MacEwen Award 2020
Park Palace Ponies, Liverpool
Shelter from the Storm, London
Margate Caves, Kent
Grand Junction, St Mary Paddington
Tŷ Pawb, Wrexham
Beacon of Light, Sunderland
Plus five shortlisted projects
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This is our annual issue that showcases a different kind of architecture. Our MacEwen Award is all about social responsibility, ‘architecture for the common good’. That’s deliberately vague – we never know what we’re going to receive and are often surprised, but our judges know it when they see it. It attracts entries from well-known names and relative unknowns alike. And while we don’t rule out zingy architecture and large budgets, we are equally impressed by projects with virtually no budget and little or no visible architecture, just ideas that have borne fruit.

The skills of architects often lie in enabling, organising, persuading, re-using: these are the more unsung aspects of design perhaps, but they can lead to projects of great impact. Relatively small interventions can rescue buildings and give them and their communities a new lease of life. Let’s not forget that this year’s Royal Gold Medal winner, Grafton Architects, was originally part of an extraordinarily fertile grouping of Irish architects including fellow Gold Medallists O’Donnell + Tuomey. Originally with little work, they applied their collective thinking to re-imagining a whole section of Dublin previously earmarked for clearance – and were able to follow through and implement it. Just ideas, as we say. But what powerful ideas they can be.

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Chris Dyson
Architects on its new dinosaur-friendly café in Crystal Palace: ribaj.com/crystalpalacecafe

“Chris Dyson, Architects on its new dinosaur-friendly café in Crystal Palace: ribaj.com/crystalpalacecafe”

Below MacEwen Award 2020 winner, Park Palace Ponies, page 12.
If it felt, by the end of the MacEwen award judging process, that there was a greater emphasis than usual on projects involving re-use, it may have been due in no small part to judge Cecilie Sachs Olsen, who had a sustainability axe to grind. One of the three curators of last year’s Oslo Architecture Triennale, Olsen had devoted the whole of that event to curating a collective vision for urban degrowth predicated on a radically reduced global carbon footprint; and when it came to scrutinising the 30 longlisted projects for this fifth year of the award, she was taking no prisoners.

That she was at the other end of a Skype connection only increased her resolve to convince the other judges of her agenda. These were planner Kathy MacEwen, daughter of Malcolm and Anni MacEwen, the former RIBAJ editor and planner, after whom the award is named; MawsonKerr’s Dan Kerr, one of the architect enablers for the Star and Shadow Cinema collective in Newcastle, last year’s MacEwen winner; Hana Loftus, co-director at award-winning practice HAT Projects; Kathryn Tombling, director and head of housing at BDP and award sponsor; and award instigator and RIBAJ editor Hugh Pearman. Gathered in a meeting room at BDP’s Clerkenwell headquarters, all needed to be won round.

The approach certainly helped whittle down the longlist, which saw some ostensibly worthy projects fall away in the wake of the developing theme of ‘loose-fit and long life’. Specificity of purpose for instance, such as the educational one of aLL Design’s zany, eye-catching Neuron Pod in east London, failed to capture judges’ imaginations. ‘Do we need profligate statement buildings when we need to be thinking about ones with multiple purposes if we build at all,’ challenged Sachs Olsen. ‘I’m not convinced this is what we need now. I get the good intentions but it could have been done in a way that made a magical classroom experience but with a bigger sustainability message.’

Any inking that renewal was being done for renewal’s sake also met with judges’ opprobrium. An impressive piece of landscaping at Birmingham’s Centenary Square seemed to remove a sizeable patch of green and replace it with hard paving, saying, according to Kerr, ‘nothing really about either sustainability or biodiversity’. Civic though it was, it slipped off the shortlist, whereas the stacked timber pallets of the learning landscape for Plymouth’s Riverside Primary School stayed on. So Hauser+ Wirth’s indulgent rural regeneration of Braemar’s Fife Arms checked out too, while tp bennett’s Manchester office Windmill Green and Featherstone Young’s Ty Pawb car park, both refurb, clocked in. ‘The default position in the office sector seems to be demolish rather than re-use,’ Pearman noted of Windmill Green. ‘This is a nice riposte to that.’

As an award for ‘architecture for the common good,’ it’s a surprise that housing exemplars have not figured more on this longlist; but these remain few and far between. This year saw two apparently similar projects submitted: community land trust development Manor Farm, Stretham, by Haysom Ward Miller and Mole Architects’ Marmalade Lane co-housing, both in Cambridgeshire – but both came in for criticism. Loftus praised the former’s ‘exemplary community involvement’ and ‘leverage of market-led housing and imaginative house types to produce a
It’s a conflicting solution to a problem that shouldn’t exist." By contrast, Kathryn Tombling saw Shelter from the Storm as ‘embedded in the community; the interaction of the public with the homeless done in an intelligent, spatial way to make a very rich project’.

In the end, the lion’s share of the shortlist and individual winners comprised either bottom-up community endeavours or highly effective, top-down community support structures. What makes the award always such a pleasure to judge is the notion that it looks at the building only as part of a wider process of social engagement. This year’s winner did not disappoint in this regard, with physically the lightest of architectural touches compared to its enabling impact on the urban community.

In a rare intrigue, the MacEwen experienced some shortlist hard-bargaining, resulting in one entry falling off the initial dozen-strong shortlist; with Sachs Olsen agreeing to Sunderland’s embodied carbon-rich Beacon of Light standing on it only if Middlesbrough’s Greatham Creek seal and bird hide project came out. With most enjoying the student-built project’s fun, scale and imagination, the rusted steel and cubic tonnes of concrete groundworks were seemingly at odds with the damaged landscape it purported to heal. ‘It’s really sweet but I think they got it wrong’, mused MacEwen. ‘It’s contradictory, cherishing nature using the very materials that are synonymous with its destruction,’ noted Sachs Olsen. Last minute sustainability horse-trading at a MacEwen at the decade’s start, in which ponies galloped sustainability horse-trading at a MacEwen at the decade’s start, in which ponies galloped sustainability horse-trading at a MacEwen at the decade’s start, in which ponies galloped sustainability horse-trading at a MacEwen at the decade’s start, in which ponies galloped...
Park and ride

The winning MacEwen Award scheme, Park Palace Ponies offers children skills rarely seen in the inner city. Architect Harrison Stringfellow enabled the dream

Words: Hugh Pearman Photographs: HSA

In Numbers

1893
Year built

513m²
GIA

£50,000
Cost

5
Number of ponies

Delight builds on delight. First, discovering that architects Sarah Harrison and Su Stringfellow have known each other since they met at school aged four. Second, that they have a five-strong studio in a shop in the legendary Penny Lane. ‘We wanted a shop because we wanted to be somewhere people could see what architects do,’ Stringfellow explains. It’s very public: in your ears and in your eyes, you might say. The barber shop of the song, I later discover, is about a five minutes’ walk away. And then thirdly, when I go back to the original Beatles’ 1967 promotional film for the song – one of the very first music videos – there they are, the Fab Four, riding horses through a city. This brings me to Harrison Stringfellow’s project Park Palace Ponies, two and a half miles west of their studio. This is a riding school for the urban youth of south Liverpool – the Dingle area and beyond – which is every bit as surreal as any of the images in that film. Because it is inside a derelict music hall-turned-cinema.

In a way this is just a fortunate accident. The original idea, which came from their client Keith Hackett who had been behind another thriving community venture nearby, Toxteth TV, was for a new-build facility – as that was. Hackett had taken to equestrianism and soon realised that the whole business of horses – their welfare, their tackle, their grooming, the organisation of them as much as the riding and the companionship of them – together presented a package of fascinating skills that urban kids seldom have a chance to experience. ‘But collectively we felt that

Left: Something of a Detroit vibe: the ponies’ riding hall is made in the late Victorian Park Palace music hall. That ceiling IS safe. Below: Not where you’d expect to find a horse – the old theatre turned cinema has found a new use.

The RIBA Journal February 2020

ribaj.com

The RIBA Journal February 2020
the success of the project depended on the buy-in of the community,' says Stringfellow, ‘their support would be critical to issues of security.’

Hence the new charity taking a lease on the old 1893 music hall on the corner of Mill Street. Having closed as a cinema in 1959 and subsequently been used as a factory and for storage, the open covered space was just big enough to make a covered riding school for young children, with stables and a shipping-container office placed in a yard outside: the theatre itself, complete with patch-repaired ornamental ceiling and proscenium arch of Corinthian columns and broken pediment, is unheated and ventilated through high-level air grilles. Harrison Stringfellow put together a strategy for the venture which also included five acres of grazing on various sites nearby (there is plenty of council-owned open land though housing is now starting to encroach) plus an arrangement with local allotment holders to use the manure produced.

