Future winners: five firms to watch
Past meets present in Nottingham regen
Finding safe anchorage at Wood Wharf
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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>
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<td>0.14</td>
<td>70</td>
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</tr>
<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 200mm concrete substrate and product Lambda value as noted.

**ProTherm Quantum® PLUS+**
- BBA Agrement Certified 20/5769.
- Satisfies NHBC requirements Chapter 7.1, flat roofs & balconies.
- Robust coating. Patent protected.
- Can be used within a system that meets BC 190/04 fire requirements of Building Regulations Part B.
- Suitable for zero falls under hard or soft landscaping.

Ilona Rose House, Charing Cross
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- NEW COLOUR RANGE
- EASY TO APPLY
- DURABLE
- DIRT AND MOULD RESISTANT
- HELPS KEEP INTERIORS MORE HYGIENIC

You can wait decades for an outdoor sea pool and then two come along at once. But this one, turning the corner of the bay peninsular along from St Peter Port in the Channel Islands at La Vallette, by young local practice DLM Architects, is the first that offers less soggy sandwiches, more a slice of Aussie cool. In summer as the year-round turquoise waters heat up, perhaps it will even beat those down under, mixed in as it is with Scandinavian hygge.

The building’s story exhibits the many strands that are coming to define the renaissance in lidos around the British Isles. They are Victorian bathing inlets that were enclosed by Edwardians, made more majestic in the 1920/30s, then fell into disrepair with the advent of cheap European holidays. Yet an ardently loyal community of enthusiasts makes them sensitive to change. Many are being rescued by grassroots action: social enterprises, charitable trusts and fundraising.

La Valette has an underlying laissez-faire story too. The States of Guernsey owns the site. Its upkeep was left to volunteer swimmers repairing the sea wall with buckets of hand-mixed concrete. The project grew out of a government competition to propose ideas to regenerate six sites. Eight bids ranged from new parasols to demolition in favour of a resort hotel. DLM and other islanders formed a committee that brought the hardly swimming bunch along by raising a new building out of the old and transforming it to be more inclusive. This swish project reveals none of that strife. No photograph does it justice; the granite benches, inglenook fireplace to pull up a stool, community venue with 360º views, outdoor wind-sheltered elephant steps for team pep talks or teenagers waiting to be picked up. Touring the 14.5km-wide island, it’s Guernsey’s latest exciting asset and could be part of something more. • Isabelle Priest
Dark arts lesson
A discreetly sited holiday home in the Sussex woods uses the latest technology to disappear when the bats come out.

Words: Jan–Carlos Kucharek Photographs: Tom Bird

Wandering disorientated along the quiet ridge road between Hastings and the village of Fairlight, it’s gradually becoming clear to me that Looking Glass Lodge’s promise to potential guests of an experience in splendid isolation is not an empty one. And once I come across the small access road taking me down through the trees into the valley’s side, I am not disappointed either.

Client Rick is the third generation to live on the edge of Mallydams Wood. His grandparents helped to establish its RSPCA centre decades before and his grandmother still lives back up the track next door to Rick and his partner Lindsey’s place; both homes enjoying wide views over the landscape they all hailed from. Originally a field, the oak, larch and evergreens among which Looking Glass Lodge now nestles were mostly planted by the family, wishing to draw Mallydams further up the hill to hide the converted barn and coach house that would become their homes.

To help generate the revenue needed to preserve their woods, the couple hatched a plan in 2018 to create a holiday let, and began to look for an architect who might do it. Michael Kendrick, who had been featured on the 2017 Channel 4 show ‘Cabins in the Wild’ as one of the eight architects building chalets for a luxury retreat in Wales, was the one who caught their eye. Commissioned initially to design it on an exposed site overlooking the AONB, it took a year for Rother District Council planners to kick the idea into the long grass – for its exposed hillside position rather than the idea of a holiday let per se. A year and a half later, the unplanted clearing in their woods higher up proved to be more viable. But even then, explains Kendrick, it was won with onerous planning conditions – notably that it not only leave no trace if removed but that while there, with resident bat populations about, it leave no trace at all by night.

How the cabin’s sizeable expanse of south-facing floor to ceiling glass wall meets that condition might at first confound a guest but it’s an answer that will reveal itself to them gradually over time. More obvious for this ‘hovering’ cabin is Kendrick’s structural steel design: four ground beams set atop screw piles, off which spring four pairs of angled columns. Less apparent are the bolted steel ring beams and columns that form the cabin box, all discreetly hidden in a thick, highly insulated timber skin clad in stained cedar slats that run round the sides and underside of the floating box.

As the visitor enters through a large, softly gliding glazed door on the ‘land’ side, those slats do too, running neatly along the ceiling soffit – a way of bringing the outside in that acts in subtle counterpoint to the singular move of the great glass expanse before you. Twelve metres long and running floor to ceiling, the effect is of a Cinemascopic view into and over the canopy of the woods, with some of the trees almost close enough to touch. Yet aside all this undisturbed nature, the 50m² single volume gives a sense of restrained luxury. Engineered oak floors that may feel indulgently warm underfoot are counterpointed by

IN NUMBERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gross External Area</th>
<th>£250,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost per m²</td>
<td>£4065</td>
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simple plywood, lining the walls and used for kitchen cabinets and the storage wall that separates the living/dining space from the ensuite bedroom. The architect designed simple sliding vent openings in the cabin’s walls, which are activated manually by a timber spigot that acts in simple opposition to high-end dark brassware and a feature black steel fireplace. The exposure of bathing in a decadent oval free-standing bath by the glass seems barely mitigated by the sheer, pale green muslin drape that can be drawn in front.

But come night, darkness falls. Kendrick’s solution to the planners’ bat stipulation was to source and install the UK’s latest example of stealth glass. Electrochromic SageGlass might be manufactured in America while being controlled remotely in Switzerland but it’s the tiny sensors on the roof of the cabin here that detect the all-important dusk, and trigger the ceramic-impregnated glazing to begin working its magic, darkening over the space of 20 minutes, to render all the cabin’s internal lighting invisible from outside. And so it remains, cosseting occupants and local wildlife until dawn triggers the reverse effect, gradually lightening to welcome the sunrise in true colours.

Of course, innovation comes at a price, albeit here a surprisingly low one due to the manufacturer’s wish to showcase the product – but even at £70,000 and with Covid sending material prices skyward, the cost was significant enough to shift the client from the original intention of having the lodge built, to project managing it all themselves. For Kendrick, it meant a return to the drawing board to make a contract set legible and buildable for a lay-person, and for Rick, Lindsey and their families, it meant digging the hole for the septic tank and its long cable trench from the house, insulating the 330mm thick walls and installing the flat roof’s vapour control layer. They all mucked in where they could.

Lindsey says that the process, while occasionally fraught, felt a galvanising one for the whole family, recalling in accelerated form, the protracted barn renovation done by her husband’s grandparents decades before. That, and the woodland around that they had planted – with its serendipitous clearing – combine to create a future reflection that played its part in making the improbable possible.

Credits
Architect
Michael Kendrick Architects
Client
Looking Glass Lodge
Structural engineer
Momentum
Glazing
The Door Co
Gardener
Ben Fitches
Responsible Joinery
Johnson Bespoke
Steel frame
Arc Fab Sussex
Screwpiles
The Great British Ground Screw Co
Building Control
East Sussex Building Control Partnership
Main contractor
Client self-build

Below The client wanted the rotating fireplace to act as the heart of the home.

After dusk, the cabin enters stealth mode.

As night approaches, the SageGlass will darken to completely rule out any light bleed to the outside.

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PermaQuik
Less is more

Fletcher Priest Architects changed as little as possible in its upgrade of Warwick Court offices to keep both the work and finished job sustainable

Words: Isabelle Priest  Photographs: Ståle Eriksen

‘Very quickly,’ says Ed Williams, partner at Fletcher Priest Architects, ‘we thought the best thing to do with this building was very little.’

We are standing outside MacCormac Jamieson Prichard’s Warwick Court office building on Paternoster Square, London. The building was only completed in 2002, but in 2019 the original tenant Goldman Sachs moved out and the building’s owner Mitsubishi Estate London decided it was time to upgrade. Four practices were invited to make proposals. Fletcher Priest could have razed it, although the risk and cost of doing that would have been huge.

‘It was Mitsubishi’s first building in London 20 years ago, part of the Paternoster masterplan,’ explains Williams. ‘It’s postmodern but polite, built using good quality materials, details and standards. We won the bid on the basis of retaining and recrafting as much as possible.’

Williams admits the carbon question wasn’t as strong four years ago. However, today that’s the story. 2002 doesn’t sound long ago, but the services were shot and tenants won’t sign a lease unless they have certainty that the building is going to operate without glitches for the 15-20 year term. Looking at contemporary photographs, the interiors had an outdated 1970s feel. The reception was a vertical gloomy corridor-like space. With Mitsubishi wanting to move from single occupier model to a multi-tenant provision, the floorplates can now be let separately and be split in two.

Much of what has been done isn’t necessarily visible. Located right next to St Paul’s, viewing corridors prevented expansion of the building footprint and height. Fletcher Priest developed a strategy based on circular economy principles and introducing natural, low-carbon materials alongside extensive re-use of the existing structure and finishes. This saved over 20,000 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent compared with building new. The project’s embodied carbon is under LETI’s 2030 550kgCO₂e/m² targets.

Outwardly, little of MJP’s original design has changed. The building is substantially solid, clad in Portland stone. There was an audit of window frames and double glazing, which can start to fog up after 20-25 years, to prioritise extending their life by another 10-15 years, rather than replacing. This can be a risk from a lettings perspective but it saved huge amounts of embodied carbon. A handful of units were replaced, and the rest resprayed internally to refresh them up. Otherwise, the glazed entrance doorway has been replaced to make it taller and more open.

Inside, the biggest visual transformation is the entrance hall. Entry points have been consolidated to the Paternoster Square side, closing off the one on the opposite side of the building. To the left of the doorway part of a former retail unit has been reclaimed as a reception and seating area in a single height area that makes it more comfortable as a meeting space. The atrium has also been partially closed off as it wasn’t providing much daylight.

However, the most radical change has been to the atmosphere. Even though the interior has the feel of a new office,
with a minimalist David Chipperfield look, many of the finishes are the originals. In the reception at ground level, the Portland stone wall finishes are retained. Above this datum, the stone has been replaced with polished plaster to colour-match the stone, releasing the existing stone to complete the expansion into the seating area. The dark granite floor, which had become worn and cracked, has been replaced with a terrazzo that uses recycled aggregate and stone, and the under-used steel stair removed. The practice did investigate the potential to recycle the existing floor but found that the journey time and energy would have been more carbon intensive, although it has been sent to similar plants to be recycled/reused, along with existing raised floor tiles, carpet tiles and doors.

How did the practice decide what to keep and what to replace?

‘It does get subjective,’ says Williams. ‘Clearly, light stone is easier to retain than the dark flooring. The material palette was chosen to go with that. Removing the steel stair and balustrades was about creating more solidity.’

