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Elizabeth Line: Station to station
Drawing a line: Safety Act unpicked
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U-value chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U-value req. W/m•K</th>
<th>Quantum® (mm)</th>
<th>Extruded (mm)</th>
<th>Expanded (mm)</th>
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<td>0.10</td>
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</tbody>
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Depth of insulation required

Sample range of U-values based upon a typical roof terrace construction with a 200mm concrete substrate and product Lambda value as noted.

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Years ago, I would pass through Burgundy twice a summer, going between the winemaking villages and towns, and sampling other local produce and dishes. We never visited the region’s capital – true gastronomy was felt to be found in the countryside. Over recent years, there has been a concerted attempt to redress this image of Dijon. In 2015, the historic centre was recognised as part of the ‘Climats, terroirs of Burgundy’, a Unesco world heritage cultural landscape whose social, political and regulatory impetus gave rise to the surrounding viticulture. Raising awareness of viticulture and the part Dijon has played is the strategy behind Agence d’Architecture Anthony Béchu & Associés’ new Cité Internationale de la Gastronomie et du Vin – Dijon. The centre has been conceived as the future starting point for discovering the goodness of the region and is one of a network of cities of gastronomy assigned by the French government.

Located just outside the protected historical centre, the Cité occupies the former Hôpital du Saint-Esprit founded by duc Eudes III de Bourgogne in 1204. The 6.5ha diamond site has been reimagined as a vast mixed-use district including 970 homes and themed around gastronomy; training, trading and culture, providing a full menu of 1720m² of exhibition spaces, two cookery schools, food market, restaurants, vintners, cinema and more. The architect’s approach has been to retain historical buildings, repurposing them while creating porosity on all sides, and a striking new identity for the district. • Isabelle Priest

1: Buildings
Creative tension

Feilden Fowles happily unites seeming contradictions at its new hall for Homerton College, Cambridge, beneath the restless animation of a shimmering faience cloak

Words: Chris Foges  Photographs: David Grandorge

Below The 27m-long hall and adjacent Ibberson Building frame an entrance court.
College dining halls are a big deal in Cambridge. They are the hub of communal life, the setting for great events and emblems of identity. It’s no accident that Porterhouse Blue, Tom Sharpe’s satire on university life, opens in College Hall on the occasion of the annual Feast, a candle-lit dinner of swan stuffed with widgeon and a whole ox roasted in the fireplace. When the new Master rises to announce that the hidebound institution must be reformed – not least with a self-service canteen to replace shuffling servants in the hall – he triggers a mortal struggle for the soul of the college.

How reassuring, then, to visit the new hall at Homerton College and find its newly retired principal – Geoff Ward, there to lead the tour – and numerous exam-week students full of praise for a bold, enigmatic building by Feilden Fowles. Wrapped in a rippling cloak of iridescent green faience atop a plinth of dusty pink concrete, it takes the rudiments of a traditional hall – its rich material character, vaulted hammer-beam roof and high windows – and spins them into something equally majestic but lighter, brighter, more open. ‘It is both a special place and something for everyone, visibly welcoming to a diverse student population,’ says Ward.

Striking that balance was critical. Like the fictional Porterhouse, Homerton has arcane dining traditions – Anglo-Saxon toasts and so on – but is overall more progressive. Founded by dissenting clergy in the 18th century, it moved from east London to south Cambridge in 1894, acquiring an almost-gothic revival campus where women trained to teach. Principles of friendliness and inclusivity were reaffirmed when Homerton gained full admission to the university in 2010.

The newest college is also the biggest, and by 2016 had outgrown its dark and stodgy Great Hall. Feilden Fowles entered the open competition for its £10.4 million successor against long odds. Founders Edmund Fowles and Fergus Feilden were just into their 30s, and though well regarded had not yet delivered anything comparable. Two things clinched it, says Ward. One was openness to dialogue: ‘they weren’t divas’. The other was an imaginative
response to the setting. A dutiful deference to context can be a mask for timidity. Not here. Familiar references are reworked in a way that is respectful, but new, strange and full of vigour.

Together with new kitchens and the buttery – a relaxed café added at the architect’s suggestion – the hall makes an emphatic full stop to the college’s main range. Like the Great Hall it juts out from the building line, but is rotated through 90° to make the most of southward views over sweeping lawns and mature trees. There’s inversion in the form, too. A pitched roof was judged too overbearing, and was flipped to make a valley expressed in the distinctive twin peaks of a tapering gable facing the heart of the college. It’s an odd-looking thing: slightly ungainly but with a certain charm.

Its shimmering faience skin, composed of 3200 hand-made pots, is a nod to the Arts & Crafts ethos of the Victorian building next door, by Herbert Ibberson, with mottled colours derived from the landscape. It covers the gable like cloth, stretched taut and flat at the eaves and over rounded haunches, with arrowhead pleats in the mid-section that recall a copper spire above the Great Hall. On the long southern flank these folds extend into a fringe of slender piers that soften the outline of the building like gothic pinnacles.

Designed to be seen in the round, the ceramic crown has an ambiguous A plinth of 80% GGBS concrete links the east elevation to the buttery.
character typical of a building that is always doing two things at once. In oblique views, the close-spaced fins appear solid; straight on, long clerestory windows are revealed. One moment the curves and folds lend vertical emphasis, and the next seem to churn like a choppy sea, with light catching the ridges like spray-crested waves.

The sense of restless animation is stabilised by the concrete base that binds the hall to the buttery, with chunky boardmarked columns set out on a 3m grid that organises the whole ensemble. ‘Most halls are solid at ground level, which can be oppressive,’ says Fowles. ‘Ours is porous, with generous, inviting spaces around the fringe.’ On the long elevation, big windows are set into scalloped niches with integral benches: a typically considerate touch, just right for quiet study in the sun. Around the corner the pink podium makes a cloister that runs into the buttery.

Inside, the hall is a jaw-dropper – voluminous, lustrous, intricate but serene. High above long tables that seat 340 people, the valley roof is borne on butterfly trusses of glulam sweet chestnut that branch from slender columns – an impossibly delicate frame, were it not pinned back to concrete walls. A faceted lining of pale ash catches daylight streaming from the long clerestories. Low-level windows, doors and serving hatches are tied together by a continuous band of recessed panelling, stained oxblood red. Together with a minstrels gallery at one end, a tapestry intended for the other and triforium-level shuttered openings to the buttery, it brings a whiff of the medieval that subtly relates inside to out. Finding these correspondences between the diverse parts of the building, revealed as you move around, is one of its pleasures.

Craft is another, manifested everywhere from the custom-made clusters of globular light fixtures to brass shoes at the foot of each column, from which metallic strips radiate in shiny sunbursts across the green terrazzo floor. The timber frame is put together without flitch plates or bolts; lapped
joints are pegged with oak dowels. Despite such details it’s difficult to see how the opulent, weighty hall fits with Feilden Fowles’ customary ‘low-tech’ approach to sustainable design – simple buildings stripped of superfluities. Nevertheless, it scores well enough for operational energy, with all-electric services, and on a whole-life carbon basis, helped by leaner construction in the ancillary areas.

These are no less well considered. The timber-framed buttery is a delight, easeful and free-flowing with clever relationships between intimate little niches and a double-height space, and between inside and out. Students pack the mezzanines, working with a beautiful view of the college through big bronze-patinated metal windows.

Generous, airy kitchens – so much better than the humid ratholes the cooks previously worked in – and staff offices are in a pair of two-storey wings at the back of the site. Outside, on Harrison Drive, the appearance changes again. Rough purplish brickwork, with fat brushed lime joints and glazed ceramic headers by artist Shezad Dawood, fits in comfortably with the Ibberson building.

‘As relatively young architects we are always trying to test new materials and construction techniques,’ says Fowles. ‘We took on quite a lot in this project – it’s like four buildings in one.’

It’s meant literally, but there’s metaphorical truth too. This is a large building that contains multitudes, without contradiction: formal when it needs to be, but friendly and inclusive; responsible and ambitious; conscious of tradition but forward thinking. It’s all the things that the college asserts as essential values, in other words – whipped up into an architectural feast.

Credits
Client Homerton College
Architect Feilden Fowles
Project architects Eleanor Hedley, Akshara Pulpa
Main contractor Barnes Construction
Project manager Ingleton Wood Martindales
Structural engineer Structure Workshop
Services, sustainability and acoustic engineer Max Fordham
Faience Darwen Terracotta
Faience installation Szerelmy
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Bricks in blocks

The Royal College of Art’s Studio Building with the tower in the foreground, aluminium fins atop a brick base.

Opposite The new Herzog & de Meuron buildings bulk up the RCA campus at Battersea.
Herzog & de Meuron has given the Royal College of Art a substantial, dramatic presence with its new Battersea Campus

Words: Eleanor Young  Photographs: Iwan Baan

Buildings designed by Herzog & de Meuron always have a sense of drama, in circulation, space or texture. Think of the grand Turbine Hall of Tate Modern, the dramatic stair and ramps of the Laban Centre, the twisting atrium of the shimmering Blavatnik School of Government in Oxford. On the 15,500m² new building for the Royal College of Art’s Battersea Campus in south west London the drama is in the large scale north lights and the offset planes as the floor plates, in the form of balconies, push out into the street.

The building reads as two. A tower and the studio building are for sculpture and ‘dirty digital’ (architecture remains at the RCA’s original campus in Kensington). It is planned for 500 students but large enough for 1000. As a graduate and research school the RCA has had the luxury of not playing the numbers game that dogs many university undergraduate courses. But this building is part of delivering on a planned expansion of students from just over 1000 in 2017 to 3000 by 2027.

The plot, just south of Battersea Bridge, once housed the RCA’s slightly dilapidated sculpture school, a petrol station and a couple of garages. There is no attempt to match that assemblage; instead the 97m facade is the frontage for a four storey studio block, in a textured but still unremitting English buff bricks. The brick extends around the corner of the block as a podium under the eight-storey aluminium-clad tower (the
Raising Innovation and Research Building.

It feels like the puritanism of bricky New London Vernacular writ large, with more than a nod to brick sixties deck-access council housing, say by Darbourne and Darke. Or is it perhaps a development in the practice’s own tropes? From Herzog & de Meuron’s own output you could trace those pushing out planes to the stacked volumes of Actelion Business Centre (watered down here), and the brick bond to the Tate Modern extension (simplified here).

But while I might looking for such references, the only model that Herzog & de Meuron’s partner in charge, Ascan Mergenthaler, will admit to is the RCA’s original base in Kensington Gore, the Darwin Building (1961) designed by ‘Jim’ Cadbury-Brown with Sir Hugh Casson and Robert Goodden.

The other reference is of course the site itself. On the official tour with RCA vice chancellor Paul Thompson, the theme was permeability and community. There was an emphasis on the three ‘streets’ cutting across the block-long building, though that is more an organising principle than the creation of recognisable streets.

Two of the ‘streets’ are internal, although

**IN NUMBERS**

- £135 m cost
- 15,500m² total area
- £8710 cost per m²
- 4,370m² site area
- 3,723m² Rausing Research & Innovation Building
- 8,368m² Studio Building (including 5,753m² studio space)

*The Hangar: for display and assembly. The galvanised steel mezzanine balcony adds texture and lightness to this space.*

*Balconies are reminiscent of deck access on sixties housing.*
It feels like the puritanism of bricky New London Vernacular writ large, with more than a nod to brick sixties deck-access council housing.

the ‘hangar’ – demonstration hall, gallery and gathering space – can be opened at each end with bifold doors; the concrete floor can take cars or any vehicle the RCA’s intelligent mobility group may want to drive in here. And it does follow the line of an old street. But the cut-through with greatest claim to being a street continues the route from Haworth Tompkins’ 2015 Dyson and Woo buildings for the RCA and filters students through to a tiny courtyard and then onto Parkgate Street.

The building looks determinedly solid rather than permeable. But it does have windows at ground floor (perhaps at the planners’ urging, suggests its Greater London Authority referral). Some of these are obscured, offering glimpses of activity using hit and miss brickwork as a partial screen. Elsewhere they become shop windows for the college with large planes of glass, showing off digital fabrication robots. On these the brick surrounds remain uncut with teeths of projecting bricks, giving a sense of the weave of the textured bond at upper levels almost fraying at the edges.

On the ground floor are the hangar, workshops and assembly spaces. Above, in the studio building, the layout is more reminiscent of offices than education buildings; vast floor plates for studios on a 8m grid, broken up only by the two cores, with staircases disappointingly hidden away. The space will be populated by play, piles and wheels, in a form that can be reconfigured by students. It sounds simple but is a bespoke system from Vitra (planned for wider RCA use and soon to be rolled out in product form).

The top floor is the most dramatic with cool natural light in one half thanks to the gigantic north

Top right Under the north lights, the studios come into their own. Right Space kitted out for robotics research. The water tank for the octopus robot is visible at the back.
lights. At the edge of each floor plate, which project past the line of columns, the ceiling lowers, creating a more intimate space – each studio-sized bay with its own door to the narrow balcony deck outside. The balcony decks are unusual in a time when students are often banned from roof terraces due to fears of suicide and dangerous high jinx. I imagine ruffled students leaning over the balustrades during nervy, gossipy or moody cigarette breaks. Mergenthaler is particularly pleased that they are under cover and protected from London’s rain.

Releasing students out to the balconies is perhaps a pragmatic solution built to its limits with little external space. It is particularly interesting when most institutional university pedagogy emphasises bringing together students and disciplines through generous staircases and shared circulation spaces, an approach the practice took at the Blavatnik School of Government. At the
The Arc Cinema is a brand-new addition to Beeston, Nottinghamshire, offering entertainment for 700 people across eight screens. After the absence of a cinema in the area for over 50 years, the development opened in May 2021 as part of Broxtowe Borough Council’s £50m plan to regenerate the town centre.

