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AJ Specification Award winning project ‘The Forge’ in London E6 epitomises the way forward in rainwater management in the UK.

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Communicating the architectural history of a place or type of building runs through all four of this month’s building studies. In Hertfordshire a new equestrian manège for a private client takes on the aesthetic of the listed farm and 12 existing stables. In Wolverhampton, Associated Architects is fitting a new university faculty for the built environment into a redundant brewery site using the surrounding industrial language of saw-tooth roofs, steel and the Midlands colour red, giving people a much-needed boost of optimism. Meanwhile, Hugh Pearman visits his old school where buildings designed by R H Burnell and W Campbell Jones, their brickwork and buttresses, help him understand the new intervention by Bell Phillips Architects. At BORD Architectural Design’s Aquaticum waterpark in Hungary it’s not the architectural history of the place that informs the design, but a thrilling cacophony of architectural references dramatically thrown together from around the world.

Yet there’s another strand of stuff taking place among these buildings too, a glimmer of hope on the role of architects in the building process – the bulking out of work and a return, perhaps, to traditional values. The manège was a satisfyingly chunky job for Atelier Architecture and Design because the practice also took on the role of main contractor. Likewise, Bell Phillips’ appointment in Tunbridge Wells came out of an initial overseer role to survey the school’s fabric pro bono, and then the building work was carried out by traditional contract too – trust that paid off for all parties and is reflected in the quality of the resulting building. •

Fairweather riding – equestrian centre
Industrial rebirth – university

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Despite the anger he channels at the elitist state of land ownership, there is a lot of positivity in the book Sarah Featherstone reveals her favourite book of 2020: ribaj.com/shrubsole

**Skinners’ School by Bell Phillips Architects, page 14.**
Never mind the weather

Glulam and glass give views without the English rain

Words: Eleanor Young Photographs: Dennis Gilbert/VIEW

A concept car, a pavilion for the Turin Winter Olympics and the British weather were the inspiration for this covered manège in the Chilterns. Fabrizio Giugiaro is a product designer near Turin; his father is a legend in car design and he carried on the tradition with Italdesign. In 1998 he designed the super glazed Structure concept car that was all frame and glass – perfect for taking in the passing views – from which grew a glass and timber frame Olympic pavilion among the trees of a Turin square. And when he set out to give his daughters a riding space out of the rain at the family’s listed farm in England, Giugiaro wanted to make it an airy experience too, with views of the Chilterns. He also wanted the smell and feel of timber and the simplicity and strength of a glulam frame.

Hertfordshire-based Atelier Architecture and Design developed Giugiaro’s idea, with a 20m span portal frame using twin glulam columns. Between them sits aluminium-framed curtain walling. Steve Melvin’s early sketches show the ribbony form of horses dancing under an elegant, minimal roof. There is something to this, though of course the reality is more complex: Hopkins-style steel ties across the glazing, doors to push open and gallop rails around the glass to discourage the stray hoof.

Over this year’s unusually hot summer – when the family was kept in the UK by Covid travel restrictions – the manège remained a cool and calm place for the horses. The roof is well insulated (150mm of insulation) using Kingspan trapezoidal composite panels over exposed glulam beams. The two angles of the roof have two purlins at the top to leave a ridge vent to draw out warm air. Though a single horse may work up a sweat in the manège there are rarely more than three or four in there at a time, so the air inlet vents at eaves level – and sometimes the doors being left open – allow enough air through for effective natural ventilation, says Melvin.

In some ways the simple form is like the storage barns that had already had planning permission in almost the same position. And its form has hints of the agricultural, though it was inevitably pricier than a standard barn. But the tradition it draws on most is that of the farm: before Giugiaro took over it already had 12 timber stables and plenty of horsey activity including an outdoor manège. In fact Giugiaro’s daughters didn’t ride in
Gallop rails around the glass discourage the stray hoof

Italy, thanks to nervous horses and a difficult riding style, confides Giugiaro. It was only in England that they were introduced to gentler horses – a particular boon for Giugiaro’s disabled daughter who can enjoy ‘driving’ the horse. The stables are also home to Millie McBride Dressage so get regular use.

For Atelier this was a large job as it also took on the role of main contractor. Some things came easy – like the glulam frame, thanks to a close collaboration with Buckland Timber. Others, particularly the ground works, were more of a struggle. A hugely wet start, finding unexpected existing footings on the site and some inaccurate soil investigation meant everything took longer.

And preventing water from getting to the specialist dressage on top of limestone dust and limestone screenings was critical – it was down to Atelier to address any problems with remedial drainage. Melvin estimates there was a substantial saving on the contract cost but that the practice paid for it in time and worry. Giugiaro too wonders out loud why it took so long, a whole year to build, when the frame was up in just two and a half weeks.

But now it is done and Melvin’s dancing horses can ride off into the Chilterns sunset (and back around), while keeping nice and dry. 

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Roofing
Buckland Roofing
Systems

Above Double glulam columns frame the manege.
Below The building is used by the family and dressage riders including one specializing in nervous horses.

1. Composite roof
2. Double glulam columns
3. Hidden downpipes
4. Part horizons

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At first glance it looks like thermal imaging and, in a way, it is; but look again. What strange insulation arrangement would account for that diagonal line on the concrete balustrade or the curious, cold blue triangle trace on the insitu concrete pier? This is an image from photographer Christopher Hope-Fitch’s personal project Brutalism in Colour. His day job is producing lifestyle shots for Getty Images but maybe it was 10 years spent in the black & white department of a specialist photographic lab in central London that led to him creating these supersaturated images.

Of course, brutalism lends itself to black & white photography, its sculptural nature responding well to the play of light and shade, while the medium binds the style in both time and perception. But it was during Hope-Fitch’s nocturnal shoots in the city that the photographer noticed the delicate colours that its surfaces absorbed when illuminated at night.

This image of a staircase outside the Museum of London is the happy accident of sodium street lights mixing with the Barbican Highwalk’s tungsten and the fluorescent light of the stair. ‘A couple of the tubes were also on the way out and go greener before they blow,’ he says, though despite his Sony A7R2’s ‘incredible sensors’, picking up the subtlest colour differentials, he wasn’t sure what the result would be. So yes, it’s thermal imaging; not of the structure but of the light that is striking it: the red, yellow, green and blue denoting the heat they emit onto a receptive surface. But there’s a time limit to Hope-Fitch’s chromatic experimentation. He tells me of a recent shoot in Portsmouth, with its new low-energy, bright white, LED street lighting. ‘London’s skies currently throw up all manner of colours in the process but at this shoot there was nothing – I was rather thrown by it,’ he recalls.

He shouldn’t be. What Hope-Fitch’s work is marking is the end of an era, a cessation of the heat bleeds of the past and a time when sustainable LEDs will, by default, see a nocturnal return of brutalism’s signature monochrome.

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Old boy on the block

Hugh Pearman goes back to school, and finds he likes it better now

Photographs: Kilian O’Sullivan

It’s a strange business, going back to a place you last walked out of 46 years ago expecting never to return. Especially when it is your old school: the Skinners’ School, Tunbridge Wells, a state all-boys grammar then and now. I become uncomfortably aware that I am carrying a leather satchel, something that we growing-up boys felt was very much beneath us at the time. Satchels were a primary school thing. The idea of an adult carrying one would have struck us as bizarre.

Nonetheless, despite all the ad-hoc changes over the years, once through the gates I know pretty much just where all the important places are to be found. But for one big change, the thing I had come to see. A large new block by Bell Phillips Architects, containing a sixth form study centre, library and English department classrooms. It’s the first properly planned and designed addition the school has made since its modernist ‘new wing’ further new not a wing, but not half of 1960. There have been several other buildings since then as the school has expanded and no doubt they work fine but there has been a lack of architectural quality, consistency and clarity. Unlike that muddle of buildings occupying the lower centre of the site, the new three-storey block is perched high, visible from the street, right alongside the original buildings. Something much better was required there.

This is the first built educational foray by a practice that is known especially for its residential work. It turns out that partner Tim Bell is another, younger old boy: the commission arose after he’d done a chunk of pro-bono work for the school establishing the siting and feasibility of the desired new building. It was a direct appointment and the work was done on a traditional contract, which was pretty much the way they did things when the school was first built. Better still, it was left to the school itself to oversee, rather than being handled remotely at county level. The Skinners’ Company still owns it.

