Eye Line lets the pictures tell the story
Six left in the race for the Stirling
Overcoat for Mackintosh
Peak practice: Hong Kong bustles on
Amanda Ballieu and Gus Zogolovitch, creative directors of Guerrilla Tactics, reveal what they have planned for November Hong Kong special

Superposition merges local craft with digital tools in its work in China and Hong Kong

High density, accelerated construction and a gateway to China: what’s it like working in Hong Kong?

Hong Kong’s unfaltering pace keeps construction at full throttle.

The RIBA has issued an action plan. The next 10 years will be crucial.

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Imagination is riding high in China, discovers Stephen Cousins: ribaj.com/ridinghigh

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Some kinds of buildings seem doomed to be overlooked, until they get singled out for special attention. What used to be called ‘retirement homes’ – nearly always bland-to-invisible places – have been totally reinvented in recent years by a roster of excellent architects for a small handful of ambitious clients, and we show you a fine new example in Tetbury. Similarly the ancillary structures of utility buildings and street furniture are too often a matter of regrettable standard products – but not in the new Cambridge enclave of Eddington. And who ever thinks about the pole-and-tarp overcoats that wrap buildings while they are being restored or rebuilt? Nobody, until it came to Mackintosh’s Hill House in Helensburgh. The Mackintosh overcoat is rather special. Oh, and we have the Stirling Prize shortlist which as ever comes with its own surprises. Enjoy! •

Growing old gracefully – retirement living
Substation sublime – utility structures

1: Buildings

An awareness of ‘the uniqueness of place’ is an attitude that doesn’t become obsolete the way technology does.

Thoughts on design from the RIBA International Prize winners: ribaj.com/internationalprize_discussion

The buildings that win National Awards have to set national standards for good architecture and demonstrate design excellence, be fit for purpose and be sustainable.

Which contenders made the grade? ribaj.com/national_awards2019
The final furlong

Six schemes, diverse as always, are within touching distance of the coveted Stirling Prize. Pick your predicted winner

Words: Eleanor Young

The six shortlisted buildings for the RIBA Stirling Prize have been announced. They range from a tiny house, the 44m² Cork House, where material innovation has been taken to the nth degree, to the huge undertaking of the £1 billion London Bridge Station, designed by Grimshaw.

Other shortlisted schemes come from across the UK. RSHP’s Macallan Distillery and Visitor Experience is in Moray, Scotland; Feilden Fowles’ Weston Gallery for Yorkshire Sculpture Park joins a seam of impressive buildings in this Sculpture Triangle around Wakefield; and in Leicestershire at Nevill Holt Opera Witherford Watson Mann reprises the remarkable muscular conservation that won it the Stirling Prize in 2013 for Astley Castle. Finally, in Norwich, a major housing scheme for the council, Goldsmith Street, all designed to Passivhaus standard, has won Mikhail Riches, with Cathy Hawley, a place on the Stirling shortlist.

Right and below

London Bridge Station, Southwark, by Grimshaw for Network Rail. Space has been carved out where there appeared to be none. The historic colonnades have become calm routes, the concourse has been opened up and is now light and legible, even for passengers rushing through. Timber slats to the undersides of the platforms give a warmth to the power of concrete. And above, sinuous roofs over the platform make a snaking view for those in the Shard above.
There is no doubt that the most visible of the projects is London Bridge Station. It is the fourth busiest station in the UK, with 48,000 passengers going through it each year. Regular travellers have lived through years of disruption and construction with complex routes through the station changing as Grimshaw performed its ‘open heart surgery’ as the station remained open. But it now it seems a miraculous transformation. It is a great step up from other Network Rail projects by the practice, the far more clunky Reading and Newport Stations. After a year of Gold Medal celebrations could this finally be the chance for Grimshaw to win the Stirling? Famously its Eden Project was pipped to the prize by Wilkinson Eyre’s Rotherham Magna Centre in 2001. What might count against it is the cost, at £11,587/m², though the expense of last year’s Stirling winner Bloomberg London was rumoured to be higher than that.

There is a really strong material and textural theme running through the projects, with the timber and roughly textured concrete at the Weston; the steel, stone and wood of the building within a stableblock of the Nevill Holt Opera House; and the structural and finishes approach that mean the Cork House really is what it says on the tin. Goldsmith Street could be dismissed as another bricky set of houses but the details of set-back panels and the glazed pantiles work really hard to make a pleasant, delicately-detailed street scene. The sense of the handcrafted is a healthy kick back against the smooth super-panel systems that allow so many large-scale projects to be craned into place, but often leave a sense of humanity lacking.

What the beautiful images of the build-
buildings can obscure is the very clear pattern of ownership. All the Stirling shortlisted projects have been commissioned by people and organisations with a long term stake in their success. They are primarily owner occupiers with the inevitable interest in performance and maintenance. The sun path diagrams and Passivhaus design on Goldsmith Street show how Norwich City Council is considering not just the maintenance of its estate but the costs – and pleasures – of its social housing tenants and residents.

Notable absences from the list are the famous names. Home grown Thomas Heatherwick did not make it onto the shortlist with his Coal Drop Yard, one of a small number of building projects by his studio in the UK and a relatively undemonstrative one despite its kissing roof. Nor are projects by the revered

Right Nevill Holt Opera by Witherford Watson Mann Architects for Nevill Holt Opera. This theatre for opera has been inserted into a grade II listed ironstone stable block. It is the architecture of separation, new and old walls held apart by a border of hoggin, balconies kept discrete with their own, cruciform columns. Above, a rooflight brings in the sky, at the base space for the orchestra pit and raked auditorium have been scooped out of the ground.

There is a really strong material and textural theme running through the projects

Left Macallan Distillery and Visitor Experience, Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners for Edrington. Likened to Telly Tubby land for its rolling green roofs, this is serious leisure with the super-shiny whisky distillation stills sitting under a dramatic curving roof. Whisky has now joined the ranks of tasting tourism that vineyards by Foster and Piano have put on the map. A work of showmanship despite the complexity of the services behind.
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Peter Zumthor (the Secular Retreat for Living Architecture) and well-thought-of Kengo Kuma (V&A Dundee) – UK projects built at long distance from the venerable practitioners that don’t match up to other, more local buildings. It is hard being an international star, building well abroad, especially when context and detail are often obscured with distance. The other star architect who didn’t make the shortlist was Sir John Soane, ably abetted by Julian Harrap Architects and Jestico + Whiles bringing back to life Ealing’s Pitzhanger Manor. It is great to welcome a list that avoids being starstruck.
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Artist Shubha Taparia’s Eureka moment came a few years ago when, in central London, she looked at the scaffolding surrounding a construction site, only to see the gubbins behind it highlighted in silhouette against its protective geotextile membrane.

‘Construction sites aren’t usually associated with calm but in the evening sunlight the building site took on a mantle of beauty all its own,’ she tells me. It led her to become fascinated with the nature of the city’s constantly changing urban landscape, with ‘what is discarded and what remains’.

The phenomenon inspired Taparia to construct an installation within her own artist’s studio, 28m by 10m in size and hanging 6.5m above the studio floor. Suspending scaffolding poles, ropes, stepladders, netting, pallets and timber boards from the studio’s beams, Taparia projected the whole lot onto a massive stretched, geotextile screen below it – her aim being to create a piece with something of the agency of her original experience. Those coming to see the work would have to crick their necks, but the artist wanted that to be a deliberate, conscious act.

‘Culturally, looking up has always had contemplative associations,’ Taparia points out, rooting her work of prosaic materials by inference in the grand tradition of decorated ceilings and domes. The digital C-type print ‘Pallets’ is an abstracted vignette from this contemporary ceiling-scape.

Her next piece is inspired by the current state of Nash’s Park Crescent in central London, half of which is being converted, under huge wraps of its own, into luxury homes for the super-rich. This will be in elevation, revealing the silhouette of everyday objects behind a giant curve of material – presenting her with another opportunity to diaphanously indulge in the ‘suspense of these interim cityscapes’.

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Pallets (from Silhouette of an Unknown Landscape)
Words Jan-Carlos Kucharek
Photograph Shubha Taparia
Seniors’ service

Downsizing, aging, isolation... retirement needn’t be like this if places are designed to promote sociability and community. Proctor & Matthews’ Steepleton does just that

Words: Eleanor Young  Photographs: Tim Crocker

The concept of a retirement complex seems fraught with undertones of ghetto, combined uncomfortably with its exposure of intergenerational disparities and disconnects – and commercialisation of age. But walking out of the steep stone streets of the Cotswold town of Tetbury towards the almshouse-courtyard of Steepleton it is hard to square this friendly looking scheme with such abstract concerns.

Developer PegasusLife has 25 sites on the go, intending to offer design-led homes to aging baby boomers. It has worked with architects such as RCKa, Coffey Architects and Morris+Company. Proctor & Matthews is among the more established housing practices it has collaborated with and the scale of this site – 68 units completed of a total of 113 with planning – makes the practice a good choice. Proctor & Matthews has shown elsewhere its understanding of the local grain of development and isn’t afraid to design plans with a twist and details that delight.

Steepleton takes on idealised village forms – at the scale of an urban block. It has an almshouses courtyard, lych gate-cum-bus stop, oversized arts and crafts chimney and a ‘manor house’ entrance. All facing the road, these are drawn together by a three-storey limestone boundary wall from which they seem to grow. The buildings are pleasantly blurred by a series of mature horse chestnuts, leaving the visible approach along Cirencester Road from Tetbury dominated by the site’s perimeter wall which seems to tower above the local houses, despite a neat roof treatment aimed at reducing its impact. But this is not a precious location – it’s an industrial edge being transformed into suburbia. The roads of family houses that turn off it are still slightly perky in their newness, cars drawn up on the forecourts. Steepleton is built on the site of a factory that made condom dispensing machines. Unsurprisingly its name celebrates instead the heritage of the town through its prominent spire.

Steepleton’s banks of housing are laid out sociably. Away from the main frontages the materials shift down a gear towards render and Douglas fir. Three-sided courts enclose spaces for gardening and growing areas and define clear mini neighbourhoods within Steepleton. At the centre of the development a quiet road kinks out in front of the restaurant and residents’ lounge, an oversized sundial marking the central social space. There are views into the sparkling heart of

IN NUMBERS

£23m total contract cost
£2,998 gifa cost per m²
7,670 m² area
19.9 kgCO₂/m² calculation
design & build form of contract

Opposite Limestone is laid like a boundary wall along the front of Steepleton and the oversized chimney grows out of that with its more refined ashlar columns that denote the shared residents’ snug.
the scheme – its natural lap pool, edged by reeds and reflecting light into the windows of the surrounding flats. Here too is the gym, spa and indoor pool and, above that, the lofty restaurant, a private dining or function room and two guest bedrooms. This is the heart of the PegasusLife offer: social spaces and interaction, paired with modest flats for downsizers. You can see it in the property ads that show off the communal spaces as much as the flats themselves.

The idea of a social, active community is essential to this scheme, combating the loneliness of age that so easily becomes the pattern in general housing populated by busy people rushing off elsewhere. The circulation to and between flats is navigable by electric buggy, even on the first floor deck access, thanks to platform lifts. Enclosing the two almshouse blocks gives the impression of a single volume and creates a narrow internal pedestrian street. There are some structural efficiencies in this and it reduces the massing to Cirencester Road, but the real benefit is the quality of
life provided by that internal street and the
neighbourliness of stable doors opening onto
it. Occupied homes already have plant pots
outside their front doors. Body-height timber
frames inset into balustrades on the deck en-
courage inhabitation and interaction, being
perfect points to stop and look from, or qui-
etly hail neighbours from above. There is the
occasional reason to pause, for example above
the swimming pool, where a pergola perch-
es between blocks. And the entrance lobbies
are not the sterile enclosures of many flats but
airy barn like structures, cool behind timber
louvres on a hot day, out of the wind and rain
the rest of the year and with powerful, simple
structural bracing. The many little circuits of
the site and the chances of encounter make
Steepleton an appealing prospect as a com-

Some potential residents might be daunt-
ed by the modest size of the flats compared to
the houses they are likely to be moving from:
typically 58.7m² and the largest are two-bed
masionettes at 102.8m². But speaking to one
resident, that was clearly part of the appeal.
She moved from a local seven-bedroom fam-
ily home after breaking her neck and was
aware that looking after a garden was no
longer an option. And some regular handy-
man time is included in the service charge.
The flats have sliding windows onto outside

Main image A giant sun dial marks the
communal heart of Steepleton with its
restaurant and common room.

