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This is our annual private house special edition. This year we take over the building section with five standout individual homes. Nearly 50 were submitted as part of our social media call for projects over the summer; others we have been collecting over several months.

As per our previous similar themed issues, one might expect a flurry of new builds, and in appearance, most are. But look beneath the surface and you’ll find all sorts of ghostly beings hanging in the corners and skeletons in the cupboard – fitting perhaps for a chilly November.

Surman Weston presents a ghosted version of suburbia in Surbiton, with a splash of California dreaming. There’s a huge polycarbonate X-ray wall revealing the bones of Oxhey Hall farm, abattoir and dairy in Watford by Fletcher Crane Architects. Conibere Phillips unexpectedly treads on top of a Victorian house in London it felt it had no option but to demolish, while a post-war beach hut retreat haunts the form and fabric of Jonathan Hendry’s Creek Cottage in Lincolnshire. It distances itself successfully but cannot escape completely.

Finally, the shadow of Piers Taylor himself robotically chopping down trees and splitting logs on the block is lurking in the deep woods around his refurbished home in Wiltshire known as Moonshine.

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Photography: Radu Palicia © 2019

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Concept sketch for Oxhey Hall by Fletcher Crane, page 14.
It almost looks like a traditional home but Surman Weston’s house on the edge of London trips your senses with spirits of California, a noble barn and the ghost of suburbia.

Words: Hugh Pearman  Photographs: Johan Dehlin

By London standards – and we are right on the south-west London fringe here – this house is a modest, two-bedroom low-budget number, albeit on a sizeable plot of land previously occupied by a much-extended bungalow. This is Surbiton, which is so much of a commuter-generated suburb that for 30 years in the 19th century its official name was ‘Kingston-Upon-Railway’. When nearby Kingston-upon-Thames finally got its own railway, they reverted to the Old English name for the area: Surbiton means ‘Southern farmstead’. Apt in a way, for there is something of the noble barn about this house.

California comes to English suburbia by way of steel framing and painted perforated brick. There is something of much else too, for this is a house with multiple visual references. On the one hand you have a young architect, Percy Weston of Surman Weston, fascinated by the surrounding interwar often half-timbered, occasionally white Art Deco, domestic context, not to mention the white-Deco listed railway station; and on the other you have a very engaged client, boho fashion designer Amanda Winship, who wanted an industrial, almost Californian, aesthetic.

The building they thrashed out between them is a delight, like a ghosted-out version of suburbia. Set well back from the street...
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The Column-free full-width living/dining space exposes the steel-framed industrial glazing in the floor above; the rooflight is thermally broken.

Below: The main bedroom is given visual privacy by the offset aperture in the perforated brick screen on the garden side.

Behind mature trees as many houses here are, implied half-timbering is reinterpreted as an exposed steel frame that is only faintly visible, being painted the same white as its (good quality, handmade) brick infill. Mastic joints between steel and brick take up differential expansion and are also painted out: no cracking has occurred, even after this year’s heatwaves.

The face it presents is a gently subverted child’s drawing of a house. There is the pitched roof, front door, window. Nothing else (a chimney is tucked away to one side at the back). These simple elements are made hyper-real. The front door and the window are both very large, and arranged not quite symmetrically either side of the centre line. The door is set in a deep angled reveal acting as a porch, with shallow steps rising to it to emphasise its importance.

It is on the garden front that the barn makes an appearance. An Alpine granary or hayloft, maybe. Here the roof projects in a cowl to protect the full-width balcony to the main bedroom. The client wanted visual privacy, so the balcony retreated behind a complete gable-end of perforated brick, again set within the steel structure, here coaxed into a large square picture-frame aperture. It is the same dimensions as both the bedroom window behind it and the equivalent window at ground floor front.

The low flanks of the house, though treated in the same painted frame/brick infill way, scarcely impinge and nor does the super-insulated zinc-panel roof with its factory-sized electrically-opening rooflights: this house is externally all about its front and its back. What is solid at the front melts away at the rear, where the perforated gable hangs above a ground floor of metal-framed, thermally broken industrial glazing. The strength of the exoskeleton allows this look-no-columns feat of visual gymnastics for the two bays and 12m span of the main living room.

Inside finishes are mostly industrial:
floors and stairs of exposed-aggregate concrete, soffits to ceilings just the painted metal undersides of floorslab forming trays, surface-mounted electrical trunking, slurry-painted blockwork partitions, raw steel and mesh stair balustrade. The only obvious touch of luxe is the oak flooring (with underfloor heating) and door joinery in living and bedrooms. Downstairs living and study spaces are in enfilade, separated by sliding doors.

There is space though, and not just outside. The house is larger than it might appear, and its volume is fully exploited in the entrance atrium, rising to the roof soffit with its stair set at 45º across the plan. This move generates a lot of tectonic energy and – combined with a carefully-contrived glimpsed ground-floor view right through to the garden at the back – cracks open the orthogonality of the plan. More prosaically, it generates space for a utility room behind the stair and a side door to the garden. When I show non-architects pictures of this house, the response tends to be that it looks sweet, like a doll’s house. There were no planning objections to the design. In actuality the sweetness is cut with considerable astringency. And as Weston remarks, if anyone in the future wants to strip off the white paint, expose the creamy brick and pick out the exoskeleton in another, perhaps startling, colour, he’d have no problem with it. •
Tenacity and an unforgettable dream found a happy ending at Oxhey Hall’s 18th century barn

Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek  Photographs: Nick Kane

Dennis Potter must be turning in his grave. The cantankerous screenwriter, who penned Blue Remembered Hills and Lipstick on Your Collar, built a notorious if cancer-killed career stoking the remaining embers of post-war English society’s bucolic nostalgia before squirting a heady mix of sex and booze on all of it – to the ire of moral crusaders. So it’s odd to find he is the inspiration behind a restored complex of 18th and 19th century farm buildings in Oxhey Hall village outside Watford.

David, one half of a couple who have lived all their lives in the area, most recently in the sedentary comfort of a large 1950s semi-detached home in the village, had been keeping a keen eye on the site for years. ‘I put it down to watching his drama ‘The Darling Buds of May’, all set in a rural idyll where they lived off the land and frolicked among run-down barns…I felt really influenced by that vision,’ he tells me. ‘And while it was derelict and clearly not the best barn in the world, it had the all rudiments of those rustic feelings.’ I’m sure the dead Potter would see a wry irony in the creation of a dream eked from a face-value reading of one of his satirical dramas and a patch of countryside on the edge of Metroland.

It was serendipity that they even got the site; formerly owned by a water utility, which over the years, says David, had put in multiple and ever less ambitious planning proposals for the barn, dairy, stables and abattoir. By the time it gained consent, the barn was set to be split down the middle and converted into two five-bed homes. When it was put on the market in 2014, the clients mustered enough for a low offer but lost out to a big developer.

‘Central gabled midstrey... braces from posts to tie beams – all straight. Queen struts to collars clapping purlins. Cambered tie beams in midstrey with angled struts clapping purlins’. Sounds like one of Potter’s saucy screenplay directions, but Historic England’s description of the barn’s structure was an intimation of the scale of the task – something the new buyer quickly balked at.

Building

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property. The client later moved into it to speed the sale of the family home; it’s now let out to help pay the mortgage. While the client’s son was a builder by trade and keen to be involved, his vested interest and desire to expand his own firm’s portfolio weren’t enough to convince the architects of his experience to take on the whole job – family relations needed managing too. So works were split into two contracts. Between Time, a contractor with solid conservation experience, set about consolidating the main fabric of the barn on a JCT Intermediate form, with the client’s son’s firm assigned interiors on Cost Plus basis. It was savvy procurement, thinks Crane, playing on the strengths of both contractors and allowing the client to realise the project ‘on a shoestring’.

It was a blessing in disguise for the son. The barn needed major work, not least underpinning, which involved stripping the structure completely, building scaffolding inside and lifting it on its trusses far enough in the air to dig out the foundations, cast new concrete ones and ground-bearing slab over soil, and sit the whole lot back down on its brick base eight months later. ‘It was like hanging a skeleton off a coathanger,’ says Crane evocatively, adding that the by the time it was ‘dropped’ the timbers had been soda blasted and back-fixed with anti-racking lime render carrier board, breather membrane, wood fibre insulation and Douglas fir weatherboarding. In addition, Between Time was responsible for the two-storey bedroom block inserted under two end bays of the barn. This feels a little mean against the 100m² living/dining space but its en-suite, open plan guest bedroom, set in the adjoining stable, is a pure joy; the bed even sits between its timber stalls.

With the barn the star of the show; internally, apart from the gestural flourishes of the curved bedroom block wall and the route to it from the dairy block, architecture whispers rather than shouts. Lime washed trusses crown the former dairy, now kitchen, and its old brick wall is wire-brushed and exposed. This, along with the poured concrete floor replete with its steel tray edge shadow gap, was first contested and is now loved by the client. The architect had to settle for IQ Glass’ budget Hedgehog range aluminium glazing, but the thicker, black-painted sections, Crane feels, were ultimately in keeping with the building’s muscularity. Similarly, a deep black painted steel door reveal intimates shifts from one building to another – a fact perhaps evinced only through occupation. More obvious is the architect’s polycarbonate wall between barn and dairy, where daylight ingress is only impeded by the ‘bones’ of the barn itself, like some huge X-Ray; all are modern takes on the site’s industrial nature.

But among the details the real success is one big spatial move. David’s pride and joy is the home’s brick-floored entrance, and there’s a reason for that. Like a Japanese genkan channelled via Lewerentz, its generous area is a soldier’s height step up to the kitchen’s poured concrete floor. Just as you leave you’ll spill through the clerestory light above the Douglas fir front door, the undersides of clay plain tiles, atop the rafters of the flat-topped porch, showing clearly how it all came together. But for now the distraction of the bright, spacious kitchen and country view beyond will serve to render the glance left that you’ll make almost incidental. And then – Bam! There it is. •
Worth its salt

Jonathan Hendry Architects has refurbished a scruffy, collapsing beach house in Lincolnshire to merge with the textures of its setting.

Words: Isabelle Priest  Photographs: David Grandorge

You wouldn't know from the images of this house that it is a refurbishment project. Unusually during a time of ‘maximising’ everything, it has not been added to or extended in any way. Not to wash the original budget too thinly, a 1960s/70s home has been amended to modern needs and emerges to demonstrate a different way of dwelling – at least for a week at a time.

Creek Cottage is a holiday home and holiday let sleeping six, located on the top of the dunes looking out to the North Sea, 9km north of Skegness in Lincolnshire. It is part of a hamlet of about 30 houses called Anderby Creek that developed organically after the Second World War as a retreat for former soldiers and their families. The eponymous creek bank falls away to the back of the southern boundary of the site. The beach is vast, empty and wild.

The clients, a couple and their children from Harrogate, had been spending a lot of time in Anderby Creek and when a cottage came up for sale decided to buy it. The building was in a bad state of repair. It suffered from subsidence, had previously been underpinned and was buckling under the weight of its concrete tile roof. The day before they made their offer, its concrete balconies facing the sea fell off. The render was flaking too, and like many of its neighbours it was an example of the botched building that characterises the area.

It was all ‘a bit bodged, very DIY, hotchpotch but charming in its own right,’ says architect Jonathan Hendry, founding director.

Left Looking out from the master bedroom over the dunes to the sea, the en-suite is around the wall.