Taylor Maxwell worked with Leonard Design Architects to specify and supply Corium brick cladding to the project, which was installed by Met Clad Contracts. This BBA certified cladding system is manufactured by Wienerberger and exclusively distributed throughout the UK by Taylor Maxwell.

The architects design vision was to have vertically laid bricks with LED strip lighting running down the building, something which Corium could accommodate due to its ability to have tiles laid vertically with a much quicker installation time than traditional brickwork.

The strip lighting and vertical tiles on the facade create a unique and striking appearance, made possible by Corium’s design flexibility. The Flexus LED light fixtures were designed and supplied by Kemps Architectural Lighting.

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Photography by Alex Upton.
RCA, connection is still intended as a theme. The vice chancellor looks to the hanger as an agora, but Mergenthaler prefers to see this connection more widely spread – a ‘distributed agora’.

The third floor, which is given over to sculpture, has a different character and has been partitioned off with rough ply to about 2.5m – all of which can be knocked around as needed. In fact the ghost of Gordon Matta-Clarke reigns in the RCA’s existing studios so here an extra 300mm of concrete has been poured to deal with the proclivity of sculpture students to take an angle grinder to the floor. This seems an unnecessarily carbon-heavy precaution given that Herzog & de Meuron confirms there are no services in the floor to protect.

While at some universities there is a palpable difference in build cost between student teaching spaces and innovation hubs, at the RCA the difference is in scale. The Rausing tower has a compact plan of 560m² on each layer. Two floors are dedicated to RCA graduates who are given a boost by the college with mentoring, space and access to a venture capitalist fund to invest in innovations.

Those innovations currently include capturing the particulates from car tyres and the development of a recyclable Gortex-style performance fabric. On other floors researchers delve into computer and materials science, the vice chancellor shows off a robotic octopus in a water tank with all the kit that surrounds it. It is exciting stuff and in large part driven by the imperative of climate change. The RCA suggests the building itself plays its part in this too, with £3 million put into reaching BREEAM Excellent, though it is unclear whether this includes passive measures such as the balconies shading windows, or the 75-80% of GGBS and the formwork that was used until it was spent. There are PVs, though only on the roof, which is easiest to service. I am assured that it meets the 2030 targets. But primarily the case for its contribution to sustainability is product endurance.

The innovations will move on out into the world and the building will be adapted for whatever comes next. •
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Bring on rush hour

Liverpool Street platform level central concourse: you are in the world of common components with Grimshaw in the design team. Plenty of space for freestanding ‘totems’.
Moving across London got a lot quicker with the opening of the Elizabeth Line within days of the Queen’s jubilee last month and there’s tenacity, ingenuity and technology to celebrate alongside thoughtful design. Here Hugh Pearman heads down to the platforms at Liverpool Street, leaving Isabelle Priest to emerge at Paddington on page 32
When planning got under way during the Second World War to rebuild London, better transport links were seen as vital. One of these – an early stab at a new cross-London deep tunnel railway system to take full-size trains – appeared in the 1943 County of London Plan. It has taken nearly 80 years to achieve a much-changed version of that proposal, namely the section of the Elizabeth Line running from Paddington in the west to Abbey Wood in the east, complemented by the patched-together Thameslink system running north-south. These are our equivalents of Paris’ RER express network.

This key section has 10 new stations: eight below ground and two above. The other branches heading west to Heathrow and Reading, and east to Shenfield in Essex, are surface lines that make use of existing tracks and upgraded stations.

The design ethos for the below-ground examples differs from the last substantial new underground line in London, the much smaller scale Jubilee Line extension. On that, individual architects designed each station from platform to pavement. On the Elizabeth Line, duties are shared. At train level the aesthetic is determined by a common set of components, from platform-edge screens and the dimpled tunnel linings to the lighting and signage: the key architect for that is Grimshaw. Individual architects take over at the surface, providing local difference. Where the two jurisdictions overlap (typically starting at the bottom of the first...
Left: Restained grandeur in the Moorgate escalator hall, flank wall pattern picking up on ceiling geometry.

Right: Ascending the escalators at Whitechapel, designed by BDP.

Below: Aedas’ Farringdon Station with its concrete coffered ceiling – a deliberate reference to the Barbican.

escalator hall) collaboration takes place between the respective teams to effect the transition.

Only one architect designed more than one of the stations on this stretch: Weston Williamson, author of both Paddington and Woolwich. The others are McAslan for Bond Street, Hawkins\ Brown for Tottenham Court Road, Aedas for Farringdon, Wilkinson Eyre for Liverpool Street, BDP for Whitechapel, and Tony Meadows/Adamson Associates for Canary Wharf. The two above-ground examples are Custom House by Allies and Morrison, and Abbey Wood by Fereday Pollard. Supervising them all was Crossrail’s head of architecture with his own team, Julian Robinson (RIBA) March 2015.

The architects worked as part of a civil engineering-led project. Three of the below-ground stations are within full-length excavated boxes – Paddington, Canary Wharf and Woolwich – while the others are ‘mined’ beneath the existing cityscape, with smaller boxes at the ends for escalators, lifts, service machinery and vent shafts. The mined stations take advantage of the ‘New Austrian’ tunnelling method using sprayed concrete rather than bolt-together ring segments. This allows more fluid junctions between platforms and cross-passages compared with conventional tube lines, with trumpet-mouth splays rather than abrupt rightangles. Finally, the 245m length of the platforms means that in the central section each station is effectively two, one at each end.
Down into Liverpool Street
Wilkinson Eyre became involved with Crossrail at Liverpool Street in the mid 1990s for the preceding cancelled version of the line, and stayed on board for the simplified railway, approved in 2008, that we see today. This is the deepest of the new stations, built in very challenging conditions. Apart from the existing Underground lines (Central and Metropolitan/Circle at the eastern end, Northern and the Great Northern Railway subterranean terminus at the Moorgate end) there is also the inactive but preserved Post Office tube line snaking through. And this being the City of London, there was a maze of underground services, from data and power cables to water mains and sewers, which needed to be relocated. Moreover
there was a lot of archaeology to descend through, and painstakingly record, at the eastern end by Liverpool Street station and Broadgate, including the Bedlam burial ground dating back to the 16th century with a ‘plague pit’ mass burial.

With large City buildings all round (including those of Broadgate, itself being enlarged at the time) and the existing busy commuter stations at either end continuing in full use throughout, getting the station tunnelling done meant requisitioning Finsbury Circus, which sits half-way along the station’s length. Here a large working shaft was sunk, and the station’s lower concourse and platform tunnels mined east and west from the bottom of it. As Wilkinson Eyre’s director Bosco Lam relates, the presence of this shaft prompted them to suggest putting an oculus in the Circus – imagine being able to look up from 34m below ground and see the sky far above, as if from the bottom of a well. But this was an expense too far so once the works were finished, the shaft was filled in.

As a place to move through, this station is exactly the opposite of its sister at Paddington with its cathedral-scale spaces. Here, the ground level and immediately sub-surface areas have to be relatively small, with most happening at the western, Moorgate, end. There a new concourse is made at the foot of an ‘over-site’ building – 21

IN NUMBERS
34m depth below surface
238m length of platforms
567,000 tonnes of excavated material
2 mainline and underground stations linked
124,000 visitors expected daily
Very Good BREEAM rating

Right At the eastern end escalators are accompanied by funicular lifts (left).
Below Underworld complexity – how the station threads itself through.
Moorfields, also by Wilkinson Eyre, just being finished. The externally-expressed trusses of its facade carry its load across the broad entrance with its splayed blue reveals, minimising the columns in the concourse inside.

The first thing you notice is the faceted ceiling. Headroom was limited but a flat soffit could have been oppressive, so the solution is a shallow zig-zag sequence of triangulated ribbed precast concrete panels cast into the slab above, their main ingredient of Portland cement given a slight sparkle with mica flakes in the mix. This soffit sets up a sense of movement, helped by the fact that nothing is mounted on these panels to interrupt the rhythm. The play of light and shade gives the impression that they are softly striped. This upper concourse also connects through to the existing Moorgate Station lines.

The zig-zag theme continues in the cladding of the flank walls of the escalator hall – in this case done graphically and two-dimensionally but for the same reason of avoiding large expanses of unrelieved wall. At the foot of the bank of escalators comes a slightly uneasy junction between the linear geometry of the Wilkinson Eyre surface finishes and the softer, more curvaceously organic Grimshaw underworld with its dimpled and perforated passageway linings: here the trumpet-mouth entrance is pulled upwards to soften the transition but it’s still a bit of a clash.

Down below, this is the only one of the deep stations to have a full-length central concourse between the platforms to either side, down which marches a long sequence of the freestanding ‘totems’ which carry all the equipment from signage to tannoy; in cramped old-style tube lines these tend to hang off the ceiling. The great luxury of the Elizabeth Line is space, generated by the size of the mainline trains and their passenger capacity. One of the successes is the indirect lighting strategy: for instance along the top of the platform edge screens is a full-length illuminated band which washes light down the curving rear wall without dazzle.

At the eastern, Liverpool Street, end the design sequence is the same, with three differences: the passageways curve this way and that to dodge other tunnels, funicular lifts accompany the escalators, and finally you emerge into Broadgate via a glass-box entrance supported by a concertina arrangement of portal stainless steel beams. Or just walk straight through into the lower concourse of the mainline station. All in all, this is quart-in-a-pint-pot stuff, an enormous subterranean station inserted into a physically congested area. There are showier stations on the line: this one is an exercise in refined understatement.
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Out of the darkness

The Elizabeth Line showpiece station at Paddington transforms London travel with efficiency, capacity, space and light

Words: Isabelle Priest  Photographs: Morley von Sternberg
It’s easy to take new things and progress for granted. On the new Elizabeth Line platform at Paddington Station, 30m down from street level, about two-thirds of the way along a modest set of stairs disappears further underground. It’s rather practical in appearance. Follow it down, wind along the newly plain tiled cylindrical tunnel, and you’ll eventually pop out at a typical left/right, southwards/northwards pedestrian Tube junction – this one for the Bakerloo Line. Coming from the Elizabeth Line – a cavernous, rectilinear, carefully crafted space with natural daylight filtering through the escalators and levels – it feels like stepping back in time. Bakerloo tunnels are tight here, cabling is screwed on the sloped walls and overhead, platforms are narrow and the air is clogged with dirt. Moving from one to the other is like glimpsing the future but being trapped in a never-ending past.

The experience serves as a useful reminder to what an extraordinary project Crossrail – as it was until recently called – is, despite its delays and overrunning costs, and quite how unfit London’s existing infrastructure is for modern human habitation. Much of the design and construction time on a project like this, as the Paddington Elizabeth Line station architect Weston Williamson + Partners’ CEO Rob Naybour explains, is sunk into technical aspects; structure, fire, acoustics, ventilation, environment separation. Sometimes it is tempting to think this can be overkill. But in the contrast between those two platforms, the benefit of these performance measures, are crystal clear. With light and spaciousness come feelings of security and safety. This is, after all, the first underground railway line designed for London since the 7/7 bombings.

To those who don’t know the station well, Paddington Station at the turn of this century was a complicated place to get into and navigate around. To achieve
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Critique

Elizabeth Line

this kind of clarity in design, alongside introducing another underground line, has meant a decade and a half of planning, preparation, pre-emptive work and construction, as well as an overhaul of how the station circulates and operates via multiple back-to-back projects. Although these have been procured through engineers, Weston Williamson + Partners has consecutively been appointed as the design team on each.

The first scheme was the Paddington Integrated Project instigated in 2007, which relocated the taxi rank from the western side to the east, opened a new underground entrance to the north and created a relationship between the station and the regenerated Paddington Basin by repurposing and streamlining existing underused areas of the station, including the parcel depot. It also sought to reorder the station’s circulation along two new pedestrian spines either side of Brunel’s barrel vault station in a way that would free up the western side of the station alongside.

‘Crossrail existed as a concept then,’ says Naybour, ‘but there was no money. It’s typical of big infrastructure projects that you must not rule out any future projects by the work you do.’

Eastbourne Terrace is where you will find the new Elizabeth Line entrance. There had been many previous proposals for the site from Will Alsop, McAslan & Partners and others, but from the street,
artwork designed by Spencer Fitch that replicates different types of cloud, and appears or disappears depending on the activity of the real clouds above. Five openings in existing arches through the terraced buildings have been created to connect this pedestrian spine to the mainline Paddington train station. Frit-patterned glass panels front a former Second World War bomb gap left in the terrace. It all feels effortless and meant to be.

Indicated by a glazed lift shaft linked by a glass bridge, the drama begins beneath the middle of the canopy with a 90m-long underground void into the Elizabeth Line station. At either end, facing pairs of escalators descend 10.3m into a huge airy ticket hall. Here, the atmosphere and materials change from grey, steel and shiny to buff brick, bronze and earthy – creating a warm feeling that continues the brick on Eastbourne Terrace as well as evoking a cutting through London clay. Enormous props span the void, separating the new hall, and giant elliptical columns with flared capitals support the retaining wall of the street.

Another set of escalators takes you to the platform itself. It is surprisingly direct to reach a train compared with most experiences of the Underground network and it’s possible to look up and see the sky through the canopy 27m above and smell the fresh air. At this level, the station is still enormous – 240m long and able to accommodate 220m trains. It is a two-directional island platform with trains on either side travelling in opposite directions. Glass screens separate the train from the station as on the Jubilee Line, but here
the top is closed too, with the space above the trains containing all the servicing – power, ventilation, security. Heat from the train air conditioning is captured under the platforms and travels to ventilation shaft pavilions at either end.

