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Cover image: Ryogo Utatsu captures Holes in the House in Nishiooi, Tokyo by Fuminori Nousaku and Mio Tsuneyama.

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CRAFT

Architecture and craft have long been intertwined, yet it can also be argued that in our digital age the two have become distant. In this issue, writes Eleanor Young, we explore how bringing them together can spark new thinking, collaborations and approaches

The notion of craft conjures up immediate images: an expert maker patiently carving, the visible marks of a hand on a crafted detail, or the considered spaces of a architect-master.

Yet deep into the machine age, and beyond into our digital one, as the many processes and expressions of craft spiral out, their defining essence becomes care and attention to material and space. So while those who handle straw and flint are to be found in this craft issue, we are not only celebrating the traditional skills but looking at how they are developing in concert with architects; pushing their chosen materials and their expression.

Our contention in focusing an issue on craft is that reinvigorated craft can offer architecture new life. It is fascinating to examine how the relationship between design and making can bring architects closer to materials and those who work them, and bring craft back into architecture itself.

One route is via digital technology: putting design tools into the hands of craftspeople in the form of augmented reality, for example, getting architects themselves closer to traditional crafts across the world and giving them a direct line to craftspeople. We hear from Adam Holloway, who has gathered makers and cutting-edge practices around his course at Oxford Brookes University to pioneer this digital crossover (page 12).

There is no doubt that craft and architecture are intertwined, feeding off one another. Anyone who has visited Royal Gold Medallist Níall McLaughlin's Bishop Edward King Chapel outside Oxford would find it hard to draw a line between where the crafted spaces become crafted details (page 18). After all, what is one without the other?

Something of an answer can be found in an emerging Japanese movement. A new sort of brutally honest truth to materials is emerging, as architects react to, and deconstruct, the admirable simple completeness and crafted joints the nation seems to have perfected (page 30).

There is no cohesive group in the UK of reinvigorated craftspeople and architects, despite the brilliant work of the King's Foundation Building Craft Programme and SPAB Fellowships. Nor do we have a William Morris among us, although contemporary designers and thinkers including Neal Shasore, the principals of DK-CM and Hugh Strange make a strong argument for learning lessons from the Arts and Crafts movement (page 38).

While craft seems out of reach for many projects tight for money and time, a good place to start may be Arts and Crafts great WR Lethaby's instruction from 1892, urging architects to deeply understand building: "You must learn the actual 'I know' of the workman. Work manually at a craft… to gain the power of real artistic expression in material."

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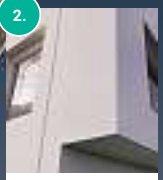

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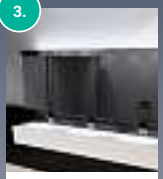

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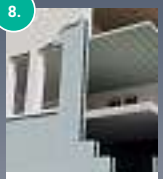

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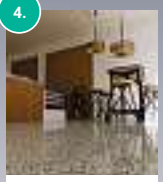

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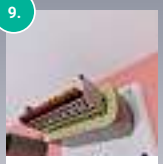

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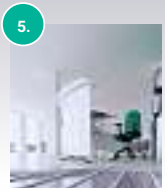

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TENDING TO A MASTERPIECE

WORDS
Flo Armitage-Hookes

The Royal Festival Hall, a concert venue, beacon of hope and architectural icon on London's South Bank, is now 75 years old.

Allies and Morrison has been caring for the building since the mid-2000s, and team members love its understated craft.

"As I took over the firm's work [as RFH house architect] in 2023, retired partner Simon Fraser walked me round, pointing out moments in the architecture as if they were old friends," recalls associate Eleanor Jolliffe. "There are many details that hide in plain sight and, now I have noticed them, never fail to bring me joy.

"To create a building that looks this simple takes significant skill," she goes on. "There are no cornices, skirtings or plaster flourishes to hide behind; every inch must work hard."

This is illustrated best by the foyer stair handrails, Jolliffe believes: "Their subtle grooves and changes in dimension telegraph that you are about to reach a landing, an end of flight or a change in direction. They are ergonomically designed so you instinctively grasp how to navigate the space, and they maximise your enjoyment of the journey.

"Once seen, the care lavished on this building cannot be unseen," she adds. "It is a deceptively simple masterpiece."

Royal Festival Hall: A Living Icon, edited by Eleanor Jolliffe and Sandy Rattray, is published in April by Merrell Publishers

"MANY DETAILS HIDE IN PLAIN SIGHT THAT, ONCE NOTICED, NEVER FAIL TO BRING JOY"

EDMUND SUMNER

Left: Ergonomically designed bannisters at the Royal Festival Hall.

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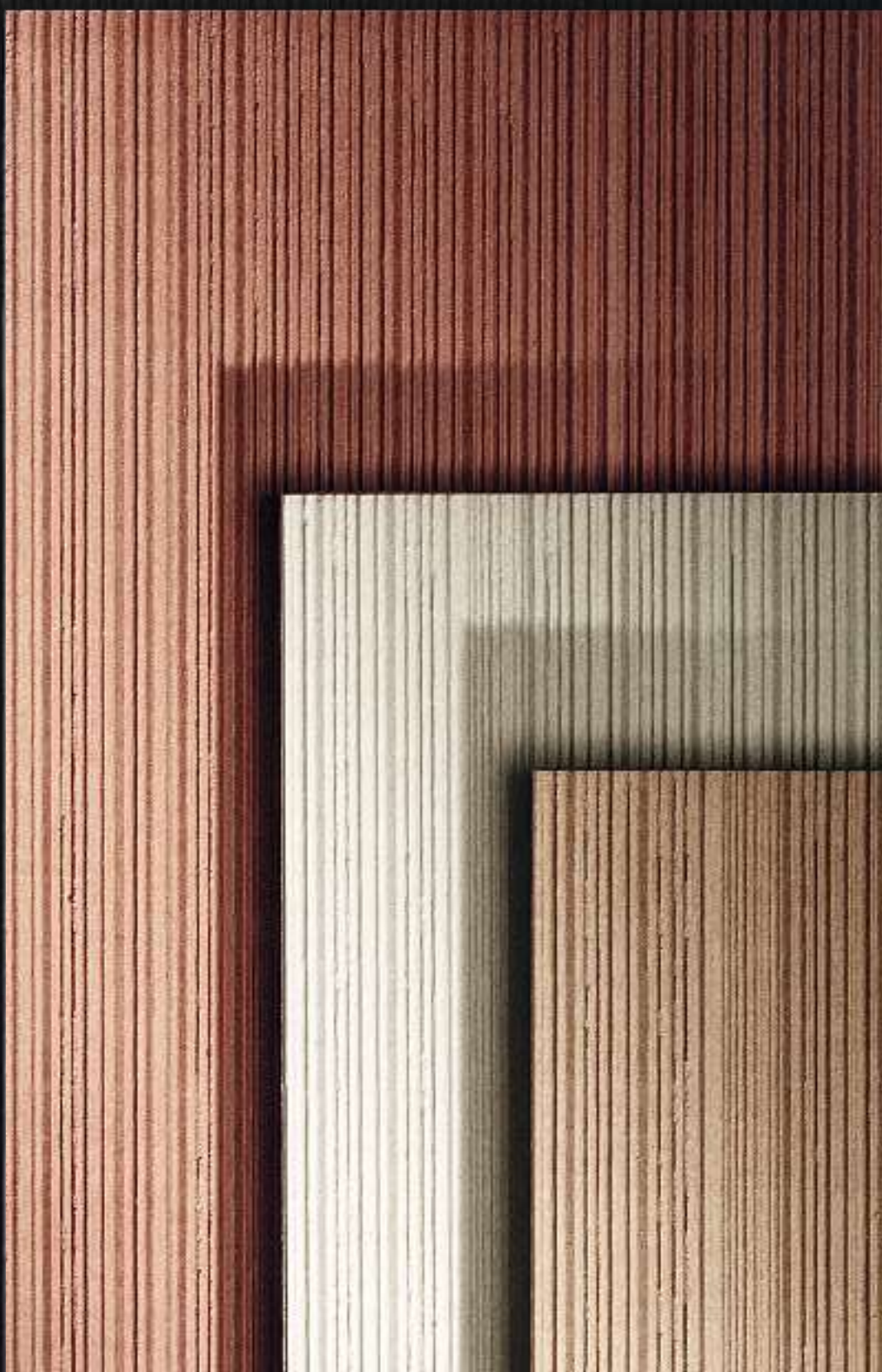

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NEVER MIND THE SLOP

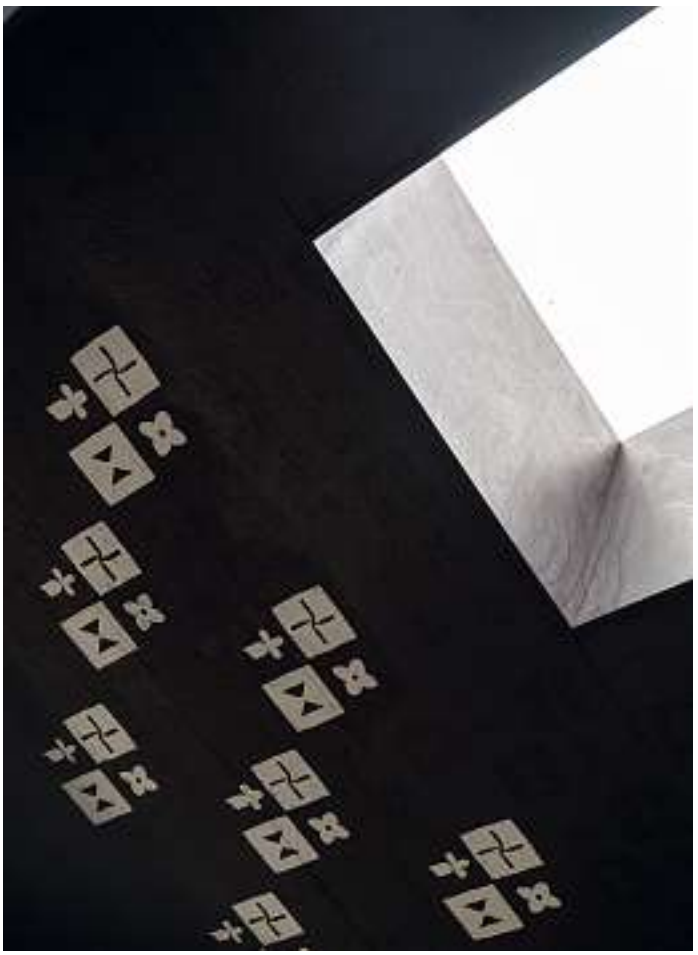
WORDS
Flo Armitage-Hookes

Carl Trenfield's architecture is a slow burn. There are no showstopper moments or dramatic reveals. Instead, a constellation of details layers up room by room. "They're all very small, but they're potent," says Trenfield.

In the recent revamp of a home in an area of Arts and Crafts houses, arched segments of pargeting rise up to waist height on a living room wall, while a motif of flowers and pinwheels patterns the stairwell's ceiling. Originally the motif – made using a 3D-printed cradle with laser cut foam stamps dipped in paint – was meant to cover the entire surface. However, after stepping back and seeing how busy it seemed, Trenfield started over and only stamped the diagonal lines. "There are lots of moments where you think: 'This isn't going where we want it to.' And so we reframe it fractionally and eventually get to something that feels right," he reflects.

Trenfield doesn't expect to nail details the first time and works closely alongside trusted makers and builders on site. Although it's time-consuming and incremental, the approach allows for whim and instinct. "It's a kind of 'punk craft'," he says. Not mohawks and studs but a protest against detached designers, an increasing reliance on AI and quick construction. "You just have to hope the [AI] slop doesn't win," he adds.

"FRACTIONAL REFRAMING GETS US TO SOMETHING THAT FEELS RIGHT"



Left: Stamped ceiling motifs at Barons Court Road by Carl Trenfield Architects.

RACHEL FERRIMAN PHOTOGRAPHY / THE MODERN HOUSE

DIGITAL CRAFTING

Cob corbelling with augmented reality template to help make the leanest, strongest shelter.

SATWIK GADANAYAK

WORDS
Eleanor Young

Digital technology, Adam Holloway argues, is the key to closing the gaping distance between architects and construction – and could even revive the role of designers as master builders

Isn't the problem with digital technology that it ties us to our screens and divorces us from the material world?
It is often viewed that way but, for design and architecture, the digital revolution in manufacturing offers a chance to return making to the same space as drawing.

For a long time we have accepted a model where architects draw instructions for builders. This has led to amazing efficiency gains via standardisation and industrialised mass production, but has marginalised and reduced the embodied knowledge of materials, particularly sustainable ones, in architecture. Digital tools offer an opportunity to dismantle the separation between drawing and making, and bring an intimate knowledge of materials and assembly back into the design process. In many ways, we are looking back to the medieval master builder, where the person drawing the work knew the materials intimately and worked directly with the craftspeople.

Architectural courses focused on digital design typically produce futuristic images. Is that what it is all about?
Not at all. I used to teach in environments focused on 'techno-futurism', with the goal often to see how digital tools could replace human skill or produce novel architectural forms. My work now, and the Digital Craft in Architecture course I set up at Oxford Brookes, is a reaction to that. It focuses on applying cutting-edge digital research in academia to real-world problems in small to medium-sized firms working with sustainable materials.

We collaborate with a range of entities, from earth builders to facade engineers all the way to larger architectural practices like Make. We think this diversity of views creates a rich framework from which to develop new projects that can leverage the digital technologies in practice.

Instead of focusing on industrialised materials like concrete, steel and glass, we are looking at vernacular architecture and sustainable materials – stone, earth and wood – drawing on the incredible resource in the Paul Oliver Vernacular Architecture Library. We are drawing on our network of researchers, designers and craftspeople working in natural building and heritage to study how different cultures historically dealt with local materials, and then we ask: how can digital tools augment rather than replace embodied knowledge? It is a shift from 'form-making' to 'form-finding'. We want to collaborate with the incredible base of knowledge about sustainable materials that has been built up over generations.

We use computational design and digital fabrication tools to enable this low-tech wisdom to be scaled up. We think these offer a profound opportunity for the most sustainable materials in the construction industry to be reinvented for contemporary architecture.

Could digital technologies help bring architects closer to crafting and making?
Absolutely. They bridge the gap between the digital model and the human hand, which allows us to design in the spaces of production.

For example, we worked with the Roundhouse Company on cob (earth) building. Cob is a very hands-on material, requiring an exceptional understanding of the recipe and how its components can be modulated for different applications. Corbelling cob, for example, requires a variation to the mix and technique of fabrication that is very difficult to replicate industrially. Traditionally, cob-making uses physical templates, but for more complex geometry these become prohibitively expensive. We introduced augmented reality (AR) templates that overlay digital guides onto the physical workspace and enable the craftsperson to engage their embodied knowledge in the act of making.

Crucially, we didn't replace the craftsperson with a robot. The AR headset acts as a digital guide, overlaying the geometry onto the physical space. This allows the maker to shape the material with their hands, maintaining that essential link with the wisdom of the hand, while the digital tool ensures precision. It removes the abstraction of the 2D drawing and puts the information exactly where it's needed: in front of your eyes, on site.

What does this mean for architects' roles?
It demands that while architects adopt more and more digital ways of designing, it becomes even more important to regain a deeper understanding of making and a material literacy, particularly for materials that require a lot of embodied knowledge to be applied sustainably. You cannot learn all of this from a book; you have to experience it. And whether you are designing toolpaths for a machine or digital templates for the craftsperson, it is imperative to understand how a material behaves and comes together on site.

It shifts the architect from being a remote instruction-giver to a collaborator who understands what they are building with. The physical reality informs the digital model and the drawing as much as the model informs the reality.

Does it have a place on a building site?
Digital fabrication has revolutionised the manufacturing industry for the past few decades, and is now already on site in a variety of ways. Its potential to reinvent the way we use sustainable materials has been explored extensively and is very successful in, for example, mass timber and 3D-printed earth construction.

AR is already used for tasks like snagging or checking pipe locations, but its potential is much greater. We see it as a way to integrate craft into modern BIM workflows. If a handcrafted section can be digitally verified to fit perfectly with a prefabricated section, it validates the use of craft on large-scale industrial projects as a viable part of today's construction.

It challenges the idea that everything must be uniform to be efficient. As the historian Mario Carpo argues, in the digital age, making everything different can be as cheap as making it the same. We can embrace uniqueness rather than forcing materials into standard shapes.

But isn't it a million miles away from the traditional crafts of building?
It is closer in spirit to Gothic architecture than modern manufacturing. Gothic builders didn't work to strict instructions for each detail, but to loose rules enabling them to solve problems creatively.

Some digital fabrication projects deskill the workforce by templating every action – like painting by numbers. We are doing the opposite. For example, with dry stone walling, we might provide a digital guide for the overall geometry, but the craftsperson still uses their expertise to scan the pile of stones and decide which one fits best. The digital provides the overall shape; the human provides the local solution. It respects the intelligence of the hand.

Could these methods help craftspeople to build in a leaner way?
Yes: it allows for material optimisation. In our cob projects, students used structural analysis software to map exactly where the stress lines flowed through a shape. Using AR they then built the structure by following those lines with the material.

The result was a structure significantly lighter and thinner than traditional walls, but just as strong. This is where digital craft becomes vital for optimising time and labour. Beyond creating more sophisticated shapes, we can use computation to place material only where it is structurally needed.

Could it help with problems like waste?
Absolutely. The stone industry is a prime example: we found quarries often waste up to 60% of the stone because architects only want thin, perfect white cladding.

We worked with AF Jones Stone Masons to use wire saws to cut structural components that utilise the entire block, including the rough, 'imperfect' edges. We have also looked at spolia: reusing stone from demolished buildings with PAYE and Make Architects. Since reclaimed stone is unpredictable, we have used AI to scan the available inventory and propose designs that fit the specific, irregular pieces we had, rather than cutting fresh stone to fit a rigid design.

What does the future hold?
We need to prove this works at scale, beyond pavilions. We are working with the Dhammada Collective in India, where local artisans build shallow brick domes that span 10m but are only 200mm thick. We are exploring how digital templating with AR can help bricklayers acquire this skill, allowing these low-carbon structures to be used for mass housing.

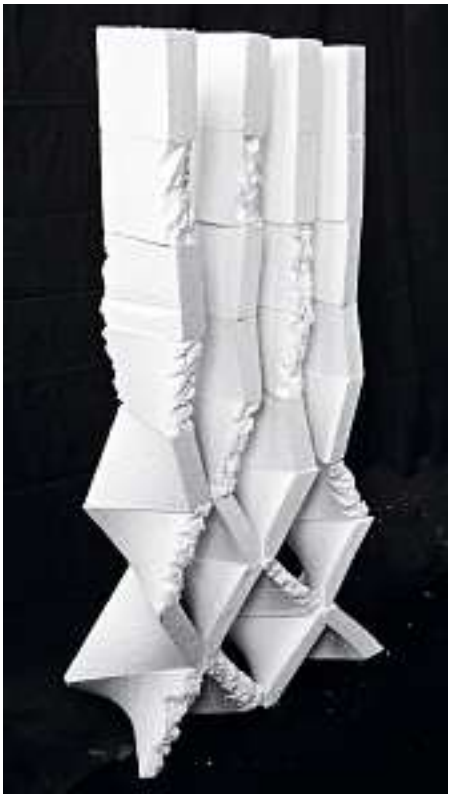
Closer to home, we are working with Earth Build to develop 3D printing with earth in the UK context – reinventing cob for robotic manufacturing. The goal is to take these sustainable, vernacular methods and make them capable of delivering mainstream architecture.

Adam Holloway is an architect and computational designer, and leads Oxford Brookes University's Digital Craft in Architecture course

CAMERON LESTER-JOHN

Above: AI can be used to scan unpredictable material such as reclaimed stone, and design around it – as on this Oxford Brookes student project.

Below: Parametric wire-cut stone prototype.



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LOOK BOTH WAYS

The 2026 Royal Gold Medal winner Níall McLaughlin talks about craft and meaning in buildings, and continuity in the culture of architecture — borrowing back and passing forward

The Royal Gold Medal awarded to Níall McLaughlin recognises an outstanding body of work – in writing, teaching and building – rooted in his understanding of architecture as a collective endeavour. "Rather than the creation of unique artefacts," as McLaughlin puts it, "I'm interested in the idea of working within a continuity; borrowing back and passing forward in architectural culture and the fabric of the city."

I get a clear impression of that as McLaughlin, 63, outlines his journey in practice. Born in Geneva, he grew up in Ireland and chose architecture almost on impulse after a kind of coup de foudre when he came across ABK's Berkeley Library at Trinity College Dublin. His formative years at University College Dublin remain a constant touchstone. Among his teachers, three precede him as gold medallists: the partners of O'Donnell & Tuomey, Grafton Architects and Scott Tallon Walker, where he worked after graduation.

Vitally, all were active builders, instilling early respect for working drawings and the creative stimulus of boggy sites and stubborn materials. Tales of life in the American offices of their own mentors also gave a vivid sense of connection to the giants of mid-century modernism, from Mies to Louis Khan. "That isn't an abstract thing," he insists. "It feels like a lived experience."

That inheritance has fed into a striking variety in McLaughlin's work – "the two sides to my personality". One produces lightweight framed structures made from industrial materials, like the hovering, impossibly minimal Saltmarsh House on the Isle of Wight; the other explores weighty assemblies carved from natural materials, as in the Stirling Prize-winning New Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge.

Those I've visited share a distinctive balance of intensity and composure. That owes much to the intricate manipulation

of space, light and materials, but also to the profusion of ideas that charge his work, ordered by a disciplined intelligence. A hint of McLaughlin's rich hinterland is visible in his practice's Camden studio, shared with a team of 26, where walls are covered in a treasured library of monographs alongside poetry and reference books. "I use the word 'loam'," he says. "It's like a deep soil that's full of nutrients, from which new ideas come."

McLaughlin wears his erudition lightly, but his conversation glides fluently between the practical minutiae of construction and philosophical speculation. One minute he'll recall the way a window meets its reveal, and the next, reflect on the significance of stone circles in Orkney as almost accidental byproducts of the need for collective action to bind people together.

"Today we are very technology-oriented, so we forget that making ever-better things is quite marginal to the fullness of human existence," he suggests. "Those communal rituals seem a richer way of thinking about architecture than as objects."

Building a frame of reference was a self-directed effort. When he moved to London in his 20s, McLaughlin found himself – happily – outside any architectural scene, with its tastes and taboos. "Being able to make myself up as I went along was incredibly liberating," he recalls. As a sole practitioner for years, he found his community through teaching, to which he remains committed. (Significantly, he is professor of architectural practice at the Bartlett.)

Recognition came quickly for small, complex projects such as an elaborate photographer's hide perched like a dragonfly on the edge of a Hampshire pond. That led, more slowly, to a broad portfolio of houses and museums, social housing and places of worship, then a slew of big buildings in historic settings – chiefly Oxbridge colleges.

