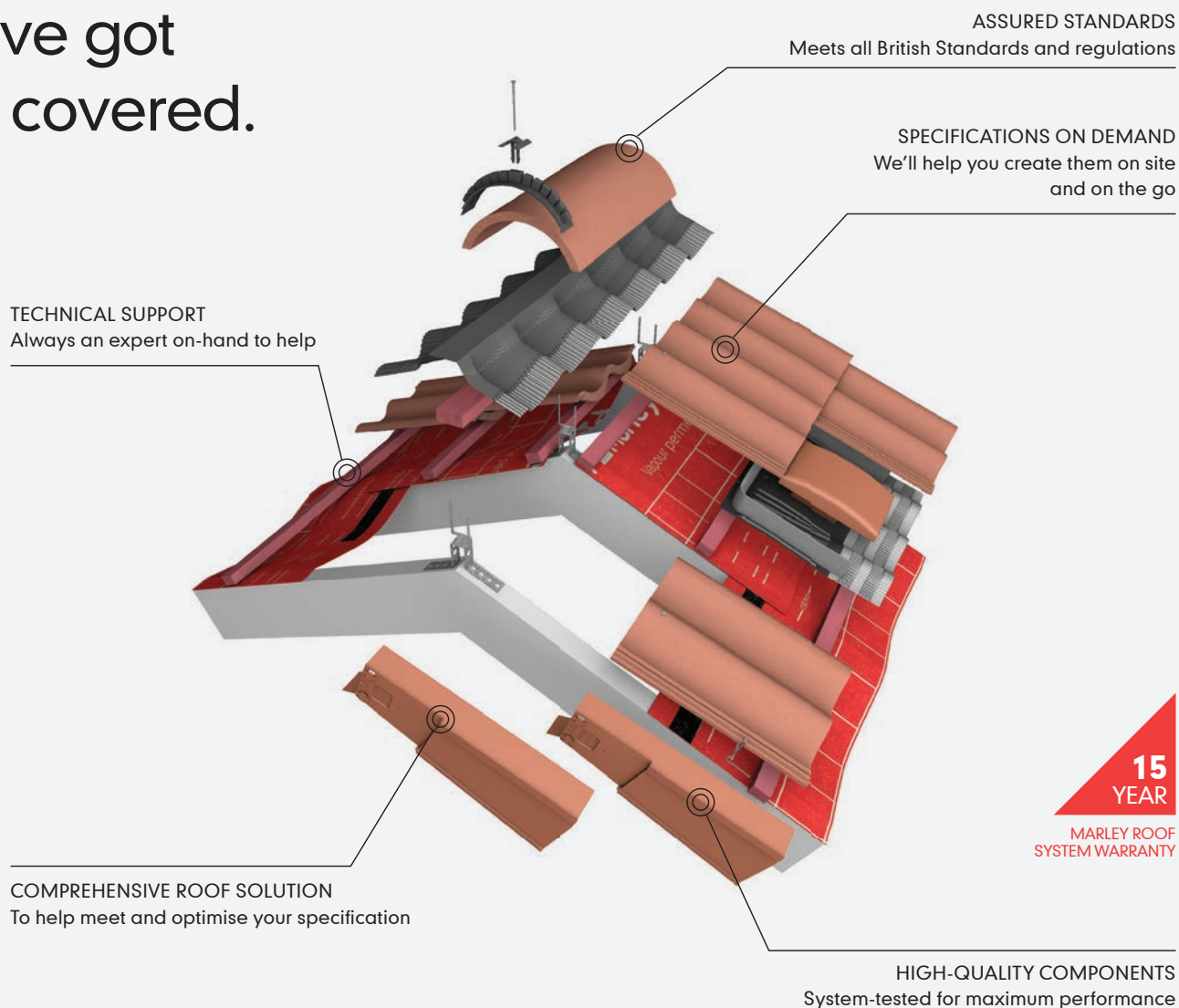
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# Read between the lines

In a country with 853 libraries, ALA was set a daunting task to design Helsinki's Oodi. The result is less about books than the experience

Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek Photographs: Tuomas Uusheimo



Book Heaven on Oodi's top floor, looking south under its cloud-like roof.





I've reached the end of the day on an official tour of five Helsinki libraries, and while confessing to feeling a little 'booked-out', I've found it insightful. First up, the 1840 National Library was an exercise in heterogeneity: its Carl Ludwig Engel reading rooms were warm and intimate despite dull Diocletian clerestory light-enhanced by many creamy Corinthian alabaster columns. By contrast, Gustav Nyström's 1903 semi-circular extension, topped with a low, oval, milky oculus from which carved timber book cases radiate, has a pared-down severity; penitential Art Nouveau, like Mackintosh having a turn of the Stockholm Syndromes.

A stone's throw away, Anttinen Oiva Architects' 2012 Kaisa Library for Helsinki University could have been inspired by Nyström, but here extrapolated up and stretched long like elastic. Beyond the catenary curves of its perforated brick facade, the telescopic cigar-shaped atrium delivers an Instagram slap that even had me reaching for my phone. On the west side, another deep catenary and carved out space offer vertiginous views over the city. Between the two trompe l'oeil effects, it's a wonder anyone gets any studying done here at all.

And maybe that's the point, as I'm about to discover. That afternoon, and after all these years, the curved white ceilings of Alvar Aalto's former 1970 Helsinki University of Technology library still managed to catch and radiate the blue hue of the day's dying rays into the architect's crafted and precisely modulated volume. But my off-the-cuff remark that we're 'finally in a proper library', got a glower from Helsinki City Library's Lotta Muurinen. Yes, it might look great but she begs to differ. 'If our libraries still looked and functioned like this one,' she's at pains to clarify, 'no-one would come to them.'

So Oodi (which means ode) – Helsinki's new 17,250m<sup>2</sup> central library by ALA Architects, opposite

**Below** Alvar Aalto's 1970 Helsinki University of Technology (now Harald Harlin Learning Centre) seems referenced in the design of Oodi.





the Parliament House and near the Finlandia Hall – embodies that thinking. And its positioning here near Steven Holl’s Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki Music Centre and the National Museum – plus its nearly €100 million budget – gives a clear indication of the ambition of the project.

In Oodi, Tommi Laitio, the city’s executive director of culture and leisure, gives the context and proffers some impressive statistics. Backing up his claim that the Finns are the world’s most literate people, he talks of their national roster of 853 public libraries and the fact its 5.5m population borrows nearly 68 million books a year – that’s 12 books per person. He also explains libraries’ central role in the civic life of the nation. Library access is a statutory right under the Libraries Act; two million people possess a card and they average nine visits a year. But critically, he underlines how the library is bound into notions of citizenship, democracy, personal and community freedom of expression. Laitio’s telling of a teenage day spent reading gay literature tucked inside the pages of Time magazine presents a very personal account of the library as a ‘safe space’ – and one that had a lasting effect. The small, perfectly formed and buzzing Kallio library we visited might be

**IN NUMBERS**

**€98m**  
budget

**17,250m<sup>2</sup>**  
GIA

**100,000**  
books

**3**  
floors

**Right** 33mm thick Finnish spruce planks sandwich the slot windows of the Maker Space.

**Below** Oodi looking south, its duck’s bill overlooking the new public plaza to the west.





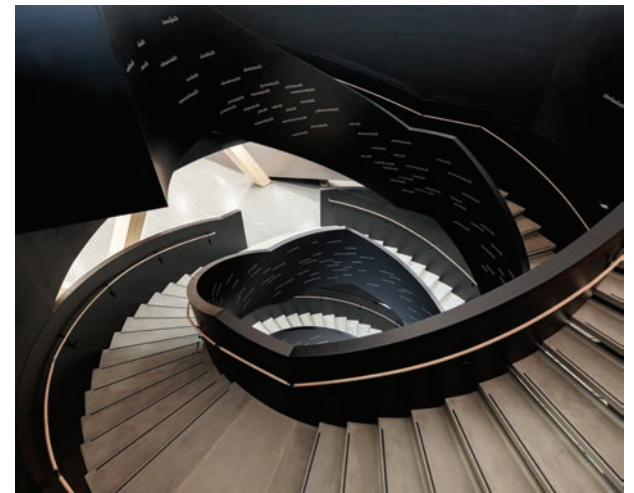
turn of the century Jugendstil but under his watch it's the first to have a dedicated area, right in the middle, for LGBT readers.

Social cohesion was also intimated on our visit to Maunula House, a lofty library built in 2017 by K2S Architects, sandwiched between its bustling community centre (overrun with feral teenagers) and a local supermarket. Yes, you can walk straight from one to the other; for effect, a picture window knocked in the party wall links supermarket shelves with the adult fiction section. It really is quite something.

Scale this up and a lot's riding on ALA's design for Oodi, which in 2013 won the 544-entry international competition with its proposal to rethink what a library might be and what it might do in the future. Those needs were identified specifically by public consultation – with other library users and professional future gazers. The result is the enormous timber, steel and glass box facing west to Kansalaistori Square and part of a rather motley masterplan of new institutions, corporate HQ's and spec offices now occupying the former railway sidings of Eliel Saarinen's 1919 Helsinki central station.

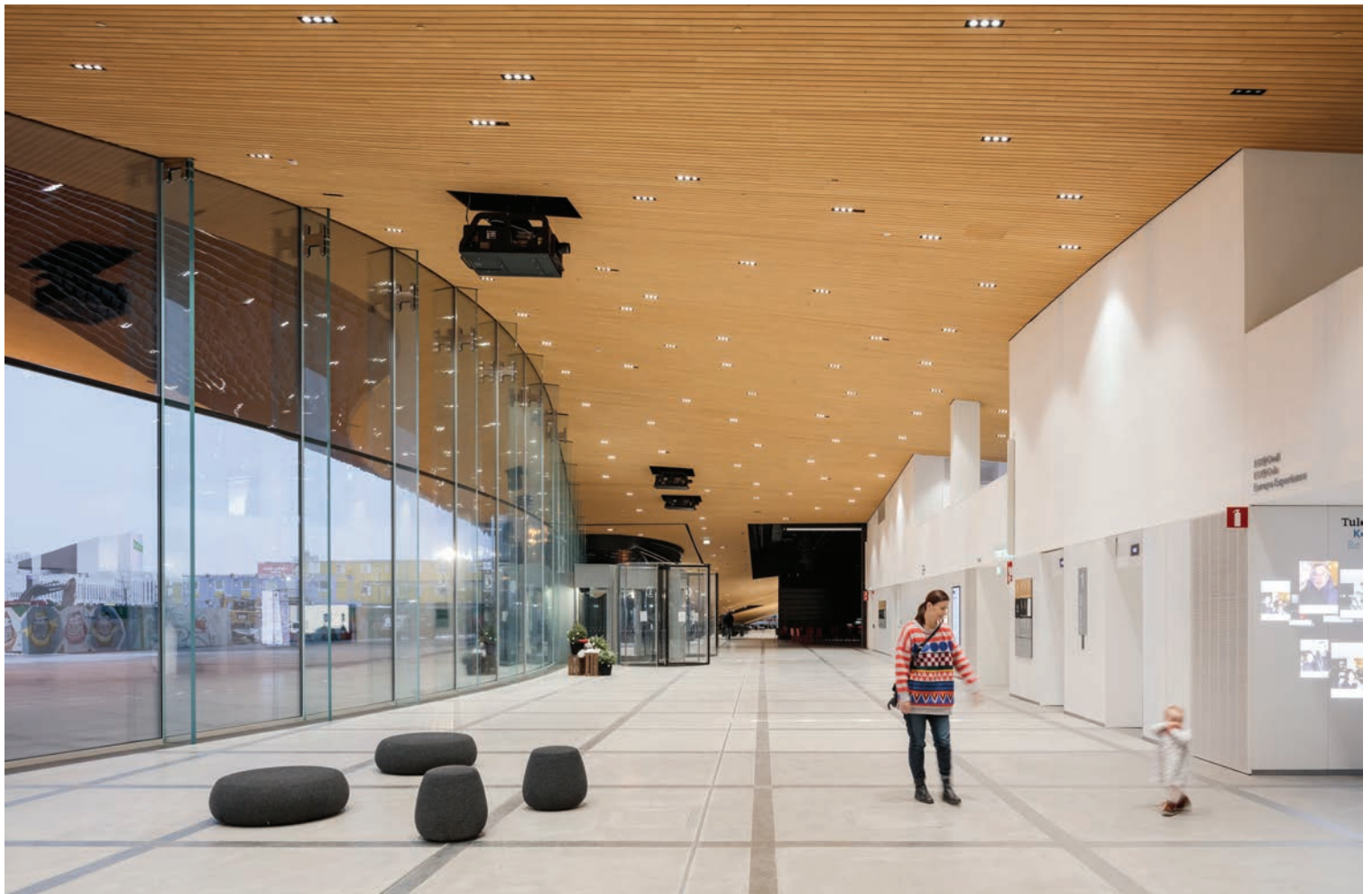
ALA's book box turns out to be another gestural intervention, albeit more reasoned and less 'artful'

**Right** Artist Otto Karvonen's double helix staircase connects the three main levels.



**Below** The ground floor looking north. The timber soffit of the cantilever draws the eye to the auditoria at the far end.

Finland's 5.5m population borrows nearly 68 million books a year – that's 12 books per person





than Steven Holl's. It transpires the box is not just a box but two massive 100m wide steel arches that allow the lower levels to be column-free, and support the great, glazed volume that tops off the building. As ALA partner Antti Nousjoki explains, its form was due to a radical rethinking of the library's nature, generating a clear tri-partite proposal of three distinct functions. The ground floor acts as an open reception, exhibition and auditorium space, and the interstitial floor as a dedicated public 'Maker Space'. The open plan reading room at the top, 'Book Heaven', uses the large cantilever at the summit of the arch to create a sizeable west-facing outdoor terrace.

