Coppin Dockray saves Dannatt gem
Mary Duggan’s tree house towers
An education revolution begins
National Theatre takes on Park Hill
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The world’s thinnest inverted roof insulation just got thinner.

### U-value chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U-value req. W/m²K</th>
<th>Quantum® (mm)</th>
<th>Extruded (mm)</th>
<th>Expanded (mm)</th>
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<tr>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample range of U-values based upon a typical roof terrace construction with a 250mm concrete substrate and product lambda value as noted.

- **ProTherm Quantum® PLUS+**
  - BBA Agrement Certified 20/5769.
  - Satisfies NBBC requirements Chapter 7.1, flat roofs & balconies.
  - Robust coating, Patent protected.
  - Can be used within a system that meets B Charl(4) fire requirements of Building Regulations Part B.
  - Suitable for zero falls under hard or soft landscaping.

---

Ilona Rose House, Charing Cross
To meet the 0.10W/m²K U-value requirement within the available 120mm insulation zone, ProTherm Quantum® PLUS+ Hybrid was used in a zero falls application to all terraces, providing level threshold access between internal and external spaces.

### Website

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Tel: 01858 410 372 • Email: quantum@radmat.com
Sydney Opera House, this year celebrating 50 years since its opening night, has played a key role in Australia’s post-colonial reframing of itself—a process that continues as the country seeks to mould its society for the future. And just as other creative arts venues seek to provide a platform from which to pose questions and prompt discussions about culture and identity, a new venue on the other side of the Royal Botanical Gardens to the opera house promises to instigate another chapter in the city’s approach to encouraging diversity and inclusivity through events and exhibitions.

Symbolically shying away from the triumphant form-making and civic formality shaping the opera house roof and its environs, Sydney Modern instead uses playful architectural placemaking and clever responses to climate and locality to visually throw open the existing 19th century Art Gallery of New South Wales to the city. Designed by SANAA, the building is a group of generous stacked pavilions that cascade down the sloped site, crowned by a well-mannered glass pavilion and wavy roof canopy. The canopy envelops an art garden between the new building and the classical portico of the existing museum. From the street, Sydneysiders encounter only the upper pavilions. Although architecturally fairly conventional, their orientation and transparency offer glimpses of the artworks within, and through the building on the gently curving roofs of the lower pavilions. This creates a most active frontage and ensures public engagement; an open (and free) invitation to the city. But it is once you’ve entered that this project really excels. •

Andrew Rixson

SYDNEY MODERN
(ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES), AUSTRALIA
SANAA
Read the full story: ribaj.com/sydney-modern

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Rescue mission
Coppin Dockray has restored and enlarged a light-filled Trevor Dannatt house that was rotting into a wilderness.

Words: Eleanor Young

Homes with walls of glass seem to be a modern trope long overdue a rethink, for the blunt instrument of plate glass transparency as much as for the thermal losses. The precursor in the sixties was a more subtle treatment that can make a moment, bring a smile and transform a brick wall into a dappled under-canopy.

In a newly revived house in Hampstead, north London, Trevor Dannatt – better known for his work in the London County Council and on the Royal Festival Hall – designed such a building.

Its new owners had walked past for years taking children to school, but the overgrown laurels and yew meant they had never even seen the house itself. And when they made their way through the tunnel of trees on their first visit it was to find a dark entrance, which looked distinctly unpromising with its rotting window frames. But as soon as they had stepped inside they ditched the estate agents’ advice to raze the house and think of this as a plot for development.

It was the light that captured them; scooped in from the south through high clerestories, brought in on corners and around a courtyard. And much of the work of Coppin Dockray has been to reveal the original light-tempered volumes. As much technical ingenuity and architectural attention has gone into ensuring the family home has a seamless flow, remaking the extensive windows, creating a warm building that wouldn’t overheat and rebuilding a second storey bedroom extension.

As soon as they stepped inside they ditched advice to raze the house; the light captured them.

Above The back of the house faces north onto the rising garden, edged by a terrace. The failing felt roof was replaced with zinc.

Below The original courtyard with the garden room, now eating area, facing it.

Credits
Architect/interiors Coppin Dockray
QS Stockdale
Garden designer Jane Brissbank Gardens
Lighting designer Lightplan
Structural engineer SDS Studio
Services engineer Jones King
Acoustic consultant Henn Tuckar
Arboriculturalist WCEL
Approved building inspector Shore Sherlock London

IN NUMBERS
299m² gross internal area
337m² gross external area
25.05kg CO₂/m² predicted
60.76kg CO₂/m² original building
Form of contract JCT ICD with Contractor’s design 2016
Below: No drama in the glazing onto the garden but a complex interplay of light and geometry.

It’s a lovely space, although it is possible to foresee internal partitions going back up.

On the street-side a tightly planned single storey block with four monkish bedrooms, that set up a banal rhythm to the facade, has been replanned and extended by Coppin Dockray to house three larger bedrooms. In the 1980s this pavilion was given a mansard roof to add bedrooms, a staircase uncomfortably squeezed in. Coppin Dockray has rebuilt this entirely as a dark sculpted box.

Between the two large volumes is smaller one; a garden room looking out onto a wilderness of a courtyard and a kitchen with little space to manoeuvre.

When Coppin Dockray inspected the house this had been extended into the original covered parking to the site line, along the back of the house.

The almost-invisible front door is tucked into the side of the building. A narrow entry sequence rapidly opens up and it is here that the flow of living spaces created by Coppin Dockray is most tangible. Four tiled timber steps lead into the one-time garden room, now occupied by an informal table where the family of six naturally gather, looking out at the spare forms of silver birch in the courtyard, and in towards the delicate projecting counter. This, with a high level ledge, suggests a comfortable division between the ‘being’ of the table and the ‘making’ of the kitchen, where it runs alongside a textured work surfaces into a comfortable play or study space looking onto its own courtyard.

Having taken one route through the building, I follow the hosts back to crux of the house where dogs and children converge as shoes are pulled on, book bags grabbed and forgotten things remembered. Down those steps alongside the front door and into the light double height space of the new stair where once sat an en-suite (you can nip left for the laundry room). The staircase curls up elegantly with a sweet chestnut banister – the 32 models made to get it right proving their value. Upstairs a very rational set of three rooms – two bedrooms and a study for writing – lead off the landing; the two corner rooms of this new extension drinking in as much light as possible.

So that is the tour of the house over. The sun has come out, revealing the complexity of the light from different angles. The texture of the brick floor and materiality of concrete is gently modulated by the smooth sweet chestnut joinery that runs through both. Only the occasional vent gives away that it hides not just storage but also air conditioning; this is the first time Coppin Dockray has put it in a residential project. But despite the remarkable temperatures in the summer of 2022 – up to 40°C in London – the family reports that they only used it once. That is perhaps testament to much

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work on ventilation and insulation, with roof vents, doors and windows easily opened. ‘The doors were just open from May to July,’ says the family – which was made easier by some being designed as stable doors to prevent dogs and small children straying too far.

The reworking of the house brought a predicted saving of 59% in carbon emissions. Timber-framed double-glazed windows with low U- and G-values made a huge difference, particularly since this building has so many windows. There is also a lot of roof for a relatively modest-sized house; these were stripped and insulation added, tapering off at the edges to keep a slim profile. Where floors surfaces changed they were insulated too. And extra summer shading is already growing delicately around the house with silver birches in the south-facing courtyard.

The architect speaks of the remarkable qualities of the house, both then and now: ‘For such a slender north-facing building, it enjoys a surprising and constant in-between quality: never either fully interior nor exterior.’ This revival is the work of an intelligent, thoughtful and sometimes painstaking team at the very tiny practice of Coppin Dockray – primarily two women, Sandra and Bev. It has the hallmarks of two of their early projects, on David Levitt’s Anstey Plum in Wiltshire and Jørn Utzon’s Ahn House in Hertfordshire. Followers of The Modern House may have been hankering after such buildings for years, but Coppin Dockray really brings them back to life beyond their visual qualities alone; the practice enlists a deep understanding of both the spatial qualities of family dynamics and the technical demands of bringing a building back to life in a time of climate emergency.

Suppliers:
Black aluminium rain-screen trays: Millimetre
Standing seam zinc roofs: Rheinzink
New bricks: Edenhall, now Marshalls Brick and Masonry
Windows and external doors: K&D Joinery
Cement floor tiles: Popham
Wall/mosaic tiles: Domus
Timber floors: Artichoke/NBJ
Sanitaryware: Duravit, Vola

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Why 3D visualisation could mean make or break for your practice

3D visualisation is much more than just a pretty add-on with which to impress clients. Its efficiencies mean more efficient bid-pricing, better control of staffing costs and a proposal that’s much clearer all round, reducing later confusion and repeat iterations.

For architects, is digital visualisation the key to survival?

In the uncertain current economic climate, winning work has never been more important. To stand out in a crowded market, there’s an ever-growing need for architects to enhance their bids with digital visualisation tools.

The latest RIBA Benchmarking Report shows that, despite a small increase in revenue last year, profits are still flat. While there were shoots of recovery following the pandemic, the current economic outlook makes bolstering your bids with digital tools even more important.

Seizing the commercial advantage

Seizing the commercial advantage means two things: pricing accurately and reducing over-servicing. Investing in a platform that generates state-of-the-art 3D visualisation means that you can price your bids more competitively without extra labour, ridding your team of commercially-unsustainable working hours and reducing the risk of expensive iterations, allowing you to focus on driving results for the client.

VUCITY is a pioneering smart cities tool that has the whole of London modelled to 15cm accuracy, and 90% of London boroughs using the platform. The platform also covers 25 major UK and international cities, with local authorities, developers and architects using the platform to provide accurate information and analysis to inform better, quicker decision-making and align stakeholders.

Its level of visualisation means that decisions on the design of a building can be made earlier on and in real-time, allowing architects to visualise possible conflicts that a proposed building would have with a neighbouring scheme or update their design to fit with the latest policy and regulations.

“VUCITY is all about ease from an architect’s perspective. The ability to condense months of site validation, research and testing in a matter of days is where its value really lies,” says Shalini Robba, senior architect at Farrells. “At our mixed-use regeneration scheme at Royal Triangle, Southwark, which will provide 1,150 new homes, we’ve been able to conduct feasibility tests almost instantly, using VUCITY’s 3D visualisation to contextualise our designs within the wider community in real time.”