The front of Creek Cottage faces the beach, the new larch sun terrace to the left.

The southern elevation gets deeper towards the creek.
of local practice Jonathan Hendry Architects. “There was evidence of years of holiday projects laid on top of each other.”

The client came across the firm through the Beach Hut (2017) and Beach Chalet (2012) it had designed along the coast nearby. These were the start of a bigger conversation about dwelling. Because the house is in a major flood zone it is almost impossible to build new, so the project was always about refurbishing the ground floor garage and two-bed layout on the first floor. Hendry was given a free hand to lead the process and explore the potential of the scheme.

The main move was to convert the ground floor into living space, connecting the previously separate levels by inserting an internal stair in the beam and block floor, as well as clearing the walls upstairs to start afresh. Two openings on the beach frontage were extended, injecting light, air and openness. Hendry wanted to make the building feel part of its groovy, sandy, windy setting. The beach is brought right up to the house, into the fabric of its walls, textures and surfaces, with the pearlescent sea in its interior tiles and the natural simplicity of its furnishing reflecting the sparse landscape outside the window. The idea was for people who stay there to question how they live when they return home. There is no sense of the previous building now.

Counterintuitively, the principal approach to the house is from the beach. Chestnut pale fencing defines the boundary, allowing the drift of sand and grass between inhabited and uninhabited. A new enclosed larch deck rises to the front left of the garden, acting as a sun terrace, windbreak for sun loungers and viewing platform to see the sea. The timber is treated with a product that ac-

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The house has been re-rendered using a lime mix containing recycled clear and green glass particles that give the exterior a coarse glimmering texture and intriguing variety, appropriate to the scene. The enlarged, not quite full-width glazed opening on the ground floor is now the main entrance, a coconut mat and metal grate positioned ready for visitors. Upstairs a door slides along in the main bed-room to reveal a Juliette balcony. The window frames are made from Accoya that comes with a 50-year warranty.

“They have been stained with a grey oil that picks up the grain,” says Hendry. “The exposed location means materials are particularly important.”

At ground level the windows have external concertina security shutters that sit flush with the render when closed, aluminium on the outside and lined with more Accoya for co - mendations was the coffee machine because it is a 30-year warranty. Hendry says he is a bit cut off from what’s going on architecturally in the world, is indisputably part of a growing movement, reflecting companies like Another Country that promote the relationship of things and nature. It is designed to bring about a slower living pace for occupants to recharge – the traditional Aga kettle on top of the wood burning stove. The walls are made of clay plaster, again bringing outdoor textures in – here, what Hendry describes as ‘before a violet’ tone.

“We didn’t want materials that needed to be decorated, or to go down the timber floors and white painted walls route,’ says Hendry. ‘This material has a lot of variety, texture, it’s polished so some areas seem to have movement in them. It is also hand-crafted.’

The matt black fronted kitchen is bespoke too, designed using colour-through MDF called Valchromet and elevated off the ground, in case of flooding. The worktop is Caeser - stone, behind the kitchen is a boot/changing room with a shower on one side and WC on the other. This leads through to an snug space lined in plywood, illuminated around the ceiling by LED strip lighting. A day bed here means it can double as another sleeping area.

Back in the kitchen a blue steel milled stair to the right of the entrance leads to the first floor, which is treated differently. In the stairwell, clay gives way to lime plaster. In the centre of the upstairs plan is a glass box twin shower room with a timber slat platform crossing the corridor outside. It feels very Japanese onsen/ryokan, blended with a bit of futurism in the sliding doors. Beyond is a double room and second bedroom, while at the front is the master bedroom and the en-suite where you can finally enjoy those pearlescent tiles and views of the sea itself.

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have mismatching facades too; his own now mediates discreetly between the two, with inset conical-frame windows, a standing seam roof and a neatly recessed entrance. The brick materiality is in keeping with the 20th century homes further along the road.

The new-build works with the language of the street and does not exceed the original envelope (plus an earlier planning permission for extending), with a 150m² floor plan that mirrors the Victorian layout. Phillips investigated more radical changes, but found the alternatives did not work nearly as well. The structural system is similar to the spine wall of the Victorian construction, whereby a middle run of four vertically aligned steel beams are placed party-wall to party-wall, and structural timber joists span outwards from this central point.

Stairs and corridors are kept narrow, maximising space in the adjacent rooms, yet the entire interior is light and airy thanks to consistent use of pale beech ply, large windows, strategically positioned skylights and a direct line of sight between the front and back of the house. On the first floor this is achieved by an open-riser staircase that allows light to percolate from front (south facing) to back, while the horizontal interruptions of the treads give a degree of privacy. The second floor is a generous master bedroom.

Subtle adjustment to floor levels allows a considerably higher ceiling in this roof-space, as well as in the downstairs front room and open-plan kitchen area, without adversely affecting the middle floor which contains three bedrooms, study and bathroom. The stepping of floor levels resulted in windows being slightly offset from those of neighbours, preventing overlooking. The back of the house has a ziggurat configuration, more elegant in terms of massing than the ubiquitous suburban dormer extensions.

The downstairs is particularly successful as a family living area. The kitchen is in three parts—a peninsula with a ceramic counter-top and metallic copper sheeting on the sides; a white Corian worktop and sink, consistent with the colour choices throughout the house (white fixtures and fittings, exposed grey blockwork); and a larder-unit/food preparation area and open-plan kitchen area, without adversely affecting the middle floor which contains three bedrooms, study and bathroom. The stepping of floor levels resulted in windows being slightly offset from those of neighbours, preventing overlooking. The back of the house has a ziggurat configuration, more elegant in terms of massing than the ubiquitous suburban dormer extensions.

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The mix of textures in the kitchen juxtaposes nicely with the pared-back dining area. This north-facing room is surprisingly light, thanks to an enormous glass sliding door and skylights which contain recessed lighting. Further tracked lighting can be directed according to need; the entire space is flexible to accommodate different family activities and varying numbers of guests.

Rather than a dining table, Phillips has used modular IKEA tables to maximise this flexibility. While no 30-something homeowner can escape owning at least one item from here, this is also a throwback to his days at Wilkinson Eyre on the design team for the IKEA Museum at Älmhult, Sweden. Something of the firm’s philosophy has rubbed off on Phillips – “I hate wasted space” – so another major benefit of rebuilding was to dispense with the eccentric nooks and crannies so often encountered in old properties. Instead we find integrated storage spaces, recessed blinds and curtain tracks, and minimal fuss.

Conibere and Phillips formed their practice in 2015, having both worked on large corporate projects at Wilkinson Eyre. But even the star architect and client – “a steep learning curve”. Procurement, relationships with contractors and time-frames all turned hairy at times, and Phillips’ desire to prioritise his paying clients affected the schedule for his own house. He is also forever noticing minor flaws in the details – the perfectionist’s curse.

Conibere Phillips has considerable experience helping clients obtain planning applications for redevelopment, yet this was another area in which Phillips found his own understanding increasing through trial, error and experimentation. Whether due to his professional negotiating skills or because they believed the next-door house couldn’t get any worse, both neighbours were by and large accommodating with party wall agreements. Phillips’ lengthy toing and froing with planning applications on the other hand (six months for an extension, six months of soul-searching and a further nine relating to the rebuild), exposes fundamental absurdities within the system despite working in his favour.

Because the original intention had not been to rebuild, Phillips first gained planning permission for a roof and back extension. As it became clearer that more substantial renovation was needed, he applied for a lawful development certificate to replace the principal elevation, aware that he was pushing it to its limit (the case officer apparently laughed on receipt of the application, acknowledging the ludicrous position).

Phillips then submitted a planning application for a full rebuild, which went to committee with recommendation for approval, knowing that even if rejected by the committee his permissions would likely permit him to carry out the works regardless. It was granted, enabling Phillips to execute his plans and benefit from the favourable VAT position. Quite why a naysaying local planning group – who could have presented at the hearing but didn’t – decided to wait until the next day to send a slew of rude messages remains a mystery. Too late: by that stage permissions were cleared twice over.

All other responses since then have been positive, and Phillips feels he has contributed to the neighbourhood by demonstrating what can be achieved with good design. He says: “I want to practise what I preach as an architect,” he explains. “It would be dishonest of me to live in a pristinely restored Victorian home while encouraging my clients to embrace something radically modern.”

His labour of love has resulted in an ele- gant, contextual and enviable family home. As for the experience, he says: “I actually found the process really fun now that I’m past the pain”.

Above The kitchen is positioned, art-deco style, allowing for Alfred and Daphne’s dream lounge space with recessed windows overlooking the garden.

Below One of the new bedrooms with exposed timber.

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**MoreWithQuadCore**
Energy is very light for most people. They get gas piped to their house, electricity zips along wires. Architect Piers Taylor has electricity and gas at his house in the woods outside Bath, but his gas comes in a heavy bottle that must be manoeuvred into place. And when he built the extension to this stone school-house 16 years ago he designed it to be heated by biomass, in particular logs.

A year’s supply of wood is a big shed’s worth, 20 cubic metres. It is cut from the woods around the house and Taylor chops and stacks it to dry before it gets carried down to the stove. You can see the work and weight in his sinewy arms. It is one reason why he and his practice Invisible Studio have reworked this slim timber-framed pavilion.

Another is that, even with all those logs, the house felt cold and leaky when winter came and the weather from Wales rushed up the valley to meet it. Visiting on the last truly hot day of September I opted for the shade on the terrace and looking at the chunky oak frame it was hard to believe Taylor’s depiction of drafts whistling through the gaps between expressed structure and floor. And the expanses of glass to the bedrooms were cold and exposing, he said: ‘When you are young you think only about opening up everything on good days.’

The blanket of woodland has been put to use – warming the house, Moonshine. Now, re-wrapped, it should be more of a refuge from the winds coming over the valley. So he has reclad it, in corrugated metal. Upstairs the valley panorama has changed from glazed vista to framed views; a north facing clerestory and timber panelling have also been wrapped up with a few holes punched here and there. Taylor estimates that upstairs glazing has been reduced by 50%. And at ground level he’s put in an insulated floor with electric underfloor heating backed up by batteries, both PV-fed. Sensors let him know temperature fluctuations overnight – so far only minimal.

The log store and stove are still there but the logs will be moving more slowly. This is not about the sustainability of ideals and abstracts, but practicality. New insulation is layered over old, 150mm continuous rigid insulation, plus 150mm mineral wool (no, not sheep’s wool or newspaper but straightforward, high performing standard products). Deeper window reveals are lined with ply. New sliding glass doors are double not triple glazed, the weight would have been too much, but the glass has a U-value of 1.2, significantly better than the original 2W/(m²K). Taylor spent a good few weekends working on the airtightness too and ensuring everything was taped down.

Left The clerestory and timber panelling of Taylor’s original designs have gone from the north side of the house. The ground floor keeps its transparency.

Above The front entrance is contained, taking you into a hard working space with windows above eye level before you are released into the openness of the living space.
Taylor estimates that upstairs glazing has been reduced by 50%.

To Taylor there is a certain shame in the building his younger self made with too much in it, too much of Australian pavilions, too much of Glenn Murcutt, too much striving for architecture. And perhaps too long looking at it, even while his architecture was moving on elsewhere. ‘It’s our home and I don’t want it to be about architecture’ he says. For those who saw his series The World’s Most Extraordinary Homes with Taylor perching on a rock explaining and enthusing about some unbelievable cantilever, this may seem unexpected. But that was never the real him, he says.

