Colour rules OK at Czech school
How architecture schools are reopening
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AJ Specification Award winning project ‘The Forge’ in London E6 epitomises the way forward in rainwater management in the UK.

“This project demonstrates good design team collaboration and joined-up thinking,” said the judges. “It responds to the city’s challenge – of not being able to put things in the ground – and uses specification to turn the scheme on its head, with a high-quality outcome.”

A key constraint of the original planning consent for this residential scheme was the site’s limiting maximum discharge rate for surface water of 3.3 litres per second – resulting in the scheme sitting within what’s known as a ‘critical drainage area’, and posing significant design challenges in terms of drainage.

Radmat’s Blue40 Roof systems provided a key element of the source control and attenuation required by the site’s Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SuDS) strategy; attenuating rainwater rather than draining it quickly.

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Award Winning Blue Roof Stormwater Attenuation Systems

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The buildings in this month’s RIBAJ all happen to be about regeneration – of a town, village and two post-industrial urban areas. However, they each use various methods: from a council facility designed by Moxon Architects that brings together public functions previously dispersed across Fraserburgh in Aberdeenshire, to a rural primary school expansion in Czechia that is reviving the reputation of the village – and that is seeing its population expanding for the first time in years.

Then there is University College Birmingham, which is itself already progressing from a further education college to a university and is intent on staying in its long-term Jewellery Quarter location by commissioning a building that suits all types of its students. Glenn Howells Architects’ design, externally brick slips attached to insulated precast panels in the factory, already shows its adaptability inside in light of the coronavirus crisis.

Finally, Hugh Pearman makes his first project visit since lockdown to a houses and apartments scheme on a small site, designed by PH+ along the canal in east London where housing is the new industry. Its early Orsman Road project further west was a refreshing architectural break along another London waterway and, pleasingly, so is this one. •

Eight ‘biospherians’ lived in the tightly-sealed closed research and living environment for two years, growing and harvesting their own food, with 100% waste and water recycling – while monitoring and measuring productivity and the Biosphere’s environmental conditions.
Concertina-wall defies canalside aesthetic

You can take an architect to water but you can’t make it build a warehouse. PH+ takes a fresh approach to housing

Words: Hugh Pearman Photographs: Timothy Soar

It’s good to come across a fresh idea when it comes to waterside housing, especially canalside housing. Too often you get the pseudo-warehouse aesthetic or just the standard brick-block-with-jutting-balconies. Anyone who walks the London waterways is drearily familiar with these types. Not here in Bow, though, on the Hertford Union Canal that runs along the south-eastern edge of Hackney’s Victoria Park. Here, on a tight triangular site, architect PH+ has opted for a sculpted concertina-wall approach, in red brick rather than the more usual yellowy London stocks or brindled grey.

It’s a proper local landmark for passers-by – from the park, from the canal towpath or from Old Ford Road behind. The residents have cause to thank Sir George Duckett, the original promoter of this curious one-mile canal which opened in 1830 as a link from the Regent’s Canal to the River Lea. That was at the tail end of the canal-mania era and it was a commercial flop, but it survived as an industrial – and now post-industrial – corridor. Housing is the new industry round these parts, either formally as in this case or informally, given that London’s waterways are now lined with live-aboard boats. Nose to tail, often moored two abreast, obliged to move periodically by the licensing authority but always immediately replaced by others, just such a shape-shifting boater community.
occupies the towpath side of the canal here as a reminder that not all homes are static and grid-connected.

It’s a compliment to say that the architecture of this new block feels more like that of a bespoke one-off house than the product of a speculative developer – in this case Earth Residential which has an established niche in developing upmarket properties on often ‘difficult’ bits of brownfield land. London property values obviously make a difference but building in this way was relatively complex and carried with it extra expense – for instance a lot of Wienerberger brick specials were needed to keep the clean lines and sharp angles of the design. Working to a traditional JCT contract clearly helped the detailing.

Although there is a very strong overall consistency to the design, it becomes increasingly ‘one-off’ in feel towards its apex where there are relatively few repeated elements. Everything is held together by geometry and uniform materials. The brickwork shrinks into every opening. The upper two storeys on the canal side float above a straight-line fully glazed plinth opening up onto broad well-planted canalside terraces: on the roadside elevation the angled masonry continues to the ground, though here the plinth line is expressed by a slight inset in the brickwork. The roadside elevation is also marked by smaller and fewer windows.

As if determinedly to avoid architectural cliché, no great play is made of the apex of the plan’s apex. Stirling-esque conning tower. Instead the apex ends on a down-sag rather than an up-tick, expressed as a narrow solid wall, deliberately not gazing west along the road as it could have done. The oblique views from the two main windows in the angled flank of this house suffice. The gesture of the overall form is enough. In fact ground conditions did not allow for much more at this point, as the building had to pull itself back a little from a large gas main crossing the site there.

This crinkle-crankle form contains three kinds of home. There are three three-storey, three bedroom freehold houses at the western end, while the broader eastern end contains three two-bed duplexes starting at first floor level, and two ground-floor single-bed flats plus a communal hall and bike store for them and the duplexes above. On the canal-side elevation the duplexes are marked by double-height recessed balcony apertures missing from the houses, but at a glance as you walk by, the composition reads successfully as one.

This was my first proper building visit – with architects and clients on site – since I just made it to the new student centre in Durham as the country was sliding towards lockdown. For this housing development, the shutdown has meant two things. Sales of the homes had only just started, and came to an abrupt halt with lockdown; and then...
resumed with a vengeance when lockdown eased, helped no doubt by the market-stimulating stamp duty reductions. Now they are all sold.

And secondly, the street outside has been filtered, with big planters placed in the roadway, so that pedestrians and cyclists – but no longer motor vehicles – have a route through this heavily residential area, instead being diverted a bit further south. This may not become permanent but one does get the sense of an urban rebalancing gathering pace. It wasn’t planned but it certainly helps the environment of these homes which suddenly have two peaceful sides instead of one.

For the duplexes, you take stairs to the first floor kitchen level in the centre of the plan, then down a couple of steps to the tall-ceiled living area with its inset balcony. There are no huge surprises to the interiors – all very tasteful, pretty spacious and well daylit, done in collaboration with the developer in the modern upmarket manner – except one. From the top floor a final set of stairs takes you up through a sliding glass skylight to a roof terrace, carved out of the shallow pitch of the copper roof, running across the plan. The houses have the same arrangement. It was a conscious architectural decision to use the volume in this way, rather than extend the bedroom roofs upwards.

The spaces up there are quite enclosed, open to the sky and treetops rather than the world of other people. This too is where the angled frontages score as overlooking from the inset balconies is much reduced. However, everything gets much more potentialistically communal at ground floor level where the canalside terrace runs right along in front of the ground floor flats and the ground floor of the houses, each unit separated not by a fence or railing but by good planting which will develop into native-species hedging; one hopes the residents will buy into this rather than getting in larchlap fencing panels. The planting also provides a degree of privacy from the other side of the canal, and is part of an acknowledgment of the natural world that includes special nesting bricks for birds (including swifts) and bats incorporated into the facades.

It’s a pleasure to come across a small residential market development like this that dares to be a bit different, is intelligently thought through and makes a significant visual contribution to its surroundings. George Duckett would have been astonished.

George Duckett would have been astonished.

The architecture feels more like that of a bespoke one-off house than the product of a speculative developer.
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Buildings
Photograph

Ruth and Bill, at home, Saltdean
Photography Tom Hull
Words Jan-Carlos Kucharek

It might be a gauge of how normalised our pandemic world has become that Tom Hull has to clarify this is not a ‘lockdown shot’, but was in fact taken in 2016. It is one of a series the photographer was compiling as a record of his family and where he had come from; and, by inference, to understand who he now was.

The photo is of his grandparents’ Ruth and Bill’s bungalow, along the coast east of Bight-on, the town where Hull had grown up. One of a row whose living rooms had amazing sea views, Hull recalls that, as was the fashion, all were closed off from it by the proverbial net curtains, protecting homes’ privacy from the road that ran between them and the sea.

But small and idiosyncratic as it was – ‘it had the longest, narrowest toilet ever and a baffling dodecahedron of a conservatory extension out the back’ – for Hull, it remains a space charged with nostalgic memories. Ruth became a gran at 45 – a few years older than Hull is now – and the couple moved into the bungalow soon after they were both 50. So, for what seems the golden eternity of childhood, Hull remembers four sets of uncles and aunts and up to 12 grandchildren cramming in for many, boisterous family events that his grandparents hosted over the years.

By the time this image was taken, Bill had been diagnosed with dementia and Parkinson’s disease and Ruth was dealing with the fact that he was slipping away, even while he was alive; he would eventually die of a heart attack two years later. Hull is sure that in all their years together, they never spent more than two weeks apart.

His photographic project, ‘A Moment’s Glance’, was intended to be chronicle of the life of a single family, its rich layers, sweet joys and incumbent pains; and in homage to his grandparents, this is Hull’s ‘Arundel Tomb’. Here, ever in the present, Bill is kissing Ruth tenderly; the gaze on Ruth’s face, wondering how long he will stay.
Primary moves

A baroque former rectory in a quiet Czechia village harbours eye-popping secrets within its walls

Words: Isabelle Priest Photographs: BoysPlayNice
The courtyard has become the heart of the living space. Colourful bridges connect the main building to the newly refurbished rear gallery of the courtyard above a concrete roof. The bridges were designed to reflect the surrounding landscape and provide a sense of connection to the natural world. The courtyard is now used for a variety of activities, including art exhibitions, music performances, and community gatherings.

The rectory passed to the state during Czechia’s great nationalisation in 1948, when it became a farm building and a fire station. In the 1970s and ’80s it was a school for masonry workers, then after the 1989 revolution the church took it over again, but it later became empty. Only in 2013 did the mayor strike a deal with the church to bring it back into use for village residents on the conditions that the town hall would have to restore it and the priest had to live inside. They settled on building the priest a new home elsewhere and opened two primary school classrooms in the main rectory building instead. This was followed in 2015 by the creation of day centre spaces for older people in the former stable wing behind, with shared dining facilities for both. This is where you will find the surprise contemporary architecture. And as architects Jiri Markevic and Jaroslav Sedlak from Public Atelier and PUEZE respectively explain, their project has made the village ‘kind of famous’ and the number of children living there is now growing.

Markovic and Sedlak were invited onto the project in 2016 via an engineer they had previously collaborat-ed with for feasibility studies. The school needed to expand capacity and the mayor needed to save the rapidly decaying roof trusses in the spaces above the day centre. At the time the school had two or three classrooms in the main building and the courtyard was used as parking and a store area. The brief was to create two new classrooms and two vocational teaching spaces for IT and English.

However, the architects saw an opportunity to con-nect everything up and, with the help of the conserva-tionists, they succeeded in pushing the ambitions of the mayor so that the project outline expanded to giving the whole complex a new lease of life. The proposal didn’t touch the inside of the rectory or previous areas of work, but revolved around the courtyard, stables and collection of outbuildings. The idea was to ensure both schoolchil-dren and visitors to the day centre would be comfortable using all parts.

On the ground floor this has been done by opening existing buildings to the courtyard. Meanwhile, at first floor level, the rooftops have been used to create a circular route that connects all of the wings of the former stables and outbuildings with the existing rear gallery of the rectory via two new colourful bridges. Above the L-shape day centre, the raftered roofspace with its cozy, timber attic floor has been restored to create a mul-tifunctional teaching room which is also used for schoolsleepovers. Here, the main baroque parts were saved and they introduced two large copper-clad dormer win-dows looking towards the courtyard and new skylights that face the village. Beyond is the more laboratory-like white and steel IT room, followed by a corridor of toilets, showers and storage.

The two new general teaching classrooms are posi-tioned on the fourth side of the courtyard above a cur-rently redundant ground floor space. Here, the roof was completely removed and replaced by a terrace at the back that has views onto the church to the south and a more contemporary box on top that overlays the ground floor to create a covered walkway through the courtyard. Green columns support the copper clad cuboid above.

