



# 25.05.06 CONTAINER ARCHITECTURE

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## CHEAPNESS ALLOWS DEVELOPERS TO PROVIDE HIGHER SPACE STANDARDS

By Ruth Slavid

Container architecture is not 'the future of architecture,' Kenneth Powell concludes at the end of his review of ABK's Riverside Building at Trinity Buoy Wharf in east London (see pages 27-37). Certainly it isn't. The idea of seeing the country covered in piles of adapted containers is as unattractive as it is unfeasible. But both Peter Ahrends of ABK and Eric Reynolds of Urban Space Management, the driving force behind the project, are confident that it is an attractive solution that could be used more widely.

One of the appeals is economic. Containers are frequently dumped because 'for a lot of people they are disposable packaging,' says Reynolds. Since the UK is a net importer of goods, there is often nothing to put in the containers for the return journey. Although the price of second-hand containers has risen steeply over the course of the developments at Trinity Buoy Wharf, Reynolds does not believe that this is a steady trend. Instead, he says, containers are

a commodity whose price fluctuates with supply and the scrap price of steel. The importance of cheapness in our overheated housing market is that it allows responsible developers to provide higher space standards for those at the lower end of the market than new-build housing. Both Reynolds and Ahrends see potential for containers to be used on small infill sites on lost backlands, in addition to relatively large schemes such as Trinity Buoy Wharf.

In visual terms, there is the appeal both of the found object and of the discipline of repeating units. As Reynolds says, the towers of Canary Wharf, opposite Trinity Buoy Wharf, are essentially a series of stacked boxes. If these seem too restrictive, think of the alternatives. Alex Wright's entertaining review of Jonathan Bell's book *21st Century House* (see page 45) points out that too much of what is being designed today is gruesome. Widespread adoption of container architecture certainly seems preferable.



## CONTRIBUTORS



David Grandorge, whose photographs are featured in the *Building Study* on pages 27-37, is a photographer and lecturer at London Metropolitan University

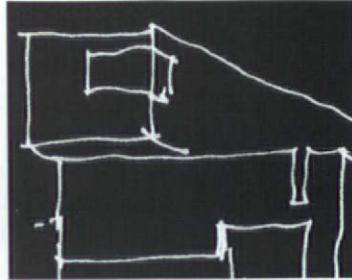


Hattie Hartman, who writes about the refurbishment of Kew Palace on pages 39-43, is a former practising architect and freelance journalist, and the AJ's technical editor



Alex Wright, who reviews Jonathan Bell's book *21st Century House* on page 45, is an architect and lead examiner for the ARB who teaches at the University of Bath

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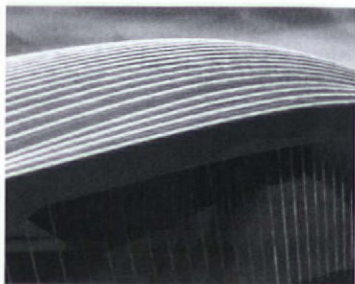
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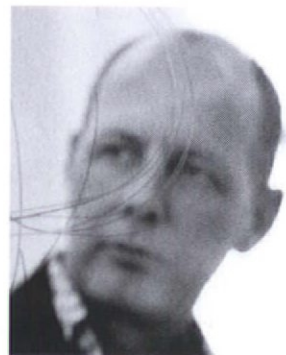
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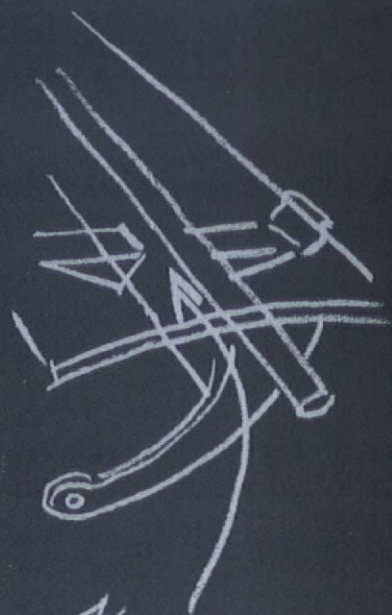


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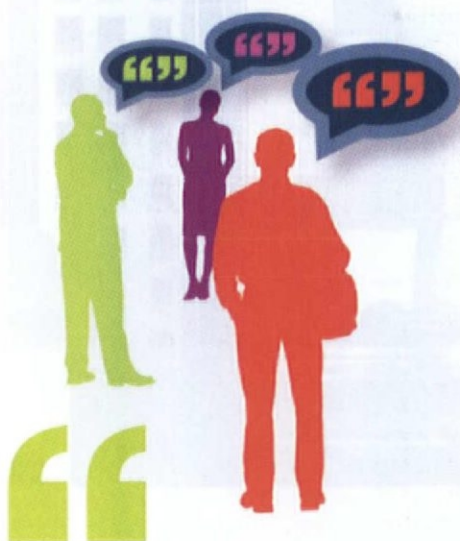
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\*A Vision of Britain, 1989



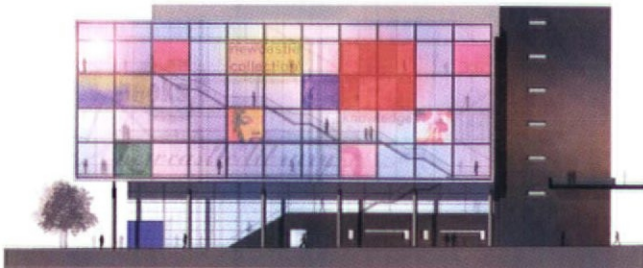
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#### FRIDAY 19 MAY

- **Takeover-hungry Capita Percy Thomas seals Ruddle Wilkinson acquisition**
- Auditors reveal SOM's £1 million Paddington Health Campus bonanza
- Frank Gehry plans to grow – not shrink – Hove towers after CABE and EH mauling
- Birmingham city centre evacuated as glass falls from Glenn Howells' Rotunda

#### THURSDAY 18 MAY

- **Memorial to 'Greek' Thomson (right) vandalised just days before it is unveiled**
- Conservationists vow to continue battle to stop KPF Smithfield scheme
- Tsunami Memorial competition: Spaniards see off hundreds to win
- Ghost of Prescott looms large over Yvette Cooper announcement



#### TUESDAY 23 MAY

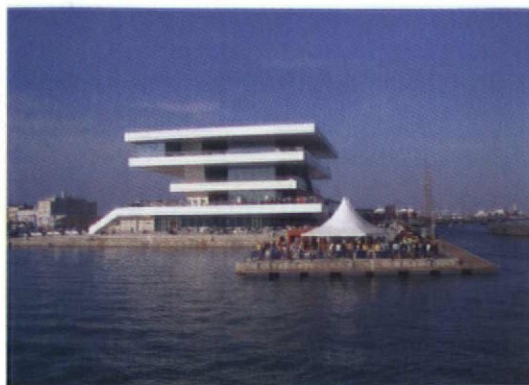
- Fury as RIAS turns back on Evolution
- Piercy Connor lands pan-European Manubuild competition
- **Ryder HKS wins backing for new Newcastle PFI library (above)**
- Holyrood window cracks 'not due to subsidence'

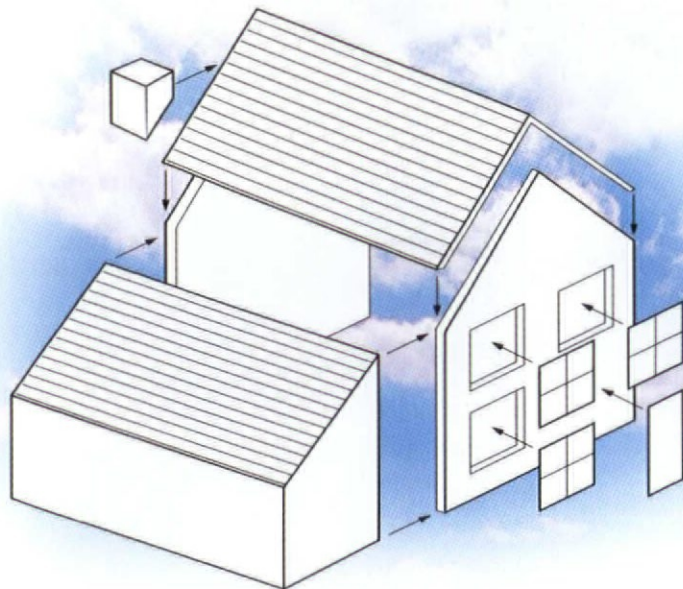
#### MONDAY 22 MAY

- **The Mayor of London admits his carbon targets are impossible (see page 14)**
- Secret talks under way to set up the educational version of British Council for Offices
- Plans to transform London's Grade II-listed mock-Tudor Liberty landmark rejected
- ARB under fire again as simmering CPD row reignites

#### WEDNESDAY 24 MAY

- Livingstone's carbon-neutral Olympics under fire
- **Chipperfield completes yachting building in Valencia (right)**
- EH leaves doomed Fortress House for listed Waterhouse building
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CHARLES GLOVER

Foster promised £100,000 for students

## FOSTER DONATION FAILS TO SHOW

By Richard Waite

Norman Foster has yet to hand over a £100,000 donation to help out students, nearly 18 months after it was publicly promised to the RIBA.

The cash pledge, made by Foster in December 2004 at the President's Medals presentation ceremony, was universally welcomed at the time.

However, a year and a half on, there are growing concerns about what has happened to the money.

As yet there is no sign of the release of the promised cash, nor of any 'suitable project' which Foster and Partners, together with the Norman Foster Foundation, would be prepared to back.

The lack of progress has dismayed Alex MacLaren, who was head of student body Archaos when Foster committed the cash.

She said: '[We] greeted the news with great enthusiasm at the time. We would be very keen to find out how the money will be used and we have several proposals for Foster as to how it might be put to best use if he's stuck for ideas.'

MacLaren suggested a contribution to a student hardship fund – similar to the donation made last year by the Garfield Weston Foundation to the tune of £10,000.

The money could also be used to help nurture regional and national links, improve student advisory provision and support better relations between architectural schools and practices, she said.

MacLaren added: 'Any of these areas would benefit greatly from this generous cash injection. As a national, free, voluntarily run society that

survives on a basic annual budget of less than £10,000, [Archaos] knows that a little can go a long way!'

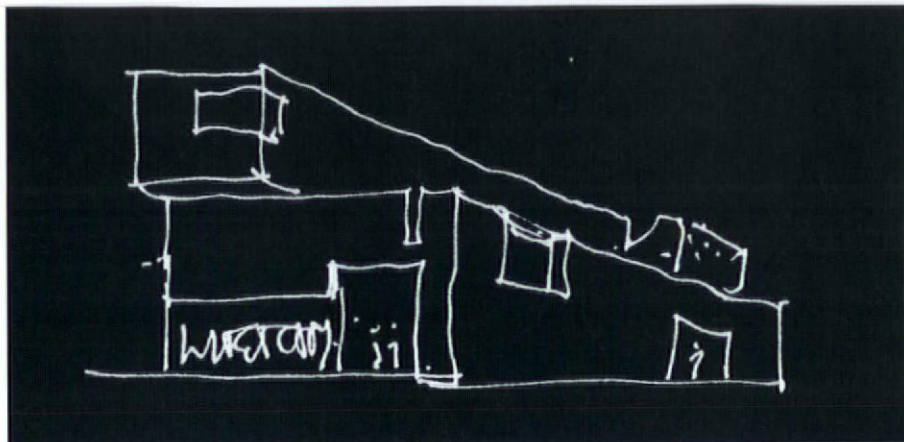
But despite months of apparent inactivity, both the RIBA and Foster deny there is any hold-up in the donation.

A spokeswoman for the RIBA said they are working together to 'agree a suitable project for the funds'.

She said: 'It is certainly not unusual for a project funded by such a significant donation to require such extensive planning.'

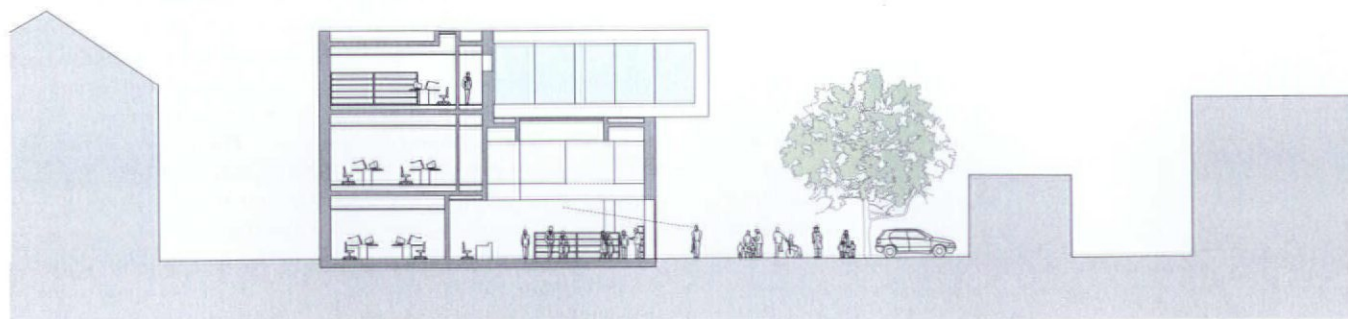
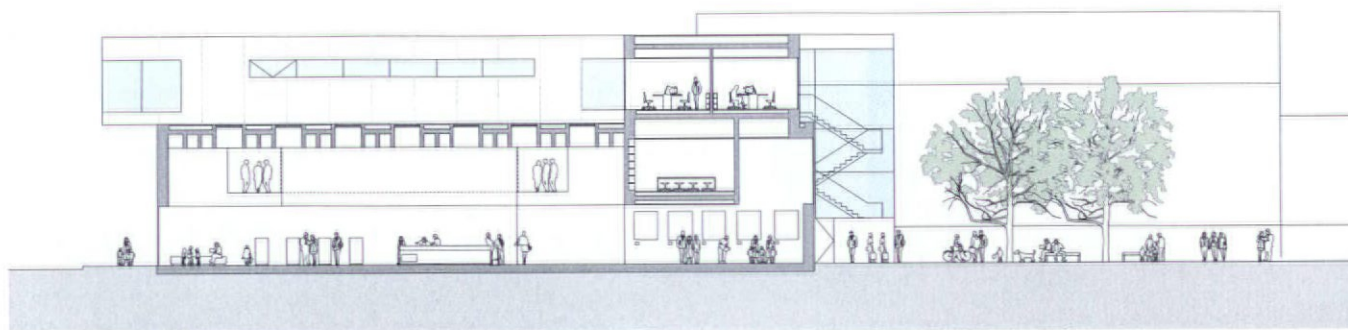
'The RIBA refutes any suggestion that the Norman Foster Foundation or Foster and Partners have reneged on or are delaying this donation.'