“VUCITY has given us a real commercial advantage, enabling us to make quicker, smarter decisions for our clients at a reduced cost, on a single digital platform.”

Delivering more than design

Beyond combining everything architects and project teams need into one platform, VUCITY’s edge is its ability to support the development of early design and access statements that are fundamental to bids. In the first instance, VUCITY generates an outline client what can feasibly be achieved and in turn creating a more efficient and competitive process.

Laura Binaburo, BIM co-ordinator at Pollard Thomas Edwards explains: “VUCITY’s platform adds real value to our schemes. From site feasibility to massing studies, the benefits go well beyond the design front.

‘Key considerations about building height, heritage and conservation are far easier to understand, plan around and convey using 3D visualisation, allowing us to better tell the overall story of a development,’ she continues. “And being able to see and weigh your designs in a community, in both its current and future form, not only benefits an architect’s work technically, but streamlines a usually lengthy process of stakeholder management.”

While governments and policies will come and go, VUCITY provides consistent and agnostic support – equipping project stakeholders with easy-to-use, understandable and reliable information. Crucially, architects and planners need to be able to tell the story of a development to both decision-makers and the public to secure consent, reduce risk and reap rewards.

If a picture paints a thousand words, then does 3D visualisation paint a million? VUCITY’s visual communication of plans to stakeholders and the public – alongside speed, efficiency, and commercial viability – is something that cannot be underestimated as we progress into 2023 and beyond.

Below VUCITY Sunlight Tool helps demonstrate shadow impacts of buildings, this includes design concepts that can be inserted into VUCITY.

For further information or to start a free trial please contact: info@vu.city
Looking down the hill from Napier Clarke’s new visitor centre at the Black Country Living Museum (BCLM) in Dudley, a new town is rising like those you see along the HS2 construction line from London to Birmingham. Tall streets of terraced buildings made from red bricks peer above the hoarding – only the slope of the site affords the view. Behind, everything is seemingly new, uniform, straight-edged, vivid and shiny.

The BCLM is a West Midlands institution. You would be hard pressed to find a child that has grown up in the region who hasn’t been there. Over the past 10 years its ‘cut’ (canal arm) has been beamed onto television screens around the world in Peaky Blinders, as the location for some of the gangsters’ grubbier activities. Danny Whizz-Bang is shot ‘dead’ on the canal bank, falling straight into a passing barge.

This period crime drama is credited with creating an explosion of interest in Birmingham and the surrounding industrial towns and cities. Visitors to the BCLM grew by nearly a third between 2014 and 2019. Themed nights on the show sell out within 24 hours.

The development at the base of the valley is part of the museum’s £30 million ‘Forging ahead’ investment, £12.5 million of which came from the Heritage Lottery Fund, among others. Like the series itself, this scheme extends the story of the West Midlands from the 1930s into the 1960s, almost up to the museum’s own creation in the 1970s. The project involves relocating existing buildings, rebuilding others that have already been lost and fabricating some from scratch. In the mix is a new 1960s town centre, entirely designed by Glancy Nicholls Architects. The first
phase of works will increase the number of buildings in the collection by 22. The focus is extremely local – just the buildings, places and people constrained by the boundaries of Dudley, Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Walsall. These are the stories that within 59 years transformed a green and pleasant land to coal mining, slag heaps and other heavy industry in glass, brickmaking, iron and steel. There are 48 former mines on the museum’s 10.5ha site alone.

This aspect of the project has consumed much of the £30 million. It’s success won’t be clear until the whole thing has had a bit more sot and dirt slung at it. It forms part of a masterplan brought about in 2014 by BCLM boss Andrew Lovett, the museum’s second director in its nearly 50-year history and also chair of metro mayor Andy Street’s West Midlands Regional Tourism Board. The investment’s other mission was to reorient the visitor arrival experience, including the entrance building contained behind the reclaimed facade of a Victorian bath house on Tipton Road. The new visitor centre took £7.36 million (including car park and external works) and is our viewing point over the pit, mill and street below. On a heavily clouded grey day, the atmosphere is packed with nostalgic glory.

Visitors now arrive even further up the hill on a plateau towards the centre of Dudley, where the metro line will stop, away from the main road. Winding down from a new car park, surrounded by the dense trees on one side and views of Castle Hill in the distance, visitors approach the museum’s collection by almost stepping back into a pre-industrial rural landscape. Country paths cross the view between the trees. Slowly the museum and its locality reveal themselves – the Ketley patterned paver trim to the path, the small, pitched roof, red-brick Brooks Entrance Building is first to greet you. Then you pass into a circus with tram cables above, bordered by vehicle sheds and the new visitor centre that completes the circle. By now you are full into the red and black of industry.

Napier Clarke came to the project in 2017 via an open competition entered by 26 practices. The studio was then only two years old, but co-director Steven Napier had grown up in Yardley, Birmingham, and the trustees who did the interviewing, says Lovett, ‘picked up on the strength and seriousness of intent of the team Napier Clarke put together’. The brief was that the design should be contemporary, inspire funding, cope with 5000 people per day and ‘herald the site, look over it, be bigger and more spacious’, continues Lovett.

Until then the broad proposal for the project set by the masterplan had been a single 1500m² volume. Napier Clarke’s major move was to bring down its scale by splitting the building into three repeated and adjoined pitched roof lengths that would use the same materials and structure to keep costs down. The gable ends stagger around the tram circle, their zinc-clad, standing seam, steel apexes opened by glazing at both ends like hooded tram sheds. The design is an interpretation of the historic fabric of the sheds and workshops on display elsewhere around the museum. Visitors enter via the central volume into a spacious atrium. Inside, the structure is exposed, revealing a deliberately minimalist and elegant engineering. Diagonal rafters slot...
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Buildings
Visitor centre

together at the ridge beam and edge purlines self-supported, avoiding the need for nuts, bolts and welding. Every other section between the rafters is infilled with wood fibre acoustic panelling or bare-faced ply, giving the ceiling a bunting effect celebratory tone. In the volume to the left is a shopfront exhibition window designed as a taster for what is inside the museum, plus offices, WCs, kitchen and a café whose walls almost touch the adjacent woodland. To the right is a large retail space, also fitted out using ply wood.

A broad cantilevered terrace projects beyond the central and right-hand volumes and starts to connect to the reconstructed Black Country landscape down the hill. You can survey the whole site at leisure on the deck.

At the centre of the middle shed two triangular rooflights, cut between steel diagonals, bring light in and down a central stair to the lower ground level, not visible from the entrance circus. Built into the slope, the textures intentionally change here from lightweight to heavy, dark brick – replicated externally. This level takes visitors out into the open air museum. Now being used as a ticketing hall (it was decided a reception desk on the upper level was not necessary), it will become an exhibition space.

Environmentally, the steel frame was not chosen for its sustainability, although...
the building is naturally ventilated through its clerestory front and rear-facing windows, vented via chimney stacks. It is entirely electric, powered by air source heat pumps. There is little plasterboard, to minimise wastage; instead, internal walls are finished with light grey standing seam metal panels.

Walking back up towards the visitor centre from the cut at the end of the day, the building is lit up, its dark outline and gable windows spectacular against the setting sun sky. The building is contemporary, vernacular, inventive, meaningful and yet simple. Its architecture may feel familiar, and that’s the point. Yet it seems there is nothing of its scale and quality anywhere nearby; Lovett gets frequent requests to hire it for other purposes, just like the rescued canal arm used by the Peaky Blinders. It could become a beacon for a flourishing West Midlands future, capturing the essence of its setting and pragmatism of its people – even on the design team – that produced such a fascinating landscape. The accomplishment of the new visitor centre’s design and execution also lightens any fears for the development down the hill. Instead I’m excited for the future schoolchildren for whom the building helps give a sense of value and possibility.

Credits
Client  Black Country Living Museum
Architect and lead consultant  Napier Clarke Architects
Structural engineer  Donald Moktyn Design
M&E consultant  BWB Consulting
Quantity surveyor  MDA Consulting
Landscape architect  Redkite Network
Procurement type  Design & Build with PCSA period

Below You can almost touch the tree branches of the woodland from the café.
Above View through into the shop, showing the metal standing seam wall finish, minimalist joints of the rafters and the ceiling alternately infilled with plywood and acoustic wood fibre insulation board.
Below The external cantilevered terrace at the rear of the visitor centre.
Dancing to a different tune
Things are changing in Sunderland, with a new auditorium by Flanagan Lawrence consolidating an arts and cultural quarter centred on the town’s symbolic fire station.
Council for £6.25 million, topped up by £1.3 million in Covid relief funding and further supplemented by trusts and foundations to enable the next phase of regeneration.

Flanagan Lawrence won the competition to create a new auditorium in 2016, on the site of a tarmacked car park adjacent to the original fire station. With Jason Flanagan having been project architect on the Sage at Gateshead while at Foster+Partners, and with its recent completion of Live Works theatre in Newcastle, the firm was well-versed in the challenges of auditorium design. Yet this auditorium, and what it could potentially offer to Sunderland, was much more than just another gig venue.

Flanagan describes how the practice began with a study of the public realm, framed by two historical pubs, The Dun Cow and The Peacock (which were also later refurbished by the MAC Trust as part of the new cultural quarter) and the Empire Theatre – an 1800-seat jewel. The intention was to create a new public square, big enough for crowds to gather in and even watch outdoor performances, spilling from pub to auditorium to theatre. However, the placement of the fixed street furniture perhaps runs counter to that ambition. Likewise with the substation that remains in the middle of the square, although I’m assured that is due to go. The external paving has been politely re-surfaced in the same manner as the surrounding approaches.

The building form itself is simple and controlled, creating a calm backdrop to the public face. Its parapet height is just below the original fire station’s cornice, as if acknowledging who came first. Terracotta brises soleil shade the upper level of the south facing front elevation, whose deliberately-scratched edges look monolithic and more like red concrete. I wonder whether this was influenced by the earlier design, intended to be a concrete frame with the auditorium expressed as a concrete volume, but Flanagan explains that it was value engineering that steered the primary structure towards a steel frame. Although a significant pre-construction change, the resulting extensive use of red brickwork on both the overall rectangular external form and internal spaces, is warm in palette, entirely fitting for the urban context and tonally sensitive to the building’s neighbours.