In addition to the big idea of the open-air station, there are several other particularly interesting aspects. The first is that the whole project has been designed to the imperial 10ft grid of Brunel’s station next door, this helps it slot easily alongside. The second is the attention to details. The columns are clad in bronze to head-height, the hit and miss perforated retaining wall into the void is designed to improve acoustics. The project was also commissioned with a 125-year lifespan brief. Everything is designed to be serviceable and maintainable. The columns at plaza level, for instance, carry rainwater from the canopy inside, and have conical footings to protect against vehicles that service the shops at night. Each component is demountable, accessible and replaceable. Lastly, the project was built using top-down construction so, for example, the concrete lily pad light fittings in the ticket hall were prefabricated into the structural grid ready and the void excavated underneath.

Compared to the provision for the Bakerloo it’s a quite remarkable and transformative experience of travel, but it even impresses compared to the other Elizabeth Line stations. The way you travel through them generally feels similar to the existing Underground, although they are considerably more generous. Paddington Station long needed a bold remaking and it’s a credit to Weston Williamson that it saw and created the opportunities, and carried them through.

The remaining thing that hasn’t been well communicated is what Crossrail does for travel itself. These are full-sized trains, but what matters is that they are full-scale tracks. It’s not just that any length train can run on them, but that any ordinary train can. Behind the scenes there is already talk of railway services that run from Manchester, say, through central London to Essex or beyond. The Elizabeth Line opens the mind to possibilities. Paddington’s station engenders the same optimism.
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Once more with feeling: how texture adds life to buildings

A lively discussion showed that not only do architects have a wide interest in texture, it adds an enriching aspect to buildings. So why don’t we see it used more often?

Architects certainly have a wide vocabulary for describing textures, making one wonder why so little of that understanding finds its way into their buildings. At least, this was the conclusion to draw from a discussion at Clerkenwell Design Week, a RIBA Journal event in collaboration with Equitone. Jim Biddulph, a materials expert who is fascinated by the neurological impact of texture, challenged the audience by asking, ‘Are
we texturally literate? Do we have the vocabulary to talk about textures, about how they make us feel?"

Speaking in a highly textured pavilion designed by Fieldwork Architects and clad in Equitone, he claimed there were few words for texture beyond rough, smooth, coarse and slick, but the audience came up with many more. These included slimy, bumpy, fuzzy, slippery, speckled, waffled, pitted, perforated, polished, porous, viscous, sticky, powdery, crinkled and ruffled. Asked for their favourite textures, they cited long grass, the bark of plane trees, clay, velvet, shaved heads (but only against the grain), the slight oiliness of skin and even dogs’ ears. There was some debate about whether or not temperature can be considered a texture. There is certainly an argument that materials such as metals, which conduct heat away from the hand, feel different to less conductive materials.

Despite the audience’s impressive vocabulary, Biddulph argued that we have lost many of our connections with texture in buildings. Follies such as that built by the Facteur Cheval in southern France, inspired by the feel of a found stone, or Gaudí’s far more mainstream work in Barcelona, were all about texture. But with the International Style of the 20th century came a move against texture, an embrace of flat smooth surfaces. And yet, Biddulph argued, ‘by using lots of different materials and textures we can enrich an environment and a building, rather than encasing it in something flat and cold and homogenous.’

Since the heyday of ‘less is more’ we have again embraced some texture. Biddulph cited the lace facades of Nottingham Contemporary, designed by Caruso Saint John, and the work of Giles Miller Studio, which focuses almost entirely on texture.

Brian Oknyansky, senior designer at Dexter Moren Associates, talked about projects by his practice that used texture to create architectural interest and to link to surroundings and create a sense of place. ‘You might think I am talking about pattern, he warned, ‘but an architectural idea of texture comes from pattern.’

Favourite textures were long grass, the bark of plane trees, clay, velvet, shaved heads, the slight oiliness of skin and even dogs’ ears.

Oknyansky showed a hotel at Manchester Airport that references a woven fabric on its facade and a Premier Inn in south London that uses brick in different planes to create texture and shadow. A central planted space forms part of that development, and Oknyansky also talked about the texture of this, a reminder that growing elements have texture too. Think of walking barefoot on grass or on a shingle beach.

Chair of the discussion, RIBA Journal editor Eleanor Young, referred to texture as something that makes a building become more, rather than less, interesting as you get nearer to it. Although Biddulph quoted Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa’s famous phrase about a door handle being the handshake of the building, there was surprisingly little reference from the audience to those elements that make a building distinctly touchable – polished concrete and plaster, timber surfaces, textured concrete and flint walls. But perhaps those architects who referenced their love of dogs’ ears and tree bark will import some of that tactility into their next projects. There is certainly plenty more to think about in this vital but unduly neglected topic. If we are to really love our buildings, we should care not only about how they look but also about how they feel.

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![Image of family looking up](image-url)
Hybrid working is the ‘new normal’, and all the practices we know are trialling diverse approaches. We wanted to preserve improvements to productivity and lifestyle benefits discovered during the pandemic, but ensure that quality of design, support for new and younger staff, and studio culture are upheld. All 13 of us are in our London studio from Tuesday to Thursday, with flexibility at both ends of the week.

Disciplined scheduling is key: we are in the office to collaborate. The week hangs around Wednesdays as a time to come together. We have full-team design reviews and the day is pretty sacrosanct, even though that can make finding time for outside meetings trickier.

More pragmatic tasks are assigned to non-studio days. We start the week running through progress of all projects on a digital whiteboard; it’s more efficient online. Directors’ business meetings are held on Zoom. Again, the split is advantageous, as we don’t have space for a private meeting room.

The model has allowed all three directors to relocate; I am in Somerset, Al Scott in Suffolk and Sarah Castle in Manchester. Those moves were for personal reasons, but present opportunities for the practice. We are at equidistant points of a triangle, spread across the country, and are building networks in those regions. The rhythm of the working week supports our expansion and growth, while allowing us to remain a London practice.

‘The rhythm of the working week supports our expansion and growth, while allowing us to remain a London practice’
Sound with vision

There’s a moveable floor and a reverberation chamber in the University of St Andrews’ new recital hall. Jan-Carlos Kucharek reveals the practical, technical and philosophical issues behind the scheme.

The £12.5 million Laidlaw Music Centre is not only the University of St Andrews’ first building dedicated to music, the centre’s McPherson recital hall is also the world’s first to have both a reverberation chamber hidden above its ceiling and a fully adjustable, moving floor. Flanagan Lawrence partner Jason Flanagan and acoustic consultant Nicholas Edwards of Idibri talk through the thinking behind the hall’s ‘tuneable’ acoustics.

How were you appointed for the project?
JF: In 2016 we won an invited design competition for a music centre at the south end of the 16th century St Mary’s Quadrangle. The focal point of the new public space is a century-old arboretum, so we had to fit the building in among the trees, in a Conservation Area alongside three listed university buildings. The university’s director of music, Michael Downes, had toured conservatoires and knew of our auditorium at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, so he asked us to submit a design for the Laidlaw.

What did the brief call for?
JF: A dedicated music building, with the recital hall complemented by three large sectional rehearsal spaces, 10 individual practice rooms, recording studio and amplified music suite. They wanted a world-class rehearsal space big enough to handle symphony orchestras, chamber music and vocal recitals but that local community choirs could also use. It needed to be inherently flexible, both spatially and acoustically.

It also had to fit into its surroundings. We put the 18m high, steel framed McPherson Hall adjacent to the tallest building on the site and wrapped everything else around it, with the foyer in the middle. This means it steps up in scale, with cornices locking in to adjacent listed structures. The entrance colonnade allowed us to respect the root base of the mature trees on the site, so the first floor could step out. The whole building is clad in Darney sandstone.

The chamber is externally clad in stone and twice the size the client had anticipated, at significant extra cost.

How did you convince them?
NE: It wasn’t easy but having a track record for major international concert halls helped us. I designed the Symphony Hall, Birmingham and the Morton H Meyerson Symphony Centre in Dallas and for some, these are the best concert
halls either side of the Atlantic. And both of them have reverberation chambers. The brief required a room that was good for a solo, symphonic and choral work – which needs a range of reverberation. But they also wanted the intimacy of a modest-sized room.

Technically, the most difficult thing was having to do a virtual reality simulation of the space with and without the chamber. We connected the VR software with headphones rigged to a mic you could sing into, and it would create the exact sound you’d hear in the space.

**What is so special about the McPherson Recital Hall?**

**JF:** Its more about what you don’t see than what you do. The reverberation chamber, hidden above the hall’s 9m open ceiling line, almost doubles the volume of the hall. It works to generate the long reverberation times necessary for orchestral and choral works.

You can go from very live to dry acoustics, which is when you fully drop acoustic banners around the walls. The latter cuts reverberation from about four seconds to one. It creates a wonderfully rich range of very clear sound – the hall is effectively an instrument in itself.

**How is the acoustic performance achieved?**

**JF:** The aim was to achieve a solid, monolithic, reflective surface. In the McPherson Hall, wall build-up was 75mm Darney stone 50mm cavity, 200mm mineral wool insulation and 215mm dense block, then plaster. To this we then screwed the oak panels that line up to the main body of the space to the open ceiling soffit. There are no gaps past the blockwork – the build up is solid.

Internally, the reverberation chamber is a very simple blockwork space with plaster lining; again, it’s all hard, smooth surfaces. A huge manually-drawn curtain that’s hung off its walls can be pulled around to soak up bass frequencies and to stop the sound bouncing round the space.

Half of the ceiling is open to the chamber above. Timber beams run across, and above them is the walkway servicing zone for the chamber. The underside of these walkways is lined with black-painted acoustic plasterboard. Voids between these zones amount to 50% open area, but as they are coloured black, some people don’t realise that there are voids there at all.

**How is the design informed by the HVAC strategy?**

**JF:** Heating is by occupancy, not volume. Conditioned air is all low velocity feed trickling in from the perimeter via low level gaps below the oak panels from the 1m-deep floor void plenum. Low velocity means that both feed and high-level extract are silent.

**Given the reverberation chamber’s extra cost, did you look at other options?**

**JF:** We believed it was the only way we could achieve the different performance flexibility that the client wanted. It could have been a 12m high room with adjustable ceiling reflectors but that wouldn’t have achieved the requisite level of reverberance – especially for organ or choral work. Site constraints prevented us making the physical space on plan any bigger and reverberance is a factor of volume. Nicholas auralised this aspect for the client via virtual acoustic modelling to show how the sound would be under various conditions.

**And why a simple ‘shoe box’ hall?**

**NE:** There is always debate over the need for acoustic diffusion, with some experts...
breaking up wall surfaces to do it; but I don’t agree with that. Precedents like Vienna’s excellent Musikvereinssaal – a classic ‘shoe box’ – have flat walls, and we merely repeated that concept here.

The classic error in music space design is to rake seating but this means that sound that should be reflected off the back walls is instead absorbed by the audience. That doesn’t happen in ‘shoe box’ design. When you perform here, the sound hits the back wall and reflects. And because we want surfaces to reflect sound perfectly, the walls are completely flat, apart from the side columns.

**It’s an 18m high room in effect. Why didn’t you make the room itself that big?**

**JF:** Because the chamber itself is basic in terms of finish – it’s just plaster lined; so all the high spec detailing need only occur below the ceiling line. Practically, you need a reflective surface for performers at about 9m. It’s only 18.7 by 14m in plan, so 18m would have felt too tall. What’s nice is that the hall feels intimate and warm, with plenty of natural light.

**NE:** Had the main ceiling been any higher, we would have needed a balcony all the way round and a soffit to throw the sound back into the room. But we stuck with the simple box form, because what you get from the reflection off the 9m ceiling is clarity. Sound that passes into the reverberation chamber persists there momentarily before bouncing back down through the ceiling slots, which gives the sound its reverberance. The sound is analogous with a good wine. There is the initial ‘clarity’ followed by richness and complexity, and the simple rectangle form is what gives the room magical acoustical properties.

**What was the story behind the moving floor arrangement?**

**JF:** The ideal starting point for a recital room is flat floor with the performers on a low rostrum. The moving floor came out of a conversation where we were considering having an element of the rostrum moving and we thought ‘but wouldn’t it be amazing if the whole floor was moveable? Nick worked out the mechanics of ninety 2x1m timber clad boxes on metal trays raised and lowered on a scissor mechanism.

**NE:** I didn’t think the moving floor would happen. I did a client presentation where we imagined it like the Giant’s Causeway and we must have convinced them. But even if they had decided not to fund it, the under-floor air plenum was always in the contract and any future moveable floor could sink into it.

**JF:** In most conditions, the room is set up with the seats dropping into the void, meaning the stage is at the same level as the foyer and 600mm higher than the front seats; so in the main, the sound is reflected off the back wall.

The floor of the timber boxes is so hard and reflective that the void below has no effect at all on the hall’s acoustic qualities, creating only subtle changes in the overall volume. The nosing on the edge of each box consists of an ingenious magnetic steel flat that flips to reveal a contrast strip, to meet guidance.

The mechanism has 40 pre-set modes. Costing about £1 million, this required separate fundraising and was only instructed towards the end of the contract. All but the ones near the side walls move up and down. It’s mesmerising to see – like watching a 3D kinetic sculpture.
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Building Safety Act makes a good start

Stephen Cousins explains what you need to know about changes to competencies, CPD, principal designers, liability and safer products

Five years on from the Grenfell Tower disaster, the Building Safety Act 2022 became law in April, bringing a slew of reforms to the way residential buildings are built and maintained, and new protections for leaseholders.