'We look forward to launching an imaginative programme together for the benefit of students of architecture.'

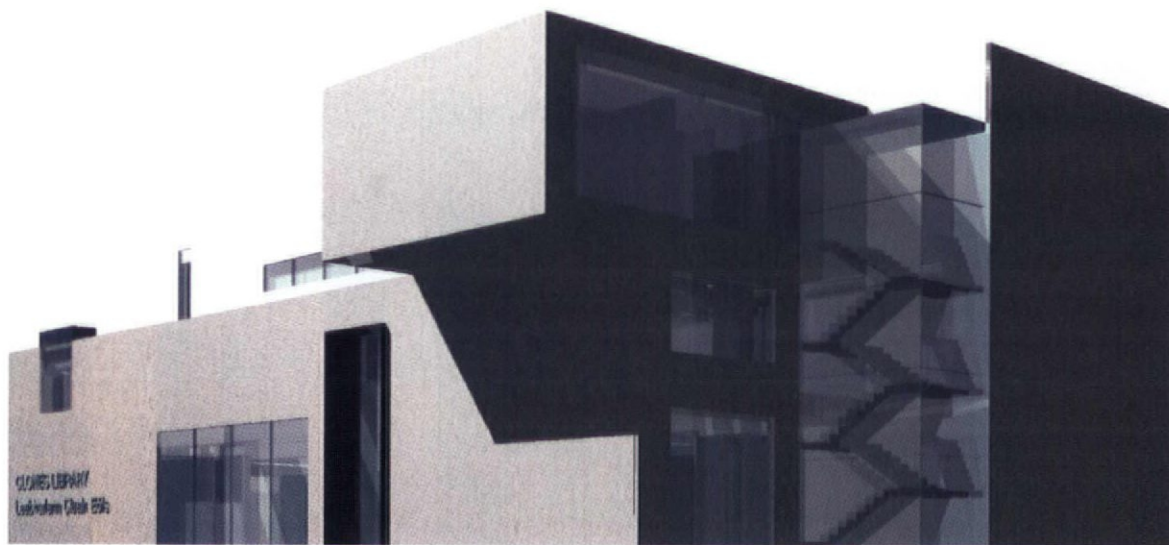


1. Concept sketch
2. Cross sections
- 3 & 4. Windows will be 'punched' through the solid-concrete exterior of the building

1.



2.



3.

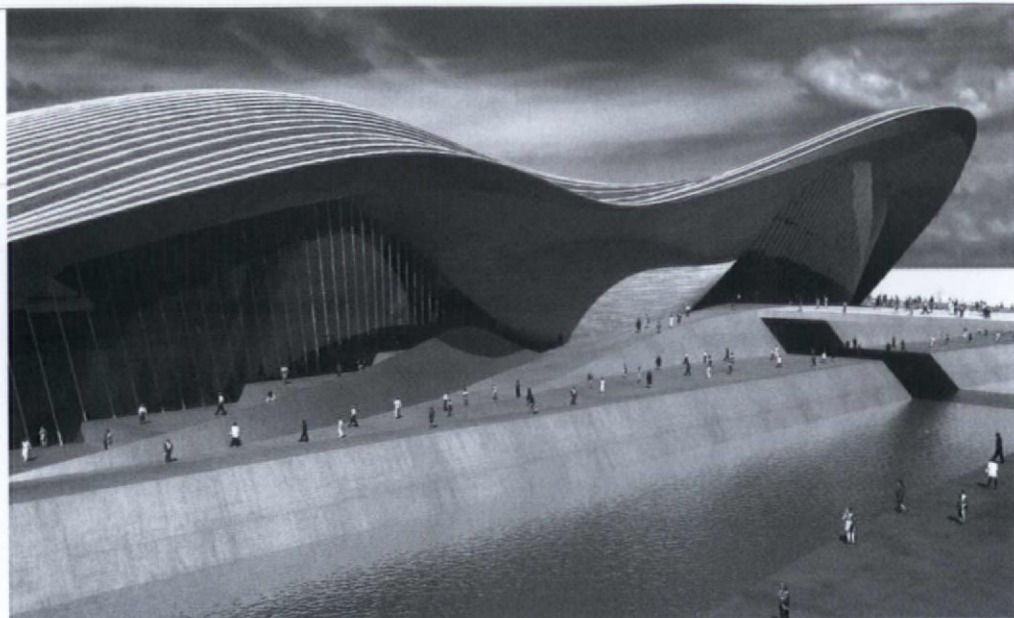


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### KEITH WILLIAMS RAISES THE TONE IN CLONES

These are the first images of Keith Williams Architects' new library building in Clones in County Monaghan, Ireland. The €4.5 million (£3 million) project, which has won funding from the Irish Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, will become a key part of the redevelopment of the town's historic centre. Due to start on site later this year, the 1,450m<sup>2</sup> scheme will house an adult and a children's library, exhibition space, local history archives, and the headquarters of the county's library services. According to the Unicorn Theatre designer, the main library will boast 'a single, double-height volume both top lit and side lit'. Windows will be 'punched' through the solid-concrete panelled exterior, opening up vistas to the town's major monuments. The Clones development is the practice's third major cultural project in Ireland and was handed to Williams back in 2004 after a competitive interview. Williams will be discussing these schemes and his high-profile Unicorn building at a lecture at the RIBA on 6 June.

*By Richard Waite*



An as-yet-unspecified proportion of renewable technologies will be used to power Zaha Hadid's Aquatics Centre

## FALSE START FOR GREEN OLYMPICS

By Clive Walker

London's 2012 Olympics are being heralded as potentially the greenest show on earth. But the revelation that funds intended to combat the capital's carbon dioxide emissions have been siphoned off to finance the Games has left the Olympics' environmental credo withering at the edges.

Plans for a £6 million 'revolving fund' for investment in renewables and energy efficiency were aborted earlier this year by the London Climate Change Agency (LCCA) – part financed by the London Development Agency (LDA) – due to 'funding pressure from the Olympics'.

'Since we won the Olympics the LDA has had a bit of a cash shortfall for the first couple of years,' LCCA chief development officer Allan Jones told the London Assembly.

At face value, the disappearance of £6 million into the 2012 money pit isn't going to make or break the capital's emissions targets. It's too late anyway. Last week London Mayor Ken Livingstone confessed the capital will miss its 2010 goal for CO<sub>2</sub> gases.

This comes a few months after Livingstone was forced to admit London will not come close to hitting key targets for zero-carbon developments in the capital (AJ 17.11.05).

But the loss of the LCCA's fund suggests the Olympic vision – far from being the world's first carbon-neutral Games – may be increasing London's CO<sub>2</sub> count by default. There is concern that the revolving fund is only the thin edge of the wedge and that the Olympics will continue squeezing green resources.

'It's very worrying that even the modest proposal of a £6 million revolving fund for renewables has been dropped due to funding pressures from the Olympics,' said Darren Johnson, Green Party London Assembly member. 'There is also a real risk of less funding and fewer staff being available to support other green initiatives.'

The funding debacle is exacerbated by fears the Games will not be the carbon-neutral exemplar Livingstone is hoping for. For example, a year after being awarded the Games, there is still no indication which renewable technologies will be used to power Zaha Hadid's Aquatics Centre.

Johnson this week called on Livingstone to clarify what proportion of the Aquatic Centre's heating will be supplied by on-site renewables.

Livingstone said: 'As the project progresses, the architect will be expected to work within the framework of Olympic Delivery Authority sustainability policy, which seeks to secure carbon efficiency and the provision of a new combined heat and power and renewable-energy infrastructure for the park.'

This has not satisfied the Green Party, which insists energy-efficient design should be integrated from the outset, not bolted on at the last minute.

Johnson said: 'We might not get the promised on-site renewables needed for the greenest Olympics ever.'

As Olympics fever heats up, so the issue of sustainable development may slip from the top of the LDA's agenda. For the time being initiatives such as zero-carbon development remain intact, but for how long?

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# REVOLUTIONARY PRACTICE

By Ed Dorrell

*Ben van Berkel is a founding partner of the Amsterdam-based UN Studio, the practice behind the new Mercedes Benz Museum, which opens next week in Stuttgart. Formerly with Calatrava, his office was first called Van Berkel & Bos.*

Ben van Berkel is really quite Dutch. The way he describes his practice prior to its relaunch in 1999 as 'crazy' is nothing short of wonderful. There really aren't enough Dutch-accented people describing things as 'crazy' these days, are there?

But let's stop the stereotyping. The point is that van Berkel's working life at the firm before its metamorphosis into UN Studio was indeed crazy, because he 'could only do design work at night and at the weekend'. The rest of the time he was managing the burgeoning office.

There are many more-conservative architects who would think it crazier still for van Berkel to have taken this as a cue to completely transform the business, change the name and revolutionise its structure. But there can be little doubt that it worked. The 49 year old now claims that he can spend anything up to 70 per cent of his time in the office at the drawing board.

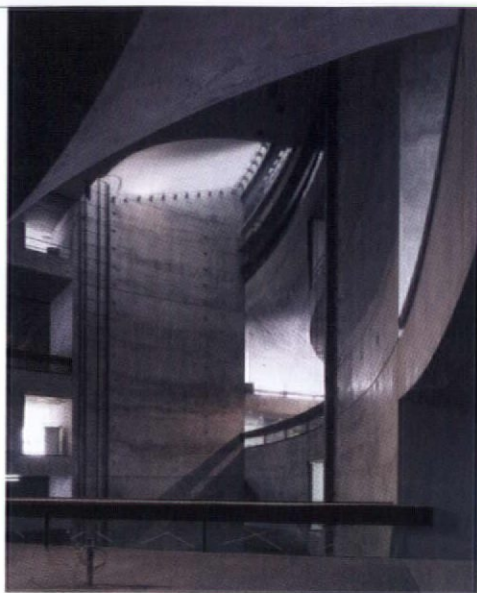
This is no mean achievement given that, along with Caroline Bos, he is at the helm of a 65-strong practice, which is producing some of its biggest and boldest work to date, such as the Mercedes Benz Museum in Stuttgart.

In many ways, however, it sums up much of van Berkel's attitude to architecture that the structure of his business is extremely important to him.

For example, the former AA student – who, alongside Farshid Moussavi of Foreign Office Architects was taught by Zaha Hadid in his final year – is as interested in the way computers can aid the organisation of a project as in the way that they push design possibilities.

This is very characteristic of the man. Many of his comments are not exactly what you'd expect from someone considered one of Europe's most promising young(ish) designers. Take this, for example: 'I only really like Frank Lloyd Wright's later stuff when he became a bit kitsch.' There's not a lot you can say to that, is there?

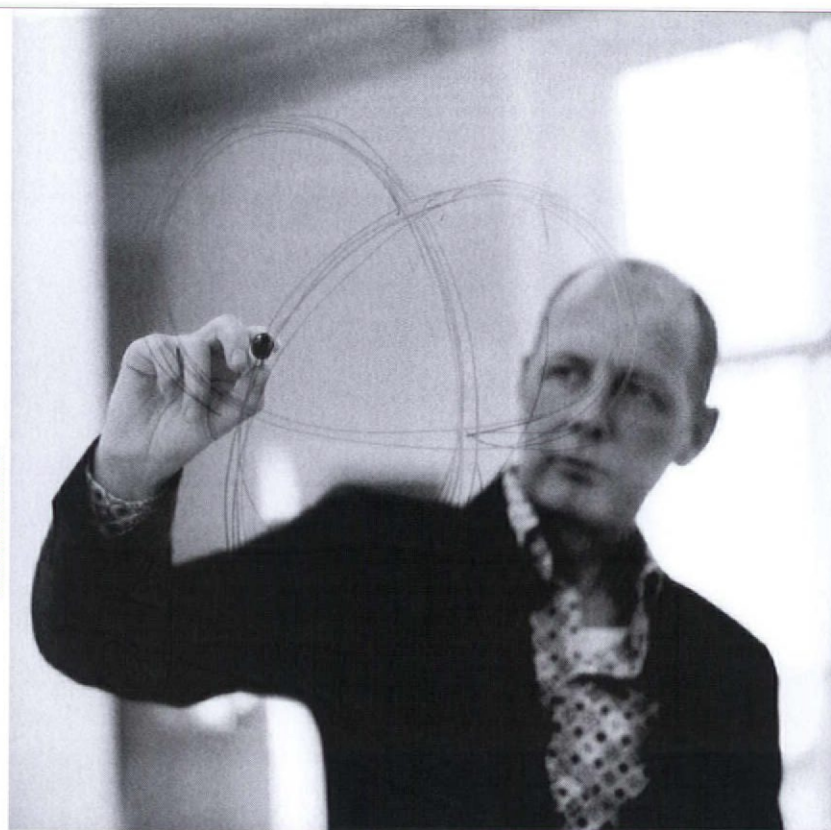
But the point is that van Berkel does want to be seen as somewhat different to the rest of the architectural set, an emphasis that brings us back



BRIGIDA GONZALEZ

1.

1. The Mercedes Benz Museum, Stuttgart
2. van Berkel's hands-on approach



CAPAZ/NIIRANDA KOOPMAN

2.

to the way he structures UN Studio, which until the 1999 tipping-point had been van Berkel & Bos Architectuurbureau.

He is clearly proud of the way the firm changed. He says: 'We have a collaborative approach to the way we work. We were keen to get away from this idea that there would be project architects working away on their own schemes. We wanted to get specialists into every position. It means that if you are good at biometrics then that is what you do,' he says.

So proud in fact that the practice wrote a book about the changes. 'We didn't expect it to sell anything – it was more of a manifesto for the new practice – but we've now sold 30,000 copies,' he says.

It is, to be honest, challenging drawing him on

the subject of either influence or style, a fact that is more than a little surprising given that this is the man who was once reported as describing Mies Van Der Rohe as 'unimaginative'.

'We have a tendency to say as a practice that we don't have a philosophy,' he tells me with pride. 'We certainly don't worry whether a scheme ends up as curved or as a box.'

But what the enigmatic Dutchman does say is that he is less interested in architectural outcomes than he is in the process of getting to them.

He says: 'Organisation is to me the most interesting thing. This is what is so interesting about using computers. They can aid this organisation. It means that the engineer and the architect can be designing a project at the same time. It becomes fluid.

'The notion of what is a dynamic form can come out of this.

'I believe that the future of design as a result can be described as "somewhere between art and airport"'. Whatever that means. He continues: 'The processes that we are working on can liberate designs from stylistic reference.'

This deep-seated interest in engineering and process is one of the few topics that repeatedly crops up in the conversation – it is clearly a key part of the way van Berkel sees himself.

He sums this up as 'belonging to the Anglo-Saxon mix between engineering and architecture.'

