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Asif Khan: pushing the boundaries
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U-value chart

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<th>Extruded (mm)</th>
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Calling for water

When a couple couldn’t find the right site by the sea they decided to bring the water to them. Lyons Architects made it happen

Words: Isabelle Priest  Photographs: James Brittain

The clients of Blackbird, a new build house near Kemble in the Cotswolds, had wanted a house by the sea for their next home. They are a couple, one an artist and the other coming up to retirement. Unable to find a suitable plot by the coast, when a paddock with planning permission came up for sale in a village near to where they lived, they went for it.

That was in 2016 – the year Hamish & Lyons (now Lyons Architects) completed Stepping Stones, a house raised on stilts above a manmade lake in Hurley, near Maidenhead. This was the inspiration the clients of Blackbird needed. Initially they had pursued the home they sought by redesigning a traditional house with planning permission via the council, but this was leading to a bulky building that wasn’t working. They decided to reassess and in 2018 were introduced to Lyons Architects by a mutual contact. The sight of Stepping Stones sparked the idea of making a lake to fulfil their desire to live by water. The lake is approximately 32m in diameter, 2m deep. It is fully lined, so really it’s a pond.

Until you realise the lake is manmade you might think that because of the relationship of Blackbird to the water, the house fully maximises its setting. Knowing it is manmade could make it whimsical – and yet it doesn’t. The site is rectangular. On two sides, including the one running behind the main road through the village, it is bordered by a 15m-deep strip of protected woodland that had to be preserved. Separated by tall trees to the west are other houses, while out the back to the south are fields.

When the clients bought the plot, this view over the gentle valley was closed off by trees. As the lake was created, the excavated soil was shifted to create a topography that accentuates existing level changes and opens the view. This had the added advantage that the house could be built, like Stepping Stones, on steel frame stilts, raising it from the ground to minimise its concrete footings and their embodied carbon. The water also reflects light into the building, has submerged heat pump pipes in it, helps cool the house in summer and blurs the woodland boundaries, drawing the house further into the landscape. As well as the

IN NUMBERS

£1.125m  total contract cost

£5000  cost per m²

223m²  gia

Above Site plan with driveway, lake and house

Below View from the opposite side of the lake showing the steps down from the living space to the pontoon terrace.

The wraparound walkway, covered by the low roof, is partially suspended over the lake.
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Find out more

The living space with the kitchen to the right and full length picture windows to the pond and fields beyond.

clients, a host of wildlife has moved in.

From the entrance in the north west corner you realise none of this. The first view is of flourishing wildflower meadows planted with native species designed by Fox Pernley Landscape Office, either side of a sweeping gravel driveway. Nestled between the banks is what appears to be a modest chalet on legs. A balcony wraps around at the upper level, protected by an oversailing roof. All black except for the natural timber soffit, the building has just a few shapes – the low hat roof, boxy central volume, two large square windows and a chunky handrail. The building looks so embedded it could have been there for decades.

Visitors approach via a car port underneath. In front of them a simple main entrance opens onto a corridor hallway paved in terracotta. Ahead is a completely glazed view between the stilts out to the other side – a rowing boat casually moored between them. There’s a utility, plant room and oak tread stair to the first floor to the right.

This might be the everyday entrance, but the best way to arrive is to walk back round the drive and up the long steps over the embankment between the olive trees. This path takes you to the whole being of the project; the lake and view to the valley. The luscious green transforms into a watery landscape – grassy edges blur into the reeds and butterflies are replaced by dragonflies. The house too turns from a modest chalet to a hovering Japanese-inspired Californian Case Study House. As you step onto the deck suspended over the water, the building reveals itself – 40m long with a double hipped roof overhanging at either end with a 1m deep terrace. Exterior walls are clad in Kebony vertical charred timber planks; the roof is covered with black diamond aluminium interlocking tiles. The references for the project are about plumage and aeroplanes but the need for them falls away.

From here steps lead up to a slightly off-centre four-part sliding glazed door. The width of the opening informs the width of the external steps and deck. This window is replicated on the other side of the building across the living space, connecting it visually to the water and woodland, the house deftly squeaked between. There is no guttering; rain soaks away into the lake or woodland.

The flatness of the water is echoed in the flatness of the building’s platform. It’s all on one level, just positioned...
perpendicular and rectangular. The lake laps at its feet. From this rear view, the building is surrounded by shrubbery and trees, dark like a shadow, and the symmetry is tempered by a hierarchy of windows, as practice founding director Nick Lyons explains: ‘They are full-height in the kitchen living space, shortened at the bottom for the study and studio to create a cill and shortened again top and bottom for the bedrooms.’

Entering at deck level, you go straight into the living space. The kitchen, with its granite-topped 4.2m-long island and solid walnut fronts is to the left, the dining area in the centre and the sitting room to the right, lightly separated by a green oak column. The ceiling is open to the rafters, showing the roof structure, which is accessed by a ladder, and will allow them to become one larger space in the future too, with the ability to live only on the upper floor with level access from outside. It is light and airy spaces flow freely, making the home feel suitably relaxed.

The building has been designed to prepare for the future too, with the ability to live only on the upper floor with level access from outside. It is light and airy spaces flow freely, making the home feel suitably relaxed. The building has been designed to prepare for the future too, with the ability to live only on the upper floor with level access from outside. It is light and airy spaces flow freely, making the home feel suitably relaxed.

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Second life

Epic yet compact and welcoming, the new Medina House by Pilbrow & Partners preserves a piece of endangered Hove seafront referencing its heritage and the exotic

Words: Isabelle Priest  Photographs: Ståle Eriksen

‘There is an interesting ambivalence to the building which I wasn’t expecting,’ says Keb Garavito Bruhn, founding partner at Pilbrow & Partners. ‘A lot of people see it as a rebirth... They don’t acknowledge it as a new building.’

Medina House on Hove seafront is a radical architectural sidestep from the post-war apartment buildings either side, the cottages behind and regency townhouses closer to Brighton city centre. This curious light brick building has arched windows, a garden wall colonnade and zinc dormers – and it’s sizeable, a fortress on the front, walled on all sides. It abounds with references, but is courageous and contemporary.

Medina House is a private house with a public history, much preceding its present incarnation. It isn’t difficult to find out who it is for, but this is the first time the house has been published in full. What’s interesting about the house is its visibility. It is located on an unusual part of the seafront where the buildings abut the promenade, one narrow road between it and the beach. Surrounding buildings are mostly former fishermen’s cottages, separated by passages known as ‘twittens’ that lead to the sea. The site was part of a Victorian bathing complex bridging Sussex Road. The barrel-vault structure is reflected in the arched windows on the ground floor.

The client, a musician and author couple, lived nearby and bought the site to preserve it. On a clear day you can see the white cliffs along the coast. Next door is Marrocco’s, an Italian restaurant known for its ice cream. The brief consequently meant starting again from scratch.

‘It was an abused building,’ Garavito Bruhn adds. ‘It had had many owners, including a diamond merchant, then it was squatted and suffered fires. The last owner proposed towers on the site.’

Consultation was intensive, with many interested groups for preservation that had started under the previous owner. One of these had recommended that the council had adopted, so that it should be a family home, a stance which the council had adopted, so that was never in question.

‘There was a huge affection for the building,’ says Garavito Bruhn. ‘It’s built into the collective imagination. People in the area knew its stages of existence and had strong connections to it.’

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stratification and erosion. Rather than a building that expresses as an assembly of components, could the building have a sense of being eroded? The wing emerges from the main mass and erodes towards the east, responding also to the changing heights of the urban situation.

Once it was decided to demolish and rebuild, changes key to adapting a public to a private building were possible. This included moving the entrance from the promenade to Sussex Road and creating another to the garden from the twitten on the eastern side, to avoid the stones and water damage blown up by bad weather. The change was raise the building by around 2m, for these reasons and because at a certain point Pilbrow & Partners realised they had sought advice from engineers but eventually turned to find a solution through model-making and testing.

The glass stops the prevailing south west wind, while the open arched transoms allow some wind through to prevent a whirlwind developing in the courtyard.

Inside, the building reflects the language of the exterior. From the main entrance hall there is an immediate sense of connection to all parts of the house. To the left is the WC and a small passage to a darker writing room. Ahead is the staircase to the basement with another flying overhead to the bedrooms, and to the right steps through a pantry up to the main living room. This, as expressed externally, is on a grand scale – 4.8m tall lateral crossing barrel vaulted ceiling with Venetian plaster that continues to a darker writing room. Ahead is the main living space. The vaults are set slightly apart for services to run between.

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The sitting area is beyond, with dining space along the elevation of the courtyard. Looking back, the stair is open to the room and a mezzanine desk space overlooks the living area. You can catch glimpses of the galleried landing library beyond. The scale is epic, but compact and welcoming.

The views of the sea continue from the triptych of windows in the garden where the landscape has been designed as diagonal planting between trees by Arabella Lennox-Boyd. Raised above the road with frosted lower glass panels, it gives you a sense of remoteness from potential crowds of visitors and the crashing waves outside. To the rear of the garden under the wing is a sunken covered outdoor lounge with clerestorey windows around the perimeter. Here the original tiles of the bathhouse have been preserved in situ, giving the feel of an archaeological discovery. However, the huge solid rectangular columns that hold up this and the accommodation wing above (music room on the first floor and bedroom on the second) create a heavy almost post-war Corbusian modernist feel. Yet the balcony from the mezzanine library interrupts that feeling again, taking you to an Italian hilltop town of narrow streets and houses. The immoveable Moorish influences on the exterior disentangle into a building with multiple faces, histories and geographies over a seemingly extended period. It’s a joy that conversely creates a sense of permanence.

Upstairs, back in the main section of the house, is the master suite. To the left is an atmospheric wallpapered ‘opium den’, before the spaces bisect into a dressing space and bathroom, then the bedroom – directly above the living room and enjoying the same sky and sea views. The architecture – vaults, floors, windows, walls – is overlaid with sumptuous interior design by Studio Ashby, which has a fitting opulence. The stair to the second floor is enclosed. Here, windows to the north overlook the cottages and taller surrounding apartment blocks. They mean there is a variety of views, should one ever tire of looking at the sea.

This issue features two houses. It’s fantastic that they can’t be compared. Yet each has a formality and laid-backness that the architecture creates in different ways. What is particularly compelling about Medina House is that this is ambitious architecture commissioned by a private client that is in full view. You can stumble upon it, soak it up, develop an opinion, post pictures of it on social media, have conversations about it with your friends, critique it. What better kind of architecture is there than that?
King’s gambit

Hall McKnight had little room for manoeuvre with its semi-subterranean Quad Building at King’s College London, but careful juxtapositions put all the pieces in place for a satisfying finish.

Words: Chris Foges  Photographs: Johan Dehlin

There’s a lovely moment in the new engineering department at King’s College London, when you stand in the immaculate concrete shell of a high-spec workshop and look up through a glass roof to see the creamy stonework of an elaborate Georgian facade rising five storeys above. To one side, its giant rusticated base sits just beyond the windows. On the other, glazed walls reveal an equally striking juxtaposition as a scarred screen of ancient brickwork slices through a coolly clinical laboratory. It’s through such careful layering – of old and new, of materials, spaces and views – that architect Hall McKnight has produced a remarkably practical yet characterful interior in the semi-subterranean Quad Building, set below a grand quadrangle at the heart of the grade I-listed campus.

Four buildings enclose the long courtyard. The east wing of the 18th-century Somerset House, designed by William Chambers, was absorbed by the college in 2010. It faces Robert Smirke’s slightly later King’s Building, the university’s original home. At the southern end there’s another bit of Somerset House, facing out to the Thames. And to the north, on the Strand, a brutalist building added in 1972. The 3,000m² Quad Building, extending under the entire courtyard, was built in the 1950s and occupies the space between two bits of made ground: the courtyard at the level of the Strand, and the Thames embankment 9m below. Windows look into a deep, narrow lightwell on the west side that extends into a crooked passage leading to the riverside.

In 2015, Belfast-based Hall McKnight won consent for an ambitious plan to improve connections between West and East. The renovated courtyard is now a sociable gathering space, and a setting for graduation photos.

Flexible teaching rooms and workshops can be easily adapted to other uses in the future.

Credits

Client  King’s College London
Architect  Hall McKnight
Executive architect  Rock Townsend (shell and core), Hall McKnight (fit-out)
Structural engineers  Elliott Wood Partnership, Plan B
M&E consultant  Aecom
Cost consultant  Turner and Townsend
Lighting designer  Light Bureau
Principal designer  Hasco Europe
Main contractor  Farrans Construction (shell and core), Overbury (fit-out)

Above The renovated courtyard is now a sociable gathering space, and a setting for graduation photos.

Right Toplit workshops occupy structurally independent buildings in former lightwells.
Buildings
University

Instead, the brief was to work within the disused, semi-derelict structure to make a departmental base where students could move freely between flexible teaching rooms and workshops, and which could be easily adapted to other uses in the future.

It also included a much-needed facelift for the courtyard itself, a dreary expanse of black asphalt. With the clay hollowpot deck unable to bear much weight, however, and a need to maintain level access with the Strand, the architect had to settle for a layer of resin-bonded gravel. ‘We struggled with that,’ says practice partner Ian McKnight. ‘It’s the last material most architects would choose for a landscape between two listed buildings.’

To add some distinction the surface is inlaid with a grid of metal strips, whose proportions echo the facade of the King’s Building. Its off-centre layout hints at the axis of a symmetrical courtyard originally intended by Chambers, who planned another wing on the site of Smirke’s building. The reference might be lost on the average passer-by, but the effect is well judged: sufficiently odd to have presence, but not enough to unsettle the wider composition. And the gravel, in two well-chosen shades of beige, harmonises with the surrounding facades, giving a new coherence to the whole ensemble.

As this surface is the most prominent ‘elevation’ of the Quad Building, Hall McKnight was keen to give some expression to what lies beneath. A circular concrete bench sitting in the

IN NUMBERS

3,280m²
gross internal floor area

£28.1m
construction cost
including external deck

£5,325/m²
construction cost including external deck

23
months on site

Below The helical stair is lit from above by the oculus.
Bottom right The ‘learning commons’ in the Quad Building is lit by borrowed daylight and a stretch ceiling system.

the disparate pieces of the campus, centred on a glass-roofed ‘learning commons’ under the quad. But following protests at the proposed replacement of some historic buildings on the Strand, the project was dropped. At the same time, King’s agreed a lease on Aldwych Quarter, the grand arc of 1920s buildings across the Strand, shifting its centre of gravity northward.

So when the practice was asked to look again at the Quad Building there was less scope for radical surgery.
middle of the court turns out to be the top of an oculus over a new staircase. A double helix inscribed around the base is a nice touch: it was here that Rosalind Franklin captured the first images of DNA molecules. Similar structures cap four lightwells behind the stone balustrades of the King's Building.

These modest protrusions give a rough sense of an efficient plan that has replaced a warren of cellular rooms and lightless corridors: on each floor there are two big teaching spaces with adjacent workshops in new structurally independent buildings set within the former lightwells, and some circulation space in the middle. ‘The concept is simple,’ says McKnight. ‘Complexity came from the interactions between the different levels and the neighbouring buildings, and with the layers of history’.

The way in is via the main entrance to the King’s Building, and downstairs to its basement. Previously, the route then led on to low doors at either end of a long corridor, but Hall McKnight spotted the potential for a more impressive – and conveniently central – threshold in a dusty archive below the entrance hall. It doubles as an informal study area open to all students. Brick vaults have been limewashed, stiffened with steel lintels and panelled at low level with crisply detailed timber and sage-green fabric to conceal services. With Jean Prouvé-designed wall lights and vaguely mid-century furniture, it’s elegant but comfortable.