Changes in the 262-page document aim to reduce safety risks related to fire spread and structural failure through greater planning scrutiny, increased regulation of professional competence and the creation of new statutory roles during the design and construction of ‘higher-risk’ buildings.

The focus is on high-rise residential buildings, hospitals and care homes, which are at least 18m, or seven storeys, high, and contain at least two residential units.

The overhaul of regulations will require building owners to demonstrate safety at each of three new ‘gateways’ for planning and design, construction and occupation. Compliance will be monitored by a newly-established Building Safety Regulator, with significant powers to demand documents and stop works, and a new National Regulator for Construction Products, with power to remove dangerous products from the market.

Leaseholder protections include the creation of a New Homes Ombudsman scheme and a ‘waterfall’ system of cost protection, to ensure that residents are the last in line to be liable for cladding and non-cladding related works.

The passage of the Act is a key moment for the UK, but only some aspects of primary legislation have been implemented; much of its secondary regulation is undefined and expected to come into force by the end of 2023.

Provisions specific to architects have filtered down from Judith Hackitt’s Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety – most of the recommendations from which were adopted by the government – and a consultation on proposed amendments to the Architect’s Act 1997.

Arguably the most significant feature is the expansion of the principal designer role, under the 2015 Construction (Design and Management) Regulations, to include oversight of safety in higher-risk buildings.

As well as construction site safety duties, principal designers will now be expected to plan, manage and monitor design work to ensure compliance with building regulations – and maintain a ‘golden thread’ of data on design decisions for fire and structural safety.

‘The principal designer duty holder role is, I suspect, both the biggest opportunity and the biggest challenge for the profession,’ says Adrian Dobson, executive director of professional services at the RIBA. ‘Every project will need to appoint a principal designer, but this brings new liabilities and technical challenges and people will need to skill up to get themselves certified and develop the right competencies.’

Competence and training

Competencies specific to the principal designer are set out under the standard BSI PAS 8671, which is out for public consultation, due to publish this summer.

It defines minimum requirements for: legal framework and compliance;
If the new system can’t be insured, that will be a fundamental flaw

Liability and insurability
Leasholders who live, or previously lived, in unsafe properties, are better protected under the Act, which includes measures to extend the limitation period for claims brought under section 1 of the Defective Premises Act (DPA) 1972.

The claims period for work already completed extends from six to 30 years, which essentially means a claimant can bring an action against a defendant for works completed up to 30 years before the Act came into effect. The claims period for work completed in the future extends from six to 15 years.

The RIBA branded the move ‘misguided’ in its evidence to Parliament and in correspondence with the Secretary of State, pointing to negative impacts on the insurability and the risk appetite of the construction sector, even where no faults are found.

Extending the claims periods at a time when the profession is already embroiled in a professional indemnity insurance crisis is difficult to support, says Dobson: ‘The risk is that the new legislation will contribute to an even slower resolution of PII, because it effectively increases liability on the designers of residential buildings. We’ve got concerns as to whether this has really been thought through properly, we’ve lobbied the government and written to ministers, if the new system can’t be insured, that will be a fundamental flaw.’

Claims brought under the DPA now apply to extensions and refurbishment works to existing dwellings, not just new properties as per the previous legislation.

Unsafe products
Disingenuous marketing practices and misleading product information have made it disconcertingly difficult for specifiers to compare and understand products and keep tabs on what ultimately goes into a building.

The new construction products regulator will have powers to issue penalties against suppliers or manufacturers who fail to comply with rules on information. Companies that sell products that are inherently defective or marketed on the basis of misleading statements will become liable to pay damages to people with a relevant interest in affected buildings, including those who have suffered economic loss.

This suggests that architects will be able to seek redress against manufacturers or suppliers where they are facing action over building failures stemming from the use of such products.

Most industry professionals agree that some prescription in regulation is needed to ensure both the basic principles of fire safety and conformity in design and build procurement, yet hundreds of clauses in the Building Safety Act still require clarification through secondary legislation and guidance.

Ambiguity on compliance
The Act introduces no changes to Approved Document B: Fire Safety of the Building Regulations, which might appear underwhelming, given that the only updates since Grenfell were the ban on the use of combustible materials in buildings over 18m tall, in 2018, and new guidance on requirements for sprinkler systems and wayfinding, in 2020.

Dobson comments: ‘The RIBA is lobbying hard for a review of approved documents and to remove ambiguities and inconsistencies between approved documents and British Standards and alternative approaches. There’s too much ambiguity around means of compliance.’

This issue was highlighted, he says, in the recent confusion over the need, or otherwise, for a secondary means of escape in high rise residential buildings. Revisions to guidance may gain momentum when the HSE takes up its role as Building Safety Regulator.

Despite the work that still needs to be done, the Building Safety Act looks set to significantly improve standards and safety in higher risk buildings, saving lives in the process. *
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By having a single manufacturer for all components, the Knauf Frameless Encasement system makes life easier for architects and specifiers as they seek to ensure products meet fire safety standards.
With the Building Safety Act passed into law, specifying construction products that affect building safety has come under greater scrutiny. Fire protection is critical, therefore building designers, architects and specifiers are turning to a single manufacturer to make achieving these standards easier and straightforward. The Knauf Frameless Encasement system allows for just that.

The first point of reference for fire safety in England is Approved Document B. Alongside this is BS 9999, the British Standard set of requirements for fire safety in the design, management, and use of buildings.

**Making fire testing straightforward**

If using products from three or four different suppliers, the designer would have to first gather fire-testing data for each individual element; then attempt to assess the overall fire-resistance rating of the components working in conjunction. This is where a single solution has the advantage. By taking a systemised approach, designers benefit from a single manufacturer for all components installed within the system.

The new Knauf Frameless Encasement System is a comprehensive solution for passive fire protection of structural steel. As well as ensuring each element meets the appropriate regulatory and manufacturing standards, Knauf also tests the whole system to determine its fire performance.

Instead of needing to ensure multiple products work together, a system approach guarantees appropriate coverage from the system provider.

**Expanding the system coverage**

Architects and specifiers can continue to benefit from a systems provider that also provides linked solutions for other parts of the design process. This further reduces the risk for conflicting or complex specification by creating a homogenous solution.

Working alongside the Frameless Encasement Solution are the Knauf Partitions Solutions, which benefit from the same level of testing, ease of installation and coverage. This makes the specifier’s task of achieving the required level of protection much easier and improves efficiencies on site for installing the products.

**How does the system solution work?**

The frameless casing works through stapling Knauf Fireboard at abutting corners. For steelwork encased on all four sides, Knauf Fireboard is fixed at each corner directly through the material, independent of the structural steel.

This ease of installation is further enhanced by Knauf Fireboard being made available as bespoke cut-to-length sizes, subject to order size. As a result, labour hours and wastage are minimal – ideal for those seeking an efficient and environmental solution.

Combined with no specialist labour or installation methods being needed, nor the need to wait for coatings or paint to dry, the system effectively reduces time spent on site.

Knauf Fireboard is rated A1 for fire protection and is available in multiple sizes, ranging from 15mm up to 30mm. Each size offers a different level of protection against fire, which allows designers to easily create a solution to achieve the desired fire protection rating.

Instead of needing to ensure multiple products work together, a system approach guarantees appropriate coverage from the system provider.

Expanding the system coverage

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**For more information on the frameless encasement system, visit** [www.knauf.co.uk/systems-and-products/drywall-systems/frameless-encasement](http://www.knauf.co.uk/systems-and-products/drywall-systems/frameless-encasement)

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**Above** The system provides up to four hours’ fire protection for those using the building

**Below** Knauf Frameless Encasement System uses Knauf Fireboard and is specifically designed to encase structural steel column and beams.
We are on the hunt for the movers and shakers of tomorrow. Should you or someone you know be entering RIBAJ Rising Stars 2022 in association with Origin?

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To be eligible architecture graduates needed to have completed either RIBA Part II, or equivalent, no longer than 10 years before Wednesday 7 September 2022. Other professions need to have completed their professional qualifications within 10 years of 7 September 2022.

Deadline Wednesday 7 September 2022, 14.00 hrs

Winners will be profiled in the RIBA Journal and on ribaj.com and invited to an exclusive Class of 2022 round table.

ribaj.com/enter-rising-stars
Local objections have – in theory – little sway over decision-making in planning. Only comments relating to material planning considerations (meaning adopted policy and guidance at national and local level) should be taken into account. If an application is decided by officers, local objections should be balanced against the officers’ interpretation of policy and the benefits of development; if it goes to planning committee for a decision, councillors are meant to put politics aside and make decisions impartially and on the basis of the evidence before them. The number of objections in itself should count for nothing – it is the merit of the comments alone that is meant to hold weight.

That’s all very well in principle, but in practice, we’ve all seen the power that local objectors hold, and that planning committees frequently take a political stance. It suits local politicians to be seen to defend the interests of their voters, even if it is indefensible in policy terms – but it makes for bad planning and low public trust for committees to refuse schemes that are then approved at appeal.

Everyone wants the win-win of local community support alongside officer recommendation – making it easy for planning committees to do the right thing. Most architects – being the socially-conscious sorts we are – also want to feel they are doing the right thing for the community. But what is ‘the community’ and what is ‘the right thing’ to do?

Communities are collections of individuals and those individuals have a multitude of perspectives. When it seems that ‘the community’ does have a settled position, this can be because certain voices have the most time, energy and motivation to get involved in planning. Tactically, those loud voices can be appeased – their concerns identified and addressed. You can

How do you do ‘the right thing’?

When it comes to development, planners and architects want to do the right thing. But what is that? Hana Loftus offers some clues to finding the best outcome for most people.
encourage your client to ‘go in’ with a scheme that has a ‘pound of flesh’ they are happy to lose in the name of negotiation – giving those loud local voices the sense of a victory.

Get into the community
But sometimes no amount of compromise will be acceptable to these interests, while still representing a viable or desirable scheme for you and your client. And even if a negotiated position is feasible, the outcome does not always result in the best result for ‘the community’ taken in its totality.

More housing may be in the interests of the many who struggle to rent or buy locally, but can be vehemently opposed by existing homeowners who want to see no change. A ‘green buffer’ screening new development from existing homes can mean that existing residents have their views preserved, but can socially segregate new residents and make it harder for them to access shops, local services and public transport by walking and cycling.

Designing – and gaining support – for schemes that do represent what is best for ‘the community’ as a whole means using local engagement as a research tool. Use the full range of techniques to understand your site better, alongside local needs, social mix and the knotty problems which have been falling between the stools of transport planning, social infrastructure, housing and job creation. You may have an instinct for what is or isn’t working in an area – whether it’s the lack of a walking link, local shops or a bus stop; but is this borne out by the experience of those in the community?

Build an evidence base for what local issues really are, and not what you assume them to be – through observation on site and face to face engagement as well as using digital methods. We’ve spent days on a site simply observing and recording the different patterns of walking and cycling, in order to build up a picture and a case for change far more persuasively than junction counts done by the transport consultant. Stop people in the street and talk to local shopkeepers, alongside speaking to groups working at grassroots. And don’t just use the evidence to justify your pre-prepared approach: allow your designs to change in response. On one recent project, we gained insights through working with a group of visually impaired people that turned our initial design assumptions upside down.

Parish councils present their own special challenges. They are a statutory consultee, but their comments should hold only as much weight as the planning merit within them, and they have no power of veto, much to their frustration. With honourable exceptions, they are not always representative of the whole village community, but they have a hotline to their local ward councillors. Their monthly meetings rarely align well to the timescales for commenting on planning applications and they often perceive that developers and planning officers are conspiring to ‘sew up’ a scheme without their involvement. So, engage early – whether through a briefing to a formal parish council meeting, or informally to a group of councillors to gain a sense of their position, before a scheme is fully developed and submitted for planning. And alongside that, widen your reach through a drop-in session, leaflets to neighbours or just posting information on the village Facebook group (and following up on the comments).

Planning officers can sometimes – disappointingly – be dismissive of the perspectives of local people, preferring their own interpretation of what constitutes ‘good’ or ‘bad’ design, or how the balance between policies should be weighed up. This is frustrating, and leapfrogging junior officers to engage directly with senior managers, councillors and design review panels can pay dividends – even though they can make you unpopular around the virtual water cooler. Offer briefings to local ward councillors – while avoiding any who sit on the planning committee, so they are not in danger of pre-determination. Conversations behind the scenes will spread the message wider.

Make it personal
Whichever approach you take, evidence your process thoroughly and use it to build a narrative that can be easily understood. While statistics are useful, quotations from real people that you’ve spoken to are more powerful. It helps councillors on the planning committee to know that there are voters in their community who do support what you are trying to achieve, and it’s hard for objectors to dismiss the lived experience of others in their own community. But always ask permission if you want to publish names alongside quotes, because reprisals are not unknown.

For all that meaningful local engagement is the right thing to do, it can feel like an effort wasted when your application still results in a flood of objections. Your client may yet have to resort to appeal, if local councillors get cold feet. But at least you can show you have tried your best – and that, in itself, wins you brownie points when the inspector comes to judge. The NPPF states that: ‘Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot.’ Early and proactive are easy to assess. Effectiveness is harder to measure, but appeal decisions show that if you can demonstrate that the insights from local engagement have genuinely shaped the proposal, it will pass that test.

Stop people in the street and talk to local shopkeepers, alongside speaking to groups working at grassroots.
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Schlüter-Systems seals in safety for East Quay art pods

Putting visitor accommodation units above priceless artwork displays required careful specification to ensure full protection. Schlüter-Systems expertise helped this remarkable scheme’s success.