From the outside all this generates a curious language. The arch is immediately read on the main elevation as the enormous duck's bill soffit of Finnish spruce that rises to meet the floor above and forms the yawning mouth to the public square in front. This eats into the largely timber-faced Maker Space above, which is then crowned with a floor of fritted full height triple glazing, its edges picking up the undulations of the roof. Oodi is thus a statement building, a distinct offering in the general menagerie of the area's masterplan. I can't say that it looks like a library but I think the powers that be would be quite happy with that assertion; I don't think they want it to. But as it's yet to open, neither can I say that it has a particularly civic presence – which might be more concerning as the building is supposed to reflect the cultural aspirations of the city. The glazing looks good though; the frit picks up on and vivifies the tombstone grey of the Helsinki sky by day, and illuminated by night, looking over from the Parliament building, it's a striking addition to the city.

Internally, the huge spruce soffit is the overriding control for a ground floor – effectively a covered public space containing two auditoria, general admin and circulation to the upper levels. It's a lot of space for little function, so the grand double helix staircase artwork by artist Otto Karvonen takes pride of place. Admin areas

**Below Maker Spaces**  
feel curiously joyless and  
unarchitectural.



Looking west from  
the upper level of the  
children's library.

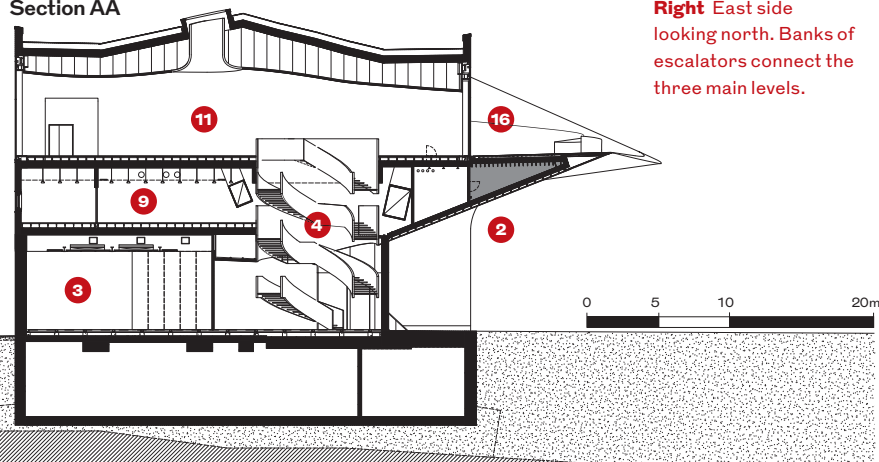
Oodi is thus a statement building,  
a distinct offering in the general  
menagerie of the area's masterplan



The amphitheatre space  
seems random, the timber  
clad cantilever steels odd and  
intrusive.

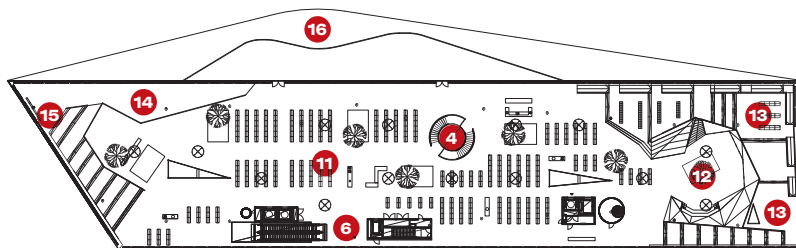


Section AA

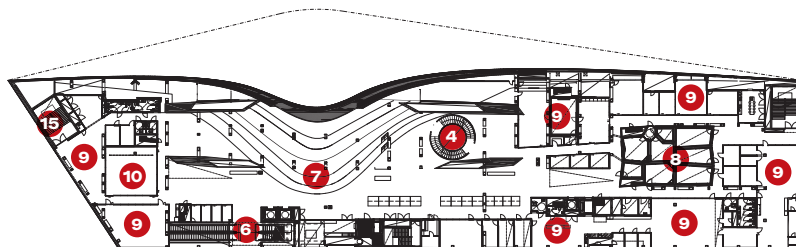


**Right** East side looking north. Banks of escalators connect the three main levels.

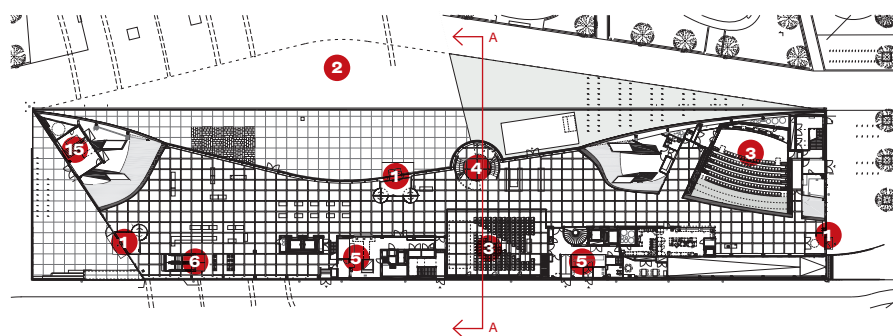
Book Heaven: top floor plan



Maker Space: middle floor plan



Entrance: ground floor plan



- |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Entrance            | 9 Workshops           |
| 2 West canopy         | 10 Interactive room   |
| 3 Auditorium          | 11 Open shelving      |
| 4 Double helix stair  | 12 Children's library |
| 5 Administration area | 13 Activity space     |
| 6 Escalator up        | 14 WCs                |
| 7 Amphitheatre        | 15 Escape core        |
| 8 Recording studios   | 16 Outdoor terrace    |

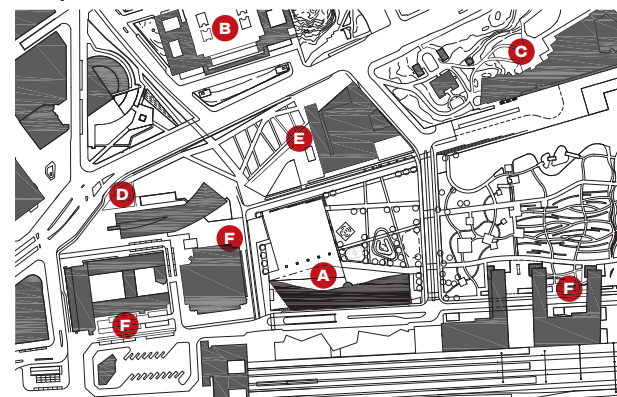
- |  |
|--|
| A Oodi                                 |
| B Parliament House                     |
| C Finlandia Hall                       |
| D Kiasma Museum of Contemporary art    |
| E Musiikkitalo – Helsinki Music Centre |
| F Office developments                  |



are minimal here; only 100,000 books are held on the open shelves, fed daily by truck from the city's stock of over three and a half million. So Oodi is not a repository as such but a checkout for books; it's like a sublimation of K2S' Maunula House project where the party wall disappears and library just turns into the supermarket.

Supposedly the space where all the magic happens, the Maker Space above the public entrance comes across as curiously unresolved. For a start, buffered as it is from the outside world by the workshops themselves, it is highly internalised, so it's hard to get your bearings. Add the black-painted soffits, and weightiness compounds the disorientation. Sitting in section at the top end of the steel arches, its cantilever trusses overpower the space. These have been oddly clad in timber, making them even more unsettling. A strange amphitheatre zone of dubious merit clogs the circulation, which leads to any number of sewing rooms, 3D printer spaces, music rehearsal and recording studios. At the south end we're shown a room with 'interactive walls' – though exactly how seemed unclear to everyone on the tour. It all feels very makeshift; and certainly not like architecture.

Site plan







**Above** Children's storytelling spaces are hidden behind a secret door in the bookshelf.

ALA's Nousjoki claims this contingency was deliberate; that they were avoiding a sense of the architecture intimidating or overpowering users; that the space isn't about display per se but underplayed, allowing for experimentation and play. The sentiment might be right but the volume feels unconsidered; joyless even. I couldn't imagine wanting to spend much time in it.

It's a relief then, to make it up to Book Heaven, where you're greeted by a white, flying carpet of a roof that furls along the full length of the building. Held aloft by a few columns, it's lofty and light-filled, perimeter glazing offering great views across the city; and beneath it books ranged across an expansive and well attenuated space. With its lovely floor of oak planks, this is the living room for the city. Its generous seating areas, open plan kids' library (with hidden story telling room) and the massive outdoor terrace on the cantilever create the feeling that conscientious study is not really the aim. Stepping up in section at both ends and with tall saplings in planters placed across the space, this reading room is akin to a landscape, cossetting readers in its central valley; a welcoming and comfortable space to linger in and socialise.

All this obviously begs questions about what a modern library is and how its civic function should be expressed. Helsinki has several iterations of the typology; all registering changes in time and social mores. The city's main library remains at nearby Pasila. Oodi is no Bibliothèque Nationale, consummately reifying both knowledge and the centralised power

All this begs questions about what a modern library is and how its civic function should be expressed

of state. Nor is it the British Library; a bank of global knowledge that just happens to look like a neo-vernacular hypermarket. Neither is it OMA's Seattle library, attempting a formal re-reading through embracing new media and technologies.

At Oodi, the presence of the library is something of a conceit. With up to ten thousand visitors a day expected and relatively few books on site, Book Heaven feels more like a temporary holding facility- just with a much better view. And with all the other functions below – at one point even a sauna was mooted – the building is actually more akin to a leisure centre. In Helsinki the gestation has been slow but purposeful, but the library has morphed into a community centre on a glorified scale that has prioritised spaces of social interaction and activity over those for individual, silent study. That is all fine but in a civic sense, sans the specific symbolic gravitas of the building as a repository of knowledge, it has, by default, perhaps divested itself of the appellation altogether. Like the city's executive director of culture's covert use of Time magazine; at Oodi too, the book was merely a device. ●

#### Credits

**Client** City of Helsinki  
**Architect:** ALA  
**Main contractor** YIT  
**Groundworks**  
 EM Pekkinen  
**Structural HVAC/**  
**Energy engineering**  
 Ramboll Finland  
**Project management**  
 Ramboll CM  
**Theatre consultant**  
 Granlund  
**Electrical engineering**  
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 Helimäki Acoustics  
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 Markku Kauriala

**Below** Underneath the arches: Parliament House viewed from contingent space in the arch.





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# Winter warmer

Protected by a translucent facade, a galleried winter garden is promoting social interaction among residents of a retirement housing scheme in Sussex

Words: Stephen Cousins

A winter garden facade of translucent cladding and full height sliding windows is eliciting a sense of community and social interaction at the Hortsley housing scheme for older people in Seaford, West Sussex.

The five-storey crescent-shaped development of 38 dual aspect apartments, designed by RCKa for retirement home operator PegasusLife, sits on a confined site between two side roads in Seaford town centre.

The brief was for a flexible building with highly adaptable layouts, tailored to suit the needs of occupants, and spaces that would combat any feelings of loneliness and isolation by promoting social interaction and fostering a sense of community.

A series of transitions take residents from the public space of the street to the privacy

of the flats. The site is entered from bustling Sutton Park Road, to the south, through a discreet oak door in a low-slung knapped flint wall which leads into a tranquil courtyard garden around a pond. From here entry to the building is via a semi-private galleried winter garden, a 3.5m wide decked structure that provides access to all the apartments.

The shared balcony spaces within it and alternate double-height galleries enable vertical connections between floors, maximising opportunities for social interaction by effectively increasing the number of immediate neighbours from two to six.

The winter garden is wrapped in a chequerboard facade of translucent polycarbonate panels by Rodeca alternating with double glazed windows over the Juliette

## IN NUMBERS

38  
flats

5  
floors

14.37kg/m<sup>2</sup>  
CO<sub>2</sub> emissions/year

4210m<sup>2</sup>  
GIA

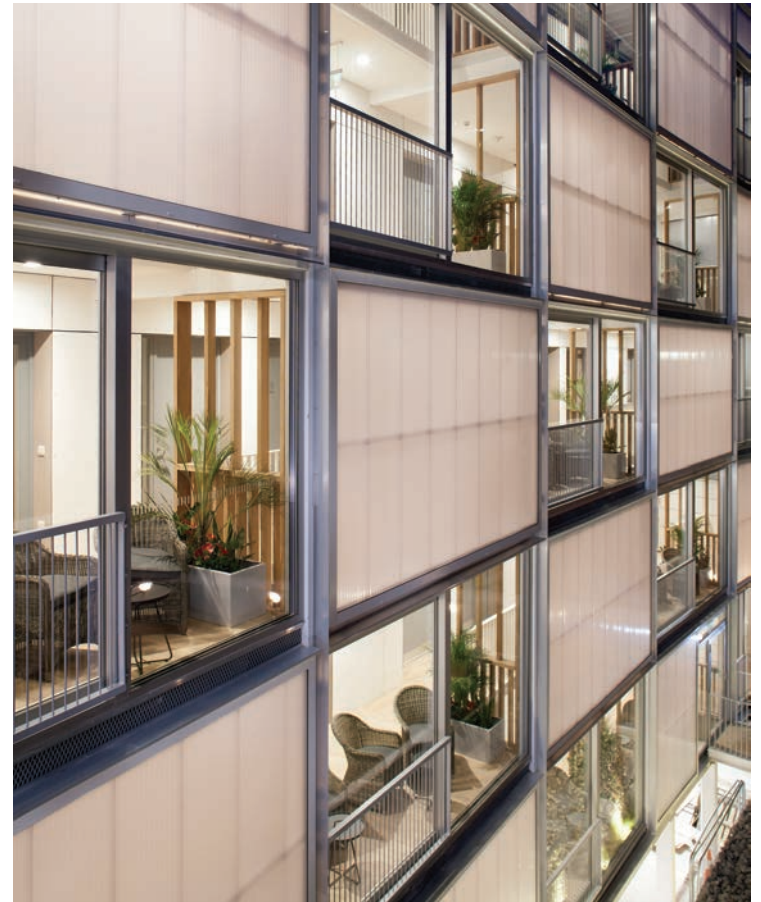


**Right** A small courtyard intercedes between public and private realms.

**Left** The winter gardens connecting neighbours and floors maximise social potential.







**Above** Polycarbonate cladding creates a chequerboard effect on the facade.

balconies which slide to one side to enhance ventilation and cool the space in summer.