At dusk, this elevation inverts. No longer filtering penetrating sunlight from the outside, the louvres allow transparency and view into the foyer and bar space. Choreographed lighting helps create a backdrop of the auditorium, with a gently glowing bar welcoming the visitor. The intention was to create a new public square, big enough for crowds to gather in and even watch outdoor performances, spilling from pub to auditorium to theatre. However, the placement of the fixed street furniture perhaps runs counter to that ambition. Likewise with the substation that remains in the middle of the square, although I’m assured that is due to go. The external paving has been politely re-surfaced in the same manner as the surrounding approaches.

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MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY BASE

Style meets substance in our breathtaking range of colours and finishes, our durable design and our commitment to sustainability. Lazenby’s polished concrete is more than just a floor, it’s a foundation for life.

It’s with you. Every step of the way.

On entering the foyer, the space is atmospheric and serene. External materials bend inside, to be complemented by what at first glance looks like cherry timber wall linings. It’s actually stained plywood, a more cost-effective way to create a similar look. Repeated, this formula continues into the heart of the building. Control of the acoustics is already evident here. The carpet used on the surrounding balcony and the ceiling’s acoustic perforated board dampen sound well. It’s a comfortable space to be in both acoustically and spatially, whether occupied by two people or many.

Layout of the building’s plan is efficient. Visitors share a lift in the existing fire station, avoiding the addition and expense of another. Serviced spaces including toilets and back stage areas are all pushed to the quieter western side. This is discreet externally, allowing the glazed frontage to have presence and visibility. As a result the key space – the auditorium – is able to be as generous as possible on the available footprint.

The auditorium is designed for 550 people seated or 800 standing, principally for amplified music, be it pop, jazz, alternative music or rock and roll.

Material choices are effective here, stained plywood mimics sweet cherry.

Left - The concrete designed to deal with seated or standing events.
Bottom left - Acoustics had to deal with a range of demands, from solo performance through to live amplified events.
Adaptability has also been provided for the needs of natural acoustics, various layouts and crowds. The stage itself can be arranged to three different depths, the largest including a dance floor. Seats are removable, either stored under the stage or retracted under the stalls and bar area, a sneaky way of maximising space. Stalls are lower than usual, on the same level as the stage and entry points, creating an intimate connection between audience and performance. In fact, the whole room feels intimate, warm and rich, lined with stained birch plywood, against a mass of black dense plastered walls.

Acoustic measures are low tech and rational, but meticulously co-ordinated so that collectively it’s a work of mastery. Moveable side panels are made of sound-reflecting ply to one face, or acoustic dampening softness to the other. They slide, turn and adjust to tune the room as needed. Only technicians can see the full extent of acoustic control, which they view from above.

The bird’s eye view from up here is rather thrilling. With the floor an entirely open steel grid spanning the space between giant trusses, clear sightlines are created in the auditorium below. This is another cost-effective solution compared to the usual array of gantries found at high level. Hanging from the grid flooring, black acoustic panels are arranged with deliberate irregularity, reflecting sound back or beyond the ceiling line. Where sound leaks through, heavy black acoustic curtains surround the perimeter, hidden out of sight and extendable on demand. Mechanical extracts are also located here, leaving the auditorium clear of grilles and clutter. There are no low-level inlet vent grilles, only discrete gaps in the floor details. It’s another subtle yet considered solution.

Paul Callaghan of the MAC Trust shares its plans to develop the external space, bounded by the fire station and auditorium, into another outdoor performance area of 1000-plus capacity. There’s a bar in development and hints of stage infrastructure already in situ. Callaghan’s ambition and hope for the place is contagious. His connection with the fire station is personal, revealed through an anecdote about his late father, who witnessed a bomb drop on the site of the auditorium in 1943. Today a plaque sits in its place with a quote from the Shipyards poem by Marty Longstaff: ‘But if you could see me now I hope that I’m making you proud’. It’s clear that the fire station has been a catalyst for cultural change in Sunderland, with memory and music now embedded in its continuing story.

Grace Choi is director at North Shields practice Grace Choi Architecture.
Landscape rather than streets informed Mary Duggan’s dense but leafy Red Clover Gardens housing in south London.

Words: Chris Foyes

Mary Duggan Architects’ Red Clover Gardens in Coulsdon, south London, is something of an anomaly among recent housing projects in the capital. Yes, it’s got the brick facades and punched portrait windows of the near-ubiquitous new London vernacular, but it doesn’t adhere to the associated streets-and-squares syntax of the traditional city. Instead, it is rooted physically and conceptually in publicly accessible parkland.

Adopting a ‘landscape-first approach,’ says Duggan, meant seeking alternative ways of engendering the neighbourliness, security and navigability commonly ascribed to streets, which has resulted in some distinctive and original apartment buildings.

The site plan:

1. Lion Green Road
2. Public car park
3. Village green
4. Parking
5. Monument

Park and reside
The emphasis on landscape is a general and specific response to context. Commissioned by Croydon Council’s arm’s-length housing company, Brick By Brick, the 157-home scheme lies at the confluence of three valleys in the foothills of the North Downs. Get up high and you see little clusters of clay-tiled roofs among trees, not vice versa. It’s a picturesque scene that Duggan was keen to emulate while building at an inner-urban density.

That instinct was supported by the site’s tricky topography, a squarish 1.4ha piece of open ground on the edge of the town centre, with a fall of 8m from south to north. At the bottom it faces a row of little houses across Lion Green Road. At the top it merges with a wooded embankment built for a horse-drawn railway – a scheduled monument – precluding much re-sculpting of the terrain. Initial explorations showed that low-rise streets with DDA-compliant access routes would leave little green space and deliver too few homes. Ribbons of apartment buildings would have been overbearing, says Duggan, and obscure views of the monument.

Instead, she treated the site as a green extension to a hilltop park that lies beyond the embankment, and concentrated the flats intended for both private sale and affordable rent in five freestanding villa-blocks that rise to the height of surrounding mature trees. Ranging from five storeys nearest the road to seven higher up, they stand in a loose cluster, set on gentle grassy mounds and hemmed by curving beds of broadleaf shrubs and tufty grasses.

As the pavilions are seen in the round, Duggan has avoided ‘fronts’ and ‘backs’. All buildings share the same plan-form – an irregular 13-sided tridecagon – making pleated facades. The repetition

IN NUMBERS
14,200m² site area
3000m² town centre car park
9549m² gross internal area (flats)

confidential cost

Right Each 13-sided building has six right-angled corners where inset balconies are located.

Below The composition of the ensemble responds to the existing terrain and trees. Red Clover Garden is among the last projects delivered by Brick By Brick, which is being wound up; the local authority is considering the sale of the whole scheme to a housing association.

is economical, but not apparent. Rotating or mirroring the plan in each has created a convincing impression of informal variety that is enhanced by setbacks on the top of some blocks, making space for key views or spreading tree canopies.

As townscape it works very well. On the winding paths that lead to and between the pavilions, every turn brings something new – a sudden shift from openness to a sense of enclosure, a beautiful vista of serried corners, or the jutting cantilever over an entrance framed by trees.

Projecting headers in the pink, brown and grey brickwork give the angular buildings a softness, especially when seen through a veil of leaves.

The walls are a little less stubbly than intended – a small casualty of inevitable value engineering on a design and build project. Duggan points out others as we walk around. ‘It’s housing,’ she says wearily. ‘All about the spreadsheet.’ Disappointment is understandable, but overall the build quality looks very high for such a challenging project, rewarding intensive work by both Duggan and Ruff Architects, which led the delivery.

Much thought also went into security and privacy, discreetly addressed through both architecture and the landscape which was designed by Duggan in collaboration with Planit-IE. The kinked facades that lend formal interest are also a defence against anti-social behaviour; instead of

Credits
Architect Mary Duggan Architects
Landscape Mary Duggan Architects with Planit-IE
Delivery architect Ruff Architects
Interiors Grounded
Client Brick By Brick
Funder London Borough of Croydon
Contractor CField
M&E and sustainability Max Fordham
Structural engineer Symmetrys
QS Gleeds
Planning consultants DPJ, Gerald Eve
Project managers Gleeds, Cast Consultancy

Above From the north, the pavilions are glimpsed through trees.
'eyes on the street’ they put eyes everywhere. At the base of each building the fall of the ground and deep beds of dogwood subtly distinguish a residents’ terrace from the public realm, and keep passers-by away from windows, without need of fences.

Maintaining a sense of openness was central to the project’s ethos. ‘I’m really proud that we were able to avoid cellularized, compartmented gardens,’ says Duggan. ‘Instead we have a shared landscape that can help to foster a new community.’ That’s actively promoted by the distribution of amenities across the site, from allotments to a ‘village green’ with a children’s playground. The total landscaped area isn’t actually all that large, but with linked sequences of outdoor ‘rooms’ between the buildings, and several routes to each destination, it asks to be explored.

Encouraging full use of the grounds is also important to avoid the dead spaces that blighted some ‘towers in the park’ postwar estates, and the buildings play a key role through clever design of the ground floors. To contend with the sloping ground each has a split section and entrances on two sides, both needed for the activities of everyday life. The higher ones lead to bin stores and parking – quite well hidden on the perimeter of the park – while the lower, with greater headroom, make notably roomy foyers. With timber bench seats set below big picture windows overlooking the gardens, they are places you might happily linger.

Above, six flats on each floor pinwheel around a central core and comprise a mix of one-, two-, and three-beds. All follow London space standards – a minimum requirement that has, of course, become a default maximum in many developers’ cost models. ‘There isn’t half a metre over in any of them,’ says Duggan, ‘but I think it’s as good a plan as you can get within those constraints.’

Every home has at least a dual aspect, giving decent daylight. Despite the buildings’ eccentric footprint, rooms mostly meet outer walls at right angles, with few cramped corners. And in the kitchen-living rooms inset corner balconies open on two sides for expansive views of the park and surrounding hills. Even inside, you retain a sense of the landscape.

‘For me the real success of the scheme is the pavilion type,’ says Duggan. ‘In material terms most new London housing defaults to a formula: you find a brick – at a given price – and there aren’t many decisions left to make. But you can still develop new ideas in the plan.’ Coming away from Coulsdon, that was a cheering thought. The dominant style in recent London housing has undoubtedly raised quality, but risks lapsing into unthinking repetition. Red Clover Gardens shows that there’s life in it yet.
There is a common perception that because LGBTQ+ people have achieved some legal equalities, they face no issues at work. But many in architecture still feel that they have to pretend to be somebody they are not, or hide parts of their lives to succeed. When Becca Thomas and I set up our practice in 2019 we weren’t particularly explicit about it being women- and queer-led, but as our understanding of those challenges grew we realised that it was important to be louder about it, and to take an active role in raising awareness.