One last question. Why have you not built anything in Britain? Is it because of the planning system? He responds: 'I am building some offices

down at Battersea Power Station with Arup. And actually I like the planners in London. They make it more challenging to build and that often leads to a better outcome.'

There are undoubtedly more than a few veterans of the British scene in general and that site in particular who would think this attitude more than a little 'crazy'.

*Ben van Berkel is giving a lecture entitled Design Models at the RIBA on Tuesday 30 May at 6.30pm. Thames & Hudson has just published a monograph on UN Studio (£36).*



1.

### AEDAS COMBINES OLD AND NEW IN CENTRAL BOLTON

Aedas has won planning permission for this five-storey mixed-use scheme in central Bolton. The 8,500m<sup>2</sup> building, which gained full planning approval last week, will provide two floors of primary retail space with basement storage and modern office space above. While most existing on-site architecture faces the wrecking ball, Aedas plans to retain a 1932 four-storey building, known as Knowsley House, which is distinguished by its Portland stone facade. The entrance foyer is to be refurbished and an attic storey added at roof level to knit together old and new parts of the scheme. Retail elevations will feature a projecting glass bay at first-floor level, emphasising the main entrance. Upper floors will be silicone-jointed curtain walling. Commissioned by Gordon Moon Properties, the project is budgeted to cost £10 million and is scheduled for completion within 18 months.

*By Clive Walker*



2.

DEANS GATE

1. The five-storey scheme will combine retail and office space
2. Concept sketch showing a 1932 building retained to the left

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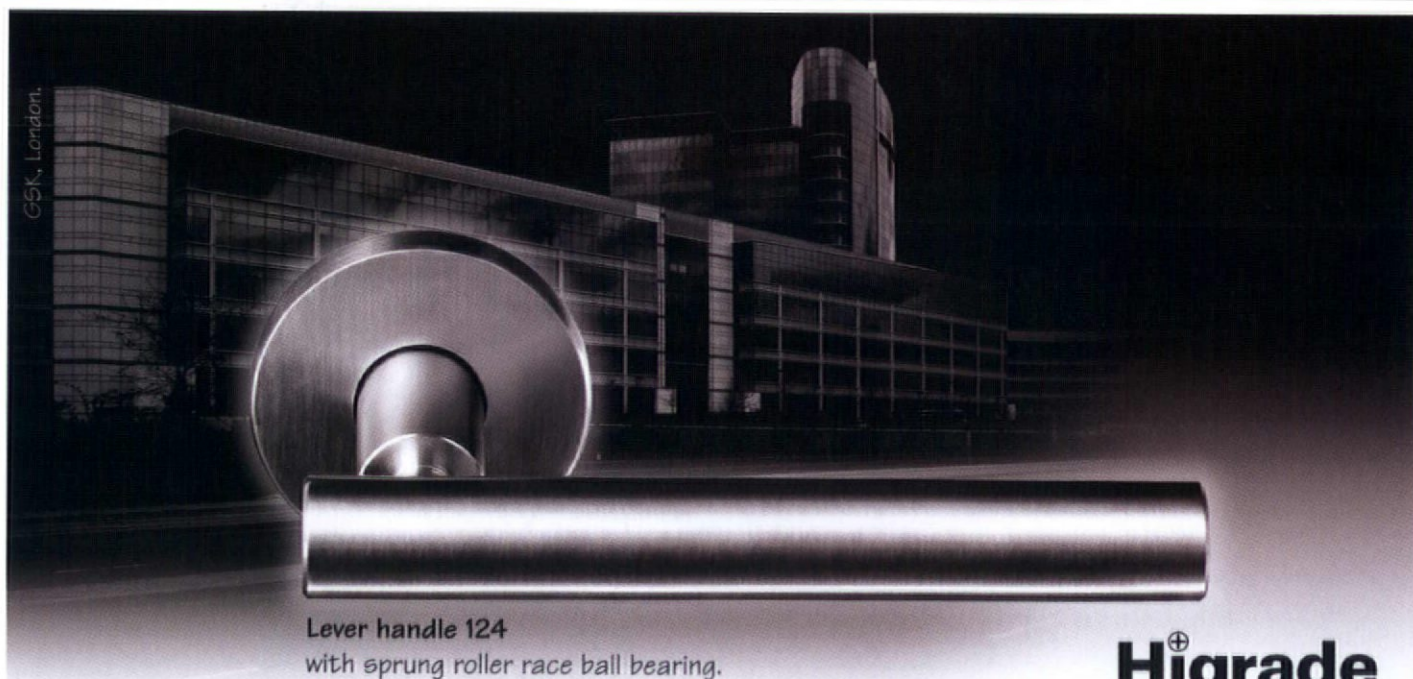
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*'The metaphorical control panel of 2012 is not yet sounding the dreaded klaxon blare of Dome! Dome! – but a red warning light is flashing'*

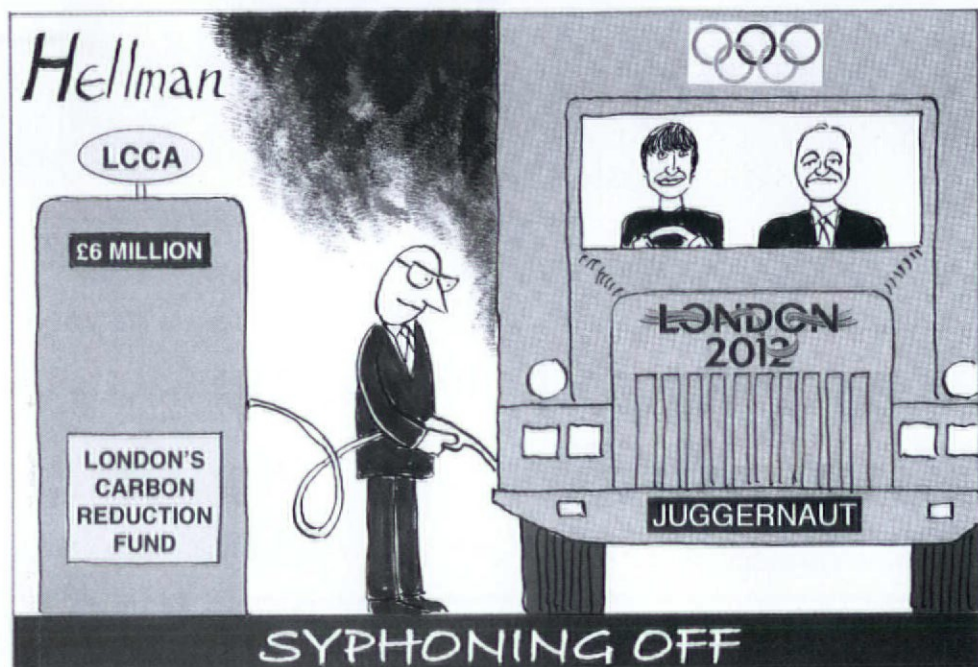
Rowan Moore is worried about the Olympics.  
*Evening Standard*, 16.05.06

*'The state of the roads offers a telling insight into the values, achievements and aspirations of any civilisation – as anyone who has been to Lambeth or Burundi knows'*

Stephen Bayley. *IoS*,  
21.05.06

*'Look at London or Paris – they're both filthy. You don't get that in Tokyo'*

Tadao Ando. *Daily Telegraph*, 20.05.06



#### IN THE GHETTO

An extraordinary statistic has come our way, courtesy of **David Morley Architects**. Apparently, the practice says, there is a registered architect for every 10m<sup>2</sup> in 'London's trendy' Clerkenwell. Few will be particularly surprised that there are loads of designers hanging out in the former watchmakers' quarter – you only have to watch the comings and goings at **Zaha's** favourite café **Moro**. But the fact that you're likely to be nearer to an architect than you are to a rat if you visit this architectural ghetto will surely reinforce some stereotyping of the trendier end of this entertaining business...

#### THAT'S 'DAM SURPRISING

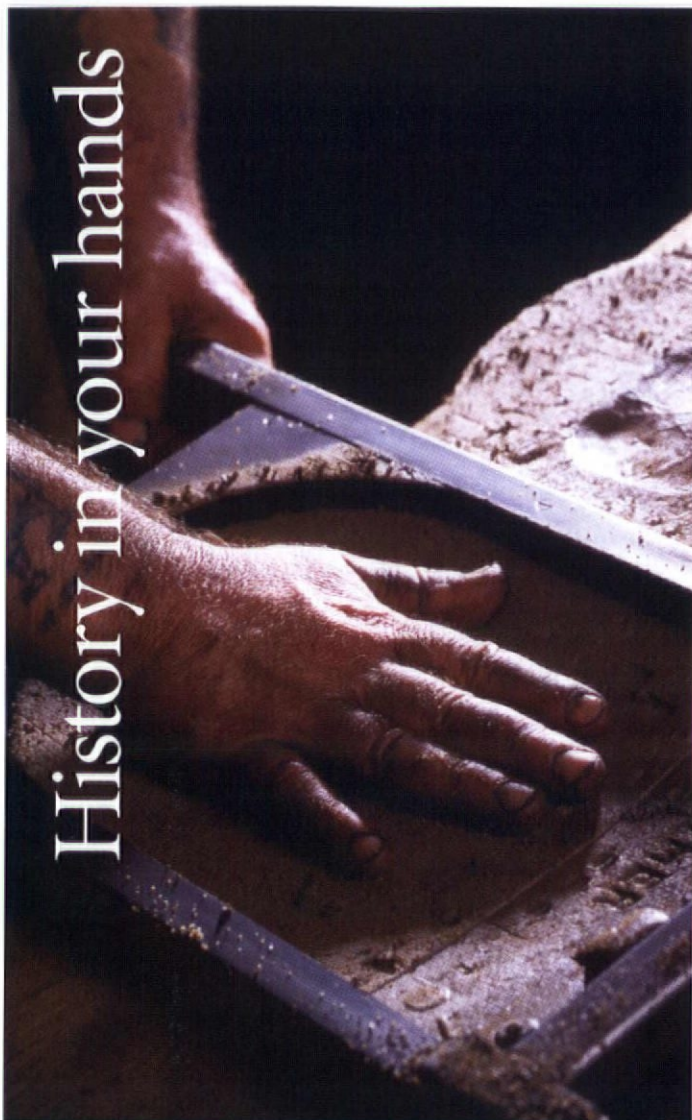
News has reached Astragal of an unlikely group of British

architects currently at work in The Netherlands on a site adjacent to Amsterdam station called Oosterdokseiland. According to one of Astragal's many spies in the low countries, a trio made up of **MacCreanor Lavington**, **Future Systems** and **Bennetts Associates** is busy grafting away on site on schemes that form part of an **Erick Van Egeraat** masterplan. While the fact that MacCreanor Lavington is involved makes a lot of sense – the practice has a great rep with the Dutch – one cannot help but wonder what the thinking was behind the other two appointments. All three, of course, are admirable architects, but they do seem to have nothing whatsoever in common. Or are we missing something here? Answers on a postcard please.

#### SHOW AND TELL

The **Barbican Art Gallery** has a few belting exhibitions up its sleeve. You didn't know? Well open your diary, sharpen your pencil and let the ever-nosey Astragal tell you all about them. The first one to scribble on the calendar is a new **Alvar Aalto** show. The exhibition itself, which will fill the gallery in the heart of the 1960s central London icon from February 22 next year, will be designed by the 'Origami Emperor', Japanese architect **Shigeru Ban**. Another show to keep an eye out for is the RIBA's high-profile **Le Corbusier** exhibition. Apparently, top secret discussions are currently under way with the Barbican to bring the **Vitra**-produced show to London after it finishes in Liverpool in 2008. Remember, only use a pencil.

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## LOCAL AUTHORITIES MUST EASE PRESSURE ON CABE

Your article 'CABE's Capabilities Overstretched' (AJ 18.05.06), highlights the value local authorities attach to advice from CABE's design review programme. Around 19,000 major planning applications are decided every year and CABE considers 350 in its role as a non-statutory consultee. We would have to expand our capacity by more than 50-fold to meet that kind of demand, which is clearly unrealistic.

We recognise that London is under huge development pressure – but so too are housing-market renewal and housing growth areas, and the core cities. CABE's remit covers the whole of England, and in deciding on whether to review a case, we are alert to other significant projects across the country – and there are many schemes outside London that we are not able to review.

Part of the answer clearly is to establish regional design review panels, such as the South East Regional Design Panel, and CABE will shortly be issuing guidance on setting these up.

But the underlying issue here is the increasing requirement for local authorities to give appropriate and, importantly, consistent consideration to design issues. This is a result of the new and very welcome significance accorded to good design in planning policy, particularly PPS1. In order to respond to this, local authorities not only need to consider design issues when dealing with planning applications but are also increasingly required to be proactive, for example in establishing a tall-buildings policy.

This is good news, but it poses a widespread resource issue. Many local authorities do not currently have adequate access to design expertise, and this is the challenge that we need to address through skills development, capacity building and better resourcing at a local level.

*Selina Mason, director of architecture and design review, CABE*

## HOSPITALS ARE NOT THE PRIMARY ISSUE FOR ICT

Your article on ICT in healthcare (AJ 18.05.06) was in fact wholly devoted to hospital IT, even though the government's healthcare ICT programme is as much, if not more, about primary care, where healthcare will be increasingly delivered, than hospitals. But the article's generalisations could be applied to anything.

In another triumph of missing the point, John Gummer and your editorial have failed to grasp that control in residential development is not just about 'aesthetic' matters, such as mock stone cladding or inappropriate windows, which are already uncontrolled, but about ensuring that neighbours' rights to light and amenity are protected. The General Development Order already gives householders more rope to play with than is probably needed.

*Alan Kennedy, London SW12*

## MURRAY IS DOWN BUT NOT OUT AT THE BIENNALE

Your claim that I would 'step down from the top job at the London Architecture Biennale' (ajplus 11.05.06) rather dramatises an

off-the-cuff comment and I thought I should reassure you that I fully intend to stay involved with the Biennale in 2008. I just think that someone else should be director. Four years is quite enough for one person; an event like this continually needs new ideas – after all, the director of the Venice Biennale changes with every show.

If we are to ensure the Biennale continues to exist we need to create firm foundations for its future; the disappointing level of funding from the Arts Council and Creative London means that we need to evaluate long-term plans and that my energies – with the support of the committee – might be better used in helping to set up the platform from which future Biennales can grow.

*Peter Murray, by email*

## ARB AND RIBA MAINTAIN PROFESSIONALISM

Responses to the RIBA's core curriculum on continuing professional development (CPD) reflect the importance of this issue to the future of the profession.

The ARB worked very closely with the RIBA in developing the core curriculum for two reasons: first, to assure the RIBA that anyone meeting its requirements would be likely to satisfy the ARB that they had maintained their competence, and second, to enable the ARB to assure the public about the competence of those on the register without placing any additional requirements on the vast majority of architects.