To understand the new building with its steep-pitched roof and deeply-modelled brickwork, all you need to do is glance at the original buildings of 1886–1899, set back from St John’s Road, the main route into town from the north. From the street outside, reading from north to south, you get the first two buildings by architect E H Burnell: the large freestanding headmaster’s house (also for many years a boarding house) and the school yard now has a visual end-stop in the form of the new building with its entrance arcade. Original 1880s buildings in the foreground.

IN NUMBERS

£3.25m construction cost
£273.77 cost per m²
1187m² GIA
13.6 kg CO₂/m² annual carbon emissions
10.0 kg CO₂/m² annual carbon emissions in use

The school yard now has a visual end-stop in the form of the new building with its entrance arcade. Original 1880s buildings in the foreground.

Sixth form study centre at ground level, English department classrooms on the first floor and library, classroom and seminar room above.
main original red-brick and stone-dressings school building complete with clock tower and buttressed hall with central niche, in a Tudor/gothic manner.

Grafting onto the southern end of that a decade later, the Science School in a more Arts and Crafts style is by W Campbell Jones (his firm still existed half a century and two world wars later and was called back to design the ‘new wing’ in ainarly brick-modern manner, a remarkable act of done-burn repeat patronage). To the right of the original Science School and back a bit used to be the school’s old gym of 1906; this and some ancillary structures were demolished to make way for the Bell Phillips building. Finally, the southernmost structure, also from around 1906, is Byng Hall, a former church institute acquired in 2003 to become Skinner’s music and drama department, with auditorium. By a different hand, it’s in turn-of-the-20th century gothic. Taken as a group, these make up a handsome range of complementary late Victorian buildings that I was surprised to find is not yet listed.

Bell anyway treats this context as if it was, carefully designing his new addition in a way that draws upon the form, massing, orientation and materials of the originals. In particular, the hand-laid brickwork of his vertically-striated street elevation nods to the particular, the hand-laid brickwork of his ver-

The main donor gave money on the strict proviso that it must in no way be spent on anything to do with sport with the clay tiles of the old buildings, I note, probably a function of cost. At a glance it might seem a somewhat conservative response, but then this is a conservative school in a generally conservative town. Its ethos probably suits the spirit of the times right now rather better than it did the hippyish zeitgeist of the late 1960s and early 1970s when we was being spasmodically anti-establishment there. Despite its links to a medieval City livery company and its inherited public-school way of going about things (all-boys, house system, a cadet force, big emphasis on sport and competition, uniform little changed since long before I was there), Skinner’s has been part of the state system since 1948, a choice made following the Education Act of 1944. Later Kent stubbornly kept its selective grammar schools going, along with the 11-plus exam that you have to pass to get in there, when most of the rest of the country went comprehensive. With local authority control and relative lack of cash came piecemeal development over time plus the lack of a guiding masterplan. Compare, for instance, the similar-sized nearby affluent fee-paying Sev-ensnaaks School there, under the direction of architect Tim Ronalds, a well-funded masterplan is being built out (RIBAJ, December 2018). State schools seldom get to build such lavish facilities. Of course private donors were needed here as well. I was cheered to find that the main donor gave the money on the strict proviso that it must in no way be spent on anything to do with sport. I would like to meet him and shake his hand, once front. Given that the school is much enlarged – five-form entry compared with the three-form set-up I knew, total pupil numbers 1,119, some 325 of whom are in the sixth forms – the need for a better library, more classrooms and improved sixth form centre was clear enough. So was the need for a higher-quality new building. The result is a lot of presence as well as accommodation for the money, working out at £2,738/m². Each day 800 pupils use the new English classrooms and the sixth form centre will take 175-225, while the library takes 80 students for private study at any given time. The new centre is effectively a gateway building, given that most pupils enter at this end of the school. From there you walk down between it and the old Science School to find yourself in the main yard, a dispersal point across what is now a very busy campus. The new block has a short return wing onto this yard with the same gable-end elevational treatment of 45° brick piers and deep lintels, providing a formal and active enclosure to
the space that was lacking previously, and including a short entrance arcade giving protection against the weather.

Inside it’s about making the maximum usable spaces, with the money for superior finishes concentrated in two areas – the eucalyptus-lined stairs and the top-floor library which goes right up into the pointy roof. That is lined in acoustically-backed timber slats. The height befits a library: it’s a good space to be. A top-floor classroom and seminar room also benefit from the extra height. Elsewhere, the rooms are more functional, well daylit, many dual-aspect, with exposed services. Strategically-placed large windows give new views of the distant hills.

Remembering the packed classrooms, many in freezing ‘temporary’ wooden huts with coke stoves, others more than a little dungeon-like; and the tiny library with its electric fire I got to use in the old school house half a century ago, naturally I see a huge improvement. Who wouldn’t, over that time-span? The key difference apart from personal comfort is the provision of good space for private study which was not something we had much of at all. But overall, this is a new building that feels properly school-like. One that communicates something of the architectural history of the place. I’m glad they invited me back. Perhaps this was a kind of closure. •

Credits
Client
The Skinners’ School
Architect
Bell Phillips Architects
Structural engineer
Built Engineers
M&E/Fire consultant
Hilson Moran
QS
Gleeds
Contractor
BBS

1: Entrance arcade
2: Sixth form study centre
3: Stairs
4: Head of sixth form office
5: Library
6: Toilets
7: Plant room
8: Seminar room
9: Classroom
10: Sixth form study centre

Below left: Main staircase is lined with Eucalyptus wood.

Below right: Ground floor entrance with stair on the left, school crest to the right and exposed services behind ceiling acoustic panels.

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It was almost a century ago, but 1927 was a year of firsts for Wolverhampton. England’s first traffic lights were installed in Princes Square in the centre, their poles still painted perkily in original ‘Belisha beacon’ stripes. Later that year, the A4123 ‘New Road’, opened by Edward, Prince of Wales, connected Wolverhampton to Birmingham with the 20th century’s first intercity highway. Had Florida’s Daytona Beach not been a far more glam place to zoom past the chequered flag, perhaps English speed driver Henry Segrave might have sped along New Road in his city-built Sunbeam 1000HP, the supercar that helped propel him to a 200mph land speed record and become part of history.

Listening to Wolverhampton University vice chancellor Geoff Layer in the YouTube ribbon-cutting ceremony of its new £26 million School of Architecture and the Built Environment, you’d think the glory days were still around; but ‘firsts’ are well and truly consigned to the past, especially here. In both the Complete University and Guardian University Architecture course guides, the school ranks second from bottom, not helped by the fact that it’s still seeking ratification for its RIBA Part II course. But Layer’s genned up on classical rhetoric, saying how the 7,900m² SoABE campus, on its brownfield site east of the centre, ‘puts the city as well as university on the map’, stressing that it ‘transforms not just lives but transforms communities, transforms business and transforms professional practice.’ That’s a triumvirate of superlatives; but there’s also a niggle, like the eventual pronunciation of the acronym, that actual performance still needs to be endorsed by a wider public outside of the organisation.

But it deserves full marks for effort thus far. The city’s Springfield brewery sits on a 5ha site just to the north of the railway station looking across SoABE’s atrium to the south end of the brewery, its clock tower and chimney and the heritage entrance.

Below left View west past the brewery gateway and stable blocks to the ‘heritage entrance’. The train viaduct is behind with the tower of St Peter’s church in the distance.
The RIBA Journal January 2021

Birmingham firm Associated Architects with Rodney Melville + Partners, with plenty of experience between them in academic and heritage sectors, were appointed by the university in 2017 to take what was left of the brewery and turn it into a state of the art built environment faculty to catalyse the regeneration and heritage sectors, were appointed by the

The architecture studio runs below the length of the roof. With an MMC aesthetic, the west elevation has repeating shop spaces, which acts as the focus of the

planners – that you could stand in a fully operational campus building three years later with old clock tower, brewery chimney and old wrought ironwork all returned resplendent. These aside, for the most part it's the spirit of the brewery that remains which is tremendous but also keen to make a mark on the new programme with an existing building itself. While the south side of the complex has been restored and the factory offices against the perimeter wall retained, the fermenting halls that would have faced the viaduct have been replaced by a new steel-framed workshop and teaching block, leaving just traces on a west wall. Likewise on the east wagon courtyard side, another new teaching block picks up on the old footprint of a factory

The campus bar. With an MMC aesthetic, the west elevation has repeating shop spaces, which acts as the focus of the

milling in and through. This and the choice of cladding contractor, FP McCann, was obvious at a glance. A polished concrete finish, rather than the more modern, black-painted pierforms. But other specification choices are more curious. While I really enjoyed the atrium's imposing birch plywood wall, which helps create spot-on acoustics for a sizeable space, the grey ceramic floor tiles are disappointing. I'd have preferred a polished concrete finish, or the cobbles from the wagon courtyard running in and through. This and the choice of cement board lining the atrium side walls of

Ideas jostle, a couple of which might have been re-evaluated had there been time for things to gestate and settle quickly. The firm was appointed in late 2017 and listed building consent received in April 2018, when enabling and demolition works began, and by October it was already building. Timing, it appears, did not go right.