Many aspects of working life can feel ‘othering’, often in subtle ways. HR policies might assume traditional nuclear families, but some LGBTQ+ people who don’t have children might have very important relationships with chosen families. Those should be treated in the same way as other personal commitments. Likewise there are issues of physical or mental health that are particularly prevalent within the community, but can be difficult to raise. While it’s worth reviewing policy, a tick-box approach is insufficient; employers need to make the time to get to know employees as individuals, fostering a culture in which people can freely express their needs.

Practices can be proactive too. All our staff put our pronouns in emails; that way, anyone can assert their gender identity without being an exception. And directors will intervene forcefully when those are not respected or if, for example, comments are made about how people choose to dress. It’s not about ‘cancelling’ people for making mistakes – we all do – but being clear that staff will always be supported and protected in being themselves.

‘All our staff put our pronouns in emails; that way, anyone can assert their gender identity without being an exception’
Intelligence
Levelling up bill

The government’s consultation on reshaping the planning system through measures introduced via the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and a future redrafting of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has fleshed out previously-outlined proposals for design codes, a new infrastructure levy, street votes for neighbourhood development and planners asking for ‘well-designed and beautiful’ proposals. However, industry reaction to the consultation document for the reform to the NPPF that emerged at the very end of last year has been mixed.

What does the consultation document contain?
Plan-making runs through the consultation. The bill requires local plans to be prepared over a much shorter period of two years, but while local authorities will still be required to use the existing ‘standard method’ for assessing housing need, the outcome has become ‘an advisory starting-point’ rather than a mandatory target. Local authorities will also be able to reject housing judged to be at densities that are ‘significantly out of character with the existing area’, which can be seen as a potential block to all but the most sensitive proposals. They will also not have to undertake green belt reviews even in cases where they cannot meet local housing need.

Some housebuilders have accused the government of abandoning its 300,000 homes a year delivery target, while more than 20 local authorities have publicly put local plan developments on hold in anticipation of a less demanding plan-making regime. The Home Builders Federation argues that the effective removal of targets could reduce housing output by up to 100,000 homes a year.

What other policy objectives does the consultation set out?
The Levelling Up consultation and an accompanying policy paper sets out a wide range of policy objectives. Other proposals directly related to project delivery and development control include:
- A new infrastructure levy to replace Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy. Developers will be charged a fee in lieu of providing affordable homes or infrastructure with payment due on completion of the project. Affordable housing providers are warning that decoupling the levy from development sites could lead to fewer affordable homes being built, and income-segregated housing development.
- A new form of environmental assessment known as an Environmental Outcome Report will replace the existing system of Sustainability Appraisals, Strategic Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Assessments.
- Local planning authorities will be able to issue development commencement notices to developers sitting on unused planning permission, and completion notices if development is not completed with a set period. There are provisions in the consultation text to allow planning authorities to consider performance against delivery in subsequent applications by those developers who fail to meet commitments.

Could the bill lead to a slowdown in allocation of new sites in some areas?
HAT Projects director Hana Loftus, a chartered planner and designer with experience of writing local planning policy and design codes, says she expects to see a slowdown in the rate of allocation of new sites and plan-making over...
proposes that local plans should be focused on development strategy and site allocations.

When it comes to emerging requirements for local authority design codes, also included in the consultation, Loftus suggests that careful thought will be needed to avoid either overlap with the NDMPs or huge amounts of duplicated effort within local authorities.

‘So many technical design requirements, and good practice design approaches, are (or should be) standardised across the whole country,’ she says, going on to argue: ‘We don’t need every local authority producing slightly different variations on the same code, it will just create confusion in the industry. With a well-developed set of NDMPs, supported by co-ordinated national design standards, local design codes could focus on landscape, local built character and aspects of design that are genuinely place-specific.’

The development of NDMPs: one to watch

One of the more immediate effects of the revised NPPF, should it be adopted, will be the scrapping of the five-year housing land supply test for local authorities that have a local plan in place.

Loftus expects that what will be really interesting to watch is the development of National Development Management Policies (NDMPs), which are mandated by the Bill. While the principles and scope of the NDMPs remains unclear, the text of the consultation suggests that they could be centrally-set policies covering planning requirements that will be capable of being standardised at national level.

‘Government thinking is still at an early stage, but the consultation proposes that local plans should be focused on development strategy and site allocations.

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Landowners of greenfield sites will have to demonstrate that their scheme is going to fit well
A recession is coming — what will it mean for architects?

While the downturn will be comparatively shallow and brief, a number of construction sectors are set to contract, the 2023 RIBA Economics Panel warned.

Words: Michèle Woodger

Earlier this year, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicted that the UK would be the only G7 country to suffer an economic contraction this year. It was against this ominous backdrop that the RIBA Economics Panel held its first webinar of 2023, bringing together insights from the Construction Products Association, represented by its economics director Noble Francis, and the RIBA, represented by its head of economic research and analysis Adrian Malleson. Their statistical analysis was bolstered by on-the-ground experiences from three leading architects: David Miller, Architects practice director Fiona Clark, Knox Bhatnagor founding partner Sasha Bhavon and Buttrass associate director Chithra Marsh, who reflected on the forecasts with webinar chair and RIBA publishing director Helen Castle.

The CPA Winter Forecast, published at the end of January, expects a recession — two consecutive quarters of economic shrinkage — in line with the Bank of England and other macroeconomic forecasters. Francis pointed out, however, that this was unlikely to be the apocalyptic event that many fear. ‘Rcession covers a wide variety of outcomes,’ he said, and this one is likely to be “briefer and shallower” than the previous three (2008-9; 1990-91; 1979-81). In the 2008 financial crisis, its economics director Noble Francis, and the RIBA, represented by its head of economic research and analysis Adrian Malleson. Their statistical analysis was bolstered by on-the-ground experiences from three leading architects: David Miller, Architects practice director Fiona Clark, Knox Bhatnagor founding partner Sasha Bhavon and Buttrass associate director Chithra Marsh, who reflected on the forecasts with webinar chair and RIBA publishing director Helen Castle.

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The details sector forecasts

Construction is a varied market, so it is necessary to drill down by subsector and region for a comprehensive picture. In 2023, according to the CPA, the following sectors are forecast to contract: private housing (-11 per cent), public housing (-10 per cent), private housing RM&E (-9 per cent), commercial (-5 per cent), and public non-housing (-7.7 per cent). Conversely, infrastructure and industrial will likely grow by 2.4 per cent and 2.3 per cent respectively.

Across all sectors, inflation is taking its toll on both clients (who are hesitant) and architects. As Marsh observed: “The problem is not keeping busy but that profits are lower. Fee levels are pre-agreed, but now architects need to be creative in the way they design to match these budgets.”

Explanations for these predictions are hardly esoteric. Housing associations and local authorities are squeezed, reducing the demand for new-build public housing, and refocusing attention towards maintenance of existing stock. ‘They don’t want to be named and shamed over high-profile issues such as mouldy properties and unsafe cladding,’ commented Francis. Moreover, councils must act on decarbonisation due to changes in EPC regulations taking effect from 2025, with non-compliance preventing property lettings. In the private housing market, housebuilders have had two strong years, stimulated by a race for space, particularly outside London, and further incentivised by cuts to stamp duty. But rising interest and mortgage rates are affecting affordability, and Help to Buy ends in March. A sharp fall in demand

Architects are expecting workloads to contract but not disastrously so.

TOP TIPS FROM OUR PANEL

• Strong financial management is key ‘Have the market and where it is going,’ said Marsh. ‘Use your experts in these sectors. Work together to form a strategy for the next three years and revisit this every year. Look forward in the market.’ This applies to SMEs too. ‘Small practices don’t panic,’ said Bhavon. ‘Build a war chest, do keep some money back, and look to the future.’

• Diversify – your workforce and your projects – as best you can A diverse workforce will bring fresh and unexpected solutions to the table, while operating across sectors will help buffer against sector-specific droughts.

• Keep up to date with technology Understanding information, construction and sustainability-based technological advancements will generate efficiencies, enable you to stay relevant, help improve client relationships, reveal new opportunities and help corner your market.

• Keep everyone in the practice informed A well-informed workforce will want to see the practice performing to create a strong, collective, loyal workforce.
is predicted, with a 20 per cent fall in property transactions. This is set to lead to a drop in house prices, by around 8 per cent on average, which will bring the figures back in line with 2022.

Private housing RM&I peaked in March 2022 but is also cooling as inflation causes people’s wages to fall in real terms, evidenced by a drop in planning applications.

However, environmentally driven retrofit projects, such as solar PV installation, will grow. Indeed, architects developing sustainable solutions are likely to benefit from pursuing this line of creative inquiry, as Knox Bhavan has discovered with its growing expertise in modern methods of construction, and the carbon calculator it developed in house. ‘There wasn’t anything like this at the time,’ said Bhavan. ‘We have worked hard on it. It has helped us and helped others.’

While the picture looks gloomy for commercial, a sector dominated by tower construction, particularly in central London, and often requiring substantial upfront investment, there are pockets of growth in refits and residential conversion. The Future Trends survey suggests that there is confidence among architects here. ‘Our experience echoes this,’ said David Miller Architects’ Clark. ‘There is an increased demand for [refitting] workspaces, in particular co-working spaces ... but we’re hearing that clients are having a more cautious attitude to new build.’

The picture also varies for differently sized practices and their locations. Of RIBA chartered practices, 5 per cent are large (50+ staff) responsible for 22 per cent of turnover; 17 per cent are medium (10-49 staff) bringing in 28 per cent; and 60 per cent are small practices (1-9 staff) responsible for 50 per cent of turnover.

Revenue. Yet in terms of work sectors, small practices are the most reliant on housing as it typically accounts for over 60 per cent of their revenue. So, the decline in housing (especially RM&I) will be felt more keenly here, with an attendant drop in confidence being reported.

Diversify for success

Diversifying sectors can help build resilience. ‘We are split between public and private sector which cushions and balances us,’ said Buttress’s Marsh. ‘Our heritage expertise has also helped balance efforts to bring in as much work as possible.’