Elsewhere, updating the mechanical electrical plant with more efficient and sustainable equipment enabled sprayed a new colour. One drawback of retaining the existing glazing, however, is that the building is still mechanically vented – a trade-off which the practice felt was necessary to avoid replacing the glazed units with opening windows. The WCs are new, upgraded, now unisex and more plentiful to meet today’s regulations. The basement car parking, except for one accessible car bay, has been transformed into 280 bike parking bays, and there are new changing and drying rooms. Basement finishes are left as robust blockwork to avoid adding embodied carbon with further aesthetic finishes. However, to Fletcher Priest’s frustration all the building’s doors had to be replaced, as Williams explains: ‘One of the issues with retaining things is you can’t always get the right accreditation, even if they appear sufficient. Sometimes you have

**Right, top and bottom** The core, with its reapplied lift and external and internal finishes refreshed rather than replaced.

**IN NUMBERS**

18,580m²
GIA
90%
retained structure
1.84
tonnes/100m² waste rate generation
20,000t
CO₂ equivalent saving over rebuilding

**The biggest issue with buildings of this vintage is fire protection. You’re never sure what you will find**

suspended ceiling voids to be compressed by around 25cm. Office floors are now between 2.8m and 3.35m tall. There are new raised floors, and the previously gas-powered building is now fully electric. It now has an ‘A’ EPC rating and is aiming for an ‘Excellent’ BREEAM rating.

‘The biggest issue with buildings of this vintage is fire protection,’ says Williams. ‘We’re doing a lot of refreshes of buildings of this scale and it’s always the fire protection that’s not properly put together, mostly in terms of compartmentation. It’s about making sure all the junctions are up to code; re-detailed and recast. With a refurb, you’re never sure what you’re going to find.’

The building was stripped back to structure, except around the cores and finishes that the practice wanted to keep. Lift carriages were retained, with just the cables replaced and the finishes

----

**Cost consultant**

Waterman

**Structure and building services**

Mace

**Principal contractor**

Priest

**Architect**

Fletcher

Stanhope

**Redevelopment**

Mitsubishi

**Client**

Greens

**Credits**

Crédits

Cheek Mitsui

Light London

Redevelopment

partner

Shinkope

Architect

Fletcher

Priest

Principarl contractor

Mace

Structural and

building services

engineer

Waterman

Cost consultant

Akin

**Ground floor plan**

Office floor

Poster, Square

Office floor

First floor plan

Second floor plan

Roof plan

**A typical office floor awaiting fit-out.**
One of the most spectacular changes to the building is a pair of new roof terraces. To convince the client to adopt them the architect showed it its Brunel Building in Paddington (PIP Nov/Dec 2019). The principle terrace is 200m² on the main roof at the eighth floor. Some plant was moved to the basement to create it and the practice inserted a new platform lift in a glazed box from the seventh floor, because the existing lifts couldn’t be extended. The result, however, is worthwhile, creating an outdoor space for occupants and social events with unmatched views over the dome of St Paul’s. It feels so close you could touch it. A second, south-facing terrace on level six was reclaimed from a cleaning-cràdle storage area.

The project demonstrates the appetite for reuse. Doing it differently would have been reprehensible from a sustainability perspective, although Fletcher Priest has taken the sustainability agenda that bit further. Sixty tonnes of waste wood were diverted from the waste and re-used through Community Wood Recycling, a social enterprise that collects wood waste. This, and sorting waste on site, enabled the project to bring waste generation down to 1.84 tonnes/100m². The building uses intelligent LED lighting and air source heat pump technology to cut the operational carbon footprint of the building by up to 45%.

‘Clients are genuinely interested in carbon now because they have to be,’ explains Fletcher Priest architectural technologist Prakash Varsani. ‘It’s a big part of lettings. Clients don’t want to move into buildings without strong sustainability credentials because these are long leases; they fit them out themselves and have their own narrative and 2030 goals.’

The fact that global investment management firm T Rowe Price pre-let 143,000ft² of the 200,000ft² office space in 2021 before completion, with commodities trader Mitsui Bussan taking 25,300ft² in September 2022, is a testament to this approach.
Jestico + Whiles maintains a healthy respect for Nottingham’s past with its bold new number 1, part of the Island Quarter regeneration project.

Words: Eleanor Young  Photographs: Christopher Terry

The small performance plaza, with a stage and step-free canal access, as well as the café, at 1 Island Quarter start to give the large regeneration site a sense of life.
With 14.5ha of derelict land and a decade of development ahead, where to do you start? At the old Boots manufacturing base in Nottingham, now dubbed the Island Quarter, the plan was for a landmark building at the site entrance with a hotel. But as Jestico + Whiles worked through it with client and landowner Conygar Investment Company, a new project emerged that would bring the city into the area for good food and live events. It is like a meanwhile use on steroids, an activation of the place. It is called number 1. Of course.

Island Quarter, previously Boots Island, has been problematic for the city for many decades. By 1993 Boots was planning how to redevelop its old manufacturing zone but in the end chose to sell instead. It is bordered by big roads – the A60 and A612 – the Nottingham and Beeston Canal and a railway line. There have been plans, of course there have; it is minutes from Nottingham mainline station and it’s just a couple more than that into the dense brick of the Lace Market and then the city centre. But it is not an easy location. Typically, for post industrial land, it had been home to gasholders and even now a gas pipeline runs through it above ground. It has roofless warehouses of bricks from Nottingham Patent Brick Company and lots of buddleia.

Perhaps the most decisive factor in ensuring that number 1 was no larger than 1,782m² was the discovery of a major Victorian sewer running through the masterplan envelope that Jestico + Whiles inherited from masterplanner Leslie Jones. And nobody wanted to risk breaching the 10m exclusion zone of an active sewer. So now there was a smaller structure to be designed, tucked into a corner alongside the canal. These restrictions have actually made for a good building that has a town scale rather than that of a supercharged regeneration area; therein lies much of its charm.

The project’s other special ingredients are the brickwork and canalside location. Here it is impossible to avoid the father of Nottingham’s Victorian architecture, Thomas Chambers Hine. Opposite number 1 is a Virgin Active Gym, its running machines whirring beneath the canopies of Hine’s Nottingham London Road Low Level station. Although that’s rather twiddly for modern tastes, it’s easy to trace the influence of its arches on number 1. You see that again on walking up through the Lace Market to Jestico + Whiles’ calm and generous interpretation of round arches on Hine’s Adams Building. An outsize arch acts as a beacon at the front of the building. Early plans for glazing to mark out the stair tower were scuppered by concerns for overheating, leaving just a ghosted-out shape in brick with a slim stripe of glass that somehow works as a convincing composition. Caged plant at the top level justifies the stair tower’s extra height, giving it a comfortable presence. At low level the arches create a colonnade effect alongside the canal, but keep their elegant length with brick piers reaching down across the plinth to touch the towpath.

This meeting of building and canal has been eased by a widening of the towpath and the removal of a 3m high engineering brick wall that cut the canal off from its surroundings as it leaves the city. Instead, a gentle slope now rises to a protected, sunken gathering space bounded by a bandstand (and a substation, though you wouldn’t notice) and

### IN NUMBERS

- **£9m** total contract cost
- **£5,050** cost per m²
- **1,782m²** restaurant building
- **38 kg** annual CO2/m²

**Design & build**

**Form of contract**

Below Number 1 sits on the city centre corner of the site, with Jestico + Whiles’ ‘blended use’ building to the west. The site extends behind.

**Above**: Sketches by Jestico + Whiles of how number 1 might mark the development while negotiating levels to meet canal and road.

**Right**: Arches give a sense of rhythm and character to the various elements of the building.
Introducing Pietra Kode: the Italian stones of yesteryear recoded by DEKTON for contemporary architecture and design.

James Dilley prefers to think of design as being about experience rather than architecture...
Buildings
Leisure

in hotels. This ‘handshake building’, he says, is intended to do just that, while fronting up the east-west route and sporting a linear park. ‘It is a theatre of arrival to animate the Island Quarter,’ he says.

Conygar is taking that theatre seriously. It acquired the site in 2017 – it is the investment company’s biggest by far, and so far it has retained the bars and restaurants rather than letting them out. Its spokesperson describes it having a ‘long term commitment to the site’, including retaining the student housing that was already under way. That doesn’t seem to have translated into any significant push for high performance sustainable building however. It has a concrete frame – local contractors weren’t up for tendering on a hybrid CLT frame – with air conditioning and the option of natural ventilation in the event space. Carbon wasn’t part of early conversations, although overheating was. And of course there is fossil fuel – Michelin-aspiring cooks still use gas.

In the meantime Conygar and Jestico + Whiles have planning approval for a far larger building next door, where the language of arches will continue around the base with a forum for bars and restaurants; build-to-rent homes and offices will fill the rest of the building. A bid for the Levelling Up Fund to help with bringing the 183m of listed warehouses to life with trees popping out of them and a rooftop tree nursery has been unsuccessful, which is a shame, not least because it would have unlocked a substantial chunk of the site for housing. Huge blocks of student housing are already out of the ground and a bioscience building is also planned, as is an update on the plans from Studio Egret West later in 2023.

I haven’t talked about the interiors or the build, taken on by CPMG as executive architect and Macaulay Sinclair as interior designer. It is clear there were some decisions where cost, supply issues, or perhaps aesthetic confusion took precedence. This means some critical points just miss the mark: the stairs are just on the wrong side of bling, floors and skirting boards are a rather excruciating hotchpotch of terrazzo types, the window frames of the events space are chunkier than they should be, and paving gives no sense of solidity or investment. These types of little details on the first finished building undermine confidence in the long term quality of it and the Island Quarter. But they are also things that Conygar could avoid in future with some simple moves. I hope it does; Nottingham’s Island Quarter is a really significant development for the city. •

Credits
Architect
Jestico + Whiles
Executive architect
CPMG Architects
Interior designer
Macaulay Sinclair
Client
The Conygar Investment Company
Structural engineer
Tier Consult
Civil engineer
BWB Consulting
M&E consultant
Elements
Environmental consultant
Elements
Transport consultant
Axis
Landscape architect
Axis
Acoustic consultant
Elements
Project manager
WES Consultancy
Main contractor
Sir Robert McAlpine

Below: A ribbon window marks the fine dining with event space above, and less formal spaces below.

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One of my great inspirations is the story of Rosa Parks, the African American woman arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger on a bus in 1955, which was the law at the time. She could have taken the easy way out but stood firm, and so looked out for those around her. As the RIBA’s new CEO, I want us to be values-driven – to be more Rosa.

The next few years will be the most exciting in our history. Preparing for that hasn’t been easy, but we are now in good shape. We have a streamlined structure, have appointed a full executive team and bedded in a new constitution – appointing new committees to simplify decision-making. We have established more efficient ways of working, such as our new Contact Centre for members. Several projects to improve our working life and culture are under way.

We are also strengthening our financial position, the strategy for which has included the sale of our commercial arm, NBS, securing money for an endowment to deliver ambitious long-term plans.

These plans include the essential redevelopment of 66 Portland Place, with the intention to make it a fully accessible and inspiring House of Architecture that will bring our teams and members even closer. We have also started to establish the future strategy for our Collections, which are a vital part of what makes us unique. Combined with our ability to drive and promote excellence and our international outlook, we have much to be proud of, and to expect for the future.

‘The next few years will be the most exciting in our history. Preparing for that hasn’t been easy, but we are now in good shape.’
Building or boat? How Wood Wharf got the best of both

Conceived as a place maker for Canary Wharf’s new 3500-home community, Wood Wharf, Glenn Howells Architect’s restaurant and public realm on two floating dock pavilions was a chance to create a contextual response. The architect, engineer Ramboll and client talk through the challenges of realising it.