Dieter Kleiner, founding director at RCKa, says: 'The winter garden naturally connects people and creates an active elevation – translucent cladding means you can see people walking behind it from the outside, which helps residents feel comfortable and connected. We had to strike a delicate balance between the need for transparency and exposure versus the desire for protection and enclosure.'

The fact the building is set so far back from the street on this side prompted RCKa to give the facade a more experimental and contemporary treatment compared with the relatively conventional and regimented red brick facade on Stafford Road.

The brick elevation was influenced by the local vernacular, particularly the Regency architecture of many towns on the south coast. Planning concerns over an original design proposal resulted in a reduction in scale, lowering the height and splitting the elevation into a series of terrace-style blocks.

The design for the winter garden also evolved over time, moving from a more open

#### Credits

**Architect** RCKa

**Client** PegasusLife

**Structural engineer**

Symmetrys

**M&E consultant** Max

Fordham

**QS/project manager/**

**CDM coordinator** WYG

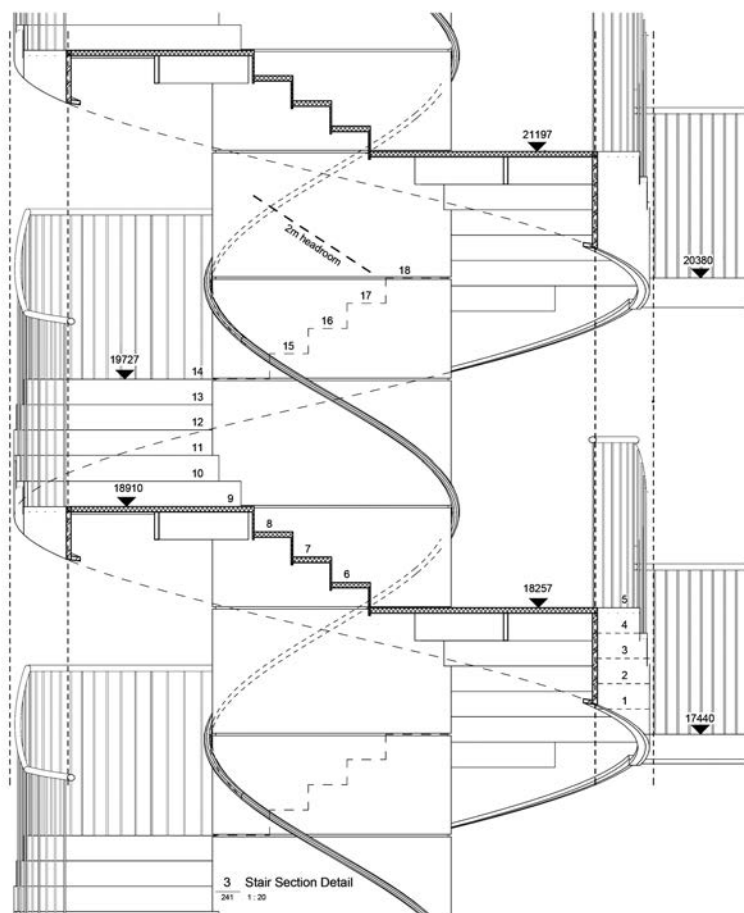
**Landscape consultant**

Camlins

**Fire engineer** WSP



Stair section detail

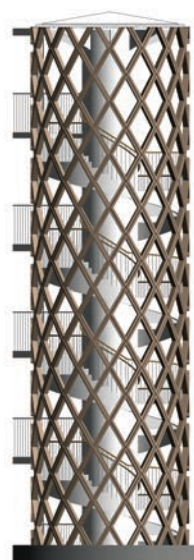


rainscreen system with 'wavy' opaque cladding to a sealed and tempered space that can be used year round. The structure is a steel frame pinned back to the reinforced concrete frame of the main building. The hollow steel structure made it possible to route the MVHR extract vents through the decks of the winter garden and out through horizontal grilles in the elevation.

A combination of active and passive measures help ensure a comfortable internal environment. The gallery effectively functions as a large heat exchanger, pre-tempering fresh air that enters through vents at the base and channelling into the flats during colder months.

Kleiner comments: 'Solar gain in summer is dealt with by large openable windows. It was important to make the system intuitive so that people know they can simply slide the door to one side if it gets hot. The balcony spaces have planters where vegetation can be grown to further cool the environment and increase shading.'

The hit and miss balcony arrangement, with alternate voids in the decks, reinforces



**Left** The latticework-clad external stair acts as a unifying element.

**Above** The staggered facade creates real elevational depth.

the strategy for fire protection and ventilation. Air or smoke is able to weave a vertical path through the floors and out through automatic opening vents in the roof.

Mechanical and electrical consultant Max Fordham used computational fluid dynamics (CFD) modelling to simulate the ventilation strategy. It is controlled by a building management system and can be supplemented by the MVHR when necessary.

The curve of the crescent is bisected by a cylindrical stair tower wrapped in a hardwood timber lattice structure inspired by a garden trellis. Otherwise the staircase is open on the sides, apart from a metal balustrade, and vegetation can be grown up the timbers from planters at the base to increase protection from the elements and strengthen the connection between the apartments and the garden. A separate lift core is housed within the winter garden structure.

The inclusion of the winter garden, and other shared spaces such as a communal lounge, social kitchen and honesty bar, has had a noticeable impact on the happiness of residents since the scheme was completed earlier this year.

That's a testament to RCKa and the project team, which had to grapple with tight financial constraints under the design and build contract (RCKa was novated to oversee detailed design) and limited scope for creative intervention.

'The value of the winter garden was almost intangible; it is not a space that can be rented out, and we only had a limited budget for extra facilities and amenities. Pegasus deserves credit for supporting us in many of our choices,' Kleiner concludes. ●



The lattice adds delicacy to the stair's solid D&B engineering.



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# 2: Intelligence



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## Minik Rosing



In Greenland 10,000 tonnes of ice per second breaks away due to climate change. Copenhagen University professor of geology Minik Rosing with artist Olafur Eliasson last month created 'Ice Watch' – transporting 30 small icebergs from one of its fjords to London. They melted away in plain sight in just days

**A scientist/artist collaboration – how did that come about?**

They are different but parallel ways of understanding the world and our place in it. Art can make you want to go somewhere and science helps you get there. On the board at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art I've always liked to work with artists involved in the environment – Olafur is among them. You have to make people want to learn. Art facilitates this.

**And what exactly was the carbon footprint of the artwork?**

We worked to quantify this exactly with Julie's Bicycle, an emissions monitor for cultural projects. We looked at the emissions of the harvesting, refrigeration, installing and team flights and it turns out that the carbon of transporting one block is about the same as a return flight to Greenland. But we are bringing this to tens of thousands of people – the possible carbon mitigation impact of the piece is far larger than not doing it.

**Given the seriousness of the problem, wouldn't art-based direct action have had more impact?**

Every possible method of highlighting climate change is welcome and we're acting where we think we can be most effective. Icebergs are beautiful and non-confrontational. Put your ear to them and the popping sound they make is air, trapped in time, being released – containing half the CO<sub>2</sub> that is currently in the atmosphere. They are unique and almost human in their vulnerability, and once they're gone, they're gone forever. We don't want people to act out of fear or anger. The impetus should be not to save the planet but to make a better world for ourselves.

**As a major carbon contributor, how can the construction industry help?**

Ten years ago architects dealt with sustainability almost as a formal thing, but now you see emphasis on re-use, adaptation and using more sustainable materials like timber. Architecture in my view has matured by going analytically into the core of the matter – rather than superficial tinkering around the edges. They're looking at far better building and material performance. And with a growing middle class in China about to burgeon with housing need, it's an enormous global challenge.

**And one thing we can do as individuals?**

Individuals are not all the same. The argument to move to a plant-based diet is interesting but in Greenland where I grew up our main diet was sourced from the sea. It's not one size fits all. What we eat has an enormous impact but non-intensive farming methods for instance could create pressure on land and reduce bio-diversity. Educate yourself – be aware of your context!

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The dome can be programmed to simulate light at different times of day, or reproduce the cycle for an entire day over one hour, or in incremental 30 minute stages

**Model making just got interesting, finds Stephen Cousins: [ribaj.com/artificialskydome](http://ribaj.com/artificialskydome)**



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





**Above** 31/44 Architects' Will Burges (left) and Stephen Davies in their studio.



# Steady does it

The diffident directors of 31/44 Architects are starting to hit their stride

Isabelle Priest

A photoshoot can reveal a great deal about the sitters. Some people take to it automatically, others find it all slightly awkward. Will Burges and Stephen Davies, directors of 10-strong London practice 31/44 Architects, are definitely in the second camp. When we meet in late November at their office in a mid-century building in Whitechapel overlooking the Gherkin, there's a feeling of novelty and unease while we wait for the photographer. Lots of tinkering, hands in pockets, sitting down and getting up again.

It's a Friday afternoon and many staff are away. When the photoshoot starts, Burges

and Davies would clearly rather pretend it isn't happening by talking instead – never really looking at the camera. But they are laughing about themselves too. And when we take the shoot to the dormant Whitechapel Bell Foundry down the road, which 31/44 is in the process of redesigning after its controversial sale last year, suddenly Davies with his blue mac and Burges with his cow hitch knotted scarf look like actors in a Jack the Ripper themed tour of the East End.

The scene pitches them wrong, but they've got into the spirit of the interview. The self-consciousness of an hour earlier has slipped away and they are chatting freely without having to be prodded hard. As the afternoon continues I realise this speaks volumes about Burges and Davies, and how they run their practice.

'We are quite sensible,' says Davies. 'We have spreadsheets and we've never thrown everything at one thing thinking if this comes off we are sorted and if it doesn't we are in real trouble.'

Instead, Davies and Burges describe their style as slow and steady, which makes sense from our encounter. That might not sound



## We are quite sensible. We've never thrown everything at just one thing

like much of a story but it is given the practice started 'accidentally' when Burges, who had been an employee of eight years' standing at Proctor & Matthews, was contacted by a friend with a lot of work and decided to help. James Jeffries joined soon after and Davies in 2012. They've completed dozens of buildings, are getting increasingly significant commissions and awards (Red House was shortlisted for the House of the Year), but only now do they feel they've done enough to warrant talking about it. It's all quite enamouring and realistic, which is refreshing.

'There wasn't a master plan,' says Davies.

Rather, at the time, the only thing that was clear was that they didn't want their own names above the door. 'I remember at Proctor & Matthews, we often had meetings where the client would be disappointed that no one with the surnames Proctor or Matthews were there,' explains Burges. A nondescript name meant people could join and leave invisibly – as Jeffries did just six months ago, closing the practice's co-original office in Amsterdam. The number above the door there was 31; 44 was the number on the first office here in London Bridge.



**Above** The Bell Foundry, Whitechapel, will have a public element.

**Below and far left** Red House in south London uses an end of terrace infill plot.



Now on the top of a four-storey building with the City of London in the middle distance and the dilapidation of Whitechapel below, the interior of 31/44's office is typical of many a small practice. Grey-green rack shelving with models stacked high line the space; architects poked in slightly unfairly underneath. But look carefully and you see that the models are at a far bigger scale than most practices would make, and Davies and Burges are wearing full navy, not black.

'We collect people with complementary skills,' explains Burges after a few minutes. 'We have an open table where everyone contributes to designs. There isn't a red pen master sketch by either of us. We are not hyper confident in that way; we look for reassurance and interrogation from each other.'

Collaged together, like the proposal drawings for Whitechapel Bell Foundry, what's interesting about these admissions is that often these qualities would be perceived as something that could hold businesses back. But in Burges and Davies' case it means they have a lot of repeat work and word of mouth recommendations. They credit just three clients with changing the direction of the practice – something they put down to 'being nice and working hard'.

'We both grew up in the countryside,' says Burges who is from The Fens, whereas Davies is from North Wales. 'We don't have that metropolitan confidence you get if you are a kid in the city. There is still a



separation in us that, even after 20 years in London, think cities are bonkers. We have a reverence for them.'

They think clients appreciate this humbleness and take on their ideas as a result. While luck in meeting clients might play a role initially, it is what happens afterwards that means they get more work. The client for Whitechapel Bell Foundry, for example, is an American investor whose secretary called up out of the blue three years ago telling them to meet this man at the such and such hotel the following Tuesday. After converting a three-storey building on Redchurch Street in Shoreditch, then an adjoining site, Whitechapel is their third project together. If that job had been offered through an open competition, 31/44 might not have got a look in as it still struggles to pre-qualify for many projects. To Burges and Davies, treating clients well means having the appetite to go through the process and get things delivered as well as getting to know clients as people and how they prefer to communicate – brief and direct in the case of the American.

'We were always mindful that the project needs to get built,' says Davies about their approach to starting up. 'Once you've been through that process, it helps you grow quite quickly.'

However, what these good manners mean for 31/44's architecture is its early projects feel now quite distant from its work today as it didn't want to go overboard on them and risk they wouldn't get built. Secondly, and this goes back to how they feel about cities, it means the firm's designs are not 'selfish', ego-led icons.

'Sometimes you need to design buildings that make a piece of the background of a city. We try to do buildings that start off like this but when you stop to look at them they have a greater depth,' explains Burges. At the



**Above** Church Farm in Norfolk is currently on site.



**Below right** The second phase of Redchurch Street picks up the characteristics of both the practice's refurbished grey block and the neighbouring Georgian terrace.

first phase of Redchurch Street, for example, 31/44 kept the original three-storey 1950s building, excavated a basement and added two storeys for a hotel.

'Regeneration is a difficult thing. We don't want to kill a place,' says Davies. 'We were always quite conscious that if we did something here, how would we make it not feel like a big commercial developer coming in but do something for the established community?' This led to the suggestion of giving the publisher Allpress, which had become synonymous with the old building, a kiosk in the refurbishment to maintain its presence there. Then overall the building feels tough, industrial as well as civic, which reflects what has happened to Shoreditch in general.