While this is easier for larger practices, smaller studios can achieve this through creativity. ‘We are small and do a lot of private house work,’ said Bhavan. ‘A good thing that has happened to us is that we have been able to move across sectors. Southwark Council has opened its Architect Design Services Framework to SMs and those with more inclusivity within the practice we have a beautiful project from being on that framework.’

A diverse workforce also helps with staying relevant and robust. Marsh added that for Buttress, diversity applies to ‘both projects and company environment. It is not all about buildings but about people – understanding cultures, understanding the people you are catering for, diversifying talent knowledge. This is good not just for our company but for the industry as a whole.’

Although the RIBA Workload Index is at -8 points, the Permanent Staffing Index is at -3, suggesting that practices are doing their utmost to retain their talent. This is related in part to skills shortages but tells a significantly different story to 2008, which saw the widespread shedding of staff.

Clark added to the recommendations for future resilience. ‘We are seeing increased demand from clients for better information management, in particular relating to the Building Safety Act. Clients need to demonstrate the golden thread of information,’ she said. Therefore, keeping abreast of technology such as BIM, cloud-based solutions and common-data environments all help develop excellent client relationships and a streamlined workflow for practices. ‘Absolutely keep your clients happy,’ said Clark, ‘so that next time they have that fantastic new opportunity, they will think of you first.’

Finally, geographically, 54 per cent of the revenue generated by chartered practices is based out of London. Traditionally, London dominates, but ‘in the last couple of years, there has been a shift towards the regions,’ said Malleson. ‘I always tell clients that the train goes both ways,’ Marsh said. ‘It is just as accessible to use northern-based architects on southern projects. We hope that more exposure means a broader spectrum can get used.’ This more dispersed picture suggests a gradual, positive, rebalancing.

‘There is certainly some reassurance there. Yes, the immediate future will be challenging, but as Francis put it: ‘Construction is still strong. This isn’t 2008.’”
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Intelligence
Foundations

Pull the carbon out from under

Steve Webb continues his series on reducing embodied carbon in structures by revealing more sustainable ways to build foundations

The honey tone of your exposed Douglas fir frame proudly proclaims sustainability and a planet-loving rapprochement with nature, but under the ground lurks a dirty secret: strip footings and a concrete ground slab.

Consider a beautiful woody 300m² house you have designed. It weighs in at a mere 30t of timber above the ground floor, but the 2.5m deep footings that encircle and traverse the ground floor. Not only is it lighter and quicker, but if properly detailed it will last as long as all the Victorian timber ground floors we are sat on right now.

Footings need to be extended beneath the horizon of moisture movement especially when there are trees nearby. This doesn't mean that the whole hole needs to be filled to the brim with concrete. Why not build a pad at the bottom of the hole and a brick pier onto it (1950s style)? This not only reduces the material used but a lot of the excavated soil can be put back down the hole. These highly conventional moves would bring your carbon footprint down to about 10t.

What else can you do? How about stone pads with stone piers? If you can use a local stone this would reduce the carbon footprint compare? A screw pile (1950s style) may weigh something in the region of 3,500kg and carbon footprint of 500kg. It’s much better (and recyclable), but it’s worse compared to a stone slab 4m deep.

These are simple and immediately applicable changes that have significant carbon benefits. Solutions like the stone pad and pier involve more complexity and labour: in order to build pads at the bottom of a deep hole, protection is required for the excavation, the stones need to be cut and laid and the hole backfilled. This means that not only are you saving carbon, you are also creating employment. This is the core issue.

The desire in general building practice in wealthy economies is to limit expensive man hours – both in design and execution – and use cheap materials instead. Over-rationalised structures save design and construction time, but with the bi-product of maximising carbon. When carbon is taxed properly, labour can be taxed less – perhaps then building will create more employment and less carbon.

Steve Webb is co-founder of Webb Yates Engineers. Read more his ideas to reduce embodied carbon in structures at ribaj.com
In many ways it is surprising that change in architectural education has taken so long coming.

There are important changes coming to architectural education. They will affect the whole profession – both students and practitioners, and those who teach and mentor them.

How students are taught – the balance of specific knowledge to skills, the support young would-be architects will need in practice and the requirements for continuing to learn and keep up to date – are up for grabs over the next year or so. On the way, there are uncertainties to be debated about funding the cost of courses, whether new routes would affect student loans and fees and how courses are approved by the RIBA and the Architects Registration Board (ARB).

The RIBA launched an education white paper at the beginning of this year, and brought together educators, students, practitioners and the ARB for a discussion day at Portland Place in London. The ARB itself has launched the second in its round of consultations on the shape of architectural education with new proposals. And a consultation on ARBs plans for continuing professional education has just closed.

In many ways it is surprising that change in architectural education has taken so long coming. The vexed question of how to become a registered architect and how long it takes has been a live debate for many years.

Opening up routes to qualification
‘We need different routes of coming into architecture at different speeds. It is not a one-size-fits-all profession,’ says RIBA president Simon Allford. He draws on his experience not just in practice but also of innovative ways of delivering architectural education as trustee for the London School of Architecture – which closely mixes practice and study. He sees the possibilities of technicians, engineers or other design professionals wanting to convert to architecture – but without starting back at the beginning with many years more study and the associated costs. Indeed, the 2015 RIBA Education Review, which took place under his watch as vice president of education, suggested breaking the rigid structure which now takes an average of 10 years to qualification. The review suggested shorter study periods, more flexible study and earn as you learn (perhaps reducing student debt).

Since that time we have had a closer pairing of practice and learning, not only at the London School of Architecture, which embeds students in practices for three working days a week, but also with the University of Sheffield’s Collaborative Practice course that works closely with its partner practices. The RIBA continues to offer its long-established office-based RIBA Studio, delivered by Oxford Brookes University. Other formal mixes of teaching and practice also exist, like the practice placements at the University of Bath. Notably we have also seen the launch of apprenticeships, which have been driven by leading practices and changed the dynamic at undergraduate (Level 6, part 1) and masters (Level 7, part 2) bringing universities and employers more closely together.

No more Parts 1, 2, 3
The ARB proposals suggest dismantling parts 1, 2 and 3. ARB chief executive Hugh Simpson emphasises the mandate for consultees in earlier rounds, citing feedback on the inefficiency of the current system and the 61% who agreed in the consultation that parts 1, 2 and 3 need to change. The point of registration would change, as could the route to it.

The regulator would focus on auditing the individual’s competencies at the point of registration, looking for assurance from whatever organisation or institution might award them a qualification confirming that a specific set of learning outcomes have been met. These outcomes would be both academic- and practice-based.

So an undergraduate degree, not necessarily prescribed by the ARB or even in architecture, topped by an additional course – so long as specified academic and practice outcomes were included – would be sufficient proof for registration under these proposals. The first registered architects trained under this system would reach practice in the 2030s.

Stumbling blocks
However, getting the practice experience and learning right may still be a problem. At the RIBA event earlier this year, professional studies advisors, who oversee part 3 at universities, gave an insight into the importance of collaboration between teachers and practitioners. A Part 3 student survey from the University of Westminster highlighted that 15% of its students were not assigned a mentor in practice and 43% only met their mentors every three months. Anecdotally, even getting professional experience development records (PEDRs) signed off could be tricky in some practices while getting the right range of experience in practice was another problem for Part 3 students. Meanwhile, off stage, practitioners talked of student workers unable to hit the ground running and the huge cost to their practice of students’ lack...
of software and technical construction knowledge. It doesn’t seem clear that the ARB proposals will address these tensions and the important role of practitioners in education.

Architectural knowledge or skills?
What is clear is that the ARB is using learning outcomes to be checked at the point of registration as a first line of defence in its role of ensuring architects’ competence. With architects the only regulated profession in a construction industry largely responsible for the deaths at Grenfell Tower in 2017, life safety is number one on the agenda. And the recent strengthening of the ARB’s powers and initial moves to ensure that fire and life safety and sustainability are part of the professional competence has had that largely in mind. Other areas of focus for the learning outcomes will be sustainability, technology and business skills.

But even on life safety architects are not expected to know everything immediately. Simpson emphasised that an architect’s competence on day one was mindset as well as knowledge, that they should be ‘conciously incompetent’ – that is, they should ‘know what they don’t know’.

RIBA director of education and learning Jenny Russell says: ‘We need graduates who are agile, confident and team workers – who are not just competent, but significantly, have the adaptability and ability to deal with changing competences in an increasingly diverse field.’

As consultees read through the learning outcomes outlined in the ARB consultation document they will be able to see if it sets in stone certain pieces of knowledge – which may quickly date – or opens up the skillset. As Allford explains: ‘The issues we are facing now are different from those 10 years ago. We have to equip graduates with skills: how to interrogate a contract; how to understand cost models; the concept of gravity and building physics. It is about analysis: we don’t know the answer to a lot of things and have to keep reviewing them – as they change.’

Comment on the ARB education and training consultation at arb.org.uk. Read the RIBA education white paper at architecture.com

Other areas of focus for the learning outcomes will be sustainability, technology and business skills.

FUNDING CONUNDRUM
It costs more for universities to deliver part 1 and 2 courses than students from the home countries pay in fees in England and Wales. In Northern Ireland there is an even lower fee cap and in Scotland, where Scottish students don’t pay fees, this presents an even more difficult situation.

The proposed additions to the ARB criteria are likely to require additional specialist content for many schools, possibly further increasing the cost of delivery.

Additional government funding above the fees depends on the academic band a subject sits in. Architecture as a subject has a cost base similar to many of the professional subjects in higher funding bands, such as engineering. Reloading architecture could bring in an additional £200 million into the sector.

The RIBA is launching research to back its calls to government for additional funding so that UK university architecture courses remain some of the best in the world and continue to produce the brightest and best architectural talent.