IN NUMBERS

€1.3m construction cost
950m² reconstructed buildings
490m² courtyard
300m² classroom turnover

Previous page
(left to right) The red and yellow bridges that connect the main rectory building to the newly refurbished buildings behind. Colourful fences every surface – solid and transparent.

Above left The only giveaway from the village that something architectural has been recently going on. The steel mesh obscures a fire door.

Right A new copper box of classrooms partially supported by green stilts replaces the roof of one using to the courtyard.

The rectory via two new colourful bridges. Above the L-shape day centre, the raftered roofspace with its cozy, timber attic floor has been restored to create a multifunctional teaching room which is also used for schoolsleepovers. Here, the main baroque parts were saved and they introduced two large copper-clad dormer windows looking towards the courtyard and new skylights that face the village. Beyond is the more laboratory-like white and steel IT room, followed by a corridor of toilets, showers and storage.

The two new general teaching classrooms are positioned on the fourth side of the courtyard above a currently redundant ground floor space. Here, the roof was completely removed and replaced by a terrace at the back that has views onto the church to the south and a more contemporary box on top that overlays the ground floor to create a covered walkway through the courtyard. Green columns support the copper clad cuboid above.

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Right A new copper box of classrooms partially supported by green stilts replaces the roof of one using to the courtyard.
Across the project, new and historical parts are continuously intertwined, but made clearly distinguishable from one another. Classic plaster facades, red roof tiles and external copper guttering deliberately contrast with new cubic forms, supremely smooth surfaces and bright colours that saturate through cladding, glass, internal wall and floor choices. Passages, connections and separations are accentuated, bringing playfulness and the possibility of operation and movement. The courtyard itself has been transformed by red brick paving encircling an oval lawn for play. Copper detailing between new volumes that project forwards from the original building gives distance and distinction between old and new, wrapping easily around baroque elements.

“We chose bright colours to create distinction between old and new – the primary colours plus green,” explain Markovic and Sedlak. “It’s the external cladding but also glass so when you pass through you realise the change and the colours help with orientation.” The new routes make the school accessible too. Children are free to choose whichever entrance they wish in the morning – under the red bridge, yellow bridge, gym green door or through the original rectory. Graphic design and wayfinding are made of stickers that can be changed as uses do, in a typeface specifically designed for the project. In general, the contemporary elements face the courtyard, with only the yellow bridge and fire escape stair visible from the village, making the scheme a secret, eye-popping world, particularly special to children.

The project was, however, complicated. Each area had a different construction system for the architects to adapt the programme around – timber, steel or masonry – and they were unsure of what might be found. A big scheme for a small village, it had to get national and EU funding (amounting to about 80%). But the school has 55 pupils and is now thriving. Vřesovice is too as new inhabitants move in.

It’s been good for the young architectural practices and their directors as well. Another village has approached Public Atelier and FUUZE to design a kindergarten, another school wants an extension to their building in a city and there’s a renovation of a town hall. Maybe I’ll be able to get to one of those instead.

Credits

Architect: Public Atelier and FUUZE

Client: Municipality of Vřesovice

Outdoor improvements: Vendula Markevičová

Graphic design: Radim Lisa + Marie Štindlová

Client: Municipality of Vřesovice

Graphic design: Radim Lisa + Marie Štindlová

Client: Municipality of Vřesovice

Multi-purpose teaching space with an attic feel and marmoleum floor.

Below: Teaching terrace with yellow awnings overlooking the church.

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Higher Education is in a state of flux, with many universities searching for a USP that sets them apart from their competitors. Brexit and Covid-19 have exacerbated already tough times and forced organisations to think harder about their academic offer and even their identity. University College Birmingham (UCB), is a former further education college that made its name in the culinary arts, nurturing exceptional talent, including Michelin starred chefs and leaders in the hospitality industry. Since gaining full university recognition in 2012, it has expanded its academic programme, but without turning its back on its FE origins, still offering courses and apprenticeships for students aged 16+. Although maintaining a wide social reach, this has created the dilemma of having to segment its estate to cater for its different student groups. The university made a strategic decision to remain in central Birmingham, creating a new campus in the Jewellery Quarter. Moss House, a teaching and social hub, is a central

Modern study

Glenn Howells’ exquisitely crafted addition for University College Birmingham might be in the historic Jewellery Quarter but it is all about the future of learning

Words: Bob Ghosh  Photographs: Rob Parrish

Detailing of the brick slips gives the facade a handmade feel.

IN NUMBERS

8500m²  gross teaching building

£42m  construction-cost (teaching building and car park)

£4000/m²  teaching building construction-cost

Suppliers

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Terracotta rainscreen tiles/Terrafirma
Steel frame/South Steel
Windows/Breakwells
Car park cladding/ADEPT
Atrium acoustic timber cladding/BCL Timber
Joinery/Joinery
Internal doors/Cotswold

Left: Three stories brought together through the atrium.
part of the second phase of development. UCB is very much embedded in the fabric of the city, highly accessible to students, staff and visitors. Of the city’s five universities, UCB seems to be the one most dedicated to a vocational programme, with specialist teams advising students on employability and cultivating entrepreneurial skills. Birmingham is Europe’s youngest city, with 40% of its population aged between 14 and 25, and the UK’s most entrepreneurial, with more start-up’s per capita than anywhere else. These statistics will no doubt have influenced the university’s decision-making. Conceptually and physically, this project represents the future of learning and the antithesis of privileged students reading Classics in archaic, darkened rooms. Despite UCB’s significant landholdings in prime areas of the city, it was a challenge to create a coherent FE campus with a ‘heart’ – most notably Nicholas Hare’s Student Centre at UCL – but Moss House does not have this level of complexity, and any sense of intimacy. However, intellectually, this project represents the future of learning and the antithesis of privileged students reading Classics in archaic, darkened rooms.

The journey through the building is celebrated. To understand Moss House, you need to appreciate its function and setting. Designed by Glenn Howells Architects, it is an ambitious project which will help propel the university onto a different stage, creating high quality teaching spaces, a social hub for undergraduate and post-graduate students, and a showcasing opportunity to attract the future cohort. This is a powerful architectural statement which responds to a simple and clear spatial brief, but also gratifies the more intangible aspects of the student experience.

Early in his career, Glenn Howells often talked of ‘the diagram of the building’ which informs the rest of the design. Moss House is no exception, here there is a clear organisation and spatial configuration. As soon as you walk in, you experience the drama of the building, a three storey volume with a staggered staircase, inhabited bridges and adjacent terracing where students can sit, contemplate, work or socialise. This follows a trend that can be seen in other projects where circulation and what is social space. Moss House does not have this level of complexity, but is highly legible and creates a jaw-dropping sense of arrival. The ground floor social spaces, including the ‘Living Room’, have the vibe of a cool American diner that will appeal to both staff and students.

Externally, the building is exquisitely crafted from enduring materials including brick, terracotta and aluminium. The brick slips, in English bond with corner quoins and queen closers, were fastened to insulat ed precast panels in factory conditions, with ruthless quality control. This exudes a hand-made quality and texture – a manifestation of a meticulously planned and executed design and manufacturing process. Even the car park has a well-composed facade treatment with vertical terracotta baguettes. The repetitive fenestration pattern is quite go as far as SOM’s Parsons New School in New York, which subtly unfolds and creates a real sense of ambiguity about what is circulation and what is social space. Moss House does not have this level of complexity, but is highly legible and creates a jaw-dropping sense of arrival. The ground floor social spaces, including the ‘Living Room’, have the vibe of a cool American diner that will appeal to both staff and students.

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Like some of the neighbouring re-purposed factories, Moss House has an in-built flexibility which futureproofs it to respond to changing patterns of use. The in-situ concrete frame sits on a 7.5m grid with ‘soft walls’ in between which could be removed or reconfigured. The top floor ‘human performance’ gymnasium sits on a jack-up floor, acoustically isolating it from the quiet spaces below, so both can be used concurrently. The 4.5m floor-to-floor height provides well-proportioned classrooms as well as headroom for lecture theatres with raked seating.

Generous circulation spaces and the avoidance of long, narrow internal corridors have made it possible to adapt to a Covid-safe environment, where classes are programmed with reduced numbers and vertical and lateral circulation have been segregated to manage the directional flow of students. Like other universities, UCB has stepped up to manage the directional flow of students.

The RIBA Journal October 2020

The concrete frame itself has an ultra-fine surface finish which was painstakingly prototyped on site, testing special shuttering blocks, an inexpensive and acoustically efficient alternative to dry-lining. A neatly stacked bonded arrangement avoids the feel of a municipal sports hall, but one can only imagine some consternation in GHA’s office about the cut block required to co-ordinate with the concrete frame... Nevertheless, there is a brutal honesty and unpretentiousness about the material palette which works well and will require little maintenance.

Moss House has an enduring quality which responds to its heritage context with calm confidence. Possibly the 21st century’s most important new building in the Jewellery Quarter, it has all the attributes to become a listed building of the future.

Credits
Architect Glenn Howells Architects
Client University College Birmingham
Structural engineer RLF
Environmental/M&E engineer Couch Consulting Engineers
Acoustic engineer//fire consultant Hoare Lea
Contractor Kier
QS/cost consultant/principal designer NGB
Project management Mace
Acoustic engineer//fire consultant Hoare Lea
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Dun and rusted

Corten stitches together Fraserburgh’s granite fabric in Moxon Architects’ civic and symbolic Faithlie Centre

Words: David McClean  Photographs: Simon Kennedy

The harbour town of Fraserburgh, in the far corner of Aberdeenshire, in an area known colloquially as ‘The Broch’, is tough and austere in both its character and architecture. It points across the grey North Sea towards Bergen in Norway, with which it shares an economic history based on fishing. However, beyond this simple association, the contrast with Bergen could not be greater. Bergen in Norway, with which it shares an economic history based on fishing. However, beyond this simple association, the contrast with Bergen could not be greater. 

The Corten and glass carapace over the old; outer skin is like a shroud over the rear of the complex that it becomes evident: a bold rectilinear geometry and layered facade that is at once suggestive of the life inside, while maintaining an element of privacy and discretion. This is the external manifestation of the scheme’s key strategic move; a new element that houses a vertical circulation to connect the many disparate levels of the two existing but completely autonomous structures. It also presents a public face that, while civic in scale, offers a more informal expression than that of the existing historic facades.

Finished in Corten steel panels and filling the voids of the neighbouring industry; of steel-clad sheds, sheet piling, and rusting capstans. Its uncompromising rectilinear form similarly acknowledges the strength of the granite townscape. In terms of language, the extension recalls some of the early work of Jean Nouvel, such as the Hotel St James in southern France, and perhaps even that of Sean Godsell. This uncompromising material lends itself to simple, bold geometries, and feels very fitting for the character of both the place and its people.

The brief sought to consolidate in one location a number of civic and public functions and services hitherto dispersed around Fraserburgh. Most of the accommodation was to be housed in the heart of the town near the harbour – in the elegant Saltoun Chambers, still in use for council meetings and ceremonies, and the adjacent derelict former police station, together with a small area of vacant land to the rear that had become appropriate for the place of great hardiness and resilience.

The town’s Faithlie Centre, the new facilities for Aberdeenshire Council, constitutes the lead project for the Fraserburgh 2021 Regeneration Capital Grant Fund and the Climate Change Fund. From Saltoun Square, or when viewing the historic facade from neighbouring Kirk Brue, the extent of the intervention is not apparent. Indeed it is not until one ventures to the rear of the complex that it becomes evident: a bold rectilinear geometry and layered facade that is at once suggestive of the life inside, while maintaining an element of privacy and discretion. This is the external manifestation of the scheme’s key strategic move; a new element that houses a vertical circulation to connect the many disparate levels of the two existing but completely autonomous structures. It also presents a public face that, while civic in scale, offers a more informal expression than that of the existing historic facades.

Finished in Corten steel panels and filling the voids of the neighbouring industry; of steel-clad sheds, sheet piling, and rusting capstans. Its uncompromising rectilinear form similarly acknowledges the strength of the granite townscape. In terms of language, the extension recalls some of the early work of Jean Nouvel, such as the Hotel St James in southern France, and perhaps even that of Sean Godsell. This uncompromising material lends itself to simple, bold geometries, and feels very fitting for the character of both the place and its people.