The RIBA has assured the ARB that its CPD scheme will also be available to the 30 per cent of registrants who are not RIBA members, and the ARB warmly welcomes this. The progress made on CPD reflects the real working relationship between our two organisations, particularly in the areas of education, qualifications and prescription.

Because of initiatives such as the RIBA's, the ARB is about to consider proposals for a similar scheme, based on RIBA requirements, which will provide assurance to those using architects that the profession keeps up to date and maintains competence to practise. If agreed by the ARB, consultation with the profession and professional bodies will take place during the summer. We hope your readers will give us their views.

*Alan Crane, chairman, ARB Prescription Committee*

## HAPPINESS IS ALL IN THE DETAILS

With reference to Alain de Botton's piece 'The Power of Architecture' (AJ 27.04.06), I have not yet read de Botton's latest book, *The Architecture of Happiness*, and doubt if I shall, due to its curious title. Does he not realise this will only encourage the idiocy of the average builder, for instance, to add sunbursts to the elevations, thus pleasing the ghastliness of future inhabitants? Will that find us anywhere useful?

Several years ago I heard an excellent lecture by a creative architect on Louis Kahn's Kimbell Art Museum. His slides were only marred by the disgustingly obese frames of male and

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## LETTERS

female Americans who clearly failed to understand the sheer beauty of Kahn's detailing. That aspect of a good building is little different from the way we should keep our own bodies, but if we do not care for the latter we will never really understand the former. It is all essentially simple.

Myself, I should continue to steer clear of the 'celibates' de Botton speaks of. Most of them know nothing of creative action and are, indeed, abominably barren in that respect.

*Patrick Hodgkinson, Emeritus Professor of Architecture and Urbanism, University of Bath*

### ANOTHER DIMENSION OF WINDOWS

I read the April issue of *AJ Specification* with considerable interest, particularly the section on doors and windows.

Our practice for many years advocated the use of over-rebated timber windows set onto sub-sills and secured by cleats behind rebated jambs and lintels. We were happy to demonstrate the many advantages of such construction in the brochure we designed for Burlington some years ago.

Unfortunately, when reproducing details based on that brochure, your draughtsman has illustrated the jamb of the window frame in the wrong plane, overlapping the facing brickwork rather than being set behind it. Failure to think and detail in three dimensions is sadly all too common; it is most unfortunate to find it in such a prestigious publication as yours!

As for the article on timber windows; it appears the UK has still not learned from Europe the merits of windows which open in and have internal glazing beads. Such windows should be fully glazed and finished complete with all ironmongery, and be fitted from inside the building as part of the finishing stages of construction; windows and doors are costly components which should never be built into wet masonry, as is sadly still the norm for most house-builders. Fortunately the requirements of the new Part L will oblige our industry to adopt improved standards of design and construction – but only if we think and detail in 3D!

*J M E Potter, by email*

The slate drawings were as supplied by Burlington. We merely relabelled them – Ed.

### A BETTER WAY TO KEEP THE BIRDS AT BAY

Re. the article *Keeping the Birds at Bay* (*AJ Specification*, April 2006). The Pigeon Control Advisory Service (PiCAS) provides professional consultancy services and advises on aspects of bird control worldwide. It is recommended by the RSPCA, the RSPB and many other agencies worldwide, and is the only organisation of its type providing independent non-commercially biased advice on all aspects of bird control.

In many cases huge sums of money can be saved, and indeed the architectural integrity of a building or site be maintained, by working with the architect at the design/planning stage to ensure the site will offer few if any bird occupancy opportunities. Many of the deterrents available are costly to install, far from aesthetically pleasing and have a very short lifespan, in some cases only a matter of months. PiCAS will work with the architect to reduce the need for retrospective controls of any type.

PiCAS also specialises in providing control mechanisms for listed buildings and ancient monuments, working closely with English Heritage and local authority listed buildings/planning officers. Too many pest-control companies compromise Listed Buildings regulations due to lack of knowledge of this complex and sensitive area of operation. The products recommended by the author of your piece on bird control (i.e. spring-wire systems) have in our experience severely compromised the fabric of a considerable number of listed buildings – Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, to name but one. And the use of a bird of prey as a bird scarer, also mentioned in your piece, is not only expensive but totally ineffective as a control option.

I would also like to add that PiCAS UK was chosen by the Scottish Parliament as sole consultant for bird control on the Scottish Parliament site in Edinburgh, based on PiCAS' wholly independent status.

*Guy Merchant, group director, PiCAS Group*

*Please address letters to: The Editor, The Architects' Journal, 151 Rosebery Avenue, London EC1R 4GB, fax 020 7505 6701, or email [angela.newton@emap.com](mailto:angela.newton@emap.com) to arrive by 10am on the Monday before publication. The Architects' Journal reserves the right to edit letters.*



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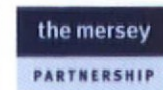


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# CONTAINER ARCHITECTURE



1. The stairwell at ABK's Riverside Building

## PREFABRICATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN A CHALLENGE TO CONVENTIONAL NOTIONS OF THE ARCHITECT'S ROLE

*By Kenneth Powell. Photography by David Grandorge*

The possibilities of prefabricated construction have preoccupied architects for the better part of a century, with Le Corbusier's Dom-ino House of 1914 a pioneering concept in mass production. Nine years later, Le Corbusier looked forward to a time when a house would 'no longer be this solidly built thing which sets out to defy time and decay, and which is an expensive luxury by which wealth can be shown; it will be a tool as the motor car is becoming a tool'. Mass-produced houses, along the lines of the Citrohan House of 1922, would be the result of 'a coalition between architects and men of taste'.

The vision of a prefabricated future remained alive over the next half-century. Walter Gropius and Konrad Wachsmann developed the idea of the 'packaged house', but failed to sell it to the American housing industry even in the aftermath of the Second World War, when new homes were desperately needed. Buckminster Fuller's Wichita House, which he claimed could be mass-produced for under \$4,000, remained a prototype. The Californian Case Study Houses were in effect custom-made one-offs, not models for mass housing. The Zip-Up House, which Richard Rogers imagined being produced by the thousand, remained no more than an interesting idea, though fed into some of Rogers' built projects. 'As industrial products,' Colin Davies commented in *The Prefabricated Home* (London, Reaktion Books, 2005), 'these houses were all either failures or non-starters'. The failure of system-built housing, most notoriously the Ronan Point disaster of 1968, set the seal on the prefabrication experiment.

Where Corb, Gropius, Fuller and Rogers failed, however, manufacturers of non-architect-designed prefabricated buildings struck gold. In the mid-1940s more than 600,000 prefabricated houses were being completed annually in the USA and the 'prefab' became for a time a familiar feature of the British urban landscape, some examples even surviving to become listed buildings. The techniques of prefabrication went back, of course, to the 19th century, when flat-pack iron churches were exported to British colonies. (Indeed, the Crystal Palace became an icon of industrialised building for Modernists.) In recent years, the housing industry has wised up to the attractions of standardised prefabricated components, though the end products are generally customised to satisfy buyers' demand for the distinctive and the individual.

When Martin Pawley wrote in 1985 that 'the prefabricated dwelling... is now held in deep execration by the public', Britain was still trying to cope with the failures of system building from the preceding couple of decades. Twenty years later prefabricated housing is back in favour, with a strong push from the government, which appears convinced that traditional site-based technologies cannot deliver the 4.5 million new homes it is looking for within the next 10 years. The Peabody Trust's Murray Grove housing in Hackney, north London, designed by Cartwright Pickard and completed in 1999, seemed to point the way forward. Using prefabricated modules manufactured by Yorkon (the company responsible for the ubiquitous Portakabin),



2.

2 & 3. Urban Space Management has refurbished the listed buildings alongside its container-based construction



3.

the 30-apartment scheme was constructed in 27 weeks. Although Murray Grove cost more than an equivalent scheme using more conventional construction technology, Peabody subsequently commissioned Allford Hall Monaghan Morris to design a 61-unit project using the same raw material on the Raines Dairy site in Stoke Newington. PCKO's Barling Court in Stockwell and Wyndham Road housing in Southwark; Proctor Matthews' Baron's Place in Lambeth; and a number of other projects in the pipeline all featured in the recent New London Architecture exhibition *Prefabulous London*, which promoted the idea that 'the prefab is now an aspirational dwelling which is becoming increasingly desirable'. In fact, all of the above projects fall into the category of 'affordable' or 'social' housing – developers appear as yet unconvinced. The largest modular housing schemes yet completed in Britain are student residences, such as that completed in Manchester by Midlands practice Design Büro in 2001.

In the 1960s, Archigram promoted an expendable architecture of capsules and pods, with a vision of houses being transported freely from place to place and scrapped when done with, like clapped-out cars. As the western world sinks under the weight of discarded fridges, computers and miscellaneous consumer goods, the idea of houses joining the junk heap is less than appealing. Eric Reynolds of Urban Space Management sees the Container City concept as 'a tactic for recycling'. USM's prototype Container City, using redundant freight containers as the basic unit for the mixed-use development, is located at Trinity Buoy Wharf,

close to the point where the River Lea flows into the Thames and across the water from the Dome. Trinity Buoy Wharf was the principal workshop of Trinity House, the body responsible for maintaining Britain's lighthouses and lightships, from 1803 until its closure in 1988. The London Docklands Development Corporation acquired the 1.5ha site and invited bids for its development, with a preference for cultural/community rather than commercial use. A long lease was eventually granted to Trinity Buoy Wharf Trust, with its commitment to fostering creative industries. The trust granted an occupational lease to USM, which has since refurbished the listed buildings there, while constructing three phases of container-based construction, the first two designed by Nicholas Lacey and Partners in 1999-2000. The third, the Riverside Building, was completed last year by ABK. A quarter of the rentals for the studios and live/work units go to a charitable trust which manages the site.

The shipping container was invented by the American haulage operator Malcolm McLean in 1956, when the first container ship sailed from Newark, New Jersey. Within a decade, the container had revolutionised the freight industry worldwide – it's estimated that four million are in use daily in the USA alone. The typical container is 6m long and 2.5m square, though 12m containers are also in use. The raw material is Corten steel, able to resist the effects of sea water. The dimensions were carefully chosen to fit the typical truck or rail wagon. Estimates of the numbers of containers in existence are hard to come by, but they obviously



4.



5.

4. Phases One and Two of Container City were designed by Nicholas Lacey and Partners in 1999-2000

5. Phase Three was completed last year by ABK

amount to many millions, and heaps of them seem to lie slowly decaying on the edge of any large city. Britain is a net importer of containers.

Reynolds, a leading figure on the London regeneration scene, questions the logic of manufacturing new modules for projects such as Murray Grove and Raines Dairy when there are large numbers of containers available at modest cost and suitable for reuse in buildings. When the Container City project started, he says, a container could be purchased for £700. Today he is buying containers from China, used once and then sold for around £1,800. Back in 1999-2000, construction costs for the first phases of the development were around £326 per m<sup>2</sup>. The last phase came in at £782 per m<sup>2</sup>. Foundations are minimal – around 300mm. Containers are delivered to the site fitted out with services ready for connection. With costs as low as this, USM is able to rent out space as cheaply as £54 per m<sup>2</sup>. 'The containers are cheap, adaptable and transportable,' Reynolds says. 'We came up with the idea of instant homes for New Orleans after the hurricane – we could have delivered them ready for occupation for £27,000 each, but the idea wasn't taken up.' However, USM has completed a building in Scotland and fitted out the interior of Will Alsop's Fawood Children's Centre at Stonebridge Park, London, on the shortlist for last year's Stirling Prize. It has commissioned ABK for a forthcoming scheme in Lafayette Street in New York City's 'cast-iron district'. British planners can, however, be intractable – Camden Council rejected a scheme for affordable housing at

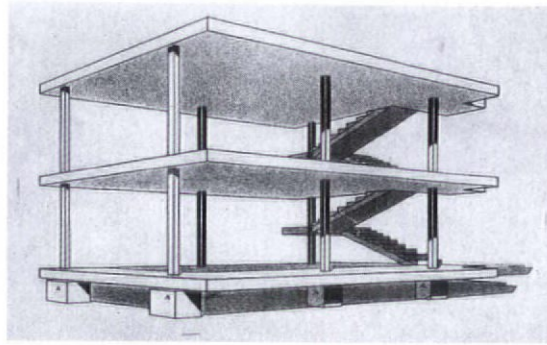
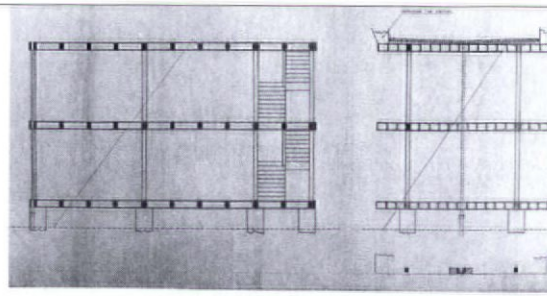
Falkland Road, Camden Town, designed by ABK for a car-park site owned by the council. Reynolds believes that planning difficulties could derail other projects which could deliver housing of quality comparable to Murray Grove at significantly reduced cost. 'We need to go beyond wasteland and derelict gap sites and do schemes on a larger scale,' he says. 'Local authorities in London have large areas of land which could be developed in this way if there was the will.'

Reynolds describes the approach at Trinity Buoy Wharf as a matter of 'piling up the containers and mining our way through'. ABK came into the project partly because Reynolds is a neighbour of former practice partner Richard Burton, but also on the strength of the series of stations it designed for the Docklands Light Railway in the 1990s. Peter Ahrends of ABK explains that 'we tried to take the system as found and use it in a straightforward way'. Ahrends contends that 'the architectural component of a project like this is fundamental – it's about moving things on.'