Community is important here: the Park Palace, as Hackett points out, is pretty much on the dividing line between South Liverpool's two Irish communities – the orange and the green. He points out a ‘Peace Wall’ enclosing a housing estate across the street: deemed at one point to be a necessary measure during marching season. But in the memory of the community, he says, the Park Palace was neutral ground: everyone went there and mingled. In the community consultation sessions organised by Harrison Stringfellow, this affection for the place came through.

Started as a 12-month trial, the venture has been a considerable success and so continues: one school party was leaving and another arriving while I was there, the ponies trotting gently round their arena (it's not big enough for cantering, I was told, and children wanting to progress graduate to a bigger riding school further away). The community has bought into it, as have the powers that be, notably the British Equestrian Foundation which funded the pilot period.

There is almost no new ‘architecture’ to be seen, it's all in the planning and consultation and enabling. Physical works on site are done in self-build, DIY fashion: indeed I found Hackett himself there painting a wall in a back room. Having proved itself, it could now become permanent and the architect...
has put in a planning application. As a way of bringing life and interest to a neglected part of town, it’s terrific.

Of course there’s a ‘ruin porn’ aspect to this – there’s no doubt we judges all loved the seductive image of the horses in the old music hall and, as Hana Loftus observed, it has a post-industrial Detroit quality to it. But as she added, ‘They’ve done the minimum to the building to make it do what it needs to do – there’s no gestural anything.’ For Dan Kerr, last year’s MacEwen winner, it was the way a threatened building first acquired a new temporary use, and could well now become permanent, that appealed. Cecilie Sachs Olsen, a curator at the recent Oslo Triennale with its theme of ‘degrowth’, sees it as exemplary in its incredibly lean use of materials (even the stabling is second-hand and the arena barriers demountable and re-usable) to achieve a considerable beneficial social impact. And Kathy MacEwen pointed out the therapeutic qualities of riding – her own parents after whom the award is named, both partially disabled ‘with two good legs between them’ as they used to joke, themselves took to riding for this reason.

So this steampunk, anti-posh Liverpudlian youth version of the Spanish Riding School of Vienna is the MacEwen Award 2020 winner. For a project cost of around £50,000, Park Palace Ponies has got the horsepower. •

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Shelter from the Storm
North London
Holland Harvey

Here’s a sobering thought: around a third of the homeless people looked after by the charity Shelter from the Storm (SFTS) at any one time are, according to its director Sheila Scott, in full time employment – but don’t have enough to pay their rent, so are evicted. Their guests – typically there for four or five weeks as they are helped to get their lives back on track – are all ages and sexes. Among their number are business people and professionals who have found themselves struggling. It’s time for most of us to reassess our stereotype idea of what a ‘homeless person’ is.

This knowledge informs the design of young architect Holland Harvey for SFTS’s new base in a north London 1970s council estate – unusually singled out by the MacEwen judges for special distinction as our only ‘highly commended’ project. It’s about dignity, a non-institutional feel, optimism, and involving the surrounding community. ‘We had to understand the mindset of a person entering a shelter, as a guest, for the very first time. Sensitivity, domesticity and warmth were key to this project,’ says Jonathan Harvey. The 20-strong practice is committed to a strong strand of pro-bono work in its portfolio, preferring to use its time productively on that rather than entering long-odds competitions.

Once Islington Council had provided the site – a dark, medium-sized, former estate supermarket beneath a decently-built deck-access slab block – the practice had just four weeks to design and get planning approval for it, Harvey working with his colleague Chloe Anderson and SFTS clients Sheila Scott and Matt Conlon. Despite a public meeting to explain the project, this accelerated programme at first raised hackles among the neighbours, given that the site had previously been known for anti-social behaviour and given the stigma of the word ‘homeless’.

But they won through at a tumultuous planning meeting and today most of the early protestors are reconciled with this well designed and run project, and some volunteer there. It’s easy to see why. This is good design on a budget, with a kitchen and community café at its heart. The discreet supervised guest entrance at one side of the building provides a welcoming introduction and an interview room while the community café entrance at the other side (the original supermarket frontage) is inviting, even intriguing:

Words: Hugh Pearman
Photographic: Nicholas Worley

Left: just another hip café? No – this is the public face of an unusual homeless shelter made from an old supermarket space in a council estate.

Below: On a previously lifeless service street is the guest entrance and reception for the facility beneath a deck-access walkway.

The interaction of the general public with the homeless in an intelligent, spatial way makes it a very rich project
Judge Kathryn Tombling
certainly reassuring to passers-by, though this is in a lightly-trafficked pedestrian part of the estate.

The architect has made good use of its experience in commercial café and domestic projects. "There’s diversity in the work we do which means we have a network of consultants and clients we can call on," says Anderson. Indeed its introduction to SFTS came via another client, a successful bakery chain which is represented on the SFTS board.

The male and female dormitories (38 beds at present, divided into four-bed sections) are basic but good, with individual storage. There are good showers and support spaces, with the right degree of privacy afforded within what has to be a communal facility. There is training provided when necessary (lessons in English, the benefits system, healthy eating and so on), and a space for community events.

The finishes and fittings are appropriately tough, secure and safe but don’t have that look about them, and that took a lot of work and cajoling to achieve. Just getting a satisfactory timber floor rather than vinyl or linoleum was a battle they won. Offsetting the potentially chilly feel of affordable white tiles in the showers with a warm sage-green colour elsewhere was another. Exposed services and raw surfaces are softened by pendant globe lamps, furniture is mostly good second hand or transferred from SFTS’ previous premises near Camden.

Unlike those, this one is effectively permanent, which allowed the tight budget to actually be a little more generous. Construction cost was £450,000 plus VAT but there was a lot of gifting from suppliers on top of the pro-bono work by consultants. ‘We wandered round the Clerkenwell showrooms begging,’ recalls Harvey.

Our MacEwen judges were, as you’d hope, impressed by this example of enlightened change of use. As Kathy MacEwen put it: ‘What a great idea – it’s a community café that the homeless also use. It’s about not knowing who’s homeless or who isn’t when you’re in there.’ BDP’s Kathryn Tombling observed: ‘It’s a dignified and lovely environment to be in.’ And Cecilie Sachs Olsen added: ‘I really like it. This is a structural way of embracing rather than dealing with homelessness. It’s a much more holistic approach. Integrating and erasing boundaries, it shows a lot of care. It’s a careful and responsible approach.’

For Matt Conlon as a day-to-day manager of the project, it’s working. ‘Since we’ve been here, things have been so much calmer,’ he said. That is down to the thoughtful layout, where both entrances and all the communal areas can be taken in at a glance from the kitchen. From the guests’ point of view the environment feels reassuring and friendly. This is shelter in the best sense of the word. •
Light in a dark place

What began as the restoration of a visitor attraction is now a source of community wellbeing in a deprived bit of Margate

Words: Isabelle Priest Photographs: Rich Chivers

It’s nice and all from the right heart

Judge Hana Loftus

Below Architecturally the visitor centre had to fit into a mixed spot with rendered social housing on one side and a listed lint building on the other.

Margate Caves
Margate, Kent
Kaner Olette Architects

Community consultation rarely gets good press. Clients tend to see it as a burden and when Sarah Vickery, chair of the Margate Caves Community Education Trust (formerly Friends of the Margate Caves), came to fill out funding applications to get the former tourist attraction reopened, that’s how she saw it too: a long-winded ‘box ticking exercise’.

That was back in 2013. The caves, an 18th century chalk mine, had been a tourist attraction since 1863 but had been shut for nearly 10 years. A health and safety prohibition notice was served on them in 2004 and seven years later the council submitted a planning application to build seven houses over the top that would have effectively closed them for good.

As lease-owner of the nearby Shell Grotto, Vickery felt losing one of the town’s main visitor attractions for a handful of houses was a bad deal for Margate and called a public meeting to stop it. Of the 100 people who attended, the group that emerged would have been happy with restoring the caves’ interior enough to reopen as piece of heritage and just replace the knackered Portakabins that had served as the reception since the 1950s. But the consultations revealed that local people also really wanted a community facility; something that could operate as a village hall for sewing clubs, church groups and the like.

‘The site is on the border of Cliftonville and Margate,’ explains Vickery. ‘Cliftonville used to have very big hotels. There was always a ballroom you could use, but they have all gone.’

The tourist attraction’s community function as well as the good work the organisation is doing locally led this year’s MacEwen judges to commend it. Margate still has its problems, despite the national attention garnered for its regeneration springing from the Turner Contemporary. The two wards neighbouring Margate Caves are in the 10% most deprived in the UK, with entrenched generational poverty and 53% child poverty. Causes include a transient population, poor housing managed by absent private landlords and health and addiction issues as well as poor educational provision over decades. The average reading age for a middle aged person is that of an eight year old. London boroughs are relocating housing-list residents there too.

‘On Northdown Road,’ says Vickery, ‘the...”
Buildings
MacEwen Award – commended

The building curves at one end to make way for telegraph pole wires that could not be moved because of the tight budget. Bright blue window frames add a pop of colour that helps the building stand out. The entrance is cut deep into the elevation with a brick soffit and patterned detailing that accentuate the cave analogy. This opens into a large bright white all-in-one visitor reception, café and shop, positioned along a single long counter so one person can manage the whole process.