Words: Jan-Carlos Kucharek   Photographs Hufton + Crow

Ivan Ferris: At first London Borough of Tower Hamlets was dubious about the idea as proposed. The Canal and River Trust was very protective too as it saw the dockside as a heritage asset. Initial discussions were to convince LBTH that the dockside as a heritage asset. Initial discussions were to convince LBTH that the docks are 36m wide here, an inherent part of the wharf, but they can be used, but our idea was bigger than that. The docks are 36m wide here, an inherent part of the wharf, but they can be used, but our idea was bigger than that. The argument was... 

What were your influences and constraints?

Keith Jones: We went with a concrete hull as there were long-term maintenance issues with a steel one – in time it would need to be re-painted and underwater welded. A lot of reinforcement went into the hulls as we had to make them as thin as possible, otherwise they’d be too heavy. It’s made of a concrete cross-rib structure to give the structures stiffness without extra weight. Our marine engineers were concerned with wave motion acting on the boxes – hence the large amount of rebar installed. It was also driven by a client wish to make it solid as a building – if had they been okay with it behaving more like a boat, we could have gone leaner on the concrete. On the hulls navigable sides there’s also a secondary flood compartments dealing with vessel impact – a crash protection zone that can fail and not compromise the hulls themselves.

What’s the function of the bridges?

Keith Jones: They give access to the pavilions but, critically, they hold both concrete hulls in place. We had to consider high and low tide scenarios in addition to any tendency to drift out from the quayside, as well as the impact scenarios – all of which leaned into the design. There were issues plus fire escape concerns – not just from the building but from the public realm pontoons and decks, that all users could safely escape. In addition to the two concrete hulls there are two pontoons and a bridge that connect to them and the bridges need to deal with all these independent movements.

Keith Jones: From an engineering perspective, the high-level connecting bridges are technically at the wrong level. We would want them connecting to the concrete hulls as that’s where we’d get best stability. Any vessel impact forces on the hull would have to be taken by the bridges, so we had to work out how to transfer that without having ugly cross-bracing in the restaurant. Instead it’s hidden on the ‘water’ side of the pontoons, in the kitchen walls.

How do the bridges move?

Keith Jones: We went with a concrete hull as there were long-term maintenance issues with a steel one – in time it would need to be re-painted and underwater welded. A lot of reinforcement went into the hulls as we had to make them as thin as possible, otherwise they’d be too heavy. It’s made of a concrete cross-rib structure to give the structures stiffness without extra weight. Our marine engineers were concerned with wave motion acting on the boxes – hence the large amount of rebar installed. It was also driven by a client wish to make it solid as a building – if had they been okay with it behaving more like a boat, we could have gone leaner on the concrete. On the hulls navigable sides there’s also a secondary flood compartments dealing with vessel impact – a crash protection zone that can fail and not compromise the hulls themselves.

What type of floating box did you go for?

Keith Jones: We went with a concrete hull as there were long-term maintenance issues with a steel one – in time it would need to be re-painted and underwater welded. A lot of reinforcement went into the hulls as we had to make them as thin as possible, otherwise they’d be too heavy. It’s made of a concrete cross-rib structure to give the structures stiffness without extra weight. Our marine engineers were concerned with wave motion acting on the boxes – hence the large amount of rebar installed. It was also driven by a client wish to make it solid as a building – if had they been okay with it behaving more like a boat, we could have gone leaner on the concrete. On the hulls navigable sides there’s also a secondary flood compartments dealing with vessel impact – a crash protection zone that can fail and not compromise the hulls themselves.

What was the engineering challenge?

Keith Jones: Being on the water! With most buildings you’re designing to maximum loads but here it was minimum ones. If we didn’t design the pavilions with enough weight, they’d be too high out the water; but also, they couldn’t sit too low in it. Marine engineers habitually design to a fixed brief for a ship, but here they had to evaluate it at concept stage, when no-one knew what was going inside the pavilions. With a tidal range +/-800mm, the hulls would need to deal with that movement. And being held in place, they had to allow for rotation and lateral sway. One Canary Wharf Group exec needed to be assured that if a pavilion moved, no customers’ wine would be spilled!

How did the idea for a pair of floating pavilions come about?

Ivan Ferris: At first London Borough of Tower Hamlets was dubious about the idea as proposed. The Canal and River Trust was very protective too as it saw the dockside as a heritage asset. Initial discussions were to convince LBTH that the dockside as a heritage asset. Initial discussions were to convince LBTH that the docks are 36m wide here, an inherent part of the wharf, but they can be used, but our idea was bigger than that. The argument was... 

What's the function of the bridges?

Keith Jones: They give access to the pavilions but, critically, they hold both concrete hulls in place. We had to consider high and low tide scenarios in addition to any tendency to drift out from the quayside, as well as the impact scenarios – all of which leaned into the design. There were issues plus fire escape concerns – not just from the building but from the public realm pontoons and decks, that all users could safely escape. In addition to the two concrete hulls there are two pontoons and a bridge that connect to them and the bridges need to deal with all these independent movements.

Keith Jones: From an engineering perspective, the high-level connecting bridges are technically at the wrong level. We would want them connecting to the concrete hulls as that’s where we’d get best stability. Any vessel impact forces on the hull would have to be taken by the bridges, so we had to work out how to transfer that without having ugly cross-bracing in the restaurant. Instead it’s hidden on the ‘water’ side of the pontoons, in the kitchen walls.

And how are they designed?

Alex Smith: The bridges are designed to deal with all movement up, down and laterally. They must also be able...
to rotate to some extent, which makes it a challenging detail. We used a steel circular hollow section that deals with lateral movement, set in a steel housing that’s padded internally to take any potential twisting action. Each detail was drawn in ‘neutral state’ and high and low tide positions. The tapering configuration at beam ends allows movement of the bridge structures as they rise and fall.

How did you deal with the services? KJ: The bridges perform a function for this too, carrying electric, data – even gas. Naturally, given that the bridges move, this all involves flexible service connections that can deal with tidal movement. Originally, the intent was to hide this within the structural zone of the bridge but as a subcontractor-designed portion, they are on show more than we would have liked. This wasn’t helped by the fact that we had no control over the point at which you connect with service runs under Water St – not least the sewers.

What about the pavilion structures? AS: We wanted to keep upper levels so light as possible as the more weight there is above the water line, the more the structure would be inclined to tip, so above the hull we went with a steel frame, cladding, roofing, timber floorings and plant areas and create homogeneity. Double glazed units run floor to ceiling, giving direct visual links to the water. Tolerances were built into the glazed facades as there’s a degree of torsion in the concrete hulls that we had to allow for.

Steel nibs at the top and bottom of the façade allow for connecting of the lozenge screen system. Their lozenge shape reverts to the idea of the pavilions as product design – the hulls, cladding, even benches all incorporate similar radii. And as you can get up close to this building, we wanted it to be a tactile experience, so there’s no sharp corners or jagged edges but radii everywhere. It feels like a machined object.

How was it all procured? DH: We used Canary Wharf’s contractors to procure it with specialist subcontractors via a construction management contract for the hulls, steel frame, cladding, roofing, timber decking, services and architectural metalwork.

So, is it a boat or a building? DH: It’s of interest to note that Canary Wharf Group wanted ‘building’ quality, not ‘marine’ – but lot of the issues at play here are marine ones. Take any canal in the UK for instance and you can walk along it and not have a safety handrail – which is what we’d have liked here but were precluded from doing. Marine regulations are less stringent than building ones it turns out. We had moving parts – like the bridges – which were all non-standard. Their moving balustrades and walk-overs sliding surfaces, like you might get between train carriages, ended up being evaluated under Building Regulations. With public realm interventions like its wire balustrades (we wanted chains!), we had to carry out risk assessments.

Ultimately, the client could have just moored a restaurant boat there – along with rubbish loos – but it clearly aspired to a higher-quality offering. We thought, for instance, that we’d be installing a hydraulic or scissor lift, but this is a proper traction one that had an engineer dictating how much tolerance – for a moving structure – was needed in the shaft. It really feels like a building!
This autumn the industry will encounter the next milestones along the government’s long road to reforming construction’s safety processes, practices and culture through the Building Safety Act. In October, the second and third of three planned gateways come into operation for higher risk buildings (HRBs), completing a safety approval process, led by the HSE as the new Building Safety Regulator, that extends from planning at Gateway 1 to completion at Gateway 3. In the same month, all dutyholders under the CDM Regulations will see their duties extended with respect to all buildings, with government guidance setting out a requirement for them to be competent and ‘co-ordinate their work and have systems in place to ensure that building work, including design work, complies with government guidance setting out extended with respect to all buildings, unresolved heavy risks within the design that remain so through to the construction stage, which then push you into a place where it’s more difficult to get it right’. Blatchford-Brown was speaking in February at a roundtable discussion focusing on the role of the architect at Gateway 2 – organised by the RIBA in association with Hilti.

The new information requirements prompted many questions from debate participants about how ‘sufficient’ would be interpreted, the level of detail required and the potential for leeway, given that a building may be delivered over years through changing supply chain conditions. Contributors cited examples, including one London council’s expectation that information should include the contractor’s smoke control design. But one architect voiced a different view, saying, ‘Gateway 2 requirements are not dissimilar to a full plans application. These are things that people are not doing that they should have been.’

In response, Blatchford-Brown again contrasted current practice and future framework: ‘Often we see a specification note that says something along the lines of: cavity barriers to meet a particular set of guidance. Is that sufficient? I don’t personally think that it is.’ In future, he continued, architects could be stating ‘where they [cavity barriers] might be, how they might perform with the build-up you’ve specified, that perhaps you have an idea of the manufacturer who’s going to provide them and how they should be installed – backed up with test evidence.’ The debate sponsor Hilti’s representative echoed those words, adding, ‘It is vital that the right product is specified, supported by the right test data and evidence. Ultimately, it’s not about what needs to happen to pass the gateways; it’s about making sure a building is safe.’

Speed the approvals process
With larger projects let on a contract ‘package’ basis, some panel members expressed concern that such an approach could affect both programme and procurement. After clarification from the HSE’s Blatchford-Brown, it was agreed that before lodging an application, principal designers need to initiate early dialogue with the Regulator over approaches to obtaining Building Regulation approvals, including the level of detail to be provided for different aspects of the design. And with the cost of navigating the gateway being charged hourly by the Regulator, Schulz noted pointedly that there is a clear incentive for design teams to provide a high-quality submission to gain approval as quickly and cost-effectively as possible.

The Regulator’s power to halt progress where it deems information is insufficient means, as another participant said: ‘If we get it wrong, there are massive penalties for a project if it doesn’t get approval.’ That raised concerns about whether the new system would lead to the adoption of safer, more well-established solutions and so stifle innovation, particularly around volumetric and timber construction. ‘In terms of bringing new solutions to the industry, there are implications,’ said the manufacturer representative. ‘This could have a really detrimental impact – or be an opportunity to standardise,’ summarized Schulz.

The safety environment is still evolving, with some changes happening rapidly – such as the London mayor’s decision to mandate second staircases for tall residential buildings – with others, including supporting training and documentation, gradually coming into place. But already contributors to the debate’s see potential advantages. ‘I think it will have a profound change in the way buildings are procured,’ said one, because under design and build the design is crystallised in a just-in-time process – to save time but also to get best value from the trade packages. As an architect, I like the idea of having the design totally crystallised.’ Another added, ‘It’s an opportunity to tackle the deep challenges we’re dealing with – the climate crisis and safety equity – to make a difference for people.’ The event ended on a positive note and with a call to arms from one architect: ‘It’s an opportunity we’ve got to take. It’s only going to happen if we roll our sleeves up.’