Far left Some courtyards are designed
as vegetable-growing promenades.

Below Residents' lounge
(right) and spa and gym (left) sit
alongside the swimming pond.
spaces, balconies project out metal clad boxes – treading the delicate balance between public and private. The most spatially interesting have double height living spaces, and the study option in some allows a space off the living room which can either be part of it or sealed off for work or sleep. The planning is rational and well considered with a modest number of car parking spaces tucked away, but the detail is sometimes disappointing, including the rough timber and the fit of balcony surrounds – and sometimes, for instance the downpipe diverted away from the rainwater butt below it, laughable.

This is the heart of the offer: social spaces and interaction, paired with modest flats for downsizers

With over 65s owning more than 40% of private housing equity in the UK and housing stock often being hard to adapt to less mobile living, it is hardly surprising that house-builders are designing for them. Within half a mile of Steepleton is a significant development inside a more traditional skin, completed in 2015 by McCarthy and Stone for the same market. Steepleton’s flats do appear to be at a premium and the service charge certainly reflects its country club services.

Those services demonstrate the generational divide between the affluent baby boomers who might buy into this and younger generations struggling to secure decent housing. Does such a development cut off its inhabitants, even as it cocoons them? The tiny Perry’s Café at the front of the scheme has been drawing runners and weekend walkers for a coffee, and the ‘destination’ restaurant is intended for others as well as residents. Perhaps it will turn out less isolated than the new streets around it; if so the welcoming architecture will play its part in that.

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**Credits**

**Client** PegasusLife  
**Architect** Proctor & Matthews Architects  
**Landscape architect** Camlins  
**Structural engineer** Peter Brett Associates, Hydrock Engineering  
**M&E engineer** Max Fordham  
**Planning consultant** Barton Willmore  
**Contractor** Speller Metcalfe  
**Suppliers**  
- Windows Rationel  
- Balcony hoods Argonaut  
- Chimneys Penine stone  
- Stone cladding Cotswold Natural Stone
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Utilitas, venustas

Utility buildings in the new Cambridge suburb of Eddington wouldn’t look out of place in a Capability Brown landscape

Words: Isabelle Priest  Photographs: Jack Hobhouse

The sports pavilion sits on the edge of a large playing field with four changing rooms and eight WCs. Its facade is pushed and pulled to make it welcoming.
Look south from the Huntingdon Road in Cambridge, just before the city ends and the route turns into the A14, and you’ll see a distant building set far back up a long wide avenue, beyond the green fields. It doesn’t look like much from here; perhaps a recently painted large manor with gable ends or a contemporary country house half hidden by the trees. The landscape is flat but apart from a cluster of roof pitches 400m away, the other forms could be mounds of earth or natural features. How could they be anything else, set away from everything as they are? But why is there so much spacious infrastructure leading to them?

Squint a little more into the sunshine and either side of this generous approach you’ll catch a glimpse in the nearer ground of two smaller gateway pieces – lighter and brighter than what’s behind. The pair, though not symmetrical, welcome visitors to this verdant parkland. This faraway place is of course no grand estate. It is, as the other approach from Madingley Road (behind the park and ride) more readily reveals, the new north west Cambridge city district of Eddington. So many competitions for the area have passed by architects’ computer screens that you’ve likely heard about it but not necessarily been here – it’s 5km from the train.
The idea was that these normally under-designed buildings could be a ‘virtue’ station and still a nascent place. There are already 930 homes and 680 student bedrooms but during the week Eddington is a bit ghostly, enlivened only by supermarket and school, and insulated from its nearest neighbours by a thick green belt of lovely wildflower meadow and groomed lawn.

Named after Arthur Eddington, an astrophysicist, the new suburb has been in conception since the 1980s when its owner, the University of Cambridge, realised that to compete for the best staff it would need to solve housing issues, particularly in the private rental sector which has for so long been expensive and poor value. Its ambition was to build its own staff accommodation as part of a mixed community including open market housing too.

The university had owned the 150 hectare farmland site, which it used for research and food production, for more than a century. In 2009, to a masterplan by Aecom, permission was granted for 3,000 homes and 2,000 student rooms. Phase 1 is nearing an end – the first buildings were completed in 2015 – and just two plots for private houses and a hotel designed by dRMM remain.

Essentially, though, Eddington is a new bit of city developing in large phases in the same way as Cambridge’s lesser known suburbs such as Arbury. From the beginning the university’s goal was to create a varied and high-quality district that was all about the big architectural moves, and so it commissioned a roll call of some of Britain’s most popular design-led architectural practices including Stanton Williams, Witherford Watson Mann, Mole, Marks Barfield and Dutch firm Mecanoo. As Gavin Coull, senior client representative for the North West Cambridge Development, explains, it wanted ‘that different look from hiring different architects’. It went about the task by splitting the site into a dozen plots that firms could submit expressions of interest for – although the result is so far surprisingly tame and homogeneous. No render or exposed timber cladding was permitted, and everything has coincidentally popped up a dusty shade of brick.

Landscape was similarly split up. The market square went to Townshend Landscape Architects and the rest to Aecom’s infrastructure department. However, within the latter a subcategory soon appeared for a group of essential but previously unconsidered utility buildings of which some would be located in that green buffer around the district. Rather than take on the multiple buildings itself, Aecom decided to bring in Robin Lee Architecture which had worked on a primary substation at the Olympic Park. ‘Often these types of buildings are simple brick surrounds with silly roofs,’ says Coull, but the idea was that these normally under-designed objects could become a ‘virtue’.

Robin Lee’s idea was to make them contribute to the

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**IN NUMBERS**

- **321m²** sports facilities
- **16m²** electricity substations
- **201m²** water pumping stations
- **9m²** granta data station
- **80m²** gas pressure reducing station

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Sports pavilion floorplan
landscape and sense of place; to help with wayfinding, creating an identity and legibility – though when Lee visited, the site was just fields and the size, number and locations of buildings were undetermined. All that was known was that there would be various types from electrical substations to sports changing facilities and pumping stations for the potable and non-potable water networks. In line with the sustainable approach outlined in the masterplan, the latter was to connect to a reuse system of rills, swales and filtering across the site. Consequently, Lee developed a palette of architectural components that could apply to all and give them a distinct but unifying appearance in the landscape.

Instead, the specifics evolved as Lee engaged with the different buildings’ final owners such as UKPN and Cambridge Water. The palette of materials and elements had to be adapted to their strict requirements, like the use of 9-inch bricks and concrete slab roofs for substations, as well as assimilating proprietary components like doors and locks. In this scenario, the challenge was to find the limits of each utility provider. For example, integrating the university’s ecology agenda to include bird and bat homes in the buildings was not possible except on those that would remain university owned, such as the sports pavilions.

The rural nature of the setting, as well as planned vistas, encouraged Lee to consider the picturesque follies and structures of 18th century English landscape design promoted by Capability Brown. At places like Stowe and Castle Howard, the buildings are characterised by forms that can be understood at distance, across a landscape, and an articulated expression that reveals and accentuates the surrounding natural forms, physical depths, shadowing, views, clearings and contours.

Lee’s ambition for the utility structures, which in most new developments are thrown up without design consideration, was similar – to create a family of buildings to promote Eddington’s natural setting. Like Brown’s, they have been given a classical placement in the landscape to frame avenues and float reflections on lagoons. In their architectural language and composition, they display classical characteristics too – columns, layering, symmetry, arcades – albeit reduced ornamentally and constructed of white pigmented...
precast concrete and pale brick, flush pointed, rather than stone. The handmade quality of the bricks adds a vein-like character to the surface.

‘We knew there would be very few windows on any of the buildings,’ says Lee, ‘so it was a case of creating a language for blank walls and enclosures.’

Scattered in an uneven ring around the urban centre, there are three electrical substations, a potable water booster station, sports changing facility, cricket pavilion and non-potable water station as well as a centre for the university’s Granta Backbone fibre network, another substation and a gas pressure reducing centre for district heating in what is called the southern utility cluster. While the other buildings in the series stand alone but in dialogue with each other in the landscape, this particular plot groups multiple types together (see p03) via a meandering wall with volumes abutting the inside and outside of a gated courtyard, much in the manner of a Roman villa. Visible through the bespoke gates, the composition of gantries, tanks and sunken chambers contained by the compound wall is made to look artful by the clarity and brevity of the architecture.

Elsewhere, the non-potable water pumping station has a porticoed appearance framing panels of louvres for heat dissipation and picturesquely sits beside the artificial lake. Much of the machinery inside is sunk in the basement. The electrical substations have mono-pitch roofs adjusted alternately to complement and contrast their precise position and are carefully detailed with recessed guttering. The walls are perforated for ventilation too. The sports pavilions, on the other hand, are characterised by their horizontality and canopies that invite people in, unlike the other buildings which are not publicly accessible. The overhangs are also useful for spectators.

Overall, these utility buildings are quiet but surprisingly inventive and provide an arcadian beauty to Eddington as a whole. Although they are designed to be seen from a distance, up close and inside it’s evident that they are carefully made too. While there is still much to be built here, they add charm and intrigue and for that reason are possibility more unifying to the new district than the range of architecture in the centre. They create a conversation about the new urban area’s relationship to its setting. It’s admirable that the University of Cambridge has seen the value of investing in these usually afterthought buildings because out of nowhere, they’ve become possibly the most urbanistically important and interesting architecture in it.

Credits
Architect Robin Lee
Architecture
Client University of Cambridge
Structural engineer Arcadis
M&E engineer Hulley & Kirkwood
Contract Design & Build
Facing bricks Wienerberger
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At first just ghostly…

A spectral chainmail box is protecting The Hill House until a conservation strategy can be found. That could take a while.

Words: Kieran Gaffney  Photographs: Johan Dehlin

The Hill House is Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s ‘gesamtkunstwerk’, an all-encompassing design from the inside out and a distillation of his interest in Scots baronial vernacular, European arts and crafts, and Japanese minimalism.

The house is an amalgam of sandstone and brick, ‘buttered’ in a Portland cement render. Mackintosh was experimenting with the then new material to create soft, flowing edges that continue over wall heads and chimney tops forming the copes. But cement render is far from waterproof, it cracks and lets in water then is unable to breathe, which has resulted in moisture saturating the permeable sandstone substrate. Accelerated by the exposed site, wind-driven rainwater has been navigating through striations in the stone into the building’s internal fabric.

This problem, which became apparent soon after the house was built in 1904, threatens the building’s unique interiors and is eroding its masonry structure. An urgent solution was required: the house had ‘only two or three serious winters’ left in it.

Conservation experts and statutory bodies have long argued about how to address the threat to the Category A listed house and its precious interiors. A 2017 executive paper for the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), which runs The Hill House, favoured ‘containment’ to shelter it from the elements while a long-term remedy was found. The trust launched an invited competition, looking – one assumes – for a suitably dramatic idea: the shortlist included, among others, Zaha Hadid Architects. The winning scheme, by London-based Carmody Groarke, was for a lightweight steel roof on a galvanised steel frame with a semi-permeable stainless steel chainmail outer skin.

The chainmail reduces rain penetration while allowing airflow for the building to breathe and dry naturally. Enough light gets in for trees to grow and bees to pollinate the garden within the structure.
The £4.5M scheme’s cross-braced galvanised steel trusses sit delicately over the house, tapering to pad foundations. No welding or hot works were allowed on site in the wake of the fire at Mackintosh’s Glasgow School of Art, so the 165 tonne steel skeleton was prefabricated for fast and simple erection; the main site works took just six months. The lightweight structure was installed using mobile cranes and has the added benefit of being entirely demountable and reusable.

The finished result is remarkably similar to the original visualisations, other than the white painted steelwork which has been left galvanised. No doubt this was for sensible cost and timescale reasons but the result is more utilitarian than it could have been; white may have enhanced the abstraction that makes the box otherwise so compelling.