Internally, the project derives its architectural quality through the careful revealing of fragments of the past lives of each of the original buildings. Through a process of peeling back and closely reading the existing structures, Moxon Architects has given expression to the features of the buildings that speak of their histories and place within the community. This process of uncovering and laying bare has created richness and incident.
Within an interior that is otherwise handled very simply. This is best exemplified by the main chamber itself, the principal space within the whole complex. With its tall, elegant windows casting a very beautiful even light across the room, its understated restoration allows a clear reading of its innate spatial qualities and refined detail.

During the process of eliciting out maximum value from the existing structures, the architect realised that the attic of the old police station had the potential for a new floor. Though beyond the requirements of the brief, it enabled the creation of an enterprise centre that reinforces the social and economic dimensions of the Council’s remit.

The project not only provides much needed integrated facilities for the council, but serves as an agent of change within the town, re-purposing valuable and important historic fabric, while forming a tough yet subtle contemporary addition, a new landmark has been created in the town, both physically and, through architectural motif and language, in the consciousness of its residents.

Plagued by difficulties stemming from the insolvency of the main contractor midway through construction, the project is testament to the design team that despite these challenges, the integrity of the scheme has survived intact, and the project delivered as intended, albeit with some compromises on the finer detail. It also speaks of a depth of understanding and trust between design team and client.

Skills and expertise from across north-east Scotland helped realise the Centre, from the beautifully restored sandstone facade of the Saltoun Chambers, to the Corten steel, which was fabricated by a servicing company for the offshore energy industry.

Overall, the scheme has an economy that is fitting for Fraserburgh and this part of the world – with a tendency towards the understood, the modest, and the reserved.

The creation of the Faithlie Centre has been handled with skill and attention to detail, fulfilling and exceeding the Council’s expectations in a manner that appropriately combines yet subtly distinguishes between the civic and quotidian functions of the client.

Visibility gleaned from the use of Corten steel is like a skinny over the old.

The Corten pays homage to the material nature of the neighbouring industry.

By night the new building reads clearly as a skin over the old.

The RIBA Journal October 2020

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By night the new building reads clearly as a skin over the old.
The RIBA MacEwen Award is our way of getting to the heart of responsible architecture. We call it ‘Architecture for the common good’ because it celebrates those built projects – in architecture, engineering and landscape – which are of demonstrable and wide social benefit. It brings together the well-known with the up-and-coming, the national with the local. And it’s time to enter MacEwen 2021!

As with all the awards we run at RIBAJ, it is free to enter and aims to reach previously under-represented parts of the profession. The deadline is Monday 16 November, 2020, 23:00 hours.

Imagine the very opposite of a speculative upmarket build-to-leave apartment tower, the kind that does not benefit its community or even grace the skyline, but merely provides something for anonymous investors to park (who knows, even launder) their money. Imagine also the very opposite of the car-dependent dormitory estates, dominated by crude road layouts, which are the standard product of volume housebuilders and somehow contrive to look the same everywhere. And vast sealed, air-conditioned shopping malls need not apply.

Imagine instead something like some of the previous winners and commendations in the MacEwen Award: a youth centre in South London made from a moved and reconfigured Segal-method timber office building; an ambitious and beautiful public-sector care home in Derbyshire; a Welsh visitor centre that opens up previously private land to the public; a cinema in Newcastle built by its community out of upcycled materials; ingenious social housing on infill sites; Scottish rural workshops made from farm buildings; or our last winner, a derelict former cinema in Liverpool converted into a riding school for city kids.

The MacEwen Award is named after Anni and Malcolm MacEwen, she an urban planner who pioneered a conservation-based approach to regeneration in both town and country, he a campaigning journalist and former editor of this magazine. This year as last we are delighted to be supported by BDP, a hugely successful multi-discipline practice that has always been guided by a strong social ethos.

RULES
Projects must be in the UK, crown dependencies (Man, Jersey, Guernsey) or Ireland. Projects must have been broadly physically completed within the two years to the entry date of November 16 2020, and must not have been entered previously for the MacEwen Award. A phase of a larger-term project is eligible. Anyone including clients, local communities and associated professionals may enter a project, but the design team must have included an architect or architecture student. The number of awards and commendations given will be at the judges’ discretion: shortlisted entries will be published on RIBAJ.com, submitting to this winners and commendations appearing in the RIBA Journal February issue. Subject to social distancing rules at the time, those involved will be invited to a winners’ celebration lunch.

ENTRY DETAILS AND REQUIRED INFORMATION
Entries should be submitted online only via the link below.
DEADLINE: Monday 16 November 2020, 23:00
Any queries (but NOT entries) to mac.ribaj@riba.org
Please include the following information in your entry:
Name, location and description of project
Explaining the beneficial social impact of the scheme
Credit list of consultants and clients.
Maximum of six images, to include photos and drawings.
ENTER AT: ribaj.com/macewenaward-entryform

Below MacEwen highly commended homeless shelter and community cafe, Shelter from the Storm by Holland Harvey.

Happy D.2 Plus. Design and technology perfectly combined.
The perfect combination of iconic design and innovative technology: the bathroom classic Happy D.2 Plus with harmoniously rounded corners in new variants. The unique Duravit technologies like the patented c-bonded open up new, individual solutions. Design by sieger design.

Duravit London, open now. For more information visit www.duravit.co.uk and pro.duravit.co.uk.
HYGIENE YOU CAN BANK ON. THAT’S SMART.

When hygiene is top of mind, Bobrick’s touch-free SureFlo™ Automatic Liquid Soap Dispenser delivers. SureFlo is top-filled with bulk soap—instead of costly cartridges—to enable cost savings, reduce post-consumer waste and ensure a reliably stocked, safe washroom.

Support good hygiene. Encourage savings. Learn more at bobrick.com/SureFlo-Dispenser

The NPPF allocates 10% of homes in major developments as affordable to meet the Luton Review’s need for housing for older people and students. Build to Rent and self-build. What sites do you seek?

A diversity taskforce, renewed Community Housing Fund in the CSR, accountability for reporting on housing diversity – that’s a lot of asks...

What about Local Plan Strategic Market Housing Assessments? Do you want policy embedded in DPP3 processes?

Could you write housing diversity demands into design codes and concentrate on diversification of small sites rather than an LA-wide blanket policy?

Would concentrating on small sites only free up stalled planning on larger developers’ sites so they could build more quickly?

Yes, but it’s whether that’s been addressed. The government says in its own 2017 White Paper that there’s insufficient competition and innovation in the housing market and it needs to diversify to increase the amount, choice and quality of housing that people want. Regarding the proportion of self-commissioned new homes, the UK’s a global outlier. On average it’s about 40% of new homes – in England it’s 5% – yet we think our housing market is ‘normal’.

That White Paper set out three pillars of housing strategy – one was housing diversification, but there’s still no breakdown of how many houses built were delivered that way. A good start would be measuring performance and engaging those making up the sector to deliver policy and action.

England’s NPPF sets out a need to deliver housing on assessed need, including custom and self-build homes.

Homes England has to deliver the government’s housing agenda – that includes diversification. It focusses on quantity, not quality and mix. Its systems are geared to a small number of larger organisations, but hopefully it’s addressing this through a new DPP commissioning and DPS (Dynamic Purchasing System), allowing it to deal at smaller scale with more locally focussed groups.

First, the planning White Paper explicitly says it will make more use of public land for community and self-build projects; secondly, small sites suit self-build or custom homes.

It’s more about the landowner I think. Do you want to sell wholesale to a large developer or retail as small parcels? Which would maximise your land value?

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It is probably the most difficult time ever for architects to gauge the level to pitch fees the year. Consumer spending (excluding leisure) is back near early 2020 levels. Stock markets are high – the US Dow Jones index was within touching distance of its all-time high in September. Prime office yields have been relatively stable. Central Banks are comfortable with expanding money supply; so lending is continuing. Governments around Europe are responding with similar monetary and fiscal policies, so there has not been a monetary or exchange rate crisis. One of the biggest differences this time round is that public sector activity is holding up, even rising. This was less evident following after 2008, when the government’s emphasis was on austerity. This time round it was already embarking on an expansive path, with capital spending a major priority. Expect schemes to be accelerated.

Shades of grey
The result is that average fees for architectural work are flat. Taken overall, the Architects’ Fees Index has remained at exactly the same level it was last year. But this overall static picture hides shades of grey. The detail shows that average fees for public sector jobs have edged lower, those for commercial and private housing are a little lower than last year.

The scale of the change is more for large projects. The biggest drop has been in the fees charged for refurbishments worth £1 million or more; fees charged for new build work are barely changed this year.

Private housing is the sector in which more architects work than any other. We have found very little change in average fees for new build work and, indeed, a slight increase in average fees charged for new build housing worth over £45 million. Average fees for smaller domestic refurbishment work – things like house extensions, loft conversions – are very slightly lower than last year’s. But there has been a more significant drop in reported fees for refurbishments worth £2 million plus. This could reflect a difference between private individuals seeking to improve their own house, and developers who may be under greater financial pressure to deliver a project in a very uncertain market.

Leisure jobs also reported a hit to fees for larger refurbishment jobs, while average fees for industrial work have edged lower for both new build and refurbishment. But we must not read too much into fee movements in the commercial sector, mainly because we have relatively little information since the start of lockdown. Architects have received fewer commissions in these sectors so there is less information to analyse. More data for public sector jobs, including education and health, shows slightly higher average fees this year.

In good company
The flattening of architects’ fees is in line with movements in average fees recorded by other construction professionals. Our other surveys of fees have found QS fees unchanged this year. This comes after a fall in their fees two years ago. Bucking the trend, engineers’ fees are higher this year than last, although their average fees have taken longer to recover from the financial crisis. Over the long term, the three professions are broadly static (in parallel); all three have seen a roughly 20% rise in average fees since the year 2000.

Although The Fees Bureau’s surveys suggest fees are overall, fairly static, practices will undoubtedly come under pressure to be more competitive. Some clients may wish to push fees down. But this is exactly the moment when there should be the greatest awareness of the unique combination of skills that architects have and the benefits these skills can bestow. Architects are needed now more than ever to re-purpose work spaces, adapt and extend homes and reinvent leisure and retail opportunities for the post Covid-19 era. Enlightened clients should understand why they ought to resist exerting downward pressure on fees, as the latest Architects’ Fees was published 1 October 2020 and gives detailed fee information for commissions on more than 40 types of contract. Find more information at feesbureau.co.uk.

This overall static picture hides shades of grey

Source: Architects’ Fees, 2021 edition, © The Fees Bureau. The Architects’ Fees Index has remained at exactly the same level it was last year. But this overall static picture hides shades of grey. The detail shows that average fees for public sector jobs have edged lower, those for commercial and private housing are a little lower than last year.

Architects’ Fees Index 2000 to 2020

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Architects’ Fees Index 2000 to 2020
The justification for the reforms is that England’s potential is constrained by the planning system.

Pillar 1: Planning for development
Pillar 1: transforms the planning process from a reactive one based on applications into one where the principle of development is established upfront in renewed local plans that would be developed to a strict 30-month timetable (or the local authority faces sanctions for delay). These local plans are of central importance in the system and would establish the basis, pattern and form of development in an area, identifying site- and area-specific requirements along with development standards and limits. The proposals turn the system on its head, reduce the time it takes to establish the planning process, improve outcomes and reduce uncertainty and risk. Sites would be apportioned to three new kinds: Growth areas suitable for substantial development; existing built Renewal areas; and sites that are restricted. The system relies on 20th century legislation, hostile to the development and growth needs for decades and the scant incentive to technology and its failings are most evidenced enough. The system is complex, not transparent, confusing to apply to very small areas such as single houses, and has too many rules.