Set over multiple levels and containing five accommodation pods built among plenty of creative spaces, East Quay is a stunning building in Watchet, Somerset. The project was commissioned by Somerset-based social enterprise Onion Collective and led by architects George Williams and Owen Hughes Pearce of PEARCE+Fægen.

The duo designed the pod interiors while Invisible Studio was the concept architect for the building. Mark Anstey of Ellis Williams Architects was the project architect.

Due to the priceless artwork displayed on rotation in the creative spaces above and below the accommodation pods, a fully tanked waterproofing solution was high on the list of priorities. Pairing this with the innovative design elements required for each individual pod meant that floor build up also needed to be taken into consideration. This is where tile and stone protection expert Schlüter-Systems stepped in to put together a specification for three of the pods.

A DDA-compliant wetroom sits on the lower floor of Pod 2 for full accessibility. Due to these requirements, Schlüter advised that a point drain would be most suitable and therefore suggested the Schlüter point drain system would be the perfect solution.

Pods 4 and 5 needed linear drains, with the architect choosing to install the low height version of shower tray Schlüter-Kerdi-Shower-LTS and its partnering product, the Schlüter-Kerdi-Line-G3 drain for each. This guaranteed entry level access in the bathroom areas.

Reliable waterproofing in the three pods was taken care of with the help of uncoupling membrane Schlüter-Ditra-25. The multi-talented product offered many benefits to the project such as crack-bridging, waterproofing and load distribution.

East Quay and its creative presence has given Watchet and surrounding areas a new lease of life, displaying just how vibrant and welcoming the town and community is. Pulling together unusual and thought-provoking design elements with technical knowhow was paramount in getting this project off the ground, and Schlüter is incredibly proud to have been part of it.

Above left A DDA-compliant wetroom in Pod 2 required full accessibility so a point drain was suggested.
Above Pod 4 included a low height linear drain and shower tray for level entry access.

Discover how Schlüter-Systems can assist with your project: email sales@schluter.co.uk or visit www.schluterspecifier.co.uk
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Speaking from his dad’s home overlooking Lake Como, Luca Piffaretti confirms it’s a fine view. But for a photographer, beauty can be as problematic as ugliness, as he found while at university in Bologna, wandering its medieval streets as a keen amateur. ‘It’s a lovely city but every time you point your lens, you’re just photographing the past,’ he muses. That frustration with looking back drew him to London for a photojournalism Masters, and he’s been here ever since.

His London wanders are less picturesque. In lockdown, he passed vacant hours on a pilgrimage along the River Lea from Stratford photographing its derelict landscape; warehouses, post-industrial and scrub land – and the new residential developments threatening to engulf them all. This view he took in Aberfeldy Village in Poplar no longer exists; hoardings up, the site is being built on. The shot was taken on a February afternoon as the sun set behind Canary Wharf, giving the sky ‘a burned-out, dreamy look’. He used film to make himself choose wisely and commit to the exposure.

Piffaretti wishes he’d been here before the towers arrived and his image bears the trace of melancholy, but there’s solace in its title: ‘I called it ‘vision’ because London is ever-changing and it’s possible to frame what is yet to come; here, you can capture the future.’

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‘Architects have to remember why a decision was made and why it is fundamental to the project’

Labours of love
The architect’s endless quest to design the best building is inevitable, essential and important. Stick to your guns, urges Eleanor Young

Which buildings are close to your heart? A recent talk from Barcelona architect Benedetta Tagliabue started with her own home, and moved via the Scottish Parliament to the colourful Santa Caterina Market and the protected gardens of a cancer care centre back in Barcelona. Preparing for the event I had been reminding myself of her practice’s work. I had studied EMBT’s glass towers for Gas Natural Fenosa and, in China and Taiwan, major campus and tower projects; but Tagliabue avoided commercial work, focusing in Asia on EMBT’s calling card to China, the wicker-panelled Spanish Pavilion at Shanghai Expo (2010).

We all have work that is just business as usual, things we don’t want to trumpet or projects that turned out less well than we hoped. You can see how major practices promote and submit certain buildings for awards while others are quietly completed and put to use without another word. Perhaps the hardest to take are the projects that promised so much but then shrank to a shadow of their former selves. Those experiments with materials that had to be dropped, the beautiful staircase turned banal, the fit out dominated by the worst of the corporate colours.

Over the years I have talked to many practices about their best projects, which inevitably segues to their best clients. That is a common thread. But there are other ingredients. Usually the clients have bought into something about the practice – its sustainability ethos, the straight talking or ideas of the director, a particular site strategy. That can emerge through marketing, networking or a competition or interview but it has to be authentic. It must allow the client, whether end user, developer or contractor, to trust in the team.

That is all very pleasant. But the other common thread seems to be the ability to fight. Not with fists but with words, drawings and design, constantly making the case for the better way of doing things. Showing that it will work. Architects must push and challenge themselves, as much as others, to be one step ahead and have tested the options. They have to remember why a decision was made and why it is fundamental to the project. It’s not easy.

Since the fire at Grenfell Tower, just over five years ago, the idea of a golden thread through projects has become established as a concept if not a working model. The Building Safety Bill will nudge construction further in that direction (see page 46). Architects have also long understood themselves to hold the golden thread of design, sometimes against the contractual odds. For better buildings, from house extensions to train stations, architects must keep battling, making more buildings to love, more buildings you can be proud of. ♦

Watch out for Benedetta Tagliabue’s RIBA + Vitra talk, coming soon on architecture.com
We live in dynamic times. Covid, war and the ensuing tragedy, and the reality of inflation destabilise all. These are the global shifts. But there are local shifts too; the Gray Investigation, local elections, a no confidence vote and the ensuing rush to reinvigorate government have a huge impact on the context in which we live. These are all disruptors we need to harness as stimuli as we seek to fulfil our long-term charter objective to advance architecture. But how?

Practices will address these things through the way they think about client relationships, design, material supply, procurement, assembly and contracts – all in the longer term context of pursuing low carbon design in a circular economy. Easier said than done. But that is the day to day context that stimulates our thinking. We are all dealing with the global and local; and the long term in an uncertain present. It’s hard!

In 2021, following much consultation with schools, practices, our expert groups and students and architects, we produced The Way Ahead. This looked at how lifelong learning would reshape the way we think about education – in terms not just of qualifying as an architect but also of practising as one. A career long model for learning.

Our critical conversations on education with the ARB have focussed on how this vital strategy document has informed our Validation and CPD programmes – and how the RIBA thinks of itself. Our House of Architecture programme is about building on the long-term assets of our learned society – the skills and knowledge of our global membership. Many members have passed through the 113 schools and 221 courses we validate around the world. Many have come through other routes. We’re also addressing culture around teaching architecture by reviewing our course monitoring and validation processes. Indeed we are currently exploring a new Education Code of Conduct for validated institutions, similar to the RIBA Code of Practice for Chartered Practices.

Avoiding duplication with the ARB in the validation of both schools and our enhanced CPD programme will be critical. The good news is that the ARB also believes we need new models of entry into the profession – learning much from the excellent apprenticeship programmes as they have swiftly moved from theory to reality.

This has suggested to me and many others in academe and practice (the boundaries blur and may disappear) that, to open up the profession, we should make entry more affordable and flexible, and address the fact that ongoing competence and learning is part of a career in practice. We will all have different views, but I am interested in enabling a route that allows individuals who earn and learn in bite sized modules, picking up points along the way, that allows them to construct their own career path. I still believe that a final professional exam is useful preparation for competence and learning in practice. Of course, none of the different routes shut out the existing models. I would expect them to evolve in response. But we need to find out more. To this end we are planning a round table with key stakeholders and, depending on what we hear, I expect a bigger knowledge sharing event will follow shortly after. These are dynamic but also exciting times and it is vital that we engage, as in our era of regulated career competence (and, I would argue, as in any era, even when there was less regulation) we are all students of architecture – and for life!

Left The RIBA is working on opening up new routes through architectural education. Apprenticeships are just one. Seen here is work from the University of Northumbria’s MArch apprenticeship.

COMING SOON... THIS YEAR'S STIRLING SHORTLIST
Later this month the six projects contending for the coveted 2022 Stirling Prize will be announced. Awarded to the UK’s best new building, the prize is the highest accolade in architecture. Keep your eyes peeled to see who’s in the running.

STEPHANIE WUNDERLICH PHOTO: HARRISON LOWTHROP
SterlingOSB Zero helps create the perfect family home

Warm, robust and easy to keep clean were key requirements for a young family’s new kitchen. West Fraser’s SterlingOSB Zero fulfilled all that – and most importantly fitted their very tight budget.

When architect Daniele Sini bought Ravensbourne House in London with his partner, his practice AU Studio set out to turn it into the perfect family home.

The focus of his attention was a poorly constructed, dingy, single-storey kitchen rear extension built for the previous owners. ‘We have young children, so we set out to transform this part of the house into a family room,’ he explains.

The challenge was that having spent most of their money on the house, the family had very little left for subsequent works. To keep costs down, AU Studio decided to retain the steel structure – with the addition of a new blockwork column to support the main beam, which was discovered to have been resting on their neighbour’s chimney breast.

To open up the space, the low plasterboard ceiling and the boxing from around the steel structure were removed and a new portal frame was inserted in the rear wall to accommodate a large glazed sliding door to the back garden.

When it came to the finishes, Sini says they had to be robust: ‘The children were young, so the finishes had to be able to take some bashing – we wanted them to look good without being too precious’.

The steel structure was painted with black intumescent paint to match the colour of the light fittings. New kitchen units were finished in grey, complemented by a cream-coloured glazed tile splash-back on the rear wall to create ‘a neutral background for the functional elements,’ explains Sini.

Sini used SterlingOSB Zero to provide a durable finish that would also add natural colour to the kitchen walls. The boards are 18mm thick to help neatly mitre the corner junctions. To make it easy to keep the walls clean, the SterlingOSB Zero is treated with a sealant before being finished with a coat of clear fire-retardant paint to prevent surface spread of flame. ‘I liked the texture of SterlingOSB Zero and its warm colour variation; this is emphasised by the morning sun to give the space a warm glow,’ says Sini. ‘I’m pleased SterlingOSB Zero is robust, but primarily I liked it because we wanted something cheap because our budget was so tight,’ he laughs.

SterlingOSB Zero has also been used to finish the part of the ceiling where it conceals soundproofing fitted beneath the upstairs bathroom – without adding to the palette of materials.

‘It’s a small project, but it involved a lot of thought to make the most of the space and exploit what we’ve got to the best effect,’ says Sini. ‘For me this project was about using clever design to overcome the constraints in order to make the space fit our needs on a very limited budget’. 

Above With a portal frame inserted in the rear wall, the kitchen could be opened out to the garden. 
Top right SterlingOSB Zero was chosen not just because it was economical, but for its warmth, texture and robustness.
Shape shifting display units take rough with the smooth

Highly contrasting exposed SterlingOSB Zero and Himacs’ smooth solidity create strong and interesting furniture for arts organisation Bloc Projects.

Architect Studio Polpo has combined SterlingOSB Zero with Himacs solid surface material to create a series of bespoke interlocking furniture pieces, known as Bloc Objects, for Sheffield-based arts organisation Bloc Projects.

Three items make up Bloc Objects: a desk, a storage unit and a display stand. These are designed so the Objects can be assembled and disassembled in different combinations, to enable Bloc Projects to run its gallery – in an old industrial building in the centre of Sheffield – as an office, event or exhibition space without compromising its primary function as an art gallery. ‘The clients were artists and the Objects had to fit into an arts space, which was an important aspect of the design, rather than being purely functional elements,’ explains Studio Polpo’s Mark Parsons.

Studio Polpo’s design for the Objects plays with the application of the two very different sheet materials used in their assembly, to challenge assumptions about what is functional and what is aesthetic. Himacs is a solid surface material composed of minerals, acrylic and natural pigments that provides a durable, smooth, non-porous and visually seamless surface. It is most commonly used to form high-end kitchen worktops.

Attractive opposites

By contrast, SterlingOSB Zero is an engineered timber board product typically used as sheathing in wall panels and as roof decking. ‘We deliberately chose the materials to emphasise the extreme contrast between the utilitarian SterlingOSB Zero and the perfectly smooth finish of the Himacs,’ says Studio Polpo’s Jonathan Orlek. ‘Our design plays with the ability to invisibly join the solid surface material, but reveals a supporting timber structure which is conventionally hidden by fabricators,’ he adds.

The desk has four flat sides finished in pure white solid surface material with the SterlingOSB Zero mainly visible in the chair recess. An open storage box, also lined with SterlingOSB Zero, punches out of one side of the desk. The smaller storage unit, its outer surfaces also finished in gleaming white Himacs, doubles as a small table. One side of this unit incorporates a rectangular recess to accommodate the desk’s storage box. This allows the two pieces of furniture to be amalgamated to form a single long table. The third element is a freestanding leaflet stand, sized to be stored under the desk when not in use.
When the desk and storage unit are combined, the gleaming white Himacs of the long table’s top, side and front surfaces create a single, smooth monolithic piece of white furniture which can be used either to display artwork or as a bar at events. ‘The gallery is a relatively white-wall type space so we set out to create something that would fit into this smooth, clean environment,’ explains Orlek.

**Purity, texture and colour**

It is when the objects are separated or rearranged that Studio Polpo’s design plays with the typical appearance of solid surface as a seamless and solid block of material by revealing and contrasting the purity of the white surface with the texture and colour of the SterlingOSB Zero lining. ‘When we decided to reveal some of the supporting structure, we also decided to emphasise the difference between smooth and rough,’ says Orlek.

