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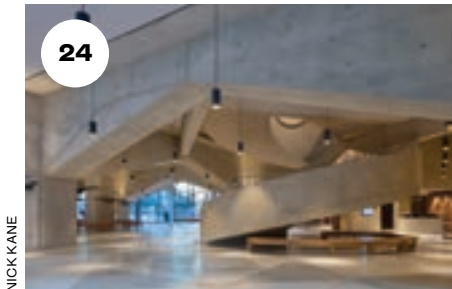
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Tonkin Liu's Tower of Light Manchester Civic Quarter Heat Network & Energy Centre photographed by David Valinsky



Knox Bhavan's timber cassettes, neurodiversity and design and the opportunities hub: ribaj.com

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1: Buildings

ICARO HOTEL
ALPE DI SISI, ITALY
MODUS ARCHITECTS
Read the full story:
ribaj.com/icaro-hotel

Reminders to save the environment are peppered all around Icaro Hotel in Alpe di Siusi, a mountain resort in the Dolomites that before the First World War was in Austria, but since in Italy. It is Europe's largest high-altitude Alpine meadow. During winter, the place transforms into a white wonderland. In spring, it bursts into luscious green life.

A new letter printed on lime card that has recently appeared on the hotel's bedroom desks, however, explains that despite the surrounding fluffy frozen water, low rainfall last autumn means there is a water shortage. It asks for more prudent handling than usual, so it won't be rationed.

Herein lies the predicament. Visitors come to Alpe di Siusi from all over the world. Yet, at the start of March, the powder on the pistes has been scraped from the mountain sides. Snow canons are poised to (energy-intensively) recreate the adventure land that 7.7 million arrivals came for in 2019. It doesn't

take a scientist to notice the ski season is shortening. If temperatures rise above the Paris Agreement 2°C, snow will dwindle by 70%. Mountain ranges are at the frontier of environmental challenges caused by climate change. However, the activities that sustain them, like tourism, are major contributors to global warming. The first cable car to Alpe di Siusi was built in 1935, bringing investment that transformed impoverished, isolated mountain villages. There is a human necessity to continue. But hotel accommodation has a design shelf-life, so waste and renewal are part of that equation too – a triple-edged sword. The question is how to do it sustainably.

Icaro Hotel's reincarnation by Bressanone-based MoDus Architects holds answers. It has transformed the building's disparate components using a uniform that upgrades its performance. Everything looks new, but don't be fooled, it isn't. ●
Isabelle Priest

GUSTAV WILLEIT



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The RIBA Journal April 2022

Towering glory

Manchester's Tower of Light might not be the largest building in the city, but it is certainly one of the most eye-catching

Words: Eleanor Young Photographs: Mike Tonkin and David Valinsky



I have a picture on my phone, my first view of Manchester's Tower of Light from the centre in St Peter's Square. In the distance, as tram tracks and wires appear to converge, is the delicate looking 40m tower, dwarfed by its backdrop of the raking cladding of the Axis tower. Flick through the other photos and I see that many of Manchester's chimneys, typically solid Victorian brick remnants of industry, have plenty of competition for attention and scale in this energetic city.

The Tower of Light Manchester Civic Quarter Heat Network & Energy Centre is the work of Tonkin Liu. For years it has been designing an eclectic portfolio of projects using a shell lace structure that draws on the principles of shell geometry (curvature, corrugation, stiffening and more) to design strong, spare structures with aesthetic ebullience.

One of those designs won the practice the competition for a combined heat and power centre for Manchester City Council's civic quarter under the old

railway arches – over which trams now trundle. But it wasn't all hidden away; the five flues needed a chimney to live up to the grand buildings it served, including Manchester Convention Centre next door, the Central Library, Town Hall and Manchester Art Gallery.

I talked to Mike Tonkin and Anna Liu fresh from watching David Attenborough's *Life on Earth*; they are animated by nature and what we can learn from it. The most fitting of their many natural inspirations here is of a skeleton of a cholla cactus, standing erect, its diagonal grid forming the starting point for the tower. This is a form Tonkin Liu believe could be scaled up to that of a residential apartment tower – that would be exciting to see.

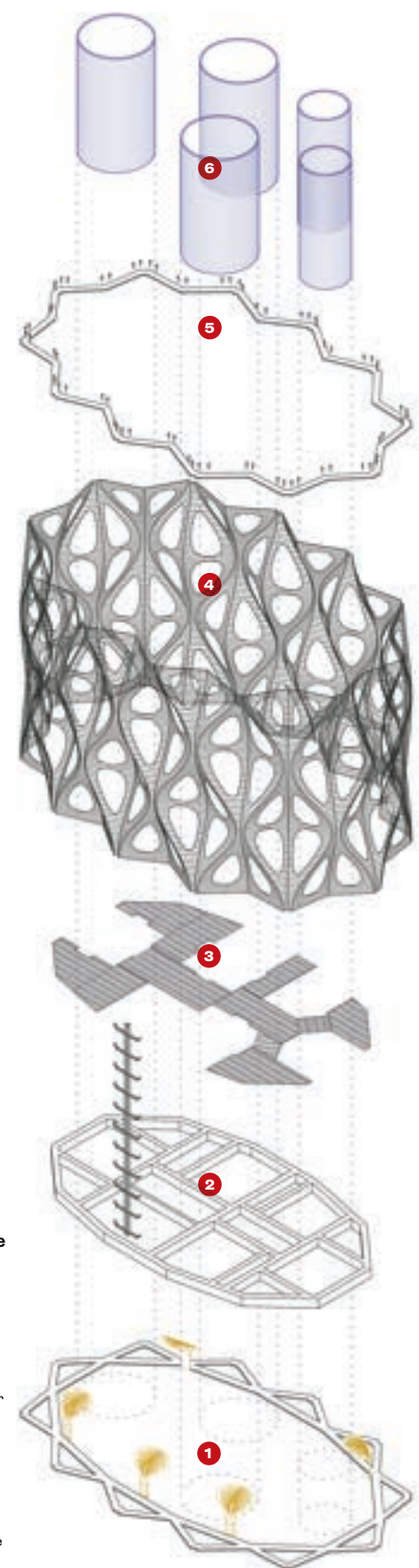
Left The Tower of Light, sandwiched between road and tramline.

Below Waves of ceramic tiles enclose the energy centre.



Exploded tower module

- 1 Sole plate for spliced connection to module below. Light reflectors on perimeter
- 2 Diaphragm deck beams for lateral stiffening. Ladder for vertical access
- 3 Steel grating for access around the flues
- 4 Shell lace structural skin
- 5 Head plate gives spliced connection to module above
- 6 Five flues





Left and below The apparent shape of the Wall of Light changes dramatically depending on the angle of view and light conditions. The tower has its own animation from the reflectors, the light moving inside it, and a programmable lighting system.



Client / employer / primary funding client
Manchester City Council
Client / main contractor & operator
Vital Energi
Art, architecture, landscape Tonkin Liu
Structural engineering Arup
Lighting design SEAM Design
Tower of Light steelwork fabricator
Shawton Engineering
Wall of Energy façade contractor
Axis Envelope Solutions
Wall of Energy ceramic tile manufacturer
Darwen Terracotta

The diagonal grid of the design allows the steel envelope of the chimney to be skin and structure in one, saving 12 tonnes of carbon on an oblong, double layered tower. The perforations and the oval plan reduce the wind load. Working with engineer Ed Clark of Arup they played around with the thickness of the steel, getting it down to just 4mm in one design iteration, but settling on increasing the thickness by 20 per cent on that, to 6 or 8mm – and enjoying increasing the openness of the structure by a corresponding 20 per cent.

Flat panels of steel were laser cut before being rolled into eight 4m-tall

drums which were craned in, two per night. Inside, mirror-finished gold reflectors give a sense of movement though the day and work with the lighting design so that the tower can be used for messaging and celebration throughout the year.

Around the base, a long window allows the inquisitive to peer at the workings of the energy centre, superimposed with Tokin Liu diagrams. The walls are in wave form, white ceramics pieces, each the same weight and finish as the classic Belfast sinks traditionally made by the supplier Darwen Terracotta.

It is a very clear step away from the much graffitied and apparently unpopular concrete of Tadao Ando’s curving wall in the city’s Piccadilly Gardens, which was demolished in 2020. This should fare better. Its luscious curves are already coated in heavy dust, but at least all it needs for a clean is a high pressure hose. And stepping back it still appears white as white and of a piece with the tower.

This is just one incident among many in the city, but it is one that brings promise of a lower carbon future and the possibility of natural ideas brought into our buildings. ●

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Inside the matrix

A labyrinthine layout of interconnected rooms distinguishes Sergison Bates' later-living housing scheme in Hampstead

Words: Chris Foges
Photographs: David Grandorge

Whenever Sergison Bates has given lectures on its work in recent years, one image has seized the imagination of the audience. It isn't a beguiling render or a clever exploded axo. It's a plan drawing showing the second floor of an apartment building in Hampstead, north London. In outline, two adjacent blocks are busily articulated by kinks, curves and clefts, so that each has more than 20 faces. But it's what's inside that really arouses excitement: a dense honeycomb of interconnected rooms – irregular octagons, distended hexagons, and splayed trapezoids – packed three-deep around a central core in each block.

This constellation of eccentric spaces is Sergison Bates' response to a brief to rethink housing for older people. Its client, developer Pegasus Life, set out to cater for well-heeled baby boomers who find little appeal in dreary retirement villages. They want to live independently in a community with shared facilities, and appreciate contemporary design. Likely buyers may be young at heart, but advancing age does bring changes in lifestyle. 'People

- 1 Hampstead Village

2 Fitzjohn's Avenue

3 Prince Arthur Road

4 Porch

5 Foyer

6 Shared facilities

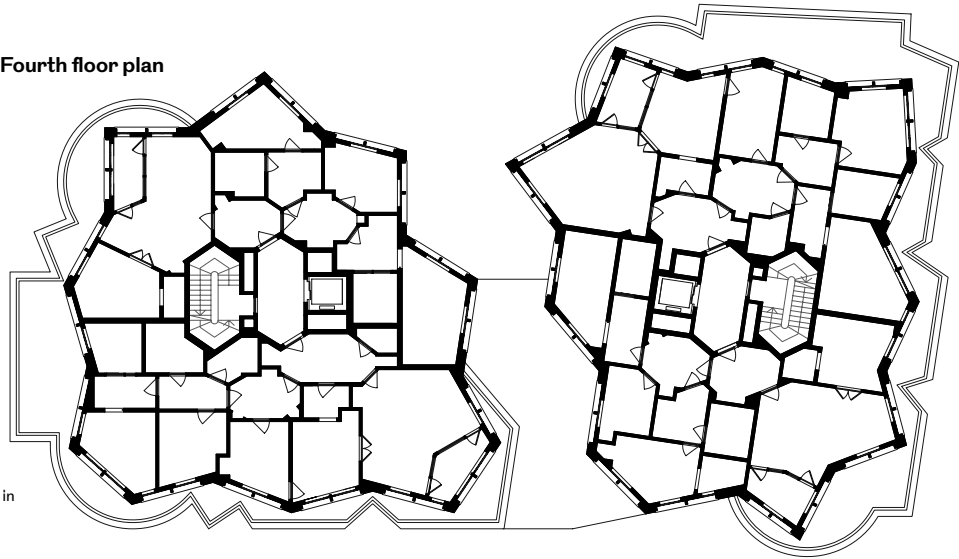
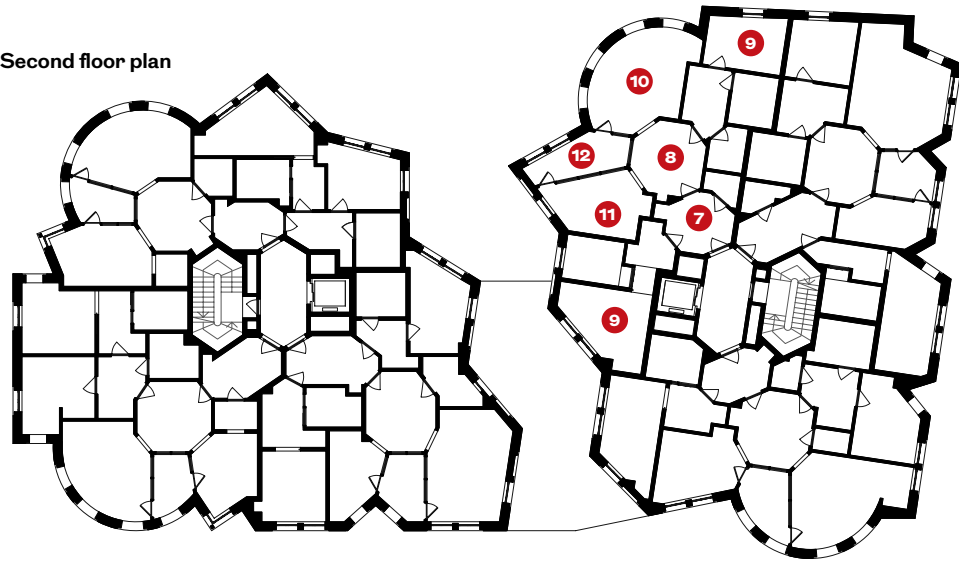
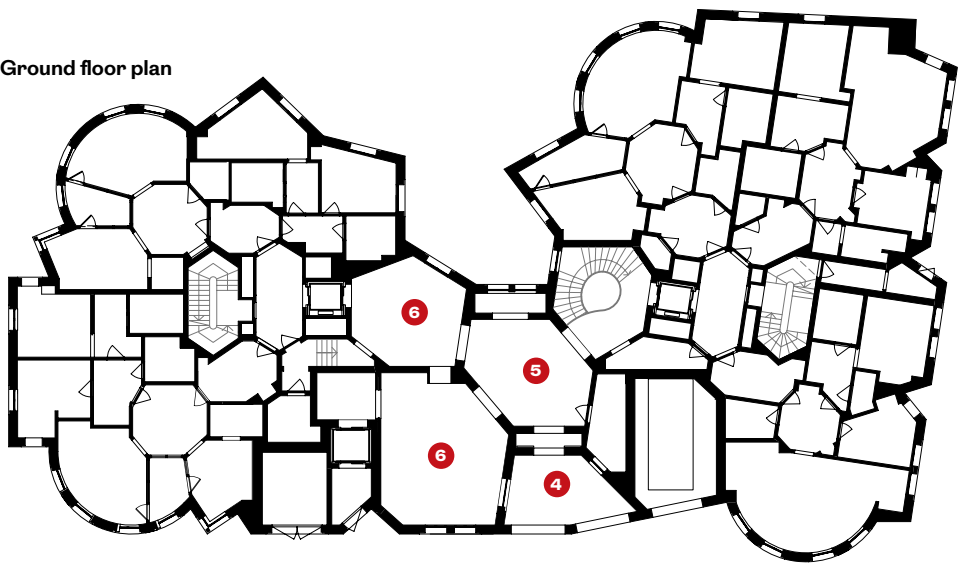
7 Hall
- 8 Octagonal inner room

9 Bedroom suite

10 Living room

11 Kitchen

12 Winter garden (omitted in realised building)



spend more time inside the home – their world gets smaller,' says practice partner Stephen Bates. 'It seemed appropriate to make complex and varied interior landscapes that can be continually rediscovered.'

Beginning with a study of Victorian mansion blocks, notably Richard Norman Shaw's Albert Hall Mansions, the architects proposed large flats – 250 to 450m² – with interlocking cellular rooms enriched by diagonal through-routes that set up unexpected views within and out.

Little of that is legible in the building's form; its appearance owes more to efforts to make a sympathetic addition

IN NUMBERS

£28m
Contract sum

6,800m²
Gross internal area

£4,111
Cost per m²



Four chamfered bays on Fitzjohn's Avenue pick up on neighbours' eaves height.

I feel a bit like Alice arriving in the long hall at the bottom of the rabbit hole

to Fitzjohn's Avenue, where it replaces some nondescript student housing on a prominent corner plot. 'The modernist correspondence between plan and facade isn't of interest to us,' says Bates. 'Interiors have their own agenda, while facades have a relationship to the city.'

Dividing 29 flats between two close-spaced blocks emulates the grain of surrounding streets and helped to negotiate a sloping site. To further break down the apparent scale of the six-storey building, Sergison Bates took cues from the large 19th-century villas that characterise the neighbourhood – simple volumes appended by a jumble of projecting bays and turrets. 'We were blown away by the confidence and joy expressed in their composition,' says Bates. In conception, each block is a sharply faceted 'extruded' form, whose lower levels are wrapped in an agglomeration of rounded and chamfered bays, lending vertical emphasis and a domestic character.

Local references recur in materials and details that have a reassuring



Above A suite of ground-floor 'chambers' contains shared facilities and lift lobbies.

Left Sheltered entrance on Prince Arthur Road.