He had designed the house with the landscape and the view paramount and his architectural apprenticeship in Australia with Glenn Murcutt in mind. And he had spent two years hunkered down in the dark stone schoolhouse with his young family. He wanted architectural expression on this tightly calculated expansion into the greenbelt. This time there were barely any drawings – a mere six, and three just overlays of original drawings. One quick elevation was sketched to order windows and so the builder would know where they went. To the north side where the land slopes steeply up, a clerestory window the length of the pavilion was swapped for others puncturing the crinkly tin at different heights; indecipherable morse code. The same on the bedrooms facing out to the view. But you still see straight through the house on the ground floor as you approach. The gutters set up a more readable narrative, galvanised and oversized straight from an agricultural catalogue – for sudden downpours but more to avoid leaf fall clogging them and causing catastrophic cascades in all the wrong places.

Over the years in this house Taylor has set up a restless rhythm of projects on site, all built under permitted development for forestry use. Barn, studio, quixotic angular caravan, compost loo, store, log stores times six at least, all with an element of the temporary and a propensity for timber and polycarbonate. They are dotted around the woods. You can see similar methods and elements in his RIBA award-winning work as Invisible Studio for Westonbirt Arboretum and his live projects with students at Reading University. The house is in a way the least remarkable of these but perhaps the most important marker of time, both the age and experience of its maker and increasing professional knowledge about how to make a house that is both light and warm, a testament to sustainable, practical building. •
Timeless shades for a changing built environment

Warming, natural and grounding colour palettes help architects to design in wellbeing as people adjust to a new way of living, working and socialising

This year has transformed our relationship with the built environment. It has made the nation question how commercial and public buildings look, feel and function like never before. And it’s shown a spotlight on the role expert colour use plays in response to the changing ways we live, work and socialise.

Dulux ColourFutures™ colour palettes are carefully selected every year to support professionals breathing life into commercial and public buildings. This year is no exception. An expert panel of colour designers, trend forecasters, design specialists, architects and artists from around the world have come together to identify an overarching theme mood or feeling. And they agreed that the mood of the moment is to have courage.

“It inspired the choice of Brave Ground as the Colour Of The Year 2021, theconnecting thread across all four Dulux ColourFutures palettes. The strong, elemental colour speaks of generation, vitality, growth and potential, offering architects, specifiers and designers a neutral canvas that allows the Dulux ColourFutures palettes – Earth, Trust, Timeless and Expressive – to shine,” Helen Hampson-Smith, director of Smith Bro’s Design, comments. “Clients are increasingly interested in the impact colour and design can have on wellbeing in the workplace. The huge level of expertise and research that goes into selecting Dulux ColourFutures palettes reassures and engages them throughout the design process.”

“An emotional health continues to be a top priority for employers I’d expect to see the greens and blues of the Earth palettes used in offices to create calming spaces, where staff take time out to pause and reflect.”

Luis Fulero, Dulux Trade commercial colour services consultant, adds “Through an occupant centred design approach, architects and specifiers can use colour to have a positive impact on people’s wellbeing. The Dulux ColourFutures 2021 palettes can play a central role in achieving this through grounding tones and surprising shades.”

To view all the palettes and download the ColourFutures™ 2021 specifi er brochure visit www.duluxtrade.co.uk.

It was never about landscape as subject – merely image construction

At the recent MA ‘New Grads’ show at Lon- don’s Saatchi Gallery, despite a deftful one-way fi le through the rooms, I momentarily stopped in my tracks, holding up the fl ow. On the wall was Dissipate II, a photo of a Japa- nese landscape rendered in the deepest, most vibrant blue, its single colour modulating as the eye passed across it. It is one of a series of landscapes taken on a two-month study tour of Japan by Alexander Mourant, a Royal College of Art MA student. Even though he had passed north via Aomori prefecture to Hokkaido, it was only when he got back that a Japanese friend inspired the show’s eventual name. ‘Aomori’ in Japanese means ‘blue forest.’

Mourant’s area of study is making pho- tography about photography, his own work done using a Mamiya 7 analogue camera, with the negatives he takes developed by hand. He is fascinated not only by the pro- cess, but by the concept that bits of you and your history come with you and inform what you see and record. A Jersey lad, he had met an artist there working on the stained glass of an 18th century church, who’d given him a broken window fragment. He had it cut circular and made into a filter, taking it with him to another island, 9,000km away.

The result, in redolent Yves Klein blue, should, he feels, not be read as representa- tions of objects but as objects themselves. It was never about landscape as subject – merely image construction. Yet despite days spent wandering Tokyo, Mourant exhibited only two city views and this is one of them: “It was 50% sky and 50% city. I loved that balance – it reminded me of a Japanese wood block print.”

For me, it was a print too. I was taken back to my teens, the summer work I did at an architect firm in my home town and the rounds of teamaking and dyeline printing. Stood in the gallery, staring into diazo blue, I seemed for a second that the room reeked of ammonia.

I told Mourant of a show I’d seen a long time ago of unsealed Frank Lloyd Wright 1:1 dyelines and how impressive I’d found them. “I love those associations with archi- tectural history you brought to the work,” he enthused, “and the baggage that you brought from your past.”
MacEwen deadline is approaching: enter now

Have you a project that aids the common good? We are waiting for your entry to our annual competition

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 somewhere 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 (Guernsey, 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 other architect.

The number of awards and commendations given will be at the judges’ discretion: shortlisted entries will be published on RIBAJ.com, culminating in the winners and commended entries 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 (300-500 words) 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

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Top left: MacEwen highly commended homeless shelter and community cafe, Shelter from the Storm by Holland Harvey. Below: Last Year’s MacEwen Award winner, Park Palace Ponies by Harrison Stringfellow
Furniture’s finishing touch

Furnishings can be the final piece of the jigsaw in an inspiring building. For LC Architects’ Cosmote TV HQ and Studios in Athens, Arper collections supplied that finish to ensure an exciting and creative environment.

Designed by London-based architecture and design practice LC Architects and built in the Greek capital Athens, Cosmote TV HQ and Studios is a new building inspired by contemporary media and the constant flow of information.

A fluid, open space designed to meet the highest specification, the scheme sees the transformation of an existing industrial building into an inspirational combination of hybrid workspaces and state-of-the-art TV studios, pushing the boundaries of innovative architecture and design.

The project is designed to bring together in one building a number of smaller departments, creating an exciting environment for people to work, collaborate and thrive while promoting communication and connection between different teams.

At the core of the design is The Plaza, a dramatic central atrium with cutting-edge acoustic ceiling, entirely furnished with Arper collections including Loop, Colina, Dizzie and Fix. It is a flexible space where staff and visitors can network daily, encouraging collaboration and interaction.

A bridge in the heart of the building connects administrative and creative departments with production and technical spaces, creating a seamless spatial connection which fosters cross-departmental teamwork and team spirit. Arper’s Colina, Dizzie and Fix collections blend in perfectly with the environment thanks to their flexibility, texture, colour and softness.

The quality of the space is maximised by a series of collaborative internal areas, furnished with Saari, Dizzie and Fix. The architects’ work highlights how design can shape and influence human behaviour and emotions, and is focused on the search for organic forms that are soft and human-centred.

Natassa Lianou and Ermis Chalvatzis, co-founders and directors of LC Architects, stressed the importance of collaboration in their work with Arper: “Our seamless collaboration with Arper’s teams in the UK and Italy was key to the project’s final outcome. We believe that all elements – large or small, details, textures, colours – contribute to the final co-ordinated architectural outcome.

Specifically, in our work, we design signature spaces where all furnishings and equipment are selected very carefully in order to enhance the experiences and emotions that the architecture evokes in users and visitors, while creating an overall exciting space.”

Speaking of Arper’s collections as solutions to design requirements, they added: “Architecture and design have the power to alter our behaviours and habits, which means that the selection of each and every piece that completes our projects is key to our work.

“The simple and clean lines of Arper’s collections add the final touch to our project, creating “pockets” of seating or working scenarios in the space,” they continued. “We believe that furnishing is the actual “touch point” of the users with the space, where they can sit comfortably, feel the soft textures and get inspired by the organic and fluid space they are experiencing.” •

For more information see: https://www.arper.com
Twitter: @ArperOfficial
LinkedIn: Arper
http://www.lc-a.uk
On.

Is there a world, in which curiosity is the force that drives every change? And in which a heartbeat is used to synchronise a network? In which pure intuition replaces rationality and "nothing" or "central off" can offer more excitement than "all at once"?

A world that is more than On or Off. One that is also cold and warm, loud and quiet. And in which life becomes a smart experience between On and Off.

Off.

View from Shanghai – profile
Out and about – urban realm rethink

2: Intelligence

What’s the name of this new body?

The design advisory body Nicholas Boys Smith is chairing? I’m not involved – it was announced by the government’s press office on the same day and stories got conflated! Not sure what it’ll be called, but my role is to separate one directly related to local heritage and listing and improving use of local lists in England. I’m advising Robert Jenrick on spending £700,000 across 10 counties to create or improve their local heritage lists.

So there are English counties without any proper lists?

Only about 50% of the country has local lists and some of those are very old. The aim is to galvanise areas where they’re outdated or never even been compiled; for instance, Cornwall doesn’t have a local list. There’s the national lists, but we want uniform adoption of a good standard of local lists to promote input from local societies and the community to get ‘Non Designated Heritage Assets’ nominated. Currently, they may not be considered in planning and we’d like to change that.

What about the Twentieth Century Society and Victorian Society – surely they’re on their radar?

True, these organisations will have regional or local branches so they keep a weather eye on buildings that might not be on the national list but are significant in some way. One would hope that they’ll put together their own nominations to add to the new lists but smaller civic groups might want to put forward other buildings that they feel have value in their communities.

What building did we lose recently that we shouldn’t have?

Well, as series editor of the Pevsner guides I was working in Surrey recently and there’s the sad case of the Birds Eye HQ, Walton Court, in Walton on Thames – a really distinguished 1960s campus office that got demolished for housing. There was a hope it might have reached the national list as it was the kind of building that was certainly important to the locality.

Do you feel the BBBBC’s Local Design Codes will create a simple and better planning system and we’ll get rid of what Robert Jenrick calls ‘Anywhereville’?

It’s not my remit, that’s Nicholas Boys Smith’s! But design codes have existed before – for instance, the Essex Design Code evolved successfully over time and there has to be this sense of evolution to them – they shouldn’t be seen as fixed things. There has to be flexibility to express shifting attitudes and assumptions by the people living in those areas. But yes, you do want a genuine design variety and not ‘cookie cutter’ communities. Wherever I visit it’s the same developments on the edges of the towns. I don’t think we want to see that repeated any longer.

Charles O’Brien

The long-time editor of the Pevsner Guides has a new role as listings heritage advisor, a result of Robert Jenrick’s shake-up of the planning system. We ask him about the new position, local ‘lists’ and design codes.
Behind the lilong door

Rossana Hu and Lyndon Neri on their Shanghai home, global practice and being local for a change

Georgie Day

Rossana Hu and Lyndon Neri, co-founders of Neri&Hu, have been hiding from Covid-19 in their Shanghai lane house. They are a multi-award winning, globe-trotting tour de force, but like the rest of the world, Covid-19 has forced them ‘to be still’. And they welcome the rare chance to slow down.