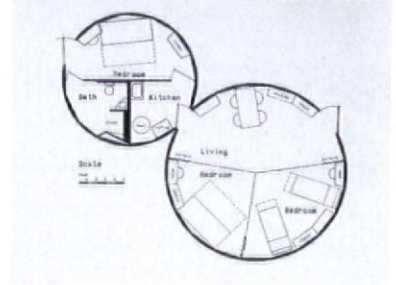
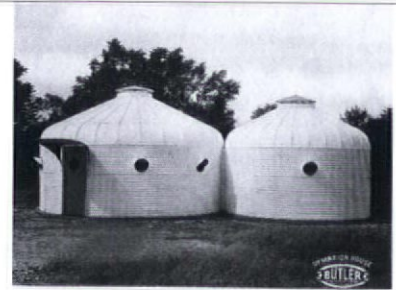
Using 'as found' materials is nothing new for ABK. It used woodland thinnings, which are usually burned, to make buildings at Hooke Park, Dorset, in the 1980s. Containers are equally a cheap and neglected resource, but cannot easily be disposed of when not required. Other architects have worked with 'retired objects', as New York practice LOT/EK describes them. LOT/EK's Guzman Penthouse in Manhattan (1996) piled adapted containers on top of an existing loft apartment. A similar New York project by the same practice, the Morton Duplex, made use of, among other



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6. Citrohan House, Le Corbusier, 1922

7. Dom-ino House, Le Corbusier, 1914

8. Buckminster Fuller's Wichita House, 1944-1946

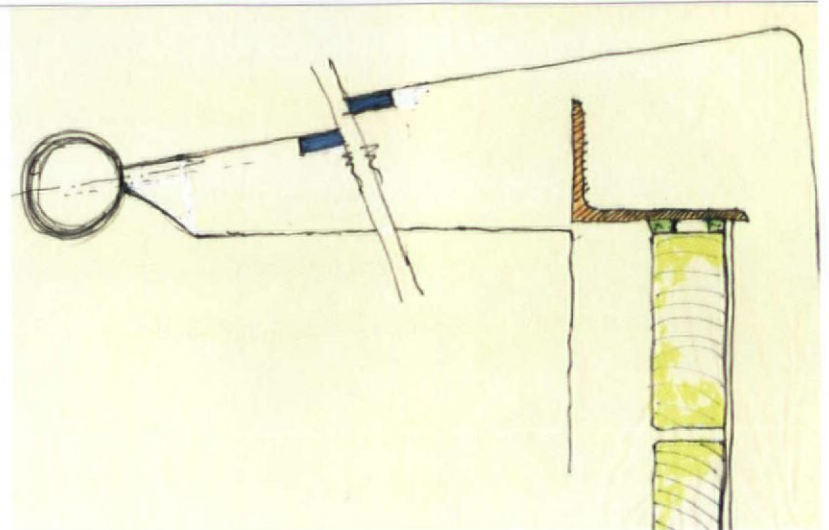
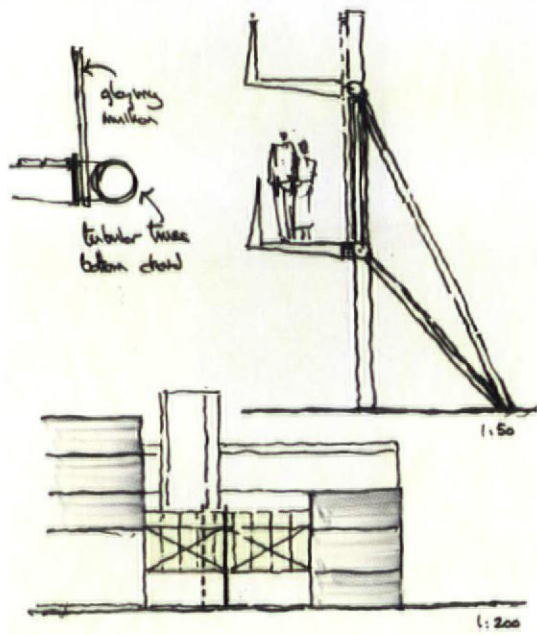
objects, containers from petroleum trucks to form sleeping pods. In a brilliant, though unrealised project for the 2002 Netherlands Architecture Biennale, MVRDV proposed the construction of a 'City Container' for Rotterdam made of 3,500 containers and providing housing, a hotel, offices, a school and other facilities.

The precise role of the architect in projects of this kind remains, however, a little uncertain. At Trinity Buoy Wharf, the contribution of Lacey and then ABK has been to infuse a compositional and spatial order on the buildings. Ahrends admits that, in places, the architects have lost detailed control of the project, one in which there is no room for a traditional view of the architect/client relationship – 'some bits are just wrong,' he admits. Reynolds adapts the containers as required by potential users – units can be opened up and joined together and window openings cut as necessary. The relationship with the architects, he says, is one of 'a curious unconventional dialogue'.

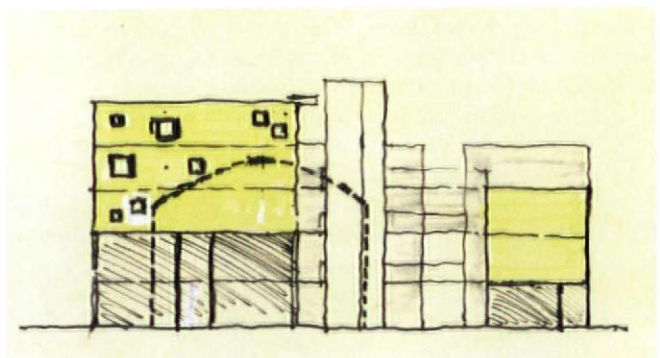
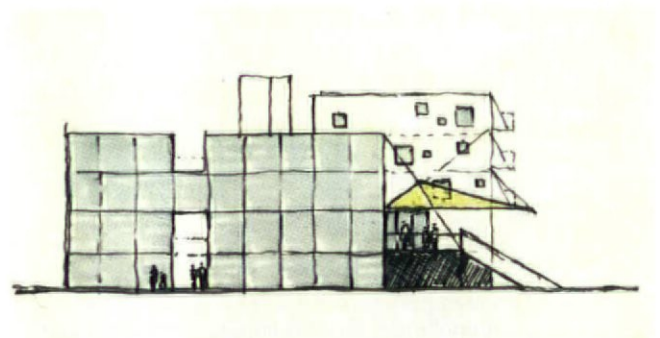
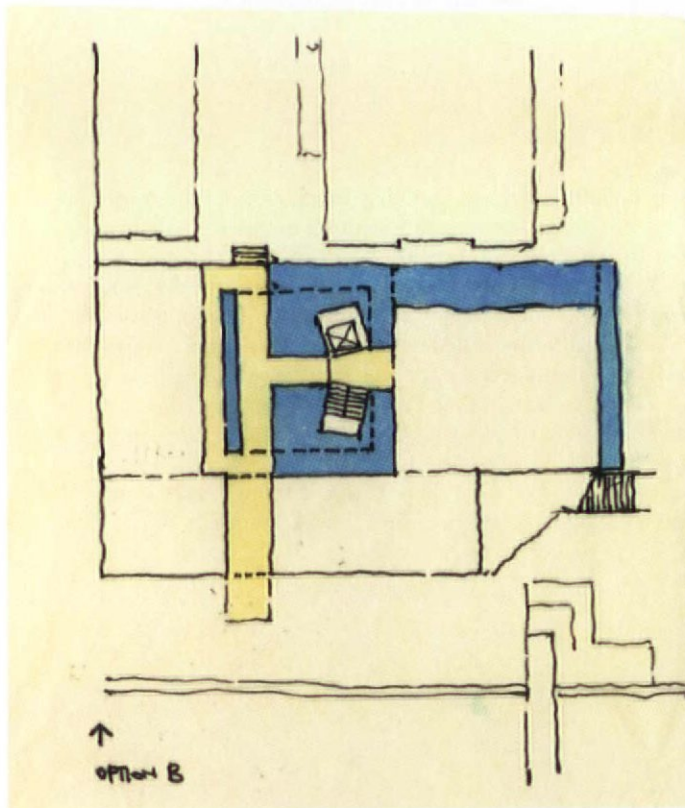
Ahrends believes that there is a future for container architecture in Britain and beyond. He was brought up in South Africa and is passionately interested in African issues, acting as an adviser to the South African government for the Venice Biennale 2006 exhibition. There is, he says, a strong case there for recycling containers as housing – 'you could build up to seven storeys high in urban areas without modification.'

The relationship of prefabrication to conventional views of the role of the architect has always been a tense one, and it is ironic that, despite the interest of a series of major architects in the

topic, prefabricated building has thrived without the involvement of the profession. 'Architecture without architects' will always flourish, whether architects like it or not. Prefabrication is, and always has been, a challenge to conventional notions of the architect's role. Container City looks good and works well, but it's really a fairly *ad hoc* collection of parts rather than architecture. And when containers are specially imported from China for use in building projects, isn't the recycling argument punctured? If containers have to be dismembered to provide spaces larger than those needed for a bedroom or small office, isn't the point of the exercise rather lost? Container City is admirable, not least in the way it provides cheap space for 'creative industries', but it is not the future of architecture.

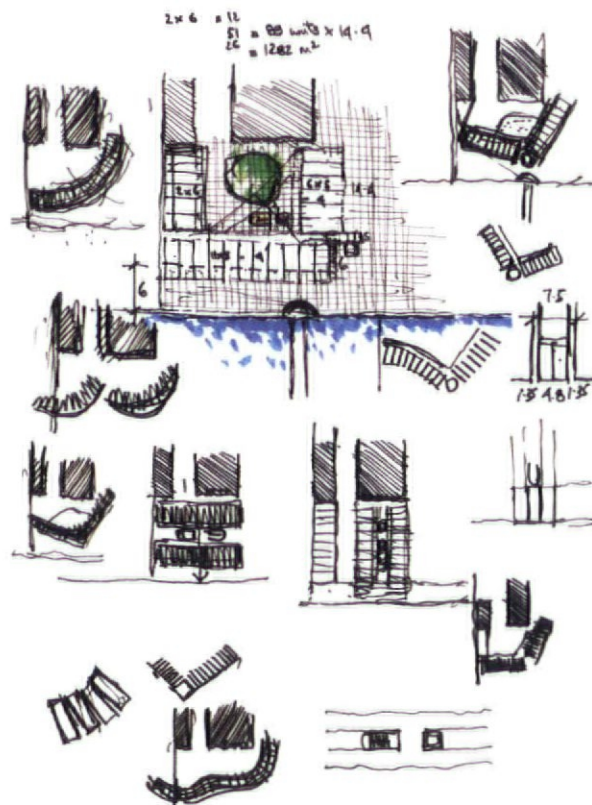
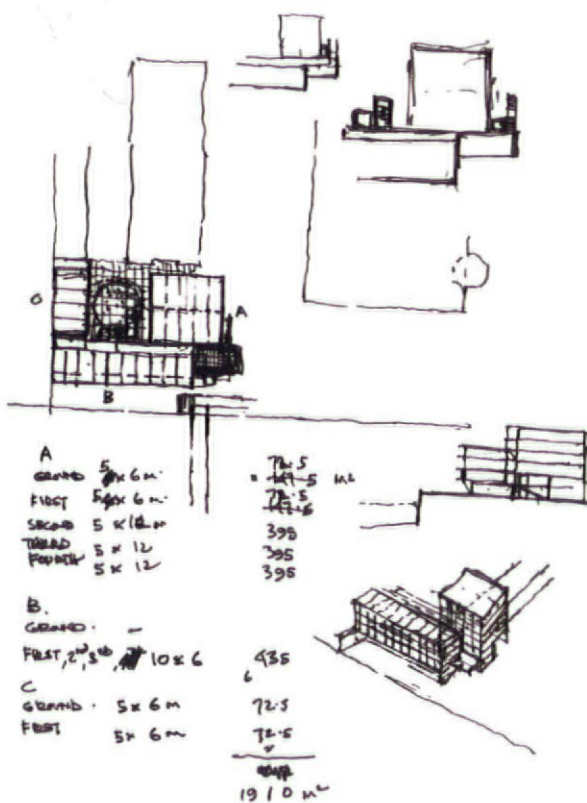
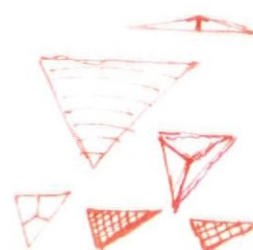
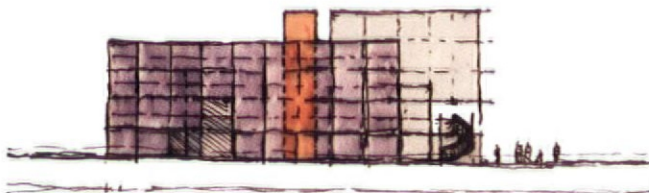
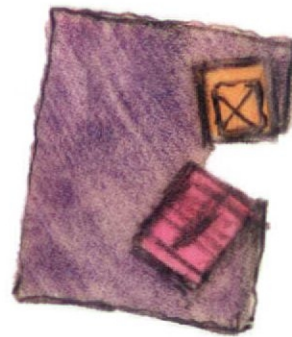
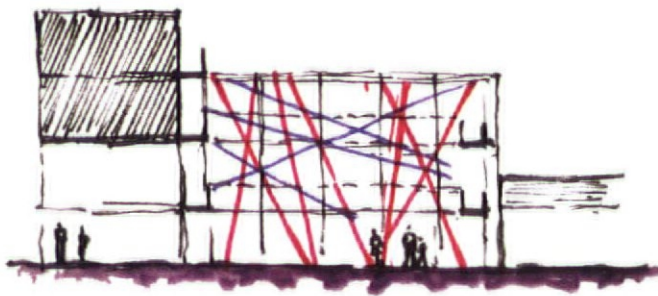


9. Peter Ahrends' concept sketches for the Riverside Building at Trinity Buoy Wharf



RIVERSIDE BUILDING / WATERCOURT

26.5.05 1:200



10. ABK's Riverside Building: the architect's role has been to infuse compositional and spatial order







11. A challenge to the architectural statements across the Thames?



12. Container construction and its more conventional counterpart

11th July 2006 - 27 Sussex Place, London NW1

# Historic Buildings

Inspirational approaches to adapting heritage architecture for modern life

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■ Impact of current legislation concerning disability access and fire regulations

■ Energy consumption, fulfilling efficiency requirements and zero carbon sources

■ The different avenues and sources of funding and the inherent issues

■ Sustainable materials and the use of new technologies in restoration and re-fits

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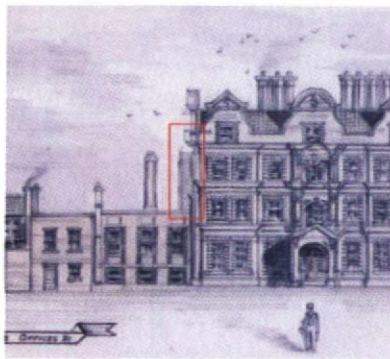
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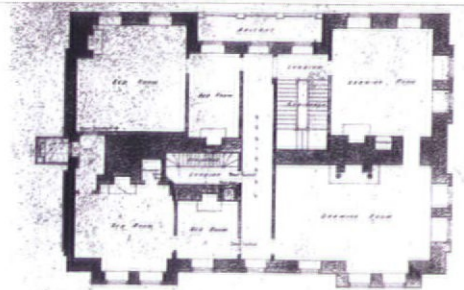
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1.

## THE STEPS SEEM UNCHANGED FROM THE DAYS OF GEORGE III

By Hattie Hartman



2.