Above: Workstations overlook the open areas at first and second floors on the atrium's north side, with seminar and workstation areas on the east.

Below: The grand connecting staircases run up the atrium alongside the service spines.
Below left: The upper rear study space, with full-height glass lanterns, porthole windows and level study space, with presence and character.

Left: Study spaces in the old south block each have presence and character.

I hope he’s right. You can see the university’s — even the city’s — need for a “finishe’d” building to create critical mass on a large site where proposed similar treatment for the derelict Cooperage to the north — for similar treatment — still feels a long way away. At £3,300/m² the architects have delivered well here for the client but it feels like the product of construction is trumping the process and I’m not sure what message that communicates to its students. But I’m encouraged by Perry’s optimism and architecture course leader Andrew Cunningham’s take on how the course structure here is founded on challenging its students to engage critically with ‘live’ projects in the city — learning firmly based in the real world. They might start by disrupting the pre-determinacy of the very space they study in; a course of action which, not being a first for students per se, might be prerequisite to the school’s becoming so.
Wild swimming

BORD Architectural Studio’s waterpark in eastern Hungary distills the essence of the forest surrounding it.

Words: Isabelle Priest Photographs: Tamas Bujnovszky

There is something about swimming in central Europe, with its baking continental summers, access to thermal waters and the culture of Turkish baths left by the Ottoman Empire. Switzerland has amazing public pools, some on the banks of lakes where you can jump from one to the other. Hungary is water obsessed too. Budapest has atmospheric 100-year-old open-air spas in the city centre, and swimming is the country’s second most successful Olympic sport after fencing, followed by canoeing. It won gold for water polo at the Brazil Olympics in 2016. Keep half an eye on competitive swimming and you’ll find a Hungarian in the line-up. For a nation of 9.7 million it does well. But look at its geography and you might be puzzled. It is landlocked, and lacking many of the mountain lakes that form an integral part of, say, the Swiss Alps. Hungary did once have access to the Adriatic Sea, when a sliver of its boundaries extended to what is now Croatia. But after its coastline was lost in the carve-up of Europe following the Second World War, and Communism restricted travel even between Eastern Bloc countries, Hungarians had to find their own ways to enjoy water. Holidays at Lake Balaton, central Europe’s largest stretch of fresh water, are a national tradition, and spas are designated medicinal in ways that are now unknown in the UK. You’ll find...
Critique

Waterpark

‘waterparks’ too, ones that will shatter your illusions about the slightly sorry type you might spend an afternoon at with the kids in Newquay or Blackpool. People go to them for a week at a time.

Enter Peter Bordas, director of BORD Architectural Studio, and László Papp, mayor of the far eastern Hungarian city of Debrecen, who has been continuing his predecessor Lajos Kósa’s mission to radically reshape the city as a gateway to Transylvania and beyond, drawing tourists and business – BMW Group opened a new 400 hectare site here in May. At 16, Bordas was a champion BMX rider for Hungary and, speaking on Zoom with a cheeky glint in his eye, it’s obvious he’s still driven by thrills – snowboarding, cycling, sailing. The pair’s latest creation is Aquaticum, a waterpark in the Nagyerdei forest north of the city. Imagine the excitement of having these project images appear in my email inbox after a summer cooped up at home in the UK.

Before we talk about the architecture, you need to understand Debrecen. With 200,000 people, it is the second most populous city in Hungary. It has the largest university. It’s the cultural and scientific centre of the region with influence on neighbouring countries because of its airport. It has always been an important place, yet it is located in the dry Great Hungarian Plain, 30km from the nearest river and 100km from the nearest mountain. The city emerged from the meeting point of three international trade routes, connecting Vienna, Bucharest, St Petersburg, Istanbul, Poland and the Balkans. ‘In Debrecen,’ says Bordas, ‘everything is big. The city is set out along two avenues crossing north-south and east-west as lots of gardens and agricultural plots.’

In the 1950s the municipality developed a recreational urban park by inserting a stadium, zoo, artificial lake, thermal baths and waterpark in 300ha of ancient oak forest. Residential blocks were added during the Communist era. However, by 2010, the area was lifeless and abandoned. The stadium closed in 2000 and the key to the pitch was lost. Over the years the swimming facilities were extended in a haphazard way and were in terrible condition.

Since then the mayoral office has gone about transforming the whole site through a series of 10 international architectural competitions, of which Budapest-headquartered BORD Architectural Studio has won four. It started with the stadium between 2012 and 2014, followed by enlargement of the artificial lake...
I couldn’t tolerate it if a building didn’t have dynamism.

The brief was to create a popular spa suitable for all ages, but because the park is protected by the Natura2000 EU natural reserve programme the scheme could not extend beyond the 1930s plot. BORD’s concept was to distil the experience of everything you see and feel in forest – the colour of water, the sky, greenery, trees up close – onto the site and ‘compress it into a pack’, ‘an oasis locked up in a box’. The 12m tall blue painted glass walls have water rippling over them to create moving reflections. The tall green walls opposite every blue one recreate the experience of being in a mountainous valley enveloped by luscious shrubbery and falling water. The triangular openings allow you to see and feel in forest – the colour of water, the sky, the light, air and openness – the rooftop decks and openness – the rooftop decks

Below: Like opening a waterfall with your hands, one of the four jumping platform openings behind the entrance

The other principal idea was dictated by the decision of the area’s first international school to attract businesspeople and their families. The council has also built a velodrome, and retail and restaurant units. The competition for the waterpark was launched in 2015. ‘When I was younger, I couldn’t tolerate it if a building didn’t have dynamism,’ explains Bordas, who commissioned a video of a troupe of parkour tracers climbing, leaping, vaulting, rolling and free-running all over the new Aquaticum buildings. ‘I liked movement and visible structures. The waterpark didn’t need to reflect existing buildings around it because they are not valuable enough.’

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‘There aren’t any waterfalls in Hungary, so this was an extra dimension,’ says Bordas. ‘The blue walls expand the experience of the building and make it more appealing in winter when a pure concrete wall would be especially cold and unwelcoming.’

The other principal idea was dictated by the decision not to chop any trees down in pursuit of rearranging the site layout. The main pool sits in the same position as the original, the orientation maintains its east-west linear plan, and facilities are built up vertically by a central boxy composition of uprights, planes and surfaces that come together spaced out around rectangular shapes of water as a 196m long mega fun palace instead. The structure is open. Water and flora appear on horizontal and vertical planes, people move over the new Aquaticum buildings. ‘I liked movement and visible structures. The waterpark didn’t need to reflect existing buildings around it because they are not valuable enough.’
This is a condensing building, a wild, energetic tour of architectural experiences, packed together on a crisply mown lawn.

by trees, nature and a separate, slower, quieter, tranquil atmosphere. But as the greenery grows and takes over the building, trailing the industrial steel frame awnings, wrapping around the building, it turns into Ricardo Bofill’s La Fàbrica in Barcelona too. And wait! I detect Art Deco as well in the carefree spectacle of the open-ended, imposing entrance-side portico with its semi-circular pool underneath and four jumping platforms. It’s there also in the flying catwalks for glamorous scantily clad bodies to bask in the sun. Where do you place the architecture of the low long entrance building with its rolling wave green roof? NL Architects, Hopkins, Pagode Architectes? You decide.

This is a condensing building; a wild, energetic, ‘dynamic’ (as Bordas says) tour of architectural experiences, neatly packed together and laid onto a crisply mown lawn. It’s monumental, subverting, a perfect backdrop for selfies and marketing the city. The municipality recognised during the competition that the design would be a draw for visitors. And this summer they came, from all over Transylvania, Poland, Ukraine and western Hungary, which is often conceptually cut off from the east because the river Danube divides the country in two. You can catch a carrot and ginger smoothie for breakfast at the green health bar, or a beer in the afternoon. Even the mix of grapevine, Japanese maple, creeping ivy and bamboo planting take you around the world in only a few steps.