In recent years the focus has shifted again: 80% of McLaughlin's work is now abroad. When we meet, he's on a brief touch-down between far-flung site visits and lecture trips. "From mid-November to Christmas, I was in Australia, India, Mexico, Jordan, Germany, Italy twice," he says. "I'm spending my life in airports."

He can't say much about those schemes yet, but new conditions demand adaptation that is enriching in some ways, and less so in others. "Working with executive architects on the far side of the world, the process becomes more disembodied," he remarks.

That's not wholly a new experience. McLaughlin has long been critical of the growing ruptures between thinking and making in British architecture, driven by D&B and clip-together construction systems. But he is keen to stress that he is not only interested in the rarefied, bespoke end of the business. "We like to tailor things so that they're beautiful," he says, "but that must be possible with the available means of production."

Such limitations have spurred rich and original work, addressing "absurd"

NICK KANE (2)

NMLA

Left: Library at Magdalene College.

Right: Ornamented facades for housing on the Olympic Park, east London.

Opposite: Bishop Edward King Chapel, Ripon Theological College.

NICK KANE

set-ups with a mix of earnestness, imaginative agility and wry humour. Designing the skin for a standard Athletes Village block on London's Olympic Park, he recalled the way Nash would dress up ordinary housing in the garb of Athenian democracy. Fragments of the Elgin marbles were 3D-scanned to make precast cladding bearing reliefs of festival scenes.

"Truth to materials is a 20th-century idea," he says. "Now the inside and outside of buildings are disconnected, so you have to employ irony, or understand that any representation is a conceit."

That applies at Oxbridge too, though with greater scope to resist componentised construction. There, he preferred malleable natural materials for control over detail. Stone mullions are honed to grade the daylight coming in. Feathered brickwork lightens corners of buildings. Intricate timber linings lend texture and warmth.

"Crafted" is the usual label; it appears in the Gold Medal citation. He is uneasy with it, wary of associations with a laboured, stuck-in-its-ways approach to building. Instead, he points to a distinction made by the poet Seamus Heaney: craft is a set of learned skills, which combine with personal experiences and attitudes as the more exploratory technique. "Of course I'm interested in detail," he says, "but it's not what defines me; I'm much more interested in the plan."

It's in plans that you see the DNA shared between McLaughlin's buildings and diverse ancestors, and the way they've all grappled with what he calls the fundamental purpose of architecture: situation and orientation. "You're assembling the random events of everyday life in a framework which grounds them and orientates you towards higher forms of order – in time, social structures or the rhythms of the natural world," he says.

A Dublin respite centre for people with Alzheimer's preoccupied him for a long time because it got to the heart of the matter. How can architecture give comfort to people who have lost their bearings? Science, he felt, needed to be coupled with some intuition. Memories of Louis Barragan's house in Mexico City and Mies's unbuilt Brick Country House fed into the idea of looping circulation routes that always return a person home – a continuous present in spatial form.

Similar genealogies are consciously present in all of his work. The tartan grid of the Magdalene College library echoes Louis Kahn's Trenton Bath House and Herman Herzberger's Centraal Beheer. The elliptical Bishop Edward King Chapel in Oxfordshire grows out of a lineage stretching back through churches by Rudolf Schwarz, Peter Zumthor and Gian Lorenzo Bernini, all concerned with the orientation of individual consciousness towards the congregation, and the divine.

The chapel remains a favourite project. McLaughlin now tends to think of it not in terms of physical properties, but in the fortifying experience of making things with other people.

There's satisfaction, too, in the growing community of architects with their own roots in his work. Around 30 practices, he calculates, have emerged from his Bartlett units or studio. "It's heartbreaking when they go," he says, "but you have to think positively about new adventures." Continuity goes on. ■

Above: Saltmarsh House, Isle of Wight.

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SHAPING

ALUN CALLENDER

PAULIN

Left: David Smith, flint.

Right: Tessa Mackenzie, glass.

Opposite left: Harry Roberts, thatch.

Opposite right: Paddy Holmes-Boyes, timber.

THE FUTURE

WITH PERMISSION OF HARRY ROBERTS

EMMET HOLMES-BOYES

Traditional craft is not just about nurturing ancient techniques – it can also open avenues to innovation. Four outstanding contemporary practitioners discuss the journeys into their specialisms, and the new directions they are taking their chosen craft

DAVID SMITH (2)

Left: Flint House, Buckinghamshire, by Skene Catling de la Peña, with flintwork by The Flintman Company.

Above: Adams Field House, South Downs, by Colman Architects, using random snapped quarry flint.

Flint

David Smith, The Flintman Company

David Smith's story is perhaps one of happy accidents. He came to flintwork by chance: in his youth he was asked to do a repair on a local house. He'd never used the material before, but gave it a go. Years later, having worked in conservation, he came back to it.

From the outset, his approach has been about experimentation and being curious, but also pragmatic, about the sedimentary rock, which has been used in building for millenia. "Engagement and failure are important – and understanding the narrative of flint," Smith says. He is always learning; pushing the envelope: "Flint can really vary in how it is laid."

He set up his own business in 1989 and passed many years doing domestic projects, as well as working on churches and castles in Sussex and Surrey. But in 2012 came another chance event: architect Charlotte Skene Catling approached him to work on the design and build of what became known as Flint House. It can be credited with transforming Smith's business, partly because the project also single-handedly revived the credibility and influence of flintwork – which had not been particularly fashionable – in contemporary projects.

Flint House used its namesake material extensively and imaginatively, with Skene Catling bringing a range of ideas and asking Smith to weigh their potential. The house is distinguished by its striking flint cladding, graduating from dark at the bottom to light at the top in a variation of styles, totalling six types (including snapped, knapped, coursed and chalk). The project involved intensive research and risk: flint quoins (cornerstones), for example, hadn't been made in the way designed since the previous century. Combining styles and reconfiguring them was a huge challenge.

Smith made sample panels testing how the scheme would work, mitigating to some extent against unexpected outcomes. For him, though, pushing materials forward means taking leaps into the unknown and being prepared to engage with failure. He used greyscale cards to grade the flint in the quarry and found that the gallets (flint shards bedded into the mortar), which had always been in the plan, helped the movement between styles of flint laying.

Flint House was an exciting opportunity that unlocked an evolution in how flint is used – though a flood of demand that followed put pressure on resources and skills. House 19, Smith's follow-on project, drew on some of the styles used at Flint House, before a further scheme in Japan led to another leap in innovation by using water-jet technology to reduce the weight of masonry materials. Learnings from there were brought back to the UK at the Depot community cinema scheme in East Sussex, which included the world's first flint ceiling, as well as using the stone for lintels and a visible flat roof. For the latter, Smith suggested using two styles: random snapped (a sharp, modern approach) and field flint laid whole horizontally, almost as it is found in the landscape around.

The development of Smith's practice has led to a shift in focus from conservation to new builds. He has also written a book, Building with Flint, published in 2024, covering the narrative of flint and offering a practical guide. An additional angle that emerged from that was the history of flint use in industries including toothpaste, ceramics and glass. The latter is now another area of interest for Smith, busying away in his workshop to discover, again, the alchemy through trial and error to make something that might be useable on a wide scale.

In the meantime though, his business has three new builds lined up to start in spring – in Sussex, Suffolk and Hertfordshire – setting it up for the year. Each scheme promises to push the boundaries of flintwork once again. Smith believes the key, as a craftsperson, is to get involved in a project early enough to help determine and be inventive, potentially, as to how the design might be successful. It's also, he says, about maintaining an excessively curious mind.

Glass

Tessa Mackenzie

Tessa Mackenzie's background is in illustration. She studied at the Glasgow School of Art, moving to the city aged 18. After graduating, she found herself balancing freelance illustration work – particularly for healthcare clients, including the NHS – with working in a bar. It was the latter experience, during which she would sketch customers in quiet hours, that gave her the idea to get into glasswork.

"I wanted to execute those drawings in a medium that was appropriate," Mackenzie recalls. "Working in bars, you've got a lot of glass waste. I started to research how to melt down the bottles, and taught myself really basic stained glass techniques." She quickly realised the craft was difficult and time-consuming, but nonetheless found it an "addictive" pursuit. "It was satisfying to get slowly better and to work with my hands, because I was so used to working digitally," Mackenzie says.

In 2019, she joined the King's Foundation Building Arts programme, which focuses on decorative elements within a building. "After the course I did a couple of placements around the UK to learn how to make a [stained glass] window properly. Then I decided to make the jump, because I had little bits of work here and there. Every job I took on was far too big for me at the time, but I obviously learned a lot from each one."

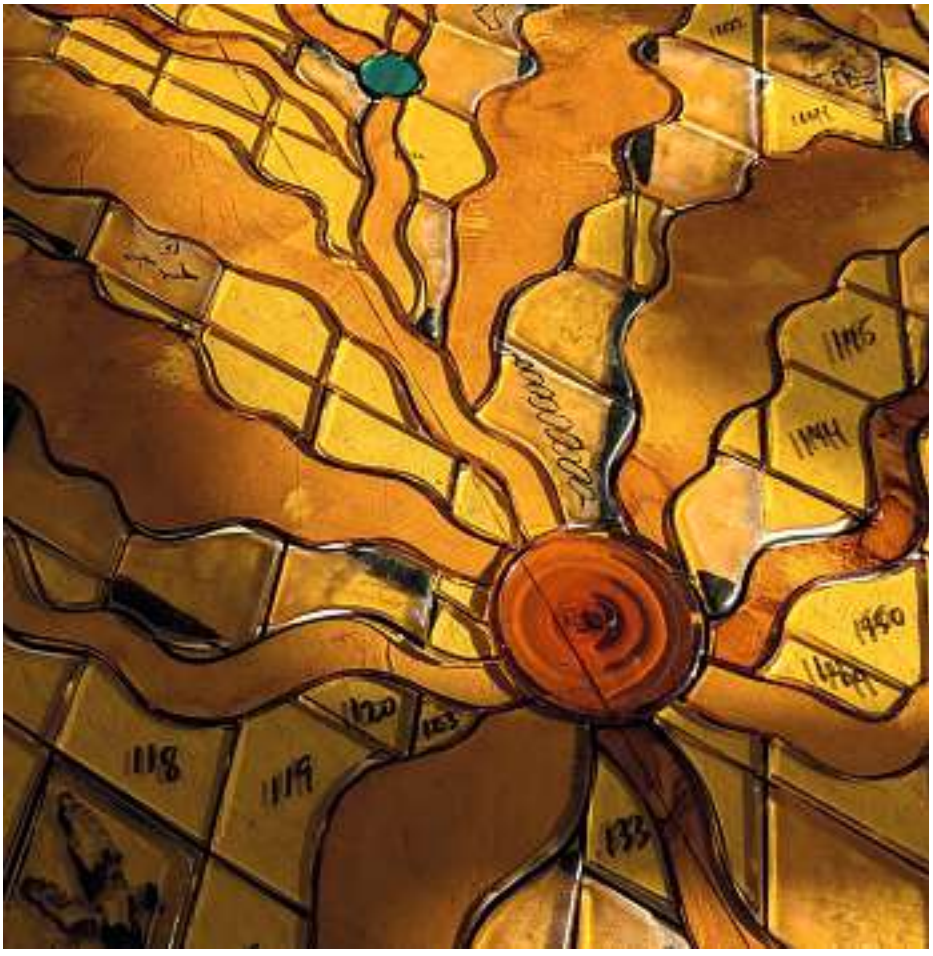
Now Mackenzie has her own retail shop – the Glaziers Arms, in Glasgow's East End – rented from arts organisation Many Studios. Inside is her workshop; she also runs classes and sells pieces through passing trade, besides taking on commissions from homeowners and architects. Mackenzie has started crushing the waste glass she generates into different grades to make discs she then turns into plates and bowls, which she also sells. "I didn't invent the technique by any means but, as far as I'm aware, I'm the only person doing it on a kind of semi-industrial scale," she says.

Her commissioned work, meanwhile, falls into three categories: fabrication jobs where designers and artists come with creations they want fabricated in glass, white-label work, and the domestic commissions – sometimes for clients who ask her to sign a non-disclosure agreement. Mackenzie starts with drawings, often in oil pastel, that she works to translate using a mixture of fused glass, silver stain and leaded glass, combining different techniques that give a contemporary feel.

The commissions are sometimes time consuming, involving a lot of back and forth to get designs right; so Mackenzie has begun work on a pattern book to streamline the process and create templates clients can simply choose or amend. This harks back almost to those that Victorian housebuilders would have used, but is all about looking forward, being more efficient and ensuring clients get what they want.

Right: Detail on a front door stained glass design by Tessa Mackenzie.

Below: An installed stained glass bathroom window that blends fused and leaded glass techniques, designed by Tessa Mackenzie.



TESSA MACKENZIE (2)

Thatch

Harry Roberts, master thatcher

There are four things Harry Roberts, a master thatcher, needs to do his job: a hammer, mallet, bars and straw. The equipment and means to become a master thatcher have hardly changed in hundreds of years. There is a specialist thatching pathway within roofing NVQs, but there are few teaching colleges, and apprenticeships take seven years with stages up to master level. Entering the field involves earning respect through experience and word of mouth.

Roberts' fascination with thatch began at the age of just seven: while his parents' house was being renovated, he was in awe of the local thatcher working on the roof. As a child, he found himself interested both in hands-on work and in the history of buildings, and at 16 he rang round local thatchers – and one offered to pick him up the next morning. Much later, after being made redundant in 2008, he would work for the thatcher who had done his parents' house, before setting up on his own two years later.

Roberts is based on the Bedfordshire-Cambridgeshire border and works across the East of England, and as far west as Oxfordshire for bigger contracts. For the most part his work involves rethatching traditional buildings, particularly homes. Occasionally, though, he is called upon to do more contemporary work too. Similarly to David Smith, this kind of work requires experimentation, trial and error; but also offers excitement and the potential for creative innovation.

Thatch House in Cambridgeshire, by PiP Architects, is one of Roberts' most unusual projects. A fully thatched end gable, a thatched mansard roof, thatch on the vertical and wrapping around either side of the front door, thatch turning the corners, and a flush ridge all set it apart and contribute to a modern aesthetic. Each element required sculptural thinking and researching how to use the chosen reed material strategically. The scheme has few peers in the UK, although these kinds of features are more common in the Netherlands and Denmark.

For Roberts, innovation also comes with having to adopt new skills amid a changing climate and political and agricultural context. He uses two main materials, straw and water reed, with the latter readily available and imported from other parts of the world. Straw would traditionally have been sourced locally, but only a handful of large suppliers of the types used in thatching remain due to factors including production skills and knowledge not being passed on, diseases, and unreliable harvests. With the average four-to-eight-week roof job using up 5t, Roberts decided in 2014 to start growing his own supply, investing in machinery (most of which is more than 100 years old) and renting land from farmers. This too presents challenges: changes to how government subsidies work for landowners mean the area he cultivates has fallen to 12ha for this year, compared with 16 to 20ha previously. Roberts' task is not only about perfecting his craft, but keeping the process behind it viable.

HARRY ROBERTS

PIP ARCHITECTS

Above: Thatching in progress at Thatch House, Cambridgeshire.

Left: Thatch House was designed by PiP Architects with inventive contemporary thatch by Harry Roberts.

Right: Dying pavilion at Highgrove, created during the Building Crafts programme by a team including Paddy Holmes-Boyes.

Opposite right: Traditional timber frame being built within a barn wrecked during the great storm of 1987.

Timber

Paddy Holmes-Boyes

Paddy Holmes-Boyes' career in woodwork took many turns before he joined the King's Foundation Building Craft course two years ago. After studying carpentry and traditional bench joinery, he worked for several firms, producing a huge range of goods. These included fitted and freestanding furniture, French doors and staircases for renovations and new builds, fabricated joinery for exhibitions and outdoor spaces, wooden pods for Brighton University students, and top-end bespoke kitchens, wardrobes and tables. Along the way he fine-tuned his making, learned veneering and took on apprentices.

But, he recalls, "I started to fall out of love with it." He felt a "lack of appreciation for the craftsmanship, care and consideration" behind the items he was making. "Clients often had vast budgets and saw the work almost as temporary – the equivalent of buying IKEA furniture." In 2024, Holmes-Boyes took part in a greenwood chairmaking course, using only hand tools, and the teacher discussed the Building Crafts programme focusing on traditional construction and the whole craftsperson. He enrolled – and found the experience transformative. Holmes-Boyes was able to work on observational skills, collaborate with other craftspeople on live projects, including at Highgrove, and complete several placements around traditional and green oak timber framing.

"I wanted to continue traditional woodwork and timber framing," he goes on. "But also I wanted to work in a different environment, on buildings with history." He found work with a company that restores timber-framed buildings, as well as producing new-build contemporary frames. Many of the firm's projects involve structures that are hundreds of years old – including a 12th-century priory, 15th-century cottages and 16th-century barns – which involve different types and techniques of framing. Holmes-Boyes also recently worked on a scheme to insert a new timber frame into the collapsing walls of a stone barn destroyed by the great storm of October 1987. The project had been in a planning battle for years, mired in thinking around blockwork or concrete doing the work to hold up the roof – until an idea to use a timber traditional cruck frame coalesced.

Alongside this work, Holmes-Boyes is back in the workshop teaching himself traditional marquetry. His skills range from the minute to the large-scale – useful, since timber framing involves millimetric precision. He is also going back to teach on the chairmaking course he did years ago over the summer – which he feels will offer a valuable new avenue.

"Looking to the future, I think craft is going to become a really powerful skill," Holmes-Boyes says. "As the world develops into more computer-based technology and AI, there's going to be a real appreciation and value for craft: these are not going to be skills everyone has. There's already a revival – also around being in tune with natural materials and nature – it's very tangible."

PADDY HOLMES-BOYES

NICK CAIN

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U-value chart

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0.13	70	250	275
0.12	75	270	295
0.11	80	290	320
0.10	100	320	355

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

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JAPANESE JUNCTIONS

In Japan, where prefabricated homes dominate, a raw, gutsy work-in-progress aesthetic is permeating many young firms' domestic projects, fuelled by societal challenges and a complex reframing of the scope of craft

In Shinagawa-ku, on a small plot typical of those making up Tokyo's inner wards, architect couple Fuminori Nousaku and Mio Tsuneyama live in an experiment of their own devising: Holes in the House. From outside it sits not like a 'statement' home but anonymously in the stylistic melange of the neighbourhood – where it has already been for nearly 40 years.

The ground floor, on first view, offers a semblance of timber-lined normality. But its steel columns and beams, curiously cossetted in cotton-wool-like, white-painted Rockwool, are a mere harbinger of what's to come. Via a bare steel stair, upper levels reveal a house that feels more like a building – or demolition – site. Sections of slab have great chunks removed, openings cross-braced to give views up or down, with netting to prevent falls. Window openings look literally that, and exposed plasterboard partitions sit beneath galvanised slab soffits and in front of wood-fibre wall insulation. Power cables erupt from an old fuse box and hang randomly like broken spider's webs.

But pull your eyes away from the absent balustrade a moment to look to your feet, and the red oxide stair has treads of crafted cedar rising to meet finished floors of the same. On one, an existing tatami room with oshiire futon storage now appears like an unexpected guest, its ceiling of cedar veneer and timber walls a formal counterpoint to what now lies around it, before

WORDS
Jan-Carlos Kucharek

Below left: Revealing structure and creating new insertions is part of the repertoire of young architects working in the domestic realm, seen here in Fuminori Nousaku and Mio Tsuneyama's house in Tokyo.

Below: The existing home, which had a commercial unit at its lower level, is now the site of radical architectural interventions.

reverting once again to unique chaos at the rooftop bedroom.

The interventions aren't random and the home is not 'unfinished' in any normal sense – but this raw aesthetic is seeping into an increasing number of younger firms' domestic projects. What of centuries-old 'kigumi' woodworking skills, which preceded obsessive detailing seen in the blossoming of Japan's late modernism? Has it been superseded by a phenomenon of stripping back and revealing, or conscious incompletion?

A lot occurred over Japan's protracted, 'post-bubble' recession: the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami and Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 and Covid-19 in 2020, bookended by the 1995 Kobe and 2025 Noto earthquakes. The country's 'lost decades' bred a sense of existentialist vulnerability, too, and put paid to any illusion that brute concrete or engineering could ever stop the wave or the earth from moving.

Perhaps it marks the end of the primacy of the 'White School', a term Japanese historian and architect Terunobu Fujimori coined for architects he saw as conceptual, precise or technology-driven. With climate change a palpable threat and Japan's economy still struggling with low growth, in the realm of the home at least, architects allying with his 'Red School,' signifying blood, guts, weight and roughness, are on the rise. Led by Fujimori and architect

JUMPEI SUZUKI (2)

JUMPEI SUZUKI

Osamu Ishiyama, still the poster boy of low-craft design after self-building his 1975 'Gen-an' home in Aichi, the thinking trumps belief in technology, materials and individualism with notions of environmental sustainability, circularity and commonality.

The hegemony of Japan's prefabricated housebuilding industry plays a big role in the understanding of craft in its domestic market. The largest operator, Sekisui House, an £11 billion company set up in 1960 to drive postwar building, has completed over 2.7 million homes. And while UK housebuilders' business model is to build traditionally at low cost to profit from land speculation, in Japan, to realise investor returns, developers must innovate to create ever-better-engineered homes.

This is tough for young firms chasing domestic work. "It might be generic, but it's a good standard of construction," says Takero Shimazaki of London-based t-sa. "A client [once] opted for an engineered home as it could be built for less and be structurally, earthquake and fire certified – they'd even site-supervise and provide aftersales warranties. Architects can't compete with that, even for a tiny fee." With the housebuilders now even staking a claim to zero-energy homes, Shimazaki says winning private house commissions is an uphill struggle.

Some architects, such as Tamotsu Teshima and Tomoaki Uno, are bucking the trend doing beautiful, highly crafted work. "My priority is to design a rich interface between the human and natural," says Uno. "Traditional craftsmanship and techniques remain vital instruments in achieving that." He reportedly always personally joins the craftspeople on site. But in the real world, Shimazaki says, architects are looking for a USP beyond meeting engineered homes' performance or economy. "Architects doing domestic work are trying to bring beauty and sustainability to design, not in traditional craft but by using off-the-shelf components in 'low-craft' ways."

Where prefabricated homes don't tick the boxes, argue Fuminori Nousaku and Mio Tsuneyama, is on longevity. "They use small-section timbers with screws and metal plate connectors," says Tsuneyama, suggesting this means a shorter life (Sekisui warranties its homes for 30 years). "Humans shouldn't live longer than houses – which also need to adapt and change over time."

Nousaku says their Holes in the House home is a response to both this idea and an reflection that individual choices can have global impact. The house wears its heart on its sleeve, with layers peeled away or judiciously added to with sustainable, reclaimed or lo-fi materials such as new uPVC windows replacing its old ground-floor shop shutters. I ask Nousaku if there were any basic rules to the design and he answers: "No – or bricolage was the only rule."

Above: The Akeno Raised Floor House sits up on its steel plate staddle stones.

Below: Akeno Raised Floor House exemplifies Fuminori Nousaku's 'touch the ground lightly' approach.