New openings in the 1m-thick walls lead to the Quad Building, and another small ‘learning commons’ – this time with a woodblock floor and an implied frame of chunky oak columns and beams, like a building within a building. Students might make a connection with the sumptuous Gilbert Scott-designed chapel on the upper floors of the King’s Building. ‘It is a bit of a conceit,’ says McKnight, ‘but in the various spaces shared with the whole university we wanted to make something of its time, with a level of detail and texture that relates to architecture made in a different age.’

With no external walls, daylight is...
The RIBA Journal July/August 2023 ribaj.com

borrowed from an adjacent teaching space, through windows set into a partition that encases existing columns and incorporates storage and display shelves for students’ work. Its evident thickness is of a piece with the weighty construction of the King’s Building.

There’s another echo of Georgian in the grandeur of a helical concrete stair set in an oak-lined hall below the oculus. It has a beautifully plastic quality, but the choice of material also reflects the practical challenges of construction. The only access was via the narrow passage to the embankment, and concrete could be pumped from outside.

The stair descends to the lower basement, where switchback ramps deal neatly with level changes across the site. It forms part of a route through the Quad Building accessible to all students – a lingering vestige of Hall McKnight’s original scheme – so views into the open-plan 120-seat labs on either side give the engineering department a visible presence in the campus.

These are more utilitarian, with a monochrome palette of pale grey resin floors and white-painted columns with a bump-resistant skirting of black MDF. Ceilings are laden with foil-wrapped ductwork – which caused some headaches in the design process, says Hall McKnight associate Emma Smart, as the building had to be insulated internally, and the roof is too fragile to take fixings. Rows of custom-made light fittings spanning the width of the room were a significant but worthwhile expense. Their large surface area allows light intensity to be kept low. With adjustments throughout the day, that creates a convincing – if false – sense of abundant daylight.

The elegant simplicity of new fixtures and finishes is counterpointed by a string of brick arches that stand between the labs from the workshops – the last surviving piece of an 19th century structure that once stood on the site of the Quad Building, which supports the balustrade of the King’s Building above. The glass walls of the compact ‘maker spaces’ are set slightly back from this charismatic relic, enhancing the impression of depth and volume in a confined space, like theatrical flats.

It’s those subtle but significant details that define Hall McKnight’s approach here. Present throughout, they reflect an ambition to enhance the campus in a way that goes far beyond what was necessary simply to equip the Quad Building for use, improve energy performance or get listed building consent. Despite few opportunities for bold statements, this diligent, sensitive renovation has made a building that lives up to its extraordinary setting. •

An efficient plan has replaced a warren of cellular rooms and lightless corridors.

Above Toilets in lightwells in front of the King’s Building are shared with the wider university.

Below left Long views from teaching spaces through the stair hall help to mitigate any sense of claustrophobia.

Below right Informal study space in the former archive below the King’s Building.
What is embodied carbon in the built world, and how can it be reduced?

As regulation and technical advances cut operational carbon, the construction industry must look at how it can reduce embodied carbon too. Marta Bouchard, AEC sustainability lead at Autodesk, explains.

More than 70 countries and 1,200 companies have committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, according to the United Nations. The goal of net zero is to cut carbon emissions to curb climate change to protect the planet and future generations. Human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are a primary driver of climate change – which, if humanity wants to mitigate climate warming on the ecosystem, must be addressed from all perspectives, across all industries.

What is embodied carbon?
Embodied carbon in the context of the architecture, engineering and construction (AEC) industry refers to the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions released into the atmosphere during the upfront activities necessary to construct or renovate buildings and infrastructure. Reported as carbon-equivalent emissions (CO₂e), the total accounting of GHGs emitted during the build phase is called embodied carbon because the environmental impacts associated with building activities are locked in place before building operation.

Embodied carbon includes all the upfront activities that are part of construction, as well as any kind of renovation – replacing a roof, fitting out a tenant space or simply replacing carpet or repainting – activities that also generate GHG emissions. Before the building systems are operating, a carbon footprint has been formed.

Operational carbon
Energy from fuel-burning activities during building operations can be converted to the metric of operational carbon. Operational carbon, therefore, is the amount of GHG emissions released during the operational, or in-use, phase of a building. For example, it can be calculated from energy bills and reported annually. Operational carbon is the carbon-equivalent emissions associated with the operation phase of the building, including heating, cooling, lighting and power.

Embodied carbon vs operational carbon
Many AEC professionals – everyone from designers and contractors to operators and owners – understand and focus on reducing operational energy costs due to fuel consumption such as oil, natural gas, or electricity. CO₂e generated by the use, management, and maintenance of annual building operations currently account for about 28% of annual global GHG emissions. Relative to operations, CO₂e generated by construction activities are accumulated and considered ‘locked-in’ as embodied carbon before the operational phase. Annually, embodied carbon accounts for close to 11% of global GHG emissions, attributed to the ongoing building activity and construction around the globe. Year on year, this is a significant carbon footprint and a big opportunity for the AEC industry to address associated GHGs beyond operational energy.

Stricter building codes, more energy-efficiency equipment and lighting, and more renewable-energy sources will help reduce the operational carbon of buildings. As buildings become more energy efficient, a larger relative percentage of a building’s total CO₂e impact will be the upfront embodied carbon. As part of the design and renovate process, AEC professionals can influence and reduce carbon impacts in the built environment. Recognising the role that embodied carbon plays relative to the total CO₂e is key to identifying how the AEC industry can help mitigate the climate crisis by reducing its carbon footprint.

How the AEC industry contributes to GHG emissions
The built world includes living, working and recreational spaces made up of buildings, roads, bridges and transportation and distribution systems (for example, utilities). Everyday operations of these human-made systems affect the world’s ecosystem and contribute to climate change. The AEC industry yields significant influence over the planning, design, construction, and operations of the built environment. Notably, the building sector is one of the biggest contributors to GHG emissions, which cause global warming. Given this influence, the AEC industry is poised to adopt more sustainable practices and lead cross-industry decarbonisation efforts to reduce its impact on climate change.
Mindful lines

Geometric gymnastics and spiritual references create a sense of wonder and calm in James Gorst Architects’ spiritual temple set amongst magnificent planting and views.

Words: Eleanor Young Photographs: Rory Gardiner

To understand White Eagle Lodge’s new temple near Liss in Hampshire, you should know that James Gorst Architects based the 1.1m structural grid on chakra lines identified by dowsing across the site. This is a project rich in references to the spiritual beliefs of the White Eagle Lodge. To understand the multi-faith Lodge itself, you have to go back to 1936 when the medium Grace Cooke started channeling the spirit of White Eagle, who became her spirit guide. The teachings were shared and draw together Buddhism with its meditation practices, Christianity and astrology – or more specifically esoteric astrology. The current estate, New Lands, has been owned by the Lodge since 1945 and the latest temple builds on a 1970s one, on exactly the same sacred spot. The £5 million contract for the new build quoted in the local press is part-funded by the sale of a lodge in Kensington.

Walking up through the meadows of the 11.5ha estate the new temple crests the ridge. The base is a low box, a lantern of tall clerestory windows rising from it, topped with a dome. It is bright white against the greens of the grass and trees. The courtyard behind, edged by library, prayer rooms, a meeting room, kitchen and foyer, is still invisible. It gradually unfolds through rich naturalistic planting as architect Steve Wilkinson and I approach. I am unnerved by the idea of a spiritual group but reassured by the greeting of an elderly volunteer, perched at a foyer table with her Tupperware lunch. Nipping through a side door to the loo I am knocked out by the long view past a tree to the woods of the South Downs. The space slips from the mundane to sublime. Architectural

North south section
1 Lecture/communal space
2 Cloister
3 Temple

White Eagle Lodge temple at New Lands in the South Downs.
strategies ensure it is on the right side of sublime. ‘You should never enter a door to a blank wall,’ explains Wilkinson, ‘there are views through to wild flowers, to earth energies’. He uses the language of the Lodge, a place that advertises retreats exploring angelic healing, earth healing and astrology as well as special seasonal services.

Churches, temples and mosques have a long history of buildings with orientation, processional routes and conventions for prayer and worship. The team here visited Niall McLaughlin’s Bishop Edward King Chapel, Cambridge Central Mosque by Marks Barfield, Waugh Thistleton’s Bushey Cemetery, and Vajrasana Buddhist Retreat by Walters and Cohen. More explicitly, the temple here borrows from the 16th century Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar in doors at each cardinal point, each of the four are double doors and together they strengthen the perception of an axis through the centre of the temple, which is on a ley line – an ancient route with a certain power and sacredness. At ground level an onyx altar marks the centre of the temple, which is on a ley line – an ancient route with a certain power and sacredness.

The remarkable drama of the temple comes from the sheer sculptural body of concrete supporting the 10m-high dome. Four pendentive arches create an inner circle of a smooth precast that speaks to the 12 signs of the zodiac and it becomes clear that when they are closed, and the angle is just right, the handles throw a cross of light onto the floor – made as they are with four holes of the MDF behind. And then the structure. The arches support 48 timber columns, each taking the load down to just a 300mm triangle (though they do connect back with radial beams to the lightweight square box around them).

As one’s eye leaves the arches and occlus it rests on the doors; that to the south, divided as a stable door, opens to sky as the view drops away. The west looks through planes of glass to a sculpture in contemplation alongside the long pool. The south door opens to sky as the view drops away. The west looks through planes of glass to a sculpture in contemplation alongside the long pool.

The first temple on this site was white and for White Eagle Lodge – which takes care to spell out the 12 signs of the zodiac and it becomes clear that the structure, the lights and even the movement joints in the ground and polished concrete floor, all emphasise this geometry. Ordinary things are put aside, you barely see the organ, in a corner half hidden by an arch, while chairs and sinks for flower arranging are hidden behind panelling.

The rest of the complex has more recognisable forms. There is a brick-floor library, slightly compromised by the scale of the circular 12-leaved table from the previous temple and its bench seats. In here the walls are lined with specialist books from Chinese Zodiac Signs to Planets in Aspect, Clairvoyant Reality and The Unwilling Martyrs. Deep roof lights with an invisible gold wall wash two small prayer rooms in a Soanian light. A communal teaching or lecture hall neatly shares a kitchen with the foyer where visitors – this building is open to the public – can make their own drinks. These spaces are linked by a glazed cloister around a delicately planted courtyard.
that white means light-filled, rather than related to skin colour – white has a strong symbolism.

For James Gorst Architects the chalk downlands, and the white Janinhoff waterstruck brick that domes from them, was a starting point – chosen for dimensions that work with the 1.1m grid. The practice has used it smooth at low levels and rough above the 2.2m datum – here with a wash to knock back the creamier colour brought out by the texture. Deep-glazed columns of Siberian larch around the cloister have been digitally sorted to remove larger knots for a simpler look, and brought together with Danish oil. The colour is intensified by the approach through the circular chakra gardens, each planted with their own colours and representing different spiritual centres of the body.

The generous, though targeted, use of precast concrete perhaps would raise alarm bells with some about the embodied carbon of this project. There is also a good environmental story here in the way that the foundations and condemned concrete of the old temple was reused in the foundation and paths. An early analysis of the embodied carbon pushed the project towards a timber structure, including on the lantern under the dome. Another strong reason to create a highly insulated and airtight building was that there was no gas on the site and only single phase electricity, so the ground around the building has been co-opted for ground source heat pumps and photovoltaics. Foul waste is dealt with on site, using micro-organisms in a Klargester before being fed into a drainage field. Cooling as needed comes via a shallow labyrinth below the building.

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Pride of place

Henley Halebrown imposes civic presence with its Thames Christian School and Battersea Chapel despite a constrained south London site

Words: Richard Gatti

While schools in European cities tend to be part of city blocks, in the UK they are often defensive spaces, set back from the street and protected by layers of chain-link fences or railings. A constrained site next to London’s Clapham Junction station, and the obligation to colocate a 430-place independent secondary school with a Baptist church, have given Henley Halebrown the opportunity to do something different. Its Thames Christian School and Battersea Chapel is a building that gives civic presence to both institutions, while deftly managing requirements for privacy and security.

At first glance the six-storey building is a simple, almost cubic extrusion, but it rewards closer examination. What appears as a ground floor and piano nobile is in fact a set of double-height spaces for both the church and school, with large clerestories providing ample daylight. Above this sits most of the school, wrapped around two elevated courtyards facing roughly east and west, so that the accommodation plan is the shape of the number ‘5’ of digital alarm clocks.

This enables the school to be inward-looking, as well as providing important acoustic benefits, reducing noise from the station across the road and protecting the rest of the surrounding Winstanley Estate from the sound of boisterous teenagers.

Sheer walls meet the site boundary on three sides, while the fourth elevation is moderated to account for an existing garden and strand of mature trees. Project partner Simon Henley describes two protrusions from the main facade that provide the edges of a sheltered, south-facing courtyard as being like a chest of drawers. The effect is both to supply a pleasant antechamber for the school itself, and to discreetly add an extra layer of security.

The school’s main reception sits in the deeper of these ‘drawers’, and as you enter, your eye is drawn to the trees beyond. On such a small site in a dense urban area, it’s refreshing to see that every opportunity has been taken to celebrate existing greenery.

The composition has a settled quality, such that you don’t realise that the road to the east has been relocated to frame views of the estate, nor that the plaza to the north is an entirely new creation – a civic gesture at the entrance to the Baptist church. Outside, a free-standing cross was salvaged from its former building. Like the school, the church has relocated from further north in the estate as part of a wider masterplan by HTA – with input from Henley Halebrown – that both provides additional housing and reorganises the green spaces into something more legible and enjoyable.

Like many of Henley Halebrown’s buildings, the colour palette is restrained. Shades of creamy grey match both a new residential tower by HTA and the retained point blocks of the estate. The mortar is fairly closely matched to the brickwork, and complemented by precast concrete elements in a slightly darker tone. The impression is not of an assemblage of individual components, but rather of something woven or perhaps hewn from some great block of textured stone.
Windows are deep set, with the piano nobile announced by larger, rigorously spaced openings underscored by thick precast sills. At higher level the windows are more playfully arranged, in part to meet the needs of individual rooms, and in part in response to planners’ fear of bland facades. A set of rather beautiful cast study models illustrates the order and complexity of these facades, and highlights the little towers that announce the school to the south and the church to the north.

Anti-graffiti paint coats the ground floor with a strange, waxy texture. It is sometimes invisible, but from some angles or at certain times of day it gives a subtly darker shade to the brickwork, angles or at certain times of day it gives views onto the courtyards on either side and access to an external deck that leads to the classrooms. This is a recurring feature in educational buildings by Henley Halebrown, such as the Stirling Prize-shortlisted Hackney New School. Daylit and naturally ventilated routes to the classrooms make a stark contrast to the stagnant, echoing, strip-lit corridors of my own school memories.

The upper floors are typically one classroom deep – with some variation in rooms for music and one-to-one teaching – which means that almost every space can be dual aspect. Deck-facing walls are mainly glazed, and therefore have a very different character to the more monolithic external walls. On my tour, the head teacher explained that this degree of transparency is much appreciated, allowing not only for passive surveillance of the students in the ‘corridors’ but also providing important safeguarding benefits for teachers.

The decks also act as a brise-soleil to prevent overheating, which is just one example of the considered but unusual environmental thinking found throughout. This isn’t a building covered in green roofs, solar panels or air-source heat pumps, and it has a fairly conventional concrete-framed structure,
Adaptable space has the potential to greatly expand the lifetime of the building

with most of the support coming from the external facade and a small number of columns to the courtyard elevations. Concrete is largely left exposed so it acts as a thermal damper, mitigating extremes of temperature. In turn, this means that rooms can be serviced with a ceiling-mounted MVHR with a heating/cooling coil, simplifying the overall servicing strategy and reducing ductwork and plant room size.