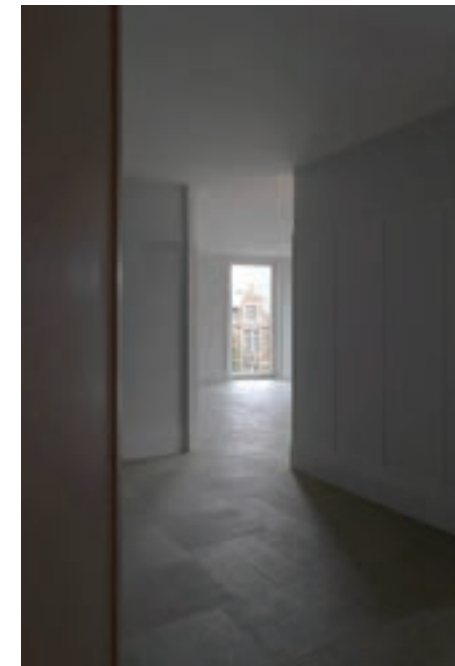
sense of solidity. On the lower parts, deep-set windows are augmented by textured spandrels of reddish brick and a corbelled cornice of paler stocks. The upper levels are lighter and leaner, with windows framed by ceramic tile that recalls decorative faience.

At ground level the blocks are joined by shared facilities including lounges and a library behind an arched porch on Prince Arthur Road. Before starting our tour there, Bates outlines the history of the £28 million project – known as Fitzjohn's – from its inception in 2014 to completion this year. Along the way, Pegasus was restructured as Lifestory with new leadership, the main contractor was replaced midway,

and Sergison Bates' role changed three times. The upshot is that there are some important deviations from the original design.

That's apparent in the network of 'chambers' extending from the foyer, though arched openings set off-centre in larger arched niches. They bring a suggestion of something enjoyably archaic that extends to a spa on the floor below, at garden level. The bones are true to the architects' intent, but the interior design – recalling an upscale hotel – is the work of others. One survivor is the shiny gold lift that whisks us up to the flats.

Stepping into each, I feel a bit like Alice arriving in the long hall at the bottom of the rabbit hole. In large many-sided lobbies, four, five or even six doors lead off in all directions. Try one and it's a coat cupboard. The next might lead



to another lobby, and on to a bedroom with its own bathroom and dressing room. (These self-contained suites are distributed around the flats, allowing privacy if residents have guests or live-in carers.) There are navigational clues for the initiated but it's hard for first-time visitors to construct a mental map, which was the aim. Multiple thresholds put residents in control, choosing how much of their home to reveal. Even with doors open, some mystery is maintained as through-views give mere glimpses of what lies on either side.

Behind one door lies another curious door-lined space at the heart of each flat, where we find the most significant alteration. These were to be enclosed octagonal dining rooms with one glazed wall looking into winter gardens set between the main living spaces

Above Oblique view through a flat.
This image Octagonal inner room.



Without winter gardens, the main living area of each flat is a single open-plan space.



beyond. At a late stage the developer opted to omit the winter gardens and combine living areas in one large room. I sympathise with the architects’ disappointment – it would have been extraordinary to move from kitchens to living rooms through a plant-filled wedge of glass – but some of the intended scale of separate rooms is preserved by the sharp angles and bulges of the outer walls. And as the thermal line is in the facades, it would be easy to add winter gardens later.

Allowing for future adaptation was a priority for the architects, and the non-orthogonal arrangement of slender columns was designed to give the building the best chance of a long life. In the meantime we are all living longer, and collectively getting older. Over-



65s will comprise a quarter of the UK population by 2050, requiring greater focus on appropriate housing. Though Sergison Bates’ labyrinthine layout is not meant as a model for mass adoption – and probably has niche appeal – the thinking behind it might have wide application. At Fitzjohn’s, it has made homes that feel as rich and stimulating as they look on paper. ●

Left View from an entrance hall to the facade through the deep plan of a flat.

Credits
Architect Sergison Bates
Client Pegasus Life, then Lifestory
Contractor Shaylor Group, then Apex
Structural engineer Symmetrys Engineering
M&E engineer Max Fordham
Landscape Camlins

TAYLOR MAXWELL

VOBSTER
ARCHITECTURAL

Ashraya



Located in The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the house was considerably constructed to be aesthetically pleasing, whilst being minimally visible from the road and neighbouring properties.

The home is nestled low into the ground and is sheltered by a grass covered arch, allowing the building to blend seamlessly and respectfully into its surroundings.

Taylor Maxwell worked with cast stone manufacturer Vobster Architectural to design and supply wet cast stone to the development. The wet cast stone was expertly installed by trusted partner **Henley Stone**.

After five years in the making, Ashraya was completed in 2021 and is now an expansive and contemporary home.

To find out more about our products visit taylormaxwell.co.uk, email us at enquiries@taylor.maxwell.co.uk or call us on 0203 794 9377.

Photography by Edmund Sumner .

Ashraya is an innovative and highly sustainable house tucked away in the hills of rural Hertfordshire. Set in the countryside and surrounded by nature, this family home was designed by architects Kirkland Fraser Moor and managed by Husker Limited.

Lecture in texture

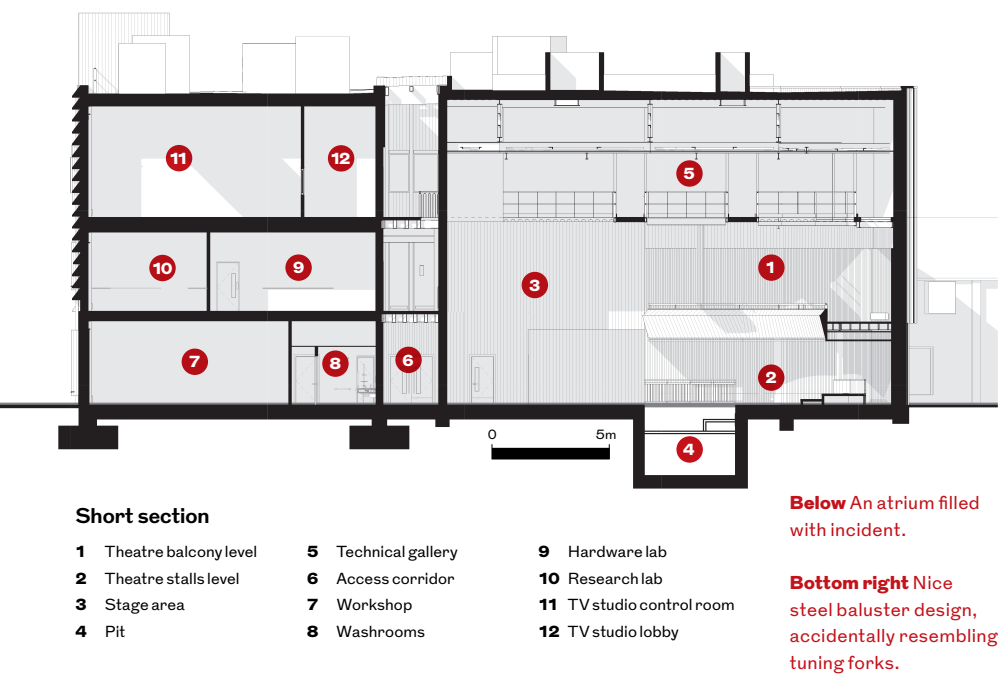


Tate + Co's design for York St John University uses texture to create a building that is as visually appealing as it is unusual.

Words: Hugh Pearman Photographs: Hufton + Crow

- IN NUMBERS**
- £12m**
Construction cost
 - 3014 m²**
GIFA
 - £3,835**
Cost per m²
 - 38 kwh**
Energy consumption per m² per year
 - Traditional**
Contract
 - Excellent**
BREEAM design rating

The centre is for the public as well as students and staff.



‘This is us doing Supertexture,’ says Jerry Tate of the rough-skinned building we are looking at. It’s also the largest built object his 10-strong practice, Tate + Co, has done since he left Grimshaw to set up what was then Tate Harmer in 2007, establishing a reputation for highly sustainable buildings.

York St John is the in-town university dating back to its 19th century foundation as a teacher-training college, rather than the out-of-town York University campus. It achieved full independent university status in 2005. It sits on the northern edge of the city centre, its buildings ranging from good mid-19th century Tudorbethan via a fine angular 1960s chapel by George Pace to a 2008 entrance cluster by Rivington Street Studio. Although the creative centre is at the rear of the university’s site, it looks directly across to York Minster.

The creative centre houses an unusual combination of activities. It’s primarily a place for learning performing arts – music, drama and television – and accordingly has a well-equipped theatre, large recital room and (still being fitted out) TV studio along with all the necessary acoustically tuned practice rooms. But it’s also a centre for computer science, a seeming clash done, they say, quite deliberately to encourage cross-discipline engagement. But both sets of students and teachers emerge



Visually, as well as structurally, these are semi-independent buildings plugged into the mothership

from their respective lairs to hang out in the informal areas (‘third spaces’ in the jargon) Tate has created in the staircase atrium acting as the glue between the three main chunks of building: two at the front and one across the back.

On the train to York, Tate sketches the plan: first a column-free steel and concrete rectangular block at the rear. It’s conventional enough, well insulated, designed for total flexibility and so change of use and long life, capable of extension.

Next come the three pieces at the front. As you approach, the large curving form of the theatre is on the left (the curve being the back of the auditorium), and the angled timber-framed glazed front to the connecting atrium is in the centre. On the right, rotated slightly towards nearby York Minster, is the projecting rectangular section housing the music recital room with its long glass wall and balcony, plus a screening room beneath. This projecting box is supported on four steel V-columns, the outer two angled inwards as if in welcome. It acts as the entrance canopy to the building.

These projecting sections are clad in black-painted fireproofed larch on their upper two levels. Fluted concave sections for the theatre make it look like a slice of some giant classical column. The convex sections for the recital room chunk have the air of a palisade. This shape reversal continues in plan: the curved outer façade on one side becomes a curved inner façade to the atrium on the other, and vice versa. Visually, as well as structurally, these are semi-independent buildings plugged into the mothership.

The Supertexture game gets gamier still on the rear elevation facing a modestly low-rise council estate behind, where Tate divides up the long flat elevation with just two surface treatments, one very shaggy, repeating

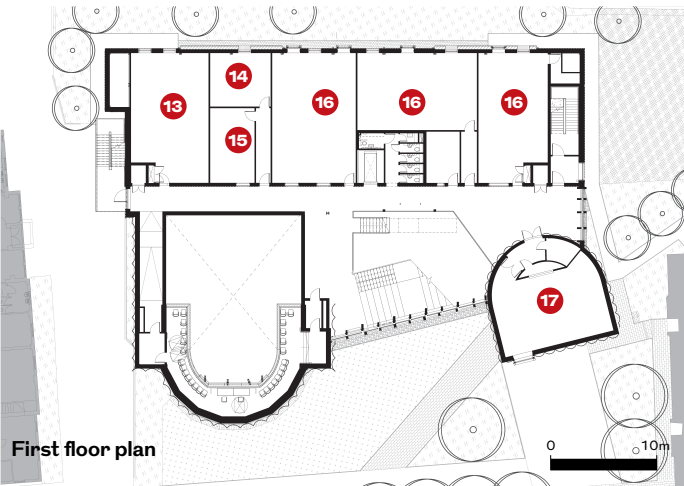
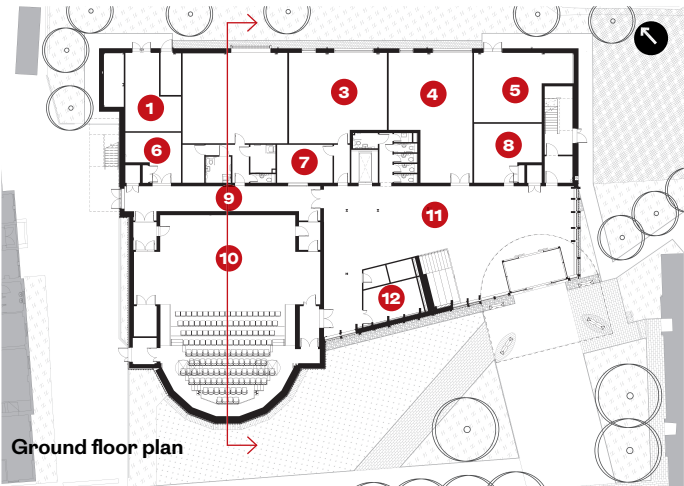


The Supertexture gets extreme on the rear elevation.



Atrium wall design continues across the roof soffit.

in bays on an A-B-AAA-B-A rhythm. All this extreme modelling and colour contrast stems, he says, from a desire to avoid the dullness that can result from large areas of smooth timber cladding. Inside, Tate avoids the big, empty atrium look. This too, with its sittable stairs and timber deck-access galleries and structure visible everywhere, is a highly theatrical space which manages to be compartmentalised visually while still retaining its floor-to-ceiling height on its Minster-facing side. Despite this heavily glazed south elevation, it is naturally ventilated: elsewhere mechanical ventilation with heat recovery is used. The 200-seat adaptable-configuration theatre (fully accessible, including the technical level) is one you’d be happy



- 1 Main comms room
- 2 Workshop
- 3 Lecture theatre
- 4 Set building workshop
- 5 Plant
- 6 Auditorium storage
- 7 Resources room
- 8 Creative writing room
- 9 Back of house corridor
- 10 Auditorium
- 11 Atrium
- 12 Atrium storage
- 13 Editing suite
- 14 Research lab
- 15 Hardware lab
- 16 Undergrad computer lab
- 17 Listening/screening room

Credits
Client York St John University
Architect Tate+Co
QS & project manager Robinson Low Francis
M&E and BREEAM engineer and lighting design Atelier Ten
Structural engineer Atelier One
Acoustic and theatre consultant Sound Space Vision
Access consultant Sensory Trust
Landscape architect Colour
Planning consultant McKenzie Town Planning



to visit, with decent scene-changing capacity, if no flytower due to height restrictions near the Minster. And I can see the recital room with its balcony being good for summer jazz evenings as much as chamber music. The layers of teaching rooms at the back are straightforward, nothing special until you get to the higher-ceilinged music practice rooms on the top floor.

How to describe this kind of Passivhaus-level architecture? Cullinan-esque, perhaps: it has something of that expressed pleasure in robustly slotting pieces together like carpentry, of avoiding slickness, of letting the materials and volumes speak and allowing for change. Of gleeful oddness, too, which is always appealing. ●



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Economics of scale

Buildings
University

25

Close analysis of the central London site helped Grafton Architects create legibility in the structural twists of its Marshall Building for the LSE

Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek **Photographs:** Nick Kane



Left Grafton's building intervenes in the space between a formal city square and a rare, street-based form of campus to the south.

Below The Portland stone and concrete 'palazzo' facade facing north to Lincoln's Inn Fields is an object lesson in balanced asymmetry.

Grafton Architects' Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara must have nailed the 'belt drop' judo move while studying. It might seem surprising that this tumbled out of a chat about their £90 million Marshall Building for the London School of Economics but it's par for the course when talking to Grafton that architectural discourse will, at any moment, range from a detail's material specificity to broader points of philosophy and experience.

The revelation comes about as Farrell gives her view of the design process, speaking of the site's 'extraordinary' nature, its history, the client and team; how everyone 'was seeking the intangible aspects of the brief ... trying to capture a story that's not yet been told.' It seems they ran with the cut-and-thrust the process demanded in the time that they worked on it. 'It felt like judo, when you roll with punches, absorbing force to transfer that energy into the making of the building,' says Farrell.

As she says it, Bruce Lee's famous quote 'be water, my friend' comes to mind. But simple things like water are clearly part of Grafton's thinking,



Grafton Architects hides the scale of its Marshall Building by taking advantage of the LSE's campus of streets — here it is glimpsed from John Watkins Plaza.



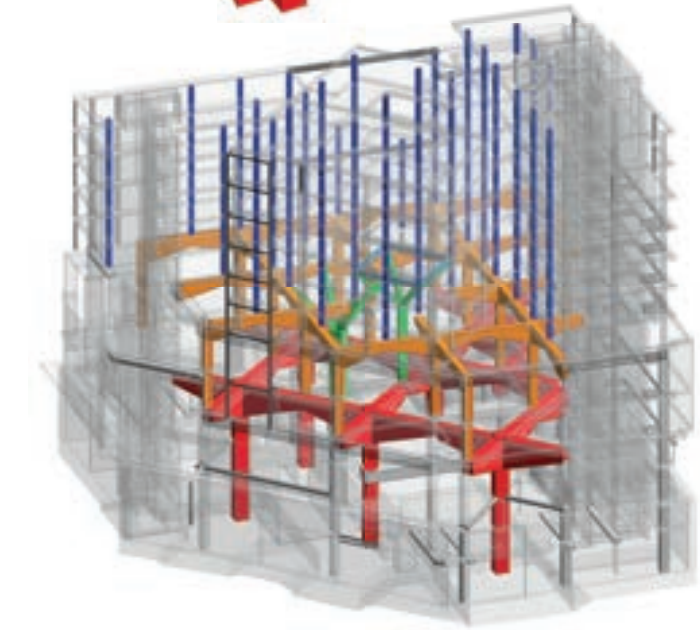
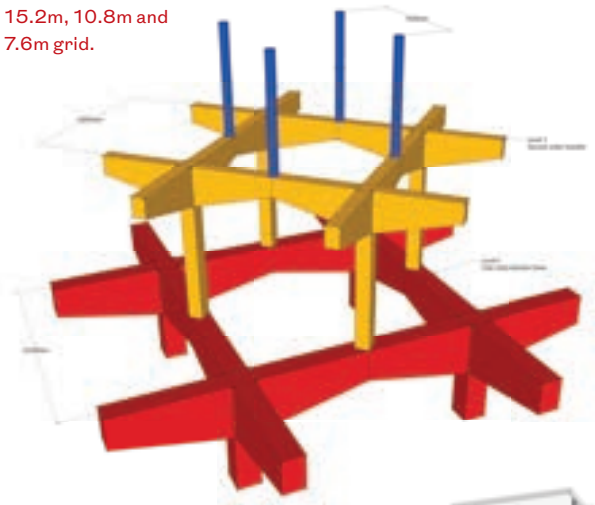
Grafton Architects' Great Hall, looking north to the Lincoln's Inn Fields entrance.