JUMPEI SUZUKI

"HUMANS SHOULDN'T LIVE LONGER THAN HOUSES – WHICH NEED TO ADAPT OVER TIME"

Above: At Haruka Nogami's home, new structural insertions, such as light-permitting slats, were in cypress.

Below: Revealing the existing roof has fundamentally changed the spatial quality of the home.

Visiting the dump and seeing concrete waste at city scale led to the couple ruling out its use where possible, he adds. The straw-bale Akeno Raised Floor House in Yamanashi prefecture was, in part, a response to soil joyfully revealed on digging out the concrete of their own home's front yard to form an urban 'wild' space; its steel and timber floor is held up on its fine, crafted, steel foundations they let the grass run beneath.

Both acknowledge challenges in realising craft on low budgets. At House on Classical Elements in Yokosuka, passive principles realised a low-embodied-energy timber home. Its coastal location ruled out steel foundations so they designed three-pronged concrete nibs to hold up a raised slab and minimise contact with the earth. Timber was treated with boric acid (a natural insecticide) with moisture-resistant vermiculite fireproofing and breathable, cellulose fibre insulation: a simple, hygroscopic, biophilic home.

In his own teaching, Nousaku teams up with Atelier Bow Wow's Yoshiharu Tsukamoto at Tokyo Institute of Technology and his Satoyama (village/mountain) School of Design. This 'live' studio aims to teach craft skills to students charged with renovating abandoned rural homes – 'akiya' – in hollowed-out villages. They learn not just skills from local craftspeople, but about bigger themes of demographics, economy and linking the land and what grows on it to the craft of building; as part of slow, organic, community regeneration.

Reports suggest 14% of Japan's housing stock – including in urban areas – can now be classed as abandoned. Exacerbated by population degrowth and punitive federal taxes on vacant land, it leaves inheritors of such houses without funds to renovate, or demolish and rebuild, with no option but to let them run down, sell or even desert them.

While not an akiya, the 40-year-old house that Tokyo-based studio amu founder Haruka Nogami bought to renovate shows one way architects can add value to avoid losing a serviceable home to an engineered one. It involved a forensic strip-back – in 2025, a historic legal exemption for two-storey timber structures was revoked to force verification of seismic resistance, while the new Building Energy Efficiency Act mandates far better thermal performance. The legislation was used to rethink the home altogether.

While the big architectural move was to optimise space by moving living/dining space upstairs and bedroom/studio downstairs, new interventions were done in close collaboration with her carpenter. "We wanted to show how the builder had cared for the house, and that our job as architects was to be deferential to that," explains Nogami. Hidden pine structure was exposed and new carpentry

SATOSHI ISHIMOTA (2)

MORINAKA YASUAKI

Left: Tsubame Architects used prefabricated house systems for its Bonus Track shops and flats, then added frame elements to let users tweak details.

Below: At Morinaha, raw sections of timber are cut to the same thickness, giving a unique profile to each mechanically cut piece.

insertions, in cypress if structural and ash if decorative, evidence a curatorial approach. Even dated bathroom tiles were celebrated, Nogami coating them in a waterproof glass-fibre resin: "It keeps the form but gives a soft, quilted feel – like a duvet." Removal of an old suspended ceiling to reveal the roof's splendour was transformative. Nogami is ready to add wood-fibre insulation panels if she needs, but, for now, she's enjoying the rafters.

"We demolished 40% and added 40%, but it feels 100% ours," she says – and an engineered home would not have been an option, even if she could afford one. "They work and are cost-effective but people don't know what they're built of," she says. "It's like living in a manga: we need to reconnect to our homes' materiality." In her own home, Nogami has hit on value architects can bring to the many akiya that sit between being unrenovated and dilapidated, feeling "they hold spatial potential and material value, helping us to engage with them more thoughtfully as designers".

Her observations on architects' use of bricolage techniques and off-the-shelf products, combined in novel ways to create a form of craft for cash-strapped clients, are echoed by Tsubame Architects. Partner Motoo Chiba says the strategy plays into the fact that federal regulation mostly precludes natural material use in urban contexts, favouring engineered products. But these can, he says, be "hybridised" to create unique architectural solutions.

This is seen on placemaking scale at Bonus Track in Tokyo's trendy Shimokitazawa, on land released by Odakyu rail company by tunnelling a section of its suburban trainline. In a prime-value area, a hamlet of low-

KAI NAKAMURA

"WE HAVE LOST OUR ABILITY TO INTERACT WITH OUR HOMES"

rent, 33m² units of independent shops below and 'owner' studio flats above, was realised on the tightest of budgets. Tsubame used prefabricated home systems to build the mini community but tailored plan layouts, roof shapes and wall panel finishes to create a picturesque arrangement along a public route. The firm left simple details, like roof canopies to shops or low walls, to be adopted by tenants. "We created basic structures they could 'own' and customise," explains Chiba. "In most old towns in Japan you'll see the same house types but their individual details will be different."

Tsubame's studies on how global impact can be mitigated at local level is seen in their Morinoha timber firm HQ in Hida, Gifu prefecture. Initially analysing the local forests' timber stocks and the way they might be optimised, the practice's design of its office saw ideas formalised, with conscious use of local hardwoods, all cut and air-dried outside over time. A truss roof structure built at Morinoha's sawmill sees layers of thick-cut, rough timber planks respond, in diminishing layers, to structural loads; each a unique slice of trunk. It also formed floors and doors, with waste woodchips pressure-treated to create panellised roof soffits. Even wood shavings, packed into clear plastic insulation 'pillows' infill between trusses above windows – a homegrown and fully certified approach to making and detailing. Chiba's view is that engineered products serve a performance function: "In our work we are always trying to consider how to hybridise industrial processes with handcrafting ones." This, he believes, is how a sense of 'craft' can be retained for the masses.

To those who can afford it, those amazing 'kigumi' skills remain out there to be drawn on by the likes of Teshima and Uno in a contemporary iteration of ancient craft. But in the hard light of Japan's experience and economy, it seems craft on the home front is more a melange of Fujimori's schools. White, in use of industrialised products – the cold, machined, transparent, sharp or accurate – but brought together artfully in ways that are red: warm, hand-assembled and rough. And there are, of course, those who wrestle craft from the hands of artisans to claim it as theirs – in the type of democratic, 'low craft' way that Osamu Ishiyama espoused in 1975 – and which may account for what we are seeing now.

JUMPEI SUZUKI

Below: Concrete nibs minimise in-ground concrete at Fuminori Nousaku's House on Classical Elements.

KEISUKE OKA (2)

Left: Arimasuton building has been slowly built by hand over two decades by its owner, Keisuke Oka.

Twenty years in the making, the just-completing Arimasuton Building in Mita, Tokyo, is home to architect Keisuke Oka, an acolyte of Ishiyama. The small, four-storey concrete-and-steel house yawns primally out of the ground, as if revealed in a tectonic shift. It is is a personal project, one that has organically developed in the time Oka has spent building it, with each concrete piece hand-cast. "We could only pour a small amount per day, so planned each piece to avoid overexertion," he explains, adding that "there were no 'rules' – the one constraint was to use methods we could build ourselves". If tradesmen came in to help, they had free rein over their work: "It was enough they think for themselves and enjoy the process." The result, with its juddered, chaotic face and mangled metal windows, is an utterly singular case study – obsessively crafted, yet free and joyful.

This may be an extreme reaction to Japan's cultural obsession with the detail. But it is symptomatic of a new thinking that reframes craft's scope, seeing it as not just the qualitative resolution of a material interface but part of a design holism that considers users as well as ecological impacts of construction on communities or wider society. Domestic architects might despair of the performance and affordability benefits engineered homes offer, but Oka believes "too many, overly fixated on perfection, become afraid to build and lack a spirit of challenge". Perhaps that's only half the problem, though; the other is homeowners' detachment from the houses they'll live in.

I ask Mio Tsuneyama if she feels her young kids are safe in their precarious-seeming home, and she pauses a while. "Something we lost in modernisation was our ability to interact with our houses," she says eventually. "In raising our children, we decided not to leave them weak in this context but for them to live with the structure every day; to be aware of it, to know how it's assembled and if it needs fixing, to learn to fix it themselves." Her parents' generation played their part in postwar industrialisation, to be rewarded with economic growth, but blind faith in technological progress has left them exposed.

The economy has faltered, an ecological crisis looms and while other natural disasters will occur, Japan's society need the skills to survive them; and this, says Tsuneyama, feeds into our ideas of craftsmanship. "Are our material choices local and sustainable? How do they react to the climate, or structure respond in unstable conditions? Our home lets us track these variables and learn from them." For a culture even now defined by collective thinking, it smacks not just of refreshing political activism, but the power of individual agency: "Yes, a house needs to be strong; but we need to be stronger than the house."

Below: Looking down from the 4th floor to the 3.5th floor. Amateur 'crafting' of concrete has given a Gaudi-esque feel to Oka's home.

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Opposite: Lutyens meets landscape by Gertrude Jekyll at Goddards, a house in Surrey (1901).

ARTS AND CRAFTS ‘TO-DAY’

As architecture faces huge change, how can Arts and Crafts ideas and values provoke new thinking? In a roundtable discussion, architects and educators re-examined lessons from history

Panel:
Ruth Lang
Architect and associate professor at the London School of Architecture (LSA)
David Knight
Director of DK-CM and a module leader at the LSA
Cristina Monteiro
Architect, filmmaker, and director of DK-CM
Daniel Stilwell
Architect and architectural historian at Charles Holland Architects
Neal Shasore
Historian of the built environment
Hugh Strange
Director of Hugh Strange Architects, writer, and teacher at the LSA

In our work as architectural designers, teachers and historians we have all felt very keenly the resonance of the Arts and Crafts ‘movement’. Ruskinian thought, the principles of William Morris, the mores of Edward Carpenter, and the innovation of WR Lethaby have been hotly debated in our WhatsApp group Nerds from Nowhere – a nod to Morris’ novella News from Nowhere – at a time when that interest has felt almost taboo within the context of architecture schools. Nevertheless, at a moment where the profession – and indeed the wider sector – is having to shift its practices fundamentally, returning to those sources and picking up some of these ideas feels urgent.

It is instructive to revisit concepts that were formative in the systems in which we operate, to understand where they came from, and useful to re-engage with the louder voices like Ruskin and Morris, as well as the people who began to reconcile those prophetic precepts with the realpolitik of their day.

We don’t hold these ideas up as perfect, or fully coherent: there was no manifesto of the Arts and Crafts movement, which was a heterogeneous mix of responses to some common questions and critiques. Instead, we are interested in the ways in which its values – a sociopolitical critique of labour and the division of tasks, a set of attitudes to place, history and memory, and a formal sensibility closely tied to construction and craft – might act as ‘provocations’, prompting new thinking about our contemporary approaches to architecture.

The first concerns education. “If you want to learn architecture, you must study architecture,” wrote Lethaby in The Builder’s Art and the Craftsman (1892). “That is, architectural construction, not the gymnastics which will overlap the building act. You must

MARTIN CHARLES, RIBA COLLECTIONS

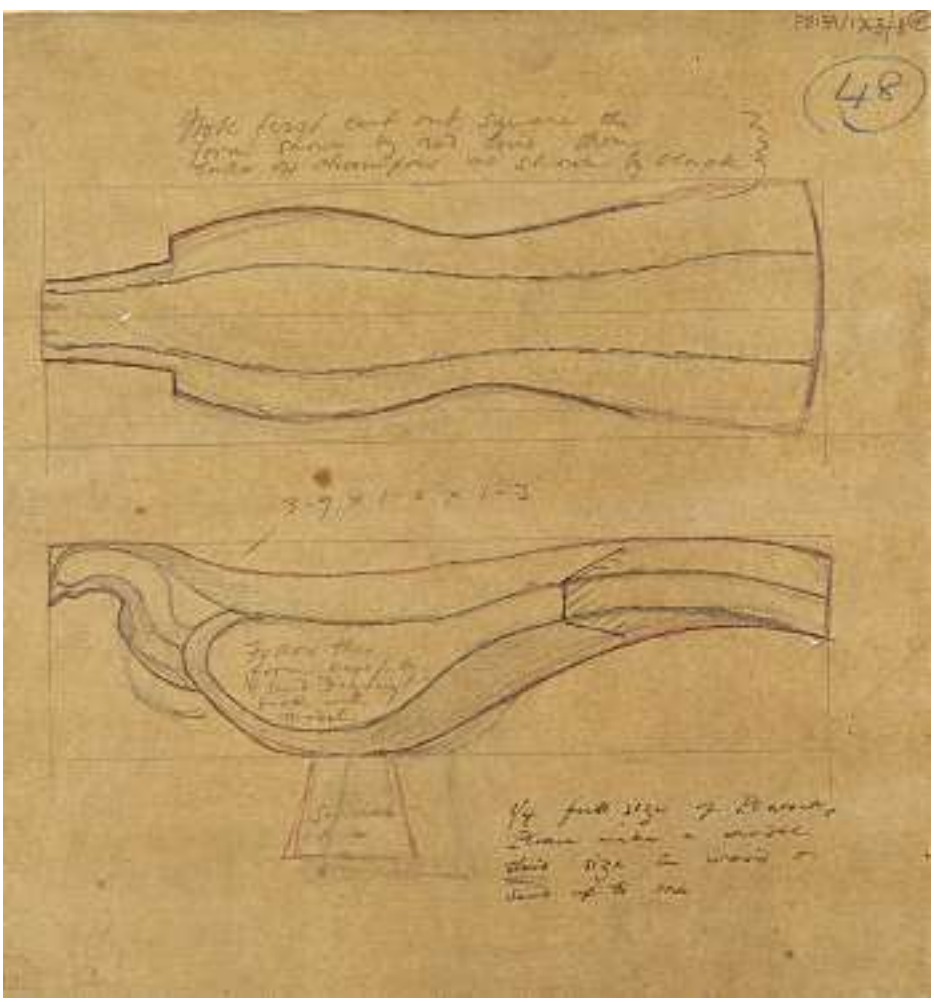
"LOOKING BACK ALLOWS US TO LOOK FORWARD AGAIN"

Opposite: The maker's marks at Tigbourne Court, Surrey (1901), by Edwin Lutyens

Below left: Terracotta frieze at craftswoman Mary Seton Watts' mortuary chapel at Compton Cemetery, Surrey (1901).

Below right: Working drawing by Lethaby for Avon Tyrrell, a calendar house in Hampshire (1891).

MARTIN CHARLES, RIBA COLLECTIONS



WR LETHABY, RIBA COLLECTIONS

JANET HALL, RIBA COLLECTIONS

FREDERICK MACMANUS, RIBA COLLECTIONS

pry into material. You must learn the actual 'I know' of the workman. Work manually at a craft – if you begin with one you will end with many – not with a view of gaining what is called 'practical experience', but to gain the power of real artistic expression in material."

How could our educational system be reimagined to root design in making? We're interested in a new model in which distinctions between trades and professions, 'apprentices' and 'masters', makers and designers are much looser or more flexible, with a free exchange of knowledge and skills.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries this was not high-faluting theory: these were the principles that informed experimental ways of learning that quickly scaled. At a time when municipal government had responsibility for technical education, Lethaby was active in advising the London County Council about its provision for design, craft and construction, first as head of the recently established Central School of the Arts and Crafts, and then in the foundation of what became the multidisciplinary Brixton School of Building.

Today, despite the efforts of individual units and the rhetorical claims of faculties, our educational system militates against this approach. But the opportunity is there. We need a significantly expanded workforce to meet the housing target, the backlog of retrofit, the national infrastructure pipeline, and the demand for commercial space. We need ways of working together that are more responsive to scarcity and unpredictability. Could a return to those founding ideals of the Central School and School of Building reinvigorate both building crafts and design?

The advocates of the Arts and Crafts also offer useful provocations in rethinking contemporary approaches to construction. For them, the building site was an intrinsically important place for architects, craftspeople and builders. Today that relationship is altogether different and more procedural – dominated by ideas around safety and efficiency, built upon the overwhelming imperatives of risk and liability.

The movement was concerned with fulfilling labour rather than mere toil, and with conscious production rather than alienated automation. How might we look at today's sector in the same light, but without nostalgia? It might seem that approaches such as modern methods of construction (MMC) are antithetical to the spirit of the Arts and Crafts, but if they improve the conditions of the labourer – taking away large parts of the backbreaking type of work – as well as making construction more efficient, then they must be taken seriously.

What is ignored by most advocates for speed and efficiency, however, is the need for joy in labour. So how could processes such as MMC be mobilised to foster that? What might contemporary construction look like if, using precision engineering and mechanisation to work with enduring and regenerative materials, we created time and space for enrichment with craft? What if we built in cycles of care and repair to create and maintain jobs, rather than the prevailing practice of seeing construction through the lens of facilities management, which 'de-risks' and 'designs out' idiosyncrasy and serendipity? Thinking again about the process of making could see the craftsperson's hand return as a desirable presence in buildings and public spaces, and begin to bridge the gap between the pursuit of efficiency and an alternative tradition founded in ethical concerns around the production of buildings.

We can turn to the Arts and Crafts, too, for provocations on urban design – not least because members of those circles were hugely influential in the nascent fields of town planning and development control. They were able to connect 'the house beautiful' to a broader conception of the 'city beautiful', not through a top-down control over design "from city to

spoon", as modernist architect Ernesto Nathan Rogers put it, but through a balance of the organic and individual with the coordinated and communal.

"[The planner] should remember that it is his function to find artistic expression for the requirements and tendencies of the town, not to impose upon it a preconceived idea of his own," declared Raymond Unwin in his 1909 book Town Planning in Practice.

The careful interrelationship of visual, physical, political and economic aspects of planning has – for complex reasons – become both overly centralised and increasingly siloed. Unwin, who gave the Garden City ideal its form and aesthetic, was deeply rooted in the Arts and Crafts tradition, and combined those values with a progressive political agenda inherited from figures like Edward Carpenter and Patrick Geddes. He started as a marginal figure, but fairly soon was in Whitehall driving state housing schemes.

The movement's contribution to the origins of planning serves as a reminder of those values, and also that there is an art and craft of planning, just as much as anything else. These architects saw creating the built environment as more than the technical agglomeration of individual buildings; it is a profound collective act needing complementary but different skills to architecture.

It's striking that recent governments have sought to revive the ideal of the Garden City, though often very superficially. The Arts and Crafts is now treated as a safely popular historical style, shorn of its radical intent. But its ideas and practices have never gone away: they have alloyed to other intellectual traditions, melded with different political traditions, manifested in multiple cultural contexts. They're there very explicitly in the radicalism of the New Left, and are woven into feminist critiques in the work of Jane Darke and the feminist collective Matrix. They are in the foundations of the Fearless Cities and municipalist movements, and underpin Sergio Ferro's bold analysis of architectural production.

Traditional timber framing is mixed with offsite manufacture at DK-CM's Camber Sands Welcome Centre (2025).

MITSI MOULSON

At Hugh Strange's Farmworker's House in Cornwall, architecture emerges from the process of construction.

JASON ORTON

One of the knottiest traps of our current architectural paradigm is a fetish for 'newness' and originality versus the perceived conservatism of 'traditionalism'. But just as in politics, where old certainties about class and voting, left and right are recalibrating, so too are a small 'p' political positions within the built environment. Modernism, still the prevailing educational paradigm and canon of precedent, has been increasingly questioned in education and practice, along with the wider Western European conception of 'modernity'. Architecture's implication in extractivism, ecocide and social inequalities requires a rethink of how we work.

The 'provocations' of the Arts and Crafts provide tools to do so. Looking back allows us to look forward again. As William Morris himself put it in The Arts and Crafts of To-day (1889): "If in the future that shall immediately follow on this present we may have to recur to ideas that to-day seem to belong to the past only, that will not be really a retracing of our steps, but rather a carrying on of progress from a point where we abandoned it a while ago."

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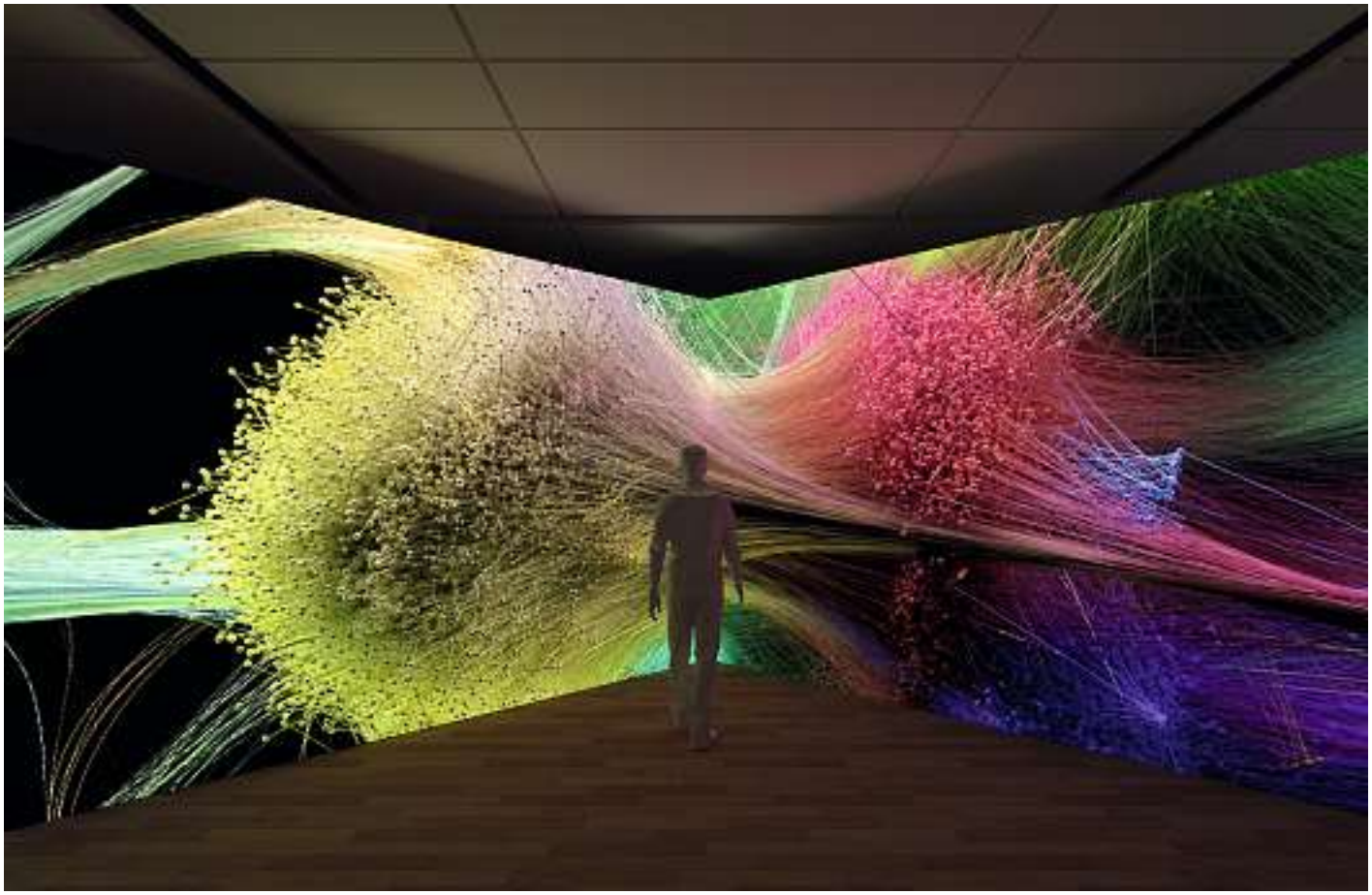


VISUALISING THE VAULTS

Refik Anadol Studio
AI neural networks as an open book
Instagram: @refikanadol

LA-based digital media artist Refik Anadol is fascinated by libraries – maybe because both his parents were teachers. Growing up in Istanbul, after learning to code at an early age, his skills were drawn to the spacing and ordering of the repositories of learning.

