Virtual Interrail
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Swedish gallery
French folly
Belgian museum
Spanish house
Polish house
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Opinion

Will Wiles is left disorientated by the insults hurled at architecture

President

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Profile

We Made That explains why it would rather design for the community than do a £25m house

Obituary

Ronald Weeks, designer of Clifton Cathedral and many British bridges

Exchange

Digital limitations, healthy materials and questions for Eric Parry on our letters page

Parting shot

Flying was glamorous once, no more so than at Eero Saarinen’s TWA terminal at JFK airport in New York

On the cover

The Netherlands powerhouse from a high-speed train window, based on a photograph by Tycho Merijn

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On the cover

The Netherlands powerhouse from a high-speed train window, based on a photography by Tycho Merijn

Has home working and virtual sharing given you ideas for design after Covid? Tell us at letters.ribaj@riba.org
Location of case study
The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London.

Project requirements
Open up the Royal Opera House frontage while remaining sympathetic to its history to encourage new visitors to take the buildable stitch.

The solution
A new expansive glazed foyer built within the current footprint, the detail subtly mirrored by A CO Brickslot gratings. The solution

Although the stories inside change, the building remains consistently recognisable whilst continually evolving. The most recent chapter incorporates the slim, elegant lines of MultiDrain Brickslot channels, echoing the detail of the fully-glazed structure, which now makes passers-by feel part of the stories told inside.

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Lines for performance

Covent Garden has been home to the Royal Opera House for over 260 years. It is a venue that has seen some remarkable “firsts” – the first indoor spotlight, the first time the piano was played in public in England, the first performances of many of Handel’s operas, and the first ballet (La Revolte), a work with a story told through dance.

Once a gathering place for only the most prestigious in society, it is no longer the exclusive domain of the privileged. A new glass entrance blends seamlessly with the historic building whilst also embracing the surrounding streetscape. A welcoming entrance, a window in and a window out, engaging everybody.

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When you can’t travel, you dream of being able to. So this is what we have done in search of the buildings we present in this issue. We conceived of a ‘virtual Interrail trip’ in which we (and you) backpack our way around Europe, calling in on a half dozen buildings by excellent younger practices – with the bonus of chatting to the architects in question about them.

Perhaps this discussion can be over lunch? So settle down to Hollandse nieuwe haring in the Netherlands, gravadlax in Sweden, confit de canard in France, moules frites in Belgium, Ajoblanco in Spain, and pierogi in Poland. Have a chilled drink too, why not. Er, where were we? Buildings! Also regionally different and delicious. Enjoy our tasting menu.

Blue sky thinking at Alex, a Belgian folly by Atelier Vens Vanbelle

Products marketed as active, with ingredients that kill bacteria, have a reasonable chance of being effective against Covid-19, particularly those based on silver ion technology. Developers of anti-viral coatings step up a gear to make buildings safer: ribaj.com/antiviralcoatings

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It’s a family affair
Janne van Berlo has repaid her father’s faith in entrusting her with the transformation of this old power station into collaborative offices in Eindhoven

Words: Isabelle Priest  Photographs: Tycho Merijn

How many fathers would trust their 24-year-old daughter with the transformation of a derelict power station into an emerging typology like a shared-working office before they’ve even completed architecture school? But Janne van Berlo of Rotterdam practice Atelier van Berlo has a dad who did just that. As the director of a large product design agency with 90 employees in three locations, he is clearly someone who has taken risks that have paid off – this was just another. His daughter brought in the extra experience of Engelink Architectuur and De Bever Architecten at the start, but still.

Janne van Berlo came properly to the project in January 2015, setting up her own practice in her final months at architecture school. Her father had already spent eight years seeking permission to acquire the power plant, a lobbying process that involved getting it removed from Eindhoven municipality’s demolition register. His goal was to create a new office for his agency within a multi-tenant shared workspace that would drive a creative, supportive and entrepreneurial eco-system of businesses. The power station used to serve the Philips factories site, an expansive area that became redundant in the 1990s as manufacturing moved abroad. Starting in 1957 it was built in four stages over 30 years as the site required more energy, a period which also saw its fuel change from coal to oil and later gas. Each extension was kept consistent with the original design.

In transforming the old plant into Innovation Powerhouse, Atelier van Berlo was most concerned about how to create a cut-through space between all areas of the building that would make it feel collaborative. The primary move was to create a 5m wide atrium that runs the length of the taller, 28m middle element, where the coal chutes could come together to catalyse the social fabric.

Innovation Powerhouse, a transformed and extended former energy centre for Philips.
The Netherlands: office

1. Entrance hall
2. Central atrium
3. Conference hall
4. Restaurant/bar
5. Offices
6. Workshop
7. Historic chimney
8. Systems and services

**Credits**

Architects: Atelier van Berlo, Eugelink Architectuur and De Bever Architecten
Developer, contractor and project manager: GeVa Vastgoed
Structural engineer: Van de Laar
Mechanical installations: Kemtec
Electrical installations: Verweij, ElektroHulpdienst
Steel window frames: Hesta
Lighting: Philips
Furniture: Lensvelt

**Below**

Wood and white painted plasterboard balustrades sit alongside concrete.

**Below right**

Both the taller part and lower rear side of the building have been extended with a steel-framed structure.

**IN NUMBERS**

11,000m² Gross floor area
8,702m² Lettable floor area

Sections of the building together, and glazing sections of the building together, and glazing the internal partitions. Next to this central backbone, a skylight spans the full length of the building, bringing light into its otherwise dark centre and revealing the magnitude of the old heavy concrete structure. The other move was to extend the power station laterally with a grey steel grid structure that completes some of the missing symmetry found in the planning drawings. This is conceived as a vertical garden housing an external fire stair, glass meeting rooms and an elevator as well as outdoor social space for occupants.

Meanwhile, the front elevation has been over-insulated and clad, with minimal slit windows inserted to maintain a solid appearance. At the back, the original machine hall brick has been retained but stylistically complementary three-storey windows inserted in the white painted grid steel structure, based on the existing fenestration of the coal chutes. A new steel roof over the existing structure improves thermal performance but keeps the industrial character. The two 80m tall chimneys have become a national monument and are in the process of being restored.

Inside, new floors have been added to create space for 500 desks. More than 2,000m² of the 11,000m² is given to communal areas, including a cafe and canteen and breakout space that can be used for exhibitions and events. Concrete columns are left exposed, but the design deliberately combines a brutal industrial aesthetic with softer, richer, more luxurious elements like oak panelling and white wall museum-like banisters to attract scale-ups rather than start-ups – businesses that lease for 10-15 years. Van Berlo's father's company has, of course, moved in but among the 14 occupiers there's also an indoor farm that grows produce under LED lights as well as a car sharing business.
Gallery’s silver lining

Boxen is a freestanding steel box in Stockholm’s ArkDes, a warts-and-all exposed structure offering an alternative scale
Words: Eleanor Young Photographs: Johan Dehlin

This is a building as object, one that shows its structure and joints, from columns to nuts and bolts. Boxen is a new studio gallery at ArkDes, the Swedish Centre for Architecture and Design in Stockholm. The insertion, by young Swedish practice Dehlin Brattgård Arkitekter, deals with problems of scale, the disjuncture between ArkDes’ large 19th century military exercise hall and modestly sized displays.

The ramp of the main circulation running round the gallery is clearly visible, but Boxen doesn’t touch the walls. The heritage status of the hall won’t allow that. And it only gingerly uses the existing foundations; it is constructed as a bridge between them. It has to be a complete box, corrugated steel roof and birch-faced ply walls to stiffen the galvanised steel frame. Enclosed in mesh, the ramp is a space to be inside as well as to look out of.

Architect Johan Dehlin likens this exploration of steel to his earlier work as a project architect with 6A on Juergen Teller’s Stirling-shortlist Photography Studio where concrete was the object of study. And perhaps to the practice’s exploration of wood in a floating Riddarfjärden baths in Stockholm. Steel provided a system of dimensions and joints to work within, a framework to explore. Though there are some tricks – behind the mesh walls is silver-painted ply masquerading as metal.

Exhibitions are condensed in Boxen’s white box galleries. Larger exhibits in the hall can peered at from the ramp. At one end you can see between the two through a grand oculus sliced through the box, just missing a hidden internal stair. This bold gesture ‘defeats the structure’ say Dehlin and partner Johannes Brattgård, before admitting the painstaking work of ensuring the ramp met it at the right level and that head heights were right.

