RIBA National Awards

Indemnity insurance: what can be done?

Cosmic view: at home with Charles Jencks

Ideas man: Simon Allford interview
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BY YOUR SIDE

RIBA Awards have been disrupted more than most by Covid-19. The extensive judging process relies on a series of visits at different stages as buildings are considered for first Regional, then National, Awards – and ultimately for the RIBA Stirling Prize. Finally this summer a window appeared, when visits looked lower risk and the judges scrambled into action to visit the architectural riches that were entered into this annual competition. The 145 Regional Award winners were published through August into early September, and here we reveal the 54 winners of the National Awards.

There has always been a huge interest in the awards. Last year, with just the shortlists to look at, our Best on Show poll of this hugely diverse bunch of buildings attracted thousands of votes from readers and those who used and loved those buildings. As we get closer to the Stirling the bookmakers will open betting on a winner. Clients turn to the RIBA Awards to find architects who have been recognised by their peers. And, of course, the buildings are a barometer of architecture in our time.

This bunch was born out of the Brexit vote. The projects were probably conceived in the run up to it and completed in deep uncertainty as the government blundered its way towards leaving the EU. It is hard to remember now, but there was a burst of construction orders after the vote, despite the uncertainty – though...
they seem to say more about domestic politics, government spending priorities and the economy. This year we can continue to celebrate social housing – after the success of Norwich’s Goldsmith Street as Stirling Prize winner in 2019, seven made it onto the national awards list, three from local authorities (more were celebrated in the Regional Awards). It is noticeable the average cost per m² on award winning housing projects is a mere £2,877/m², radically below that of any other typology.

There is a shift in the culture projects, recognised in the National Awards from the centre to the periphery, with the exception of David Chipperfield Architects’ Royal Academy of Arts. Instead there is an encouraging with the exception of David Chipperfield Architects’ Royal Academy of Arts. Instead there is an encouraging

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Alongside an elegant flood-resistant newbuild, the houses winning RIBA National Awards restore, convert and reinvent homes with exemplary imagination – from a water tower to 14th century ruins.

**House-within-a-House, London South East**

*alma-nac for private client*

Contract value: Confidential  GIA: 233m²

One can feel the stress of everyday life start to recede the moment one enters the front garden of this charming three-storey, six-bed, detached family home in a conservation area.

The new building repairs the Victorian street that had suffered bomb damage during World War II and housed a nondescript building built in the 1960s in the meantime. Although the house has a new skin, it is built around the existing two-storey dwelling.

The architect’s solution in effect wraps the retained external walls in a thick warm coat to bring it up to contemporary standards. Many of the inner walls were also retained and skilfully integrated into the new. Where there are new additions, above and to the rear, they are made of lightweight structure, mostly exposed timber. The detailing is robust, exposed and attractive.

The inside is not entirely open plan. Two rooms to the front, which could be used as a study and a snug, look onto the front garden. The living quarters are split-level, the sitting room stepping down to the single-storey kitchen and dining room at the back, which looks onto the rear garden. The stairs are separated from the living room with a sliding door, and rise through the middle of the house to the bedrooms.

The composition of the elevations, having retained a lot of the original openings, is very pleasing, poetic and fluid. Combined with the pale grey colour of the brick cladding, the overall effect is respectful of its context and nicely restrained, communicating in a beautiful whisper.

**The Narula House, Wargrave, South**

*John Pardey Architects for Charlotte Narula*

Contract value: Confidential  GIA: 334m²

Narula sits on a stunning plot on a bend in the River Thames near Wibdon. Accessed from a long private road, it is the third house in the vicinity by John Pardey Architects. The plot sits in flood zone 3b and floods periodically up to 1.2m. As a reminder of this, the dinghy is on show in the undercroft of the house, waiting.

On a summer’s day, the shade of the undercroft offers a cool respite from the heat. The river is always present – people in boats pass part regularly. An external steel staircase appears both elegant and durable, akin to that for embarking a ship.

The crafted front door opens into an extremely long corridor. An elevated box, the house is split between the living and sleeping wings to create a partly covered courtyard space. Given the difficult physical constraints to the garden below, this is a welcome move which allows the client to be in the landscape and enjoy the setting.

An elegant long form has open plan living and dining and cooking to the eastern end, with all the sleeping accommodation and bathrooms to the western end. Pardey first designed the house to be ‘flipped’ in orientation but client Charlotte Narula insisted on having a morning terrace and view of breakfast. Narula – the daughter of Gerald Beech who won House of the Year in 1960 – has furnished this home beautifully and her imprint is evident; from the bespoke bronze door handle to colour themed bedrooms, her touch enhances the architecture, and the building feels lived in and homely.
Type Studio for private client

Redhill Barn, Devon, South West & Wessex

Within a typology of barn conversions, this piece is approaching work-of-art status. It tells a wonderful story of family ambition with father, son and partner working hard with vision and restraint. This rediscovered barn was no ordinary barn, which is clear to see in the quality of its masonry, its scale, its proportion, and its immediate rural landscape setting. It is complete with its subtle but powerfully anchoring crescent shaped extension.

The barn was a place for prize cattle, and now faultless execution has transformed this previously abandoned building into something worthy of being a scheduled monument. It was found by chance, as a ruin on a plot of land, with no permission for re-use. Since then, it has truly been rescued and rehabilitated as a building of high architectural and historical significance.

As a piece of contemporary design, everything that has been added brings continuity to its past and present and sets up a most deft future of further interpretation and evolution from the structural interventions that stabilise the original half-rounded columns. The new roof, engineered to allow for an additional mezzanine if needed. The jury could not fault in any of the decisions, from the lightest of steel shoes that stabilise the original half-rounded columns, to the new roof, engineered to allow for an additional mezzanine if needed.

Windward House, Lydney, South West & Wessex

Alison Brooks Architects for private client

As a labour of love by client and architect working together with what appears to have been a complete unity of purpose. An art collection might sometimes be a sobering influence on the feasibility of a home, but here the overall mood is one of didactic or pompous. The house and its contents represent a near perfect amalgam of architecture, landscape, inhabitation and art – that is notably poised and elegant as well as bright, light, fresh and airy. The overall mood is calm and assured.

The project’s first phase converted the farmhouse. On one side three storages have been turned into one complex new space to make a lofty but intimate display room. The original stair links a series of small rooms and culminates in a suspended landing.

The extension, larger than the original house but subordinate to it, contains a luminous interior. The architect’s distinctive skewed geometries give rise to an extraordinarily complex and finely resolved play of solids and voids, and a sense of openness with carefully considered views. A beautiful在外墙的砖结构。The kitchen commands the heart of the plan. Upstairs rooms – bedrooms and study – are comfortable and light. Deep brown fibre cement cladding to the new extension recalls the darkness of the nearby Forest of Dean, counterpointed by small stitches of highly polished stainless steel.

The extension, larger than the original house but subordinate to it, contains a luminous interior. The architect’s distinctive skewed geometries give rise to an extraordinarily complex and finely resolved play of solids and voids, and a sense of openness with carefully considered views. A beautiful glass structure graces the front, complementing the new extension and culminating in a suspended landing.

North West

Walkabout Gillespie NHS Architects for private client

Pole Tower House, Cumbria, North West

Contract value: Confidential GIA: 678m²

This project displays considerable inventiveness and carefulity in meeting the challenges of transforming a remarkable, but decaying, group of historic buildings into a 21st century family home. Considerable love and care have gone into the works, from both client and architect, and have resulted in a scheme of real delight and personality.

Highly characterful, and displaying multiple layers of history, the buildings sit in a spectacular setting at the head of a valley. The works enhances both building and landscape, removing modern furring structures and excessive areas of hardstanding. Externally the interventions are modest and understated, responding to the qualities and materials of the historic structures. The 14th century Pole Tower’s character as a ruin has been successfully retained by deeply recessing new glazing within the massive depth of the walls, creating shadow externally and beautifully illuminating reveals internally.

Inside, the project unfolds in a series of episodic events reflecting the diverse uses, significance and character of the different elements of the existing buildings. Historic elements, however humble, have been retained. Modern additions can clearly read as distinct from the historic fabric, maintaining an effective dialogue between the new and old parts of the whole.

Despite an apparent lightness of touch, the scheme works hard to upgrade the environmental performance of the retained existing buildings to modern standards while working within the considerable conservation challenges of the listed buildings. Careful upgrading of the existing fabric has realised significant benefits – both in reducing energy use and in creating a more comfortable place to live. This is complemented by renewable energy generation from ground source head pumps, and a micro-hydroelectric scheme which produces more energy than the house consumes, further reducing the carbon footprint.

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The simplicity of adding a conservatory to the rear of a townhouse gives architects an incredible range of expressive opportunities. Wooden Roof takes this to a new level of sophistication and elegance. Its grade II listing limited its overall height and demanded it remain subservient to the main building, prompting a uniquely crafted timber structure that uses digital manufacturing and draws on traditional Japanese joinery. Used as a new sunken dining space in the garden, the precision of the faceted glazed roof extends to the way the timber ring beam is jointed and even to how the perimeter gutter is detailed to provide a genuinely considered elevation to the upper rooms of the house. The design emphasizes timber’s expressive qualities by putting the language of carpentry at the heart of the project. It exemplifies how intrinsically sustainable timber can and should become the structural material of choice for small- and medium-scale projects.

Setting the extension partially below ground level required a meticulous negotiated section. The detailing of the external surfaces was no less carefully rendered than the roof itself. Even the placement of stone slabs in the lawn to make an outdoor seating area has the compositional skill of an artist.

Internally, the quality evident in the structural joinery of the roof runs throughout the furniture. The project adds visual balance, clarity and beauty to the listed house as well as facilitating domestic life.

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Choose a greener future by using our sustainable alloys for your next project
Southampton Crossings is a newly completed student residence in the heart of Southampton City Centre, catering for students from the University of Southampton and Southampton Solent University. The 527-bed accommodation building was designed by Architecture PLB for client HOST, an award-winning provider of student housing.

Managed by main contractors Midas, the building comprises three distinct blocks in a ‘C’ shaped formation, with ground floor colonnades that create a central courtyard. The £30m development has been completed using the Corium brick cladding system, expertly installed by Facade Concepts.

Corium brick cladding is a popular choice for developments where the look of traditional brickwork is desired and speed of construction and cost saving is important. The system holds a Class A1 fire rating, as determined by its BBA certificate, which makes it a perfect solution for high rise residential buildings where safety is of the upmost importance.

Throughout the planning and design process, there was careful consideration towards making the building sustainable, with the goal to achieve a BREEAM excellent rating. There was a major focus on reducing heat loss from the building, as well as including elements of prefabrication to reduce the amount of waste produced during construction. Corium can be installed significantly quicker than traditional brickwork, which reduces construction time onsite.

The project’s three blocks feature white, cream and buff brick tiles across varying building heights to create a striking form that stands out against the traditional, listed park below. The central building within the courtyard features a white glazed brick tile, which provides a light and clean background for the colourful courtyard art, designed by the artists Denman and Gould.

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As a focal point for the London City Island development, the English National Ballet’s new home delivers on its mission to provide the highest quality classical ballet to the widest possible audience.

This public-facing, purpose-built facility opens onto the civic Trinity Square, and invites in passers-by through a ground-floor exhibition area and café. This in turn opens up to an atrium that connects to all levels with a feature stair. The stair entices visitors to explore both the company and the school, encouraging public engagement with the performances taking place in the various rehearsal studios.

The building provides a range of flexible facilities, including a main production studio, rehearsal studios, and spaces for set builders, back-of-house technicians, costume designers, and over 200 office staff. The top two floors are occupied by the English National Ballet School.

Far from lying dormant when there is no performance, this building’s impressive flexibility and adaptability allows it to host the ENB’s strong community outreach programmes.

The award-winning project rich in protecting and expanding our cultural heritage range from a dramatic bridge to shrouded house, a new treetop walkway to restored, repurposed vaults.
The redevelopment of this important art gallery is the result of a decade of intensive work by the architects, the gallery team, Aberdeen City Council and various international specialists and stakeholders.

The project delivers major new exhibition and education spaces, an enhanced system of servicing and environmental control systems, and dramatically improved access to the gallery, storage, back of house and visitor facilities. The result is a spectacular triumph, retaining and enhancing the special character of the original spaces, while making major alterations such as removing the main staircase, which blocked the entrance, and placing it at the back of the building.

The dramatic new glazed roof allows natural light to flood into the Sculpture Court below. The removal of the staircase has created a welcoming, spacious entrance offering clear views and well-connected public routes into the Cowdray Hall and Remembrance Hall. The design, detailing and choice of materials have been selected to create a beautifully new art gallery that must now be one of the very best in the country.

The Hill House Box, Helensburgh, RIAS
Carmody Groarke for National Trust for Scotland
Contract value: £3.2m GIA: 1660m²
Cost per m²: £1927

This radical approach to conservation is protecting Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s grade A-listed masterpiece from imminent collapse due to prolonged water damage. The temporary structure that envelops the house also contains visitor facilities, including a reception, café and toilets, that previously were uncomfortably located inside the house itself.

The demountable steel structure and walkways provide a sheltering environment for the building to dry out – an integral part of a remediation process that will take up to 10 years. A stainless steel mesh above the roof allows light for trees to grow within it. The Box offers visitors the opportunity to see the building and its conservation at close quarters, while also attracting under-represented groups and young people to enjoy a very different experience of the historic building and gardens.

This project is demonstrably successful, both in terms of reducing the dampness, and also in attracting many more people to visit the building. It is a daring and unconventional approach that has solved a very difficult problem.
From masterplan to minute detail, this is an exemplar for the refurbishment and repurposing of historic buildings.

Royal Academy of Arts, Westminster, London West

David Chipperfield Architects (with Julian Harrap Architects) for Royal Academy of Arts
Contract value: Confidential GIA: 17,000 m²

From the initial masterplan approach through to the most minute finishing details, this is an exemplar for the refurbishment and repurposing of historic buildings. The project integrates the grade I listed Royal Academy of Arts on Piccadilly with Burlington Gardens, a grade II* listed building to the north that was designed in the 1860s as Senate House for the University of London.

The masterplan brief called for an ideological as well as a physical link between the buildings. This posed numerous challenges since the two were on different levels and axes, and had different orientations. And the client was reluctant to lose gallery space to circulation.

To unlock the masterplan, the architect sensitively refurbished key spaces, opening up closed-off areas and reactivating zones for the public. Critically, a new circulation route was created to connect the Piccadilly and Burlington Gardens entrances. Key strategic interventions included the use of a brick vaulted former storage space and installation of a new, contemporary in situ concrete covered link bridge to resolve differences in levels and axes. The bridge creates an engaging journey between exhibits and leaves visitors appreciating what’s on display, but also curious about the buildings themselves. It has opened up the RA School, integrating its activity into the wider organisation.