In this scenario, the National Planning Policy Framework would set out development management policy. Authority presumption in favour of development would be machine readable, map-based and use the latest digital technology. In growth areas, legislation would establish presumption in favour of development, with updates to systems to be made in line with these documents. However, in renewal areas, where development is restricted, planning applications would be reviewed at a higher level, and the changes would be supported by a new standard method for setting housing requirements and distributions nationally (published for consultation separately) to an annual target of 300,000. These are intended to reduce the time it takes to establish the amount of land to release in each area. They would be binding for Local authorities to allocate, targeting existing urban settlements and based on relative affordability. It would, however, become possible to aggregate and move towards the development process and the presumption in favour of development. All these changes will be supported by a new digitally enabled, data-driven planning process, with updates to systems to be considered in the next government spending review. Local plans, policies and codes should be machine readable, map-based and use the latest digital technology, supported by a new template, enabling interactivity, automation and clarity for those proposing developments; development applications would be limited to 50 pages and local authorities would be required to give decisions within a 8-13 week timeframe.

Local Plans would be subject to a single statutory ‘sustainable development’ test, replacing tests of soundness, sustainability appraisal and duty to cooperate, and resulting in fewer requirements for assessment on deliverability. Rather, sites should be machine readable, map-based and use the latest digital technology, supported by a new template, enabling interactivity, automation and clarity for those proposing developments.

Development applications will be limited to 50 pages and local authorities will be required to give decisions within a 8-13 week timeframe or face penalties. The changes aim to make development proposals easier to understand and for more people to engage with the planning process. Neighbourhood Plans would remain and possibly be extended to apply to very small areas such as single streets.
### Solutions of Continuity

The project De Castilia 23 was developed by Progetto CNR for Urban Spy Chapel Group, in Milan. We created an ever-active eco-friendly ceramic body that acts as a skin for the building: the self-cleaning potentiol stone by Fiam+® Architectural Surfaces.

In particular, architectural and anti-pollution ACTIVE SURFACES® - also certified according to the LEED standard - cover the entire Granite® ventilated façade of the building and its external Sorting, all blending with the surrounding environment. Today, more than ever, the material is the solution; it reverts itself to match the architectural and structural features of the setting and grants continuity to urban scenery.

 info: www.granitefiamrende.com/insights

### Intelligence

Planning

mass manufacture and the modularisation of construction to speed up delivery.

To deliver this, each local authority should appoint a chief officer for design and place-making, and the paper proposes a range of ways to support/monitor local authorities, including through a new body or strengthening of architecture centres. The government will also consider how it can augment Homes England’s objectives to create beautiful places, as well as other recommendations from the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission. The paper also says the government will amend the National Planning Policy Framework to ‘target those areas where a reformed planning system can most effectively play a role in mitigating and adapting to climate change and maximising environmental benefits’, although it is vague on details, pointing to consultations like the National Tree Strategy and Future Homes Standard instead.

A new framework to speed up environmental impact assessments will, however, be introduced to avoid the duplication of effort and reports. National and local data will be made available digitally to consolidate, update and reuse information, reducing the need for site-specific surveys. On heritage sites, the reforms propose to explore ways in which ‘suitability experienced architectural specialists’ could earn autonomy from routine listed building consents in order to allow ‘appropriate, sympathetic changes’ to listed buildings and sites of interest to upgrade environmental performance and adapt them for climate change more speedily.

The government acknowledges that such a system will only work if the correct powers can enforce it. It is suggested that the reforms will free planning authority time and resources could be reassigned to that instead.

Experienced architectural specialists could earn autonomy from routine listed building consents

### Pillar 2: Planning for infrastructure and connected places

Pillar 2 is about capturing land uplift values and developer contributions to ensure that development is accompanied by investment in local services and infrastructure. Currently this is done through discretionary, locally set planning obligations like Section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy, which only half of authorities charge. Both are negotiable, causing delays and making levels of community investment uncertain.

The white paper proposes replacing both with a new Infrastructure Levy, fixed as proportion of the development value above a threshold. It would have nationally set mandatory rates, charged on the final value of a development based on the rate when planning permission is granted and be levied at point of occupation, with prevention of occupation as a sanction for non-payment. It aims to reduce risk and cashflow difficulties for developers and increase revenue levels nationally, but receipts would continue to be collected and spent locally.

To support the timely delivery of infrastructure, local authorities would be able to borrow against infrastructure levy revenues to fund projects. On-site affordable housing delivery would, in some cases, become mandatory in-kind developer contributions to cover infrastructure levy liability, instead of Section 106 agreements. To ensure developers are not rewarded for low-standard homes under the levy, local authorities could revert to cash contributions if no provider was willing to buy the homes due to poor quality. Local authorities could also accept infrastructure levy payments in the form of land within or adjacent to a site. The 25% neighbourhood share of the levy would be kept and extended to allow receipts to be spent on other local policy priorities once core infrastructure obligations are met, including reducing council tax. And the scope of the infrastructure levy would be extended to better capture changes of use which require planning permission and for some permitted development rights including office to residential conversions, although the white paper does not say how.

An alternative option would be to keep the new infrastructure levy as optional but consolidate planning obligations into it, potentially leading to higher uptake than the current system.

The white paper also proposes to explore how government can support SME housebuilders, community land trusts and self-builders to identify public land disposal opportunities and set up development corporations. The final proposals concern how the planning system should be funded principally by the beneficiaries of planning gain – landowners and developers – rather than the national or local taxpayer. Planning fees will continue to be set nationally but a proportion of development contributions will be earmarked for local planning authorities to cover their overall costs, including the preparation and review of Local Plans, design codes and enforcement activities. Consequently, councils will be subject to a new performance framework but they too will receive stronger enforcement powers to address intentional unauthorised development, a move intended to build up trust in a reformed Local Plan-based system.

### Have your say

Respond to the consultation, before 29 October, at www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future

Meanwhile, the government is separately consulting on methods to assess local housing need, temporarily lifting the small sites affordable housing contribution threshold and extending permission in principle. For more information visit www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-current-planning-system

Tell us what you make of the White Paper’s proposals at letters.ribaj@riba.org
Here’s the plan

The RIBA sets out five things the government needs to do to ensure its overhaul of the planning system delivers the homes people need

Andrew Forth

Recent planning reforms have generated lots of debate. Some moves are welcome and long overdue, such as putting ‘design and quality’ at the heart of all new developments, digitalising the planning system (making it easier for people to understand how new buildings will appear individually and together) and providing clarity over who controls land.

But as a package, and alongside the extension to permitted development, they are a long way off ushering in a golden age of well-designed, low-energy sustainable housing. The government has an opportunity to overhaul our complex planning system so that we’re able to build the homes people need – and it must get it right.

Be realistic about how to achieve good design

The faith the government is placing in ‘rules’ to determine the appearance of new buildings is worrying. Visual design guides are helpful because they establish certain principles, but copying and pasting from a pattern book doesn’t guarantee good design or environmental performance; good design needs scrutiny and architects who are able to engage with communities and local authorities.

Politicians – hand over the power

We aren’t going to achieve nationally set housing targets unless there’s a fair, transparent and non-partisan mechanism for determining where economic investment and new homes should go. Politicians cannot go on micromanaging housing developments. They must hand that power to an independent body, along the lines of the Boundary Commission, with a mandate to determine where to place the quota of homes each year.

Climate targets need tightening

The government must be far more ambitious when it comes to tackling the climate emergency. A 2050 target for carbon neutral homes means that we’ll be building homes which damage the environment and leave people at risk of fuel poverty for decades to come, and that simply can’t be the case. We can, and must, reach net zero by 2030.

Invest in social housing

The UK spends more than almost any other country on subsidising housing, but we’re not getting value for money or generating the social progress that is well within our means to realise. The proposals to create a national infrastructure levy to fund affordable housing are interesting but we need to be wary of simple solutions to complex problems. I’m not convinced this new levy will raise enough money to produce the social and affordable housing we need. At a time when borrowing money to invest is both cheap and popular, wouldn’t it be great if government let local authorities actually plan and build new council housing so that more families had access to the stability that long-term rents can give?

Focus on the human cost – housing isn’t just a numbers game

The government finally needs to recognise the human cost of focusing on the number rather than the quality of new homes. Allowing office buildings to be turned into homes without any safeguards has been disastrous. It has led to barely liveable ‘homes’ – some even smaller than budget hotel rooms. By making it easier to build new homes that don’t have to meet space, quality or environmental standards they are blighting lives and making it harder for developers who do want to build the high quality, sustainable homes that we need.

The RIBA will be engaging with members to help shape our official response and encourage members to submit their own.

Read the RIBA’s response to the white paper on architecture.com

Andrew Forth is RIBA head of policy and public affairs
Keeping the studio alive?

Collaboration, practical work and online learning: what's waiting for students as architecture schools reopen

At the core of architecture, perhaps more than any other profession, is the bonding of years of education; seeing a beautiful section over someone's shoulder, borrowing a presentation idea off a studio partner, looking up and just asking 'how?' shared moments at the kettle boiling water for pot noodles, waiting for the bandsaw with a mate, scrambling for a last minute lecture seat. We know all of that disappeared in the lockdown. And we know this was distressing, one Part 1 first year asking 'how am I supposed to learn like this?' and reducing student satisfaction by 58% according to the National Design Studio Survey sponsored by SCHORIA, which represents heads of schools of architecture.

Now students are back in school what can universities do to support students and staff in October 2020 and beyond?

The Online Design Studio Survey admitted: 'I am in a constant state of confusion'. Schools are now having to juggle the requirements of live, geographically specific teaching courses with being available both online and in person. Other universities will have a mix of live and asynchronous elements, so maybe live questions and answers and pre-recorded lectures. For the Bartlett that is just a hint that two minds are looking at the design studio post lockdown – as evidenced in the digital shows and in the submissions for this year’s Presidents Medals – and shown here by the work of Shawn Adams of the Royal College of Art. But, Gloster points out, the live feedback is only offered twice a week at many universities, with different studio leaders, and fourth years turning up at new schools after time in other studios. The year design project at the RCA was titled 'Plinths and Tapestry' and addresses precarious conditions of the digital and face-to-face learning environment. Shawn Adams' final year design project at the RCA was titled 'Plinths and Tapestry' and addresses precarious conditions of the digital and face-to-face learning environment.

Hi was impressed with the quality of student work post lockdown – as evidenced in the digital shows and in the submissions for this year's Presidents Medals - and shown here by the work of Shawn Adams of the Royal College of Art. But, Gloster points out, the live feedback is only offered twice a week at many universities, with different studio leaders, and fourth years turning up at new schools after time in other studios. The year design project at the RCA was titled 'Plinths and Tapestry' and addresses precarious conditions of the digital and face-to-face learning environment. Shawn Adams' final year design project at the RCA was titled 'Plinths and Tapestry' and addresses precarious conditions of the digital and face-to-face learning environment.

Prioritising the design studio

Staff are also worried. Alan Chandler, reader at UEL, looks back to what fired up him in his peers: blue sky thinking about design ideas. Now there is Covid-19 and a whole set of technical demands from climate emergency to fire engineering, with RIBA and ARB criteria under review: "People say we are changing everything in the tool box, but we don't even know the tools", he says with a hint of despair. "We are negotiating all these in an online medium where nuance is lost."

Most schools RIBAJ spoke to are prioritising design studio in the time their students can be in the buildings. Studio space, as a levelling place of exchange where access to knowledge, support and resources are evenly shared, is only offered twice a week at many universities. Alex Wright of Bath, co-author of the National Design Studio Survey, says Covid-19 will exacerbate a move away from studio culture, accelerating a 20 year drift.

But for now UEL is lucky to have large work spaces so students can be split into two work across the studio. Bath architecture school’s fairly new open plan double height studios has avoided screens but will be divided by stickers on the floor, the tables locked rather than endlessly reconfigurable. Room size and ventilation determine occupancy of other rooms. At Reading some studios will be just three students and a member of staff thanks to room sizes. UWE is extending the teaching day to 9pm to give students more chance to be there (first years will get six hours a week with four hours for other years). Head of architecture and the built environment Elena Marco is looking at other spaces, thinking about the empty shops in the city centre and, more immediately, at a temporary building outside for an air spilt out space. Designed by one of the tutors, the plan is for staff and students to build this simple timber construction in the first month of term.