DEBATE PARTICIPANTS
Judith Schulz  chair and director, Arup
Colin Blatchford-Brown  operational policy lead for gateways and building control, HSE
Paul Buxey  fire safety expert advisory group, RIBA, and technical design: CDM/fire/access lead, Alfred Holland Monograph Morris Architects
Rhajde Bak  northern European head of engineering marketing and engineering design team, Hilti
Sarah Saxson  associate director development consultancy, PRP
Nevi Lekky  technical director, Berkeley Group
Craig Renton  partner, quality and safety, Pollard Thomas Edwards
Nigel Ollins  partner, project delivery lead, Hawkins
design
John Gray  partner and head of design delivery, HTA Design
Séine de Gale  national council member, honorary treasurer and board trustee, RIBA, and chief executive and chartered architect, Séine de Gale Architects

Hilti is on hand to help specialists through the complexities of passive fire protection. hilti.co.uk

with the best ways to fulfil its demands
Big challenges confront British architectural practice today. As a result of Brexit, Russia’s war on Ukraine and the after-effects of the global Covid-19 pandemic, we are facing economic and supply chain issues beyond our control. Closer to home, the Building Safety Act, reactions to the global climate crisis and the recommendations of the Hackitt Review seem likely to cause overhauls to competence, architectural education, the ARB’s powers, construction information delivery and even professional indemnity insurance cover. It would be easy to become overwhelmed, or to feel the moment is somehow unprecedented, or beyond our control or ability to cope.

Over the last three years Paul Crosby and I have researched and written Architect: The evolving story of a profession, on the evolution of architectural practice and education over the last 3,000 years. While there is no doubt that the contemporary British profession faces significant challenges, very few of them have not faced architects before. We don’t even need to look that far back to find them.

Recent models of evolution
Architects weathered economic storms, labour shortages and supply chain issues just as challenging as now, if not more so, following the Second World War. A stable, self-confident architectural profession.

Above AHMM’s studio in the White Collar Factory, east London.

Has architecture’s scope narrowed too far?

How can the profession deal with today’s challenges? Eleanor Jolliffe argues for a widening of the definition of architecture as she takes the long view.
War. This catalysed some innovative building forms, materials and what some refer to as a ‘golden age’ for British architecture. The recessions and forced privatisations of the early 1990s compelled the profession to re-think its reliance on public sector jobs and led to the formation of the firms that have seen significant global success for British architecture. Moreover, while climate challenges and legislative changes will complicate life, previous legislative overhauls or shifts in understanding of context and climate have resulted in technological breakthroughs and provided the impetus needed to persuade a slightly conservative construction industry to adjust its course. In all the ‘adapt or die’ challenges the profession has faced over the centuries it has adjusted and survived.

Architects have always been a necessary, even vital, part of society; from the very first moments of humans seeking shelter there have been people who ‘designed’ that structure and guided its construction. There is no reason why architects should be any less vital in the future, although our own definition of ourselves may need to relax a little. Across the centuries, architects have found their greatest successes through embracing the role of a polymath professional that engages with a plethora of engineering and aesthetic disciplines. Architects in the past did design grand palaces, funerary monuments, cultural and civic buildings and grand boulevards. However, they also helped with the proper siting and layout of military encampments, guided discussions on watercourses and infrastructure, embraced engineering challenges as a crucial part of aesthetic design, contributed to military siege engines, engaged in debates on philosophy and aesthetics, played key roles in construction logistics and project management, and designed gardens, cities and even costumes for royal masques and plays. It was not until the 1800s (in Britain) that we sought to define what an architect was, or to separate them from the myriad overlapping and related disciplines that lend so much richness to design, and to the profession as a whole.

A narrow definition? What we today consider constitutes an architect would in the past have been seen as a crucial part of the role, but not its full breadth. The narrowness of the modern profession would have seemed odd to our forebears; for example, the notion that an architect could be considered fully educated with only a cursory understanding of the basics of structural or building related engineering would have seemed nonsensical. Professional architects understood their materials, how a building went together, how it worked and what might cause it to fail.
The main difference between the architects of the past and those of today is in diversity. Not necessarily in terms of gender, sexual preference or ethnic background – though in the past this form of diversity was certainly lacking. The key difference between now and the more distant past lies in the variety of social and educational backgrounds of architects, and a significant reduction in types and scope of practice.

A different sort of education?
Reaching back into antiquity there are records of freed slaves becoming architects. Through the Middle Ages any man could be apprenticed to a master mason, and even into the 1800s papillage gave those from poorer backgrounds a route into architecture (though with varied results, as satirised by Charles Dickens in Martin Chuzzlewit). It was not until the late 1950s that the profession required a university education. Until then it was open to those with more vocational skills whose highest qualifications were O Levels (equivalent to today’s GCSEs). It is not an easily answered question perhaps, but must an architect always need to be educated to postgraduate level? Could a more diverse profession contain a general practitioner with further specialisations, as medicine and law do?

Re-embrace the building crafts
Before the 1800s architects had a broader skill set, came from a broader range of backgrounds, had more diverse educational backgrounds and combined their architectural practice with expertise in a wide range of related disciplines. Most did small scale engineering, worked in measuring or were in some way connected with construction. Even noted names such as Robert Adam held building patents, co-owned building materials companies and dabbled in surveying and other related work in order to regularise their income. Could a more resilient contemporary profession re-embrace the building crafts as a vital collaborator, reforming recent decades of often adversarial relations? Could such a profession heal the artificial fracture between architects and architectural technicians perhaps?

Perhaps a more stable, self-confident architectural profession may not choose to answer the question: architecture – profession or art? It may simply decide both forms of practice are valid, that there is space for both within a modern profession. It may be that in true diversity we find the next step in our evolution.
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In the context of its 2030 Climate Challenge, the RIBA has launched a Passivhaus Overlay to the Plan of Work to make it easier for architects and clients to raise their sustainability game. The initiative, in partnership with the Passivhaus Trust, will help project teams to make informed design decisions at the right time to reach Passivhaus standards.

According to author, architect and certified Passivhaus designer Mark Siddall, the Overlay provides a useful starting point for any project team aiming to boost sustainability and work towards the Passivhaus standard.

The document gives valuable insights into the actions, considerations and processes relevant at each RIBA Stage, outlining the sequences and workflows that successful Passivhaus projects follow. It is not intended to be a standalone guide to achieving the Passivhaus standard, rather providing clarity on the order of effective decision making and design exercises to achieve streamlined certification. Additional guidance and resources are signposted in the document.

Key pillars of Passivhaus design
The Overlay was informed by the findings of a survey carried out with the RIBA North East Sustainable Futures Forum. This showed that Passivhaus designers perform certain duties and design activities at an earlier stage than conventional design approaches. Key considerations consistently brought forward are: energy use, thermal comfort, summer comfort (avoiding overheating), air tightness and addressing thermal bridges, which form the key pillars of Passivhaus design.

“We found that practices designing to the Passivhaus standard have been developing their own overlays over the years,” says Siddall. ‘With the standard now being applied to larger building types of increasing complexity, it seemed the right time to bring all this practical experience together in one place.’

‘The emphasis is on making design changes early and getting genuine value engineering techniques in place that support the delivery of cost effective Passivhaus buildings. The earlier you make decisions that explore the implications of designing to the Passivhaus standard the more opportunity there is to deliver the project cost effectively.’

Using early modelling
Passivhaus designers employ prototyping and options analysis, often using the Passivhaus Planning Package (PHPP) before an architectural design has been developed, to deepen their understanding of site and project specific parameters.

Below: Passivhaus student accommodation designed by PHPP for Lucy Cavendish College, University of Cambridge. The Passivhaus Overlay provides clarity on the order of effective decision making and design exercises to achieve streamlined certification.
This early modelling gives each building type and site an optimal range of useful design metrics, such as form factor, glazing ratio and ventilation rate. Unlike traditional practices, these procedures take place over RIBA stages 1 and 2.

The Passivhaus Overlay itself is broken down into three workflows across the RIBA work stages: Delivery strategy, Core quality assurance tasks and Procurement tasks.

In parallel with the Overlay a separate roles and responsibilities matrix indicates who should be doing what and when at each RIBA work stage. This is useful for all members of the design team and will help clients to understand where their own decision making is needed.

Siddall says both the Overlay and its matrix will work for all procurement options, just as the Plan of Work does, and will work at all scales, for all building types, as well as for retrofits targeting the Passivhaus EnerPHit standard.

Reduced embodied carbon
The Overlay also presents opportunities for designers to reduce embodied carbon alongside the usual Passivhaus focus on operational energy.

While the Passivhaus standard does not talk specifically about embodied carbon, Siddall adds that good Passivhaus strategies are sympathetic to reducing it. For example, getting a building’s form factor right—which usually means simplifying the shape to reduce heat loss, avoid thermal bridging, improve airtightness and support buildability—will also reduce surface area and so reduce the amount of materials needed even before any discussions have taken place about which materials to use.

And although the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge is an as-built standard and a Passivhaus design standard, Siddall says there is a lot of congruity between them.

The monitoring of over 2000 Passivhaus dwellings shows that they achieve and maintain their design targets, and suffer no ‘performance gap’. So designing to the Passivhaus standard offers a credible route towards providing the as-built performance required by the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge. As a case in point, Siddall has demonstrated that Passivhaus newbuild and retrofit projects (EnerPHit) that he has worked on satisfy its requirements.

For instance, after showing that Siddall’s Shepherds Barn, the North East’s first certified Passivhaus retrofit which reached EnerPHit Plus, achieved a 30% improvement on RIBA 2030 in-use operational energy and embodied carbon targets, the project went on to win RIBA North East Building of the Year 2022, and the 2022 RIBA Sustainability Award. The forward thinking client gained recognition by receiving the RIBA Client of the Year 2022 award.

Siddall reports similar results for Larch Corner Passivhaus, believed to be the UK’s most airtight building. ‘The beauty of the Passivhaus standard is that it has been shown to close performance gaps,’ he says. ‘If you are designing to the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge and you don’t want embarrassing performance gaps, then you want really to be designing to the Passivhaus standard.’

He concludes: ‘The Passivhaus Overlay to the RIBA Plan of Work helps clients and project teams make informed, intelligent decisions and a positive impact. In essence it takes something that has been implicit in the design process for Passivhaus buildings and makes it explicit so that anyone can use and adopt it.’

The Passivhaus Overlay to the Plan of Work is available on architecture.com
3: Culture

Antioch, founded in 300BC on the Orontes River in modern Turkey’s south east edge, was a major trading post of the Roman and Byzantine empires, drawing over time a diverse ethnic and religious population that created a rich local culture. But in 526AD an earthquake destroyed the city, claiming tens of thousands of lives.

History repeated itself on 6 February, when a magnitude 7.8 earthquake in Gaziantep province 100 miles north east rocked Antakya again; nine hours later another of 7.7 magnitude reduced large parts of the city to rubble. More than 50,000 lives have been lost to date in an area spanning Syria and Turkey. Hundreds of thousands of people are homeless and 54,000 buildings destroyed.