Parsons elaborates: ‘SterlingOSB Zero has a beautiful texture and colour and is doing a lot of the work, while Himacs is this perfect high-end material that is almost a veneer; we were trying to give them both equal billing’. As example, he says the pockets on the leaflet rack cut into the SterlingOSB Zero have been finished to a very high standard, ‘which is not something normally associated with SterlingOSB Zero because it is harder to sand and to cut out holes neatly’. He admits this approach was a challenge for the fabricator, Preston-based bespoke furniture manufacturer WALL (We Are Limitless Ltd), but says that the result, combined with a high degree of craftsmanship, is that ‘they both come off looking like special materials’.

Given the designers’ desire for Bloc Objects to fit within an arts space, it was appropriate that the furniture was launched in parallel with a Bloc Projects’ art exhibition. Since then, Bloc Projects has continued to evolve, and Jonathan Orlek says that as a consequence the Bloc Objects have faded more into the background which he says ‘feels right’.
Abandoned trout-fishing buildings revived as study centre

A project to restore a declining and neglected loch in Moray included refurbishing and fixing fly fishing buildings. As a local initiative, it welcomed the cost-effective options of SterlingOSB Zero.

Trout fishing at the Loch of Blairs, Moray, ceased around the time of millennium. Since then, the loch has started to merge into its surroundings: its banks becoming overgrown, weed clogging the water, and the Victorian boat house, adjoining bothy and adjacent stable and cart-house buildings had all fallen into disrepair.

A group of locals came together as the Friends of Blairs Loch, with a mission to transform the loch into a place for recreation by extending the network of footpaths around its banks, transforming the dilapidated buildings into a field study facility for local schools and, ultimately, returning trout to the water.

By 2020, the Friends had enough funds to restore the picturesque boat house and bothy. Its slate roof, structural frame and cladding were all repaired by local contractors and new windows were installed on the Bothy. Internally, the works were completed by volunteers, including insulating the Bothy’s walls and roof and replacing the timber lining. The floor too was rebuilt using SterlingOSB Zero boards as a solid substrate onto which the final floor covering was applied.

Attention then turned to the stable and cart room. The Friends had intended to restore the wooden building and turn it into a classroom, but surveys revealed that its structure had deteriorated to the point where it was unsafe.

Wittets Architects designed a contemporary replacement for the stable to occupy the same footprint as the original. ‘The stable room is a very conventional timber framed building; the frame was built and covered in SterlingOSB Zero with a larch skin applied externally, while on the inside is insulation and a plasterboard lining,’ explains Brian Higgs, one of the Friends. Wittets Architects’ scheme also features a metal profile roof mounted on a SterlingOSB Zero substrate. ‘The only work carried out by volunteers to this building was decoration,’ says Higgs. ‘The rest we left to the professionals because it had to comply with Building Regulations.’

Alongside Stable Classroom, the architect has also added a new building, designed in the same style and built from the same materials, which houses toilets, a changing area and a kitchen. The Friends have built a series of wildlife hides using i-Joist offcuts supplied by local manufacturer James Jones & Sons. The joists feature softwood flanges either side of a SterlingOSB Zero web. The hides have been formed by screwing together the joist flanges to form the walls and roof of the hides.

With restoration of the buildings complete, the focus of the Friends is to remove weed from the loch before reintroducing the trout. Check their progress at www.blairsloch.com •

The RIBA Journal July/August 2022

Above The refurbished boathouse and bothy and new stable block took advantage of SterlingOSB Zero’s intrinsic structural properties.
Below The new Stable Block is a timber-frame covered in SterlingOSB Zero.
We live in a golden age of lavish screen adaptations of works of fantasy. Amazon Prime has thrown huge sums of money at the genre, adapting Robert Jordan’s sprawling Wheel of Time saga, and making The Rings of Power, a prequel to Lord of the Rings – a passion project of Mr Bezos himself. Netflix’s The Witcher recently released its third season and has adapted Leigh Bardugo’s Shadow and Bone. And HBO will soon air its prequel to Game of Thrones, the show that started this boom. Though it’s on the sci-fi side, Apple TV’s lush and vivid rendition of Isaac Asimov’s Foundation books belongs in this list.

On the big screen, Denis Villeneuve has given beautiful new life to Frank Herbert’s Dune saga. It’s a feast for anyone who enjoys the genre, though perhaps bittersweet. All literature works on the imagination, even the lapidary psychological portraits of Henry James. The mind illuminates the spaces carved by words. But it’s fantasy that fully exploits the ability of the imagination to exceed reality. This makes the experience of reading fantasy personal, as our inner image of Gormenghast is ours alone.

Fantasy books often give the imagination images to work on: they have covers, and illustrations – sometimes by authors themselves, as Mervyn Peake and JRR Tolkien both did. But the imagination has a way of overruling those images. I never found Tolkien’s drawings for The Hobbit very satisfying – especially his odd, Anderson Shelter-like depiction of Bilbo’s home. And is that cricket pavilion really Rivendell? The words are luminous – the pictures do not matter much.

The screen is another matter. If a film or a big-budget TV adaptation does a bad job of portraying a fantasy world it can be disappointing. But strangely, a successful depiction can be a subtle tragedy of its own. Peter Jackson’s colossal early-2000s adaptation of The Lord of the Rings did supreme justice to the potential of places like Rivendell, Minas Tirith and Barad-dûr. Reinforced by its enduring popularity over two decades, that communal hallucination has somewhat overwritten the private visions we might once have harboured. Who can picture Barad-dûr now without seeing Jackson’s obsidian tuning-fork, and that blazing reptilian eye?

Once I probably had my own idea of what Barad-dûr looked like, and yet I can’t summon it now. There’s not a lot to go on in the text: ‘wall upon wall, battlement upon battlement, black tower of adamant’ – fabulous prose, with that rhythmic assonance, but not a lot of architectural detail. We are given immensity, complexity, blackness and firmness, but little else. What diverse structures this fragment must have raised in generations of readers. And we don’t even have to picture the whole, an impression is enough. Mervyn Peake’s Gormenghast – an unending, mouldy gothic castle – is deliberately unimaginable and impossible to depict, and the better for it. Our conception of it must always stay fragmentary and dreamlike.

After more than 20 years of writing about real architecture, where precise description matters, I’ve been writing a fantasy novel. Naturally, I’ve thought a great deal about the appearance of the cities, forts and palaces therein – but how much to say, and what to leave to the reader? I must be careful because I’ve thought carefully about the why of my architecture as well as the what – the historical, cultural, climatic and material reasons for the appearance of these imagined places. It’s easy to drown the reader in detail. Tolkien’s economy is a hard but necessary example.

The Last Blade Priest by WP Wiles will be published by Angry Robot on 12 July 2022.
Making an entrance at Three New Bailey

Boon Edam’s Circleslide installation for HM Revenue and Customs at Three New Bailey in Manchester provides a bold, spacious and welcoming entrance to Bowmer + Kirkland’s new development for Make Architects.

Three New Bailey is a 157,000 ft², BREEAM Excellent building in the heart of Salford’s thriving New Bailey development. The landmark building is part of the £1 billion New Bailey masterplan, a regeneration scheme led by the English Cities Fund and Salford City Council to transform the historic city into a vibrant business, retail, and leisure destination.

As the first building to greet passengers leaving Salford Central Station, Three New Bailey establishes a strong but quiet presence fronting the
new piazza. The distinctive, interlaced red brick facade references the local 19th century warehouse architecture and pays homage to the city’s cotton weaving heritage. The new seven storey building now serves as a regional hub for HM Revenue and Customs, welcoming approximately 2,400 people through its doors each day.

**Bespoke entrance**

Early in the project, Boon Edam was approached by Make Architects to deliver a bespoke entry following the successful completion of several nearby developments.

With the Three New Bailey entrance sitting on a busy pedestrian route, the project required DDA-compliance in order to act as both a fire escape and a means of controlling the entrance lobby.

Based on the detailed specification, Boon Edam supplied and installed an automatic circular sliding door. Designed with two curved bi-parting doors, the Circleslide has a wider throat opening than traditional sliding doors and can easily accommodate a higher traffic flow. With the elegant design of a revolving door and the functionality of standard sliding doors, the Circleslide was the perfect entry solution for this project.

**Making a statement**

Three New Bailey’s Circleslide installation was not typical. Unusually, the specification called for the door to be installed directly under a 6m suspended cylindrical drum to create the illusion of a taller, more striking entrance. Throughout the project, Boon Edam worked closely with specialist facade contractor MTW Architectural Ltd to deliver a design that was true to the architect’s specification while also addressing the technical issues associated with the requirements.

Andrew Eades, project manager at Boon Edam, explained: ‘The main challenge we overcame was ventilation for the integrated Omnivent air curtain installed in the door canopy. Air curtains require adequate ventilation to allow airflow and enable the heater to breathe, but the vents were compromised due to the positioning of the cylindrical structure above. After several meetings between our engineers and the team at MTW, we identified a solution. We calculated that a specific number of slots needed to be machined into each roof panel to achieve the combined m² perforation.’

He added: ‘Our team also delivered a custom-built box section which connects the door canopy to the drum-like structure above, creating an impression that the door is 8m tall. In addition, we installed an access panel in the canopy to allow for easy maintenance in the future.’

The bespoke circular sliding door, finished with a matte black anodised coating, perfectly complements the distinctive red brick facade, adding an individual and exclusive touch. Its circular design gives the illusion of a revolving door, creating a three-dimensional effect and leaving a lasting impression on employees, visitors, and passers-by.

**Collaboration and expertise**

At Boon Edam, we take pride in our expertise and knowledge. When it comes to entrance control, we know what works and what doesn’t and what requires fine-tuning, and that confidence helps us to provide future-proof entry solutions. No matter what the scope of the project is, we collaborate closely with designers, architects, and building managers to ensure the perfect fit.

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ZENCHA
Design by Sebastian Herkner
Queer Spaces is both a celebration and a howl of protest – but it deserves the widest possible readership, says Ewan Harrison.

Between the wars, the exterior of an ordinary looking regency villa in the Cambridge suburbs masked a riotous interior of silk drapes, iridescent celluloid paint, fan vaulted ceilings made of silvered glass and a staircase clad in copper.

The house's owner, Mansfield Duval Forbes of Clare College, had created this interior with the help of his protégé, the modernist architect Raymond McGrath, as a syncretic fusion of the archaic and the modern. It was layered with highly personal references: to 18th century Gothick, to Forbes' childhood in colonial Sri Lanka, and to his family's Scottish ancestry – indeed the house was christened Finella in honour of a semi-apocryphal Pictish queen that Forbes adopted as an alter ego.

As the historian Elizabeth Darling explains it, Finella emerges as a profoundly queer space: a site where Forbes, as a gay man, ‘could find the freedom of expression’ denied to him in interwar Cambridge. Finella’s knowing nods to Sir Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill, Britain’s queer interior par excellence, are a further element in its queer expression.

The astonishing interior of Finella, as described by Darling, is just one of the 100 or so buildings and sites profiled in Queer Spaces: An Atlas of LGBTQIA+ Buildings and Stories, edited by the artist, designer and curator Adam Nathaniel Furman and the architectural historian...
Joshua Mardell. *Queer Spaces* unites over 100 short entries written by 55 academic historians, practising architects, curators, activists and members of the queer community. Through these entries the editors set out not to define queer space, but to celebrate it in all its heterogenous diversity.

The entries are split into three themes: domestic, communal, public. However, the editors are at pains to point out that these are a loose framing device and not a hard taxonomy. The story of Finella features under the first of these, domestic, alongside other similar scholarly excavations of the palaces, country houses, cottage ornees and weekend retreats of queer aristocrats and bon-vivants.

These are leavened with poignant accounts of quotidian domestic queer spaces: Facundo Revuelta writes about the Hotel Gondolin in Buenos Aires, which as a community owned centre for the city’s trans population provides ‘an emblematic space of self-sufficiency and travesti-trans pride,’ while Rhul Abdin describes the homes of some of Bangladesh’s Hirja community.

Rather closer to (my) home, Helen Smith uses police reports and newspaper accounts of working class men prosecuted for homosexual activity to uncover the queer history of a typical Sheffield two-up-two-down. Smith notes that ‘working-class, queer domestic spaces don’t carry blue or rainbow plaques. They hide in plain sight, like many of the men who lived in them.’ Smith’s source material might conjure browbeaten lives, yet her reading of that material instead points to lives filled with sexual liaisons and friendships that suggests a ‘refusal to be cowed’. If a thread runs through the first third of this book, it is that domestic space can and should be a locus of liberation: a closet that empowers as much as it shelters.

The second and third frames – communal and public – unite a wide range of club nights, performance spaces and spaces of organising and activism. Of these, the design collective STALLED’s prototype for inclusive airport bathrooms, designed to accommodate the needs of a wide range of differently embodied people, neatly encapsulates the agency of architecture and design in addressing issues of exclusion. Aparecida Arguello describes the queer appropriation of the ruined Santiago Apostol Cathedral in Managua, Nicaragua, during the Somoza dictatorship and after, which illustrates both the resilience of queer communities under oppressive regimes and our ability to repurpose and reappropriate spaces to our own ends.

*Queer Spaces* is impressively wide reaching in its coverage yet there are still poignant lacunae. South Africa is well represented but only one entry gives voice to queer communities in the rest of the continent: an account of Sappho Islands, a queer bar that operated for one year in a suburb of Kampala. The bravery of the Ugandan LGBTQIA+ activists who operated Sappho Islands under one of the world’s most violently repressive homophobic regimes is no doubt mirrored throughout Africa, in queer spaces that necessarily operate behind a thick veil of secrecy. We must await future publications to tell their stories.