The architects’ game with movement is taken on by small children running, adults exploring, wheelchair users ascending the ramp. It is coming back to life since reopening from lockdown at the start of June. •

IN NUMBERS

264m²
gross area including ramp

156m²
internal gallery area

£180,000
budget

Above The oculus cuts through two walls, flying over the staircases.
Right Inside the gallery. At the top that Boxen’s roof is proud of the wall allowing natural light into the first floor.
Buildings
France: dental studio

Not the usual drill

The proposal for this odd site in Marseille was without a client or purpose – until a local dentist heard about it

Words: Isabelle Priest  Photographs: Lisa Ricciotti

This building’s programme fits its form and execution so perfectly it’s hard to believe that the project was originally a speculative proposal without a function by French practice Marret & Fernandez Architectes. It was presented as a fully resolved building, a piece of architectural concrete sculpture that already took into account its site – a scrap piece of apparently unusable wasteland on a dual carriageway on the northern outskirts of Marseille, on the way to the huge container port. It could have been a house, office, shop or just about anything else. The design was only modified internally to become a dental studio when a local practitioner Monsieur Tourrolier heard about the proposal in 2017. The design found the client, the programme was made to fit – not the other way around.

It’s located in a hot and dusty landscape that blends industrial and commercial between the hills of Verducas behind and the Saumaty-Séon industrial valley to the south. The gantry cranes and shipping containers at the rear of the port rub shoulders with vacant lots, detached family homes on walled single plots, and the warehouse units and offices built recently as part of the area’s planning designation as an urban free zone. Traffic on the highway is dense.

Marret & Fernandez exploit the plot, which is shaped like a narrow safety pin. Formed as three distinct, offset, interlocked vertical concrete sheets, the building contours in all directions, cantilevering over and tip-toeing around between steep embankments and an underground river. The unbuildability of the site explains why only 40m² of the 172m² area could be used for construction.

Inspired by Tadao Ando and Peter Zumthor, the design treats each elevation as a unique pictorial work. The north facade consists of three solid, seemingly barely habitable vertical streaks which exhibit the building’s slenderness and provide an intriguing sculptural form. The southern side is a zooming energetic cantilever with a huge square glazed end, giving the treatment room within views towards the harbour. The rear eastern elevation is an all concrete sweep where the panel construction is most visible, while the western interface with the road becomes a 3D...
Mondrian artwork of textures, tones, planes and openings. The elevations are so individually characterful that they hardly seem to go together. Yet they generate a memorable image to passerby from every aspect, and the finesse of the detailing and construction, and the small scale, freestanding nature of the project make it inviting and iconic too.

Timber panels by the front door give a flavour of the materials inside, where wood is used next to the exposed concrete structure for adjustable elements – walls, dividers, doors, stairs and joinery. The front door opens into a reception and waiting area with WC with the first treatment room beyond. Upstairs on the first floor is another waiting area, second treatment room, a sterilisation area, X-ray room, staff WC and cloakroom. The third floor is reserved for staff only with a rest area and shower room. In the basement is the operating theatre with a scrubs ante-space and stockroom as well as patient records storage and a technical plant room.

Out of such a small footprint, the building manages to create 200m² of space conceived with such poetry, lightness and dignity that surely going to this particular dentist would be something of a delight.

Entrance
2 Reception
3 Waiting area
4 Public WC
5 Treatment room
6 Terrace
7 Staff WC and cloakroom
8 X-ray room
9 Sterilisation area
10 Staff restroom
11 Staff shower room

Above The exposed concrete and timber reception area on the ground floor.
Below left The first floor treatment room with its huge picture window. Here walls are white and more stereotypically dental studio.
Below right The southern elevation’s projecting periscope lens looking out to the port.

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Legendary performance
Equitone’s facade retrofit for the ONS was chosen to blend with the original brick while enhancing protection of the offices behind.

A colourfully retrofitted facade for The Office for National Statistics features Equitone’s [natura].

A £10 million modernisation project was undertaken to improve the Office of National Statistics’ (ONS) Newport facilities. Home to the newly created Data Science Campus, the facility uses new data sources and technologies to provide statistics for policy makers and businesses about the UK economy.

The campus building not only provides a first-class working environment, it also demonstrates the potential of retrofit to reimagine facade design, presenting a contemporary composition that mirrors the aspirations of the Data Science Hub as an outstanding home for international data and research.

Tri-coloured facade retrofit

In response to existing external walls in need of expensive repairs, the ONS worked with Vinci Facilities to design a new rainscreen cladding system, specifying 6,800m² of Equitone [natura] in a combination of colours and panel sizes. Colours from the [natura] range with a low contrast were chosen to complement the tones of the original redbrick building and provide a striking tricoloured facade.

Dave Willett, senior project manager at Vinci Facilities, said: “With existing walls needing extensive repairs that would affect the overall aesthetic of the building, we needed to find a solution that was visually striking, but also sympathetic to the original brick colours.

“We felt that Equitone provided the best combination of quality, versatility and value for money. The adjustability of the mounting system accommodated the varying planes of the original walls extremely well, resulting in a really crisp finish,”

Dave added: “Equitone was very supportive at the design stage and maintained their support throughout. There have been no issues with the product to date and it is looking as sharp and rich in colour as the day it was installed.”

Through-coloured facade materials

Equitone [natura] is one of five fibre-cement ranges that the company manufactures in its Belgium and German plants. [natura] has a smooth, matt appearance which is silken to the touch. Its surface clearly shows the natural fibres, used to make the fibre cement, randomly distributed and making every panel unique. [natura] is available in a range of eight through colours including the recently launched Quartz White, a subtle white tone which has been highly anticipated by architects.

Non-combustible, durable, sustainable

Equitone materials are classed as non-combustible in Scotland and limited combustibility in England and Wales. The A2-s1, d0 classification means Equitone emits little or no smoke and produces no flaming droplets or particles within the first 10 minutes of fire exposure. This means our materials do not contribute to the formation or spread of a fire and puts people’s safety first.

The facade is resistant to extreme temperatures and frost – perfect for the increasingly unpredictable British weather. The products can reduce thermal bridging and the associated energy consumption required to keep the internal environment temperate. Equitone requires limited maintenance and cleaning, and is resistant to many living organisms such as bacteria, fungi, insects and vermin, thereby reducing the need for chemical cleaning products. Equitone works with architects to develop the range and colour of its materials, delivering designs that are for architects and by architects.

For more information on Equitone facade materials, visit www.equitone.com.
Step down into the unknown

Fantasy becomes reality in this film director’s Belgian folly

Words: Eleanor Young Photographs: Tim Van de Velde

Not many new buildings are entered through a shed. But Atelier Vens Vanbelle likes to surprise. And that is what the film director client asked for – something outstanding, with a twist.

So you reach this folly through the living room of an ordinary house, stepping out through the chaos of a garden shed and a tangle of bikes. And then down into the rough concrete of a basement tunnel. Strange and a little disturbing is how architects Maarten Vanbelle and Dries Vens imagined this. The little building takes on unheimlich qualities as the long narrow tunnel surely too long for the building? Where is it taking you? turns, with no visible end. Then, deep in the building, by a cinema screen and simple bar, there is that seep of cold air as a spiral stair twists you up and up 7m, to above the folly and into the trees – for what? The indulgence, almost debauchery, of a shower in the tree canopy.

With such a sequence of unpredictable spaces it hardly seems right to explore the more mundane aspects of what Vens and Vanbelle call Alex, after the client. But in other hands this might be referred to as a guest and entertainment suite. The elongated 20m tunnel is perhaps a device to ensure you enter in the heart of the building, at the cinema screen, buried in concrete with garden earth piled over. Above it is a prefabricated timber cave, put together in the builder’s workshop.
from individually drawn pieces of laminated veneer lumber panels, and transported to site in four sections. This makes comfortable guest rooms overlooking the garden and River Schelde. The shower tower-cum-watchtower and building are clad in Corten, given depth by the builder making ribs in the flat plates.

There are no international film visitors coming to stay at the moment, the client instead takes his book into the trees and sits in the watchtower reading. And it is spill out space for his young daughter. Vens and Vanbelle are currently doing a lot of babysitting. Since they started in practice 14 years ago as students, they have worked together in a practice of two. Between them they travelled the half hour from Ghent and visited every day while the building was on site.

Vens and Vanbelle have also stayed here since it was finished. Did they use the tree-top shower? ‘Yes.’ And how about visiting the bathroom, back through the tunnel, in the night?

‘It was very creepy.’

Above Sunny, cosy upper levels. The guest rooms become contoured caves made of layers timber.