The Bartlett, UCL, is looking at taking over office buildings and halls of residence for space on what has always been tight city centre campus. It has also taken the most radical steps around the design studio and decided to teach units remotely. Instead workshops are taking over the building with equipment moving out onto the expansive landings of each floor. The concentration will be ‘exploring the physical realm,’ says Bartlett acting director Barbara Campbell-Lange.

Online benefits

Questions about extra bookable hours in university buildings seems to be a matter of convincing institutions. UEL and UWE have dispensation for longer hours in the evenings, and in Bath the question of allowing students in seven days a week is still for the future. For some universities extra time is bookable, say for workshop time. As the narrative of opening up starts to be undermined by rising UK infection rates this seems particularly vulnerable to being withdrawn.

Most schools we talked to plan to have fully accessible online teaching – with studios available both online and in person. Other universities will have a mix of live and asynchronous elements, so maybe live questions and answers and pre-recorded lectures. Full online courses will not get usual local lockdowns and students who are unable or unwilling to attend, particularly international students, may benefit from the amount of live, geographically specific teaching certainly looks less compelling at the moment. Some students have been rapidly going on since March through the virtual learning environments such as Blackboard and Moodle. But it hasn’t always been clear. One second year Part 1 surveyed for the National Design Studio Survey admitted: ‘I am in a constant state of confusion’. Schools are now consciously trying to make things far simpler. For the Bartlett that is just a hint that two hour lectures might be a bit much. For others, UWE is extending the teaching day to 9pm to help students be there.

The RIBA Journal October 2020
Global virtual field trips, and online speakers and critics, have ‘opened up a world’

‘lectures’ have become 15 minutes sessions followed by interactive activities, then a task and an online seminar. At Falmouth expectations and support will be spelled out and projects broken into five steps including reflection and round up. ‘We want to be really super clear,’ says head of architecture Tom Ebdon. Binge-watching of lectures will not be encouraged; videos will be released to a conventional timetable. ‘We have to help students, especially first years, understand the pace of learning,’ says Lorraine Farrelly, chair of SCHOSA and head of architecture at Reading.

Shrinking world

Digital poverty is particularly acute for architecture students who need specialist design software, computing power to run it and decent broadband. To give them a boost some schools offer money towards better computers, £800 from UWE for those who can make the case. Also important is universities buying software as a service so it is available to their students wherever they log on.

And how about all those amazing field trips that underpin projects? The strategy is either choose places in walking distance, or go global virtually. The same goes for speakers and critics. ‘It has opened a world,’ says Campbell-Lange. Ebdon in Falmouth – two hours from the nearest sizeable city, Plymouth – feels this even more keenly and has been able to secure involvement from the US as well as other parts of the UK. And as well as less travel, less paper is being generated. Another fit with sustainability and a way to ensure easily fileable records of student work.

So will we see the same sort of partnerships and practices emerging from these constrained years? Think of Office S&M, Feilden Fowles or Richard Rogers and Norman Foster. Reading’s Farrelly met her husband while studying. Bath’s Wright’s first client he knew at university. Can the hugely limited pandemic university create links like this? Perhaps not, but beyond the super control are halls of residence and houses, parties and bars. They too set the course for future development...
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Storm the barricades

A systemic inequality is ingrained in architecture, from education to practice. This can, and must, change.

Ruth Lang

The recent fiasco over algorithms privileging private schools in determining A-level grades highlighted one of the means by which disadvantage is dealt to those from state school backgrounds. Yet the advantages of private education are much more deeply ingrained and far reaching in architecture than the barriers to university education established.

Other advantages with no relationship to academic or professional capacity have long influenced the demographics of the profession.

This systemic inequality has a detrimental effect on the journey from application, through education, to practice, affecting the lack of diversity evident in the architectural profession. These barriers are not just financial but social. Even at school, students can be made to feel that architecture is ‘not for them’. By constraining expectations to what might have gone before – either in their social environment or family life – limits are placed upon their aspirations. Exposure to those already practising can help, and students who have family connections with practising architects to offer insight, advice, work experience placements, or to suggest subjects for discussion at interview, will feel more comfortable applying to study architecture. Demonstrating a sense of familiarities, awareness and confidence is a sure route to acceptance at interview, so those without brave enough to strive towards new territories in design, and even to challenge the definition of the profession. Students studying without financial security often feel the need to conform more heavily in order to get a ‘solid’ qualification, curtailing the bravery of their ambitions. While as educators we must try to counteract this, often their anxiety for conformity can be dismissed as a lack of enthusiasm for the discipline.

Overbearing grandeur

Students have told me this feeling of discomfort stretches to the locations where we hold events. The grandeur of venues such as 66 Portland Place, for example (pictured above), can feel overwhelming for students and practitioners who do not align to its historicist aesthetics and imperial iconography. We may wring our hands asking why certain groups or demographics don’t attend events intended to welcome them, yet we don’t see the barriers we erect. For all the negative impact of coronavirus upon our cultural experiences, it has been heartening to see how the ‘digital pivot’ has brought so many new voices to the fore, in the demographics of both panels and audience representation, and how this has flattened previous hierarchies. Setting out in practice, preference is often given to students whose connections with industry may lift their application above a sea of others, or who are able to take low paying placements because they have financial support from their families. Practices may insist that employment is based on merit alone, but those offering these places are wilfully blind to the inequality such preference reinforces. Similarly, in later establishing their own practice, these same graduates may feel they must take a safe route rather than create a more entrepreneurial form of practice, since the potential for failure and its financial consequences is more significant. While we may jokingly remind our students how many of their heroes were first commissioned by moneymakers, or married into financial stability, it is no coincidence that such routes into the profession are still prevalent.

Thankfully, it does not have to stay this way. Such barriers can be overcome by the student’s resourcefulness, determination and occasionally luck, but the onus should be on educators and professionals to acknowledge and then help dismantle them. We must understand our own preconceptions, expectations and assumptions, and how this privileges what we value as a ‘good’ architect.

We must strive to build stronger, further reaching links through the education system, engaging with initiatives such as Arts Emergency which build connections with students beyond our usual socio-economic bubbles, in order to demystify and open up the profession. In the histories we write, and the practices we discuss, it’s imperative that we highlight alternative paths taken, and how to overcome the barriers we shy away from discussing.

Ruth Lang is a senior lecturer at University of the Arts, London.
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Price war

Treat housing as vital infrastructure, not financial speculation

Hugh Pearman Editor

Summoning the ghost of that great and eccentric architecture critic and provocateur Martin Pawley (1938-2008), I am going to talk about house prices. At one time Pawley was fascinated to the point of obsession by the subject, particularly the ‘leakage’ mortgages provided into the rest of the economy.

There was a great pretence going on, he averred. In the late 1980s, well into the ‘Right to Buy’ era, mortgages – deregulated and divorced from purchasers’ savings deposits – had effectively become all-purpose long-term loans. You’d borrow money to buy a home and add a wedge for other stuff. Some used it to improve the property; others bought flashy cars or holidays. Margaret Thatcher’s ‘property-owning democracy’ became a credit boom underwritten by soaring house prices.

So to today. We take it for granted, don’t we, that the UK has a housing shortage? Everyone keeps saying so. Not enough new housing is being built compared to this or that period of recent history. Property prices and rents are sky-high, so the laws of supply and demand must apply. Build more homes, everywhere! Drastically simplify the planning system to boost building!

To some extent the supply-and-demand argument must hold true. If the population is increasing and households becoming smaller, that surely leads to increased demand for places to live. However, housebuilding has been increasing all over the place for years, and the more they build, the higher prices seem to go. Government subsidies for first-time buyers vanish in this inflation.

Adherents of supply-and-demand overlook the investment aspect. Homes are financial assets to be speculated in – hence ‘buy-to-leave’, that assumes rising prices, so no need to rent out. A pernicious practice, especially at a time of great homelessness.

The only big exceptions in recent times (pandemic apart) were the recession-induced house price ‘corrections’ following the 1980s boom and the financial crash of 2008. Suddenly demand vanished. People hadn’t gone away: the money had. In 2008 it was mortgages themselves which led to the crash, the subprime scandal. We did not learn from this.

Now a report, from independent-minded Bank of England staff (‘Houses are assets not goods’) has looked into the matter and concluded that the principal cause of soaring house prices is NOT so much supply and demand, more mortgages themselves. Cheap readily available money, driving up prices and rents. Of course it is not cut-and-dried: economists will never agree. But it makes sense.

Martin would have relished this. The rest of us should be on our guard when – as happens in the present planning white paper – it is assumed that evidence of local ‘demand’ for housing is simply housebuilders wanting to build there. Sounds suspicious? It is.

There is most certainly a national shortage of genuinely affordable housing. Perhaps, rather than continuing to stoke up a dangerously overheated property-investment system that guarantees ever-higher prices right up to the moment of a crash, the government might try another, more infrastructural, approach. Invest directly in social housing for rent, at scale. Simple.
Good times

Vision and public generosity underpin many small towns – let’s bring them back

On top of the Malverns: people, selfies and a kestrel hovering. England rolls out on one side, Wales is in the near distance on the other. I never thought of this view as important when growing up, just hills, green for miles and great (often bottled) water.

Whether it’s because everyone is desperate to get away or squeezing in anything before any future lockdowns, the August sense of urgency felt intoxicating. London appeared empty and social media filled with chat of new towns, but brilliant. Some have been restored, some violent. There’s a view at the top, from the roof of Lubetkin’s empty Elephant House across itself. There’s a view of the Cadbury brothers. A model village. Further south, standing on a castle ruin, 300 metres of pure stonking brilliant.

Behind me, 200 metres of pure stonking brilliance from sculptor William Mitchell. Low and high. Tectons. There’s a storm so most animals are sheltering inside – the totally wild proposal for Dudley. The future of the Malverns, I’m thinking, in the shape of new towns, but with a focus on public benefit, not private profit. I recommend two pieces of new towns: ‘English universities are in peril because of 70 years of colonisation reform’. I’m in Redditch, a place I knew in my teens as being ‘weird’. An appreciation for New Towns hadn’t hit me then, but driving around the houses and roundabouts, visiting the Paolozzi murals in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, I get it now. My younger self is sorry.

There’s a view, the bucolic rolling hills of Worcestershire, or the de-industrialised Black Country drift of my youth. It’s about revisiting these views, with my adult, current global view: a zoo, a shopping centre, a ring-road and a chocolate factory. A tourist in the familiar.

To Dudley Zoo. Not in search of animals, but Tectons. There’s a storm, people, people, people, selfies and a kestrel hovering. England rolls out on one side, Wales is in the near distance on the other. I never thought of this view as important when growing up, just hills, green for miles and great (often bottled) water.

We have no idea what’s going to happen in this post-everything world. These places are underpinned by vision and public generosity. This is needed now more than ever, be it for quality affordable housing, landscape retained for communities or wild architecture for Dudley. The future needs to be both ambitious and realistic. It needs to be optimistic. It needs to be firmly focused on public benefit, not private profit. These small places deserve this ambition and care. We all do. A happy day, an old ring road. Kidderminster. I lived this roundabout in 1986 to welcome Princess Diana with my school when she came to open the Forest Glades leisure centre, now just a huge gap post demolition.

A new day, an old ring road, Kidderminster. I lived this roundabout in 1986 to welcome Princess Diana with my school when she came to open the Forest Glades leisure centre, now just a huge gap post demolition. Behind me, 200 metres of pure stonking brilliance from sculptor William Mitchell. Low at points, exquisitely detailed at others. I recommend you go and find it. Touch it.

Bournville. I did my Art Foundation course here. Streets upon streets of houses for workers, all different in line with the grand vision of the Cadbury brothers. A model village. Further south, standing on a castle shaped folly on top of the Lickey Hills – land, view and folly gifted to the people of Birmingham by the Cadburys. – I’m looking over Brum, thinking over the last few decades and forward to the next few.

We have no idea what’s going to happen in this post-everything world. These places are underpinned by vision and public generosity. This is needed now more than ever, be it for quality affordable housing, landscape retained for communities or wild architecture for Dudley. The future needs to be both ambitious and realistic. It needs to be optimistic. It needs to be firmly focused on public benefit, not private profit. These small places deserve this ambition and care. We all do. Holiday done.

