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Houses: get inside eight great homes
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There’s a lot about the house this issue – and for something different read Indy Johar’s view. Send us your thoughts!

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The world's thinnest inverted roof insulation just got thinner.

**U-value chart**

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<thead>
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<th>U-value req. W/m²/K</th>
<th>Quantum² PLUS</th>
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Sample range of U-values based upon a typical roof terrace construction with a 200mm concrete substrate and product Lambda value as noted.

**Bracken House, FT Building.**

Due to the proximity to St. Paul’s Cathedral, there was limited height available for insulation on this extensive refurbishment. To meet the required 0.18W/m²K U-value within the existing 75mm insulation zone, ProTherm Quantum PLUS Hybrid was used with ProTherm Quantum PLUS Pure over the existing concrete plinths.

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Eleven years ago, architect Slava Balbek’s practice manufactured a series of bespoke cargo containers for an architectural project but the initial commission fell through. Last year Balbek Bureau’s forlorn project was resurrected as a modular, relocatable art gallery (designed to be de- and re-assembled in less than ten days) for don’t Take Fake, a cultural organisation mobilising a fundraising campaign for the restitution of Ukraine’s artistic scene. MOT (Module of Temporality) now hosts the work of 28 different creators and since February 2023 has toured Kyiv, Dnipro, Lutsk and Lviv. MOT’s interior is purposefully neutral, yet the material properties of metal are celebrated – in a feature spiral staircase and the exposed fixings and joints holding the containers together. In a symbolic gesture, the architect sourced additional beams and sheets originating from Illich Iron and Steel Works and the famously besieged Mariupol Azovstal. The structure is deceptively complex, with a cantilever, drainage and heating requiring particular attention. And there are moments of surprise, notably the entrance sequence, where one is initially squeezed through a confined entryway, to be suddenly faced with an unexpectedly expansive, naturally-lit, double-height atrium.

But nobody is as surprised as Balbek himself. ‘I still don’t quite believe it… I mean, it’s been 10 years – come on!’ Still, he couldn’t be happier about MOT’s eventual purpose. The finished architecture and the work of 28 different artists was deployed in ‘only a few months, which is almost impossible to do in the art world, not to mention in a country where a war is going on,’ he says. ‘I am really happy that this project is happening in Ukraine right now.’

Michèle Woodger

MOT, UKRAINE
BALBEK BUREAU

Read the full story: ribaj.com/balbek-ukraine

1: Buildings

Lab tested — University

Ideal home — House of the Year

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Six diverse projects have been shortlisted for the coveted 2023 award. Which will be proclaimed the winner on 23 November?

COWSHED, DEVON
DAVID KOHN ARCHITECTS FOR PRIVATE CLIENT

Over 15 years Suzanne and Peter Redstone have worked with former House of the Year Award-winner David Kohn Architects to convert agricultural buildings on their dairy farm to residential use. The fifth and final piece of the new community is their own home, which will be the winner on 23 November?

New work uses sympathetically simple and robust materials. Super-insulated external walls are clad in Devcon cedar, while internal partitions are in exposed Corten blackwork, which makes a rugged backdrop for numerous painting and sculptures and is elevated by subtitles in the detailing: a change in the bond marks the moment when construction resumed after a lockdown-enforced hiatus.

Living accommodation wraps around the workspace, whose glazed elevation onto the farmyard is treat to form a sheltered veranda and outdoor workshop. Lower roof heights give these areas a more intimate character. Some bedrooms are on the step-free ground floor to ensure that the house can support all stages of life. Playful details include louvered windows onto the yard. Suzanne’s artwork is referenced in the bright wooden panels pop up from the sills for privacy.

A more restrained rear elevation is clad in corrugated panels of recycled cladding and black bilumin. The 180m² two-storey single-family house, which replaced a taller and clumsily extended 1980s house in multiple occupation, is arranged around a double-height, top-lit atrium ringed by stairs and landings in green-painted steel. The atrium connects gardens at the front and back, though richly coloured curtains subdivide the space.

Cross-laminated timber was selected for ease of construction and its insulating properties, as well as its suitability to create the desired ‘agricultural’ aesthetic. End grain is exposed, and door frames and architraves omitted. Without additional linings, the whole building’s embodied carbon is 270gCO2/m². And with high U-values, an air-source heat pump and rooftop photovoltaic panels, operational energy use is 29 kWh/m²/year, or 410 kgCO2/m² over the building’s lifecycle – all well below the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge targets.

SALTMARSH HOUSE, ISLE OF WIGHT
NALL MCLAUGHLIN ARCHITECTS FOR PRIVATE CLIENT

Built in the grounds of a large 19th century house on the edge of a tidal lagoon, Saltmarsh House provides compact guest accommodation in three timber pods – a cabin-like bedroom, kitchen and bathroom – beside a long glass-walled dining room with a copper-clad roof of pyramids that recalls the garden’s original glasshouses. Its geometric order and warm larch linings make a wry joke as the client doesn’t watch television.

Deep eaves shelter a veranda that wraps the dining room, and an outdoor terrace at one end. Glass walls pass through the centres of each skeletal column cluster to preserve legibility of the structure from both inside and out. Fine tolerances were achieved through offsite prefabrication by specialist contractor Milimetre.

The house was principally to be a retreat for the clients’ extended family. Its physical and symbolic heart is a double-height hall, dimensioned to allow a 5.5m-high Christmas tree. It stands below an oculus lined in gold leaf and above a drain.

Living accommodation wraps around this space, rising to three storeys to make one ‘tower’ on the southern corner and two in a bedroom wing, whose sloping roofline echoes the fall of the land down to a small loch at the eastern end. Interiors share something of the building’s sparse, rugged outsides character, with giant harling-covered hearth framing one corner of the living room, and a white-tiled floor in the double-height, barrel-vaulted dining room. On top, a four-place in a sheltered roof terrace warms guests enjoying spectacular views.
MADE OF SAND, DEVON 
STUDIO WEAVE FOR PRIVATE CLIENT

Named in honour of a historic sandpit on which it stands, Made of Sand is a timber-framed self-contained annexe to a stone cottage in rural Devon that can be used by friends and family of the clients, or made available to artists as a creative retreat.

Replacing a down-at-heel garage and workshop, the 85m² extension has an L-shaped plan. A single-storey kitchen is set behind the existing house, and the addition rises to two storeys against its gable end, with a bedroom on the ground floor and a living room above, whose large window frames a view of a meadow in front of the house and the Blackdown Hills beyond.

Facades are clad in Western red cedar that is silvering to match surrounding woodland, with slender upright and diagonal timbers that lend texture and express the structural arrangement within. Inside, the frame of Douglas fir remains on view throughout, with the spacing of beams also reflected in a web of battens over timber-lined walls. Heavily figured Douglas fir is also used to form integrated storage and window seats. The warm tones of the wood are enhanced by a material palette that includes brass, cob, hand-made terracotta pament tiles and a pinkish lime plaster to which some sand was added in a subtle acknowledgement of the site’s former use.

MIDDLE AVENUE, SURREY
RURAL OFFICE FOR PRIVATE CLIENT

When the clients for this 285m² home in suburban Farnham first appointed Carmarthen-based Rural Office, their intention was to renovate a run-down inter-war bungalow that previously stood on the site. They were attracted by the architect’s rustic revamp of a Norfolk barn, which was one of the practice’s few completed projects at the time; the 2017 House of the Year winner Caring Wood was still under construction. Feasibility studies determined that there was little worth preserving, but the new build house has the craftsmanship, comfort and historic sensitivity that its owners had admired in the barn.

A 4m-high clay-tiled roof studded with patinated zinc dormers gives a subtly contemporary inflection to the Arts & Crafts style of neighbouring houses, as do crisp white-rendered gables and chimneys. The plan is organised around a triple-height hall which connects all levels of the house and the main living areas, as well as garden ‘rooms’. Bedrooms for the clients and their two grown-up children are tucked under the steeply pitched roof – tall, airy spaces given a more intimate character by a datum of dark through-coloured MDF.

Natural materials are in evidence throughout, detailed in a way that again recalls the Arts & Crafts movement. Light filters through basket-weave timber panels at the entrance. Oak marries the custom-made kitchen cabinets to partitions between the ground-floor rooms and the staircase, and harmonises with the brick-paved floors and hearth to make refined interiors that are understated but nevertheless warm and inviting.
Sandy Rendel Architects’ new house on the South Downs is elegant and liveable – and could have been bigger

Words: Isabelle Priest Photographs: Ståle Eriksen

The feeling I get about Bury Gate Farm does not come naturally. The project is a new house designed by Sandy Rendel Architects near Pulborough in West Sussex. It is in the South Downs National Park on the flat Wealden Greensand before the ridge rises sharply and dramatically, a great humpback. Peeping at it through a hedge from down a long field, the house sits almost isolated in its spacious setting – meadow in front, a backdrop of mature oak woodland. The owners’ original 1930s country home is just out of view to the south-east, hidden by foliage. My feeling is that it is occasionally a shame that self-building a home in the UK has become so complicated and expensive, because Bury Gate Farm could, and perhaps should, have been bigger.

The house took a year in planning, five in construction and completed in June. But it’s not that. The house is a five-bay stacked colonnade, book-ended by chimneys. From that distant position you can’t see the rough aggregate finish of the concrete columns, nor the fine framing of the floor-to-ceiling glazing. However, the grid is slightly squat, deliberately diminutive in the landscape. More generosity with the scale would set off the building and its setting, making them that bit more resplendent.

The house is designed as it is because of geology. The Wealden Greensand – clay soil on sandstone bedrock – has always been unproductive, leading to its recreational use. The gentry built their farmsteads on the productive land to the west and houses here. As a result, the landscape is spotted with small and large country homes. Bury Gate Farm evolves that architectural heritage. It meets those qualities, which is why it could be bigger. The building’s contemporary portico faces the Downs in the same way, and it deserves more presence like them.

It isn’t a small house, of course. The building you see from the field is 459m², then there is a 50m² annexe and 73m² garage behind. The owner, a former building contractor, lived next door for 35 years and bought it 25 years ago. When Rendel got to the project in 2016, the

Buildings
House

That’s the way to do it.
existing bungalow had been demolished and the piling mat for a larger pitched roof house in a Wealden vernacular was already down. But the client had a change of heart and approached the practice having seen its Corten and glass South Street house in Lewes at the other end of the national park. The client wanted to broadly keep the layout, but explore different articulation.

The previous design had obtained planning permission relatively easily. This one didn’t. The proposal went to committee, and it was fraught. ‘We submitted the project to the South Downs National Park Design Review Panel,’ explains Rendel. ‘That’s not normally something we would do for a scheme this size.’ The panel is led by Allies and Morrison’s Graham Morrison and was instrumental in the house getting permission. The design review panel showed the design met the criteria – including being smaller than the previous design. There was no way the local authority could object – but it was concerned by views from the South Downs Way, three miles away. The gate at the end of the meadow where we looked through was removed as part of the permission. So the house is not seen.

Evidently, I think it’s regrettable. To the landscape is the formal facade. The plan strings the principal rooms – kitchen family room, double-height hall and formal living room downstairs, master and family bedrooms above – along this south-facing elevation, stepping forwards and down the site from the north-east to south-west and fronted by the double colonnade. To the rear, the plan breaks into more informal components with a wing containing the WC, utility and plant room on the ground floor and guest bedrooms above. Beyond is the annexe, arranged as two main spaces and a shower room, as well as the garage and store. This is the view on approach from the horseshoe driveway; a cluster of stacked and slipped volumes.

The buff brick house faces the humpback ridge of the South Downs. The rear cloister that leads around the annexe to the front door has the same concrete and stone aggregate columns.
The arrangement, however, is suggestive of the refined architecture of nearby parkland houses. A porte cochère through the garage leads to a courtyard parking area, log store and electric charging – essentially a modern stable yard. A single-storey cloister winds around the annexe so you can park up and arrive at the front door without getting wet if it’s raining. Inside, the house opens into a great hall that twists the orientation of the view towards the Downs for the first time through floor-to-ceiling glazing. The chunky concrete columns step past – a sensation that is continued through all the main rooms. Everywhere is suggestive of both grandness and informality that sit in balance. Fine pieces of antique furniture transported from the clients’ previous home sit alongside steel handrails, concrete ceilings, a slab front and granite kitchen, sheets of glass and slim glazing frames. This successful outcome appears to be a result of the craftsmanship and knowledge of traditional techniques that have been embedded into the fabric of the building – by Rendel but also by the client.