It’s a structure that enables a great deal of future flexibility; indeed even with the school roll filled to only half its capacity, there are already plans to enlarge the library. This pursuit of adaptable space rather than fixed rooms for specific purposes has the potential to greatly expand the lifetime of the building, making the initial investment – in both carbon and cash terms – more sustainable.

With no outside space at ground level, literally every roof space has been pressed into service for play and recreation; six areas with varied characters serve different age groups. These range in scale, sense of enclosure and aspect, as well as in their degree of surveillance, from closely-watched play spaces for the younger pupils to more independent spaces for sixth-formers.

Though compact and constrained, this is a school that works hard for staff and pupils alike. All the teachers I met were extremely proud of their new building, with one suggesting that they were the finest facilities he’d used in his 40 years on the job – ‘saving the best till last,’ as he put it. It is also a building that works hard in its context – deftly managing the fine line between being an integral part of the estate, and being a noteworthy civic presence in its own right.

Richard Gatti is a co-founder of Gatti Routh Rhodes, whose projects include the Bethnal Green Mission Church.

Credit
Client Winstanley & York Road LLP
Architect Henley Halebrown
Executive architect HLM
Structural engineer Pinto Pina Maria
Services engineers Desso
Quantity surveyor Martin Arnold
Landscape architect Farrer Huxley
Main contractor Midgard
How to maintain safety and quality using cavity trays

Safety sits at the top of the specifier’s agenda, but how do you keep informed, maintain trust and juggle other pressures such as cost? A roundtable came up with some ideas.

At a time of increased scrutiny of fire safety, what is the best practice for architects when specifying non-combustible cavity tray systems? That was the subject of a RIBA/Keyfix roundtable discussion that sought to identify the difficulties and find a better way forward for manufacturers, specifiers, clients and occupants alike.

Designed to collect water that has penetrated the external skin of a cavity wall, cavity tray systems are one of the few products that pass through vertical fire barriers around the whole building. If specified and installed wrongly, these can compromise build quality and safety. As one participant said, it’s about ‘opening up the discourse for learning’ in both directions. This will ensure that lessons learnt and technical considerations are shared to help move forward together and ensure that all systems are compatible and complementary with an ultimate aim of achieving best practice and building integrity.

Participants were not necessarily in favour of the removal of ‘equal or approved’ given the need for flexibility when there are supply chain issues. But they agreed there was a need for greater awareness of the implications of substitutions, and crucially who was taking responsibility for the approval of these. Too often this is left to the site team or a subcontractor. Time also needs to be allowed in an architect’s contract for them to carry out their due diligence and replicate their research when a product is substituted. Perhaps architects have to learn to allow for this in their fee, suggested one participant.

Architects were keen to be confident that they were specifying a totally tested, robust, warranted system with reasonable conditions for that warranty. It was clear that a greater flow and use of information in all directions would help architects understand the nitty-gritty of the products they are specifying and how they are used. All systems on the market achieve minimum standards and have differing approvals, but how can a product that is cut, shaped and bonded together with tapes or mastics be considered equivalent to a fully designed, itemised, detailed and supplied system.

Knowledge of the benefits of cavity tray systems and where to use them is particularly important, said one architect, when they can be under pressure not to use them. ‘Let’s have all the knowledge we can. Let’s understand the product you are choosing,’ said one architect – and let’s ensure those proposing a specification change have the same understanding, which is quality-rather than price-led.

So what do architects want from cavity tray manufacturers to help with their specification? Early engagement with manufacturers, before order stage, would enable architects to be better informed when writing their technical specification. This should include the full technical design specification and schedule, including fixings and corner details, and BIM information and drawings rather than rolls or lengths of product to be formed on site sometimes in less than desirable conditions. They want to know how it is assembled and disassembled, as well as details of the system’s embodied carbon, toxicity and renewable content. And they need to know the product’s durability and lifespan – it has to be compatible with the lifetime of the building. Brick facades should last hundreds of years so the non-maintainable components in them should too. And they want the manufacturer to be willing to develop the product and work with the architects ‘on the hoof’ if required.

As well as knowing what the product can do, architects at the roundtable want to know what would happen if anything did go wrong after the end of its, or its components’, shelf life. Long-term access to information on the system specified and its warranties was also identified as important.

And what do manufacturers want from architects? For Keyfix, it is important that architects have taken the time and made the effort to understand the issues in cavity tray specification, and ‘back us up’ by acting as ambassadors when a substitution is proposed to a less high performing product, rather than ‘going straight to the bottom’. Feedback from specifiers was also invaluable to help them improve product performance.

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Working with Thrislington, Bobrick, the global washroom accessory brand, has created the Fino Collection. A beautiful line of washroom accessories designed for both high-end installations and to complement Thrislington’s range of washroom products.

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I’ve wanted to be an architect since I was eight, but there have been countless obstacles along the way. First, I couldn’t see any black deaf architects – there were no visible role models to convince me it was even possible for someone like me to get into the industry. Then there’s the language barrier – my first language is British Sign Language (BSL), and the level of written English necessary to get onto an architecture course seemed almost unachievable to me.

I did, eventually, get to architecture school, onto an MA and into a firm, but my experience was heavily affected by the additional burdens of having to find and manage interpreters, secure disability funding, advocate for myself, and do it all with no-one I could communicate with about my experiences.

These experiences led me to develop SignStrokes – a BSL lexicon of architectural terms – with architect Adams Kristapsions, and then to establish the Deaf Architecture Front (DAF), which launched in June.

DAF aims to support deaf people who want to work in architecture. It will provide advice, help secure funding for interpreters so students can do work experience, and encourage the production of information in BSL. Personally, I want the right to do my Part 3 exam in BSL.

DAF will give visibility to deaf architects, and create a network that shares tips and experiences. It will help the deaf community to participate in events – from building tours to public consultations – and campaign to improve guidance on deaf-accessible spaces, from lines of sight to light levels required for BSL. Eventually we will see DAF consultants who can advise on schemes, and ensure deaf perspectives are considered in the architecture of the future.
Asian fusion

Purcell had its work cut out at Manchester Museum, creating new exhibition halls in an Edwardian courtyard and a new entrance in a listed facade – all of it reversible. Tom Bridgen tells how the firm worked with planning and site constraints on its £12 million South Asian Galleries

Give us an idea of the context

Manchester Museum occupies a series of listed buildings on Oxford Road, most notably the grade II* listed 1888 one by Alfred Waterhouse. It was a family affair. Son Paul did the adjacent Haworth building in 1912 and annexe a year later – both grade II. Grandson Michael built onto this in 1927, linking it to the 1908 dental school. There were ad hoc additions over time as routes in and through the museum were always problematic. In 2003 an Ian Simpson Associates extension created an accessible entrance in the courtyard between it and Manchester University’s 1904 grade II Rutherford Building but this was difficult to find. Only was it only reached via an arch on Oxford Rd. As the museum’s remit was to use the chance of expansion to grow and diversify its audience, we had to address this – not least because our new South Asian Gallery needed to go into that courtyard space.

How did you deal with the new entrance?

There had been a lovely arched entrance in the annexe building in the past but re-using it was ruled out as it was accessed up stone steps and far too narrow for emergency egress. The client wanted an Oxford Rd entrance, but as it’s listed, we had to consult Manchester city planners’ conservation team, Historic England and the Victorian Society. It meant breaking the Haworth elevation by removing a stone window sill and transom. There was a lightwell in front with iron railings, which had to be filled in and railings (and basement lights) reconfigured, and highway stopping-up was needed to allow for the ramp access. Stopping-up involved months of negotiations with the city highways department and we could only start once we had planning and listed building consent. Building it required the road to be dug up – with university data and electric cables running through it – a co-ordination nightmare. The curious layout of the ramp’s stone paving intimated the line of the former lightwell.

The new entrance is quite understated

We wanted to keep it really simple, but it’s also informed by Part B regulations for escape. We couldn’t have doors opening onto the ‘highway’ section of the ramp so inner bi-parting doors open outwards and the full height oak outer oak-board doors rebate into the oak side walls to allow clear escape widths. This gives the impression of the nurses’ entrance, which we all liked. An architrave on the inner doors lines up with where the stone transom was – a historical reference to it.

What about the new courtyard insertion to the rear?

As it’s set off a small lane to the university campus, there is limited access and grade II-listed buildings all around it, it was a challenge to build – luckily we were able to plug into the 2003 Ian Simpson entrance extension without further disturbing any of them. The extension was conceived as a ‘jewel box’; a total of 750m² of lower-level gallery space with the new dedicated South Asian Gallery above. The massing was again dictated by Historic England and conservation concerns – which was mainly about the roofline and how it connected to the buildings around.

To gain consent we did context studies to prove our proposal did not obscure existing elevations – which meant creating a narrow lightwell around the new building and linking it back with recessed glazed connections to maintain the legibility of the listed elevations. Then there were roofscape concerns. Views of the Haworth’s ‘Hotel de Ville’-style roof were sacrosanct to Historic England and our building line was set to the upper string course line of that building so we did not impinge on it.

And your material approach?

Being a high-grade museum space, it’s conceived essentially as a highly secure decorated box. The upper level is expressed in 3D, formed, green faïence tiles from Darwen terracotta in Blackburn, influenced by Manchester’s 19th century terracotta tile traditions. We imagined the lower-level wall as mortar-bayed stone ashlar. But this was a D&B contract in which we were novated, and as a result of cost and buildability concerns, limestone facing panels hung off rails on rainscreen cladding were chosen. Honed panels were supplied for maintenance reasons. Glazed areas needed to be 99% UV filtering, which accounts for their dark, highly reflective nature. One large floor-to-ceiling glazed opening is set into the wall of the exhibition space. The glass and frame are fully security-rated and can be closed off with blinds but provide a great shopfront for the museum on a lane much used by students and staff. In the narrow lightwell on the perimeter we did not need to deal with direct sunlight, so glazed units are more transparent, allowing visitors to read the museum’s listed elevations beyond and for the Rutherford building to bring light into its study spaces. The east-facing pair of sawtooth roof lights to the South Asian Gallery have oak slat blinds outside to cut out direct light, so both exhibition halls can be naturally lit – or not.

What was the structural strategy?

It’s a hybrid steel and timber structure sitting on concrete foundations. There was a lightwell going to basement level fact – to ensure there’d be no effect on listed, we had to consult Manchester University’s 1903 grade II Rutherford Building but this was difficult to find. Only was it only reached via an arch on Oxford Rd. As the museum’s remit was to use the chance of expansion to grow and diversify its audience, we had to address this – not least because our new South Asian Gallery needed to go into that courtyard space.

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More for less: modular WikiHouse ups its game

WikiHouse tests show that SterlingOSB Zero not only offers better structural performance than the plywood it has traditionally used, it's more sustainable and cheaper too.

Why the hybrid structure?

A lot of considerations informed the structural strategy. Our environmental sustainability advisor was keen on the cross-laminated timber floors in the steel structure to cut the project's embodied carbon but they brought clear benefits in other ways. This is a working, academic site and we had to minimise site logistics where we could. Bringing in pre-fabricated CLT slabs and inserting them in the steel structure using a crane was much better than constant concrete deliveries. That said, the new ground floor sits on a raised steel sub-frame and is made of insulated polished concrete, with the CLT slabs sub-frame and is made of insulated polished concrete, with the CLT slabs and inserting them in the steel structure using a crane was much better than constant concrete deliveries.

Why the switch from plywood?

There are several reasons: SterlingOSB Zero is more sustainable – manufactured in the UK from timber grown in the UK. The carbon footprint of SterlingOSB Zero is lower than for plywood, it is cheaper and its predicted structural performance is generally better.

How do you design a WikiHouse?

All the information on how to design a WikiHouse is available free on www.wikihouse.cc, including a guide for designers. We’re targeting one and two storey buildings, which is what the off-the-shelf system has been optimised to deliver. There is a high degree of flexibility in what can be designed using the system. The only constraint is that because all the SterlingOSB Zero blocks are 600mm long and either 200mm or 250mm wide, the dimensions of the building’s footprint should ideally be a multiple of 600mm. If you want something different, you can develop special blocks, but it is much easier to drag and drop the standardised blocks from our website in order to build something beautiful and sustainable.

How can you be sure of its improved structural performance?

Our testing so far shows that the jigsaw joints fabricated using open-source code from which WikiHouses are specified design. We’re targeting one and two storey buildings, which is what the off-the-shelf system has been optimised to deliver. There is a high degree of flexibility in what can be designed using the system. The only constraint is that because all the SterlingOSB Zero blocks are 600mm long and either 200mm or 250mm wide, the dimensions of the building’s footprint should ideally be a multiple of 600mm. If you want something different, you can develop special blocks, but it is much easier to drag and drop the standardised blocks from our website in order to build something beautiful and sustainable.

As told to Jan-Carlos Kucharek

SterlingOSB Zero can help your

Another concern was construction vibrations. The museum's very delicate collections are all held in the basements and could have been damaged by the works. Monitors were installed on site and fed live data to both the contractor and client during construction to ensure agreed limits were not exceeded. Also, the new toilets that we installed in the old building were located above these collections so we had to ensure that if water leaked here it could never reach them. As a result, we fitted specialist tanking all along the floor and up the walls behind the integrated plumbing systems.

It’s a high spec building – how was this co-ordinated?

Air handling happens in the suspended ceiling void below the CLT soffit, with a high level perimeter feed and central extract for the main gallery spaces. Main service risers run up either side of the new gallery entrance. The client wanted to maintain the potential for a roof garden as this is visible from windows facing the courtyard, so future loadings have been accounted for and heavy plant is on a flat roof of the 2003 extension, leaving the rooflights as the only elements at roof level.

The suspended ceiling has electrical and data tracks installed to allow for fully flexible exhibiting and lighting. Metal ceiling panels are acoustically insulated behind to create requisite acoustic levels in the gallery spaces. And there’s a resilient layer in the first floor timber floor to deal with visitor footfall.

900m² for £12m seems expensive

Museum consultants were appointed to ensure that we met international exhibition grade spaces. That’s not just about the servicing of the galleries but includes minimum heights for exhibits as well as reinforced floors to allow for cherry pickers, museum grade ancillary spaces, air tightness criteria and security design for wall build-ups. On top of these, logistics issues concerning single-point site access and accommodating the needs of a working university campus all added to the cost of the D&B contract. But yes, it was £13.9m,000.

As told to Jan-Carlos Kucharek

More for less: modular WikiHouse ups its game

WikiHouse tests show that SterlingOSB Zero not only offers better structural performance than the plywood it has traditionally used, it’s more sustainable and cheaper too.

Why the hybrid structure?

A lot of considerations informed the structural strategy. Our environmental sustainability advisor was keen on the cross-laminated timber floors in the steel structure to cut the project's embodied carbon but they brought clear benefits in other ways. This is a working, academic site and we had to minimise site logistics where we could. Bringing in pre-fabricated CLT slabs and inserting them in the steel structure using a crane was much better than constant concrete deliveries. That said, the new ground floor sits on a raised steel sub-frame and is made of insulated polished concrete, with the CLT slabs and inserting them in the steel structure using a crane was much better than constant concrete deliveries.

Why the switch from plywood?

There are several reasons: SterlingOSB Zero is more sustainable – manufactured in the UK from timber grown in the UK. The carbon footprint of SterlingOSB Zero is lower than for plywood, it is cheaper and its predicted structural performance is generally better.

How can you be sure of its improved structural performance?