A hermetically sealed ‘glass box’ solution was quickly discounted in favour of the chainmail mesh which gives a permeability and transparency that could not otherwise have been achieved. The result is a ghosted structure that shrouds the house within. The finely woven chainmail, commonly used for butchers’ gloves, is semi-permeable to air and moisture, allowing just 13% of the rain to reach the house to ensure controlled and gradual drying of its fabric.

The mesh arrived in 1.5m wide rolls from the German supplier Alphamesh and was...
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The fabric feels surprisingly and satisfyingly stiff

hand stitched in situ by local steelwork contractor Miller Fabrications.

The 2,700m² of chainmail is fixed at the top on hidden brackets then draped, curtain-like, down the facade before being tensioned from a steel flange just above ground level. The mesh is bolted back to the galvanised steel frame at regular vertical intervals to resist any billowing effect. The architect worked with engineer Price & Myers, which designed not only for the chainmail self-weight of 8.3 tonnes, but also for the perfect storm of an entirely ‘iced’ screen turning the mesh into a sail with wind loads of up to 70mph. The maximum modelled deflection is 30cm and hence the fabric feels surprisingly and satisfyingly stiff to the touch.

While the mail is translucent rather than transparent, and The Hill House appears as though in a fog, up close it is beautiful and tactile but fades away when looking out to the long view.

Much is made of the new ability to walk around and over the building and see it from ‘dramatic and unusual’ perspectives ‘that Mackintosh could only dream of’. The hung walkways defiantly snake around the box and the detailing is confidently handled by the...
The rooftop view of the house itself is interesting, although whether Mackintosh would have wanted us to see this is debatable. The walkways are part of the ‘sell’: National Trust Scotland sees the box as part of an enhanced tourist experience to attract visitors to an otherwise ailing monument.

Discussions overheard in the gift shop make it clear that the walkways are difficult for those with a fear of heights, the architect having chosen to use steel grilles instead of solid walkways to keep as much transparency as possible.

It is anticipated it will take three years for the house to dry out before conservation work can begin in earnest. The NTS still needs to develop a long-lasting solution, which means The Hill House box may have to stay in place for between seven and 10 years. Carmody Groarke compares its effect with making the building the exhibit; a jewellery box or ‘ship in a bottle’. The experience certainly feels like being inside an architectural model. The result is unambiguously better than the alternative of a scaffold covered in flapping plastic. The NT’s own experience during restoration works at Edwin Lutyens’ Castle Drogo in Devon meant it quickly ruled this out.

Less successful is the new three-storey, dark stained timber service building, not surprisingly difficult to spot in press photos. This houses the ticket and gift shop, lift and café. Despite its clever circulation path, the building is clumsily located, directly in front of The Hill House’s west, and most important, elevation. To the north there would have been ample space and less brilliant sections of Mackintosh’s architecture to obscure.

What of the conservation project? The worry is that this semi-permanent structure ends up in place indefinitely. If, as the NTS says, we are invited to a discourse on how we deal with our built heritage, we should be advocating for its removal as quickly as possible. Perhaps the sacrosanct status given to ‘original fabric’ needs to be challenged as the logical conclusion might otherwise be that the render and damaged stone should not be removed and the box would have to stay. Hopefully this is not the case and the building can be restored to deliver its original conception.

But for now the box is bold and brilliant and it’s a contemporary abstraction that is wholly in keeping with Mackintosh’s synthesis. •

Kieran Gaffney is an architect with Konishi Gaffney
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Amanda Baillieu and Gus Zogolovitch

Why did you go for the Guerrilla Tactics creative director job together?

We had a conversation a year ago about developing small sites. We wanted to create something about what architects can do with them as you don’t learn it at school. Gus, with his developer background, had some of the answers and that combined well with Amanda’s background in architecture. Often gap sites are too fiddly for large developers and housebuilders. We think they are an opportunity for architects to be more business savvy.

What is the programme?

The theme is ‘Understanding the developer mindset’. The first part will be about understanding development, for example, the cost of decisions architects make. The second will be about giving architects tools and tactics; how to value land, routes to development, finance, delivery, how to pitch. Architects don’t necessarily need to want to become developers to attend; understanding what developers’ pinch points are will make architects more valuable to clients and more likely to win work. But the model of the architect developer is not new – many have done their own office or house. We want more acceptance and encouragement of that to take work away from housebuilders, starting with just one home, then moving on to two or three then four or five.

What would happen to these gap sites otherwise?

They would sit doing absolutely nothing. These don’t have to be empty plots, they can be garages, a disused office, any site that is underused. Politicians are also now thinking about sites like this. [London mayor] Sadiq Khan wants to use small sites, defined as under 0.25ha, for the 25,000 homes needed in London per year – the Small Sites, Small Builders scheme. Our idea is to change the UK housing crisis from a problem into an opportunity for architects and give them the necessary skills. Hopefully it can mean better homes and a new income stream for architects.

What highlights can conference goers look forward to?

The event will mix inspiration with practical skills. For example, Meredith Bowles of Mole Architects will run a session on doing development appraisals – the spreadsheet that tells you whether a development will make money. Emma Zangs, a body language and communication specialist who has worked a lot with start-ups will run an interactive session on how to do a successful three-minute pitch to convince investors to go with your idea.

The most important sense in architectural experience is not vision, but our existential sense

Juhani Pallasmaa on beauty as interpretation and other thoughts: ribaj.com/juhanipallasmaa

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Hugh Pearman

The University of Hong Kong (HKU) is an agreeable place, perched half-way up the hill towards the western end of the island. Its very colonial original Edwardian building, now somewhat shabby and scheduled for an upgrade courtesy of Wilkinson Eyre, is not really at the heart of the action: that takes place on the higher ground where a sequence of modern buildings arranged along lofty covered walkways, terraces and squares gives a processional feel and wonderful views. Here, in the square in front of the rather impressive Knowles Building where the architecture school is based, I meet Donn Holohan.

He and his fellow Irish colleague and partner Elspeth Lee (away on the day I called in) run a practice, Superposition, that is among other things designing a community theatre performance space in Hong Kong and some rural co-housing in Ireland. Holohan’s principal research project at HKU is a thoroughly practical, hands-on affair. It marries traditional materials and techniques with modern design technology to produce useful and lyrical buildings in the southern Chinese village of Peitian.

The pair previously had experience with leading Irish firms such as O’Donnell + Tuomey, Grafton, Paul Keogh, Bucholz McEvoy, plus in Lee’s case spells with firms in Germany. She’s an assistant lecturer at HKU, reviewing and teaching while building up the practice, he a full time assistant professor. Both alumni of University College Dublin, they share with the likes of long-term UCD teachers Sheila O’Donnell and John Tuomey a love of and fascination with the craft and communal aspects of building.

Moving to Hong Kong in 2014, with the possibilities that opened up in China, allowed them to do things that were increasingly difficult in Ireland or the UK, says Holohan. ‘We couldn’t practise in the way we wanted to – making things rather than specifying products,’ he says. Having a degree in furniture design as well as a masters in architecture, making is what he’s used to – at HKU he also helps run an enviable workshop where traditional materials like handmade brick meet the world of the computer-controlled robot.

Hong Kong has its fill of large practices, both native and outposts of overseas organisations (see page 38): smaller experimental firms are less well represented.

Architecture’s yin and yang

Ancient skills and modern technology, practice and academia, theory and making, Ireland and China: Superposition in Hong Kong purposefully mixes it all up

Photographs: Superposition
Superposition offers a way through this. There are some parallels with the work of Rural Urban Framework, the non-profit collaborative teaching practice at HKU run by Joshua Bolchover and John Lin. That is a larger-scale affair dealing with the judicious urbanisation of rural communities in China and Mongolia. In contrast, Superposition the practice is outside the university – though as Holohan says, ‘there are unavoidable overlaps and interests – indeed the goal of Superposition is to blur the lines between practice/building, teaching and research’. The series of HKU built projects in Peitian – one per academic year – learn from and develop the traditional techniques found there.

Peitian in Fujian province is a village where traditional craft skills were on the wane, and historic buildings falling into disrepair, but where the traditional agricultural way of life survives. Working through an NGO, Gengxin Village Co-Creation, Superposition has so far realised three projects there: the Wind and Rain Bridge in timber that acts as a covered walkway, shelter and meeting place; the Sun Room shelter and resting place comprising an in-situ composite woven bamboo shell; and the Living Museum archive and workshop, inserted into a disused grain store. So far 180 students have participated.

The Wind and Rain Bridge of 2015-16 is an interlocking timber structure made of 265 digitally-designed components with no mechanical fastenings. This mountainous fertile area had been devastated by flooding in 2014 and reconnections had to be made. The bridge, spanning a rocky torrent in the fields, is also a flight of shallow steps making a seating area: a place to pause, not just traverse.

Sun Room, the second project of 2016/2017, is the most lyrical in form: students and villagers worked with the last remaining

‘The goal of Superposition is to blur the lines between practice/building, teaching and research’
Sprinklers are recommended for tall buildings by the RIBA where there are material alterations.

The third, Living Museum of 2018/19, moves beyond the scope of the earlier buildings to become something of an economic generator for the village. By finding a new use for the old granary the Living Museum provides a knowledge exchange for crafts and skills and makes a museum of the place itself and its hinterland, so encouraging tourists. Given the continuing commitment of Holohan/Superposition to the village and their description of the project as a place where ‘knowledge is shared between students, teachers, villagers and the academic community’, one might also see it as an occasional rural atelier for the architecture school and the practice.

‘Merging vernacular means and methods with digital tools’ is how Holohan describes this process, and it could even be a motto for this practice with a strongly community-centred view of evolving tradition and place. Superposition is designing, making and building to excellent purpose.
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Hong Kong practice

Hong Kong is a very different proposition to almost anywhere, but global practices value a foothold in this fast-paced region

Helen Castle

Hong Kong is a magnet for architectural practices worldwide. There is hardly a global firm that does not have an office here. With a population of just 7.3 million, it has nearly 1,000 RIBA members – the greatest number outside the UK – while the Hong Kong Institute of Architects has a further 4,000. A centre for architectural education, two of its architecture schools are in the top 20 of the QS world university rankings. The RIBA has also developed a Part III course here.

Despite the territory’s prominence, its professional and commercial landscape is often misunderstood. With East Asia changing fast, will Hong Kong remain an important stepping stone for mainland China? What does it take to make a practice work in this local context? What challenges do practices face working in China from Hong Kong?

Nine Plus Two and the Greater Bay Area

Hong Kong and China are each other’s main trading partners. Political influence, however, remains the subject of internal negotiation and tension. As a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong’s citizens value the high level of autonomy that its separate legal, administrative and judicial systems provide. As is being demonstrated by recent protests.

Earlier this year the Chinese government announced its Greater Bay Area Plan that earmarks nine mainland cities in Guangdong – most notably Shenzhen – and the two special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao, as engines for Chinese growth. The ‘Nine Plus Two Plan’, as it is known, is embodied in the world’s longest sea bridge, the Hong Kong-Zhuuhai-Macao Bridge, which links the two regions to the mainland.

The intention is to create an innovation and financial powerhouse in southern China to rival Silicon Valley and the Tokyo Bay Area, as China aims to become an ‘artificial intelligence super power’. Hong Kong is to strengthen its status as a trade, financial and professional services hub, while Shenzhen, home to telecoms giant Huawei and Tencent’s multi-purpose, social media and payment platform WeChat, bolsters itself as a tech hub. Zhuhai’s development as a financial, tech and tourism city has already been vastly accelerated by the new bridge.

Architectural expertise is fundamental to the Greater Bay Area Plan, which includes urban development and housing provision, consolidation of infrastructure, environmental protection, sustainable energy sources and liveability. Government funding already recognises the need for future architects with subsidies reducing tuition fees at the University of Hong Kong to £4,000 a year.