Externally, the brick was chosen to closely match the colour of the local buff Fittleworth stone. The columns use that stone as aggregate. The brick is pointed using lime and Flemish bond, with detail vertical brick detailing. Brick returns on the window openings minimise the frames. Internally, the walls are lime plaster. Floors and main doors are oak, like the surrounding trees. The halfback stair is lit by a west-facing window and lands in a central galleried landing. There is even some 1970s sustainable tech. In a house like this, electricity-only, super-insulated and low-energy in use, a woodburning stove is not necessary. However, for the client, it is an essential part of living in the countryside. The double-sided surround is large, but the actual unit is small, and its energy captured to heat hot water.

The thinking behind this project is so good, I’d have liked to see more of it. •

**IN NUMBERS**

582m²

GIA

13,700

predicted on-site energy generation (kWh/yr)

A-rated

(110)

EPC

**Credits**

Client: Confidential

Architect: Sandy Rendel Architects

Structural engineer: Structure Workshop

ASHP and PV design and installation: Invicta Clean Energy

MVHR design and installation: Built Environment Technology

Precast concrete: Cambridge Architectural Precast

Brick: Petersen Tegl

Glazed windows/sliding doors: Panoramah and Schueco

Flat and green roofing: IKO by Sussex Asphalte

Soft landscaping: Euphorbia Design

**The thinking behind this project is so good, I’d have liked to see more of it. •**

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Got it down to a T

Knox Bhavan’s Little Big House creates just the right balance of aesthetic delight and essential practicality for an artist and author living with life-changing injuries

Words: Rachel Coll Photographs: Edmund Sumner

Knox Bhavan’s design is a little house down a quiet lane in Hertfordshire, but it makes a big impression. 

On arrival, the Little Big House personifies its name. Set back from the road on a T-shaped footprint, it has a modest street presence, but the dramatic cantilevered roof sweeps out to greet you with a big statement of intent. Bold and ambitious, it is the culmination of a challenging and inspiring journey between Knox Bhavan and its client, Henry Fraser. Fraser is an artist, author and motivational speaker and was the inspiration for the West End musical ‘The Little Big Things’. It’s an impressive CV for anyone, but especially given Fraser’s pivot following a life-changing accident that left him paralysed from the shoulders down.

Culmination, however, feels the wrong word. From the start, this house was about ambition, hope and life. Knox Bhavan became involved, pro-bono, with the family soon after Fraser’s accident to help adapt the family home. The opportunity to develop a purpose-built home allowed Fraser to take his next step to independence.

The Little Big House, in a quiet lane, replaces a 1950s bungalow which Knox Bhavan concluded could not be retrofitted and adapted sufficiently to meet the requirements. The newbuild is a fulfilling and energy-efficient lifetime home made using modern methods of construction.

Budget constraints drove the design towards a prefabricated timber cassette system, developed in a partnership of Knox Bhavan, BlokBuild and Price & Myers, and produced by a bespoke digital pattern. That provided the efficiencies, minimal waste, speed of construction and high thermal performance. It has been combined with PVs for energy collection and air source heat pumps to supply the heating and cooling for the controlled environment that life changing injuries require. So far the expansive opening glazing and thermal performance seem to be enough not to need the cooling much.

The swooping roof creates a sheltered arrival point, specifically protecting Fraser from the weather and leading through the entrance gate into the first courtyard to the front door. The floorplan is orientated to suit the sun path and allows the central living space to straddle peaceful courtyard gardens on either side.

The external envelope reflects the overall design and offers the first evidence of design sensitivity throughout. The reflective aluminium roof soffit contrasts with walls clad in warm

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The RIBA Journal November/December 2023
Mapei is committed to creating safe, long-lasting products that have the lowest impact possible on our health and our planet. A measurable commitment visible to everyone thanks to P.A.S.S. (Profile, Aspects and Synthesis of Sustainability): data sheets indicating the main green characteristics of products and the advantages of using them in terms of sustainability. A concrete help to those who want to design sustainably.
features are sensitive to Fraser’s needs and those assisting him, without defining the aesthetic or overpowering the design.

Close attention has been paid to the location and design of the principal bedroom suite where Fraser spends a significant proportion of his time. The bathroom takes prominence on the corner with an expansive glazed corner into the garden that is a calm and serene space to start the day. Both spaces take advantage of the orientation to bring in light and connect to the garden.

The modest first floor adds two bedrooms to those on the ground floor, as well as a kitchenette and small dining/study space for guests and/or another carer. Once installed, the lift will connect the ground floor to this area, reflecting Fraser’s will to access every part of his home and always looking to the future.

This is a house for a positive man with an exciting life ahead. Its polished concrete floors and sliding glazed doors open the central kitchen and dining area to the courtyard and garden spaces either side, inviting – almost demanding – social interaction and life to enter. The material selections are not just clean and practical, but the aesthetic choices of a young man who wants to make a home with a bright future. The display case of colourful objects, at the threshold between public and private, embody the character of the owner which pervades the design. The layout is a meticulous translation of the client’s brief and requirements and a celebration of that day-to-day experience. It is filled with natural daylight and the double height central space feels bright and optimistic.

Fraser has been on an incredible journey and this house feels like the culmination of that experience; it embodies the hope, zest and drive that he has for life and living.

Rachel Coll is a director at Tigg Coll Architects

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Part of the Manchester Science Park masterplan, Base is a new five-storey specialist hub that has provided the area with a 91,000sq ft office space.

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The £21m redevelopment was designed by Bridge Architects to provide an environmentally sustainable workspace, specifically designed for occupiers in the computer engineering, energy technology, light manufacturing and materials science sectors.

Taylor Maxwell worked closely with main contractors Speedclad Ltd to specify and supply the grey multi Corium brick cladding used across the facade which was installed by Longworth Building Services.

The BBA certified cladding system, manufactured by Wienerberger, was installed onto Rainspan panels directly which helped reduce installation time on site. The design possibilities of Corium allowed for the building’s design to match the overall masterplan brief to create a cohesive Manchester Science Park.

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One for all

Witherford Watson Mann’s Appleby Blue almshouse gives ordinary people the kind of elderly housing that is normally the preserve of the wealthy

Words: Eleanor Young Photographs: Philip Vile

A good few buildings have one remarkable room. Only the best have more, and of those just a few make travelling from one lovely space to another a pleasure in itself. Appleby Blue almshouse in Bermondsey, designed by Witherford Watson Mann, is one such place. Built to house the older residents of Southwark in south London, it corrals the sun into airy social spaces, warm, generous walkways and 57 neatly appointed flats that borrow their character from the structure and the city. At its centre are ginkgo trees and the sound of water runs through its courtyard, while on the boundary to local terraced streets, pleached fruit trees edge sunny growing spaces. Residents can take a circuit right around the building, pausing for conversation at the benches in front of each kitchen window.

Over the last decade housing for older people has had its own market grow up around it. You no longer need to buy a bungalow to downsize, you can move to a tailor-made community of elderly peers, with classes and tea parties and a lift to your brand new flat. It has a certain appeal – and a hefty monthly fee. The social, low cost version of this arcadia has traditionally been provided by almshouses. Influenced by ideas from the visitors’ book at its Stirling Prize-winning Astley Castle, and news of the much reported killer loneliness, Stephen Witherford, co-founder of WWM, unwittingly contributed to a new brief for such a place when he attended the away day for a small Southwark almshouse and grant-giving charity, United St Saviour’s. There he listed the best things a building...
can bring a sense of how light moves, time, memory, the joy of garden focus, shared place. These, rather than space requirements became the brief. The relationship with the charity grew.

The project took time to crystallise, eventually settling on the site of a squatted 1960s former care home and car park on which Southwark Council bought out the lease. The money was to come from a Section 106 on a major development, Triptych Bankside behind the Tate Modern, for developer JTRE London. Happily, JTRE, which hails from Slovakia and has developments across central Europe, took on the drawings at Stage 4.2 and kept on Witherford Watson Mann through the construction management contract, even though much of the professional team was changed.

Witherford explains that the design started with the traditional almshouse diagram – a U-shape of homes reaching towards the street. But instead of burying community spaces at the heart of the homes, the practice designed them to face the street, separating the courtyard while offering views into it.

Approaching the building the four storeys of brick with a stepped-back zinc top storey has much in common with the many brick apartments that have gone up over the last decades across England’s major cities. But it is somehow more. A few small details, and one big one, make it stand out. The big one is the two-storey projecting timber and glass of the community elements with just a kink to guide you to the entrance. The timber window frames and panels and projecting brick headers in bluey Danish brick give depth and a warmth of extra detail.

Playful corners enliven the block as it turns towards local terraces and steps down from five storeys to two, using projecting two-storey bays with little gardens at their feet, as it cosies up to its neighbours.

The design has subtle layers of public and communal space. While the building appears open and welcoming from the street, the raised ground floor gives those inside the gallery a view onto it. Its signalling fits the charity’s plan for a place that the community can be invited in to, but only as valued guests. Thus the communal double-height garden room that spans the building from street to courtyard garden feels self contained, and turns naturally towards the internal courtyard it opens onto.

The walkway acts an organising device, on side streets projecting bays set up a rhythm that fits the terraced houses they run into.

**Suppliers**
- Hardwood windows and glazed screens: Boisrois
- External brickwork: Leighway Brickwork
- Internal joinery: Horohoe Construction
- External precast concrete: Shire Cast Stone
- Steelwork: Powerhouse Design and Engineering

![Diagram](image.png)

**IN NUMBERS**
- £25.1m construction value
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running around the edge of the courtyard, except for a first floor diversion to the street side of the building. It is a buffer between the communal and the more private spaces of private front doors and kitchen windows. Some residents have separated themselves off further with net curtains, others have populated their windowsills with plants and decorative jars of pasta and cornflakes; still others have started to colonise the walkways, planters and benches with ferns, roses and conversation – it is the perfect place to slide back the glass screens of the walkway and sit down with a passing friend, a kind of sociable winter garden. And all overlooking the courtyard and the planted roof garden.

The walkway is also an example of how London’s Housing Design Standards open up architectural possibilities. In project workshops people asked why

The allocation for private outside space was folded into that of the circulation to provide these generous, tempered spaces that also give shade to the windows. At a build level the walkways are a testament to collaboration. ITRÉ brought on board the Lithuanian-based Boisrois which worked with WWM on the design of solid oak frames for the windows and glazed screens, with integrated glass balustrades and vents – both passive and automated. The frames are robust and handsome, promising quality and care from Appleby Blue.

As we walk around a small group of residents is finishing up in the community kitchen and share slices of brownie. Residents pause to exchange a few words; many of them came for Witherford Watson Mann’s 21st party here a week before. There is a sense of the jobs people have had, the work that still continues for some, lives of addiction or the move with family (one local resident has her sister living just along the way). There is optimism about being able to move somewhere new – often from tired council housing – in their local area, where red double deckers going past the window can take them up to their club at London Bridge or a short ride to Bermondsey Iceland. They can gather in the lounge and watch Strictly or take a comfortable chair looking out over Southwark Park Road.

The charity sees itself, and its two earlier
almshouses, as enabling people over 65 to remain part of the city, rather than retreating. Different local groups are being brought in – gardening, cooking, perhaps sharing craft skills – bringing the 63 residents together with people from other generations. For many there are challenges with the move itself and failing health, and despite the immense feeling of privilege in being among the natural materials of the building and the gardens, there is acknowledgement that lives can be hard. The community kitchen is something of stand against both food poverty and loneliness. There is a logic in sharing resources, one example: shower rooms in the modest flats are augmented with what is jokingly named ‘Bermondsey Spa’ where any inhabitant can take a soak in the bath.

Charity chief executive Martyn Craddock says: ‘We expect this to be a benchmark for older peoples’ housing for a number of years.’ It has been a huge undertaking, avoiding the dumbing down of the project as the developer took on the contract, the worries over Covid and materials shortages. And now there’s the pressure on staff and finances of taking on another almshouse. Despite that, Craddock is toying with the idea of building another. Spending time at Appleby Blue it is easy to see why embarking on another almshouse build is such a compelling idea.

Credits
Client: JTRE
User: United St Saviour’s Charity
Architect: Witherford Watson Mann
Structural engineers: Price & Myers (stage 0-3); Pringle James (stage 4-5)
Services engineers: Skelly & Co (stage 0-3); AWA Consultants (stage 4-5)
Landscape architect: Grant Associates
QS: Thompson Cole (stage 4)
Project management: Gardiner and Theobold (stage 0-3); Beyond (stage 4)
Planning consultant: DP9
Fire consultant: The Fire Surgery
Acoustic and thermal consultant: Mullan
Main contractor: JTRE

Bottom right
At the back of the site the building steps down to meet surrounding terraces. A rooftop garden creates more shared sunny spaces.

Garden room with the red buses of south east London passing on one side and the gentle trees and water of the courtyard on the other.

Cutaways at the corners make them interesting, in the tradition of Bermondsey corners, says Witherford.
Lucent still looks like 13 buildings despite the single space they enclose, expanding and enriching the streetscape in the heart of London’s West End.