Our testing so far shows that the jigsaw joints fabricated using open-source code from which WikiHouses are specified design. We’re targeting one and two storey buildings, which is what the off-the-shelf system has been optimised to deliver. There is a high degree of flexibility in what can be designed using the system. The only constraint is that because all the SterlingOSB Zero blocks are 600mm long and either 200mm or 250mm wide, the dimensions of the building’s footprint should ideally be a multiple of 600mm. If you want something different, you can develop special blocks, but it is much easier to drag and drop the standardised blocks from our website in order to build something beautiful and sustainable.

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Modern makeover puts 1830s Paris in the present day

Industrial wood and black steel combine to make a Parisian loft studio a contemporary but welcoming home, writes Andy Pearson

Florent Chagny Architecture (FCLA) has given a small Parisian loft apartment a distinctive industrial aesthetic using SterlingOSB Zero and black painted steel.

The 50m² apartment is on the top floor of a wooden-framed residential building, built around 1830, in the 5th arrondissement. Its new owner approached FCLA and asked the architect to reimagine the duplex’s building, built around 1830, in the 5th arrondissement. Its new owner approached FCLA and asked the architect to reimagine the duplex’s dated interior. ‘The client wanted to give a new identity to the old apartment he had just bought,’ says FCLA principal Florent Chagny.

FCLA’s response has been to open up the dwelling by removing partitioning along with a huge ‘useless’ fireplace. A spiral staircase, added in the 1990s when the apartment was approached FCLA and asked the architect to reimagine the duplex’s dated interior. ‘The client wanted to give a new identity to the old apartment he had just bought,’ says FCLA principal Florent Chagny.

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By choosing an industrial wood, a raw material usually meant to be hidden, we created a stylish interior. Sterling OSB is Zero, no formaldehyde has been added to the board during manufacture, which will also help in creating a healthy living environment. Enabling SterlingOSB Zero and steel, materials that would normally be concealed, to be the most prominent design feature required close attention to detail. ‘The idea was to highlight the functionality and form of the materials used,’ says Chagny. ‘By choosing an industrial wood, a raw material usually meant to be hidden, we set out to create a stylish interior by focusing on all of the little details we had to draw on’. FCLA’s extensive use of SterlingOSB Zero gives the apartment an edgy style that looks both cohesive and individual. Its use is most prominent in the kitchen where SterlingOSB Zero is also used as a floor covering in the kitchen and lounge.

The kitchen includes a custom-made low-level SterlingOSB-faced storage cabinet, complete with a smooth black top and sides that reference the apartment’s open-plan lower floor. A bespoke peninsular unit serves as a floor covering in the kitchen and lounge.

The industrial aesthetic flows through in the kitchen where SterlingOSB Zero forms the doors of the units.

Below right SterlingOSB Zero is even used for the fitted wardrobes and even used for the fitted wardrobes and even used for the fitted wardrobes and even used for the fitted wardrobes and even used for the fitted wardrobes and even used for the fitted wardrobes and even used for the fitted wardrobes and even used for the fitted wardrobes. Even the bed is built from it, with the storage beneath housed in OSB drawers. A neutral white paint scheme has been used to complement the SterlingOSB Zero and black steel, a bright power-blue finish to one of the party walls adds just enough colour to the lounge and bedroom to make the spaces feel welcoming and comfortable and relaxing.

Chagny says: ‘The client is really delighted to live in a new contemporary stylish space, with a high ceiling and much more light, which is very important in the centre of large cities like Paris.’

Industrial materials on the inside contrast with Parisian neoclassicism on the outside.

Right The upper level magazine bedroom maximises space in the rooftop apartment.

Below Section showing how rooflights and dormers fill the space with light.

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Timber marries aesthetics with carbon practicality

As the drive towards a carbon-free future gathers pace, the construction industry could be missing a trick when it comes to exploiting wood – in all its uses.

In the absence of sustainable specification guidance from the government, it feels sometimes like it’s industry driving sustainable practice in construction, leaving policy-makers trailing behind. But given the current energy crisis, putting pressure not just on the cost of heating and cooking homes but on the fabrication costs of industry supply chains, policy-makers should be pushing the idea that architects need to be doing more with less, and further embedding energy efficiency in designs. Surprisingly, even clients seem to be jumping aboard; look at The Office Group’s commission to Waugh Thistleton for the UK’s first mass timber workspace. Such inspired client-side forward-thinking is a balm to architects convinced that their sustainability arguments are not being heard.

As was highlighted in RIBA’s PiP’s Special Report (May/June 2023), even local authorities are looking at building energy-efficient homes, motivated by the Department for Energy Security & Net Zero’s ‘Building for 2050’ report and the likes of the Better Social Housing Review panel. Pollard Thomas Edwards’ partner Edmund Sumner-Knox BHAVAN (2) of sustainability and innovation Tom Dollard is now working with Cambridge Investment Partnership – an alliance of the City Council and Hill Investment Partnerships – to develop Passivhaus-equivalent schemes of 6-70 units for social rent and market sale. Dollard describes Passivhaus as ‘the optimum fabric-first solution’ designed around low-cost, low-energy principles that are easy to embed if designs are considered from the outset. The use of structural timber in housing can be key to ensuring that designs are low in embodied energy, as well as low energy in use. With structural timber banned in buildings above six storeys, perhaps'

Copyright and licensing are thorny issues when taking over a project from another architect. Neal Morris looks at how to avoid an expensive breach of contract assurances that everything is ‘good to go’ are never enough, and, with questions of copyright, architects need to take steps to ensure the right licence is in place to use designs.

It is not uncommon for an architect to be instructed to develop to completion the design of another architect,’ says Smartarch director Christopher Smart, who has been dealing with complaints against architects via ARB and the RIBA for over 20 years. ‘Such situations can arise when the first architect develops a scheme for planning and then the site is sold and another architect is engaged,’ he explains. ‘It can also occur in a design and build scenario when the original architect is not novated.’

Where the original architect was commissioned to design a project to planning, for example, a second may be appointed as executive architect to complete it. Ownership of the site might also have changed, which will mean a new client name on the contract.

But the incoming practice has clear obligations under the RIBA Code of Professional Conduct and RIBA Code of Practice for Chartered Practices when taking on a project started by someone else, and it risks infringing the original architect’s legal copyright – and with that the prospect of legal action – if designs are not properly licensed for use.

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What are the contract provisions that apply for licensing?
The RIBA codes (Principle 3: Relationships; section 2: Previous Appointments) give clear guidance on the steps that chartered practices and members should take to satisfy themselves that the client does indeed hold a licence to use design drawings, specifications and the like.

‘A second architect should check that the client actually has a licence or some other authority to build out the first architect’s design,’ Smart recommends. ‘To be absolutely careful, perhaps a call should be made to the first architect to check that there is no impediment on the design being developed.’

What may be less straightforward are the contract provisions that apply for licensing, because different contracts treat the licensing of designs in different ways. The RIBA Helpline reports a number of enquires recently from architects concerned about the legitimate use of other architects’ designs.

Rachel Gwilliam, senior legal manager at Bouygues Energies & Services and a member of the RIBA Standards Committee, says an incoming architect must start by establishing who owns the copyright: ‘It’s really important to understand what the original contract says and how copyright is treated, and it’s best to check the original contract with your own eyes.’

The original architect could have assigned copyright to the client, but this is rare. Typically, the architect retains copyright and grants a licence to the client to use the design. Gwilliam says the terms within this licence are critical. They may be broad in range, even allowing for multiple uses of a design on repeat projects, or there may be stated limitations.

What should architects do about fees paid?
Incoming architects should know whether or not they are allowed to modify or adapt the existing design, for instance, or whether modifications can be made within certain boundaries. This can be particularly relevant in design and build contracts where the original architect has not been novated to the contractor.

The incoming architect must also check whether the granting of the licence is conditional on fees being paid and then check that those fees have indeed been paid. Most standard forms of contract have a provision that fees must be paid to enable licensing, but some are more architect-friendly than others. The RIBA Standard Professional Services Contract spells it out clearly: the architect can withdraw or suspend the copyright licence if any fees are outstanding.

If the licence does not exist at that time, the client has absolutely no right to use the design, says Gwilliam.

What are moral rights?
Moral rights – the right to be identified as the author of an artistic work – exist alongside legal protection of copyright, although they tend to be less well understood and may not be addressed in contracts.

Moral rights will continue to apply whether or not a licence has been granted to make use of copyrighted material. This means that clients and incoming architects may need to acknowledge the work of the original architect. This is not a matter of professional courtesy, but is a statutory legal right of the original author, says Gwilliam. Moral rights apply to drawings, models and images as well as the completed project itself.

Conversely, where the treatment or execution of an original design is regarded as derogatory, the original architect can demand to be no longer associated with it.

What does the RIBA Code stipulate?
Beyond establishing contractual rights, chartered practices/members must adhere to the RIBA codes when taking over work from a previously-appointed architect.

The incoming practice should inform the original architect that they will be continuing with the project before accepting their own appointment.

‘It’s really important to understand what the original contract says, and it’s best to check it with your own eyes’

They should also seek assurances from the client that the previous appointment has been properly terminated; that the client holds a licence to use any information such as drawings, specifications and the like; and that there are no known outstanding contractual or other matters that would prevent them accepting the appointment.

Kirthana Neelala, professional standards manager at the RIBA, recommends that architects should not hesitate to quote their obligations under the Code to any client querying why they are requesting such information.

‘It is always good practice to document what reasonable steps you have taken. For conversations that have taken place or phone calls, it is generally good practice to write an email summarising the discussions. It does seem obvious, but maintaining written records of any changes to appointments or terms of engagement make a big difference if disputes arise at a later date.’

Chartered members and practices that have queries regarding previous appointments on projects, particularly where there has been a dispute or the incoming architect suspects there are unresolved issues regarding licences, should seek advice or contact one of the RIBA’s specialist practice consultants for guidance.
Practice management: how and why to set the right fees

A studio’s basic viability is compromised if fees are pitched wrong, but how can practices get it right? A RIBAJ webinar unravels some knotty issues

In our current economic climate – with volatile markets, inflation, high interest rates and tightened margins – fees, and how to pitch them right, have never been more important. Pressures, ranging from competition, margins – fees, and how to pitch them high interest rates and tightened volatile market conditions, inflation, are all factors that can affect a practice’s viability. It is important to establish roles and how to charge.

Understanding the client

Nash’s practice, whose projects are primarily private residential, has devised its own tailored Plan of Work, unique market strategies to offer clients clarity. This sets out what the home-owner gains in each stage, she says, ‘because clients like to know what is included, and when.’ Fees are generally fixed, with additional work charged hourly. Nash sees the per centage fee altogether: ‘It seemed fairer and our clients liked it in that we were giving our time and explaining what was taking place.’

Indeed, at the basic level, ‘what you are selling is a piece of time’ says Damisaan Van Zanen, Total Synergy’s head of partnerships. Understanding the maths behind what makes a business profitable, or merely break even, is pretty fundamental. Farrell outlined a series of analogue calculations, which can be used to determine staff hourly charge-out rates to arrive at a desired profit margin. This was elaborated on further by van Zanen, whose role is to help practices make sense of their data with technology to make projects more profitable. Total Synergy helps users to understand costs, set the right fees, build fees, assess performance and iterate for future projects. Such software can be used to connect staff, salaries, overheads, billable hours and profit targets, with key metrics aligned to the Plan of Work to achieve accurate calculation.

Above a project resource programme is essential to calculating your own fees. There are several ways of charging for your work; percentage fee, lump-sum/fixed-fee; and time charge/reimbursement. While each has its place, a decision on which is most appropriate should depend on resources, historic or published benchmark data, and the client relationship vis-a-vis the project requirements.

Your appointment document is the datum against which your fee, services and outputs are measured, ’ says Farrell, ‘but it needs to be seen in the context of the procurement route which is not always evident at the outset.’ Since each procurement route has different challenges, which affect fees, it is important to state certain assumptions at a very early stage. Farrell also advises using the RIBA Plan of Work 2000 for the fee proposal to outline candidly where expertise and time will be devoted. At an early juncture, Stage 2 can be a useful stopping off point to review the scope and fee once the project is better defined, he says. Feasibility studies are a good way to gain client confidence while establishing the viability of projects before committing to a fee, he advises. And clarifying the responsibility matrix is important to establish roles and how to charge.

Duncan Architects + Interiors. ‘Business planning, part by part, can be used to determine staff hourly charge-out rates to arrive at a desired profit margin. This was elaborated on further by van Zanen, whose role is to help practices make sense of their data with technology to make projects more profitable. Total Synergy helps users to understand costs, set the right fees, build fees, assess performance and iterate for future projects. Such software can be used to connect staff, salaries, overheads, billable hours and profit targets, with key metrics aligned to the Plan of Work to achieve accurate calculation.

Architects’ average hourly rates (£)

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<td>Salaried partners &amp; directors</td>
<td>122</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>96</td>
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<tr>
<td>Architects* (5+ years A/RB registered)</td>
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<td>63</td>
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<td>Other short-term professionals</td>
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Source: RIBA Business Benchmarking 2012, the full data by practice size is available to chartered practices

To end on a positive note, as Farrell sums up, ‘Remember the several ways of charging for your work in business, and value your skills.’

KEY POINTS

• Architecture has a culture of fees compared to other professions. Often the information you talk about will make your client part of a culture change.

• Be clear on your business model and the type of work you want to be involved in don’t let a lack of understanding of your own financial position be the reason you are taking on or turning down projects.

• And remember, fees are often inversely proportional to your overheads. Have the courage to sack the contract and the confidence to tell your clients. Think carefully about this correlation and the strains it places on those around you. It’s your responsibility not to undermine your own work. People understand the time taken on jobs. She advocates teaching younger members of staff and students about the business aspects of being an architect, so as to see the cost side, and seeking a mentor who can give advice.

• Nash’s business model is likewise geared around a wholesome work-life balance to ensure staff wellbeing, and notes that women in particular are increasingly open about pressures faced at work, being more honest about what is going on behind the scenes. Rather than being cagey towards competitors, she recommends networking with other businesses to promote more transparency around fees, including learning from non-architecture but local businesses. Van Zanen notes that Total Synergy’s online community of software users has evolved over time as practitioners use it to solve business problems together, further suggesting a move towards co-operation.

• And Attanayake reports that the collaboration groups which his practice set up in their early days still share information, with beneficial outcomes for the businesses: ‘It’s historic that architects are siloed and protective,’ she says. ‘Businesses need to be nimble for change, and with Total Synergy’s online community of software users has evolved over time as practitioners use it to solve business problems together, further suggesting a move towards co-operation.

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Slowly but inexorably our cities are being reclaimed from the motor car. It might well be the most profound change to the urban environment in the coming decades. Birmingham City Council, for example, has launched a 20-year plan that could see its inner ring-road turned into a park. Glasgow plans a city-centre People First Zone, and councillors are joining campaigners in calls to replace the M8. The pattern is repeated across the world, from the traffic-free core of Ljubljana and Barcelona’s expanding Superblock system to Shenzhen’s planned Net City, a carless district the size of midtown Manhattan.

This trend offers the prospect of a renaissance in public space. While roadways will still be needed for access, what might be done with the part of every ordinary side-street now claimed by on-street parking – ‘Jaks’ in London alone? Or with newly redundant surface car parks, or bleak expanses of asphalt at once-busy junctions where traffic has dwindled to a trickle of bikes and trams? New landscaping might change the complexion of the city, but perhaps we can do more.

At a one-day design workshop hosted by RIBA Journal and Marshalls Bricks & Masonry, five architects will develop ideas for versatile pieces of ‘infrastructure’ that could enhance use and enjoyment of the public realm. Participating teams are asked to propose robust, durable structures that might support or enable a range of social and cultural activities, from public gatherings to live performance, active travel to adventurous play. Something more open – and open-ended – than conventional buildings, but with greater utility, potential and presence than the ordinary components of urban landscaping.