Below Developed with AKT II, the structure twists and twists again to create the 20m, 15.2m, 10.8m and 7.6m grid.

Above The structural trees grow up centrally past two floors of Harvard-style lecture spaces.

Bottom right The student commons, with varying types of study spaces, beneath the structural trees.



General north/south section



even with an 18,000m² building for a world-class university, facing London's largest square, in the heart of this global city. Because while, for example, the intention might just have been to establish a flow of students to its ground-level Great Hall from three entrances on Lincoln's Inn Fields, Portsmouth Street and Portugal Street, from where LSE's tight campus fans out, their approach works not just by connecting directly to the streets around. A 700mm fall across the site absorbed by an imperceptibly sloping ground floor, by default makes it effortlessly accessible for all. Place a mishit ball from Lincoln's Inn Fields' tennis courts on the Marshall Building's north-east corner 'and it will gently roll south towards the river', notes Farrell. 'The building's mix of uses is a microcosm of this city and we felt it important for students to be subliminally aware of their position, relative to the Thames.'

You imagine it must have been difficult for Grafton to hold onto the aesthetic reins here, so weighty are its psycho-geographic influences. The arched windows of Sir John Soane's Museum scrutinising from across the 17th-century square; Lincoln's Inn, still in session to the east; Charles Barry's hard, classical carapace sheathing the viscera of the Royal College of Surgeons next door; and LSE's meandering campus of buildings to the

Creating an open undercroft added to an already complex structural arrangement

south – not least with O'Donnell + Tuomey's 2014 Saw Swee Hock Centre. But to varying degrees, they will all make their presence felt in the nine-storey concrete structure, itself complexly housing various functions piled densely, one upon the other.

While this innate complexity may have seemed inevitable, the manner of its expression is the result of the firm 'living and breathing the building' for years. LSE's original brief had asked for an on-campus sports facility, new mid-sized lecture halls, open-plan and dedicated student study space, numerous academic and administrative offices as well as economist and major donor Paul Marshall's Institute for Philanthropy and Social Entrepreneurship.

Keen to democratise space beyond the brief's remit, Grafton had been struck by nearby Lincoln's Inn Chapel, whose open, groined undercroft ushers you, via stone staircases, to the chapel above. 'They were like stairs to another world, and we thought of it as a fantastic way to think about the project,' recalls McNamara. So they did the same; hoicking the programme up off ground to create their generous, civic, relaxed – if unstipulated – Great Hall with free flow within from three sides.

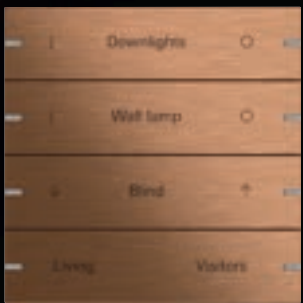
Of course, creating an open undercroft added to an already complex structural arrangement but Grafton was considering programme, load and light simultaneously. And as one does to solve complex problems, you break it down. First was to consider the orders of layering; the large sports hall nestled in the basement and above the open ground floor, two levels of lecture spaces; above that, six further floors of study and office space; at the top,



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the Marshall Institute. In section and elevation, with its piano nobile, this allowed the practice to emulate the palazzo nature of the adjacent Barry building. Meanwhile, as structural complexity reduced on ascending, the density of the building was increasing.

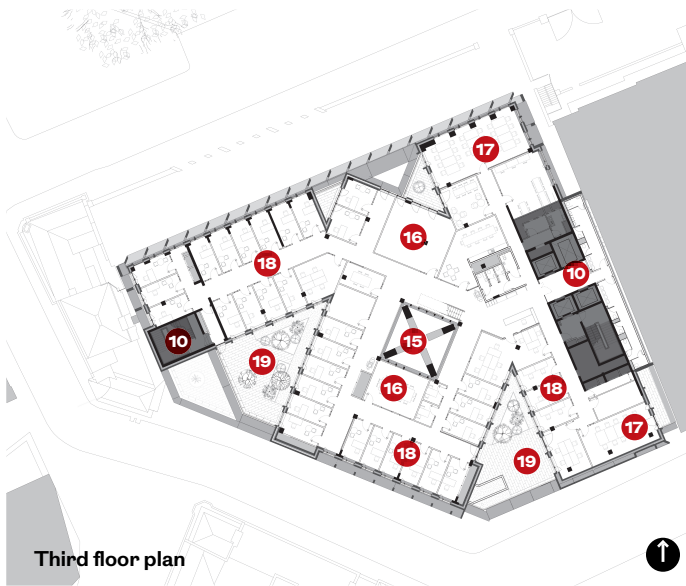
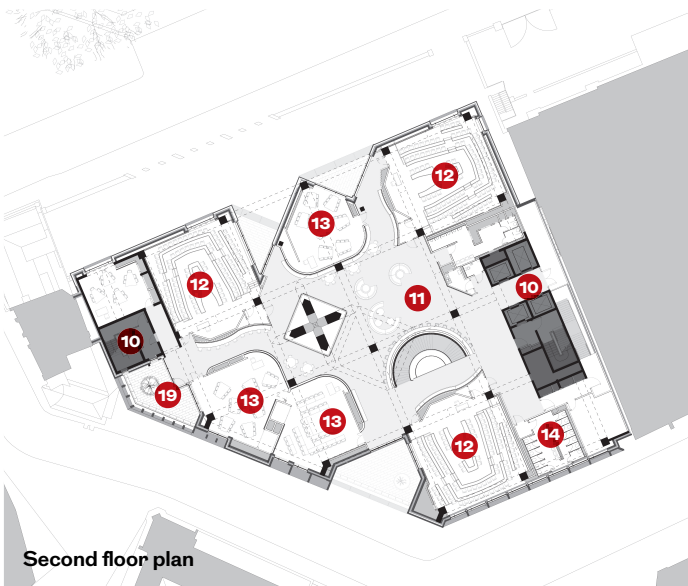
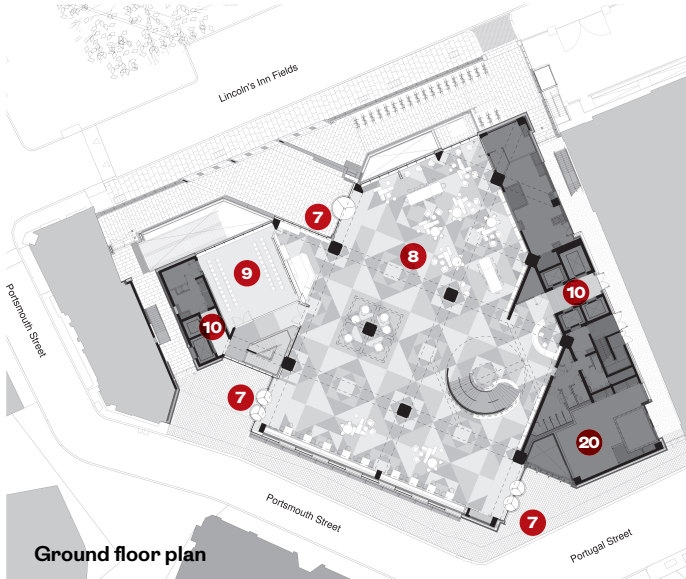
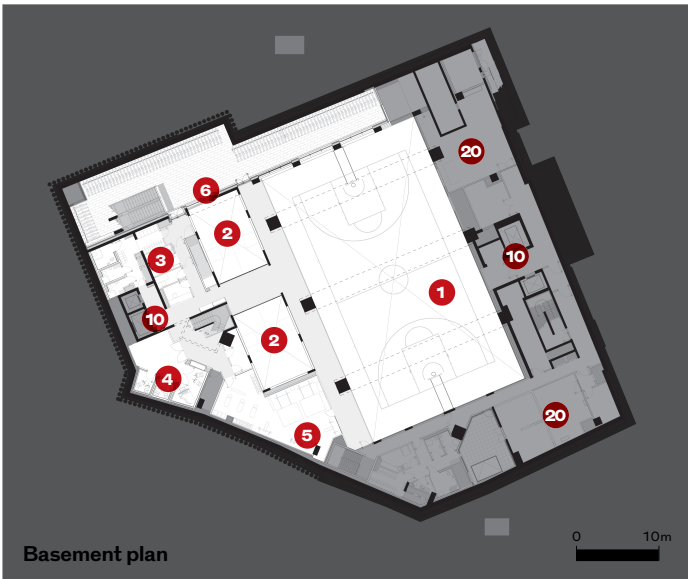
This meant Grafton faced the dual challenge of creating a seven-storey formal facade to the north while drawing in light and air from the south to meet demands for it from cellular offices.

‘We didn’t want an axis but to cut into the form and create a diagonal relationship – and a place to loiter – whose geometry stems from the streets and context,’ McNamara explains. Hence the idea of the 20m structural trees; great concrete ‘trunks’ rising at 15.2m centres astride the sports hall up past the Great Hall at ground, where ‘branches’

then twist at 45 degrees to generate the 10.8m grid of the lecture hall floors and similarly twist again to form the 7.6m grid ‘stems’ of the academic offices and admin floors. Despite engineer AKT II’s efforts to minimise redundancy and mass, rising up to the lecture hall levels via two concrete spiral stairs, Grafton’s love affair with the material is palpable – holes punched through slabs to allow its ‘trees’ to rise and support upper levels and give views down to ground. With one column growing up towards a far Soane-like rooflight, the overall effect is arboreal, as if passing through a wood. Students, you feel, sense this gentle drama. On the day I visit, they are crammed beneath the canopy in the student commons at the centre of the centre of the lecture floors, the place buzzing with quiet industry.

Drama is muted in a less satisfactory way at

- 1 Sports Hall
- 2 Squash courts
- 3 Changing area
- 4 Music rooms
- 5 Gym
- 6 Bike store via ramp
- 7 Main entrance
- 8 Great Hall
- 9 Dance studio
- 10 Lifts
- 11 Student Commons
- 12 Harvard-style lecture
- 13 Classroom
- 14 WCs
- 15 Atrium
- 16 Meeting room
- 17 Student study space
- 18 Academic offices
- 19 Exterior terrace
- 20 Plant area





Block model, looking north east.

IN NUMBERS

£90m
Total building cost

18,000m²
Gross internal floor area

£5,000
per m²

176
Academic offices

the upper levels, where Grafton was forced to deal with cellular repetition of offices either side of central corridors, creating staggered height, splayed arms that reach out to the campus to the south of. A central, concrete-lined internal courtyard space with connecting stair forms a ceremonial confluence for them all, around which is punched glazing to meeting rooms and formal study areas; two cores doing services and structural grunt work to east and west. Central atrium space excepted, that lovely flow of space experienced at lower levels feels very channelled here. But the sense of drama at urban scale returns at the top floor Marshall Institute with its landscaped roof terrace, where lofty city views might persuade potential donors to dig deep.

Those big internal twists don't shirk from making themselves evident on the exterior, with Grafton using them to create a sophisticated

Credits
Client LSE
Architect Grafton Architects
Structural and civil engineering AKT II
Mechanical, electrical and public health Chapman BDSP
Fire safety engineering Chapman BDSP
Acoustic engineer Applied Acoustic Design
Facade engineer Billings Design Associates
Contractor Mace
Working/learning environment Burwell Deakins Architects
Theatre and performance Sound Space Vision
Access and inclusion Buro Happold



composition of the north facade, fronting Lincoln's Inn Fields. Shifts are referenced as you enter off-axis in the cast stone seats between crafted lighting columns and in the triangular cut-outs of the Portland stone-faced ground and piano nobile. Above it, the central 'office' arm insinuates itself on the formal facade, past a crisply detailed and jointed veil of concrete fins that run along its 55m length.

The piano nobile, which runs round to the site to the south, works hard to help articulate entrance and internal volumes. But there's no escaping the unrelenting repetitive nature of the upper office arms. The streets' tight grain, foreshortening these elevations, has been put to the architects' advantage, breaking down massing; but you can't help contrasting this 'working' side of the building against the nuanced complexity of the north elevation. Granted, Grafton achieves what was required of it – to deliver light deep into the section – but it was done by relying on cleverly crafted, snatched views from LSE's narrow streets to pull off its massing sleight-of-hand.

Arguably, this last point proves how closely Farrell and McNamara have analysed the site to eke advantage from perceived weakness. Those playing sports in what would have been a windowless basement may appreciate this as they look up past the cut-out beyond the bike store to glimpse the sky above Lincoln's Inn Fields. Here at LSE, you sense Grafton wrestled very hard with a demanding programme and physical constrictions to make their building work. 'Yvonne and I did Judo in college,' McNamara will tell me. 'It's where we learned how to fall.' And to win. ●

Left On the 'working' side of the building, lower levels work hard to reconcile, the density of the programme above.

Above The building's three arms attempt to break down the palpable density and height of the building.



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The Retreat

Imagine a modern-day escape from the world, formed of SterlingOSB Zero, and win £2,500 courtesy of West Fraser (formerly known as Norbord)

The idea of the retreat has long been embedded in western culture. Take 14th century Italian author Giovanni Boccaccio's The Decameron, written from 1348-53, whose plot revolves around 10 people fleeing a Florence beset by Black Death to seek shelter in a deserted villa outside the city. In the safety of its walled garden, each agrees to tell a story each day over 10 days - 100 in all - as a diversion to pass the days of isolation.

Recent events have made the premise of this nearly 700-year-old text prescient. Indeed, if the pandemic revealed anything, it is the desire to escape the city and seek refuge in the country.

West Fraser is asking you to hold that thought in mind for its seventh annual SterlingOSB Zero competition, The Retreat. We want you to select a site and design a country escape for up to 10 people; one whose form and material have a strong, considered relationship with the landscape it sits in, as well as internal volumes that elicit meaningful interactions between users. Which spaces allow small, contemplative gatherings and which give exposure to the countryside? How are relationships between them mediated? Inspiration may come from a classic design or one of the many new Living Architecture homes - but the building must be constructed, mainly, of SterlingOSB Zero board.

We place no demands on the site itself, the materiality or the structure's size. What we're looking for is a poetic interpretation of the brief, celebrating the potential of a site, its internal configuration, and SterlingOSB Zero.



THE PICTURE ART COLLECTION / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

THE BRIEF
We are asking entrants to design a retreat for up to 10 occupants, set within a landscaped setting of their choosing. This may be one or more storeys in height. Terraces or internal courtyards may be incorporated. While we assume the design may be made up of a palette of different materials, we would like to see SterlingOSB Zero used as the main part of the overall material strategy. How does its nature and high strength features make it integral to the retreat's design?

While we do not seek to curb imagination, we would ask you to consider the nature of SterlingOSB Zero and ensure propositions reflect its material capabilities. SterlingOSB Zero used externally should be adequately protected with a cladding material and/or insulation; this may also apply to internal finishes.

JUDGING
Chaired by the RIBA Journal, judges will look for imaginative uses of SterlingOSB Zero that best responds to the competition brief. Pre-fabrication or CNC fabrication to create novel forms will be considered. Other materials may form an integral part of the proposition, but it is expected that the design will make good use of SterlingOSB Zero.

The winning proposal in this ideas' competition will be the one that, in the minds of the judges, best unites practical needs of simple habitation with the romantic qualities of the landscape it sits in, in a considered and poetic way.

JUDGES
TBC but including Jan-Carlos Kucharek, deputy editor, RIBA Journal (chair), and Timea Cooper, marketing manager, West Fraser

DEADLINE
Entries should be received by 14.00 UK time on Monday June 20, 2022.

The narrators of the Decameron.
Bodleian Library, MS Holkham misc 49f 5r detail.
Unknown illustrator c1467

TO ENTER
Go to ribaj.com/retreat-competition-enter
Entries must include the following, laid out on no more than two A3 sheets, supplied electronically as pdfs:

- An explanation of no more than 500 words on the entry form, describing the design of the building, stating clearly where SterlingOSB Zero has been used and the core ideas around the design of the proposition, its siting and configuration.
- Plans and sections explaining the nature of the building, its structure, build-up and materials used.
- 3D Axonometric or perspective images conveying the nature of the proposition.
- Any supplementary images you consider helpful.