The project is also clever, using surplus heat and gas from the natural thermal water to power it, so that in summer 70% and in winter 50% of its energy comes from renewables. It is BORD’s first zero-emission scheme. Aquaticum’s success arises from the richness and extent of its architects’ searching, travelling, keeping in touch with their senses and replicating those feelings. While we are stuck at home or in our offices, the project is a reminder to not necessarily resume the old ways of long hours and drudgery. Get out, see stuff, push yourself and experience the extreme – perhaps jump off a few things too.

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Excellence in wall insulation on display

As insulation grows ever more important, this year’s INCA awards demonstrate outstanding innovation and variety

For almost 40 years, external wall insulation (EWI) has been popular in the field of social housing treatment of the solid wall housing stock and as part of an EWI system instead of more traditional brickwork for a concrete or steel frame structure. The benefits of adopting this construction method are numerous, but include: far fewer bricks being delivered and stored, a simpler design negating the need for a cavity, and an installation method which makes the wall watertight sooner and can be carried out in a flexible sequence to best suit the needs of the overall building programme.

The Cedars Development in Glasgow – three significantly sized residential blocks planned with more than a nod to the area’s industrial heritage. Five linked blocks of five to 10 storeys was designed by Steve Ritchie Partnership and constructed using SFS with insulated infill panels, and the facades completed with Alsecco’s Ecowall 600 clay brick slip system with two complementary brick slip colours and ceramic slips at many window details. Different thicknesses of stone wool insulation were used to create different recess areas; far more easily than would have been achieved with traditional brickwork, from which it is indistinguishable. The clean cut lines and couring, as well as accurately struck mortar joints, demonstrates the workmanship for which INCA members are renowned.

In keeping with schemes that have featured in previous years of the awards, The Cedars Development in Glasgow – three significantly sized residential blocks refurbished to ultra-low energy standards with insulated infill panels, and the facades treated with Sto’s Lotusan surface will provide excellent protection against algae growth and staining. These blocks are now a striking feature on the Glasgow skyline.

Winner of the INCA Architectural Merit Award is The Globe Works in Birmingham, refurbished by Sto, are highly commended by INCA judges. This is a major student accommodation scheme in the iconic Gun Quarter and was planned with more than a nod to the area’s industrial heritage. Five linked blocks of five to 10 storeys was designed by Steve Ritchie Partnership and constructed using SFS with insulated infill panels, and the facades completed with Alsecco’s Ecowall 600 clay brick slip system with two complementary brick slip colours and ceramic slips at many window details.

For more information on these schemes and a full list of INCA members, visit www.inca-ltd.org.uk

This year marks the 40th year of INCA and entries to the 2021 Awards promise to be just as notable, bold and innovative as the 2020 winners have proved to be.
More architecture information and inspiration online

BCKJ Architects, set up by Dong Mei and Liu Xiaochuan in Beijing, has won the Royal Academy Dorfman Award for Architecture. A £10,000 prize marking exceptional emerging talent, BCKJ is lauded for its approach to nature, cultural heritage and social engagement. Dong Mei spoke to Pamela Buxton

BCKJ is not part of the mainstream of architecture in China. How would you sum up your overall practice about?

The difference is that we’ve broken away from the assembly line and carry out more in-depth research-based practice. We approach projects looking at their unique characteristics to solve each problem. Prioritising problem solving means our work pays more attention to inner emotions than current fashion.

Whose work do you draw inspiration from (either past or present)?

I read Luis Barragan 20 years ago and he said that his work had nothing to do with fashion, but focused on tranquility, beauty and emotion, and I was moved by that. Other influences are Peter Zumthor, Sverre Fehn, Renzo Piano, Geoffrey Bawa…

Is awareness growing in China for the need to design more sustainably and contextually?

Due to the economics of rapid urbanisation, Chinese architects prioritised cheap, mass-produced materials for construction and few practices designed for local conditions. Recently, there have been great improvements in building standards, and sustainable technologies. So sustainability is no longer unfamiliar but we need to adopt circular thinking that suits local conditions.

In China's urbanisation process, more and more sustainable technologies have been applied through vigorous government promotion in recent years. But I feel sustainability is about more than that: we need an overall cycle of economic and cultural continuity. There is still a long way to go to establish circular thinking at different levels.

Tell us about some projects you are working on at the moment, and your aspirations for these

I look forward to the construction of Wuhan Shiguang Church, bringing spiritual comfort to people there after Coronavirus. Also, the Gongliu Butterfly Museum in Ili, Xinjiang, creating opportunities for tourism in the area. We’re working on the renovation of Feiqi Airport in Hefei, where the 2022 China Horticultural Expo will be held. It’s hoped that via this expo the city’s public space will be revitalised.

What would be your dream project?

Designing a Vipassana meditation centre that shelters the soul in a beautiful natural environment.

See the full interview at ribaj.com/bckj/dorfman

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Culture revolutionary

From Johannesburg to New York, Lesley Lokko’s writing, teaching and speaking has engendered debate on cultural identity in architecture. Now it has won her the RIBA Annie Spink Award for outstanding contributions to architectural education.

Eleanor Young

‘She was causing so much upheaval… quickly building up into massive explosions… it was wild, exciting, exhilarating… ideas were flying, adrenalin was pumping… After the explosions everyone was on shifting dynamic ground, what began to take form was truly transformational, innovative, progressive, and painstaking process.’ So writes Mandy Shin-dler, an alumna of the University of Johannesburg’s Graduate School of Architecture, of its 2014 founder, Professor Lesley Lokko.

As Lokko is awarded the biannual RIBA Annie Spink Award for outstanding contributions to architectural education it is worth following this story through and discovering what it meant to the education of one architecture student. ‘I had never in all my years having studied in South African schools, and now a typical South African University, even considered the possibility of education being uplifting, inspiring and motivating. Instead the tradition in South Africa seemed to me one of what we’d call vasbyt (hold tight, or literally, ‘bite tight’)… An education was something to be endured.’

In autumn 2020 Lokko hit the news in the US and UK for her resignation from the Spitzer School of Architecture at The City College of New York, less than a year into the job. She explained the perfect storm of leadership and institutional issues together with a weight of expectation to be a ‘superhuman’ as a black woman bringing change to a school on entrenched tenured staff – all in a time of a pandemic and with minimal back up and resources: ‘I realised I would be working 18-20 hour days and still couldn’t turn the ship around,’ she says. She has won the Annie Spink Award against that background, selected from a strong field of nominations.

Enriching architecture

The judges said: ‘She has pioneered for and cultivated critical debate about identity in architecture. In so doing, she allows our discipline to be enriched by many new voices, traditions and dreams, enabling students and educators to find their place in architecture, on their own terms, galvanising others in the field to address a more pluralistic, inclusive, and open culture of education.’

Lokko grew up in Scotland and Ghana, and is living between the two. She is pictured here in Edinburgh.
She has pioneered for and cultivated critical debate about identity in architecture

Futures Institute.
is setting up the African
Lokko’s next challenge
Right
a graduate school. As South Africa erupted in
iner. She wasn’t impressed with the architec-
Johannesburg University as external exam-
in Holland, where an invitation took her to
West over racism as part of a continuum of
comprehensively, to give their all, we
race. She clear that the real work will come
strengths. In recent lecture she gave a hint of
Both racism and race has been one of Lokko’s
Making issues meaningful
opening up those hidden spaces around both racism and race has been one of Lokko’s
relationship between race and architecture. Early on she edited and published an influ-
ential reader, ‘White Paper, Black Marks: Architecture, Race and Culture’, which stamped her mark on this nascent field. She
surprised herself at getting the book pub-
lished. ‘At the end of my fourth year I sent a
book proposal to Routledge,’ she explains.
They wanted it. Drawing it together put her in
touch with others exploring these issues, in-
cluding critic, architect and educator Michael
She has ‘changed the conversation, globally’. It
She sees the summer 2020 protests in the
relationship between race and architecture. A wide range of
issues and provocations to action, allowing ideas to flour-
ish and make good things happen. Her nom-
ners for the Annie Spink award state Lokko has ‘changed the conversation, globally’. It
looks like she will continue to do so. »
We have a juggernaut of changes coming towards us’, says Jane Duncan, chair of the RIBA expert advisory group on fire safety, summarising a number of concerns emerging from the government’s response to the Grenfell Tower fire. The juggernaut must be steered steadily along its route to bring about the significant shift in safety practice and construction industry culture envisaged by Judith Hall Farrance, chair of At Soderin. As well as reviewing building regulations, the response centre on the new Building Safety Bill chair, a chief housing secretary Robert Jenrick, promises ‘the biggest change in building safety for a generation’. This draft legislation, published in July, ‘will provide the “golden thread” of information through the design and procurement – the first of four articles places these key themes in context.