“We all need places that make us feel happier, safer and more sociable,” says Dean Harris, managing director of Marshalls Bricks & Masonry. “As part of the Marshalls family, we believe it’s our responsibility to help shape these places, through the products we supply and the way in which we operate, creating spaces that give people the freedom to work, play, create and grow. Spaces that enhance people’s lives; because the better our environment, the better we can be.”

The five practices bring a broad range of experience in the design of public space, informed by a variety of interests and specialist knowledge: Studio Multis, based in London and Amsterdam, intends to take inspiration from novel approaches to the public realm in mainland Europe; Toshiko Liu draws on the stories unique to any site to make socially and environmentally responsible public spaces; Native Studio aims to create culturally sensitive spaces that embed a sense of belonging and encourage cohesion; What if? projects has a particular interest in community-led schemes that address the need for shared space in dense urban environments; and vPPR, designer of the Camden Highline, has a particular interest in the way public space serves young people.

You can see the results in the September issue of RIBAJ and – who knows? – perhaps some new car-free street in the future, e
Wisest is he who knows he does not know

Speaking of resilience, as we explored the waves of crisis that have buffeted high streets over decades (supermarkets, the internet, Covid), one thing becomes clear: we don’t often see them coming. So to ensure resilience we need to plan with a degree of humility, aware that we don’t know what will come next.

Gone are the days of large single-use shopping malls for example, often built on the rubble of demolished small shops and businesses. Even if these large schemes were once viable, they put all their eggs in one basket. The shopping centre model – based on an anchor department store that generates footfall, allowing it to be built off-pitch – is vulnerable if that store closes.

The urban environments that adapt best to change seem to be made up of small and medium-sized flexible units fronting onto streets and public spaces that are naturally busy because of their connected nature. But what are we to do where mistakes have already been made? Shopping centres can be divided into smaller units, the roof removed to let in light and air, and underused space repurposed for other uses including public facilities, leisure and offices.

The book looks at Nottingham, where the monolithic Broadmarsh shopping centre is being redeveloped. In such cases it is sensible to reinstate historical street patterns or use techniques like Space Syntax and footfall modelling to understand what spatial configuration would have been most likely to evolve over time in that location. New space should be designed with floor-to-ceiling heights, fenestration, entrances, floor plates and servicing to suit a range of uses. This would allow the scheme to weather change and remain usable into the future.

Flipping the script

Falling rents and shorter, less certain leases mean the retail development of the last 20 years is no longer viable. The notion of new shopping centres anchored by a department store and catering to select blue-chip retailers is no longer an investable proposition – as many places have found to their cost. More worryingly, the cyclical maintenance and refurbishment of existing retail space looks increasingly unrealistic in all but the strongest town centres. We need a new development model; the book’s case studies point to three possibilities.

The first is for developments in town centres to base viability on residential and office development. Abandoned retail schemes are now often pursued as housing or office schemes, the retail on the ground floor being largely incidental. Sometimes the retail is only there because it was a planning requirement...
and is likely to target food and drink uses rather than traditional retailers. Some schemes, like City Centre South in Coventry, have been criticised for demolishing part of the retail centre for what is essentially a residential development. The scheme’s attempt to develop the ‘Pavilion’ to promote new local independent businesses and artisans has unfortunately turned out not to be viable.

The second approach is to find a different business model – as we saw with Bobby’s independent department store in Bournemouth, Kommune in the old Co-op department store in Sheffield, and the market in Altrincham. All have been promoted by developers who know how to make a profit while nurturing small independent businesses. As the developer of Bobby’s says, it is possible now for a small developer to buy good quality retail space for less than it would cost to build. By keeping capital costs low, developing space incrementally, and being flexible and responsive to tenant needs, it’s possible to build a viable business model.

Many councils have taken the opportunity to buy old shopping centres and malls as they come on the market, often at knockdown prices. Wigan council was delighted to buy the Galleries shopping centre in 2018 for less than half what it had sold it for 10 years earlier, and Bradford recently bought the Alhambra Centre. Some councils have gone further, undertaking direct development. The investment will generate sufficient income to cover borrowing costs and may even generate a small surplus, if not one that a developer would regard as a commercial return. However, even if the development makes a small loss, the benefit in terms of jobs created, economic activity and investment in property make it very good value for money.

The high street is dead, long live the high street

The authors went in search of the (latest) crisis on the high street and found instead town centres and high streets in a state of transition. It is a painful transition involving the loss of many anchor retailers, Covid lockdowns and a cost of living crisis. If we can create a town centre economy that is more diverse in terms of the type of retailers, mix of uses and range of activities, then the transition, painful as it is, may end up being positive. It might deliver us from the clone towns of the 2000s and create town centres nearer to those that exist in the popular imagination – community hubs with a range of distinctive retailers and leisure uses with a strong identity and a sense of place. These are all public goods and are too important to be left to the vagaries of the market. High streets need to again be a focus for public policy at national and local level, to allow their diversity to flourish.

High Street by David Rudlin, Vicky Payne and Lucy Montague is published by RIBA
Tested and approved: the reformulated Dulux Trade Diamond Matt

With climate change awareness spreading to all corners of life customers are asking for more sustainable paint. A new, 99.9% VOC-free formula for Dulux Trade ticks all the boxes.

Dulux Trade Diamond Matt has been reformulated in line with customer feedback to offer durability and improved sustainability credentials, helping the industry move towards a more sustainable future. The updated product aims to provide architects and specifiers with confidence that Dulux Trade Diamond Matt will provide their clients with quality results for years to come.

Dulux Trade Diamond Matt delivers ultimate durability. It is compliant with BS EN ISO 11998 Class 1 and BS 7719 Class C and can withstand 10,000 scrubs (the equivalent of five hours non-stop scrubbing). This means it will stay looking newer and fresher for longer.

With 71% of professional decorators saying their clients now regularly request sustainable paint options, Dulux Trade has reformulated Diamond Matt so that it is 99.9% VOC (volatile organic compounds) free. This has lowered its impact on indoor air quality and the carbon footprint of a project when compared with the previous Diamond Matt formulation.

To showcase its commitment to quality, Dulux Trade Diamond Matt now comes with a ‘Tested and Approved’ seal of approval. This showcases the rigorous three-stage testing process carried out by experienced professional decorators to ensure Dulux Trade Diamond Matt delivers on durability, as well as improved opacity and sustainability.

$1$ Based on in-can VOC content, measured in accordance with ISO 11890-2:2013

The technology helps to stop stains from being absorbed by the surface and makes them easier for the end user to remove.

Improved opacity

To improve the opacity of Dulux Trade Diamond Matt, more titanium oxide has been added to the formulation. On top of this, adjustments to the balance of raw materials in the mix to reduce roller mottle have improved the smoothness of the finish.

The journey to 99.9% VOC-free

The previous Dulux Trade Diamond Matt included semi-VOCs to form a strong film and offer quick drying times at a range of temperatures. However, the upgraded product uses an innovative binder technology that forms a film even at very low temperatures, without the addition of semi-VOCs. The paint also includes a new latex that doesn’t require coalescing solvents and has switched to completely VOC-free versions of additives. As a result, Dulux Trade Diamond Matt is now proudly 99.9% VOC-free.

Thanks to these updates, this water-based paint offers a durable finish with improved sustainability credentials.

For more information on Dulux Trade Diamond Matt, go to www.duluxtrade.co.uk/diamondmatt

A durable paint for the modern world

Dulux Trade Diamond Matt’s compliance with EN ISO 11998 Class 1 and BS 7719 Class C, and its capacity to withstand 10,000 scrubs, mean it can be repeatedly cleaned, ensuring that unwanted stains can be easily removed without damaging the paint film on the wall and making the professional finish last even longer.

Dulux Trade Diamond Matt already contained a hydrophobic surface that repelled water-based stains such as red wine and coffee. Thanks to new binder technology in the upgraded formulation, the product now has resistance to oil-based stains too, such as food or cosmetics. The technology helps to stop stains from being absorbed by the surface and makes them easier for the end user to remove.

This was meticulously tested by the Dulux Trade Research and Development (R&D) team in the lab, using substrates painted with white Dulux Trade Diamond Matt and measuring the whiteness of the paint before and after the food and cosmetics had been applied and wiped away.
based paint delivers quick drying times, helping professionals work quickly and efficiently – but with added sustainability benefits.

Peter Rhodes, national sector manager for building design at AkzoNobel, explains: ‘The fact that Dulux Trade Diamond Matt is compliant with BREEAM, LEED and WELL environmental standards, is 99.9% VOC free and long-lasting means it’s the clear sustainable choice for a diverse range of projects. We’re confident these enhancements will reassure architects and specifiers that Dulux Trade Diamond Matt should be the go-to durable, sustainable paint option that will provide winning results for their customers.’

Reducing waste
Waste is another issue in the construction and decorating sector, with commercial and industrial waste accounting for around 33.8m tonnes of waste in England in 2020. Dulux Decorator Centre aims to tackle this by offering a can recycling service to help professional decorators reduce the impact of paints and coatings after use.

Dulux Decorator Centre accepts a wide range of dry or empty metal or plastic paint cans, as well as those that have contained emulsions, gloss paints, undercoats and primers, floor paints, exterior and masonry paints – and those that have contained water-based or solvent-based products. Plastic cans are shredded, washed, and sent back into the plastics market, while metal is remelted into new steel and returned to the general market.

Since its introduction, over one million empty paint cans have been recycled. Decorators are also encouraged to donate unused paint to Community RePaint, a reuse network sponsored by Dulux.

Tested & Approved by professional decorators
As well stringent tests in the lab, Dulux Trade ensures its paints undergo rigorous evaluation from professional decorators in external conditions, explains Hannah Beeke, R&D Team Leader at AkzoNobel.

‘Our Tested & Approved process is designed to truly put products to the test and we do this by working closely with experienced professionals.

‘We worked with our expert decorators to trial the new Dulux Trade Diamond Matt and used their feedback to make further improvements to the formula. We then took the range into field trials where it was tested under external conditions – enabling us to see how it will perform for our wider customer base. This rigorous process means that we are confident the new Dulux Trade Diamond Matt range is the best it can be and will genuinely deliver the durability and sustainability benefits professionals are looking for.’

A decorator’s view
Desmond Cass runs D Cass & Son, a family decorating business in central London, which has been established for 65 years. He has been a Dulux Select Decorator for 26 years and was the Grand Winner of the 2019 Dulux Select Decorators Awards. He was asked to take part in the ‘Tested & Approved by Professional Decorators’ process.

‘Painting and decorating is a really satisfying way to make people’s living environments more enjoyable,’ he says.

‘Choosing the right product is key to this so the project you’re working on runs smoothly and to budget. As a Dulux Select Decorator, we put a two-year guarantee on all our work, so the product we use must be good. You can be as diligent and meticulous as you like when preparing a room for painting, but if the product you use isn’t up to standard, it’s all a bit pointless.

‘Modern painters and decorators will do plenty of research before buying a new paint and we want to know what other professionals think. Sustainability is also becoming more important for customers and we’re starting to get inquiries for low odour and low VOC products.

‘The people who use paint daily understand it the best. That’s why I was more than happy to be part of Dulux Trade’s external testing panel, as it’s integrative the trade is involved with the product development process.

‘Decorators tried a wide range of paints on several surfaces, giving feedback on their performance and finish. It was a blind testing, so we had no idea which products we were using. The process was thorough, so we get an idea of how the paints performed in real life scenarios.

‘It’s vital for decorators that paints have been tested by other professionals, which is why the Tested & Approved seal of approval is so important. Having since used Dulux Trade Diamond Matt, I’m impressed with its opacity. It is beautiful to apply and you’re safe in the knowledge it will stand the test of time. Ultimately, decorators want quality at a fair price, and Dulux Trade delivers.’

We’re confident these enhancements will reassure that Dulux Trade Diamond Matt should be the go-to benefits professionals are looking for.’

It’s vital for decorators that paints have been tested by other professionals

*For further information about the Tested & Approved process visit: www.duluxtrade.co.uk/testedandapproved
Michael Collins talks to me while on holiday in Boston’s fringes, where ash and smoke from wildfires raging in Nova Scotia have channelled south to hang in the air and turn Massachusetts’ limpid summer Moon an apocalyptic orange.

Perhaps it was once like that here at Beckton Jetty. From 1870 coal barges plied the Thames to feed what was world’s largest gasworks for 100 years until its closure, when coal gas production stopped and the gasometers finally ceased their inexorable piston. Now the site behind the jetty lies abandoned as a lorry park, encroaching development rising nearby to intimate a future.

‘I find ruins of any kind relaxing – it’s as if the landscape is at rest,’ Collins tells me, adding that photography is, itself, a kind of archaeology; ironic, when that discipline provided the earliest and most enduring subjects for the camera during the great excavations in Egypt, Italy or Greece.

His view is that the British have an ambivalent relationship to industry, having to either recreate it as a theme park or obliterate its traces altogether, so I ask him if his image embodies a nostalgia for something past or just an expression of absence? The truth is even more benign.

‘Whatever is going on in the world, this stands like some industrial Persepolis; mutely, as a river flows by.’ — Jan-Carlos Kucharek
Rooflight

Neo gives barns a new lease of life

The neo® range from the Rooflight Company helps give new purpose to derelict 19th century barns in rural West Dorset.

Rooflights provided a key design feature in converting a collection of derelict 19th century barns into an accessible, farm education and holiday site for a not-for-profit organisation. When the owners of Wraxall Yard approached Clementine Blakemore Architects to help transform the rundown site in the West Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the strategic brief included two priorities. The first was to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for all, and the second was that the restoration be sympathetic and pay homage to the site’s agricultural heritage.

Planning restrictions meant that achieving a good source of natural light in barns that traditionally have no windows was a challenge. The Rooflight Company’s neo® rooflights were the perfect solution for both light and ventilation. The modern design aligns with the architect’s brief for repairs to be “visible and pragmatic”, while also using reclaimed and naturally derived, low carbon materials where possible.

The agricultural rusticity of the design contrasts with the comfort of the accommodation itself. With its linings to glass® design, the neo® provides modern punctation and effortless integration between interior and exterior. Its motorised opening plays an instrumental role in creating cross ventilation in conjunction with the doors, providing a well-ventilated room at the touch of a button, for the comfort of guests.

Use of seven neo® rooflights was key to the design and function of the development, which is why the architect specified this effortlessly elegant rooflight. The space reflects both its environment and heritage while offering comfort and accessibility to guests. Testimony to the design and quality of the project is the High Commendation received by Clementine Blakemore Architects in the 2023 MacEwen Awards and its winning of the 2023 AJ Retrofit Awards.

Above The Rooflight Company’s neo® rooflight installed on award-winning project, Wraxall Yard.

Top and below right Shining vaulted ceilings with neo® rooflights allow for an abundance of natural light, while their signature flush finish creates unobstructed views across the fields beyond.

Global warming: is it time to panic?

Eleanor Young wonders what it will take for us to take climate change seriously

It seems hard to believe that it was only in 1972 that we first saw the whole earth as a lonely green and blue ball floating in space. The Blue Marble picture, captured en route to the moon, has become iconic.

From the busy space of the thermosphere, where satellites orbit in temperatures of up to 2400°C, there have now been many more images. From those satellites, NASA’s time lapse images have captured the polar ice caps retreating. Soon we will be looking at earth from satellites in the familiar flame tones of thermal imaging as one company, Satellite Vu, launches eight satellites with high definition thermal imaging. HOTSAT-1 reached orbit in June after its (no doubt carbon-costly) rocket launch.

Last month Leeds City Council took part in a pilot for this satellite imaging that will eventually spy out leaky homes from 500km into space. It plans to use the data to help with its £16.8 million Net Zero Homes plan to upgrade dwellings. It will also help build bids for grants to fund more of this work. If only leaky houses could be fixed en masse from space; perhaps an insulation zapper would do the trick.