Jenny Russell, RIBA director of education and learning.
Term contractor changes working landscape at Greenhill Place

William Haggard, of Carver Haggard, tells Jan-Carlos Kucharek about the limitations – and unexpected freedoms – of working under a term contractor, with the firm’s new public realm scheme in Harrow

Photographs: Francesco Russo

Design, construction & technology Sustainable Architecture

What is the background to the project? Harrow’s placemaking team is dynamic, and in addition to Section 106 levies in 2018 it applied the Mayor of London’s Good Growth Fund for funding to convert a town centre surface car park into a public square. The site was identified as being of strategic value as 500 units of housing are going up around it and it’s on a key pedestrian route. The quality of space and its ‘play’ aspect were important – the council was drawing lots of people into this urban centre and needed to make it more suitable for public use. Some council departments were worried about loss of parking and almost all our efforts at Stage 1 of the design were about allowing concerns, verifying actual demand or proving parking could be redistributed elsewhere in the borough. Now the site has been stepped up, with land transferred from Highways to Commercial Property departments. The square is leased to operator Tudor Markets and the Arts kiosk run by Harrow Arts Centre.

What were the contractual relationships that brought it about? Councils procure highways and public realm works using a few, sizeable ‘term contractors’, usually for a five-year term. And because councils want price certainty, works such as fixing a pothole or installing a bollard or lamp post are priced on material rates rather than on project basis. The term contractor has a list of products that it regularly uses and a schedule of associated rates. This might give price reassurance to councils but what’s good for a road is not necessarily good for a one-off public realm project. It can be a challenge to specify items that aren’t on the contractors list because if you do, they’re treated as specials. For us, the key aspect of working with a term contractor was that it was about fixed rate rather than fixed cost, meaning constantly monitoring any design changes.

How did you manage to overcome the limitations of the contractors list? We accepted that baseline public realm staff like level-setting, surface finishes and lighting would be done by the term contractor; but first we asked what it had left over in its yard that we might be able to use. It turned out to have some big slabs of granite over-ordered from another project – enough to make some bench seating and create granite steps leading up to the highway around the square. We also used pieces of leftover basalt for the kiosk dining area. Drainage kerbs and grilles were standard elements, as were the ‘power’ bollards, though we colour-matched these to go with the rest of the scheme. Pricing for supplying, cutting, delivering and installing the items on site was a little opaque, but the material itself was almost zero cost, and we’ve since done the same thing on another project.

How did you manage to include specific products not on its list? We had to defer to the term contractor on the public realm works but we had a good relationship with Harrow’s Highways project manager and so were able to work in a few specials into the job – priced by suppliers so that the council was confident to order them in itself. We had originally wanted quality paving for the square and so were surprised by the design review panel’s suggestion to use tarmac, but it really worked for the project. We conceded that using it was probably the best way to deal with all the level changes, avoiding unsightly cutting of stone on site which, in our consultant’s role, would have been out of our control to manage anyway. And cost savings on that perhaps left the panel more amenable to our other specials such as the terrazzo ‘welcome mat’ spelling out the name of the square. This was relatively costly but has civic quality, adding both colour and material delight to the project. Andrew’s Terrazzo cast it in Leeds, brought it down and laid it and we’re really happy with the result. We also designed special steel cruciform bollards, made of four standard angles welded and painted by a Buxap and delivered to the council, with the contractor installing them at standard installation rates. We were worried we’d end up with standard play equipment from the list, but managed to get the council to agree to our designing it, with supplier PlayEquip matching the kiosk design aesthetic.

A key element for us was also bespoke cast cruciform brass pitch markers running at 3m centres on the site’s edge which, set into the tarmac and paving, are more subtle than we thought. Each has a unique grid reference marked on it to place it. We had to fight for them but feel it’s a small detail that creates extra nuance for the project and which we hope the public will discover through use.

But you say the project was eventually procured under separate contracts? Yes, two. The council and community stakeholders wanted to encourage local retail business. The GLA funding bid had
with the amount of concrete it required – even as pads it amounted to 130 tonnes. Luckily, with our engineer Toby MacLean, we and the term contractor agreed on helical steel coil foundations topped with a bolted, galvanised grid. A sustainability argument was won for sequencing and construction – it was simpler and required less in the way of earthworks, which were employed only for the attenuation tank that sits under the central play space.

We tendered the kiosk job publicly to find a specialist company able to do this work under design and build, to mitigate Harrow’s risk concerns. Halo Structures won the tender using its own lightweight steel structure of Meccano-like castellated beams which are screwed together on site and just as easily demounted for re-use at end-of-life.

The built structure is a simple shell and core – no fit-out – just a water and power supply for tenants. Aluminium shutters are installed over the kiosks and dining space to address security concerns. The collaboration with Halo was good and we really liked its system, so we exposed it where we could. Its laser cut steel structure with threaded fixings is visible through the grille soffit of our roof overhang. On this, Halo suggested that our frieze could be made using layered Tricoya MDF as a fascia plate, and it came out well. Although we had intended the outer columns to be structural, they became redundant with the Halo system, but we decided to keep them to retain a colonnade language.

In the end we missed out on some nice-to-haves, like getting green glass chips set in the tarmac to make it sparkle, and couldn’t get our desired kiosk lighting, but we came away from the experience surprisingly philosophically about it. It made us realise that had the whole project been procured as D&B, there would always have been a punitive aspect to design changes. Instead, working under the term contractor gave us in some ways more flexibility to make design changes as we saw fit; so, that, with their support, we weren’t bound into one approach.

included food kiosks around the square, although the council’s estates team raised concerns including security risk, so the original idea was that these would be off-the-peg units brought to site. But we built a case to show that combining them into a single structure would create a more cohesive public space – in effect a market square. Because it was a very particular kind of ‘special’, this element was procured from a specialist fabricator.

So how did you eventually procure the kiosks?

Kiosk foundations were procured through the term contractor because it was civils work. We were uncomfortable

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Eye Line 2023: call for entries

Get your pencil out – or your mouse. Whatever you choose to draw with, our annual drawing competition is open for submissions.

Eye Line 2023, RIBA’s annual, international competition showcasing the best drawing and rendering skills, is open for entries. As ever, we ask for images in two categories – student and practitioner – that brilliantly convey architecture, in any medium or combination of media. In the competition’s 11th year, we are once again seeking the best and most exciting submissions from those at the sharp end of representation.

We want images of all kinds, from a hand-drawn concept sketch to technically proficient and layered renders. For us, ‘drawing’ includes any method by which the power of an architectural idea is communicated; be it depictions of existing buildings or works of imagination. Practitioners and students enter in different categories:

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

Winning entries will be published in the July/August issue of the Journal and online. Our colleagues at RIBA’s drawings and archives collection will consider winners for potential inclusion in one of the largest architectural collections in the world.

Last year’s student winner was the Bartlett School’s Mengjiao Zhang, who translated the architectural space of George Orwell’s 1984 into a surreal and compelling narrative that was technically proficient and highly rigorous. The winning practitioner was architect Alan Power with sublime oil paintings of assisted living housing that felt all the more poignant.

Winners and commendations will be announced: July/August 2023, winners and commendations announced: July/August 2023, issue of RIBAJ and online.

**Key Dates**

- **Deadline**: Tuesday 9 May 2023
- **Winners and commendations announced**: July/August 2023, issue of RIBAJ and online.

**EYE LINE RULES**

- We seek the best 2D representations of a building design or concept through visual means. They may be hand or digitally drawn, incorporating collage or any combination or overlay of methods. Video and straight photography excluded.
- Enter in either the student or practitioner category. The RIBA Journal reserves the right to reallocate to a different category if deemed necessary.
- Maximum of three images per entry, which can be from different projects, or all from the same project.
- Joint entries on which more than one person has worked are permissible.
- All entries must be uploaded online (see link). We cannot accept physical works. Images must be at 300dpi, file size maximum 25Mb.
- The work must have been produced within the three years up to the closing date of Tuesday 9 May 2023 and must not previously have been entered for Eye Line.

**Information Required**

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

**Winners and commendations**

For more details go to ribaj.com/eyeline/enter
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Culture
Leader

‘AI could make design more robust, say on the design of a Staircase – estimated at around 150 decisions at its most basic’

I dislike the way Microsoft has co-opted friendly group working as Teams. Now ‘chat’ is going the same way with chat bots and ChatGPT cloaking artificial intelligence in a cosy, human, informality.

In these developments we see the collision of the two major investments in architectural practices: people and technology – and the delicate balance between them. People outside architecture often think that architects work with steel, concrete, timber and fine surface material. But it is clear that the basic ingredients for architecture are the people who design it, their skills and knowledge.

Tools might include Rotring pens and cardboard models, but now they are more likely to involve software – whether researching products on Chrome, project management on Union Square or drawing and communicating through CAD or BIM with all the necessary plug ins.

The RIBA Benchmarking Survey of chartered practices shows quite how significant people costs are – making up 61% of mean practice expenditure in 2022 (IT doesn’t reach even 10%).

When Zaha Hadid Architects announced its results to April 2022, it flagged a dramatic increase in staff costs, with £11 million on wages and salaries going not just on its expanded workforce (from 440 to 520) but also cost of living increases and bonuses. It was enough to affect its profits, despite increased turnover. This in a company led by Patrik Schumacher, who has long promoted software-based parametric design.

Many practices are reporting difficulty recruiting. And so salaries rise, not from fair employers trying to maintain the staff’s standard of living, but in order to secure and to retain talent. Public sector salary negotiations show how contentious this is, with nurses at food banks on one hand and estimates of the many millions from the government for tiny wage rises on the other.

I was looking out of my grubby car windscreen as I sat in line for the carwash and thinking about the economics of automatic versus manual carwashes. This example does the rounds on sites explaining productivity and the lack of it in the UK: the huge investment in efficient machines on the one hand that have been overtaken by cheap labour supplying a hand polish and shine on the other. But as the costs of labour increase, so the pendulum swings back in favour of the machine.

The question of whether AI will take our jobs has been around as long as AI. Dale Sinclair, now head of digital innovation as WSP, has written about how AI could make design more robust, say on the design of a staircase – which he estimates is around 150 decisions at its most basic. AI could ensure it is referencing the most up to date regulations and sustainability best practice, perhaps even checking in on material prices too so that could be factored in.

How much AI will replace roles or push architects up the value chain to ask the big questions of unique sites will depend on the economy of labour and software investment. But it’s clear that a watercooler chat with an AI bot will never rival one with a colleague...

Stephanie Wunderlich   PHOTO: ZHA

Most houses survived Category 5 hurricanes with consequences no worse than a missing galvanised roofing sheet or a wooden shingle’ Book review looks at Dominica’s ti-kai houses: ribaj.com/ti-kai

Left: ZHA is a leader in using software in design – here with a virtual project for video game PUBG. MOBILE – but it still needs its staff.