Neri & Hu is a buzzing, interdisciplinary practice. Based in Shanghai, it is international in every sense with projects spanning the globe, an office staffed by individuals who speak 30 different languages and an ambition to bring a ‘global world view to a new paradigm in architecture’. Neri and Hu themselves co-hold the John C Portman Design Critic in Architecture post at Harvard Graduate School of Design.

As you might expect of architects confined to the domestic, they have used lockdown as a chance to work on their own house. Accord-
ing to Neri, this is not something they would ordinarily have time for: ‘As they say, doctors are usually not the most healthy individuals’. They have spent some of the past six months refining a scheme to tame their wild garden – burned in front of their door. There is a con-
"On the house which was a restaurant is now a school. Two hours later, when someone wants to watch a movie, it becomes a theater." There may be important lessons for architects here. ‘As architects we see so engrossed with the idea of labelling and specification… having a bathroom, a living room, a bedroom is a modern invention. Maybe we should start thinking about spaces as opposed to their definitions.”

Cities may be faring less well, however. ‘Covid has made people start to look to rural areas again’, which is of interest to Hu and Neri who talk widely on the phenomenon of rural-urban migration in China. Around 80% of China’s cultural relics are all in the rural areas, and yet a lot of them have been abandoned. 930 villages a day are vanishing, not because of demolition, but because they are not viable. Farmers move to the city to drive, brick layers become janitors – things they are not passionate or skilled at. Kids are left to be looked after by their grandparents. This is an unfortunate society.’ Covid, they hypothesise, is changing that – ‘people are going back home as cities are too claustrophobic. It’s happening in China, but also places like New York. It’s a healthy thing. There needs to be a time of rest.”

The pair talk passionately about the issues facing China and render Shanghai life vividly. Do they consider themselves Chinese architects? ‘No matter what we do, we are Chinese, we love to cook Chinese food.’ When we are up this is the language we think in, and inherently we bring our preconceptions and experiences to our practice. But forgetting to try to make our work Chinese. ‘Instead of being defined by their nationality, they simply try to be good architects – an attitude they attribute to Michael Graves, whose practice they worked at when they met.

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politans. Not only does their teaching and prac-
tice span oceans but each grew up as part of the Chinese diaspora. Neri was born in the Philippines and Hu in Taiwan, and both studied and worked in the US before returning to bring up their children in China. ‘Citizens of nowhere’ however, they are not. Neri thinks this is what makes their work interesting. ‘We have inherited Chinese discipline and the American conceptual mindset – and for me the Spanish/Filipino, crazy artistic flair.’ They try to bring this equilibrium between the universal and the particular to their work. Hu says: ‘A universal response regarding the state of humanity today can be very different from a regional one. But architects have to try to hold both things in their projects – the specificity of a particular site, programme, client and cultural context, with the universality of mankind building a building.’

These are useful times to think this way, when Covid has swept the world affecting nations and economies and cultures in different ways. These are interesting to follow their future work to see the what fruits this ‘period of rest’ bears for Neri and Hu, and how they respond to the inevitable social, economic and cultural changes. Is it a good time to be an archi-
drever for architects we have to be good in every circumstance,” they conclude. •

Georgie Day is an architectural designer and Public Practice associate at Enfield Council. Catch up on Neri&Hu’s RIBA Vitra Talks at architecture.com/campaign/riba-vitra-talks.

Behind the lilong door

Rossana Hu and Lyndon Neri, co-founders of practice Neri&Hu, have been hiding from Covid-19 in their Shanghai lane house. They are a multi-award winning, globe-trotting tour de force, but like the rest of the world, Covid-19 has forced them ‘to be still’. And they welcome the rare chance to slow down.

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Revolution in the public realm

Public space has far greater importance since lockdown. How can we maintain and enhance its availability and value?

Pippa Goldfinger

As we emerge blinking into the new living-with-Covid world it’s evident that the economic carnage wrought will require a longer recovery time than the dread disease that has caused it. Councils reliant on income from tourism and business rates are having to re-prioritise budgets, city centres are empty and public transport is no-go service for many. And yet there are glimmers of hope: for years the writing has been on the wall for retail-only town centres, city leaders have been pondering the political fallout of limiting car use and public health professionals have been warning of the combined evils of poor air quality and an inactive population. Now the push-pull effect of fear of public transport and the requirement of space for social distancing has seen streets given over to cyclists, pedestrians and more recently (with planning laws relaxed) areas that cars, bars and restaurants can occupy. A global pandemic has forced through this worldwide experiment in tactical urbanism and shown how much nicer our cities and towns can be when liberated from the demands of the car (moving and stationary) but will these changes stick or will post-pandemic agoraphobia lead us to abandon the city centres and retreat to an automised car-dependent future in the suburb? And what does this latest shock in a long line of horrible surprises mean for the long-vision-masterplan-approach potential – vulnerable to external biological, environmental and economic forces? We spoke with four architects to get their views on how the current crisis is affecting how we view the urban realm.

Pippa Goldfinger, head of programme, Architecture Centre

We should tap into rhythms of the community and use this knowledge to shape spaces

Pippa Goldfinger

As architects we should design beautiful, non-generic spaces that celebrate trees and planting, birds and bees, and the local community. We should try to tap into the rhythms of the local community, how people move through a space and use it, and use this knowledge to shape the spaces and create future opportunities. We should also value the ecological role a public realm has in the larger city. At Tonkin Liu we use a methodology called Asking Looking Playing Making, which helps us to interpret the brief, place, and people, and to design spaces other than retail-oriented areas. Trees and gardens play very place-specific specifics that enable us to create place-specific concepts.

Every community has ideologies that should be identified early on, to infer the character of the design. There is the social capital that forms the community, at Great Yarmouth, as part of an RIBA Future Places project with the council, Tonkin Liu carried out an analysis of the seafront and proposed inclusive improvements to the public realm such as inviting areas for solar and rainwater harvesting. We learned much from our research and public consultation workshop here. We learned that the beach has a strong link to particular areas of the seafront and communities near the seafront that hosts circus performances. We learned from the strong community-led art commissions, and the fantastic Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust.

Public realm has become our lifeline during Covid-19. People feel the sense of social isolation and lack of access to outdoor spaces. You can see the joy on their faces when they are out in public spaces, cycling, taking a stroll and standing and nourishing under trees. More than ever, public spaces are used for gathering and activities.

Having learned how public spaces in the UK are under-used, compared with spaces in Asia which are effectively outdoor living rooms, outdoor bars and outdoor spaces for gardens of all ages, I have seen how this has changed in the UK during the lockdown.

As architects we should design beautiful, one-storey spaces that celebrate trees and planting, bird’s and bees, and the local community. We should try to tap into the rhythms of the local community, how people move through a space and use it, and use this knowledge to shape the spaces and create future opportunities. We should also value the ecological role a public realm has in the larger city. At Tonkin Liu we use a methodology called Asking Looking Playing Making, which helps us to interpret the brief, place, and people, and to design spaces other than retail-oriented areas. Trees and gardens play a very place-specific role that enables us to create place-specific concepts. Every community has ideologies that should be identified early on, to infer the character of the design. There is the social capital that forms the community, at Great Yarmouth, as part of an RIBA Future Places project with the council, Tonkin Liu carried out an analysis of the seafront and proposed inclusive improvements to the public realm such as inviting areas for solar and rainwater harvesting. We learned much from our research and public consultation workshop here. We learned that the beach has a strong link to particular areas of the seafront and communities near the seafront that hosts circus performances. We learned from the strong community-led art commissions, and the fantastic Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust.

The Trust has preserved more than 50 buildings that are important heritage assets, has revived community training in survey and construction, and even works internationally. Students from Dublin and Bristol have learned to conserve derelict farmhouses, working hands-on, and coming to Great Yarmouth for further experiences. This type of social capital should be built on, to strengthen some of the community identity and pride of place.

Inflicting the design and function of good public spaces are two external boundary area and ownership. Public realm leads to too many rules. People who feel like it is ‘their park’, for instance, can be entitled of outdoor activities that they do and the community is forced entitled to ban them. Sign like ‘no ball games’, no bikes to railings, no dogs’ are symptomatic of intolerances. If you make all these rules you will end up with a pristine lifelessness and snobish public spaces.

Over-programming leads to too many planned, large scale events that are detrimental to planting and the local community. Grass takes a long time to recover from having large marquees set up on top of it and lots of people traffic. The local community can also feel unwelcome during these events.

There should be a balance of spontaneous local activities – wedding groups, exercise classes, and large scale gatherings once or twice a year that puts the public realm ‘on the map’ and attracts people from further afield.

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Intelligence

Rethink: Urban Realm

James Barfield
Director and Pavilion designer at James Barfield

Covid 19 has brought into public consciousness a conversation that has often been confined to spatial design professionals (and thoughtful city mayor) - effective land use – not solely for land value, but for social value.

While Covid 19 requires us all to practice social distancing, it has also encouraged us to get to know our neighbours better, and to better love (and recognise) the very land and public space available to us. Whether it is the park, the street, the corner or the front shop, this is space to breathe and interact. We are social beings and it is the Covid environment (post Covid seems increasingly distant) it is human interaction that we crave.

Hilton Barnfield Architects in collaboration with David Hawes is working with Easter City Council and Homes England to develop a toolkit for the RIBA supported Future Placemaking in Exeter. This focuses on breathing environments and human-centric design, fulfilled through higher, ‘gentle’ density developments.

While major cities face well-documented challenges, land scarcity (and thus value) encourages development (often brownfield) that – through good design – often facilitates improved public realms. Smaller cities and towns, however, have been typically vulnerable to sprawl. Covid 19 has opened many eyes to the effective use of space and, in particular, the role of our streets.

The response to the challenges of Covid 19 should demand, therefore, a re-appropriation of existing land use, away from confined road building, car parking and sprawl, toward human-centred, effective land use with habitable and civic environments (at numerous scales). Not only can this deliver improved public spaces, it can also encourage us all to be more mindful of resources depletion, plan the other pandemic that we must remain focused on, the climate.

Below: Hilton Barnfield ideas for going local in Exeter.

One of the certainties of life is that things change. Really, they do. Turner Works has been reimagining how high streets operate in the future now actually - next month, next year, next month - not years ahead.

The recent pandemic has brought this thinking to the fore, but we had already begun the RIBA high streets and much new development to be deeply flawed, with often huge investment going into the assets buildings and civic realms) with little focus on people. This approach to development pushes economic and people by pushing up prices. At Turner Works our mission is to seed an environment in which young, creative people can build, live, work, and in so doing create a critical mass that through good design and place making can change direction.

This toolkit methodology seeks to achieve a series of shifts in the approach to placemaking, from a vocabulary of ‘growth and quantity’ to ‘quality and thriving economies and communities’, from ‘site and policy area’ to ’regional, economic and landscape positioning’.

While this work began before the pandemic, Covid 19 is now demanding that all communities look critically at their immediate environments and the use of space.

As cities and towns transition to an unavoidable net zero carbon future, the neighborhoods and districts which people identify with and function within will adapt. With major cities facing well documented challenges, land scarcity (and thus value) encourages development (often brownfield) that – through good design – facilitates improved public realms. Smaller cities and towns, however, have been typically vulnerable to sprawl. Covid 19 has opened many eyes to the effective use of space and, in particular, the role of our streets.