The Hong Kong Design Centre advocates the significant role of design in economic growth and productivity – and to the city’s progress and citizens’ wellbeing. As Dr Edmund Lee, the centre’s executive director, says: ‘Hong Kong is a service economy and does not have natural resources, so requires the human-centred perspective that design brings.’ The centre’s annual Business of Design Week is a focus for international exchange, drawing speakers and delegates from around the world. This December, the UK will be the partner country. The RIBA
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is collaborating with the Department for International Trade on the architecture programme, giving 40 RIBA members the chance to form a major design delegation.

**A strategic approach to mainland China**

Foreign practices often regard Hong Kong as a safe launch pad for mainland China. The ‘One Country, Two Systems’ approach guarantees the rights of property and ownership in the territory, while currency and language are different. Hong Kong-based practices must collaborate with Local Design Institutes (LDIs) in China, who undertake work at the detailed design stage, limiting services to the conceptual. Getting money out of clients and the country is also an issue.

How a practice works in mainland China therefore requires a clear strategy. Matthew Potter, director of WilkinsonEyre in Hong Kong, says his focus for the moment is on the Greater Bay Area with projects in Hong Kong, Macao, Shenzhen and Zhuhai. He is expanding the 15-strong team in Hong Kong incrementally. Projects under way include high-profile schemes for institutions in the Greater Bay Area: rejuvenating the main building for Hong Kong University, the Skybridge at Hong Kong International Airport and Shenzhen Bay Avenue East Extension.

Dedicated resources are needed to access the market in China effectively. This means employing mainland Chinese staff with language skills and connections with government and planners – and, increasingly, the tech industry. Keith Griffiths, chair and founder of Aedas, who came to Hong Kong in 1983 to work with Fosters on the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank, has set up his 1200-strong global company to meet Chinese demand. Though its Hong Kong headquarters has 700 staff, the growth is now in China where there are four offices with 300 staff in Chengdu, Shenzhen, Beijing and Shanghai. Work in the Hong Kong office is 60% from China and more than half the staff are from the mainland. The Shenzhen office leapt from 20 to 80 staff in its first year. Griffiths explains: ‘Where there was nothing in 1985, it is all built out. Shenzhen is three times the size of Hong Kong. Old areas of Shenzhen are 15-20 years old.’

Like Aedas, Farrells focuses on China. It has 90 staff in Hong Kong and a further 10 in Shanghai. It set up in Hong Kong at the height of the recession in the early 90s when it won three key commissions – for Kowloon Station, The Peak and The British Consulate. It has gone on to excel in transit-oriented developments – a model that has become an essential component of high-density urban design. Towers are also important, often built at great speed and with complex phasing, where various parts of a building can effectively be at different work stages at the same time. As the international design architect on a project, Farrells will typically be paired with an LDI to deliver the plot masterplan and the building/facade design.

**The practice context**

The role of the architect in Hong Kong is quite unique. The Authorised Person (AP) system provides the framework for supervising construction: The Building Department requires APs to coordinate and monitor all building

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*Top* WilkinsonEyre’s Skybridge at Hong Kong International Airport.

*Above* Hengqin International Financial Center and Hengqin MCC Headquarters Complex (phase II) in Zhuhai, designed by Aedas.
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Plot ratio is the main instrument of planning in Hong Kong. In one of the highest density regions in the world, it is used to control population density. The plot ratio of a building is obtained by dividing the gross floor area of the building by the area of the site on which it is to be erected. Ratios in redevelopment zones, for instance Kowloon, can be 10–20 per cent lower than on Hong Kong Island North, where ratios are to 8 to 10.

Density and the lack of affordable housing are a matter of urgency. For Aedas’ Griffiths, Hong Kong can only retain its way of life ‘if the government is wise about housing provision. There is a big gap too between rich and poor.’ It has even affected his practice: ‘The shortage of affordable housing already makes it difficult to get architects to work in Hong Kong from mainland China.’ Griffiths argues that, having built hardly any housing between 1997 and 2016, the government must unlock rail lines and land: ‘There is an urgent need for infrastructure and land supply.’

A new model for international practice

Bean Buro epitomises a new generation of practice, which is redefining what it means to be international. Partners Lorène Faure and Kenny Kinugasa-Tsui set up their studio in Hong Kong in 2013. Faure was born and studied in Paris, and then worked in London with her one-time teacher, Peter Cook, where she met Kinugasa-Tsui, who is Hong Kong born of Chinese and Japanese heritage. After studying at the Bartlett, he worked at Richard Rogers Partnership and Urban Salon Architects in London. Bean Buro is in the process of becoming a chartered practice; chartered members Faure and Kinugasa-Tsui oversee the log books of their 14-strong, cosmopolitan staff.

The practice focuses on the large-scale opportunities provided by interiors in workplace, residential and hospitality design, which have plenty of crossover. The shortage of available land limits the scope for new builds, but interiors have plenty of potential for interventions, as demonstrated by Bean Buro’s sculptural canopies for The Work Project, a 30,000ft² co-working space at Causeway Bay in central Hong Kong. The canopies, inspired by those of the fishing community that once occupied the location, also make a feature of the lettable meeting rooms.

Workplace design here, like Hong Kong style practice, is pragmatic and innovative, moving quickly and at scale. Frequently on short leases, offices can be refitted as often as every four years. It typifies the ethos of practice in the territory that is highly regulated but business-like, responding quickly to the demands of one of the most highly populated regions in the world. International in composition, it always keeps a close eye on rapid developments in mainland China.

A longer version of this article is on ribaj.com

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Room for one more?

Hong Kong’s reputation for densely packed building and land reclamation continues its forward march

The protests had just started, before this, my first visit to Hong Kong. In the weeks and months that followed they steadily increased, and sparked protest in support from members of the Hong Kong diaspora around the world. The HK government under chief executive Carrie Lam moved towards the protestors’ central demand – the withdrawal of a bill which would have allowed extradition to mainland China. The demonstrations just continued and intensified, in an echo of what President Macron experienced with the ‘gilets jaunes’ in France. The dissatisfaction culminated (at the time of writing) in the violent storming of the Legislative Council building on 1 July. More protests are planned.

This is a lesson in what ‘Hong Kongness’ means. We are not yet half way through the agreed 50-year transfer period following the handover of the former UK colony. Hence the extreme sensitivity to any government move that is seen to erode the prized freedoms of the Hong Kongers, which have over time led to the physical expression of the place itself.

Why am I writing about this? One reason is that Hong Kong contains the largest number of RIBA members outside the UK, both indigenous and ex-pat. Partly that is a legacy of colonialism but mostly it is to do with those facts outlined above: its location and political status, combined with its vigorous trading history. As Helen Castle reports in the previous feature, this is where international architecture firms like to have their regional bases. You don’t need a visa to go there and when you do, it’s almost nostalgic to arrive at Foster’s Chek Lap Kok airport on its man made island. When it opened in 1998 this was the ne plus ultra of terminal design, a rapidly-built farewell gift to the colony by the UK government. Now, though still vast to British eyes, it is almost a period piece. It is exactly what we should have built years ago for London in the Thames Estuary, but let’s not get into that.

It is, of course, all about the topography, the feel of Hong Kong. You get development clinging to the subtropical high ground. This explains two things about the place: its famed hyper-density and the fact that they just can’t stop reclaiming more and more land to build things on, roads included. The shape of the shoreline seems to change constantly as the relatively shallow waters of the archipelago allow for the making of new land.

Above Hyper-dense living in the Mong Kok district, inspiration for the film Blade Runner.

The shape of the shoreline seems to change constantly as the relatively shallow waters of the archipelago allow for the making of new land.
relatively shallow waters of the archipelago allow for the making of new land in a way that is reminiscent of Dubai.

But they are pretty good at building on steep slopes too. One of the attractions of Hong Kong island is the vertical layering of the place, skyscrapers sprouting one behind the other. Often you are so close to another building you can almost touch it, and it is common for windows on lower levels to be opaque to avoid overlooking, but somehow, overall, the vertical separation makes this tolerable. Vegetation creeps in. At the edges vertiginous staircases set into the slopes, alongside carefully-maintained stormwater channels, arrive in mountainous parkland, loud with birdsong, dotted with shrines.

Verticality expresses itself in another way: retail takes place on many more levels than we are used to in Europe. Here, four levels is about the most we’ll attempt – how do you get the people circulating round more floors of shops? No problem in Hong Kong: in one vast 2004 shopping centre we visited – Langham Place in the teeming commercial district of Mong Kok in Kowloon – I counted 15 floors of retail, two below ground, 13 above. Retailing happens everywhere: it’s not unusual to find yourself being directed through a supermarket to get to a metro station.
Mong Kok is an eye-opener – many thanks to Thomas Chung of the architecture school at the Chinese University of Hong Kong for being our guide. It is an example not only of the traditional HK super-density from the interwar period onwards – it inspired the atmosphere of Ridley Scott’s original Blade Runner movie, after all – but also of how such enormous new developments (and plenty of smaller ones) are inserted into the urban fabric. There is a perpetual churn of new, ever-taller buildings, many effectively just vertical extrusions of their plot boundaries. And the area’s history is also horizontal: the steady advance of land claimed from the sea.

Nonetheless the character of Mong Kok as a place of innumerable small shops and stalls, roughly zoned street by street into enclaves of fruit, fish, meat, electronics and so on – survives happily outside the megamall. A 2017 boutique hotel, the Beacon, designed in the stacked-pod manner by Aedas, fits the ultra-dense surroundings considerably better than the Jerde megamall (which entailed the destruction of a complete old market) – and tells you something about the changing character of the place. But there is another factor: Mong Kok is a centre for cosmetic surgery and such hotels serve the demand for ‘medical tourism’ from China and beyond.

As you’d expect, everywhere in Hong Kong displays the crunch of new against old, from the old trams and new British-built double-decker buses to the built environment. Colonial-era buildings, the relatively few that survive, demonstrate various eras of response to the hot humid climate – deep open balconies and planted courtyards at such places as the 1911 Hong Kong University giving way to taller postwar buildings with sophisticated concrete brise-soleils. While Foster’s 1986 HSBC HQ famously uses the waters of Victoria Harbour for cooling and deploys an external sunscoop to direct daylight into its interior, most of the new corporate architecture is just the standard sealed, air conditioned energy-hungry type.

An exception is to be found in the new West Kowloon cultural district – made on new land, of course, lushly landscaped, intended to become something of the HK equivalent of Singapore’s Gardens by the Bay. There’s a curious new performing arts venue there, the Xiqu Centre for Chinese opera, by Canada’s Revery Architecture with local practice Ronald Lu and Partners (the concept is of aluminium curtains being pulled aside, so literally a curtain wall). An OMA-designed lyric theatre is in the pipeline, and a sizeable art museum by Herzog and de Meuron. All big look-at-me lumps, but a small look-at-me lump there now is a beautifully made timber pavilion by New Office Works (Paul Tse Yip-pong and Evelyn Ting Huei-chung), the result of the first Hong Kong Young Architects & Designers Competition. It’s a reminder of the architectural elements of an older Hong Kong, focusing your view out to sea.
Further to the east in Kowloon, directly opposite the harbour centre on the island, the mega-development of Victoria Dockside is under way, masterplanned by KPF and Ronald Lu with James Corner Field Operations on landscape. All in strict accordance with the HK government’s sustainable design guidelines, we are told.

New public space is a key aspect of such developments, which reminds you how little of this there is in urban Hong Kong – though there is plenty up in the hills. The city centre cultural quarter of Tai Kwun, made out of the old colonial police station/courts/prison complex and designed by Purcell with new insertions by Herzog & de Meuron, represents a victory over the usual demolish-and-cram-more-in mentality. Here the old police parade ground and other courtyards, surrounded by relatively low Victorian and Edwardian buildings, provide a real sense of urbanity, and it’s very popular.

Every Sunday, people make their own public space as the (largely Filipina) house-servant class flocks into town on its half-day off, camping out on public concourses and beneath the HSBC building. This reminds you of another Hong Kong, that of the poorest workers living in exceptionally cramped accommodation – essentially, cages or coops, subdivided from other rooms. In this city all property is expensive and (usually) small. The less you earn, the smaller the space.