The RIBA Journal March 2023

ONLY ON RIBAJ.COM
I was very sorry to hear of the death of Balkrishna Doshi, our 2022 Royal Gold Medallist. I am pleased, however, that we had the opportunity to celebrate him last year. Doshi was both a hugely important and influential architect and a kind and generous man. On a personal note, I have wonderful memories of time with him in Ahmedabad, India. His multi-generational family life endured, but boundaries between practice and home, architecture and art, and life, religion and philosophy. On reflection, I learned much about both my personal and professional participation in the theatre of everyday life.

Like many great architects, Doshi was not the product of a formal education. His story – as he recounted it to me – was of a journey by boat to London, of part-time courses at North London Polytechnic and hours in the RIBA Library – studying books, drawings, photographs and the magnificent space – all washed down by tea with the librarian.

Doshi’s story is very relevant to the current debate on the way ahead in education. A few days before he died, the RIBA hosted a day on education and practice where we heard from students, educators, practitioners and the Architects Registration Board (ARB). We heard of the financial challenges to the funding of education, the accumulated debts of students who also were奖金 removes the student loan and also of new ways into the profession. We learned much that reinforces some of the RIBA’s thinking on the provision and validation of architectural education. Personally, I am a fan of the architectural degree – as a good general degree and a springboard to a host of different avenues of work. I strongly encourage you to try. We must continue to learn and improve, and I hope some of the debates we are engaging in will help open up more avenues of work.

Simon Allford is president of the RIBA

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The year started with reminders of two great, and neglected, books about the city. The first was the 25th anniversary of Geoff Ryman’s novel 253, published in 1998. Published in print, that is, published in working form. But it has now been restored to working form. But it has now been restored to

Hypertext was the perfect medium for this

Simultaneous hypertext experiments have not

2023, the 25th anniversary of Geoff Ryman’s novel 253, was released. A collection of 253 biographies, each 253 words, it is a reminder of the

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Hypertext was the perfect medium for this

Simultaneous hypertext experiments have not
Kay Hughes is HS2’s guardian of the design vision. It sounds flamboyant, but it’s her wide experience of big projects and down to earth style that gets things done.

Words: Eleanor Young

In for the long haul

While the newspapers speculated about the ditching of High Speed 2’s London leg, the project’s design director, architect Kay Hughes, is deep into thinking about a seamless customer experience from train to station, and looking at how to take lessons onto the later phases starting with Crewe to Manchester.

You can’t talk about HS2 without running into controversy, the fundamental failure to address connectivity between regions outside of London, the destructive construction driving right through landscapes, the splitting of communities, the spiralling costs. But once you are in it, as Hughes is, you have to work with it. Written into her official job title is her raison d’être at HS2: ‘Guardian of the design vision’. We laugh at how grand that sounds as I shallowly admire her silver shoes.

But it is a lot to ask on a project this size, even with a core team of 32 to help. Official figures put HS2 phases 1 and 2a at £42.5 billion. It is record-breaking – take the length of the Colne Valley Viaduct, at two miles the UK’s longest, even if it isn’t quite a match for France’s Millau Viaduct in drama. On phase 1 most of the design is done, the whole trace of the track from London to Birmingham is pretty much in place and Old Oak Common in West London is on site and preparing to be the UK’s largest train station. At London’s Euston the demolitions are done and, with the hoardings up, the site is ready for a complex future shared by Lendlease’s over-site development, Network Rail’s existing station, Transport for London’s below ground expansion and Camden Council – the last of the partners. At Curzon Street in Birmingham, work on the Grimshaw design is under way with the first piece of the viaduct that will run into the station installed in January.

Much of that was in the process of passing onto the delivery partners and their design teams by the time Hughes joined HS2 in 2019. The design vision was written into the contracts. Hughes can’t be in every project meeting but has stayed alongside to give design a voice and is able to pick up on some things. ‘There is no “of course”, with design,’ she says. Her focus has been on urban design and the integration of this new infrastructure – and the structures that will mark its route through the country.
I am not here to design but to know where the key levers are and be a voice in the room, to champion designers

She got an idea of how much you could achieve with limited resources: ‘We did a sixth of the Olympic Village, smoking Ducados as we drew with little pens at 11pm.’ In 2002 she moved to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, working on its embassy programme and delivering Tony Fretton’s Warsaw Embassy and a number of other significant schemes as senior project sponsor - directly appointing architects and bearing responsibility for the budget. ‘Multi-million not multi-billion,’ she cautions, comparing it to HS2. Then it was on to the Olympic Development Authority (ODA) as design director, six years seeing projects through from masterplanning to design development and delivery.

She feels she caught the last days of the professional design client. ‘There is a real lack of understanding of expertise and knowledge that is needed for masterplan, landscape, building and delivery. People often don’t understand what the route to good delivery is; to functional, integrated and really enjoyable delivery. Ultimately the public is our client and how you serve it is really important.’ Though the role of public sector design client has waned, throughout our interview she is giving credit to those she learnt from, who set up the conditions for success – from Alison Nimmo and Joanna Averley at the ODA to Sadie Morgan as HS2’s design chair and Mark Bertram at the FCO. In the same way she likes to pay it forward with mentoring and collaboration – she was one of the founders of VeloCity, a village-based interconnected strategy for growth by a group of women cyclists and design professionals.

She knows that her work has to take a long term view and she may well have retired by the time phase 2b gets delivered. With the current debate around ‘tough decisions’ on HS2, it is perhaps Hughes’ part in the scheme’s intelligent replication project on lessons learnt and her enthusiasm for Weston Williamson’s designs of better standard objects – like the footbridge – that will be her most significant legacy.

Sitting with the attentive press officer in the room there is no back story of the battles fought, but there is a genuine appreciation of the ‘absolutely exceptional’ work of LDA Design on the landscape restoration in the Colne Valley using 300 million tonnes of excavated chalk, as well as Grimshaw’s Colne Valley Viaduct and headhouses. Hughes can get excited about reducing the underground culverts; she singles out the way small practice Moxon Architects ‘changed the dynamic about the way work is done and presented’. She loves the way Small Dean Viaduct is designed ‘so you get the excitement as the trains come out of the portal’. Into that comes the emphasis on sport and infrastructure that has become her bread and butter, from the London 2012 Olympics and HS2, gradually emerged through her career. She started on Demys Lauden’s European Investment Bank in Kirchberg, Luxembourg. But perhaps the seeds were sown when she landed in Barcelona in 1981 working on its embassy programme and delivering Tony Fretton’s Warsaw Embassy and a number of other significant schemes as senior project sponsor - directly appointing architects and bearing responsibility for the budget. ‘Multi-million not multi-billion,’ she cautions, comparing it to HS2. Then it was on to the Olympic Development Authority (ODA) as design director, six years seeing projects through from masterplanning to design development and delivery.

She feels she caught the last days of the professional design client. ‘There is a real lack of understanding of expertise and knowledge that is needed for masterplan, landscape, building and delivery. People often don’t understand what the route to good delivery is; to functional, integrated and really enjoyable delivery. Ultimately the public is our client and how you serve it is really important.’ Though the role of public sector design client has waned, throughout our interview she is giving credit to those she learnt from, who set up the conditions for success – from Alison Nimmo and Joanna Averley at the ODA to Sadie Morgan as HS2’s design chair and Mark Bertram at the FCO. In the same way she likes to pay it forward with mentoring and collaboration – she was one of the founders of VeloCity, a village-based interconnected strategy for growth by a group of women cyclists and design professionals.

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Sitting with the attentive press officer in the room there is no back story of the battles fought, but there is a genuine appreciation of the ‘absolutely exceptional’ work of LDA Design on the landscape restoration in the Colne Valley using 300 million tonnes of excavated chalk, as well as Grimshaw’s Colne Valley Viaduct and headhouses. Hughes can get excited about reducing the underground culverts; she singles out the way small practice Moxon Architects ‘changed the dynamic about the way work is done and presented’. She loves the way Small Dean Viaduct is designed ‘so you get the excitement as the trains come out of the portal’. Into that comes the emphasis on sport and infrastructure that has become her bread and butter, from the London 2012 Olympics and HS2, gradually emerged through her career. She started on Demys Lauden’s European Investment Bank in Kirchberg, Luxembourg. But perhaps the seeds were sown when she landed in Barcelona in 1981 working on its embassy programme and delivering Tony Fretton’s Warsaw Embassy and a number of other significant schemes as senior project sponsor - directly appointing architects and bearing responsibility for the budget. ‘Multi-million not multi-billion,’ she cautions, comparing it to HS2. Then it was on to the Olympic Development Authority (ODA) as design director, six years seeing projects through from masterplanning to design development and delivery.

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Park Hill’s musical generation game

A musical scored by Richard Hawley is the unlikely vehicle to tell the story of the fall and rise of the Sheffield estate through the eyes of three sets of occupants. Laura Mark booked a seat.

Photographs: Johan Persson

As Park Hill’s newest residents settle into Mikhail Riches’ latest revamp of one of the UK’s best-known ex-council estates, a musical charts three generations of residents and their lives.

Written by Sheffield-born Chris Bush and featuring new and back catalogue songs by Sheffield legend Richard Hawley, Standing at the Sky’s Edge weaves together three separate but interconnecting stories of people who had lived in the same flat. Though not told chronologically, the stories are overlaid and woven together, painting a complicated picture of a changing estate which mirrors the state of UK housing.

Young newlyweds Rose and Harry move in as the building completes in 1961. Their story begins as one of optimism. Park Hill Flats were a vision of the future, replacing the slum terrace housing which had sat on the same ground that the estate went on to occupy. Residents were excited to move into these ‘streets in the sky’ with all the mod cons. Like many working in the city at that time Harry is a steelworker, and we witness his life beginning to fall apart as Margaret Thatcher’s policies decimate the industry.

Next, we see the occupants of 1980s Park Hill. The flat is now home to Joy and her cousins Grace and George – Liberian refugees who have been housed on the estate, which is becoming ever more run down. These are Park Hill’s dark days – there’s crime, racism and the city of Sheffield itself is suffering widespread unemployment. A combination of poor maintenance and societal and political issues is reflected in the disrepair of Park Hill and its subsequent reputation. The estate becomes a no-go area and Joy becomes a prisoner in her own home. It is a hard watch.