Three and a half years on from the tragedy, decisions for inquiry ongoing, questions are still being asked of the industry

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How can we decarbonise heating?

We have the technology to cut down CO₂ emissions, but without official direction, the cost, convenience, space and aesthetics hamper progress. What do the experts advise?

The road to net zero 2050 is fraught with challenges and the need to decarbonise heat in buildings – the single biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions comprising around 37% of national CO₂ output – is the most pressing of all. But the move to greener fuels for heating remains in its infancy. One scenario, from UK Power Networks, forecasts that 7.6 million electric heat pumps would be needed across Britain by 2030 – from around just 10,000 in operation in 2019.

Swapping out methane for hydrogen in the gas network offers an opportunity to reuse existing infrastructure, but building services experts claim the fledgling state of development means market-ready solutions may not be practical until the 2030s. ‘We need to make an impact on decarbonising heat immediately, and hydrogen is not ready to be rolled out at a large scale,’ explains Jon Greg, associate for sustainability at Buro Happold. ‘It’s definitely part of the mix but we’re not in a position where homes can be easily transferred to the technology. Heat pumps, whether air or ground source, are really the only technology that can be delivered at scale today.’

Regulation can give businesses and consumers a head start on the changes needed to decarbonise heating and encourage investment, but clear and concise guidance has yet to emerge from Whitehall.

Incremental retrofits for existing homes could offer a ‘quick win’ using heat pumps and gradual fabric upgrades

A national Heat and Buildings Strategy, due to be published this autumn, has been pushed back to 2021. Meanwhile a 10 point plan for a green industrial revolution, revealed last month, includes positive initiatives, such as a target to install 600,000 heat pump systems per year by 2028, an extension of the Green Homes Grant and more funding for the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. However, it ditches an earlier plan to implement a Future Homes Standard by 2023, which would have required all new-build homes to include low-carbon heating technologies. Compare that to Norway where oil-fired heating systems are already banned in all buildings. Considering that any heating systems installed today might still be in use in 30 years’ time, when net zero kicks in, designers need to think hard about sustainable options for newbuilds and retrofits and for buildings of different size, use class, heating and cooling loads.

Homes

Transforming the 85% of UK homes currently connected to the gas grid to low carbon alternatives is a Herculean task, not least because burning gas is cheap, delivers high temperatures quickly and the technology is familiar to installers and users. But air and ground source, tend to have higher capital costs, are not plug and play and require various modifications to building services. They also run at lower temperatures, which in houses is likely to mean installing larger radiators and/or upgrading the performance of the building fabric to reduce heating demands.

Air source heat pumps are not compact and must be installed outside, typically at ground level, and can also be noisy. Each unit draws several kW of electrical power so widespread deployment within a community will place greater demands on network capacity. ‘Mass uptake of heat pumps will have a big impact on the electrical infrastructure of the grid, so retrofitting houses to reduce peak demand on the coldest days will be really important,’ says Greg. Self-generation via rooftop solar and solar thermal would help take the strain off the grid, he adds, while providing occupants with hot water at a decent temperature. They could also generate an income through feeds-in-tariffs.

An alternative option for hot water is to introduce a storage tank, similar in size to a regular hot water tank. The transition to net zero might see an initial preference for hybrid heat pumps that combine an air-source heat pump with a traditional gas condensing boiler. The Daikin Altherma hybrid heat pump automatically determines the most economical and energy efficient combination based on energy prices, outdoor temperatures and indoor heat capacity, cutting energy consumption by up to 35% compared to a regular boiler. Eon offers a system that transforms an oil or liquid petroleum gas heating system into a hybrid. Incremental retrofit strategies for existing homes could provide a ‘quick win’ reduction in carbon intensity using heat pumps with gradual upgrades to the building fabric, says Gwilym Still, Passivhaus leader at Max Fordham.

‘We’ve worked through strategies on some projects that involve the initial installation of heat pumps for low carbon space heating and/or domestic hot water which can then move towards lower system temperatures and more efficient operation as the fabric is improved over time,’ he says. ‘The end goal looks the same, but the pathway to get there is slightly different, depending on the building.’

Offices

The electric plant is at the ‘top of the spectrum’ in terms of noise emissions from the main plant, says Patel – a particularly environmentally friendly option. Heat pumps can pump up to three times the energy used in their electricity consumption, such is the efficiency of the technology. Incremental retrofits for existing buildings can be easily transferred to the technology.

‘In simultaneous operation the COP (co-efficient of performance) of performant heat pumps can reach 50% more than that of cooling mode alone,’ says Rahul Patel, a mechanical engineer and associate director at Arup, which devised the building services strategy for 80 Charlotte Street. ‘Rather than chucking waste heat energy into the atmosphere, you’re putting it back into the building where it’s needed.’ Air source heat pumps are typically larger than office chillers and ‘really need to see sky’ to optimise the extraction of waste heat from the air outside. Visual impacts need careful consideration because covered roofs or ventilated louvres on the sides can create issues with air flow and over pressure in the refrigerant circuit, increasing the risk of a complete shut down.

‘We need to see sky’ to optimise the extraction of waste heat from the air outside. Visual impacts need careful consideration because covered roofs or ventilated louvres on the sides can create issues with air flow and over pressure in the refrigerant circuit, increasing the risk of a complete shut down.

Polyvarient heat pumps are an attractive solution for offices
important consideration if there are mixed uses at the top of the building, if there are homes nearby, or if the building has a thick roof slab or timber deck that might let noise penetrate to the inside. ‘Acoustic packs can be fitted but they degrade energy performance and strategically positioned acoustic louvres or plant screens can mask sound, but distance is the best attenuator for sound if possible,’ he adds.

Apartments
As buildings become larger, heat distribution losses can become more significant, which in residential buildings can lead to overheating in corridors, communal areas and rooms. Ambient energy loop systems offer an innovative solution by pumping water at low temperatures around a building, with a flow/return temperature of 25ºC/20ºC versus 70º/40º for a regular boiler system. The two-stage approach uses tepid water, generated by central plant using air or ground source heat pumps, circulated to individual water heat pumps inside each apartment, which take heat out of the loop for domestic hot water and space heating. Architects need to factor in space for each apartment for a small heat pump and a hot water tank.

The results can be impressive: the ZeroE Energy System by GenDimplex is claimed to cut peak heat losses by up to 90% and halve the plant room footprint. Ambient loops can be applied to other building types or mixed use developments that require a mix of heating and cooling, explains Max Fordham’s Still: ‘A light industry building that wants year round cooling, or a one with refrigerated display cases or intensely occupied retail spaces, can get useful cooling from a loop of water. It’s an effective mechanism to shunt heat around a building.’

The systems have also been posited as an alternative to district heat networks, which typically operate at higher temperatures, increasing heat loss from pipework.

Reusing waste heat and sharing energy between buildings and sources is going to be key

But there are potential drawbacks. The requirement for individual heat pumps in every dwelling makes things complicated when parts need replacing, and they could increase the embodied energy of the heating system, regaining in operational CO2 savings.

Neighbourhoods / developments
Heat networks that distribute energy from a central source to communal buildings, like new-build apartments or clusters of homes, are an attractive option in urban areas, but currently serve only 500,000 customers across the UK. The energy saving potential is much greater if they can take waste heat from industrial sources, waste incinerators or the London Underground.

Gregg says: ‘Reusing waste heat and sharing energy between buildings and sources is going to be key. We don’t want to be adding more gas into these systems, this requires strategic thinking at a government and local authority level to prioritise connections into low carbon sources of heat.’

It’s an area that needs closer scrutiny: incinerators continue to gain planning permission without any obligation to integrate district heating, potentially locking in CO2 emissions for decades to come. •

Above Max Fordham’s services design at Baker Place in Manchester city centre. OMI Architects is based around these temperature community heating networks using roof-mounted air source heat pumps as the heat source. Heat is distributed to apartments located in areas to provide space heating and communal hot water.