This comes as no surprise: Anadol's radical visualisations of generative neural networks are based on mining the data held within them. As a digital artist, he's been given access to the likes of NASA's space archives for Machine Hallucinations, or 200 million images of Earth for his Quantum Memories show; he's digitised every note in Mozart's repertoire and absorbed each poetic verse of Rumi's epic Masnavi, consigning it all to the virtual realm, for imaging.

Vast growth in processing power does not make his job easier, but it does make it faster. He shows me two images created using the same data from Istanbul's SALT archive. One, square, like white, gold and black paint dragged across a canvas, took six years to generate a decade ago. The other, current one took just 90 minutes and shows a nuanced blend of the same shades: small clouds gathered in a circle, as if in a petri dish.

The former, he says, "uses algorithms in X and Y directions, correlating to a human need for narrative, while the latter, with its many axes, shows the non-linearity of how an AI mind now looks at the data"; there's a reason it looks like bacteria – or a brain scan.

"The craftsmanship is in the algorithms that interrogate the data, like a chisel to marble," he adds. "I will spend a year sorting, creating meaning in data, and only then does the real work start."

What he'll do at Oxford University, with its Bodleian Library, is anyone's guess, but its multi-dimensionality is hinted at above. "I love Borges' imagining in The Library of Babel, of all the world's information held in one place – and what it might look like." Could Anadol's work be a path to a new way of seeing? We are no longer in Borges' hallucination.

Jan-Carlos Kucharek

Refik Anadol: Archive Dreaming, Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities, University of Oxford, 25 April-24 May 2026.

COMMUNITY REVIVAL

WORDS
Isabelle Priest,
chair of the judges

The winning schemes in this year's MacEwen Award focus on saving buildings for their communities and improving life skills

Welcome to the MacEwen Award 2026! In this extra special 10th anniversary year, we reveal the projects that the panel of judges selected as winners.

This year we have one winner, four highly commended schemes and one special mention. The projects demonstrate that the criterion for the award of "architecture for the common good" is taking place across all scales of scheme. They include the redevelopment and rewilding of a Canary Wharf dock; the reimagining of a high street department store; a revived lido pavilion and café; an upcycling community workshop and hub; and a simple single piece of timber that acts as a bench for a bus stop on the front of a private house. Geographically, they stretch right across the UK, from Portreath in Cornwall to Tarlair in Aberdeenshire, while their designers range from multinational architectural practices to a couple of architects designing and making under their own steam.

This year's shortlist had a discernible focus on buildings saved by and for the community, as well as centres for improving life skills. The winner is very much concerned with the latter, while integrating innovation too.

In these pages you can read a brief introduction to each winner, highly commended and special mention, and then find longer in-depth building reviews of them online at ribaj.com.

Thank you to our winners, entrants and other judges – Dafydd Tanner of Pentan Architects, which designed last year's winning scheme, Robyn Poulson of BDP, and Twentieth Century Society chairman Hugh Pearman – for their continued support of the awards.

A Special Mention to BuStop House, which transforms the front elevation of a home to be more public spirited.

JACK HARRISON BUNNING

MacEwen Award Special Mention

BuStop House, Willingham, designed by Conscious Design Studio

BuStop House is a regular private home on a high street in a small Cambridgeshire village. For Conscious Design Studio, it was an opportunity to redefine how a home can serve not only its inhabitants but also its wider community. The building has been given a distinctive cork facade. The front entrance has been reoriented to the garden, adding a 8m^2 extension in place of the porch. The exposed courtyard now has a brick boundary wall, laid using a parametric-inspired pattern. But the smallest most impactful amendment is to set back the house's front wall and incorporate a sheltered public bench for the bus stop.

This small but mighty gesture transforms the experience of waiting for the bus and encourages community life. The judges felt this, in particular, made the project deserving of a Special Mention. We think it is the first private home to have been submitted to the award, and shows how even the most closed projects can have a public spirit.

MacEwen Award Winner

Heritage Quad and Tech Hub, York Minster Centre of Excellence, York, designed by Tonkin Liu Architects for York Minster

"Mason's yards are usually private places," said MacEwen judge Hugh Pearman, admiring the way the public get glimpses into York Minster's two new craft buildings: the Tech Hub for major stone cutting, which also includes a drawing room; and the Heritage Quad, focused on hand-finishing stone. The complex has secured top spot as winner of this year's MacEwen Award.

Pearman also praised the way Tonkin Liu has translated this essentially medieval form into buildings that are relevant today, both "good architecture and functionally interesting". Fellow judge Robyn Poulson highlighted the "moments" the two buildings create in York's "constrained and dense" centre.

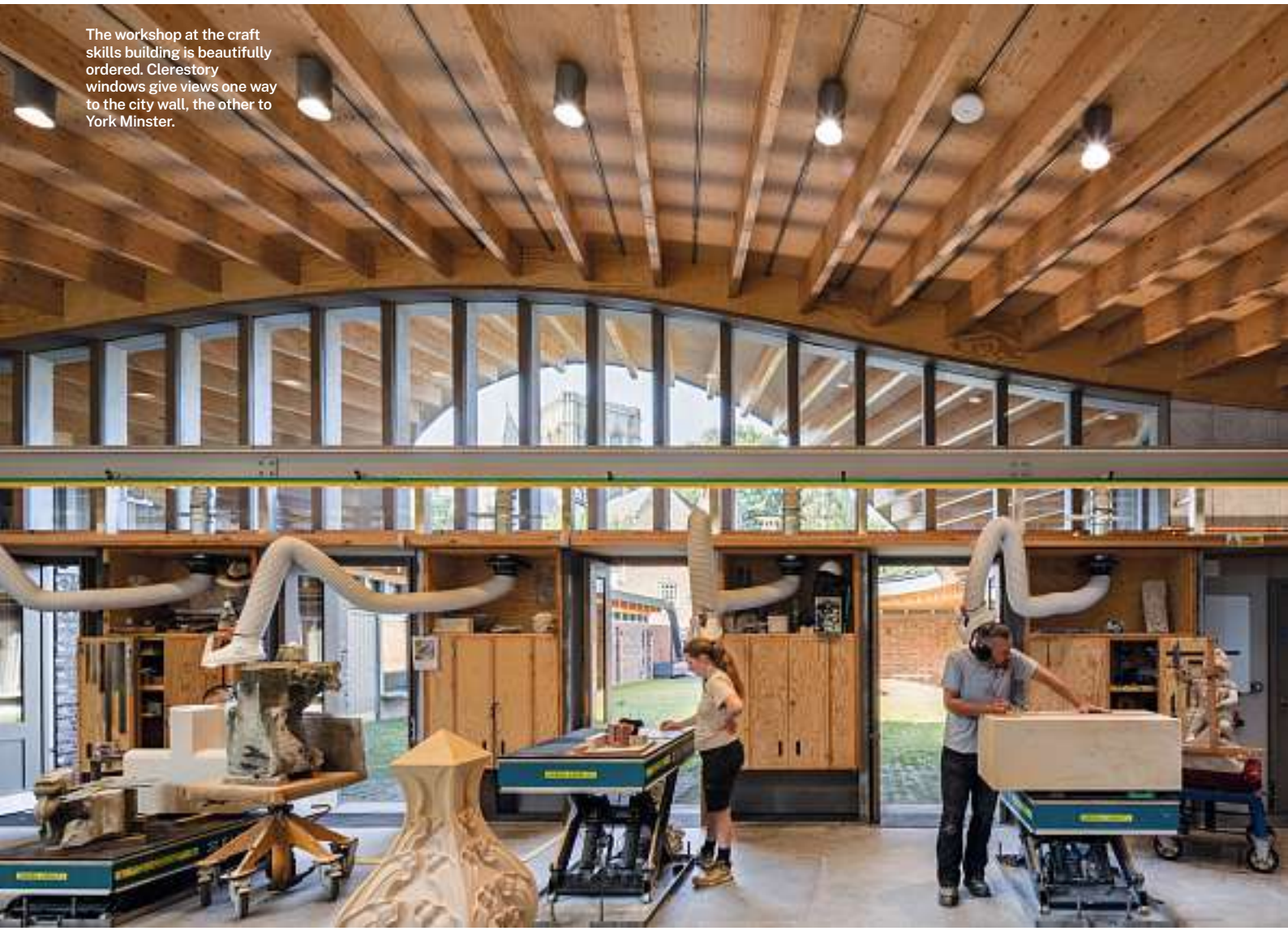
The buildings have a critical and holistic role to play in the upkeep of York Minster's precious heritage. They connect the craftspeople to the mission and the place through proximity and design values embedded in the new buildings' architecture. The Heritage Quad, which is more intensely occupied by stonemasons and has living quarters for those coming to learn more about the craft, imparts a real joy through the roof of radiating timber beams, dipping down to the central courtyard.

York Minster director of works and precinct Alex McCallion took a long-term strategic view to bring the project to fruition and give planning clarity. He used a neighbourhood plan to bring stakeholders together and map out areas of opportunity.

He says that the vision was "to do more conservation for the same budget, and really utilise 21st-century technology as a tool to support the work that we do, balancing the continuing nurturing and training of traditional craft skills".

The centre is not only critical in the minster's journey to net zero but in dealing with impact of climate change, which has accelerated the decay of the minster's magnesium limestone. To achieve that while uplifting the experience of those working and training in these beautiful buildings, and giving passersby an insight into the processes, is quite an achievement.

DAVID VALINSKY



The workshop at the craft skills building is beautifully ordered. Clerestory windows give views one way to the city wall, the other to York Minster.

MacEwen Award Highly Commended

Eden Dock, London, designed by Howells for Canary Wharf Group

Eden Dock is a regeneration project that transforms a previously inaccessible dock in Canary Wharf into a model of sustainable regeneration, uniting ecological restoration with imaginative placemaking and re-establishing a meaningful relationship between landscape and water.

The project, designed by Howells with landscape architect HTA Design, creates a series of floating islands with integrated timber seating, gardens, steps and walkways, which bring people down to the water's edge for the first time. The new south and west-facing terraces and gardens create places for gathering, rest and reflection, immersed in a landscape of trees, educational features and social terraces. Linked by boardwalks and promenades, the islands offer an alternative way of navigating the estate from the water, encouraging movement, discovery and connection.

A new pedestrian bridge provides a convenient, step-free route with integrated seating for rest and enjoyment. It reconnects previously separate areas of the estate to public transport nodes, increasing permeability and generating new activity across the wider public realm. It also enables safe access for open-water swimming, kayaking and other activities that encourage everyday interaction with nature. The arrangement of pontoons and bridges was influenced by detailed sunlight and shadow studies of surrounding buildings, ensuring year-round usability.

Biodiversity has been enhanced through a carefully designed network of habitats for river flora and fauna. Judge Dafydd Tanner commented: "It is a lovely version of what it is." Isabelle Priest added: "It is a huge proposition for a huge client that doesn't have to do it, particularly in context of a government wading back on environmental and biodiversity commitments. It's a good project for the many visitors to Canary Wharf and the people who live there too."

TIM CROCKER

Regeneration through improving biodiversity and the public's relationship with nature won Eden Dock a MacEwen Award Highly Commended.

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DAVID PRIOR

A remarkable commitment to reuse has underpinned the low-waste scheme while maintaining historic character at Upcycle Kernow.

MacEwen Award Highly Commended

Upcycle Kernow: Community Workshop Retrofit, Portreath, designed by Crow Architecture for Upcycle Kernow

A 1941 former RAF garage in Cornwall has been transformed into a welcoming community workshop in a project led by Crow Architecture for UpCycle Kernow. From design to delivery, the redevelopment has been underpinned by the ethos of reuse, collaboration and upskilling.

The original building was cold, damp and made of low-value materials. However, demolition was a last resort for the architect and client, which both adopted a "nothing is waste" approach. Existing single-skin blockwork walls were overclad with a timber-framed insulating envelope and finished with striking dark grey steel sheets. The concrete slab, Ministry of Works steel trusses and timber sarking boards were also retained, and the front door was repurposed internally as a partition. Other materials were sorted by volunteers and, where possible, reused locally or recycled.

New triple-glazed windows, rooflights and an MVHR system create light-filled and comfortable spaces inside. These host a weekly repair café, craft classes and tool library. "It's warm and spacious; the light floods in," reflected a user.

The MacEwen Awards jury were impressed with the project's inclusivity. The design was developed collaboratively across four Cornwall-based practices, informed by community workshops, and integrated micro-internships with three Falmouth University graduates.

In addition, a new female-led contractor was set up to complete the works. "It is something I've never seen in my life before," said Dafydd Tanner of Pentan Architects, admiringly.

When further funding is obtained, there are plans to construct a refill porch and sorting shed and install PV panels. For the community, this will provide further opportunities to learn, build and get involved. Although small in footprint and budget, the retrofitted structure is a remarkable hub of teaching, sharing and making.

MacEwen Award Highly Commended
Tarlair Outdoor Pools, Aberdeenshire, designed by Studio Octopi for Tarlair Community Group

Studio Octopi's restoration of Tarlair Outdoor Pools has secured the future of an extraordinary facility, much loved by the communities of Macduff and Banff on the Moray Firth. Originally completed in 1934, the Category A-listed complex, once among the largest outdoor pools in Scotland, comprises a paddling pool, boating pool, swimming pool and pavilion, all fed by pumped seawater. Its closure in 1995 and subsequent decline became a powerful symbol of loss.

Following early community-led conservation work, the Friends of Tarlair Community Group was established in 2014, securing a 99-year lease on the pools and appointing Studio Octopi in 2021 to lead the restoration of the pavilion. Working closely with heritage specialists, the architects undertook detailed condition surveys before returning the modest concrete structure to its original character – "a successful retrofit in an extreme location," noted judge Dafydd Tanner.

Cream-painted concrete, peppermint-green metalwork and replica panelling reinstate the building's art-deco identity. A poor-quality 1970s extension has been replaced with a modern addition that draws on deco proportions while clearly expressing its 21st-century origin.

Internally, the pavilion now accommodates a café, event space, toilets and a community workshop, designed to support year-round use. Upgrades using cork insulation and lime plaster improve thermal performance, enabling the formerly seasonal building to operate sustainably.

Community consultation shaped the building's uses, with residents, volunteers and the local primary school actively involved, from site maintenance to logo design. The café provides paid jobs and volunteering opportunities, including for people with learning difficulties. As restoration continues, Tarlair is once again becoming a source of civic pride and a catalyst for social and economic life along the Aberdeenshire coast.

Below: A marble-clad extension complements the restored 1930s pavilion at Studio Octopi's Tarlair lido.

ANGELA PRITCHARD

ANTON GORLENKO

MacEwen Award Highly Commended
Oru Sutton, designed by Oru Space, Samuel Chisholm Studio and Takero Shimazaki Architects for Oru Space

With a new facade of dusty pink cladding and large expanses of glass showing reveals of its concrete slabs, Oru Sutton delicately intervenes on the face of a former BHS store on Sutton's high street. Its main entrance is even more discreet: inside the somewhat down-at-heel Times Square Shopping Centre, but marked by a curious old green door that is suggestive of wonders beyond.

Oru Sutton is a singular example of high-street regeneration – a mixed-use development, providing coworking space, fitness studios, a nursery, an event space, a café restaurant and a large rooftop community garden.

The client, Oru Space, is a socially conscious, "purpose-driven" company, whose model comprises coworking space, retail, wellbeing and hospitality. Its brief called for adaptive reuse of the existing building to suit the new programme with accessibility and affordability at its core, helping to bring community back to the high street.

Most of the space was on the upper levels and formed of deep-plan rooms, so one challenge was to bring light and air into these spaces, mainly through clever use of courtyards "punctured" through the existing structure.

Oru's path to its rooftop garden and bar is imagined as a promenade through a generous circulation route, beginning at the green door, then passing up through a first-floor community café and restaurant, and a Town Hall event space, Wellbeing Quarter and workspace on the third floor, so introducing users to every aspect of the operation.

The roof garden is a public social space with a pond, trees, planting beds, bird boxes, rainwater harvesting and even chickens. The community is growing through weekly gardening sessions, and Oru also hosts meditation, chair yoga and Chatty Wednesdays.

Judges were impressed by the scheme's active effort to address the scourge of our dying high streets by repurposing a defunct department store in such a bold and community-focused way.

Isabelle Priest found the fact that the scheme "addresses upper floors in particular quite commendable", remarking that the architect "took opportunities internally and on the roof". Hugh Pearman added: "There's much dead space in all of our town centre shopping precincts, and this makes real use of it."

All the judges saw Oru Sutton as a blueprint for adapting complex existing buildings and reusing materials in a light-touch, yet economical and bold way.

Above: To bring light into a deep plan at Oru Sutton, slabs have been broken out at key points and courtyards introduced.

RAMMING IT HOME

WORDS
Debika Ray

PHOTOS
Jim Stephenson

A new country house by Tuckey Design Studio was only built of rammed earth after a chance discovery on site – but the project's success underlines the material's potential in domestic settings

Projecting strips of pozzolanic lime mortar in the rammed earth facades slow the descent of rainwater that causes erosion.

Left: The ‘homestead’ is set in sweeping Wiltshire pasture.

Below left: The kitchen ‘pavilion’ and nearby glasshouse face into a walled garden.

Below right: Triple glazing and the thermal mass of rammed earth walls support the sustainability strategy.

The traditional English country house is synonymous with permanence, continuity and authority; with social hierarchy and command over the land. A rammed earth structure represents something quite different. Produced by one of the oldest known building techniques, used all over Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas, it rises up slowly from the ground itself, making visible the labour that creates it and the material’s inherent vulnerabilities. It eschews decoration in favour of function, and rejects inflexibility for adaptive endurance to the climate.

Given the cultural resonance of both these architectural forms, it is perhaps fitting that a recently completed home in Wiltshire that brings them together was born out of writing about how buildings carry meaning. When Tuckey Design Studio put itself forward for the project, the clients – a retired couple – asked the architects to recommend three books to read ahead of an interview. The first was Life in the English Country House, Mark Girouard’s 1978 study of what these buildings have represented in society. The other two suggested how this type might evolve. In Praise of Shadows (1933), by Japanese novelist Jun’ichirō Tanizaki, and The Poetics of Space (1958), by French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, both pointed to overlooked and intangible elements – differing qualities of light and dark; idiosyncratic spaces; imperfections and evolutions – that lend a place its character.

That set of references, together with a series of sketches made by practice founder Jonathan Tuckey, became a manifesto for the project – a sort of shared anchor not only for the architect and client, but also for interior designers, landscape architects, contractors and craftspeople.

That anchor mattered partly because of the setting. When faced with a spectacular view, architects often find it hard to resist the temptation to make it the central focus; think expansive glazing that makes rolling hills visible from every point. But Tuckey believes there can be too much of a good thing: that a view is best when rationed and mediated. “You need to pace it,” he says. “You can have one moment where you

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get it all, but it also needs to be sliced up and served in small chunks."

That principle of variety also informed the house's relationship with its setting. "Traditionally you'd have the country house surrounded by a curated, man-made garden and the wildness of nature beyond that. Here, the belief is that the fields and forests are just as beautiful as the formal garden." The building sits alongside natural woodland, with parts of the plan protruding into the landscape and others facing the kitchen garden nestled within its walls.

The notion of imperfection set the tone for the project's most significant design decision: the use of rammed earth. It came about by chance. When the client demolished some buildings on the site, an old brickworks, they discovered clay underneath. "All you need for rammed earth is clay and an aggregate, and we had them within arm's reach," Tuckey says.

Despite being durable and energy efficient, rammed earth fell out of favour over the past 100 years, replaced by more standardised materials. The team reached out to Martin Rauch, a world-renowned expert in the technique based in Austria, for guidance. "Ultimately rammed earth can be done with unskilled labour as long as you have the knowledge, and Martin gave everyone confidence," explains project architect Emaad Damda.

Beyond that, Tuckey says, rammed earth is forgiving. "It allows you to repair it, add things and evolve as you're doing it." The central risk was making sure the building would withstand weather over time, though the architects point out this applies to any natural material. Nonetheless, given their lack of experience with rammed earth, the site was a testing ground for the first six months, full of samples and mock-ups trialling different mixes.

The process is as follows. First you dig up the clay, then you dry it for anywhere between a few weeks and six months – in this case, two or three – before crushing it into a powder. "The whole site looked like a quarry at that point," Tuckey recalls. When you're ready to build, the clay is mixed with an aggregate, which can be gravel or broken-up bricks, blockwork or concrete. Here, the demolished buildings on the site were the first option, but when that didn't provide the right consistency, gravel was sourced from nearby to correct the balance. The material was then combined with water to form a "dry, biscuity consistency".

This was tipped into formwork and compacted from 150mm to about 75mm for the external walls and 100mm to 50mm for the internal ones, to make them tighter and less prone to dusting. The external walls are stratified with layers of pozzolanic lime mortar that act as an erosion check – 'speed bumps' for falling water – every 300mm, and every layer on the corners. The most exposed walls are tiled with stone for additional strength. Walls are typically 400mm thick, but range up to a metre.

There were 25 pieces of rammed earth wall in total, of varying lengths and heights, and they took an average of about a month to build. "Even though each element looks more or less looks identical, the builders improved their technique as they went along," Tuckey says. What complicated matters was timing. Construction began during the Covid pandemic, forcing the team to seek Rauch's guidance remotely. "It showed the enormously collaborative sense of the team that we navigated that quite effortlessly," Tuckey says.