1. 1880 watercolour showing the extension to the palace and the external WC shaft
2. Plan showing the external WC shaft

Until last month, a day out at Kew Gardens meant a delightful meander through the grounds to admire specimen plants and beautiful vistas, perhaps punctuated by trips to the great glasshouses. Now visitors may also plunge back in time to the domestic interiors of Kew Palace, where King George III and Queen Charlotte retreated during the king's madness and where Queen Charlotte spent her final days. In an unusual collaboration between Kew Gardens and Historic Royal Palaces (HRP), which owns and operates Kew Palace (as well as the Tower of London and Hampton Court), the modest 1664 brick palace has reopened its doors after a 10-year multi-phased £6.6 million restoration, complete with a dedicated visitor centre and an elaborate interpretative exhibition with the latest audiovisual technology, which evokes life in the house in 1804.

### KEW PALACE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

A critical aspect of the project was to make the building as accessible as possible, and the design team's multi-pronged approach to this issue included input from a Disability Access Forum established specifically to review the project. The introduction of two lifts and a ramp and the redesign of the stone steps at the front entrance are the most prominent features of the newly accessible palace.

From the outset, the brief from HRP included the addition of a lift, not an easy task given the compact symmetrical plan of the building – often referred to as a doll's house – and its status as

an Ancient Listed Monument. Approval by English Heritage (EH) was predicated on a historical quirk documented in a 19th-century watercolour – the serendipitous existence of an external royal privy shaft which had been added in the 18th century. Evidence of the original door openings inside the palace had survived and they have been reinstated as the entrance to the lift.

Purcell Miller Tritton (PMT), responsible for the architectural aspects of the project, undertook an options study for lift access. The palace has three primary floors (ground, first and second) accessible for visitors; an attic, which is closed to the public; and a beautiful brick-vaulted undercroft, which will serve as a reception area for school groups. Concern that the new lift shaft might disrupt the foundation of the palace if it extended below ground to serve the basement meant that a platform lift was added to the project to serve the basement only.

PMT associate Dante Vanoli explains that the main challenge of the lift design was to achieve as small a footprint as possible so that the lift could fit between two existing pedimented bays on the west side of the building. Height was also a concern because of the required refuge space at the top of the lift shaft and a desire to keep the top of the shaft below the projecting cornice of the pedimented bay. Several different design approaches were considered, including a structure that adhered closely to the building or a slightly detached shaft with a visual gap, as well as a variety of cladding materials, including bronze, lead and timber. The final design of horizontal lapped oak weatherboarding over



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3. Installation of lift shaft steel work with cantilevered steel projections inserted between brick bays  
4. View of completed lift shaft clad in ship-lapped oak



4.

NTI IMAGES

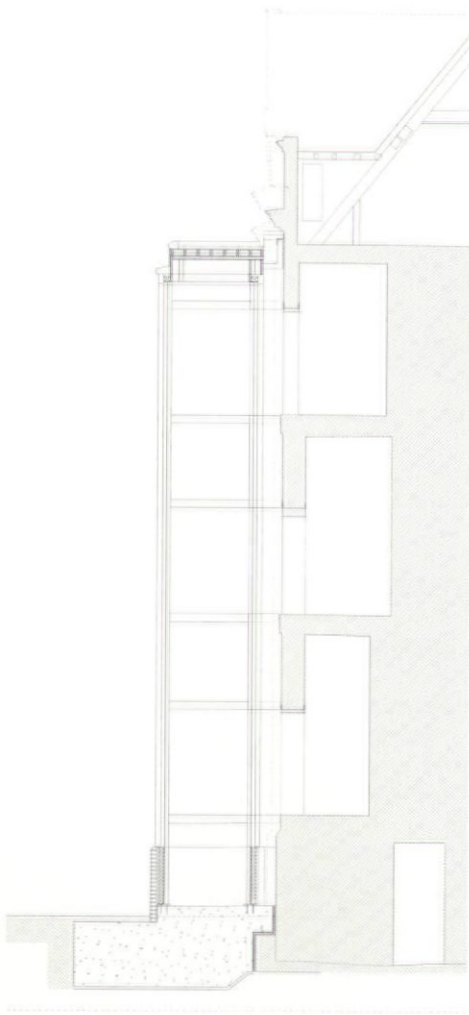
a steel structure with the shaft tight against the existing building was selected because it was considered by the design team to be the least visually obtrusive, giving pride of place to the palace itself. HRP, rather than the architect, negotiated the necessary approval with EH after extensive groundwork presenting the project to its numerous stakeholders, including the Trustees of Kew and the Georgian Group, neither of whom had any actual jurisdiction over the project.

The lift design had to be 'reversible' in the event that it should need to be removed at some future date. The bespoke steel structure is designed as a vertical cantilever which is completely independent of the existing building. Steel projections at each lift landing were individually dimensioned to accommodate the fact that the building was not completely plumb. The continuous vertical flashing is detailed to allow movement.

Another given from the outset of the project was that all visitors should be accorded 'dignified universal access' through the front entrance of the building. Consideration was given to having disabled visitors access the palace through the new lift on the side of the building, but this not only complicated the lift design but also posed security problems by creating a second entrance to the building. Access through the front door proved difficult to achieve, not because of the steps, which could be easily resolved by adding a ramp, but because of the 130mm level change between the Portland stone landing at the front entrance and the height of the front-door threshold. PMT developed an elegant solution

which involved raising the existing stone landing to the height of the threshold. The steps and landing were carefully removed and then reinstated over a 130mm band of new stone. The surrounding paving was gently regraded to accommodate a ramp graded at 1:21, which eliminated the need for a handrail. With the exception of the ramp, the worn stone entrance steps appear unchanged from the days of George III.

Many more subtle design decisions resulted from the input of the access forum, which was composed of local people with a range of disabilities, including mobility, hearing, sight and diabetes. One example is the treatment of the edge definition of the palace's front entrance steps. At the suggestion of one of the forum members, the risers were treated with soot rather than unsightly tape. Jo Thwaites, the HRP conservation department project sponsor responsible for the restoration, explains that the access forum was initiated as an alternative to a focus group and was found to be more effective in terms of meaningful input and financial outlay. Forum members were paid for attending bi-weekly meetings. For Thwaites, it was the intersection of the views of people with a range of disabilities and differing requirements over the course of the project that resulted in the best access design solution. Details ranging from the size of text in the interpretative exhibition to the location of lighting so as not to create glare for wheelchair users were scrutinised by the forum. An additional study, a wheelchair path survey, was undertaken by access consultant David Bonnett.



5. Cross section through west wall showing lift



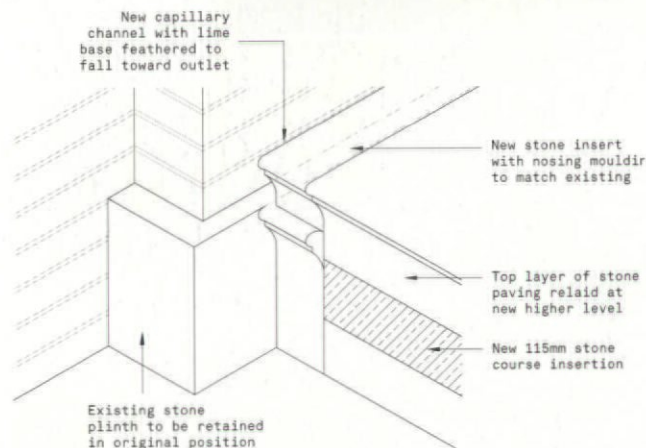
6. Section through new lift shaft and platform lift to basement showing west elevation



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7. Repointing pavings after raising front steps

8. Front entrance steps before construction, showing level change between landing and threshold

9. Detail drawing of front entrance steps showing new stone course and capillary drainage channel against building

10. Pink paint was found concealed behind a door fixture in the drawing room. This colour dates from the time of George III

11. Painting the exterior of Kew Palace with limewash pigmented with red brick, called 'ruddling', protects brickwork and mortar and results in a controversial pinkish red colour

12. The restored palace with new lift shaft visible on left and raised steps



10.



11.



NICK GUTTRIDGE/HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

12.

## PAINT ANALYSIS

Visitors to Kew Palace cannot help but be struck by the colour scheme of the restored building, which, though based on extensive research to ensure its authenticity, looks rather garish. Lee Prosser, HRP curator of historic buildings, does not hesitate to call the exterior limewashing, completed in 1998 as part of a previous phase of work, 'controversial'. In Kew's pastoral setting, the limewash, which is pigmented with red brick dust, is certainly eye-catching. Used in its day to cover up imperfections in the Flemish bond brickwork and protect the building fabric, it was reinstated after a sample of the original limewashing was found behind a rain hopper. The limewash, like the lift, is reversible because it weathers naturally. The technique had not been used in England for over 150 years, and must be renewed approximately every seven years.

By contrast, the choice of interior paint colours, pinks and off-whites, is restrained, though the wallpapers, carpets and recreated furnishings, also based on historical research, are not. A variety of specialists and curators employed a range of techniques to ascertain and date original colours. Stratigraphic cross-referencing was used to document the layers of paint on every interior surface to facilitate dating and comparison between rooms. Chemical analysis was used to identify the pigments used in different layers of paint also for dating purposes. Ultraviolet lights were used on paint samples which had faded to restore their true colours. A spectrophotometer was used to digitally record absolute

colours in order to precisely match new paints. There was one moment of certainty when a sample of pink paint dating to the beginning of the 19th century was found behind door ironmongery in the king's drawing room. Thwaites admits that the art of paint analysis is 'far from an exact science' and that the procurement of paint specialist work is 'quite tricky'.

## AND FINALLY...

Access issues and paint colours aside, the overriding impression of the restored palace is shaped by the interpretive display masterplanned by Metaphor, which is also responsible for the installation of the Michelangelo show currently at the British Museum. At Kew Palace, Metaphor has artfully threaded together artifacts with an audio-visual radio play which movingly recounts the story of the palace during the occupancy of King George III. In lieu of headsets, sounds emerge from unlikely places, such as the entrance path and from behind closed doors. The fascinating content will engage all ages, though the presentation does feel overly packaged. Unusually, certain rooms have been left in a state of semi-restoration to enable the visitor to see what lies behind the finished surfaces. Well worth a visit – but be prepared for the double entry fees.

*Further reading: Kew Palace: The Official Illustrated History, by Suzanne Groom and Lee Prosser, was released last week to coincide with the reopening of the palace.*

## A GREY-ON-GREY AREA OF WEBSITE DESIGN

I am still getting regular feeds from Eric Morehouse at <http://eyecandy-webcandy.blogspot.com>. One of his recent sites, [www.airesmateus.com](http://www.airesmateus.com), is that of Aires Mateus & Associados. And, of Francisco Aires Mateus Arquitectos. Father and son? Brothers? You can't tell because the site is in Portuguese. Yet what a model of reticence.

The home page is a black screen with a grey strip over the top with the practice name in black, bold, condensed sans serif. Below on the black field are four grey headings in the same type which even monolingual I could understand: Projectos, Prémios, Cronologia and Contactos. And that's it: six words, mostly black screen and a grey strip.

Naturally you click on Projectos. Everything moves down to accommodate five building type names in a white version of the standard type. And so on: website design at its... dammit. I've just spotted some pale grey-on-grey characters up on the extreme right of the grey strip: pt|en. Dammit: Portuguese\English. OK, so after a click it's the brothers Aires Mateus and forget what I said about model typography. Well, some of it. [sutherland.lyall@btinternet.com](mailto:sutherland.lyall@btinternet.com)

## THE LATE SHOW

In the distant days when I trained in the criminal courts of the Home Counties, there was a defence doing the rounds among the seasoned pub brawlers who were regularly charged with violent-disorder offences. The defendant would argue that he (it was usually 'he') anticipated that the victim was going to cause trouble and that he 'retaliated in advance'. Upon this unlikely platform the defendant would hope to found a defence of provocation or even self defence to a charge of causing grievous bodily harm. The feeling that I experienced when confronted by such a prospect convinced me that I was not cut out for crime.

Decades later, and from the comparative comfort of the world of construction law, I encountered a similar concept in the unlikely forum of adjudication. This time it was 'defence by ambush'. Ambush and adjudication are, of course, no strangers. Some might even suggest that the whole idea of adjudication is to ambush the unsuspecting defendant, and, for that matter, the adjudicator, with 26 lever-arch files of detailed delay claim supported by several experts' reports; various network analyses; and a CD-ROM, while simultaneously demanding your right to a fair and enforceable answer within 28 days.

The concept of 'defence by ambush', however, was coined

in the recent Technology and Construction Court (TCC) case of *Kier Regional Limited v City & General (Holborn) Ltd* (Judgment 06.03.06). Kier sought to enforce an adjudicator's decision on a dispute arising out of the refurbishment of London's former Patent Office Library. Kier referred two claims for extensions of time to adjudication. In adjudication number three, it claimed loss and expense of £1.3 million. The developer's response to the claim included allegations of concurrent delay and miscalculation of losses and was supported by the reports of two experts. Kier objected that the reports contained detailed new evidence it had insufficient time to respond to. The adjudicator agreed and refused to consider the developer's expert evidence but went on to find largely in Kier's favour, awarding it £1.25 million.

The developer resisted Kier's court application to enforce the decision on the grounds that the adjudicator had wrongly refused to consider its experts' reports. The decision was, it said, unfair and a nullity. Kier countered that the developer had conducted a 'defence by ambush' by producing new evidence at a late stage and that the adjudicator was entitled to disregard it.

Despite the fact that Mr Justice Jackson believed that the

adjudicator should have taken the experts' reports into account, he held that the failure to do so was an error of law which did not invalidate the decision. For good measure, he pointed out that earlier cases that suggested the contrary must now be regarded as incorrect.

Kier's case shows that attempts to avoid adjudicators' decisions because they were reached in breach of the rules of natural justice and unfair will be about as successful in the TCC as the defence of 'retaliation in advance' was in Maidstone Crown Court.

*Kim Franklin is a barrister and chartered arbitrator at Crown Office Chambers in London. Visit [www.crownofficechambers.com](http://www.crownofficechambers.com)*



## REVIEW



1.



2.

## BOOK

By Alex Wright

21st Century House

By Jonathan Bell.

Laurence King, 2006.

£19.95

Creating a definitive picture of the 21st-century house in 2006 is, as Jonathan Bell admits, far from practical. 'This book identifies four themes but there could just as easily be 100 such distinctions. These categories are little more than classifying snapshots,' he says.

Bell's brief introductory essay rails splendidly against the culture of media-driven imagery, grotesque McMansions and the 'eccentric predilections of moneyed egoists on *Grand Designs*'. It is wonderfully opinionated stuff from someone in a position to know a good deal about his subject (Bell writes for *Wallpaper\**, *Blueprint* and *Grafik*).

He pointedly comments that 'architectural publishing has a mania for categories and classification: modern houses, small houses, extreme houses,

experimental houses, houses on the edge, see-through houses, minimalist houses, vernacular houses, wooden houses, moving houses, each a neat peg upon which a number of glossy, even iconic, projects can be hung.' After such a breathless list one can almost hear the cry of 'somebody stop me' as Bell rolls out this latest collection on the pegs of the Iconic House, the City House, the Practical House and the Future House.