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Intelligence
Rethink: Urban realm

To let space for the first few months, the pandemic seems to have jolted people into making serious changes in their lives and we have now let nearly all the space. The site has reopened cautiously, and with a large open-air yard at the heart of the scheme and a large translucent shed (the Hothouse) we now have the perfect space for post Covid hang out. Business is on the up!

These projects create a stepping-stone economy where someone can move from a market stall into a small food kiosk or retail unit at minimal uplift in cost. Or from their bedroom study into a co-work desk or small studio space. We want people to grow and move and to keep the pipeline of space open and flowing, in contrast to a normal high street were businesses typically take 10 to 25 year leases. We want affordable space to be available in the future.

Enlightened councils and developers are now working with Turner.Works exploring this approach at scale up and down the country. In Weston-super-Mare, with several masterplans in the drawer never likely to be implemented, we have been working on the antidote: a micro plan. This incremental approach of layering many small things can have a profound effect on places and can be achieved quickly without breaking the bank. It nurtures local enterprise and it does take a lot of management and support. You can’t build it then walk away.

In Weston, we haven’t had to change the micro plan much post Covid as we were already imagining a new type of high street, one inspired by festivals and street markets; active rather than passive public space. We have included a drive-in cinema on the roof of the car park. The guys who run the shopping centre are already getting on with it.

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**Home design rearranged**

Covid-19 has brought into sharper focus the critical importance of homes in meeting our physical and emotional needs.

**Josephine Stoll**

Last summer the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government allocated £1.1 billion to more than 100 ‘shovel-ready’ projects to drive economic recovery and deliver up to 45,000 homes, as well as infrastructure projects. But a report by property consultant Savills for housing charity Shelter estimates that this year 171,000 new homes will be delivered from planning applications, around a third down on last year’s total. The report, Impact of Covid-19 on Social Housing Supply and Residential Construction, says that economic ripples from the pandemic could see 15% fewer homes built over the next five years and forsees increased overcrowding in both the social and private rented sectors.

This warning comes as growing research assesses the effects of living conditions on physical and mental health during the pandemic. A Fairer Future — Ending Poverty in Brent, a report from the London borough’s Independent Poverty Commission, highlights emerging evidence indicating a higher death rate from Covid-19 in more deprived areas, among lower paid workers and in areas with higher rates of household overcrowding, with those from black, Asian and ethnic minority communities most affected.

The Homes at the Heart Campaign, which is backed by the National Housing Federation and other organisations, used the English Housing Survey and a YouGov survey to analyse overcrowding. In Housing issues during lockdown: health, space and overcrowding, it concludes that almost a third of adults in Britain experienced mental or physical health problems because of the condition, or lack, of space in their home during lockdown and that 30,000 people spent lockdown in a house comprising one room.

‘We have become more acutely aware of how well or not our homes enable us to function — to work, to care for others, stay connect- ed with friends and family, and keep healthy and happy. The pandemic has brought into sharper focus the critical importance of homes in meeting both our physical and emotional needs,’ writes Sarah Weis, CEO of the Design Council, in A Public Vision for the Home of 2030, a report looking at what the public want from their future home. The report informs the Home of 2030 competition, an initiative driving innovation for future affordable, efficient and healthy green homes, which is backed by the government, managed by RIBA Competitions and has an overall programme managed by a consortium led by BREEAM.

A study by the Quality of Life Foundation, based on research carried out before and during lockdown, also highlighted how neighbourhoods and community contribute to wellbeing. It joins the wealth of evidence being gathered from the pandemic to inform the creation of homes and neighbourhoods.

Below, practitioners working in housing and community design and architecture share their perspectives on the future of the sector relative to Covid-19.

**Russell Curtis**

**Founding director, RCKa**

We work across residential, community and public sectors. We have specific expertise in community engagement and thought that instead of being allowed to meet people face-to-face it would be a real problem. But rather than trying to replicate conventional community engagement online we’ve been working in different ways, and have developed a new toolkit for remote engagement. We’ve found we can achieve greater reach than we might in physical workshops as online engagement allows people to choose their level of participation. We will go back to face-to-face engagement, for sure, but only if it equates with online methods.

Urban life will never be the same again. The pandemic has provided further ammunition for accepting that not being able to meet people face-to-face would be a real problem. But rather than trying to replicate conventional community engagement online we’ve been working in different ways, and have developed a new toolkit for remote engagement.

We have become more acutely aware of how well or not our homes enable us to function — to work, to care for others, stay connected with friends and family, and keep healthy and happy. The pandemic has brought into sharper focus the critical importance of homes in meeting both our physical and emotional needs.”

**Marianne Heaslip**

**Associate principal, URBED**

In our area of work — urban projects at all scales promoting mixed-income, mixed-social-benefit — flats are being built but projects are still happening. Some businesses and householders have used this time to Account to work, while the government’s announcement of the Green Homes Grant in July has also — progressively — prompted people to pause and review what we will do. We’ve been alongside Carbon Co-op as the People Powered Retrofit community programme for homes in Greater Manchester. We stopped doing home surveys during lockdown but restarted in June with enhanced procedures. We used to interview householders at home about their experience of living in their property. Now we have a video call ahead of the survey and will keep doing that. It’s worked quite well. It gives householders time to reflect and means we won’t be making judgments in their living room.

During the pandemic the housing conditions have generally worsened overall. There often seems to be an improvement in the UK in the way we are cold, damp and badly ventilated — in fact, for Covid-19. Those who were going to nice heated offices are now working from home. We are more aware of how our homes have got colder. Some householders have already the Green Homes Grant was launched, but it hasn’t fulfilled the demographics as for as we can see. Generally our home retrofit clients are either approaching retirement or slightly younger and keen to make their family home as environmentally and as good as they can be. The Green Homes Grant alone won’t pay for a full retrofit, which makes it more important that environmental actions are carefully planned.

We’re working alongside Carbon Co-op on the People Powered Retrofit programme, including the public consultation and the local authority-led planning process. We stopped doing home surveys during lockdown but restarted in June with enhanced procedures. We are working alongside Carbon Co-op as the People Powered Retrofit community programme for homes in Greater Manchester. We stopped doing home surveys during lockdown but restarted in June with enhanced procedures. We used to interview householders at home about their experience of living in their property. Now we have a video call ahead of the survey and will keep doing that. — it’s worked quite well. It gives householders time to reflect and means we won’t be making judgments in their living room. During the pandemic the housing conditions have generally worsened overall. There often seems to be an improvement in the UK in the way we are cold, damp and badly ventilated — in fact, for Covid-19.

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**We have become more acutely aware of how well or not our homes enable us to function**
It’s my goal to bring more open space into cities and optimise the spaces we already have

A lot of householders that have been active in the cities have shown the pace of development, so we’re using a shift to actually rebuild home contexts. The pandemic has got people thinking about quality of life, physical and mental wellbeing and access to both private and communal space. Open space is as important to the home as an internal space now.

For schemes that are on the drawing board we are introducing wider corridors for flats and making privacy areas more private in terms of community interaction. Gardens have also become important for social activity. Livable spaces programmes have taken off in various places, while forms like the mews and the traditional cul-de-sac have shown themselves to be quite successful in terms of community interaction.

To retain conversation in all cities we think about access to open space. We’ve worked on a lot of projects with pocket parks – which are an efficient, but Birdlife friendly – with the idea of creating more open spaces. We have a lot of work to do in the market understand the priority being given to walkability. We know that people get to connect people that we have addressed issues.

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What has Covid taught us about designing schools?

How best to spend the government’s £1bn school building bonanza? Four sets of priorities range from better access and bigger spaces to flexibility and promoting hygiene

Pamela Barton

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, schools have been balancing safe ways to teach vulnerable and key-worker children with online teaching. But having adjusted their procedures to welcome back all pupils and staff for the winter term, school buildings faced their real acid test from September.

Clearly some buildings are better placed to accommodate the required safety protocols than others. Those with flexible space, generous circulation areas and ample room externally with the potential for outside teaching can more easily enable safe movement around the school and make it easier to limit interactions between class or year ‘bubbles’. Yet over the last decade, these are the very characteristics that have all too often been squeezed following the demise of the Building Schools for the Future programme in 2010, and the advent of more austere funding around the school and make it easier to limit interactions between class or year ‘bubbles’. Yet over the last decade, these are the very characteristics that have all too often been squeezed following the demise of the Building Schools for the Future programme in 2010, and the advent of more austere funding.

Meanwhile, as the schools open over the summer with a making a safe learning environment in the buildings they’ve got, the government announced a £1 billion ‘transformational’ school rebuilding programme. It proposes starting construction over the summer with 50 schools in greatest need of repair, starting construction on the first projects in autumn 2021.

While the programme was welcomed by the Association of School and College Leaders, it feels there is still a long way to go. ‘The fact is that we still have far too many children taught in older buildings which are cramped and poorly ventilated, and there is a lot of ground to be made up in terms of capital spending,’ says ASCL general secretary Geoff Barton, who feels that much has been learned in terms of school design from Covid-19.

‘In short, it has shown that we need to have plenty of airy, well-ventilated spaces, that are large enough to allow learning and movement around the site to take place while maintaining some sense of social distancing. Equally, we have also seen the importance of having ample outdoors space, which can be used for teaching and activities, and take pressure off the indoor environment,’ he says. Below, three school design experts explain what impact they feel Covid-19 will have on school buildings in the long term. The importance of flexibility is a recurring theme, along with the need to revise the Building Bulletins that govern school design standards.

Flexibility should not be seen as a luxury, believes Meryl Townley of van Heyningen and Haward Architects. She says, ‘AHMM’s Philip Marsh sees scope for the use of outdoor classrooms as well as flexible-use creative halls.

Looking further ahead, I’m sure that all new school designs, managerial frameworks will be far more focused on ‘New normal’ related themes such as the movement around the school, environmental conditions and hygiene. The big challenge longer term will be making a partial rethinking of the prescriptive nature of the Building Bulletins that define area and accessibility requirements. Only in this way will designers be able to develop new types of additional spaces that are less controlled and allow more flexibility. If there isn’t going to be any additional scope to build extra space to improve social distancing in schools, we have to think differently. One approach is to extend learning outside the classrooms by bringing alternative space free from the constraints of current BBR standards. We recently made proposals for a new primary school which includes outdoor classrooms that are a contemporary version of the Dutch Open Air School; this was built in Amsterdam to help physically weaker children gain strength with the help of sun and fresh air. These classrooms could be orientated to the south with solar gain, and make some concession to comfort with a simple glazed facade and canopy. As well as having the benefit of getting the children into the landscape, such ‘loose’ spaces will free up more room within schools.’

A new way forward is to build the O2C to accept a more flexible approach to school design concepts: cost per metre squared, and increase area as a result. Inherent flexibility should be designed into all new schools as they can be stripped back and reconfigured to suit the latest educational thinking. Measures could include a single volume, flexible ‘creative hall’ that could serve for a range of uses from art classes, to design technology, food tech or performance space. This could be a low-tech, simple timber frame building with a single roof and walls.

Carpet is often preferred as it is easy to maintain, forgiving, cost effective and improves acoustic absorptions. But we should consider materials that are more environmentally sensitive and have natural bacteria-killing properties such as bamboo. Schools will also re-evaluate their soft furnishings, such as the comfy chair for the story area.