To the left is the ticketed interpretation room and tunnelled entrance to the rather surprising and church-like caves, to the right is the community room, which is also independently accessible via a side entrance when the museum is shut. The space can accommodate 100 people theatre-style or be divided for use by two groups simultaneously. Prices are low, like those in the café: £20 for half a day. To date the room has been used for book launches, children’s clubs, self-help groups, and recently had its first wedding enquiry.

But what makes the building a MacEwen Award commended project is how it has got the community involved. One hundred people volunteered for the archaeological dig (it’s on the edge of an Iron Age fort), 3,000 locals have visited the caves for free since it opened in August, and it will soon start running accredited tourism training courses and a community gardening programme on the scrub land above the caves. The scheme is a financially sustainable asset for the wellbeing of the community. An elderly neighbour who had initially behaved antisocially has become one of the café regulars, and when someone attempted to break in four days after the centre opened, another neighbour became de facto community watch. In an area long-accustomed to mediocrity, the project has also raised aspirations of what the built environment can be and the self worth it can provide. This was done by grassroots action, with locals, volunteers and professionals putting in more effort than they had to. As judge Hana Loftus remarks: ‘It’s nice and all from the right heart.’

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experience was so different to the Turner, you may as well have been on the moon. The need was there. The brothel, people trafficking... on the evening we opened a murdered body was being carried out of the house over the road.' Consequently, the project became as much about the community as visitors. The two components financially support each other: by effectively making each part separate buildings, the scheme received both Big Lottery and Heritage Lottery capital funding – one of the few in the country that has been awarded both.

Architect Kaner Olette has been involved almost since the beginning, contorting the process and design to the changing dynamics of the project. Most of the time the team was working blind – they say the council didn’t want to engage and there was fake information that the caves were full of poisonous gas. The restorative and conservation work on the caves themselves was the critical issue. They had to be engaging and something people would pay to see. The architecture was about ensuring the interface with them was right – the entrance, interpretation aspect, tunnel, accessibility, handrails and lighting.

From the street the building is a simple slanted form with ramps up behind an existing crazy paving retaining wall to bridge the 2m level difference. The narrative is monochrome too, but the inverse of the caves. Externally the building is Italian black brick, like the flint stratifications with white specks of chalk, held together by dark mor

IN NUMBERS
£945,000 total building contract cost (excl fees)
£90,000 total caves restoration cost
290m² GIFA
£3,258.62 cost per m²
20.8 kgCO₂/m² (A rating)

Above The community space can be divided into two by concertina partition walls. Each part has its own kitchenette and access to the garden.

Below View of the community space from the rear garden.
Grand Junction
St Mary Paddington, London
Dow Jones Architects

A warm café onto the canal, kids’ activity upstairs behind the glint of faience, a majestic nave set out for events. This is Grand Junction, St Mary Paddington, full of life even on a grey weekday thanks to the work of Paddington Development Trust and Dow Jones Architects.

Once the tallest building round here, St Mary was a mission church originally squeezed between tight terraces alongside the Grand Union Canal. Now, just a few hundred yards from the Westway flyover, it is one of the few historic remnants among the sixties tower blocks of London’s Warwick Estate. Here 40% of children live in poverty, despite the gleaming offices being built nearby. Grenfell Tower is not far away.

The church wasn’t well used. The north door was blocked up and Father Henry Everett inherited around 20 parishioners when he took over a decade ago. He and Paddington Development Trust, which was already running community activities nearby, saw its potential. ‘The estate lacked anything remotely uplifting to be proud of,’ says Father Henry. This 1869 grade 1 listed church, designed by GE Street, was important in defining the ambition for quality architecture – and for unlocking sources of funding through the Heritage Lottery Fund in particular.

Architect Biba Jones of Dow Jones describes the project as a staircase and lifts, but it is much more than that. A new building offers spaces for community use and opens up access to the reconditioned church for more. It slots into a few metres (2.5m at the narrowest) between the west face of the church and its neighbouring school, rising to three storeys and down to the level of the newly restored crypt. Café, loan, community and education rooms – all with level access – work for the church too (not to forget the secret door in from the school). Outside light changes the nuances of the new structure’s faience every time you look at it, and with its projecting top windows and signage it acts like the welcoming beacon both client and practice desired.

MacEwen judges were particularly impressed with the way the project works with the listed church and the role local residents played in getting a strong solution. Last year’s MacEwen Award winner, Dan Kerr of Mawson Kerr Architects, said: ‘It had the greatest numbers of letters of support at planning received by Westminster and had been on the Heritage at Risk Register. It seems a sign that the community is listened to and valued.’ Judge Hana Loftus added: ‘Next to a grade I church it would have been an uphill struggle.’

A dedicated group of residents was closely involved over the four years from pre-planning to detailed design. Biba Jones is clear that the firm’s voice helped to ensure the value of a strong modern design was appreciated through the planning process.

Local involvement has built a sense of ownership, community and goodwill around
two interns and two apprentices were recruited and regular volunteering sessions saw 40 people scraping the brick pigment on the Victorian concrete and digging out the soil of the casual drainage channels in the crypt before sifting it for archaeological finds. This volunteering required some organising by the architect as well as two extra site huts, including a ladies’ loo.

A heritage group of residents worked with the team to depict the area’s history in tiles that punctuate the walls of the concrete stairwell on the new building. Local people came in for scaffold tours and could join workshops with artist Linda Florence to design tiles that were used to enliven toilet cubicles. These and ceramic signage by David Sudlow and Simon Leach mark this building out as special.

This project has drawn a community together in turning a heritage white elephant into a valuable asset, recovering its original purpose as mission church, although with a wider remit. Run for six days a week by the Paddington Development Trust (reverting to Father Henry on Sundays) it is used for yoga, youth work, drama, Black History Month events, films, boxing and screen printing, and is able to draw events that bring in revenue, like the launch of Music Declares Emergency. ‘It lifts the feel of the neighbourhood,’ concludes Paddington Development Trust’s Toby Gale.

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The nave of the grade I listed church has had its ceiling cleaned and restored.

The crypt has been brought back into use as well as being made accessible.

IN NUMBERS

£3.5m total contract cost
£2.19 m² Cost of new building
3114 m² GFA (new building)

Credits
Architect Dow Jones Architects
Client Paddington Development Trust and the Vicar and Parochial Church Council of St Mary Magdalene, Paddington
Structural engineer Momentum
MEP engineer Max Fordham
Quantity surveyor William DICK
Approved building inspector Ascend
Interpretation Simon Leach and David Sudlow
Artist Linda Florence
Access consultant Access = Design
Catering consultant Lynda Brewer
Main contractor Lengard

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It was a cold, mizzling day when architect Sarah Featherstone, curator James Harper and I visited Tŷ Pawb, Featherstone Young’s newly-refitted arts centre and covered market in the north Welsh town of Wrexham. The name means Everybody’s House, and like a house, it accommodates and welcomes one and all: gallery visitors, shoppers, passers-through, and rain-soaked journalists unprepared for the wet Welsh weather.

Funded by Arts Council of Wales and the Welsh government, Tŷ Pawb is a ‘quiet retrofit’ of a former multi-storey car park. The imposing and awkwardly-placed brick behemoth had loomed since the 1990s over a no-man’s-land at the end of the high street, near a collection of warehouse-style superstores that skirt the ring road at the edge of town. The site had also housed the ‘People’s Market’, one of three markets in Wrexham, but whose popularity had dwindled over time.

From the outset it was agreed that relocating the Oriel Wrecsam gallery (Tŷ Pawb’s previous incarnation) should not displace the stall holders. Yet, perhaps inevitably, this group put up the most vocal opposition. Featherstone says one particularly grumpy poster saying ‘If you want art…go to Chester!’ became an impetus to prove art needn’t be a minority interest. That art gallery and market vendors could not only coexist harmoniously, but actively benefit each other, led to an innovative business model which integrates the revenue-generating market and car park into the programme of the inter-

The RIBA Journal February 2020

Tŷ Pawb houses a market, multiple community events and an art gallery all in one former car park

Words: Michèle Woodger
Photographs: James Morris

It’s a good example to highlight an approach to re-use that really works
Judge Cecilie Sachs Olsen

nationally-recognised arts organisation. The concept is as timely as it is original: ‘Every town in Britain has a car park like this’, states MacEwen Award judge Hugh Pearman. ‘If we are going to have fewer cars, we’ll have more of these opportunities for re-use’.

After leaving its original home, Oriel Wrecsam temporarily moved into a vacant unit alongside the traders, initiating a relationship which would develop organically over time. The liminal location of the site turned out to be key to the project’s success, and its identity as a place of connectivity. Much like the covered arcades elsewhere in the town, Tŷ Pawb now acts as a convenient and convivial cut-through between the disparate shopping areas; four entrances enable this circulation, and an improved entrance on the out-of-town-facing side significantly lifts that profile of both building and street.