In the Senate House building, the works reinstated a semi-circular lecture theatre, and created a new cafeteria from the former Senate Room. The external grounds between the two buildings and under the new link bridge have been connected too, creating an enhanced green amenity for staff and students.

Imperial War Museum Paper Store, Cambridge, East

Architype for Imperial War Museums
Contract value: Confidential GIA: 1456 m²

Clad in weathering steel, the new archive building at Imperial War Museum Duxford nestles among the collection of important facilities that make up the Duxford Airfield conservation area. Sitting peacefully at the rear of the site, it creates a place for contemplation for those that have donated archival material.

A simple but flexible plan allows future expansion without compromising the building layout. Its minimal form creates a sculptural object in itself, and is in line with its sustainability credentials, ensuring that heat losses are minimised from additional corners and junctions. Cladding panels, one for each year since 1914, are punched to reflect the volume of storage in any given year; those of high conflict are heavily perforated. This building, made with low embodied carbon materials, also achieves the additional fire safety performance required for such an important archive. Super insulation and passive design create stable internal temperatures and relative humidity without expensive mechanical systems.

The client deserves high praise for both testing the standard approach for archive design and for trusting the architect to develop the brief and manage the process through to successful completion. The predicted performance of the building is exemplary, with its first primary energy much lower than standard specification archive buildings, as well as lower than the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge Figures for operational energy, and embodied carbon.

Together, architect and client have achieved an archival facility that both creates an emotional response and is a blueprint for sustainable performance.
The RIBA Journal September 2021

**RIBA National Awards**

**Culture**

*Tintagel Castle Footbridge, Cornwall, South West & Wessex*

Ney & Partners and William Matthews Associates for English Heritage

Contract value: £3.5m  
Cost per m²: £20,000 (excluding landscaping)

This is much more than a bridge. It is a connector, an enabler, an interpreter and a spectacle all within its own right.

Located on a north Cornwall cliff top on a site that’s the legendary base of King Arthur, this new bridge is beautifully executed at all scales, from the way it respects the silhouette of the landforms it abuts, down to the tactile detail of its path, made from slate laid on edge.

Retracing the approximate width and length of the natural landbridge and castle structures that have long since fallen into the water, the bridge notionally links past with present and physically connects two stranded sections of the castle precinct, which dates from the 13th century. With its highly ceremonial presence, articulated in every piece of finely crafted stainless steel, it also allows contemporary visitors to retrace the steps of predecessors who would have passed through this section of the castle to gain entry to the grand hall on the island side.

The structure is formed from two 30m cantilevered bridges separated by a 40mm gap, intended as a symbolic and playful threshold from mainland to island, and from present to past.

Technical achievement and degrees of difficulty metrics are high in this project, where construction logistics and material specification have all been expertly handled. It is built to the very high above the potentially choppy waters of the competitions and commissioning process, standing tall as an example of how projects should be run, having been taken from concept to delivery without delay or delay.

**The Egg Shed, Argyll & Bute, RIAS**

Oliver Chapman Architects for Scottish Canals

Contract value: Confidential  
GIA: 270m²

This former egg storage building has been transformed into a new community and canal heritage visitor centre. The aim of this awarded project was to improve the built environment of Ardrishaig’s waterfront, and to increase the tourist offer in the village. It forges new connections by bringing the historic harbour back into the body of the village and re-establishing it as part of a circulating route (which is still to be completed).

The design team had to deal with salt contamination and protection from flooding, which required the foundations to be raised, and flood resistant materials to be used up to a height of 1m above the internal floor level.

The simple roof of the existing building has been extended across a new structure, and the new walls and roof are clad in red steel, making it clearly visible from a distance. It is robustly detailed, with adaptable internal spaces and an exhibition designed in collaboration with the local community.

The project is an excellent example of how a fairly small architectural intervention can transform an area, and open up new possibilities for future development.

**The Oglesby Centre at Hallé St Peter’s, Manchester, North West**

stephenson hamilton risley STUDIO for Hallé Concerts Society

Contract value: £4.7m  
GIA: 1145m²  
Cost per m²: £4105

This is a highly successful and sophisticated piece of urban architecture, completing the east end of Manchester’s Cutting Room Square. Its interior spaces are no less compelling, and provide transformative facilities for this major cultural institution.

Extending the grade II-listed St Peter’s Church, it provides essential new facilities for the Hallé concert hall, and gives it a public face, greatly expanding opportunities for engagement with the surrounding city. Architecturally, it sits confidently in its urban setting. Inspiring and functional, it successfully negotiates the challenge of creating a modern addition to a historic building. With substantial ingenuity it fits considerable accommodation onto a constrained site and delivers high-performing acoustic conditions. Attention to detail is exemplary with the use of high-quality materials which are clearly built to last.

Externally, the brickwork of the building’s plinth successfully integrates the new and existing buildings, while the use of weathering steel reflects the industrial heritage of the surrounding district.

Building form, massing, daylighting and the performance of the building fabric have all been carefully considered. The thorough sustainability strategy has been borne out in energy use, performing well in relation to RIBA 2030 targets.
MK Gallery, Milton Keynes, South
6a architects for MK Gallery
Contract value: £7m
GIA: 2,062 m²
Cost per m²: £3395

This was a challenging project that has been beautifully crafted. A high level of research, interrogation, collaboration and consultation from an enthusiastic team has delivered a revitalised and expanded building that remains true to the ethos of the original Milton Keynes masterplan and aesthetic.

Reworking of the original gallery spaces, with a new window to the plaza, provides an enfilade connection through all the galleries to the parkland beyond. The existing interior spaces have been opened up and reconfigured to provide both greater flexibility and a better user experience as visitors pass through the building to other facilities, including the new performance space.

The authenticity of the project is reinforced by the architect’s reinterpretation of the original design ideas for Milton Keynes, such as colours, fonts, materials and street furniture. The use of two colour palette ranges, extracted from the original concepts for the New Town, provides clear wayfinding while also reinforcing the original idea of the muted picturesque against the vibrant cosmopolitan. This idea is also reinforced on the building externally through the use of colour and materials. The new galleries are clad in reflective materials which are either solid or perforated so that they appear light or seem to disappear.

The design team found and incorporated an original pointing finger gate into new landscaping – another indication of its level of commitment to Milton Keynes’ heritage.

This is a project that uses originality to create a building for now and for the future, while drawing on the New Town’s past.

The Story of Gardening, nr Bruton, South West & Wessex
Stonewood Design with Mark Thomas Architects plus Henry Fagan Engineering (Treetop Walk Way) for Emily Estate UK
Contract value: Confidential
GIA: 1000 m²

The architect and design team have worked in full harmony with client, site and brief to deliver The Story of Gardening, which combines a largely subterranean museum building with a treetop walkway.

Designed and fabricated in Cape Town, the walkway is the perfect companion to the museum, providing a fully accessible route from the top of the bluff that borders the historic woodland, through, down and around to the main entrance of the subterranean museum. It also sets up the parterre approach to materials and architectural detail that is seen throughout the project.

The concrete bunker offers the best of both worlds, delivering a robust and stable environment for the exhibits, and providing a suitable degree of drama for visitors courting its fully extended glass facade, which provides expansive and ever-changing views of the woodland beyond.

There is very little fuss with this piece of architecture, which bears the signs of a mature hand from a relatively young practice. The architect has achieved its intention of creating a building with minimal impact on the land, the rainfall, the ecology, the biodiversity and the trees. It is simply beautiful, and takes a deferential position to the surrounding landscape.

The attention to all aspects of sustainable design is exemplary, from its underground positioning and shuttering of deciduous trees for the glazed wall through to specifying locally made materials such as aggregates of Hadspen stone. The services, which include heat pumps and an inter-seasonal heat store, are all thoroughly integrated.

The design’s flexibility should ensure longevity so that the building can be enjoyed by many generations to come.
RIBA National Awards

Culture

Winchester Cathedral South Transept Exhibition Spaces, Winchester, South
Nick Cox Architects with Metaphor for Winchester Cathedral
Contract value: Confidential
GIA: 580 m²

It would be easy to miss this wonderful little intervention, which creates new exhibition spaces and includes the first lift to be inserted into a medieval cathedral in the UK.

Arriving at the South Transept, it is not immediately obvious that any intervention work has been carried out as the lift shaft appears recessed – a similar tone to the cathedral’s stone walls. A metal reveals in front of the lift shaft glass gives a luxurious finish appropriate to this special place. Continuing this theme, metal fabric curtains have been used throughout to control sunlight.

At ground level, a new roadway has been cut into the masonry and metal gates commissioned to close off and secure the Winchester Bible. These Grade II* gates enquire the attention to detail shown throughout.

Emerging from the lift at first floor level, the view down to the main body of the church creates a ‘wow’ moment that is incredibly moving. This alone, even without the wonderful exhibition designed by Metaphor and the new accommodation of the Winchester Bible, makes the project a worthwhile venture.

The overall outcome enables better engagement with the cathedral, improved understanding of its heritage and improved accessibility for all. The detailing and quality of the materials used are impressive – a very restrained palette of metal, wood, and glass. The craftsmanship is stunning and worthy of this important setting, and it is evident that many of the elements will improve with age as they gain the patina of use. By complementing and enabling appreciation of what has gone before, the architecture adds a worthy new layer to a sacred and iconic building.

Walmer Castle and Gardens Learning Centre, Walmer, South East
Adam Richards Architects for English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund
Contract value: Confidential
GIA: 200 m²

This is an excellent example of reusing an existing structure in a sensitive way to sustainably generate income that supports the current use.

Located in the grounds of a Kent castle, the project combines a café in a repurposed old greenhouse with a new, 700 m² learning centre. The collection of small buildings has been carefully positioned using existing sight lines, and is almost unnoticeable behind an existing tree when viewed from the Tudor fortress.

The understated, well-detailed new building fits a huge amount into a compact space, providing a comfortable and engaging space for education for all kinds of users and age groups.

Brickwork and the shape of the windows reflect the neighbouring historic buildings, with the ‘vitrine’ window taking cues from the original fortification’s Tudor gun embrasures.

This project offers delightful little surprises everywhere. Changing ceiling heights respond to the functions and volumes of the spaces, while unobstructed views from the carefully aligned windows provide visual connectivity to the nearby gardener’s shed, or the seated gathering space, which is formed from the cleverly detailed concrete base of the building.

Contemporary detailing of the little café references the historic buildings in its materials and form. It re-uses an existing timber frame greenhouse to create a light-filled and spacious, yet carefully articulated, space to serve visitors to the castle grounds.
Nestling into the eastern shore of Lake Windermere, the Jetty Museum creates a compelling composition of vernacular forms, reconciling the reassuringly familiar with the strikingly contemporary. When seen from the lake, the dark shed-like buildings appear embedded in the wooded hillside behind. Yet when experienced on arrival, they evoke the confident identity of a major cultural institution.

The cluster of pitched-roof forms successfully breaks down the large scale of the museum, integrating it into its landscape setting. This seemingly picturesque arrangement derives its layout from functional requirements while carefully framing views of the lake. It is these views, and the experience of the water, which become the main protagonists in the choreographed sequence of the visitors’ route, with the building successfully blurring boundaries between climate-controlled galleries, workshops, the wet dock and the lake itself.

Learning from older lakeland buildings, the provision of deeply overhanging eaves creates external rooms, sheltering visitors from the elements. Considerable thought has been put into the selection of materials, in particular the use of oxidised copper, the primary external material, which is already weathering to a variety of subtle hues.

The sustainability strategy is intelligent and comprehensive, from reuse of the existing wet dock through to the choice of building services systems and materials, and consideration of biodiversity, drainage and health and wellbeing. The building touches the earth lightly and sits comfortably in its setting.

This is an outstanding project. The unique setting demanded a scheme with a clear vision and of the highest quality. The resulting building has been handled with sensitivity and deftness. It has a restrained and simple beauty that is boldly confident in its design and delivery.
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### U-value chart

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Health

Both winners successfully tackle challenging sites. A medical research facility sits with a conservation area, while the latest Maggie’s centre occupies a triangular plot at the back of a car park.

Zayed Centre for Research into Rare Disease in Children, London North
Stanton Williams for Great Ormond Street Hospital and UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health
Contract value Confidential
GIA 13,090m²

The Zayed Centre for Research into Rare Disease in Children is a delicate and intricate response to a challenging brief. The building sits on Guildford Street, always on the heart of a conservation area opposite Coram’s Fields. The elevation to the street, with its stone finish at the upper level, creates oblique solidity while allowing views to the surrounding green spaces from inside.

The building comes to life at ground floor, offering a fully glazed facade through which passers-by can look down into the building’s primary function: the research laboratories. Having these up front and on show is the building’s driving parti. Everyone entering the building must cross a bridge over them to reach the reception desk – a sequence that reinforces the idea that treatment and research are the same thing.

From here the building is functionally split between offices and research, and spaces for the children who are taking part in research. The research wing is light and bright, wrapping around the atrium and connected by a communal stair. The children’s wing, on the other hand, has its own atrium and is smaller in scale to suit its users. Treatment rooms are planned to allow families to wait towards the front of the building where they have views of Coram’s Fields.

The architects have successfully translated a complex brief into a disciplined architecture that is joyful and perfectly modulated to the centre’s serious purpose. And the material finish of the timber, concrete, glass and stone is exceptional throughout.

Maggie’s Cardiff, Cardiff, Wales
DomeJones Architects for Maggie’s Cancer Care
Contract value Confidential
GIA 240m²

This building occupies an awkward triangular plot at the back of Cardiff’s Velindre Cancer Centre car park. It is the 19th completed Maggie’s centre and, at first sight, is both striking and surprisingly diminutive. Its orange carapace is formed of rusty corrugated sheeting – a colour that references the region’s red sandstone as well as the autumnal colour of bracken on the nearby hills.

The entrance sits on the southern corner. Once inside, a small courtyard embraces the visitor, and an immediate transition occurs from the institutional to the domestic. The mostly open plan is given order by three ‘freestanding’ timber elements, containing toilets, storage and lift shaft, intimate space lift from above and lit by Welsh vernacular chimneys. These elements lead to the kitchen table common to all Maggie’s and provide the only square walls. Elsewhere, exposed rafters play out like waves washing over the geometrically complicated plan above.

At the back of the building, two glazed screens open to a wall of trees and a small outdoor seating area. Art has also been infused into the building, including bollards designed by Antony Gormley, which act as rusty sentinels, guarding the public sides.

The building compensates for not being allowed PVs by using highly insulated prefabricated timber frame that follows Passivhaus principles. It is also 20 per cent smaller than most Maggie’s analyses than half of the average cost – it is a exemplary structure that will be replaced as the hospital site is developed over the next 10 years. Nevertheless, the project is infused with Welsh vernacular, art and a deep concern for materiality. It creates truly restorative and poetic spaces as an antidote to the shadow of cancer.
Ten winning residential schemes in the RIBA National Awards prove that social housing can be considered, desirable and delightful as well as affordable.