NOTES

- The judges' decision is final
- First prize £2,500. Three commended prizes of £500.
- No correspondence will be entered into by the organisers or judges regarding entries and winners.
- Shortlisted entries will be notified in writing.
- National guidance permitting, shortlisted entries will be invited to the prize-giving event in September
- Please email questions to ribaj.retreat@riba.org

The Retreat is produced in association with West Fraser <https://uk.westfraser.com/>



2: Intelligence

WITH SOCIAL MEDIA
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TAREK MERLIN,
FEIX & MERLIN

Many architects put effort into creating content for their websites, but to attract attention you have to go where people are – social media. Feix & Merlin is active on all the main platforms. Management used to fall to me but we now share the load with an outside consultant. We've introduced a strategic approach – using data to see what content is effective, and when – and tuned our messaging for each channel. On Instagram, for example, we've rethought the appearance of our grid, and pushed more behind-the-scenes video snippets. We've worked to define an appropriate tone of voice without losing our tongue-in-cheek humour.

In the last year, I've made a series of films for YouTube and TikTok called Behind Closed Doors. The films look inside buildings that people can't normally see, and celebrate diversity to show young people that architecture is for everyone. Being from the LGBTQ community, my co-founder Julia and I always want to be visible and vocal about what we stand for. Working with three film-makers, we produce six-minute videos which I adapt for TikTok, having fun with fast-paced transitions and unexpected music choices. Although the aim wasn't to win work, some opportunities have followed.

TikTok suits us as we've never felt constrained by expectations about how architects present themselves, but all architects should bring their natural passions to social media. Corporate identities used to be rigid and impersonal; now they need to be complex, layered and, above all, authentic, revealing real individuals behind the work. ●

'We produce six-minute videos which I adapt for TikTok, having fun with fast-paced transitions and unexpected music choices'



Left Feix & Merlin's London studio, complete with cocktail bar.



Intelligence is officially approved RIBA CPD. Look out for icons throughout the section indicating core curriculum areas.

PHOTO: TAREK MERLIN

Fresh thinking

An effective ventilation strategy for new and existing buildings is essential to reducing the transmission of Covid, writes Andy Pearson



Health, safety
& wellbeing



Design, construction
& technology

Covid-19 made designers acutely aware of the need for effective building ventilation. Its continued presence means they need to consider its presence as part of a building’s wider ventilation strategy.

Chris Iddon, a research fellow at the University of Nottingham, is a ventilation expert looking into the risk of Covid transmission in the built environment and co-author of CIBSE’s Covid Ventilation Guidance. He talks of Covid and ventilation in terms of relative exposure risk – see graph (below right) showing the relationship between aerosol concentration and ventilation rate.

Ventilation is the process of introducing outside air into indoor spaces while removing stale air.

The graph shows that the more outside air you put into a space the lower the risk of occupants inhaling the virus, which is the advice we were all given during the pandemic.

What is significant about this graph, however, is the shape of the curve. ‘It shows that removal mechanisms are inversely proportional to the inhaled amount of virus,’ explains Iddon. In essence, there is a very sharp drop in relative risk as the amount of ventilation in a space goes from zero to a small amount. Then its impact on reducing risk becomes less and less. Improving the air in a poorly ventilated space has a greater effect on risk reduction than increasing the ventilation by the same amount in an adequately ventilated space.

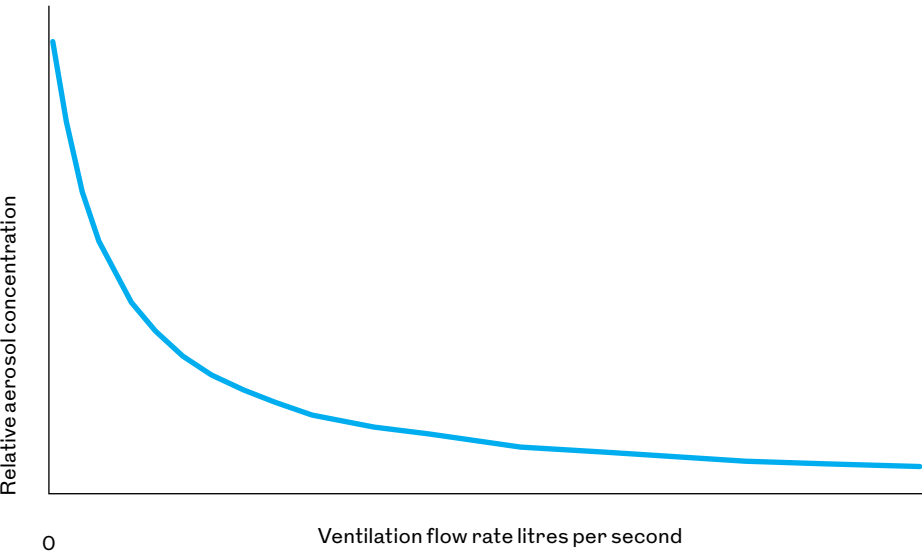
DESIGNING FOR BEST VENTILATION

- For cross ventilation, the floor plate should be no wider than five times the height of the space.
- Provide for natural ventilation at the outset of a design; it’s hard to retrofit.
- Use air quality information (as required by the planning process) to help decide whether to use mixed-mode ventilation. It could allow you to provide opening windows even in the city.
- Plan for improving air quality. As electric cars replace diesel and petrol ones, opening windows could become an option if they have been planned for. Ensure this provision does not get lost in value engineering.
- Consider air-cleaning technologies as a temporary measure if it is impossible to increase the ventilation rate sufficiently in the near term.

This law of diminishing returns is particularly important when finding an appropriate balance between ventilation rates and energy consumption. Every additional litre of fresh air supplied to a building will have an energy penalty, both from tempering the air and from the fan energy needed to push it through the building. Of course, every extra litre of air will also reduce the risk of inhaling the virus. The challenge for designers is in finding the appropriate balance between ventilation and energy use.

Iddon says the typical Part F Building Regulations outside air requirement of 10 litres/second/person, or 1 litre/

Change in relative risk index as ventilation flow rate increases (indicative)



Source: Chris Iddon, data derived from Jones, B. et al. (2020) ‘Modelling uncertainty in the relative risk of exposure to the SARS-CoV-2 virus by airborne aerosol transmission in Buildings’, Building and Environment. 191:107617



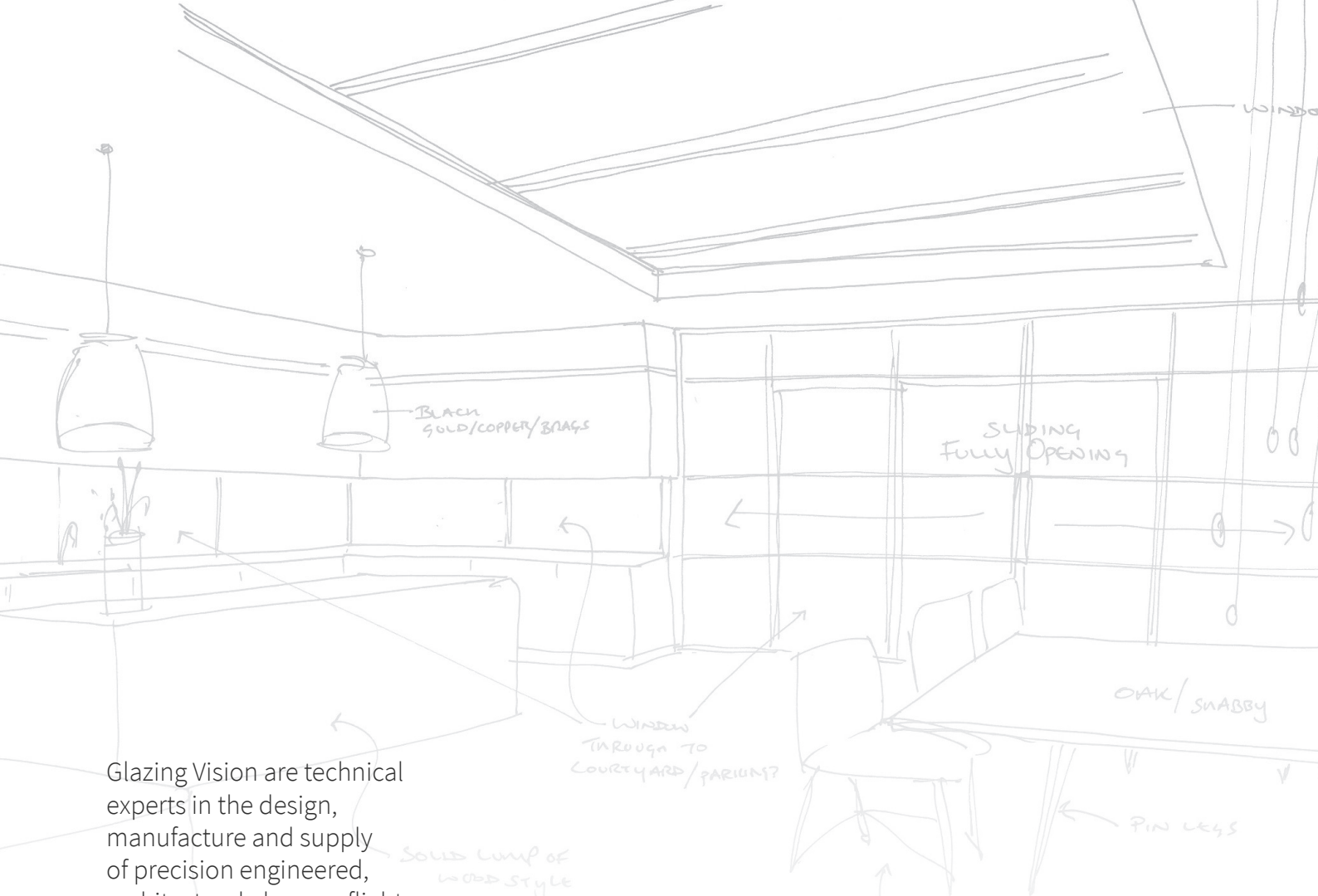
RIGHT: MARTIN CLEVELAND; ABOVE: JIM JOHNSTONE

Top Mixed mode ventilation at Horizon House designed by Alec French Architects.
Above Red Kite House by Stride Treglown is naturally ventilated.

ENERGY SAVINGS FROM MIXED-MODE VENTILATION

Compare these two office buildings in the south of England for the Environment Agency, both with an environmental strategy from engineer Hoare Lea:

- Red Kite House, Wallingford, was designed to be naturally ventilated with openable windows so there was no opportunity for heat recovery in winter. Post-occupancy evaluation measured the building’s energy consumption at 200kWh/m² per year
- Horizon House, Bristol, was designed with a mixed-mode strategy. It features mechanical ventilation with heat recovery and has openable windows for natural ventilation when external conditions allow. Post-occupancy evaluation showed its measured energy was 120kWh/m² per year, 60 per cent that of its naturally ventilated sister.



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second/m² of floor area is 'a good rule of thumb to adopt for all spaces' when considering the risk of Covid transmission in both new and existing buildings. His message is: 'Target what you need to hit, and if you can improve on that there will be certain benefits.'

It is not just about avoiding virus transmission. Health and wellbeing benefits from improved fresh air supply rates also include better sleep, fewer sick days and an improved ability to concentrate. But seasonal conditions bring challenges. 'The focus of guidance I've written is to increase ventilation as much as is reasonably possible,' says Iddon, 'but what is reasonable in winter is different to what is reasonable in summer.'

The emerging consensus among engineers is that the most effective means of improving ventilation rates in both summer and winter in new-build office and commercial buildings,

Above Pilbrow & Partners' EDGE Building at London Bridge, London, is aiming for WELL Platinum with its mixed-mode ventilation.

'What is reasonable ventilation in the winter is different to what is reasonable in summer'

MIXED-MODE, WELL AND BREEAM: THE FUTURE OF BUILDING VENTILATION

Architect Pilbrow & Partners is working with engineer Atelier Ten to design what Dutch developer EDGE claims will be London's most sustainable office tower.

- EDGE London Bridge is a 27-floor commercial office, aiming for BREEAM Outstanding and WELL Platinum certification.
- The office floors incorporate an underfloor air supply and high-level extract, delivering outside air at 2 litres/second/m² to comply with the WELL standard.
- In addition to mechanical ventilation, the scheme incorporates perimeter openings to allow the office floors to be naturally ventilated.
- EDGE London Bridge has an ambitious targeted regulated energy consumption of less than 23kWh/m², which aligns with the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge operational intensity targets for new-build offices.



MILLERHARE/EDGE

without incurring a huge energy penalty is to adopt a mixed-mode or hybrid ventilation system. This is a combination of mechanical and natural ventilation systems, which exploits the best features of each to improve the indoor environment and reduce energy demand (see box, page 34).

In a mixed-mode system, mechanical ventilation often with heat recovery is used to ensure minimum fresh air supply rates can be maintained in winter when the outside air is cold. Ideally air is not recirculated between different occupied zones so as to keep transmission risk down. In spring and autumn, openable windows boost the ventilation rate by allowing a space to be naturally ventilated. The natural ventilation mode can also be used in summer if conditions are favourable, however, there is also an option of reverting to mechanical ventilation with comfort cooling.

A major benefit of mixed-mode ventilation is that it gives occupants control over the type of airflow in their environment. Post-occupancy evaluations frequently show that people are prepared to tolerate warmer internal temperatures when they have some level of control.

'Mixed-mode is definitely starting to happen in buildings more and more often,' says Edwin Wealend, head of

research and innovation at consultant Cundall and chair of the CIBSE Air Quality Task Group. 'If you look at the London Energy Transformation Initiative (LETI) guidance on transitioning to net zero operational carbon [which is supported by RIBA], to get energy consumption down to the level needed, you have to look at using natural ventilation in offices, which is not something we've been used to designing for.'

To function effectively, a mixed-mode ventilation system will need to be integral to a building's design from the outset. 'If you look at passive design best practice,' says Wealand, 'you want openable windows and a shallow floor plate no more than about 12m deep, or a floor plate that opens out on to an atrium to enable stack ventilation.'

Mixed-mode is equally applicable to the ventilation of residential schemes. The concept of mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR) in winter

Mixed-mode exploits the best features of mechanical and natural ventilation systems

Left 2 litres/second/m² is the target for air delivery for the EDGE Building based on the WELL standard. MillerHare/EDGE

and openable windows in summer has been employed in some, though not all, Passivhaus homes. MVHR is now the norm in most new apartment blocks, says Hoare Lea's Ashley Bateson. However, a mixed-mode solution will enable heat to be purged in summer, preventing overheating and helping compliance with the new Part O of the Building Regulations.

While mixed mode is set to become an increasingly popular option to improve the ventilation of both new residential and commercial buildings, a major challenge will be in improving the ventilation of existing buildings, to which Iddon's relative exposure risk graph applies every bit as much.

'What the pandemic has done is shone a light on the rooms and spaces that are not properly ventilated,' says Shaun Fitzgerald, a ventilation expert who supported Foster + Partners with the ventilation strategy for Bloomberg's London HQ and is a member of the government's Environment Modelling Group, part of SAGE.

'First base for me,' he says, 'is ensuring that ventilation in all workplaces where there are multiple occupants is brought up to modern Building Regulation standards, since we know tackling really poorly ventilated spaces provides the most benefit. We can then debate whether the current Building Regulations are fit for purpose for risk mitigation in managing Covid, and indeed future airborne virus pandemics and ensuring occupant wellbeing.'

Fitzgerald and Iddon are both team members of the government-funded Airborne Infection Reduction through Building Operation and Design for SARS-CoV-2 study, or Airbods as it is more commonly known. It is set to publish its findings later this year, including ventilation guidance for architects and consultants for use at the early design stage. The findings may even lead to changes in the Building Regulations. ●



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Intelligence
Building safety

41



SARAH LEE

What architects can learn from Grenfell

Architects have not emerged well from the inquiry into the tragic fire, but they can turn this around by becoming advocates for safety, writes Peter Apps



Health, safety
& wellbeing



Design, construction
& technology

'It's masquerading horsemeat as a beef lasagne, and people bought it.' So Neil Crawford, one of the Studio E architects responsible for the design of the cladding system on Grenfell Tower, memorably told the public inquiry in March 2020.

He was describing the Celotex insulation specified for the majority of that system and the misleading way in which it had been marketed – presented as suitable for use on high-rise buildings when it was actually anything but.

Since he made that statement, the inquiry into the 2017 fire has revealed a scandal that actually makes the horsemeat saga feel a little tame.

Take Celotex. Its staff plainly knew that the material – a plastic called polyisocyanurate – was combustible. 'Do we take the view that our product realistically shouldn't be used behind most cladding panels because in the event of a fire it would burn?' wrote one staff member in an internal email in autumn 2013.

Despite this, the firm's management was adamant that it should pursue efforts to snatch a chunk of the high-rise market from its rival Kingspan, which at the time had something close to a monopoly. In early 2014, Celotex sought to pass a 'large-scale test' that would

open the door for the use of its product at height. The first time it tried, it failed. Undeterred, it tried again.