There are plenty of other potential changes. A free flow of space and movement should be encouraged, by reducing contact with handles and push bars. Corridors and doors that suffer the greatest wear and tear should be held open, and doors on toilet cubicles removed. The physical and authoritatively segregated between pupil and staff areas could also disappear. Perhaps we’ll see a return to the Board School specifications of wash basins facing circulation spaces. The opportunity to build new schools is welcome, the demise of the over-ambitious BSF programme has led to very constrained school funding in recent years. Apart from demanding a higher standard of teaching environment, we should be building to a high quality so that the 25 or so new schools benefit from longevity and minimises the annual maintenance cost for the local authority.

Greater focus on the importance of Covid-19 precautions will undoubtedly raise the bar for design, including the need to space the work to even greater extent. I think it could be really exciting.

I would like to see a greater emphasis on developing exemplary design standards.
Most of our schools returned to full occupation in September by working with what they’ve got – you want to avoid making short-term changes to buildings that don’t add value to the school in the future. That’s where thoughtful advice from experienced architects can help by creatively using existing areas to facilitate better learning, and to keep everyone safe.

Covid-19 will offer us a once in a generation opportunity to think about what works well and what doesn’t, but it will be reinforced by schools well operating normally, and current pressures may make teachers and students reluctant to embrace the potential of teaching in new ways. But we can use digital means to present and engage.

Larger form. I hope for a greater appreciation that the tightness of spaces that arises from designing to Education and Skills Funding Agency guidelines makes it harder for schools to cope with unforeseen problems such as Covid-19.

Longer term, I hope for a greater appreciation that the tightness of spaces that arises from designing to Education and Skills Funding Agency guidelines makes it harder for schools to cope with unforeseen problems such as Covid-19.

Loose fit spaces are favourites, allowing imaginative teaching and learning

Paul Monaghan
Partner, Allford Hall Monaghan Morris

In the short term, every school will have to adjust to meet the government’s new operational guidelines. Those that were designed to meet Building Bulletin 98 standards, rather than the less spatially generous Building Bulletin 103 that superseded them, are better equipped for the challenges we face.

I recently asked Howard Jackson, deputy principal of Boulevard School in Tooting, London, which we completed in 2014, how it was adapting to the new operating model. He said it was working very well in terms of bubbles of year groups, with enough classrooms, toilets and other facilities to accommodate one year group on each floor, and the children staying out of one classroom while the teachers move around. Because it was designed to BB98 guidelines, it has more generous corridors, which also help.

Longer term, there will generally need to be more thought given to the environmental engineering of school buildings and in particular how we get fresh air in using natural ventilation – air change will be key. Consideration of hygiene and surfaces will also be important in the future.

Generally of circulation spaces is definitely an issue. I’d like to see the spatial guidelines of BB500 increased by 25% to give more space for this. I think we may see ‘schools within schools’ approaches – the idea that there is an AVA All Saints Academy in Southwark, London – to ensure more separation of years, and also more consideration of multiple entrance and circulation systems. At Westminster Academy we designed toilet areas with two doors at opposite ends. While this was primarily for bullying reasons, it works well in the current situation. I’d also really like to see some of the thinking that goes into office design going into schools, including more flexibility to change room configurations and settings. We don’t know yet what the impact of technology changes will be on the future on school design, but we will definitely need to think about the role of flexibility here.

The government’s new school rebuilding plan is an opportunity to make a statement about what the future of education could be, rather than just making functional buildings. It’s going to be a big programme – £20 billion over each, that’s 50 new schools. I’d like to see the government set out a manifest for what schools should be like.

BB98 understood the idea of a school being aspirational from the funds available, to meet each school’s aspirations. I also believe that as a result of Covid-19, the value of external spaces, and the importance of nature and exercise, are now fully acknowledged in educational wellbeing. These spaces, which are often compromised, must be retained and maintained in briefs for schools. Even on a challenging urban site such as that for New School, vHH maximised and protected the external landscape, which was accessed directly off the doing hall. Multi-use sports pitches are on the roof.

The independent sector continues to embrace more generous spatial parameters than state schools in classroom sizes, breakout spaces, circulation and external spaces. As a result they are better able to cope with Covid-19 restrictions. They were also much better set up with remote digital learning, an inequality that has widened.

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The independent sector continues to embrace more generous spatial parameters than state schools in classroom sizes, breakout spaces, circulation and external spaces. As a result they are better able to cope with Covid-19 restrictions. They were also much better set up with remote digital learning, an inequality that has widened.

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Homes are a mental health issue

As an RIBA survey reveals the links between home design and mental wellbeing, what do owners want and how can architects help?

Eleanor Young

The rumour is true: the design of your home does affect your mental health. So confirms a new survey commissioned by the RIBA. An overwhelming 69% of homeowners surveyed over the summer, as lockdown restrictions eased, agreed that their homes’ design improved their mental health, with a third saying that better design could have helped them to relax more. Here we offer a taste of some of the figures, look at the psychological implications and consider how the findings can be used by architects to strengthen their offer when they talk to potential clients.

‘Homes are primary sources of attachment to place,’ says Eleanor Ratcliffe, environmental psychologist at the University of Surrey. ‘They represent self to you and to others and can make you feel happy and in control – which is especially important when things feel out of control.’

The Covid lockdown and continuing strictures have left many homes having to do so much more. ‘They have been having to function as offices, schools, gyms and nurseries; and to avoid interrupting others. Meanwhile a desire emerged for a closer relationship with nature and the freedom of vistas.’

The survey was commissioned as part of the RIBA’s ‘Work with an Architect’ campaign to promote architects to homeowners. Launched at the Homebuilding and Renovating show, it comprises a social media advertising campaign, a PR campaign aimed at local and national TV and radio and national newspaper advertorials.

27% of respondents want evidence that an architect will make their home more environmentally sustainable
If you were to appoint an architect to redesign your home or build from scratch, what characteristics are most important to you in each of these categories?

- Cheapest cost
- Evidence that they will add value to my home
- Respect for my budget

15.7% 47.7% 36.6%

What services do you think architects offer as standard? Percentage of respondents who agreed:

- Help you to find and buy plots to build houses on
- Advise on building costs and feasibility
- Advise on the financial viability of your project
- Offer advice about mortgages and loans
- Develop and improve your brief
- Design your building according to the agreed brief
- Design your interior
- Design your furniture
- Design your garden
- Design for energy efficiency
- Design for resource efficiency
- Design for biodiversity
- Produce sketches, visualisations and technical drawings
- Carry out structural calculations
- Secure planning permission on your behalf
- Check that the design and building works comply with regulations
- Advice on the selection of building materials and finishes
- Advice on the selection of builders and other consultants
- Carry out the building works
- Oversee the building works
- Check that what is built works as intended

Almost 50% think evidence that architects can add value to homes is important

GREAT NEWS FOR YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY

The RIBA’s poll of 1,500 homeowners aged 24-64 from across the nation is a goldmine of market intelligence for architects and the perfect accompaniment to the recently published marketing toolkit for chartered practices.

If your practice operates in the private domestic markets (i.e., consumer) market, you should take note of its findings and incorporate them into your strategic communications plans.

The poll’s most striking result is that ‘membership of a professional organisation’ is singled out by the greatest number of respondents (61%) as an important factor in selecting an architect – roughly twice as important as having a quality management scheme (36%), a commitment to combat climate change (31%), or having won awards for house design (29%).

Review the extent to which you promote your RIBA membership. Since it is possibly the most important factor for clients looking to select an architect, your marketing communications should emphasise it.

It also turns out that almost 50% of respondents think evidence that you can add value to homes is important, much more so than the cost of your service, which was voted more critical by only 15%.

Note the word ‘evidence’ here, though. Simple unsupported claims are unlikely to persuade. Perhaps one of the best ways to support claims is with good references: 48% of respondents thought this the most important factor from a list of six options – closely followed by evidence that you listen (43%)

These high-scoring characteristics are worth reflecting in your client communications, perhaps best achieved through a dedicated process of seeking client feedback.

Another headline finding is that 70% agree that better home design could have positive impacts in various ways, with relaxation, happiness and mental wellbeing topping the list. Respondents’ most important target for home improvement was to reconfigure existing spaces, followed, in order, by extending, creating a home office, and improving levels of daylight.

The granularity of these findings is useful for pitches and what you choose to promote down communications channels (including Find an Architect), allowing you to better align your offer to your target market’s needs.

Matthew Thompson

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Don't divide new and old
Conservation and modernism sit side by side

Hugh Pearman Editor

If you’ve never been to Newark in Nottinghamshire, I can recommend it. A large and largely intact town dating from Norman times with two railway stations on different lines, the fully-functioning Trent river navigation, a big active market square including several medieval timber buildings, a Town Hall by Carr of York, one of the finest parish churches in England (St Mary Magdalene) and the remains of an impressive castle overlooking the river. It’s not perfect as a town of course – there are the usual bits of insensitive traffic planning, too many land-hungry superstores and builders, with a dollop of ‘Building to Level 3’ and ‘Conservation to Level 4’ thrown in. Sites are prefabricated and relocatable, not that anyone has ever tried to shift this one. This is the kind of medievalism that appealed to anyone has ever tried to shift this one. This is the kind of medievalism that appealed to modernist architects, and that ‘hovering’ modernist buildings are in some way inhuman. But there is a lot of good stuff around. The old White Hart in Newark is richly decorated with carved motifs and figures and appears to have been quite colourful – none of the default black-and-white here. It reminds me slightly of the work of Louis Sullivan centuries later. And its kind represent continuity in architecture and point to the future. It gives the lie to the preposterous theory that vertical emphasis is the only true way to do architecture, and that ‘hovering’ modernist buildings are in some way inhuman.

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Proof of the pudding

Will Wiles traces his interest in architecture back to family meals as a child

Does anyone remember Ice Magic? Archaeological researcher Rebecca Lambert does, and put that question to Twitter, and now I remember it as well. It was a highly processed chocolate dessert topping made by Bird’s and popular in the 1980s, where it sometimes – as a very special treat – graced the Wiles family dinner table. You poured it over your ice cream, and it hardened into solid chocolate.

What witchery kept it liquid at room temperature? I don’t know, and perhaps I am better off not knowing, but it was magic indeed. ‘An innovation on a par with the bounce on an iPhone screen,’ the architect Sean Cronin contributed to Lambert. She goes under the Twitter handle @LadyLiminal, and had there identified the truly liminal desert: a ritual of transformation, a play of different states, from solid to liquid.

The magic began with the packaging, a conical plastic bottle with a top that had a wavy lower edge, like a child’s drawing of a snow-capped peak. In packaging terms this was akin to a Venturi/Scott Brown ‘duck’, neatly uniting function with form. The softened Hot Glue was the participant emerged transformed, a play of different states, from solid to liquid.

But it also had architectural potential. If you were lucky in your pour and careful with your spoon, you could eat the ice cream out from underneat the solidified Ice Magic, leaving behind a neat and delicate chocolate dome. In doing so, you recreated some of the most advanced and interesting buildings of the 20th century. Sometimes you got something that was all legs and no top, and resembled Wilbur Smith’s spindly Theme Building at Los Angeles International Airport. Other times a balance of canopy and support emerged, perhaps resembling one of Félix Candela’s thin-shell structures, such as his restaurant in Valencia; or, if the ice cream was scooped less tidily, Eurostar’s TWA terminal at JFK. If the Ice Magic didn’t make it down the sides of the ice cream to form a structural connection to the bowl, you could be left with a complex Zaha Hadid-ish bit of parametric drapery.