In my teens I had no appreciation of new towns, but I get it now. My younger self is sorry.
Mind the gap

Access and accessibility are more important than ever to achieve real inclusion

Alan Jones

In these challenging times access and accessibility loom large. The removal of barriers and the addition of positive strategies are essential to ensuring access to our profession. They are essential to all that is necessary for us to function and deliver the impact we aspire to, and that governments and societies need us to deliver. Equality of opportunity to access our profession is essential. Children must be able to dare to think of being an architect. It is vital to create clear and supported routes through an education that encourages talent, knowledge and skill to flourish into a generous profession – with ongoing ways to be supported and to grow as an individual. It should be that clear and that fundamental.

The Covid-19 pandemic has put inequality into focus and is accentuating the gap in opportunity between groups of people.

Covid-19 has put inequality into focus and is accentuating the gap in opportunity between groups of people and reliant on their own domestic provision, which for those less well-off often means inconsistent, shared and slow.

Those same students benefit much more from contact with their peers and teaching staff, but as schools and their institutions address safety and space standards, the essential facilities and supportive studio culture can easily slip away. At these times those less confident students, and those from less supportive backgrounds, are likely to suffer most. Once resources are reduced and inventive staff show how people can manage to work with even less, those lost resources will likely not be returned. The institutes and regulators of doctors and dentists would surely never permit an erosion of education and the RIBA must ensure there is no gap in attitude between their provision and that for architects. We must make it clear to universities that their policies and resources must be set and maintained, and not eroded, to ensure equality of access and opportunity for the broadest spectrum of students to progress and excel as future architects.

The year out gap between Part 1 and 2 needs consideration too. With many practices still home working, mentoring Part 1 graduates in their initial practice experience needs careful consideration and positive action, to ensure graduates, our future architects, progress equitably and meaningfully.

There are rumblings of a digital gap in practice. As we press on with our 2030 Climate Challenge, it is critical that all have access to the most appropriate software to consider and demonstrate delivery of high-performance requirements. Collective bargaining and sharing effective working methods seem potential gap fillers.

The gap between where our profession is and where it needs careful minding. The RIBA Inclusion by Design Festival at the end of September was about celebrating diverse perspectives and considering what we can do to create an inclusive culture which incorporates as many strands of opinion as possible, to produce the answers and practices that work best in today’s society. I encourage you to catch up with sessions at architecture.com. There were five events taking place with topics of discussion including social mobility; gender and race equality; disability and LGBTQ+ inclusion. Mind the gap? We must close the gap. »

Graeme Martin
Client Relations Manager

.routes to carbon zero housing
On Monday 5 October at 6.30pm, the RIBA, alongside the Institute for Government, is hosting an online panel session as part of Conservative Party Conference, looking at ‘How to get net zero housing right’. The UK government has stressed that demonstrating leadership on climate change remains very important, more so, and that means getting on track to meet its net zero target. But what is required to achieve this and to ensure the economic recovery from coronavirus supports a transition to net zero? Register to attend as an observer at conference.conservatives.com/registration

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Sir Peter Hendy, former London bus driver and conductor risen to boss of Transport for London and since July 2015 chair of Network Rail, had only just arrived back in his office at London’s Waterloo Station. For months he’d worked from home in the pandemic like most of the rest of us. Although he’s not convinced by the experience. ‘I’ve not been working from home – I’ve been living at work,’ he says. ‘You’re on call from when you get up to when you go to bed.’ In normal times Waterloo is the busiest station in the UK so from his eyrie there he can keep a daily eye on how the commuter return to work is going. When we video-spoke at the end of August, weekday traffic on the rails was light, very light even for that time of year. In fact, there’d been a reversal of the usual pattern nationwide, he reported: ‘Our networks are most under pressure at weekends – we’ve had crush-loading conditions on trains to the seaside.’

That, though, was bound to change and not just because of reimposed social distancing and the end of the holiday season. In contrast to rail, road traffic (people in cars rather than buses) was already back to 90% capacity by the end of August, Hendy said. That’s evidence of people trying to avoid being physically close to other people, breathing their air. But cars and roads can only absorb so much of the demand for transport, assuming it returns in anything like its previous form. It is just not possible for a large chunk of Waterloo’s usual 95 million passenger movements a year to transfer to cars, says. So what happens? Hendy, always straightforward,
The railway has always adapted to massively changing conditions in economic and social life, and it’ll have to do it again. It’s hard to say what things might look like in five years’ time. But historically the railway has always adapted to massively changing conditions in economic and social life, and it’ll have to do it again.”

He expands on this — a “fantastically durable” railway system largely built between 1825 and 1880 has been able to cope with two world wars in the 20th century, financial crashes, technological change, the explosion of car ownership from the late 1950s which contributed to a huge decline in passenger numbers and the radical 1960s pruning of the network instigated by Beeching. And then of course came the great revival in passenger numbers (doubling between 1997 and 2014) to the point that new stations are now being opened. Lines are being improved and (with large expensive hiccups and government vacillation) electrified. There is a huge investment in new rolling stock while previously closed sections of line — such as the Oxford-Cambridge link — are gradually being reopened.

There are new lines too, such as HS1 to the Channel Tunnel, the perennially not-quite-finished trans-London express route Crossrail, and HS2, now being built to Birmingham — though its continuation northwards from there is less certain these days. Oh, and then there was privatisation and Railtrack with all its accidents and controversies but its successor Network Rail is a public body — no shareholders — while, he says, the train operating companies who run on its tracks and were bailed out by the government during the pandemic are now essentially contractors. However the public/private case develops — he predicts much closer integration though the ‘nationalisation’ word does not pass his lips — he’s confident that his railway will weather this storm. “Infrastructure investment is very long term. Look at Waterloo here, originally built for the demands of the Edwardian railway.”
‘Suppose the railway of the future is determined by peak Saturdays? Well, we’ve done that before.’

New Street as key recent transformations) the smaller stations have received scant attention in recent years. They were, Hendy reminds me, ‘reduced to the absolute minimum’ between 1960 and 2005, seen as being cost burdens rather than community assets.

He and his CEO Andrew Haines, who arrived from TfL two years ago, are, along with their engineering-trained head of buildings and architecture Anthony Dewar, ‘passionate about architecture and design’, he says—something that Hendy partially ascribes to the very strong design heritage of TfL.

They started with a 2018 international RIBA architectural competition for new footbridge designs: some of the existing designs, especially those incorporating lifts, were ‘bloody hideous’, he says. They are developing two of the winners. As for the neglected smaller stations—typically with not much more than the equivalent of a bus shelter on the platforms—the current RIBA competition aims to develop flexible, repeatable designs for new station buildings ‘which we can be confident in and which communities can be proud of’. These days it may be all about prefabrication but a house style for station buildings was always part of the identities of the original railway companies. And he has just launched a new version of the famous BR ‘Rail Alphabet’ font, redesigned by Margaret Calvert and Henrick Kubel.

Hendy’s personal history stays with him: he owns two Routemaster London buses which he drives for charity events, both around London and on his annual ‘Imber house’ event to Imber, the abandoned village on Salisbury Plain that is under the control of the Army. It didn’t happen this year for obvious reasons but last year 28 double-deckers plied the 23A route from Warmington Station, which he equipped with what is the westernmost London bus-stop sign. Naturally, he charters a special train from London to complete the experience.

That kind of thing is why people trust Hendy with what he always calls simply ‘The Railway’. He’s no apparatchik, he’s the real thing. An enthusiast for public transport, he understands the history, wants it to be better, and makes good things happen. Let’s hope he and his team stay long enough to get more of them done.”

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‘The most interesting short-term questions are: what will cities look like if road capacity is already back to 90% and many people will only be attending works once or twice a week? It’s already apparent that people are determined to have their leisure. Suppose it’s the case that the rolling stock of the railway of the future is determined by peak Saturdays? Well, we’ve done that before.’

He’s referring to the pre-Beeching era when railway companies and then BR held large amounts of rolling stock mainly for summer excursions — factory Wakes-Weeks outings to Blackpool, cup finals, that kind of thing. That was one way the railway responded to demand back then. Today a large proportion of the rolling stock exists to serve morning and evening commuter peaks into cities around the country, but if there’s a significant change in working patterns it can obviously be re-assigned.

As for leisure, there’s already a move to encourage ‘active travel’ — lots more bikes are being carried on trains, and Hendy mentions the ScotRail initiative where carriages on commuter trains at the very strong design heritage of TfL.

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Time capsule

Provincial Britain’s dramatic emergence from medieval society to industrial powerhouse is charted in this book of maps and city scenes. Words: Edward Crooks

Fifty-six percent of the UK’s population now lives in towns, defined by the ONS as an urban area of 5,000 to 225,000 people. We may be used to such statistics, but this upper figure has seemed monumental to the 18th century inhabitants of places such as Manchester (a mere 18,000 in 1750) or Bristol (65,000).

Capturing the changing fortunes of provincial Britain, Town by Bernard Nurse is a collection of drawings from this time, documenting the dramatic shift from medieval society towards the dawn of the industrial revolution. Based on the topographical collection of Richard Gough, the book’s simple premise is to guide us across the UK, showing prospects, maps and scenes of towns that in some cases appear familiar and in others barely recognisable as industrialisation and modernisation have taken hold.

Gough was a keen traveller and used his independent means to build a collection of artefacts related specifically to the British Isles. He mined a seam that might otherwise have been lost to the allure of expensive foreign purchases, leaving to Oxford University and the Bodleian Library a collection that captures a fascinating period in British history. Helpfully categorised by region, the book gives a broad understanding of how provincial areas were adapting to a new economic outlook based on international trade, rapid industrialisation and a growing population.

Beginning in the North, these drawings unpack the social, economic and political influences within towns at these times. A pastoral prospect of Leeds shows pre-industrial tenter-frames of stretched cloth beside the river, complete with new lock for the swift export of these goods. This is contrasted with a perspectives view of the town’s Mixed Cloth Hall, a clear marking point in its move from cottage industry to globally exporting powerhouse.

Elsewhere, we see pre-1750 maps of Manchester before the factory system revolutionised cotton production, alongside clipplings of adverts for the Long Loom, a place to view artefacts useful for trade. In the simultaneous collection of surveyed drawings, as well as broader cultural paraphernalia, Gough appears to have recognised these as significant moments in places on the verge of radical change.

Of course, an inherent bias lies in the act of commissioning, creating and collecting these artefacts, and there is a risk of our misunderstanding history. Many of the drawings here are the product of a commission from a merchant, landowner or the military, and thereby the viewpoints from which we understand these histories inevitably miss swathes of lived experience.

In some cases this provides an interesting insight, such as a beautiful illustration of Coalbrookdale, commissioned by the town’s ironworkers, which acts primarily as a picturesque diagram of its cast-iron production process.

Others hint at more shocking aspects of history. A 1774 engraving of Liverpool’s Custom House shows the transatlantic trade with ships unloading cargo just two black children hint at Liverpool’s extensive, horrifying role in the North Atlantic slave trade at this time.

While the broad scope of the book leaves little room for detailed discussion, the author helpfully notes some instances in which a darker story may lurk behind the images. This serves as a useful reminder to be conscious of which moments of our history are recorded, and by whom.

While most drawings are exquisite in their craft, many of the most charming fail to obey conventional rules of projection. One such is a 1735 plan of Haslemere which combines plan with flattened elevations, arguably telling us far more of the town’s character than any individual plan, elevation or perspective could.

Given this collection of both measured surveys and looser interpretive drawings, it is clear that Gough revelled in the evolving act of map-making. This is most clearly evidenced in his own sketch of Herford Cathedral’s medieval Mappa Mundi, bringing the drawing to public attention and emphasising the wealth of knowledge gained in previous centuries.

As director of the Society of Antiquaries, Gough was no passive collector. This book documents moments where he seems to have had an active role conserving buildings, most notably commissioning the illustrations included here of Salisbury Cathedral’s ceiling paintings before their destruction by James Wyatt.