North Street Housing, Barking, London East
Peter Barber Architects for BeFirst /London Borough of Barking & Dagenham
Contract value: Confidential
GIA: 925m²

Built on the site of a strip of grass separating two roads previously considered unsuitable for development, North Street housing is, in fact, a picturesque island terrace of 14 ‘cottages’. Ten of the dwellings have been thoughtfully designed as single bedroom units to tempt downsizers from larger units in the adjacent local authority housing. Each house has its own front door and entrance courtyard or front garden, which not only lends a sense of ownership but facilitates dual- or triple-aspect rooms at ground and first floor. All homes are designed to the GLA/National Space Standards as a minimum; one unit has the benefit of a roof terrace at first floor, and the two, two-bed units are designed to be fully wheelchair-accessible.

The careful massing of the cottages with their hit-and-miss courtyards keeps them private and avoids unwelcome overlooking with adjacent buildings. While the construction materials of brick and timber might be conventional, the details are not. A playful use of oversized brick arches and variety in fenestration shows that social housing need not compromise on good design. The light and airy internal rooms are generous and full of delight for the occupant, as are the barrel-vaulted bedroom ceilings, which also reduce the impact of the roofline on neighbouring properties. This neatly-designed, considered island of houses stands out as a gem among its neighbours; discrete, delightful – and silently radical.

This neatly-designed, considered island of houses stands out as a gem.
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ALUCOBOND® A2 is a composite panel consisting of two aluminium cover sheets and a fire-retardant mineral-filled core (70%).

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For rear-ventilated façades, we recommend ALUCOBOND® A2 (EN classes A2-s1, d0) or ALUCOBOND® PLUS (EN classes B-s1, d0) in combination with non-combustible mineral insulation. This combination shows no flame propagation or critical temperature rise.

Moore Park Mews, Fulham, London South West
Stephen Taylor Architects for Baylight Properties

This project creates four detached houses on an awkward triangular backland site, overlooked by multiple neighbours. The elevation of a decade of planning challenges; dealing with both the principal and detail of this exceptionally tight scheme. The client’s brief demanded houses rather than flats, each with outdoor space; with buildings internally feeling like a series of spaces that could be read as phases.

The architect describes the plan’s geometry as “driftwood washed up on a beach”, but the buildings and, more critically, the spaces between, are clearly the result of meticulous calculation and thought and are incredibly successful. Each house has a front door and garden and the gnomonically pure, gabled house volumes are all legible as they tumble and crease across the site. First- and ground-floor plans open up playfully into larger lower-ground living spaces, creating ways for daylight to penetrate. Light gently washes over them, the brick masses finding warm creamy alabaster. The external material palette is minimal and appropriate domestically: brick, clay tiles, and windows carefully detailed with control, precision and modesty.

Inside, too, the palette is warm and textural, left neutral to allow for daylight to penetrate, light gently washes over them, the brick masses finding warm creamy alabaster. The external material palette is minimal and appropriate domestically: brick, clay tiles, and windows carefully detailed with control, precision and modesty.

Overall, the project has been designed and delivered to a very high standard. By creating a new public connection at street level, it sets a desirable precedent for new housing developments locally as well as an aspiration for housing in general.

RIBA National Awards

Caudale Housing Scheme, Camden, London West
Mae Architects for London Borough of Camden

Contract value: £4m GIA: 602m²

Cost per m²: £6645/m²

Overall, the project has been designed and delivered to a very high standard. By creating a new public connection at street level, it sets a desirable precedent for new housing developments locally as well as an aspiration for housing in general.

For rear-ventilated façades, we recommend ALUCOBOND® A2 (EN classes A2-s1, d0) or ALUCOBOND® PLUS (EN classes B-s1, d0) in combination with non-combustible mineral insulation. This combination shows no flame propagation or critical temperature rise, and even exceeds the requirements of BR135.

Part of a wider HS2 remediation masterplan, the Caudale housing scheme was developed for London Borough of Camden to provide affordable dwellings for residents displaced by the new infrastructure works. It creates dual and triple-aspect homes, intuitive layouts and massing that give excellent levels of sunlight and cross-ventilation. Working to very tight timescales, the architect engaged successfully with the very active resident groups in an intensive public consultations process, responding to concerns such as multi-generational living, internal passive supervision within apartments and creating more connections to the outdoors. During the judgements’ visit, a resident praised the architect for listening to their concerns and assisted the development for improving an area that had previously been subject to frequent fly-tipping.

The giant chequerboard design of the facades breaks up the composition cleanly and pays homage to the neighbouring 1960s Frederick Gibberd housing block. The general massing responds well to its proximity to other buildings and protects existing views, with the twin blocks topped off with intensive green roofs.

The project was designed to be Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 and to exceed Lifetime Homes standards, allowing for a range of occupants. It features a new communal garden that is open to the public, part of a wider local authority initiative to create more green spaces needed in between the dense housing developments in the wider area.

Overall, the project has been designed and delivered to a very high standard. By creating a new public connection at street level, it sets a desirable precedent for new housing developments locally as well as an aspiration for housing in general.
Blackfriars Circus, Southwark, London South East
Maccreanor Lavington for Barratt London
Contract value: £105m GIA: 39,467m²
Cost per m²: £2500/m²

Challenged with a brief to rejuvenate a semi-derelict brownfield site, the architect responded by creating a sustainable new neighbourhood. The scheme comprises several blocks with attractive roof gardens and a 28-storey tower. It maintains the urban grain and creates new public realm and welcome breathing space, repairing a large portion of the street and revitalising the St George’s Circus area generally.

The mixed-use scheme creates 336 new homes, including 56 social rent homes for Southwark Council. It also incorporates two new public spaces within the block and a pond surrounded by paths aimed at small enterprises, with a café on the adjacent square.

Blocks respectfully reference the past, with robust detailing of the window surrounds and horizontal bands defining floor levels. A lot of work has gone into the facade design, including attractive metal railings and subtly multi-coloured brickwork in intriguing patterns, using glazed bricks of different shapes and sizes. The tower is inset from the edge of the circus and deeps its scale, fits well in the overall streetscape. Double-height ground floor leads to commercial spaces; perhaps the most interesting of these is the atrium off the circus which, with its translucent roof, provides colonnaded access to the flats. It feels timeless.

Given the size of the project and its many constraints, the result is a great achievement. It reactivates the area with many new residential and commercial units, all supported by pockets of new public realm. The judges visited during the lockdown when the streets were still fairly quiet. With a return to normality, it is anticipated that this new addition to Southwark will become a lively quarter.

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The Gables, Liverpool, North West
DK-Architects for Musker Developments
Contract value: £5m GIA: 3342 m² Cost per m²: £1499

This project rethinks the suburban house, creating a working model for denser, more characterful and more sustainable development. Housing is clustered around well considered shared-surface streets in which car parking is thoughtfully accommodated without dominating. A gable-motif and shared street give the scheme its identity. Despite increased densities, the 40 apartments feel over-developed and there is no compromise to privacy or amenity.

This project demonstrates the importance of decisions made on the basis of value rather than simply cost, resulting in high build quality. Homes exceed National Space Standards, with considered amenity space and robust, well detailed finishes. The scheme’s character and enhanced density have underpinned its financial success, sales value and appeal to the market.

Clever reinvention of the back-to-back terrace creates homes with both gardens and roof terraces. Their compact form enables higher densities and cuts embodied carbon by optimising building volume, to reduce heat loss and use of materials. Of the 30 homes, 20% are affordable, with a mix of size and type contributing to a more varied and socially sustainable neighbourhood; the fact that the variety of tenure and property size is not evident is a triumph. Impressively, this variety is achieved with a moderate budget via construction methodology and some standardised elements.

The character and quality of this scheme stand out as a challenge to the generic housing schemes being delivered across the country. It is an exemplar of the way that architects, working with informed clients, can enhance our environment, responding to the way we live our lives and creating tangible value.

Key Worker Housing, Eddington, Cambridge, East
Stanton Williams for University of Cambridge, North West Cambridge Development
Contract value: Confidential
GIA: 22,916 m²

Although keyworker housing, this scheme, with its loose interconnected courtyards, manages to feel as though it part Cambridge college and part a new piece of the city. As such, the distinction between public and private resident communal space is unclear. This ambiguity is deliberately employed to foster a communal sense within the development. With almost no private balconies, most of the external space is shared, so residents are always likely to bump into each other.

A well-considered and calm palette of materials has been used. The ground floor plinth is of mottled buff Cambridge brick, extending vertically at level changes to celebrate corner conditions. The upper, light brick forms a gridded panel system, with rebates sometimes interlacing with the plinth brick. Reconstituted stone is used for copings and ci-ledge, running horizontally around each floor level. Cycle stores are picked out in vertical black timber, supplemented with oak reveals and entrance doors. The enclosed cycle courts, also wrapped in timber, and their planters, are a delightful realisation of what is often considered to be a banal storage requirement. Cycling is celebrated here and the stores help to articulate the courtyard’s edges and the arrival sequences.

The landscaping incorporates water features and manages water run-off and storage as an integral part of the design. Utilisation of CHP, rainwater harvesting and SUDS strategy was considered at concept stage and has been successfully delivered. The buildings were designed to meet Code for Sustainable Homes Level 5 and its non-residential spaces are BREEAM Excellent.

The sequence of buildings and spaces between at Eddington is a delightful example of how a rigorous approach to form, materials and details can create a harmonious environment and make a great place.
RIBA National Awards
Housing

Moor’s Nook, Woking, Surrey, South East
Coffey Architects for Pegasus Life
Contract value: £8m  GIA: 3400m²
Cost per m²: £2353 / m²

This development of 34 flats for retirement living is arranged around a south-facing landscaped communal courtyard on the site of a former industrial laundry. Working on many levels, every detail accumulates to create a highly responsive building, to both its setting and its many residents.

At ground level, the courtyard entrance to the flats has pockets of planting and sheltered window seats extending the threshhold space, offering a comfortable space to engage with others. Access decks above are generous to reinforce the idea of shared external space. Above, the roof extends right over to create shade and a sense of enclosure accentuating the intimate nature of the courtyard. The balance between privacy and shared space is handled with subtlety.

The architectural principles applied to each good affect at this retirement development have created a wonderful place to live, regardless of age.

Rye Apartments, Peckham, London South East
Tikari Works for Metropolitan Projects
Contract value: Confidential  GIA: 880m²

Realising this extraordinary development of two small blocks of six and four flats with a social housing component, facing Peckham Rye Park, was a labour of love. Coming from a practice that was architect, developer and contractor all in one, it was a pleasure to learn about the architectural concept and the trials and tribulations of turning it into a successful building.

The corner design is sustainable and visually attractive, creating apartments that are a joy to live in. Beauty and innovation are everywhere, a respectful but subtly subversive response to its urban context: the quality of light inside and subtle detailing of the rooms, mainly in timber – especially the Spruce kitchen cabinetry, storage units and shelves – to create a seamless surface. Terrazzo-style cream and amber flooring runs throughout with brick-red quarry tiles lining the hallways and bathroom, a nod to the building’s exterior.

Shared gardens are separated by a timber fence, with private outdoor amenity spaces for apartments without access to gardens.

Above the concrete structure that forms the basement and plinth, the architect decided to use as few wet trades as possible, choosing a CLT structure, self-finished on the inside.

The project’s subtle and the intelligence of its planning and execution sparking,

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The housing project is an imaginative re-interpretation of the modernist typology, housing at affordable nondescript Peckham road. It creates 33 low-cost apartments, with a courtyard linked. There is direct access from the street and courtyard to the lower apartments, alongside two access core for the flats, each serving three apartments at every level.

It is not possible to pass the new block without smiling. The building is the work of an architect versed in designing successful housing, but it has a sense of humour thrown into the mix. The design is deconstructivist, with a facade of different planes, with windows not necessarily following any order and to the rear, long, continuous, brick-clad balconies – eerily the underside. Even if these features are perhaps exaggerated, it’s hard not to be beguiled by their overall beauty and tactility. Paved with cobbles and interspersed with soft landscaping in the forms of large containers, the courtyard is a coup. It somehow contrives to be peaceful, creating pockets such as the park room, with a good use of budget making use of its roof in a rich and engaging way. It is spatially adept, creating identity and interest at street level that respects the scale of neighbouring buildings.

To the north, the school fence is porous, creating identity and interest for the local area and for the local children. The exterior is well-detailed with generous openings, combining rationality and cohesion with a sense of history. Technically rich, the school has a school as a whole, with the plinth occupying almost the entire site. The school sits to the north, purchased by cut-away ground floor outdoor areas, while the housing to the south comprises two separate towers overlooking Hackney Downs Park. Set from the southern edge, these combine with the plinth in a modulated way that does not overwhelm the general massing. The interior is well designed; they feel like homes, with single-aspect units giving an upmarket feel.

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Outdoors, the school’s whitewashed decor is elegant and simple. Space organisation allows for passive surveillance with views out to the south comprises two separate towers overlooking Hackney Downs Park. Set from the southern edge, these combine with the plinth in a modulated way that does not overwhelm the general massing.

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Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, Haringey, London North

Populous for Tottenham Hotspur

Contract value: Confidential
GIA: 120,000 m²

Tottenham Hotspur’s new stadium is a tour de force in the design of sports facilities, delivering an unparalleled experience for users and benefits for the community in which it is firmly embedded.

Externally, the form and facades of the large building are carefully knitted to its low-rise, primarily residential, neighbourhood. The adjacent high street has been refurbished and new buildings sensitively added to improve the stadium’s connection to its urban context. The simple curved volume encloses the roofs of heritage buildings that line the widened pavement. A sweeping glazed entrance attenuates the building’s mass and brings activity to the street scene. The building’s inequality aligns the numerous requirements of the facade, including fire access, ventilation and fenestration. Angular panels catch the light delicately.

Inside, the experience for supporters is exceptional. Circulation spaces encircling the bowl are open and relaxed, and have significant architectural merit. Huge volumes and expressionistic structure bring light deep into the plan, where fans can enjoy attractive bars and food outlets.

The bowl incorporates additional features that surprise and delight: the grass pitch slides away to reveal an artificial American football pitch beneath, and a ‘Sky Walk’ allows people to view the stadium from the bowl’s rim. Wherever one looks, the architect has skilfully exploited the stadium’s structure and volume to improve the supporter experience.

Edwards Hill Hufton + Crow

REIACH AND HALL (2)

Sportscotland National Sports Training Centre Inverclyde, Largs, Scotland

Reiach and Hall for sportscotland

Contract value: £11m
GIA: 6700 m²
Cost per m²: £1600

Accessibility was vital; the brief stipulated that large teams of wheelchair users should be able to move easily all around the building. This has been elegantly achieved, with an impressive attention to detail. The building is a pleasure to be in, its generously proportioned spaces filled with natural light.