Left The quixotic Alex that is visible with its watchtower shower obscures the darker spaces below.
The Spanish province of Extremadura has been battled over for millennia since first being conquered by the Romans. It was a caliphate from the 8th to 12th centuries, and once recaptured by the Spanish, had to deal with an expansionist Portugal to the west. It explains the towers of the walled city of Cáceres, a number of which – notably the 12th century Torre del Bujaco – still guard its old town. But it has another historic enemy – poverty. There’s a reason why the New World shares many place names with those of the province; conquistador Francisco Pizarro was one of its many sons driven to seek fortunes abroad that had eluded them at home.

**A stitch in time**

Art gallery raises medieval town to a higher plane

*Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek  Photographs: Amores Pictures*

Extremadura remains the second poorest region in Spain, a stark reality that noted art collector Helga de Alvear was perhaps attempting to remedy with her new Museum of Contemporary Art. This, together with the 2015 Mies van der Rohe Prize shortlisted Atrio Relais & Châteaux hotel by Mansilla + Tuñón, is intended to draw new tourist hordes – and their gold – to the medieval UNESCO Heritage City. De Alvear kept on Emilio Tuñón for her museum, to work his magic on a steeply sloping site at the medieval town’s south west corner, where it fights off the more prosaic 20th century expansion in the valley below.

This latest project is effectively a sizeable extension to the Helga de Alvear Foundation’s 1913 Casa Grande, the restoration of which had formed the first stage of this commission. But the art gallery’s civic purpose, and the size of the project, means it has become an urban-scaled intervention. By developing the language of wall and column that he first adopted at the hotel, Tuñón’s museum skilfully stitches together two distinct parts of the city.

The gallery’s size and civic purpose means it has become an urban-scaled intervention.

Hidden behind an intimate town house facade alongside the Casa Grande, the museum reveals its nature and stature as it cascades down the valley, its storeys defined...
Buildings
Spain: Gallery

In elevation by concrete walls and fins or columns that shift subtly in relation to one another. That nuance manifests in plan too, where the museum’s parallelogram is echoed in the detailing of the columns, each of them skewing a touch to face the new town.

Internally, the materials are similarly Cistercian, with industrial concrete float floors offsetting bespoke windows or reveals of oak and fine plaster soffits. Such asceticism is damned to hell with the galleries’ sheer size and Tuñón’s sectional indulgence of anything up to 9m; but all is forgiven in the spatial drama.

The real beauty of the project however lies in the creation of a new route that brings joy and levity to the laboured task of ascending 20m from the lower street to the old town. An elegant stone stair now draws people up the side of the valley to a generous terrace offering shadow and verdure, overlooked by the museum’s shaded open-air entrance. A staircase to this bridge level then guides them on and up through a wide, covered passageway to pop out from that town house onto the old town’s curving Calle Pinarro.

It might not have happened; or could have all been done with the hubris of an institution leaving a public imprint. But instead this complex journey from the roadside’s hard sunlight to the respite of a raised courtyard, and past the gallery on up through Tuñón’s pre-emptive gloomth into the heart of the medieval quarter, is done with humility yet assurance. A large museum that has insinuated itself into the quotidian life of the city.

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Out of the woods
Nearby trees are integral to the design of this timber-clad home and studio.

Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek
Photographs: Maciej Lulko

Jakub Kowalczyk and Gosia Łapaj – both just 35 – met as students at Kraków Polytechnic and did their Erasmus years in Amsterdam, taking in the Low Countries’ new architecture while there. It was as students in 2009 that the pair missed out on winning an open competition for the Szczecin Dialogue Centre, placed second to upcoming Polish firm KWK Promes. But the near miss proved an impetus for the couple to set up on their own as Kropka Studio, following in the winner’s footsteps designing high-end homes while developing their brand on social media. Ten years on, they are a small but busy office.

‘Domolas’ – a house and workshop for a successful artist couple in rural Wadowice, 50km southwest of Kraków, builds on the firm’s interests in the local vernacular and contextual appropriation. The earlier ‘House in the Landscape’, in Skarżyce, used gabions of local Ural limestone as a structural facade while its later ‘Split-Level House’ outside Kraków divested itself of the staircase by adopting a section of interconnected floor planes at half-levels. It also echoed an old Hoffman lime kiln on the site with its hit-and-miss brickwork base, from which rises a bold, two-storey glazed box of living area, with a hat of black-rendered bedrooms. It’s defensive nature, Kowalczyk says, references the Bodzów fort nearby.

Completing in October, the L-shaped, timber-clad, concrete frame home with a black zinc roof, is one of ‘three wings’. The invisible third wing is the edge of a wood of birch trees; the design drawing this verdant boundary into the demise of the home, to form a nascent courtyard in the process. The long wing is the couple’s living space and the other is a large studio/workshop, with two en-suite bedrooms and galley kitchen that allow artists-in-residence to work independently or collaborate. A slot cut into the workshop wing, separating the sleeping and studio areas, is resolved with a snappy, all-glass connection.

Kraków invested itself of the staircase by adopting a section of interconnected floor planes at half-levels. It also echoed an old Hoffman lime kiln on the site with its hit-and-miss brickwork base, from which rises a bold, two-storey glazed box of living area, with a hat of black-rendered bedrooms. Its defensive nature, Kowalczyk says, references the Bodzów fort nearby.

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The larch cladding’s yaki-sugi treatment is suggestive of the tar-coated timber vernacular of local barn buildings. The design intent had been to extend this up and over the building onto the roof, but the artists curiously balked at the idea, leading to the compromise of the black zinc standing seam roof. Augmenting the walls’ thick insulation, triple-glazed gables frame views of the expansive landscape.

Kowalczyk says that things were booming in terms of quantity, if not quality, before the lockdown was imposed – the after-effects of which might stifle Poland’s young design practices. But as far as Kropka Studio is concerned, the Covid casuara has been cause for a guarded optimism: ‘We’ve gone from designing what we liked to having the time to think about our direction – and what we really love.’

‘Domolas’ builds on their interest in local vernacular and contextual appropriation.
Stay cyber-vigilant working at home

Cyber threats rise hugely with remote working. Here are some pointers to help you stay safe at home.

Without exception, remote working is one of the top three critical vulnerabilities that can result in a serious cyber incident.

With many architectural practices working remotely, there are a lot of things to consider and guidance will vary by business, but the following checklist from the RIBA’s technical security business partner, Mitigo, will help to proportionately reduce the risk of a cyber breach.

Cyber vigilance increased

Staff behave differently in a home-based environment and cyber criminals are actively creating new attacks to exploit the change in business arrangements. Things to watch out for:

1. Acceptable use of a company laptop – work use only.
2. Unattended machines – be conscious of who can see your work and lock your machine when unattended. Set auto lock to a maximum of 5 minutes.
3. Phishing attacks – increased vigilance is vital especially as fraudulent emails and infected videos, related to coronavirus, are already proliferating.

Tip – Staff should re-do cyber training and tests when they start remote working. A simulated attack may be appropriate for a prolonged period of home working.

Effective controls maintained

Important technical controls which are run centrally in the office network environment do not operate when working outside it. It is important to set up work laptops properly, otherwise they will become increasingly vulnerable. Three controls you should check:

1. Anti-virus – make sure that applications are up to date and configured to proactively scan devices, attachments and downloads. You should consider upgrading to a version with a cloud portal so that control and alerts can be maintained centrally.
2. Operating systems (Windows or Mac typically) – this is usually centrally managed when connected to the office network, but remote working prevents this. Machines need to be reconfigured to update independently, and staff shown what role they must play in that update.
3. Back-up – this will vary hugely depending on your practice’s setup. Seek professional advice on the latest configuration setup required.

Top three defensive configurations you should review:

1. Update the remote connection software – this can go horribly wrong if done incorrectly. Advice will vary dramatically depending on your business processes, your IT set-up and the third-party software you rely on. If in doubt, seek support.
2. Don’t allow personal devices. Where at all possible, remote machines should be work devices, configured to the points above. Seek advice before connecting home and personal computers to your secure network.
3. Strong authentication – enable these settings on the cloud applications you use, eg MFA on Office 365, two step verification on G suite. Most of the applications, where you log on via a web page, should have something that is stronger than just relying on a password.

Tip – If you must rely on a password, make sure it is strong and unique (not shared or re-used), and don’t store it in plain sight. • Make sure your password is something that is stronger than just relying on a password. • Don’t re-use passwords.

Above All you need for a cyber-attack is a weak password.