Words: Isabelle Priest

As an almost triangular plot measuring 3,047m², Lucent is not the largest city block, yet its position makes it one of the most loaded – perhaps in the world. Its name is a clue, but perhaps not quite enough of one. Because even if you don’t know the project you do know the site. Everyone does. Lucent is the new name for the city block that accommodates the Piccadilly Circus Lights. What makes it loaded is that each of its elevations are so atmospherically different. You have the digital screen, which contrasts to the classical formality of Regent Street. Then there is Denman Street, a narrow lane of lower, humbler townhouses that is more Soho than Regency. The remaining side on Shaftesbury Avenue is part of theatreland, with its neon signs and aspect to the casinos and cinemas of Leicester Square and Chinatown.

The site’s owner, Landsec, has been acquiring the individual buildings that make up the island since the 1960s. It took over the last in October 2012. That’s how Lucent came about. Previously, the site comprised 13 buildings with a dank courtyard in the centre. The broad idea was to bring them into a single building. Fletcher Priest Architects was brought in via a closed invited competition, having worked with Landsec several times.

Above Site plan of Lucent outlined using red lines.

Left Lucent is the city block that contains the Piccadilly Lights. This aerial view of the new building shows its faceted roodscape to protect views.

IN NUMBERS
- 13,494m² total GIA
- 11,138m² grade A office space
- 2,044m² retail space
- 312m² residential
- 1,132kg CO₂e/m² whole building embodied carbon

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At that point the extent of the works wasn’t clear. However, phase 1, the replacement of the Piccadilly Lights
4-6 is a listed Portland stone former banking hall for London County and Westminster Bank, designed by Edward Keynes Purchase and Reginald Blomfield in 1909 in an exuberant baroque style. Here, the facade was taken down and sent to Dorset for each stone to be reworked and refaced by piece by piece. On its return, it was put back ‘stretched’ so that its parapet aligns with the top of the Lights, with an extra level inserted between floors five and six, and everything else slightly elongated too. The listed internal features have also been reinstated.

To the left again is 8 Glasshouse Street, which turns a corner with 1 Sherwood Street, and is a similar story. This time the facade is Bath stone, the building wasn’t listed but it has also been stretched in height to line up with the internal levels of next door and had a mansard roof level added with a roof terrace above. At the ground floor, two huge shop windows open onto the lobby above. The three-storey dormer looks like it belongs in the streets of Rennes or Rouen and is completely endearing.

The three-storey dormer looks like it belongs in the streets of Rennes or Rouen and is completely endearing of the main entrance to the Lucent block – a lobby with artwork exhibited on the walls and a sculptural spiral staircase that project architect Joseph Sweeney says is designed to ‘hint at Mayfair galleries’. The entrance, however, is in the new infill building beyond. A narrow frontage, this is one of the few areas of the elevation where the geometry of the new city-block-sized roof (deliberately faceted to preserve protected views) is visible, a plane of Welsh slate tiles streaming down the elevation. A three-storey dormer sits within it, and another roof terrace to the other side. Its asymmetrical design and focus on the roofscapes rather than the facade shakes up the street scene, making it almost medieval in nature. It could belong in the streets of Rennes or Rouen and is completely endearing as a consequence. The facade is a deep grey-blue façade developed with Darren Terracotta and, like the slate, references the 19th century buildings all around Piccadilly, as well as Eric Parry’s nearby 2013 One Eagle Place.

Each building has undergone its own special and highly laboured treatment.
Continuing to Denman Street, the three corner buildings are not part of the Lucent plot (hence not quite a triangle), but are undergoing their own independent renovation. From here the street is red brick and designed to a townhouse format that carries on from numbers 19 and 20 at the western end. These are Edwardian and were dismantled brick by brick like those before, but have been converted for residential use with seven apartments, separate entrances and a bike store. Next is another 52.1m-long newbuild section that reverts to retail on the ground floor and workspace above. The long elevation is broken into six townhouses, using alternating brickwork patterns and styles from English, Flemish and modern stack bonds inspired by Soho’s typical Westminster Dutch style. The units are purposefully boutique-size for smaller brands to occupy.

Finally, a new retail unit wraps Denman Street onto Shaftesbury Avenue. This replaces a 1970s brown brick building with a memorably irritating colonnade at ground level that was awkward for the passing crowds to navigate. Fletcher Priest’s replacement again uses faience, here manufactured by NBK. It shines brilliant white on a sunny day and is designed as a complex facade of closed bays and recessed balconies to maintain the classical proportions of the last section in the island block, the 19th century, cream faience, 11-17 Shaftesbury Avenue, to the right of the Lights. The faceted roof again drops down on the corner of the new building. Inside is a 13,000m² retail unit on the ground and basement floors, already let although not yet open. The last existing building also underwent the ‘stretch’ process, with new levels and an infilled mansard from the third floor upwards. The building was not listed, but a certain lightness has grown denser in its redeveloped guise.

So what of the inside? Creating...
workspace with the largest floorplates was what it was all about. Six levels of offices accommodate around 1000 people, with a restaurant on the seventh floor. At their largest, the floorplates are 2500 m², their span requiring two lightwell atria for daylight. One of these is in the middle; the structure of the other, behind the Lights, forms the framework for a vertical winter garden. The most successful office floors are five and six; the latter has surrounding curtain walling that sits in the folds of the roof and opens onto semi-sheltered terraces which ingeniously provide solar shading and shelter for all-weather use so workers can pop out there for a coffee, to have meeting or to take a call. Nevertheless, each level has almost 360º views, the best higher up the building over other rooftops. The public restaurant has a substantial terrace directed towards the sculpture of Eros on the Circus and to Westminster Palace. However, there are 20 roof terraces snuck into the building, designed long before the Covid pandemic hastened their implementation.

The lower office floors exhibit the facade retention approach more than those above. A phenomenal amount of work and attention has gone into those processes, which is fantastic, especially the focus on craft and traditional skills. The resulting array of window types is less convincing – as are the spaces, which prompt the question of whether it is just the facade that matters in a historical building, or what sits behind it, including the memory of its footprint. There is an increasing number of these types of projects. Perhaps as more clients and designers push similar programmes in ever-densifying cities there will be improved ways of conveying external character to internal configurations, rather than the same internal treatment of white walls being used to draw together the 13 originally separate buildings here.

It hardly matters, though, as the site was dictated by the steel trusses involved in holding up the new screen for the Lights. You can see the steel truss in the restaurant, and it is a formidable piece. A few years ago, this area behind Piccadilly didn’t offer much. Dixon Jones and Donald Insall Associates’ Quadrant 3 across Sherwood Street precipitated this improvement, but Landsec’s investment solidifies that, and makes visible an impressive confidence and swagger in London itself. The transformation of the island into Lucent makes a destination worth visiting for more than the famous Lights. Within three short, newly concentrated streets, Fletcher Priest Architects has captured the thrilling diversity of the West End so that you can almost experience it in a single city block. It’s an impressive feat to pull off – and a morale boost for the city. •
Architecture and nature in harmony at Sigma’s new headquarters

Arper’s role in the fitout and furnishing of an office complex in Kawasaki, Japan, was symbiotically entwined with the architectural, environmental and natural priorities of the client.

A lively professional space, in close dialogue with the surrounding natural environment and made dynamic by fluid interaction among colleagues: this was the vision that inspired Kajima Design Studio in the design of the new headquarters of Sigma, a leading Japanese company in the field of photographic optics.

That inspiration became manifest as a building – constructed in just two years – in Kawasaki, in an industrial area surrounded by greenery, a stone’s throw from Shinokoji Park.

The architectural complex rises at the back of a hill and consists of three parts: two white elements connected by a dark monolith. It’s inside the brighter blocks that corporate life takes place, not only in the offices but also in the laboratories, darkrooms and photo-exhibition rooms.

The dark-colored block, on the other hand, is a space that chronicles Sigma’s innovations in technology and design, with a museum-like layout.

The building truly seems to live in symbiosis with its natural surroundings and seasons, thanks in part to the landscape design, construction and maintenance by Green Wise. In spring, the cafeteria building has a view of cherry blossoms, in the autumn, yellow chestnut-leaved oaks celebrate the landscape, while the entire building is traversed by green corridors and patios. Even its main facade of mirror-brushed aluminum seems to dematerialize in its embrace with nature.

Similarly, sustainability features prominently in Kajima Design’s construction choices, which favoured prevalent and prefabricated structures to make the building more streamlined and environmentally friendly.

It is a sustainable building in terms of energy too, thanks to a photovoltaic system that reuses the energy of the entire building and powers the electric charging stations in the parking lot.

The rooftop garden, created to promote thermal insulation by raising residual earth after excavation, is in line with these solutions.

The intimate relationship between architecture and natural surroundings is guided by the interior design project, created by architect Riccardo Daniel in collaboration with Arper.

‘The light colours of the offices and common areas – from plaster to wall coverings – are enlivened by the palette of the furnishings: a mix of neutral tones and shades of green in the meeting areas and open spaces, with countertops in bright, autumnal tones in the recreational space.

‘Arper collections become sparks of color, whose nuances identify the intended use and atmosphere of a space,’ says the architect.

The synergy that was created between Sigma and Arper with this project is also due to Ichiro Iwasaki, creative director of the Japanese company and creator of several of the Italian company’s collections.

‘Since I have a deep knowledge of both Sigma and Arper, had an active role as a supervisor in this project,’ Ichiro says. ‘Right from the start, I felt that these spaces needed to support the daily activities of the people who work for Sigma. These people focus every day on microscopic details, those of the precision devices produced by the company. “Concentration” and “relaxation” are thus the two thematic strands that alternate in this new location, depending on the intended use of each area. And the same logic guided the selection of the furniture – which also needed to convey the Arper spirit – which I would call “Arperness” in this context,” Ichiro concludes.

Indeed, the lines of the furnishings redesign the interior volumes, their heights playing an important role in bringing space back to a human and dynamic dimension that encourages interaction and sharing.

An orientation also present in the idea of the “open desk”, proposed by Arper and embraced with conviction by CEO Yamakawa Kazuto, which encourages using the office in a more active and lively way.

This is a revolutionary stance not only for Sigma, but for Japanese companies in general, demonstrating how the concept of a space can influence not only the lives of those who inhabit it, but also the very idea of that environment, the conventions and atmosphere it evokes.

Architectural design: Kajima Design Construction company: Kajima Corp. Landscape design: Green Wise Interior design: Riccardo Daniel, Kajima Design Sigma creative director: Ichiro Iwasaki Arper products: Adell, Arcos, Babar, Califa 80, Catifa Up, Catifa 80, Cila, Cross, Dice, Dana 02, Gher, Kik, Kinesit, Leaf, Mesty, Noon, Pix, Planwell, Pij, Song, Stacy, Steeva, Wim
Statement of intent

With East Marshgate, UCL’s expansion into London’s former Olympic park, Stanton Williams creates a convincing piece of a promised new urban quarter.

Words: Hugh Pearman    Photographs: Hufton + Crow
Go to the district in Stratford, east London, branded as East Bank, and you are in the world of large discrete objects set among waterways and railway lines. To the 2012 remnants of the cut-down former Olympic Stadium (now West Ham FC), swoopy aquatics centre and the fading red steel tubing of the ‘Orbit’ sculpture/observation tower, you can now add a new university campus. This, at the southern end of what was the Olympic park, is the chosen expansion zone of University College London. It is building UCL East with conviction, from deep pockets, to compete with research-science rivals including Imperial College, Oxbridge, Manchester and Edinburgh.

The first element of the masterplan to complete last year was the nearby One Pool Street by Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands, four floors of labs, studios, public and exhibition space and a plush lecture theatre/cinema, topped with 552 student rooms in two towers of 13 and 17 storeys. Now it is joined, across one of the several channels of the River Lea delta, by East Marshgate, a £250 million megastructure by Stanton Williams that is the daily workplace for some 2,500 students, teachers and (as with One Pool Street) as many of the public as care to come in.

This is the largest single building in UCL’s portfolio. Its presence, the way it sits in the landscape – especially this flat windy landscape of memories industrial and athletic – is the thing. It may be only eight storeys high but they are tall storeys: the overall height is what you’d expect from a conventional 12-storey block. Its external appearance is all about the large scale, emphatic modelling of surfaces and textures into four zones from bottom to top. It is an inscrutable beast, its facades including a series of heavyweight vertically-slatted precast screens with the razor-sharp concrete detailing that is the trademark of the practice.

The facades are a full-scale sampler of concrete finishes, on lower levels referencing boardmarked and pick-hammered types. Today these finishes come from moulds and, while presenting textural variation, lack the sharp definition of their forebears. With BREEAM Excellent as the target, relatively low-carbon concrete of the slow-curing variety with a high proportion of cement-replacement fuel ash is used. Exposed-aggregate concrete is used at ground level, polished for the floor, as a memory of the riverine gravel beds underlying the site. And as Stanton Williams director Gavin Henderson points out, a key element of sustainability is building for the long term: minimum 60 years in this case.