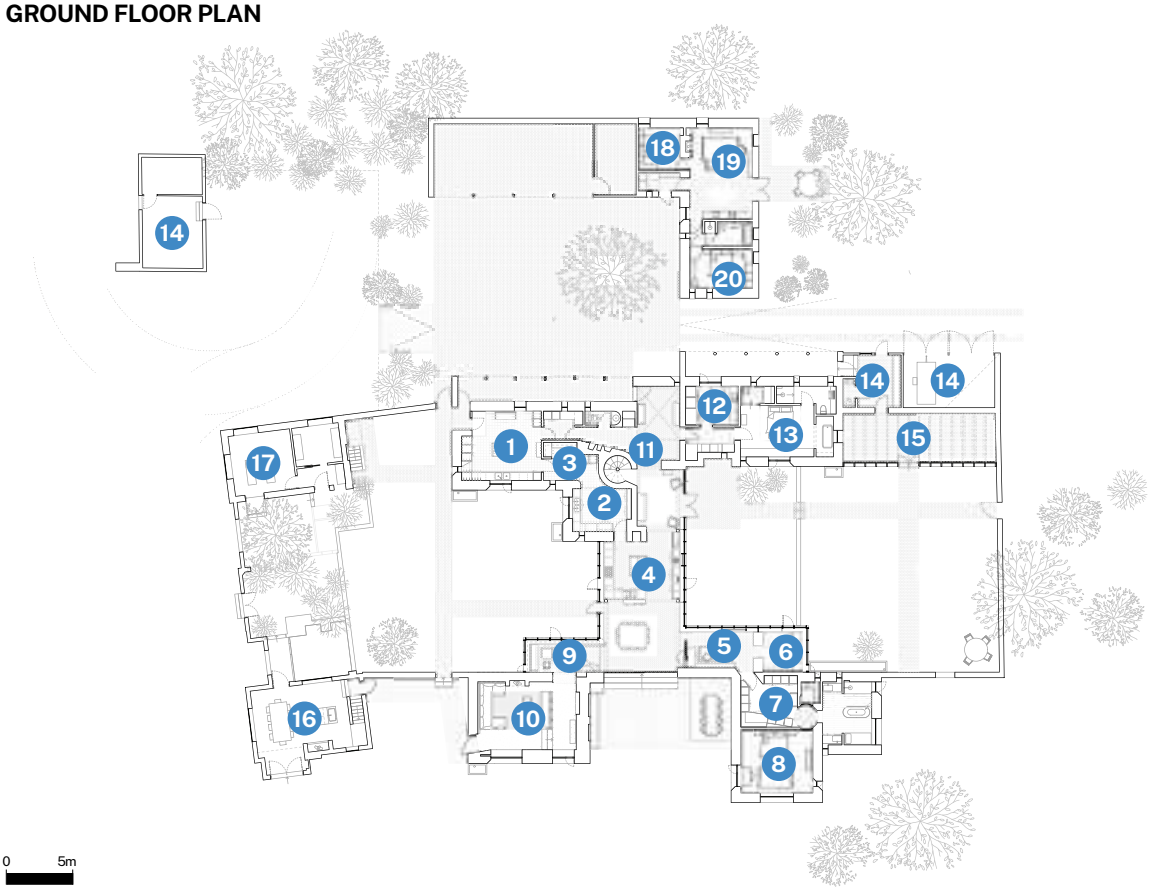
The main house comprises two large wings formed in rammed earth, linked by a glass and timber structure looking out to walled gardens in two directions, and southward to the landscape beyond. Retained and refurbished Victorian cottages complete the jumbled ensemble, like a little rustic hamlet tucked against the tree line.

Collaborations continued inside. The interior designer – who was on board before Tuckey Design Studio was appointed – selected furniture and décor in keeping with the design, while the wider team included 12 different joinery

Left: Kitchen-diner with custom-made cabinetry.

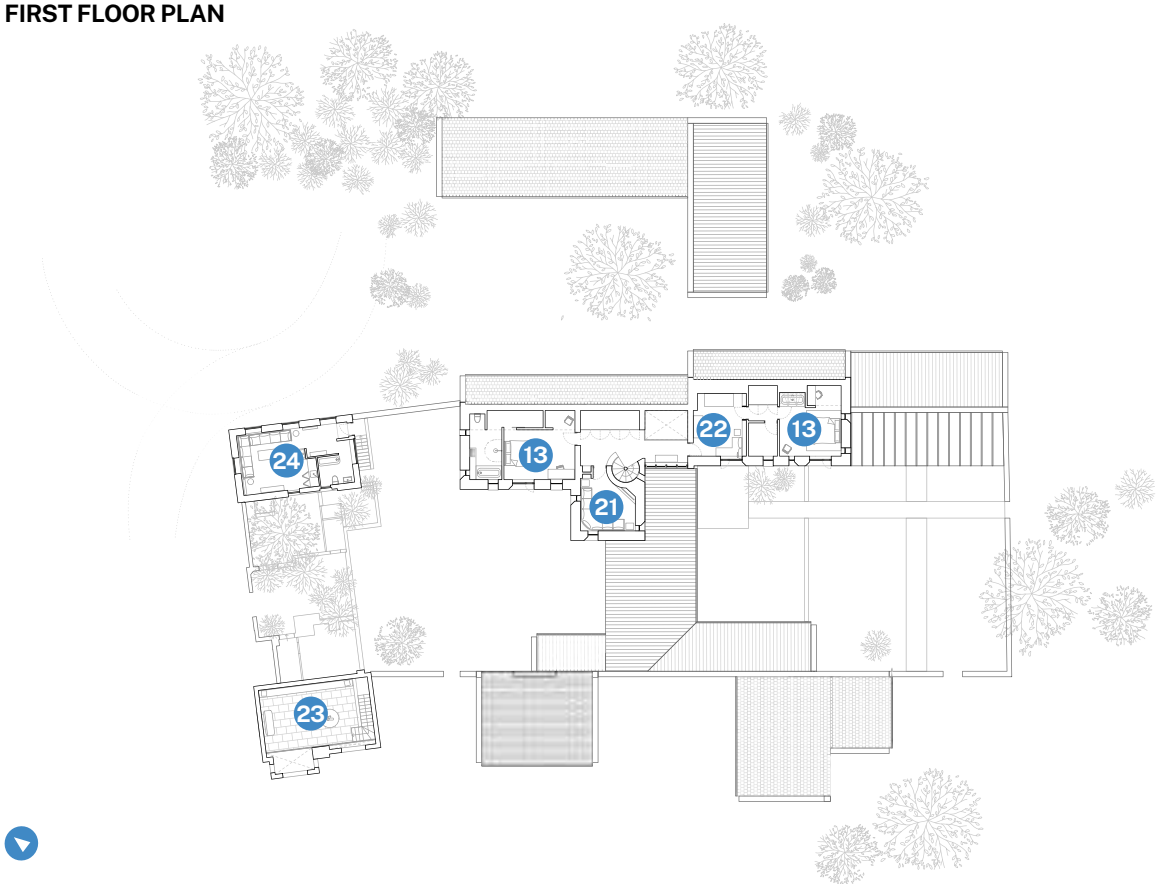
Below: Deep windows with timber-lined reveals frame landscape views.

GROUND FLOOR PLAN



1 Boot room
2 Back kitchen
3 Larder
4 Kitchen & dining
5 Library
6 Study
7 Dressing room
8 Master bedroom
9 Puzzle room
10 Living room
11 Hall
12 Utility room
13 Guest bedroom
14 Shed
15 Glasshouse
16 The ruin
17 Exercise room
18 Plant
19 Staff room
20 Staff bedroom
21 Snug
22 Child's bedroom
23 Roof terrace
24 TV room

FIRST FLOOR PLAN



and furniture makers, and many other craftspeople across a range of materials, including stone, timber, brick and plaster. Together, the team created features ranging from a wooden spiral staircase to enormous pivoting doors. Creative freedom was balanced with a common understanding of the atmosphere required. The end result comprises spaces that vary from double-height atriums to cosy nooks, creating a sense of discovery and variety. Recessed niches for objects echo the benches carved into exterior walls. The palette is rich and tactile: earth walls finished with a muted, protective casein coating, limestone, oak, copper and clay plaster.

While craft and materiality are the house's most evident characteristics, it is far from arcane. A lot of technology is hidden within the earthen structure. There's a fully automated lighting system, a ground-source heat pump for hot water and heating, a photovoltaic slate roof to generate electricity, and troughs harvesting rainwater for watering the garden – all of which fulfil the client's expectation of high functionality and sustainability.

Though the house officially only has two residents, they host frequently, so the interior was laid out with both situations in mind – with several interconnected and self-contained living spaces. "The fragmented nature of the plan allows them to feel like they're not in too large a place when they're alone, and when it's filled with people everyone can also have their own separate spaces," Tuckey says.

From the moment rammed earth was chosen, the possibility of weather damage was understood, so it came as no surprise that a few minor elements had to be strengthened after completion. It is a reminder that, more than just a private home, this is an experiment in a different ethos of building, in which repair and renewal are expected rather than resisted.

The studio hopes it will form the basis of further work. With the project's contractor, Stonewood, the architects are looking at the possibility of applying the knowledge gained in developing 12 terraced houses, using prefabricated rammed earth elements created with local materials. "The dream is to get the price down to the levels of affordable housing," Tuckey says. That would add to a long list of successes in this monumental, experimental take on the English country house.

Above: An oak spiral stair is structurally independent of curved rammed earth walls.

IN NUMBERS

INTERNAL FLOOR AREA
810m²

TIME ON SITE
39 MONTHS

RATIO OF CLAY, DEMOLITION AGGREGATE, LIMESTONE GRAVEL AND WATER IN RAMMED EARTH
25/25/25/25

CREDITS

Architectural design
Tuckey Design Studio
Client
Private
Project leaders
Emaad Damda, James Moore
Interior designer
Todhunter Earle Interiors
Structural engineer
Webb Yates
Quantity surveyor
Dadson & Butler
Contractor
Stonewood Builders
Services engineer
SGA Consulting
Landscape architect
Pip Morrison
Lighting consultant
John Cullen Lighting
Sustainability consultant
The Healthy Home
Rammed earth consultant
Lehm Ton Erde
Ecological consultant
Peach Ecology

SUPPLIERS

Timber framers
Timber Frame Company
Stair joinery
Robert Lynch
Joinery
Somer, Willow & White, Oakwrights, Monk, Edward Collinson, Penchard, William Garvey, Orwells Furniture
AV specialist
Edison Projects
Timber supply
Vastern Timber
Clay plaster
Clayworks
Woodfibre insulation
Pavatex
Chicksgrove limestone
Lovell Stone Group
Purbeck limestone
Artorius Faber
Copper guttering
Coppa Gutta
Galvanised guttering
Lindab
Brick
Traditional Brick and Stone

Opposite: Section through the three buildings of LSA – the extension, the Leverhulme and the terraces to Abercromby Square.

This page: Timber frame takes over from concrete on the top two floors with views out to the Metropolitan Cathedral.

OPTIMISTIC ASSEMBLY

WORDS
Eleanor Young

PHOTOS
Nick Kane

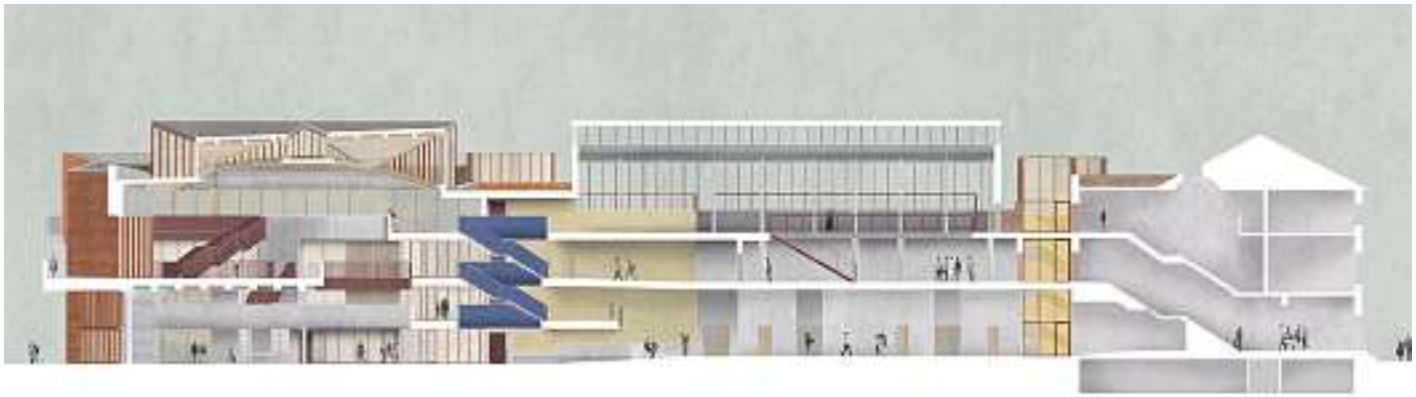
With its inclusive spaces and structural reveals, O'Donnell + Tuomey's new Liverpool School of Architecture building is both a learning tool and an expression of where education can lead

As you come into the orbit of the University of Liverpool, the order of Abercromby Square's dark Georgian terraces gives way to the mistreated mishmash around Denys Lasdun's sports hall and Basil Spence's Chadwick tower and labs, and then to ranks of car parking and kerbs on the approach to Frederick Gibberd's Metropolitan Cathedral. O'Donnell + Tuomey's new building for the Liverpool School of Architecture draws the institution through from Abercromby Square, via its 1930s extension into a wonderful cascade of sweeping spaces that turn to look at the cathedral – and could provide the catalyst for a new central space for the university.

How it was

The generation of architects that passed through the school in the 1980s and 90s remember it as a place where the layout encouraged the interchange of ideas. The PoMo-lite King McAllister designs from the 80s added to the 1930s Leverhulme Building, using the central courtyard for a crit space under a rooflight, with studio desks running either side, on a mezzanine level. The studio had a bright green carpet under exposed castellated beams. Yes it overheated and was noisy, but it was brilliant. "You had to walk through the main crit space to get anywhere; it was fantastic, all the years were there – you really did learn from that," recalls one student from that time.

This openness was later chopped up with partitions, the pressure of space pushing crits into the dark basement; narrow Georgian staircases creating pinch points. So associate professor Marco Iuliano dreamed up a competition to give the school some growing space, create a "new chapter on the education of the future". And, perhaps, to give the university a new heart – or at least nudge it towards that.



O'DONNELL + TUOMEY

An ambitious competition

RIBAJ documented the ambitious competition process in 2019. An intelligent narrowing down of practices, through three stages, with students intimately involved, led to six practices presenting designs to a jury including architecture greats Kenneth Frampton and Juhani Pallasmaa. The marking for the contract award was adjusted in favour of design and interpretation of the brief.

Winners and RIBA Royal Gold Medallists Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey were driven by their personal connection to the school. Their mentor James Stirling trained and later taught there, which gave Tuomey a sense of "family duty" towards the project, even though its initial stages ran without detail of scale, timescale or budget. They won it with a design for the 9,000m²-plus of the whole school, although Austin-Smith: Lord, which has a Liverpool office, has taken over after Stage 4 for the retrofit of the Leverhulme and terraces.

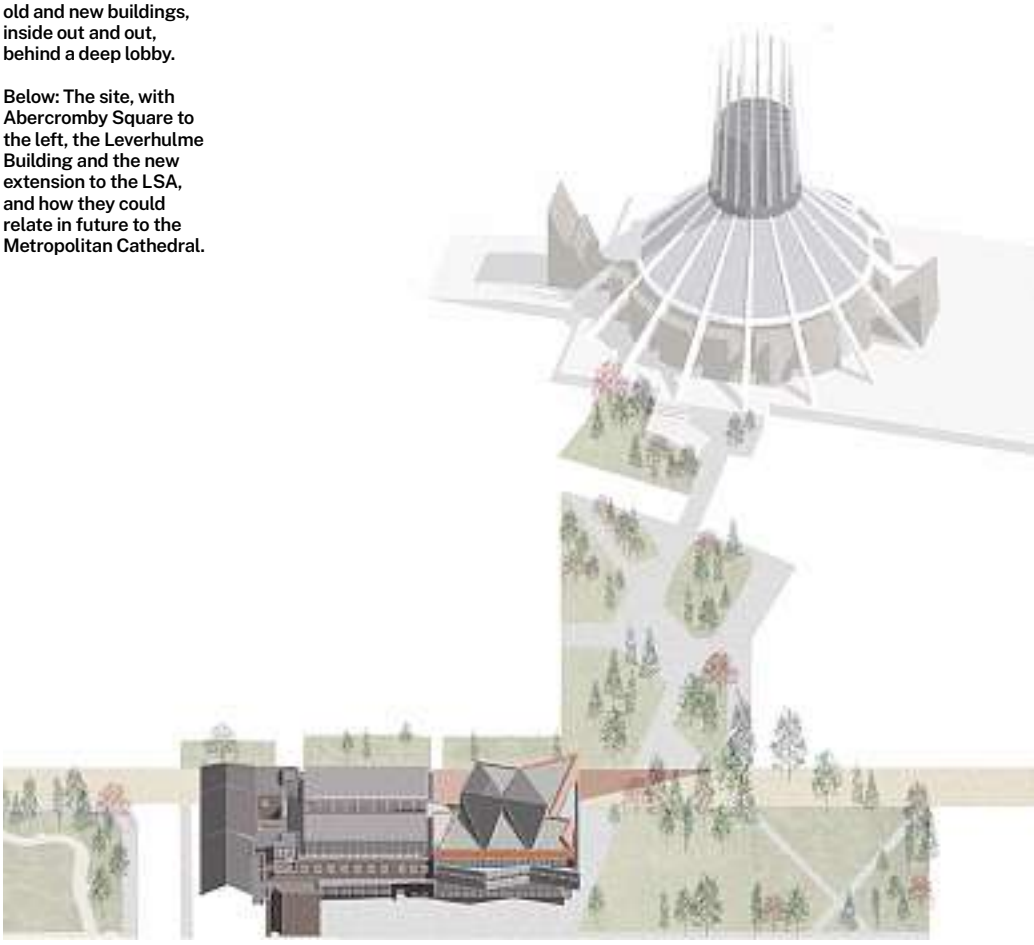
An axis with a twist

O'Donnell + Tuomey imagined a new axis for the three buildings, starting by reopening a staircase in one of the terraces so there were two points of entry to the bridge, leading into the Leverhulme Building. The two strands are spliced together in the new building, which turn opens up into the new sweeping, connected spaces at the heart of the university. Director in charge Willie Carey modestly describes it as a "one-room extension to a house". Here though, the symmetry is left aside; the new building looks sideways, taking a half turn towards the Metropolitan Cathedral. Tuomey describes it as "adjusting its standing to give a welcome, reaching out and pulling in the city".

This twist sets up interesting geometries that give the potentially orthogonal building an angular life of its own, which is played through structurally right up to the dramatic timber trusses of the roof. The first hint is in the fissure you can see on plan between O'Donnell + Tuomey's building and the Leverhulme; squeezed at one end are the lifts, and it widens out to a generous main entrance that is pulled back from the facades of the two buildings, a moment of acknowledgment of each.

The geometry is demonstrated in the satisfyingly muscular haunch-headed columns, which rigorously follow the

Above: A ply-lined reception space linking old and new buildings, inside out and out, behind a deep lobby.



Below: The site, with Abercromby Square to the left, the Leverhulme Building and the new extension to the LSA, and how they could relate in future to the Metropolitan Cathedral.

“IT IS CLEAR THIS IS CONCEIVED AS A PLACE STUDENTS CAN LEARN FROM”

The full gamut of geometries from the haunch-headed columns to the flying stairs and roof trusses is seen from this mezzanine crit space.

building's geometry even when the eye may not. Whether the angles of these column heads will be judged as signs of a rigorous masterpiece – or merely extraneous by future generations of architects who will study here – remains to be seen.

But what is clear is that this is conceived as a building for students to learn from. Tuomey sees the roof structure as "didactic": the glulam bow-tie trusses and joints, even the columns pulled back to the perimeter of the building, visibly showing anyone who cares to look how the assembly works. It also demonstrates, as the best buildings do, how structure in the hands of a gifted team can elevate architecture and create a celebratory experience.

On the top floor, you can get up close to the paired trusses. Although the central joint where the four major trusses connect is boxed in rather than celebrated, you can see where glulam columns land on steel plate and concrete column, and understand the concept of this concrete base with the timber structure above.

Inhabitation

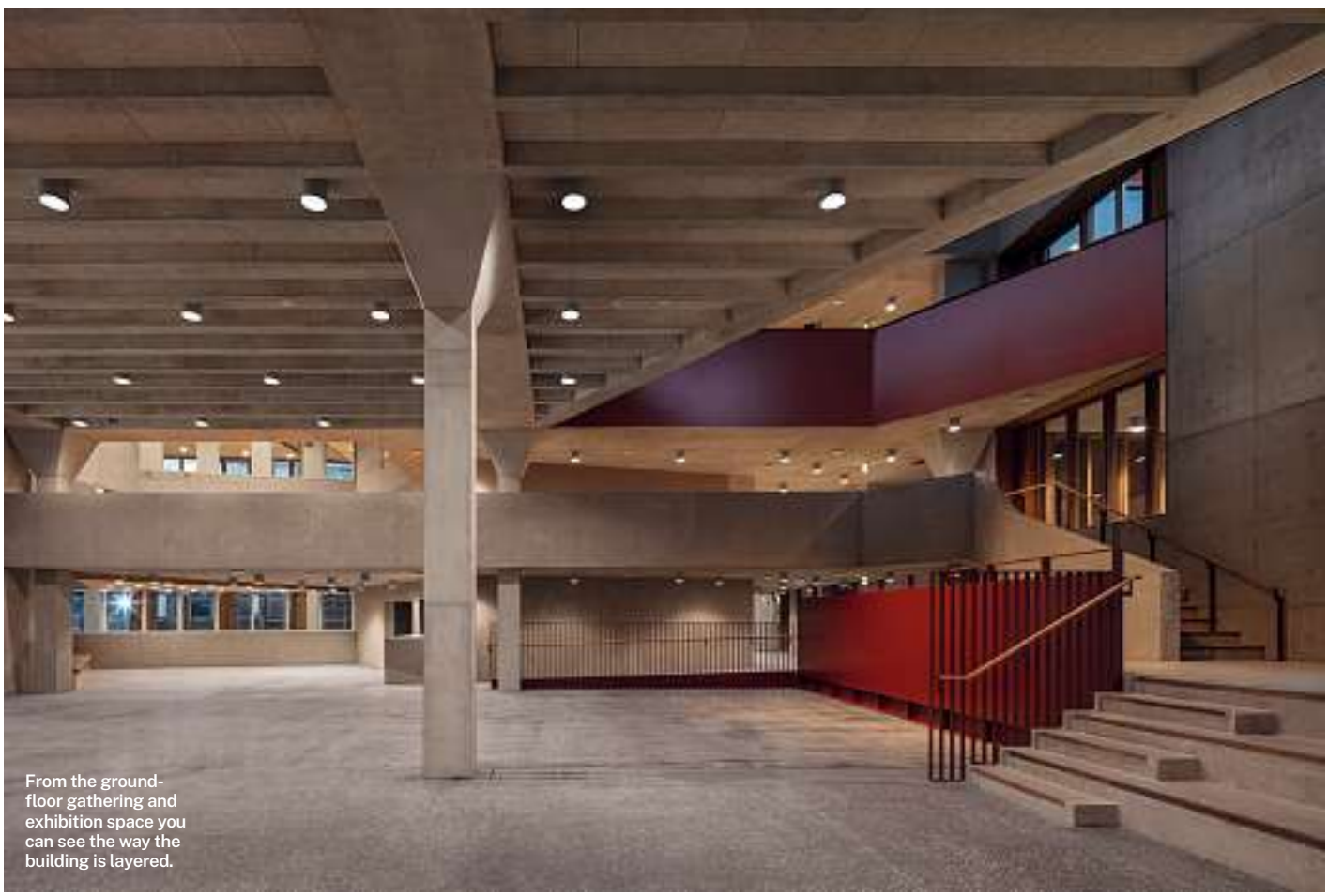
The photos shown in this article are of the building as it was handed over, with raw, knockabout surfaces to the fore; the timber and the red oxide steel of the flying staircases and balustrades are the only colour. But it is now populated with studio desks, an extra 182 for students, as well as flexible study areas. A smaller double-height space captured by the line of the stair and the sweep of a floor plate will make a dynamic crit space; the ply-lined funnel between old and new building may have shelves of journals. And then there is the ground floor, a gathering place, an exhibition space, perhaps an area for those across the university to wander through to see how architects learn, alongside a more intimate café and kitchen.