Given that the book is itself promoting the latest crop of novelty, however creatively themed, the mismatch between the sentiment of the text and the book's content is ever present. As Bell observes, the forum for debate has shifted from books to imagery, with architecture books becoming 'thinly disguised brochures or academic treatises of limited

interest'. Given that *21st Century House* has 55 projects, 'lavishly' presented in 300 colour illustrations and 150 drawings, but only 22 of its 256 pages are critical text, I suspect the author himself would think it was in the brochure category.

While the examples in the first three sections are generally interesting, the final section contains some optimism-crushing projects for 'the future house'. From the fuchsia graphics of House D, or the tragic images of Parasite Paradise, to the plain silly Home-Scape Project, the future seems to resemble a poor end of year show at a struggling school of architecture.

Generally Bell is articulate, astute and entertainingly annoyed. Much in the same way that watching *Grumpy Old Men* is amusing for its powerless

sniping against the world, he stabs away at modern house culture and the organs which feed it.

I found the book generally enjoyable – partly because I agreed with pretty much everything the author had to say, but also because I too find myself unexpectedly grumpy and old. There is something comforting about flicking through the pages to confirm that the new new is just like old new. Unfortunately it's all invariably worse than the original, but that's probably just a 20th-century point of view.

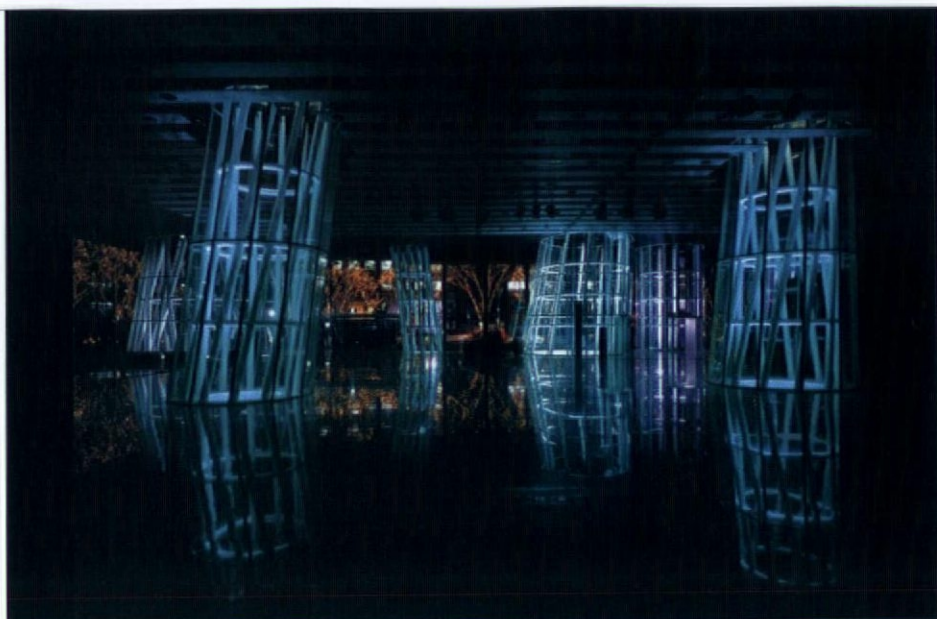
*Alex Wright is an architect and teacher in Bath*

1. Robert Dye Associates' Stealth House, London
2. Vicente Gualart's Hortal House, Tarragona, Spain

## BOOK

By Dean Hawkes

**Made of Light: The Art of Light and Architecture**  
By Mark Major and Jonathan Speirs. Birkhäuser, 2005.  
£32



Artificial lighting in Toyo Ito's Sendai Mediatheque

The Made of Light project is the product of the distinguished lighting designers, Mark Major and Jonathan Speirs. First seen in 2004 as an exhibition at the RIBA and also available on line, it's now a handsome book. Major and Speirs both trained as architects, which leads to an approach that, in their words, 'deliberately focuses on qualitative, ephemeral and abstract considerations', rather than the quantitative emphasis of lighting engineering. The result is a document that both beguiles and frustrates – but mainly the former.

The method combines words and images to illustrate 12 'themes' that represent common bonds between light and architecture: Source, Contrast, Surface, Colour, Movement, Function, Form, Space, Boundary, Scale, Image

and Magic. These are represented by narratives that combine historical examples with cases from contemporary practice – frequently the authors' own work. These are informative, with frequently lovely images, but the history is often schematic and sometimes inaccurate. For example, it's incorrect to assert that Palladio's *Quattro Libri* doesn't deal with light – see Book I, Chapter 25, 'Of the Dimensions of Doors and Windows'. There is also much more to be said about the significance of light in the works of architects as diverse as Soane, Labrousse, Le Corbusier, Kahn and Ando than the soundbites offered here.

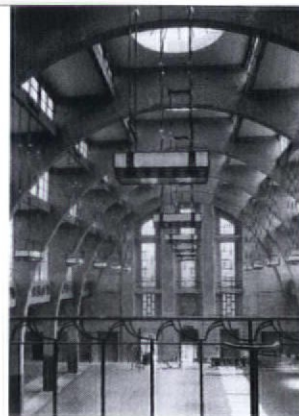
But, in compensation, the book offers a number of special insights. It begins with an eight-page 'timeline' that traces important steps in the

development of the light of architecture from 32000 BC – the torch of the Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc cave in the Ardeche – to the present. This deals nicely with both natural and artificial light, a balance that is maintained throughout the book. I found it fascinating to note, as a kind of measure of the evolution of the subject, that the timeline travels from the cave to the birth of Christ in about a quarter of a page, then takes three quarters of a page to reach the beginning of the industrial revolution. Five pages are needed to present the 19th century, with its frenzy of invention, before another two traverse the 20th and bring us to the present. In addition there are two series of comments by other contributors on the themes of 'Light and...' and 'My light', the first including

thoughts on, for instance, 'Light and Music', and the second offering ideas from a pilot, an actor and a welder (among others).

This should not be your only book on light and architecture. The achievements of architectural science and lighting engineering in quantifying the behaviour of both natural and artificial light in architectural space and in understanding how light provides both utility and meaning to the human mind are as important as the subjectivity on offer here. But this is a long-awaited counterpoint to the scientific and engineering tradition and deserves to be in every serious architectural library.

*Dean Hawkes is an architect in Cambridge*



## BOOK

**The Eames Lounge Chair:  
An Icon of Modern Design**  
By Martin Eidelberg et al.  
Merrell, 2006. 192pp.  
£29.95

Much as everyone loves the Eameses, and with due respect to Peter Smithson's comment that 'when we design a chair we make a city in miniature', it still seems a bit much to devote almost 200 pages just to the Eameses' lounge chair. This book accompanies a touring exhibition in the US, currently at New York's Museum of Arts and Design until 3 September. After an introduction placing the chair in the lineage of Hoffmann, Breuer and Corb, we see the evolution of its design, its prototypes, its manufacture, the finished article with various incumbents, and some of the adverts that speeded its success. 'The unequal pairing of a large chair with footstool alludes to the binary oppositions of parent/child and male/female,' says one devotional essayist.

## BOOK

**London's Contemporary  
Architecture: An  
Explorer's Guide**  
By Ken Allinson.  
Architectural Press,  
2006. 264pp. £18.99

Ken Allinson's excellent user-friendly guide to recent London architecture now appears in an updated fourth edition. One reason why it's good is that Allinson avoids flip judgements to explore pros and cons in depth, with major schemes – the British Museum Great Court, the Sainsbury Wing, Paternoster Square – getting a page or more of small type, not just a paragraph. And though the focus is 'contemporary', he also includes historic buildings in the vicinity, sometimes pointing out affinities that readers might miss, as with Stirling's No 1 Poultry and Hawksmoor's St Mary Woolnoth. There are maps, many photos, occasional plans – and some quite sharp criticisms *en route*. Despite all the typos, it's a truly practical companion to the current London scene.

## CRITIC'S CHOICE

By Andrew Mead

One of the key figures to show architects what was happening beyond these shores during the inter-war period was the photographer *Frank Yerbury*. In his day job he was secretary (chief administrator) of the Architectural Association and many of the articles that he illustrated were produced in partnership with the AA's then director, *Howard Robertson*. A new exhibition of Yerbury's work opens tomorrow, 26 May, at the Building Centre, 26 Store St, London WC1, where it can be seen until 1 July.

Just as when they first appeared, the value of these images lies more in what Yerbury chose to photograph than the way he did so. Travelling repeatedly in Europe, with interludes in the US, he wasn't a doctrinaire promoter of a particular kind of architecture; rather, he seems to have been drawn to whatever was new. So while he pictured Le Corbusier's Villa Stein-de-Monzie at Garches and Mendelsohn's Schocken store in Stuttgart – Modernism with an M – he also captured the powerful austerity of Asplund's City Library in Stockholm and the skyscraper Gothic of the Tribune Building, Chicago. Pictured above is something closer to home: Easton and Robertson's Royal Horticultural Hall in central London ([www.buildingcentre.co.uk](http://www.buildingcentre.co.uk)).

Yerbury went on to become director of the Building Centre, which celebrates its 75th anniversary this year with an exhibition called *Materials of Invention: 100 Years of Construction Innovation*, running concurrently with the Yerbury show. Alongside the historical focus is an attempt to foresee some innovations of the future – 'concrete so light it can float on water, invisible technologies for acoustics'.

Will those innovations ever include a flawless solution to one perennial problem: how to stop Venice from sinking into its lagoon? Or is it now such a tourist-trap theme park that it should be left to its fate? To mark the 40th anniversary of the floods which raised the spectre of this apocalypse, the Venice in Peril Fund is holding a debate at London's Royal Geographical Society on 12 June, titled *Enough Money Has Been Spent Saving Venice*. Speakers include Joseph Rykwert and AN Wilson ([www.veniceinperil.org](http://www.veniceinperil.org)). For forthcoming events visit [www.ajplus.co.uk/diary](http://www.ajplus.co.uk/diary)

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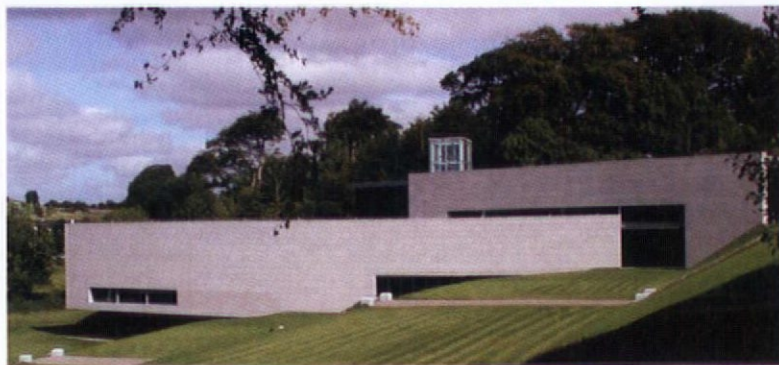
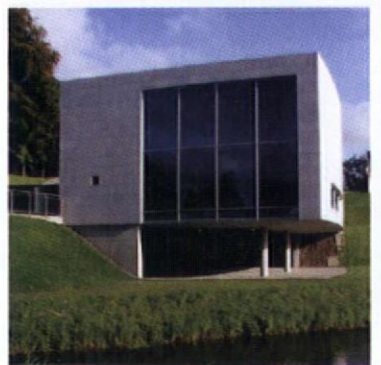
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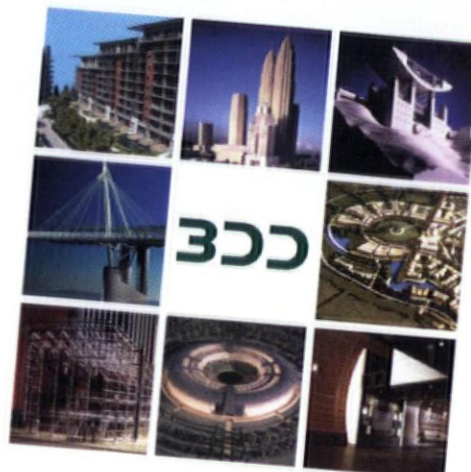
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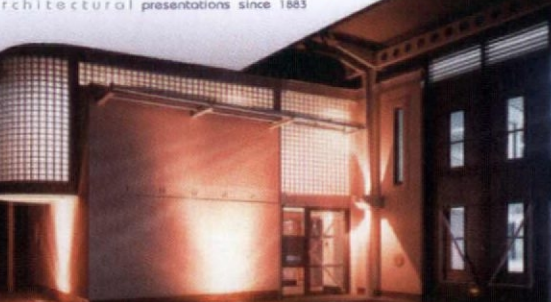
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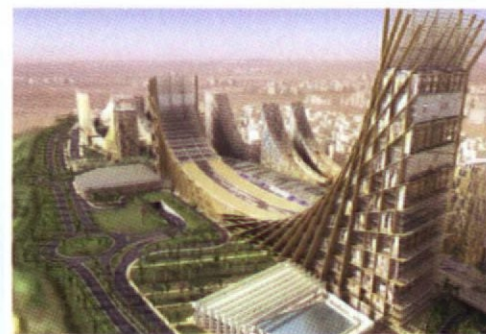
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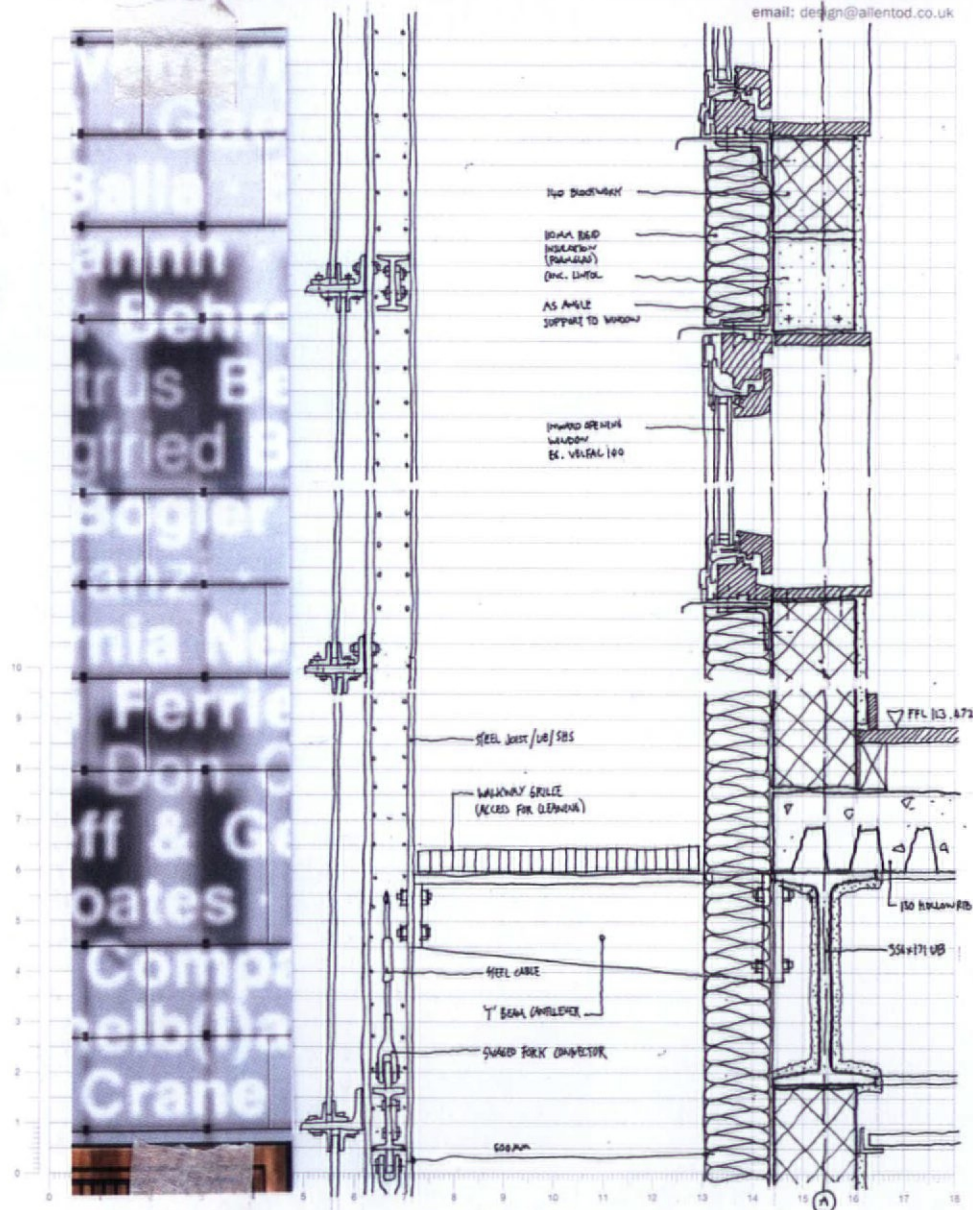
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**12th September 2006** / Cavendish Conference Centre, London, W1G