The air source heat pump is housed in an enclosure on the roof as it’s just visible.

To see the same number of clients and do the same number of jobs, we need to change the way we work

Any architect who has had to negotiate the new one-way systems on construction sites will know site visits often take much longer than they used to. But physically standing in front of an on-site challenge and discussing it with the manager usually gets a solution much faster than a chain of emails, photo attachments and phone calls ever could.

Now though, the interactions required to get the job done are more complicated – and take longer – because of social distancing. Which all means less time in front of your workstation getting on with designing the structures your clients want built.

Digital is only part of the answer

One of the ways in which architects have responded to this challenge is to accelerate the pace of their digital transformation. This includes using technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotic process automation, innovations such as wearable tech, geolocation, and the Internet of Things (IoT) devices to gather data, and monitor site conditions.

All these innovations can help accelerate work rates and save time. Enabling staff digitally so they can work away from base makes social distancing at the office easier when clients do visit. But alone, technology-based measures are not enough.

Once everything that can be digitised has been, the proportion of time taken up by the remaining physical elements of the job is greater than ever. This leaves two main challenges: how to make these physical processes faster and more efficient and socially distance and safe. Chief among the physical processes is printing.

Large-format printing for architectural work

Printing schematics, artistic renderings and other large-format print jobs is a standard part of any architect’s day, but can be time-consuming. What’s needed now is a printer seamlessly integrated in the workflow for a digitally streamlined, post-Covid age.

This is why HP has recently released its new HP DesignJet T200, T650 and Studio Printer series. All have been designed from the ground up to be low-touch, and the easiest and most efficient way to maintain large-format printers, ever. Adaptions include:

• Easy document set up print multiple files, at any supported size, in just a single click with no extensive manual configuration.

• Smart multi-size printouts with an A3 print tray and an integrated A5 workflow, you can use any size from A3 up to A0, without manual reconfiguration.

• Work anywhere, any time print from any printer, whenever and wherever you’re in the office, at home, on site or in transit.

These ranges also include some of the most compact yet powerful printers ever made. In fact, the HP DesignJet T200 in-series printers are up to 18% smaller than competing products, making them the world’s smallest large-format printers, perfect for remote working.

Taken together, these features deliver real flexibility – allowing your colleagues to print remotely and collect documents quickly, with minimum configuration and almost no physical contact with the printer. Perfect for the socially distanced office and home-working.

Perhaps even more importantly, the easy set-and-print subscription combination, with the printer’s reliability helps accelerate the physical task of printing in the same way other digital processes have accelerated.

‘These new large-format printers are specifically designed to help architects and other design-led professions to be as efficient and operate as intelligently as their customers and the market demands,’ says Colin Easton, large format printing channel manager at HP UK. ‘They are ideal for architectures looking for smarter ways to operate in the post-Covid era, and are highly cost effective and environmentally friendly, saving up to 95% on ink costs for routine maintenance compared to the competition and reducing emissions from large-format printing by up to 7.3 tons a year.’

Above Diagram of two stage heat pump system for apartment blocks.
Rejuvenate your home with these exciting design ideas

How to take the lead again
Architects should design for society rather than the market

Gordon Graham was the first RIBA president I knew, in office 1977–79, many years before I took this job. Old-school modernist, senior partner in ACP, liked his whisky and ciggies. I remember him sitting in the back of the coach, puffing away, in a 1979 trip to Paris organised by the resourceful Salaried Architects Group. Top of our agenda was of course the Pompidou Centre, then still fresh. Almost 60 by then, Gordon was a high level architectural fixer. As president he was consulted on who should be the architect for the new Lloyd’s of London building, and was instrumental in getting both Richard Rogers and Norman Foster onto the competition roster to design it. Rogers of course won, and now his building is grade I listed. Gordon went on to become CEO of Fosters as it was taking charge of the building of its international breakout building the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank HQ. So this now almost forgotten man was instrumental in a root-and-branch architectural revolution. There have been some good presidents since, but none, I’d argue, with that kind of heft.

Then, just under half of all architects in the UK worked in the public sector. Large local council and central government architects’ departments, some with their own ‘direct labour’ building contractors, were simply part of the landscape. RIBA Council was full of fine public architects such as Gordon Wigglesworth of the GLC and Kate MacKintosh of Southwark. Jim Callaghan’s spending cuts were starting to hurt, but that was as nothing compared with what was to follow. The year of our study trip to Paris, Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister.

You can argue about her legacy all you like but consider this: last year (2019–20) just 6,566 social-rented homes were built in England, close to a record low. Since Victorian times, the private sector left to its own devices has very seldom managed to make the sums add up on social housing. UK land values are too high. The market does not provide.

The other constant over the years, nearly always featuring in the campaign pitches of would-be RIBA presidents, is the desire to recover the status and influence of architects. Is there the remotest chance of getting back to the state we might fondly imagine existed right up to the time of Gordon Graham?

The bad news is that it didn’t. A few years before in 1974, one of my predecessors in this chair, Malcolm MacEwen, wrote ‘Crisis in Architecture’, a polemic against the complacency of architects commendably published by the RIBA itself. Architects, he wrote, had become ‘caught up in a social system that rewarded their most selfish and destructive impulses while repelling their most generous and creative ones’. They were responding to the market, not social demands, he argued.

Happily, some things have improved. In February we’ll be showing you the results of our RIBAJ MacEwen Award 2021. As ever, the strapline is ‘Architecture for the Common Good’. There are some uncommonly good things there. Let them, I suggest, show a way forward for the profession. •
Not part of the plan

Thomas Sharp planned to manage urban traffic in the ‘40s, but nothing was enough

Viki Willis

When many of my school friends were getting into drugs, I developed an affection for Sharp’s vision, possibly out of local interest, possibly because it was a very attractive object, a fat Oxford-blue hardcover full of interesting proposals presented as delicious watercolours. It is a document designed to impress and convince, with diagrams and pretty fold-out maps. It is a document designed to impress and convince, with proposals presented as delicious watercolours. It is a document designed to impress and convince, with proposals presented as delicious watercolours.

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Retiring RIBAJ editor Hugh Pearman is happier talking about architecture than himself, but you’ll find glimpses of his character in this reflection on his 44 years in the business

Words: Isabelle Priest
Portrait: Sarah Lee

At the start of our conversation Hugh is at pains to point out that this profile was not his idea. He had hoped to write a final column then slope off quietly into retirement.

After 14 years as editor of RIBA Journal, however, he wasn’t getting away with that. Hugh Pearman is the longest-serving post-war editor and has stewarded the magazine through good and turbulent times. At the very least he was going to have to be interviewed for a ‘where architecture’s at and going’ article. This is why he has agreed, it’s an excuse to look at architecture over a 44-year career. It’s also an opportunity for people who haven’t met him to get a flavour of who he is. There’s something of the passing down wisdom dynamic too. And what I realise from my first question is that he’s never been interviewed about himself before. Call this a RIBAJ exclusive.

Let’s be clear, this is no normal set-up. Hugh believes in the office. Yet in nine months I’ve seen him once, at the outdoor lunch where he announced his retirement. Although if coronavirus hadn’t happened, he’d have left six months earlier. We are speaking on Teams from our homeworking spaces that are geographically only 3km apart — of course he already had the perfect Zoom background. He is in his study, surrounded by floor-to-ceiling Vitsoe shelving, packed silly with architecture books. One shelf somewhere is signed by Dieter Rams himself. If Hugh spins his camera around, the desk is piled with paper, only space for his keyboard and hands to do ‘the one thing I was ever good at: write’.

Until recently Hugh attributed his interest in architecture to being a student in Durham in the 1970s, where he studied English language and literature. His college was a 1963 neoclassical Francis Johnson building in the historic centre. Round the corner was the cathedral and Arup’s Kingsgate ‘the best bridge ever’. Beyond was the tiered brutalist
and it later proved useful in getting his first job – a traineeship on a travel agent magazine at publisher Morgan Grampian in Woolwich.

At one end was a big shed under construction, which was new, but I was interested in architecture; things were starting to happen and change. On the way back from Durham one year he had stopped at UEA to see Lasdun's zigzags. At one end it was a big shed under construction, linked to Lasdun's by an unlovely bridge. It looked like a sports hall but turned out to be Norman Foster's breakout Sainsbury Centre.