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Shaun Fitzgerald
A co-author of CIBSE’s guidance on emerging from lockdown, Shaun Fitzgerald is a Royal Academy of Engineering visiting professor at Cambridge University and member of the SAGE Environmental Modelling Group. He spoke to RIBAJ about virus mechanics and how we might create environments that mitigate them.

In a pandemic, infected people may transmit from other jurisdictions as well as locally. As reported, this will continue to happen and we’ll have to get used to living with it. The point about spikes is to keep the virus at low prevalence that can be flagged up and dealt with.

There are three transmission mechanisms. Droplets emitted from an infected person of 10 microns or larger behave like projectiles. If they are inhaled, it’s a direct mechanism. A Fomite mechanism is where viral droplets land on a surface which a person then touches. The third is via smaller viral particles held in air on convection currents, which are inhaled. Evidence is stronger for the first two but we need to reduce the risk of all three.

Shaun Fitzgerald is a Royal Academy of Engineering visiting professor at Cambridge University and member of the SAGE Environmental Modelling Group. He spoke to RIBAJ about virus mechanics and how we might create environments that mitigate them.

Lifts are a challenge. We need to reduce occupancy to maintain safe distances. Even residual viral air in a lift is relevant as exposure time to viral droplets is a factor. Leaving lift doors open when idle may help; CIBSE’s recommendation for air dilution leads us to ask if we should operate lifts differently. Contact transmission from call buttons is a concern too; IoT tech on mobile phones might help make lifts hands-free. There may be other opportunities for re-thinking technology use in buildings to enhance our experience even after the pandemic.

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Mechanism 3 is most relevant here. There are two types of air conditioning. One heats or cools then recirculates air and the other supplies fresh air that is fully conditioned before being fed to the internal space. The advice is to provide enough fresh air feed rates to dilute airborne viral particles – but that could mean ramping up fans – it is important that increases in flow rate keep to tolerable limits of noise and draughts. If you use an MVHR system, only recommended filters should be added.

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You need to return to the three mechanisms and reduce them all. But the general rule is ‘get plenty of fresh air in’. Build resilient ventilation to get more air in if necessary. It may mean getting used to room temperatures that are more like those outside in the height of summer, with cooling systems to ensure bountiful supplies of fresh air. In winter we’ll have to weigh up whether we supply more fresh air than minimum guidance – but even these rates are much better than scenarios where mass infections are known to have occurred.

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There are two strands: the absolutely practical aspect of getting people back to work with physical distancing and the longer term impact on office design. For both, the culture of the organisation will be hugely important in holding everything together.

Offices will differ in the short term as they deal with health and safety and social distancing. We’re working with clients on the physical effects of running an office with the distancing. There are several aspects – how you prepare the building overall and how you prepare the workplace, the layout facilitating access and security safely. The social distancing is one key aspect. Then there’s the circulation and access routes to desks and tea points. This further reduces occupancy. Cleanliness and facilities management will be more important than ever to businesses. These are the front-line.

Collaboration and drop-in spaces in offices will not be open on normal scale in the first wave of returns to work but as soon as it’s safe to open up, there will be a real desire to use them. In the meantime, meeting rooms, and meeting rooms, will be used for physically distanced working – meetings will mostly still be taken digitally even if people are in the same office.

Longer term, there’s an opportunity for betterment. There’s a chance to press the re-start button on how people occupy and respect their office environment. It will be everyone’s job to think about keeping things clean, and reconfiguring diets protocols that probably may not have been heard.

I think the civic urbanity of offices will not go away – it will definitely return even though it’s now recognised that we can work in a variety of remote locations. I foresee a greater emphasis on wellness in the workplace. Will the office ever be the same again? As preparations gather pace for a loosening of some lockdown measures, it’s clear that the workplace will have to adapt fast to deliver a safe environment that staff can trust.

In the short term, this means enabling physical distancing in the office and a hybrid office/working-from-home combination. Will the longer term mark Covid-leave on the way we design and organise our offices? If many of us can work from home instead, how can designers make the communal workplace a more compelling, and effective, setting? And what do we still need it for?

The future of offices is more about what they are than what they do. It starts with where we work now?

Pamela Buxton
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The office is ‘far from dead’ but will evolve in response, according to Neil Pennell, head of design innovation and property solutions at Landsec and chair of the British Council for Offices’ technical affairs committee.

“We’re social beings. We’re all missing the office. A lot of people work off that spark that you get with human contact,’ he says, anticipating that offices will be planned with the ability to shift to modes that respond to future virus flare-ups.

He has edited a BCO briefing note on the post-Covid-19 office that looks at issues such as decreased density, reception and lift protocols, management of meeting rooms, kitchenettes and toilets, greater use of touch-free technology, safe ventilation and other building services, and increased hygiene measures.

In the short term, visible measures that provide reassurance to returning office workers are important. In the longer term Pennell also expects the planning of new offices to involve more generous reception and lobby areas – with safe circulation a particular issue in taller buildings – as well as greater use of materials with more virus resistance, and a deeper, rather than ‘tokenist’, emphasis on wellness in the workplace.

It’s a sad driver, but this is a fantastic opportunity for the design industry. This will spur some interesting debate and dialogue. Architects and engineers will have to work closer than they ever have before, he says.”

Below, four architects with expertise in this sector share their views on the post-Covid office.

Find links to BCO guidance and to see Nicola Allen speaking go to ribaj.com/rethinkoffices

Above: The future workplace. Will our space be managed digitally, with circulation and more generous entrance areas?

Below: Four architects with expertise in this sector share their views on the post-Covid office.
The impact of Covid-19 on how and where we will work has at least two main phases: pre-vaccine and post-vaccine.

In the short term, once restrictions begin to lift, there will be a combination of working from home and in the office. Choice and flexibility will be key, and we’re working with organisations to help them understand which roles might work best from home, and to consider the whole journey from home to work, as well as thinking more strategically long term.

At Cushman & Wakefield, we’ve created the 6 Feet Office concept for social distancing in the workplace, which includes analysis of the existing workplace for virus safety, advice on air circulation and ventilation, and rules of conduct. We’ve also produced a ‘how-to’ guide for returning to the workplace, which we’ve made freely available on our website, based on our learnings from the Vienna experiment, a research project to help prevent the spread of air and surface viral transmission in offices. In many firms however, Covid-19 will be the catalyst for a more long-term and fundamental questioning of why we should go to work in an office rather than simply working from home experiment, it doesn’t make sense for every employee to travel long distances just to sit at individual desks not doing so as a default. This is an opportunity to change that default, and really question all that money, time, carbon and personal energy that we spend commuting to work.

There are a lot of conversations going on about whether there will be fewer offices – and perhaps there will be. Either way, offices will definitely be different.

Before, people were naturally afraid of change. Now that the working from home blockage has gone, every aspect of the centralised office will be up for review, and as the working from home debate has gone, very aspect of the centralised office will be up for review, and as the experience of Covid-19 will challenge how offices work. We’ve seen a range of trends towards more agile office workplaces over the last five years or so but the biggest blockage to working in different ways has always come from employers regarding security of information and the ability of staff to engage effectively with each other. A big part of that is trust. Now that those blockages have been diluted by enforced working from home, Covid-19 will be the driver that changes how offices will work in the future.

We’ve got clients who are asking questions about how in the short term they can get back to using their current space through simple measures such as spacing, in combination with shift work and some working from home. As well as cleaning, the big challenge is how you get people into buildings and through 1200. And we have clients who were in the process of looking for new spaces in the centre of London, and are now questioning the nature of the spaces they need.

The office will change in importance as a place where people come together to work when they need to. Rather than being a big, centralised office of several thousand people in the middle of London, there might instead be a hub for about 500 people and a network of smaller office ‘spokes’ where teams can go to work together when required. This might mean that these offices dispense to more high street and suburban localities, maybe even to repurposed former retail spaces.

Office space will be increasingly programmed. Desks won’t disappear from them, but the proportion of desk space will increase significantly and used in different ways will be more agile, collaborative workspaces that are programmed for use by different teams. There will be less demand for workspace for process workers such as data input, or call centre work. Instead, these employees may work from home but will still need access to a shared building space.

It won’t be a landslide change over night. People are used to long commutes, and it may take a little time for the full benefits of agility to be realised. But the experience of Covid-19 will challenge how offices work. Before, people were naturally afraid of change. Now that the working from home debate has gone, every aspect of the centralised office will be up for review, and as architects and designers, we need to be at the heart of that conversation.