# designing with renewable energy

Successfully incorporating renewable energy into the built environment

**Featured speakers include:**

**Brian Wilson**, Non-Executive Chairman, **Airtricity**

**Bill Dunster**, Founder, **ZedFactory**

**Alexandros N. Tombazis**, Founder, **Alexandros N. Tombazis and Associates**

**Christer Nordström**, Founder, **Christer Nordström Architects**

**Andy von Bradsky**, Associate, **PRP Architects**

**Dr Sue Roaf**, Professor, **Oxford Brookes**

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Successfully incorporating renewable energy into the built environment

## Feedback from AJ Creating Sustainable Architecture conference

**"Thought provoking."**

E Teague, Gallions Housing Association

**"Good quality presentations  
from well informed speakers."**

N Johnston, Alpheus Environmental

**"A point of reference to  
achieving a sustainable future."**

D Adamson, BNFL

**"Very informing and  
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With oil prices at a record high and the supply of fossil fuels in decline, the search for a more secure, environmentally friendly energy source is paramount. And with the built environment accountable for over 45% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and energy consumption, it is crucial that architects take responsibility for redesigning the future.

Local authorities throughout Britain are taking up the challenge of increasing the use of sustainable energy by vigorously pursuing the implementation of PPS22. No longer the concern of a few sporadic councils, the 10% renewable energy target is expanding and becoming more aggressive. As a result architects, developers and clients are getting caught out.

This is your forum for getting to grips with one of the most profound issues in architecture. If you want to understand how to successfully incorporate renewable energy into modern and retrofit design, then you must attend Designing with Renewable Energy.

### Key benefits from attending:

- Learn about the latest international trends from award winning designers in sustainable architecture

- Hear the latest insights and ground-breaking case-studies from a broad spectrum of experts engaged in renewable energy and architecture
- Get the low-down on what local councils across the UK are planning with regards to renewable energy
- Exclusive opportunity to network with industry leaders across architecture, construction, M&E consultancies, contractors, and end-clients

### Outstanding networking opportunities

**Designing with Renewable Energy** is a great chance to liaise with some of the leading figures in micro generation. Expect to meet leading architects, housing associations, contractors, building services consultants, offsite manufacturers, and leading clients from across the architecture and construction industry.

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- 08.40 Registration
- 09.20 **Chair's introduction**  
**Ruth Slavid**, Editor, **AJ SPECIFICATION**  
 and Special Projects Editor, **THE ARCHITECTS' JOURNAL**
- 09.25 **Keynote address**  
**Understanding the Government's objectives for addressing micro generation**
- Outlining the Government's vision and plan for tackling micro generation
  - Understanding how the Government will be pushing the take-up of renewables
  - Assessing the available funding and grant schemes
- Invitation extended to **Elliot Morley**  
**MINISTER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT**
- 09.40 **Assessing whether the microgeneration strategy moves us forward**
- The importance of regulation and policy to the microgeneration sector
  - The impact of planning policy on industry confidence
  - Permitted Development or permissive excess?
  - Building Regulations – the ultimate weapon of success
- Dave Sowden**, Chief Executive, **MICROPOWER COUNCIL**
- 10.05 **Understanding why sustainable energy is key to the design and construction sector**
- Why energy efficiency is crucial in the renewables debate
  - Assessing the key drivers behind incorporating renewable energy into the design phase
  - Understanding the real benefits of adopting renewable energy
  - Educating the market: finding the key information points behind renewable energy
- Brian Wilson**, Non-Executive Chairman, **AIRTRICITY**
- 10.30 Question and answer session
- 10.40 Morning refreshments and networking
- 11.05 **Lessons from abroad: what the UK can learn from international design projects**
- Examining the impact of various funding and grant structures on renewable energy development
  - Learning from other international eco-models
  - Looking at leading design innovations from around the world
- Christer Nordström**, Founder  
**CHRISTER NORDSTRÖM ARCHITECTS**, and  
**Alexandros N. Tombazis**, Founder  
**ALEXANDROS N. TOMBAZIS AND ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS**
- 11.55 **Sustainable planning policies and PPS22: the effect of local council practice on architectural design**
- Understanding the Council viewpoint on micro generation and sustainable energy
  - Balancing the visual impact and renewable energy targets
  - Educating the client: getting client buy-in to PPS22
  - Looking at innovative design solutions to PPS22 and local planning policies on sustainability
  - Where next? Evaluating the future implications of this policy decision – raising the bar of low carbon planning
- Stephen Tapper**  
 Assistant Director for Planning and Transportation  
**ENFIELD COUNCIL**

- 12.25 Question and answer session
- 12.35 Lunch
- 13.35 **Technology that matters: a practical overview of the various sustainable energy solutions**
- Examining the pros and cons of each method
  - Analysing the payback and whole life costs of each technology
  - Understanding when to integrate which technology and how they work in combination
  - Looking at the supply chain and procurement issues
  - Looking to the future: what could be the big drivers and technologies in 10+ years?
- Dr Sue Roaf**, **OXFORD BROOKES**  
 and **Gareth Ellis**, Manager Renewable Energy  
**NATIONAL ENERGY FOUNDATION**
- 14.20 **CASE STUDY: Generation Home**  
**Upgrading UK housing stock with sustainable energy solutions**
- Understanding the intricacies of working in the housing sector
  - Challenges faced and lessons learnt from current projects
  - Examining how the project changed from early design to completion and why
  - Post completion energy and occupancy analysis
- Assen Gasharov**, Consultant  
**ENERGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**
- 14.50 Question and answer session
- 15.00 Afternoon refreshments and networking
- 15.25 **CASE STUDY: St Matthew's Estate in Brixton - Lessons from an exemplar low energy residential project**
- How combining environmental principles with commercial drive works in practice
  - Understanding the do's and don'ts of integrating renewable energy into the built environment
  - Futureproofing buildings for renewable technologies
- Andy von Bradsky**, Associate, **PRP ARCHITECTS**
- 15.50 **CASE STUDIES: Rural ZED and Jubilee Wharf**
- Understanding how to start and complete a renewable energy project from scratch
  - Tips for achieving client buy-in
  - Maximising the environmental and economic benefits when integrating renewable energy
  - Best practice for working with the supply chain and maximising the impact of renewable energy
- Bill Dunster**, Founder, **ZEDFACTORY**
- 16.20 **CASE STUDY: Dongtan Eco City - a new city running on sustainable energy**
- Understanding the importance of sustainable energy to the world's first Eco-City
  - Strategies for making renewable energy a community success
  - Transferring the success and lessons of Dongtan to East London
- Chris Twinn**, Associate Director, **ARUP**
- 16.45 Question and answer session
- 16.55 Closing remarks from the chair
- 17.00 End of conference

**Tuesday 12th September 2006** Cavendish Conference Centre, 22 Duchess Mews, London, W1G 9DT

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## ASH & LACY



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Great Barr School in Birmingham, the largest school in the country, has received a makeover featuring an Ash & Lacy Ashjack propped rafter over-roof conversion system. Ashjack over-roof conversion systems are constructed using bespoke lightweight-steel framing.

## STOAKES SYSTEMS



### AJ ENQUIRY 202

AJ readers liked the external image showing how Atkins used highly insulating Kalwall on the new Highways Agency Centre in Warrington, Cheshire – diffusing daylight without shadows and glare, retaining privacy and reducing energy costs. Tel 0208 660 7667 or visit [www.stoakes.co.uk](http://www.stoakes.co.uk) for more information.

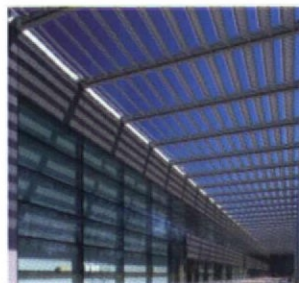
## PHILIP WATTS DESIGN



### AJ ENQUIRY 203

Philip Watts Design has come up with an exciting product solution to make stair treads look contemporary and satisfy building control. Seven different designs are available in packs of 13 with routing templates. For information telephone 0115 947 4809 or visit [www.philipwattsdesign.com](http://www.philipwattsdesign.com)

## KINGSPAN



### AJ ENQUIRY 204

Students at the new £12 million Djanogly City Academy in Nottingham are benefiting from the high-performance tapered rigid urethane insulation from Kingspan Insulation. Some 5,000m<sup>2</sup> of Kingspan Thermataper TT47 LPC/FM was installed as a practical and cost-effective alternative to timber.

## VELFAC



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## SWS



### AJ ENQUIRY 206

Scandinavian Window Systems (SWS) was chosen by architect The McFarlane Partnership to supply to a luxury development in north London. SWS was selected not only for quality but also for its ability to provide a package of products. This included the Bergen alu/wood windows, and Alu-clad Olsen lift + slide doors.

## JAMES HARDIE



### AJ ENQUIRY 207

James Hardie UK is leading the way with external finishes with HardiPanel Vertical Siding – a modern cladding solution that meets the need for high technical performance and a strong aesthetic impact. The product is exceptionally durable and has extremely low maintenance requirements.

## KNAUF INSULATION



### AJ ENQUIRY 208

Knauf Insulation's Polyfoam Floorboard has been chosen for use with Osma underfloor heating systems at the Eden Project's new education centre, The Core. The use of Polyfoam Extruded Polystyrene helps to provide a heating system with minimal environmental impact at the Cornish centre.

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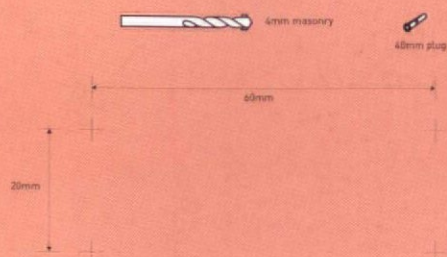


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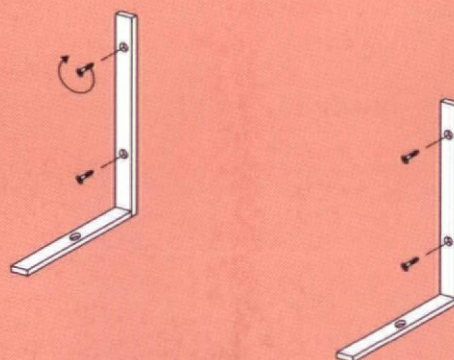


Fig 3

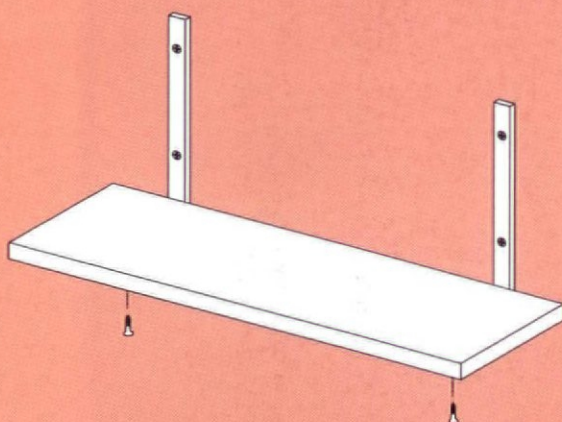
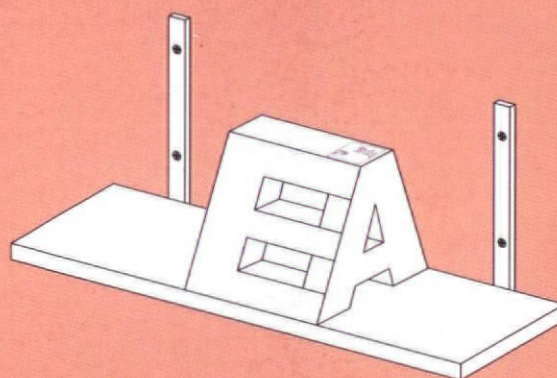


Fig 4



## The 2006 Edge Employer Awards.

Rewarding practical learning at work.



Theory is all very well. But there is no substitute for hands-on, real world experience. That's the principle behind the Edge Employer Awards. We believe in rewarding organisations that put practical learning – from apprenticeships and volunteering to work placements and traineeships – at the heart of everything they do. And that means you. **Practice makes perfect (and £300,000).** The winners will not

only set a shining example to their peers, they'll also walk away with a share of over £300,000 to reinvest in on-the-job development. Just imagine how far that could take your employees and your business. You'll also need to find a home for your Edge Employer Award – but that shouldn't be a problem for a place with practical skills like yours, should it?

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