As a father, I’m forever telling my children to stop playing with their food, but remembering Ice Magic makes me regret that. Every dinnertime, they get handed a little materials lab with a mixture of differently composed solids and liquids, and endless possibilities. They quickly set to work damming grey rivers with mashed potatoes and assembling Platonic structures from their mini waffles. In thinking only of the peas scattering across the table, I’m stilling the next Pier Luigi Nervi? What witchery kept it liquid at room temperature? I don’t know, and perhaps I am better off not knowing, but it was magic indeed. ‘An innovation on a par with the bounce on an iPhone screen,’ the architect Sean Cronin contributed to Lambert. She goes under the Twitter handle @LadyLiminal, and had there identified the truly liminal desert: a ritual of transformation, a play of different states, from solid to liquid. Combined with its ritual qualities and precious status as most special treat, this was probably what made it memorable.

Sometimes a nice balance of canopy and support emerged, perhaps resembling one of Félix Candela’s thin-shell structures.

Will Wiles

Ice Magic had an extremely pleasing material quality. The crunch as it broke and the spoon sank into the ice cream beneath was as rare and pleasurable as the first footsteps on deep overnight snow. It also had a delightful, although highly artificial, slipperiness in the mouth as it completed its lifecycle and returned from solid to liquid. Combined with its ritual qualities and precious status as most special treat, this was probably what made it memorable.

Besides material pleasure, Ice Magic also provided some material education. It was capable of bringing interesting forms into existence. Economy was key – I can still feel my mother at my elbow, moderating the amount I used. The saddest result was when the hull of your topping slid into a crevice between ice cream scoops, forming a tasty but shapeless lump. Rest of all was when it poured evenly over the top of an iced hilllock, and ran down the sides. This was most attractive, and gave the best topping-to-ice-cream ratio if you wanted a bit of both in each mouthful.

Crisp retort

Is it a bit of a stretch to apply architectural criticism to Ice Magic? Perhaps. But I would like to cite a precedent: William J Mitchell, my late, great professor in this spot, once extracted a glorious bit of criticism from different kinds of crisps, and claimed that his ‘Bag of Chips Theory’ tells you everything you need to know about architectural form. I trail in that magnificent shadow.

Below: Our food is a materials lab.

The RIBA Journal November 2020
President

Professional indemnity insurance is on most practice owners’ minds. After a decade or so of relatively low premiums, Grenfell and its consequent Hackitt review, along with other construction disasters such as the collapses in Scottish schools, have contributed to the significant hardening of the marketplace. Other factors are also at play, including PII performing badly compared with other areas of insurance, the unreasonableness of bespoke appointment contracts for architects and that certain architects are prepared to sign them. Architects are valued for their PI insurance, with inappropriately high levels of coverage often stipulated by client representatives and related warranties, and with architects present at the project’s end they are vulnerable to a contribution to a claim. In 2019 James Burgoyne, in Defining Contemporary Professionalism, confirmed that two-thirds of architects’ PI claims are ‘sector or situation-al issues’ which means ‘essentially being in the wrong place at the wrong time’ and that ‘a firm needs multiple risk management strategies as a series of lines of defence’. The legacy of numerous potentially unsafe residential buildings looms over the whole construction industry and property market, freezing sales and worrying insurers about retrospective claims.

Some suggest it has remained relatively easy for practices to gain PI insurance. Such a stance neglects the near market failure situation with some insurers having left the market altogether and the rest offering limited cover at a cost, almost all with broad exclusions on fire safety issues. Although the appetite in the insurance market for architects’ PI has got to the point where even a clean claims history and excellent risk management processes do not shield a practice from premium increases and broad exclusions of cover, chartered architects are changing culture and can look forward to being able to better demonstrate competence to provide assurance to clients and the public. In 2019 the RIBA introduced the new online CPD recording platform and in August 2020 The Way Ahead set out how academia and practice must come together to facilitate lifelong learning, mandatory competencies, career trajectories and increasing levels of expertise. The RIBA Academy is live, with online CPD and support, soon, for schools of architecture to address carbon literacy, professionalism, public health and life safety. The new 2020 RIBA governance includes a new standards committee with a remit across education and validation, codes of conduct and competence.

Over the last month I have presented The Way Ahead to numerous RIBA committees, regional councils and nations. Even in these challenging economic times everyone I have spoken to appreciates and agrees with the direction of travel and wants to be involved. There is a significant change within the RIBA and its membership; we are stepping up, and government needs to step in, to resolve the legacy of ‘deem to satisfy’ construction by providing industry support funding, as well as underwriting the remediation of unsafe residential buildings and by pressing reset on our industry – on appointment and fees, on procurement of the design team and construction, on competencies of all involved, on reasonable apportioning of risk, on clear roles and responsibilities – creating the conditions in which architects, the only regulated profession in the construction industry, can truly deliver for everyone.

@AlanJonesFRIBA

Even a clean history and excellent risk management do not shield a practice from PI premium increases and broad exclusions of cover
You are in Accra, Ghana as we speak. How long have you been there?

DAVID ADJAYE: I have been here a year. I moved here to work on the cathedral. I have close to a 50 person office in Accra. With Covid we all decamped at first to our houses, but when the government introduced a method for businesses to go back we did.

EY: This is not your first RIBA Medal. You were awarded the RIBA Bronze Medal in 1990 for your student project Respite Centre. Was that medal important to you? Can you tell us about that project?

DA: I am lucky to now have two! The Bronze Medal was incredibly important. It was what made my parents pay attention and think maybe I had something, a voice in this profession I was choosing. It was a creative profession and they were nervous for me.

The Respite Centre was slightly biographical. It was a reflection on years of taking my brother to such places. A way to imagine having disability respite as a valuable and beautiful part of our urban environment and not tucked away.

That was really the torch that set the direction of my desire to have a practice – it wasn’t an issue being addressed by the profession. I wanted to use architecture as a way to make the changes I wanted to see in society.

EY: That social conviction is very obvious in your early projects like the Ideas Stores and the Bernie Grant Arts Centre. So is your strong interest in materials. How can we help change culture here in the UK so architects of your calibre are designing our schools and hospitals; the infrastructure of the everyday?

DA: For me it’s a hope that with this medal my office is able to do more work in the mainstream in the UK’s public sector. And I hope young architects can have the possibility of doing both private homes and be engaged in public buildings early on. The competitions system and direct commission to certain generations can help that. Not just the market. I really believe this. Architecture needs to go to the youngest as well as the most established. There is something profound about when it does that and what it contributes to the discipline.

EY: Is it possible to retain small project sensibility in a big project?

DA: I jumped from designing a nearly 40,000ft² building, the Ideas Store Whitechapel, where we were controlling everything including the light fixtures, to a nearly 500,000ft² Management Institute in Russia. You are operating at this large scale, you have to realise where you can make impact and where you have to allow the systems to work for you. You have to find what your idea is and how you are going to deliver it. And buildings should be judged that way.

EY: Many of your projects deal with diffic-
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Culture Profile

I have grown up in my profession having to find different ways to work and attract patronage.

cult histories and belief systems – the UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre, National Cathedral of Ghana, Abrahamic Family House, the Nobel Peace Centre, the Smithsonian. Does the idea behind each building come from these human stories? DA When I say idea it encapsulates three different parts: form, craft and programme. Essential in any creation of architecture is your attention in those three arenas. You need a certain focus to create and curate the building and for your teams to understand what is important, to know when critical thinking is required.

DA Tell us about that on your current big project, the National Cathedral of Ghana.

DA For me it is a social centre in the 21st century – a place for Accra citizens and Ghanaians to gather both for the everyday and a myriad of other functions including education facilities, and an assembly hall that can support state events of a sacred, spiritual nature, like national funerals. This is very important in West African culture, the life and death culture is much more important than it is in the west; it’s much more social, cultural and national.

Then craft, understanding what the limitations in Ghana are and what the innovations are that we want to bring here. Engineering excellence is largely neglected here due to budgets and a culture of making do.

DA Form. Here it has been about how to make the hall specifically work for the culture of Ghana and West Africa and its background of animism. Our research looked into making make a building that would really engage with that nuance.

DA Have projects been put on hold due to the pandemic?

DA We are lucky we haven’t been devasted. In 2009 I nearly lost my business – then I had a lot of commercial work. In this pandemic a lot of the cultural projects have been able to sail through. We have about 20% commercial work in my three studios and some of those did go on hold. But we have been able to re-distribute our teams, we haven’t had to make anyone redundant. And now more work is coming in as we see how to operate in this Covid world.

DA Might the pandemic offer some new opportunities?

DA We are going to rethink typologies, especially workspace and public space. The pandemic has opened our eyes, we are now in an age of pandemics thanks to the climate predictions we have reached. We have 20 or 30 more years of pulling back from climate change – if we get on board with it now. And in that time we have to make architecture that is resilient to new forms and mutations and deals with invisible air transmission. We know that science can’t make vaccines fast enough. It goes to building standards. I think they will change requirements on filtration and space standards. We understand that biophilic design is important to human health and immunity. From clip-on greenery to the wider relationship between greenery and the built environment. We have to understand those things are going to be completely incorporated into our new norms.

We have needed something, sadly, to knock us back; it is not just looking at architecture in terms of values and costs but evolve typologies that contribute to our wellbeing. Modernism was born as a result of tuberculosis. It was born as a way of dealing with diseases, not just an aesthetic.

DA You have long been friends with the best of Young British Artists. You have rubbed shoulders with Barack Obama; Mayor of London Sadiq Khan congratulated you on being awarded the Royal Gold Medal. Your Instagram posts quickly garner thousands of likes. Few architects have this political or popular traction. What does it mean to be operating like that?

DA If it is different it is because I have grown up in my profession having to find a different ways to work and attract patronage. I have always been influenced by different professionals and different people, artistic and political ideas, right from when I chose to study at the RCA. This is how I connect to people and gain intellectual nourishment. Also in architecture, especially if you
work in the public realm, you have a public role. This idea of being a public architect who can also discuss the complexity of public architecture is part of being given the privilege to make public buildings.

What is going on with the Holocaust Memorial [the planning inquiry] is profoundly important, we need that public debate. The same with the Smithsonian, I had nine years of being cross-examined by public bodies including Congress. If you want to do this work, it helps to be a public person which is a great responsibility. It’s about being able to work in a democracy and share ideas that will profoundly affect people, and explain the benefits.

Who are your heroes? 
DA Lina Bo Bardi and Oscar Niemeyer in South America. And I admire Hassan Fathy in Africa for his return to traditional values and, in Europe, the reinvention of craft by Carlo Scarpa. These are characters that I love very much.

You are the first black architect to be awarded the RIBA Royal Gold Medal. In the year where the killing of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter has brought a better understanding of equality and inequality is the medal a hopeful sign or an indictment of the profession?
DA It shows recognition of the issues but is also an indictment that it has taken so long. The defence that there hasn’t been the talent just isn’t good enough. For talent to emerge there has to be support from education to procurement to give someone the ability to shine. And that happens for some races and not others. That is the issue that needs to be tackled continually in a democratic, multi-racial society. It is a systemic issue. I am happy to be celebrated. But I am not the model that I want any kid to follow. This is an exception, me charting a path despite the process. It should be a path because of the process. It is incumbent on all architects and educators. We should work with the greatest diversity that gives us the greatest results.