In a city where publicly-financed housing is commonplace (hence the famously dense forests of towers in the New Territories especially) there are plans for much more social housing; perhaps inevitably this involves making another artificial island, near existing Lantau Island to the west which itself spawned Foster’s airport. 1,000ha, 260,000 homes, cost of £60 billion. There are real environmental concerns about taking such a drastic course of action when (protestors aver) suitable land exists in the New Territories. But this is part of Hong Kongness: it’s what they have always done, and somehow I can’t see that attitude changing for a while yet.
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RIBA grasps the climate change nettle

Action plan makes constructive commitment to tackle climate change

Hugh Pearman

It was a highly significant moment. In the RIBA Council meeting of June 27 – the last under the presidency of Ben Derbyshire – Council joined the global declaration of a climate emergency and committed the institute to develop an action plan towards a net zero carbon environment.

As Derbyshire said: ‘The climate emergency is the biggest challenge facing our planet and our profession. But to have a significant impact we need to do more than make symbolic statements – we need to turn warm words into impactful actions. We architects need to transform the way we practise and, along with our fellow professionals around the world, make changes that will impact at a global level.’

The RIBA has been working on this for some time through its Ethics and Sustainable Development Commission (ESDC) which had put forward 19 recommendations to Council. The Commission’s findings are aligned with the United Nations’ 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and Council also supported the UK government’s commitment to a 2050 net zero CO₂ emissions target.

There is now a real impetus behind this, especially given Extinction Rebellion, professional work already done by the ESDC with cross-industry think tank the Edge, and the parallel Architects Declare initiative headed by 17 Stirling Prize winners – naturally enough also supported by the RIBA – which we reported on p65 of our July issue. If that grabbed the headlines, what’s especially encouraging now is that the action plan will fill in the detail on what needs to be done, by when, by practitioners and their clients, in order to achieve the zero carbon goal.

The first 10 years from 2020 to 2030 will be key, and the demands will be tough: essentially to slash energy in use by more than two thirds, reduce embodied carbon in construction by some 40%, ditto water consumption. The expectation is that this will be measurable (entry to the RIBA national awards, for instance, is likely to require demonstrable data to this effect). Another expectation is that architects will be ahead of the regulatory curve – though the institute will lobby hard to enshrine these aims in Building Regulations. As Adrian Dobson, executive director of professional services at the RIBA, puts it: ‘For those used to Passivhaus or equivalents this will be perfectly achievable but it will be stretching for many practitioners’.

The key individuals involved in delivering the action plan are Dobson on the staff side and Caroline Buckingham (vice-president, practice and profession) as RIBA board member. They are supported by Gary Clarke of WilkinsonEyre and Mina Hasman of SOM (respectively chair and member of the Sustainable Futures Group and in Hasman’s case also a member of the ESDC).

The first visible fruit of the declaration is likely to come this autumn with the launch of ‘the RIBA 2030 challenge’ in collaboration with other industry professional bodies. ‘We want to embed this widely in everything the RIBA does,’ says Dobson. The criteria for chartered practice membership will be revised, as will the RIBA Plan of Work and Client Guide. Key to much of this will be the development of a cross-industry standard set of post-occupancy evaluation reporting metrics, supported through CPD training – because to be sure that the plan is working, the results must be measurable.

The uncomfortable fact is that while the UK’s greenhouse gas emissions have reduced by 43% compared to 1990 levels, three-quarters of that has come from the energy-generation sector (wind and solar power generation especially). All other sectors including construction have lagged badly in comparison. Now is the time for real change.
Delivering a masonry masterpiece

The distinguished façades of the Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre’s (DNRC) timeless buildings feature over 1,000 Brick Slip Feature Arches and 3km of offsite cornice designed and manufactured by IG Masonry Support.

Overview

The Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre (DNRC) is a bespoke £300 million purpose built clinical rehabilitation centre of excellence based in the Midlands, at the Stanford Hall Rehabilitation Estate near Loughborough.

The classical architectural style of this project extends to over 47,000m² of floor space, of which approximately 41,000m² is new, purpose-built accommodation. Two storey structures were configured around a series of interlocking courtyards and external garden spaces, creating distinguished, timeless buildings respectful of the existing architecture, including the grade II* listed Stanford Hall.

Each elevation features a network of complex brickwork elements. Lee Marley Brickwork collaborated closely with IG design engineers, using modern building techniques to create the brick façade and achieve the architect’s vision.

IG Masonry Support manufactured and designed a range of bespoke prefabricated brick slip solutions, including over 1,000 Brick Slip Feature Arches and just under 3km of offsite Cornice.

IG’s Brick Slip Feature Arches are one piece prefabricated units, manufactured bespoke to order. The patented perforated stainless steel in an IG Brick Slip Feature Lintel allows BBA approved adhesive to squeeze through the perforations and form a ‘mushroom’ on the inside, providing a mechanical and chemical bond between the steel lintel and bricks. IG collects a consignment of bricks from site which are then cut into 25mm brick slips and bonded to the lintel. This eliminates the need for a specialist brickwork contractor to spend hours on site cutting bricks to suit complex brick details. The finished brick feature arch blends seamlessly with the surrounding brickwork.

Challenge

Consistency and quality were essential when replicating the complex brickwork elements throughout this 21st century state of the art landmark project. To create the arches using traditional methods would have been a time consuming task requiring a great deal of skilled labour and
brick cutting onsite. IG Masonry Support’s offsite solutions provided greater certainty for project delivery within the ambitious construction schedule.

**Solution**

IG’s Brick Slip Feature Arches and Cornice offered the perfect solution for achieving the key architectural features on the exterior façades of the buildings. A clock tower retained from the demolished stable block at the historic estate forms the cornerstone of the main courtyard which features a series of impressive arches throughout its ground floor elevation. The design of the arches vary throughout each elevation, featuring a collection of different classical architectural styles. IG provided Lee Marley Brickwork with Brick Slip Feature Arch solutions that enabled it to achieve grand architectural details with the simplicity of a single piece prefabricated component.

The largest free standing arch installed on the development spanned an impressive 8.7m opening. The base of the arch sits at 9.5m above ground level. This bespoke brick slip solution incorporated a 0.3m deep brick soffit and a 0.8m brick face. The arch was fully installed in under an hour, demonstrating how effective modern building methods can deliver large-scale brick features. Crowning the brick façade of each building, the corbelled cornice demonstrated a varying degree of complexity. IG designed and manufactured a lightweight system of cornice units to achieve this architectural element. The speed at which the corbelled units were installed significantly reduced the amount of time that Lee Marley Brickwork’s team was working at heights.

IG Masonry Support’s products provide quality and consistency and this proved a major advantage for Lee Marley Brickwork. Each bespoke brick feature component was produced in a factory in optimum controlled conditions, free from wet weather, extreme temperature and excessive dust.

‘IG Masonry was instrumental in achieving over 1,000 brick arches and cornices of classical and traditional architectural styles. The IG systems were chosen for their efficiency as prefabricated units and to achieve the desired aesthetics. The quality and craftsmanship is apparent throughout and has delivered on the façade envisioned at the beginning of the project, giving the impression that the buildings vary in age and have grown over time’ – Neil King, Purcell UK

For more information on IG Masonry Support Brick Slip Solutions or to avail of IG’s free design service or design partnership meetings contact: support@igmss.co.uk 01283 200 157
A BRAND NEW LUXURY
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Save Richmond House now
Parliament’s move doesn’t have to destroy this fine listed building

Hugh Pearman Editor

It was quite something, being in Committee Room 12, a Puginian cube overlooking the Thames, in the Palace of Westminster. We were there, along with two great conservation organisations – SAVE Britain’s Heritage and the 20th Century Society – to discuss another parliamentary building: Richmond House in Whitehall by the late Sir William Whitfield. It is grade II* listed. Parliament intends to demolish all but a fragment of it. We are very strongly against this idea and architectural historians, conservation-minded architects, even a parliamentary security expert, lined up to say why. It was an instructive and entertaining masterclass in debunking muddled thinking, done by Marcus Binney of SAVE through historians Andrew Saint and Alan Powers, Catherine Croft of the 20th Century Society and other experts. Whitfield’s surviving practice partner Andrew Lockwood contributed from the floor.

Why is this demolition even being considered? Because the Palace is to be emptied in the mid 2020s to speed its restoration, requiring temporary chambers for the Commons and Lords – with associated ancillary accommodation – to be built. Yes, it would be great if Parliament could move in the interim to Birmingham, Leeds or even the Excel exhibition centre in London’s Royal Docks. But you’d have to move the whole of Whitehall too to do this and that would be monumentally more expensive even than what’s proposed now.

What to do? The Lords is scheduled to move to Powell and Moya’s Queen Elizabeth II Centre at Broad Sanctuary across from the Abbey. Of similar mid-80s date to Richmond House, this should also be listed in my view (a Certificate of Immunity against listing expired in 2016), given the amount of carving-out of space it will need. But the Commons is the real problem. Architects including Lord Foster and Sir Michael Hopkins have suggested putting the temporary chamber respectively in Horseguards Parade or in the great atrium of Hopkins’ Portcullis House. These have been dismissed, it seems, on security grounds – a convenient get-out given that nowhere can ever be totally secure (apparently the 19th century-looking windows of our committee room are attack-resistant, though it was hard to see how).

But Richmond House, under plans drawn up by BDP and AHMM, would be demolished entirely other than its famous Tudor-inspired Whitehall facade, and that would be compromised by a higher new structure behind, a new security-check building in front, and barriers everywhere. Richmond House is much more than its main facade however. The way it defers to the Norman Shaw buildings behind is adroit, its cascade of beautifully-made, well-daylit office floors a delight. It has worn very well and is well used.

SAVE has shown how it could be refurbished as an exemplary energy-conscious government building, and has found alternative secure sites for the two Parliamentary chambers in courtyards of the Commonwealth Office and the Treasury. We don’t need to lose Richmond House. Let’s not.
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Plans, trains and automobiles

Ford springs a surprise at Michigan Central Station

Standing alone on the skyline like a great stone bookend, bereft of books, Michigan Central Station has loomed over Corktown in western Detroit for decades as a painful reminder of the city’s long gone glory days.

Designed by Warren and Wetmore, it was the tallest station building in the world when it opened in 1913, with a slender slab of offices towering 70m above the train sheds below. At its height, the station saw more than 4,000 passengers a day, but it wasn’t to last. In the city that invented the automobile, the interurban service was discontinued less than two decades after the station opened. It finally closed in 1988 and was left to rot – too big to renovate, too expensive to demolish.

Today, crumbling plaster rosettes cling to the vaulted ribs above the main concourse, while stone columns, swollen with damp, support precariously balanced capitals. A rusting iron roof hangs like an eerie cage above the former taxi drop-off, while 13 floors of empty peeling offices rise above.

As a ready-made icon of urban dereliction, it became a popular choice for location scouts looking to conjure a post-apocalyptic mood, starring in Eminem’s 8 Mile and the Transformers movie, and providing an atmospheric setting for the climactic battle scene in Batman v Superman. It is the supreme specimen of Detroit’s rich array of ruin porn. Beyond repair, it seemed consigned to a fate of providing spooky scenery until it crumbled once and for all.

This all makes what is happening now all the more remarkable. Last summer, Ford Motor Company announced it had bought the building, with plans to invest $740 million to transform it into a world-leading research centre for ‘future mobility’. The very industry that signed the station’s death warrant in the first place is now set on resuscitating it as a beacon of sustainable transport.

‘It’s quite a turnaround,’ says Richard Bardelli, Ford’s construction manager, as he shows me around the building. ‘It was the icon of its day, then it became a symbol of the city’s decay. If the building was knocked down, it would be the end of Detroit.’

His team’s first challenge is to dry out the great hulk. After years without windows or a watertight roof it’s sodden, and decades of freeze-thaw have left extensive cracking in the masonry. After pumps were installed in the basement and fans placed throughout the building, taking care not to dry it too quickly, the stone facade has already lightened in colour. Replacement blocks of Indiana limestone are being mined from the quarry that supplied the original stone. Silicone casts have been taken of decorative plasterwork, while the whole building has been scanned to enable some details to be 3D-printed.