This time it installed a layer of fire-resisting magnesium oxide board behind the exterior cladding, designed to help stop it cracking. With these reinforcements, it passed the test.

But Celotex then decided to obscure the use of these boards from its marketing. Instead, it secured a certificate from Local Authority Building Control which implied the product could be used in buildings above 18m in a range of systems. Asked if this was 'intentional, deliberate and dishonest', the firm's former product manager, Jon Roper, said: 'I believe so, yes.'

Celotex then produced marketing that bluntly said the material was 'acceptable for use' on high-rise buildings when this claim was never true outside the specific cladding build-up used in the test.

And Celotex's story is the tip of the iceberg. We have had further revelations about Kingspan, which include the fact that it obtained the fire rating of Class 0 by testing only the foil-facing on its insulation and not the insulation itself.

Text messages between employees of the firm show them joking about this.



'Alls we do is lie in here,' wrote one.

The cladding company Arconic, meanwhile, spent 13 years before Grenfell hiding testing that showed its panels – containing a core of polyethylene which was as combustible as petrol – burned 10 times as quickly and released seven times as much heat when bent into a 'cassette' shape. They were bent into this configuration on Grenfell Tower.

In the midst of this, it seems legitimate to ask what possible chance architects have at making their buildings safe? It is a fair question. But if the response were simply to throw up our hands in despair, then the opportunity this once-in-a-lifetime inquiry provides for change would be lost.

The truth it has exposed is that the architects who worked on refurbishing Grenfell Tower gave themselves no chance. The firm had no experience of high-rise residential projects and precious little of cladding in general. Its senior partners spent crucial stages of the job focused on the liquidation and rebirth of the firm.

And crucially, those who drew up the plans neither knew the specific rules around cladding nor troubled to find

them out. Instead, they trusted others down the line (most pertinently the specialist cladding subcontractor) to check their work.

They also comforted themselves that what they were doing went along with what most of the industry was doing. If using combustible insulation on high-rise buildings was so common then surely it couldn't be wrong?

Half-understood concepts ('it chars rather than burns') replaced serious fire engineering principles, while the objective of achieving aspirational u-values left fire safety a secondary consideration.

There was also the revelation that some of the CPD-training given to the firm was actually provided by Celotex.

With all of this, Studio E found itself at the mercy of the word of sales

Ultimately, what the Grenfell Tower Inquiry calls on those in the construction sector to do is mistrust each other

Left How can architects build safer homes, learning the lessons from the inquiry on the fire at Grenfell Tower?

people who were always going to use that weakness to bolster their order books. This, sadly, is a symptom of what has happened elsewhere to give us the building safety crisis.

But it didn't have to be like this. Had Studio E known, for example, that the fire classification of Class 0 was irrelevant to the use of insulation on high rise, they would have been less likely to be suckered by marketing that placed this classification front and centre.

Had they known that a large-scale test only applied to the exact specifications of the system tested, they would have been able to see the spurious marketing claim that the product was acceptable for use on high rises in general for what it was.

Neither of these are difficult concepts to understand, and both were available on a plain reading of the relevant guidance.

Ultimately, and sadly, what the Grenfell Tower Inquiry calls on those in the construction sector to do is mistrust each other. But that can be healthy. If you expect sales people to come bearing snake oil and subcontractors to duck and dive and slice off the top, you are far less likely to be caught out when they do.

Architects can play a key role in an improved construction sector. Within the system, they should be the advocates for safety in the same way that they are for aesthetics and sustainability.

The profession should take as much pride in the thought that everyone can leave one of their buildings in an emergency as they currently place on their wise use of space. The fact that a wall would never propagate a fire should be seen as illustrious an achievement as designing one that delivers perfect energy efficiency.

Most importantly, though, they need to be the ones in the kitchen who can tell the horsemeat from the beef and have the pride to ensure the former never ends up in their lasagne. ●

Peter Apps is deputy editor at Inside Housing



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Feel strongly about something? Enter our Future Architects writing competition

Architecture raises many points of contention. Write a piece on your pet subject to win a prize – and audience

We live in turbulent times. What do you, the architects of the future, think about it? How will current affairs, protest, identity politics, climate emergency, technology and your local high street feed into our future buildings, our future places? How do we tackle homelessness, the struggling retail sector, schools under pressure? Can architects build a better metaverse? Are there design issues you yearn to celebrate, condemn, change?

Past winners of this competition have drawn out lessons in multi-generational living from the film Parasite and asked deep questions about the possibility of anti-racism in architecture as a profession and beyond.

The award-winning RIBA Journal is now giving you the chance to have your say with a writing competition run in collaboration with RIBA Future Architects Network.

We want to hear from and feature the voices of architecture students and early career professionals (part 1, part 2 or studying for part 3) to showcase the voice of the next generation.

We are looking for bright, original submissions of 800-1,000 words that give an insight into design in the making, the ideas, strategies and techniques that go into making up architecture. Entries should be aligned with the three main sections of the RIBA Journal: Buildings, Intelligence and Culture. Articles should be in one of the following categories:

- Building/place: A study of a building – new or refurbished – or place
- Tech/practice: An informative piece on an industry innovation or hot topic for architects
- People: A profile of a person or practice connected with architecture, in the UK or internationally

The judging panel, chaired by RIBA Journal contributing editor Chris Foges, will include professional architectural journalists and emerging architects.



Above Entries to the Future Writers competition tackle the pressing issues facing those who shape our environments.

This competition and RIBA Future Architects Network are designed to support, inspire and give a voice to architecture students, pre-qualification, and early career architecture professionals, as they move from study to practice.

Future Architects is a way for emerging architects to engage with the profession at the start of their career and offers continuing support throughout the educational journey.

Our writing competition deadline is Monday 4 April 2022 and the winning article(s) will be featured on ribaj.com. ●

Enter now at ribaj.com/future-writers-2022

Evaluation panel:

Sarah Maafi	Guest lecturer, Technical University of Munich, winner Future Architects writing competition 2021
Lucy Watson	Commissioning editor, Financial Times
Nana Biamah-Ofosu	Architect, teacher, writer and director of Studio NYALI
Chris Foges	Contributing editor, RIBA Journal, chair of the panel



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Aggregate Industries expands its low carbon concrete product range with the launch of ECOPact Prime AS

Leading materials supplier's exciting new product is an active setting concrete that offers carbon savings of over 50% while not compromising on quality or build time, with the flexibility to meet site-specific requirements

Leading construction materials supplier Aggregate Industries has added to its market-leading ECOPact low carbon concrete product range with the launch of ECOPact Prime AS. It is a new and unique active setting carbon-saving concrete that delivers greater carbon reduction compared to ECOPact, with no compromise on performance – and the same setting time plus active development of strength.

As well as over 50% carbon reduction, other key benefits of ECOPact Prime AS include its active strength development compared with the current ECOPact product and the flexibility to provide bespoke products to fit site specific requirements. It is also available in most consistence classes to meet the evolving needs of customers and clients, without compromising on quality or build time.

Lee Sleight, Aggregate Industries managing director, said: "We're delighted to add to our ECOPact green concrete product range ECOPact Prime AS – a low embodied carbon concrete product, but with an improved performance, meaning our customers don't need to compromise when choosing between sustainable concrete and technical performance."

"Being at the forefront of sustainable materials has long been a goal of Aggregate Industries and we have invested heavily in low-carbon solutions that assist in meeting the construction industry's sustainability goals."

"As the UK's leading building materials supplier, we recognise our responsibility to play a central role in the transition to net zero and part of that is an ongoing commitment to developing innovative and sustainable construction solutions that consistently



Above ECOPact low carbon concrete is helping to build a more sustainable future.

Right Getjar pouring ECOPact Prime AS on-site at Elephant and Castle.

deliver against expectations. We look forward to continuing to work with contractors on providing solutions that meet their sustainable targets, without compromising on project schedules, quality or performance."

As part of the launch of ECOPact Prime AS, London Concrete, part of Aggregate Industries, has been working with a range of customers, including reinforced concrete and framework specialist Getjar, which has used the product on a project in Elephant and Castle.

Simon Copeland, Group Compliance Director at Getjar, said: "We're delighted to be working with the team at London Concrete to use the ECOPact Prime AS product. We are committed to sourcing and using a variety of sustainable construction solutions across all of our projects and were particularly impressed by ECOPact Prime AS for its low carbon qualities, without compromise on performance or build time."

ECOPact Prime AS is readily available



from most of Aggregate Industries' batching plants. Aggregate Industries offers a range of technical and dedicated support, ensuring the provided solution meets industry standards, requirements and construction schedule.

What's more, clients are able to get a clear understanding of their individual requirements and potential carbon savings through Aggregate Industries' online carbon calculator. ●



Visit www.aggregate.com/carbon-calculator

For more information on ECOPact Prime AS, visit <https://www.aggregate.com/ecopact>

How to help planners approve your scheme

In the first of a series on working with the planning system, Hana Loftus spells out what architects need to deliver to help planners say yes



Places, planning
& community



Conservation
& heritage

What do planners really want from us? This is a frequent cry from architects who feel they've come up with the perfect scheme only to find it mired in a process that seems to go round in circles. When planning feels like a Sisyphean struggle, and determination periods end up many multiples of the eight or twelve weeks set out in legislation, what can architects do to increase their chances of, if not success, at least a swift and clear outcome?

Planning today is a highly adversarial branch of public law. The level of challenge is phenomenal – it's simply not possible any more for a planner to just like a proposal; they need to be sure it won't fall foul of a judicial review, that it won't set a precedent that will have every rogue developer in the area rubbing their hands in glee, and that it won't land them in hot water with their elected councillors, local activists or social media. It's an unenviable task – weighing up the views of innumerable other officers and external consultees behind the scenes and second-guessing local politics, all while struggling under ever greater workloads.

The best way to help your proposal succeed is to make life as easy as possible for your case officer. Believe it or not, they actually want to grant you consent. It helps the council's performance statistics, reduces the number of appeals they have to resource (and pay for out of their meagre budgets) and gets them kudos with their superiors for being

efficient and capable. But too often they are faced with a pile of documents and drawings that aren't easy to relate to the policies they will be assessed against, and are full of gaps and inconsistencies.

A Local Plan isn't a gorgeous coffee table book or a pretty Instagram feed but still, it's surprising how few architects have read the planning policies their schemes will be assessed against. The many layers of the decision-making framework – the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the neighbourhood plan, the supplementary planning documents, the conservation area appraisal that's a PDF of a photocopy of a print-out from around 1985 – all have their weight. Read them, and set out clearly how your proposal conforms, supplying piles of neatly ordered and incontrovertible evidence addressing all the relevant policies. Think of it like going to court for the prosecution. When architects zero in on design, ignoring the other policies that need to be satisfied, they don't make it easy for planners to say yes.

When architects zero in on design, ignoring the other policies that need to be satisfied, they don't make it easy for planners to say yes

But planning isn't just about policy compliance, it's also about politics. A planning officer's worst nightmare is that a scheme they recommend for approval is refused at planning committee. (Arguably, that's a good outcome for applicants as it's a fair bet the proposal will succeed at appeal.) To avoid this, officers will often take a very cautionary approach if local voices oppose a proposal – unless there are public benefits that unambiguously outweigh the harms. They don't want local councillors clogging up their inbox; complaints being lodged; under-employed busybodies deciding to 'take on the council'. Help your planner by ensuring they won't have brickbats coming for their head. Depending on your situation, this can be through meaningful local consultation – exhaustively documented – or a bottle of wine for the neighbours and a promise to keep quiet about the unauthorised loft conversion they had done last year.

If this all sounds like a disproportionate amount of work to justify the tasteful house extension you've designed, you would be right. And the level of planning challenge and scrutiny rises exponentially with the wealth of the area. Depressingly, planning runs more smoothly in low-income areas where residents just don't have the capacity to object effectively and where you're unlikely to be in an area of heritage or landscape protection.

If you feel that planning is ever more capricious, unpredictable, bureaucratic and frustrating, then it's likely your case officer does too. So give them the information they need in the form they need it and try to make their job a little easier. If you want to change the system, respond to policy consultations at national level and get involved with plan-making at the local scale. Few architects engage in that part of the planning process but upstream is where the real power lies. ●

Hana Loftus is co-director of HAT Projects and a chartered planner. Until recently she was engagement and communications lead at the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service.

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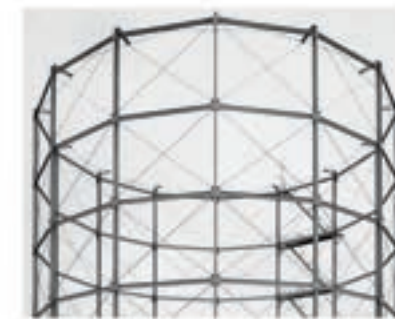
Trinity Riverview, Manchester
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Standardisation
— Leader **51**

Future winners
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3: Culture



As a child, Richard Chivers was fascinated with gasholders. His father had been a British Gas works inspector, a career spent crossing the country to report on their condition. Forgotten in intervening years, Richard's fascination was rekindled in 2015, on reading that National Grid planned to demolish a large number of them and sell the land they stood on.

Great iron lungs that had, for more than a century, slowly respired for the UK's industry and homes, were to be turned off for good. At this point, Chivers chose to follow in his father's

footsteps and carry out a survey of his own.

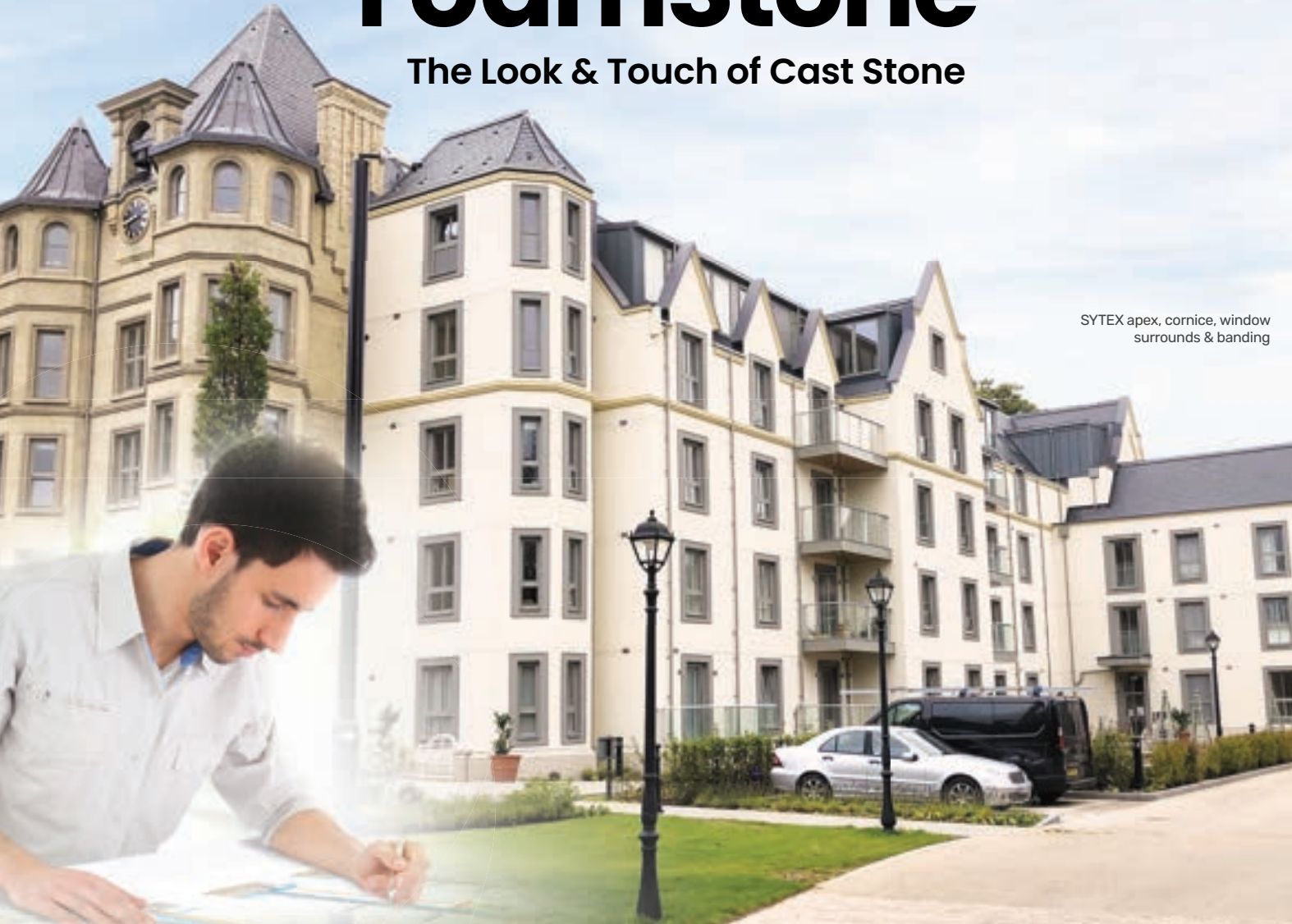
He photographed hundreds and, as he did, found himself more drawn to the gasholders themselves than their place in the cityscape. He channelled this first by draining them of colour to black and white, then by placing them together, allowing the structures, denuded of context, to speak plainly, one to the other: Leeds to Greenwich, Hornsey to Great Yarmouth, Aston to East Ham.