It is a handsome building with something of the air of a fortress. The second-floor terrace projecting above the entrance has a Corten view framing device with a gatehouse feel. This defensive impression comes partly from it being the first of a planned cluster of four buildings, likely to go to competition. So it will not continue to stand in isolation. By the time UCL East is built out, the university will have expanded its capacity by 45% and, with the associated landscaping, have made a new city district, the four palaces of learning.
arranged around a square.

The architectural expression matters because one of the headline ideas behind UCL East is being open to the public. The ground levels of all the buildings on the masterplan are ‘fluid’, containing cafes, exhibition spaces and outreach teaching spaces for local school pupils and the like. East Marshgate does all this, in a distinctly patrician manner. It’s instructive to compare it with LDS’s smaller One Pool Street which, with its radiused corners and brises-soleil, avoids the austere magnificence of its big neighbour but gives the brief a perhaps friendlier physical expression.

So as things stand, one not of the academic world might approach East Marshgate with some trepidation: just a few hundred yards to the east the gargantuan Westfield shopping and entertainment mall offers its more obviously accessible alternative wares. Nearing completion even closer northwards is a rival cultural quarter with branches of the V&A, Sadler’s Wells, London College of Fashion and BBC studios. One remembers former London mayor Boris Johnson’s boast that this whole post-Olympic quarter would be a new Albertopolis on the South Kensington model. If so, only the university buildings seem to be full-size or even, in the case of Marshgate, slightly over-sized.
On plan there are two wings at angles flanking a lower central section, making an unequal quadrilateral. This translates into broadly U-shaped upper floors which are rotated in three pairs to frame views to east, north and south. The west flank will be hard up against a future phase, so no vista is set up in that direction. The shifts in aspect as you rise through the building – by escalator around the atrium, or via one of the four lift/stair cores – provide variety and orientation as you move around.

The result is a readable sequence of spaces, though the Cyclopean scale, industrially-inspired finishes and earthy colour palette continue to be the dominant attributes. An enormous ‘Gaia’ globe hanging from the atrium roof – the kind habitually seen as installations filling cathedral naves – looks from below almost too small, balloon-like. The columned double height staffroom with its open terrace on an upper level aspires to the condition of a temple. Helped by the hard material palette, the overall internal experience is perhaps less the fortress, more akin to an art gallery carved out of a power station, complete with mandatory turbine hall. For galleries, read laboratories, on display through glass walls. The highly-serviced nature of labs doubtless accounts for a chunk of the construction cost: at £7,100/m² GIA this compares with £5,000 for Grafton Architects’ recent £90 million Marshall Building for the LSE, which is non-science. The exceptional strength of the Marshgate frame to take heavy loadings and be vibration-free, along with the overall generosity of scale, also plays its part.

**IN NUMBERS**

- £250m contract cost
- 35,000m² gla
- £7,100 cost per m²
- 2,500 person capacity
- 970 kg CO₂ eq/m² whole-life carbon
- A1-A3, B4, B5, C4
- BREEAM ‘Excellent’
- NEC3 with Option A form of contract

**Ground floor plan**

**First floor plan**

**Fifth floor plan**

**Eighth floor plan**

1. UCL reception
2. Community classroom
3. Learning studio
4. Future medicine lab
5. Precision fabrication workshop
6. Institute of Making
7. Cafe
8. Specialist computer lab
9. Lecture Theatre
10. Making space
11. Institute of Making
12. Chem risks & biosciences architecture studio
13. Workspace
14. Teaching space
15. Manufacturing future lab
16. Advanced propulsion lab
17. Entrance
The programme is not all science and engineering: ‘creative industries’ including architecture and animation are in the mix. You will find only one relatively small – 120-seat – lecture theatre, made externally important by its Corten cladding projecting at an angle from the north facade. Pedagogically UCL is moving away from the model of individual faculties with professors addressing crowds of students scribbling in notebooks. The watchword now is cross-disciplinary collaboration. Floors are organised into a series of ‘neighbourhoods’, each of which has a double-height ‘collaboration space’ for informal meetings or exhibitions. As is increasingly the way with new higher-education buildings, circulation routes are designed to maximise chance encounters, with places to pause, sit and talk.

East Bank as a whole has a way to go yet before it finally knits together as a convincing new district, with the UCL campus as its southern anchor. East Marshgate is a self-contained world: touring it is an urban exploration in itself. The quality of architecture is first rate. Now we await the promised quality of urbanism.
Sustainability shapes Rwanda’s Ellen DeGeneres Campus of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund

The Ellen DeGeneres Campus of the Fossey Gorilla Fund in Rwanda was purpose-built to save gorillas – and inspire a new generation of environmental advocates. By Matt Alderton

This is an excerpt from an article that originally appeared on Autodesk’s Design and Make, a site dedicated to inspiring construction, manufacturing, engineering and design leaders. Scan the QR code below to read the full article.

The Sha Ellen DeGeneres Campus of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund continues the legacy of primatologist Dian Fossey, embodying the principles of conservation and sustainability in every aspect of its design, construction, and operation.

Architecture, design, and build firm MASS Design Group developed a measurement framework for the campus that evaluated mission-driven impacts in five areas: environment, economy, education, equity, and emotion.

Green roofs, native plants, local materials, and a natural wastewater-treatment system are highlights of the project, which employed more than 2,400 Rwandans in its design and construction, accounting for 99% of project labour.

Gorillas are grand, not only in size – the largest gorillas weigh up to 440 pounds – but also in significance. They help maintain the tropical rainforests that humans rely on for clean air, crop-nourishing rainfall and life-giving medicines.

Sadly, gorillas are dying. Numbers have been dwindling for decades due to habitat loss, poaching and disease, according to the World Wildlife Fund, which says populations of eastern and western lowland gorillas in Central Africa have declined by more than 50% and 60% respectively since the 1990s.

The mountain gorilla – a subspecies known for its thick fur and high-elevation habitat – is the exception to the rule. After falling precipitously in the 20th century, the population of mountain gorillas in Central Africa has increased from 620 in 1989 to approximately 1,004 today, reports WWF. Its efforts are stronger than ever thanks to the Ellen DeGeneres Campus of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, a new multi-building campus funded by the comedian and talk-show host’s philanthropic Ellen Fund. The campus opened in February 2022

A ‘Purpose-Built’ Project

When MASS began working with the Fossey Fund in 2015, it introduced the organisation to its Purpose Built design process, conceived in 2014 and based on extensive research about how nonprofits and their funders can make the most of capital projects. Its research showed that capital projects are most successful when they’re built around a mission-based objective that informs all design decisions.

For the Fossey Fund, that mission is to make gorillas an entry point for a lifetime of conservation activism. ‘The real inspiration for this project came from Dian Fossey herself, and the great work that she was doing,’ says Emily Goldenberg, MASS architect and project director for the Fossey Campus.

Long before scientists understood climate change, and decades before the modern sustainability movement reached its tipping point, Fossey understood that protecting gorillas meant protecting their habitat. MASS and the Fossey Fund agreed that conservation and sustainability were two sides of the same coin. To integrate them in service of Fossey’s legacy, MASS established five impact frameworks to design the Fossey Fund’s new campus, each measurable throughout the lifespan of the construction project. It calls them the five Es of impact: environment, economy, education, equity, and emotion.

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One essential skill that many architects need to learn is development appraisal; managing risk is the primary task. Otherwise, they have advantages over anyone else starting out, such as the ability to spot promising sites or changes in planning policy. That should give confidence. Do your sums properly, and you should expect to succeed – though most first-time architect developers find that it takes more time, effort and money than anticipated.

Opportunities and challenges exist in any market, including today’s. When it is easier to find land, it can be harder to raise finance. Every developer starting out has to box clever. Those without capital might look for joint ventures, or get options on sites without planning consent.

Architects can feel embarrassed by the profit motive, but do have to be commercially minded to make it work. Those featured in the book had a variety of objectives besides making money. Some wanted greater design freedom or to be more hands-on. Others aimed to launch a practice or prove its capabilities. If nothing else, the experience teaches you what people really want and about the financial implications of design decisions, which can make you a better, more practical architect for other clients. It’s like the missing piece of architectural training.

‘Architects can feel embarrassed by the profit motive, but do have to be commercially minded to make it work’
RNIB welcomes neurodiverse and blind people to its new HQ

How Kay Elliott Architects and Buro Happold reworked the Royal National Institute of Blind People’s Grimaldi Building as an exemplar of inclusive access

Words: Andrew Pearson   Photographs: Buro Happold

Yuli Cadney-Toh: The RNIB’s headline for our appointment was: ‘We want to create a beacon of accessibility’. We began by engaging with stakeholders, taking on board lived experiences, and looking at how people would like things improved when downsizing and moving to the Grimaldi Building.

Jean Hewitt: accessibility and inclusive design consultant at Buro Happold and technical author of PAS 6493 Designs for the Mind – Neurodiversity and the Built Environment

Sarah Fiddy: project architect, Kay Elliott Architects

Chris Kenny: associate, Kay Elliott Architects

How did the office refurbishment become the first to incorporate the standard for design with neurodiversity, BSI PAS 6493?

Jean Hewitt: I was already working with the RNIB on a project at Moorfields Eye Hospital. After buying this building, the RNIB asked me to do a light touch audit to highlight the big ticket items.

Tricia Smikle, RNIB senior project manager, wanted the building to be exemplary in terms of accessibility, and I was just finishing writing a new standard about designing for neurodivergence, so we included that.

The project was fast-track. Buro Happold’s lighting, acoustics and asset consulting teams were quickly on board. The RNIB needed an architect; we were working with Kay Elliott on a project for Guide Dogs for the Blind, so we knew they understood about designing for sight loss and they teamed up with us.

What was the architect’s role?

Yuli Cadney-Toh: The RNIB’s headline for our appointment was: ‘We want to become the first to incorporate the standard for design with neurodiversity, BSI PAS 6493.’

Jean Hewitt: The RNIB needed an architect; we were always invited to do a bit about neurodivergence, so we included that.

We found working for the Institute a joy, the architecture and detailing of spaces that environments identified by Jean, from a neurodiversity perspective. Remodelling generally. Our role in designing for accessibility started at the front gate and continued throughout the interior levels, to create the diverse environments identified by Jean, from a designated quiet floor and collaborative spaces to a serenity room.

Are there conflicts between adapting a building for differing access needs?

Jean Hewitt: Designing for blind and partially sighted people is mostly compatible with designing for neurodivergent people. Most neurodivergent people have information/sensory processing differences, around 70% of which will be people who experience hypersensitivity to the environment they are in, often in response to lighting and noise.

However, lighting glare can also adversely affect people with certain types of sight loss. When we did user trials, we found that most people with sight loss wanted a bluer light while people with hypersensitivity generally favoured a warmer light.

What RNIB has done is provide fully adaptable, adjustable lighting for both Lux level and colour temperature for every cluster of desks on the three office floors; people sit based on their lighting preference, which works well. The same adjustability is provided in the shop, boardroom and Serenity (quiet) Room. There is a designated quieter office floor and a collaborative office floor.

How do you reconcile having visually contrasting surfaces with providing a calming environment for neurodiverse occupants?

Jean Hewitt: The building has a calming colour scheme based on mixed monochromatic backgrounds of greys and whites, which gives good visual contrast with splashes of colour added to differentiate the floors. It is a legal requirement under Building Regulations to have visual contrast between adjacent surfaces, so we always maintained a minimum contrast of 30 points difference in Light Reflectance Value – as is required in the UK.
How did the design process work?

Chris Kenny: First we’d have a workshop with Jean and representatives of the different functions of the RNIB. Then we’d present our designs in a workshop, for feedback. Presenting was very different, we had to put a lot more thought into describing the layout to help people visualise our proposals. Jean would follow with a more detailed mark-up of plans. This happened on an iterative basis as the design was refined.

There are a lot of publicly accessible spaces: the low vision clinic, Products for Life store and recording studios. A big success was being able to plan these to feel welcoming on the public floors, which are the ground and lower ground. Spaces are designed to share functions. For example, the Products for Life store is adjacent to a living room space that can be used as a lounge or to demonstrate products. There is also a kitchenette for staff use where members of the public with sight loss can try out kitchen aids.

How easy was it to incorporate PAS 6493 into the design?

JH: I thought this would be an interesting test for the standard because of the potential conflicts of designing for sight loss, but it was surprisingly easy. What we’ve shown with this project, which isn’t even a new building, is that it’s possible to design for inclusivity and neurodiversity. If it can be done here, on a charity’s budget, anybody can do it.

How do the blind and partially sighted people navigate the building?