Murat Germen, a Sabancı University professor and architectural photographer, made the difficult journey to document the disaster. Despite jaw-dropping levels of loss, he was struck profoundly by the support and camaraderie apparent everywhere. In the vacuum of help, people self-organised. Basement banqueting halls became safe havens for the displaced, community groups were there with food, others came with medical supplies – all while shattered survivors shared their grief.

Kurtulus St, a major thoroughfare of the old and modern city, follows the line of a Roman Road. Once, it may have linked the Gate of the Cherubim, set into Emperor Tiberius’ city wall, with the Habib-i Neccar Mosque to the north. The gate is lost to history; the street, along with its ancient mosque, has, for now, joined it.

Jan-Carlos Kucharek
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 real-life projects or to explore ideas and experiences. Fully qualified and working in practice, either for architectural education or who are submitting the best and most exciting submissions from those at any stage of their career, 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 architectural collections in the world.

Last year’s student winner was the Bartlett School’s Mengqiao Zhang, who translated the architectural space of George Orwell’s 1984 into cartography, tipis as a future urban form and how sublime oil paintings of assisted living housing that winning practitioner was architect Alan Power with a surreal and compelling narrative that was architecturally of the highest order.

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:

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For more details go to ribaj.com/eyeline

**EYELINE 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 redact 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 author(s) of the work.**
- **Name of organization where author works or studies.**
- **Email, postal address and phone number.**
- **Dimensions of the original work as presented, in mm.**
- **Date it was completed.**

**KEY DATES**

- **Deadline:** Tuesday 9 May 2023
- **Judging:** End May 2023
- **Winners and communications announced:** July/August 2023, issue of RIBA and online.

**Correspondence:** eyeline@ribaj.org

For more details go to ribaj.com/eyeline

Above Eye Line 2022 Practitioner winner Alan Power’s ‘Interior: Early morning’ Oil on canvas, 610 x 508mm

**2023 JUDGES**

*Rana Begum RA* 
Artist

*Jas Feneie* 
Curator and editor

*Alan Power* 
Architect and Eye Line 2022 practitioner winner

*Hannes Shikh* 
Architect and producer

*Jae-Carlo Recknalek* 
Deputy editor, RIBA Journal

**Fossil fuel slow to slip into history**

Buildings are adapting to energy needs in climate crisis, but where’s the urgency, asks Eleanor Young

A growing number of buildings are being completed without gas supply. Those I have visited are the advance guard, with engineers and architects who have read the writing on the wall for fossil fuel. They have switched to the electricity grid and its good proportion of renewable energy.

The German government recently announced draft legislation to ban gas or oil heating in all new and refurbished buildings by 2024, according to Bloomberg. And in 2019 the UK government had its own stab at a similar announcement. ‘We will introduce a Future Homes Standard,’ said Philip Hammond, then chancellor of the exchequer, ‘mandating the end of fossil fuel heating systems in all new houses from 2023.’

It is not yet in regulations. You may remember the consultation for the Future Homes Standard and particularly its foundation, Part L of the Building Regulations, two years ago – many, many of you responded. We still await the standard and revised regulations, anticipated later this spring.

If it wasn’t for the climate emergency the glacial pace would be a relief; it feels like the rules are changing so fast that it’s hard to keep up.

Who has even got their head around ventilation and net zero? We should be discussing Document O, or worked out that merely a couple of flat refurbns on a tall building may get your insurers jittery and need to go through an extra planning process for scrutiny by the Building Safety Regulator?

With the extreme weather events we are already seeing in the UK, architecture and construction are going to have to adapt rapidly over the next few years, even if legislation – and sometimes technology – lags behind. So we see LET’s new guide unpicking comparisons between new build and refurbishment, continuing its method of essentially crowd-sourcing knowledge from the industry. And beyond that are the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge and ongoing work to define net zero carbon for UK construction by the RIBA and others.

It is hard to say how a ban on fossil fuel heating might come through – there are proposals to add hydrogen to the pipes with natural gas to reduce its carbon intensity – and heat pumps, the obvious successors, are still clumsy, clunky and pricey, at least at a domestic scale (now there’s an example of a technology lagging behind).

What is not in doubt is that these adaptations and mitigations are already changing the form of buildings, just as natural ventilation did through the early 2000s. Designing creatively with heat pumps as an alternative to gas could produce new tropes, as we can see emerging at Niall McLaughlin’s Saltmarsh House. In the meantime, form factor and how to avoid giving too much energy away through extraneous surface area have reasserted themselves as fundamental design principles. And as solutions are found in deep reveals, Part O looks set to be as influential to our streets as the window tax.

**Culture Leader**

*Pamela BuXTon dips into Lightroom’s inaugural show* [ri baj.com/hockney]

*Above* Pamela BuXTon dips into Lightroom’s inaugural show

The overwhelming impression is an exhilarating dive into Hockney’s work with the artist as our guide

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You will have seen a flurry of announcements in the press of projects shortlisted for RIBA 2023 UK Regional Awards. As always, their variety and quality is extraordinary. Awards are important as they promote the value of architecture to the public (the client of the future) and celebrate and share exemplary design at all scales. Making good architecture is tough so celebration is important.

Awards also open the door to new practices and models of working and making. So I am very pleased to announce that the Stephen Lawrence Prize, set up in memory of the young aspiring architect who was shockingly murdered, is being restructured. From this, its 25th year, the prize will be awarded to a project led by an early career architect. I am sure you will agree this is an appropriate celebration of youth, ambition, hard work and talent. Shortlisted architects will be selected from winners of the UK RIBA Regional Awards, and the winner will be announced at the Stirling Prize ceremony in October.

To win an award projects must be proven to work well in practice, to be making serious headway in embodied and operational carbon and to be seen by the jury at least to offer something close to delight! They are a celebration of what is good in architecture in the broadest sense. Good luck to all shortlisted practices and clients.

On the professional practice front we can celebrate the recent signing by the UK’s ARB and the USA’s National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) of a game-changing Mutual Recognition Agreement for architecture qualifications. Over recent weeks, I’ve thought quite a bit about the significance of this landmark agreement and the weight it carries for both countries, which have played crucial roles as architectural powerhouses on the world stage. In addition to the far-reaching benefits of the agreement for architects on both sides of the Atlantic, it carries a personal significance for me. Having offices in both London and Oklahoma City has shown me the innumerable opportunities for knowledge sharing and mutual expertise between the UK and the US. As well as the movement of talented people, I cannot stress enough the importance of co-operation between the UK and the EU/US to open doors for architects overseas while boosting trade in services.

While helping open up new export markets for UK architects, this agreement also lays the foundation for the next steps as architects navigate a post-Brexit landscape. The impact of the decision to leave the EU has reverberated through our profession and the higher education sector. As practices look to recruit and retain a diverse talent pool, it’s imperative that new models of education facilitate an inclusive profession.

It is on this basis that I recently voiced my concern that the ARB consultation on educational models leading to registration will negatively affect the vital new affordable models that we have been supporting; models that seek to speed up and open access to our profession. At this key moment in the development of architectural education, we must work hard to ensure that new models can come forward alongside proven existing ones. We will be publishing our initial thoughts in response to the ARB proposals and urge you to review and respond.

Events flourish at number 66

With spring under way, 66 Portland Place is awash with exhibitions featuring busts by artist Celia Scott, the writings of Robert Musil, the revered photographic work of Monica Pidgeon, and Long Life, Low Energy, a look at the circular economy.
Global issues in your local urban room

Newcastle’s Farrell Centre, an enaction of Terry Farrell’s theories of city-making, uses its first show to address the climate emergency, explains director Owen Hopkins.

There is surely no more exhilarating arrival into any British city than approaching Newcastle by train from the south. After trundling through Gateshead, one suddenly emerges high above the Tyne looking out over a dramatic cascade of bridges. Just visible, peering out high above the city, is the Geordie Cathedral, otherwise known as St James’ Park football stadium.

Newcastle’s – or rather Tyneside’s – urbanism is defined by its stark, at times arresting contrasts: the way the railway punches its way through the city, 19th century industrial buildings next to 21st century icons; the elegant neoclassical city of John Dobson et al abutted by the modernist visions of T Dan Smith, the charismatic impresario who transformed the city in the 1960s and early ‘70s.

Smith, it’s fair to say, remains a highly controversial figure, with his legacy forever tainted by his fall and eventual imprisonment for corruption. Yet he, more than anyone else, is responsible for the Newcastle of today. And as one walks round the city and sees what he realised – from the US-style central motorway, and numerous modern housing estates, to his crowning achievement, the Civic Centre – the energy, ambition and sheer radical zeal that drove his project to reimagine Newcastle as a great city-state of the north is still palpable.

T Dan Smith was riding high when Terry Farrell, Britain’s most important architect-planner of the last 40 years, was growing up in Newcastle. It’s fair to say that Farrell’s approach to city-making, manifest in projects around the world, as well as his home city where he led the project to reimagine Newcastle as a great city-state, is almost diametrically opposed to Smith’s. Yet the shared a fundamental belief that cities are more than just bricks and mortar, steel and concrete, but are central to defining who we are – and who we want to be – as individuals and as society.

In contrast to Smith’s top-down, paternalistic approach, Farrell sees this as meaning that everyone should have a voice in the conversation about a city’s future. This simple yet quietly radical contention is the starting point for the Farrell Centre – a new public forum for architecture and cities, established by Newcastle University, which opens on 22 April. Combining a gallery, research hub and community space, the Farrell Centre aims to be a new type of public institution, a place where ideas are generated, tested and debated, and where everyone – from professionals to school kids – has a seat at the table.

Farrell has been the instigator of the project that bears his name in several ways. In 2018 he gave his practice archive to the university as a resource for research and engaging the public in architecture and planning. At the same time he pledged £1 million towards the refurbishment and transformation of a four-storey Victorian building on the edge of the university campus into an ‘urban room’ for Newcastle and Tyneside.

This followed the recommendation he had made in the Farrell Review, a report commissioned by the government into the UK’s built environment published in 2014, that every city should have an ‘urban room’ where local people can go to learn about the past, present and future of where they live. And following that model, a key part of the Farrell Centre will be a rolling programme of public talks, meetings, roundtables, workshops for schools, families and young people all geared to encouraging participation in the debate about what kind of city we want to live in.

Cities, of course, have never existed in isolation. Local situations are felt (and often repeated) regionally, nationally and globally – and vice versa. And this no more true than with the climate emergency and the seismic changes it imposes on how we live and understand our place in the world.

This provides the focus for the centre’s inaugural exhibition – More with Less: Reimagining Architecture for a Changing World – for which we have commissioned four architects to create installations that explore how we can dramatically reduce the built environment’s carbon footprint, but without compromising architecture’s potential to bring about social, cultural, and technological transformation.

At the heart of the show is the belief that while architecture and planning have often been part of the problem – the built environment is, after all, a significant contributor to global carbon emissions – they must be also part of the solution. And for the Farrell Centre as a whole, we are driven by the conviction that architecture and planning can offer the tools to help us not only navigate an ever more complex and fragmented world, but perhaps set it on another course.