Combining market with art gallery, and linking previously unconnected retail zones together, has healed several ‘physical and psychological rifts’, says Featherstone.

The budget is £4.5 million, which judge Kathy MacEwen points out is ‘a lot of money for Wales’. But rather than wasting this on what Featherstone calls ‘prettifying’ the exterior, the beauty of the radical new model lies on the inside. The set-up makes use of an experimental concept which the architect

Left: The ‘People’s Wall’ is a trivision billboard featuring work by artists with the community.
Integrated seating allows shoppers to ‘inhabit’ the wall.

Right: The flexible ‘People’s Square’ can be partitioned with plastic strip curtains for different uses.

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MacEwen Award — commended

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describes as ‘baggy space’—minimal intervention, loose, permeable spaces, defined and shaped by different uses at a given time. Judge Cecilie Sachs Olsen points out that sometimes non-prescriptive interior spaces risk being unsuccessful: ‘too generic and generating waste through constant rebuilding, unlike stable rooms’. But this is not the case here: ‘This is more solid, permanent and serious’, she observes.

Deviating slightly from the original brief, the portion of the ground floor designated specifically to the arts centre comprises one large gallery and one performance space, with acoustic panelling and retractable seating. A semi-open space, formed by the backs of these two defined rooms and the gallery shop, can be used for virtually anything: smaller exhibitions, workshops, events—it’s an open proposition.

Around the perimeter of the ground floor are the integrated market stalls and a food court; with an open space in the middle called Square Bobl (People’s Square). Here, movable street furniture, seating and tables—designed and made by local artist Tim Denton in collaboration with school groups—helps to extend the streetscape into the building. Free wi-fi encourages people to linger and settle.

Part of this central area can be further screened off with translucent plastic strip curtains—a nod to the retail/market aesthetic—which divide the space into smaller zones. On the day we visited, a local adult daycare group was busy enjoying a Christmas lunch; music from the band entertained both diners and shoppers while the partitioning created an open space, forming the ‘People’s Wall’, a huge indoor trivision billboard. The current artist is Lydia Meehan as the band plays Elvis Presley in the background.

The latter is related to Tŷ Pawb’s involvement as the leading Welsh organisation at the Venice Art Biennale. In addition to the above, Tŷ Pawb collaborates regularly with artists for the ‘People’s Wall’, a huge indoor trivision billboard. The current artist is Lydia Meekan who works with asylum seekers in Wales.

If the team here wasn’t busy enough, Harper often finds himself addressing field queries from the general public and stall holders, including being told face to face what people do and don’t like about what’s on in the gallery. Other, less courageous, curators might find this outside the job description but all the team take it in their stride. This unexpected outcome of sharing space offers a rare and valuable opportunity to gain direct, immediate feedback from a demographic that would never ordinarily engage with the arts. ‘It’s certainly never boring,’ he assures me, as the band plays Elvis Presley in the background. ‘He’s not wrong; the venue has clearly taken on a life of its own.’

Buildings
MacEwen Award — commended
FaulknerBrowns’ Beacon of Light uses sport to help bring social benefit to Sunderland’s residents. It’s a runaway success.

Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek Main image: Jill Tate, other photographs: Richard Chivers

On the ball

Probably one of the largest projects to be submitted for the MacEwen award, and in close proximity to the Stadium of Light, Sunderland’s £18 million Beacon of Light was initially written off by the judges as a form of glorified leisure centre; but, in the manner of a great sporting underdog, it backed the assumptions. ‘I passed over it and then came back to it, finding it fascinating the second time around,’ said judge Kathryn Tombling. ‘I was blown away by how much the community was involved at different levels involving the whole city’. Judge Dan Kerr

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As the driver for all its other initiatives. Here, at any time of the day or evening, you’ll see kids, adults and older people engaging in football, futsal, tennis, netball, badminton, judo, even paralympic sport boccia. On the day we visited, over 50 table tennis matches were in full swing, the space hireable by local groups at highly discounted rates due to the funds raised by renting the halls out for big corporate events or conferences. ‘The business model is a social enterprise whose profits are reinvested in the charity to keep everything affordable for the community at point of use,’ King tells me, before listing what else they run here. A prime focus is on health and wellbeing. The five-a-side community football initiative ‘Man V Fat’ challenges its overweight players to win their league not just by playing, but by shifting pounds as a team through a short programme of nutritional advice before a game. In a region where even childhood obesity is a problem, King says: ‘60 adult men lost 45 stone between them in 10 weeks. The scheme is so successful we’ve extended the initiative to women players, as ‘Hi-Weight the Lasses!’ There’s more serious health education too – physiotherapy referral rooms that can double as less institutional mental health touchpoints for veterans suffering from PTSD. And they’re adding an NHS-funded gambling addiction pilot programme, a problem that’s got a grip on young people too.

With the foundation’s administration offices occupying part of the first floor, the rest of it is given over to the Work Zone, where, in conjunction with the likes of Nissan, Barrett Homes and Jamie Oliver Ministry of Food, those struggling with employment can get the necessary Level 1, 2 & 3 NVQs in vocational skills to start their careers. It brings added benefits – for example, parents can take cookery classes to learn about healthy eating, and kids in literacy classes downstairs can come up and prepare foods associated with the stories they read. It’s the cross-purposing of programme and spaces associated with the stories they read. It’s the cross-purposing of programme and spaces involved at different levels involving the whole city.

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The Beacon of Light looking west over the River Wear.

Beacon of Light Sunderland

Architect: FaulknerBrowns

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that makes the Beacon feel so energised.

Probably the best example of this is in the 60-pupil school on the second floor, specifically for those kids who have been excluded and referred from schools or the local council. With classrooms, science labs and IT suites, it’s a high teacher-to-pupil ratio Ofsted school, sandwiched between the community functions below and that heavenly pitch on the roof. King adds there were understandable concerns about this being programmed into the facility, as there were certainly no precedents that they were aware of when they did it; but that it has been a real success story. ‘You feel as if this place is transformative for them,’ he tells me. ‘They might have a bad home life or other negative influences, but here they can check all that in at the door and inhabit a supportive and completely different, aspirational space.’

All connected by a grand stair rising from the ‘Street’ level, its 73 steps might be a reminder of the year Sunderland last won a major title; but with the foundation’s football scholarship producing, I’m told, seven players from last year’s women’s World Cup England squad, the only way is indeed, up.

‘It’s meaningful and a significant scale of project,’ offered MacEwen judge Hana Loftus. ‘It’s saying that community architecture – and this award – isn’t just about cute little grass-roots projects but strategic, large-scale ones.’ And with more than 6,000 people a week using its sport and outreach services, that scale component is key, thinks King. But, he feels, the numbers should not distract from the Beacon’s power to inspire on an individual level. ‘There aren’t many sports facilities where you enter a space like this; so when you see young kids walk up the steps for the first time to the rooftop pitch, you feel that, for them, it’s a bit like a dream.’
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Riverside Community Primary School

Outdoor Classroom

Plymouth, Devon

By A+R Architects, BA Education Studies and BA Early Childhood Studies students and academic teams, University of Plymouth

Riverside Community Primary School is on a hilly site close to the river Tamar in Plymoutn. Its grassy garden should have been an idyllic setting for learning and play, but in the 10 years since it opened, teachers and pupils had been unable to enjoy the space because it was buffeted constantly by strong winds.

A team of first year BA Architecture students from the University of Plymouth helped revitalise the plot, in collaboration with students from the Early Childhood Studies and Education departments. The main objective was to develop an outdoor learning space with a fire pit as focal point. The aspirins of architects would experience various job-stages, from briefing to post-completion evaluation, within a live nine-week time frame.

Students grouped into teams to generate a design concept and propose it to the school. Each scheme had to include locally sourced recycled timber; in the end the entire structure (with the exception of a brick surround for the fire pit) was of recycled materials, including 130 timber pallets.

It’s educational aspiration and answers to the community

Judge Cecilie Sachs Olsen

Residents enjoy shared ownership rights at the Common House, right audits facilities including a garden offering space for play and growing plants.

With 42 homes over 0.9 hectares, Marmalade Lane is the largest co-housing development in the UK. Mole Architects worked with clients and commissioners TOWN, Trivselhus, Cambridge City Council and R1 Co-housing to deliver this successful and popular scheme.

The two- to five-bedroom houses and apartments have numerous shared facilities including gardens, laundry, a hall and kitchen for shared meals, a workshop, a gym and a ‘common house’ for guests. All residents have a financial stake in the common property.

Key values at the heart of this development are sustainability, intergenerational living, community spirit and diversity – and an acknowledgement that social interaction and shared responsibilities create a supportive, vibrant neighbourhood. Eliminating isolation for older residents was crucial: ‘It’s an inter-generational scheme which is important in this world,’ judge Kathy MacEwen observes.