The RIBA Journal July 2020 ribaj.com

When the specification matters

The client required a waterproofing system capable of enduring foot traffic and sustaining plant whilst providing exemplary drainage falls and a roof area suitable for hosting a solar PV array.

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nicole gillen, emea head of technology workplace at real estate group cushman & wakefield, and author of future office: next-generation workplace design
tated by Covid-19, a situation exacerbated by the fast many are densely populated with residents forced to share bathrooms where infections can spread. Should minimum standards be made more fit for purpose and conducive to health and wellbeing?

These new design considerations are set against a backdrop of an ageing health building infrastructure that's ill-suited to meet the demands of a growing population, a changing workforce and new technologies. Christopher Shaw, chair of Architects for Health and senior director of Medical Architecture at GLANCY NICHOLLS ARCHITECTS, says: ‘We need to see specialist hospitals consolidate skills into larger buildings that serve much larger populations, like the European super hospitals. Walk 20 minutes in any direction in London today and you hit a hospital; those will have to go.’

Prime minister Boris Johnson revealed plans last year to build 40 new hospitals, but in reality just six will be upgraded by 2025, while 21 others will get seed funding to develop plans for upgrades. Critics have claimed this fails to acknowledge the scale of the challenge and the overhaul required.

Many architects working in healthcare will now be taking stock to consider what it means to design for a world far removed from the one that existed just four months ago. Here, four of them share their views.

To see Charlotte Ruben speak go to ribaj.com/rebibhealth

Walk 20 minutes in any direction in London today and you hit a hospital; those will have to go.
The pandemic will of course also influence the current thinking among care home clients and the situation offers an opportunity to raise the game for design and quality of care.

We need to promote as expansion, or an overhaul, of the national minimum standards for care home regulations to drive forward quality design. The current standards were last updated in 2006 and only require a minimum of one bathroom per eight residents, which is one aspect that should be revised.

The main barrier to reform is funding. Social care has been chronically underfunded for years and needs sustained investment and rescuing from central government. This could drastically improve people’s quality of life and dignity and ultimately help reduce the strain on the NHS.

Remote GP consultations could see health centres acting as air traffic control for the local population.

That has implications for schedules of accommodation. You can imagine a big push for the remote management of healthcare and more advanced devices, with health centres becoming more like air traffic control centres for the local population.

In terms of acute care hospitals, the hot core isn’t likely to change. Operating theatres are already designed to tackle disease transmission and are heavily engineered with the separation of flows, and of clean and dirty materials.

Pressures on gender separation and for different acuities in wards has led to increasing numbers of individual bedrooms. Around 70% of beds in a new hospital are single bedrooms and the push for separation is likely to continue in the wake of coronaviruses.

Hospitals incorporate vast office space and staff, many of whom now work remotely. The challenges for a massive organisation like the NHS, which is the fourth largest employer in the world, is how to maintain a sense of belonging for high value staff.

We need to move towards business ‘office’ type environments where people can drop in and drop out, where they can feel part of a viable place to be employed.

Many of these ideas are nascent, we’re still trying to deal with the problems of the past. As the UK is embarking on a major-cycle of health infrastructure investment at a time of economic downturn, we need to reboot our ideas in each theatre, in a light and safe environment. This is an imperative action in the face of pandemic.

The pandemic will of course also influence the patient experience outside of hospitals. The digital revolution is here to stay, but what will solutions for isolated and mobile healthcare units, that bridge the gap between the patient’s home and the healthcare provider, ultimately look like and how will they work?

In the longer term I think we will be increasingly looking at hospital, pandemics and digital technologies together in relation to reinventing whole health landscapes: how should we be combining mobile units and primary care? What will the emphasis and pressure of the new model look like and how will they work?

We're widening the focus from hospital design to healthcare design.

Hospitals are the most complex buildings in society and environments that people inhabit during the most vulnerable moments in life. These buildings represent huge investments in a future-proofing agenda must be highly valued at all stages.

Assessment of our recently commissioned projects in Stockholm – Karolinska University Hospital in Solna and Huddinge Hospital – has highlighted new design features that proved successful during the peak weeks of the pandemic. These include adaptability, flexibility and humanity, with a healing and attractive environment for patients and staff that is sustainable over time.

The pandemic case study is fascinating: in just 10 days 23 operating theatres were transformed into 84 intensive care units able to accommodate three patients in each theatre, to a light and safe environment. This was impressive action in the face of the pandemic.

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We’re focusing on now at White – it’s a widening of the focus from hospital design to healthcare design.
How to sell the high street

For a store already in crisis, Covid-19 looked like the last straw for physical retail. But four specialists see a chance for growth and change for the better

Pamela Buxton

Physical retail was already in crisis long before Covid-19 struck, fuelled by changing shopping habits and the rise of online retail in particular. Since the lockdown, overall retail sales plummeted by a record 18.1% in April to a record 30.7% in April compared with 19.1% in April 2019. Now, non-food retailers emerging from the shut-down must add to that social distancing, one-way systems, entrance and queuing outside and more. And then there’s the whole of house stockroom and loading procedures. So what’s the future for this struggling sector? ‘A lot of innovation is needed in retail as an industry, we wouldn’t be surprised if interesting things come out of Covid-19 in terms of selling across different platforms, and different experiences of shopping,’ says Fiona Scott, co-author of the new GLA report High different experiences of shopping,’ says Fiona Scott, co-author of the new GLA report High different experiences of shopping,’ says Fiona Scott, co-author of the new GLA report High

Friedrich Ludig is a director of Bblur, whose work includes Victoria Central, Central, Eastland in Melbourne, and Dublin Central.

I don’t think that retail clients will be asking architects tomorrow to redesign their stores just for Covid. That’s like saying the vases of the 1960s, when you were dealing with the ice-breaking strategy towards. Before the virus had struck, overall retail was under serious pressure to evolve, with those traditions of the high street, the department store and the shopping mall being played out at increasing speeds. Online retail was working with more-accelerating pace and market share. Consumers had started to question if conspicuous retail consumption is sustainable in a climate-changing world. The new SKP-S store we completed in Beijing last year in collaboration with eyewear brand Gentle Monster was conceived as a department store of the future, but just 40% of the store is dedicated to the product, compared with a norm of 70-80%. Yet even with the impact of Covid-19, our retail sites have been way ahead of their projection because SKP-S offers an experimental take on retail as we know it. As designers, we ensure our clients to operate their stores safely. They need to retrain their staff to be almost like flight attendants. The service will have to be impeccable and focus on the details and the personalisation of service. Retail’s future will rely on high-quality products, curated experience, spatial sensations and social interaction. The high street needs to rediscover its specialities. Covid-19 has brought people to shop more locally again. Retailers must build on their local strengths and differently. People like to go to places of knowledge and expertise like a good bookshop or specialist fishmonger. And if there is one niche the virus has shown, it is the importance of offer to the local high street has a chance to become more relevant again. On a more personal space we're more people spending more of their working day away from the city centres.

Retail will never disappear, but it will still being perceived as a profit centre, and a standard design. Retail will return to its roots, as a space of commerce and exchange at the heart of our buildings. Retail will become much more embedded in the heart of our city, it will be local, it will not be deployed to make money, but to make it a place. The right food shop bar and on the ground floor will be important. Space will become multidimensional. Retail will turn around visitors through the door to sell a product, or an service or experience including doctors, architects and carpenters, for example. Looking ahead, there won’t be pure retail developers anymore, instead there will be mixed-use developers, who understand the value of retail as an active ground floor space in a bigger scheme. It will be one part of what we need to make a thriving, human-scale city.

Shane Mitchell is a founder of architect and designer Apliqué, a practice specialising in retail and hospitality environments.