The entries throughout are pithy, rigorously scholarly, and beautifully illustrated: a testament to the strengths of the dual-editorship that steered the book to completion. In all, *Queer Spaces* is a glorious wunderkammer: a howl of protest and celebration, and a sourcebook of alternative domesticities and urbanisms. This book deserves the widest possible readership among architects, designers, and urbanists.

Ewan Harrison is an architectural historian.
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Obituary

Country-house ‘snooper’ turned self-taught historian who became curator of the RIBA Collections, transforming the study of architectural drawings

John Harris
1931 – 2022

John Harris, who has died aged 90, was a self-taught historian and curator who led the RIBA Collections through a golden age and transformed the study of architectural drawings.

Born in Hackney and raised in a dreary west London suburb, he rebelled by deliberately failing the 11-plus and leaving school at 13. When his father arranged for him to enter the family upholstery trade, he contrived to get the sack from Heal’s. Instead, jaunts with his Uncle Sid inculcated a love of grand country houses. He was soon hitchhiking all over the country to ‘snoop’, visiting more than 200 crumbling piles. If occupied, entry was secured by charm and guile; if not, he’d go through a window.

National service took him to what was then Malaya, where some shady business paid for a disappointing stint at the École du Louvre. Real education continued by other means: cultivating wealthy Paris aesthetes, avid reading and trespass. On return to London, that zest and a refined connoisseurial eye won friendships with eminent scholars, whose esteem secured him a job as assistant librarian at RIBA in 1956.

There, Harris began to write in earnest; his output would eventually total more than 25 books and catalogues, including notable monographs on William Chambers and Inigo Jones. An early commission was to help Nikolaus Pevsner with his volume on Lincolnshire. With one strictly methodical, the other led by boundless curiosity, their relationship was fractious.

It was in Lincolnshire, however, that Harris met Eileen Spiegel, a Brooklyn-born historian and expert on Robert Adam, whom he married in 1960. She survives him, along with their children, Lucian and Georgina.

Marriage coincided with a new role as the institute’s first curator of drawings. Harris wrested control of the ill-housed collection from the library and, with a team including Alexandra Wedgwood, Margaret Richardson and Jill Lever, catalogued the holdings in 23 volumes. Shrewd purchases and well-aimed appeals added many treasures, including works by Frank Lloyd Wright and Ernő Goldfinger. ‘Harris transformed the collection from one that was antiquarian and inward-looking to one that looked outwards, backwards and forwards’, says Charles Hind, the present chief curator. ‘The international reputation that it now enjoys is largely due to him.’

His greatest coup was relocating the collection to 21 Portman Square. Working with little money but abundant energy, he turned the compact outpost into a public forum. The world’s first purpose-built gallery for architectural drawings opened in 1972 and hosted over 130 exhibitions on subjects as varied as Eileen Gray, James Stirling, pubs and First World War cemeteries.

Jovial office lunches were an information exchange for the whole field; from the kitchen, Harris’ influence spread in all directions. SAVE Britain’s Heritage was conceived there after the smash-hit V&A exhibition The Destruction of the Country House, which he co-curated in 1974. He was also founding president of the International Confederation of Architectural Museums.

Despite his success at RIBA, Harris remained a natural maverick, and in 1986 resigned in protest at plans to return the collection to Portland Place. Prolific activity continued: snooping, campaigning, editorships and writing, including two memoirs, No Voice from the Hall and Echoing Voices. Peopled by rogues, grandees and sundry eccentrics they are a portrait of a rich life, and a contribution to architectural history as great as any. •

Chris Foges
Don’t let cost cutting tamper with safety-critical specifications

With the spiralling costs of many construction materials and products, Hannah Mansell, group technical director for Masonite companies in the UK, cautions against the prospect of lowering specifications to mitigate price rises.
As part of the need for increased transparency in the specification of building safety components, it is more important than ever to guard against the prospect of specifications being negatively changed during the design and construction phases, or when a building is refurbished.

This is sometimes referred to as value engineering, although true value engineering should not just be cover for cost-cutting. It should be a creative process during which the project team can improve the overall value of a project by considering the function and performance of each construction element against its cost.

This process should look at optimising every element of a project through an analysis of all benefits and downsides, including total cost of ownership over the lifetime of a building. This includes considering alternative design solutions, the availability and use of materials, construction methods, transport, process and logistics, plant and machinery, and site issues.

So, what are the issues that design and construction teams are dealing with here? Construction materials cost increases reached a 40-year high last year, based on the annual growth of the BCIS Materials Cost Index. Increased global demand in the construction sector as the effects of the pandemic wane, alongside materials shortages and labour cost rises have all contributed to this situation. General building costs are forecast to rise by almost 10% in 2022, while the cost of materials is forecast to rise by almost 18%.

**Guarding against cost-cutting**

By specifying construction products that have been independently third-party certificated, architects can be assured that they have done their best to ensure that changes to inferior specifications won’t happen further down the line. At Door-Stop International, part of the Masonite companies in the UK, we’re committed to independent third-party certification of our products and are in a strong position to help architects avoid the pitfalls of specification trimming.

By specifying a particular fire doorset that has been third-party certificated, architects can be assured that the product in question is fit-for-purpose and has been manufactured precisely to the original product specification.

When a third-party certificated product is manufactured it is labelled with a unique number, providing full traceability of the manufacturer and any certification relating to its specification and production records. This enables on-site checks to be made against the door’s original standards and provides information on replacement parts that are compatible with the original specification and test requirements, so that compliance with the original specification is maintained.

Certification includes precise details of the products covered (including maximum permitted dimensions). It also provides information on door leaf configurations, doorframes, thresholds, door-to-frame gaps, supporting construction, installation instructions, glazed apertures, intumescent protection, locks and latches, self-closing devices, and ancillary items.

**Competent installation**

Of course, certification of fire doors does not stop with the product itself. Equally important is to ensure that the doors are installed strictly in accordance with the certificate, data sheet and installation instructions by trained, competent installers. One way to be assured of using a competent installer is to make sure they are third-party certificated under a recognised scheme. If fire doors are not properly installed, their fire-resistant capabilities can be seriously degraded. Certification schemes for installers are designed to provide reassurance that fire doors have been correctly installed and should perform as intended.

Door-Stop International, use a digital ‘Critical to Safety’ framework that records the checks carried out during the manufacturing process. Products are shipped with copies of the full certificate, data sheet and installation instructions, which list the original primary test evidence reports. This is a vital link in helping stakeholders manage, inspect and maintain the product throughout its lifetime.

**‘Golden thread’**

By using third-party certificated products such as fire doorsets, architects can also be assured that they are contributing to the ‘golden thread’ of building safety information, first introduced by Dame Judith Hackitt in her report Building a Safer Future. In essence, critical fire and other building safety information should be collected at each phase of the building’s development and passed on to the managers of a building for its occupation. As people who commission building work and participate in the design of buildings, architects become Golden Thread dutyholders under secondary legislation to be made using powers within the Building Safety Act.

As can be seen, attempting to trim the specification of fire doorsets is never a good idea, even under cost pressures. By specifying independent third party certificated products, architects can be assured that they have discharged their professional duties, as well as reducing the chances of cost-cutting specification changes further down the line.

www.masonite.co.uk/firedoorsets/learnmore
Skills and surrealism: Eye Line 2022

Eye Line’s first joint placing and a trio of wins for students of a problematic school reflect closely argued positions in a protracted judging process.

Given the wide range of expertise present in the room, it was a given that there would be as many polarised as converging opinions in this year’s judging process, leading to stimulating discussion, if protracted resolution.

Professor Kester Rattenbury is versed in trends that intermittently rise out of the UK’s architecture schools; recently noting a shift from the fantastical to more surreal modes of representation. Niall Hobhouse’s interests lie nearer the margins of architectural representation; his Drawing Matter Trust ‘collecting drawings in the main because I think institutions collect the wrong ones’; images based more on ‘product’ rather than ‘process’.

Contrast this expertise with Rory Chisholm’s own views; forged in academic study but tempered at the coalface of conservation practice – ‘interested in the primal architectural forms and bringing them into the modern world.’ And Ana Luisa Soares, whose firm, Fala Atelier had made a name for itself for its drawings before it had ever built a thing. Developing these skills by pursuing a PhD in ‘frontal framing in architectural composition,’ Soares admitted at the outset that she was ‘more interested in work investigating ‘planar modes of drawing’ than anything else.

As for Adam Turk, CEO of Eye Line sponsor Siderise, used to poring over contract and construction sets, he confessed that, despite his clear enthusiasm for the judging process, this was going to be a baptism by fire. It explains why the judging morning, usually a ‘game of two halves’ became a one of ‘three thirds’, with the student category judging being sandwiched between two practitioner discussion periods while judges thrashed out who the practitioner winner would be. With so many views aired, it felt hard to keep judges to either time or plan. ‘Serves you right for choosing such opinionated judges!’ exclaimed Hobhouse at the end of the morning – and he was right.

As ever, the level of student entries remained high. Rattenbury noted that today’s students are building on generations of developments in drawing technique, resulting in breathtaking levels of skill from some entrants and definite stylistic ‘bents’. One such was student Beth Mogey with ‘Well-Timed Openings’, pale, deftly detached renderings influenced by artists Hammershoi and Johann Erdmann; a clear style emerging from Queen’s University, Belfast.

But with all judging done ‘blind’ and opinions based solely on the quality of skills and surrealism:
the drawn submissions, work is judged on its merits rather than the school it originated from. Students from the UCL’s Bartlett school took 1st, 2nd and 3rd place. The accolades come as a damning report was published detailing the toxic study culture and abuses at the school that has seen its director Bob Shiel resign and UCL provost Michael Spence vow to address the issue ‘swiftly and robustly’.

There were strong showings from other schools in the capital, the AA School, the RCA and University of Greenwich which set a high standard. With practitioner winners undecided, the judges returned to them after the student submissions to appraise them again with a dose of salts; not surprisingly, the work in this category tends to be more conventional in nature and channelled by realities of practice. Yet within those constraints they sought out the entries with hallmarks of experimentation or risk; that no one submission ticked all those boxes meant a clear winner proved elusive.

It took the statistician head of Siderise’s Adam Turk to draw the eventual winners out of judges shortlists; and even then, the act was mediated by Rattenbury’s insistence for the ‘heart’ to rule on what the ‘head’ had realised. This saw another first for Eye Line – a joint second place position – to serve as evidence of those polarised views. For her, not even our winner escaped a caveat: ‘a resonant yet controversial image which both speaks of the positive aspects of architectural practice and the human conditions it must respond to.’


Judges
Rory Chisholm 2021 Eye Line winner (practitioner)
Niall Hobhouse trustee, Drawing Matter
Kester Rattenbury professor, architecture and cities, University of Westminster
Ana Luisa Soares co-founder, Fala Atelier
Adam Turk CEO, Siderise
Jan-Carlos Kucharek deputy editor, RIBA Journal, chair
Culture
Eye Line drawing competition
It was late June, and there was a glimmer of light behind the blinds, signifying the start of the sun’s ascent for the day. She eased herself out of the bed and into her wheelchair. Practitioner Alan Power’s emotive fictional account of a resident in his firm’s assisted living housing overlooking a garden in Leicester was as evocative as his oil on canvas renderings of it. Power (who came third in 2018 Eye Line) wrote that his design looked to address the ‘perceived’ needs of its occupants – and it was that perception element that so engaged the judges; splitting their opinions was the nature of what was actually being described.

Rory Chisholm was gripped by the image’s ambiguities, saying ‘it could be seen as an optimistic but realistic; that no matter how good the architecture, a sense of separation will always be there for those using it.’ Adam Turk thought the work ‘thought provoking. Power seems to be highlighting the beauty of existence and the sense of isolation that can stem from that.’

Niall Hobhouse was initially ‘uneasy with oil on canvas for an architectural drawing, though I have no problem with the (Interior) image’s emotional loading – it’s great,’ Ana Luisa Soares’ felt more ambivalent. ‘I like the powerful composition but don’t know if it works as an architectural depiction of the project,’ she said. ‘If such is the feeling they are eliciting in their building, it leaves me asking if the building works?’ Chisholm saw this as a reason to push the project, thinking it a fair point ‘but that’s why I like it. It doesn’t adhere to what architects usually try to do.’ Kester Rattenbury agreed with the ‘Interior’ if not the ‘Exterior’ image’s emotional aspect, noting ‘a strong sense of surrealism in a lot of student work this year and I feel that aspect comes over in this (practitioner) entry; the content is highly charged.’ Chisholm, championing the work throughout, concluded, ‘It’s one of the only images that speaks of poetry, and that gives it real value and makes it the best in its category.’

Left Interior. Early morning. 610 × 508mm, oil on canvas. Below Exterior. Early morning. 610 × 508mm, oil on canvas.
Practitioner: Joint 2nd Place
Katherine Jones
Architect

Two variations on a theme of Wales gained this place for Katherine Jones, who enamoured judges with "flattened" representations of its highly dimensional natural landscape — even if that wasn't the country that Chisholm first referred to when discussing her pared-back drawing style: "The tradition of oblique flat representational drawing is highly developed in Indian Art and those very aspects seem to come through here. Its accuracy comes through the innate detail rather than the forcing of perspective." Jones' style reminded him of the drawings of Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa, he added.