A massive injection of capital from central government would also be welcome. This seemed to be on the horizon, possibly at next election, with Labour’s promise of £28 billion a year for its Climate Investment Pledge – some of which was intended for insulation and retrofitting. It would have also aided newbuilds with plans to make British-made steel carbon neutral. But the current economic mess has seen shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves step back from commitment.

It is not the time to go soft on carbon targets. While the UK basked in another hot summer hottest years on record in the last eight years. Meanwhile the global prediction of the National Centers of Environmental Information in the United States is that this year will also be hot enough to join the record books, a reflection of the impact of record highs of the big three greenhouse gases – methane, nitrous oxide, and carbon dioxide.

The orange glow, taste of smoke and airway clogging particles taking over Boston and New York from Canadian wildfires over 1,000 miles across the border has been widely reported. But on the West Coast of the US wildfire smogs are now becoming a regular occurrence, with authorities urging residents to buy mechanical filters and set up clean air spaces in their houses – a kind of panic room to retreat to when the threat of climate change gets too much.

The question of action is becoming a hotter topic. Can we get to insulation, rocket-fuelled or otherwise, before we start needing to retrofit our homes with climate panic rooms?
All present and correct

In his last column as RIBA president, Simon Allford leaves feeling he has achieved his aims and excited for the institute’s future.

In September, just over 1,000 days since I became president elect, I will be stepping down from the role. Medical science says the first 1,000 days in anyone’s life sets the precedent for all the days to follow. It also tells us of the last 1,000 days, but in relation to an end of life journey, so it is not – despite how it has sometimes felt during my tenure – relevant to this Institute or this column.

Of course, like all presidents, honorary officers, members of council, board, committees and the indeed the staff team, I am just passing through. I ended up here because I was very vocal in my criticism, demanding that the profession storm its London HQ and ‘take it back for architects and architecture’ and fill the building with architectural life. Past president Jack Pringle shared my mission, and together – as president, he as chair of board – we have worked with the similarly committed of the wider group to help build a team and a long-term plan. So I will step down happily knowing there is a continuity plan that will allow RIBA to move to the next level in fulfilling its Charter commitment. It will be better equipped to serve society, engaging with its members, public and government in leading the design of the low carbon future. This ambition is now embedded in the governance and organisational structure, and collective mindset.

Crucially, it is also reflected in the plans for the architecture of organisation’s headquarters. Though architecture has limits it can help those it accommodates to define a better future. So the RIBA has embedded the idea of the House of Architecture in all that we do and a number us are signed up long term as stewards of this project.

This overarching project has dramatically reduced our property footprint and, in a few years, our magnificent but inaccessible and decaying forever home at 66 Portland Place is to be turned into the accessible generous and delightful centre of architectural discourse we have long needed. Our plan also involves cataloguing, digitising and generously sharing our magnificent world class collection of more than 4.4 million drawings, objects, photographs, models and books, helping give the RIBA a clear outward looking public identity as a generous host. A place where ideas about the design challenges of today and tomorrow are aired and shared. This model of RIBA as an Institute of Ideas is vital to its future. With everything in one building – mirrored in a virtual world – we can support architectural action by our members and others around the world as we work collaboratively to design the low carbon future. We have tough targets and 2030 is just seven years away. But I believe that by sharing knowledge we can make the rapid progress required. Alex Gordon PPRIBA was right when he said the future ‘means more climbing on older people’s shoulders and less ad hoc originality’. Which is why we need a House of Architecture. Innovation is about learning from history as we seek to address the great problems we face. Problems that demand great thinking from us all.

This will require considerable effort and engagement. Like Groucho Marx, we architects are not keen to join any club that will have us, but the RIBA is the best vehicle for supporting academe and practice in dealing with the bigger picture. We invented it and we need to make sure it is seriously useful and seriously fun. These are exciting but exciting times, and with the engagement of members old and new, the re-modelled RIBA can enable us all to play a vital role in designing a better future. »

Above One of the RIBA’s significant collection – a design for a waterfront office block with helicopter pads by R Seifert & Partners in 1970.

As a timeless classic of interior design, elements in black are a great way to make a statement. Whether in a contemporary finish.

To find out more, visit www.schluter.co.uk
The plot of William Gibson’s cyberpunk novel *Count Zero* (1986) hinges on a question of authorship. Who is the anonymous artist of a remarkable series of found-object collages? The answer is no one – no artist, anyway. They are made by a neglected artificial intelligence hiding in an orbital server farm, and their melancholy meaning must remain somewhat inscrutable.

When I first read *Count Zero* 30 years ago, the thought of art made by artificial intelligence felt brilliantly exciting and subversive. Today, I fear we may already be tired of it. AI art may emit the odd twinkle of novelty or strangeness, but that doesn’t alter its fundamentally dreary, imitative nature, and its plagiaristic reconstituting of the work of real human artists with the creative insight of an auto-completed text message. It is guessing what the talented might have made of the instructions of the talentless.

Gibson’s *Boxmaker* beguiled with its glimpse of the inner landscape of an alien mind. Today’s AI art just offers a bleak view of the mundane contents of human minds in the tech sector, for whom human art is unnecessary expense and human artists an obstruction. A few months ago, feeling more open-minded and curious about the technology, I argued that architecture was probably one of the better placed arts to weather this tempest of dross, given its reliance on a wider suite of practical and management skills. But with the AI industry’s apparent eagerness to reproduc the world, not where it ends. ‘Elevator pitch’ isn’t bad practice. But it’s where it begins, not where it ends. A brief surely goes a long way, but not all the way. Nevertheless, the machine’s reliance on prose expresses something about the way words underwrite other arts.

Alberti regarded architecture as a sort of rhetoric – a way for a society to express its beliefs and virtues. It is part of a conversation, and conversation can be part of art. Eva Hagberg’s recent *When Eero Met His Match* examines Aline Saarinen’s contribution to her husband Eero’s career. Hagberg makes a case for the importance of talking as part of the making of architecture.

Aline worked as Eero’s publicist: she discussed his projects with him, and then talked about them with the press. In Hagberg’s telling, this helped clarify the ideas and image the great Finnish-American architect employed on his later projects. It’s a curious feature of artistic creation – be it book, painting or building – that a fully formed idea is never fully formed. It is not present in the book, painting or building by looking at it from the outside. It’s only when you start working on it that you discover what it really is. If I experience a creative problem, and I write down the instructions of the talentless.

Read Will Wiles at ribaj.com or here every other month

*Above* Does an AI application could be made to join in an architectural guessing game: figuring out the frame of classical paintings, showing what the painters ‘left out’. An exercise with predictably dire results. But I do wonder if — just for fun, you understand — an AI could be made to join in an architectural guessing game: figuring out the contents of human minds in the tech sector, for whom human art is unnecessary expense and human artists an obstruction.
Experimenting and making drive Asif Khan, where buzzing creativity and burgeoning success belie Khan’s gloomy predictions for the automisation of design and construction by AI.

Words: Eleanor Young  Portrait: Agnese Sanvito

‘What should we do with the final 25 years of our profession?’ asks Asif Khan.

For the past 15 years Khan has been building up his own practice, and things are looking good. During his part 2 at the Architectural Association he was talent spotted to follow Thomas Heatherwick in building a seaside structure at Littlehampton; in 2010 there was a Design Museum fellowship, and at the London 2012 Olympics the exploding red and white planes of the Coca-Cola Beatbox Pavilion. Then there was a slew of lively temporary projects. But now Asif Khan as a practice is competing and winning projects for cultural giants where curation and deep thought are just as much part of the design as drawing up plans and programmes.

The practice’s reworking of Smithfield Market for the Museum of London is due to complete in 2026 and it won the competition for the renewal of the Barbican Arts Centre last year. It designed the 21m-high carbon fibre gates for Dubai Expo 2020 and the 650ha of public realm that has become a new quarter. And it has a museum and space centre in the Middle East and projects in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

So why the dire warnings for the architecture profession? In Khan’s analysis, technology, financial greed and our depletion of natural resources – from ecosystems to materials we extract – combine in the form of artificial intelligence and robotics to create a seamless, architect-free process from design through to construction. Which is, in effect, a money making, resource gobbling machine with few limits that can tear through the biosphere.

Quietly, with energy and deep, gentle pauses to draw out what he really means to say, Khan makes a case that speaks to your heart. I ask him if this is about extinction. He is more optimistic than that in person, but his recent short film, Kalpa (the Sanskrit word for birth and destruction at a cosmic level), takes us through two billion years of the earth’s history and the near future, from microscopic organisms through industrialisation to humanity’s self destruction.

He was in early on AI, beta-testing DALL-E pre-launch, and saw what it could do. And he knows how far things have moved even in his 43 years. ‘Even Vectorworks or Revit can work out a staircase for you,’ he says. ‘All professions in construction can be automated.’ But that is not all bad. ‘The worst architecture will get better when it is automated,’ he says lightly, as we discuss poor quality housing estates and awkward offices.

Below: Inside the Museum of London, a visualization of the building that will open in 2024. Appointed with Stanton Williams, Asif Khan took on one of the two market halls.
That still leaves some big questions for the last 25 years of the profession as he sees it. ‘Should we design with panels and prefabs to be assembled by robots? Or do things that are a brilliant celebration of ingenuity?’ He has an urgent call to action for humanity: ‘We must learn to value human creativity.’

He sees the possibility of a fightback following the model of the slow food movement that emerged as fast food was recognised as a problem – which brought a focus on home cooking, great alternative chefs, farmers using permaculture and the explosion in sourdough and artisan bakers. Does that reach the whole of society? Probably not, ‘it may be more challenging and less affordable,’ he concedes. He is planning something of a research project on this, ahead of his RIBA + Vitra talk in September, which will take it as its theme.

As we tour his east London studio it feels like creativity is already being valued. The light industrial unit is inhabited by fantastical original models and mock ups and a dense library that leaps from social justice to magazines. Some magazines were collected before his Bartlett Part 1, when Khan discovered a deep love of craft and making at the Prince’s Foundation which rivalled his teenage interests in computing and film. There is a cluster of desks with the team at work. And then there is more, we walk through the climbing wall, cut and installed between lockdowns in a test for a new CNC Smart Bench: ‘a few of us like climbing’. We edge around a newly laid brick wall in the centre of the workshop, ready to test renders, and stop at a bench for trying out fabrics – starting with market sacks – for the Museum of London. Then there is the messy workshop. ‘Everyone is encouraged to be in the workshop for their projects and to understand materials,’ says Khan. A structural model of a self-supporting wall of stone and glass is for an installation with Theaster Gates, in a dock on Liverpool’s waterfront. ‘We work it through then test it with engineers,’ explains Khan.

There are similar riches in the archive. Here are the slim black A4 boxes in which Khan gathers his inspirations and sketches for projects, a column light unused from a project that will make it in one day, a droplet of plaster, a series of droplets that they now know how to produce to perfection – perhaps the method could be used for making chocolate? The 5000 pages for the public realm at the Dubai 2020 Expo, 500 from the practice figuring out junctions and locations of plants, 1000 from collaborator Aecom - each marked up by the practice.

Its latest project, the Museum of the Incense Road in Saudi Arabia, avoids the monolithic approach of many museums in favour of pavilions creating an extension of the public spaces of its host village. With this Khan estimates the office has enough work for 100 architects. They will be recruiting but he wants to keep the practice small and work out a model to multiply its work, perhaps as with Aecom, perhaps using the model of film production, where people are brought together project by project. Khan is puzzling this out, he has never had a blueprint of practice to
work from having skipped that stage in his career. It might not be easy though. ‘Clients are now asking us to do everything, from programme to logo,’ he explains.

Some of the projects will take many years to realise, like the work on the Barbican with Allies and Morrison. This is one Khan is particularly attached to – he was taken there as a child, playing in the public spaces. He might be a London boy but his geographical hinterland is rich and complex, with his father coming from Pakistan and his mother growing up in Tanzania. Through his Japanese ex-wife and their children he has a strong attachment to Japan, where he has taught, and he looks to Kenya Hara – Muji art director, a mentor and collaborator – for advice and inspiration. His current wife is Kazakh: ‘A revelation to me, Kazakhstan connects the world together,’ says Khan.

But in recent years he has found himself in his work in Dubai. There is a shared Islamic heritage and many more connections. They enabled Khan to connect with deep parts of his identity. ‘There were things that I hadn’t allowed to be present in my work creatively. It is something a lot of diaspora people feel. You want to be assessed by the measure of the society, on your ability to assimilate. I had put away things I had learnt as a child, as I have grown older I am ready to go back to them… The funny part that is our individual identities are fundamental to our personal happiness, purpose, dialogue with peers and what contribution we make to society. It has to come from within, from your heart.’

Throughout our interview Khan paints a picture of a dynamic studio, with colleagues (each warmly named) jumping up to make models and sharing stories of trips. He talks about it as a teaching practice – always investigating, often in new territory – and it is obvious that it’s a personal one, pursuing his ideas. When long-time fellow director Peter Vaughan joins us he moves into more material detail. But even then Khan values the less tangible: ‘He asks all the questions that stretch the narrative,’ he says of Vaughan. I am interested in the tension between big thinking, experimentation, investigation and the exciting process of design versus gruelling long projects and Khan’s commitment to serving demanding clients, often jumping on a plane to do so. I want to see Khan’s own experimentation and whether he is being sucked into management, so I ask about the last model he made. And there they are, little squiggles of plasticine, an acrylic grid, coloured Jenga style blocks. In each sequence of models his is the first, the roughest, the one most likely to get thrown away, but holding the seed of an idea. This hive of industry and creativity seems a long way from Khan’s dystopian vision of the future. Long may it stay that way.

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Department 4 Education: last chance to enter

The department store has seen its popularity decline, but demand for schools continues unabated. Could one become the other? This competition to imagine how it could be done closes on 7 July.

While not a modern concept in itself, the department store is bound into our cultural consciousness via the high-volume consumer goods sold in them and the link directly to the pure, unconflicted notion of craft, utility and mass production first propagated by the Bauhaus in 1919. Architects Erich Mendelsohn in Germany and Britain’s William Crabtree later helped give contemporary expression to these stores – emulated by European and US architects, and creating a globally recognised aesthetic.

Recent history has been less kind to them, the global pandemic accelerating changes to customers’ shopping habits already affected by the exponential rise of online retailing. That has had a marked effect on urban centres, with traditional anchor stores that contributed to the life of our high streets, such as Debenhams, closing down for good. Even UK stalwart John Lewis has felt the strain, with stores closing in Birmingham, Sheffield, Aberdeen, Swindon and Peterborough.

It is even re-considering its Partnership constitution to help it raise the billions in capital it needs to restructure its business, with housing and leisure mooted for town centre sites. But estate development brings its own issues, seen in the planning battle between SAWY, Britain’s Heritage and retailer M&S over demolition of its Art Deco, Oxford St store to re-develop the site. It’s not just about old or new, but demolish versus re-use, in this case 40,000t of embodied carbon.

West Fraser, in its ninth RIBAJ design competition, is asking you to wade into the discussion. The deep plan and siting of department stores allows amazing opportunities for reuse, so consider that potential in our ‘Department 4 Education’ challenge. We want you to address ever-rising demands for new secondary schools for growing communities, and sublimate that need with the sustainable concept of re-purposing sizeable city-centre department stores. Top of the class wins £2500 – so heads down and get to work!