I tried to find doors to count: there are very few, with only the PhD post-doc room and the reception office enclosed. Everything seems possible in the joined-up spaces – including leaning over the balustrade and learning from your peers as you listen in to a crit.

Forward facing

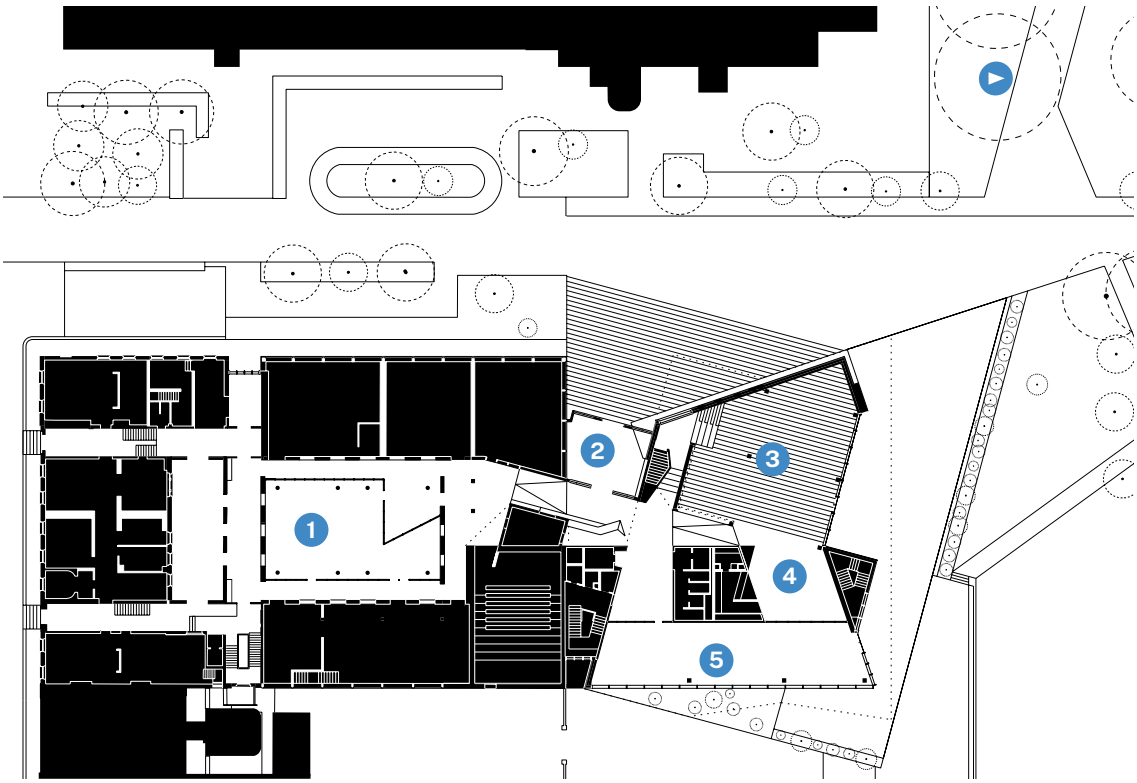
This is an international building, designed in Dublin and Cork, driven by an Italian practitioner and academic, for a student cohort half of whom came from China. This building was commissioned at what seems now like a high point in architecture schools, before the ARB education changes that have thrown the Part 1, 2 and 3 structure up in the air and school's income stream with it, before the university sector's funding crisis and the ensuing folding of schools of architecture into other departments and colleges and the loss of many practitioner-teachers.

Liverpool School of Architecture was the first to offer a university degree course for the profession. This building is a statement of optimism about the future of that education and the power of architecture.

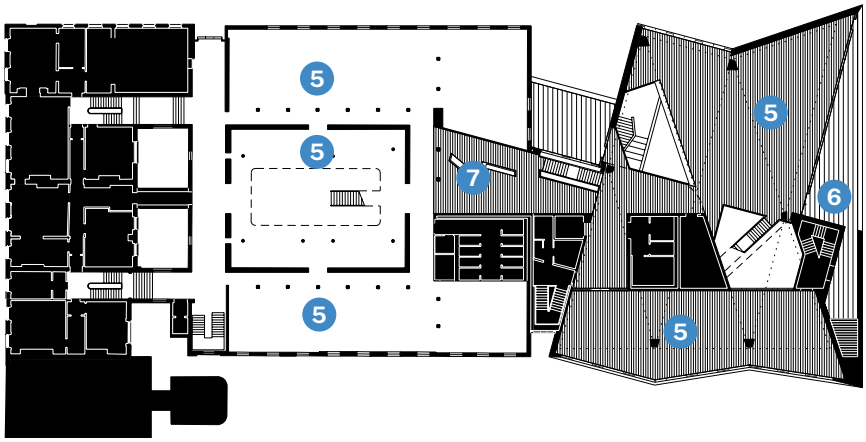


From the ground-floor gathering and exhibition space you can see the way the building is layered.

GROUND FLOOR PLAN



1 Workshops
2 Entrance
3 Exhibition
4 Café
5 Studio
6 Terrace
7 Splice



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

0 10m

IN NUMBERS

TOTAL CONTRACT COST
CONFIDENTIAL
AREA
2,525m²
AREA OF SCHOOL
9,220m²
FORM OF CONTRACT
NEC4
BREEAM
EXCELLENT

CREDITS

Architect
O'Donnell + Tuomey
Client
University of Liverpool
Project manager
UoL Capital Projects with Starr Architects
Quantity surveyor
Cunliffes
Structural engineer
AKT II
Mechanical and electrical
Max Fordham
Fire engineer
Buro Happold
BREEAM Assessor
Ridge
Landscape architect
BCAL

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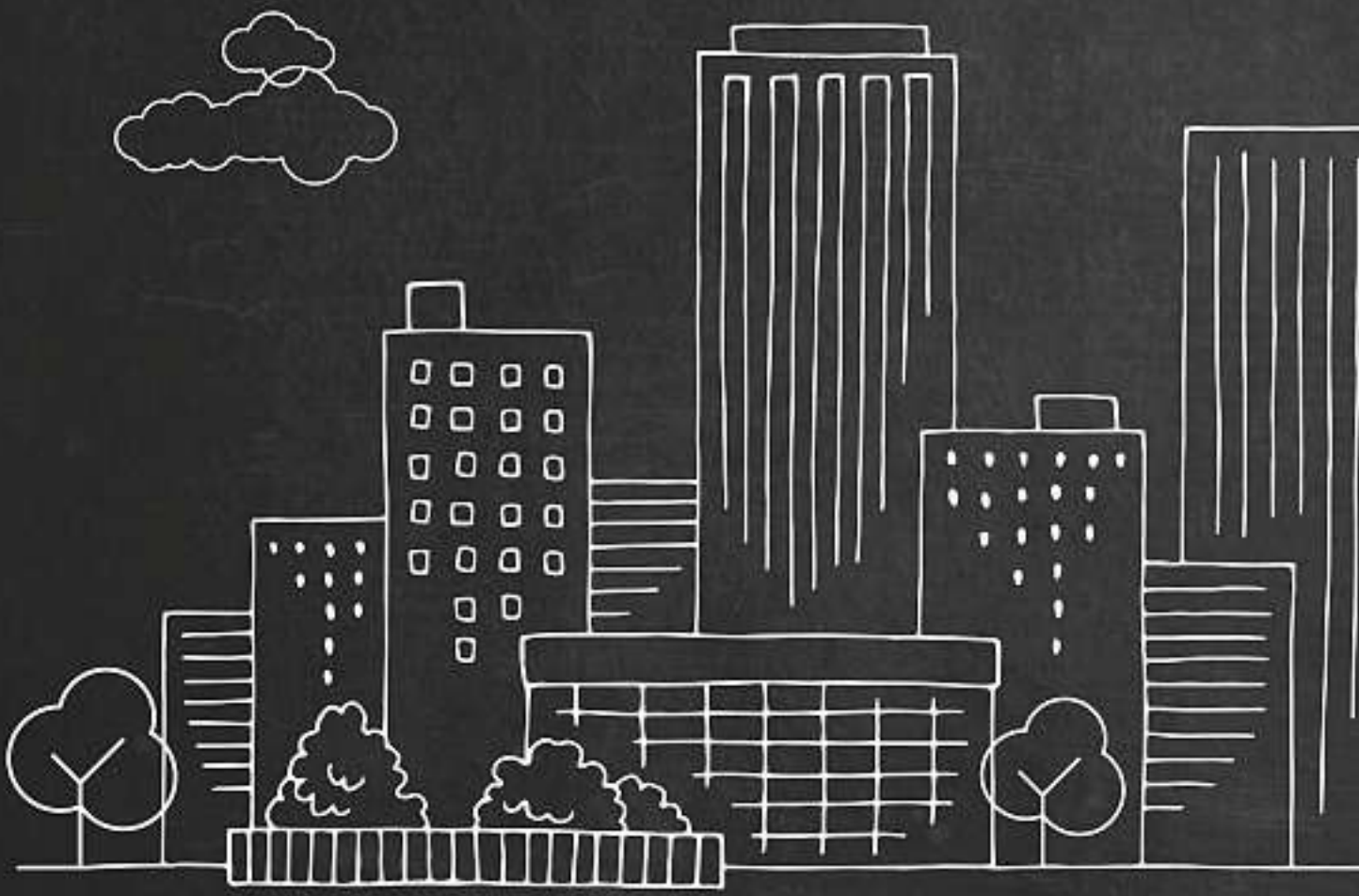

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ENSEMBLE CAST

At the Old Vic's Backstage creative and community hub, Haworth Tompkins' brise-soleil of recycled theatre lights grabs attention. But wall, floor and ceiling design choices all play crucial roles in setting the venue's tone

WORDS
Pamela Buxton

PHOTOGRAPHS
Philip Vile

Although Backstage by name, the Old Vic theatre's £13.7 million rear extension has a front-of-house energy of its own, thanks to a colourful brise-soleil of cleverly repurposed, obsolete theatre lights above a projecting balcony. Painted in shades of yellow, orange and red and rising up the main facade, these act as something of a siren call not only to theatregoers but to passing pedestrians around Waterloo station. Both are very welcome in the new café and bar, which aims to serve the wider community.

Inside, these colours, combined with an emphasis on warm, natural materials, recycling and reuse, are key elements of a project that has transformed the theatre's back-of-house, hospitality and engagement provision. Initially, the brief was to provide new supporting facilities by redeveloping the site of a former pub to the rear of the theatre that had been recently acquired by the Old Vic on Waterloo Road. Over the course of the six-year project, it expanded to incorporate substantial refurbishment and replanning of all the back-of-house facilities in the adjoining Grade II*-listed building – with the exception of the stage

Left: Warm colours combine with an exposed timber structure to create a welcoming double-height entrance bar.

Below: A mezzanine script library overlooks the bar.

house – with connectivity between old and new. In doing so, it addressed historic, longstanding accessibility constraints, including access from the redesigned stage door entrance on Webber Street.

Backstage reflects the practice's long-held commitment to low-embodied-carbon design and natural materials, combined with a facade that is both eye-catching and resonant. The 1,250m² (NIA) project is a major addition to a Georgian theatre that has undergone various changes since its establishment in 1816, most notably to its front facade. Blitz bombing caused damage to the rear of the theatre and destroyed an adjoining building of similar height that had once occupied the Backstage site. This historic precedent helped make the case for the scale of the 600m² new build, which at six storeys, far exceeds the postwar building it replaces.

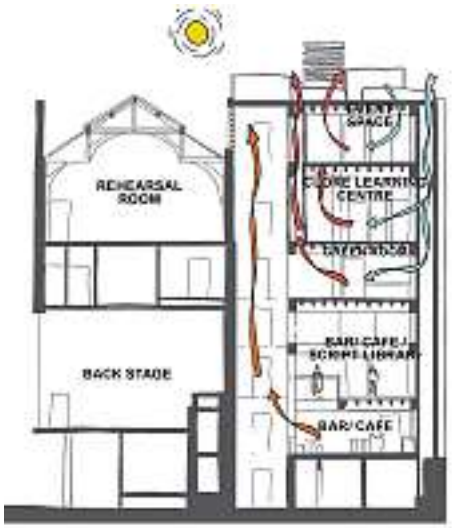
According to Haworth Tompkins director Lucy Picardo, the biggest challenge for the practice was pushing through its proposal for a demountable timber structure. In particular, it was crucial that the technical detailing met regulations and satisfied insurers' post-Grenfell requirements without needing to resort to fire boarding, requiring close attention to charring rates. This was achieved using standard spruce sizes and by resisting tempting aesthetic choices such as increasing beam sizes to align exactly with columns throughout the building. Instead, she says, the practice went for the most economical timber frame possible. In this way, it was able to see off any value-engineering suggestions of going with a steel frame instead.

The timber structure is used in combination with a retained basement and a natural ventilation system. Air is drawn through a stairwell at the back of the new building, where the thermal mass of its concrete wall – the only concrete in the building – helps regulate temperature. Rising through the building, it is extracted via rooftop chimneys. Rooftop air-source heat pumps supply fresh air – and hot water – to the rehearsal space.

The exposed European spruce glulam frame and solid timber floors set the tone for the extensive use of low-carbon natural materials throughout the interior. The timber helps meet the theatre's brief for a colourful and warm space, along with a palette of terracotta tones. "Deep red

Opposite: A brise-soleil of repurposed theatre lights adorns the Old Vic's new rear extension.

Below: A natural stack effect ventilation system extracts air through solar chimneys.



HAWORTH TOMPKINS

is a historic Old Vic colour. We've taken that and widened the spectrum of red to oranges, to yellows, to deep purples," says Picardo, who aimed to create a colourful and welcoming space.

This is apparent immediately on entering the ground-floor space, where the practice has created a dramatic arrival zone, with double-height café/bar overlooked by a mezzanine script library. This incorporates a variety of warm finishes, including Venetian polished plaster walls and a pigmented concrete screed on the bar floor, supplied by Hatcrete. "We didn't want grey flooring. We wanted it to be a mineral burst," says Picardo.

Additional texture is provided by an exposed brick wall, which formerly marked the rear of the theatre and is visible on all levels as a celebration of the transition between old and new. It has been patched up as required with bricks salvaged from the demolition of the former pub, and with new bricks at fourth-floor level. "We wanted to keep the patina of what stood before," explains Picardo.

Right: **Polished plaster walls and stained timber joinery in the mezzanine balcony area.**

Below: **The Clore Learning Centre, animated with reflections of the brise-soleil.**

In the script library, one wall is lined in Garnica maple-faced ply sourced from Europe, a more local alternative preferred to birch-faced ply typically supplied from China. Combined with the timber structure and a European oak engineered timber floor from Hakwood's Savoy collection, the effect is cocooning.

The rear wall on both levels is clad in maple plywood slats with felt and acoustic insulation behind, and further wood-wool insulation by Knauf between all the beams and joists to create a comfortable acoustic environment. A stained wall finish was chosen because for its durability, and great attention was paid to achieving the deep red shade of stain desired, a tricky process given the disparity between the stain's hue before and after application that involved around 20 samples. The same stained red slatting is used on the ground-floor bar, which has a worktop by Smile Plastics incorporating recycled theatre programmes.

At the back, an adjoining script room has a natural cork floor by Granorte, specified for its warmth, robustness and environmental credentials. This lofty room is designed for flexibility, with a window onto the script library that can be covered with a blind, and with flip-down desks.

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Left: Sectional perspective of the Backstage building.

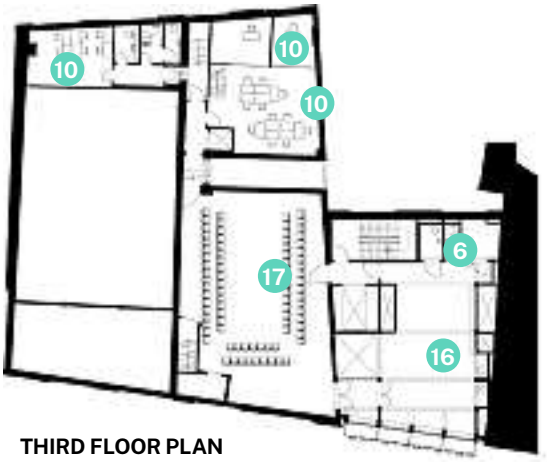
Below: Material palette of warm natural materials, with a colour spectrum inspired by the theatre's historic use of deep red.

BASEMENT PLAN

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

1 Café and bar
2 Get in
3 Stage
4 Dressing room
5 Ramp to stage door
6 WCs
7 Kitchen
8 Store
9 Crew room
10 Office
11 Wardrobe
12 Stage door
13 Green room
14 E&C office
15 IT room
16 Clore Learning Centre
17 Rehearsal studio
18 Stairs up to writers' room/ script library

SECOND FLOOR PLAN



THIRD FLOOR PLAN

0 5m

HAWORTH TOMPKINS (6)

The intention is that it can be used as an events bar if required.

The second floor provides an accessible green room, three times larger than formerly, with views out beyond the colourful louvres across the city; as well as meeting room, office and Changing Places toilet facilities. Red Forbo Norplan rubber flooring is used throughout. A new 100m² education space – the Clore Learning Centre – is located on the third floor, which again features maple-lined walls, combined with an orange-speckled floor by Terrafit made from recycled rubber. Although not sprung, this has "more of a give to it", says Picardo. "We use it a lot as a top finish because it's really lovely to walk on, and it has that deadening of the sound to the floors below."

Like the green room below, the space is animated by shadows cast by the facade's theatre-light louvres. Mounted on a ladder frame attached to Corten rainscreen cladding, these serve the practical function of mediating the daylight on the southwest-facing building, as well as contributing to the external and internal aesthetic. Crucially, they do so in a manner that resonates with the building's shared theatreland heritage – the redundant 'barn' theatre lights were sourced via an open call to London's theatres.

The learning centre in the new extension links to the main building's rehearsal studio. This has been refurbished with the technical infrastructure to enable use as a 90-seat studio theatre if required. Acoustics have been improved by floor separation in the floor buildup, which is topped with 25mm birch ply flooring, and with new acoustic panels on the walls by GB Acoustics, which use a recycled PET acoustic fabric. Blackout blinds also increase functionality. The recessed top storey, meanwhile, provides an events space – again with maple-lined walls and engineered oak floors – and external terrace.

While the showstopper facade is undoubtedly Backstage's most memorable feature, deeper gains are perhaps to be found in the project's success in delivering additional and convivial support facilities while resolving issues in the main building. Now, 75% of the back of house is accessible – whereas none was before – thanks to careful replanning and the addition of ramps and lifts. "It's really transformative for the theatre," concludes Picardo.

Above: **Refurbished rehearsal studio in the backstage area of the main Old Vic building, with links to the new Clore Learning Centre.**

Below: **The green room, located on the second floor of the new Backstage building.**

CREDITS

Architects
Haworth Tompkins
Client
The Old Vic
Contractor
RISE Contracts
Project manager
Equals Project Management (Backstage), Bristow Consulting (back of house works)
Cost consultant
Aecom
Theatre/acoustic consultant
Charcoalblue
Facade consultant
Eckersley O'Callaghan
Lighting designer
BDP Lighting
Access consultant
Vin Goodwin
M&E engineer
Skelly & Couch
Structural engineer
Momentum
Fire consultant
The Fire Surgery
Principal designer
PFB

SUPPLIERS

Spruce frame
Buckland Timber
Green room rubber floor Forbo
Maple wall panelling
Garnica
Wall acoustic panels
GB Acoustics
Cork flooring
Granorte
Engineered timber floor Hakwood,
Bar floor Hatcrete
Smeed Dean London stock
GB Construction
Venetian plaster
Evoke Polished Plaster Interiors
Wood wool acoustic ceiling Knauf
Brise soleil Premier
Corten rainscreen cladding RAF Group
Bar and table tops
Smile Plastics
Curtain walls Schüco
Learning centre rubber floor Terrafit

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Large-format tiles continue to gain traction across commercial environments, offering clean lines, visual continuity and practical benefits. Ideal for high-traffic areas such as lobbies, retail spaces and transport hubs, larger tiles reduce grout lines, support efficient installation and simplify ongoing maintenance. Recent developments in digital printing have expanded design possibilities further, delivering convincing marble, concrete and stone effects at scale, while retaining the technical performance required for demanding applications.

Solutions for high-traffic environments

Durability remains a critical consideration in commercial flooring. Tile of Spain manufacturers continue to innovate with advanced glazes, finishes and production techniques that enhance resistance to wear, scratching and slipping, while maintaining tiles' design integrity over time. These developments ensure that ceramic and porcelain tiles remain a robust, low-maintenance solution for busy commercial spaces where safety, longevity and aesthetics are equally important.

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tileofspain.com

Top: Terre tiles by Cevica (cevica.es)
Middle: Bergstein Pearl tiles by Argenta Cerámica (argentaceramica.com)
Bottom: Bone tiles by Ecoceramic (ecoceramic.es)

WORDS
Jan-Carlos Kucharek

GLIMPSES OF PARADISE

Three Chamberlain Square, by Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios, is a new 10-storey, 17,500m² spec office in central Birmingham for Federated Hermes MEPC. It is part of the £1.2 billion Paradise regeneration project. The £74 million building drew on a heritage of richly ornamented civic architecture; its facade of 8,000-plus red, fluted terracotta panels and 3,000 windows runs up to an ogee-formed mansard 'crown'. FCBS partners Alina White and George Wilson discuss their BREEAM Outstanding design and approach to specifying windows and doors.

ANDY STAGG (2)

Right: Three Chamberlain Square to the right, with the north elevation of Birmingham Town Hall in the foreground.

What general structural approach did you take? How did a concrete structure work to push your sustainability drive for the building?

AW: It's a concrete structure but with aluminium-clad steel columns up to the second-floor soffit overhang, with terracotta fins above. It might sound odd to choose a concrete structure, but we worked with Cundall to engineer a small structural grid of 7.5m (office buildings might previously typically be 15m), so it meant we could use very thin, 215mm post-tensioned slabs, helping mitigate embodied carbon. The basement sits on solid sandstone so we used a 300mm raft slab with local thickening to 1,000mm and no pile foundations. Cundall considered using a steel composite structure, even CLT – but both would have still required concrete basements and cores, as well as on the roof and as separation of lower-level retail from office spaces above. There were benefits: the thermal mass helps take the peaks and troughs off internal temperatures and fireproofing was easier, without the need to detail round steels. There was more rigidity to the structure as a result, enabling us to make the slab-hung unitised glazing system more slender.