Eventually all the council tenants were moved out of Park Hill, and the estate – which was then grade II-listed – was sold by the council to developer Urban Splash for almost nothing. A Stirling Prize-shortlisted redevelopment by Hawkins\Brown signified a new era, and it is here, in the newly renovated flat, that our next character Poppy appears. She is a middle-class Londoner who arrives in Sheffield rejoicing in its sense of community, laid back lifestyle and proximity to the Peak District. It’s almost tongue in cheek, but the sad reality is that this is the truth of Park Hill now. It is no longer home to the council tenants it once housed. With the exception of a few affordable-rent tenants in the first phase, all have been replaced by second home-owners, university lecturers, and the millennial equivalent of middle-class yuppies yearning for a place to put their mid-century modern furniture.

Mark Henderson’s lighting design for the show picks out the estate’s now infamous graffiti scrawl of ‘I love you, will u marry me’. Once a sign of Park Hill’s abandonment, the words can now be seen on mugs, tea towels, Arctic Monkeys t-shirts, beer bottles, estate marketing, and cushion covers. Clare Middleton, the local woman for whom the message was intended, died of cancer at just 30 years old. Her troubled life is edited out in the commodification of those words. The graffiti hangs over the stage, where the kitchen and open-plan living space of one of the flats has been recreated. It is here that much of the musical’s action plays out. Above, set designer Ben Stones has recreated Park Hill’s iconic access decks, and the eight-piece band sits behind in what could be imagined as another flat. This walkway is a key location in the drama, just as it is on the estate.

Park Hill has become a symbol of Sheffield – both loved and hated for many of the reasons brought up during the performance. The musical was put on at the Crucible in Sheffield before its transfer to London’s National Theatre in February. For a local audience the stories are easy to relate to. There’s even a moment in the first act which centres around a bottle of Henderson’s Relish – a condiment unique to the city – as it is passed around the three different households.

References are made to both Sheffield Wednesday and Sheffield United football teams. The Crucible audience laughed along knowingly.

The musical is a tale of Sheffield, written by a local playwright, featuring the wistful soundtrack of Hawley, with in-jokes and local references. It is a love song for the city and for the estate that towers above it. It is moving; even this steely northern lass shed a tear – although perhaps with a knowing thought that now I am priced out of Park Hill, a development my own grandfather worked on as a freshly qualified member of Sheffield’s city architect’s department.

But this is not just a tale for Sheffield; London audiences have plenty to enjoy and to reflect on. The tales told in Standing at the Sky’s Edge have happened in estates and cities across the UK. Although they are sometimes a little glossed over, it asks uncomfortable questions about gentrification. It is about the memories which we all have tied up in our homes, nostalgia for a building, and what it represents for our society.

Laura Mark is an architect, teacher, urbanist and keeper of Walmer Yard.
Get building back to nature

The Building Centre’s exhibition demands root and branch rethink to bring bio-based and local construction products into the mainstream, writes Pamela Buxton.

The Building Centre’s new exhibition Homegrown: Building a Post-carbon Future may be modest in scale but it lacks nothing in ambition. With its associated book Material Reform, Homegrown advocates an urgent shift towards bio-based and locally-grown low-carbon building products as an alternative to conventional, more carbon-heavy products. Both exhibition and book are from Material Cultures, the not-for-profit design and materials research practice.

With the construction industry generating some 60% of the UK’s waste, radical change is required. This exhibition, part-manifesto, part mini-materials library, makes a compelling case for bio-based materials and how they can move out of the niche. Rather than browbeat or depress, it gives visitors a positive vision for change.

Material Cultures co-founder Paloma Gormley hopes the show will challenge negative perceptions and show how scaling up production of bio-based building products could increase their efficiency and viability for wider use. This is illustrated by the dominant physical exhibit, a thatched wall installation measuring one thatcher’s square (100ft²), made from a rye/wheat hybrid. Created by a master thatcher as part of a prefabricated cassette system, the thatch will last 30-70 years.

The exhibition’s materials library of bio-based homegrown products – derived variously from mycelium, hemp, cob, waste clay, porcelain, glass and timber – demonstrates that it is possible to specify with not just performance but provenance in mind. With so many of our building materials imported, we don’t always see the impact of the product’s extraction for ourselves.

According to Gormley, architects may need to be ‘a bit more investigative’ in understanding the implications of material processes. At the same time, she adds, the implications of the greater use of bio-based materials from an agro-ecological perspective also need to be understood.

Short films in the exhibition explore straw, timber and extraction – three of the chapters in the accompanying Material Reform book. This draws on the research behind the exhibition, with a detailed look at aspects of construction including resources, land use and supply chains.

The opportunity to use straw – a very cheap, often surplus raw material – better could, we’re told, provide a ‘significant carbon sink’. The timber film discusses how centuries of deforestation in the UK have helped lead the country to import 80% of its timber products: ‘For timber to play a meaningful part in the future of construction, we will have to get into the habit of using it sparingly... as a rare luxury, rather than a standard.’ The extraction film makes the case for a move away from demolition and redevelopment to a ‘culture of repair’.

Perhaps the core lesson is that architecture needs to renew its relationship with the land, with the use of regenerative land management practices to balance the needs of landowner, community, and construction industry. There are, it’s clear, no easy answers – all construction practices have consequences. Holistic thinking is needed to establish which of these are acceptable.

Homegrown’s advocacy of bio-based materials makes a stimulating contribution to an ever more pressing topic. The scale of transformation needed to steer UK construction towards a post-carbon future is indeed daunting. But Material Cultures’ Summer Islam does see signs of progress, whether changing attitudes among architects, or the use of rewilding practices. ‘It’s all small change,’ she says, ‘but that’s how movements begin’.

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The RIBA Journal March 2023

ribaj.com
Obituary

1944 – 2022

John Thompson

John Thompson, who has died aged 78, was an inspirational, thoughtful, and highly motivated architect and urbanist who was passionate about improving the quality of life in neighbourhoods across the UK and internationally.

Trained at Cambridge in the 1960s, John rejected the prevailing view of the architect as a heroic form-maker and instead devoted his career to working with local people to create places that nurture a sense of community, often in areas of significant social and economic challenges.

Uniquely, he established two notable practices that remain successful: Hunt Thompson Associates (now HTA Design) in 1969, and John Thompson & Partners (now JTP) founded in 1994. John’s placemaking was based on a strong belief in the ability of individuals to control their own destiny, and in his desire to harness community spirit he worked to empower residents in the difficult decision-making required by regeneration. A good example is Lea View House in Hackney, an inter-war housing estate blighted by crime and anti-social behaviour.

Participatory planning approaches were also exported overseas, in urban transformation schemes in Russia, Germany, Italy, France, Iceland, Sweden, Ireland and China. All his work reflects a clear understanding of the design factors critical to the social success of built environments: the distinction of public and private space, natural surveillance, distribution of public space throughout the urban landscape and the provision of mixed uses promoting environmental, social and economic sustainability.

For much of John’s career it was rare for an architect to design from a standpoint of social inclusion ‘everyday life’, and to see places as more important than individual buildings. In 2006, the growing acceptance of these principles led to John being instrumental in establishing the Academy of Urbanism, an autonomous, non-profit cross-sector organisation set up to identify and disseminate new ideas in placemaking.

He was also a founder member of the Urban Villages Forum and chair of the RIBA Planning & Urbanism Group for five years. He received a presidential citation from the American Institute of Architects, and a lifetime achievement award from The Urban Design Group.

He is survived by his second wife, Nova, and their two children, Tom and Tibbs; together with his first wife, Rosie, their two children, Wally and Grace, and a stepdaughter, Jessica. He was a devoted grandfather to Elliot, Scarlett, Phoenix and his step grandson, Jack.

Marcus Adams is managing partner at JTP

Who judges the judges?

I find it hard to believe that the ugly structures in Adelaide Street Belfast were considered for the RIBA MacEwen Award. The structures detract from handsome brick buildings, and serve no purpose other than creating waterfalls, when it rains, onto pathetic planters which are out of scale in an urban setting. What were the judges thinking?

Christopher McCauley RIBA, Belfast

Cost of omission

I must record my (our) disappointment with your article on the Gainsborough Museum in your January issue (p10). You quite properly list the design and construction cost consultant. I note that this omission follows through, so I can only assume that it is editorial policy. Could you explain why this is the case?

I am sure you that the client for the project was very pleased with the work of the project surveyor and our MD.

Otherwise, an excellent article.

Colin Hayward PT Projects London

Due to space constraints we cannot always include the full list of consultants and suppliers. There is certainly no intention to exclude a particular discipline – Editor

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INF MEMORIAM

James Terence Radcliffe

ELECTED 1989, BURY

Colin Fergusson-Jenkins

ELECTED 1971, INVERNESS

George Frederick Oldham

ELECTED 1970, PRESTON

Malcolm John Kirkup

ELECTED 1971, TEIGNMOUTH

Philip Robert Evans

ELECTED 1974, WITTON

Marie-Joan Drovett

ELECTED 1970, LONDON

Roger Edward FitzGerald

ELECTED 1970, LONDON

Robert Matthew Kneuss

ELECTED 1991, NORTHAMPTON

ARCHITECT AND URBANIST WHO IMPROVED PEOPLE’S LIVES THROUGH COMMUNITY ARCHITECTURE AND COLLABORATIVE PLANNING, LONG BEFORE IT BECAME A MAINSTREAM APPROACH

EXCHANGE
Parting shot

Campo dei Fiori, Rome, late 19th century

Now one of the hotspots of the Italian capital’s nightlife, Campo dei Fiori is, and was for centuries, a market square. It was also a place for public executions, most notably that of Giordano Bruno in 1600 for heresy; a monument to the great philosopher now stands in its centre. Campo dei Fiori was paved in the mid-15th century but never architecturally formalised, as can be seen in this image by James Anderson, one of the first professional photographers to operate in Italy in the 19th century. Born Isaac Atkinson (1813-1877), he left England to study painting in Paris and then moved to Rome, where in 1853 he opened a photographic studio. He soon became one of the most prominent in the city, specialising in historic architecture, panoramic views and reproductions of works of art. His work, and that of his son Domenico (1854-1938), who succeeded him in the studio, was displayed in exhibitions worldwide, including Paris and London. The studio continued to operate under Domenico’s heirs until the 1940s. • Valeria Carullo