JH: There is beautiful tactile signage that incorporates braille, and raised lettering so that non-braille readers can feel the words. There are also tactile additions to the staircase handrails with embossed bars to count down steps from the landing, with three, two and then one.

The main circulation route on each floor is indicated by an embossed vinyl path – the flare path. Normally for the RNIB this would be bright yellow, which I thought would create a conflict between user needs because often neurodivergent people with visual hypersensitivity are sensitive to bright colours. Happily, testing with visually impaired users showed the flare path could be a similar colour to the adjacent surface if it felt different underfoot and could be detected by the long cane used by blind people.

The building also uses NaviLens wayfinding software. This has a code, similar to a QR code, that can easily be picked up by the camera on a mobile phone. It gives an audio description of the immediate area. For example, if I point my phone in one direction it might say, ‘Three metres to store cupboard’; then if I continue to move my phone it might say ‘50 metres to reception’. Staff also have the code on their lanyards so people know the name of those approaching.

NaviLens codes have been installed along Pentonville Road too, to direct people from King’s Cross to the building.

What other adaptations are there for blind people?

JH: There are integrated tea points on the office floors. Because all the cupboards look the same each has a tactile sign in charcoal grey that says what it contains.

Also, the cupboards are fitted with two 300mm doors rather than the usual 600mm single door, so that if the door is left open it will not project beyond the worktop. The signage manufacturer MK Designs has added a highlight colour to the leading edge of each door that matches the theme colour for the floor to make them visually apparent.

Also, some worktops have a lipped marine edge to help contain any spills.

There are a lot of publicly accessible spaces – a big success was being able to plan them to feel welcoming.
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Second stairways: which way now?

Safety in residential blocks has won a victory with the lowering of the threshold to 18m for second stairs. Now the industry must tackle the practicalities.

Words: Andy Pearson

In July, the government confirmed that it will adopt an 18m height threshold for second staircases in all new residential buildings. The announcement of the lower threshold was a huge win for the RIBA-led coalition of built-environment and fire safety groups and a vital step towards safer residential buildings.

A second staircase in residential buildings over six storeys gives residents alternative escape routes and fire-fighters the option of a dedicated fire-fighting stair.

While nobody would argue that putting in a correctly designed second staircase would make a building more unsafe, there are concerns that it will reduce the area of the building available for sale, effectively cutting the value and viability of a development.

Space-saving stair

So some see the requirement for a second stair as a hindrance to development, but others have embraced it as an opportunity to benefit a scheme.

Matt Brook Architects is one such practice. Working with fire consultant ORF, it has developed a two-stair core design for a series of residential towers in Greater Manchester which maximises safety and accessibility benefits while increasing the useable floor-plan by 5% over a typical two-stair design. ‘It is quite a significant saving in a tall building when you multiply it by, say, 50 floors,’ says Matt Brook, founder of the practice.

Its design is based on two interlocking but independent staircases arranged in a double helix around a central, fire-rated wall that separates the two spirals, so that in plan it looks like a single stair. ‘We’ve got two stairs pretty much within the footprint of a single stair,’ says Brook.

With lift access to every floor, the fire escape stairs have a ‘utility’ classification under the Building Regulations. This enables the flights of concrete stairs to be run in a straight line floor-to-floor.
The copyright of this drawing is vested with Matt Brook Architects and must not be copied or reproduced.

Lifts and separation

Stair flights are incorporated in a square concrete core which, on a 50-storey scheme, holds four fire fighting and evacuation lifts, arranged in pairs either side of a central lift lobby. Concealed twin doors in the centre of the lift lobby separate the pairs of lifts. The doors close in a fire, dividing the lobby in two – each half having access to both a fire and evacuation lift and an escape stair.

‘The design provides two independent stairs and at least two lifts for use during an evacuation,’ says Richard Rankin, design director of fire engineer OFR Consultants. ‘The fire service also has access via the stairs and fire-fighting lifts.’

Crucially, each half of the core is served by a dedicated smoke ventilation system to ensure complete separation. ‘The smoke control systems are designed not just to prevent smoke getting into the staircases but to protect the route to the staircase and the route to the evacuation lift in the affected corridor,’ explains Rankin.

Notably, no refuge is located in any escape stair, but with two protected lobbies formed once the central doors close, if one is compromised, wheelchair users can move across to the other lobby – a lobby being a commonly accepted place of relative safety. Brook adds: ‘Each lobby has a lift for self-evacuation because the fire service arrives, with an emergency call point for communication. This means all residents can self-evacuate and no one need wait in a stairwell refuge for rescue,’ he adds.

The scheme also incorporates two vertical wet risers, located at the top and bottom of each flight of stairs. ‘Because the stairs interlock, you have access to two wet risers within the same fire fighting stair, when normally you’d have access only to one,’ explains Brook. ‘It means all residents can self-evacuate and a wet riser is used to get twice the number of people down a staircase,’ explains Rankin. ‘Here we’ve provided two separate staircases with identical levels of fire protection. It’s like two single staircase buildings merged and arranged so that a single fire cannot compromise both escape routes at once.’

Because this core is being developed for a tall residential tower it will come under the remit of the Building Safety Regulator at the HSE when it is submitted for formal Gateway One planning application. ‘We’ve done a lot of work using CFD analysis to show this design works,’ says Rankin.

In advance of this submission, the design team has undertaken a pre-application submission to the HSE which Brook says ‘had no concerns’. He says that in their response in support of this solution the HSE makes it clear that ‘scissor stairs are not allowable but that this design is not considered to be one’.

This space-saving, interlocking stair arrangement is that while each staircase has access to all floor levels, they do so in an alternating position on each floor; so if you enter the stair on the south side of the core you will exit on the north side on the floors above and below.

While this arrangement will have no impact on the occupants leaving the building in a fire, it will affect how the fire brigade approaches the fire. According to Rankin, to fight a fire in a tall building, fire fighters typically take a lift to the floor below the fire and then proceed to the fire-floor via a staircase.

It means they will exit in the opposite corridor to the one from which they entered; he says. ‘However, the level of protection afforded to the fire-fighters is identical and all apartments can be reached with standard hose distances regardless of which stair is used,’ he adds. To aid fire-fighter wayfinding, a discussion with Greater Manchester Fire Brigade suggested colour coding each staircase to help with identification.

To aid fire-fighter wayfinding, colour coding each staircase could help with identification on a scissor stair. ‘Often, a scissor stair has no separation, so the two flights are intertwined in one core without a dividing wall; it is used to get twice the number of people down a staircase,’ explains Rankin. ‘Here we’ve provided two separate staircases with identical levels of fire protection. It’s like two single staircase buildings merged and arranged so that a single fire cannot compromise both escape routes at once.’

Rankin says ‘had no concerns’.

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Considerations and complications

Paul Bussey, architect, fellow of the Institute of Fire Engineers and member of the RIBA expert advisory group on fire safety

The case for a second staircase in new residential buildings over 18m has been won, but of course the total picture is more complex. Existing buildings which cannot accommodate a second stair will need remediation work, with additional layers of safety to compensate.

It is helpful to remind ourselves of the circumstances under which emergency evacuations take place. To tackle a fire, firefighters will use the primary firefighting staircase even if there’s a fire-fighting lift, wearing their bulky fire retardant protective suits and carrying large hoses, breathing apparatus and other important equipment. When they charge these lengthy multiple hoses, attached to dry rising mains in the staircase, a dynamic force is generated that can flip and twist on the stair, additionally leaking water everywhere. Passing though the corridor access door, hoses can allow smoke onto the staircase.

Watching fire-fighting practice drills it’s clear that with a single staircase, firefighting and evacuation are unavoidably entwined. Evacuation is hard enough for the able-bodied on a smoke contaminated stair, but for the semi-ambulant, children, elderly or those recovering from an operation it is nigh-on impossible. And getting ‘all people to a place of safety’ has to be the plan – as is written into the new ‘Secretary of state’s intentions’ of the functional requirements in the Approved Documents (ADB 2019 Vol 1 B1 with 2022 amendments, p 8).

Everyone is looking for a one size fits all solution for the second stair – but that is impossible. The RIBA has identified and explored possible layers of safety.

In Australia interlocked stairs that are fire separated have been adopted, with colour coding. This would help residents but does not save as much area as imagined and can be complicated for both residents and firefighters.

Two stairs allow one for firefighting, and the other for escape. But the size of the floor plate is critical. With a big plan area hose lengths must reach any fire and both stairs may need to be fire cores with dry risers. Placing wet or dry risers in a protected lobby off the staircase can reduce the problem of dynamic hoses, trip hazards and water leaks on the stairs, and prevent smoke ingress.

Existing tall buildings with a single staircase ideally need a second, escape, stair plus a firefighting staircase. There are now bespoke and prefabricated products offering this, erected by crane two storeys at a time off a low loader lorry.

Fire protection within the building with sprinklers in flats and a temporary place of safety – typically a protected lobby next to the staircase with ventilation in the form of smoke extract or opening windows – can also help.

Depending on dynamic circumstances during a fire, it is sometimes impossible to escape down a staircase at one point; later the smoke clears, permitting escape. Voice connection capability within the fire alarm system to each flat and refuge can allow a fire leader on site to direct residents to the best course of action.

Financial and commercial ways to encourage the second stair could include planning area exemption, zero VAT, and being protected from weather but outside the thermal envelope – which could all soften the perceived loss of area and additional cost. This will need government help to implement, and could help amend the regulatory ambiguity of combustible cladding at Grenfell. Contractors could also use the second stair for future refurbishment and fit-out works access.

The RIBA fire expert panel has discussed and developed a document that explores all these and other layers in more detail – for instance smoke control, compartmentalisation, refuge lounges and travel distance issues. Now that the fundamental human right of an alternative means of escape for all has been established, further development of these layers could be considered.»
Dulux unveils Sweet Embrace as its Colour of the Year 2024

Colour and design are intrinsic to the way people feel within a space. Specifying colour correctly is crucial to evoke the right emotions in building occupants. Here, Dawn Scott, senior colour designer at Dulux Trade, discusses the latest colour trends and how the Dulux Colour of the Year 2024 can support specifications.

The Dulux Colour of the Year is decided based on extensive global trends research, and this year the team needed to find a tone that reflected people's need for stability, comfort and a sense of belonging in the wake of recent global events. They chose Sweet Embrace, an understated, neutral pink with subtle grey undertones. It is welcoming, calming, optimistic and modern – and incredibly versatile as it brings a sense of stability and softness to any space.

A beautiful standalone colour, Sweet Embrace also matches perfectly with numerous other shades, so it can be used as a backdrop to build a totally individual space upon.

Complementary palettes

To further inspire specifications, Dulux has launched three supporting palettes:

- **Warm** – Earthy terracottas and burnt oranges create welcoming, familiar spaces.
- **Calm** – Serene greens and blues evoke relaxation and tranquillity.
- **Uplifting** – Cheerful yellows and soft blues, for instance Serene Waters, bring joy, playfulness.

Each one works perfectly with Sweet Embrace to create beautiful spaces across all sectors.

With both saturated colours and muted pastels, this palette can be used in primary or secondary education settings alike. However, for areas like libraries or time-out spaces (including staff areas), shades from the Calm palette are recommended as the sage greens and sea blues provide a subtle link to nature and help people unwind.

Healthcare

To create positive environments for hospital staff, patients or visitors use the restorative and soothing Calm palette’s soft blues, for instance Serene Waters, and greens such as Tranquil Dawn.

In care homes, aid wayfinding by using Sweet Embrace on main walls to make bolder tones like Sapphire Salute or Neptune Seas in the Calm palette – or the Warm palette’s Peanut Butter or Fireside Embers – used on critical surfaces (doors, handrails etc) stand out.

Hospitality and leisure

The Warm palette can create a home-from-home feeling with tones such as Pink Sandstone and Copper Glow, which are inviting and reassuring. Alternatively, for leisure spaces, the Uplifting palette’s brighter colours will bring energy and encourage playfulness.

Residential

Every room in the home should evoke different emotions in occupants. For such relaxing spaces as the living room or bedrooms, consider the Warm palette’s more saturated hues. The Calm palette can be used to create a sense of calm and belonging, making it the ideal choice in bathrooms. To bring energy to the hallway and kitchen, for example, we recommend the Uplifting palette to bring joy and friendliness.

The perfect paint

While colour is key, paint choice also affects a scheme’s success. Dulux Trade offers a wide range of products that can be supplied in Sweet Embrace and its supporting palettes. For high-traffic settings use Dulux Trade Diamond Matt. Based on in-can VOC content and measured in accordance with ISO 11890-2:2013, it withstands up to 10,000 scrubs to provide a professional finish that lasts, and supports sustainability goals as it is 99.9% VOC free. Dulux Trade Scuffshield Matt is another tough, water-based emulsion that is designed to protect walls against scuff marks.