As for Newcastle, it’s easy to be critical of the hubris – and at times excess – of T Dan Smith and that era. And for sure, the challenges we face today require fundamentally different approaches. Yet for all that, at this critical moment it’s vital we recapture that moment’s radical, transformative spirit and harness it now in creating more open, more inclusive and more sustainable cities. The Farrell Centre’s mission is to help make that happen.
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A need to know

The architectural historian, journalist, curator and broadcaster Gavin Stamp (1948-2017) had an intense passion for architecture that was entirely seductive. Now, a small exhibition of objects from his archive waits to seduce us all over again. Watched over by his portrait, by Glynn Boyd Harte, in the drawing room of the Paul Mellon Centre, it charts his work as a scholar of 19th and 20th century architecture, expanding and challenging the canon, and as a conservation activist battling against uglification for half a century. Above all, Stamp modelled fiercely independent, often hyperbolic forms of criticism – from which current architectural discourse could learn much.

Among the star objects on display from the archive – which was donated by Stamp’s wife Rosemary Hill – is his model of a Victorian train, made while a scholarship boarder at Dulwich College in the late 1960s. He had a passion for Victorian things, and understood the power of thinking in three dimensions. Another, more monumental, model was of the aborted east range of CR Cockerell’s 1836 design for Cambridge University Library, made for an exhibition in 1977 at the Fitzwilliam Museum, The Triumph of the Classical: Cambridge Architecture, 1804-1834. Originally drawn to the Gothic Revival, Stamp developed a profound eye for neo-classicism during his studies at Cambridge, through the influence of its art history world – especially David Watkin. So he was well-placed to understand the achievements of Edwin Lutyens, and Alexander ‘Greek’ Thomson, whose popularity he revived. Indeed, retrieval – of rogues, misfits and those unfairly marginalised – is a key Stampian trope that the exhibition explores.

Another star object is Temples of Power (1979), a lively history of the architecture of electricity, with lithographs by Harte and accompanying letterpress by Stamp. The book launch took place at the National Liberal Club, with another model: an iced cake in the shape of Battersea Power Station, with pink icing approximating brickwork.
and solid marzipan chimneys (reinforced, as Alan Powers recalls, by knitting needles).

The display also contains material from Stamp’s freelance life as a self-taught draughtsman, including three eclectic items from 1973 alone: an altar frontal for St Margaret’s Church, Westminster for Watts & Co; a poster advertising Sunday services at the extravagantly high church St Mary’s, Bourne Street; and a speculative commercial venture, The Architect’s Calendar: Twelve Architectural Phantasies, One for Each Month, drawn in an attenuated Art Nouveau style. Also included is Stamp’s original drawing for the frontispiece of his and John Betjeman’s 1974 campaign pamphlet to save the Arts & Crafts church of Holy Trinity, Sloane Street (now grade I listed), and the elegant catalogue accompanying Silent Cities, his 1977 exhibition of the memorial architecture of World War I.

One display case chronicles the campaign Stamp waged with the Thirties (now Twentieth Century) Society to save Giles Gilbert Scott’s iconic telephone kiosks for the nation. Telecommunications ephemera abounds in the archive, most amusingly a letter from Stamp to John Nathan-Turner, the Doctor Who producer, enquiring about the history of the police box. While his portrait’s Young Fogey attire may signal lofty exclusion, Stamp’s architectural history was ultimately one of inclusion, accountability and, above all, reach. The latter was enabled especially by his limpid, telegraphic and accessible prose, his terrific concentration and his feel for buildings.

When leaving the drawing room, visitors will find two posters in the lobby advertising lectures by the sculptor Sandy Stoddart at the Mackintosh School of Architecture (arranged by Stamp, where he taught between 1990 and 2003). Testament to Stamp’s (and Stoddart’s) humour, one was ‘An illustrated RANT’ while the other addressed the problem: ‘Why do sculptures have small penises?’

Joshua Mardell is an architectural historian at the Royal College of Art.
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Visit our online store, or stop by the bookshop at RIBA, 66 Portland Place, London and buy one of our new releases. Featuring Drawing Attention, Architect: The evolving story of a profession, Collective Action or The Access Audit Handbook.

Future winners

Welcome to our annual series on up-and-coming practices. Some of the five firms that follow are already award winners. Ones to watch, they are a dynamic group of practices, all less than 10 years old, from across the UK, with different stories, fascinations and ways of finding their groove in architecture.
Thinking big

With the knowledge to create sophisticated designs, Minesh Patel Architects’ next task is to find the scale that makes the most of it, while becoming a role model practice for diversity, says Isabelle Priest.

old Typhoo Tea building along the street from the terrace of houses. There’s an area masterplan too.

I started Minesh Patel Architects in October 2019,’ he says. ‘I’d always had it in mind, and it was now or never – give it a go. I’d moved back home so I didn’t have rent, mortgage or responsibilities.’ Patel will be 35 this year. The practice doesn’t have a huge portfolio of completed works, but beautiful flat evocative drawings on its website show a level of design intent acquired through previous experience. Patel studied for Parts 1, 2 and 3 at the University of Nottingham and spent years out at Glenn Howells Architects working on the Paradise and Exchange Square masterplans, 2 Chamberlain Square, Arena Central and Southampton Arts Complex. Eight months after qualifying, he went to work for three years at O’Donnell + Tuomey as a project architect on the University College Cork (UCC) Student Hub – a restoration and five-storey extension with ground floor market hall events and exhibition space. It has all that firm’s classic attributes including brick floors and exposed concrete, which is why he went – ‘to learn how to do concrete’.

For the first 12-18 months the practice entered competitions and registered with directories, including the Yellow Pages. That’s how it got its first couple of projects – mid-pandemic when families were looking to extend their homes. Then word started spreading, also via social media.

‘I had never worked on residential projects; it can feel like starting all over again with small domestic schemes,’ he explains. ‘But because UCC was a restoration, the detailing and construction were similar. It’s enjoyable working with clients, but I don’t know if Birmingham has a market for such architecture. To achieve the level of finish that makes it worthwhile as a practice, you’d need to spend more money than your house was worth.’

There’s a row of locally listed Victorian terraced houses near HS2’s Digbeth station in Birmingham – charming buildings that have seen better days. Minesh Patel Architects has just been appointed to bring one of them back to life – its own office, in a converted red brick two-storey warehouse by a soot-covered railway arch, backs onto its garden.

‘It’s a good time to be in Birmingham,’ says studio director Patel. ‘There’s a lot of development and exciting projects.’ Patel grew up in the city and saw a gap in the market for a small practice. Lately, Digbeth has blossomed from an industrial area into Birmingham’s creative district, full of breweries, start-ups and studios. BBC Midlands announced last August that it will move into the old Typhoo Tea building along the street from the terrace of houses. There’s an area masterplan too.

Above Director Minesh Patel outside his office in Digbeth, Birmingham.

Below Design proposal exterior and interior for Ulverley Green Road, Solihull, home rear and side extension.

This can mean clients come and go, even if, as at Ulverley Green Road, designs can be pared back. Another avenue of work has been feasibility studies for small local developers. North Street in Walsall, an elegant proposal for 18 flats, is one such scheme, and a proposal for housing on the cusp of the greenbelt near St Albans in a rural and residential context. The design has features of both – timber cladding, flint plinths and tin roofs that reference local barns. The issue is that when they get to pre-application advice stage the projects require more consultation that the clients aren’t prepared for.

Yet the practice has around four domestic projects ticking over at any one time. One scheme for a newsagent in Wolverhampton goes to tender and on site soon. The budget was ‘bare minimum’, so the resolve was to make the most of proportions, colour, tones and textures through simple material choices of brick, render and tiles.

Patel’s ambition is to grow and work on larger projects like those he’s worked on elsewhere.

Two years in, the practice started getting noticed in ways that are propelling it forward. In 2021, Haworth Tompkins approached it as a local architect to join a team bid for one of the plots on the 14ha Smithfield development – a huge flat concreted site adjacent to Digbeth and the...
Bullring. Working collaboratively on facade designs that reference the local context took most of the practice’s time in the past year. That’s why Patel brought Part 1 colleague Patrick Allan on board – who he found on LinkedIn. It’s good for the practice, but a shame small local firms can’t be involved at Smithfield without being invited as collaborators by London studios.

At the end of the interview Patel adds: ‘One other reason why I started a practice was to promote diversity as there is a lack of it in the profession, with few role models. It’s also why I named the practice after myself. It’s good for people from minority backgrounds to see successful and good quality architecture practices in the media. I felt I was in a good position to build on that… people with more diverse backgrounds are put off culturally at university and before. If you are from a working class or immigrant background, there’s no family or friends network that can provide support through project work.’

‘Eighty to ninety percent of the practice’s enquiries from people/organisations with minority backgrounds,’ he explains – a statistic that should be the opposite way round even in the relatively diverse West Midlands. ‘We’re missing out on a huge chunk of potential opportunities. It isn’t talked about, but it’s the reality.’

This begs the question of what holds back a more proportionate balance of enquiries. The only silver lining might be that the practice is more approachable to some clients than other firms, enabling architecture to reach wider audiences than it might otherwise. But it’s no consolation. How can Patel rebalance the mix? Hopes rest on growing and getting work with larger developers and local authorities that wouldn’t have such biases. That the practice recently won an invited competition for a substantial project for a local charity, is perhaps an element of progress. •
Big value savings
You can do much more with less if you challenge briefs and commit to building well, Sanchez Benton tells Chris Foges

‘Our focus in architecture is twofold’, says Carlos Sanchez, co-founder with Tom Benton of London-based Sanchez Benton. ‘First, on materials and the act of building. And second, on a duty of care to the city. We approach projects from both ends – at 1:1 and at the urban scale’. The commitment to building well, adds Benton, explains the reticence of the practice website, which offers only snippets of news and glimpses of work in progress. ‘We decided early on that if we were confident in one thing it was pushing construction quite hard in unusual ways, so we’d limit publication of renders and wait to be judged on the work’.

That confidence came from a shared background with a strong grounding in the poetics and pragmatics of making buildings. The pair, now in their late 30s, met in the office of the late Jonathan Woolf, and reconvened at 6a Architects where they delivered a Stirling Prize-shortlisted studio for photographer Juergen Teller. Their own office was established in 2017 and grew quite quickly; it’s now 13-strong. ‘A practice works best when you can all have lunch together,’ says Sanchez. ‘And a team of this size could build anything’. The studio, in a small industrial building in Clerkenwell, has the air of a workshop. Shelves lining the walls are packed with models and bits of timber, brick and tile. More samples are scattered across the two large tables around which the whole team sits. ‘There’s always materials testing going on’, says Sanchez. ‘It gets messy’.

That inquisitive attitude has benefits beyond professional satisfaction and buildings that are a pleasure to experience, suggest the architects. Retaining control over the way buildings are made gives influence beyond the project itself. ‘You can vote with your specification’, says Sanchez. ‘Our push to use bio-based materials like hemp is about reducing carbon but also intrinsically about supporting the development of local industries.’ And in the practice’s early projects – domestic renovations, galleries and public work – it was vital in creating architectural opportunity within stringent financial constraints.

‘If you can take time you can do a lot for a little,’ says Benton. ‘We can be quite cunning, moving quickly on some things to concentrate on others’. And in every project, says Sanchez, the architects aim to work out early which parameters are fixed, and which might be challenged to create potential.