‘I’ve never been involved in a project where a building has brought so much out of a community,’ says Bardelli, describing how the renovation has encouraged people to come forward with items they’d scavenged from the building over the years. People have returned lamps, letterboxes and elevator buttons, and one anonymous donor even returned the enormous cast-iron clock that once hung above the entrance. This was a real cloak and dagger affair: it was left in an alley with directions to find it texted from a disposable burner phone.

In Ford’s plans, the entire ground floor will be a public market-style space, with food and drinks stalls and events, while the offices above and a couple of nearby buildings will house its 1.2 million ft² innovation campus, where the company and its partners will work on autonomous and electric vehicle businesses, and urban mobility services, bringing 5,000 new employees to the area.

‘Detroit has long been the automotive capital of the world,’ says Bardelli. ‘Now it’s going to be the mobility capital of the world.’ They could start by bringing the trains back...

Oliver Wainwright is architecture critic at the Guardian. Read him here every other month and at ribaj.com

The team sent in to survey the decrepit station might have been expecting to find dead bodies and other ghoulish relics, but their chief discoveries have been 100-year old beer and whisky bottles, hidden in the walls by the original masons – and a family of foxes living happily on the 12th floor.
Change was necessary

Ben Derbyshire departs the presidency with a sense of achievement – and optimism for the future

As I look back on three years since I was elected president of RIBA, I reflect on the strapline of my election campaign #ChangeIsNecessary. It recognised that significant change is not in the gift of one person, one president, one term to deliver, and I do not take the credit. But it has been a privilege to have occupied the president’s office and on behalf of all those who have been involved, I am proud that the institute is on a firm financial footing and will soon obtain the effective governance necessary for an even stronger organisation, membership and voice.

I have not space to go into all the aspects of change that will benefit members here – RIBA is so broad and wide-ranging with responsibilities for membership growth, guidance and benefits, standards of education and practice, ethics, CPD, the collections, awards, cultural programme, publishing, research, policy and lobbying. It’s a huge span for the president too! But some have special significance for me.

The presidency has brought many opportunities to brief politicians and civil servants, local, national and global. Apart from the many private meetings at home and abroad, the stand-out moment was perhaps at the last Stirling Prize ceremony, on prime-time TV with a reported 10 million viewers, impressing upon secretary of state James Brokenshire the industry’s hopes and expectations for a resolution of the Brexit impasse. We are still waiting but thanks to RIBA lobbying the qualifications of our EU colleagues will be recognised in the event of no deal.

In last month’s column, I set out my concern to champion diversity in the profession and I’m delighted that Femi Oresanya, chair of our expert group on equality, is guiding a comprehensive package of activity to improve diversity, including social mobility, in the profession. Given my own specialism is housing and urbanism, it’s great that the RIBA is now working with the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Chartered Institute of Housing and Local Government Association to support five towns and cities with place-making – with Future Place, a project to support skills and capacity. The Quality Tracker developed with the Chartered Institute of Building and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors to respond to past president Steven Hodder’s 2016 Client Survey should help overcome the worst procurement ills (design and build especially) by sustaining the ‘golden thread’ of accountability for performance, as we continue to lobby for a POE requirement for all government funded projects.

International meetings prompted me to instigate five principles designed to reinforce the profession’s compact with society, covering increasing diversity, research, the public interest first, managing risk, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We have extended this commitment to other institutes around the world and will be comparing notes on our respective efforts as things progress. On that front, I’m pleased the Institute has accepted in full the recommendations of our own Sustainable Development and Ethical Commission and put in place new Codes of Conduct and Practice.

Some changes must wait until Alan Jones’ presidency to really gain traction. But I have every confidence that under him programmes such as the acceleration of education reform, and work to follow up on Council’s support for the declaration of a Climate Emergency will flourish.

This is an extraordinary time for the institute and its members. As I return to the back benches, I hope you will join me in supporting the organisation to make the most of these circumstances – unique in the 185 year history of the Institute.

@ben_derbyshire president@riba.org

DIVERSITY ADDED TO 2020 CPD PROGRAMME

A brand new session focussed specifically on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in business will be included in the RIBA’s Core CPD programme for 2020. The interactive seminar will enhance understanding of EDI & while providing greater awareness of its legal and business case. Designed for both small and large organisations, the session will focus on implementing EDI strategies and discussing initiatives for impact. RIBA will launch the full 2020 CPD programme on 12 September – stay tuned.
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Gavin Green at the Linbury in the Royal Opera House, London.
'Even my parents don’t know what I do,' says Gavin Green, theatre consultant and co-founder of Charcoalblue. Theatre design sounds straightforward, but it is not set design, nor is it architecture. It is technical – rigging, acoustics, stage floors that can smoothly swallow up performers – but also about designing for the intangibles, how the audience watches, how it feels – the things that make theatres great.

Why is this needed when great architects like Haworth Tompkins are experts in theatres and seem to get this right every time? But here’s the thing: Charcoalblue is long term collaborator with Haworth Tompkins, from the Young Vic in 2006 to the recently completed Cambridge Peter Hall centre via Stirling Prize winning Liverpool Everyman (2013) and many more. And while we are making lists, here are some of its UK projects that opened in recent months: Milton Keynes Gallery, Alexander Palace, the Kiln Theatre, Bloomsbury Theatre, Bristol Old Vic and the Linbury theatre within the Royal Opera House. And it has almost as many projects – eight – in this year’s RIBA National Awards.

It is not just theatres. Green recently sat in on the architect interviews for London’s Centre for Music. This Huddersfield-trained architecture student turned theatre designer almost has to pinch himself as he describes interviewing Frank Gehry, and the brilliant Elizabeth Diller, whose team eventually won the design for this high profile concert hall. Charcoalblue will work alongside Diller Scofidio + Renfro. He is also working on OMA’s £111 million Factory in Manchester which is due to open next year.

At 13 Green wanted to be an architect. But when he finished his Part II he got a job at Theatre Projects on a Günter Behnisch concert hall in Bristol (unrealised) and was hooked. ‘It is the excitement, and clients are so passionate about their building and art.’ As he and colleagues from electrical and sound engineering and production management,
outgrew Theatre Projects along came the small, complex but gripping project of the Young Vic and Charcoalblue’s multi-disciplinary practice was set up on the back of this.

On an early project the client came to the practice with one burning question, says Green: How do I stop my architect screwing up? Much of Charcoalblue’s job is translation – of concepts and need as well as the vocabulary. Green feels that his team, many who have worked in theatre, won’t lose sight of what is on the stage at the end, which helps when some architecture can be overbearing. He says this all very lightly as if it is the natural way of things rather than anything to worry about – and with an apparently boundless energy, there is a little of the cartoon kid ready to turn action superhero about him. But that might just be the spiky hair.

We meet at a recent project, the Linbury, and walk through spacious interiors that have opened up the Royal Opera House as Green relates how they got the job. ‘We were on the losing team here,’ he says. The firm entered the competition with Witherford Watson Mann, and came second. But its suggestions for the Linbury were enough for the ROH to ask it to take it on alongside Stanton Williams, and so it did – luckily Witherford Watson Mann was understanding.

The Linbury has been completely transformed from a scruffy, underwhelming black box. It now has curvaceous timber balconies. It feels established, despite being new. A change in rake, shifting staircases to the corners and an electric-acoustic system have changed its character and the experience of watching – all within the same box. It feels like a proper auditorium now, though the shows are still on the experimental side for the ROH, as with the current South African production of the Man of Good Hope, which draws its cast from the townships.

Green can explain the technical side, the need for oversized ducts for quiet, slow moving air, the spikes in occupancy and toilet use.

Above Concept sketch for The Factory, Manchester with OMA which will house theatre and arts.
Bottom left Charcoalblue concept sketch of Alexandra Palace, London, with an end stage. The firm worked on this with architect FCB Studios.
Bottom right The completed Alexandra Palace
use. ‘Theatres are fiendishly complicated,’ he says. But we are soon back on that magic, the intimacy and sense of togetherness; a cultural phenomenon that is interestingly far harder to achieve in the US and Middle East due to local regulations and expectations about personal space. If the density of seats is lower you can easily lose the sense of the body of the audience and the way that charges the atmosphere.

Green needs to know about theatre and venues abroad because now two of the practice’s four offices are overseas, along with 50% of its work. It is a global network – and such things as the way three venues function within the Young Vic have inspired farflung producers and chief executives working in Chicago or on the theatre for the World Trade Centre site. In the typical way of construction, creative directors often leave as their projects finish, but that has seeded collaborators elsewhere in the industry. For 80-strong Charcoalblue this international market is particularly important. He admits they maybe running out of British theatres and venues to work on. ‘But our ones will need refurbishing soon,’ he smiles.

There is a little of the cartoon kid ready to turn action superhero about him. And there is work with Google and Facebook, which are interested in how to engage people, including their own staff, in the real world. ‘Google has more conference rooms than anyone on the planet,’ reports Green. It is working on tuning them technically, as it might do with apparently tiny interventions into seat heights in a West End theatre.

There are also a few projects where Charcoalblue gets to be lead consultant. When the play Harry Potter and the Cursed Child moved from London to New York it took on the NY Lyric, ‘where plays go to die. In the 13 month renovation it pushed through permits and piling into New York’s bedrock, bringing seats closer to the stage to create an immersive theatre. Leading a team including Marvel Architecture and set designer Christine Jones, and using the latter’s large scale model, Green puts the refurb’s speed down to a ‘theatrical sense of purpose’ and a willingness to challenge construction processes. So here we uncover what a theatre consultant does.

But should you be impressed with the Harry Potter phoenix sconces at the Lyric please note, they were not Charcoalblue. •
SimpsonHaugh
Rachel Haugh and Ian Simpson talk tiny projects, recognition of roles, the day of the Arndale Centre bomb and the towers beyond

Waugh Thistleton
Waugh Thistleton: Andrew Waugh and Anthony Thistleton on their journey from Hoxton hipsters to Bushey Cemetery, age and timber campaigning

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Peter St John on gorgeous galleries and Damien Hirst and going sporty with Zurich ice hockey stadium

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Smoke and mirrors

Our columnist Will Wiles’ novel Plume reflects a disturbing world

Gillian Darley

A novel set around the trials of a London lifestyle journalist in freefall might suggest a punishing read. Set over a week in the bleakest season of the year, against a drop curtain of an optically baffling miasma, everything is on a downward trajectory into chaos, in which misunderstandings will be by far the least menacing element. As Jack, our hero, says, ‘Tell enough lies, or a big enough lie, and the truth gets corrupted. The boundary gets lost, it rots.’ Corrosion is the theme in Will Wiles’ Plume – of trust, of physique, of structures, of certainties. Derailment and disturbance, whether emerging under the long shadow of AI or the skewed perspectives of psychogeography, are the ubiquitous drivers.

Sharp Jack Bick (his actual name, rather more pedestrian, is James Bickerton) is an insightful interviewer of the achingly crucial figures who dominate London’s east side. Meanwhile he is drinking himself into oblivion, and worse. The detritus of a heavy drinkers’ life, the path to self-deception marked by a trail of Stella cans, empty and half empty, becomes the stuff of dank comedy, desperation played against high farce. In early days, Jack had bought himself a can crusher to cover the traces from a girlfriend. As Wiles has recently revealed with disarming honesty, in this he was drawing on personal experience.

Jack’s work setting is Shoreditch, where his increasingly suspicious colleagues pull together a magazine which still, but only just, exists on the page, and his bleak flat in Pimlico where he often ‘works at home’, the better to keep his fridge stocked. He wakes to the percussion of drills as they rip apart the neighbouring houses, behind or below the dull frontages, including next door. Periodically he emails his landlord Dave to complain. Dave never replies.