In the healthcare sector where hygiene is critical, Dulux Trade Sterishield delivers antibacterial protection, with its wipe-clean surface limiting bacterial growth.²

² Based on in-can VOC content and measured in accordance with ISO 11890-2:2013

For additional guidance on the use of Sweet Embrace and its supporting palettes, the Dulux Trade Commercial Colour Services team is on hand to help and create bespoke palettes for your project. Alternatively, refer to the Dulux Trade Colour of the Year 2024 Specifier Brochure: www.duluxtrade.co.uk/COTY24.
Talent should be recognised

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AGILITY UNDERPINNED BY COMMUNITY

This year’s cohort of 10 RIBAJ Rising Stars demonstrates the variety of routes through the profession that could be seen throughout the many impressive submissions we received this year.

The Rising Stars are leading architecture into areas beyond the traditional boundaries of the building contract. They are pushing material innovation into building products, using design for manufacture with a clear logic and strong design thinking, and working through the impact of artificial intelligence.

But these are not just technocratic problem solvers. Everything they do is underpinned by community, their peers, colleagues and the people beyond, whose needs drive the projects.

The final word should go to judge Lucy Clark: ‘The agility of thinking and creative response is coming through in some wonderful, quality work.’

Eleanor Young, editor, RIBA Journal

Nick Read, director of Wraxall Yard, is Clementine Blakemore’s client and referree. He is glowing in his reference, ‘I doubt there is a more satisfied client than me, truly overwhelmed by the finished result, delivered without stress and on budget,’ he says. ‘Clem’s delivery of the project was completely outstanding!’

Blakemore came into architecture through a study of sculpture and film, then spent a year hands-on building with Rural Studio in the US. She continued self-building through leading AA summer schools and her dissertation at the RCA which she turned into a live project, the inventive timber-frame Music Pavilion for a primary school in Buckinghamshire, built in two phases. All the funding was raised by Blakemore and the school’s PTA.

Her Wraxall Yard project, highly commended in this year’s RIBAJ MacEwen Award, converted old farm buildings into inclusive holiday accommodation with education and shared community spaces in an enriched, biodiverse landscape. It has been taken up by families with disabled members (60 per cent of bookings so far), by groups using the space for supported holidays for local disabled people and by a volunteer scheme for young people with mental health and/or addiction issues to get them into the countryside. ‘The quality of her buildings is clear to see,’ said judge Eleanor Young.

Her work has been widely recognised – she was designer in residence at the Design Museum and her practice was selected as one of the AJ’s 40 under 40. ‘She’s what a Rising Star should look like,’ says judge Lucy Clark. ‘She’s set up her own practice in a difficult climate and is delivering high-quality projects at the same time as having a young family.’

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ELENA SHILOVA
LEADING MATERIAL INNOVATION AT GRIMSHAW WITH INITIATION OF RADICAL SUSTAINABLE SUGARCRETE SLAB
Architect, Grimshaw; visiting professor, University of East London
Part 1: 2016 Part 2: 2018

‘Elena’s pioneering work bridges academia and practice, propelling Grimshaw towards sustainable construction practices,’ says Andy Watts, director of design technology at Grimshaw. ‘Her potential to shape a new practice agenda at the intersection of material craftsmanship and technological innovation makes her a standout candidate.’

Shilova has made an especially strong impact with her initiative for Sugarcrete Slab, which brought together the University of East London, where she teaches, a by-product from Tate and Lyle, which is based nearby, and Grimshaw.

She describes the material and the system that has grown from it: ‘Sugarcrete is an innovative kit-of-parts construction system using sugar cane by-product (bagasse) with a mineral binder, which can be disassembled, reused, or extended in new or existing structures.’

It has been used at the Royal Docks for a festival project but the hope is that, in sugar producing regions, this open source system could contribute to more sustainable construction practices building community resilience. The team is exploring its potential in the Global South and it has been recognised with a nomination for the Earthshot Prize 2023.

In the meantime Shilova continues her work on major projects at Grimshaw, contributing through her work on computation and advanced fabrication while building on her projects and works directly with communities and young people.

What piece of architecture or placemaking do you most admire?
Two projects hold a very special place in my heart. First, Bath Schools of Art and Design – an inspiring example of adaptive reuse by Grimshaw, which transformed an industrial building into an art school, preserving its heritage. Secondly, 15 Clerkenwell Close, London, by Amin Taha. I frequently contemplate its presence and bold blunt beauty from the neighbouring churchyard. The building symbolises a paradigm shift in architecture from the steel and concrete status quo, emphasising raw materials’ inherent design potential, and sparking valuable discourse within the architectural community.

Left Eden Project Foyle, in Derry-Londonderry, Northern Ireland.

Right Out and About exhibition at Bartican’s The Curve gallery (2022).

MARTHA SUMMERS
ARCHITECT AND ARTIST DESIGNING QUEER AND FEMINIST COMMUNITY SPACES AS PERSONAL PROJECTS

I’m always keen to be working with people I’m already in community with,’ says Martha Summers of the many queer and feminist projects she has taken on in addition to her day job at Feilden Fowles.

These include co-founding the Feminist design collective HI-VIS, which provided design services for Feminist Library’s new home in Peckham. She recently designed INTRA – Depend On Me Bhy – a exhibition raising funds for low-income tickets to Camp Trans. Designed on a material budget of £20, it included a flatpack stage and canopy, tent and projection screen and is designed to be reused at the camp year after year.

Summers also volunteered on the creation of the LGBT+ Community Centre, a temporary installation on London’s South Bank, assembling an all-queer construction team from architect to plumber. The initially six-month pop-up has since been extended to five years.

‘It felt like a really radical construction site,’ says Summers, who is autistic, from a working class background and identifies as a butch lesbian. ‘It was really healing for me to be respected automatically.’

She particularly enjoys the creative freedom of these pro-bono projects, and the opportunity to relax and ‘take your guard down’ in a way that might not happen at other sites and workplaces.

‘Projects are more hands-on and experimental,’ she says. ‘It’s a really joyful process, often working with people who are your friends.’

 Judges were impressed with the breadth of her activities and in particular her lean design approach when working with limited budgets.

‘Martha’s quietly assured work is holding space for queer communities,’ said Betty Owusu. ‘Martha’s been properly busy,’ added Nick Hayhurst. ‘She’s been founding collectives, creating exhibitions, building pop-ups – all based around creating queer and feminist community spaces along a theme of material reuse.’

At Feilden Fowles, she leads on Charlie Bigham’s campus in Somerset and is working on a proposed satellite venue for the Towner Gallery in Eastbourne. Her referee, practice associate and Rising Star herself Ingrid Pett, praised Summers’ leadership skills, design flair and championing of EDI issues both in her own work and through her advocacy at the practice.

What existing building, place or problem would you most like to tackle?
It’s been really devastating to see the backlash against gender desegregated public toilet provision over the last few years. Fighting for everyone to be able to use public toilets without hostility or violence isn’t the most exciting spatial issue; it’s the pursuit of a simple and basic right. But it’s vital at a time when the safety of gender-neutral spaces is being so frequently and disingenuously attacked.

Left Summers made this TOOl belt-come-sculpture.

Below Camp Trans in Leighton Buzzard.
**James Purkiss**

**Engaging sustainability champion co-designed on Retrofit with Becontree estate residents**

Associate and sustainability champion, Archio Architects, and research fellow, UCL


Changing our thinking is one of the most important tools for reducing the depth of the climate emergency. So converting sceptical Becontree estate resident Kirk to an energetic advocate of retrofit is testament to James Purkiss’s skill. It is typical of how he operates, turning his drive for sustainability into expertise and targeted tools that help others – from clients to local authorities and residents – easily integrate carbon-cutting measures.

Archio director Kyle Buchanan describes Purkiss’s sustainability champion role as being carried out with ‘great gusto’, also praising his ‘engaging communication style’. Purkiss has started to bridge the gap of educating clients with regard to sustainability, helping them identify clear goals and draw up a measurement action plan to address potential scope gaps in design team appointments.

Purkiss displays a real fire in his mission when talking about the huge 29,000 public housing estate that is Becontree, as well as other social housing, energetically articulating the health impacts of fuel poverty, damp and mould.

Some of this he pinpoints as resulting from the performance gap, so he has trained as a certified Passivhaus designer because he believes this expertise can help him ensure that buildings are not just robustly designed but perform in line with that promise. He has been able to apply that rigour not just to his two Passivhaus projects but to all of Archio’s projects.

His current part-time secondment to UCL as a research fellow follows the logic of what he observed among residents’ enthusiasm for local authority guidance. At UCL he is contributing to the launch of a Net Zero What Works Centre, which will support local authorities to implement proven solutions.

The judges were unanimous in choosing Purkiss as a Rising Star. ‘James’s entry inspired me,’ said judge Eva MacNamara. ‘He’s identified a need, focused his efforts on it and, in doing so, achieved excellent outcomes.’

‘He’s fantastic – he walks the walk,’ said Betty Owoo. ‘He’s passionate about his role as being carried out with “great gusto”, also praising his “engaging communication style”. Purkiss has started to bridge the gap of educating clients with regard to sustainability, helping them identify clear goals and draw up a measurement action plan to address potential scope gaps in design team appointments.

Purkiss displays a real fire in his mission when talking about the huge 29,000 public housing estate that is Becontree, as well as other social housing, energetically articulating the health impacts of fuel poverty, damp and mould.

Some of this he pinpoints as resulting from the performance gap, so he has trained as a certified Passivhaus designer because he believes this expertise can help him ensure that buildings are not just robustly designed but perform in line with that promise. He has been able to apply that rigour not just to his two Passivhaus projects but to all of Archio’s projects.

His current part-time secondment to UCL as a research fellow follows the logic of what he observed among residents’ enthusiasm for local authority guidance. At UCL he is contributing to the launch of a Net Zero What Works Centre, which will support local authorities to implement proven solutions.

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**Larry Botchway**

**Dedicated to development of communities through the elevation of young people**

Co-founder of POoR Collective


Larry Botchway’s own experiences of discomfort during his architectural career have fuelled his mission to platform and champion young people, most notably through POoR Collective, which recently won the Emerging Design Medal at the London Design Festival 2023.

‘My experience was very different to most of my peers,’ he says. ‘I grew up on a council estate to migrant parents and I hadn’t met an architect until we started the course. However I grew to learn that my perspective and many others like mine were just as valuable but weren’t being heard in the industry.’

He co-founded POoR Collective in 2019, combining his work there with his role as an architect at We Made That, where he leads on social engagement. POoR seeks to help young people recognise their agency to shape their built environment and give them the opportunity to do so, whether through co-design projects or meaningful internships.

A recent initiative in Bexleyheath addressed tensions between school children in the town centre and elderly residents. POoR organised intergenerational workshops and co-designed a number of wayfinding and public realm initiatives. Another project, Bringing Home to the Unknown, created a pavilion in Regent’s Park with teenagers from Mayesbrook Park School in Becontree.

Students were first taught how to draw plans and perspectives. ‘It’s important to be able to represent your ideas,’ Botchway says.

He also makes school visits to promote architecture as a career. ‘I want people to meet an architect and see it’s an option,’ he says. POoR aspires to design a building. A dream project would be to co-design a youth building with young people, says Botchway, who benefited from youth clubs when he was young, and regrets the closure of so many due to austerity funding cuts.

Judges were inspired by his dedication to both promoting inclusivity in the profession and meaningful co-design engagement. ‘He is so passionate about community engagement and is a fantastic role model for those who don’t always see themselves represented in architecture,’ said Betty Owoo.

Judge Nick Hayhurst added: ‘He seems to have his finger on the pulse. He is interested in co-design, engagement, empowerment and entrepreneurialism, and setting up initiatives to make these things happen. Brilliant!’
OLIVER BEETSCHEN
AGILE DESIGNER WITH A PASSION FOR PREFABRICATION AND EXPERIENCE IN THEATRE DESIGN, RAILWAY INFRASTRUCTURES AND ELIZABETH LINE STATIONS
Architect – theatre designer, Charcoal Blue

What existing building, place and problem would you most like to tackle? I would love to radically tackle the sustainable regeneration and refurbishment of our ageing civic building stock – particularly theatres, schools, libraries and even railways! I’m passionate about creating well-designed spaces in our communities that bring people together regardless of who they are. I trust and hope that the architectural industry is changing for the better, and feel passionately that we can create better spaces, be more sustainable and more inclusive by learning from other diverse industries and communities.

Judges praised the breadth of Oliver Beetschen’s creativity, which includes designing infrastructure, theatres and – in his spare time – working as a freelance sound engineer and set designer. After delivering Elizabeth Line stations for Hawkins/Brown, he now works as a theatre designer for CharcoalBlue. He particularly impressed with his commitment to harnessing design for manufacture and assembly (DfMA) technologies and processes and applying them in a number of different ways on a range of building types, added judge Nick Fretton.