Architect Reiach and Hall responded to an open tender process with a design that was in keeping with its surroundings. The 6700 m² centre has stunning views of the Firth of Clyde and the mountains of Arran.

The centre has stunning views of the Firth of Clyde and the mountains of Arran. Each with large accessible wet rooms and floor-to-ceiling windows. Set on a woodland hillside, the client’s high-level sports and para-sports training aspirations. Used by elite athletes and local clubs, it has 60 fully adapted twin-occupancy residential rooms designed to exceed standard sizes, each with large accessible wet rooms and floor-to-ceiling windows. Set on a woodland hillside, the centre has stunning views of the Firth of Clyde and the mountains of Arran.

Sportscotland National Sports Training Centre Inverclyde, Largs, Scotland

Reiach and Hall for sportscotland

Contract value: £11m
GIA: 6700 m²
Cost per m²: £1600

The Standard, Camden, London North

Orms for Crosstree Real Estate Partners

Contract value: Confidential
GIA: 16,559 m²

Occupying a brutalist building that was once home to Camden Council, and located opposite the grade-I-listed Euston Station, the Standard is a stylish new London hotel and a beautifully resolved solution to a complex architectural brief.

Architect Orms responded to an open tender process with a proposal to refurbish the 1970s office block, both because that was the most sustainable option and in recognition of local affection for the building. That bid was successful and so the concrete frame and loadbearing concrete facade were retained and restored, resulting in substantial cost savings and beating the emissions benchmark of the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge by 60%.

A three-storied extension on top of the existing building made it possible to accommodate the 266 bedrooms required by the brief. Although the expression of the steel-clad extension draws on the geometry of the existing facade, its refinement and materiality also add to its design intelligence in reconciling the wishes of the local community and the client’s requirements, successfully weaving the constraints imposed by an existing building to fulﬁl a complex brief.

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The Standard, Camden, London North

Orms for Crosstree Real Estate Partners

Contract value: Confidential
GIA: 16,559 m²

Occupying a brutalist building that was once home to Camden Council, and located opposite the grade-I-listed Euston Station, the Standard is a stylish new London hotel and a beautifully resolved solution to a complex architectural brief.

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Motor vehicles race off with two of the winning slots in the RIBA National Awards, along with an office building that brings a welcome splash of green to inner London

**Workplace**

The Ray, Ilfeling, London North
Alford Hall Monaghan Morris for Viridis Real Estate Services
Contract value £41m GIA 11,777 m² Cost per m²: £3481

The Ray is a bright, contemporary office building that fits effortlessly into its urban context, responding successfully to its location at the intersection of busy Farringdon Road and the much quieter and narrower Ray Street.

The primary Farringdon Road facade is exquisitely composed. Strong horizontal banding indicates the building’s interior organization, and balancing vertical massing panels incorporating many different brick bonds, colours and textures. This playful composition echoes the variety found in the neighbourhood and is best described as urban.

The building really comes to life in response to the intimate scale of Ray Street, its massing is gently cut away to form a building with stepped terraces – a delight from the street and a witty play on the scale of Ray Street.

The entrance is a lively composition that draws you into the foyer, a large, all-white space with a large atrium. The circulation spaces are naturally lit and ventilated. Stone floors extend beyond the building into the landscape, which has been designed to connect the APCC to Jaguar Land Rover’s existing facilities on this former airbase. Waterways and a new park provide natural amenities for employees.

There is a Hollywood glamour to this space, as the home of the National Automotive Innovation Centre, the facility brings together research teams from academia and industry to develop new transport technologies. Among the many challenges was the need to protect the secrecy of car companies’ R&D work while creating shared spaces for collaboration and a feeling of connection within the building.

This has been achieved by careful distribution of security lines around the building and neutral, keeping the focus on the cars and models on display.

As befits a showcase for pioneering technology, the interiors have an elegance and lightness of touch, with rigorous detailing at every scale. It also has excellent sustainability credentials.

This is where the future of mobility is being invented, a process facilitated in high-tech labs and workshops, and celebrated in its internal moments like the bridge that carries cars through the atrium to be displayed in a rooftop garden. Reflecting the values and aspirations of its custodians, this building is innovative and above all beautifully crafted.

Jaguar Land Rover Advanced Product Creation Centre, Gaydon, West Midlands
Bennetts Associates for Jaguar Land Rover
Contract value Confidential GIA 58,952 m²

Jaguar Land Rover’s Advanced Product Creation Centre sits in rolling Warwickshire countryside, but is of such a size that its interior is best described in urban terms. The 59,000m² facility is a network of internal streets, bridges links and courtyards.

Visitors to this state-of-the-art automotive design and engineering facility enter a huge two- storey atrium flanked by retail areas, open-plan workspaces on the upper storeys, and eye-level displays of cars and engines. One can easily imagine product launches here, the permanent space further animated by crowds of people.

As the APCC gathers three separate businesses under one roof, there was particular focus on creating secure areas where staff can meet and work informally. The spaces are spread throughout the building and include a generous restaurant with wonderful views out to the countryside.

The east timber roof visually unites all parts of the building. Construction details reflect the precision of Jaguar Land Rover’s engineering. Timber is also used for flooring and the aerial network of internal streets, bridge links and courtyards.

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Jaguar Land Rover Advanced Product Creation Centre, Gaydon, West Midlands
Bennetts Associates for Jaguar Land Rover
Contract value Confidential GIA 58,952 m²
Floating Church, Hackney, London East
Denizen Works for Diocese of London
Contract value: Confidential
GIA: 45m²

Canals are a form of real estate that is under-used in many cities today. The Floating Church – currently moored on the River Lee Navigation canal, adjoining London’s Olympic Park – puts this infrastructure to community use. The Diocese of London intends the mobile church to serve the parishes of St Paul, Old Ford, and St Mary of Eton initially, but in future it may operate in other areas undergoing urban growth or change. A kinetic, folding roof structure can be laid flat to allow the newly built barge to pass under bridges.

The main space is small but can accommodate various activities, from church services to film screenings. The space inside the hull provides good head height, as canal boats go, with high quality finishes, well-considered built-in storage and bespoke wooden furniture. A central rooflight creates a pleasant pool of light to the main function area, which is complemented by the translucent sides of the canvas roof. At night, when the boat is lit inside, the pop-up roof acts as a beacon.

The folds of the pleated roof are picked up in zig-zag patterns on the internal window shutters and on the outside of the boat. Along with the colour scheme 8 bands as Art Deco character.

This is an imaginative and well-executed project: thought and care are evident in every aspect. From its construction by a traditional boat-builder to the use of the compact spaces and the accessibility of a church on water. A true community asset.

Cambridge Central Mosque, Cambridge
Marks Barfield for Cambridge Mosque Trust
Contract value: £23.2m
GIA: 4900m²
Cost per m²: £4385

Combining Islamic and English architectural traditions with a sensitive approach to context, this non-denominational mosque is specific to its place and time, rich in references yet without contrivance—a remarkable achievement.

Although it is a large building capable of accommodating 1000 people, the mosque has a modest presence in its low-rise, residential neighbourhood. Worshippers approach through an Islamic garden, arriving at an open, welcoming portico. Beyond, the building increases gradually in size; worshippers progress through an entrance hall and central ablution areas to arrive in the largest volume, the prayer hall.

Architecturally, the building’s defining features are engineered timber ‘trees’ that support the roof. These intricate columns manifest a geometric order that underlies the structural grid, developed in collaboration with the late artist and geometer Keith Critchlow and based on an Islamic pattern, ‘The Breath of the Compassionate’. The decorative use of structure also recalls the fan vaulting of nearby King’s College Chapel, and there are further references to local architecture in the building’s facades. Cross-laminated timber walls are clad in Cambridge Gault brick tiles. Protruding headers pick out a piece of Arabic Kufic calligraphy that reads ‘Say he is God (the) One’.

Material selection supports an ambitious sustainability agenda, achieving net zero carbon emissions in use and exceeding some RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge targets.

Cambridge Central Mosque shows how cultural and religious traditions can find new expression in contemporary architecture. It is a building of evident programmatic clarity, masterfully meeting its functional requirements in ways that also foster religious contemplation and delight.
Education projects grabbed the most RIBA National Awards this year with universities taking the lion’s share – which is probably good news for all those students scrambling for a place.

Kingston University London Town House, Kingston, London South West
Grafton Architects for Kingston University London
Contract value: £42.46m  GIA: 9056m²  Cost per m²: 4689

The Town House’s challenging brief framed a bold aspiration to design the beating heart for Kingston University within a building worthy of the international stage. Combining two dynamically opposed uses – dance studio and library – the highly accomplished result is both technically and spatially excellent, generating a warm and dynamic energy that truly captures the spirit of learning.

Conceptually, the building exploits two key devices: colonnade and courtyard. Wrapping the building in a tall colonnade gives it presence on the street, successfully balancing the need for a landmark statement with a respectful response to its context.

The collision and separation of opposing uses, like a dance itself, creates endless connections through voids, views, stairs and windows. When occupied by people, the dynamic interplay will prevent the building from feeling sterile or institutional.

The acoustics too are expertly controlled, with quiet and noisy uses set symbiotically side by side. Spaces flow freely around the inner courtyard where students meet, surrounded by creativity on all sides.

Environmentally, the building is BREEAM Excellent in design. Embodied carbon was reduced through structural efficiency and the use of better concrete mixes, designing out the need for a carbon intensive basement. The concrete frame’s thermal mass helps to regulate indoor temperatures, reducing the overall energy load.

High quality is evident at every scale, from the choice of materials to more abstract characteristics of warmth and flow. The muted colour palette and detailing is controlled and superbly executed – nothing is cut or out of place, everything is considered, creating a rich, beautiful canvas against which to set young creative minds free.
Bayes Centre, Edinburgh, RIAS
Bennetts Associates for University of Edinburgh
Contract value: Confidential
GIA: 9500m²

The Bayes Centre is the final phase of the University of Edinburgh’s Potterrow development, which started in 2003. It is a building for research, business and learning, designed to enable collaboration between different groups of users who are part of the data industry.

The Centre is designed around a tiered atrium, criss-crossed with various horizontal and vertical links that encourage people to linger and exchange ideas. The ground level creates a permeable pedestrian environment with a central courtyard.

The building is clad with prefabricated stone panels that match the local stone used for neighbouring buildings, along with polished white precast cladding to reflect sunlight in the courtyard. Landscaped roof terraces allow for spectacular views of the city and surrounding hills. Internally, the exposed concrete frame is modified with acoustic baffles and oak finishes to provide a sense of warmth.

It is a rigorous and adaptable design that should robustly meet the changing requirements of the university, and positively support the urban activity alongside the nearby Student Union and McEwan Hall.

The Dorothy Wadham Building, Oxford, South
Allies and Morrison for Wadham College, University of Oxford
Contract value: Confidential
GIA: 5432m²

The architectural language of this new student accommodation replicates the nearby traditional villas, but with a contemporary update. The blocks are arranged around a private landscaped garden, where students can relax.

On the busy Iffley Road, the main building maintains the height and grandeur of its neighbours, while those on the side streets step down to respect the scale of the cottage terraces typical of the area. This method of integrating the new scheme into the context is also evident in the retained rear access lane across the back of the site. This provides space for new communal facilities building and cycle stores.

Internally, the layout groups bedrooms sharing kitchen, dining and lounge facilities. Attention has been given to corridor ends, having windows and seating for informal use. Internal staircases incorporate lift wells and stair lights to help bring natural daylight from above down into the lower floors.

On the adjacent side street, the scheme also maintains the business use of a former workshop site, which has been redeveloped as light工作室 or separate commercial units.

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The RIBA Journal September 2021

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RIBA National Awards

Education

Royal College of Pathologists, Aldgate, London

East Benulloch Associates for Royal College of Pathologists

Contract value: Confidential

GIA: 4436 m²

The new headquarters for the Royal College of Pathologists serves a variety of functions by providing educational areas, workspaces, workshops, social spaces, areas for exhibitions and meetings, and overnight guest suites.

At the entrance, the modest concrete and brick street frontage leads to a striking double-height lobby. The toning craft of the use of materials is controlled and reducible but never stark, and brings the space to life. The concrete-off structure is expressed unoxoured, reflecting back the daylight soothingly. Brick is expressed as load-bearing on the first exposed facade, and used inside to make clear distinctions in hierarchy through the building.

A third set of materials covers the muscular brick and concrete, featuring wood slats in the window, bathroom, library, and the cold steel feature wall. The design retains the style and feel of the college’s former headquarters in St James’s, but introduces a ceremonial entrance stair in a new and modern way.

As a purpose-built headquarters, this adaptable, multifunctional building affords the conference greater flexibility than if it had stayed put. Its concrete-framed structure allows for large spaces, which can flex, add new floors, and by reducing the overall volume of concrete building dramatically cut back on embodied carbon with self-finishing mortar. The building can be sublet. As well as reusing the existing foundations, the architect has created a roofscape that responds to the city, and this connection is highly successful. It also translates into the internal spaces, each having a slight difference in character, orientation, and light in each of the zones on the upper floor.

The Lower Mountjoy Teaching and Learning Centre provides an inclusive and welcoming environment for teaching and learning at Durham University.

Although substantially a volume, a clever and layered design has resulted in the building feeling appropriate to its context rather than imposing. Externally, the main entrance appears secure and restrained, although the well-considered proportions of the elevations and hardwood brickwork give a softer feel on approach. A subtle manipulation of blocks establishes zones within the building and helps to create a more articulated series of facades when viewed from the outside.

Internally, the simplicity of the plan translates into easily manoeuvrable spaces with a clear hierarchy, all set around a dramatic but informal central atrium. The warmth of the space is aided by detailed timber work on the stair and balustrade, which draw visitors up and through the spaces.

The playful roof forms are one of the key elements of the design and are especially visible when passing the building to the south. The architect has created a roofscape that responds to the ad hoc evolution of the medieval rooftops of the city, and this connection is highly successful. It also translates into the internal spaces, each having a slightly different character, orientation, and light in each of the zones on the upper floor.

Overall, this is a highly accomplished building. Restrained and sophisticated, it provides both a welcoming environment and flexibility of use in a changing world of education. It is an outstanding addition to the university and the city.

In 1976, Grimshaw designed a single storey shed, a factory for furniture maker Herman Miller in a riverside site in Bath. Much admired at the time for its high-tech architectural language, it was listed grade II. In 2016, Bath Spa University approached Grimshaw to transform the factory into its schools of art and design and in doing so upgrade it to meet 21st century environmental standards.