Aside from smaller acts of conservation, many of the drawings show disaster on a larger scale, from the Great Flood of 1607 to the 1786 collapse of Hereford Cathedral’s West Tower. Most striking of these is a map of the burnt thatch town of Blandford in which 90% of the buildings are coloured black, signifying their destruction in a large fire. With the town later rebuilt to a similar arrangement in brick and tile, drawings like these demonstrate the potential of mapping to provide a record from which we can enact change.

This book is a welcome reminder that our built environment is never static, and as we live through a global crisis, one only has to imagine a map of footfall in city centres to picture how our way of life has shifted. Perhaps as the priced-out centres of our largest cities suffer from changing patterns of living and working, our towns may find themselves the subject of an entirely new revolution.

Words: Edward Crooks

The RIBA Journal October 2020
Takeover: Deconstructing gender

Are we running out of men? Could women be the answer to tackling the UK’s declining construction workforce? Fewer than 13% in the industry are women – with only 3% of those in manual trades. Most women are project managers and related professions, and even they comprise just 24.6% of the workforce. At the same time, we are approaching a construction worker shortage. The highest proportion of employees is aged 45–59 – leading for retirement. What would balance up gender inequality?

In the first of an occasional series, Rosa Turner Wood, project manager and series, Rosa Turner Wood, takes over for Part II, takes over for Part II, takes over for Part II, takes over for Part II, takes over for Part II, takes over for Part II.

Why women aren’t represented

There are many reasons behind women’s low employment rate. Studies such as Meg Munn’s 2014 Building the future: Women in construction, and the University of Westminster’s 2015 No so softly, softly, offer data and anecdotal evidence that suggest an unwelcoming culture of sexism and inadequate support put women off entering the profession and sticking to it. Obstacles include high levels of gender-biased discrimination, informal recruitment processes which benefit men working in the sector (only 3% of jobs are advertised), and negative perceptions of the physical demands, as well as lack of knowledge, awareness and encouragement around how women could be employed. Many describes women recruitment processes as far more rigorous than men’s and this is compounded by unsuitable clothing and PPE, lack of training opportunities and even appropriate WCs. Add the traditional need for a mobile workforce and culture of long working hours and it becomes clearer why employment/retention of women is so poor. But all this could change. Mark Farmer’s boldly titled 2016 government-commissioned report Modernise or Die provided a compelling argument for the deployment of digital practices and manufacturing within construction – ‘modernise’ or ‘face a future of decline and marginalisation’. Only by harnessing contemporary and sustainable construction technologies would the UK meet housing demand and address emission targets.

Could offsite manufacture be a model for women’s employment?

Offsite manufacture involves the prefabrication of elements or whole modules in a factory before assembly on site. This might be a volumetric system such as a fully-fitted bathroom or kitchen or a closed panelised system like a fully insulated wall complete with features, windows, doors and cladding. Offsite rates counter to traditional onsite construction, contributing to a greater professionalised environment, heightened efficiency, more integrated digitalised systems and technologies as well as more stable working conditions. These are all attributes that could resolve why women are marginalised in construction and could help reduce gender imbalance. Fixed factory locations and hours create more consistent working environments and make it harder to ignore discrimination. In the Construction Management and Economics Journal, Texas Wright suggests the greater the physical distance between a construction company’s HQ and the building site, the greater the likelihood of harassment because it is easier to ‘ignore formal policies’ that curtail macho culture. Of the 13% of women in construction, 27% are employed offsite.

Robotic technology as a tool to engage young women in STEM subjects

Likewise, robotics in construction could be equally inclusive to women and men. Anna Hannah Arkell, whose master’s thesis ‘Plexus’ developed at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts deployedobotics fabricated with winding techniques to achieve intricate geometries using natural fibres, explains: “Robotic fabrication methods are not hands on/ labour intensive, so the stereotypical view that a man would be more able is removed.” Robotics offer stable working and coding environments conducive to learning too, regardless of gender. However, according to WISE Campaign, the body encouraging women and girls into careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, women account for only 22% of the STEM workforce. This has direct repercussions on our economy and is a missed opportunity, with a report by the Institution of Engineering and Technology revealing that increasing employment of women in STEM professions could contribute an extra £2bn to the UK economy. At the moment there isn’t capacity to use robotics at all to meet demand – partly because financiers and insurers do not adequately support companies in the area and the sector does not yet extensively embrace this technology. Claire Perry MP, Minister for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and crossbench peer Baroness Barran, of Westminster’s 2015 No more softly, softly, suggested that making things with robots maximises the gendered link between construction and physical labour.

Increased use of robotics

Robotics in construction could be equally inclusive to women and men. Anna Hannah Arkell, whose master’s thesis ‘Plexus’ developed at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts deployed robotics fabricated with winding techniques to achieve intricate geometries using natural fibres, explains: “Robotic fabrication methods are not hands on/ labour intensive, so the stereotypical view that a man would be more able is removed.” Robotics offer stable working and coding environments conducive to learning too, regardless of gender. However, according to WISE Campaign, the body encouraging women and girls into careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, women account for only 22% of the STEM workforce. This has direct repercussions on our economy and is a missed opportunity, with a report by the Institution of Engineering and Technology revealing that increasing employment of women in STEM professions could contribute an extra £2bn to the UK economy. At the moment there isn’t capacity to use robotics at all to meet demand – partly because financiers and insurers do not adequately support companies in the area and the sector does not yet extensively embrace this technology. Claire Perry MP, Minister for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and crossbench peer Baroness Barran, of Westminster’s 2015 No more softly, softly, suggested that making things with robots maximises the gendered link between construction and physical labour.

Remember however, that homogeneity in the construction sector extends beyond gender imbalance. The industry is branded by stories of ethnic, racial and LGB+ discrimination too. Confronting inequality in the construction sector is essential not because it’s fair and right, but also a means to meet industry needs.
This Black History Month shop from a collection of books curated by Paradigm Network to inspire and educate.

Award-winning architect with a painstaking eye for detail, whose carefully crafted buildings excelled in geometric design and timber detailing.

While still a student, architect Ian Campbell was part of the design team for the 1951 Festival of Britain Exhibition in Belfast. The experience had a lasting effect on his multi award-winning career, and he continued to collaborate at times with Max Clendinning, another young member of the team. While Clendinning (RIBA June 2020) went on to make his mark in London, Ian stayed in Belfast developing geometric solutions for his clients, which led to some of his most successful work.

Initially influenced by Le Corbusier (he was an elected member of the Association des Amis de le Corbusier and paid study visits to Ronchamp, La Tourette and Firminy), in 1965 Ian explored a type of machine age architecture for his first major project in Belfast. The result, Fanum House received a Civic Trust Commendation, but was not popular with the public.

Later influenced by more by Scandinavian architects and designers, particularly Alvar Aalto, he united regional and universal and won major awards, including RIBA awards for the 1979 Teahouse at Tollymore Forest Park and his 1993 Railway Museum Gallery at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Cultra. His work regularly featured in the UK and international architectural press. Denis Wilson Ian Campbell was born in Bangor, Co Down, educated at Belfast Royal Academy and then studied architecture at Belfast College of Art and were among his most talented protégés.

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Ian worked as an assistant in the Department of Works, then in the offices of Young and Mackenzie and also initially as an assistant with JVT Scott, and, after qualifying, as an associate in that practice. After being elected a member of MARS (Modern Architectural Re-

Oblivious

IN MEMORIAM

Robert Ronald Sady
ELECTED 1968, LONDON

John Michael Everett
ELECTED 1967, NORWICH

Philip Stephen Heat
ELECTED 1975, LINCHEashire

Stephen Houl
ELECTED 1976, WASHINGTON

Shane Edie Bell
ELECTED 1976, NORTH YORKS

Nigel Paul Langshaw
ELECTED 1980, BOROUGH, LONDON

Eric Samuel Tomich
ELECTED 1982, NEW JERSEY, USA

John Smith Bensington
ELECTED 1966, YORKSHIRE

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Lockdown spurs creativity

This is the sixth year that Norbord Europe has teamed up with the RIBA Journal for a competition that challenges architects to use Norbord’s flagship OSB brand, SterlingOSB Zero. And what a year it has been so far. Firstly, I hope you are all safe of course and secondly, your hope is business is thriving and ever booming as the building and planning landscape heads for a new future.

Since we have all learned how to use Zoom, Teams and TikTok, nothing was going to stop us continuing with our ever-popular competition with its £2,500 first prize. So, remote was the way to go in terms of the judging process. This proved as engaging as ever, and technology made it almost as much fun as in “normal” times.

The Second Skin idea is particularly relevant today – though we did not know that when we chose the theme. The use of materials, injecting the building with “warmth” and making it “affordable”, explains the entrants should “find joy in the context”.

The concept couldn’t be more topical. With home-working rapidly becoming the new norm and the government’s controversial extension of Permitted Development Rights in England allowing certain buildings to be converted into homes without needing planning permission, repurposing redundant structures may well become a common theme for architects.

Designs and material choices that prioritise sustainability, occupants’ wellbeing, ethical supply chains and versatile uses have never been more crucial.

The judges unanimously stood behind the overall winner, Paper Architecture + Design by Malcolmson Architects, which was admired for its “temporary nature and evolving proposition” particularly suitable to economically challenging post-pandemic times. As Norbord Europe’s marketing manager David Connacher nicely summarised “Hilder’s Yard made measured use of OSB, such that it was not overwhelming, and made appropriate use of the material in the most innovative context it is a fair, worthy and right winner.”

Oriented strand board (OSB) is a material of layers. It derives its distinctive texture, appearance and strength from compressed and bonded wooden strands which visibly crisscross and overlap across the surface of the board. So it seems apt that the Second Skin competition should call on entrants to peel back, subtract, strip, swaddle and substitute dilapidated building elements, layer by layer, with Norbord’s SterlingOSB Zero.

Reimagining old buildings by adding or removing layers of their fabric is a theme common to several successful recent projects. Notable examples include the Mutsuimki Kindergarten Playroom (2019) by Shigeru Aoki, which incorporates a semi-dismantled 100 year old Japanese house within an outer steel frame; and Second Hare London Fields (2019) – Cano Lanzo’s Frei Otto inspired adaptive reuse of a drab 1960s concrete structure into a co-working space, which drapes it in a translucent ETFE membrane. Such projects work with and augment the existing materials, injecting the building with renewed vitality.

Norbord Europe and RIBA Journal’s competition, now in its sixth year, sought proposals to give run-down buildings a new lease of life. The brief challenged candidates to take a “considered and imaginative approach to a building conversion updating environmental credentials and upcycling elements with Norbord SterlingOSB Zero so as to maximise the material’s capabilities as a high strength, precision-engineered, structural board, devoting a contextual and better performing building. Ultimately, as RIBA Journal senior editor Ian-Carlos Kucharek explained, the entrants should “find joy in the context”.

The concept couldn’t be more topical. With home-working rapidly becoming the new norm and the government’s controversial extension of Permitted Development Rights in England allowing certain buildings to be converted into homes without needing planning permission, repurposing redundant structures may well become a common theme for architects.

Designs and material choices that prioritise sustainability, occupants’ wellbeing, ethical supply chains and versatile uses have never been more crucial.

Reinventing old buildings layer by layer

The RIBA Journal October 2020
The year is 2022... the high street and small-scale manufacturing are under existential threat from online shopping, chain businesses and Brexit uncertainty. The 2020 pandemic dealt another blow, both economically and [through] regulation over social mixing. This is the context in which the winners set their intervention, a prefabricated OSB insertion into a disused Victorian yard, intended to rekindle business while protecting local heritage. In a pragmatically optimistic vision of the future, the architects foresee that ‘social distancing, isolation and loss meant a more supportive commercial model appealed … businesses operate independently but within a balanced community, forging bonds and sharing creativity’.

Their scheme sees the plot converted for mixed-use in its first phase, while subsequent revenue generated by the businesses is reinvested to subsidise building maintenance with the aim of long-term, permanent rehabilitation. A brick envelope and metal roof structure remain at the site with all other defunct materials removed and retained as valuable reusable resources. The OSB insertion is a sturdy, demountable framework with flexible future uses.