There was a direct transition between modernism and high tech,' Hugh explains. 'Not many people were writing about architecture outside the trade press. There was Colin Amery in the FT, Nicholas Taylor here and there and Ian Nairn, encouraged at the Sunday Times as a travel writer, which was not his best work but by that time he was basically ignored.'

Architecture was in a process of total re-evaluation. It had been rocked by post- world council estate failures, particularly by the partial collapse of Ronan Point. Architects were exploring a number of avenues. Some were looking at historic buildings to see if they could apply those lessons – the Asda tile barn look which then BD editor Peter Murray splashed ‘The apotheosis of vernacular fakery’ – and could be argued found its way into the British Library,’ Hugh says. ‘Then postmodernism started up, although that was more Italian at first. To me the interesting stuff was high tech because it was prefabricated. Foster and Rogers hated wet trades, instead they wanted clipped-together architecture that could be changed, extended, extruded, even if the early buildings became ensnared as temples. By the time Prince Charles came along in 1984 you had another strand: straight historicism.’

Changes were afoot in journalism too. At BD they’d been using technology that had hardly changed since 1980 – manual typewriters, typesetters. In 1982, Hugh went to work at BD where they had early computer-ised communication. In the middle of this four years there, he began to write for the Guardian and the Observer, mostly about technology as the future where we would work from home/wherever we wanted. By 1986 he was doing freelance shifts at the Sunday Times, following Deyan Sudjic. It was the tail-end of the Wapping Dispute – the stand-off between News International and printworkers after production was shifted to east London and computers were introduced so journalists could input copy directly. After a year, he was offered a contract. He became architecture correspondent for the next 30 years.

‘It’s unsayable to say, but the Wapping Dispute probably saved the newspaper industry for 25 years. It was an ugly moment, but there had to be a concession. Murdoch was simply the man that did it.’

In architecture the news was the National Gallery extension – a key moment for Prince Charles and his courtiers, who didn’t trust British architects. Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi ‘were like innocents coming into a hurricane’, Will Alsop came a bit later.

‘We just assumed architecture was prefab,’ Hugh says. ‘Other British architects didn’t talk about historicism even while they were designing. Caruso St John’s Tate Britain and the Stirling Prize winning MAXXI (2010) in Rome were prefabricated. The point is you can incorporate prefabrication into architecture, you can think of it as a new form of material. It was simply the man that did it.’

Hugh wishes this had won the second Stirling Prize – which, incidentally, he helped launch out of the competition he ran at the Sunday Times with the Royal Fine Art Commission. The title ‘Stirling’ came to him in the shower after watching the Turner Prize on TV. Jim Stirling had died four years before, but it was a controversial choice because buildings like his Cambridge History Faculty had become known for going wrong.

‘It was notable that the projects Stirling built in Germany like the Stuttgart Neue Staatsgalerie didn’t fall apart. It doesn’t tell you about Stirling, but it does tell you about British construction.’

Hugh still thinks that when architects like Mecanoo, OMA or BIG build here the results ‘look a bit disappointing and aren’t quite so good’. That’s why he is not keen on Brexit. ‘Isolationism is never good for culture, let alone for the fact architecture is intercon- nected. Britain is a net exporter of architecture. The movement has been a driver of the pan-European interchange of ideas.’

Since 2000, Hugh’s ‘best building’ is David Adjaye’s Tate Modern extension. ‘The last good Zebrak before it all went mechanised’ – the Stirling Prize winning MAXXI (2010) in Rome.
Witherford Watson Mann’s new building dropped into Astley Castle are two examples. He thinks it’s time for the next international movement – the last was deconstructivism in the 1990s that led to Zaha and Gehry – but he has no idea which way architecture will go. He argues for stylistic biodiversity, although he sees binary thinking that good stuff is old-looking and bad stuff is new-looking is back, led by people behind Create Streets and Building Beautiful and based on Roger Scruton’s ideology that ‘beauty’, meaning Trad, will overcome Nimbyism.

‘It’s a fig leaf – part of a deeply conservative movement to get developers who fund Tory Party coffers to build all over everywhere,’ Hugh says. ‘It’s also part of retreatment and drawing back; that we’re OK here with our sausage sandwiches.’

We must build though, and that’s why he was pleased to see Mikhail Riches’s Goldsmith Street win the Stirling Prize and witness the rise of Peter Barber, who models projects on tight Victorian streets. For a RIBAJ column, Hugh measured the street he lives on to work out the magic formula himself.

‘To say there is one thing called modernism is bonkers,’ he says. ‘That hasn’t been true since the mid-1950s and Team 10. When you look at practices like Squire & Partners and Stanton Williams, they are applying neoclassical ways of looking at buildings to modern perspectives.’

He thinks traditionalist practices like Adam Architecture, the Terrys, Ben Pentreath and Stanhope Gate should issue a joint statement to counter the terrible stuff on wackier websites and forums where neoclassical architecture is being linked with anti-Semitism and white supremacy.

Beyond style, architects must find a way back into leading the process, a lack made bleakly clear by the Grenfell fire, which he believes was part of a culture of D&B contracts and value engineering. These combine with scrapping and regulatory failure into many small acts that are at the root of much bad architecture. You need buildings with budgets of a workable size. The thinking also finds its way into places like Nine Elms in Vauxhall.

‘Architecture is not building buy-to-leave apartments for sale on the international market that nobody lives in,’ Covid may lead to them – or it could push things further in the same direction. The other issue is about making everything climate change aware – ‘it isn’t just about zero emissions, but loss of terrestrial biodiversity.’

At RIBAJ, Hugh made a point of allowing writers their own voice, of launching competitions to create a dialogue with readers and getting around the country to unearth practices and make the magazine representative.

One final question though. Who would he get to design his Paragraph 79 home in Derbyshire, where he spends a lot of time? ‘Evans Vettori, Paul Testa, Gagarin Studio – not a London firm. But make this clear too: I haven’t got the money.’
Ben Holland takes over the pages in a rallying cry to unite with the activism of students and young professionals across the UK and really act on the climate emergency, the latest in our series tackling urgent issues for the profession.

“The RIBA Journal January 2021 ribaj.com

Takeover: Greening needs grassroot power

Calling all architecture students, graduates, professionals. Your education is failing you!

There’s a clear message in the tagline of the Climate Action Network (CAN) – ‘WE CAN’ – a recorded manifesto encouraging them to be accountable for their own education in their ‘climate action in up to 12 words’ to be posted on the WE CAN Instagram page. The library will soon be launched on their website and Instagram. The library will soon be launched on their website and Instagram.

‘I think the issue of education is the number one problem because we never learn in school about the issues that we are facing and the solutions to those problems, instead we are told to ignore and a powerful public statement to encourage other industries to follow suit.’

In Bredel, Nicola Mead, a fourth-year student, AGAN member and sustainability officer at the University of West England Architecture Society, set up WE CAN, a student activism group linking with academic staff to adapt the curriculum to address the climate crisis appropriately.

A recent project asked students to send in their ‘climate action in up to 12 words’ to be posted on the WE CAN Instagram page – a recorded manifesto encouraging them to be accountable for their own education in the climate emergency.

At the end of the last academic year, Scott Students for Climate Action at the Sheffield School of Architecture conducted a survey gathering feedback from students about the quality of their education in tackling the climate emergency. Their findings were presented to the faculty in a staff reflection day held the university to consider its strengths and weaknesses, but despite its success, they feel this is something all schools should be doing of their own accord. The co-ordinators of the group note a significant lack of funding for students to carry out this type of reflection. They hope that by pushing upwards, their school can do the same, twisting the arms of the officials set in bureaucratic constraints to give them the green light (and green paper) to begin the essential transformation required to start tackling the major shortfalls of an outdated education system.

Looking to the future, the Students for Climate Action team including Eleanor Derbyshire, Claire Wilson and Marian Ask, hope to form relationships with other student action groups across the country. Joining the wider conversation while keeping a local focus expands their agency, and groups are finding the same. AGAN’s subbranch, ACAN Education, is preparing a new campaign to unite student groups across the UK and give an identity to student, ACAN member and sustainability officer at the University of West England Architecture Society, set up WE CAN, a student activism group linking with academic staff to adapt the curriculum to address the climate crisis appropriately. A recent project asked students to send in their ‘climate action in up to 12 words’ to be posted on the WE CAN Instagram page – a recorded manifesto encouraging them to be accountable for their own education in the climate emergency.