I think there will be a radical shift across every part of the luxury sector from fashion and accessories to cars and jets, as companies adjust to volume swings, supply chain and wars of attrition. In fashion terms, Covid-19 will accelerate trends towards operating without seasons, such as the one with David, and also fashion will give in to the end of the runaway show. Balenciaga has already shown that you can reach hundreds of thousands with a live stream instead of a 2,000-cover banging band and sellouts through later sales. Even more than before, luxury retail will now be about selling the dream – how to unleash all the nuances of the experience by looking at the facility of surface, the comfort of chairs to be run in, the use of beautiful lighting and mirrors that are supremely flattering, as well as providing luxury clients the good coffee and service. There will be more focus on the little nuances that will make people feel special and pampered, and inspire them to get out and explore the collections and try on the quantity-quality clothes. Luxury bricks and mortar is about the tactile experience, the quality clothes. Luxury bricks and mortar is about the tactile experience, the

Fraser were in and out of administration. John Lewis & partner were already working with ever-accelerating pace and market share. Consumers had started to question if conspicuous retail consumption is sustainable in a climate-changing world. The new SKP-S store we completed in Beijing last year in collaboration with eyewear brand Gentle

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The planning of the customer by thinking about tactility of surface, the selling the dream – how to subliminally reach all the senses

Gucci, and will also hasten the impact of Covid-19, the retail sales have been way ahead of expectations compared with a norm of 70-80%. Yet even with the impact of Covid-19, the retail sites we have been way ahead of their projection because SKP-S offers an experimental take on retail as we know it. As designers, we ensure our clients to operate their stores safely. They need to retrain their staff to be almost like flight attendants. The service will have to be impeccable and focus on the details and the personalisation of service. Retail’s future will rely on high-quality products, curated experience, spatial sensations and social interaction. The high street needs to rediscover its specialities. Covid-19 has brought people to shop more locally again. Retailers must build on their local strengths and differently. People like to go to places of knowledge and expertise like a good bookshop or specialist fishmonger. And if there is one niche the virus has shown, it is the importance of offer to the local high street has a chance to become more relevant again. On a more personal space we're more people spending more of their working day away from the city centres.

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A recent article in *The RIBA Journal* (July 2020) discussed the ongoing challenges faced by the retail sector, particularly in light of the ongoing pandemic and its impact on consumer behavior and preferences. The article analyzed how the retail environment has evolved, with a focus on the importance of inclusivity, mixed-use developments, and adapting to changing consumer needs.

The article highlighted the ongoing shift towards more adaptable and mixed-use retail spaces, which can accommodate various activities such as workplaces, leisure, food and beverage, and residential spaces. This approach allows for greater flexibility and adaptability, accommodating changing consumer preferences and needs.

The article also discussed the need for retailers to think beyond traditional retail spaces and to consider the role of retail in the broader landscape of urban development. This includes the rethinking of how retail space is planned and designed, with a focus on creating spaces that are not only attractive but also functional and adaptable to changing circumstances.

The article emphasized the importance of collaboration between architects, designers, and urban planners in creating retail spaces that are not only aesthetically pleasing but also functional and adaptable to changing circumstances. This includes the consideration of how retail space is integrated into the broader urban context, with a focus on creating spaces that are not only attractive but also functional and adaptable to changing circumstances.

Overall, the article provided a comprehensive overview of the current challenges faced by the retail sector and the need for innovation and adaptability in retail design and planning to meet the changing needs of consumers.
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Power on past Covid
Building up a practice is a challenge enough. But can pandemic disruption be turned to advantage?

Emma Kayte and Rachel Birchmore

Is the evolution of a practice strategic or one big opportunistic adventure? When we began interviewing practices 18 months ago to discover how they navigate the thresholds of emergence, maturity and succession, we couldn’t imagine how dramatically their resilience would soon be tested. Here we look at how disruption - whether due to economic recession, changes in government policy or personal circumstance, or unforeseen events such as global pandemic - can interrupt a practice’s trajectory, in the best cases setting it on a completely new evolutionary curve.

In previous articles on ribaj.com, we identified forward thinking, shared values, lack of ego and space for individuals to develop as important foundations for a resilient practice. The most successful practices use moments of arrival along the way as opportunities to set the tone, recharge the team’s energy and act as a springboard towards the next. Is it possible for moments of disruption - rather than arrival - to act as similar opportunities for practice evolution?

For many larger practices, disruption is an inevitable part of the business cycle: they have weathered storms before and have systems in place to adapt. Covid-19 has presented a specific set of challenges in that the pandemic is global (meaning it’s not just a shift in geographical markets), and it is not manmade. However, it demands similar tactics from the leadership to other crises.

Established practices are often more resilient...
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Intelligence

Avoid silos
Changes in government policy can also create significant disruption to practice workflow, as Penoyre & Prasad discovered in 2010 when the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme was abruptly stopped. ‘We survived because we had our feet in several sectors,’ says principal Mark Rowe, ‘but also because we weren’t siloed. Our practice structure was fluid enough to adapt.’ This flexibility has seen the practice through more recent disruption, first when it merged with Perkins+Will in late 2019, and of course during the current pandemic. ‘We’ve now spent more time working in lockdown than we had in our new shared space,’ he continues. ‘But because they tend to have a more collegiate approach, relying less on a single figure to mobilise the response. Arup’s shared values, for example, and Grimshaw’s distinctive internal spirit, mean people instinctively rally to the cause in times of disruption. Chris Harding, chair of BDP, echoes this, ‘We’re built on the idea of constant change, which allows people the freedom to express themselves and act intuitively. It’s autonomy within a collective idea. Our design for the Nightingale Hospital came not from a considered strategic effort driven from the top, but from one of our team pulling together the right people, quickly.’

Above: Resilience can lie in the agility of the team, as BDP found when working on the Nightingale Hospitals.

Below: Joe Morris of Morris + Company suggests this is a time to consider the studio afresh.

Take stock
Other practices have used the pause of the pandemic to take stock of where they are and, amid the cacophony of voices offering their reflections, are calling for a radical rethink. Joe Morris of Morris and Company, speaking from a mountain of models as part of the Architecture Foundation’s 100 Day Studio series, suggested that many of us have simply taken the bad habits of the real office back into our locked-down, virtual one, whereas this should be a moment to consider the studio afresh. ‘Our methods are weakened if we merely try to do “business as usual”. It isn’t just about how we work from our bedrooms; it is also about how we view the value of our work, and those involved in or affected by it.’

This impulse to look at things through a new lens is vital. The practices that stick rigidly to their usual ways of working are more likely to disappear in times of disruption; those who survive tend to be those who
make a virtue out of a crisis. A useful perspective is to consider how you might set up a new practice under the circumstances. As Chris Bryant of alma-nac says: ‘Whether you’re setting up from scratch or are more established, at a time like this we’re all startups in a way.’ Despite – or maybe because of – the fact that it is nimble, alma-nac has consciously taken time out during lockdown to explore what the likely changes will mean for it. ‘Architecture starts from an optimistic standpoint, and that’s what we’re focusing on,’ says alma-nac co-founder and director Caspar Rodgers. ‘There is only learning.’

Think creatively

Surviving uncertainty – no matter its cause – almost always demands creativity. Dan Nation, co-founder of the Redundant Architects Recreation Association (RARA), was working in a shared workshop space at the time of the 2008 financial crash. As co-workers disappeared overnight, he and the other members of the East London Design Bureau decided to take on the space as RARA. ‘It was an open workshop available to hire for the many architects who had been forced into inactivity. There was no set hierarchy or remit. Our direction shifted according to the skills and outlooks present at any one time.’

Collaborative Design and Build (Co-DB) has since evolved out of RARA and the same values and flexibility that attracted members following the economic recession seem newly pertinent in a post-Covid world. Gort Scott of Gort Scott Architects suggested that crisis might even become the new normal, taking into account the current, parallel challenges of climate emergency, pandemic and social unrest. Set up after the last recession, his studio grew out of the founders’ academic practice. ‘The way we taught is the way we’ve ended up practising,’ says Fiona Scott. ‘Until now we’ve been quite organic in the way we do things, but Covid-19 has accelerated the need for clarity around our values. Refining or re-emphasising a practice’s culture and spirit seems to be an important ingredient for survival in times of uncertainty.

Like many we spoke to, Gort Scott also emphasised the importance of collaboration. Informal groups such as the London Practice Forum, London Architects Group and London bring together like-minded practices to lobby for positive change, promote ethical standards and share resources. For Joe Morris, collective working is both a means of surviving crisis and a hoped-for outcome: ‘It is blindingly obvious that we are interdependent, and that the virus itself is a manifestation of this. We must reflect on the fact that we are all part of a complex system, and that system – and our practice – should use all of its talent to support the interests of all.’

Big moment

Sometimes, disruption can also bring about the unique set of conditions that signal a practice’s big ‘moment’, giving its work heightened currency and acting as an important threshold in its evolution. Ackroyd Lowrie, for example, has focused heavily on the use of virtual reality since forming four years ago. Oliver Lowrie says: ‘It’s obviously a difficult time for everyone, but we set out to change the way our industry works by embracing technology and the pandemic has accelerated the need for innovation.’