One of her Rotring pen images, of Clough Williams-Ellis' Portmeirion Italianate fantasy village in north Wales, built from 1925 and 1975, beguiled Hobhouse, even if he wasn't quite sold on the topographical accuracy: "The Portmeirion image charms me just because the style seems to match the absurdity of the place," he noted, adding: "It looks like Portmeirion on the Sorrentine peninsula as the hill isn't half that high!" Though with Snowdonia in the distance, was its' foreshortening intentional?

Jones' sectional rendering of the subterranean workings of Cilely Colliery near Tonyrefail, created from historical images of the coal mine is, according to Jones, a "pieced" together representation of what the mine used to look like. And while Andy Turk liked her "fascinating" drawings, it seemed Rattenbury and Soares, while appreciating them, were less taken by their interpretive quality, happy to see the work take second place.

Above Cilely Colliery.
297mm × 210mm, pen, ink and watercolour.

Below Portmeirion.
420mm × 240mm, pen, ink and watercolour.
Practitioner: Joint 2nd Place
Duncan Webster
Architect

In his reimagining of the 4000-year-old North American Tipi, Webster brings the form into the future with his ‘3d multicellular community of adaptable conical enclosures, linked by sky water gardens (harvesters)’. These massive structures are connected to each other via ‘Hyperloop hubs’ and with the cones coated in a ‘graphene matrix’, its skin becomes a solar energy collector, the hyper-scaled structure conditioning itself by drawing air from the bottom and expelling at the ‘sky garden’ level.

Yet in all its sense of futuristic potential, there is something compellingly primitive in its means of expression, mimicking the geometric forms found on cave walls and rock formations from our own ancient pre-history – a flatness and abstraction that removes it all from the real and takes it into the realms of symbolism.

The means of representation was certainly enough to capture the imaginations of the judges. Chisholm was a fan from the start, calling it ‘a strange, investigative drawing using conventional, almost historical architectural language, which is getting rarer; and for that reason, it ticks the boxes for me.’ Hobhouse and Rattenbury had more reservations about the project, the latter feeling ‘it’s trying to do something very conscious with the drawing technique that makes it intriguing.’

Soares was circumspect about the narrative for Webster’s cones but the two-dimensionality of the representation caught her attention; ‘I like the way he has merged his sections and plans on the same drawing; in that respect it’s quite successful.’
Practitioner: Commended
Shaun Young
Senior lecturer, Northumbria University

Young’s long drawing uses a plan of Robert Adam’s Croome Court near Worcester to frame the perspectival interventions of a wholly reversible installation of the estate’s artefacts, set up in a contiguous suite of rooms in the stately home. The installation itself works with Adam’s motifs, using fabrics and pattern to play increasingly ‘attenuated’ spatial games as one moves through the spaces. Young describes it as the ‘developed surface’ drawings characteristic of Adam’s practice, collapsing the space between representation and reality.

The judges appreciated the fact that these spatial ideas manifested in a play on the drawing itself, with Rattenbury enjoying ‘the fact that it’s a project in itself – using the framing and composition of drawings to make a drawing.’ Andy Turk was ‘won around’ by the argument to make it commended as were Chisholm and Hobhouse, who both remarked on the framing device albeit with a lesser degree of enthusiasm. In all, the drawing worked in communicating what Young called ‘the illusive, painterly quality of “movement” in architecture that Adam so coveted’.

Above Robert Adam Rooms. 1200mm × 360mm, pencil, watercolour, CAD, and photocopied layers digitally overlaid (detail right).

Practitioner: Commended
Jolene Liam
Architect, Studio Egret West

It’s a case of third time lucky for Liam, having also received commendations in both 2018 and 2021. Over three years’ of entries she has been documenting the minutiae of private and public space in almost obsessive fashion. Her 2018 submission observed the ‘stuff’ of her life in a small flat barely able to hold it. Last year saw her journey meticulously around the site of her imposed quarantine on her return to Singapore, and this year it was the small, incidental, shared common space outside her granny’s flat there that captured the imagination of this year’s judges.

Ana Luisa Soares found the images had ‘beautifully drawn intensity’ but wondered if, as a set, they had an ‘observational rather than critical sense’. Rattenbury thought the opposite: ‘The propositional aspect relates to the fact that the architecture isn’t there. What we’re looking at is the everyday; the plants and shared accessway with its implied uses are propositional by default.’

Above Corridor Garden — Medium. 420 × 297, ink on paper.
Art meets science

Creativity starts with the expression of ideas and ends with technical execution, which is what makes fire protection firm and Eye Line sponsor Siderise such a good fit.

Technical excellence is born from creativity. This is why Siderise Insulation, leading manufacturer of passive fire protection solutions for the building envelope, is thrilled to be sponsoring this year’s RIBAJ Eye Line competition.

Developing, manufacturing, and supplying passive fire protection, such as cavity barriers and firestoppers, may not seem a natural fit for a competition celebrating artistry. It is a highly complex area of construction product manufacturing, requiring in-depth consideration of all kinds of technical aspects, from how fire behaves to the resistance of certain materials, or the legislative landscape of different regions. However, it is only through the creative vision of architects that the impetus is there to develop and apply these technical solutions to make those concepts reality. Indeed, Siderise’s products have been specified and installed on numerous iconic projects all over the world, including London’s 100 Liverpool Street and Canary Wharf developments, Manchester’s Deansgate Square, and Dubai’s Creek Gate complex.

As CEO of Siderise, Adam Turk, explains: ‘Architecture is a blend of artistic creativity with technical practicality. As a manufacturer of passive fire protection, the purpose of our business is to assist architects in creating safe, compliant, but ultimately beautiful buildings. To be able to support a project that celebrates the pure creativity of the architectural profession’s current and future minds – and to personally see the wealth of ingenuity out there as part of the judging panel – is very exciting for us. And who knows whether we will get a glimpse of the next technical challenges we will need to consider as imagination and inspiration are given free rein.’

Siderise is looking forward to celebrating the winners and commendations in both the practitioner and student categories, and to seeing their work published in RIBAJ and exhibited at the RIBA London showroom at RIBA headquarters 66 Portland Place, London.

For further information contact us at www.siderise.com
Culture
Eye Line drawing competition
Student Winner
Mengqiao Zhang
Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL

In this project, Zhang looks at issues of surveillance capitalism, and ‘translates George Orwell’s 1984 storyline, symbolic objects and metaphors into architectural space. Mr. Smith is designed to be a parallel protagonist for hybrid cupboard dwelling; the cupboard can be unfolded, showing duality of appearance and substance.’

Kester Rattenbury’s thesis that recent drawing was moving towards the surreal was vindicated by Zhang’s project, seducing all the judges in Mr Smith’s bedroom’s uncanny intimacy. In bedroom and changing room, furniture and objects camouflage themselves, with the dresser mirror creating distorted reflections and perspectives, with a ‘rare’ window offering glimpses out to Downing St and the surveillance state’s current seat of power – ironically now, a centre of surveillance scrutiny itself.

Rattenbury considered it ‘a very beautiful surrealist image that’s not just about the render; it feels as if the drawing itself is a form of exploration.’ Niall Hobhouse was similarly effusive of the work, adding that it ‘feels like a cross between a real and utopian project; especially the Bedroom image that’s merging the real world and surrealism.’

Zhang’s second image ‘The Bell Room’ takes Winston Smith’s love of the rhyme ‘Oranges and Lemons’ to turn the famous bells of St Clement’s into a fruit machine, dispensing juice as they ring. Hidden behind a painting in his ‘gallery’ the compelling stylistic variation on a theme resonated with the judges. Adam Turk loved ‘the 1984 metaphors and the resulting complexity of the images,’ while Rory Chisholm enjoyed ‘the Bell Room image’s clear sense of narrative while the Bedroom has an altogether more ambiguous quality.’

For the judges it was clear that the work displayed both a thoroughness and rigour despite the complexity of Zhang’s narrative, creating images that not only evidenced great technical expertise but which drew the viewer into a covert and tenuous world on the fringes of current reality. All these considerations made it this year’s clear winner.
Yale Professor Edward Tufte cited the ‘brutal elegance’ of 19th century engineer Charles Joseph Minard’s exquisite infographic, commissioned by Napoleon, to describe his failed campaign on Russia to help Bonaparte understand where the war was lost. There is something of the spirit of that great statistical drawing on display here in Blasiotti’s submission.

Outlines of Nuclear Geography is an infographic illustration of nuclear waste materials (for example spent fuel, i-graphite, metals, concrete and soil) forming the silhouette of a mountain and stacked upon each other following two hierarchies of volume and radioactive contamination. It further annotates different decontamination technologies and potential reuse projects, distinguished by material.

The ability to drill into and interrogate this graphical landscape was not lost on the judges, who referred to the project even in the preamble to the judging. Again, the drawing in a sense followed the surrealist theme, taking real information and moulding it into a graphic language that takes the form of a mountain landscape.

This landscape, says Blasiotti, ‘stands for an archetype of eminence, abundance and presence. It does not signal an invisible threat; rather the threat is visualised, classified and exposed in all its matter, as a tangible issue that can and should be addressed.’

There were certain things I was looking for with the entries,’ said Rattenbury. ‘And I found myself always responding to those that had something unique about them.’ Blasiotti’s nuclear ‘infodump’ had this quality in spades.
Tyler Thurston
Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL

Themes of Brexit and survival are at play in Part II Tyler Thurston’s project, EU-topia. As a proposed sequel to Roald Dahl’s ‘George’s Marvellous Medicine’, it looks to create a new EU, inhabited and governed by children, at the birthplace of Europe – Crete – with the aim of educating adults into the sustainable lifestyles they themselves seem incapable of adopting. In addition, the project looked at symbiotic community living with water management at its centre, the children as ‘guardians’ of this most precious resource. In this way, there is something of the Greta Thunberg to Thurston’s narrative.

In their engrossing, colour-saturated intensity, the three images taken together caught all the judges’ eyes. ‘I love the homogenised triptych nature of the three images,’ declared Ana Luisa Soares, echoing the admiration all had for the presentation’s combined richness. Perhaps there was not the unique style that Rattenbury craved, who called the work ‘accomplished yet familiar,’ but there was acknowledgement around the table, picked up by Chisholm, that the work was ‘definitely a contender’.

It came down to the wire between this and an eventually commended entry but the enthusiasm and glee – and impressive technical skill – with which Thurston approached geo-politics and the critical issue of water management in times of devastating climate change ultimately won him a worthy third place.
**Culture**

Eye Line drawing competition

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**Student: Commended**

Zain Al Sharaf Wahbeh  
Royal College of Art

There was a deeply personal component to Wahbeh’s work on the site of Al-Manshiyya, a ‘lost’ Palestinian neighbourhood of Jaffa. Subject to ‘Zionist’ demolition, post-1948, the aim of her ‘Image as an Archive’ project was a ‘restorative cultural practice, virtually reconstructing the (site’s) most relevant vernacular components,’ all drawn from archive images and personal testimonies.

Detailed and delicate delineation of window grilles, shopfronts and furniture, aim to ‘raise awareness of the untold Palestinian narratives that remain largely understudied in mainstream academia.’ Alongside Chisholm and Hobhouse, Soares found herself identifying with the work’s compelling flatness. Rattenbury called it ‘a project filled with spectacular content [with] surreal and exceptionally beautiful images.’

Wahbeh’s success in reimagining a personally intimate vernacular through the lens of absence, as if humans have just left the scene, gives the work strange and poignant power.

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**Student: Commended**

Sana Tabassum  
University of Greenwich

Tabassum’s project, situated in her fictional food court ‘Metro Mela’, feels like a reaction to recent pandemic-induced societal privations. ‘Garden of Eat’n’ celebrates these spaces’ ‘extravagant nature and atmosphere, bringing back shopping, using objects and furniture as the basis for its architecture, creating an ornamental fabric devoted to all things shopping.’ In another image, even the closing of the mall, with shutters simultaneously drawn down around its exterior, is celebrated as cause for a ceremonial event.

While Hobhouse was drawn to these two representations, it was ‘Playing Shop’ that most intrigued two of the judges, with Ana Luisa Soares feeling that scale plays going on in the mall’s hypothetical creche had a sophisticated intent: ‘It shifts from the image in the background to the ‘toy’ subject in the foreground – and so mixes things up a bit.’ Rattenbury agreed, adding that the work ‘showed a level of compositional and technical skill that’s well above average.’

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Traversing the Reimagined Palestinian Neighbourhood:

**Top** The Kitchen. 390mm x 135mm

**Above** The Market. 354mm x 135mm

Digital rendering and illustration.

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Below Garden of Eat’n, 594 x 841, render with Post-production.

Below Playing Shop, 594 x 841, render with Post-production.

Below Grand Shutter Ceremony 594 x 841, Render with Post-production.
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The 1929 Barcelona International Exposition – the second World Fair to take place in the city – hosted 20 European nations, as well as private organisations from the United States and Japan. The main aim of the exposition was to highlight Barcelona’s technical progress in the early 20th century and promote modern Catalan industry. Of the national pavilions, the best known by far is the German Pavilion designed by Mies van der Rohe, but this was not the only representative of international avant-garde design. The Serbian, Croatian and Slovene Pavilion (later referred to as the Yugoslav Pavilion) was a strikingly original star-shaped structure, with elevations made from wooden strips arranged in horizontal black and white stripes. It was designed by Serbian architect Dragiša Brašovan, who had previously worked in the popular eclectic style. The pavilion in Barcelona marks his transition to modernism and was followed two years later by another national pavilion at the Milan Fair. Brašovan, who had studied architecture in Budapest, was to become one of the leading modernist architects in the Balkans and was elected an Honorary Corresponding Member of the RIBA in 1953. • Valeria Carullo
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