Now 31/44 has a few buildings under its belt it is designing projects with increasing personality. Red House in south London, which was speculatively built by Arrant Land, for example, uses the red engineering accent brick of the neighbouring terraces all over, as well as picking out a decorative scheme in those which it repeats as blocks of pattern. The practice takes something ordinary and subverts it slightly – 'adopting to undermine'. It ekes out space and is sympathetic to context, with everything


feeding into the one thing. The effect is quite abstract and intriguing, with a twisting ground floor plan around lightwell courtyards. That client came to them by recommendation too, but what convinced him was a well-written design and access statement by 31/44 (check yours now!) which they found online.

So what next? Whitechapel Bell Foundry is about to go in for planning, which may take some time as it includes proposals for a five to six storey hotel on the two sites behind as well as the listed building (which will retain a foundry element but be open to the public). The practice also has a two-house, six-apartment scheme in Whitstable as well as private houses in Peckham and Forest Hill, and eight supported living projects across the country. However, after all this, Davies and Burges feel it might be about time to revisit the large housebuilding projects they worked on before at Proctor & Matthews. They've learned a lot since and are interested to put it to use on that 'sometimes frustrating process'. As ever they'll start cautiously and bashfully I'm sure, before swinging into it. ●



We both grew up in the country; even after 20 years in London we have a reverence for cities





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# Research harvest

In a new section we join the architecture school studios to discover what students are thinking and discovering. First up is Manchester

Eleanor Young

This September the number of cranes on Manchester's skyline broke city records, reaching 64. Numerous large practices have been opening up offices in the city and there are now nearly 150. Under mayor Andy Burnham the city region is capitalising on the development with its own design manifesto. And Manchester School of Architecture, one of the UK's largest with 800 Part I and II students, is also growing and drawing themes from its city – from policy and data-driven regional planning to bringing together historic environment and community to make better places.

So it is apposite to launch this new RIBA Journal series with the Manchester school. Our intention is to get inside architecture schools and design projects to understand some of their investigations and excitements, from the speculative to the more prosaic. Students hear about these from fellow students, and practitioners from portfolios, but we hope to capture the headspace and pioneering thinking that comes with teaching and studying. These can be rare commodities in the treadmill of practice – yet they enrich it greatly. Student work may draw a lot from practice (just think of all those references to Zumthor) but it also pushes the envelope in scope, technology and, most importantly, design ideas. You may not have yet have designed with algae but even before Arup built

its BIQ house in Hamburg in 2013, student projects were already exploring its potential.

The optimism and future thinking of design teaching in schools stand against a background of crippling student debt and pressures on education delivery. Current students will likely leave their diploma with debts of £100,000 and be paying them back into their forties. As apprenticeships develop they should change this model: we will also look at them as more come on stream.

The raft of new build university architecture and design schools – an incredible investment in the university estate – has been undermined by the income-driven pressure to fill their spaces beyond capacity with students. The miraculous moment of a right-sized school with busy but uncrowded workshops and studio space for each student is fleeting, lasting for perhaps a couple of years after redevelopment. The argument is that whole faculties and universities are full of touch down and collaboration spaces and, anyway, you rarely get everyone in at-

Jefferies characterises  
the MArch as questioning  
what architecture and  
cities should be



**Above** An exploration of the relationship between vertical and horizontal space for Lizard Spaceport, Cornwall, a project by Peter Bell at Manchester School of Architecture.

tendance at the studio. But this ignores the peculiarly physical nature of architecture (if you can't leave your model safely do you drag it in on the bus or would you just work from home?) and the value of sharing and developing projects with your studio team.

In the same way teaching can often be so stretched that the much-vaunted (and valued), peer-to-peer learning has to replace one to one time on a project with a tutor. Tutoring 17 students in a weekly day of studio teaching, even with input from other experts, risks sending the tutor into automaton mode. So, as well as capturing the ideas of some of the studios and ateliers of schools, we want to get a snap shot of each institution we profile in terms of tutor resource and studio space.

So where does Manchester School of Architecture fit into all this? It has had a new building, designed by Feilden Clegg Bradley and Stirling Prize nominated in 2014. Connecting textiles and other art disciplines with architecture, it is an exciting space with an openness and energy and cross-cutting



big bridges adding an Escher-ish thrill.

Head of school Tom Jefferies arrived in 2011 with a plan to link research activity with design. So the MArch has eight ateliers, each directly connected to a strand of research activity. 'As academic staff pursue their own interests so they help direct the ateliers,' says Jefferies, continuing: 'A masters cannot run without a research agenda. I reshaped some and closed those without any research.' His idea is that this discipline brings greater connectivity with external partners so the impact of work is wider.

The ateliers are intended to be collaborative groups gathered around a research question, enabling a range of views and opinions. He characterises the MArch in all its forms as questioning what architecture and cities should be. 'We acknowledge the city as a starting point,' he says. 'We're based in Manchester, it is an urban situation.' That seems to work for the MArch students, where half are drawn from the undergraduate programme and many want to carry on to work in the city. The university does its best to connect them with an annual open review of sixth years by 60-70 practitioners from Lancashire, Cheshire and Yorkshire as well as Manchester itself. But Jefferies is clear that this is an academic not vocational course. 'It is a mistake to think practices know best,' he says. ●

### Infrastructure Space Research

Jefferies' own atelier, Infrastructure Space Research, focuses on large scale mapping, using data sets and policies alongside more obviously spatial information on things such as communities and housing. The results are often complex models. 'It tends to have a social agenda,' explains Jefferies. He sees that you can produce architecture in a 'formal bubble' but is determined to avoid this. Two years ago the atelier's focus was on the Highlands – inquiring how healthcare can deliver on a regional policy of equality across the massive geographical range from Glasgow to Ben Nevis. Data mapping brought together health, connectivity, energy and demographics. Out of it came a project for remote diabetes sensing, delivered by NHS Highlands and small company Tactical Wireless. 'It saved at least one person having their foot amputated,' says Jefferies.

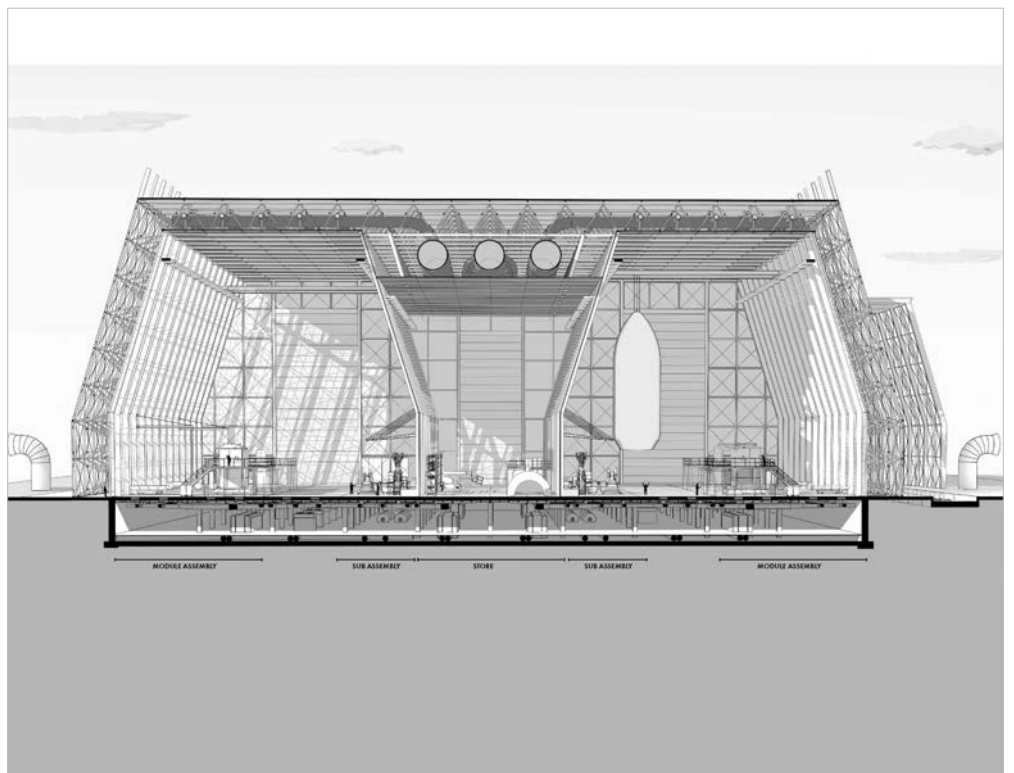
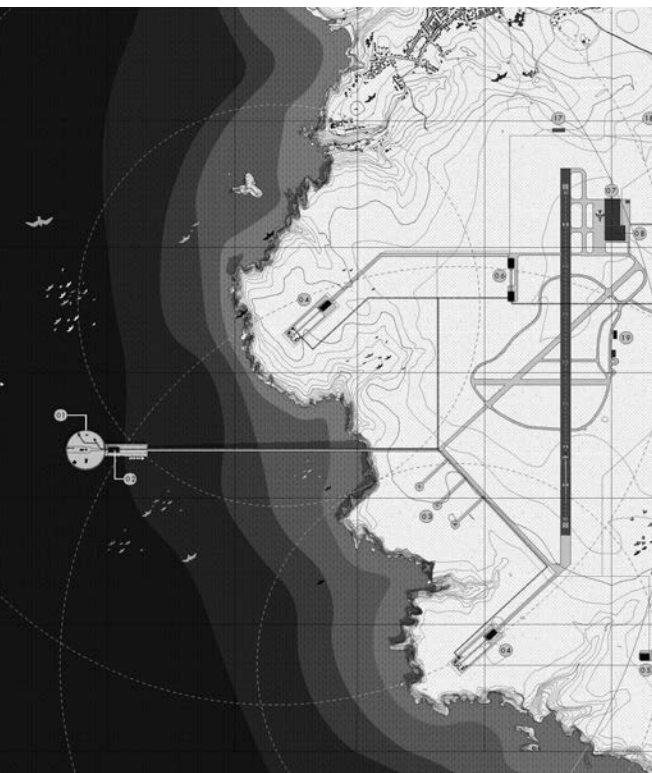
Last year, working with the Satellite Applications Catapult, it concentrated on how Cornwall operates as a region over the course of the year, given the ebbs and flows

**Below** Peter Bell's Lizard Spaceport arose from the data gathering and mapping of the Infrastructure Design Studio atelier's studies in Cornwall. Masterplan (below left) and assembly building (below right).

How do you make a dynamic model of spatial operation with four times the population?

of visiting tourists in a context where essential services are all sized for the local, winter, population. 'How do you create a dynamic model of spatial operation when you [sometimes] have four times the population?' asks Jefferies. Students mapped the issues and looked for gaps in the system, where there is space for projects to correct them with building design, digital technology or via other agencies. One proposal involved the re-use of space satellite waste, which would be processed on the site of an old airfield.

Under way now is an investigation of the Irish border question triggered by the issues raised by Brexit. A three day field trip saw the atelier following the 310 mile border, starting at Derry and searching for any evidence on the ground of any new approaches. It is too early for the projects yet to have emerged but this identification phase already goes to the core skills that the MArch must embed, says Jefferies. 'Architects are good at looking and synthesising.'





**Right** Continuity in Architecture 1:

The design of this archaeology museum and research institute reuses an existing 18th century belvedere, drawing on the past for this small contextual intervention.

**Continuity in Architecture**

MArch programme leader Sally Stone takes things down a scale in her atelier, Continuity in Architecture. Here students start at the scale of 1:100, concentrating on the architectural needs of small communities and architectural solutions to help them heal. Context and place are all important. This year the title is Rochdale by way of Venice; students are expected to get to grips with Rochdale – 15 minutes away by train – a place with a complex ethnic and minority population and a reputation struggling to get beyond cases of extensive grooming of young women. But students also get their trip to Italy and a project there. ‘Venice is a great model for living very close together with a strong community,’ says Stone. Interestingly, John Ruskin was involved in both cities (including a hand in the great gothic construction of Rochdale’s town hall).

Possible interventions include objects in public space, street furniture and housing. The question is always ‘What is appropriate?’ That means understanding the buildings that are appropriate for a 21st century population considering demographics and family sizes, with the technology and techniques we have now. It is also a question of what is appropriate in detail, using the school’s workshops, designing texture 1:1 to give a level of intimacy with it. One project developed ornamental facades using new digital techniques. Stone is particularly keen on this as applied to the town’s housing need. ‘You could approach a developer and get three-bed semis or you could look at the students’ ideas which take in today’s smaller sized families, with the kitchen at the centre of the house,’ she says.

Previous years have taken as a focus Colwyn Bay in Wales and Bollington in Cheshire, where students examined its massive congestion problem and came up with ideas of how to reduce the problem – work that is now being implemented by a part time tutor through their practice. ●



**Left** Rebekah Parkinson and Karissa Parkinson's La Fondazione Vito Maria Amico museum in Sicily for the Continuity in Architecture atelier. The experimental facade models, including textured castings, physical constructions and technical detail, speak of the technologies of the 21st century.

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# A pure thoroughbred...

Gerflor has a long history of continuous product development. Here we describe the production process of its noted sports flooring, Taraflex®



The Gerflor factory in Tarare where its top-performing Taraflex® sports flooring is manufactured seems to ooze out naturally from the side of the surrounding Rhône-Alpes hills. The factory sits in 20 hectares which house the production facility and the holding areas for stock. Of the 650 staff on site 80% are involved in production with the other 20% in R&D, marketing, administration and communications.

The factory has a stream of continuous product development and process innovation which is fed by an R&D department that has its roots firmly planted in materials research. The factory also holds a vast amount of stock ready to be despatched to its large international distribution network. Gerflor is adamant that stock levels should always remain high in Tarare to be assured of satisfying customers eager to lay their new or replacement sports floors.

**Above** Part of Gerflor's sports flooring range, Taraflex® Performance was specified in vibrant Yellow at the Polo Farm Sports Club in Canterbury, Kent.

**Opposite top** Water jet cutting from Gerflor can create bespoke designs and logos which further enhances the choice for designers and specifiers.

**Opposite bottom** The product is spooled onto the 'mother roll' with all waste lost through the manufacturing process recycled back into new products.