Yet, perhaps the scheme’s most intriguing element is that ‘here, OSB is used to symbolise rejuvenation, subverting any connotation as boarding for declining buildings.’ Rather than simply using OSB for patching up and blocking off illiquidated areas—a sad but common usage of OSB sheets—this association is celebrated. ‘I like that they recognise that OSB can be used to board up but can also bring life to buildings,’ commented Proctor. Seilern agreed: ‘It contrasts old with new and doesn’t sanitise or clean up, inserting contrasting elements within it (while allowing it to remain as a romantic ruin in an urban setting). Sian praised the design for its ‘big appreciation of the existing fabric’ and its ability to disassemble, showing consideration for the ‘whole life-cycle’. The architects displayed considerable confidence to keep the surroundings in ruins, leading Loftus to describe the project as ‘wonderfully poetic and ambitious’.

‘It contrasts old with new and doesn’t sanitise or clean up ... it’s a romantic ruin in an urban setting’
Christina Seilern

Top images across spread
The interior envisaged through time; the adaptable OSB framework is continuously repurposed to accommodate new uses.

Near right: Hilder’s Yard’s present derelict condition.

Far right: OSB now heralds rejuvenation, subverting the image of a building in decline.

Opposite page: Detailed models of OSB insertions.
Harriet Stride’s plan for Tricorn House – a derelict brutalist, former civil-service building on a roundabout in the Cotswolds market town of Stroud – faces head-on the issue of retrofit versus demolition. The office block has been threatened with redevelopment or removal for two decades, with no conclusion. Meanwhile, visitors to Stroud face a depressing welcome from the stained concrete, boarded-up building on first entry to the town.

Stride explains that, although many favour demolition, the structural shell is in good condition. Her proposal harnesses the structural reliability and thermal comfort of OSB in a light-touch retrofit. Recognising the post Covid-19 landscape will increasingly favour suburban co-working hubs over city-centre headquarters, Stride’s design revives Tricorn House by inserting a collection of modular, replicable, prefabricated SterlingOSB Zero pods, which can be tessellated together.

The judges were impressed by Stride’s grasp of material properties. Sian admired the fact that the proposal was ‘topical’, demonstrating that ‘you don’t always have to go down the route of Permitted Development’ to make fruitful use of disused offices. Loftus commended the project’s ‘clarity and attitude towards thermal performance’ while Kucharek also picked up on the ‘warmth’ of the scheme, imagining that occupants would feel ‘coasted’ within the OSB pods. The design’s engagement with the existing language, encouraging life within the circulation spaces, led Proctor to dub the style ‘soft brutalism’.

Colin Sim, Malcolmson Architects

With its ever-so-slightly sinister title and brooding photography of crashing waves, Colin Sim’s resurrection of Copelands Lodberry from a watery grave captivated the judges with its technical ambition. A lodberry is an 18th/19th-century structure unique to Shetland, combining courtyard, store and dwelling-house which projects, pier-like, into the sea. The unoccupied, Category B-listed (Scotland) premises is falling into disrepair, but Sim’s proposal restores it into a dwelling, keeping the external walls for flood defence and replacing the rear elevation, part of the roof and the entire interior with a lightweight OSB insertion capable of floating. New elevations would be clad in metal to contrast with existing stonework.

The judges did have some reservations about whether OSB was suited for use in marine conditions. ‘I’m dubious about the fact that the structure will be floating,’ commented Loftus, voicing concerns about the longevity of the material in such a watery environment. Nevertheless, Sim’s ambitious vision drew favourable reviews. ‘I enjoyed its sense of the epic in a small building,’ said Kucharek. The concept – a lightweight box that can float in a shell, tucking a new-build into existing fabric – retains the lodberry’s atmospheric appearance. ‘I like the juxtaposition of the new OSB structure with the old building in a rugged landscape,’ said Connacher. Sian agreed, saying: ‘It’s ambitious and challenging to slot a new structure into an existing building of beauty.’
Co-working (with cats)

Facture Architects Ltd

‘Working in an office is great: the chat, the comfortable chairs,’ begin our feline-friendly designers. But, in a lockdown environment, with offices out of bounds, ‘what happens when your colleagues become your cats, your office is your dining table and your new colleagues invade your personal space?’ This very real scenario is ingeniously addressed in an ergonomic OSB workspace for two professionals (which they actually built), placing a raising desk into that awkward space under the stairs where ordinarily you might find a fuse box, a couple of spiders and a mop.

Norbord SterlingOSB Zero sheets form the supporting elements. The facing is painted white, then brushed with steel wool to expose and celebrate the wood-fibre grain. OSB is further used to clad the party wall, the underside of the stairs, and underfoot – the voids filled with insulation to attenuate creaking noises and improve thermal comfort (’toasty feet’). In a stroke of genius, to entice the co-working cat away from the primary work station, separation of heat from the IT equipment is directed up into an OSB pocket for cat bed and relaxation area.

The cats were not the only ones enticed; the judges were all inevitably smitten with kittens. The choice to focus on a small-scale project – as Connacher put it, ‘problem-solving an everyday scenario’ – was applauded. Sian praised the way ‘the proposals break down why, structurally and thermally, the use of OSB is appropriate’; Loftus praised the ingenuity of combining SterlingOSB Zero with Ikea products, resulting in a ‘bespoke solution without being high end’. The charming drawings channelled an Ikea manual aesthetic with considerable clarity and wit.

‘I like the way that it’s presented with humour,’ concluded Proctor.

Top Traditional homeworking (unfavourable) vs co-working with cats (preferable) – all thanks to OSB.

Above Photographs of the finished proposal in situ.

Above section Colleagues are able to co-work harmoniously with cats, mice, spiders and Henry Hoover.

Above The benefits offered by OSB: hot bed, toasty feet, acoustic insulation on the party wall and attractive cladding on the stairs.

‘What happens when your colleagues become your cats, your office is your dining table and your new colleagues invade your personal space?’
Longlisted

Kreft – Megan Coe

Coe’s community project, a series of five craft workshops, embraces the industrial heritage of a historic Cornish foundry. A series of OSB insertions with a mezzanine level are arranged around existing features and openings. The design maintains the language of a derelict mill, making the most of its hybrid spaces and crumbling stonework. Kucharek praised Coe’s proposal to create a community space. The Kreft scheme (Kreft is Cornish for ‘craftsperson’) would encourage locals to learn trades listed on the Heritage Crafts Association’s ‘at risk’ register. All the judges praised the high quality of Coe’s visuals which ‘communicated the sense of an idea with immediacy’.

Inhabited Walls: Reimagining Kirkton Steadings – Reuben Roberts and Lucy Maughan

The project repurposes a barn on Scotland’s Craignish Peninsula to accommodate four winter-season forestry workers. OSB sheets are used to repair the roof and partly dilapidated stone walls, as well as to create an internal structure whereby rooms of different programmes are placed along the periphery, ‘cocooning’ a central, communal living space in warmth and comfort. The conversion does not considerably alter the building’s exterior, retaining its visual harmony with nearby 12th-century chapel ruins. Reed commended the scheme’s respect for context, modest ambitions and ‘humanity’, while Kucharek and Proctor praised the ‘loose’ drawing style and ‘strong graphics’ of the visuals.

Fixed Fashion – Matthew Cooper and Sarah Rogers

Cooper and Rogers’ proposal, to insert standardised OSB workstations into an empty department store, aims to provide a new retail model for Northampton’s fashion industry. Designer-makers create and sell sustainable goods, educating shoppers about a circular fashion economy. Each offsite manufactured, flat-packed workstation includes a raised deck (accommodating services), bench, shelving, flip-out ironing board, lockable store and optional fitting area. The judges praised both the interesting programme, the modularisation of units, and the realistic use of SheringOSB Zero. Sian commented: ‘The theme of the declining high street is highly topical and the project merits its place on the long-list.’

Sancta Civitas – Charles Wellingham, Fergus Connolly and Joe Franklin

This polemical entry divided the judges with its programme, but wowed them with its detailed renderings. To subsidise a working C of E church in Bristol, revenue-generating Airbnb accommodation (in the form of a self-supporting OSB unit) is inserted within the side aisles, leaving the central nave open for continued worship. The independent OSB structure enters into considered dialogue with interior features – church organ, reredos etc. Kucharek praised the ‘interesting proposition’, but Seilern was unconvinced, finding it ‘problematic and disrespectful’. Although the thought of tourists sipping cappuccinos during mass was tasteless to some, this ‘Marmite’ entry was nonetheless a convincing runner-up.

Above OSB is specified for the interiors of each heritage craft workshop, for its resilience, appearance and acoustic properties.

Above and right An OSB structure of peripheral rooms cocoons Kirkton Steadings’ central common space.

Above Visualisation of a modular OSB workstation making use of discarded department store fixtures and fittings.
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Naturally enough
Your recent piece on ‘Time running out!’ for a coherent response to the climate emergency (RIBA September 2020, p7) is important, and I appreciate you taking this position.
At last we are waking up to the fact that sealed buildings and the air conditioning systems within them are, in this post-Covid era, significant health risk.
Sealed office and residential buildings have spread around the world, and many workers are not keen to go back to the office. High-rise apartments are invariably designed without openable windows, and are thus dependent on air conditioning. Most air conditioning systems operate by recirculating a large amount of the air within the building, risking the spread of infection. Simply increasing air change rates will increase energy use and shorten the lifespan of fans, pumps etc. However, for several decades a number of architects and engineers have been developing alternative design strategies to avoid the need for conventional air conditioning. It is time for these to be adopted more widely, and to be actively promoted by our professional institutions.
New buildings must avoid conventional air conditioning. This can be achieved by naturally driven ventilation and convective cooling, as shown by a number of buildings around the world, including the new LSE building in central London by architect Rogers Stirk Harbour and engineer Klaus Bode (RIBAJ December 2019, p26).
Existing buildings need to be adapted to provide more fresh air and achieve low carbon heating and cooling to meet the combined challenge of pandemic risk and climate change. We must encourage a ‘whole building’ design approach, dramatically increase the industry’s capacity to deliver natural cooling, and avoid the health and climate penalties of conventional air-conditioning.

Rethink reversal
It was heartening to see Greater London Agriculture by Tim Rodber and Dominic Walker as the city-scale winner in Rethink 2025 (RIBAJ August 2020, p32). The judges’ comments reminded us how far attitudes have changed in the past 20 years: arguments and practices in favour of nature-based solutions for urbanising societies have accelerated within a context of drivers to more equitable and circular economies. Indeed, the number of (small) productive urban landscapes in London has grown significantly, and all over Europe, cities are taking on similar ideas even more systematically, even at larger scale.
But the government’s recent ‘Planning for the future’ consultation seems to be moving English planning policy in the opposite direction. Within a policy advocating ‘build, build, build’ and designating sites for ‘growth, renewal or protection’, it is difficult to see where the space for urban agriculture actually sits. We know how to design food-productive urban landscapes, we certainly feel their attractiveness; we now need to get them mandated in planning legislation.

Rethink 2025 (RIBAJ August 2020, p12). Walker as the city-scale winner in Rethink 2025 (RIBAJ August 2020, p32).

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Andre Viljoen & Katrin Bohn, University of Brighton

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Castel Nuovo
Naples, 1860s

Originally built in the late 13th century by Charles I of
Anjou and located by Naples harbour, the Castel Nuovo
(New Castle) was almost entirely rebuilt by the city’s
new Aragonese rulers between 1453 and 1479. The re-
sulting imposing structure, with its five round towers,
had a defensive as well as representative role. Two of
the towers flank the entrance to the courtyard, a gate in the
shape of a double-tier triumphal arch that is considered
a masterpiece of the Neapolitan Renaissance. Created by
artists of various origin, especially brought to the city, it
probably owes its design to Francesco Laurana, one of the
most significant sculptors of the 15th century. The relief
between the two arches represents the entrance of Alfon-
so of Aragon into the city in 1443, while statues of virtues
stand in the four niches on top. The castle continued to
be the seat of the kings of Naples until the early 19th cen-
tury and is to this day one of Naples’ main architectural
landmarks; it is also commonly called Maschio Angioino
(Angevin Keep), in reference to its original builders.

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