

13.11.08

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AJ

CREATIVE EXCHANGE

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A subscription to the AJ (47 issues)

UK £150. Overseas £210.

Back issues and subscriptions Tel: 0844 848 8858,
website: www.architectsjournal.co.uk/subscription

Cover Timothy Soar

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The Architects' Journal is registered as a newspaper at the Post Office. ©2008. Published by Emap Inform, a part of Emap Ltd. Printed in the UK by Headley Brothers Ltd.

AJ (ISSN 0003-8496) is published 47 issues, weekly except Christmas and August.
Subscription price is \$420. PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID AT RAHWAY, NJ and additional
mailing offices. Postmaster: send address corrections to: AJ, c/o Mercury International Ltd,
365 Blair Road, Avenel, New Jersey 07001. Distributed in the US by Mercury International Ltd,
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Brisac Gonzalez
Architects'
proposed Peacock
Visual Arts Centre
for Aberdeen



ARTS CENTRE UNDER THREAT IN ABERDEEN

Brisac Gonzalez proposals not part of tycoon's 'vision'

The future of Brisac Gonzalez Architects' Peacock Visual Arts Centre in Aberdeen is hanging in the balance after a Scottish tycoon pledged up to £50 million to develop the same site.

Ian Wood, chairman of energy-services company Wood Group, announced on Tuesday (11 November) that he would hand over the cash to redevelop city-centre park Union Terrace Gardens.

But, according to a source close to the arts centre, Wood's involvement could 'sound the death knell' for the £13 million project, due to start on site early next year.

In a statement, the arts centre said: 'Our funding package is time-limited and we must use it

or lose it. A delay in proceeding with Peacock's project will likely mean that we will lose our design team, architect and campaign team. There would be immediate redundancies at Peacock.

'It is unlikely that the project could be revived should [Wood]'s feasibility study introduce further delays into the process.'

Brisac Gonzalez director Edgar Gonzalez said he hoped Wood's plans would take his project into account, adding: 'Apparently they will be considering a variety of options, so we will just have to wait and see.'

However, Wood will only hand over the full £50 million if his preferred option, which would see the park brought up to street level and a new public square devel-

oped, is carried forward. Any funding from Wood will have to be matched by the public purse.

Wood said: 'I am only prepared to provide the £50 million for the ambitious, transformational Option 1... if Peacock achieve their funding and go ahead as is, my vision could not proceed.'

The scheme has been backed by Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond, who last week pushed through Donald Trump's controversial Aberdeen golf resort.

Salmond said: 'I look forward to seeing the outcome of the feasibility study. It strikes me that in these tough economic times there is all the more reason to think big for the future of the North East of Scotland.'

Richard Vaughan

BRITISH FIRMS BARRED FROM EMBASSY COMP

British architects have been barred from competing to design the new US Embassy in London due to security reasons.

The American government has confirmed that no foreign firm will be eligible to apply for the £275 million project to build the new home for the US consulate at Nine Elms in Wandsworth.

According to tender documents recently issued by the US administration, the 'lead designer' must be based in America and have the necessary security clearance. The US Embassy, which will move out of its Eero Saarinen-designed building in Grosvenor Square, is not bound by EU procurement rules.

A disappointed Jeremy Estop of MJP Architects, which designed the British Embassy in Bangkok, said Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) had 'managed to deal with security issues' despite using architects from around the world.

He said: 'The FCO is currently employing American architects for new British Embassies in Jakarta [HOK Architects] and Rabat [RTKL Architects].'

'If security is the reason, then logically this would mean the [State Department] intends to fly in a whole US construction workforce, which cannot be practical.'

However, a spokesman for the US Embassy insisted there were still opportunities for UK firms: 'It is anticipated and encouraged that the winning design team could incorporate UK and other members with international expertise.' *Richard Waite*

NO SUITABLE UK SITES FOUND FOR EUROSPAN 10

CABE has decided to withdraw the UK from Eurospan 10 due to a lack of suitable sites.

The commission, which has been trying to turn around the UK's disastrous involvement with the Europe-wide housing design competition, admitted only two possible plots in the UK had emerged, despite 'an intensive two-month search'.

A spokesman said the level of interest was down significantly on previous years and 'while these [two] were interesting proposals... the sites did not offer enough scope to proceed'.