A compare and contrast for gasholders – like Uswitch for your gas bills. • Jan-Carlos Kucharek

Richard Chivers
Gas Holder Grid 2.
March 2022
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**Culture
Leader**

'It is exciting to see architects working to create new standard forms that will be easier and quicker to build with'



Maintaining standards

Standard formats don't have to be obeyed but knowing those rules and when to break them makes it a whole lot easier to design, says Eleanor Young

The world is governed by invisible rules. You don't have to understand the mathematical equation of gravity to feel its impact. I was a teenager abroad when I divined that UK balustrades had a regulation height – and that was why I felt I might pitch over one low international balustrade. Fitting a mattress to a bedframe or a kitchen carcass to cupboard door, you curse that you bought one that appears to fit a European or Scandinavian standard while the other seems to be based on imperial measures.

In IT they talk about standards ensuring interoperability. Can your system or device work with mine? We expect standard jacks to fit computer sockets; WiFi and Bluetooth are underpinned by patented tech and integrated circuit chips, all agreed by huge committees, which allow devices to connect to each other. And it makes sense. If we are investing in BIM we need to be able to share it with the rest of the team and asset managers down the line.

Of course simple things go together simply. That doesn't just mean you are limited to designing for 2x4 timbers or standard bricks (however satisfying that might be). It is exciting to see architects working to create new standard forms that will be easier and quicker to build with, whether it is Knox Bhavan with its OSB structural cassettes or the hempcrete panels developed by Practice Architecture and Material Cultures, which we spotlight on page 74 as part of our Future winners section.

The rules of physics, of law and regulation and the rules of manufacture and industry agreement over standard sizes and formats define the world around us. Some rules need to be stuck to, as the Grenfell Tower Inquiry has shown (page 41). But knowing those rules and when to break them makes it a whole lot easier to design and make.

And often less wasteful and expensive. And think of the pleasure, and relief, when things fit together without extra complex calculations and workarounds.

Printing also has these invisible rules. As you will have seen, this month we have changed the magazine shape and size, adopting a format that works with standard 870mm-wide paper reel sizes, rather than having to order special paper reels that go to the maximum size of our Lincolnshire presses. This is less wasteful in terms of paper and packaging and has provided an opportunity to refresh the layout while ensuring clarity and readability.

Due to rising costs of paper, postage and energy, we also have taken the decision to combine magazine issues during holiday periods. In the meantime look out for the May issue with full coverage of all the RIBA Regional Award winners, which you can also see, region by region, as they are announced on ribaj.com. ●

There is a satisfaction in working with standard dimensions – and knowing when not to.



ONLY ON RIBAJ.COM

Knox Bhavan Architects on designing the timber cassette system it developed for a riverbank home
ribaj.com/cassette-construction

STEPHANIE WUNDERLICH PHOTO: ISTOCK

ribaj.com

The RIBA Journal April 2022



Maintaining perspective

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has thrown much of what we knew into turmoil, writes Simon Allford. Now we must help make sense of it

The world has changed dramatically. Particularly for Ukraine and its population. Proof, if ever it was needed, that we should never assume the longevity of the post-Second World War model of European peace and security. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and collapse of the Iron Curtain re-set the European model in a remarkably swift and surprisingly (and relatively) peaceful process. None of us today, however, can have any idea where Russia's invasion will end. But we are all now aware, beyond the tragedy being played out, of some of the immediate impacts and outcomes.

One is that surprised western democracies have been galvanised to act swiftly and in concert – through the provision of arms and the exercising of sanctions – in support of a sovereign Ukraine. Another is that the world has been pushed further into an economic troubles that will affect us all in many ways. Yet another is that the much-vaunted idea that future wars will be cyber has been exposed, at least in part, as a fallacy – it is troops and tanks that are leading the invasion; it is bombs and rockets that are raining down on Ukraine's cities and its people. One truth has been confirmed: energy supply and energy security are a vital driver of geopolitics. The over-reliance of western European democracies on fossil fuels – piped in from Russia – may well have informed Vladimir Putin's thinking. Though their resolve, despite that reliance, may also have surprised him.

But what does this mean for architecture? In many ways that seems a selfish and narrow question. Many practices, individuals – and the RIBA – have expressed support for colleagues from Ukraine and in Ukraine and its environs – as refugees flood into Poland and elsewhere. Some practices have announced they are stopping their work in Russia. Many have already chosen not to work there. I was struck by the courage,

in an increasingly draconian Russia, of the large numbers of people taking part in public protests and by an open letter from Russian architects and planners condemning the invasion of Ukraine as 'unacceptable'. Potentially, they are putting much more than their livelihoods at stake.

The greatest impact on global architecture is the effect the threat to energy security will have on the climate challenge. Germany may consider a return to nuclear power, previously rejected, to reduce reliance on Russian gas. But that is a long-term shift that will not be in play for years. Right now, with the supply of gas precarious, energy security concerns will impact throughout Europe on plans to phase out coal fired generators. Right now, despite warm words post-COP26, it is clear our planet remains immediately vulnerable to more than global warming: political power plays and nuclear weapons are a threat at a level not seen since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

Inevitably, these concerns overshadow the day-to-day challenges. But our role as a profession is to help to address the immediate humanitarian, cultural, political and economic impacts of the war while maintaining our focus on how the day-to-day impacts on the long term. Maintaining perspective is as vital as it is difficult. ●



RADICAL ROOMS: POWER OF THE PLAN

Charles Holland Architects and visual artist Di Mainstone explore the domestic plan from Hardwick Hall to the Hopkins House in the new exhibition Radical Rooms: Power of the Plan at the RIBA, 66 Portland Place, London W1B 1AD. 7 April – 30 July 2022

Irpın, Ukraine on 3 March by a bridge shelled by the Ukrainians to slow down Russian convoys.

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BACK IN



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Eye Line 2022: call for entries

Our prestigious annual drawing competition is open – add your work to a decade’s brilliant submissions

Eye Line 2022, RIBA’s annual international competition showcasing the best drawing and rendering skills, is open to entries. As ever, we ask for images in two categories – student and practitioner – that brilliantly communicate architecture, in any medium or combination of media. In the competition’s 10th year, we are looking for work that defies the constrained outlook of the last two years and posits a sense of optimism and hope.

We are on the hunt for images of all kinds, from a hand-drawn concept sketch to technically proficient and layered renders. For us, ‘drawing’ includes any method by which the power of an architectural idea is communicated; be it depictions of existing buildings or works of the imagination.

Practitioners and students enter in different categories:

- Student category – images made by those in architectural education or who are submitting images made before final qualification.
- Practitioner category: images made by those fully qualified and working in practice, whether for real-life projects or to explore ideas and experiences.

Winners and commendations will be exhibited at the RIBA alongside a winners’ party with winning entries published in print and online. Our colleagues at RIBA’s Drawings and Archives Collection at the V&A Museum will consider our winners for inclusion in their archive.

Last year’s practitioner winner was Rory Chisholm for his ‘Manchester Courtyards’, a fluid render in pen and ink, whose scope ranged from the detail to the city. Student winner was Annabelle Tan from the Bartlett School, whose reimagining of the Norfolk landscape through healing ‘craft industries’ produced a drawn narrative informed by her Singaporean roots and notions of the English Picturesque. Commendations in both categories mused on Persian architecture, ‘queerspace’ and quarries.

Every year we are gratified by the originality, wit and talent represented in the Eye Line entries: a truly international, free-to-enter award conducted online. Practitioners and students – show us your best drawings and join a prestigious decade of winners! ●

Eye Line 2022 is produced in partnership with Siderise



Above Eye Line 2021 Practitioner winner Rory Chisholm with ‘Manchester Courtyards: a proposal for Ancoats’. Pencil and ink. 560mm x 1120mm

Siderise are thrilled to be sponsoring Eye Line, which celebrates the first stage of architectural creativity - the drawing. We support architects by developing leading passive fire solutions to protect even the most creative building envelope design.

EYE LINE RULES

We seek the best 2D representations of a building design or concept through visual means. They may be hand or digitally drawn, incorporating collage or any combination or overlay of methods. Video and straight photography excluded

Enter in either the student or practitioner category. The RIBA Journal reserves the right to reallocate to a different category if deemed necessary

A maximum of three images per entry, which can be from different projects or all from the same project
Joint entries on which more than one person has worked are permissible
All entries must be uploaded via the link below. We cannot accept physical works. Images must be at 300dpi, file size a maximum of 25Mb

The work must have been produced within the three years up to the closing date of Friday 6 May 2022 and must not previously have been entered for Eye Line

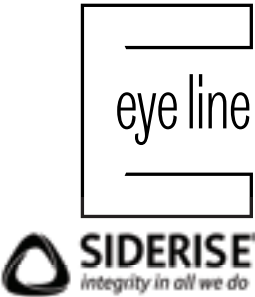
Enter at: ribaj.com/culture/enter-eye-line

Information required

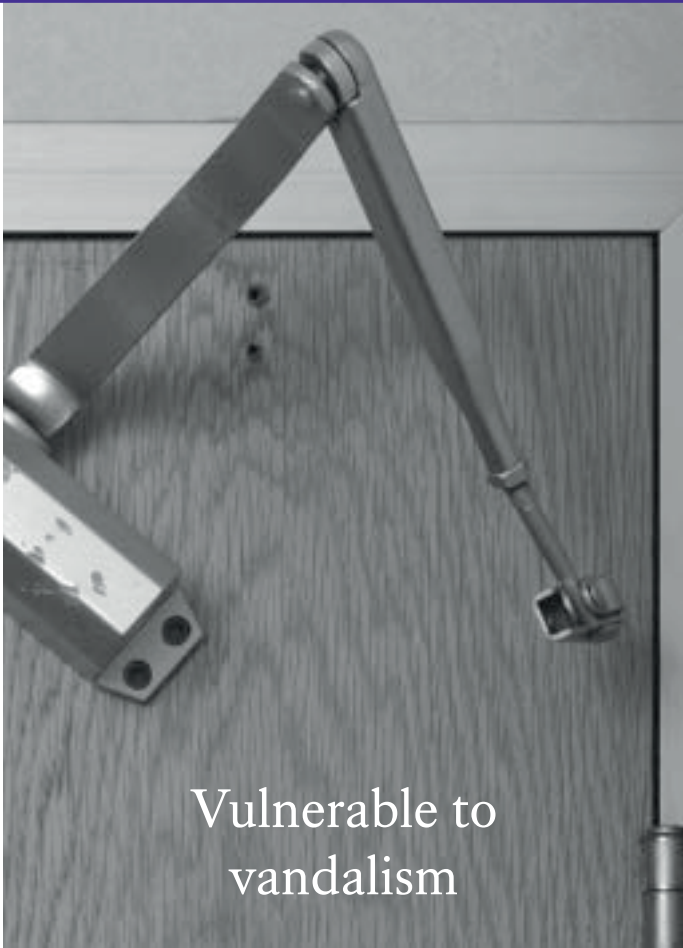
Title of work(s) if applicable, and medium.
Name of the author(s) of the work
Name of organisation where author works or studies
Email, postal address and phone number
Dimensions of the original work as presented, in mm
Date it was completed

Key dates

Deadline: 6 May 2022, 14.00 GMT
Judging: End May 2022
Winners and commendations announced:
July/August 2022 issue of RIBA J and on ribaj.com
Exhibition August/September 2022 (provisional)
Correspondence: eyeline.ribaj@riba.org



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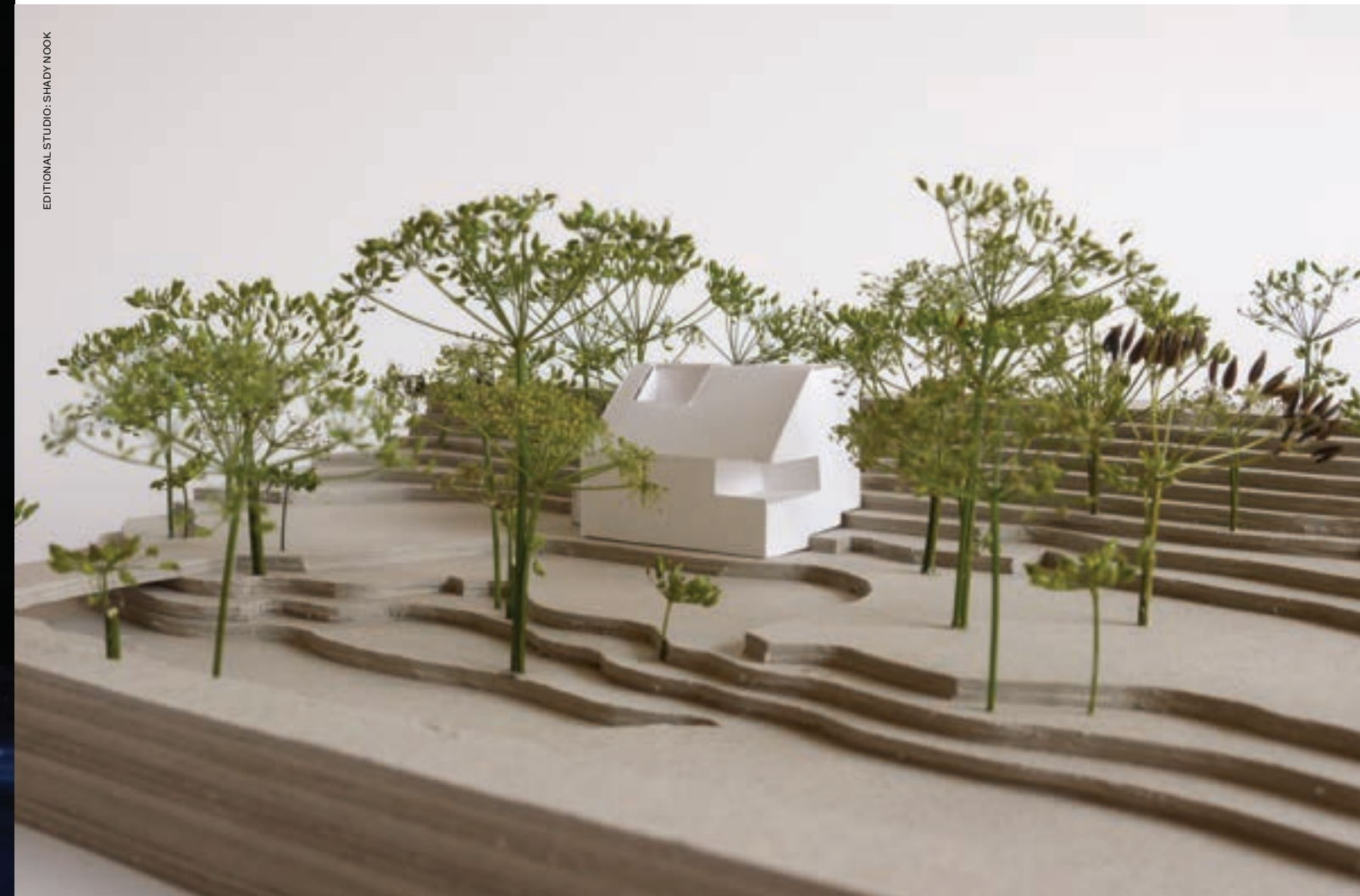
Culture
Future winners

57

Future winners

Our annual gathering of brilliant young design practices shows them working around the UK, creating conditions for better design as they take on development, get close to communities, offer sustainability advice and push material boundaries. We know you will be hearing more from them all in the near future!

EDITORIAL STUDIO: SHADY NOOK



ribaj.com

The RIBA Journal April 2022



‘No one truly speaks for a community unless they sit down and listen to its members,’ says Gurmeet Sian, founder of Office Sian. Since establishing his practice over a decade ago, the British-born architect of Indian heritage has made a name for himself by championing the voices of others and for the considered design of elegant domestic and public buildings.

His passion for community-focused design dates back to Sian’s student days, but has even deeper roots in his childhood in a Sikh family in Maidenhead. ‘After my parents came to the UK in the 1960s, they really had to engage with the south-east Asian community,’ he says. ‘Every weekend we were doing something within that setting.’

Another early influence was music, with which Sian was closely involved from the age of five. ‘Learning about north Indian classical music taught me how to create feelings and atmospheres within a space,’ he says when we meet in his white-walled London office. ‘Now when I design, I think very carefully about moods.’

The opportunity to start the practice came with a commission for a house extension, won while Sian was doing a master’s in History and Theory at the Bartlett following Parts I and II at Liverpool. His modest red brick addition was an important experience: ‘I found a little bit of my voice’, he recalls.

Off the back of it, Sian began to pick up more work, including a £10,000 garden office in east London that remains one of his most notable schemes. Titled ‘Hackney Shed’, the small building has an exposed timber structure that neatly houses a series of bookshelves. By means of retractable full-height doors and a clever skylight, daylight filters into the intimate workspace in different ways throughout the day.