Grimshaw responded with enthusiasm and creativity. The result is beautiful. Dramatically improving the energy performance involved insulating, upgrading and reinstating the external cladding panels, and replacing single glazing with high performance triple glazed units. The roof has been lifted on new Vierendeel girders and incorporated, discreetly set back clerestory glazing. This, and many more rooflights, brings daylight into the deep interior and cuts energy demand.

The cladding panels retain their original semi-random arrangement so that from facade, you would hardly know anything had changed, except that the building looks better than ever.

Inside, a full height internal void provides an organising mass, and helps make sense of the variety of large and small teaching and research spaces at ground and mezzanine levels. Interiors are open, calm and undifferentiated, a layered minimising machine. The 1970s structure is painted its original yellow. Hanging hoops, once for factory service runs, now support table tops in the open teaching areas.
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The apparently simple form of these new music studios at New College, Oxford, has been borne out of many constraints. These include planning requirements restricting the height, a Civil War rampart restricting the width, the desire to tie the building in with the adjacent accommodation, and the essential need for a lift large enough to get pianos to the top floor without sacrificing floor space.

The challenge has been successfully resolved with a stack of music studios and performance spaces that cater for the musicians’ needs. These are wrapped in a stone and glass envelope that respects the streetscape, well. In parts, the stonework has been worked, adding texture and detail to what could otherwise have been a flat stone box.

The music studios are well considered and are arranged around a glazed atrium which unifies the new building with the adjacent existing accommodation, and rationalises the floor level differences. Internally, the studios have been designed for their acoustics to allow students to practice and develop their skills.

On the lower ground floor, the main music space has dealt successfully with the constraints of the site. Taking advantage of its generous height, high-level windows provide views both skywards and to the street through the landscaping.

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RIBA National Awards

Education

The Clore Music Studios, New College, University of Oxford, Oxford, South
John McAslan + Partners for New College, University of Oxford
Contract value: £6.95m
Gla: 508m²
Cost per m²: £5906

The apparently simple form of these new music studios at New College, Oxford, has been borne out of many constraints. These include planning requirements restricting the height, a Civil War rampart restricting the width, the desire to tie the building in with the adjacent accommodation, and the essential need for a lift large enough to get pianos to the top floor without sacrificing floor space.

The challenge has been successfully resolved with a stack of music studios and performance spaces that cater for the musicians’ needs. These are wrapped in a stone and glass envelope that respects the streetscape well. In parts, the stonework has been worked, adding texture and detail to what could otherwise have been a flat stone box.

The music studios are well considered and are arranged around a glazed atrium which unifies the new building with the adjacent existing accommodation, and rationalises the floor level differences. Internally, the studios have been designed for their acoustics to allow students to practice and develop their skills. They are naturally-lit, with the glazing factored in to ensure the optimum acoustic performance.

On the lower ground floor, the main music space has dealt successfully with the constraints of the site. Taking advantage of its generous height, high-level windows provide views both skywards and to the street through the landscaping.
Oxford’s colleges have a history of commissioning architecture that is designed to enhance the education of future generations as well as providing a legacy to the built environment. As colleges expand in the city, they become more constrained. Finding new sites becomes a greater challenge, especially when looking within their own grounds.

The Student Centre, UCL, Bloomsbury, London
Nicholas Hare Architects for University College London
Contract value: £43.2m
GIA: 5,765m² Cost per m²: £7493

The Student Centre on UCL’s main Bloomsbury campus is a simple idea exceptionally well executed. Conceived as a giant wraparound stair with inhabited landings, it provides a terraced through-route at ground level and a hard-working double basement. Completing the fourth wall of a Japanese garden courtyard, it links seamlessly through to Gordon Street to help the flow of pedestrians. Its restrained, elegant material palette generates a calm and inviting atmosphere that belies the high volume of student traffic. The sober and rational courtyard elevation sits comfortably in its conservation setting. Reconstituted stone ground- and top-floor loggias emphasise the horizontality of a buff brick middle band and deep-set rhythm of windows. On the Gordon Street elevation, modulated window bays create depth and interest that holds up firmly to adjacent Georgian terraces.

In the fullest meaning of the word, it is sustainable. Integrating historically sensitive elements of the college grounds and buildings into the new scheme has been well conceived. Sitting behind the historic Sprott’s Wall, while also looking over it to the gardens beyond, the architectural concept was transparent wrap-around glass corners to allow visual connection through, and in doing so minimises the visual mass.

In providing the new building, the design has enhanced and revealed some of the existing context that was previously hidden away, while maintaining privacy where needed, such as for the President’s Garden.

In developing the brief for the new library and study centre, St John’s College and Wright & Wright Architects for St John’s College Oxford have achieved a building which delivers on many levels. There is a robust sustainable design criteria, with the commissioning of artisans for elements such as the stone artwork and joinery. This is combined with an attention to detail, connections and overall materials and finishes which does not go unnoticed.

The Library and Study Centre project has been used to link older parts of the college with newer parts, with the creation of new routes providing communal meeting points. The centre is student focused, with different types of reading/research space provided to cater for personal preferences and study methods. Integrating historically sensitive elements of the college grounds and buildings into the new scheme has been well conceived. Sitting behind the historic Sports Wall, while also looking over it to the garden, beyond, the architectural concept was transparent wrap-around glass corners to allow visual connection through, and in doing so minimises the visual mass.

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This building combines sports and science disciplines in one linear volume at the edge of the public school’s playing fields. Here, science classrooms, labs and greenhouse excitingly run above a sports hall, weighing gym, gym and performance space.

Rising on pilotis as it stretches south, its angled spine runs counter to the site’s natural slope and presents a dynamic form to the sports field. On this external elevation, translucent glass and solid grey panels are animated by views of the huge four-storey greenhouse and a whale skeleton hanging beyond a huge picture window. A tapering concrete extraction ramp allows for a seamless link to the playing field below. This elevated external space and foyer/café is a welcoming new focus point for the school.

Inside, the fluid circulation connects departments in plan and section, with glazing flooding the building with light and simultaneously draws into multiple spaces such as pool, dance hall and science classes. The sports field is now suspended from new trusses concealed in the roof above. While visited, the architects treated the building as if it were, reinstating the facade with the use of a single historical photograph. This was not a slavish recreation, however; it respected and adapted it to the needs of the interior without announcing its new function. Subtly cut steel beams that were once the ceiling, now cleverly support cantilevered balconies, while the original ceiling is now suspended from new trusses concealed in the roof above. This is an example of how to re-purpose an existing building for a range of uses in an imaginative, honest and sensitive way.

The Malt House, a fine example of local 19th century agricultural vernacular, had been used since the 1960s as a car-parts warehouse. Despite this, it remained incredibly atmospheric, offering enormous dramatic possibilities as a ‘found space’ for a performing arts centre. While visited, the architects treated the building as if it were, reinstating the facade with the use of a single historical photograph. This was not a slavish recreation, however; it respected and adapted it to the needs of the interior without announcing its new function. Its entrance is a simple iron archway. Though not artificially weathered, new brickwork is well matched to the uncleaned original.

The entrance area is dominated by a grand stair that runs up the building, rising from a pitch off the base of the central kiln. Light filters down from sunlights and reinstated brick ‘chimney’, revealing existing brickwork, ironwork, concrete ceilings and restored floor tiles. The entrance, now at the heart of the building, does not come at the expense of its original identity.

Entering the main theatre space, carved out of the former malt store, it seems almost inconceivable that this was not its original function. Saffy cut steel beams that were once the ceiling now cleverly support cantilevered balconies, while the original ceiling is now suspended from new trusses concealed in the roof above.

This is an example of how to re-purpose an existing building for a range of uses in an imaginative, honest and sensitive way.
This is a complex brief on a challenging site, well-established with lush green plants and flowers, to meet and interact across all year groups. Now delightful, creating a safe central place for students and staff to express themselves, the library is magic. The detail of the roof's construction is married to pragmatic demands for daylight with strong emphasis on energy efficiency. Solar shading and sun control, with the entire building sitting on top of a vast roof garden, are key. The result is a lyrical resolution of the very real challenges of both its size and location with circulation.
The new Office for Place was formally launched in July. What is it?

It’s a new office set up by the Ministry of Housing, which helps communities to encourage development that they find beautiful, and refuse what they find ugly. Initially it sits within the ministry but might later become an independent body. It aims to catalyse change across government, planning and the development sector to create popular, healthy, beautiful and sustainable places.

We have five main areas of work, but in the first year will focus on two: gathering evidence on popular placemaking, and sharing it with planners and neighbourhoods to support the creation of design codes – simple visual tools representing local character and preferences. The National Planning Policy Framework advises local authorities to develop design codes, and the new National Model Design Code gives guidance on the process. The government set the brief and worked with Urbed to produce it. Among other things, the Office for Place will support pilot codes in around 20 communities and share the learnings from that – the first pilots are up and running.

Research shows that opposition to development is often driven by lack of trust in developers and the planning process. Design codes can help make planning more certain in giving neighbourhoods and developers clarity about expectations for the design, layout and sustainability. This can give people more confidence about change. We would also benefit from a more diverse range of developers creating homes and neighbourhoods. To encourage competition from self-builders and small developers we need to reduce cost and risk. Regulation that is clear and comprehensible makes it easier for more people to do development. Design codes offer certainty and encourage diversity of supply and better outcomes.

Design codes won’t necessarily code for everything – councils will make their own calls on that. Codes will probably remain tight in conservation areas, but in towns contemplating urban extensions they might initially be quite loose. The aim is not to control all development in all circumstances. Codes can set a clear framework, and help provide a smoother route to planning consent. We don’t want to stop the weird and the wonderful, just level the playing field so we don’t rely on a small number of house builders to deliver the ‘good ordinary’.

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The new Office for Place aims to encourage popular development explains Nicholas Boys Smith, chair of its advisory board.

Design codes are a significant feature of the government’s proposed planning reforms. What are the benefits?

How will that happen?

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How will that happen?
Premium problems

With the price of professional indemnity cover rocketing, a roundtable brought together architects and insurance industry representatives to examine the situation.

Problems with professional indemnity insurance (PII) will not disappear, despite the best efforts of professionals, professional bodies and the insurance industry. These were the main conclusions of a roundtable discussion convened by RIBA Journal and chaired by Adrian Dobson, executive director professional services at the RIBA.

The discussion followed the paper that Dobson presented to RIBA Council, showing that not only had PII premiums risen but there were increasing numbers of exclusions for cladding, fire and basements. It also responded to a survey of members that highlighted widespread problems with PII (see page 43).

Indu Ramaswamy, a director at Allies and Morrison with responsibility for contracts and insurance, explained the situation at her 300-strong practice. ‘In the last two years,’ she said, ‘we have seen our PII premiums rise by 70 per cent.’ As a result, the practice had reduced its level of cover while keeping it high enough to honour the level in contracts. But, she said: ‘We had to write to clients with high levels of PII, warning them that it might not be commercially reasonable in the long term.’ In addition, she said, when negotiating PII for new contracts, there have been exclusions. As a result, ‘we have lost contracts, particularly where we have been novated. Some contractors refuse to carry on with us.’

The other architect in the discussion was at the opposite end of the scale. Maggie Mullan is a sole practitioner based in Liverpool, with clients who are a mix of blue-chip organisations, educational bodies and local authorities. Her PII, she said, had gone up by about 25 per cent, an increase that was made more difficult by her fluctuating workload during the pandemic. And she is very worried about future uncertainty and had been looking at the ‘nature of claims’.

Paul Dinwoodie, executive director at insurance broker Gallagher (which owns the RIBA Insurance Agency), was the first, but not the last, to use the term ‘perfect storm’. One of the reasons PII costs had risen, he said, was simply that previously they had fallen too low.

The Lloyd’s review of 2018 showed that PII was the second worst-performing form of insurance and recommended there be a reduction in capacity. Insurers took note and prices started to rise. The Grenfell tragedy,
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The seminar by Colin Blatchford-Brown for fire safety in residential buildings, was one of, if not the best I have ever attended. Full stop. Well presented, concise, but enough detail to really take something away with you and make you think. Excellent.

That aside, I really like the webinar format. Extremely convenient and for some unknown reason I found it much easier to concentrate, sitting on my comfortable settee. This will sound terrible, but being able to do my knitting whilst listening seems to help me focus.

Weibke Rietz, Dipl Arch PgDipCons RIBA CEPH, Alchemilla Architects Ltd

In the short term, Peat said, ‘We need to unlock things. The insurance industry will not fix things overnight. The only way to unlock claims is for remedial work to be done, and to decide who will pay’. She was referring to the money that needs to be spent on defective cladding and other problems revealed in the wake of Grenfell. Fortunately, she said, ‘we [CLC] have good representation on a group from MCCLG and BEIS [the housing and business ministries]. We are saying we need a quick fix that is well defined so that it uses taxpayers’ money well. If government could intervene to cover for the safety risk, to get the work done, we could get back to pre-Grenfell ways.’

Some rise in premiums may be inevitable but other increases are not. ‘Post Grenfell’, Dinwoodie said, ‘insurers are petrified. Where the law is not clear, nobody knows where this liability will be. Insurers have no interest in insuring a risk that they can’t price. We need clarity over liability.’

There was a feeling that the current situation is unsustainable. If architects’ practices are unable to get PII, or if they fail, the burden will have to be carried elsewhere in the industry. ‘If we are taking longer term and big ideas,’ said Peat, ‘the industry will have to pay decent prices for decent fees and pay a decent amount for PII.’

Meanwhile, a further potential problem has recently arisen, as Dobson explained. The Building Safety Bill, introduced to Parliament on 30 June, makes mention, unlike the draft, of the Defective Premises Act 1972. The bill looks to more than double the limitation period over which designers may be liable for buildings that are ‘not fit for habitation’. Dobson said: ‘There could be complex unforeseen circumstances.’

Ramaswamy said that previously Alliess and Morrison had not worried about the bill. ‘It seemed such a high threshold, we thought the risk was minimal,’ she said. ‘But now we are questioning whether it means buildings where cladding has to be taken off. It poses more questions than it answers.’ Dobson said the RIBA would give evidence to the scrutiny committee about this. But if the government doesn’t listen, this could make existing PII problems even worse.

Professional indemnity insurance has moved from being a minor nuisance to a major problem. A solution must come, before it breaks the profession. »
13 Oct 2021 — 30 Jan 2022

Stateless Heritage
DAAR (Decolonizing Art Architecture Research)

Indemnity insurance costs are soaring while exclusions are forcing practices to turn down work, an RIBA survey shows

Adrian Malleson

Is obtaining affordable and comprehensive professional indemnity insurance (PII) now the most significant threat to the business of architecture?

For some time, RIBA members have been providing anecdotal reports of rapidly escalating PII costs and of policies being revised to apply an increasing range of exclusions and restrictions. As part of its response, the RIBA ran a survey into PII among its chartered members. The results described below give a broad and evidence-based understanding of the issues, which the RIBA will use to put forward the architects’ view. The survey ran from June to early July 2021 with members proving keen to share their experiences and views; there were 1,405 responses to the survey, though not all respondents answered all questions.