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Buildings
MacEwen Award — shortlist

Windmill Green Office Buildings
Manchester
TP Bennett / FORE partnership

Windmill Green, an 80,000 ft² office building in Manchester, is the first multi-let office in the city to be rated BREEAM Outstanding. It began life as a vacant 1970s concrete office block that was acquired by FORE Partnership, a real estate investment firm, which engaged architect TP Bennett to carry out a deep retrofit.

The project is a commercial one ‘with good intentions’, as judge Cecilie Sachs Olsen puts it. FORE was adamant that reducing the carbon footprint and promoting healthy living be intrinsic to the design; one way of doing this was to retain the concrete frame. An efficient facade system interprets local character through the use of terracotta, bifacial solar panels, ultra-efficient LED lighting and underfloor displacement ventilation with exposed soffits were introduced. Biophilic features include a green wall, a green roof and an apiary. ‘Developers and commercial architects need to be doing more stuff like this,’ says judge Hugh Pearman. ‘The default position today seems to be to demolish rather than reuse. This is a nice riposte to that, and worthy of commendation.’

The building also has a cycle entrance, 40 bike racks, 32 lockers, shower facilities, maintenance centre, a Brompton Bike rental and a free fleet of scooters made by a local business.

Windmill Green has been a springboard for social initiatives such as a construction skills programme creating 16 apprenticeships for local people, and offers free space for community groups and charities.

The judges were impressed that a commercially driven venture should place sustainability and community so firmly in the picture. ‘It has social impact. [You can see] that they have tried here,’ says judge Hana Loftus. »

When the teachers at Torriano Primary School in Camden engaged Hayhurst and Co to build a STEM Laboratory for their own pupils and others in the district, they hoped that working with an architect would ‘bring a little magic to the table’. They wanted pupils to experience a sense of wonderment about science, technology, engineering and maths.

‘Nothing says fairy-tale more than a castle turret, and the Victorian school building had an unused, two-storey one. The architects created a small roof-top extension, an external “learning terrace” and a living wall, in just Slim’ – turning it, in judge Hugh Pearman’s words, into ‘an intriguing place to go to do science’.

‘The lab is for practical experiments, so the architects adopted a similarly hands-on approach with the designs, asking pupils, teachers and the artist-in-residence to test, draw and model activities. The result is a breathtaking double-height space occupied by a laminated plywood superstructure. This is also a piece of science apparatus – a literal and metaphorical framework for learning. Items can be dropped from, threaded through, projected onto and clamped to the frame. A black-out area can be used for light-based experiments. Constellations are etched into the faces of the timber; these provide fixing points as well as being useful learning tools.

‘The space is playful and well used… it makes use of what they have,’ says judge Cecilie Sachs Olsen.

A green wall teaches about nature and biodiversity, and, thanks to the flexible, non-prescriptive interior, the space has the capacity to evolve naturally too. »
Learning

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Bo Asmus Kjeldgaard

Five years before Copenhagen is supposed to achieve its goal of being the first carbon neutral capital, we ask its former mayor and instigator of this ambitious plan how near the city is to becoming the world’s most environmental.

So is Copenhagen an example of hedonistic sustainability?

I’d like to think so. When I got the mandate to make the city an environmental capital in 2010, I knew we had to change the system. Copenhagen’s story was about green growth, better citizen life and quality; but we needed everyone to be a stakeholder in that future. It was also about changing the idea of sustainability as suffrage. We argued that taking a bike means fewer cars, more trees, cleaner air – and you might engage with other people on a bike. It all makes for a more liveable city.

Ten years after you implemented it, how is the programme going? Will it reach its goal?

It’s moving forward. It helped that we adjusted the plan between 2017-2020 to make sure we were still on course. It involved extra investment of DKK800m (€92mn) to reduce business consumption of electricity and boost green mobility. This was partly because the city is affluent and growing by around 1000 residents a month. But it’s not only about adjustments for that but being seen to be on the case with the carbon neutral plan.

What’s the single biggest policy that will have contributed to achieving the goal?

Production of energy; 80% of the goal is about changing energy sources. Copenhagen is now negotiating with municipalities to generate electricity regionally. Part of the plan also uses biomass, whose sustainability is now being questioned by the UN, as if everyone used it as an energy source, there simply wouldn’t be enough of it.

Isn’t it just about the small scale? Could these policies be implemented in a bigger metropolis like London?

The key is ensuring that there is cross-party political consensus to a plan being implemented. If the long-term policy is stable and unswerving, everyone can get behind it. I’m really encouraged by young people’s climate awareness nowadays. Change feels more possible when it’s bottom-up as well as top-down.

What can we do to help arrest global mean temperature rises?

Stop the carbon quotas trade for a start. It’s not about technical fixes but concrete, achievable plans from every city. The challenges, with floods and fires, are formidable. In a short time the biggest refugee problem will be climate migration ones. The time to act is now.

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If you want to be a successful architect, if you’re passionate about architecture, you’re going to have to think outside of the box’. Selasi Setufe’s comment comes towards the end of two hours of intense conversation with the four founders of Black Females in Architecture on a quiet Saturday morning in east London. To write about them I’ve been trying to work out how to summarise both our discussion, and the organisation. But it’s not an easy task – the issues they are tackling and the themes they are addressing are wide ranging, relevant, progressive and urgent.

BFA was not planned, rather it emerged organically through the chance meetings of these four women, Setufe, Neba Sere, Akua Danso and Alisha Morenike Fisher, at various architecture industry events over 2017 and 2018. Drawn to each other through the shared experience of being black women negotiating a white male dominated industry, rather than shy away, they were pitching in. At the time Sere was a trustee of the Architecture Foundation, and Setufe an RIBA trustee. All four are recent graduates, and the breadth

Racial and gender diversity is an acknowledged issue in the profession. Four young black architects have taken it on and their organisation, BFA, is gathering pace.

Caption

Shahed Saleem

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Racial and gender diversity is an acknowledged issue in the profession. Four young black architects have taken it on and their organisation, BFA, is gathering pace.
Dania grew up in Tottenham, London, took her Part 1 at the University of Kent and was then an intern at the Architectural Review, also working in small practices. Her Part 2 at the University of Liverpool included a six-month Erasmus placement in Berlin, and on completion of the course she joined Scott Brownrigg, where she now works.

Morenike Fisher, also from north London, took her Part 1 at Hull which she completed with support from an RIBA student fund. Having graduated in 2017 she worked with Hunt Thompson Architects for 11 months before moving to Sweden to run her own company involved in environmental sciences. Following this she worked at Public Practice before moving to project development at Arcadis, where she is now.

Urgent message

When the four of them were operating in different spheres of architecture, each with their various networks and trajectories. Through their conversations and friendships they realised that the race and gender discrimination that they may have experienced or observed, and put to one side, was shared, so betraying a structural problem in the profession of architecture itself. The urgency of their message was illustrated with the speed of growth, as they were very quickly at the 250 WhatsApp group limit. So began the formalisation of the network into an organisation, a process that is still under way. Through the continued sharing and articulating of experiences among themselves, the group found that as much as race and gender-based inequalities, they were also raising questions about the nature and experience of architectural education and practice itself, and how this is affecting a new generation which is trying to navigate it. Here the intersectionality of BFA's observations and critique were not only salient but threw up further questions that go to the heart of architecture's future.

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E60 EI60

Remarkable appearance, remarkable performance

Schueco Jansen unlatched, non-rebated, single-acting steel fire doors

Schueco Jansen’s newly introduced range of unlatched steel fire doors with associated screens and partition walls, has everything a specifier could want: clean modern design, slender profiles, slim sightlines and a level of performance that’s been fully tested and approved.

Flexible thinking

BFA is acutely aware of these realities, and rails against them by proposing a flexible and inventive approach to architecture. It insists that not going on to Part 2 is not a failure, and that successful interdisciplinary careers can be pursued where collaboration, project-based initiatives and networks open up new possibilities. To build capacity and provide opportunities for its members, BFA has a series of regular events based on mentoring, networking, promoting and making black women practitioners visible – plus ‘living room sessions’ to provide a safe space to share experiences, a book club to discuss wider issues, and research projects. The founders are active public speakers with a growing international presence, having recently addressed forums in Melbourne and New York.

Throughout our conversation a number of key themes and issues circulate and overlap: that the experience of black women in architecture is specific, and that BFA exists to create a space where these experiences can be shared and addressed; that the power of architecture lies in its ability for social engagement, and is through collaborations across disciplines and individuals that positive change can be affected; that architecture needs to diversify in order to properly reflect the realities of the world that it operates within; and that with diversity comes new narratives that must be placed within the culture and practice of the profession. BFA exudes energy, passion and dynamism, and these four women have a message that resonates and is spreading. Along with advocacy for black women, this is an initiative that has the potential to speak for many, and so influence the production of architecture, inspiring buildings and spaces with social purpose and a responsiveness to the contemporary, complex and diverse worlds that we inhabit.