Will Wiles’ writing is wry, atmospheric and oddly credible for all the apocalyptic staging and mirages that alcohol provides. A column of smoke on a shifting horizon dogs Jack’s steps, initially an immense fire burning out in Barking, but to remain in Jack’s line of sight far longer – the plume of the title. He is also beset by white cockatoos. One in particular sits on a sour tree outside his basement window. He decides to deal with it, for all that it is only a plastic bag caught in the branches. In an episode worthy of Buster Keaton Jack clammers up towards the ‘bird’ by balancing himself on the back of an inadequate plastic chair and then the wall top. Looking down, just before he topples off, he discovers the adjoining house is no more than a vast hole in the ground. When Jack Bick eventually reaches the office, his face skinned and body battered, there’s little more to go wrong. He has nothing to show, having lost all the raw material for his interview with Pierce, the author of the acclaimed Night Fall, an account of a mugging. Pierce has fallen mysteriously silent – off social media, no responses to any contact – and Bick surmises, despite his colleagues’ doubt, there must be a story here. The twists and turns, the blurring of truth and lies, identity and virtual reality, are Wiles on top form. Even Dave Spotford, his landlord, turns out to be a bot, manipulated by ‘de Chauncey’ (a new style estate agent, his other interviewee) while the denouement, assisted by all-seeing social media site Tamesis, is truly sobering.

Plume is a tale for our times, a post-truth world, where events can be no more than a matter of doubt, actions no more than a response to prompts (and data) well beyond our ken. The book could hardly be more disturbing or better done or, often, funnier. Will Wiles has turned in a bravura performance, but it’s best read in the serenity of a rose garden in the evening sun.

Gillian Darley is a writer and biographer

As Wiles has recently revealed with disarming honesty, in this he was drawing on personal experience

Plume by Will Wiles, pub. 4th Estate, £8.99 PB / £16.99 HB
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Heritage under fire

What Remains looks at the oppression and rectification of a potent weapon of war

Pamela Buxton

‘When our cultural heritage is lost, so are people.’ So says the introduction to What Remains, a small but powerful new exhibition at the Imperial War Museum in London.

Staged in partnership with Historic England as part of the Culture Under Attack season, this provides an accessible distillation of a complex, wide-ranging and all-too-perterrible subject: the deliberate targeting and destruction of cultural heritage during conflict. For while the scope of the exhibition stretches back a century to the First World War, this is clearly an ongoing occurrence, as demonstrated by footage of the Taliban’s attack on the thousand-year-old Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan in 2001 and the destruction of the treasures of the Mosul Museum in 2015 by ISIS in Iraq. Although familiar, these troubling images continue to shock.

It is precisely because of their importance that cherished historic sites and cultural institutions such as libraries and museums become targets. The exhibition doesn’t mince its words: ‘The destruction of cultural heritage is a step on the path to genocide’, adding: ‘It can weaken the ability of any survivors to express and maintain an identity. Ultimately it can be an attempt to erase everything that attests to their existence.’

What Remains is divided into two distinct parts, both told through the use of well-chosen case studies. The first half, Targeting, covers the destruction of cultural heritage as a distinct tactic rather than a by-product of war, and how it is used to coerce people into submission. In World War I, the Germans launched a campaign to erase more than 1,000 historic buildings in the Belgian town of Louvain to warn other towns not to engage in resistance. But when Hitler targeted scenic British towns top-rated in the Baedeker travel guide the morale-sapping destruction was used in propaganda to galvanise the war effort.

The second section explores Saving, and covers built, legal and educational responses to dealing with the aftermath of conflict.

Coventry Cathedral in England and Germany’s Frauenkirche in Dresden make effective examples. In contrast to the UK’s commissioning of Basil Spence to design a new, modern cathedral linked to adjacent ruins, the 19th century German church was left as it was for half a century. When the time was right, it was faithfully rebuilt using as much of the surviving building fabric as possible.

Legally, the destruction of heritage is now a crime in the International Criminal Court, which had its first convictions in 2016.

Paris Agar, a curator of What Remains, says this thought-provoking exhibition aimed to raise awareness of cultural destruction and why it matters so much, and in this it has succeeded. It works well with accompanying Culture Under Attack exhibitions.

The adjacent Art in Exile tells the story of how the Imperial War Museum prioritised which of its own artworks to save in from World War II damage, and invites visitors to question whether they would have made the same choices. This theme is expanded to consider how other national museums kept their assets safe in the conflict, sometimes in remote country houses or even down quarries. A third exhibition, Rebel Sounds, looks at four case studies from a different strand of cultural heritage, that of music, and lightens the mood with exhilarating blasts of sound.
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The story behind the drawing was the key to this year’s successful submissions in our annual competition

Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek

More than any discussion on style or fashion this year, a theme that arose from the judges’ Eye Line deliberations was the notion of the ‘back story’ and how far explanations of the drawings, beyond actual technique, should influence the eventual choice of winner. It was a discussion sparked by a comment from last year’s winner Tszwai So at a key moment in the judging of the Practitioners category, in which an expertly rendered drawing was being looked at alongside a highly expressive one using the most primitive of means.

‘I feel strongly that architects should bring personal experience to bear on everything that they do,’ said So, defending the latter. ‘There is always a back story to their work and for architects to pretend there isn’t is just foolish; in fact, I can’t imagine how you could even separate the two,’ he added. So’s winning 2018 submission, reflective, delicate pencil studies for a Pan-European memorial for victims of totalitarianism – indeed his firm Spheron Architects’ own built design for the London Belarusian Memorial Chapel – stand as testament to this voiced concern.

And it became one that resonated throughout the judging process, modifying the already incisive views of our other panel members who sifted through the 50-entry longlist, whittled down from 256: artist Anne Desmet RA, Neil Spiller, architect and editor of Architectural Design; Wen Quek, architect partner at Cullinan Studio and RIBA Journal editor Hugh Pearman.

The initial cull that occurred in both Student and Practitioner categories seemed to suggest that the standard in Eye Line’s seventh year was generally lower than previous ones, but perhaps this had more to do with the judges’ own back stories. Desmet has had to ruthlessly curate rooms at the RA’s own summer show; and in his many years as a tutor, Spiller has an eye that sees through student sophistry. Quek, meanwhile, is charged with analysing her firm’s person skills and optimising performance, while Pearman, having sat in on the six previous years, is fully aware of the bar that needs to be hit to qualify as a winner. In all – a tough panel to impress.

And a lot fell at the fences. Of the Practitioners, one dense aerial view of a future London that had been worked on for years but seemed dead behind the eyes; failing, Desmet thought, to account for the humanity in congestion that an artist like Chris Orr expresses and revels in. A previously commended entry, dissolving London’s domestic architecture to leave us with the objects within that mark our existence, seemed indulgent when applying the same tactic to a designer hut in the Swiss Alps. Another, attempting to register incremental changes to a developing site in India over time, with its allusions to climate change, somehow merely came over as ‘worthy’ and ‘ponderous’. And highly resolved, digital ‘Steam Punk’ images were dismissed out of hand as ‘repellent’.

And of the students, the presence of the artist’s hand or iPhone smacked of a benign narcissism that the high quality of the drawing couldn’t assuage; the same for the compelling brief of an abandoned mafia-linked Palermo development being greened and repopulated, whose rendering couldn’t mask the lack of any real proposition. This was not the case for a detailed pencil drawing of a crematorium as a new form of public urban space, but it led Quek to ask: ‘Are we more seduced by the programme than the drawing?’

So despite being ‘strong, with beguiling abstract qualities’, it too fell by the wayside. The same went for artist Ben Johnson’s expertly delineated images; which, while technically excellent were, apart from his Maclaren render (left), divested of the architectonic subtlety, the sense of light, the grain of his subject – a ‘reductio ad absurdum’ – the drawing not conveying the whole story.

‘Are we judging skill over originality?’ So found himself compelled to ask. Technically, yes, but both Eye Line winners relied on strong conceits to take them over the line; one of an invented future and the other on an equivocal past. ‘I feel on a different day, we’d have different winners,’ mused So. But in an age of ‘fake news’, the judges seemed content with these back stories.
Below Holding Up: Castle Drogo No.1.
Pen & ink on paper, 594 x 420mm

Practitioner: Winner
Edward Crooks
Holding Up: Castle Drogo Nos 1, 2 & 3

Drawn from his solo exhibition ‘Holding Up’ at Edwin Lutyens' 1930 Castle Drogo, Edward Crooks' beguiling images represent a further play on the whole fantastical nature of a project that critic Christopher Hussey declared 'does not pretend to be a castle. It is a castle, as a castle is built, of granite, on a mountain, in the 20th century'.

Both practitioner and teacher, Edward Crooks' studio seems to concentrate currently on site-specific installations, and in these pen and ink drawings, part of a series commissioned by the National Trust, Crooks drew on the architecture of Drogo and Lutyens other projects to inform his proposal; the tower ‘a provocation, a tool...to further understand the history of change, adaptation and speculative design from which Drogo is derived.’

Hugh Pearman was instantly struck by this ‘Capriccio of Lutyens’ but added the caveat that he wondered if ‘this was more a technical exercise than an emotional one.’ And while Neil Spiller and Wen Quek both acknowledged the undoubted skill of the exercise, Quek went further, calling the work ‘romantic, if objectively so.’ Tszwai So felt Crooks’ submission to be ‘of the highest order’ but harboured doubts over whether it was as ‘authentic’ as its rivals. Anne Desmet agreed that while the root of the work drew heavily on Lutyens, nonetheless the effort was ‘painstaking’, declaring it to be ‘an epic work, more evocative for its ruined fantasy viaduct and with a beautiful sense of composition and repose throughout’.

In the end there was consensus: here perhaps real emotion is deliberately kept on a tight leash. But the work highlighted the conundrum at the root of Eye Line; the difficulty in comparing evenly the sheer breadth of entries. Spiller was just as drawn to more instinctive work, divested of time and patronage, but no less skilled or propositional, noting: ‘Both approaches, knowingly applied, can be equally powerful.’

An epic work, evocative for its ruined fantasy viaduct and beautiful sense of composition and repose.
Above Holding Up: Castle Drogo No. 3.
Pen & ink on paper. 594 x 420mm
Practitioner: Commended
Yulia Filatova
Happy to be here in the bottom
Above the City
Hot air balloon building

Yulia Filatova started from zero when she arrived in Milan from Moscow with no job and barely any money, so separating the work from the story of the person who produced it was difficult. ‘To start everything from the beginning, I didn’t take with me even paper to draw,’ Filatova explained. ‘So one day, not standing any more without drawing, I found a piece of cardboard, and there I could express myself.’

Whether the story is true or not is, in a way, as immaterial as the choice of material is...material. Filatova’s large but expressive gouache on cardboard musings on the urban condition and the individual within it resonated strongly with the judges. Spiller, tired of the slickness of London schools’ architectural production, announced himself immediately drawn to the watery-thin premonitions of what seemed the death – and possible rise – of the city. Desmet was captivated by the methodology – “the dribbling of the pain through which the idea arrived” – cutting through to the nature of the creative process. Quek, having worked with the medium, thought the originals ‘might look throwaway’ but could not dispute the collective power of what Pearman termed ‘this emotional exercise’.

The balloon building, transforming the city block into something as delicate as a paper lantern, struck the panel in particular, and all concurred that the set was a cri de coeur, communicating the sense of architecture being able to damn and redeem itself. That sense they reciprocated: ‘My heart goes out to this one,’ said So.
Watery-thin premonitions of what seem the death – and possible rise – of the city.
Practitioner: Commended
Povilas Jurevicius
Carbon Future

There was no shortage of entries that whose designs made clear or indirect reference to climate change but it was Jurevicius’ hand drawn and Photoshop rendered image that stood out for the judges. His generic ‘I was trying to imagine what future would look like if the governments and big corporations continue to ignore this most important issue’ was backed up with a heartfelt drawing that had a power all of its own.

Despite its other-worldliness, there was a disarming recognisability to his reimagining of London’s Deptford that the panel were drawn to. ‘The way it treats the individual elements in his drawing in different ways gives it strength I really like,’ remarked Desmet. ‘It’s a wild and fantastic yet very controlled image.’ Spiller admiringly remarked that ‘it looks like Lebbeus Woods,’ but Quek added it withstood the comparison, adding ‘It doesn’t look derivative; his sky is beautiful.’

Quite what the function of the structure that Desmet termed ‘The remains of a crashed space ship’ is never explained but its epic scale begins to speak of some portentous use yet to be called into being. This dark question at the heart of the image, sitting in front of a sky straight out of an 18th century Dutch landscape painting, elicits a creeping sense of unease that won Jurevicius’ dystopia its well-earned commendation.