Gerflor's R&D department  
has its roots firmly planted in  
materials research

Taraflex® sports flooring can trace its birth back to 1947 when Gerflor developed calendaring for PVC production. The Taraflex® range really made an impact on the sports flooring market from around 1965 when public investment in France for construction and renovation of multisport halls really took off, providing the population throughout the country with an infrastructure to support sport and fitness.

The Taraflex® production process starts with calendaring which involves dry blending; then it's made gelatinous, mixed, embossed and cooled. In short, it's the transformation of thermoplastic raw materials into layers of a regular thickness. The pre-mixed pellets (the size of gunshot) are initially fed into a dry blender, then mixed and spread onto a heated conveyor belt. The pellets contain small pieces of PVC plasticisers to make



## Only harmless raw materials are used in production

the PVC more malleable, and to deliver the colouring pigment. That's the simple bit. Next comes the coating element of the process which uses a fibreglass grid (unique to Gerflor) as a support where the liquid PVC (called plastisol) is applied, then set and solidified in an oven under high temperature before being embossed and cooled. This is where the process looks like giant slabs of chocolate about to be rolled out. Large rollers each about the width of a tennis court are constantly whirring to keep the continuous flow of Taraflex on the move. The final process is lamination where the product is further assembled with several coated or calendered layers by using a heat bonding method. This enables a wear layer within the whole thickness of the flooring. It's like seeing the letters or pattern all the way through a stick of seaside rock... hugely effective to the eye and very durable. These giant rollers also stabilise the product, so it won't lose its new shape once it has cooled at the end of the production line. The product is then spooled onto the 'mother roll' with all waste lost through the manufacturing process recycled back into new products.

Gerflor has more than 70 years of experience with its Taraflex® sports



flooring. Pioneering and innovation in sports flooring is right at the heart of Gerflor's DNA when it comes to both production and R&D. Taraflex® offers a wide range of colours and is suitable for a variety of applications and has been used by the largest international sports federations (volleyball, handball, badminton, table tennis) for decades. Through partnerships with these federations Gerflor has been present at the Summer Olympic Games since 1976. It's an Olympic pedigree stretching back over an incredible 42 years. Taraflex® is available in 17 colours and three wood-effect designs. The range offers P1, P2 and P3 shock absorbency categories and is designed to cater for all needs.

Taraflex® is recognised for providing durability, safety and comfort without impairing performance. The range also provides a greater than 45% force reduction, making it unrivalled in the marketplace in terms of offering comfort for users. Taraflex® meets the EN Standard of 22196 for antibacterial activity (E coli, S aureus, MRSA) returning more than 99% levels of growth inhibition. The product is also treated with ProtecSol, the triple action of which means no polish is ever required. It also contributes to easy maintenance and is anti-friction burn and slide/grip. Taraflex® has a double density foam backing and has another bonus in that it's environmentally friendly. Taraflex® from Gerflor also meets the EN 14904 Standard for indoor sports

surfaces. It is ideal for renovation works and is available with the Dry-Tex™ System – perfect for new construction or refurbishment projects with damp subfloors.

Water jet cutting from Gerflor can create bespoke designs and logos which further enhances the choices for designers and specifiers. It's a real boon when a sports facility wants to customise its 'look' or just make sure the team logo is 'front and centre'.

Recycling is also a huge issue for Gerflor. It is at the forefront of the manufacturing of 100% recyclable, sustainable floorings: it only uses harmless raw materials in its production processes, and its production sites like Tarare are ISO 14001 certified. Almost 100% of Gerflor's production waste is recycled and its products are among those with the lowest VOC emissions worldwide.

Producing a pedigree is never easy. It takes planning, patience, incredible talent and vision. It's a testament to the R&D at Gerflor that it was able to produce its Taraflex® sports flooring, which back in the 'Beatle driven' sixties, helped transform the general health and well-being of the French public and go on to be the world-beating thoroughbred sports flooring it is today. ●

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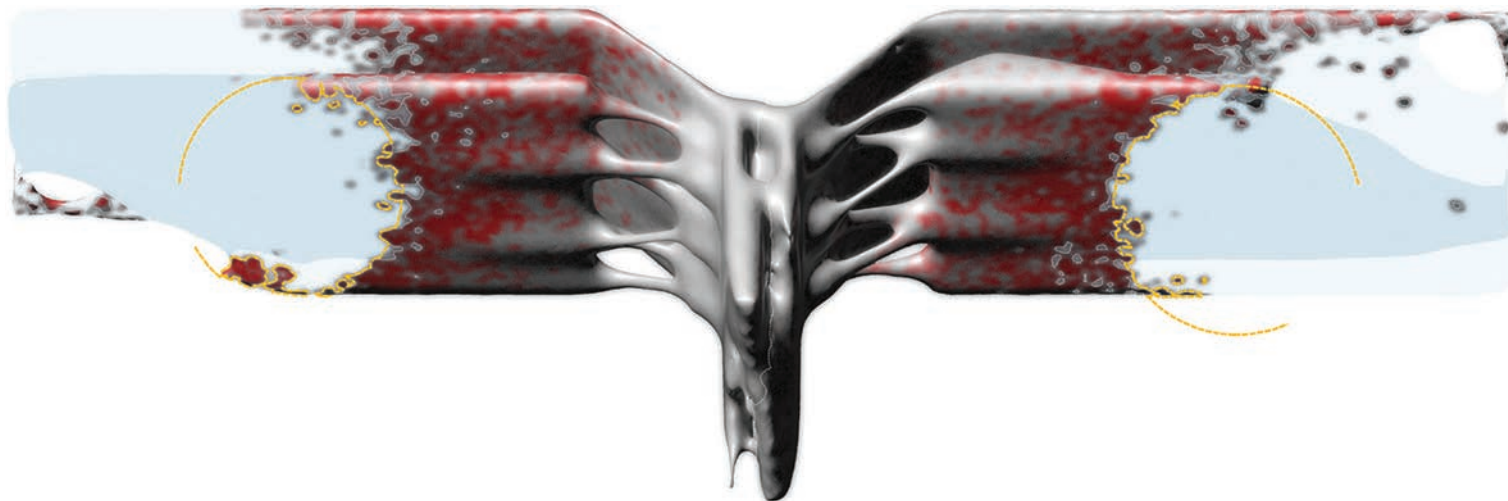




# Building without bolts

Design processes see a future in fusion

**Below** Interior view of the multi-material mullion interface showing the aluminium (silver), alumina (red), and glass (translucent blue) sub-material distribution.



**Kostas Grigoriadis**

'There is a sea change in the world of construction: the shift from assemblage to fusion. In material terms this translates into a move from mechanical to chemical attachments; more simply, things are built without bolts, screws, nails, and pegs' – Greg Lynn,

Fused materiality has existed since time immemorial in the form of alloys, but was introduced in the form of gradients only in the late 20th century in aerospace. Its significance for architecture relates to the ever-rising scale of 3D-printing and its expanding material palette. Research by Foster+Partners, Skanska, and Loughborough University for instance, are exploring large-scale component fabrication for 3D-printing entire buildings, while investigations in the fusion of materials into multi-material, or functionally graded material (FGM) building parts (varied gradually in composition within a single volume) indicate considerable material, cost, and energy savings among other advantages.

Convergence of building-scale printing and multi-materiality is only a matter of time. This research initially outlines the impacts that this new material technology heralds.

First, tectonic construction, based on the assemblage of materially uniform, discrete building components, will be replaced by the continuous fusion of materials. Discrete boundaries will be replaced by gradients which, being more 'forgiving' than discrete

components, will see the acceptable margin for error rise. Finally, procedures of translation from 3D CAD information to 2D (drawn) instructions that are then converted into built space, will be superseded by seamless-ness between designing and building.

The research moves on to the impact of multi-material use on design practice, criticising and rethinking voxel-based design (the FGM CAD method most used by architectural researchers), due to its inability to incorporate material properties in the design process.

So in the new landscape of part-less FGM constructs, materially-oriented design and the generative emergence of material gradients are expected to take precedence over current, form-biased approaches. The resulting research question is: what design methodology can correspond to the use of functionally graded materials in architecture?

The designer's objective should be to create a framework within which sub-materials can mix into a graded topology, finding their own arrangement in space over time. As blending occurs when matter is in its liquid state, computational fluid dynamics (CFD) simulations offer an alternative for designing with FGM.

The aim is a step-by-step methodology of this novel design process, targeted to the glass to aluminium frame connection in a unitised curtain wall panel – typically associated with low environmental sustainability, supply chain inefficiencies and installation failures that could all be eliminated by a

component-less FGM connection. The workflow concerns the whole process of material research, design, and fabrication of the part in a physical multi-material.

The findings mainly concern issues arising from the use of material simulations in architectural design, and discrepancies between computational and physical phenomena.

The principle contribution to knowledge is the formulation of a set of prerequisites for the validity of material simulation use in architectural design, plus the creation of a visualisation workflow for the (relatively) accurate representation of a multi-material that is partly transparent, and the linking of simulation to additive manufacturing through bespoke Python and Visual Basic coding. Representation can now be made simply with standard 2D graphics and 3D modelling software, while the incompatibility between CFD and 3D-printing is resolved by converting gradient material data into colour values for (partially accurate) multi-material fabrication.

The research lays out a work path for the architect or designer of this forecast, multi-material future, who will be called upon to operate within a changing architectural and material landscape, shifting from a logic of discreteness to one of continuousness. ●

**Computational Blends: The Epistemology of Designing with Functionally Graded Materials**, by Kostas Grigoriadis of Architectural Association School of Architecture won the Design & Technical category of the RIBA Research Awards



# Photos set off space sleuthing

How salvage started a story of social housing

Jane Rendell

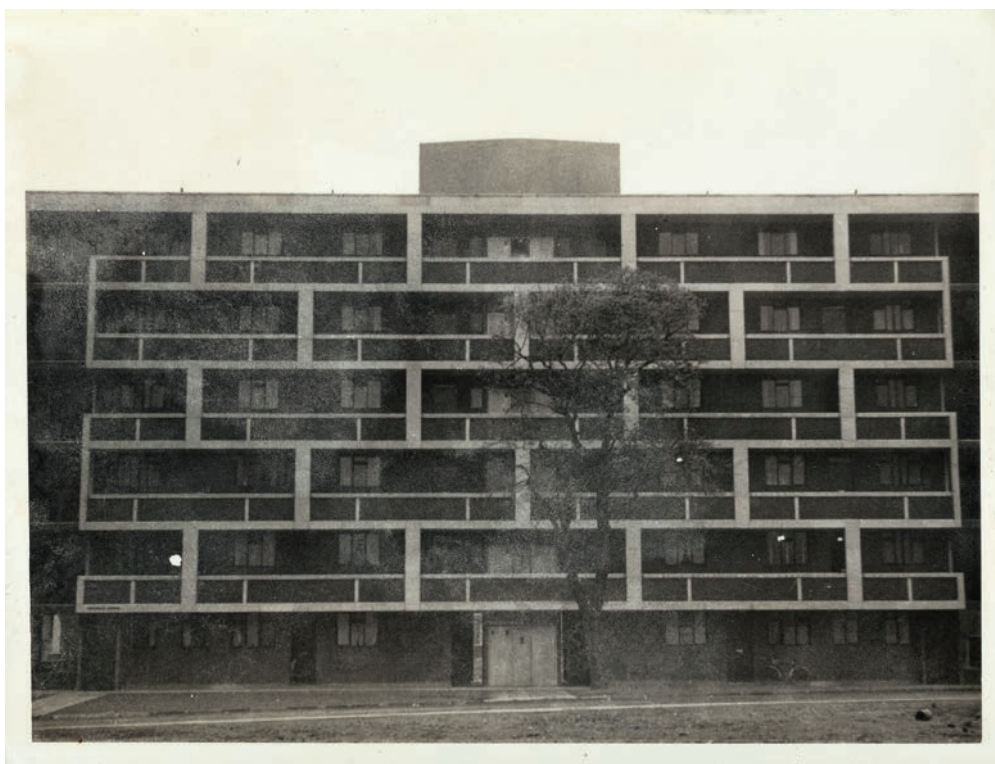
My research around May Mo(u)rn began almost 20 years ago with the salvaging of some abandoned photographs of buildings in a derelict arts and crafts bungalow in London's green belt. The photographs lay in my collection, dormant, for many years, until on a return visit I found the building's name plaque, 'May Morn', buried in brambles next to the broken gate. This prompted me to consider how the homonyms, morn and mourn, suggested the relation of beginnings and endings. In their deteriorating material states, wall three – the house, the paper of the photographs, and the painted letters – pointed towards their own disintegration – or endings, and yet the buildings in the photographs were at the beginning of their lives, some with the construction scaffolding not yet removed.

Aided by the architectural qualities of the structures and some text-based clues drawn from the photographs, such as a street sign in one reading 'Westmoreland Terrace' and letters over two entrances with the words: '2-24 Edmund Street' and 'Witl-', I managed to track down all the buildings. They included The Elmington Estate (1957), Picton Street, London SE5, designed by the London County Council's architect's department; The Hallfield Estate (1952-1955), Bishops Bridge Road, W2, designed by Tecton, Drake and Lasdun for Paddington Borough Council; The Alton East Estate (1952-1955), Portsmouth Road, SW15, designed by the LCC architect's department; The Alton West Estate (1955-1959), Roehampton Lane, SW15, designed by the LCC architect's department; and Churchill Gardens (1950-1962), Grosvenor Road, Lupus Street, SW1, designed by Powell and Moya for Westminster City Council. I revisited each one, and took another photograph, from the same position as the original, showing how some were



**Above** The Alton East Estate (1952-1955), Portsmouth Road, SW15, London designed by the London County Council Architect's Department.

**Below** The Hallfield Estate (1952-1955), Bishops Bridge Road, W2, London, designed by Tecton, Drake and Lasdun for Paddington Borough Council.



being refurbished and others demolished, depending on whether they were undergoing what Paul Watt and others have called 'regeneration and state-led gentrification'.