Can architects do more to bring black architects and people of colour into the profession?
DA In the workforce, architects should just see how many people of colour they have and ask where they place people of colour, are they in senior positions? You have to train people into those positions. We strive not to be an exception, me charting a path despite the process. It is incumbent on all architects and educators. We should work with the greatest diversity that gives us the greatest results. It is about significant change and contributing to the practice of architecture. It is incredible to have the medal, it gives weight to the agendas I’ve been promoting since the beginning of my career. The legitimacy it confers will hopefully make it more possible I can do better work in the future.

If you hadn’t been an architect?
DA I wanted to be a chemist, I wanted to be a pilot. But my hopes were dashed. I was, until this pandemic, flying around a lot, and I think architecture is alchemic, it’s the combination of extraordinary – or mundane – materials and it’s a kind of magic.”

If you want to do this work it helps to be a public person, which is a great responsibility.
**Shock and awe at the V&A**

Darren Waterston’s Filthy Lucre tells a dramatic tale of beauty, arrogance and anger.

**Pamela Buxton**

In the late 1980s, Le Corbusier famously defaced bright murals on the plain white walls of E-1027, the villa in the south of France designed by Eileen Gray. This seemingly aggressive act pales into insignificance compared with what the celebrated painter James Abbott McNeill Whistler got up to 60 years earlier when he created the Peacock Room in the London house of his patron, Frederick Leyland. The story goes that Whistler was unhappy with the interior design of the room where his painting The Princess from the Land of Porcelain was hung. This room was being created at great expense by the architect Thomas Jeckyll to showcase Leyland’s collection of Chinese porcelain. With Leyland away and Jeckyll unwell, Whistler was consulted on colours and seized the chance to instead spend months completely re-painting the room to his own resplendent design, to the astonishment of Leyland, who was left with a hefty bill from the money that Whistler had charged to his account. The two formerly great friends fell out irreversibly; poor Jeckyll had a nervous breakdown shortly afterwards and was destined for an early death in an asylum. However Leyland did keep the room, with its splendid golden embellishments, as it was – even if he didn’t want to pay for it. The room’s name refers to Whistler’s wall painting of two golden peacocks representing the artist and Leyland, the latter with tail feathers showering coins. It’s a great yarn, and one which we can thank American artist Darren Waterston for shining a light on anew with his installation Filthy Lucre at the V&A, an immersive re-interpretation of Whistler’s controversial tour-de-force. Briefly on show before lockdown, this atmospheric piece has now been given an extended run until the end of November. When Waterston was commissioned to create a painted room by MASS MoCA in Massachusetts – where the installation was first shown – he immediately thought of the Peacock Room as his starting point. ‘It’s a gesamtkunstwerk that brings architecture, sculpture, painting and design all together into one thing, which is very much my interest,’ he says, drawn also to the resonance the story has with tensions between art and money in the art world today. He was also interested in Whistler’s pro- vocative character. ‘He was a bit of a troublemaker, very self-promoting... cunning. He knew how to advocate for himself,’ he says.

Waterston’s approach was to re-imagine the sumptuous Peacock Room in a way that explored its emotional complexity. It is, he says, like ‘a surreal fever dream’ where things are destabilised and unsettled. After studying Whistler’s design in detail – the room is now in the custody of the Freer Gallery of Art at the Smithsonian – he created his own eerie and unsettling version, built to a scale 10% smaller than the original to give the space a sense of compression so that it felt ‘a bit tighter’. With its collapsing shelves, smashed porcelain (Waterston painstakingly painted 250 pots before smashing many of them) and strong sense of decay, this room clearly conveys a sense of something gone very wrong indeed. Strange accretions sprout from the surfaces like some weird golden fungus. Stalactites hang down off the mantelpiece and some of the shelves. crimson pots seem to seep as if bleeding, a golden stain spreads across the floor. A melancholic soundtrack of strings and whispered quotes from Whistler rams up the atmosphere further. Two more subtle elements speak volumes. Waterston has created his own play on the artist and patron peacocks of Whistler’s original. In Filthy Lucre, they are engaged in violent combat – and it’s not only the feathers that are flying. ‘I wanted the peacocks to still have elegance but they are literally eviscerating each other – pulling out each other’s guts. There’s a violence to it amid all the shimmering decadence,’ he says.

In his version, the Porcelain Princess is still present in her kimono – the original room was created at the height of the japonisme craze. However her face is no longer visible. I thought this was because she couldn’t bear to look at the state of the room, with its ruination and disaster, and so had turned her head so that we were looking at an elaborately coiffed hairstyle. But instead, Waterston explains, her face has morphed into a surreal organic bulbous form. It’s all rather weird – and wonderful.

Waterston hopes that visitors to his Filthy Lucre Peacock Room will go away thinking about the volatility of beauty, and how one piece of art could have created so much destruction and heartbreak too. He particularly enjoyed working with a multi-disciplinary team to realise the immersive room, which is built in modular sections and tightly choreographed to enable it to tour. Waterston is working with Seattle architect BuildingWork on another architectural installation, a modular Byzantine chapel called the Congregation of Tears. "
As a child, designer Kenya Hara (creative director of MUJI) owned a dog who – like Snoopy from Peanuts – preferred to lie on top of his kennel rather than in it. It was squeezed into a narrow alley, so the dog developed a taste for rooftop living. Architecture, Hara observed accordingly, has developed according to human needs, scales and ergonomics. Dogs have adapted to this human-centric setup, but we rarely consider design from our pet’s perspective. ‘I sense new possibilities,’ muses Hara. ‘What would come of a dog-scaled architecture?’ Since 2012 he has collaborated with acclaimed architects to create the charming ‘Architecture for Dogs’, which opened at Japan House in Kensington in September.

In his opening speech, Michael Houlihan, director general of Japan House, observed that ‘finding aesthetic pleasure in the functional ordinary’ is uniquely Japanese. These pieces are functional, but delightfully out of the ordinary. Torafu Architects’ ‘Wanmock’ (wan=woof) for a Jack Russell who enjoyed sleeping in his owners’ laundry, is a plywood frame with a jumper stretched into a two-layered hammock. Toyo Itô’s ‘Mobile Home for Shiba’, a covered woven structure on wheels, was designed for his elderly Shiba Inu. Hiroshi Naito’s ‘Dog cooler’ is a curved platform of wooden slats and aluminium tubes that can be filled with bags of ice. Inspiration came from his own dog, cooling itself on the bathroom tiles during humid summers.

We are starting to get a rare insight into our architects’ sensibilities. And if, as is said, dogs resemble their owners, do architects’ dog buildings resemble their human ones? In short: Yes. Visually, many of the pieces leave little doubt as to who conceived them. Sou Fujimoto’s ‘No Dog No Life!’ – which seeks to redefine the boundaries between human and doggy environments by housing a Boston Terrier in a hinoki (Japanese cypress) grid frame, populated with household artefacts – recalls his 2013 Serpentine Pavilion. Asif Khan’s ‘I see you!’ is a minimalist, table-like construction covered in assiduously handmade sheepswool felt, with a crater in the top for a dog to burrow into; inspiration came from watching a friend’s dog hollow out a tree stump to hide in. Rather than focus on a particular breed, Khan’s piece services all manner of black-furred dogs, camouflaging them and engaging them in a game of hide and seek. The curved, smooth sides derive from dogs’ spatial experiences: ‘Whereas humans perceive volume, a dog’s perspective is horizontal and surface bound’, Khan tells us. ‘This project forced us out of our comfort zone. It scrambled our preconceptions as architects, forcing us to imagine the dog as client.’

So what sort of client does a dog make? A Jekyll and Hyde character who initially seems obedient but then bulldozes the architect’s perfectionist creation? The prosaic dog owner within me cannot help but question practicalities. Hara Design Studio’s paper tipi ‘Pointed T’, and the fluffy covering of Kazuyo Sejima’s (SANAA) den for a Bichon Frisé would not survive my destructive lurcher. Blueprints of the Pritzker prize-winning architects’ designs are available online – though I’d address your dog’s chewing behaviours before engaging a contractor.


More doggie design images at ribaj.com
John E Dangerfield 1930 – 2020

Australian-trained architect who majored in military and museum art design, and rejected art school for a more practical career

IN MEMORIAM

David Norman Gaskiffs
MELBOURNE VIC

Michael Gregory Holland
FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

Robin James Spika
ELECTED SENIOR FELLOW

John David McCall
ELECTED SENIOR FELLOW

Stu Sarr Vivienne-Jones
ELECTED SENIOR FELLOW

London W1B 1AD

Fixed on home ownership

I have just read last month’s editorial on the housing market (Price War, pg1). You have nailed it with the observation on the crash in 2008 – the amount of available money, both home-grown mortgages and foreign speculative investment, is creating most of the demand. Coming from a country where building is much more common and accepted, I took a long time to understand the British obsession with home ownership. I fear this fixation with housebuilding is the only purpose of the planned reform of the planning system with its proposed zones (p35, same issue) – the tall is clearly wagging the dog. Most countries with such a system are actually the ones where living in a rented apartment is normal – I wonder whether this irony is obvious to the key forces behind the zoning approach.

Nils Feldmann, Feldmann Architects, Leicester

Upgrade older homes

Your Green Homes Grant story (Recovery needs a stronger home improvement fix, p52, RIBAJ September 2020) correctly identified the importance of improving the energy efficiency of private homes as a vital contribution to reducing the UK’s CO₂ emissions. Architects and surveyors must play a greater role in implementing improvements to the energy performance of the owner occupied UK housing stock. Only our professions have the numbers and skills to deliver the national change needed. We need to be ready to deliver, while schools of architecture and surveying should introduce the necessary teaching of the techniques and challenges of retrofit.

Nils Feldmann, Feldmann Architects, Leicester

I fear this fixation with housebuilding is the only purpose of the planned reform of the planning system with its proposed zones

Stay streetside

Thank you, Colin Davis, for continuing the conversation of highway vs street design (Exchange, p73, RIBAJ, September 2020). You are correct that the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges is incapable of delivering residential style streets – as every urban designer knows and every good highways officer should know.

As part of national funding for roads which are intended to open up land for housing, a nasty consequence is that because the roads will initially function as bypasses until the adjacent land is built out, they may eventually be designated as RRBS standards capable of 50mph and associated visibility splays (i.e. 36m radius corners).

So it’s those involved in highways funding projects who need to appreciate the right to walk on the streets, not just developers who need to have the right to build on them.

Patrick Mullon, Kingston, Surrey

To inquire the RIBA of the death of a member, please email membership.services@riba.org with details of next of kin.

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The Lovell Beach House under construction
California, 1926

Rudolf Schindler (1887-1953) was one of the many Central European architects who moved to the United States in the first half of the 20th century, but unlike most of his colleagues he left his native Vienna – where he had trained with both Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos – before World War I, never to return to Europe.

The Lovell Beach House, built by the ocean in Newport Beach, is widely recognised as one of his most important works, as well as an emblem of the modern movement in America. Built in reinforced concrete, it clearly reveals its structure on the street front, where the house is raised above ground level. The two-storey living-dining area features full height windows on two sides of the house, with sea views to the south. The house was listed as a Registered Historic Place in California in 1974.

Three years later, Schindler’s client, Philip M Lovell, also commissioned the famous Lovell Health House in Los Angeles from another Austrian émigré, Richard Neutra. Both architects had a lasting influence on American residential architecture, especially in southern California.

Valeria Carullo
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