Practitioner: Commended
Studio McLeod
Ori

The Eye Line judges were less enamoured by the story of a notional sculpted concept house, designed according to Passivhaus principles and the WELL Building Standard that they were by the processes that the design underwent in order to arrive at the final drawing. Far from a justification, if anything they viewed those credentials more as a red herring. In this case, the commendation award centred on the story of the drawing itself.

Studio McLeod made a Vectorworks model derived from an actual folded paper model (‘Ori’ means ‘folded’ in Japanese), which was rendered via Twinmotion, manipulated in Photoshop and digitally printed on FSC watercolour paper. This act of passing from a physical object through digital rendering to arrive at a two dimensional representation of the original — on the very material from which it was initially made — was an irony not lost on the judges.

Though at first irritated by its centrality — the deliberate positioning seemed to reflect the self-referential process — So conceded that: ‘I enjoy the whole conceptual journey of the drawing. It grows on me the more I look at it.’ Quek too, admired ‘the iterative investigation through different processes’, with Desmet enjoying its ‘minimalist quality’. Pearman admitted it had survived his own iterative sifting, conceding: ‘I just kept coming back to it.’

‘It’s serves as a focus for mindfulness,’ Quek concluded. ‘Perfect for hanging somewhere, looking at and contemplating.’
‘I enjoy the whole conceptual journey of the drawing. It grows on me the more I look at it’
Student: Winner
Theo Jones Bartlett School, UCL
Unfolding Julian Assange’s Home of Diplomatic Containment I & II

‘From leaked documents, it has been established that Ecuador considered transporting Assange in a diplomatic bag. For a time, the Met Police even scanned objects exiting the embassy for heat signatures.’ So runs the opening paragraph of Theo Jones’ explanation of his project analysing the conditions of Julian Assange’s political asylum, turning the whole stasis into a proposition, adding: ‘The “jacket” acts as a diplomatic bag holding a collection of rooms that can be folded up, hidden and transported with diplomatic immunity.’ And so within Jones’ flip up, fold-out, pocket-sized world, is contained the means of Assange’s eventual liberation.

Neil Spiller said the theme was popular with students, but it was the resolved manner of its delineation that caught the imagination of the Eye Line judges. Tszwai So called it ‘very communicative work coming out of some intelligent and clear thinking. You really do buy into the idea.’ Though Hugh Pearman was more circumspect, saying ‘while I thought it curious, I was not that taken by it until I really started to look at it in detail.’ Anne Desmet was instantly sold, declaring the idea ‘ingenious, funny and elegantly put together,’ reminding her of a trip on the Orient Express where ‘cabins unfold like a box of delights.’ Wen Quek felt the drawings to be ‘instantly memorable, the folding out done excellently…the programme making it something quite original.’

Spiller was the last to concede, being ‘a bit irritated by the intellectual conceit,’ but in the end was won over by Jones’ political mechanisms. ‘It’s clever and there’s real intricacy in his deployment drawings; of all the Assange schemes I’ve seen, this is the best.’
Very communicative work coming out of some intelligent and clear thinking.

Below Unfolding Julian Assange’s Home of Diplomatic Containment I. Photoshop & Illustrator on paper. 594 x 841mm
As a former Yale student won a commendation in 2017 with a similar hand-drawn perspective of another Rome church, the judges wondered if Yale University was sending all its young students on a tour of duty in the Eternal City. But that didn’t stop them recognising this skilful drawing of Borromini’s Baroque church in the Piazza Navona. Nor, indeed, did the fact that none was really convinced the drawing could have been done on site.

The skill of the work was acknowledged however, with Pearman noting that ‘we get very few traditional entries,’ and directing attention to Yuen’s use of both bird’s eye and worm’s eye views in the same sectional drawing, in a sense echoing the convex/concave nature of the architect’s own work. So was struck by the work, remarking ‘It’s very rare to see modern students drawing like this.’ Quek commented that it was hard to judge actual designs against measured drawings of existing buildings but saw this example of the latter as ‘a very strong contender’.

Desmet meanwhile, read both this and the sectional axonometric of the Yale School of Architecture as ‘epic images’. But all appreciated the palpable sense of physical process embodied in both; Pearman feeling it to be ‘one of the most complex and effortful of all the entries.”
Student: Commended
Jason Ho Bartlett School, UCL
A Day in Global Britain: A Christmas Gift to a Dear Friend in Memory of a Summer Day, The Pool of Tears
The Garden of Living Flowers

The Mulberry harbours – temporary jetties to aid Allied landings in Normandy – inspired Jason Ho’s study of a floating outpost within the territorial waters of the Falkland Islands, assembled from plastic waste in just 12 days. Ho develops his brief further, populating the island with elderly British subjects ‘like Alice Liddell, so seeking adventures and opportunities to contribute to national security’. If the brief sounds utterly cockamamie, it’s apparently founded on the Brexit illusion – ‘the nostalgia for childhood and reclaiming independence – all presciently captured in the surreal story of Alice’.

Presented as hand-drawn digital graphics, Ho’s drawing, The Pool of Tears was ‘inspired by the crying scenes in Alice in Wonderland, the hot spring bath made from recycled plastic, pipes and by-products of a desalination and ice-making heat exchange system.’ Desmet was particularly drawn in to Ho’s evocative fantasy world, keen to see it as the winner; but Spiller, while admiring the quality, strongly felt work was a unit-influenced form of representation he had seen before in the Bartlett school. Quek was struck by the high level of drawn skill, calling it ‘technically proficient in terms of composition, colour and shade.’ Pearman concurred with Spiller, but acknowledged Ho’s submission as ‘intensely detailed and adept work.’

Left The Pool of Tears. Hand-drawn digital graphics, 1016 x 1372mm
Below The Garden of Living Flowers. Hand-drawn digital graphics, 1016 x 1372mm
Culture
Eye Line drawing competition

Most climate change projects by architecture students either portray a dystopian future or attempt to avert it; few, if any, result in strange propositions that sow the seeds of their own destruction, as this commended one serves to. ‘Sited on the Rhône glacier in Switzerland, the project embodies the Ice Stupa typology by using melting ice to restore fragments of the lost glacier. With the advance of the new glacial landscape, the buildings succeed in incremental self-destruction,’ states Kielb.

Her three drawings evoke this attempt at regenerating the glacier and convey the all-too-disturbingly rare hostility of the Alpine context while keeping the function of the stupa as unclear as the blizzard in which it is portrayed. Desmet felt the idea of arresting the melting ‘nicely topical’, with the marooned buildings ‘beautifully composed’. While used to seeing similar drawings, Spiller particularly admired the feelings that they evinced, the series ‘conveying the coldness, the mist and the altitude’.

But despite the lack of explanation, there was the sense of something just out of reach, beguiling in its undefined nature, with Quek feeling that ‘as a series [the drawings] skill is in communicating a feeling without being specific.’

‘This shows that a totally digital drawing can have all the evocative power of the hand on paper,’ concluded Pearman. ‘The sense of poetic impermanence comes through strongly.’
John Arthur Wells-Thorpe
1928-2019

Architect who prized functionality with creativity, who worked tirelessly on ecclesiastical buildings and who devoted much of his retirement to South Downs Health Trust.

Over some 40 years of architectural activity, John Wells-Thorpe and his colleagues carried out building commissions primarily in England but also internationally. As many as 50 built developments covered civic, commercial, educational, ecclesiastical, medical, residential and workplace projects.

Dozens of John’s parallel activities and responsibilities – sometimes to architecture, sometimes to the church or education or society – extended beyond the remits of the OBE which he was awarded by the Queen in 1995 for services to architecture. A vice president on RIBA Council, he also travelled extensively as president of the Commonwealth Association of Architects.

Trained at Brighton College of Art, after National Service in Singapore he worked in two practices: first Gotch and Partners (1953-1971), where he started as a trainee and in time became a partner; then in his own practice of Wells-Thorpe and Suppel (1971-1991).

The practice’s output demonstrated both functionality and creativity, whether they showed sympathy for the scale of their surroundings like Hove Town Hall (1970-74) or care for building detail. The latter is demonstrated on buildings such as Brighton’s Brighthelm Centre (1987) fronted by Helen Skelton’s sculpture of ‘Loaves and Fishes’; or at Dulwich College where John designed the Shackleton Science Block (opened by Lord Shackleton, the explorer’s son, in 1989), the new work with its red and buff brick livery matching the neighbouring buildings by Charles Barry.

Having retired from practice in 1991 John embarked on a different lease of working life. Already chairman of Hove’s Martlets Hospice, he was also now made chairman of the NHS South Downs Health Trust. Over six years he was able to enjoy being a client who commissioned other architects to design buildings. A series of neighbourhood medical facilities were planned, addressing local needs such as the care of the mentally ill, the frail elderly or injured children. Here John’s management talents flourished as always, while he continued to contribute to national medical publications which dealt with the nature of healing through thoughtfully designed environments.

In his 2009 book ‘Behind the Facade’ John gave only hints about his more personal life. From his earliest student written thesis on Modern Church Architecture, checked by his diocesan bishop George Bell of Chichester, John clearly remained a loyal member of the established Anglican church. This was in spite of the church’s harsh ruling that his father, having committed suicide, was allowed only to be buried in an unmarked grave. Undeterred, perhaps forgiving, perhaps strengthened by regular visits to a retreat, John’s involvement in the design and repair of places of worship lasted a lifetime.

In the book we find a man with a rich sense of humour and keen wit, understanding all aspects of the times and situations in which he lived. John shows how critical it is for the head of a private sector practice to react sensibly to the inevitable rises and falls of the national economy. So he surrounded himself with a good team of design and technical collaborators to whom he was prepared to delegate and for whom he knew that it was his responsibility to find work. He later wryly reflected ‘never talk to shopkeepers about aesthetics or the greater public good’.

He had two children, Frances and Peter, by his first marriage to Ann. He married Meta van der Steege, then director of RIBA London region, in 1989. To her he dedicated his book. He is survived by her, Ann and their children.

Stephen Adutt
A fuller version of this obituary appears on the website of The Regency Society

IN MEMORIAM

James Arthur Roberts
LYMINSTON, ELECTED 1946

Thomas Anthony Cross
LEWES, ELECTED 1959

Peter Thompson
OXFORD, ELECTED 1960

Michael Robin Hurley
STOURPORT-ON-SEVERN, ELECTED 1975

John Nathaniel Rachkind
GODALMING, ELECTED 1993

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Russ Edwards, Lendlease

Balancing standardisation and customisation in modular housing
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Punching above your weight through collaboration
Tomas Stokke, Co-founder, Haptic Architects

Disrupting the procurement landscape? Lessons on Integrated Project Insurance
Case study Derby Silk Mill by Bauman Lyons. Contributions from architect, client, contractor, insurer and construction lawyer

Building communities
Dr Jan Kattein, Founder, Jan Kattein Architects

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The widespread use of aerial photography during World War I introduced a new way of looking at the city and the built environment in general. From the inter-war period onwards, bird’s eye views emphatically expressed the height of tall structures such as skyscrapers, pylons and factory chimneys, while aerial views of groups of buildings highlighted geometry and pattern.

This photograph of Keeling House in east London, designed by Denys Lasdun in 1958, emphasises the novelty of the design – four stacks linked along diagonal axes to a central service core – and the difference in scale between the tall building and its surroundings. The lower slab block of Bradley House behind it, also by Lasdun, was demolished in 2005. Also noticeable is the contrast between the pre-existing terraces and pre-war housing blocks, and the long three- and four-storey blocks of the Minerva Estate on the right, built by the LCC between 1946 and 1948.

The photographer, Bill Toomey, was a keen flyer and often accompanied critic Ian Nairn in his plane excursions over the British Isles. We owe to him the numerous aerial views, published by the Architectural Press, documenting the changes in post-war British towns and cities. • Valeria Carullo
HIDE is a stunning new Michelin Star restaurant and bar in Piccadilly, London by LustedGreen Architects.

Oscar Acoustics’ specialist in-house installation teams applied 20mm of SonaSpray fcx in two bespoke whites to feature curved ceilings on both the ground and first floors. SonaSpray controls reverberation, creating a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere within a space.

Photo by Andrew Meredith

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