I became fascinated by the history of the variations in typology of social housing architecture, and the links – through different slab and point block designs – to Swedish and brutalist versions of modernism. It was possible to trace a history of the Alton West Estate back to Le Corbusier's early work, Unité d'Habitation (1947-52) in Marseilles, and before that to Moisei Ginzburg and Ignatii Milinis's Narkomfin Communal House (1928-9) in Moscow, whose design influenced, but was also influenced by, certain principles of the Unité embodied in Le Corbusier's earlier work. Most interesting to me was the importance of the design of the transitional spaces of these structures, those neither public nor private, that lay between the apartments, such as the corridors for shared social activities; and the fact that Narkomfin was designed as a 'social condenser of the transitional type', whose transitional status came from its intended role in constructing a new soviet way of life. This made associations for me with certain psychoanalytic ideas. Consequently a second strand of research developed around, for example, D W Winnicott's notion of the transitional object as the



## Most interesting to me was the importance of the design of the transitional spaces

object of the child's first relationship with their parent, and the transitional space this object occupies between the internal psyche and external world. Winnicott claimed that the ability to keep inner and outer realities separate yet inter-related resulted in an intermediate area of experience – 'potential space'. He argued this was retained and later contributed to the intensity of cultural experiences. Winnicott's notion of 'potential space', located between 'the individual and the environment (originally the object)', struck me as highly relevant for considering our emotional responses to the buildings that we design and build and in which we live.

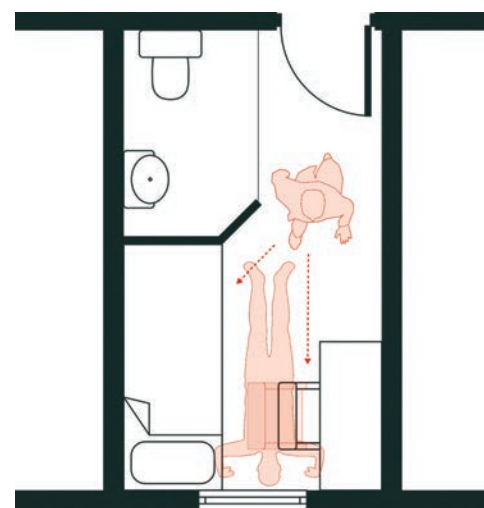
I was also taken with Sigmund Freud's reflections on how the first object is also the lost object, in his work on mourning and melancholia, and a striking recommendation made by the historian Dominic Capra. This was that the historian should avoid taking a melancholic position, facing back to the past in relation to attachments to potentially traumatic events; but instead mourn

and write history as a way of working things through in order to approach the future. This encouraged me to take a more autobiographical turn in my own writing, and consider both the sites in which I had been conducting my research, as well as its potential to affect the future of social housing in London.

The final writing was conducted from my leaseholder flat in south London, where from the 18th storey of a point block designed by the architect of Alton West, I was able to see the transformation of the London Borough of Southwark, from the pointed end of the Shard at London Bridge, through the Victorian townhouses of the estate agent's newly coined 'Walworth village' to the ragged holes where the Heygate Estate had been. My flat faced the western end of Burgess Park, its northern edge a battle ground, with the so-called 'affordable' new flats being built in place of the social housing provided by the slab blocks of the Aylesbury estate. Some had already been demolished; others lay under threat. I decided to use my research to inform the preparation of an expert witness statement for the Public Inquiry into Compulsory Purchase Orders to help leaseholders on the Aylesbury Estate. ●

**May Mo(u)rn: transitional spaces in architecture and psychoanalysis – a site-writing by Jane Rendell of Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL won the History & Theory category of the RIBA Research Awards**

## Wellbeing in prison design



### Design guide founded on psychology and supporting rehabilitation

**Roland Karthaus**

Recently, the debate on the purpose of prison has shifted, with a greater emphasis on enabling rehabilitation and reducing reoffending alongside punishment and secure detention.

Although architecture alone cannot direct an individual's behaviour, environmental psychology proposes that the design of the built environment has a significant effect and can support positive change. A renewed government commitment to the rehabilitative function of prison brings the practical, economic and ethical issues together. It raises whether prison architecture can be designed to support prisoners to rehabilitative ends through design considerations.

In 2017, supported by the RIBA Research Trust and Innovate UK, Matter Architecture led a multi-disciplinary team to produce a research-based design guide on supporting health and wellbeing through prioritising design measures in the prison environment. Working alongside the MoJ Prison Estate Transformation Programme, Matter explored an alternative methodology, drawing on ev-

Churchill Gardens (1950-1962), Grosvenor Road, Lupus Street, SW1, designed by Powell and Moya for Westminster City Council.







Growing numbers of prisoners, overall cost and repeated news stories of prison disturbances are a strong impetus for change

#### Left and opposite

Extract from detail level of Wellbeing in Prison Design Guide.

idence from environmental psychology and user experiences to inform design decisions.

Fieldwork study visits to two recently built establishments gave insights at a particular moment in the prison building programme.

The UK's most recently built and largest prison, HMP Berwyn, is a post-PFI design and has been subject to superficial adjustments to try and mitigate the potentially de-humanising effects of a largely logistical environment – including the installation of large-format images and use of bright colours. A survey was undertaken, with structured meetings with prison staff, acoustic testing and escorted 'walking audits' with officers and peer mentors from among the prisoners. Following the fieldwork, a survey was distributed to the entire population.

HMP Low Moss in Scotland, designed by Holmes Miller, was also visited. Scotland's devolved prison procurement produces significantly better, more progressive architecture. Survey work was not undertaken here, but it provided clear evidence that alternative approaches to design are realistic within the constraints of modern secure facilities.

Matter's design guide is organised into three tiers: high, medium and detail level. At the higher level, the report recommends improvements to the processes of commission-

ing and design; including user-engagement in the briefing process as demonstrated in the fieldwork and a quasi-independent design review to continually test the balance between security, costs and qualitative provision. At intermediate level, provisions for specific buildings and functions in the prison describe specific aspects of the typical building design, including house blocks, visitor centres and cells. Strategic observations on relationships, outlook, external spaces, form and layout are described, with environmental considerations. Potential design responses are aligned with principles for improvement, related to the environmental psychology evidence base. The detail level describes specific opportunities for improved, integrated design issues at a construction level of detail. Issues such as acoustics, lighting and ventilation were explored.

The guide provides qualitative, supplementary guidance in the design process of prisons. It uses evidence to link architectural measures to potential outcomes, so they can be more firmly valued during commissioning.

While our research has informed the commissioning of new prisons, it remains to be seen whether the objective of providing quality space to support rehabilitation will survive maximum security/minimum cost

procurement. But the wider commissioning, financing and procurement of prisons needs reform to realise meaningful change.

Growing numbers of prisoners, overall cost and repeated news stories of prison disturbances are a strong impetus for change. Many of these crises arise directly from the emphasis on security beyond all other considerations. The dangerous individuals from whom society does need to be protected are a minority and there is strong evidence that greater use could be made of 'open' prisons for lower risk people. The tension between security and resettlement remains unexamined in policy and architectural terms, and we strongly believe a fundamental rebalancing is needed if people are to be reintegrated into society. We are exploring a new research project to test this proposition.

The application of environmental psychology to architectural design is also underexplored, and with environmental psychologist Lily Bernheimer, we are probing its potential for other building types, including public and educational settings as well as shared residential spaces such as co-living. ●

**Redesigning Prison – the Architecture and Ethics of Rehabilitation** by Roland Karthaus of Matter Architecture won the Ethics & Sustainable Development category of the RIBA Research Awards



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## Fallout from failed favours

Remember the architect who did some free work for friends and then they fell out? How did it end?

Angus Dawson

It's unfortunate when something that starts out as a favour turns into an ordeal. Following two costly trips to the High Court and one to the Court of Appeal we have finally seen the conclusion of a long running dispute involving a favour that turned into a full on legal saga.

In 2013 Mr and Mrs Burgess asked Mrs Lejonvarn, an American qualified architect, a friend and former neighbour, for help with the landscaping of their garden. Mrs Lejonvarn duly obliged and secured a contractor to carry out the earthworks and landscaping and planned to carry out design work for the 'soft' elements (planting and lighting) later on in the project. Mrs Lejonvarn's services for the initial stages were carried out for no fee but it was agreed that Mrs Lejonvarn would be paid a fee for the soft elements.

Things did not go well. The Burgesses were unhappy with the quality and progress of the work and Mrs Lejonvarn's involvement in the project came to an end. The works were subsequently finished, but much later and at a significantly greater cost than the Burgesses originally anticipated. The Burgesses tried to recover some of the additional costs from Mrs Lejonvarn.

The first question that came before the

courts was whether there was a contract between the Burgesses and Mrs Lejonvarn. The courts decided there was no contract so the breach of contract claim failed. However, in the courts' opinion Mrs Lejonvarn had 'assumed responsibility' for her services and a relationship akin to a contractual one had arisen. While she did not have to carry out the services of an architect and project manager (and could not be required to do so), if she did provide services then she had to exercise reasonable skill and care when doing so. Why? Even though she was not being paid a fee she had agreed to provide services on a professional, rather than informal or social footing, and she knew that the Burgesses were relying on her to perform those services adequately. As a result, she was bound to the same standard she would have been held to if she was being paid a fee.

The most recent set of court of proceedings was to decide whether, on the facts, Mrs Lejonvarn had failed to act with reasonable skill and care when delivering the services she did. A five day hearing and 15 witnesses later the court decided that she had not breached this duty and the Burgesses claim was dismissed.

As part of the decision, the judge helpfully highlighted that, given the nature of the works involved, Mrs Lejonvarn was entitled to rely on the skill, experience and expertise of the 'experienced, competent specialist groundworks contractor' to decide how best to carry out and implement the original garden designer's design. He also reiterated that un-remedied defective works does not automatically translate into a claim that the contract administrator is negligent for not identifying them and having them remedied.

The latest decision is (another) reminder to avoid blurring the line between friendship and work and, in the work sphere, to document terms of engagement. If you are asked to provide advice or an opinion in a non-work context, be clear that any views/opinions you provide are not in a professional capacity and that they cannot be relied upon. In the professional context, clearly set out the services that will be provided and the standard of care that will be used. If you are expecting remuneration, make that clear too, including the basis on which you are to be paid. Anything which is left unclear may come back to haunt you at a later date, even among 'friends'. ●

Angus Dawson is a partner at Macfarlanes LLP

Mrs Lejonvarn was bound to the same standard she would have been held to if she was being paid a fee

### IN PLAIN ENGLISH REASONABLE SKILL AND CARE

When providing services a consultant is under a duty to act with reasonable skill and care. In a contract this is either because the Supply of Goods and Services Act 1982 implies a term into it or because the contract contains an express provision to this effect. It is possible for the contractual reasonable skill and care requirement to be 'enhanced' to what is often called a 'project specific' duty of care. So rather than the reasonable skill and care of a reasonably competent person of the same profession it is the reasonable skill and care of a reasonably competent person of the same profession experienced in providing services for projects similar to the project in question. The common law test for negligence provides that a consultant is not negligent if they carry out their work to the same standard that a reasonably competent person of the same profession could have met. Given the reliance of skill and judgment a consultant does not usually guarantee a particular outcome or result (unless there it has agreed to a fitness for purpose obligation).



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# 3: Culture

## More for everyone

You've seen our new cover – we've more content too, with an eye on the next generation



**Hugh Pearman** Editor

You may have noticed that the front cover of your RIBA J this month looks a little different. The big J of our name and logo has made a bid for independence and become a superscale graphic device which we shall use in various interesting ways month by month. Designed by Linda Byrne, it is an evolution of our classic 2013 design by Matt Willey which itself was part of a root-and-branch rethink of the Journal.

Inside his design remains unaltered, but some of our content is changing: welcome to our new occasional 'In school' feature (p46) in which we take a look at what's going on in the architecture schools around the country, starting with Manchester. If you read the magazine from front to back rather than starting from the back as I always do, you'll have seen the start of our shift to covering more one-off houses and – as the RIBA itself expands its membership overseas – overseas projects and topics.

Following favourable reaction to our previous forays into this area, as the year unfolds we plan to do more appraisals of whole places

*'Working with a team of talented architects has ensured that our children are able to develop life skills, such as team work, solving a brief, problem solving and communication'*

rather than just individual buildings. We'll also be profiling more of the practitioners and clients of architecture, starting with the fast-emerging 31/44 Architects on p44 in addition to our regular profile which this month (p64) is of Murray Fraser at the Bartlett, winner of this year's Annie Spink Award for teaching in architecture.

Let's stay with teaching because in my view one of the most valuable things the RIBA has trialled recently – and now wants to roll out nationwide – is its programme of getting practitioners into schools to spark an interest in and knowledge of architecture in students from ages four to 18. Not to mention enthusing teachers. This is the National Schools Programme, organised by the RIBA Learning Team.

Its pilot phase is already impressive: some 18,000 young people, many from disadvantaged backgrounds, have taken part in over 200 schools across England. The scheme involved 349 'architecture ambassadors' from 170 practices. Now the plan is for it to happen everywhere. Why? Canan Ahmet, a teacher at one of my local primary schools in north London – Rokesly Junior – says: 'Working with a team of talented architects has ensured that our children are able to develop life skills, such as team work, solving a brief, problem solving and communication. The programme raises aspirations and creates potential career pathways for some architects of tomorrow.'

I've seen this approach in action on a related project, Scale Rule, which every year brings architects and engineers (Grimshaw and AKTII) together with secondary school pupils to both design and build an annual summer pavilion on a site set aside for the purpose in a local churchyard. It's a lot of work in a short time but the enthusiasm and talent you see from the students is extraordinary. If we want to encourage social mobility and a more diverse profession – and who doesn't? – the RIBA's National Schools Programme is the way to go. Sign up to it! ●

### ONLY ON RIBAJ.COM

You can clearly see his training as an architect. Engaging with building spaces through painting was a major concern for Léger

**Pamela Buxton** enjoys the first exhibition of Fernand Léger's work for 30 years: [ribaj.com/legerliverpool](http://ribaj.com/legerliverpool)



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# Over and out

Roger Scruton's back – but really, does it make any difference?