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Those in positions of power, who have the ability to effect fundamental change, will likely be dead before the worst of the tragic results of a tardy response to the climate crisis are realised.

The RIBA Journal January 2021

If the government was met with noise from more than 50 universities, the RIBA and practices, it would be pretty hard to ignore.
While promoting the three main tenets of ACAN’s agenda: decarbonisation now; ecological regeneration and cultural transformation, ACAN Education has set up working groups with focused research themes, provided educational resources and encouraged the RIBA to listen to the student population. Ben Yeates, SSoA alumni and co-ordinator of ACAN Education also notes the mental well-being benefits of getting involved with initiatives such as these, noting that collective action can help people to feel that they’re doing some good in what can otherwise seem like a helpless situation.

The reception across the board has been positive. Tutors have been engaging and open. Students are getting involved wherever they can, and there is assessable support from adjacent disciplines. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic seems to have provided alternative methods of working which might just provide this movement with a longevity that others have not had. According to Yeates, “the pandemic has generally improved confidence and willingness to communicate via online calls. Geographic barriers no longer limit activism and, while London is involved, this is not a capital-centric movement whereas previously it might have been. In fact, it’s not only national but beginning to spread further afield with people joining the conversation from the European Architects Student Assembly and even as far as Nairobi.”

While originally, coalitions with a united voice have been effective vehicles for change, and strength here is definitely in numbers. Students and young professionals, eager to see the changes that will save our world, have begun taking ownership of the problem. More professional practice must follow suit. Time should be provided for all employees to improve their climate literacy and perform their own activism. Resources should be shared and tools developed between practices, not just within them. We cannot wait until the current student cohort climbs the ranks - that leg time is too long. Intervention is required now. Professional reform is needed just as much as educational.

So back to the original question. What are students and young professionals doing about the climate emergency? The answer is taking ownership. Leaving the fate of their future to older members of the profession is just too big a risk. There is a collective responsibility to act now and students across the UK are using their energy and enthusiasm to transform education and add their voices to the growing noise.

Benjamin Holland is a student at Central St Martin’s and part of one of the winning teams for RIBA MAwH 2020.

www.benhollanddesign.com

Student architect and technology Ashleigh Mipo makes their pledge on climate action.

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So back to the original question. What are students and young professionals doing about the climate emergency? The answer is taking ownership. Leaving the fate of their future to older members of the profession is just too big a risk. There is a collective responsibility to act now and students across the UK are using their energy and enthusiasm to transform education and add their voices to the growing noise.

Benjamin Holland is a student at Central St Martin’s and part of one of the winning teams for RIBA MAwH 2020.

www.benhollanddesign.com

Student architect and technology Ashleigh Mipo makes their pledge on climate action.
How shows woo visitors

Content aside, what kills or brings to life an exhibit? The frame? The label? The lighting?

Pamela Burton

Dinah Casson’s Closed on Mondays – Behind the Scenes at the Museum explores aspects of museums and galleries that most people rarely give a second thought to – the labels, frames, windows, even the coat-check.

And while that might sound rather tedious, thankfully it isn’t. On the contrary, the author uses these seemingly mundane elements to explore issues that are intrinsically linked with our experience of these cultural institutions, ranging from truth and interpretation through to the nature of collections and the impact of the gallery environment on how visitors respond to what they see.

Much of the book’s success is down to the author’s ability to draw on her extensive exhibition design experience in an accessible way. As co-founder of Casson Mann in 1984, Casson has designed installations at many leading museums and galleries including the Victoria & Albert Museum, Churchill Museum and the Imperial War Museum. But Closed on Mondays isn’t really about Casson Mann’s projects, although these are referenced extensively. In this, Palaeolithic cave paintings are recreated a stone’s throw from the closed-off original. With the cave’s open limits due to visitor-induced deterioration, the Lascaux IV recreation and the wonderful interpretative exhibition (designed by Casson Mann) seem the ideal solution, and are both entertainingly experiential and educational. While it could have been located anywhere, this approach, not surprisingly, works best close to the original hillside site. Casson pondered the role of facsimiles in both conservation and the sharing of access, as well as discussing broader attitudes to authenticity. The advent of digital archaeology and its potential role in reconstruction makes this very topical subject.

The discussion on the power of museum labels probes the fundamental issue of what is truth and what is interpretation. Casson also cites Alain de Botton and John Armstrong’s suggestion, in their book Art as Therapy, for labels that encourage visitors to connect with the a work’s meaning and emotion. Casson hopes it will encourage visitors to take a more scholarly approach. Certainly I’ll never look at a museum label in quite the same way again.

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Michael Aukett 1938–2020
Leader of two award-winning, highly successful multi-disciplinary practices, who reached the Stirling Prize shortlist

Michael Aukett was a highly talented design architect, something happily coupled with strong management ability. This enabled him to create and run a successful practice, twice over. His reputation for modern high quality buildings was such that his firms won a total of 29 design awards: nine RIBA awards including a Stirling Prize Finalist; 10 Civic Trust Awards; three Financial Times Awards; via Structural Steel Awards; and the MIPIM Office Building of the Year Award in 1996. 

Born and raised in Brentford, Middlesex, he trained at London’s Regent Street Art School from 1956 to 1962 on a part-time course, so his college work was done in night classes and at weekends, while working in the week. In 1965 he joined Austin-Smith:Lord, quickly rising to become a partner, then leaving to found his own practice Michael Aukett Associates in 1972. It was based in Covent Garden, and rapidly grew, with a mixed range of work and such clients as IBM and Boots. His interest and skill in interiors and space planning meant that this was always a key part of the practice. He raised his profile and that of the office within the profession, with strong management ability. He was always the first to say that the success of the practice came from the great talent within it.

A good leader, he had warm, sociable and optimistic personality. Being hands-on was always highly visible in the studio. Outside work he had a major love of sport, particularly cricket – he was an MCC member – though golf was what he played later in life. Another interest was modern art. He commissioned paintings from such artists as the abstract expressionist Albert Irvin, also a friend. The studio’s multi-discipline structure was relatively unusual, with strong parallels to YRM. Like them, Aukett’s practice floated on the Stock Exchange, in 1987, and became one of the most successful practices of the time. Notable among its many buildings of high quality were the Stirling-shortlisted Marks and Spencer’s Management Centre Chester (1989), Procter and Gamble HQ at Weybridge (1995), and the 1984 Lennox Wood Computer Centre. 

He played a leading role in developing business parks in the UK, visiting the USA to study them and being involved in several major examples, starting with London’s Stockley Park in 1982. The practice created joint venture offices in Germany with Lutz Heere and in Holland. 

The practice undertook important conservation work, notably in 1981 at Voysey’s interior at Garden Corner, Swan House by Norman Shaw (both on Chelsea Embankment) in 1984, and Shrubland’s Wood in 1987, one of only three buildings by Erich Mendelsohn in the UK. He left Aukett Associates in 1995 to get away from the time-consuming City pressure and founded a new smaller studio, Michael Aukett Architects. This went on to become equally successful with more award-winning buildings such as its 1998 Tesco store in Sheffield. He retired in 2009. 

He is survived by his wife Allison and their two children Jonathan and Claire. A memorial service is to be arranged in the spring.»  

Peter Foulsham, Brockley 

To inform the RIBA of the death of a member, please email membership.service@riba.org with details of next of kin.
Lanteglos
Calenick, Cornwall, 1960s

In the Cornish hamlet of Calenick, ‘Lanteglos’ (now known as Otter Creek) sits on a slope overlooking the Truro river. It was designed in the early 1960s by local architect Giles Blomfield (1925-2012), a partner in John Crowther & Associates, for himself and his family. A grandson of Edwardian architect Sir Reginald Blomfield, he had studied at the Bartlett School in London, where he also worked in the office of Ernő Goldfinger before returning to Cornwall. The house in Calenick, influenced in its design by the work of modernist European architects such as Marcel Breuer, was conceived to maximise the links between indoors and out, and features extensive fenestration and a cantilevered balcony. This design won the architect what was then the RIBA Bronze Medal for completed buildings in 1964, and articles in the specialised press. The photograph also shows in the foreground a stone sculpture by Roger Leigh, who had been assistant to Barbara Hepworth. Blomfield himself was a sculptor as well as an architect, and, in this role, he contributed various works to Canterbury Cathedral, in which he became architect later in his career.

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