The brief

Choose any UK department store, redundant or not, and show us how it might be turned into a small secondary school for 750 pupils with an average class size of 30. Inspired by the likes of Cedric Price and Joan Littlewood’s 1960 Fun Palace perhaps, how can the plan form accommodate new educational uses? How could the complex programme and adjacencies of classrooms, labs, refectory, library and school hall play out within the deep plan? Could you knock through floor plates or repurpose the atrium – and what about roof level? Will it fit in a playground or even a playing field? And how does the new programme manifest outside? The Victorian schoolhouse was intrinsic to the city fabric – how might it be again? Using SterlingOSB Zero as one of the main components in your intervention, show us how your design generates an exciting 21st-century re-thinking of a 20th-century building type.

JUDGING

Chaired by the RIBA Journal, judges will look for imaginative and successful responses to the competition brief that also makes best use of SterlingOSB Zero in its specific context. Precast or CNC fabrication to create novel forms would be considered. While other materials may form an integral part of any proposition, it is expected the design will make good use of SterlingOSB Zero.

In this competition, the winning proposal will be the one that the judges consider unites the programme for a school and its attendant spaces with the volume, floor plate and site context of the chosen department store in the most exciting and imaginative way. Blue-sky thinking to interpreting the brief is welcomed – if carried out with conviction!

JUDGES

This year’s judging panel will be Holly Lewis, co-founder of We Make That; Proctor & Matthews Architects’ Stephen Proctor; Butterfield Architects director Olivia Marsh; David Connacher, marketing manager of West Fraser UK and will be chaired by Jan-Carlos Kucharek, deputy editor of the RIBA Journal.

DEADLINE

Entries should be received no later than 14:00 UK time on Friday 7 July 2023.

TO ENTER

Go to ribaj.com/department-4-education-enter

Entries must include the following, laid out on no more than two A3 sheets, supplied electronically as pdfs and uploaded to the official entry website.

• Plans and sections explaining the nature of the school programme, that would best convey your proposition.

• Supplementary images, eg schematics of structure or programme, that would best convey your proposition.

• An explanation of no more than 500 words describing the choice of department store and core ideas for the school project at key positions in the building.

• 3D axonometric or isometric perspectives conveying the school project at key positions in the building.

• Plans and sections explaining the nature of the school programme.

• An explanation of no more than 500 words describing the choice of department store and core ideas for the school project at key positions in the building.

NOTES

The judges’ decision is final.

• First prize £2500.

• Three commended prizes of £500.

• No correspondence will be entered into by the organisers or judges regarding entries or winners.

• Shortlisted entries will be notified in writing.

• Shortlisted entries will be invited to the winners’ announcement and prize-giving on 21 September 2023.

• Email any questions to ribaj.department4education@riba.org
Lesley Lokko’s post-colonial reset

Venice Biennale’s ‘uncomfortable and uplifting’ Laboratory of the Future confronts architecture’s complicity in colonial violence and environmental destruction. Chris Fuges looks at a bid to change the status quo.

The 18th Venice Biennale of Architecture is presented as a turning point, both for the festival and the discipline. ‘Rupture’ is the word used by its curator, the Scottish-Ghanaian architect, teacher and writer Lesley Lokko. That’s probably right. Until now, the most exalted platform in architecture has been given to the grand schemes and recherche preoccupations of established stars, mostly from Europe, the Americas and Asia. Lokko’s Laboratory of the Future instead turns the spotlight on people and places that have been not only under-represented here, but largely excluded from the story of architecture.

For the first time, architects and artists from Africa and its diaspora comprise the majority of the 89 contributors to the exhibition, presented in two giant venues at the Arsenale and the Giardini, surrounded by the national pavilions that make up the other half of the event. The gender balance is 50-50; the average age just 43. Many are what Lokko calls ‘hybrids’, working across disciplinary and cultural boundaries. All were asked to address twin themes of decolonisation and decarbonisation, and to ‘bring their authentic selves’.

The result is a bold, complex exhibition that seems urgent and deeply felt. It is uncomfortable and uplifting, forcing us to confront violence and environmental destruction in which architecture is complicit, while pointing – in a vague way – to a more equitable future. Like all recent biennales it is vast, scattered and uneven, but just about held together by Lokko’s clarity of purpose.

Some of the most potent exhibits deal with the enduring legacies of historic exploitation. With architect Gloria Cabral and historian Cécile Fromont, Congolese photographer Sammy Baloji has produced a rippling, glittering wall of smashed brick and coloured glass, scored with precise geometric patterns. The motifs derive from textiles from the Kongo kingdom and Brazil – places linked by the slave trade – while the structure is made of demolition waste from the former imperial capital, Brussels. It is a beautiful evocation of the idea that value can be created from the ‘debris’ of the past. Miami-based Germane Barnes challenges the assumption that the dominant voice in architecture can speak for all. His gnarled column carved from black marble, representing diasporic identities, is offered as a ‘sixth order’ that rejects the rules of the classical tradition. It finds a chilling echo in an exhibit by Mabel O Wilson with Höweler & Yoon. In sound and light they convey what little is known about 4000 enslaved people who built the University of Virginia, whose Thomas Jefferson-
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Culture Review

designed classical Rotunda represents the power of reason. The words of one, Isabella Gibbons, are stencilled on the backdrop: ‘Can we forget the crack of the whip, cowhide, whipping post... No, we have not, or ever will’.

Alongside painful histories in the guise of ostensibly beautiful objects, there are heart-on-sleeve celebrations of identity and community. Lokko calls it a ‘collective outpouring of pride and joy’. One standout is an alluring triptych by Kolkata-born, London-based, Arinjoy Sen. Made with Bengali garment workers, it depicts architect Marina Tabassum’s bamboo monsoon shelter and scenes of communal construction among palms and meandering watercourses, in a hymn to co-operation between people and with the planet.

Another recurrent theme is ongoing plunder of far-away lands. A son-et-lumière by Andrés Jaque dramatises an unexpected link between New York’s $25bn Hudson Yards and Xolobeni in South Africa. The exaggerated lustre of stainless steel skyscrapers relies on titanium extraction that depletes the soil and throws up choking dust.

Thandi Loewenson’s intricate drawings tie exploration of the cosmos to the exploitation of African sites from which satellites were launched. They are etched on graphite mined in Mozambique – a major component of the batteries integral to much sustainable technology. It’s a telling illustration of Lokko’s contention that decarbonisation and decolonisation are inseparably connected. ‘After all,’ she says bluntly, ‘the Black body was Europe’s first unit of energy’.

These are complex stories, not easily communicated through the sort of art-objects that predominate, or at the breakneck pace of a large show. Most exhibits need long captions – unhelpfully in small type and low light. The effort required is usually rewarded, but it’s hard going. Also frustrating is a general absence of buildings, although a small sample of African projects hints at a serious effort to develop new languages for architecture whose starting point lies outside the Western canon. David Adjaye presents current work on both sides of the Atlantic – from the national cathedral in his native Ghana to the Newton Enslaved Burial Ground in Barbados – whose design is rooted in local cultures and geography. Niger’s Atelier Masōmī shows its striking public buildings against chalk wall-drawings of vernacular Sahelian architecture. A clay structure by Francis Kéré explores the low-carbon potential of traditional construction in Burkina Faso.

You also get a fascinating glimpse of Koffi & Diabaté’s sustainable masterplan for the town of Ebrah in Côte d’Ivoire. Otherwise there’s little engagement with large-scale development. It is a significant omission. Africa’s population is expected to double by 2050, and perhaps 80% of the buildings it will need don’t yet exist. Choices
made now will shape the lives of billions and determine global efforts to decarbonise. Nowhere does the design of buildings matter more. At its opening, however, Lokko rejected criticism that the exhibition ‘stops short’ of architecture, saying: ‘The opposite is true; it’s our conventional understanding of architecture that stops short’. The discipline, she argues, is broader than the profession, taking a legitimate interest in all aspects of land use, and in territories defined instead by culture, economics or technology.

Work on show includes research, community organising and activism. A gripping film details architect Alison Killing’s Pulitzer Prize-winning work to identify China’s Uyghur concentration camps from satellite photos. Architectural skills are also deployed to recognise spaces claimed by those who don’t get to shape the built environment. Le Laboratoire d’Architecture uses simple line drawings to map nomad encampments in Tunisia and halts for travellers’ caravans in Lausanne. A film by London-based Gbolade Design Studio documents social networks forged by the Windrush generation through dominos clubs.

Lokko insists, too, on the primary importance of the imagination in building a better future, especially where circumstances seem to limit possibility. So we get a fair bit of freewheeling speculation, unshackled by the practicalities of concrete propositions. In that vein are diverse contributions from Estudio A0, MMA Design Studio and Forensic Architecture which examine below-ground traces of ancient settlements in South Africa, Amazonia and Ukraine. These finds are pitched as inspiration for more sustainable, pluralistic and ethical turn in the built environment sector.

In part, that reflects a laudable effort to energise and optimistic that this is indeed a turning point with rare frankness at the entrance, listing barriers to participation that range from software skills to securing visas. The connection between means, representation and the opportunities that follow might be one of the most valuable insights visitors take away. If this biennale triggers a recalibration of expectations, so much the better.

Lokko prefaced the show by saying that its ‘essential gesture’ would be change. And it seems unlikely that the biennale will revert fully to type; a dam has burst. But what effect will this exhibition – which offers more questions than answers – have beyond its walls? As Lokko advised participants, quoting Maya Angelou, it’s not what you did or said that people remember, it’s how you made them feel. For many visitors I spoke to, the Laboratory of the Future was received like a cool drink in a desert. They left energised and optimistic that this is indeed a transformational moment, helping to catalyse a more diverse, pluralistic and ethical turn in the culture of architecture. Lokko is hopeful, too, if circumspect. ‘All events are beginnings in some ways,’ she says. ‘This one offers a unique platform. More fool all of us if we don’t build on it!’
Our new releases
Visit our online store, or stop by the bookshop at RIBA, 66 Portland Place, London and buy one of our new releases. Featuring RIBA Climate Design Guide, Community Schools: Designing for sustainability, wellbeing and inclusion, Collective Action or Reworking the Workplace.

The historian Elain Harwood, who has died aged 64, was a tremendous force of energy which she devoted to 20th century architecture in Britain, chiefly the period after 1945. Born in Beeston, Nottingham, her love of architecture was sparked by a visit to the Nottingham Playhouse with her Brownie troupe. Proceeding to a history degree at Bristol, she ventured out with Reece Winstone’s pictorial guidebooks to find buildings in obscure parts of the city.

After looking for a career in museums, she passed the Civil Service exams and joined the Department of Environment, landing in the newly-created English Heritage. Her interest was never exclusively limited to modernism; when she took the post-graduate diploma in conservation at the AA, her thesis was on Victorian asylums. She later took a PhD on the period after 1945. Born in Beeston, Nottingham, her love of architecture was sparked by a visit to the Nottingham Playhouse with her Brownie troupe. Proceeding to a history degree at Bristol, she ventured out with Reece Winstone’s pictorial guidebooks to find buildings in obscure parts of the city.

The listing of post-war buildings began tentatively in 1988, but with the establishment of the Post-War Listing Sub-Committee in 1992 Elain took on the role of processing research, which was carried out through printed sources, phone calls to architects and expeditions to discover what remained unmolested. Not all the sub-committee’s recommendations made it through the double filter of EH’s own Historic Buildings Committee and ministers who sought to curb excesses that would excite the press. Elain managed this situation effectively with publications and exhibitions, and a more pluralistic view of the period began to emerge.

By 2002 the post-war programme was reduced to a reactive ad-hoc process, but she had been commissioned to write what became Space, Hope and Brutalism, English Architecture 1945-1975, published in 2015. It was an exceptional opportunity that she grasped with both hands, accumulating facts from archives across the country, from interviews in which she became a valued friend of many retired practitioners, and from on-site inspections.

Elain’s single-author books included three guides to post-war listed buildings, the Pevsner City Guide to Nottingham, and a popular series of stylized books, including Art Deco Britain and Brutalist Britain. She was invited to write for the first issue of Twentieth Century Architecture, the new-style journal of the Twentieth Century Society (C20), and became an indispensable colleague over a further 14 issues.

When C20 and English Heritage worked with RIBA Publishing to launch the series Twentieth Century Architects Elain was a key figure, working with me to commission titles, and contributing one on Chamberlin Powell & Bon. Now with Liverpool University Press, the series numbers 21 books, with more in the pipeline. John Allan reviewed them as ‘mercifully free from twaddle’, which might have been Elain’s motto as a writer. Her work was recognised by the award of an Honorary Fellowship of the RIBA in 2022.

Elain was also an indefatigable lecturer to audiences at home and abroad and made many appearances on radio and TV. She was probably English Heritage’s best-known public figure, champion of 20th century architecture and a RIBA fellow, author of multiple books and notably involved in the Twentieth Century Architects series.

Elain Harwood
1958 – 2023

To inform the RIBA of the death of a member, please email membership.services@riba.org with details of next of kin.
Eye Line 2023

Artificial intelligence has penetrated our annual drawing competition. Does it promise great new things or foretell doom? Will Eye Line – or the profession – ever be the same?

So many questions this year! The judging session was dominated by a debate on AI in architectural representation, spurred by a number of AI Eye Line entries for the first time. Ultimately it led me to the strange and obviously rhetorical inquiry: ‘How good an architect could Martin Amis have been?’ But in a way, even that was only a counterpoint to a much earlier question, posed by an entrant on RIBAJ’s Twitter account, which had asked whether AI submissions would be considered. ‘Why not?’ I had thought at the time, ‘After all, how would we even know!’ And that sense of not knowing was expressed by (almost) all the other judges. By Rana Begum, noted artist working in the ‘real’ visual and spatial realms, independent curator and writer Jes Fernie and 2022 Eye Line Practitioner winner Alan Power, an architect clearly at home as much in front of an easel as a monitor. Only Hamza Shaikh, architect at Gensler, architectural podcaster and author of the book Drawing Attention, which analyses the cutting-edge drawing techniques of students and architects in the profession, seemed to be able to offer the AI insights we all needed.

Shaikh was there at the beginning when AI platform Midjourney had only 5000 users, when the prompt notation for renderings was still in gestation and producing limited outputs. Now there are 1.5 million users and with its ‘diffusion model’, Shaikh tells us, which draws on image sources from across the web, the potential to generate AI images of incredible complexity and nuance is now possible. But there’s one caveat, he adds – as long as we know how to ask for it.

‘Simply typing in a prompt isn’t good enough,’ explains Hamza. ‘The skill is in developing the prompt notation – which could be hundreds of words – and it needs architects to understand how and where it is used in the order, which changes the nature of the output.’ Confused? We were.

And it turns out that it was not just an image he was looking for but how other techniques and skills might ‘hybridise’ the drawing to make it something unique and of the artist. ‘I’m interested in processes and medium and pushing the boundaries of that, using AI but in combination with other techniques.’

If that sounded like a tall order, it was. None of the three AI submissions, two of which you see here to consider yourselves, made it past his critical eye. But in seeing the compositional beauty even of these examples, the potential of AI image generation to transform the profession seems excitingly, scarily, within reach.

Perhaps the vastness of that potential drew us all momentarily to the solace of Simon Crockford’s pen-hatched ‘Prisoner of the Mind’, a contemporary reimagining of Piranesi. For Shaikh, it seemed ‘to resonate with the idea of the isolation of social media,’ but it transpired that those of us still at the social media base camp of LinkedIn failed to connect to that idea. And with judges still working, in articulating 3D, real, space, perhaps that accounts for the eventual winning entries in both categories.

But with the hybrid AI art era looking like it is visible on the horizon, it felt that this year we had hit a kind of watershed moment. What sort of architects will we be in the near future, and what skills will we need? Shaikh thinks architects will need to learn to articulate better with language and notation. ‘So will architects have to become wordsmiths?’ I ask. ‘Perhaps,’ he answers, ‘and what if you ran a prompting competition instead?’ The questions keep coming. ·

Above Practitioner Simon Crockford’s pen-on-paper and digital media ‘Prisoner of the Mind’ was a Piranesian work offering temporary solace from the chasm of AI’s potential.