‘Confidence came from a strong grounding in the poetics and pragmatics of making buildings’

That’s evident at Peveril Gardens, an RIBA Award winner in 2022. Southwark Council had initiated a public art competition, anticipating new installations in a gritty area around the Old Kent Road. Sanchez Benton proposed that it would be better to improve something already there – a redundant 1960s parking structure next to the busy Bricklayers Arms roundabout. A first-floor terrace has become a landscaped public garden, dotted with exotic plants. Necessary repairs provided the opportunity for a visual flourish: lined in zesty orange waterproofing paint, the walled garden is a vivid oasis of colour. The first-floor terrace has become a landscaped public garden, dotted with exotic plants. Necessary repairs provided the opportunity for a visual flourish: lined in zesty orange waterproofing paint, the walled garden is a vivid oasis of colour. In the undercroft, artists’ studios are enclosed by custom-made glass and timber screens.

‘As a practice, it would be easier just to worry about the general look of things, and not to detail so much, taking on extra liabilities,’ says Benton. ‘But by understanding every component and getting directly involved in procurement we can deliver something better than standard systems for the same price.’

Commission likely to offer bigger budgets have started to come in. Will the same value-seeking approach prevail? Yes, they say; they’ll just push clients to be more ambitious. ‘We’re working on a couple of projects now’, says Benton, ‘where we’re trying to build for the very long
Culture
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second-hand brick for its low embodied carbon required patient work with reclamation yards to ensure consistency. ‘Our worst nightmare would be to ship fake London stocks from China’, says Sanchez. ‘You have to draw a line’.

That is not merely rhetoric. After the practice won consent for its first housing scheme, to be built with complex timber transfer structures, the developer got cold feet and insisted on steel and concrete. ‘We decided it wasn’t a building we want to deliver’, says Sanchez. ‘You have limited time as an architect – why spend it on this?’

It was a disappointing result for a practice especially keen to work in housing, but projects on the go are otherwise pleasingly diverse. A three-storey arts complex in Bermondsey has been consented, and a timber-framed community centre in Hackney. Four warehouses are being retrofitted on Passivhaus lines to make flexible studio space. More public realm opportunities should be forthcoming, too, following listing on London’s ADUP3 framework. Though these are a step-up in size and complexity, the architects insist the ethos underpinning projects to date is scalable. ‘We always want to know how the bigger picture is resolved in an architectural proposal at the scale of a room or a piece of furniture’, says Benton. ‘It is hard, mucky work, but we can’t shake the interest in very well-made things’.

term, using structural stone and green oak. And the environmental targets are extremely high.‘Sustainability is a central preoccupation, inextricably linked to concern for construction. One manifestation is a focus on the whole lifecycle of buildings. At Low Line Louie, a temporary café in Southwark, using dry mechanical connections throughout ensures all elements can be reused.

Avoiding the catalogue-shopping approach to specification takes effort, too. A house on site in London’s Borough Market has a frame of ungraded green Douglas fir. ‘It’s a beautiful, sustainable structure for a quarter of the price of any other timber’, says Sanchez. ‘But to use it we had to get someone almost out of retirement to grade it quickly and cheaply’. Likewise, using

Left The Boiler House, a newbuild community centre in Hackney, is designed to be fully demountable.
Right Louie Louie, a meanwhile-use café, is the first phase of Sanchez Benton’s masterplan to turn Holyrood Street into a lively stretch of Southwark’s pedestrian-friendly Low Line.

Left House in Borough Market, London. Reclaimed bricks are laid in lime mortar so they can be reused.
Local strength and community connections have seen Harrison Stringfellow working with some big architectural names, propelling this humane practice to greater things, reports Hugh Pearman

I meet Su Stringfellow at a former vehicle repair workshop building in Liverpool’s Baltic Triangle, south of the city centre in the hinterland of the docks. It is to Liverpool what Shoreditch was to London some years ago: a post-industrial district which got colonised by musicians, artists and designers in search of cheap floorspace, later becoming a visitor destination for its performance venues, galleries and bars, now getting rather pricey.

I also meet Mel, Su’s life rather than design partner. He is a builder and joiner. They met years ago at the restoration of Oliver Hill’s Midland Hotel in Morecambe, when Su was project architect with practice Union North. He contributes his skills to most Harrison Stringfellow built projects. In this case he’s in charge of converting the lofty old building into a showroom and admin centre for Utility, supplier of high-end modern furniture.

But Su and Mel keep at arm’s length on this job. He works with another senior architect from the practice, Michael Noon, who is acting as clerk of works on the scheme. There’s an emerging problem with detailing on a welded mezzanine balustrade to the new upper level in the building.

Harrison and I walk over to the central docks area where the practice has been involved in a succession of competitions and projects for National Museums Liverpool.

It’s here that the development of the practice took an interesting turn, because NML competitions attract national and international attention. Harrison Stringfellow’s reputation for community consultation and project enabling in the city means it is increasingly approached to be on competition project teams. It has found itself working variously alongside BIG from Denmark, MICA, and Jayden Ali’s JA Projects with Haworth Tompkins. Its multi-discipline team was eventually beaten by David Adjaye’s to win the NML’s Museum of International Slavery expansion competition, but the connections made are invaluable.

Out of this sprang a solo commission from NML to revive some of the collection of smaller historic buildings in its waterfront campus. It’s an evolving job including a very tiny building, one of engineer Jesse Hartley’s octagonal granite huts for dock workers, in this case watchmen. Originally mooted as a café, it is more likely to become a micro-museum in itself, thinks Harrison.

Other jobs include one-off houses including one in Donegal, the total upgrading and extension of a community centre and town council building in Halesowen, the expansion of a listed Edwardian church for its evangelical congregation, and a long-term community project we later visited: the Sudley House walled garden, much used by schools, next to which the practice is now converting a former playing field changing block into therapy suites.

Stringfellow recounts the issues surrounding a small practice in growth mode. She and her co-founder Sarah Harrison, who first met aged four in the reception class at primary school, have since worked at various stages of this growth including the challenges of being professionals but also mothers, and evolved
a mode of flexible working that stood them in good stead when emerging from the Covid pandemic. But Harrison was knocked back; first by her son being diagnosed with leukaemia in September 2021 – he has subsequently made a full recovery – and then just before last Christmas by her own breast cancer diagnosis, for which she is undergoing treatment. Pending her recovery, she divides her working hours remotely, being based with her family in Rugby. Harrison Stringfellow is looking to expand, and it’s enough of a squeeze in the studio as it is. That studio being a small former shop in a short parade in Penny Lane. Everyone is on display to the street through the shop window, with the only buffer a meeting table. Not surprisingly, a topic of conversation when I called in was where to go next. The practice has made an Airbnb in the rooms above the shop to provide a supplementary source of income, and that sometimes becomes overspill space.

Harrison Stringfellow feels that a studio of 12-15 people would be an acceptable next step. Pandemic notwithstanding, the practice has made an Airbnb in the rooms above the shop to provide a supplementary source of income, and that sometimes becomes overspill space.

The senior figures are Katie Begley, a Passivhaus specialist previously with Cottrell Vermuelen in London – she divides her working hours between the office and her home base in the Lake District – and Mike Noon. He returned to his native Liverpool after working with Moreno Masey in London on high-end residential projects. Then come Jessie St Clair, recently qualified, and Bonnie Jackson, part II assistant. The architecture team is rounded out by part I assistants Jordan Hau and Grace Limani, while office administrator Esmé Mortimore works remotely, being based with her family in Rugby.

HSA is local architect in a competition team including JA Projects and Denmark’s BIG. HSA was local architect in a competition team including JA Projects and Denmark’s BIG.

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Ideas built on solid research

OGU’s interventions in Belfast are often small and temporary, but the practice hopes that their disproportionate impact can change the conversation about the city, says Eleanor Young

Rachel O’Grady and Chris Upson made their move to Belfast before their a competition win for a temporary timber pavilion in the city, Built:East. Upson grew up in County Tyrone; Rachel arrived with new eyes. Married, they are the two founding directors of three-person practice OGU.

In the short time since, they have transformed streets, given Belfast city centre a new indoor public space and improved their adopted city with strategic temporary projects. As projects extend into Derry/Londonderry, OGU has been chosen for the Republic of Ireland’s Tallinn Architecture Biennale pavilion, its pieced-together greenhouse of reclaimed mahogany-framed windows setting off echoes of the reuse fundamental to decades of gardeners before it was reified by architects.

As Paddy, their border/bearded collie cross, enthusiastically makes himself heard O’Grady introduces him as ‘smarter than me’. Which is some claim given her PhD on roots-up heritage projects in north India at London Metropolitan University and her continuing research and teaching at Queen’s University Belfast. As O’Grady was studying Upson had gone from the intense detailing of a theatre and Ironmonger Row Baths, while at Tim Ronalds Architects, to strategic projects with Karakusevic Carson. He had started making his way independently with a group of like-minded architects in Tower Hamlets. OGU operates in a similar way in Belfast, working closely with councils and local stakeholders on low budget interventions and often in collaboration with other practices, in particular MMAS.

This area of work has thrown up questions of what we mean by public space, what we want from it, and what architects might bring to it. This is particularly interesting when highways departments hold sway over much of the public domain, as they do in Belfast.

OGU was onto ‘parklets’ early. Concerned about the impact of Covid and traffic on cafés near the couple’s home it expanded the pavement with greenery and street ‘furniture’. On its self-initiated project the practice brought in Queen’s University, Belfast City Council and the Department for Infrastructure. It used its experience of making and knowledge of Northern Ireland manufacturers, which it had explored with the Built:East Pavilion; cheap repurposed cattle feeders and screens from metal worker contacts gave pedestrians a sense of space. There wasn’t a template for this sort of development, just a lot of joining up, pushing ideas and design. ‘We have a Jack Russell approach; small and ferocious,’ says Upson. ‘And there’s a need for people to implement structures on the ground in Belfast.’

For Upson and O’Grady, demountability seems to be the key to getting change through. Ideas can be tested, their impacts understood and when a change works it can be made permanent – and the kit reused elsewhere. ‘We need to invest in these dynamic, moveable improvements in the city,’
There is a new life to this mixed up old building: a small bar and many seats (drinks purchase not required) that have been taken over by teenagers, a refugee group, mums and students since it opened last year. And critically, in the energy crisis that hit over winter, it is warm and free. The £90,000 design is able to be softer and looser than street interventions, and although the Meanwhile use to reanimate the council-owned building has some way to go, OGU would love to see it opening out to the space behind.

O’Grady’s and Upson’s move from London to Belfast was done with open eyes. They are winning open tenders but often competing with big city practices and even multinationals and they see a race to the bottom on fees. They look at practices in the generations above and wonder quite how they got bigger projects, but OGU’s work with Belfast Harbour on the regeneration of Barrow Square by the docks might be a start. Upson says, ‘Northern Ireland is a tough place to practise… There may be less opportunity in Belfast, but there are lower costs and risks are easier to take.’

‘It gives the clout behind our thinking,’ The fruit of O’Grady’s PhD work talking to locals at the Taj Mahal in Agra might be seen in OGU’s engagement. But it is also tempting to see it in the transformation of the constrained spaces of 2 Royal Avenue, a closed-down Tesco in an old bank building. She talks of heritage beyond the fixed, beyond historic architecture, of wedding structures, and dressing spaces with flowers and lights. The old bank, with its low long ceiling that once extended over supermarket aisles, is broken up with gentle wafts of coloured fabric.
Out there, in every way

Unknown Works takes an energetic, adventurous approach to work. It’s keeping the practice busy across the world, writes Isabelle Priest.