Will Wiles

When I sit down to think about what I am going to write, I have to consider whether it will still be relevant in six to eight weeks. You will be reading this at Christmastime, online, and 2019 in print – are people still talking about Foster's Tulip? Or – and here we come to the actual business of this column – is Roger Scruton still chairing the government's 'Building Better, Building Beautiful' commission? At the time of writing, the right-wing philosopher's copious back catalogue is proving a clown car of odious opinions. Surely, come 2019, this nonsense will be at an end and he will have been returned to the obscure swamp of sinister, opaquely funded conferences and think-tanks that is his natural habitat.

At the time of writing, it rumbles on. Trumpeting the commission that Scruton will lead, Kit Malthouse (housing minister at the time of writing) told architects to 'stop being so defensive'. Scruton himself responded to critics on his website by suggesting they are habitual offence-takers whose upset is simply a ploy to censor discussion of – for instance – whether homosexuality is 'normal' or not. If your opponents are inventing their offence, you have no need to substantively respond to them, which is handy, but it's also exactly the bad-faith argument you're projecting onto them. He reserves his offence for important matters, such as an Evening Standard reporter failing to address him as 'professor' or 'sir'. This he compares to the formal disrespect shown by the Nazis towards the Jews, an interesting line of argument considering his

Architects seemed less defensive or offended than terribly, terribly weary. Not the style wars, again!

own remarks, made in Hungary, about Jewish intelligentsia and the 'Soros empire' (he insists his words have been taken out of context). His most recent email bulletin boasts that he has survived the storm, aided by a day of fox-hunting.

But it hardly matters if he is still in place or not by the time this column appears. The fundamental problem is timeless. From what I saw of the profession's response to the appointment, architects were less defensive or offended than they were terribly, terribly weary. Not the style wars, again!

Thanks to Prince Charles's ham-fisted architectural intervention in the middle of the 1980s, we have voluminous evidence of what happens when today's architectural clients – who make more of these decisions than architects – are instructed to ape vernacular and classical forms. We can see it in pitched-roof out-of-town supermarkets studded with dovecotes and in the rash of truly ugly magistrates courts the country built in the 1990s. Moreover we can see it in scores of identikit housing estates extruded by volume developers in efflorescing orange brick.

More subtly, we can see the positive effects of its aftermath, though only after the Prince and his supporters had done their worst could architects and clients begin to process a more intelligent response to the problems of buildings and the city, from the Urban Task Force to the London Design Guide.

It's these later developments that seem to have passed Scruton by. He seems genuinely oblivious to three decades of earnest debate and improvement. His terms of reference are Le Corbusier and a few decon-icon punchbags, such as Daniel Libeskind and the late Zaha Hadid, names calculated to get a boo from the small conservative audiences he is accustomed to addressing. This is, to use a term from the hard sciences 'not even wrong' – it is simply irrelevant, it has no bearing. It is not the vast majority of architects who are obsessed with form and envelope, it is Roger Scruton. Meanwhile his myriad antique prejudices speak of a mind completely unprepared to address the realities of the 21st century. His problem is not that he is a conservative – it is that he has nothing to offer. He is simply tiresome, and it makes little difference whether he stays or goes. The government has doomed its commission to sterility. ●

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

## TALENT SWATTING

Scruton's invocation of Libeskind, Gehry and Hadid as somehow emblematic of what architects think in 2018 (or 2019) is telling in one respect. If Hadid had been designing mass housing in the UK since the 90s, we might not be better off, but our problems would certainly be a lot more interesting. But of course she was never given the chance to build anything here, not until decades later, because of the last bout of style wars. We can only hope that terrible squandering of British talent will not be repeated this time around.



# Extending our global reach

The world's getting smaller and resources are finite. The RIBA knows what to do



Ben Derbyshire

Take a dawn flight up the Gulf to Kuwait and, revealed by the low angle sun across the sand, you will see shadows of the enclosures, homes and pathways that belong to an era before the oil fuelled 'Golden Era' that gave us modern day Kuwait City. Now, a new pattern of motorways, oil pipelines and development cuts across the delicate remnants of a once self-sufficient past. Similar explosions of wealth have swept through Singapore and Dubai, earlier stops on my recent tours of RIBA's overseas chapters. Rapid, almost unfettered development that relies on the car has brought unintended consequences.

Integrated urban transport systems are either in their infancy or, as in Kuwait, completely absent in many rapidly developing cities. At the Cityscape Dubai conference, I was by no means alone in articulating the importance of happiness, wellbeing and place-making as an approach to resilient, liveable, walkable neighbourhoods. I greatly admired the ambition of members of the local chapters I met in both the Gulf and South East Asia, who are engaging in this narrative, and seeking anew to preserve the planet's finite resources, creating comfortable, sustainable conditions for citizens in their local markets.

This topic is being explored by RIBA

Rapid, almost unfettered development that relies on the car has brought unintended consequences

International vice president Chris Williamson in Chile, with a design challenge on the reuse of Santiago railway lands. A charrette in March will be livestreamed so members across the globe can engage.

As we approach Brexit, it is increasingly important that we celebrate the international nature of our profession. The RIBA, which has an unrivalled reputation as a global brand for advancing the profession, is in a unique position to build collaborations of all kinds. At last June's AIA conference I met counterparts from around the world, eager to share understanding of how best to sustain standards of education in the profession, set up improved programmes of CPD, explore the benefits of BIM and collaborate on research, especially related to urbanism.

I shall be inviting these presidents to join me for a round table to coincide with the Royal Gold Medal ceremony for Sir Nicholas Grimshaw, himself a renowned international practitioner. The winner of the 2018 RIBA International Prize, the Children Village in Brazil by Aleph Zero and Rosenbaum, and the shortlist, showcase superb architecture around the world.

There are great opportunities to share the extraordinary range of RIBA members in planning, stakeholder and community involvement, political positioning, design and management with the wider world. Our international approach seeks to develop a network capable of delivering collaborations, award schemes and charrettes. These highlight the profession's contribution to the challenges of human wellbeing, sustainability, biodiversity – creating resilient settlements at a time of rapid urbanisation.

In one example, a series of activities with our Hong Kong chapter, throughout 2019, will act as a valuable platform for our members and the architecture community to collaborate and celebrate our profession, including at the annual Hong Kong Business of Design Week. We are greatly encouraged by the support we have received for our international work from the British Council and the Department for International Trade.

I have no doubt that there is much to be gained by investing in the Institute's international engagement and support, including increasing the global focus of our media output. Indeed, I look forward to more regular features on global issues in this journal. ●

@ben\_derbyshire president@riba.org

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Murray Fraser never expected to be an academic, but he's won this year's RIBA Annie Spink award. Stay student-centred is his advice

Words: Eleanor Young Portrait: Ivan Jones

# Master of the role

'I always take the stairs,' says Murray Fraser as we climb up through the Bartlett School of Architecture to his office. 'It is the only way I get to see people.' Warm interchanges follow, on stairs and landings. Fraser studied here, for 17 years in total from undergraduate to PhD, then as critic and external examiner and finally returning full time in 2011. He now revels in the title of professor of architecture and global culture as well as vice dean of research.

Now he has been announced as the winner of the biennial RIBA Annie Spink Award for his contribution to education. Perhaps it is not surprising: over the years his name has come up again and again as tutor for President's Medal and Dissertation Medal winners. He bridges the divide between design and history and theory in his teaching and his book on Design Research in Architecture and again in his work with the Palestinian Regeneration Team. He brought cultural theory

into architectural history and widened the discussion to a more global subject as befits an education system for students from across the world. This is clearly demonstrated in his book *Architecture and the 'Special Relationship'*, which picks up on UK-US themes, and an entirely new and renamed Sir Banister Fletcher's *Global History of Architecture* – a huge project of a million words that has taken all (and more) of a year's sabbatical to commission and write and comes out next year. 'It is not quite an encyclopedia,' he says, quite underselling the massive undertaking.

The dossier assembled for his Annie Spink Award nomination not only outlines his achievements, it also gives a sense of a man who has warmth and interest in those around him – 'ever-friendly engagement' wrote one highly regarded academic, 'openness and tireless enthusiasm' wrote an ex-student. As we take a seat in his Bartlett

**Right** Murray Fraser's 'openness and tireless enthusiasm' was noted in his Annie Spink Award.











office the way he talks is inclusive – as if I was there and know the people he talking about – but without leapfrogging the basics. He still explains and contextualises but a collaborative nature seems to be embedded in his speech patterns.

Fraser never thought he was an academic, he always enjoyed practice, including early work at Architype. But when the nineties recession made a full time teaching job look more attractive he found it was his medium. 'I always imagined I would be teaching and practising but I just really enjoyed teaching. It is so creative, you are creating new knowledge.' Since then his career has been marked by three institutions: Oxford Brookes, the University of Westminster and the Bartlett. This at least is simple, as his list of achievements in publications, collaborations, teaching and course conjuring is not.

Reflecting on his career ahead of receiving the award, Fraser thinks he may have spotted something new emerging – the way at Oxford Brookes he and others such as Niall McLaughlin and Alex de Rijke were feeling their way to a new model of teaching which made students co-researchers. 'It was a very fertile time,' he

**Above** Murray Fraser has brought together design teaching and history and theory. Here in his office at the Bartlett.

**Below** Work by Murray Fraser's student Mark Rist: 'Communes for Urbanites', Soho: Westminster (co-tutored with Anthony Boulanger). RIBA Silver Medal Commendation and Serjeant Part 2 Drawing Award.



says. 'We felt like a different generation, it changed from master and pupil or learned master and novice. We felt much more collaborative, though we didn't realise it at the time. Now things are shifting to research-based teaching but we were doing it de facto.'

Perhaps the outstanding example of this is his student at Oxford, Tracy Meller, recently made the first female partner at RSHP. 'Her thesis was staggering,' says Fraser. 'It was like an urban design town planning competition that she did all by herself.' How did he help? 'I always found being student-centred is the way to get the best of people,' he says. It was at Oxford that his remarkable string of President's Medal and Dissertation Prize winners started to emerge, helped by the dedication of two terms of history and theory to a major study and an eclectic set of subjects from housing provision to shopping malls.

This continued after he shifted to University of Westminster. Being in London with the capital's architects and tutors on tap felt like a great privilege. Running part two, he put together a hugely varied set of tutors including UFO on digital design and the now-stalwarts of the London teaching scene, Susanne Isa



and Simon Herron. Those in other architecture schools couldn't fail to notice the remarkable string of President's Medals Award winners from Fraser's graduate diploma course at the University of Westminster between 2005-10: four Silver Medals in five years and five Dissertation Medals. He believes that the sorts of skills which earned these awards for his students are exactly those possessed by the best architects. 'You have to be able to design and read and think – it's about understanding and learning from others in the subject.' He made that easier too, as co-investigator on the Archigram Archival Project to make an online archive of their work.

In 2011 a rare job came up at the Bartlett and he returned to his alma mater. Though it wasn't just a sense of homecoming he was after. University rankings and the recognition of the Bartlett internationally make it easier to build connections across the EU and in China and elsewhere. Those links improve collaboration and funding – both of which Fraser has taken advantage of through architectural research groups, the journal AJAR (which he helped found) and specific projects on things like entrepreneurship.

The nascent field of research by design also drew him to the Bartlett. This recognises the value of design as a way of creating new knowledge. And en route it can bring greater rigour and depth to design in practice and greater range and applicability to academic research. Fraser was developing a course at Westminster, and at the Bartlett he found a group of other academics – Jane Rendell, Jonathan Hill – already pushing at the boundaries in

this area. He sees this as a major shift in architectural education. His projects in Palestine, regenerating some of the historic villages, stemmed from this way of thinking, starting by mapping urban form, social practices and buildings. In Birzeit, for example, new paved routes were built into the historic centre passing through new squares and civic buildings.

So Fraser doesn't just piece together big ideas – which can seem rather abstract to the outsider. On arriving at the Bartlett he was also asked to teach design studio to first years, an unusual request at this stage of his career. 'It has been very fresh,' he says, obviously revelling in the students' energy and interests. And he has provided a lifeline at the Bartlett for the team and knowledge of the Survey of London, securing funding to ensure it didn't disappear when English Heritage disposed of it. The editors and researchers are now also teachers, on a new masters in architecture and historic urban environments. Excitingly, this treats the re-use of buildings seriously. 'I don't know if you have seen this too, but I think the best architecture is on existing buildings,' says Fraser (I have and I agree.) He sees a structural change in the way we treat our cities – shifting in China and India, as much as Europe – in favour of retaining the best cultural heritage instead of bulldozing it in favour of development.

Unusually for an Annie Spink winner, Fraser is not on the verge of retirement. And there is a position free at the top of UCL's faculty of the built environment as dean. Or will he go on to do something much more unexpected, networked and unusually interesting? ●

'I always found being student-centred is the way to get the best of people'

#### NÍALL MCCLAUGHLIN ADDS:

I have had the pleasure of working with Murray for almost two decades, and have also seen how he expresses his passion and enthusiasm to students and teachers around him. From the moment I first met him at the Oxford School of Architecture, Murray had the knack of communicating to everyone the urgency and significance of what they were doing. He fostered an environment that was competitive and co-operative at the same time. It was always serious and playful. As a course leader he was good at recognising the particular identity of each student and teacher, and encouraging everyone to do their own thing better. I always felt that Murray thought everything I did was worthwhile, and then I realised that this is how he made everyone feel.

I have been teaching part-time for over 20 years at the Bartlett School of Architecture and have invited Murray to all our major crits. He finds time to come with absolute regularity. There is a very small bunch of critics who I think of as the 'pros'. They are able to concentrate fully throughout the whole long day, they treat weak and strong students with equal respect, they remember students' projects from the last crit a month or even a year ago, they draw a crowd, they have something lively and constructive to say to each pupil, they always stay for a drink and help you mull over the day's action. They are as rare as hen's teeth and Murray is one of them.

This is the kind of invisible stitching that really good teachers do, launching students in their careers and finding ways to support architectural practice. When I have asked Murray's ex-students, of which there have been many in my office, if anything sets him apart they've said he is very unusual in the extent to which responds to what is given. They tell me that if you show him a piece of work, he will talk about it without the familiar round of his own references. They say that he makes you feel interesting. He has an openness and finds new links that help to extend and amplify what you are doing. He is always constructive.