Figure 1: By what percentage has the cost of your PII increased since you last renewed it?

Overall, the findings are clear: PII costs are rising. Eighty per cent of respondents reported a rise in premiums at their last renewal. For almost a half, they had increased by 25 per cent or more, and for 32 per cent the increase was at least 50 per cent. At the top end of the scale, 17 per cent said premiums had doubled or more (see figure 1).

Close analysis of the data, combined with reports from the industry, suggest that slightly fewer smaller practices were facing increases and that those increases were smaller. Responses from those who had renewed a policy more recently suggest that renewal costs may be beginning to level out.

And while costs have been going up, so too has the policy excess for many. While a majority (62 per cent) have seen no excess increase, 39 per cent have, with 16 per cent seeing excess increases of 100 per cent or more.

PII exclusions

The issue is not just cost but obtaining adequate cover. The survey showed 39 per cent of respondents reporting that one or more insurers had declined to provide a quotation that met their requirements. This may not only be from their existing insurer but from other potential PII providers.

Insurers are frequently restricting coverage, almost three-quarters (73 per cent) of respondents reported having had one or more exclusions added to their policy. The graph overleaf (figure 3) shows three significant areas where restrictions and limitations are being applied: cladding, fire-safety and basements.

Looking at the responses for each answer, 56 per cent report an exclusion or limitation (or both) being added in respect of cladding, and 49 per cent report a restriction or exclusion (or both) being added in respect of fire-safety. At a time when architects’ expertise is increasingly needed to remedy dangerously clad buildings and resolve significant fire-safety concerns, a majority (54 per cent) of respondents reported an exclusion added to their policy at renewal on at least one of fire-safety, cladding and buildings 18m or higher.

Given that these responses cover only added exclusions and restrictions, a lack of
cladding, fire and tall-building PII cover may be even more widespread.

These restrictions and limitations are leading practitioners to completely or partly stop accepting commissions for certain types of projects across the range of building types (housing, offices, retail etc). In the 12 months leading up to the survey, 22 per cent of respondents reported that their practice had completely or partly stopped accepting commissions for certain types of buildings or services because of changes in PII cost and availability.

And it is not just affecting buildings with a heightened fire risk. A significant number of practices have stopped accepting commissions on projects that include, for example, swimming pools or basements.

The overall result is that the current PII market is proving a barrier to architects’ ability to work on the very projects where they are most needed, where their unique range of professional skills is irreplaceable.

Attitudes to PII

As well as looking at the facts about the specific price and exclusions of renewed PII, the survey explored architects’ attitude to the state of the PII market in general, and the direct effect it is having upon them and the wider built environment.

For every question the RIBA asked about architects’ views on the PII market, a very clear majority of respondents agreed with a series of statements that described significant issues.

Of those surveyed, 87 per cent agreed that ‘new exclusions in PII mean there are types of projects that architects can’t work on’ and 74 per cent that ‘changes in PII are pushing architects out of the design process’. This is not just an issue for the profession, but the future of the built environment. With a need to create more decent housing, liveable cities and a sustainable built environment, 80 per cent agree that ‘changes in PII threaten the UK’s ability to create the buildings it needs’. PII is also having a direct effect on the business viability of practices just as we begin to emerge from the health and economic onslaught of the pandemic – 69 per cent agree that ‘the current cost of PII is threatening our business viability’.

Adrian Malleson is head of economic research and analysis at the RIBA.
People have been exploring local areas more than ever. This competition seeks ideas for a playful structure to provide a place to rest and enhance a walk outdoors – with a chance to win £1,000.

**Wanderer’s Wonder**

The RIBA Journal September 2021 ribaj.com

For our physical and mental wellbeing, daily walks have become synonymous with the pandemic lockdowns. Many of us have evolved out to explore local environments beyond our front doors more than ever before. We’ve potted the streets, parks, paddy fields, and grids exploring closer to home. We’ve got to know familiar places better and found new ones along the way.

Wanderer’s Wonder is a new competition brought to you by RIBA Journal and the Galvanizers Association. It invites proposals for a fun, playful building or structure for rest and recuperation that would enhance a walk in the great outdoors – rural or urban, near to home or far, in which you could spend a few minutes or stay overnight.

Designs can include any imagined facilities. The structure must use galvanized steel ideally both structurally and aesthetically. Judges will be looking for sustainable and green in line with the circular economy.

Is it a platform that enables a better viewpoint? An information kiosk that guides you further? A conversation of the Scottish Bothy or a refuge of a different kind on the seashore? Anything goes as long as it’s wonderful, brings out the allure of its kind on the seashore? Anything goes as long as it’s wonderful, brings out the allure of its environment and is a thing of beauty.

**THE B Brief**

In this idea competition, we are looking for entrants to design a building or structure for the fun, rest and recuperation. You can have any other additional function but should be modular, demountable, portable and be designed to promote and draw out the beauty of a place. It does not need a specific location but should be intended conceptually for a location in the UK or Ireland with their climatic conditions. While the building will be made up of a palette of materials, we would like to see hot dip galvanized steel as an integral part of the overall material strategy, ideally both structurally and aesthetically, and the structure to be unattractively sustainable.

**SUBMISSION**

Entries must include the following and be laid out on no more than two A3 sheets, supplied electronically as pdfs:

- An explanation of no more than 500 words, describing the building design, stating where galvanized products have been used during the construction stages, build-up and material composition
- An online video or any other images

**ELIGIBILITY**

- Open to qualified Part 1, Part 2, Part 3 and any other students and architects
- Projects must be theoretically cited in the UK or Ireland

**GALVANIZERS ASSOCIATION**

To be announced in September 2021

**ENTER**

ribj.com/wandererswonder

**DEADLINE**

2pm UK time on Monday 15 November 2021

**NOTES**

- The judges’ decision is final
- The first prize is £1,000 and there are three commended prizes of £250.
- Shortlisted entries will be notified in writing, with winners announced in the RIBA Journal February 2022 print issue and on ribaj.com.
- No correspondence will be entered into by the organisers or judges regarding entries and final decisions.

**THE JUDGES**

To be announced in September 2021

**P R O D U C T S A F E T Y**

Following revelations at the Grenfell Inquiry, can the Building Safety Bill re-establish trust between architects and product suppliers?

**Value engineering can lead to products being "swapped out" without the implications being fully considered**

**Product safety**

Not only does this process leave architects doing work twice; for no additional fee, it also tends to make suppliers reluctant to go the extra mile when assisting architects during the initial design stages because of the likelihood their products will be substituted by those of their competitors. Also, the commercial pressures of value engineering can lead to last minute changes where products are ‘swapped out’ immediately prior to contract award without the implications being fully considered. This increases the potential for errors in design coordination, or worse, lapses in building safety.

Over this time, these processes have eroded relationships between architects and the supply chain, and reduced the quality of design outputs at the preconstruction phase. These problems are not unique to the UK. According to HKA’s 2020 CRUX Insight Report, the top causes of construction claims and disputes globally were scope change, incorrect or incomplete design, poor management of subcontractors, suppliers and their interfaces. So, how can manufacturers be encouraged to develop and market their products appropriately, and how can supply chains be better engaged by architects to restore confidence, increase efficiency and maintain design continuity?

**Value engineering can lead to products being “swapped out” without the implications being fully considered.**
At the RIBAJ Fire Safety in Practice webinar in the summer (see pages 86-87), CPA chief executive Peter Caplehorn noted there is insufficient testing capacity within the UK to meet these demands and said urgent discussions were underway with the government to seek agreement on a more practical regime for the fire testing of construction products for 2022 and beyond. This will facilitate the challenges presented by worldwide material shortages, supply chains, and increased demand for cladding materials in the UK to accommodate the widespread post-Grenfell remediation programmes being undertaken.

**Improved engagement**

Much has been reported on the Building Safety Bill’s implementation of ‘the golden thread’, where duty holders will be required to maintain up-to-date digital records of design information requiring formal approvals at key ‘gateways’ over the course of a project.

The introduction of these defined hold points within the programme, alongside a more rigorous approach to design management and change control, should help reduce the proliferation of product substitutions and value-engineering changes that blight the design process. Historically, parties have been less inclined to change materials where samples have already been signed-off with planning authorities so as to avoid disrupting the approvals process (a prospectionally attractive commercially). It is likely the new regime will initiate similar restraints.

In order to fully realise the golden thread’s objectives, there will need to be increased collaboration between designers and suppliers. An example of this is architects and manufacturers working alongside the NBS (National Building Specification) to develop NBS Source, which is intended to provide structured, high-quality product data to include all relevant performance criteria and certifications.

The introduction of defined hold points should help reduce the proliferation of product substitutions that blight the design process. The golden thread is being seen as a catalyst for wider industry adoption of BIM with opportunities to link NBS Source data (and specifications aligned under NBS Chorus) to the BIM model to create a fully integrated ‘digital twin’ for the building’s life cycle. RIBA’s CRUX Insight Report has observed that while the global Covid-19 pandemic has had many negative impacts on the construction industry, the consequent increase in remote working and use of cloud-based technologies has accelerated the digitalisation of construction workflows and buoyed the increased productivity. The NBS 10th Annual RIBA Report 2020 confirmed that, while BIM adoption has grown substantially over the last decade, the lack of client demand and perceived unsuitability to certain project types continue to act as barriers.

Embedding digital technologies through the adoption of the UK BIM Framework is one of 14 key policies summarised under the government’s Construction Playbook, which promotes delivery excellence across public-sector procurement by harnessing the potential of best industry practice. The playbook focuses on establishing key project outcomes from the outset and seeks to foster behavioural change from delivery teams by employing a more balanced approach to risk allocation.

Other policies include encouraging the use of early supply chain involvement, effective collaborative contracting and offsite construction to minimise greenhouse gas emissions. By engaging teams much earlier in the design process under framework agreements, the playbook promotes the use of early contractor involvement with a pre-assembled team of consultants, subcontractors and suppliers of construction products to develop the scheme design collaboratively while minimising wasteful design changes later in the programme.

It remains to be seen how architects will adapt to these proposed reforms and whether the drive for increased collaboration and standardisation will be seen by some as a restraint on creativity. But it is clear the profession must adapt to embrace this widespread cultural change if it is to rise to the challenge of constructing safer and more sustainable buildings while delivering real value for clients and communities.

Paul Jolly is associate technical director at Preoday Murrell HKA
Ecological elegance

Kaldewei does more than craft sleek, stylish eco-friendly bathrooms – it also demonstrates a strong commitment to environmental issues.

Awareness of the need for sustainability and environmental cognizance within the industry is increasing.

In this respect, Kaldewei is something of a pioneer. For more than 100 years, this family-run company has been transforming raw materials into steel enamel and crafting long-lasting, recyclable bathroom products.

“We need a shared understanding of what sustainable building means. It has to be measurable, applicable and comparable,' says Franz Kaldewei.

The qualities that set Kaldewei’s steel enamelled bathroom solutions apart from plastic products and contribute to their eco-friendliness and climate-neutrality from plastic products and contribute to their longevity.

Kaldewei works with partners and architect networks, such as InteriorPark, one of the leading platforms for sustainable interior architecture and eco-friendly design, to raise awareness of sustainable building among professionals and private builders.

Kaldewei has been at the forefront of everything the nuclear industry does. I work for Sellafield and our mission is to clean up the nuclear site once and for all the nuclear industry can teach us about safety. How this works in practice is that everyone we work with from external consultants, contractors, stakeholders and regulators are all made to understand that safety is part of every decision we take.

Let me give you some examples.

At Sellafield, every meeting or workshop we hold begins with a ‘safety share’. This is often delivered by the meeting chair and is an integral part of every meeting we have. The attendees listen and learn from a five-minute safety presentation, and then debate the lessons learned. Examples can come from other industries as well as from nuclear.

A strong part of our safety design measures is in our ‘gated design process’ where we move through several stages or, rather, gates. Gates are defined as studies, concept, preliminary and detail design phases, and in order to pass through each gate you must hold safety reviews which inform the safety case strategy. Approval of the safety case is mandatory before any construction can begin.

To allow safe passage through each gate, we hold single-discipline design reviews carried out by panels including independent people who are competent and who understand the key features of the design. This has been something that the nuclear industry has been doing for many years.

Part of being a nuclear professional means actively taking responsibility to create a culture of safety. How this works in practice is that everyone we work with from external consultants, contractors, stakeholders and regulators are all made to understand that safety is part of every decision we take.

Let me give you some examples.

For more information on all Kaldewei products visit www.kaldewei.co.uk

KALDEWEI
this is to understand how learning from other projects on safety has been embedded into the project and is also used to share best practice.

Hazards-in-construction reviews – or “hazcons” – are part of the measures we use to engage with the contractor. We work in collaboration to design out any significant hazards. One of the main uses of the process is to provide auditable evidence that designers have taken the necessary measures to remove, reduce or control hazards of both construction and future maintenance of the structure as required by law.

Where risks remain that cannot be designed out, details of these residual risks can be summarised and communicated to the main contractor to ensure that it is aware of its obligations and, therefore, able to control all the significant risks that will exist during the project’s construction phase.

During the design process, you are required to log any design risks from all disciplines on a central risk register, which is monitored by the safety team and principal designer. This is regularly reviewed by the project, involving all discipline leads. Everyone on the project needs to be aware of the risks that other disciplines are carrying. These risks are then fed into a live document called the safety case, and inform the project of the risks that need to be addressed. These are monitored through holding regular risk reviews.

Architects are also required to write a basis of design document. This records how the function of architecture will meet the client’s requirements. The primary purpose is to record the basis for all design decisions, addressing requirements and logging any assumptions you have made throughout the design process. Each design basis is given a trackable reference code and we regularly review every assumption.

Architects write a basis of design document, each basis is given a trackable reference code and we regularly review every assumption. Someone more experienced will check the drawings to the required level and add a signature. In addition, the approver of the drawing will be a different person and is often the lead architect, who will take full responsibility by signing the drawings. No drawing will be registered or built from without these three signatures, ensuring a fresh pair of eyes is given to each drawing.

On smaller projects you may not have the budget or time for carrying out all the above safety suggestions, however even some of these applied appropriately could save lives. The creation of an enhanced safety culture within the construction sector can only be a good thing. Can we make things safer? My project for a silos maintenance facility took 1,286 days to construct and we had no reportable accidents on site. That is quite a record for most construction sites but a common occurrence on nuclear projects.

Jason Boyle is a nuclear architect at Sellafield Ltd.
Changes to the UK construction industry to ensure it delivers safer tall buildings will be complex and fraught with challenges. These are already under way as expert panellists discussed at the ‘Fire Safety in Practice – How to Mitigate the Risks’ webinar, hosted by RIBA Journal and Hilti in July.