‘The most resilient practices in times of disruption are likely to be those with a clear purpose and strong identity. They will value collective thinking, whether this is intra- or inter-practice, and demonstrate the creativity, energy and attitude to adapt to circumstances. They will be equipped with a strong reputation and a network of supportive contacts. And they will have optimism about the value of architecture – and architectural practice. As Chris Bryant of alma-nac says: ‘Recessions inevitably bring huge amounts of pain as existing structures crumble, but they also bring new energy and opportunities for us to rethink the way we work.’

See the rest of this series at ribaj.com/resilience

Emma Keyte is a communications consultant and writer. free-projects.co.uk

Rachel Birchmore is a business and leadership coach. arebe.co.uk
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To be eligible you should have completed your professional training (Part II for architects) within 10 years from the date you submit your entry.

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What’s what
Will Wiles is starting to wonder what he’s looking at

Some years ago, this magazine was based at Ludgate House, on the south bank of Thames in London. It offered a fantastic panorama of the river and central London, prominently including its near-neighbour, Sampson House, just across the Thameslink train lines.

Sampson House, a brutalist ziggurat in concrete and dark metal, was in dock next to Ludgate House’s ocean liner. From our elevated position in the tower next door, it had a heavily-serviced, industrial feel. It was hard to love, but undeniably charismatic, and like all charismatic buildings it generated stories and myths. Its basement was eight, 12, 20 levels deep, depending on who you talked to – everyone agreed it was deep. There was, of course, a nuclear bunker in there, or command centre, or whatever. And – this was the best – it was where your cheques went to be incinerated, assuming they didn’t get bounced back to you.

This last story was the best because it was true, or at least true enough. Sampson House was a cheque-clearing and financial data centre for Lloyds Bank, where numbers scrawled on slips of paper were programmed to bounce back your cheques. Whether they were burned afterwards, I don’t know, but I hope so. It’s so much more romantic that way, a flash of cleansing flame at the end of the ant-work of everyday finance, a Viking funeral for your fulfilled promises.

But did Sampson House look like an incinerator? It had a proper chimney stack which lent credence to the story – and added to its nautical appearance – as did the industrial ruggedness of its materials and suggestion of menace. How much of the gossip about incinerators and bunkers was simply subconscious anti-brutalism? It recalls Prince Charles’s attempt, years ago, to maltreat John Madin’s brutalist Birmingham Central Library as ‘a place where books are incinerated, not kept’.

In my last column I said the popular discussion of architecture often resorts to ‘a katty list of derogatory clichés’ and promised to return to the subject. And here we are. Though not threadbare enough to be a cliché on its own, the incinerator belongs on the list with the abattoir, sewage works and electricity sub-station, all of which make appearances when the intention is to compare a building to a utilitarian and drab place with an unpleasant or noisome function. But the ‘big three’ clichés are the alien spacecraft, prison and airport.

The alien spacecraft is literally anything that appears out of place, with bonus points if it is raised up on pilots. I was moved to write this column when I saw that objectors had used the analogy for A+D Design’s Will Alsop-esque student accommodation proposed for Cambridge. It’s a baffling comparison – out of place it might be, but its cladding of scattered battens made it more like a picnic basket or a birdwatching hide. How many wicker spaceship ships are there? And what’s had about spaceship ships? Very advanced bits of kit, they are. ‘Prison’ makes sense as an insult – an ugly, noisome function. But the ‘big three’ clichés are the alien spacecraft, prison and airport.

Confusion really takes flight with the airport, intended to evoke an impersonal scale, and a restless absence of place. Euston Station is often disparaged with this comparison, for its large booking hall, now cluttered with retail, and tunnel access to trains. But arguably the reconstructed St Pancras is now more airport-like, with its subterranean departure lounge reached via shopping mall, and people love it. But did it ever look like a railway station?

Prince Charles criticised the British Library, next door, as looking more like a terminus than a library. Will Wiles is an author. Read him here every other month and at ribaj.com

KNOCKS OF AGES
Condemnation by comparison isn’t new, of course. It’s a taste and scale shift. Yesterday’s insults won’t cut it – people now compare things to clothes they own. But some stick in the mind, such as Horace Walpole’s sneering about Robert Adam’s ‘gingerbread and sippets of embroidery’.

How many wicker spaceship ships are there? And what’s so bad about spaceship ships?

Wiles

Will Wiles
As lockdown eases, recession looms. The RIBA is here to help practices navigate these choppy waters

The seminar by Colin Blatchford-Brown
Designing for fire safety in residential buildings, was one of, if not the best I have ever attended. Full stop!

We will not return to ‘business as usual’. As the pandemic leaves its indelible mark on society, business and our profession, our actions to respond to and recover from this crisis are what will create our new normal and new practice.

While lockdown may have presented opportunities for some architects to make positive changes to their working arrangements and re-evaluate the work-life balance, most have also experienced high levels of personal and professional anxiety, fearing future workloads, reduced salaries, redundancies and the difficulties of working from home. But now things are starting to move towards a new version of normal. Work on site has resumed, architects’ practices are gradually returning to the workplace and businesses seem to be switching from ‘response’ to ‘recovery’ mode. We still face unknowns, especially regarding the extent of the financial fallout, but while we cannot be certain what lies ahead we can start planning for it.

It remains the priority of the RIBA to provide our members and practices with the guidance and support to help weather this storm. This means helping map routes to recovery and build future resilience through the RIBA Recovery Roadmap, creating a dialogue around post-pandemic design through our competition Rethink archetype 2025 and continuing to collect and share intelligence to understand how architects and students are coping.

Launched last month, the RIBA Recovery Roadmap provides guidance to help members plan their route to recovery. Split into three phases – response, recovery and resilience – the digital platform contains actions that practices can take across different areas of their business to respond to the challenges from stabilising finances and supporting staff wellbeing to winning new business and reopening the office. ‘Road to Recovery’ podcasts will feature member reflections on topics covered in each phase, and these will align with the themes of RIBA Practice Clinics – online events where members can discuss their experiences with peer practitioners.

Guidance in the Recovery Roadmap directly responds to member queries and concerns gathered via our regional teams, information line and surveys. Since March, huge numbers of architects have shared their views through our Covid-19 and Future Trends surveys, helping us tailor our output and provide a benchmark against which practices can compare their experiences.

These insights have also directly informed our lobbying activity with the government: our work to ensure policy makers provide the right support to protect jobs and businesses and take steps to mitigate an elongated economic recovery. We are also incredibly mindful that the handling of Brexit will play a major role in this recovery, and we continue to call for a feasible UK-EU deal that will allow for sustainable growth. We will also advocate for architects as being essential to the many other facets of a successful recovery, of wellbeing, social cohesion, equity and inclusion within private and public space, of place making and identity and belonging.

Whatever lies ahead, the RIBA will continue to support and advocate for members. The RIBA also wants to make it easier for those struggling financially to renew their 2020 membership so has introduced measures including a reduced rate application extension to the payment deadline. Find out more by emailing membership@riba.org.

As we move into the next phase, the RIBA promises to support you – our members and practices – in your own routes to recovery, to protect your interests, represent your concerns, and help you build resilience against current and future challenges in the process.

Keep in touch
For those keen to keep in touch, architects in the south west are running a series of ‘On your own route to recovery’ events. Short, sharp and sweet, these personal stories give an insight into careers and challenges during the coronavirus and before. Search RIBA_practitioner_stories on twitter or visit RIBA Bristol and Bath on Facebook.
It’s said often enough that architects need to get out of their professional ghetto, collaborate with other professions and trades, be less concerned with look-at-me buildings and more with the public realm, do solid research, hit the streets and talk to real people more. It’s hard to disagree, especially when you are talking to one of the now firmly established practices which does all these things. Here they are, and they are called We Made That. Holly Lewis and Oliver Goodhall started working together in 2006. Unusually, they set up on their own while at architecture school – the Bartlett – having won their first competition while still Part 1 students. An international competition in fact, for a tiny building: a beach hut at Mablethorpe in Lincolnshire, one of a series by various architects. Their resulting ‘A hut for gazing and canoodling’ – black bituminous fibreboard outside, pink stencil patterns inside, high-level corner doors swinging open to take in the view – might have suggested a future as buildings architects, quite possibly as designers of imaginative one-off houses of the postmodernism-revival variety.

But this was not the way they wanted to go. The pair wanted to be strategists as much as architects, as interested in fruitful urban adjustments as in new buildings. Determined to take on only public sector commissions, they stuck to their guns and made their own niche: more often than not working in what could be described as half-forgotten, run-down, overlooked parts of town. Reviving previously declining high streets, making congenial space for people rather than speeding machines, generally stimulating communities by getting directly involved with them.