Beetschen is enthusiastic about the potential for industrialisation in infrastructure to benefit civic architecture. ‘By embracing lessons from diverse industries and cross-discipline collaboration, and allowing architects to diversify, I believe we push the boundaries of what is possible,’ he says.

It is particularly important, he believes, to foster creative growth in early-career architects. His referee, Expedition senior director and founder Chris Wise, praised his very clear knowledge of lean materiality and sustainable detailing.

SOPHIA MALIK
CHAMPION OF INNOVATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE BAMBOO ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN
Architectural assistant, Arup

What existing building, place and problem would you most like to tackle? My thesis project! It is a very real problem in Karachi – there are thousands of unused, damaged stone buildings that need repairing. I want to be the first person to adapt an existing stone building with bamboo, and I have this beautiful vision of the very rigid, rectangular colonial buildings being repaired with a contrasting bamboo structure. The old and the new, the British and the Pakistani. It’s poetic, functional and low carbon all at once.

Judges praised Sophia Malik’s commitment to heritage reuse, which led to a collaboration with Yasmeen Lari as part of her MPhil research into adaptive reuse in Pakistan using low-carbon materials. ‘She’s one of the youngest applicants and she has been able to apply her research into hybrid bamboo-earth architecture undertaken in her studies through into practice and professional collaborations,’ said judge Nick Fretton. Betty Owoor added: ‘She is very passionate and engaged. She has taken her interest and really done something with it.’ Malik aims to challenge misconceptions surrounding ‘poor man’s’ materials, such as bamboo, earth and lime, by finding ‘beautiful and accessible’ ways to build with them. She was praised as ‘inquisitive, brave and creative,’ by her referee, Kim Oozie, a director at Arup, where she is an architectural assistant.

As well as her MPhil, she attained a first class MEng, BEng in architectural engineering and was a founder of the Decolonise Architecture group. After being awarded the Bamboo Ux Kenzo Parfums Scholarship, she recently collaborated on the construction of two bamboo buildings in Bali.

What existing building, place and problem would you most like to tackle? It’s a really interesting time to be working in housing,’ he says. ‘How can we reconcile Passivhaus with the challenges of the city context, diversity of type and issues of viability? The question of what a decarbonised architecture looks like in housing is fascinating – it seems there is no catch-all solution.’

In addition, Hawthorne was project architect on the Lasulo, the adaptive reuse of a Victorian warehouse for flexible workspace in London’s Archway. He also leads on competitions and on the practice’s Dialogues series of public talks, established in 2016 and intended as an open forum for international discourse. He is currently teaching a masters unit with Tony Fretton at London Metropolitan University. ‘He is an exceptional all-rounder, but one who humbly champions creative collaboration with others in practices and professions,’ said his referee, Henley Halebrown’s Simon Henley.

Hawthorne joined the practice in 2015, attracted by the opportunity to work on ambitious public sector housing. ‘I was excited at the prospect of bringing some intensity of design quality and ambition to a sector that felt like it would really benefit from it,’ he says. He was project architect on infill housing at Hackney’s Frampton Park Estate, which has been nominated for this year’s Neave Brown Award, and is currently working on Charlton & Albany, a Passivhaus project in Hounslow for 209 affordable homes.

‘It’s a really challenging area in which to build something beautiful and timeless.’ ‘He’s championing lots of DfMA technologies and processes and applying them in a number of different ways on a range of building types,’ added judge Nick Fretton.

Hawthorne was praised by judges as a ‘fantastic’ project architect for his work at Henley Halebrown, where he has been an associate since 2021. ‘He has worked at the coalface, delivering challenging, very complex, collaborative projects,’ said Lucy Clark.

What existing building, place and problem would you most like to tackle? ‘I think architects have a vital role to play navigating the ethical dilemmas that society faces, and that the built environment helps shape. I’m particularly fascinated by the question of architectural expression in response to decarbonisation. As BT starts to release its telephone exchanges across the country, it would be interesting to consider what role these quasi-industrial, civic buildings might play in the city.

Nick Hayhurst praised Sophia Malik as ‘passionately that we can create better spaces, be more sustainable and more inclusive by learning from other diverse industries and communities.’
Faye Sedgewick impressed judges with her commitment to inclusive design for healthy ageing, which extended to living in a care home in order to understand the impact of building design on vulnerable populations. ‘She’s shone a spotlight on the important issue of taking care of a vulnerable population,’ said judge Betty Owoo, while Nick Hayhurst added: ‘She has an area of interest, working across academia and practice using evidence-based research.’

Sedgewick is leading a knowledge transfer partnership (KTP) between Northumbria University and Building Design Northern, where she is KTP associate and architectural assistant. This initiative aims to improve homes and care environments by enriching the architectural design. ‘Collaboration is at the heart of my architectural philosophy,’ says Sedgewick, who has a PhD in creating supportive living environments and has collaborated with organisations such as the Centre for Ageing Better and the Royal Society of Arts. She is keen to embrace the role of architect as an agent of change – as recently advocated by RIBA president Mayiwa Oki. ‘I firmly believe that my diverse architectural experiences equip me with the skills necessary to champion this change and advocate for socially responsible architecture,’ she says.

She hopes to become a housing leader and inclusive consultant as well as advocating for women in construction and promoting inclusive design practices. ‘Her collaborative work ethic and expertise have not only impressed our team and clients but also fuelled new industry relationships and opportunities,’ said her referee, Building Design Northern managing director Richard Marsden, who also praised her for leadership within the longevity sector.

What existing building, place and problem would you most like to tackle?

We urgently need homes that are both accessible and adaptable for our ageing population – set to reach one in four by 2050. Presently only nine per cent of homes meet basic accessibility standards, exacerbating the housing crisis. We must collectively tackle this problem by reimagining housing for longevity, implementing inclusive and enabling strategies for all ages and abilities.

Hamza Shaikh has always been intrigued by experimental drawing methods and the possibilities of architectural representation. His referee, Chris Hildrey, architect, founder of the Hildrey Studio and a 2018 Rising Star explains: ‘Hamza’s commitment to architectural engagement is impressive and effective.’

He documented his earliest forays on Instagram where he started to get a strong following (he has nearly 35,000 followers). A book followed this year, Drawing Attention: Architecture in the Age of Social Media, a RIBA Publishing bestseller; along with an exhibition of the same name at the Roca Gallery. His YouTube videos demystify the process of drawing – the most watched one now has over 22,000 views. He has also presented at schools of architecture.

His reach is undeniable but has been given added impetus by his exploration of artificial intelligence, melding it with traditional sketching techniques. He has offered seminars on this to share his learning and experience with other architects. And all this while working in practice, completing his Part 3 and bringing up a young son.

What existing building, place and problem would you most like to tackle?

I am very passionate about rethinking sacred spaces, I believe the need for pause, reflection and awe within the noise of our busy cities is needed now more than ever, I see a unique and much-needed opportunity to revitalise our existing places of worship – especially those that have become disused or run down.

His entrepreneurialism has now secured him a new title at Gensler as architect and digital artist, working to understand and be able to implement AI visualisation. With Gensler’s 7,000 employees it is clear his influence on the discourse around architectural visualisation will continue to grow.

He’s agenda-setting at the intersection of social media, AI and architecture and is a thought leader in this space,’ said Betty Owoo. ‘He’s pushing the boundaries; bringing debate and expertise to an area that needs to be approached with responsibility.'
THE RISING STARS
2023 SHORTLIST

James John Cliff (Rogers), director, Studio Weave
Played a key role in the growth of Studio Weave, developing the practice’s approach to holistic built environments that address the changing climate.

Pati de Souza Leão Müller, public programme curator, Building Centre
Makes knowledge of the built environment engaging and accessible.

Hajir Kheder, engagement manager, Karakusevic Carson Architects
Draws on her architectural training to deliver creative collaboration and effective co-design.

Evie Martin, Part 2 architectural assistant, BDP
Devised the BDP People Library to create more meaningful and diverse imagery to populate project visuals.

Claire Miller, associate architect, Askew Cavanna Architects
Advocates for gender and racial equality, education and social mobility in the built environment in addition to leading community engagement and co-design work.

Akshara Pulpa, architect, Connolly Wellingham Architects
Project architect for Feilden Fowles’ acclaimed Homerton Dining Hall in Cambridge and now focused on reuse at Connolly Wellingham, with her qualification as a retrofit coordinator.

Lois Shannon, architect, Taggart's
Project architect with an expertise in construction contracts, and chairperson of the Early Career Architects Forum at the Royal Society of Ulster Architects.

Tobin Sobowale, Part 2 architectural assistant, Gensler
Architectural designer, photographer and writer who advocates for diversity and inclusion in the architectural profession, and has pioneered Gensler’s Behind the G initiative for graduates.

Greg Walton, director, Studio McW
As well as heading his own practice, he co-founded Made of Good, a company focusing on property development as a creative practice.

Gina Windley, architect/sustainability designer, Levitt Bernstein
Committed to improving sustainable practice both at Levitt Bernstein, where she leads on sustainability in the Manchester studio, and more widely for LETI and Architects Declare.

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3: Culture

Studying for a masters in urban regeneration at The Bartlett, Chilean architect and photographer Francisco Ibáñez began a pet planning project, cycling around London visiting building sites, to capture them in various states of demolition or erection. Unlike his own capital Santiago, where decisions to do away with or keep seem more cut and dried, here, he felt, guidance could lead to very strange scenarios indeed.

The project snowballed. Friends told him of sites they’d seen; or as he was photographing one, a local might tell him of another nearby. His book ‘Non-Structures’ has only 140 images but having amassed over 1000, Ibáñez felt the need to categorise them under headings like ‘Obsolete’, ‘Ghost’, ‘Deconstructed’, ‘Naked’. This retained facade, propped by a frame that itself depends on party walls each side, he termed ‘Unsustainable’. Ibáñez considers this curio on Grosvenor Street theatrical; not just visually, but in terms of the stage it struts philosophically – whether its preservation was worth the effort, what its story will be once part of a new structure; or, indeed, if it is really ‘real’ at all. Such thoughts may come to the fore in his role helping Santiago city government regenerate the public realm of its Avenida Alameda. ‘Construction sites are strange places,’ he muses. ‘While being transformed, they seem to disappear from the city’s collective imagining until finished and then they’re suddenly unveiled: new, different – but architecture again. •

Jan-Carlos Kucharek

Francisco Ibáñez
Unsustainable Structures
Mayfair, London 2018
Canon EOS 5 with Tilt-Shift lens
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Projects photographed:
New Library, Magdalen College, by Niall McLaughlin Architects. RIBA Stirling Prize winner 2022. © Nick Kane
Friendship Hospital, Satkhira by Kashef Chowdhury/URBANA. RIBA International Prize 2021 winner. © Asif Salman.

Who needs complicated?

People experience buildings differently, so clean and simple design is essential – and all too easily neglected, finds Eleanor Young.

It’s only ok if you can look at it with a hangover and feel alright; that is artist Hugo Dalton’s verdict on public sculpture. What happens if you apply the same rule to architecture? Does the work of Frank Gehry get knocked out of the ring or does it neatly sort his projects? Do Battersea’s squiffy flats go out while the silvery titanium arcs of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao stay in?

How people experience space is intriguing. There must be papers on why teenagers don’t see their bedrooms as messy, even while their parents despair of ever getting a hoover round. I have been accidentally experimenting with perception, first with long Covid then migraines. Stairs looked evil for a long time to me, struggling with fatigue and breathing issues, long flights were even worse and I still can’t understand those evening events with no seat in sight. The brain tangles and then the neural disturbance and hypersensitivity of migraines mean that now I use ‘complicated’ like a swear word, damning train stations with their unremitting fluorescence of shops and offices.

Making complicated simple can start small with services co-ordination. Remember the test: It’s only ok if you can look at it with a hangover and feel alright. It’s lucky I’m not drinking. •

The attitude in both daily habit and urban fabric, temporally, spatially – is one of collaboration with climate. Postcard from Florence: ribaj.com/florence-postcard

Below Complicated: the concourse at London Liverpool Street station.
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Above: The delight of the plan: cellular irregularity at Sergison Bates’ apartments on Fitzjohn’s Avenue in north London.

Going to plan

Floor plans reveal many of a building’s secrets while maintaining the mystique to arouse your imagination, says Will Wiles

Castles are very good. Hotels often are as well, more so than you’d expect. Theatres are terrific. Very large functional buildings like hospitals and industrial plants can be engrossing, but too arcane to really enjoy. Churches can be good but abbeys are better. Modern apartment buildings aren’t as good as they should be, apart from the very best and the very worst. Pre-war apartment buildings are a lot better. Stately homes can be a little dull, unless they’ve built up over time. Gothic always beats neoclassical. Which brings us back to castles.