Phoenix Garden
Community
Building.

Care of the community

Office Sian is passionate about designing for people and that drives it to create architecture for public spaces that has genuine social value

Words: Shawn Adams Portrait: Wilma



Above Extension to a house on Buckingham Road, in an east London conservation area.

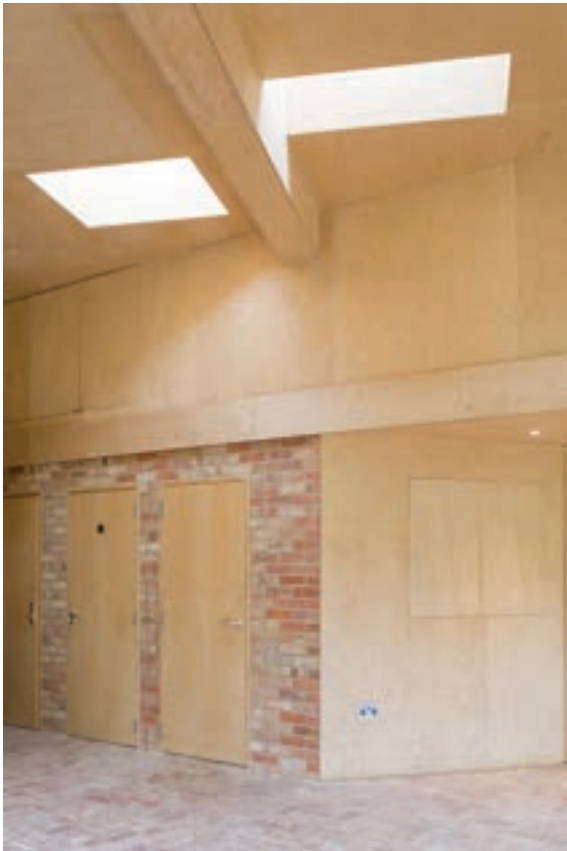


Above Interiors at Buckingham Road are characterised by robust, colourful materials, including brick and hand-painted tiles.

Other notable projects include renovations and light-filled extensions to houses on Buckingham Road and Middleton Road in Hackney, east London, both of which show the studio’s affinity for tactile, self-finished materials, with brick floors and expressive timber structures.

A move into public buildings came in 2014 with the appointment to design the Phoenix Garden Community Building. Having seen the Hackney Shed, the Phoenix Garden Trust approached Office Sian to make a sustainable, multifunctional venue at its community-run garden on a Second World War bomb site in London’s West End – a blissful retreat from the bustle of the city. This was a perfect opportunity to translate the architectural language developed in domestic projects for an institution with the strong social networks he had known as a child.

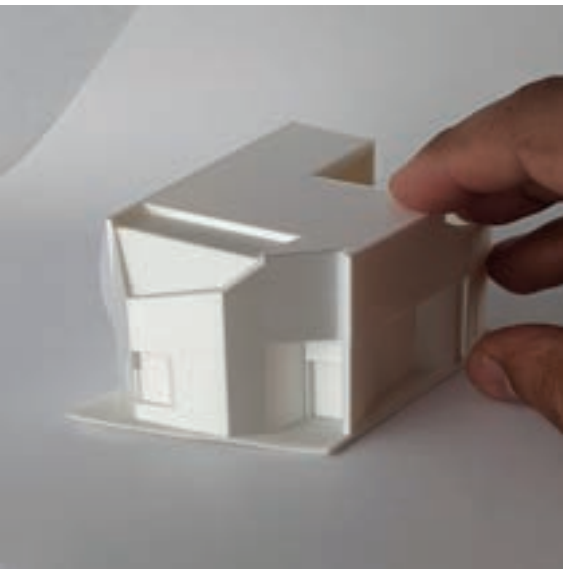
Influenced by English walled gardens, the brick structure has a bold arched opening and a



Left, right Constructed from a prefabricated SIP system, the Phoenix Community Garden Building is lined internally in brick and timber.



RICHARD CHIVERS (6)



Right Hackney Shed, a low-cost workspace and studio in east London.

Left Sketch model for a community building in Enfield.



sleek, white limestone cornice etched with the word ‘Phoenix’ acting as a beacon for people meandering down the street. Inside, a brick-floored, timber-framed space opens onto the tranquil garden and hosts workshops, parties and events. The building was completed in 2018 – snagging ‘best building’ at the Camden Design Awards and a place on the shortlist for RIBA’s MacEwen Award – but Sian’s involvement continues. He chose to have his wedding breakfast in the hidden garden and aims to help the trust organise events in the space. ‘I want to work with local musicians,’ he says, ‘and get funding to do site-specific pieces.’

Domestic work continues alongside more involvement in larger and more public projects, including two further community centres in London. ‘The ambition has never been to do a certain scale of building,’ says Sian, ‘but instead to work with larger groups of people.’

Current work includes an 800-home scheme within Enfield Council’s 85ha Meridian Water development, won in competition as part of a team led by Karakusevic Carson Architects. Alongside practices including Mary Duggan Architects, Maccreanor Lavington, and Architecture Doing Place, Office Sian will create strong community facilities and a programme of education, mentorship and work placements for local people, in consultation with the community. ‘There should be a strong onus on architects and developers to have very integrated and intensive engagement processes’, he says.

The same concerns inform Sian’s activities beyond building, from giving talks to leading workshops.

Below Steel- and timber-framed extension at Middleton Road, east London.



‘What I want to see in the next 10 years is more diverse conversations with different people from different backgrounds,’ he says. As a member of the Redbridge Design Review Panel and chair of the Southwark Community Review Panel, Sian is committed to using design skills to support those that are often under-represented.

Passionate about creating equitable public spaces and buildings with genuine social value, Office Sian has an important place among a generation of practices that are making the architecture profession recognise the power of listening to people. ‘The best designs,’ he says, ‘come from the best conversations.’ ●

Shawn Adams is a co-founder of POoR Collective.

JAMES PFAFF



Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Cardiff

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Flying the flag for retrofit

Manchester-based Editional Studio uses its approachable shopfront studio to win work and propagate its passion for sustainable architecture

Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek
Portrait: Zora Küttner

From its office-cum-gallery in Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Editional Studio is on a mission to excite and educate. Even my taxi driver, who until now has insisted there’s going to be no shopfront anywhere along this respectable south Manchester residential street, is caught unawares when it appears – and pulls up quickly.

With a large picture window to the street beneath a bold, blue sign, it’s definitely looking more like a gallery than an office; intriguing models of tile or hemp within, A1 posters hanging in the space’s depth, each a sobering statement of the construction industry’s effect on global carbon emissions with slogans like ‘Solar won’t save us’. Its exhibition and pamphlet, Decarbonise Your House Now, is the result of the practice recently winning RIBA research funding to look at how small practices might better communicate climate change imperatives to clients. But it feels like a unilateral declaration to upturn the status quo in favour of retrofit, recycling and renewables.

Editorial Studio’s directors Jack Richards and Jo Sharples met on the first day of their degrees at Manchester School of Architecture and



ALEX MACDOUGALL

Left The Decarbonise show features models made of found or recycled materials.

Bottom left The studio’s Shady Nook house outside Stockport, in preplanning, has a fairytale quality.

Right Posters form part of the studio’s agit-prop drive for retrofit.

Below Jack Richards and Jo Sharples outside their office/ gallery.

have been friends ever since – even doing their diplomas together at London Met University. Richards then worked for Karakusevic Carson on its Colville Estate regeneration before returning to Manchester in 2014 to work on Hodder + Partners’ city projects; Sharples to Caruso St John and then Casswell Bank. But carving a joint path was clearly on their minds. Sharples came back to Manchester to teach at Sheffield University and, in 2018, set up Editional Studio with Richards, who teaches there too. Firm friends to firm directors, both wearing sustainability credentials on sleeves – Sharples is a Passivhaus designer; Richards an accredited retrofit coordinator.

Educating is a core part of the firm’s social agenda, evidenced not least by its gallery



space, born of a deflated former balloon shop owned by a friend; both this and the flat above comprised the firm’s first project. It highlights the partners’ interest in sustainable retrofit, community engagement, educational outreach and architecture’s intrinsic cross-disciplinary nature. Previous shows included local artists, ceramicists, furniture-makers, even a sustainable Christmas pop-up. Drawing in people from the street has also proved a good business card. ‘We found people were less intimidated by walking into an opening to talk about a project than the formality of an office,’ says Sharples. In fact, it’s how they’ve found the majority of their work.

But these aren’t extensions of their work as much as manifestos. Take the exhibition model in front of the firm’s office desk, which shows tiles proposed for an extension. These have been made by the client – a local ceramicist – from locally excavated clay. ‘The brown ones were dug up from clay in her back garden,’ says Sharples, ‘and the pink and green ones from waste clay, inspired by capping bricks on walls in Manchester. She made and fired them both in her studio.’

It’s clear the firm is about ‘fabric first’ in a deep way, tempered with a large dose of pragmatism. Experience has taught them that advocating for sustainability in prescriptive ways didn’t work.



Left Examples of facing tiles made and fired by Editional Studio's ceramicist client for her own home extension.

Right Model for Editional Studio's Holcombe Walk garden room, set to be clad in the hand-made tiles pictured left.



there's no big client in Manchester ready to take on board big-picture stuff. But they are working with a community land trust in its negotiation to purchase the old Chorlton Picture House and create a community facility rather than seeing it demolished for housing. Editional Studio was struck by its elaborate neo-baroque interior, hidden from view by a bad, modern brick add-on.

I remark on the fairytale nature of the Shady Nook visualisations and ask about their influences. They mention a few names but none seem to fit with what I'm seeing. 'As we're using local materials and trades, it may feel William Morris or Lutyens ... arts and crafts maybe,' muses Richards, 'we're trying not to be dogmatic.'

'It doesn't come from language or style,' adds Sharples. 'I think we're always considering materials first and seeing how form shifts relative to that.' Their introspection, I feel, belies their ambition: 'You can get the Decarbonise pamphlet at the Whitworth Art Gallery but our hope is that you'd also get it at B&Q.'

Below Chorlton Picture House: an evocative model of dried clay sees the firm search for an appropriate materiality for its community land trust proposal.



'You'd spend ages preparing a detail package for a contractor but they wouldn't engage with it,' explains Richards. 'Now we try to embed sustainability in designs from the outset; principles like local sourcing, minimal steel use, reuse of original fabric or use of external wall insulation.'

But for Editional Studio, it's not just about improved technical performance but the aesthetics that can arise from it. 'We want to get people excited about the architectural potential, and that's what's currently missing from the world of retrofit,' adds Richards.

An example of this ethos is Shady Nook, a new-build passive house on an idyllic 1.6ha site outside Stockport. The timber-framed, highly insulated three-bed home will be clad in stone sourced from within a 10-mile radius and local slate on the roof. But it means tough conversations with the client, who, with a growing family, understandably wants the house to be bigger. 'We'll say: if it's twice as big you still need more energy than if it's not passive but three times smaller,' says Sharples. Negotiating this – along with discouraging wood burners – is stuff they have to tip-toe through gingerly with clients.

The pair are prepared, for the moment, to fight at this domestic level. They accept that

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Chasing the challenge

Having worked together for 10 years, the founders of Glasgow-based New Practice are still looking for opportunities to do things differently

Words: Chris Foges Portrait: Alexander Hoyles

What's in a name? For Marc Cairns and Becca Thomas, the founders of Glasgow-based New Practice, their snappy moniker is a subtle statement of intent. 'We were never going to use our own names,' says Cairns. 'The office is not about our architectural egos; it's about challenging how the built environment is made.' It also announced a fresh start for the pair, who had previously collaborated with a third partner as Pidgin Perfect, building a reputation for socially engaged placemaking projects. That was three years ago, so the 10-strong practice is no longer new-born, but perhaps the suggestion of novelty won't date. 'We are always looking for new ways to practise,' says Cairns, 'so it feels apt.'

Confident and fluent – thanks to a short-lived sideline as a TV presenter – Cairns does most of the practice's public presentations, but is only speaking for both directors now as Thomas is on maternity leave. Would she take a different line on anything? 'Probably, but we've talked so much over 10 years that we know each other very well.' They met as masters students at Strathclyde University and discovered a shared interest in community-led urban design, which evolved



Pavilion for the 2018 London Festival of Architecture.

ALEXANDER HOYLES



New Practice founders Marc Cairns and Becca Thomas.

into a practice more interested in grass-roots organisation than fetishising details for fancy back extensions.

Though aligned in attitude, they have complementary strengths reflected in defined responsibilities. Thomas is creative director and oversees design. Cairns handles operations and develops the complex relationships involved in many of their projects. 'We are yin and yang,' he says, 'but with me identifying as a queer man and Becca as a woman, we've both experienced the difficulties the profession has in being inclusive.' In their own firm that feeds into a commitment to diversity and to making a positive atmosphere. Being flexible about time allows team members to pursue all manner of side projects. 'We are in a national wellbeing crisis,' says Cairns. 'Practice leaders have a responsibility to tackle that.'

Other objectives for the new firm were to build more, and to leverage experience of how change happens in cities – or doesn't – gained in earlier years through a usefully 'naive' impulse to get stuck in. One calling card was its home at Many Studios in The Barras, 10 minutes' walk from Glasgow city centre, which the architects created from a derelict market building. With curator Natalia Palombo, they formed a community interest company, secured government funding and assembled like-minded tenants.

Those convening skills are vital to New Practice's work as two-way translators between



NEW PRACTICE

Above Multifunctional parklets improve public space on Kilmarnock Road in Shawlands, Glasgow.

Below For COP26, New Practice created a temporary exhibition on the site of a former petrol station and, with In-House, programmed events ranging from climate karaoke to workshops for children.



ALEXANDER HOYLES



the machinery of urban development and the public. Most engagement projects take a physical form – like turning a cargo bike into a pop-up exhibition – or involve collective activity based around design and making. ‘Standing outside a shopping centre with a clipboard on a wet Wednesday is not the best use of our skills,’ says Cairns.

During lockdowns, the architects developed creative, narrative-based online communications; one example is a tool to engage Portobello parents with the idea of active travel. ‘That’s the sort of microscopic intervention that can have a big impact in people’s lives,’ he says. Acting as local design champions for projects by larger practices has provided another point of entry to vital conversations on the changing city.

New Practice also relishes a mix of scales in its built work. Much of it to date is in meanwhile use, or ‘worthwhile use’ as Cairns prefers to call it. ‘Lots of wee things can quickly make a compelling portfolio.’ Opportunities to do bigger things have also started to arrive, notably the newly complete Kinning Park Complex. The community-owned space in an Edwardian school was in a parlous



Above Visualisation of the Kinning Park Complex, based in an Edwardian sandstone school.

Left Many Studios in The Barras is home to 35 creative enterprises and also hosts arts and cultural events.

Culture Future winners

state. New Practice helped to win funding and fully revamped the building, stretching a modest budget to add joyful touches to pragmatic accommodation for work and events.

Geographic scope has also grown, across Scotland and further south. Appointment to the Mayor of London’s architecture and urbanism panel led to projects for several councils in the city, where two staff members are based. In Cambridge, where developers U+I and Town are planning the 5,500-home Core Site scheme, New Practice is adapting buildings for use as workspace which will be redeployed when the district is complete.

So what’s next? The firm is ambitious to do more, but not at the expense of its intimate culture, or by doing work for the sake of it. ‘It would be interesting to do a totally new building with people who share our values,’ he suggests. ‘No houses for oligarchs.’ Going on past form, New Practice won’t be waiting for an invitation, or taking no for an answer. ‘Glaswegians come from the school of “If you don’t ask, you don’t get”,’ says Cairns. ‘If we are not given the right opportunities, we make them.’ ●

Below Scotland’s First Minister Nicola Sturgeon visits Kinning Park Complex during construction.



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First: find your plot

As a developer-architect, Tikari Works has carried out every role from marketing its schemes to hiring its own site workforce

Words: Isabelle Priest Portrait: Claudia Leisinger

Below Ty and Nicola Tikari, whose work combines both their theoretical and practical backgrounds. Ty studied at the AA, while Nicola's studies in Munich included six months working as a plumber.



'Communal garden doesn't really work,' says Ty Tikari as we look down into the four fenced-off gardens on the ground floor between the front and rear blocks at Rye Apartments in Peckham, south London. They are a bit gloomy in mid-February, but also a surprise from the expected central communal entrance leading through to a beautifully planted shared garden.

'Everyone likes to think they work but nobody who buys a flat wants a communal garden,' he continues. 'When you are involved in the whole process, you realise the reality; that people want their privacy.' I don't doubt it – plus, as Tikari Works co-founder and Ty's life partner Nicola Tikari points out, there is plenty of communal space on Peckham Rye common, which the scheme overlooks.

We are viewing Rye Apartments' shingle and concrete exterior as all the units are now occupied – sold or let – following their completion in March 2020. By 'whole process', Ty is referring

to the fact that Rye is one of the practice's self-developed projects. The studio did everything from finding a site through to designing the branding, website and marketing material. It has retained the freehold so it is now dealing with leaseholder issues too. For Tikari Works, this all means a lot of work that is not carried out by your average architecture firm. It gives it a whole view of the picture and a direct relationship with users. 'When you do sales viewings, you see the immediate reaction of buyers,' says Ty.