Unknown Works signed the lease for its first studio in February 2020. The vaulted double-height space overlooking Gillett Square in Dalston, east London – with a separate meeting room – was bigger than the team needed so it always planned to let a few desks. But as the globe plunged into Covid lockdown, what’s interesting is what the practice did next. To cover the shortfall in rent, the directors went out to the hotchpotch square to ask if any of the small businesses and organisations there needed help from an architect. Amazingly, it worked. One client that came out of it, the Vortex Jazz Club, moved back into its newly refurbished venue last November; acoustic work had already been done.

This bold move is emblematic of the unfettered intensity with which Unknown Works’ directors go about their work. The three friends – Theo Games Petrohilos, Ben Hayes and Kaowen Ho – met 17 years ago at the Bartlett with the same levels of energy. I know because I was there with them. Each had access in multiple ways to the worlds of architecture before that; family, work experience at top studios. That they run their practice with the same untempered approach to meet, make and build is astonishing, although, Hayes says, it can sometimes be ‘a bit naïve’.

Sat in the meeting room, with lunch on the go among Unknown Works’ seven staff next door, Games Petrohilos explains that they set up together because they wanted to ‘do cool things. It sounds cheesy, but we’re best friends.’ Their second-year unit trip to New York was seminal. They stayed an extra week and were interested in how they ‘reacted in different ways to the same thing’ and vice versa – music, the city, buildings. Games Petrohilos went to do part I at Alsop, Hayes at Foster + Partners, including in Beijing, and Ho also at Foster’s and then in Beijing for Henn Studio B. It was an exciting time in China and Unknown Works still has projects there.

They all returned to the Bartlett for their master’s degrees. Hayes won the RIBA President’s Silver Medal for his final project and between them Games Petrohilos spent six years at Studio Egret West (hence the communal lunch making), Hayes at Niall McLaughlin Architects and in Hong Kong at Rural Urban Framework, and Ho at Haptic, Undercover Architecture and Heatherwick Studio.

‘The nice thing about Heatherwick is that it takes something that could be megalithic and monumentally massive, picks out the lovely little bits like a handrail or a doorknob and goes to town on those,’ says Ho. Similarly, Hayes went from designing at superscale to starting almost with detail at McLaughlin’s.

The aim has always been to make stuff that gets built; they even build things themselves. They have been moonlighting on projects and competitions since their master’s degrees. Their meeting room doubles as a workshop; the saws
and tools pushed to one side now. The moment when the directors realised they were formally becoming a practice was for their 2018 London Design Festival submission (although they had intended it for LFA). The project became Space Gap – a play on ‘wealth gap’. It was a way for them to respond to the housing crisis and high-density development as a design, political and social issue. A spatial diagram demonstrating housing square metres per person became an installation in Olympia with a three-day programme that the directors curated and organised themselves. One half of the money came from the Arts Council and the other through crowdfunding. They spent three months making it happen, including building the pavilion and individually casting its 50 concrete plinths. They folded in as much as possible, as if it was their last shot, although in fact it was the beginning.

They had already done a similar thing for their 2015 submission to the Chicago Architecture Biennale. The team designed an ambitious community kiosk and everything that could happen in it, cold calling businesses there to be involved.

This is the naivety Hayes talks about – putting in so much of themselves. From the sidelines, Unknown Works’ approach could be seen as exhausting, unsustainable even. For some it might well be, but is it for them? The trio have been operating like this for nearly 20 years, so clearly not. It’s about getting lift-off. Their accomplished CVs disguise the reality that twice they graduated during recessions; first in 2009 and then in the 2012/13 double dip. The experience of it being a ‘weird time’ and ‘really hard to get a job’, as Hayes and Games Petrohilos remember along with anyone of these years, is difficult to shake. Working extra hard and hustling are perhaps inevitable.

Unknown Works is ‘a curious non-name’. It’s anonymous and yet it communicates something about not knowing the answers when the firm sets out on a project. Perhaps this extends to how and when it seeks projects, getting them however it can at that moment. One of the practice’s first domestic schemes came through a chance encounter on the street. A man, who turned out to be a famous musician, approached Ho, inquired what he was doing and asked him to redesign his house. The rest has rolled from there – by word of mouth, for people they know from university and school, and introductions.

The personality differences between Ho, Hayes and Games Petrohilos punctuate a scale from outgoing, outspoken and forthcoming to considered, collected and relatively calm. But they are sociable. For example, at Games Petrohilos’ refurbished flat in Kentish Town, an oversized table and crazy number of chairs fills the tight space to entertain as many friends as possible. That musician has become a repeat client. The directors are good at carrying people with them, but the chummyness could be isolating to others.

What of the architecture? You’ve guessed

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Each project is an opportunity to drive a new thread, uncover a new area of design that also pulls the project together. The approach is not predictable and is a clever way to upskill. At Pigment House, a lower ground extension in Dartmouth Park in north London, the practice experimented with coloured concrete and shuttering. CLT House, an overhaul of a 1950s suburban home in Leyton, east London, was Unknown Works’ first full CLT scheme. They chose the material for speed and sustainability, but the team pushed it in every detail, making handmade circular light switches the memorable thing – photographs compel you to demand to know how they work. In-your-face yellow exterior paint adds ‘sunshine’ to the post-war street.

On site now is the Energy Revolution Gallery at the Science Museum in west London. Displays here are being built using reclaimed archive shelving from the museum’s Blythe House storage building. Design time in the office is about transforming one thing into another, pieces of 1:1 prototypes lie about the meeting room/workshop. At Scott’s restaurant in Ho’s home city of Chengdu, China, on the other hand, 3D scanning was the theme, and means to recreate the iconic British chippie. The kitchen became the retail unit space and the architecture becomes an inhabited fold-out GRP facade. Everything is subverted, down to the restaurant serving river rather than saltwater fish because it is 1400km from a coastline. The work at the moment is about pushing limits and learning, produced using a known language of contrasting computerised graphical imagery. Rapidity of ideas and getting in among many streams of work gives Unknown Works its highs. Perhaps you are reading this with a trepidatious feeling of chaos and energy. That’s OK. Great architectural partnerships have come out of groups of best friends. It’s not clear yet what kind of architecture will emerge. For Unknown Works, it will evolve – perhaps magically, into something that’s probably really decided. The creative spark and gutsiness that the directors get from each other, that took them out to Gillett Square, promises to keep watchers on the edge of a dizzying seat. It was difficult, at university, not to think that this is what the route to success in architecture looks like. It still is.
RIBA Academy

Spring highlights

MARCH

Conservation course webinar series
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Develop critical awareness and knowledge of conservation work with this online six-part series.
RIBA Principal Designer Course CDM and the Building Safety Act
21 March to 9 May
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APRIL

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Building Regulations and planning series
2 May and 9 May 1pm to 4pm
Get an overview of the current building and planning regulations.
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4 May 10am to 11am
This session highlights key learning outcomes from this core CPD topic.

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Gentlemanly leader who used art as a key design tool, and who deepened his relationship with buildings by painting prolifically

Roger FitzGerald
1959 – 2022

My father Roger FitzGerald, who has died of pancreatic cancer aged 63, proudly led ADP for two decades, shaping the firm and encouraging colleagues to explore their artistic abilities through their designs. As a husband, dad and friend, he inspired many with his creativity – designing a beautiful house and garden in Kent for my family, and producing distinctive paintings and books.

Among his favourite architectural projects were The Forum – a municipal and academic library in Southend, a masterplan for the University of Sussex, and the conversion of Oxford Castle from a prison to a hotel. In addition to his buildings, he is remembered for his quiet intelligence, wry humour, and kindness.

Roger was in a talented circle at the Manchester School of Architecture. Then, he was content to live in accommodation that did not match his later high standards for a building. His friend Peter Lines, a fellow architect, says Roger’s digs were ‘grishly’, with areas of floor unsafe to stand on, and others reserved for playing cricket.

His joined ADP in 1983 and served for 38 years, 20 as chairman. He helped the firm move to employee-ownership and implemented a rigorous system of design review. Colleagues saw him as a calm, thoughtful and gentlemanly leader.

Peter and others held Roger’s concept sketches in high regard. Despite advances in computer-aided design, he advocated the merit of simple pen drawings – known by others as ‘Roger-o-grams’ – when trying to win over a client. He encouraged ADP staff to develop their own artistic talents by launching an annual charity auction of their work.

His own art deepened his relationship with buildings. He painted prolifically, late at night, with watercolours and later acrylics, which were combined with collage and ink to achieve dynamic, playful compositions. These works were exhibited or used to illustrate four books on the buildings of Britain, London, New York, and Kent. Roger determinedly continued with the last of these during his final weeks in hospital.

His personal qualities helped him to cultivate longstanding relationships. Sometimes he won work by flipping a design brief on its head, as at Riverhead Infants School – a landmark commission where a sweeping roof brings parkland landscape over the top of a built form.

Much of his highest-profile work saw him treading sensitively within a historic context. A visitor centre he designed for the Palace of Westminster is the building’s only significant extension since the 1800s. Roger later recalled an occasion during this project when he was forced to eject then-chancellor Gordon Brown and his team from a pre-booked meeting room in the Palace.

Other contenders for Roger’s top project might have been one of his university buildings, which sit alongside work by Sir Basil Spence in Sussex and Denys Lasdun in Cambridge, but the honour goes to the first on which he took full control, aged 27: an award-winning swimming pool extension for a private house.

Growing up, I took the unconventional features of our home – a circular window, giant murals, chains instead of drainpipes – for granted. Having a designer-dad has affected every aspect of how I see the world, including the value I give to creative expression. Among thousands of inherited beliefs on matters from furniture to fashion, I’ve adopted Roger’s philosophy of packing a car boot ‘architecturally’ – with a rational and orderly placement of items.

He is survived by his wife Lynne, my brother Will, and me. We miss his love and wit every day. – James FitzGerald is a BBC journalist based in London.

IN MEMORIAM

John Hugh Phillips
ELECTED 1981, BELFAST

Anthony Spencer Morgan
ELECTED 1966, LONDON

Kenneth Vivian Robert Lan
ELECTED 1970, BATH/BRISTOL

Colin Maxwell
ELECTED 1962, BELFAST

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The RIBA Journal April 2023
United States of America Pavilion, Île Sainte-Hélène, Montréal, Expo ’67

The US Pavilion was one of the most popular of Expo ’67, enjoyed by over 9 million visitors. The six-level interior, designed by Cambridge Seven Associates, responded to the theme of ‘Creative America’ and displayed a wide range of artefacts, from NASA’s Apollo Lunar Excursion Module to items of popular culture such as Elvis Presley’s guitar. What made the pavilion highly memorable was its exterior, a geodesic dome designed by Buckminster Fuller. This transparent, free-standing structure was a three-quarter sphere of cylindrical steel tubes covered by an acrylic skin which reflected the sun during the day and glowed from the interior at night. While many of the pavilions of Expo ’67 were subsequently dismantled, the US Pavilion was donated to the City of Montréal and used for exhibitions and other cultural activities until 1976, when the acrylic skin was destroyed by a fire. In the 1990s the pavilion was converted into a museum – the Biosphere – promoting the environment and its protection; during the renovation project only the original tubular structure was retained.

Valeria Carullo

An exhibition of Monica Pidgeon’s photographs is now open at the Royal Institute of British Architects.

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