We’re talking floor plans, of course, and how absorbing they can be even if one knows nothing else about a building. There are floor plans that have the ability to surprise or disturb, for instance that of Howells department store in Cardiff, which was built up around a historic Baptist chapel – invisible from the street, a ghastly off-angle aberration in the plan of the building.

Howells is something of a special case. Some typologies seem to naturally generate intriguing plans. A couple of years I discovered an Instagram account by the name of @misterericerone, which mostly posts the floor plans of high-end pre-War Manhattan apartment buildings. These plans have a peculiar ability to beguile, and are stacked with peculiarities.

Servants’ quarters are a lot more common here than you might expect, and sometimes have their own shadow networks of circulation. Grand staircases are de rigueur in the duplexes – why even have a duplex if your staircase isn’t grand? Another recurring status symbol is a round or oval room, generally a foyer, and often a foyer, which creates voids for chimney courses on upper floors.

Every one of those buildings, it seems, had a quirk of layout – possibly deliberately as an effort to insert character into what could otherwise be a very homogenous type. The Ansonia residential hotel on the Upper West Side has a profusion of round and rounded rooms, giving it a strange echo of a refinery or the ‘Tree of Life’ of the Kabbala. 1307 Fifth Avenue goes for curved corridors instead. The library room of some apartments at Rosario Candela’s 720 Park Avenue have concealed doorways leading to a small lavatory, for those more private reading sessions.

A few months ago in this column I wrote about the attraction of cutways, which provide a glimpse of a hidden world. Plans, while naturally telling us a great deal, are less voyeuristic: they appeal more to the imagination than curiosity, even without any other information. (Seeing pictures of the interiors can in fact be strangely deflecting). A turreted library in the corner of a building is naturally enchanting, but a small maid’s room with a tiny corner window into a brightly lit well also spurs speculation. Voids, hidden passages and unusually spacious closets create uncanny possibilities, a reminder that the devilish events in the 1968 film Rosemary’s Baby are set in motion by an abnormality in the layout of a Manhattan apartment building.

Plans, like maps, are inherently narrative: to be drawn into them is to tell oneself a story. One of the great strengths of the Journal is its inclusion of plans, revealing such delights as the cellular irregularity of Sergison Bates’ retirement apartments on Fitzjohn’s Avenue in Hampstead (RIBA April 2022). Thank heavens some modern buildings have the capacity for startling plans.

Will Wiles is an author. Read him here or on ribaj.com

*Culture*

*Opinion*
Christmas gifts

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Moral stance is good for business

Muyiwa Oki discusses the ethical imperative for a more resilient profession

The world of work has fundamentally changed following the upheaval of the pandemic. As more of us reflect on what we want and expect from our working lives, architecture – as much as any industry – stands at a crossroads.

Ethics – for design and people – has come to define this transformative moment. It’s about doing what’s right and maintaining trust, but it’s not just about morality; it’s also good business.

Some employers are offering flexible working arrangements and rethinking traditional office setups. This underscores a commitment to employee wellbeing as a defining trait of the modern workplace.

The RIBA recognises that ethical practice necessitates equilibrium between the needs of employers and employees – as we represent both. The strength of the architectural profession hinges on both the health of its practices and the wellbeing of its practitioners. So as president I will be dedicated to cultivating a fairer, more inclusive profession. We’ll prioritise the employment and wellbeing of those shaping our built environment, guiding chartered practices to be a force for good.

Our commitment is reflected in our work to foster inclusion and diversity, in both the RIBA and the profession. This includes collaborating with individuals and practices who are actively modelling a more inclusive profession. I firmly believe that diverse perspectives produce better outcomes, benefiting both practitioners and the communities they serve. There is more to come on this in my Biennial Plan, which Council and the Trustee Board have recently endorsed.

To truly succeed in this endeavour, we must shed the notion that overworked, underpaid employees are a badge of honour. I firmly believe that diverse perspectives produce better outcomes, benefiting both practitioners and the communities they serve. There is more to come on this in my Biennial Plan, which Council and the Trustee Board have recently endorsed.

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Dark matter is the most abundant substance in the universe, and the most mysterious. Although invisible, its gravity shapes everything we can see. As a practising architect, Indy Johar quickly became aware of a parallel with the intangible forces that govern the built environment: maintenance contracts, mortgages, investment models. He saw, too, how they serve private interests at the expense of the common good. What is needed, Johar believes, is a radical redesign of everything from property rights to measures of value. With tongue in cheek, he calls it the ‘boring revolution’. In the vanguard is his free-thinking strategic design practice, Dark Matter Labs.

It emerged seven years ago from London-based Architecture 00, the office Johar co-founded in 2005, which has incubated numerous innovative start-ups including the open-source construction system WikiHouse. It’s in the Hackney studio shared by the 00 family that I meet Johar – 50, casually attired in a quilted gilet, affable but quietly intense.

As he explains it, DML operates like a think-tank. It has overarching ‘missions’, like spatial justice, and collaborates with partners ranging from universities to city councils to formulate small-scale projects intended to infect mainstream thinking. ‘We’re looking at how you organise, govern, contract and finance civic goods’. A non-profit, it has branches in Sweden, South Korea, Canada and the Netherlands, and the 65-strong team including architects, economists, lawyers and data scientists is dispersed around the world. This is a rare visit to base for the frequent-flying ‘mission steward’. So what made him think that an architect could alter conditions that most regard as immutable? ‘It looks extraordinary, I’ll grant that,’ he says, ‘but we’ve always developed by exploring adjacent possibilities that reveal themselves as you work’. The plywood table at which we are sitting was an attempt to democratise design through distributed digital manufacture, but that demanded a new approach to warranties. ‘Every rule is only there until you make a better argument,’ he adds. Though measured in his speech, there is a sense of urgency as Johar outlines why change is vital. For 400 years, he says, we’ve imagined a world composed of discrete objects that could be governed by simple rules and rigid bureaucracy. It engenders rivalrous, extractive relationships between people and things. Climate change is one outcome. ‘Who thinks of boring property rights as enslaving things to you,’ he asks, ‘and creating externalities that kill?’ (Johar has a knack for the arresting phrase). We need to construct relationships in a way that reflects ‘entanglement’ at local and planetary levels, he says.

Conversation cycles rapidly between the objectives of a given project – how to govern autonomous surveillance cameras, for example – and esoteric references that illuminate complex interdependencies. Quantum physics is followed in short order by machine-enhanced ecological consciousness.

If the scope of Johar’s thinking can be hard to process, so is the nature and range of DML’s work. A single project might produce an entire ecosystem of policy proposals, digital tools and on-the-ground pilots. Most exhibit a blend of idealism and close attention to worldly concerns. Take the effort to position trees as critical urban infrastructure. The benefits are abundant – from flood mitigation to better health – but hard to quantify and finance. Moreover, trees tend to by local communities are most likely to survive. ‘So the real design problem is not drawing a tree on a plan,’ says Johar. ‘It’s the accounting, and doing that in a way that doesn’t put money over
other forms of currency, like love and care.’ DML’s solutions – being tested in Glasgow and Stuttgart – include data gathering and tools to measure value and match against liabilities. Other experiments with the governance of nature aim to secure legal personhood for the River Don in South Yorkshire and the Yarra in Melbourne.

Architects have much to contribute to this kind of work, which is essentially about the qualities of place says Johar. ‘They are extraordinary synthesisers of complex information and can imagine anew.’ There is frustration, though, that the profession doesn’t fully recognise the scale of transformation we face. Carbon budgets will allow very little new building or even retrofit, he argues. Designers must envision new ways of sharing, but few are yet developing the necessary capabilities.

Nor has architecture grasped the real significance of the digital technologies that underpin all of DML’s work, from open-source material registers to mass participation in planning. ‘It’s a bureaucratic revolution which is changing our relationship with the physical world,’ he says, pointing to Airbnb as a prime example. ‘That has much more architectural significance than squiggly buildings.’

It’s been years since Johar last sketched a plan, but the project he’s currently most excited about is an experimental home. As well as biomaterials and digital manufacturing, Free House will demonstrate a host of intangible features – perpetual bonds and smart many-to-many contracts – that fundamentally alter the nature of a building. ‘It isn’t owned by anyone, and residents have a stewardship relationship to land which is self-sovereign,’ he says. ‘They have custody over materials in a stewardship chain which will sequester carbon for 200 years.’

The aim is to create a template for zero-carbon housing that creates positive externalities and gets cheaper over time. DML plans to build the prototype with a museum.

The big question is whether such attractive, ingenious ideas can really thrive outside the laboratory. Johar will admit no doubts. Climate breakdown is merely a symptom of the problems with our current system, but also threatens the predictability on which so much depends, from insurance to capital markets. Entanglement can no longer be ignored. ‘Not long ago I’d speak at conferences and be treated as lunchtime entertainment,’ he says. ‘Now pretty serious people are inviting us into interesting conversations. The world has already changed.’
Qualified architect, fierce writer and critic, dedicated teacher and voracious reader, whose most influential work was The Big Rethink.

Peter Buchanan

1942 – 2023

Peter Buchanan, who has died aged 80, was an architect, writer and teacher committed to the idea that architecture should draw from the full breadth of human knowledge and cultures, and who advocated a more central place in architectural thinking for tradition, psychology and the natural world.

‘He sought to become specialist across every field, describing architecture as “the nexus of all disciplines, as fundamental as language”,’ says his friend and colleague Will Hunter. ‘At its most compelling, this enabled him to put architecture into its largest perspective, explaining “design as the way humanity can consciously participate in evolution”.’

Born in Zomba, Malawi, Peter studied science in Johannesburg before taking up architecture at the University of Cape Town, graduating in 1968. He worked for two leading practices in the city, Gabriël Fagan and Revel Fox & Partners, before moving to London in 1972 where he joined Halpern & Partners and then Siddell Gibson, masterplanning an extension to the city of Arak in Iran.

In 1979 he switched to journalism, joining the Architects Journal and the Architectural Review (AR), becoming deputy editor at the latter three years later. ‘Peter Davey, the editor, was the magazine’s heart, while Buchanan was its brain’, recalls his colleague Julia Dawson. ‘Though Peter Davey had an impressive intellect, Buchanan’s was of a higher order than most mere mortals’.

He also had prodigious energy, authoring entire issues on the Netherlands, Switzerland and Spain. When the magazines changed hands in 1992 he went freelance, beginning work on a five-volume series of monographs on Renzo Piano Building Workshop. He also taught and lectured extensively, from Uzbekistan and Peru. As a curator he had notable success with Ten Shades of Green, an exhibition exploring the opportunities for creativity and invention provided by sustainability. First shown at the Architecture League of New York, it toured museums across the US. As a critic he contributed to numerous publications, and was on the editorial boards of the Harvard Design Magazine and Japan’s A+U.

His most influential writing was The Big Rethink, a series of 12 essays published in the AR between 2011 and 2013, which called for a reconception of the discipline in response to economic and environmental crises, and for the enrichment of life. It took aim at targets from ‘starchitects’ to narrow functionalism, and championed esoteric ideas from Integral theory to spiral dynamics. ‘He was interested in the human mind and spirit,’ says the historian Alan Powers, ‘and ways of recovering from the mistakes of modernity.’

One broadside targeted architectural education, and Buchanan continued to discuss the subject with AR deputy editor Hunter, who in 2015 founded the London School of Architecture. Buchanan was a founding faculty member and the school’s reader in architecture and urbanism, whose wide-ranging lectures could last late into the evening. When students suggested they might be curtailed he countered that they were too short; he had given talks on Le Corbusier that lasted five days. Former students remember his generosity and enthusiasm, and a forthright, even fierce critic.

Towards the end of his life, when seriously ill, he continued to correspond with numerous international architects whose work he admired, and had done so much to encourage. He is survived by his sister, Yvonne, and nieces Catherine and Robyn.
One of a pair of small single-storey, three-bedroom houses on the site of an old orchard, 57 Ham Street was architect Stefan Buzás’ own home – built in a Miesian style and highly regarded as an example of modern domestic architecture. The local authority had demanded that the street elevation be brick, but allowed Buzás more freedom of expression for the rest of the building, with its large glazed facade and freely planned living space set around a central core of sanitary and heating functions topped by a timber-clad loft area.

With the deteriorating political situation in Vienna in 1938 Buzás (1915-2008) had been sent to England, completing his studies at the Architectural Association. He became a founding partner of James Cubitt & Partners in 1948, where perhaps his most significant works were the adjoining South Africa Tourist Board and Quantas Airways showrooms. Featuring glass extending down to pavement level these frameless spaces gave a new sophistication to shopping, setting the standard of design for the future.

From 1965 there followed a long collaboration with Alan Irvine including interiors for the Queen Elizabeth II liner.

Jonathan Makepeace

Garden elevation
57 Ham Street, Ham Common, London, 1953

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