The government introduced its Building Safety Bill and accompanying fact sheets in early July. These were swiftly followed by the Building Regulations Advisory Committee’s golden thread report, setting out the definition and principles of the golden thread of information that extends through a building’s design, construction and operation. So documentation is coming at the industry thick and fast, along with the first demand of the new regime. This requires fire safety information to be submitted for approval at three gateway points – planning, pre-construction and completion – for higher risk, multi-occupied residential buildings of 18m or more or seven or more storeys in height. Compliance with the first gateway was required from 1 August.

‘Pandora’s Box has without question opened for the entire construction industry,’ says Tane Duncan, RIBA past president and chair of the RIBA Expert Advisory Group on Fire Safety, as she opened the ‘Fire Safety in Practice’ webinar.

‘The implications of the bill are enormous. We have a complete rethink of our competence requirements, we’re going to have to think about retraining and taking CPD, our responsibilities as architects within the bill itself will change, and the principal designer role will come into force as a new dutyholder.’

Central to the new regime is the principal designer, whose dutyholder role is set out in a government fact sheet. Paul Bussey, senior technical consultant at Allford Hall Monaghan Morris and a member of the RIBA Expert Advisory Group on Fire Safety, compared this role to that of an orchestra conductor: ‘We don’t have to know how to play all the instruments but we need to know when it’s sounding wrong and pull everyone together to create a symphony.’

‘We need to step up to the plate and do it, but we have a seat at what’s called the Intention Industry Competence Committee, who will be setting the level of accreditation and competence expected of our members.’

‘There are a few onus on architects to take this role on,’ says Matthew Needham-Laing, partner – construction and engineering, at firm Edwin Co. Architects are front and centre of the bill as they are the only construction professional body that has a statutory obligation to do CPD, basically in relation to fire safety. If architects don’t comply with their CPD requirements in terms of the bill, then they could get sanctioned.’

Needham-Laing saw problems in aligning the operation of the gateway regime with the realities of managing a project: ‘The build doesn’t really lend itself to design and build. When you get to the second gateway, the assumption is that the design is completed and it is handed over to the contractor who takes over as the principal contractor and builds,’ he said.

‘It is the area where architects have least control because they are often not the people who determine the procurement process in that wider sense of what contracts will be used to get a building built.’ Ultimately, he suggested, this could be resolved through greater adoption of collaborative contracts.

Uncertainty continues around several areas as the bill works its way through parliament – expected to take at least nine months – and secondary legislation is put into play. However, the panellists said, there are steps architects can take now. Peter Caplehorn, chief executive of the Construction Products Association (CPA) said: ‘The issue is to get organised.’

Next tools are helping architects gather information, with RIBA’s Fire Safety Compliance Tracker tool, which enables project teams to record and share fire safety information, issued in July.

The quality of product information is being addressed by a Code for Construction Product Information, which is being developed by the CPA with the Considerate Constructors Scheme. This 11-point code, due to be published in November, aims to ensure manufacturers’ information is clear, transparent, obvious, honest and available.

Architects are already asking manufacturers for more information. ‘While in the past, we would have been contacted by specialist contractors down the chain during installation phases, we’ve recently been approached more by designers and architects, which we welcome as it allows us to engage and support much earlier in the construction process,’ said Olga Katsanova, head of product management for Hilti UK. ‘It allows us to open underwriters’ doors,’ says Jenny Carter-Vaughan, managing director at Affinity Select Insurance Services, highlighting the bill’s intention to extend the time limit for claims under the Defective Premises Act to 15 years, and to extend the time limit for claims under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations to 30 years. ‘We can help snare the real culprit and make sure our products fit into BIM models and support the industry through BIM services, for example,’ she said.

‘As the principal designer, it seems to me that architects will be left holding the baby,’ she said. ‘I know it’s not particularly exciting, but record keeping and the quality of those records are going to be the things that enable you potentially to defend claims if they are made against you.’

How looks like the time to get ready. •

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How looks like the time to get ready. •
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Thursday 11 November: Making Friends

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3: Culture
Take a look at the photo. What is your eye drawn to? Is it the tower block filling the frame or the woman and her child in the foreground? And what assumptions have you made? None of these questions went through the mind of Tim Crocker when he captured this image. On a recce last month to shoot Allies & Morrison’s new Hale Wharf housing on London’s River Lea, he had, at that moment, his eye pressed to the viewfinder. With the building pulled into focus and shutter speed set, it had been an instinctive response to fire the shutter release as a new object moved into view, registering as a blur of brown, black, white and red.

‘It started as a formal view of a building in its urban context, but the split second that the woman entered the frame, it became something else; an image about what an image is,’ Crocker tells me. He notes the distant look in her eyes, passing as if oblivious to him or even her surroundings: ‘Perhaps she was tired carrying the child – I wondered how far she’d walked like that along the canal.’

He’s right. Her appearance changes what you take from the building. Blink and it could be a scene from elsewhere; a casualty of rapid gentrification, a refugee issue, a war-torn state. That glass may not reflect clouds but be blown-out window holes, sky viewed beyond the empty shell of the building. It is confronting, thinks Crocker, because the woman forces us to challenge our presumptions based on our own innate prejudices. We started at a tower in Tottenham and somehow ended up at the Tower of David in Caracas. From a western perspective, how did we get here and what does it say about us? •

Jan-Carlos Kucharek
Tim Crocker
Hale Wharf, 2021
You still have time to design a house daylit from above, but hurry – the competition closes on 21 September.

CRITERIA
Judges will look for imaginative but workable schemes which take full heed to daylight as an opportunity to explore the potential of daylight, borrowed daylight and sky views in a domestic setting. The winning proposal will:

- Be spatially innovative
- Relate the form and architectural character of the building to the sources of available light
- Turn the limitations of the site into an architectural advantage

SUBMISSIONS
Entries must include the following:

- An entry form, including a text of no more than 400 words, describing the approach to daylighting
- Drawings laid out on no more than two A3 sheets, supplied as pdfs. These are to include:
  - Floor plans, including north point
  - 3D axonometric or perspective images that convey the nature of the proposition
- Any supplementary images you may consider helpful to explain the proposition

DEADLINE: 14:00 hours, Monday 21 September

PRICE
Wining and commended entries will be published on ribaj.com, one entry in the print edition of the RIBA Journal. There is no cash prize for the winning entry, and £500 each for three commended entries.

JUDGES
Glenn Botsford  Director and head of design at Glenn Botsford Architects, whose projects include the Manor Metal-shuttered Light House and the subterranean House in a Garden
Tatiana von Preussen  Co-founder of vPPR, whose design of the entire home

Download the entry form at: ribaj.com/lightroof

As our cities densify, and straightforward sites become ever more scarce, attention turns to backland plots and enclosed courtyards that – with a good dose of perseverance and architectural ingenuity – have turned such courtyards that – with a good dose of persistence and architectural ingenuity – have turned such

With a sense of trespass, creep around the rear of a building and you’ll find another, often very different side of its character, says Eleanor Young.

'Older buildings are less discreet and a little more interesting'
Demolition of Swindon’s domed Oasis Leisure Centre would destroy the last of an entire typology, says Will Wiles

Geography is destiny, as they say in Swindon. The Wiltshire market town’s location between London and Bristol made it an important stop on the Great Western Railway, and Brunel placed his engine works there. About a century and a half later, the town’s location halfway between Oxford and Bath meant it was where my sister and I were taken for days out with our similarly aged, Avon valley-based cousins. But what was there to do in Swindon? Well, that was the best part: we went to the Oasis Leisure Centre.

The Oasis, you must understand, was not your common-or-garden leisure centre. Designed by Mark Potiriadis at Gillinson Barnett & Partners in the mid-1970s, it had three thrilling water slides, a wave machine, and a number of other attractions, all underneath a 24m high glazed dome. Architectural treasure-houses they might be, but Oxford and Bath are a little short on wild-eyed fun. Raised in tourist centres, we went to Swindon to get away from it all. Words cannot quite capture the visceral excitement that built up as we awaited the next trip.

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Words cannot quite capture the visceral excitement that built up as we awaited the next trip. Typically tropical

The dome, it must be said, is not the prettiest of an entire typology, says Will Wiles

Early drawing of the Oasis centre, complete with the right of the outside it was taken from.

Untypically tropical

Demolition of Swindon’s domed Oasis Leisure Centre would destroy the last of an entire typology, says Will Wiles

Words cannot quite capture the visceral excitement that built up as we awaited the next trip.

The rise of the leisure world

The world-apart quality is an underrated factor in making a leisure attraction a success. Soft-play facilities capitalise on this intensifying effect. Their play components are not individually fascinating, but bolted together in an enclosed, child-scaled, three-dimensional labyrinth, they become irresistible. The same is true of the adult equivalent of soft play, cruise ships, and is what makes them more appealing than the meagre sum of their parts.

One can understand why that makes modern leisure providers a little wary of immersive, intensively themed attractions. Also, they are vulnerable to the tides of fashion. Who now appreciates Laser Quest, another pocket paradise of my youth? Gone the way of Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens and the Oxford Street Pantheon. But the rising popularity of escape rooms and interactive theatre experiences suggests that appetite remains.

But that is because it is highly functional, and the function is the manufacture of joy. Inside, it is more industrial than Xanadu. But that is because it is highly functional, and the function is the manufacture of joy. Inside, it is more industrial than Xanadu. But that is because it is highly functional, and the function is the manufacture of joy. Inside, it is more industrial than Xanadu. But that is because it is highly functional, and the function is the manufacture of joy. Inside, it is more industrial than Xanadu. But that is because it is highly functional, and the function is the manufacture of joy. Inside, it is more industrial than Xanadu.

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Happily the Oasis can be saved. It is a place Swindon can be proud of. After all, I have had a soft spot in my heart for the town for years thanks to those days out. Meanwhile, I am pleased to note that a new typology of leisure world is due to appear in early 2021: Folkstone is getting a purpose-built, multi-storey skate park. May they blossom across the land. Let city-centre car parks become skate parks, water parks, soft-play extravaganzas, laser quests, escape rooms... * * *

Early drawing of the Oasis centre, complete with the right of the outside it was taken from.

LORD RICHARD WILLES

At time of writing, Historic England was still waiting for the DCMS’s listing decision for the Oasis. It will likely be decided one way or the other before this column appears. The Save Oasis Swindon campaign can be found at www.facebook.com/savetheoasis.

Will Wiles is a writer. Read him here and on ribaj.com

Early drawing of the Oasis centre, complete with the right of the outside it was taken from.

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The RIBA Journal September 2021

ribaj.com
Simon Allford takes up the presidency this month, with a determination to get ideas into the open to disrupt business as usual. His mission to open up the RIBA’s buildings as places to collaborate, host and promote will help that

Disruptive influence

Simon Allford has spent the last year, since being voted RIBA president elect, making plans. His ‘House of Architecture’ election headline needed more detail, a strategy, initiatives. He stood for election knowing there was a moment of opportunity, urged by those who recognised his criticisms of the RIBA to take action. He saw the new way the RIBA was governed gave a possibility of a more dynamic decision making process and the £172 million from the sale of the RIBA’s NBS technology arm meant there would never a better moment to create change.

On one of those super hot summer days I waited in the cool basement lair of the White Collar Factory near London’s Old Street that Simon Allford’s Stirling Prize winning practice, Allford Hall Monaghan Morris, took on just before the pandemic; in the building it designed. Regimented desks march away from the entrance, light filters down from above past green steel beams, filmic and architectonic – Jean Prouvé meets Wes Andersen. Allford arrives, on foot from AHMM’s long term base five minutes’ walk away. He is hot but cool headed, even when we move to the heat of the running track on the roof for portraits. There is no jogging here but plenty of chat. I glean a little of his personal life, the pleasure of the walk to work, changes as his twin daughters (there is a younger one too) start secondary school, his Marylebone flat and annexing the one below and the endless building work that entailed. But when we take our seats around the board table in the biggest meeting room, Allford is focused on presidential business – the RIBA supporting architects and architecture.

Allford’s House of Architecture addresses the fact that the institute at 66 Portland Place ‘feels like a venue’. But more important is the mindset, not just the building but the whole operation – from website to policy pronouncements – should feel like it is welcoming people, a generous host. ‘Members are the RIBA,’ he says. ‘They are its intellectual powerhouse.’ Interest groups should be meeting here, people coming to the bar and finding stimulating conversation, other organisations using the space for talks or exhibitions – clients and other professions should be welcomed. Such an experience, via an exhibition, was formative for AHMM itself in its early days. And this model of collaborating, hosting and promoting saw the rebirth of the Architecture Foundation while Allford was chair. Such interchange can lead to reinvigoration – often by disruption, he hopes.

Allford has been working with the RIBA for years, including stints on the group that steers the RIBA Awards. As RIBA vice president for education (2004-9) he was one of those shaking up architectural education, asking why it was so divorced from practice and how teaching practices and apprenticeships might work. When shortly afterwards the London School of Architecture began pioneering teaching through practice, Allford was invited to be a trustee, a role in which he continues.

Another example of this more open way of working might be the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge. He applauds it as coming from members and being
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Culture Profile

neither too prescriptive nor too dumbed down but something that ‘sets us off’ on the right course. And it does a good job of encouraging government in the same direction, he notes. Talking of government, the RIBA can share the ways that design, say of the green economy, is being implemented by the profession and different ways of approaching a problem. And not just government. ‘We can take clients on a journey,’ says Allford. He wants to show them intelligent, demountable and low carbon buildings.

There are some major issues to tackle in architecture right now. ‘Our biggest challenge is a low carbon built environment,’ says Allford with conviction. ‘Covid-19 is a left-field curve ball. Buildings have been too sealed, that is a 30 or 40 year blip. Now we have the correction. We need to get back to the basic laws of physics: thermally massive is good, light is good, access to the sky is good. Covid has accelerated our understanding of the importance of air changes and the generosity of volume.’

Allford traces his environmental genesis back to his architect father’s advice on low energy buildings. From that came the low energy Great Notley School in Essex, completed in 1999, a response to the Rio Earth Summit. And the Angel Building, in north London, completed in 2010, with its high profile re-use of the concrete frame showing a way for radical refurbishment. ‘It was pragmatic,’ he says, rather than claiming a grand plan. ‘If you think carefully you can adapt or extend.’ The White Collar Factory itself – on which Allford led – is naturally ventilated with an exposed solid frame and lightweight skin. Rather than replacing high embodied-carbon materials – on which Allford led – is naturally ventilated with an exposed solid frame and lightweight skin. Rather than replacing high embodied-carbon materials, he is looking to developments into composites of steel, timber and concrete – while noting progress on low or no carbon concrete.

‘I think architects are great problem solvers. I don’t think the role is just getting fees for designing buildings: they can advise on what architecture can be, revising, changing a building, seeing how it can be used in a different way,’ he says. ‘We can help people think differently about the environment.’