What about the facade specification?

GW: It was a delicate balancing act, because while the client had aspirations for a highly sustainable building, they were sensitive about what the office market expects in terms of provision. Highly glazed facades remain attractive to tenants and they wanted to avoid a building that looked like it was formed of smaller, punched windows in case that limited tenant interest.

AW: The unitised facade was very considered. Cundall's energy strategy gave us a maximum value of 40% of the facade to be glazed so as to mitigate solar gain. That's typically less than a standard office but we worked to articulate glazed facade elements alongside the terracotta ribs. Insulated spandrels and opaque glazed panels were installed below desk height where sunlight would not contribute to daylight factor but just increase solar gain.

Right: The facade was designed with the classical Town Hall's column fluting in mind.

What glazing system did you use?

AW: Spanish firm Inasus fabricated the unitised glazing system. Panels they manufactured incorporated backing for terracotta ribs and spandrel glazed elements. The scalloped fin extrusions were fabricated by Palagio Terracotta in Italy and were cast as two asymmetric sections, so that joins would not be visible at the most prominent point. They are unglazed, to avoid added embodied carbon. Fins were set onto a storey-height supporting framework in Spain, and then combined with the unitised cassette panels (which were also prefabricated in Spain) on site before hanging on the facade – none of the unitised facade is structural. Inasus also modelled the complex aluminium fascias and steel structure of the lower arcade levels, which span up to and run along the second-floor soffit. This is separated from the glazing system behind by a 60mm gap, meaning that the glazing acts as the weather line for the building.

Was there a reason for that decision?

GW: It was partly about facade maintenance. There were stipulations regarding glass replacement behind the ogees, and units had to be accessed – with a cherry picker – externally. So on the four corner curves we decided on smaller, faceted glazed units that could be slid out, whereas big, curved corner pieces would be far more difficult to manipulate out from behind columns. We had to consider glass replacement because the goods lift, as sized, was not big enough to get full-storey panes of glass out from the inside. Using flat facets to create the four corner curves at lower levels, while not our ideal solution, yielded cost benefits too, which pleased the client.

What was the lower-level glazing strategy?

AW: There is 8.2m-high glazing enclosing the reception running behind the ogee-form columns. Externally there is a 1m slope across the site, so we decided to run the upper transom in line with the first floor slab level, to act as a general elevational datum line. Over retail spaces these become louvred spandrel panels for ventilation fit-out. There's a pair of 3m x 2.5m Boon Edam main entrance revolving doors, which Inasus integrated into the curtain walling facade system. Next to one of them is a Schüco AD UP 75 swing door with a GEZE Powerturn Swing 'press to open' post for mobility-impaired users.

What was the strategy for the upper levels?

AW: For the 3,000 office-level windows, we looked at carbon implications of double or triple glazing. The latter meant better thermal performance but more embodied carbon in production; also, the unitised system would have to be of thicker sections to support the additional glass load. The double-glazed option was lighter, so less embodied carbon, but would require extra energy for cooling and heating. Cundall analysed both scenarios over the windows' lifetime for this design and location; factoring in a decarbonised grid the balance tipped in favour of double glazing. The U-value for the blended facade (solid and glass) was 1.12 W/m2°C for the vertical unitised, 1.2 for the curtain walling and 1.27 for the inclined facades.

So is the building fully air conditioned?

AW: It's mixed mode – we have 250 openable windows installed across the facade. Our five-star NABERS UK rating required ascertaining what periods the building could remain operational in using natural ventilation. In spring or autumn, during periods of low occupancy and outside of set 'conditioned' times, windows are openable when air temperature is likely to be cooler outside than in. Cross-ventilation is also possible, but dependent on the layout of the tenancy split.

You have a different glazing approach at ninth-floor level, why?

GW: We wanted outdoor amenity at the top on the east side in the form of an external terrace within the terracotta ogee fins that run up and over it to tie back at roof level. Here we have pivoting double doors by Schüco running along the length of the facade, interspersed with unitised aluminium curtain walling with 200mm of insulation behind it. We exceeded the 40% glazing allowance we set ourselves to take advantage of the views you get from here.

Above right: Aluminium-clad steel columns run in front of the double-height glazing of the retail and reception frontage.

Right: A run of pivoting glazed double-doors from the ninth floor tenant space leads onto a generous roof terrace.

ANDY STAGG (2)

EXCELLENCE THAT'S CLEAR

Presented by

SIDEY

Balancing performance, design and sustainability, Sidey and VEKA's windows are raising the bar for energy-efficient PVCu in the commercial sector

The commercial sector is undergoing a clear shift in priorities. Energy efficiency, sustainability and long-term performance are no longer optional; they are central to decision-making, particularly within social housing and new-build developments. As a fabricator and installer of VEKA systems, Sidey sees advanced PVCu solutions playing an increasingly important role in meeting these evolving demands.

Thermal performance remains a key consideration, with U-values directly impacting compliance, running costs and occupant comfort. By fabricating VEKA's System 10 and Rustique ranges, Sidey can offer both bevelled and sculptured aesthetics without compromising performance. Triple-glazed tilt-and-turn windows achieve U-values as low as 0.87, while triple-glazed casement windows can reach 0.82. These levels of efficiency help housing providers and developers meet stringent regulations while supporting long-term energy reduction strategies.

Functionality is equally important in commercial applications. Through VEKA, Sidey also fabricates a fully reversible window solution, ideal for high-rise and multi-occupancy buildings where safe and easy cleaning is essential. Even with its practical design, this system delivers U-values as low as 0.99 when triple glazed, proving that usability and performance can go hand in hand.

Sustainability is embedded across Sidey's operations through a circular business model focused on reducing material use, reusing where possible and prioritising recycling. Today, 100% of post-industrial waste, 97% of manufacturing waste and 96.5% of post-consumer waste is reused or recycled, ensuring measurable environmental impact.

By partnering with VEKA and VEKA Recycling, Sidey supports a closed-loop recycling journey. With three recycling plants processing up to 100,000 tonnes annually, the VEKA Group saves 780,000 tonnes of CO_2 each year and has recycled more than 25 million PVCu windows.

Together, Sidey and VEKA offer PVCu solutions balancing performance, design and sustainability for the commercial sector, today and into the future.

sidey.co.uk

Above: Sidey replacement project.

Top: Sidey fabrication.

Right: The glazing transom in the reception area acts as a datum running around the building's lower level.

Below: FCBS took a biophilic approach to interior specification, evidenced most clearly in the reception area.

What about internal door and window specification?

GW: We did the Cat A fit-out for reception, internal communal areas, lift cores and WCs and basement changing and cycle storage areas. Our idea was that it should work with the external palette but not mimic it; for it to feel polished but have a natural quality. We wanted bio-based materials such as limewashed walls and wood wool acoustic soffits. We used fluted mycelium panels on walls and some lovely oak joinery by Gariff at first-floor level of the double-height reception, which uses 60-minute fire-rated glass.

Doors from the lift lobbies to tenant areas are fully glazed so that when you step out of the lift you have natural light coming in and critical views out beyond to the Town Hall or cityscape. These Planet double doors needed to be 30-minute fire rated, so incorporate a slim aluminium frame with side panels.

In the biophilic common areas we specified oak-veneer doors by RW Joinery, with brass ironmongery which matches switch cover plates and ironmongery elsewhere, and installed Selo frameless doors on all riser openings.

AW: Office WCs have the same timber-veneer doors as elsewhere. We have gendered toilets, non-gendered superloos and one accessible WC. The client wanted the building to be very inclusive, so in the basement there are male and female changing areas and a section between where there is non-gendered changing.

GW: We were aware the budget for internal finishes in the basement would be lower than the reception areas but we wanted it to feel part of the same suite of spaces, so we took care specifying. Blockwork walls are black-painted with natural plant-based paints by Edward Bulmer above a 2.4m datum line, and below there are oak frames inset with cork panels above a 150mm skirting zone. Basement doors are just painted solid-core doors, but WCs and shower cubicles in wet areas have high-pressure veneered timber-effect finishes for durability.

We used a muted palette in office lift lobbies with limewash painted datums, and timber-veneered ceiling batons hiding service runs and limewashed end walls with large brass floor numbers. We have full-height vision panels on all timber toilet lobby doors. Alongside big moves we made with structure and facade, the choices were integral to a low-carbon ethos. Bio-based and renewable materials plus recycled content in interior elements support a healthy indoor environment and cut embodied carbon. The scheme achieved 449kgCO_2e/m^2, LETI band B, so is at the forefront of UK best practice.

ANDY STAGG (2)

STORYBOARD: DESIGN A CENTRE FOR STORYTELLING

Storytelling is bound into the DNA of humanity. In 2026, the UK National Year of Reading, for our RIBAJ/West Fraser £2,500 annual challenge we're asking you to design a demountable storytelling centre to bring the joy of reading and listening to the nation's children

Opposite left: Aldo Rossi's designs for Il Teatro del Mondo, Venice: sketch plan, elevations and perspective (1979).

Opposite top right: The public plaza of the Shonandai Cultural Centre, Tokyo (1990) by Itsuko Hasegawa.

Opposite bottom right: A children's event inside Fraser Livingstone Architects' 2006 Scottish Storytelling Centre on Edinburgh's Royal Mile.

As children, we all loved a good story. We've all been thrilled by the plots of The Hobbit, Harry Potter, Hunger Games or His Dark Materials. But whatever our age, there's no escaping the visceral power of the written – or spoken – word to grip us in the same way as when the tale of Beowulf was recounted over an open fire.

Despite 2026 being designated as the UK's National Year of Reading and the hundredth anniversary of one of our most loved fictional characters – AA Milne's Winnie the Pooh, written for his young son but living in all our hearts – why is children's reading at an all-time low?

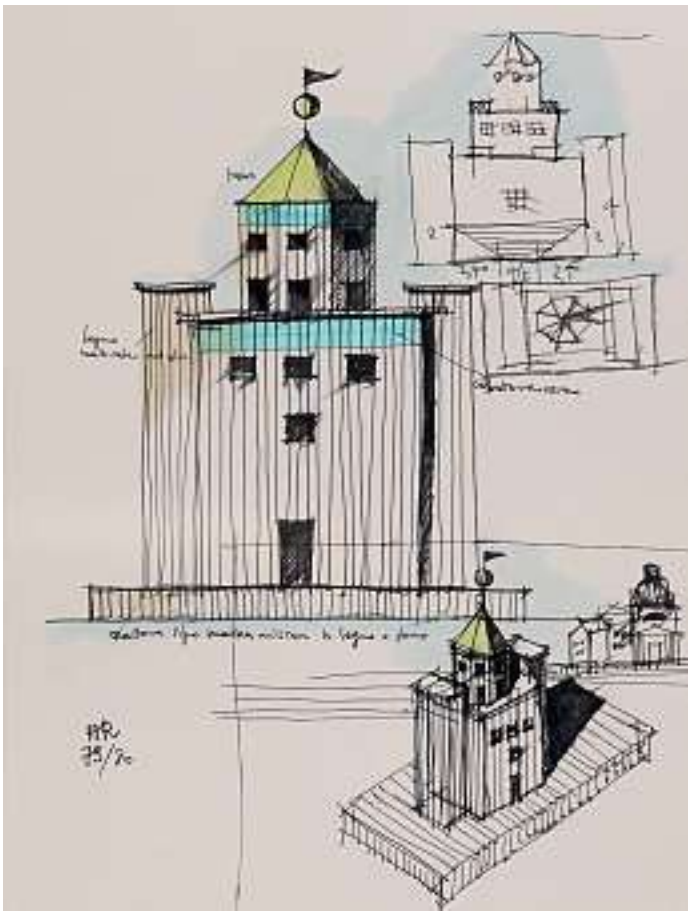
A recent annual survey by the National Literacy Trust highlights that only one in three children aged eight to 18 said they enjoy reading in their free time, with even fewer saying they read anything daily. For a culture with historic links to children's storytelling, these statistics – the worst for 20 years – are worrying.

Architecture has a strong relationship with books. The magnificence of Egypt's Library of Alexandria is lost in legend, but architects have always since delivered when tasked with designing libraries, whether national, academic or local. Repositories of knowledge and learning, they remain symbols of pride.

But what of the oral tradition? Where, outside of theatres, are there dedicated spaces to honour the spoken word? Such places are vanishingly few, though it should come as no surprise that Scotland, the country that gave us Burns' Night, has set its love for the art in stone with its Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh, aiming to keep the craft alive for future generations.

So for this year's RIBAJ/West Fraser SterlingOSB Zero design challenge, we are asking you to design a mobile storytelling centre that will celebrate storytelling – and reading – nationally. With a main space that evokes the theatricality of gathering to listen, we'd also like a library/reading space, reception and even a café – but in a total of 400m² or less, all of which can be demounted to be set up in a new, temporary location. Structures can be more then one storey if desired, as long as you can ramp up to them, and these routes need not come out of the space allocation.

We are asking you to be inspired by historical spaces of engagement and exchange – the theatre, caravanserai, pavilions, fayres, even modern festivals – to come up with a space that inspires young readers of all ages to switch off their tablets and instead listen to stories old, new, and perhaps yet-to-be-uttered.



RIBA COLLECTIONS

KEITH COLLIE / RIBA

ROBERTO RICCIUTI

Who can enter

We welcome entries from experienced and emerging architects, those in Part 1 and 2 professional training, and diploma and undergraduate architectural students. Applying to all, the emphasis should be on imagination and fun – so enjoy yourselves!

Judging

Chaired by RIBAJ, judges will look for imaginative responses to the brief that make best use of SterlingOSB Zero. While we anticipate that other materials and surfaces will form an integral part of any proposition, it is expected that the main constituent of the design will be SterlingOSB Zero panels. Given that this is a conceptual brief, we do not require entrants to meet building codes or standards.

In this ideas competition, the winning proposal will be the one that, in the judges' view, proves to be the most joyful response to creating a space for gathering and listening. The proposal may be set in a context, but the expectation is that it be demountable and that this strategy should be evidenced. You should also set out why SterlingOSB Zero is particularly relevant for use in your chosen context.

Judges

To be announced. The panel chair will be Jan-Carlos Kucharek, RIBAJ deputy editor.

Deadline

Entries should be received no later than 14:00 BST on Monday 15 June 2026.

To enter

Visit ribaj.com/storyboard – entries should be laid out on no more than two A3 sheets, supplied electronically as PDFs and uploaded to the official entry website.

How you illustrate your proposal is at the entrant's discretion but may include:

- plans and sections explaining the proposal, its structure, material choices and demountable nature
- 3D or perspectival images that communicate a sense of the proposal in use
- supplementary images (such as model shots or fly-throughs) that entrants feel would further convey the proposition

An explanation of no more than 400 words should also be uploaded to the online entry form describing the proposal and the manner in which it claims to meet the brief.

Notes

- The judges' decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into by organisers or judges regarding entries or winners.
- First prize is £2,500, plus three Commended prizes of £500 each.
- Shortlisted entries will be notified in writing, with entrants being invited to the winners' announcement and prizegiving event on Thursday 10 September 2026.
- By entering this RIBAJ competition, West Fraser has your agreement to using your name/company name and collateral produced by our marketing agency – videos, interviews, case studies, images – for our company's website, social media, digital and print media titles.
- Please email questions to: ribaj.storyboard@riba.org

THE INS AND OUTS

FRANCISCO IBANEZ HANTKE

Alan Beveridge, associate director at RCKa, highlights the crucial role that doors, windows and ironmongery play in connecting interior and exterior realms at four of the studio's projects

Windows, doors and ironmongery are building components that people use and notice every day. They draw people in, connect internal and external spaces and stand up to daily wear. At RCKa, we think about these elements at the very start of the design process, using them to enhance everyday interactions and provide memorable spaces for people to see, touch and pass through. The projects here demonstrate that, across varying scales, windows and doors should be treated not as secondary technical components but as active contributors to life and experience.

Nourish Hub, Hammersmith

In Shepherd's Bush, west London, this community kitchen engages users in the process of growing, cooking and eating healthy food. Designed to have a welcoming relationship with the street, windows support everyday interactions, sparking curiosity and inviting visitors in. With a tight budget, the focus was on robust design decisions. Street-facing glazing provides openness and visibility, while a colourful servery window offers a point of exchange between inside and out.

The servery window, by Senior Architectural Systems, was detailed for durability in regular use. An extended sill is practical and enables people to lean, pause and place items while they wait. Open, it facilitates engagement between staff and passersby; closed, it remains part of the glazed frontage, offering views into the kitchen. In its colour, detailing and robustness, it becomes a familiar point of contact between Nourish Hub and the community, helping to animate the street.

> “In its colour, detailing and robustness, Nourish Hub’s servery window becomes a familiar point of contact”

JIM STEPHENSON (3)

Highgate Newtown Community Centre
This community centre is based around a vibrant public courtyard and a passageway connecting two previously divided London neighbourhoods. The entrance emerges gradually on approach, designed to pique the interest of people to pause, look more closely and feel tempted to come inside.

The composition is layered and three-dimensional with fixings, junctions and concrete structure left visible. This sets it apart from conventional curtain wall approaches and lends the threshold depth.

An arched opening contrasts with the facade’s rectilinear geometry, marking an arrival point. Concrete is set against light, finely detailed glazing to balance solidity and openness. Views into community rooms, café and foyer combine with the reflectivity of the glass to pick up light, sky – and passersby. Thin glazing bars by Sealtite Group offer good sightlines. With a soft yellow accent and bespoke brass handle, they complete an entrance that is engaging, tactile and welcoming.

Leyton Road, Harpenden
This Hertfordshire later living scheme prioritises users’ wellbeing with amenity-rich apartments and villas that borrow from the town’s rich Arts and Crafts heritage. Windows were designed to be in repose with the architecture, connecting homes to landscapes beyond. Openings are shaped by deep reveals, corbelled brickwork and built-in planting, easing the transition from inside to out. Coloured window frames in matt finish match the facade but sit in the background visually to reinforce continuity.

Window boxes are integrated with openings, with window size, position and operation carefully considered to encourage their use. Generous, dual-aspect windows with minimal section bring daylight deep into homes and support cross-ventilation, while orientating living spaces to the shared courtyard and adjacent park. These elements soften the threshold between interior and exterior spaces, allowing the windows to quietly facilitate interaction with what lies beyond.

Hortsley, Seaford
At another later living development, of 38 homes in East Sussex, windows perform a vital role in a winter garden and create a distinctive facade. An integral design component, the winter garden mediates between inside and out, providing a sheltered, year-round social space. Its windows are carefully sized, positioned and detailed to support this. Full-height sliding openings offer long views along the gallery and out to the landscape, and can be fully opened to become balconies in warmer weather. This promotes comfort, daylight and ventilation, encouraging residents to engage with air and outlook at their own pace.

Clear glazing is balanced with hit-and-miss frosted screens, forming layered thresholds that offer privacy and shelter while maintaining visual connection. Windows and screens work as a system, shaping the winter garden’s character and reinforcing its role as a shared edge between homes and the outdoors.

COSTINGS
INTERNAL FLOOR, WALL & CEILING FINISHES

Essential guidance on specification prices from Annie Newcomb, Turner & Townsend alinea cost manager

Specification of internal finishes varies greatly in quality and complexity, and therefore also in price. For example, a floor tile could range from a porcelain item at £200/m², to a marble one that might reach £1,300/m².

No two buildings are the same, and structures' size, shape and logistics can all have a significant impact on costs. Economies of scale also play into the cost of wall, floor and ceiling finishes. The larger the quantity of material ordered, the greater the efficiencies that can be realised. On the other hand, if a very small area of a bespoke finish is required the cost can be exponentially higher.

The prices below reflect a mid-range product or display a range of rates from low to high specifications as of Q1 2026. All rates exclude subcontractor preliminaries since these can vary greatly depending on project-specific variables such as size, logistics and programme.

CEILING FINISHES

Considerations when pricing ceiling finishes could include:

- requirement for access panels
- lighting troughs
- enhanced acoustic treatments eg backing panels
- bulkheads
- fire cavity barriers
- cutouts for services
- trims

All of the above are typically priced as extra over items and are not considered in the benchmarked rates set out below.

DECORATIONS

Painted plasterboard	£55-90/m²
Soffit spray acoustic finish	£110-150/m²
Soffit spray painted finish	£35-50/m²
Acoustic panels – fixed to soffit	£300-550/m²
Suspended acoustic system such as panel, grid or baffle	£500-1,000/m²

SUSPENDED CEILINGS (ASSUMES SAS OR SIMILAR)

Hygienic metal ceiling system	£140-200/m²
Standard-range metal ceiling system	£200-250/m²
High-range metal ceiling system – bespoke cutouts	£525-550/m²

JOINERY CEILINGS

Bespoke joinery ceilings – varies greatly as bespoke; for example, slatted timber baffles	£1,000-2,500/m²

FLOOR FINISHES

Considerations when pricing floor finishes could include:

- expansion joints
- ply substrate
- cutouts for floor boxes/grommets
- trims
- protection

All of the above are typically priced as extra over items and are not considered in the benchmarked rates set out below.

SOFT FLOOR FINISHES

Entrance matting	£750-1,000/m²
Vinyl	£60-100/m²
Microscreed	£160/m²
Heavy-duty gym flooring – including subfloor buildup	£1,000/m²
Carpet tile	£35-60/m²
Timber planks	£175-300/m²
Cork planks	£140-180/m²
Bespoke loose-lay rug – depending on specification, bespoke colouring, trims	£1,000/m²
Inset rug – depending on specification, bespoke colouring and trims	£700/m²

HARD FLOOR FINISHES

High-range tiling such as marble or travertine	£700-1,300/m²
Mid-range tiling such as ceramic, limestone or terrazzo	£250-400/m²
Porcelain tiling	£200-250/m²

WALL FINISHES

Considerations when pricing wall finishes could include:

- tile backer
- trims
- skirting

All of the above are typically priced as extra over items and are not considered in the benchmarked rates set out below.