Here is a teacher who operates on a remarkably broad spectrum. With all this he brings a level of personal concentration to everyone he encounters. He makes you feel that you are part of his tribe and you want to live up to his optimistic expectations.

Professor Niall McLaughlin, Niall McLaughlin Architects



Work takes shape at Beit Iksa, Palestine.



# Po-mo for our times

How could postmodernism liberate us? Terry Farrell and Adam Nathaniel Furman examine its resonances, relevance and freedoms

Helen Castle

Sir Terry Farrell and Adam Nathaniel Furman are improbable collaborators. Forty-four years apart in age, Farrell is a knighted principal of a leading global practice and arguably the UK's foremost architect planner and Furman is an exuberant designer and social media influencer. What they share is a regard for postmodernism as a liberating force.

Much maligned since its heyday in the 1980s, postmodernism has an uneasy status in architecture. It remains rejected as a formal style which catholically embraces a wide range of historical and stylistic influences, yet many of its central tenets, such as the contextual and pluralism in urban place-making, have been absorbed into everyday practice.

In the wake of the postmodern years, a McCarthyism has reigned in architecture that has led many of its protagonists to deny their initial allegiance. As Furman highlights in *Revisiting Postmodernism*, which he wrote with Farrell, it was not until 2011 and *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970–1990* at the V&A that Denise Scott Brown felt able to come out as a postmodernist. We are, as Farrell proposes, simultaneously 'All postmodern now', and yet not quite ...

For Farrell at the end of the 1970s, postmodernism presented itself as a 'new way of thinking about the world – bigger than

Many of its central tenets have been absorbed into everyday practice

architecture, encompassing poetry, fiction, cinema and history itself.' In the work of those such as James Stirling, 'modernism begat postmodernism' and freed architects from the 'phoney over structured rationalism of modernism'. Ultimately, it led Farrell to 'a passion for the cityscape'.

When in 1985 Farrell was invited to appear at the Mansion House Square public inquiry into the posthumous realisation of the 1960s plaza and tower scheme by Mies van der Rohe, he presented his own alternative proposal. Building on the characteristics of the existing buildings, Farrell proposed retaining the handsome Victorian Mappin and Webb structure, and focusing on the pedestrian realm. In this way his solution for Mansion House heralded a new era of urban design, foreshadowing today's more contextual approach to public space.

**Above** Adam Nathaniel Furman, *Lumalisk*, 2018 Biennale Interieur in Belgium. The hyper-coloured obelisk provided the exhibition hall with a conspicuous meeting point by drawing on a smorgasbord of influences, including the Flemish renaissance, Chinoiserie, Thai prints, Japanese sunrise symbolism and Italian radical design of the 1970s.



JEROEN VERRECHT

Postmodernism also liberated what architecture could be and do, and its relationship to popular culture. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Farrell's flamboyant TV-am Building, completed in 1983 at Camden Lock. A renovation of a 1930s industrial garage, the studio's crowning egg cups, TV-am signed facade and sunrise arch became iconic of breakfast television and a new commercial media culture. The global 24-hour nature of television was embraced in its interior spaces with bold themes from around the world and a central atrium that ran east to west following the sun's path.

As Farrell highlights, it became a significant precursor to Google, pioneering the notion of workplaces being open and fun. It is no coincidence that Clive Wilkinson, job architect of TV-am's interior at Farrell's office, went on to become principal of his own practice in Culver City, LA, responsible for designing Googleplex in Silicon Valley in 2005. It was Wilkinson's Googleplex design that first convinced Google to embrace transparent workspaces, which have since become synonymous with tech companies worldwide.

For Furman, postmodernism also has the potential to open up architecture to richer and more diverse influences, to 'ornament, expressiveness, narrative, history – everything that alludes to the contemporary condition'. It brings a richness that is otherwise missing says Furman: 'Diversity and culture is too often banned from architecture.' Postmodernism has absorbed his otherwise excluded 'interest in exuberance, vigorous expressionism'.

Furman first encountered Farrell's buildings when he was still at school: Alban Gate, SIS Building (MI6) and Charing Cross Station (Embankment Place). In his late teens he discovered the excitement of the latter in the three-dimensional maze of the nightclub Heaven beneath it. Wild, drug-fuelled nights were intensified by its complex, rich forms: 'Charing Cross is futuristical-

Charing Cross is futuristically thrilling and dense – almost Asian in its complexity

**Below** Terry Farrell & Partners, the exterior of TV-am, Camden, London, 1983.



ly thrilling and dense – almost Asian in its complexity – which renders it current as well as contextual.'

At university in the early 2000s, Furman found that the instinctive pleasure that he encountered in the work of Stirling and Farrell ran counter to current architectural orthodoxy in terms of taste and approach. He recounts how tutors regarded it as their job to beat out of him his delight for colour, pattern and ornament. Even though he has since established an international following on Instagram and is engaged on prestigious commissions for his highly colourful and exuberant contemporary product designs and installations, his work still stands to the side of architectural culture. He believes it remains contentious in architecture to care about aesthetics, ornament and stylistic aspects of design, and to draw too plainly from the past. As Furman states: 'Queerness, liberalism and multiculturalism embodied in aesthetics are so, so, so important to me; the techniques and openness of that period.'

Postmodernism in its widest definition, spanning the 1950s to 1980s, allowed for this expression 'for the first time,' he says. The controls and strictures of current culture might be more nuanced and less overt than they were 40 years ago when modernism held sway, but they endure. For Furman, postmodernism prevails as a liberating force today – when it is even more pressing that we have a diverse range of aesthetic influences and attitudes explicitly expressed in the built environment. ●

Terry Farrell and Adam Nathaniel Furman, *Revisiting Postmodernism*, RIBA Publishing, November 2017, RRP £35: [ribabookshops.com](http://ribabookshops.com)

Helen Castle is publishing director at the RIBA

**Above** Adam Nathaniel Furman, *Gateways*, Granary Square, London Design Festival, 2017. A project that was devised initially to promote Turkish ceramics, it became a celebration of the vibrant and decorative possibilities of tiles in an urban setting – overflowing with current and historic references.

Sir Terry Farrell and Adam Nathaniel Furman will speak on *Revisiting Postmodernism* at the first RIBA Book Club on 25 January, entrance by ticket only: [eventbrite.co.uk/e/riba-book-club-revisiting-post-modernism-registration-53012518871](http://eventbrite.co.uk/e/riba-book-club-revisiting-post-modernism-registration-53012518871)



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# Gothic reunion

Scattered pieces from Horace Walpole's important collection have come home to the exact spots he chose for them at Strawberry Hill

Pamela Buxton

In 1842 one of the most important art collections in the country, that of politician, writer and antiquarian Horace Walpole (1717-97), was auctioned and its contents scattered. Spread over 24 days, the sale was an important society event, with special steamers laid on to take prospective buyers down the Thames from London to Walpole's Gothic revival creation, Strawberry Hill House, in Twickenham.

Now more than 170 pieces have been brought home in the splendid exhibition *Lost Treasures of Strawberry Hill: Masterpieces from Horace Walpole's Collection*, and installed exactly as they were in Walpole's time. Although this remarkable house opened to the public in 2010 after a painstaking restoration by Peter Inskip & Peter Jenkins, it is only with this exhibition that it can be appreciated as Walpole intended.

The son of Sir Robert Walpole, Britain's first prime minister, Walpole created Strawberry Hill as his summer residence between 1749 and 1790. The castellated house was an expression of his Gothic taste, referencing medieval architecture to varying degrees of authenticity in the same way that neoclassical architects looked to antiquity. Highlights include the first ever gothic revival library, complete with bookcases inspired by a doorway in Old St Paul's Cathedral, and the fan-vaulted Gallery, which channels Elizabethan, baroque and monastic influences.

For co-curators Michael Snodin and Silvia Davoli, the exhibition is the culmination of four years of detective work to track down and secure loans or acquisitions from more

Walpole had catalogued where and how each item was displayed

than 40 lenders, in association with the Lewis Walpole Library at Yale University. Arranging them in the house was relatively easy, thanks to Walpole's own catalogue, *A Description of Strawberry Hill*, which revealed where and how each item was displayed.

The exhibition conveys the eclectic nature of the collection, which included important pieces from antiquity as well as works by Hans Holbein the Younger and Sir Joshua Reynolds, and curios such as a red hat once owned by Cardinal Wolsey – Walpole was particularly interested in objects, and architecture, with a story to tell. Today, the overwhelming impression is the number of portraits: Strawberry Hill was evidently generously populated with paintings of him and his family as well as historical subjects.

'Nearly all Walpole's paintings were portraits. This is a bachelor pad, surrounded by these huge portraits of people. It was like a big family,' says Snodin. 'When you move a portrait from an art gallery to a house it does something – it just looks different. Here, they sing out.'

Other highlights include a miniatures cabinet designed by Walpole to house 86 portrait miniatures and enamels. There is also Grinling Gibbons' virtuoso limewood carving of an embroidered cravat, which Walpole famously wore once to greet guests, and a first century AD Roman eagle, whose beak was broken off in Walpole's day by thieving visitors (but is now restored).

When I last visited Strawberry Hill, the grade I listed house was stripped back and vulnerable in the throes of its restoration. What a joy to see it now in all its magnificence. ●

**Above** The Gallery, created between 1761 and 1763 as a space to entertain and display pictures.

KILIAN O'SULLIVAN

**Below** Eagle on an altar base, Roman, first century AD.



© EARL OF WEMYSS AND MARCH, GOSFORD HOUSE, EAST LOTHIAN

*Lost Treasures of Strawberry Hill: Masterpieces from Horace Walpole's Collection*, until 24 February 2019, Strawberry Hill, 268 Waldegrave Road, Twickenham TW1 4ST [www.strawberryhillhouse.org.uk](http://www.strawberryhillhouse.org.uk)

An accompanying book by Silvia Davoli is published by Scala at £15.



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# Vernon Harry Lee

## 1924 – 2018

RMJM partner and chairman who worked in some of the poorest regions of the world in masterplanning, recovery and regeneration



MARCUS LEE

Vernon Lee FRIBA was a partner and former chairman of Robert Matthew Johnson-Marshall (RMJM) Scotland, joining in 1962 as its hospital specialist. He was responsible for a number of hospitals including Edinburgh and Newcastle Royal Infirmarys.

Vernon graduated from the University of Liverpool

School of Architecture in 1945 with a first class honours degree and diploma in civic design. A Pilkington travelling scholarship took him to Switzerland to study modern schools and he had his first taste of hospital design in Houston, Texas, part of his six months of practical experience.

He worked with Sir William Holford in 1948 on studies for Cambridge Town Plan and was poised to leave the UK having been offered a post in Eero Saarinen's studio in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan in 1951. However, Saarinen reluctantly withdrew the offer when the office had to downsize with the outbreak of the Korean War.

Vernon joined Farmer and Dark in 1954 to work on a new paper factory, research labs and offices in Northfleet. But in 1956 he returned to Hertfordshire County Council as group leader of senior schools and further education colleges in the heyday of the post-war schools rebuilding programme, pioneering pre-fabrication systems such as CLASP.

His attention soon turned to overseas opportunities. In 1970 he travelled at the request of the Peruvian government to make plans for earthquake damaged Yungay with Sir Robert Matthew. It was one of his many global forays into poorer regions in need of strategic masterplanning, recovery and regeneration. He worked extensively in the West Indies designing a number of hospitals in the region including Glendon Hospital, Montserrat, which was sadly buried under many feet of ash following the 1995 eruption of a once dormant volcano.

In 1972 Vernon was invited to represent the firm on the British Consultants Bureau, an initiative sponsored by the government to promote British expertise overseas. He held the position for 10 years, and also became RMJM chairman in 1980.

Vernon devoted his career to the practice and the industry until he retired in 1989.

Vernon and Sir Andrew Derbyshire, as sole surviving partners of RMJM before the firm was incorporated, had the distress of dealing with a baseless mesothelioma claim in 2013. This was a deeply upsetting experience in retirement years for these two stalwarts of a practice with the highest integrity. Their sons, Ben Derbyshire and Marcus Lee, successfully helped fight and defend the case. A positive outcome of the ordeal was the establishment of the asbestos FAQs website to assist members that might be placed in a similar position in future.

### Marcus Lee adds:

My father was a modest man yet a highly talented draughtsman, designer and dedicated professional. He had a passion for drawing – I have the exquisite pen and ink drawings of his entry for the Coventry Cathedral competition, as well as the meticulous working drawings of our Hertfordshire mid-century home.

He would spend hours on his sketchpad developing and perfecting designs – but selflessly ensuring there was appropriate delegation to include the wider team.

His career focussed on the public sector and the needs of others through universities, schools and hospital programmes around the world. He devoted time to overseas aid through the British Consultants Bureau, promoting British consultancy expertise abroad.

He struggled with the dilution of the architect's role in public building and the emergence of design and build practices which led to some school building failures in recent years. He practised with pride, though he advised me against becoming an architect. I didn't always do what I was told.

Vernon is survived by his wife Anne and their five children. ●

### IN MEMORIAM

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ELECTED 1957  
WREXHAM

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### Dawson's Heights Southwark, London, 1964-72

Dawson's Heights rises dramatically over the landscape of South east London but it is one of Britain's lesser known social housing schemes.

Constructed between 1964 and 1972, it was designed by Kate Macintosh, a 26 year old architect who had joined Southwark's Architects Department after working on Denys Lasdun's National Theatre. She won the project after her ziggurat design was chosen over the more conventional approaches of two colleagues – a traditional tower block scheme and a low-rise alternative – in a competition devised by the borough architect Frank Hayes.

Her building sought to relate to the surrounding

urban landscape, and the two blocks that comprise it undulate with the contours of the hillside, rising in steps to 12 storeys, carefully staggered to maximise light and the view of the city to the north.

This image is part of a set, taken in 1973 for the Architects' Journal by Sam Lambert, that capture both the detail of life on the estate and the impression it makes on the London skyline, visible for miles cresting the hill. ●

**Justine Sambrook**

Sam Lambert's photographs of Dawson's Heights will be displayed in the RIBA First Floor Gallery at 66 Portland Place until 2 February 2019

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