This belief in the ideas of architects feeds into Allford’s ambition to set up an endowment fund with the RIBA receipts from selling NBS. Members and others could apply for grants from it. ‘Most architects are passionate about something,’ says Allford. A grant could be used to pursue and share those passions. Some will fail – ‘we need to be prepared to fail,’ he says – but others will go on to change things for the good. Again his belief in disruptors comes to the fore. For Allford it is about putting ideas out there. ‘They could be taken on or rejected; we can share them more widely, we don’t have to say this is the one we have chosen.’

In the post Grenfell world, competence supported by adequate fees and thus cash flow have emerged for architects as critical to practice and building safety. ‘We can be more confident if we have money in the bank,’ he says, ‘so we can avoid the race to the bottom line and accepting inadequate fees’, adding that AHMM loses ‘quite a lot of work on fees’.

‘Architects as a whole love risk and will sign up for uninsurable risk to make projects happen. It can be about cash flow, people feel they can’t afford to say no. You can do it as a young architect with fewer overheads but if you look after a team, pay parental leave and so on? That’s where the RIBA fee calculator is useful. You need to hold a line on fees.’

Managing that risk and competence could also be the key to dealing with the increasing burden of insurance premiums. ‘Insurers got a good free ride out of architecture. Now it is seen as a bad bet, so it is a challenge to get PII and not have exclusions. Jack Pringle [chair of the RIBA board], I and others are looking at options for the profession to help itself.’

‘We talk about competency testing,’ Allford simply with wood, he is looking to developments into composites of steel, timber and concrete – while noting progress on low or no carbon concrete.

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‘We talk about competency testing,’ Allford

Allford alongside Graham's track on top of the White Collar Factory.
Out of this world
Charles Jencks’ home turned museum uses rich symbolism and wry humour to make serious points about PoMo, culture and the cosmos
Words: Chris Foges
Photographs: Sue Barr

The garden façade incorporates an abstract representation of the family – two parents and two children.

My favourite museums are the houses of artists and architects: Dali, Barbara Hepworth, Ernő Goldfinger, Eileen Gray. Part of the appeal is simply nosiness, of course. But house-museums also illuminate the relationship between life and art, and present work in ways that are more direct, unmediated and immersive than any conventional exhibition. You get all that and much more at the Cosmic House, the eccentric, exuberant home of the late architectural theorist and designer Charles Jencks, which opens as a museum on 24 September.

Designed with his wife Maggie Keswick Jencks and architect Terry Farrell and completed in 1985, the six-year project to remodel an early Victorian house in west London was a kind of sequel to Jencks’ 1977 bestseller, The Language of Post-Modern Architecture. With PoMo degenerating into a superficial style, he wanted to demonstrate another way forward: an architecture of complex and meaningful symbolism. The result defies concise description, save to say that it has a richness and intensity comparable to Soane’s house.

Jencks resolved to make a museum shortly before his death in 2019, and it has been realised by his daughter, the designer Lily Jencks, and the writer Edwin Heathcote, who Charles appointed ‘Keeper of Meaning’. When I visited they were still considering the finer details of presentation. How lived-in should the lightly restored rooms appear? How should Jencks’ customarily messy desk be dressed? ‘We don’t want it to look like he has just stood up and left’, said Lily, ‘but nor do we want the house to be too aestheticised’.

My tour started in the Cosmic Oval, a mirror-lined vestibule where inscriptions and frescoes introduce two principal themes that recur symbolically on the journey through the house. They are ‘cultural time’ – the story of civilisation – and ‘cosmic time’, from the Big Bang to the diurnal drumbeat of our own lives. ‘It sets up a game of hunt the symbol’, said Lily.

You don’t have to look far to spot one. Straight ahead, in the middle of the house, is the Solar Stair, a toplit spiral staircase with 52 concrete treads, each with seven facets in its riser, representing one year. Each step bears a sign of the zodiac. Steel balls threaded onto banister rails depict the sun, moon and Earth.

Interconnected rooms arranged around the central stair reflect the four seasons. Winter comes first – a dark-hued, maximalist sitting room. A fireplace by architect Michael Graves is one of several small-scale commissions dotted around the house. Above sits a bronze bust by Celia Scott, portraying Eduardo Paolozzi but representing Hephaestus, god of fire and sculptors.

Theatrical ruched curtains frame the entrance to the adjoining Spring room, where primrose-yellow furniture riffs on classical architecture. Here the spatial intricacy of the house also comes into play. Bookcases screen a small Egyptian side-chamber, and steps descend into a giant bay window, where seating encircles a sundial. An angled doorway leads to the cheery Summer dining room, where daylight spills from slots between rafters that radiate from the Solar Stair, delivered by some mysterious system of glazing and voids above.

The first floor contains some of the most idiosyncratic spaces, from Jencks’ square-themed bedroom to the Moonwell, a kaleidoscopic lightwell lined with mirrors and arched windows. One moment of calm amid the profusion of ornament and oddity is a plain room originally used as Maggie’s study. ‘She said “symbolism stops at my door”,’ Lily recalls. Though the house is generally quite practical, it does lack informal spaces to relax – not that Charles would have noticed. ‘He had no downtime. What he wanted was the complete integration of life and work’.

Such matters were not a priority for Jencks as a designer, suggests Heathcote. ‘Charles thought of himself as a critic who architects, rather than an architect who critiques, and the house was not conceived in the way that an architect primarily interested in ways of living might approach it. It is a series of stories, as much akin to a written manifesto as to a conventional building’, Terry Farrell recalls.

Above: Jencks’ Architectural Library has a roof painted like the sky, with exposed timbers radiating from the Solar Stair.
that the instructional agenda grew in importance as the project advanced, and Jencks took the lead on interior design. ‘I used to say that there should be a page number on each of the drawings he did, as they would all be going into a book’.

If the house is sometimes like a built lecture, it is one liberally leavened with jokes. Next to the high-minded Cosmic Oval is the Cosmic Loo, where the toilet has two handles – a surreal contribution to the pervasive theme of balance and symmetry. There are terrible puns: the Spring room has lamps mounted on coiled springs. The kitchen sits between the Summer and Autumn rooms and has an Indian theme: Indian summer – geddit? MDF cabinets resembling chunky fragments of Hindu temples are painted to look like pink marble. As Jencks liked to say, ‘If you can’t stand the kitsch, get out of the kitchen’.

The wry humour gives an engaging sense of Jencks the person. Another discernable characteristic is his famous fondness for taxonomy and classification. In the tent-like Architectural Library, bookcases resembling buildings from different ages contain volumes on those periods. Books remain as Jencks left them, slightly higgledy-piggledy and stuffed with newspaper clippings and his own notes. ‘He wrote like crazy in everything’, says Lily. ‘His marginalia is extensive and usually fun’.

On and on it goes, a fizzing ferment of ideas, quotes, abstruse information, puzzles, tricks and contradictions. Almost every inch demands a second look, from the abstracted human forms in the facades to a trompe l’oeil jacuzzi designed by Piers Gough, based on an inverted Renaissance dome. Visitors will get background information from a detailed guidebook that comes with their £5 tickets, but thankfully the building’s custodians have chosen not to slap interpretive labels all over the place. The house still looks more like a home than an exhibition.

The most conventionally museum-like space is a new basement gallery and visitor reception, an enticing concoction of shiny green resin, glittering mirrors and cosmological symbolism, which Charles and Lily created from an internal garage just ahead of the building’s grade-I listing in 2018. Outside, new steps that descend from the street double as seating for waiting visitors. (The museum will welcome groups of up to 15 people, by appointment).

Large hinged panels create more display space than one expects. Exhibitions form part of a wider programme devised by curator Eszter Steierhoffer. An annual theme will guide the content of shows and events in the house and at partner institutions, as well as zines and digital publications, all of which feed into a book at the end of each year.

This season the theme is the house. Thereafter, Jencks’ archive provides abundant material for presentations on postmodernism – an era now distant enough to allow fresh reflection – and the museum will also address contemporary issues. ‘Charles was keen that the house should not become a shrine or mausoleum’, says Heathcote. ‘Inevitably it is about Charles Jencks because he designed it and lived here, but that’s not the end of the story. The Cosmic House is fixed in appearance, not in ideas – it will continue to provoke.’

• Cosmic House, London. thecosmichouse.com

Below The Dome of Water is a jacuzzi overlooking the garden, designed by Piers Gough.
Something wild

Biodiversity through rewilding – both of scraps of the inner city and tranches of countryside – was urged at the latest Architecture Anew talk, a RIBA + Vitra season of talks on sustainability.

As someone who’s helped deliver 230,000m² of green roofs, Dusty Gedge was a good choice as chair for Rewilding: ‘Nature Cannot Wait’, the fifth in the RIBA’s latest Architecture Anew talk, a RIBA + Vitra season of talks on sustainability.

The president of the European Federation of Green Roof and Living Wall Associations was certainly clear about what was needed to promote a better understanding of designing with nature in mind. ‘All architects should do as part of their education delivering biodiversity,’ he said. ‘And ecologists and nature conservationists should understand architecture. We need to empathise with one another, not fight our battles.’

This was one of the key messages in an event that took a broader approach to the subject than the title might suggest – from transformations of neglected scraps of inner city to the large-scale rewilding of whole tranches of countryside.

Certainly the concept of rewilding is not, as speakers pointed out, widely well understood. Rewilding Britain’s definition is the ‘large-scale restoration of ecosystems to the point where nature is allowed to take care of itself. Heal Rewilding’s Jan Stannard set out the ‘R’ word ‘continues to be divisive and toxic’, he says. Perhaps it’s no wonder he relocated to Totnes in Devon, where he’s carrying on his uplifting work.

The natural and built environments shouldn’t be set up in opposition, argued Maria-Chiara Piccinelli of London-based architects PIM studio. She spoke about how architects can design to integrate nature into their buildings, and showed the practice’s proposal for Sevenoaks Visitor Centre, which encouraged the growth of moss on its roof in a design that was ‘soft and welcoming’.

PIM’s Patio House in Switzerland is elevated to accommodate creatures passing beneath. In-between spaces, she said, can often be where ‘encounters’ with nature can happen, such as nesting in the eaves.

Even in the heart of central London, there is scope to encourage habitats for nature through multiple pockets of parklets, green roofs, walls and balconies, with considerable knock-on benefits for residents and landowners.

This is demonstrated by the Wild West End project, which brings together major landowners including the Crown Estate and the Grosvenor and Portman estates. Project director Jess Kennedy of the project’s technical partner Arup described the project’s strategy for creating a ‘green corridor’ from St James’s and Green Park to the south to Regent’s Park to the north (defined as 100m² of green space every 100m) with further green routes crossing this.

‘If you provide the habitat, nature will come,’ she said, mentioning sightings of species such as bats, woodpeckers, and black redstarts and the arrival of a green-winged orchid on a sedum roof.

Heal Rewilding’s Jan Stannard set out the organisation’s ambitions for rewilding on a large, landscape scale. The organisation is fundraising £6 million for its first 200ha site of ecologically depleted landscape. The project’s strategy for creating a ‘green corridor’ from London’s West End to the north (defined as 100m² of green space every 100m) with further green routes crossing this.

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Robert Harbison taught architectural history for more than 30 years, mainly at the Architectural Association and London Metropolitan University. He became a legendary figure for generations of students and his books earned him an international reputation as a historian and critic. Born in Baltimore, Bob moved to London and published his first architecture book in 1974; Eccentric Spaces applied a poetic sensibility to topics as diverse as gardens, maps, machines and ideal cities. It was Bernard Tschumi who, having read the book, invited him to lecture at the AA and thereby launched his teaching career.

More architecture books followed, including Ruins and Fragments, Reflections on Baroque and The Built, the Unbuilt and the Unbuildable. Bob’s early books benefited from the fact that his wife, Esther, an editor. Thirteen Ways, first published in 1997, is typically unconventional. It borrows its title from a Wallace Stevens poem but refuses the obvious implication, consisting of only ten chapters. Bob also knew his adopted country well. It comes as a surprise to many readers that the author of History of Architecture is in one sense a traditionalist, which ignited his passion. He very rarely wrote about modernity, which he felt was not quite to his liking. In a way, it was a source of pride. His brief descriptions of about 500 churches, all written by Bob himself, would be available in advance for more advanced students. Comprehensive notes, written by Bob himself, would be available in advance and were usually more accurate and authoritative than the published guide-books. Even well-travelled fellow-teachers would gather around the slightly uncomfortable text-book on the building at hand. Until recently, Bob could also find poetry in the ordinary and wonder at, the cul-de-sacs and shopping streets of East London before moving on to fresh and penetrating analyses of the major monuments.

Students appreciated Bob’s teaching for its eccentricity as much as its erudition. They caught his infectious enthusiasm and were keen to follow him to the intellectual high ground. He taught with equal success from first year to post-graduate, and would often find genuine quality in student work that other teachers dismissed as naïve or incompetent. Though his research and publications were prolific, he never shirked or off-loaded his teaching and administrative responsibilities. Helping with the day to day running of the department by, for example, organising visiting lecturers, was to him a welcome opportunity to enrich the intellectual atmosphere.

Student trips were a specialty: Rome, Florence or Venice for first-years; Scandinavia, Greece or Turkey for more advanced students. Comprehensive notes, written by Bob himself, would be available in advance and were usually more accurate and authoritative than the published guide-books. Even well-travelled fellow-teachers would gather around the slightly dishevelled, well-haired figure to listen to his comments on the building at hand. Until recently, a group of his ex-students, some of whom now well advanced in their careers, would gather regularly to talk about architecture and share their written assignments under his informal guidance. To say that he will be sorely missed is more than merely a conventional sentiment.}

Colin Davies is an architect and former professor of architectural history at London Metropolitan University.
The Temple Bar is the only remaining of London's eight perimeter gates. The original Bar was on the Strand and marked the boundary between the City of London and Westminster. It was damaged by the fire of London in 1666 and replaced by a Portland stone monolith apparently designed by Sir Christopher Wren. Wren's building was dismantled in the late 19th century to make room for the new Royal Courts of Justice, and its carefully numbered stones languished in a builder's yard until Henry and Valerie Meux discovered them and transported them to their house Theobalds Park in Hertfordshire, where the Bar was resurrected. In the 1950s, the Bar featured in William Holford's plan to revive the bomb-damaged area around St Paul's Cathedral. The idea extended the imagination of John Seely, of architect Seely and Paget, who became surveyor to the fabric of St Paul's in 1957. He worked with photographer Bedford Lemere to produce this photomontage showing the gate installed at Ludgate Hill. Holford's plan was only partially realised in the 1960s. Temple Bar returned to London in 2004 as the grand entrance to the newly redeveloped Paternoster Square.
Light is what you make it.