DECORATIONS

Render finish	£160/m²
Polished plaster – additional cost for ribbed finish/grooves etc	£140-180/m²
Paint – higher end of range for nonstandard colours	£6-10/m²
Low-range wallpaper	£80/m²
High-range wallpaper	£250/m²

HARD WALL FINISHES

Ceramic tiles	£420/m²
Porcelain tiles	£300/m²

SPECIALIST WALL FINISHES

Veneer panelling	£750-1,100/m²
Slatted veneer panelling	£1,200-£1,500/m²
Glass panelling	£700-750/m²
Mirror Panelling	£750/m²

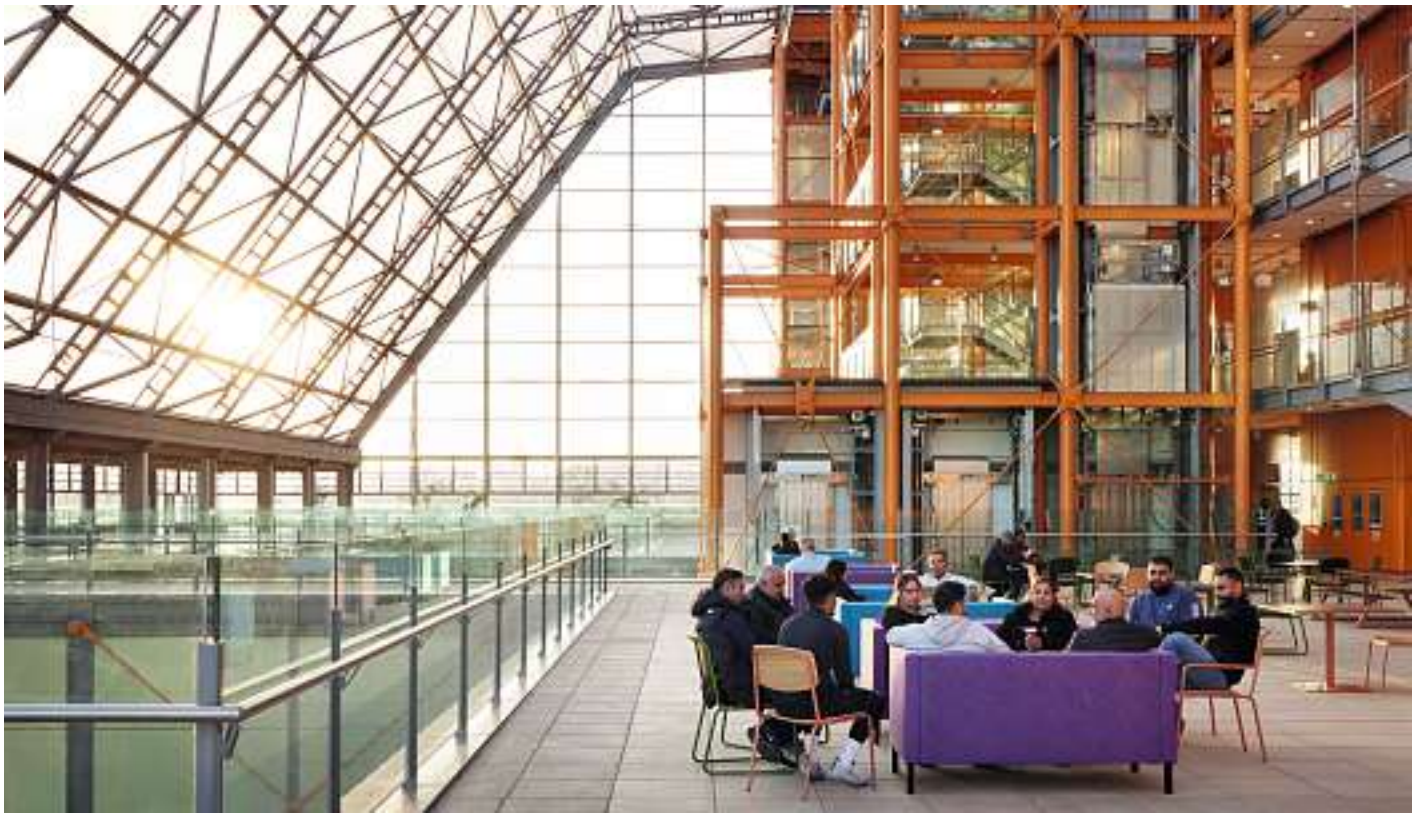
FABRIC WALL PANELLING

Fabric panels – additional cost for joinery surround/trims	£330-500/m²

THE TRUE IMPACT OF COLOUR ON WELLBEING

Colour is among the most potent design tools – but one that architects can underuse. A RIBAJ/Dulux roundtable set out to discuss how to harness its power beneficially across a range of settings

HAWKINS\BROWN



Opposite: Colour will welcome patients at the Cambridge Children's Hospital by Hawkins\Brown.

Is colour perception objective or subjective? Should certain colours always be avoided? And how can colour be used to aid wellbeing? A RIBA Journal roundtable, in partnership with Dulux Trade, gave architects and designers the opportunity to discuss the use of colour as a potent design tool, whether to trigger memory and emotion, ramp up drama, or assist in navigation and understanding.

"Colour is so powerful," said Danielle Patten of the Museum of the Home, describing how it is one of the first things that people mention when asked to remember their home. Yet architects, unlike interior designers, are rarely taught about colour theory as part of their education, judging by the experience of participants at the roundtable. Instead, Catrina Stewart of Office S&M recalled having to justify her colourful work at university crits while peers were never asked about their less vibrant choices. So often, she said, colour is feared and seen "as a big risk" – and so avoided.

"It's harder to use colour well than to take that easy decision," added Alexander Turner of Studio MUTT. "There isn't a set of rules because it's so specific to place."

Russell Whitehead of 2LG Studio remarked on how few projects shortlisted for awards he'd judged recently had featured colour. "It was astonishing how much was just a blank white canvas with natural materials. People just are not using it in these prestigious buildings," he said. That can't be said of the roundtable participants, who shared examples of bold use of colour across sectors from healthcare and education through to residential. There was much discussion over whether perception of colour is objective or subjective, and whether there was a case for avoiding certain colours – for example red, the colour of blood, in healthcare settings. Charlotte Conroy of SODA Studio said one client had asked her practice to avoid the use of yellow on the grounds that it could incite violence. White, meanwhile, has been discouraged in prisons as inhumane, according to Dulux's Dawn Scott.

Angela Bardino of Jacobs described how opinions on colour vary geographically

Above and below: At Birmingham's Midland Metropolitan University Hospital, Cagni Williams opted for warm "architects' colours" rather than typical NHS hues.

PAUL RAFTERY (2)

Left and below: Calming colours complement natural materials at the MEplace nursery in Islington designed by Office S&M.

MEGAN TAYLOR (2)

across the global firm. Context is also critical to colour perception. Studio MUTT's Turner, whose practice works extensively in museums and galleries, talked about the impact of factors such as room size, orientation, windows and exhibits. Stewart advocated thinking about colours in palettes. "I think it's also important to not think about colours as individual colours. One colour will look very different and feel very different if it's alongside another," she said.

According to Dulux's Scott, colour perception is both subjective and objective. "We can measure light reflectance values (LRVs). But then there is the subjective piece as well around how we perceive colour. And I'm particularly interested in that now with a neurodivergence lens," she said, adding that colour vision deficiency, and changes to the eye due to ageing, are also factors in different perceptions, including for those with dementia.

For Nimi Attanayake of Nimtim Architects, the use of colour creates joy, and is driven by context, engagement with stakeholders, and the project narrative, to create a "meaningful attachment" for people. "We spend ages thinking about what the context is, what story we're trying to tell… it's about knowing that those colours work within what you're trying to do as a concept, and that's what leads you to make the decision," she says.

Mark Coffey of Oberlanders Architects talked about how the wealth of guidance for healthcare projects, including the effect of colour on various health conditions, could be "overwhelming and often misinterpreted". His approach is to draw on the context of the landscape and community to create a sense of connection. "Whatever colour is applied to any of our buildings, what's most important is that the community feel like they got a sense of ownership," he said. While he believes that no particular colour is wrong to use, having a single colour can polarise views, while developing a "tapestry" of relevant colours can bring communities together and be "healing".

Laura Carrara-Cagni of Cagni Williams described how she had researched colour in order to have a more scientific approach to choice, something that has been "incredibly useful" when talking to clients. This includes the use of harmonic colours to help other

JACK HOBHOUSE

Above: Pops of bright colour lift the interior and exterior of Sheppard Robson's SEE Building at the University of Salford.

hues shine. For her, a more psychological attitude to colour comes after this more scientific reasoning. She described a recent hospital project where orange was chosen after the structure changed from timber to steel; previously, yellow had been proposed to complement the timber. This provided a useful rationale in response to some perceptions that the colour related to a particular faith, or one of the local football teams.

Sometimes, really simple colour moves can be effective: Jacobs' Bardino described the use of different coloured curtains for around the beds in a children's hospital to those in the treatment rooms, which may have negative associations.

Lee Bennett of Sheppard Robson remarked that colour was not included in the BB103 guidelines on school design. While he agreed that colour can have a huge impact, for him this is less important than the fabric of the building, for example the use of timber in classrooms. For Stewart, however, colour is always a fundamental part of a project. "We've always seen colour as a sort of building material that's just as important as bricks and mortar," she said.

The discussion considered designing for neurodiversity, including in workplace settings. Morag Morrison of Hawkins\Brown advocated presenting a palette of colours that work well together, and using different proportions of these within the workplace to give choice. "You can develop calmer bits of the palette for more focused working, or use colour in a vibrant way for more social spaces," she said.

Looking to the future, the chair, RIBAJ's Chris Foges wondered if repeated exposure to our colour-saturated digital world might affect approaches to colour. This struck a chord with 2LG Studio's Whitehead, who said he was already feeling a shift towards more natural and muted colours: "I am actually craving some calm myself," he said.

Not that panellists were in any real danger of shunning colour. "For me, the idea of being devoid of colour is so negative," said Attanayake. "Colour – whichever it is – should be celebrated".

Chair:
Chris Foges
Contributing editor, RIBAJ

Colour expert:
Dawn Scott
Senior colour designer, Dulux

Panellists:
Nimi Attanayake
Director and co-founder, Nimtim Architects
Angela Bardino
Senior associate director, interiors, Jacobs
Lee Bennett
Partner, Sheppard Robson
Laura Carrara-Cagni
Founding director, Cagni Williams
Mark Coffey
Partner, Oberlanders Architects
Charlotte Conroy
Senior interior designer, SODA Studio
Morag Morrison
Partner, interior design sector lead, Hawkins\Brown
Danielle Patten
Director creative programmes and collections, Museum of the Home
Catrina Stewart
Director, Office S&M
Alexander Turner
Director, Studio MUTT
Russell Whitehead
Co-founder, 2LG Studio

PRESIDENT AND COUNCIL ELECTIONS 2026

DURING 2026 RIBA WILL HOLD THE FOLLOWING ELECTIONS:

Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) President
Any Chartered Member is eligible to stand. The successful candidate will take office on 1 September 2026 as RIBA President-Elect for one year and serve as RIBA President for two years from 1 September 2027. Both offices confer a seat on the RIBA Council, and after serving as President, the successful candidate will also have a seat on the RIBA Council as Past President for one year. As RIBA President, the successful candidate will also be a member of the Board of Trustees of the RIBA.

Royal Society of Architects in Wales (RSAW) President
Any Chartered Member in Wales is eligible to stand. The successful candidate will take office on 1 September 2026 as RSAW President-Elect for one year and serve as RSAW President for two years from 1 September 2027. As RSAW President, you will also have a seat on the RIBA Council.

Two Council Member seats
Any Chartered Member is eligible to stand for one of the two seats, and successful candidates will serve a three-year term starting 1 September 2026.

Sixteen Regional Council Member seats
Any Chartered Member on the electoral register for one of the Regions listed below is eligible to stand for one of the seat/s available in that Region. The term of office will be three years from 1 September 2026.

- RIBA London - six seats
- RIBA South East - two seats
- RIBA South West – one seat
- RIBA Wessex – one seat
- RIBA West Midlands – one seat
- RIBA Scotland South – one seat
- RIBA International - Europe (excluding the UK) – one seat
- RIBA International - The Americas – one seat
- RIBA International - Asia and Australasia – one seat
- RIBA International - The Middle East and Africa – one seat

By-Elections

RIBA East Regional Council Member seats (two)
Any Chartered Member on the electoral register in RIBA East Region is eligible to stand for one of the seats. The term of office will be two year from 1 September 2026.

RIBA South Regional Council Member seats (two)
Any Chartered Member on the electoral register in RIBA South Region is eligible to stand for one of the seats. The term of office will be two year from 1 September 2026.

RIBA Associate Member seats (two)
Any Associate Member is eligible to stand for one of the two seats available. Successful candidates will serve a two-year term from 1st September 2026.

TIMETABLE FOR ELECTIONS

- Notice of Election 25 March 2026
- Nominations open 1 April 2026
- Nominations close 15 April 2026
- Voting opens 15 June 2026
- Voting closes 26 June 2026

To be eligible to participate in this year's annual RIBA election, you must be a RIBA member on the qualifying date. If you are not a RIBA member and are eligible for RIBA membership, you must have submitted your application online no later than **23.59 on 14 March 2026**.

The RIBA has a commitment to sustainability and using resources effectively and efficiently. In line with this, the election process will be conducted online. Members who wish to participate in any election must have a registered email address with the RIBA. If any member has recently changed their contact details, please update their information no later than **23.59 on 15 April 2026**. This can be done by accessing the member portal at **www.architecture.com/login**.

If you have any questions about any RIBA election, please email **elections@riba.org**

Note: All times BST (GMT+1)

For more information visit **riba.org/elections**

#RIBAElections

WHY I RESIGNED MY ARB REGISTRATION

Regulation of function is the single most important issue for most RIBA members. Now I'm highlighting the absurdity of the current situation, writes president Chris Williamson

Above: RIBA President's Medal winner formally being given their medal by Chris Williamson.

I've been asked what prompted my decision not to renew my ARB registration, and why now.

The issue of regulation of function is – judging by my inbox – the single most important issue for most RIBA members, and I have found myself in the fortunate position of being able to highlight the absurdity of the current situation.

The issue, and I believe the solution, is intrinsically linked to my manifesto campaign for world-class, online lifelong learning to raise standards, ensure competence, and increase diversity and opportunity while allowing architects to curate their own careers by developing valuable specialisms.

On the campaign trail, I talked about regulation of function rather than title. My first few months in office have provided the opportunity to highlight the issue, and to formulate a plan for how regulation might improve.

I had the pleasure of sitting next to Judith Hackett at a posh dinner and was reminded that she believed that the "lowest-cost culture" in procurement is the biggest single danger to ensuring safety and encouraging best practice. I think most architects and many others in the construction industry would agree.

In September, I helped judge the Stirling Prize – an event that showed the very best of the profession and showcased our work to clients, politicians and society at large.

In October, I chaired the panel to decide on our nomination for the 2026 Royal Gold Medal and had the great pleasure of phoning the nominee, Níall McLaughlin (see page 16), to inform him. It was an emotional phone call!

In November, I presented the President's Medal awards to talented, energetic and enthusiastic students.

In December, I represented the profession alongside other creative industries with the British Council in Qatar and then presented the Asia Pacific Awards at the RIBA Architecture Festival Awards (RAFA) in Shenzen.

Each of these events highlighted the very best in our profession. Each made me even more aware of the need to fight for respect and representation.

But if there was one event in particular that encouraged me to speak out, it was one Saturday morning in November at the Quaker Hall on Euston Road, handing out over 300 certificates to graduates from RIBA Part 3 courses.

Speaking to the proud parents of these talented young architects afterwards was chastening. Most were perplexed by the absurdity of their hard-working and indebted offspring having to pay £225 to call themselves an architect, but with no regulation of function.

The fact that I was so willing to resign when they were so keen to join after studying was a bitter irony, but an easier choice for me than for them. Something had to be done.

I should say that I am against any form of protectionism: I think any client should be able to choose anyone to design a building for them. But there are certain areas of public safety, ethics and competence that need to be the preserve of competent professionals just as they are in medicine and law. We also need to recognise the limits of our own competence and act to fill the gaps.

We still need oversight to ensure that we educate, mentor and nurture world-class expertise. But one thing is clear: we need to change the current ridiculous and dangerous status quo.

Find out more about RIBA's campaign for competence-led regulation at riba.org

JACKIE KING, COURTESY OF RIBA

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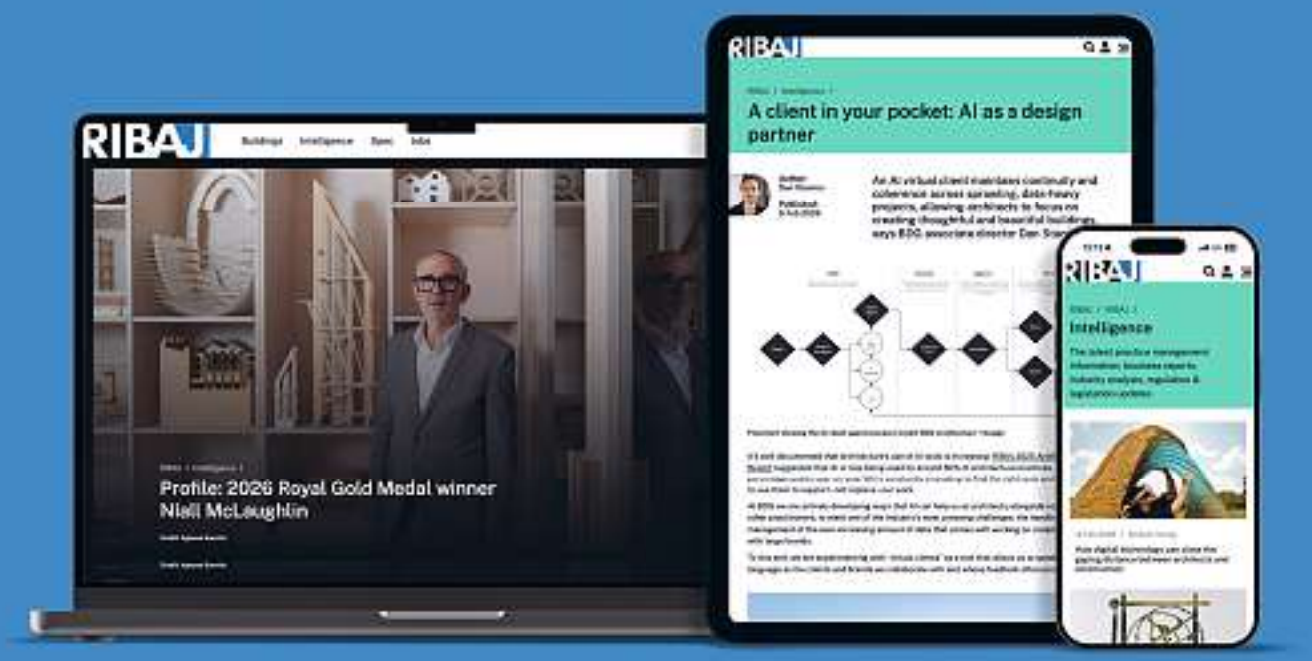

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OBITUARY: DAVID ROCK 1929—2025

By Mike Stiff

MONICA PIDGEON / RIBA COLLECTIONS

David Rock, who has died aged 96, was a hugely talented architect who made significant contributions to the profession, both as a co-founder of Rock Townsend and as president of RIBA.

Back in 1977, I was Rock Townsend's first year-out student when the studio was at 5 Dryden Street in London. Conceived and developed by David, it was the precursor of today's ubiquitous co-working spaces – a "working community" of more than 30 firms. The management structure of the practice was similarly radical: transparent, non-hierarchical and collaborative – a reflection of David's generosity and warmth of personality.

David was born and raised in Sunderland. He studied at Newcastle University in the early 1950s and, following National Service, began his career at the offices of Basil Spence. He then moved to become a founding partner of BDP's London office, which is where he met John Townsend. Together with Charles Thomson and Alastair Hay, they formed Rock Townsend in 1971.

While the practice is perhaps best known for its PoMo buildings at Angel and Chandos Place, its formative work was Middlesex Polytechnic, a radical high-tech fit-out of some very ordinary warehouses in Bounds Green, which sadly has not survived.

Another project, Vivat Ware, involved producing a design manual for East Hertfordshire District Council – an object lesson in guidance that combined town planning with architectural sensibilities. David both conceived the project and drove it to completion. It was this entrepreneurial streak that marked the practice out from many others at the time; not just having ideas for schemes but putting forward the resources and skills to make them happen.

Rock Townsend became a hothouse that nurtured young architects. John Lyall, Mark Foley and the founders of Wright & Wright and Hawkins\Brown all began their careers there.

Lyall remembers hearing stories of David's footballing career at Sunderland in the 1950s. "David said he was known for his devastating sliding tackles as a full-back," he recalls. "He continued that ability to be there at the right place at the right time when he became an architect, which he always did with kindness and humour."

David took a keen interest in the practices that Rock Townsend spawned, and was always there to give advice and help whenever it was needed. The lessons I learned from him had a big influence on the way we structured our own studio, Stiff + Trevillion. For example, salary reviews – including the partners' – were published and visible to the whole office.

David was an extremely talented artist, and our shared passion for drawing sustained our friendship over the years. He promoted and championed the Society of Architect Artists, and organised its annual exhibition, which used to be held at RIBA.

His retrospective exhibition at Chris Dyson's Eleven Spitalfields Gallery in 2022 showed his student work from the 1950s, alongside his "Piper-esque" observational pen and ink work that recorded his travels and holidays.

David was also an active and enthusiastic director of the Architects Benevolent Society. However, for many, he will be best remembered as RIBA president from 1997 to 1999. He brought the same pragmatic, no-nonsense approach to his leadership at Portland Place as he did in his practice. Notably, he instigated the move of the drawings collection to the V&A, where it enjoyed greater public access for nearly 30 years.

David first married Daphne Richards, with whom he had three sons and two daughters, and in 1989 was married again to Lesley Murray, who predeceased him. He is survived by four of his children and eight grandchildren.

Mike Stiff is co-founder and chairman of Stiff + Trevillion

IN MEMORIAM

HUGH ALEXANDER CAMPBELL
Elected 1962, Co Kerry

KEITH WILLIAM PEPPER
Elected 1962, London

KEAT EENH KHOO
Elected 1967, London

CHARLES NOEL FOX
Elected 1967, Devon

ALISTER MCGLASHAN
Elected 1969, Edinburgh

FRENI SHROFF
Elected 1971, London

STEWART JOHN SNOOK
Elected 1973, Surrey

CHRISTOPHER JOHN BAILEY
Elected 1975, Cheshire

BILL CRAMPIN
Elected 1975, Nottingham

GRAHAM PHILLIP HANDLEY
Elected 1983, Cambridgeshire

MARTYN JAMES LEE GREEN
Elected 1991, Surrey

BRASS ELLIPSOGRAPH JOHN FAREY

Designed by John Farey (1791-1851)

Brass ellipsograph, early 19th century

By India Whiteley

The English mechanical engineer John Farey Jr was a polymath who turned his hand to novel inventions, patent law, manufacturing and encyclopaedic illustrations alongside his work for his family's engineering business. Driven by the need to accurately produce perspective drawings within tight time constraints, the ellipsograph was one of several drawing instruments Farey devised, coming a few years after his tool for drawing converging lines. Both instruments won him medals from the Society of Arts. The ellipsograph enabled the user to draw accurate ellipses (or ovals), and therefore to convey circles in perspective. It was taken up enthusiastically by architects, who could use it to draw arches, vaulted ceilings and curved staircases. The user would hold the square frame to the page with one hand, and revolve the inner circles at the required distance using a pen with the other. James Smith's Compendium of Practical Inventions praised the instrument's ability to render "any required degree of eccentricity". The device was so popular that in 1824 it was featured in the sixth edition of Encyclopædia Britannica. ■

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RIBA COLLECTIONS

SonaSpray acoustic ceiling in 'Downstairs at dMFK'. ©Ed Reeve.

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