Ty was born in Calcutta but his parents emigrated to California when he was young, so he grew up there. Nicola is German. She studied in Munich, Ty at the Architectural Association. They met in 2000 in New York where they were both taking a year out before their final year of studies – they settled in London as a neutral ground afterwards. Before starting Tikari Works in 2014, Nicola worked at Nagan Johnson, Stephen Davy Peter Smith and Studio Egret West, often on residential projects; Ty at John Lyall Architects, Jestico + Wiles and John Smart Architects (now Craftworks). It was at the last of these that Ty was exposed to architecture as a wider discipline – site surveying, financing, construction management, sales and development.

He had wanted to set up his own office for a long time. 'Both being foreigners, we didn't have an established network of people we know or other contacts apart from other architecture students,' he explains. 'We are also not natural

Above and top right Rye Apartments in Peckham replaces a smaller house and garages. The eaves follow the neighbouring building but it is clad using clay shingles on top of a concrete plinth with loggias and 'cranked' windows. Inside, a raw finish reveals the apartments' CLT construction.

Right Pocket House, also in Peckham, Ty and Nicola's first built self-developed scheme and former home on the site of a double garage across three levels; bedrooms in the basement, kitchen on the ground floor and living space above.



LEFT AND RIGHT: JACK HOBHOUSE



networkers, that's not our core skill, so we felt that using the skills we had made the most sense; to use development as a way to starting a practice.'

This was the long game, dependent on the right opportunity. The first project was a planning gain that came along in the form of a derelict care home in Forest Hill, which they got permission to convert into eight apartments and financed through commercial lending and savings. Although Tikari Works didn't have the resources to build it, the deal earned them enough to buy another plot – a house and tyre garage.

The first project built out, however, was Pocket House, also in Peckham, which began as a feasibility study for a private client for the site of a double garage. Tikari Works won permission for a house on three levels, which Ty and Nicola then built as their own home. It was nominated for RIBA House of the Year 2019 and put the practice on the map. At Rye, the ambition was to scale up the qualities of Pocket House in an apartment



EDMUND SUMNER



building. The office didn't just design the scheme, it also acted as the contractor, directly hiring an eight-to-ten-strong team to work on site.

It is this type of work the practice hopes to move into more, where it can be involved in the whole process but for other developer clients; meaning its experience as a developer-architect becomes just a means to prove its abilities.

'As a developer you are strapped in for the whole process; a minimum of three years,' says Ty. 'All that while you are sitting on a mountain of debt and exposed to things outside your control like Brexit and Covid. Ninety-nine per cent of sites are dead-ends, but you have to cover overheads and need the capital to maintain four people in the office running projects, including ordering materials down to the last nail.'

'We rely on our skills to move quickly on working out whether something is feasible,' adds Nicola. 'Life savings are going into every project, so you need to have good nerves.'



Above Tikari Works' next self-developed scheme for eight Passivhaus apartments is currently in planning. It will likely have a hybrid structure using some CLT but not as extensively as at Rye to futureproof against regs changes.

Below The diamond footprint apartments at Gondar Gardens for a developer client on a complex infill site with overlooking issues.

Tikari Works is now moving into the second stage of its office by working on diversifying its portfolio. Gondar Gardens, for example, is a scheme for a small developer in north London where it is starting afresh from first principles on a complex infill site to formulate the brief for four residential units with a diamond plan. It has also recently been approached by John McAslan + Partners to collaborate on a mixed-use scheme, and there is a house in Germany potentially in the pipeline.

The practice still has its own self-developed projects running alongside, including a nine-unit housing scheme in planning, which it hopes will reach Passivhaus Standard. After eight years, Tikari Works has earned itself the latitude to experiment, with architecture that carefully balances all the usual architectural drivers with an additional eye to cost, quality, maintenance and, of course, what people want. What a formidable way to start. ●



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Culture Future winners

Practice Architecture's Flat House has been causing a stir since before it was completed. That is hardly surprising for a house made of hemp, on the hemp growing Margent Farm in Cambridgeshire. It is an architecture of first principles, so called low tech, one of the most exciting things about the work of Practice, of Material Cultures which grew out of the project and of Paloma Gormley, who is the link between them as co-founder of both.

If the surname sounds familiar, it's because Paloma is sculptor Antony Gormley's daughter. That may come with certain privileges and connections, but she and her collaborators are pushing architecture in remarkable ways with a fundamentally sustainable approach. In conversation near her studio in Bethnal Green, Gormley is a powerful advocate of bio-based materials. 'Hempcrete has integrity, avoiding all those petrochemical layers with monolithic construction allowing honesty, directness and truth to materials,' she says.

The work they are doing has the potential to be genuinely regenerative. Despite being at the core of the values of Architects Declare, which so many practices have signed up to, regenerative design feels part of the missing puzzle about construction and climate change – something that the Part L and embodied carbon measures have struggled to get beyond: the idea you might not just do no harm, but actually bring climate good.

This way of working stems Gormley and Leticia Drake's first project as Practice Architecture. As students they designed Frank's Café for the top of



RACHEL HAYTON

Above Exploring self build – a shelter built as part of a summer school at Grizedale Arts in Cumbria.

Below and opposite bottom Phoenix Project housing in Lewes takes hemp, and Gormley, up a scale.

a multistorey car park in Peckham, keeping it a deadly secret from their tutor, Tom Emerson of 6a, to avoid being told off for distracting themselves from their finals at Cambridge. They built it themselves, with help from friends, from then-cheap scaffold boards and ratchet straps. 'We would live, breathe, sleep on site,' says Gormley of early projects. Frank's was a while ago now, 2009, but putting it up again the three following summers embedded the experience. 'We needed to make it easy to build,' says Gormley.

Of course, designing from first principles, with an emphasis on materials rather than products, can be a problem. It is hard to foresee all the consequences and issues you might face. Gormley tells how staff had to slough off the pools of water on the lorry-side material roof of Frank's Café with brooms in a rain storm. 'But it creates theatre and intimacy,' she says. Warranties, skills, contractors and, therefore, clients can be in short supply and that leads to another big problem of first principles: they can be hard to scale up.

Scanning the websites of Practice Architecture and Material Cultures it looks like this is indeed a problem they are facing. There was a change in tempo to more permanent structures with the Timber Weaver's Studio in 2017 (also using hemp). But it is hard to see a sense of progression to larger projects and a more sustainable business. Yes they are teaching. Material Cultures' Gormley and Summer Islam are running a unit at Central Saint Martins that last year energised their students as researchers designing natural low carbon versions of London housing types under the title Carbon Copies. But will the impact of their experiments in materials, hemp in particular, be influence alone?

Best practice

Paloma Gormley has seen the future and it's made of hemp. She and her partners in Practice Architecture and Material Cultures are pushing awareness of what can be achieved with this and other sustainable, bio-based materials

Words: Eleanor Young Portrait: Ivan Jones

Above Paloma Gormley at her studio near Bethnal Green, east London.



MATERIAL CULTURES (2)





OSKAR PROCTOR

Until recently, the larger housing projects in the south east have been kept out of sight by non-disclosure agreements. Flat House gave them the leg up, so let's look at that again. Because it is not just hemp; after all, hempcrete has been around for sometime. It was hempcrete in panel form, short-circuiting buildability issues. The house was also clad in corrugated sheets made of hemp and a sugar-based resin. And flowing spaces with the hempcrete exposed internally, all within the volume of a previous barn, look comfortably liveable. Oh, and hemp stores a huge amount of carbon.

The first of those housing developments – which we can talk about as it is being launched at public exhibition ahead of planning – is the Phoenix Project alongside the River Ouse in the town of Lewes, East Sussex. The 700-home

Above Inside Flat House, Cambridgeshire with hempcrete panels exposed.

Below Developing the Wolves Green Lane Horticultural Centre, from one of its greenhouses.

development includes 100 designed by Practice Architecture with developer Human Nature. The plan is to prefabricate hempcrete panels in a warehouse already on the site.

In the meantime, the influencing role has grown. Visitors to the Design Museum's Waste Age were treated to a Material Cultures exhibit on repurposed exhibition materials; and a recent report on local bio-based construction in Yorkshire draws together local economy, agricultural and supply chains. It builds a case and explores the stumbling blocks to it becoming reality. Coming up is an SOM fellowship devoted to exploring regenerative forestry practices and the building systems that can be drawn from such a model.

'There is no kit of parts for bio-based buildings,' says Gormley. 'We are joining up the dots.'



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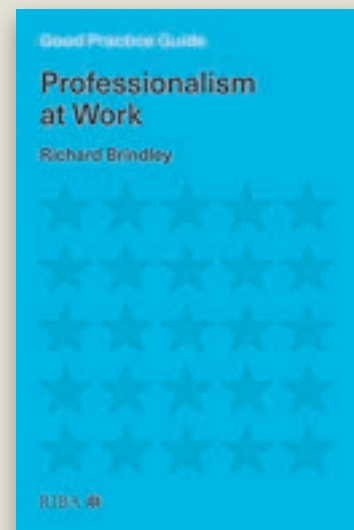
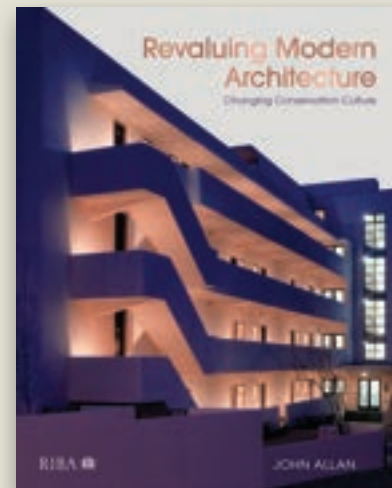
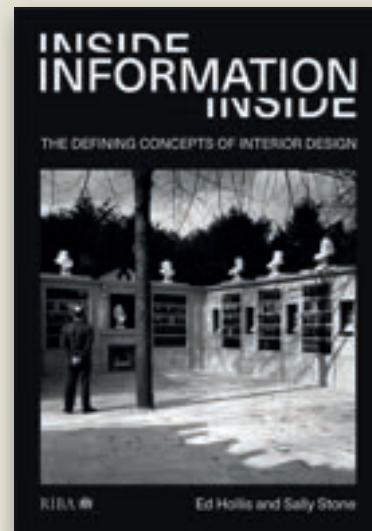
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Obituary

Partner at Shephard Epstein Hunter with a magical flair for urban regeneration



Peter Hunter 1938 – 2022

Peter Hunter, the last of the founding partners of Shephard Epstein Hunter, has died aged 83. He was the vital force within the practice in the 1980s, and a gentle but compellingly persuasive architect, urbanist and advocate whose pioneering approach to urban regeneration underpinned and inspired many notable schemes.

Born in 1938 in London, then growing up in Welwyn Garden City, he could have become a classical pianist but instead pursued a career in architecture, joining Bridgwater Shephard and Epstein in August 1962 on the advice of the head of the Oxford School of Architecture, Reginald Cave.

He soon became a partner of the practice and one of its driving forces. After major successes, such as the 1964 commission for a new campus for Lancaster University and a flow of municipal housing projects, Peter took over the operational reins, enabling Gabi Epstein and Peter Shephard (RIBA president 1969-1971) to devote more time to public life and teaching posts abroad.

By the early 1980s, he was pivotal, with his desk in the Kingly Street W1 office positioned at a fulcrum point where he could greet everybody as they arrived. But that decade – of Thatcher and Heseltine – was turbulent. The firm could no longer rely on its respected public sector reputation and had to make the running and form new relationships in order to survive.

Peter had an entrepreneurial magic about him – in terms of ideas and imagination rather than financial self-interest – and started speculatively generating ideas for urban areas, effectively illustrated by his balsa models with blue foil water, often made overnight before an early morning train journey.

The two most notable and prominent legacies of his initiatives were Laganside in Belfast and its precursor Salford Quays, where the water in the docks was so polluted it occasionally caught fire; most people thought the scheme was a hopeless, wild idea. The practice was commissioned to prepare a masterplan, which unlocked publicly funded infrastructure and led to the Lowry, Imperial War Museum North, and the BBC at Media City. Alongside the models, Peter's principal and potent design tools were his remarkable patience and tenacity, and his ability to forge relationships, which turned the previously unthinkable into reality.

He became a development consultant in his own right in the early 1990s, to travel light and pursue ideas around the UK, creating a network of colleagues who became loyal friends.

Tributes have typically described his qualities as a mentor, friend and inspiration – an architectural visionary and one of life's optimists. Many recalled his brokering skills, charm and generosity of spirit, which brought out the best in others, allowing him to navigate formidable challenges: 'Humble and soft-spoken, he would let others have their say before commanding a room's attention'; 'You could always rely on him to spot the one or two qualities that made any place special. Then he'd encourage you to build on that. To be bold. To imagine what the place could be.'

In former Northern Ireland minister Richard Needham's book *Battling for Peace*, he brusquely described his first, initially underwhelming encounter with the 'bespectacled, shy, unassuming, uncertain, uncharismatic' architect, but concluded, after Peter gently explained his ideas for Laganside: 'The man was a genius.'

Steven Pidwill is a director at Shephard Epstein Hunter

IN MEMORIAM

Peter Jubb
ELECTED 1959,
TYNE AND WEAR

David Harbord
ELECTED 1978, READING

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Culture
Feedback

Exchange

Building Safety Act

We write with reference to the letter from the RIBA Exeter Branch (RIBAJ January 2022). We share the concerns about the changes proposed through the Building Safety Act and believe they may worsen problems in the industry.

Current arrangements have the title of architect protected and regulated by the ARB, but not the activity (or 'function') of designing buildings. As architects, we have to pass a training and examination process similar to that of medical practitioners, maintain our title registration each year and are the only construction industry professional externally regulated. As 'function' is not protected, we are competing against others who do not even need to hold qualifications. This is an illogical system which the proposals in the Building Safety Act will exacerbate. Either the 'function' needs to be protected or the requirement for external regulation applied to anyone who designs a building.

There is no requirement for a minimum level of qualification to work or trade in construction (bar electrical and gas safety trades) and there is no external regulatory body. This has led to the current situation with poor and declining construction standards and a lack of consumer protection.

Although some forms of construction contract establish responsibilities for compliance monitoring, the statutory arrangements for this are, in our opinion, ineffective. Contractors are, instead, predominantly checking their own work, and the examples of Grenfell, the Edinburgh Schools, The DG1 Leisure Centre and the current cladding crisis show the consequences. The Building Safety Act appears to be intending to push compliance monitoring responsibility onto architects, which will not work in practice. We think instead that Building Standards, Building Control and Approved Inspectors are the appropriate bodies for this.

Architects are required to carry minimum levels of professional indemnity (PI) insurance as a consumer protection measure. Premiums are rocketing and insurers are introducing blanket exclusions relating to fire safety and basements. Given the requirement for architects to carry 'run-off' insurance for several years after each project, and insurers changing exclusions each year, we find that we cannot obtain the level of



cover we are required to have. If architects are faced with additional liabilities as a consequence of the Building Safety Act, we may have a situation where the PI insurance industry refuses to provide cover to many architecture practices, with detrimental consequences to the profession and consumer protection. A dysfunctional PI industry may well put companies out of business.

As chartered architects in Scotland, we look to the RIBA and RIAS to represent our interests as a profession and provide leadership, but are concerned that this is not being done effectively. The RIBA and RIAS need to be consulting members and establishing a holistic vision for how regulation of the construction industry can be practically improved and how the architectural profession will work within this.

We will be writing to our MP and MSP to share these concerns and we suggest that other architects with the same concerns should take similar action.

Roderick Binns, Fernandes Binns Architects, Edinburgh

Kampus not so verdant

Interesting article on the Kampus development in Manchester (RIBAJ March page28).

However, judging by the photographs, I would not describe it as 'verdant', or an 'intimate green enclave', or 'small-scale'!

Brian Loudon RIBA, Lymington



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Write to us: letters.ribaj@riba.org

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We welcome letters but retain the right to edit them



Fieldhouse
Surrey, 1969

In 1969 the architect Georgie Wolton, who died in 2021, built Fieldhouse, an experimental glass house for her family on the site of a fallen-down timber agricultural worker's cottage in Surrey. Contemporary with John Winter's more famous house using the same material in Highgate, Wolton's design was probably the first in the UK to use Corten steel as a primary structural material.

Wolton had trained at the Architectural Association and in 1963 formed Team 4 with her sister Wendy Cheesman, Su Brumwell, Richard Rogers and Norman Foster. In fact, it was

Wolton's inclusion in the practice that allowed it to operate as she was initially the only qualified architect. However, she discovered that she preferred to work alone and left after a few months to form her solo practice. Her output was small but precise and included an esteemed live/work space, Cliff Road Studios in Camden, and a house for herself in Belsize Park. Jonathan Meades described her as an 'outstanding woman architect of the generation before Zaha Hadid'.

Fieldhouse was dismantled in 1993 and is now in storage.●

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