Opposite Practitioner Andy Shaw’s ‘Mackintosh Wynd’ digital drawing using Midjourney, merging Charles Rennie with south of France village forms, while picturesquely fell short of the hybridisation required.

Below One of practitioner Stephen Parnell’s AI entries after his Twitter query: ‘Almost Futures II: People’s Republic of South Yorkshire: Sheffield 1982…exploring undocumented, unknown, undiscovered, un熟悉ed brutalist media constructions.’
Culture
Eye Line drawing competition

First Practitioner

Dustin Wheat
Lecturer in architecture, University of Texas at Arlington, USA

‘I believe sketching is a reflection of how we internalise our world,’ explains our 2023 Practitioner winner Dustin Wheat. And with what skill he gives us a glimpse into his. The collage of pages from his Moleskine sketchbook, which revolved around his thinking for the design of a house for an astronomer, were as captivating in their detail as they seemed broad in their scope. Wherefore the octopus, from whose tentacles the rest of the drawings seem to emanate? And the yellow overlay (butter paper?) that creates formal connectivities over the conceptual ones. And it seems even Wheat was not sure where the process would lead: ‘Each page had to consider how it was going to stitch together both vertically and horizontally, keeping me in the dark until completed.’

All the judges were beguiled by the result. ‘His sketch process seems to prototype a real world being created by ideologically working through archives – all done contemporarily,’ said Jes Fernie. ‘It’s amazing it’s happening, one apparently unconnected image with one another,’ added Rana Begum. Hamza Shaikh added that while Wheat submitted three drawings, each displaying a prototyping that only arises from ease with the medium, the sketch book montage evidences a serious level of skill; he’s a talented draughtsman; I even love the Post-It notes that run through.

Wheat’s sketch of Le Corbusier’s Saint-Pierre, Firminy, chapel, impossibly supported on a fantastic mesh of strange timber, intimates a later hallucinogenic communion between himself and Charles-Édouard outside Amsterdam, ‘...together, laying in a field of tulips’. A travel sketch of OMA/REX’s Wyly Theatre in Dallas meanwhile, was a skilful pencil render completed in-situ over many hours, in which he realised the importance of ‘bringing a goddamn chair.’ The personal nature of his interpretations charmed judges with their introspection, humour and humanity.

And while Alan Power was keen to note the hand-drawn sketchbook’s ‘singular nature’ compared to other entries, Begum was as drawn to his work’s potential to be randomised ‘in seeing what would happen if pages were mixed in a different way to generate a new arrangement’. Substituting both ideas with themes arising from this year’s judging process, Fernie observed the work appeals to me in the same way that we talk about AI’s hybridity; he’s using the old technologies of paper, pen and pencil but he’s similarly playing with format and scale, the future and past.

Right Thinking Architecture
Graphite, Moleskine, Loose Paper, 450 × 1130mm.

Left
WYLY Travel Sketch
Graphite, Ink, Colour Pencil, 400 × 450mm.
Second, Practitioner

Wyn Gilley  
Senior architect, ArchitecturePLB, London

Narrowly missing out on an accolade last year, persistence has rewarded Wyn Gilley with his atmospheric ‘Barbican, Winter Light.’ The judges acknowledged the obvious coda of the Barbican estate as an architectural and social vision that seems unattainable today, but this did not detract from the Gilley’s clear love of the subject and evident skill in representing it. Depicting Cromwell Tower in a rare moment of warm, mid-winter light, ‘the reflected image provides a further transfiguring of the tower as it melts into the organic mass of water lilies below, creating a point where water, plants, sky and concrete coexist and intermingle.’ The judges all admired the skill of Gilley’s five-colour linocut, with each colour handprinted following the gradual reduction of the block. Winning last year for his oil painting skills, judge Alan Power was ‘struck by the beauty and delicacy of the foreground, particularly for a linocut.’ Fernie too liked ‘the complexity and composition of the multiple colour layers,’ while Shaikh was impressed by his ‘pushing the use of a traditional artistic craft in a way that’s outshining progressive technologies on display here – and really successfully.’ Jan-Carlos Kucharek felt the raw technique liberated the architect from self-imposed controls: ‘Watching architects lino-cut is like watching them enter another world.’

Third, Practitioner

Jolene Liam  
Freelance architect, London

Over three years of previous entries in which she has been commended, Jolene Liam has allowed the judges into her world, where slowly and gradually she offers views a unique glimpse that every year expands by an order of magnitude – and secured her third place. She initially started in her flat, but this year Liam takes us on a psycho-geographical journey through the parks of Singapore as she winds into – or unwinds out of – the perceived experience. ‘Developing on from Gordon Cullen’s concept of serial vision,’ she explains, ‘multiple views are merged into continuous loops, creating their own forms. Through documenting my own experience, I wanted to find a way of capturing the spirit of each place.’ Alan Power appreciated ‘what she’s trying to do in terms of changing scale every time she presents her work for judging’, Hanza Shaikh meanwhile, versed in more technologically-generated fly-throughs, was impressed, thinking ‘She’s developing a new way of interrogating space, evaluating its qualities in a super-interesting way,’ with Begum seeing it as ‘a novel way of looking at architecture.’ RIBAJ’s Kucharek saw the uncharacteristic looseness of two images as ‘seemingly drawn more from the unconscious’ – and was backed up by Fernie, who saw the ‘messiest’ drawing as the most convincing, where Liam’s experimenting had most authenticity. ‘She’s entering into a more sketchy, intuitive and imaginative viewpoint where she is no longer obsessed by the detail, to come to a more free-form conclusion.’
It was the presence of the human that appealed to the judges with architect Michael Lewis’ representations – based on both a student housing project carried out while at FCBS and the way Lewis’ own home transformed during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Despite a standard orthographic representation of the latter, the layering of potential usage in all its forms, like a Neufert data manual on steroids, lent a complexity that raised the drawing from the prosaic to the philosophical.

While Shaikh enjoyed the graphic play – ‘his ethos is to show the life in space anchored through orthogonal representation’ – he wondered if it could have been pushed further, adding: ‘If he had done something more prescient I think it would have had more power.’ But Fernie enjoyed the expression of human physicality embodied in the architect ‘holding’ his own work, returning to the idea of the body-centred design, noting ‘I appreciate the valid relationships he sets up between architecture, the space and the humans within it.’

Two of Vithanaga’s submission of three images of local urban subjects challenged the judges with a seemingly sugar-coated view of colonial architecture that seemed to be at odds with contemporary dialogue on empire, but this striking image of the Sri Lankan capital’s Red Mosque was of a power that had it springing from the screen.

Kucharek felt that at the stated reproduction size, the work would be ‘totally immersive, almost hypnotic’ while Begum felt that the ‘flatness of the image is offset by the saturation of the colour in a compelling way.’ Hamza Shaikh pointed out that: ‘I’m from that background ethnically and resonate with its sensory stimulus.’ But while the popsicle stripes soak the viewer’s gaze, he was more drawn to the human detail of the image’s foreground: ‘Seen together, the image is almost overwhelming and the fact that she’s captured all that is incredible.’
Eye Line drawing competition

Above The Study of Unfolded Forest.
Digital rendering and physical paper collage.
594 × 841mm

First, Student
Chia-Yi Chou
Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL

Chia-Yi Chou’s MArch project asks what happens if you optimise the surface area of forest using fractal geometry whose three-dimensional fractal shapes create endless surface area, making it 1,000 times more efficient than authentic woodland for carbon capture. Using the concept of the ‘fractal cube’ Chou infuses it into her virtual forest, but to do it requires the use of a third dimension beyond that of the traditional drawing. This is a fractal cube that seemingly unfolds and opens out ‘to elaborate on the dynamic illusion of scale... where different scales of building elements are uncovered through the unfolding process.’

All the judges were enamoured by the evident skill and playfulness on display in Chou’s submission, which kept them wondering what was truly three-dimensional and what was not, or what unfolded and what didn’t, bringing a curious tension to the work as presented. They were fascinated by the wide-ranging Archigram/steam punk/Meccano-like conceptual references of her drawing sculptures and the consummate level of detail that had been worked into them.

‘I love this as an idea of how you can make a drawing, big in both thinking and presentation. It’s pulling everything out from two-dimensionality into three in a way that is totally engaging,’ said artist Begum. Power seemed uninterested as to whether it was a sculpture, saying: ‘It’s extremely skilful in terms of its drafting and use of colour, and whether it is or not, it conveys the impression of a three-dimensional model.’ Shaikh also noted the image-making skill: ‘It’s a digital collage but then she’s printed it and worked on it to create a mixed media collage and then she’s introduced the dimensional interactivity – impressive.’

‘The paper flaps enable the dynamic juxtaposition of different scales through the process, creating unexpected spatial illusions and enchanting visual effects,’ said Chou of her work—and Ferris was sold on it. ‘She’s doing absolutely everything that we want her to do. Experimenting on a climate future while referencing past aesthetics; attempting a DIY 3D approach layered onto beautiful drawings. For me it blows the other entries out of the park.’
*Second, Student*

Victoria Wong
Taubman College of Architecture + Urban Planning,
University of Michigan, USA

Wong’s stunning triptych, as notable for its sheer size as level of detail, also deals with themes of a big scale. ‘Architecture is essentially an internalisation of society yet an externalisation of ourselves,’ says Wong, quoting Lebbeus Woods, and her project ‘adapts Japanese aesthetic theories of transience and imperfection and applies them to the city of Hiroshima… Investigating the decay and death of artefacts and events, [the project] illustrates the new collisions of regrowing and reshaping our relationship with different agencies.’

In this strange space where the city’s past, present and future seem to collide, Wong has created three canvases that are highly evocative, not least for a precision that implausibly seems drawn out of the realms of pure fantasy. Shaikh was struck by the ‘brilliant’ levels of technical modelling skills on display. ‘The concept is a heavy one but the drawing bears it out – you can keep just zooming in.’ That sense of detail was echoed by Power who mused: ‘It makes you wonder if they didn’t look at Bosch’s Garden of Earthly Delights’ as an inspiration.’

The otherworldliness was picked up on by Kucharek who felt the level of detail ‘intimated the graphic complexity of Tarot cards at super-scale,’ and Fernie agreed. ‘What I love about this is not only is it technically proficient but theTarot-like formatting is so interesting,’ she said. ‘The layering of meaning into the graphic and traditional use of colour with the text beneath references past culture but brings the future into the frame. It’s very compelling.’

*Third, Student*

Max Cooper-Clark
Royal College of Art, London

Using the agricultural history of his site in the rural Alentejo region in southern Portugal, Cooper-Clark draws attention to a forgotten historic symbiosis of this land’s soil with its former tillers with modern ‘colonial extractivism… desertification, soil erosion and a continuum of racial capitalism in the exploitation of migrant workers from Portugal’s historic colonies.’ He draws a worrying picture of over-intensified land and human exploitation based on subsidies that have helped mar the contemporary landscape. Even bagasse, a by-product of olive oil extraction, is no longer used as natural fertiliser but ‘burned as monetizable fuel, making the land ashen. So this story worked in charcoal, to “reflect the overlapping and accumulation of systems into techniques – essences of the particular collapse – figures layered and rubbed away to reveal the histories and cartographies that pervade contemporary land uses.”’

Judges were struck by the politics of the drawings and how their materiality resonated with the issues. Begum calling the interplay ‘intriguing and intriguing.’ Power was impressed by how the images ‘convey the unexpected, apocalyptic nature of modern-day farming and this individual as the centre of it’ Fernie added: ‘The storytelling is fantastic – counterpointing [simple charcoal-based techniques] with big themes of global, industrial-scale farming.’
Culture
Eye Line drawing competition

Commended, Student: Naomi Vallis
School of Architecture and Planning, University of Auckland, New Zealand

Using Marco Frascari’s notion of the ‘Architectural Monster’, Vallis homes in on ‘how the migration, transportation, and integration of Mughal tectonics to New Zealand has conceived “monstrous” building traditions that represent two different cultural contexts’. Vallis attempts to capture the final moments of this historical assemblage (her ‘monster’), showing the extraction, comparing and assembling of various architectural forms from South Asia to New Zealand (exemplifying similar traditions) through the collision of Mughal and Gothic arches, pergolas, masonry towers, polychrome brick tectonics and terraced forms dismantled and reassembled to create the culturally hybrid representation we see.’ Kucharek enjoyed ‘the almost Klee-like qualities of the assemblages’, while Fernie was drawn to Vallis’ ‘strange, layered effect. Fernie liked “the way she introduces narratives through different colours [and] human figures that engage with the architecture’.

Commended, Student: Sweta Solai Sanker
Royal College of Art, London

‘Through a collaborative approach involving ideas of fictional world-building or collective gameplay, ‘Kid Fiction’ focuses on ideas of how we can better understand, value and empower children as individuals in their own right, using architecture as an intermediary body of communication.’ So Sanker goes rogue, collaborating with primary school pupils to identify issues and solutions for the world around them. And, boldly drawn on a tablet with extreme colour and sophistication, Sanker feeds us scenarios of a Tube system reimagined as a network of slides and Hyde Park as the site of a form of electrolytic conversion that generates energy from microbial fuel cells. Jes Fernie ‘loved the magical references to children,’ while artist Begum and architect Power pored over the child-like playfulness of the images, which nonetheless stood up to interrogation. Begum added, ‘Colours are seductive and reflect the subject, but there’s such density and thought here too which you only see if you zoom in.’

Notice of RIBA Annual General Meeting

RIBA’s Annual General Meeting will be held on Thursday 28 September 2023, 14.00 to 15.00 (BST) at RIBA, 66 Portland Place, London, W1B 1NT and online.

The Agenda, together with the Annual Report and Accounts, will be published on www.architecture.com/agm2023 on Tuesday 5 September 2023.

To attend the AGM, please register at www.architecture.com/agm2023 no later than 12.00 (BST) on Wednesday 27 September 2023. When you register, please indicate whether you wish to attend the meeting in person or online.

Whilst all RIBA Members may attend the AGM, only Chartered Members are entitled to vote.

Yours sincerely,
Graham Devine,
Honorary Secretary

Join us this Autumn for the return of the RIBA Future Leaders Programme. Commencing on 6 September with our opening workshops and closing on 24 October with an immersive afternoon of workshops, live business actors and conversations with industry experts and thought leaders, Future Leaders is designed to provide you with all the tools to excel and progress in your career.

Focusing on three core modules to start delegates on their leadership journey, don’t miss out on this chance to collect 13 hours of CPD learning, from 7 September to 23 October.

It will be led by experienced coaches, communications experts, and industry leaders.

Register now to secure your spot! architecture.com/ribaacademy

Essential training for early career architects!
Czech pavilion
Bruxelles World’s Fair, 1935

Architect, artist, set designer, teacher, industrial designer... Antonín Heythum (1901-1956) had a varied and fulfilling career that brought him from his native Czechoslovakia to the United States. In Prague, where he had received his degree in architecture, he joined the avant-garde artists’ group Devětsil and exhibited his work both in his country and abroad. In the 1920s he also designed residential buildings and sets for theatrical productions, but his first high-profile project was the Czech pavilion at the Bruxelles World’s Fair of 1935. In 1939 Heythum went to the United States with his wife Charlotta, also an architect, to work on the installation of his country’s pavilion at the New York World’s Fair and to design the Czech section at the Golden Gate Fair in San Francisco: here a display of Czech traditional crafts and views of historical buildings were offset by the thoroughly modern exhibition design. After the outbreak of World War II, the Heythums decided to remain in America, where in 1941 Antonín founded the department of industrial design at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena.
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