RIBA Journal February 2020
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Shaded Saleem teaches architecture at the University of Westminster, and is the author of ‘The British Mosque, an architectural and social history’.
Fire safety gains momentum

As safety climbs back up the political agenda, the issues – and some solutions – were discussed at a RIBA/Hilti conference

Safety in buildings has been put firmly back on the policy agenda. In last October’s Queen’s Speech, the government confirmed it would implement the recommendations of Dame Judith Hackitt’s review with the introduction of a building safety bill back on the policy agenda. In last October’s Queen’s Speech, the government confirmed it would implement the recommendations of Dame Judith Hackitt’s review with the introduction of a building safety bill. The background briefing note issued by the prime minister’s office alongside the Queen’s Speech made clear its objectives. These include ‘providing clearer accountability for, and stronger duties on, the occupier, safety in buildings throughout the building’s design, construction and occupation, with clear competence requirements to maintain high standards.’

The RIBA and its expert advisory group have been working towards these objectives through measures such as the planned fire safety overlay to the RIBA Plan of Work, and improved fire safety training for both practicing and student architects. Past RIBA president Jane Duncan, director of her own practice and chair of the RIBA fire safety expert advisory group, has urged architects to take on the principal designer role. Speaking at the conference ‘Raising the bar in passive fire protection’ the evolving role of architects post-Grenfell’, last year, which was hosted by RIBAJ Journal in association with Hilti, she said: ‘If architects are acting as lead designers, then we need to step up.’

Change has begun

The two and a half years since the Grenfell Tower fire have seen other changes. The government has banned combustible materials in the external walls of high-rise residential buildings over 18m. But there have also been further fires in lower-rise buildings, such as the Beechmere residential care home in Crewe, Cheshire, and an apartment building at The Hamptons, in Worcester Park, south west London. ‘In these fires we haven’t seen fatalities thankfully, but there is a concern that these were in timber frame buildings,’ pointed out Duncan. Weaknesses were also exposed by an independent review of housebuilder Persimmon’s operations, whose findings were published last December. This noted that missing or incorrectly installed cavity barriers in the housebuilder’s timber frame homes was a ‘systemic nationwide problem, which is a manifestation of poor culture coupled with the lack of a group build process.’

Working with layers

Such occurrences have put the spotlight on the fundamentals of design and installation of passive fire protection, particularly when using offsite construction systems. Manufacturer Hilti has worked with timber system manufacturers and Marriott’s Moxy hotel brand to improve protection for the fundamentals of design and installation of passive fire protection, particularly when using offsite construction systems. ‘Timber is a very predictable material in fire, but the layers in CLT can give variation in the amount of timber lost in a fire, the char rate,’ says Alastair Brockett, firestop engineer with Hilti. ‘Generally, research has shown that the multi-layer systems, with their thinner layers, have greater average char rates. The number of layers may make a difference to the char rate of 0.6mm per minute or 0.7mm per minute, which doesn’t sound much, but that becomes important over the duration of a fire.’

Intumescent sealants are conventionally used to fill service openings in timber systems to prevent spread of smoke and fire, but Hilti came up with a solution that is as pre-fabricated as the timber system itself, as Brockett explains: ‘It seemed crazy to bring in wet materials for a dry construction method, so this is a dry fit firestopping using intumescent blocks, which doesn’t depend on adhesive or installer skills and can be checked visually to ensure it has been correctly fitted.’

Passive protection

Until recently, firestopping has typically been something of an afterthought during design and construction. ‘When it comes to buying and specifying fire safety products, we’ve not experts. We need to shift procurement,’ Niall Rowan, chief executive officer of the Association for Specialist Fire Protection (ASFPI), told the audience. Hilti’s Brockett meanwhile says passive fire protection is receiving greater attention. ‘Architects coming to our CPD seminars tell us that their university training didn’t cover firestopping but now, particularly in the light of Grenfell, there is a focus on fire protection. For me, firestopping is a basic minimum requirement for all buildings.’

With insurers also putting a greater focus on fire safety, as noted by one of the conference attendees, there is added impetus on the act now. As Richard Hilt, conference chair and professor of chemistry and fire science at the School of Physical Sciences and Computing, University of Central Lancashire, stressed, ‘While we are waiting for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s actions to come into force, architects can show solidarity and say we can do better.’
Sustainability criteria in the RIBA Awards are becoming increasingly stringent

Eleanor Young

In 2019 the top level of the profession firmly grasped the need for change in the face of the climate emergency with Stirling Prize winners signing up to Architects Declare. This year it must make good on those promises and start the transition to carbon zero buildings.

As hundreds of practices log in to the RIBA Awards system they will see that the institute is doing its part too. There has long been a requirement for sustainability information in entries, but now the judging criteria for all the awards embody these values.

Winners should be environmentally aligned to. The RIBA is working with the CIC, UK Green Building Council, Architects Declare and the UK Committee for Climate Change to ensure these are industry wide metrics. The RIBA is also helping to drive operational energy efficiency upwards.

The RIBA Awards deadline is 20 February making the transition to a zero carbon world.

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Fashion victims

Where will the architectural pendulum swing next?

Hugh Pearman

One of the truisms of the built environment is that the once-despised becomes accepted and praised while the once-accepted and praised becomes despised. Wait long enough and the cycle may even repeat. Happy the architects, such as Sir Denys Lasdun, who live just long enough to see their work, having fallen into disfavour, swing right back into fashion.

In his January column Will Wiles noted the ever-shortening timescales between good buildings being built and moves being made to protect and preserve them. The record is surely held by Nick Grimshaw’s Waterloo International Terminal which was threatened by an air rights development before it was even built in the 1990s, leading to considerable protest which saw off the predatory project. Yes, it happened: a preservation battle for a building still at design stage, and I was one of the many signatories, at a time long before too-easy online petitions. The building should be listed now, of course, but we’ll have to assess the impact of the commercial development that eventually IS happening to this breakout building by Grimshaw, namely a two-level foodhall/entertainment venue below the tracks in the former international passenger waiting areas, not above them. It is due to open in 2021.

One consequence of the telescoping preservation timetable is overlap; one section of the commentariat continues to denigrate perfectly good buildings while another praises them to the skies. We see this with brutalism, we see this with postmodernism. So many people still regard certain now-listed buildings as crumbling hellholes simply because they happen to be council housing made of concrete. All concrete is not the same of course, any more than all brick is the same, but just try telling them that. And you still encounter sharp exchanges between the pro and anti when it comes to PoMo, though that is more of an intra-professional squabble. I get the sense that the general public is blissfully unconcerned about that one.

So here is the next test: the identikit edge-of-town greenfield housing estates churned out by the volume builders. They vary in their quality but there is an average type of house involved – vaguely traditional-looking apart from the bleak road layouts. While in the 1970s and 1980s, say, neo-Geo or faux Regency were popular with the builders, for some reason these days they nearly all have to have a slightly Victorian air to them. Very seldom terraced, though: with rare exceptions the volume-housebuilding world is all about detached houses with narrow wind-channelling gaps between them.

However, this has happened before: Sir John Betjeman was the first to find merit in the endless semi of inter-war suburbia he called Metroland. Who are we to assume that today’s equivalent homes (though in some cases notoriously poorly built and usually not rail-connected) will not come to be loved for similar reasons? The only thing we can be sure of is that tastes change. Which is why anyone trying to codify ‘beauty’ as an aspect of home-building is on a hiding to nothing.

Who are we to assume that today’s equivalent of Betjeman’s Metroland will not come to be loved for similar reasons?
Sinister cities

Do techno cities symbolise a brave new world or an oppressive tyranny?

Like a supercharged humanoid set to default TED Talk mode, Bjarke Ingels leapt to the stage of the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in January to unveil his latest bold vision of the future. The Danish architect responsible for conjuring a power plant with a ski slope on top and an apartment block in the form of an undulating figure of eight has now turned his hand to crafting a whole new city – with a radical vision for its modes of transport and the structure of its community.

‘Normal streets are a mess,’ Ingels declaimed, standing in front of a gigantic screen that showed a conventional city street being sliced up into three different ribbons, creating separate streets for fast-moving autonomous vehicles, people-powered bikes and hover-boards, and pedestrians.

This heady new place is the dream of Japanese car manufacturer Toyota. The company has commissioned Ingels to masterplan its new ‘living laboratory’ to be built across a 175-acre site in the foothills of Mount Fuji. Initially planned to house 2,000 people, the Toyota Woven City will see timber apartment buildings draped with greenery and topped with swooping roofs of photovoltaic cells, stuffed full of the latest artificial intelligence technology. The smart homes will know when to restock your fridge and take out your trash, and even monitor how healthy you are. Combining the traditional craft of Japanese wood joinery with new robotic production methods, ‘the solid timber buildings will stand on top of a subterranean realm, where water filtration systems and hydrogen power storage will mingle with driverless delivery vehicles servicing the city’s residents above.