Having finished their studies they went full time in 2010. ‘We used to say I did the words and Oliver did the shapes and colours,’ Lewis recalls. ‘It’s a bit more complicated than that these days.’ We Made That is now an 18-strong firm working in 22 of the 33 London boroughs, and further afield: a masterplan for the district around Runcorn Station anticipates the eventual arrival of HS2...
You start off with a project that doesn’t have a brief… what emerges comes from community engagement.

The discussion with the community, trying things out. We Made: That is not a hair-shirt practice, Lewis emphasises. “I wouldn’t let the community focus of the portfolio distract you from the fact that we’re really serious about the business side of things. We think carefully about how we’re structuring the practice and the projects, the resourcing, empowering people to run projects themselves, being transparent about our finances and practice management, paying people properly, being interested in growth. We don’t see any conflict in doing that and in doing the kinds of projects that we like to do. Being strong and resilient allows us to do more of that.”

“They do their work in a joyful, humanistic, de-mythologising way, it seems to me. They don’t find their work dry nor do they present it as such. The stats are people, and the people inform the designs. It’s understandable that their work has featured in the RIBAJ’s MacEwen Awards – ‘architecture for the common good’. But all architects and designers secretly hanker after the project they’ve not won yet, don’t they? What is theirs? Both Lewis and Kurian say the same thing in different ways: they would like to see some of these years of research and large masterplanning projects through to completion – including more ‘weird and amazing’ buildings designed by them. But in the meantime they are happy in what they do. As Lewis puts it: ‘There’s something rather lovely about writing your own brief and then delivering on it’.”
Ronald Weeks, who died in March aged 83, was an outstanding and versatile architect, best known for his award-winning Clifton Cathedral Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Bristol, a virtuoso concrete building constructed between 1969 and 1973.

The grade II* listed Roman Catholic cathedral was designed by Weeks with his colleagues Frederick S Jennett and Antoni Poremba at the Percy Thomas Partnership. This was his first major design for the firm, which he joined in 1965, later becoming a partner, then director and finally chairman in 1997 before his retirement in 2001, the year after he had his cathedral listed.

A winner of many awards, it is one of a trio of modern churches designed by Weeks on a hexagonal module. The second is St John Vianney Church in Seattle, USA, which he designed with his brother-in-law Roy Koczarski and which opened its doors in 1993. Here Weeks echoed the star-beam roof structure employed at Clifton and organisation of participants around the altar, creating a complex of spaces for social activities and education.

This was followed by a smaller parish church in the town of Weeks’ birth, Buckfastleigh in Devon, to replace the former parish church Holy Trinity, which was destroyed by fire. As with the Clifton Cathedral, the new St Luke’s Church has a light-filled, star beam roof structure, with a complex of social spaces designed in dialogue with clergy and community and opened in 2004.

He was consultant architect for some of Britain’s finest bridges, among them the Prince of Wales Bridge, the second Severn estuary roadbridge. Inaugurated in 1996, it is Britain’s longest river crossing, its 948m central cable-stay section flanked by two long viaducts, each over 2km long, on a total of 100 columns arranged on a 35m module. Weeks also played a key role in designing the Jackfield Bridge alongside Gifford & Partners in the Ironbridge Gorge on the River Severn in Shropshire, which was opened in 1994. It was described by the Royal Fine Art Commission as ‘worthy of the Ironbridge Gorge’ and ‘an overwhelming success’.

Lesser known but of lasting significance is the key role Weeks played in developing healthcare facilities in the UK and abroad, winning several important commissions for the Percy Thomas Partnership such as Colchester District General Hospital (1984) and the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast (2003). He also designed the Xerox HQ in Leatherhead, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (formerly the First Polytechnic Hong Kong), and National Physical Laboratories in Teddington.

Weeks was educated at the Bartlett School of Architecture where he was awarded the RIBA Donaldson Medal and won a scholarship to the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where he met Le Corbusier. While still a student Weeks gained ‘highly commended’ for his design for the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral competition.

At the Bartlett he met his future wife Irena Koczarska who was studying interior design, forming the beginning of a lifelong creative partnership. The couple married in 1961. Herself a talented artist, Irena died in January 2018.

In the calligraphy cut into the concrete floor leading from the narthex to the font at St Luke’s, Weeks’ buildings and was integrally involved in design—both the presbytery (Cathedral House) at Clifton and in the calligraphy cut into the concrete floor leading from the narthex to the font at St Luke’s—An ornamental and accomplished artist and modelmaker, Ronald retired to Buckinghamshire and later Britta-

He is survived by his daughters Sophie and Susan, and by his granddaughter Scarlet. A memorial service will be held at Clifton Cathedral, date to be announced once current restrictions are lifted. •
Following a ‘virtual’ City of London planning and transportation meeting on 14 May the Times reported the Clothworkers’ Company proposal at 50 Fenchurch street to erect a 36-storey, 78,000 ft² tower by Eric Parry adjacent to the Tower of London. It is one of a cluster of tall blocks adjacent to the Tower of London, namely 1 Undershaft at 247m (also by Parry), and 100 Leadenhall by SOM, which will contribute to a ‘substantial cluster of tall buildings beside the Tower’.

In approving the scheme the Corporation swept aside objections from Historic Royal Palaces and ditched the protected view of the World Heritage Site across the river from the south.

After the decision Parry commented: ‘The proposal will unite more than 800 years of the City of London’s history with its future in a development that will dramatically improve the experience of the city for all.’

Given that none of the public were able to attend the meeting due to lockdown, I wonder if we might ask Eric Parry what he meant by this extraordinary comment?

Nick Snow, by email

Hand made

Owing to the Coronavirus, I was slow to get to read your March 2020 issue, but was much cheered to read about the wonderful Hallé St Peter’s and Kingston University buildings, both designed with care and cleverness, and both of which I expect bring joy and delight to their users.

Then I came to your 11-page ‘Digital Revolution’ section. This is important territory to be examining. That the section consisted of four articles written by the same person, and that the words ‘automated design’ managed to appear in your pages, may well be symptomatic of the subject matter, which aims at the production of more with less means. I despair that were such a digital revolution to transpire, as one infers from the articles that it will, it would be very hard to imagine the two above-mentioned buildings coming into existence, and the world would be a poorer place for it.

Nick Snow, by email

Health kick

Total applause to CSK Architects for asking what sort of ‘fundamental transformation’ should architects be instigating to thwart climate change, thereby raising awareness of toxins in building materials which are contributing towards the poisoning of our planet (RIBAJ April 2020).

Martin Brown in FutureRestorative (RIBA Publishing), and others, cite the built environment as being responsible for 40% of all carbon emissions in the UK. He also suggests that ‘40% of a nation’s health costs are attributable to the built environment’.

Natural building materials are healthy for our homes, healthy for our bodies and healthier for our planet. Would it be timely now to give healthy materials more of a platform in the RIBAJ?

Clare Sherroff, via email

Alma pater

Stephen Parnell refers to the Arts Tower which houses Sheffield University’s School of Architecture as being completed in 1966 (RIBAJ April 2020 p.50). However, I was one of the School’s first year intake to the School in September 1965. The formal opening was by the Queen Mother in 1966.

The paternoster lift was for most a unique and somewhat amusing form of vertical travel. However, that and the two conventional passenger lifts were completely inadequate to cope with the numbers requiring access at 9am to the 20 floors of accommodation above the lower ground floor lecture theatres.

Nevertheless the now refurbished and listed 20 storey tower is a key city landmark and for 55 years has offered lucky architectural students views from its top floors over one of the country’s most interesting and continually evolving cities.

Philip Evans, Kettering
With travel severely restricted in the past few months, it is perhaps easier for us now to understand the glamour of flying as it must have been perceived in the 1960s, and as it was then expressively captured in this photograph of the TWA terminal at JFK airport in New York. The building’s design by Eero Saarinen, seen at the time as boldly futuristic, had its centerpiece in the winged head house, covered by a thin reinforced concrete shell supported at the corners. The curves of this dramatic structure are repeated inside, linking ceiling, walls and floor in a fluid internal space. Saarinen sadly died a year before the completion of the terminal, which was therefore overseen by two members of his team, Kevin Roche and John Dinckels. In 1994 both the exteriors and the interiors of the building were designated a historic landmark by the City of New York; this status didn’t stop the demolition of the two structures at the sides of the head house when, almost 28 years after its closure, the terminal was converted into a hotel in 2019.

Valeria Carullo

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SonaSpray fx – Windermere Jetty Museum, Cumbria.

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