The plan appears to have much in common with the principles of many postwar town plans, with people separated from cars and the messy business of servicing and deliveries swept beneath an elevated podium. Yet there is an important difference. While New Towns were the work of the state, every aspect of this new city’s residents’ lives will be monitored and managed by the private interests of Toyota. The homes are described as ‘test sites’ for the company’s future technologies, with every bit of data harvested and processed for its commercial gain.

Ingels’ plan joins a host of similar megacorporate urban schemes by high-profile designers for tech companies, all looking to expand their influence beyond the bounds of their conventional businesses to every aspect of the city.

OMA, for example, is working on a company town for Facebook in Menlo Park, California. Google has poured serious cash and city-making expertise into a new urban planning branch of its company, Sidewalk Labs, and Thomas Heatherwick is designing a 2,500 home scheme in his trademark Hobbit-meets-Avatar aesthetic. Again, the question is what purpose its high tech data will serve. Several high-profile members of the project’s board recently resigned over data protection and privacy issues, while one critic has described it as ‘a colonising experiment in surveillance capitalism attempting to bulldoze important urban, civic and political issues’.

While the slick presentations of Ingels et al are seductive in their technocratic logic and blue sky dreaming, it is important to remember that cities are not machines that can be optimised, or laboratories for running experiments. They are living, breathing, messy, vital places run by democratic processes. The homes are described as ‘test sites’ for the company’s future technologies, with every bit of data harvested and processed for its commercial gain

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below ingels’ plan for Toyota’s city of the future includes substantial data gathering opportunities for the japanese firm.

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Five people selected at random who complete the survey will win a £50 John Lewis voucher*
The 2020 Royal Gold Medal for architecture is being awarded to Grafton Architects, as a practice. Normally the Gold Medal goes to an individual or a pair of individuals and very rarely to a group or practice. This could be a beginning of a new era, when we focus less on individuals at the top of practices and acknowledge that it is all the practice contributors coming together effectively that makes really great architecture.

Practice and business are becoming increasingly complex and demanding for a single person to have sole oversight and leadership. As I visit practices I find more and more have changed, or are in the process of changing, to an employee ownership trust. In ‘Defining Contemporary Professionalism’ Denise Bennetts sets out very clearly why practices need a clear definition of the core competence of a professional architect. An architect’s professional individuality must obviously in addition to central core competency.

In these times of high expectations and risk, practices need their team of individuals to have expertise along the flow of work, from securing business through to physical realisation and review. The myriad skills and talent, facing outward towards client, user and society, to understand the technical, regulatory and environmental demands and the business and running of the practice, all work together to create complementary forms of success.

We must remember to resist being drawn in and employing those who are the same as ourselves, and to seek out diversity to complement and challenge. As early as 1999 John Worthington, of DEGW fame, argued that our profession should acknowledge different types of architect and that we should ‘educate for diversity’. That call must be tempered with collective ethics, responsibilities and risks being more broadly known and agreed across the practice. So we are becoming more collective and relying on each other.

Although recognising individuality, separate backgrounds and trajectories, we also need a clear definition of our core; of what is central to be a contemporary, competent professional architect. An architect’s professional individuality must obviously in addition to central core competency.

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The new RIBA CPD recording platform went live in 2019 and we will soon be launching our online CPD delivery system – RIBA Academy. It is an important tool in maintaining and evidencing competence and expertise; what is core to maintain registration and what is enhancement for delivery of greater levels of service, positive impact and personal progression. Personal spider diagrams of profiles of expertise, overlaid with those of colleagues, could create a revealing multi-layered studio mesh confirming essential individuals, team depth, CPD requirements and aspects needing external input.

The award of the 2020 Royal Gold Medal to Grafton Architects highlights that successful and effective practice is the combined effort of a team of individuals. Long live collaboration!
‘In theory you could get eight people in here,’ says Richard Griffiths. We’re in the family cabin he built three years ago in the shell of an old agricultural shed near Blythburgh in Suffolk, one of a pair of buildings he has done on a 1ha patch of land he has, overlooking the floodplain of the Blyth river. The other, now sold on, is a larger earlier barn conversion. The cabin is compact but ingeniously planned. Small though it is, the architectural and artistic references here are ambitious. There’s the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright to be found here which also ‘relates to a pre-classical articulation of English interiors,’ he says, pointing out that the horizontal banding to the interior is in the manner of Hardwick Hall for instance: panelling to a certain height, and then frieze and ceiling treated in one pale colour. Similarly the way the spaces of the little house connect in an enfilade down one side is like many a country house, while his deployment of elements plugged into one side of the house is derived from the Arts and Crafts houses of Baillie Scott. On the exterior, the way he has integrated a row of 10 dark photovoltaic solar panels into the reddish corrugated Corten roof is, in his mind, a Rothko moment. The whole place is a highly insulated timber-frame construction done to near-Passivhaus standard. Furniture is mostly mid-century Scandi-modern.

Richard Griffiths Architects, a practice now 25 years old, is both a noted conservation and new-build firm. You might think that a Griffiths building is more traditional in character than many but you’ll always find he brings something new to the table – even where, as in his gatehouse tower for Brighton College in 2015, he was ostensibly completing an unfinished design by Sir Thomas Graham Jackson, a pupil of Sir George Gilbert Scott whose buildings form the original core of the school (RIBA Journal, February 2015). Now, 125 years after Jackson’s original design drawing, some simplification was in order and both modern and traditional construction methods used. The effect is the thing; it is honest and believable.

Griffiths is good at catching the mood of a place and taking it from there. He trained at Cambridge first as an engineer (he was dreaming of bridges and dams, he says) before he switched to architecture. There he started to evolve his ideas: not to be a narrow conservation architect but, as he puts it, to practise ‘architecture in the context of old buildings’.
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Culture Profile

Naturally enough, he went to work for Julian Harrap who was himself ploughing that furrow, having previously worked as a modelmaker for Jim Stirling. ‘It was about new and old together as a way of producing an architecture that is as interesting, if not more so, than all new building,’ he says, citing the example of Harrap’s later work with David Chipperfield on Berlin’s Neues Museum as an example. Come the recession of the early 1990s, however, the Harrap office was short of work. Griffiths set up on his own in a back-bedroom office with a project he’d brought in and started at Harrap’s; the National Trust’s closed and decaying Tudor Sutton House in Hackney. An exemplary community-led project it saw restored (including some 200 year old cobwebs) but in a way that showed the layers of history – Tudor, Georgian, Victorian, 1980s squatted, and Griffiths’ own contemporary layer. As part of all this he introduced 43 hinged panels you can open to see what lies behind. Sutton House proved to be his passport to a rich vein of projects. And, he says, ‘I did my first five-plank door there. Tudor technology’. In his 25th-anniversary book Old Buildings, New Architecture he recounts how he first encountered an original example of this door type in his restoration of Eastbury Manor in Barking. It’s a lamination technique: a typical example would have five vertical planks on one side clenched by 10 horizontal ones on the other, though there are lots of variations, some with vision panels cut out in the squares where planks overlap. Most architects specify doors as ready made products but the bespoke five-plank door is almost a Griffiths signature.

Classic Griffiths is his small complex of new buildings at Southwark Cathedral. He’d become the cathedral’s official architect but hadn’t expected to find himself in charge of its successfully-funded Millennium project which needed a total redesign. Key to this was a new refectory and library building at right angles to the cathedral, defining a new entrance courtyard, a memory of a cloister. The new north entrance from the river side is set in a second block of meeting rooms parallel with the cathedral. All this involved demolishing some of the 1890s work of the predecessor architect and dean, which was somewhat controversial at the time. Working with the aptly-named Ptolemy Dean (now surveyor to Westminster Abbey) Griffiths evolved an architecture which is a fascinating hybrid of ancient and modern, its materials creamy-brown stone, flint, oak and copper but also paired arch ribs of smooth precast concrete to the library. That’s a reference to ES Prior’s equally ribby interior of St Andrews, Roiker.

As with his hotel extension at St Pancras Station – done in the manner of Scott, not least because pointed windows fitted into the huge pre-existing two-storey steel lattice truss built to carry a previous rejected design over a 30m loading bay – this kind of work is the opposite of the received idea that a new extension should be an obvious visual foil or contrast to the original architecture. Instead it draws on and blends with the original architecture while not slavishly copying it. This is acceptable practice now and Griffiths’ work has done much to make it so. But he does the architecture-as-contrast thing too, and singles out his turn-of-the-century work is the opposite of the received idea that a new extension should be an obvious visual contrast to the library. That’s a reference to ES Prior’s equally ribby interior of St Andrews, Roiker.

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 graduation from Manchester School of Architecture, he went to London where he worked in a range of practices.

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Free examples of Griffiths’ work at www.rangefordvillages.co.uk
You are known as educators. Who were your own early influences?

**Yvonne Farrell:** We studied architecture at University College Dublin where we were very lucky as we arrived at a time of change in thinking and teaching. Ivor Smith had taken over the running of the school and with him came the ‘flying circus’. Ed Jones, Chris Cross, Fennella Dixon and others – tutors who were young architects, all rationalists and all building. Cathal O’Neill had worked with Mies van der Rohe in Chicago, others with Le Corbusier – their influence was very strong in the school. We were reading Kenneth Frampton’s Critical Regionalism and going to concerts – which were now very diverse. We were reading Kenneth Frampton’s ‘Critical Regionalism’ and going to concerts – which were very diverse. We were reading Kenneth Frampton’s Critical Regionalism and going to concerts – which were very diverse.

As students, we were reading extensively about architecture; about our own place and the scale of Ireland from generation to generation. The scale of Ireland and Dublin, Cork and Belfast means that it is quite a particular and distinct architecture in Ireland.

**Shelley McNamara:** Yes, we were so hungry and passionate. We were very passionate about ideas from different disciplines relating to place; to the classical, global and European cultures. There were similarities in spirit with critical regionalism; we found it this deeply inspiring and challenging.

The framework for Dublin’s Temple Bar cultural quarter (1992–96) as Group ‘91 was the first time you came to international prominence. What was special about that?

**YF:** In the late 80s there was very little work for architects in Ireland. We began to organise exhibitions, hoping to foster a love of city. For one, together with seven small practices, we worked on samples of urban housing for public discussion. Then, when an international competition for the Temple Bar Area of Dublin came about, those same practices formed Group ‘91 to enter. The whole area had been frozen awaiting demolition for an enormous bus station. Group ‘91’s proposal retained buildings and made new public spaces. Having won, each of our practices got a project to design.

SM: We were so hungry and passionate. We were very passionate. We have now done many projects for universities. You have one under way in London at LSE and one just complete, Town House for Kingston University.

**YF:** With each institution we take on we try to understand their different dreams and stories. We try to find practical solutions but also add another dimension. We try to understand their different dreams and stories. We try to find practical solutions but also add another dimension.

You have now done many projects for universities. You have one under way in London at LSE and one just complete, Town House for Kingston University.

**SM:** It was more powerful that we had imagined. Architecture is not just a theoretical exercise. It is a felt experience.

With your school of economics for the University of Toulouse, just completing, your interest in the walls, battlements, ramparts and towers of the city is explicit.

**YF:** The Toulouse project was really challenging. In Milan the city structure was more familiar, strong, rational and rigorous. In Toulouse, it is picturesque with the Garonne River, the Canal de Brienne and wonderful bricks. We found it really hard to find a language for the shape and quality of the site. We wanted windows, but with the intense summer heat we needed to reduce the amount of glass. So, the question was how do you hold the surface? Using fragments of the city: colonnaded cloisters, battlements, and so on, we worked using a method of collage. It is a fan-shaped plan, we started it at one end, and it’s really bringing the city in.

**SM:** The building builds the awareness of where you are in the city. It frames the Garonne River or the cathedral spire. Architecture has the capacity to help you experience the places more.

You now have one under way in London at LSE and one just complete, Town House for Kingston University.

**SM:** With each institution we take on we try to understand their different dreams and stories. We try to find practical solutions but also add another ingredient to spatially tell the story of transformation.

The building builds the awareness of where you are in the city. It frames the Garonne River or the cathedral spire. Architecture has the capacity to help you experience the places more.

That might mean drawing people into a place where thresholds are not offputting or a completely new representation of the institution.

**YF:** We did have an influence because we were very passionate. We were very passionate. We have now done many projects for universities. You have one under way in London at LSE and one just complete, Town House for Kingston University.

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We were very passionate.
Culture
Royal Gold Medal

In Kingston, the Kingston Town House is not owned by any one department. It is open to all – an antidote to compartmentalisation – which shows Kingston University’s progressive ideas of education.

You are using precast concrete frame on Town House. Do you see yourselves taking prefabrication further?

SM
In the Town House, we have both a prefabricated structure and facade. We were influenced by Jørn Utzon’s Paustian House with its elemental columns and beams. It ties into the idea of repetition and economy – ease of construction is directly connected to these. Kingston was the first time we were novated to a contractor. Lots of decisions were influenced by this and the way the construction industry works. Precast is very economical in the use of materials.

In your manifesto as curators for the Venice Architecture Biennale (2018) you describe the earth as a client. How are you responding practically to climate emergency?

YF
We continue to try to understand each material: in situ concrete, precast concrete, timber, steel, stone. It is frustrating that there is no clear answer as to which is the most ecologically responsible use of material.

SM
We have always been irritated by lack of respect for beautiful materials; people take ancient, incredible geology and use it in a cheap way that loses all its qualities.

YF
For Bocconi University, we chose a stone called Ceppo. In that quarry in the mountains, the method is to cut out 9m by 9m cubes of solid stone. As they cut, we realised we were carving into a mountain to make a mountain. It made us acutely aware that what we specify as architects brings its own kind of responsibility.

SM
Architecture is not claiming enough territory. We need a sense of structures, of environmental control and of comfort. We shouldn’t undervalue common sense. Economy pushes against generosity, less space and volume often means more technical kit is needed.

We need to remember that there are free elements for us to use: the pleasure of sunlight, moonlight, air, shade.

YF
When a young Swedish activist lays at our door that we must be more conscious of what we do, we take note. With areas of Australia, a first world country, burning out of control, we see how fragile our earth can be. It takes time for fully sustainable projects to come into being. But thinking about climate, use of materials, etc is changing. For us, architecture is the physics of culture.

You wanted the Royal Gold Medal to go to the whole practice – all 40 of you. How have you built up your team?

SM
We were down to eight architects in 2008 during the recession. We have increased gradually, to the largest we have ever been. We have mostly Irish architects and many of them we have taught, so they understand what we specify as architects brings its own kind of responsibility.

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John Stiff 1930 – 2019

Successful architect who withstood enough booms and slumps to advise his son against joining the profession – but ended up in joint practice with him.

It is common enough for children to follow their parents into architecture but more unusual for parent and child to find themselves sharing a practice. In the case of John Stiff, both happened. His son Michael Stiff had established a promising practice in the 1980s with Andy Trevillion while he, having made his successful career in other practices, wanted a change of pace as he neared the enviably young retirement age – 60 – he had set for himself. So they merged their firms for a few years.

John Stiff was born in Slough to Stan and Ada, Stan being a steam engine driver on the GWR. John left Slough Grammar School at 16 and entered a stint of National Service in the RAF, which he thoroughly enjoyed, and which allowed him to expand his jazz repertoire, he decided to become an architect and when married, he was encouraged by his stepfather in law to sign up to evening classes at Regent Street Polytechnic. He worked for British Rail architects department during this time.

A year before qualifying in 1961 he entered the world of commercial architecture, joining Scherrer and Hicks (Anglo-Swiss architect Emil Scherrer was a tutor at Regent Street Polytechnic. He worked for British Rail architects department during this time.) and was engaged in the project, especially the collaboration between all the parties engaged in the project, especially the.

Though eminently praise-worthy it left me wondering how artistic ‘delight’ could retain its status. In the future, it is likely that the designs depended so much on the make and construction materials and suppliers who were overprivileged. That’s before adding contractual disputes and wider professional responsibilities. Go back far enough and the architect (before the title) didn’t just plan and calculate cost for the client, but also to make the demands. It would it satisfy its demands.

The raw and honest truth was that the city architect WAS awful. How refreshing brave to Brian Anson to tell him and these enthusiastic students the truth. Enlightened education will produce good architecture. But people must learn what good architecture is. And, the money will lead you to some of the worst architecture.

Our challenge is to make 2020 the year for optimism. That’s before adding contractual disputes and wider professional responsibilities. Go back far enough and the architect (before the title) didn’t just plan and calculate cost for the client, but also to make the demands. It would it satisfy its demands.

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Following a sharp rise in the late 1930s in the number of central European architects seeking admission to Britain, in January 1939 the RIBA set up a special Refugee Committee, which was tasked to strike a very difficult balance between giving assistance to foreign architects who could no longer find work in their native countries (and were, in some cases, also in physical danger) and safeguarding job opportunities for local architects in a period of economic uncertainty. Among the numerous Czech applicants was Ladislav Machoň (1888-1973), a prolific architect who had worked on a great variety of projects, from housing to government buildings. The photograph shows one of his restaurants in Prague, where he also designed the very popular Automat Koruna, a modern type of self-service buffet. Interestingly, Machoň also designed an automat in London’s Regent Street in 1938, but it is unclear whether he ever managed to leave his country before the outbreak of World War Two. He was, however, still practising in the late 1940s – one of the fortunate aspiring émigrés who succeeded in surviving the Nazi era.

Valeria Carullo

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