The move is the latest setback for Eurospan in the UK. The country has had a notoriously unproductive 14-year-long

'flirtation' with the biennial competition, aimed at architects aged under 40. In recent years, some of the country's up-and-coming firms, such as Witherford Watson Mann (Eurospan 6 and 8), Loop Architecture (Eurospan 8) and Tom Russell (Eurospan 9), have won potentially groundbreaking Eurospan-backed schemes in the UK.

But despite CABE's five-year involvement, none of the projects have been delivered and only Witherford Watson Mann's has managed to achieve outline planning permission.

Richard Simmons, CABE's chief executive, said: 'While this is very disappointing, it is not surprising given the scale of the

housing-market downturn.

'It is a great pity that sites could not be found within the timetable governed by Eurospan.'

Phil Catchside from Loop Architecture said: 'The credit crisis seems to have unnerved potential site-sponsors and stopped them from putting their sites forward... Being a Eurospan site brings responsibilities to commit, in principle at least, to start building the projects within two years.'

UK-based architects will still be entitled to enter the contests elsewhere in Europe. *Richard Waite*

Read Tom Russell's comments on Eurospan 10 on page 16

THIS WEEK ON THE WEB

MCASLAN TO DRAW UP NEW SMITHFIELD PLANS

John McAslan + Partners has taken over from KPF to draw up new proposals for Smithfield General Market in central London. Thornfield Properties, which owns the Smithfield site, announced on Monday (10 November) that it has appointed the West London practice to bring forward a new scheme in a second attempt to develop the site.

SCHOOL WILL BE 2012 GAMES HEALTH CENTRE

London 2012 Olympic athletes will be forced to use a health centre housed in a converted school, the AJ understands. The AJ reported last month (AJ 23.10.08) that Penoyre & Prasad's proposals for a health centre in the Athletes' Village had been put on hold due to funding difficulties.

CHIPPERFIELD MUSEUM PLANS ON HOLD

David Chipperfield Architects' \$92 million (£60 million) extension to the Saint Louis Art Museum in Missouri, USA, has been put on indefinite hold. According to the gallery, the 7,660m² extension plans have been stalled due to the downturn. The museum is expected to restart its funding search once the market stabilises.

DOOLAN PRIZE SPOILS SHARED TWO WAYS

The RIAS Andrew Doolan Best Building in Scotland Award was handed to two buildings on Friday (7 November). UK architecture's biggest cash prize was awarded to both the Castlemilk Stables Restoration by Elder and Cannon Architects and the Potterrow development at the University of Edinburgh by Bennetts Associates.

Read all of these news stories in full and see images at

WWW.ARCHITECTSJOURNAL.CO.UK

CHIPPERFIELD WINS ZURICH MUSEUM

David Chipperfield Architects has won the contest to design the £81 million extension to Zurich's Museum of Modern Art in Switzerland. The practice beat 20 other finalists, including Caruso St John and Steven Holl Architects. *Richard Waite*



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DUBLIN'S NEW SPORTS HALL

This is Dublin and Drogheda-based McGarry Ní Éanaigh Architects' Ballyfermot Leisure and Youth Centre in the west of the Irish capital. The recently completed 18 million euro (£15 million) building includes a 4,200m² swimming pool, public sports facilities and a 1,100m² youth centre. *Richard Vaughan*



GEHRY'S KING ALFRED BECOMES LATEST CREDIT-CRISIS VICTIM

After five years, £13 million and enough column inches to fill a phonebook, Frank Gehry's King Alfred scheme in Brighton is dead.

The announcement was made on Sunday evening (9 November) and is a miserable end for the controversial £290 million project – yet another high-profile victim of the financial crisis.

The project, dubbed 'Tin Can Towers', was designed alongside HOK Sport and Piers Gough's practice CZWG, with the backing of local developer Karis, which had brokered a deal with Dutch bank ING.

However, after ING pulled out of the 750-apartment project in August, it seemed in doubt.

Karis managing director Josh

Arghiros said: 'Given there's an economic meltdown going on at the moment, there's no way to fund it. You cannot sell residential at the moment – it's impossible.'

Arghiros, who has lost £13 million trying to realise the scheme, was joined by Gough in lamenting its demise.

Gough said: 'It is a heartbreak and a loss for Britain. We need examples of work by architects from abroad.'

'We are dominated by the High-Tech of Foster and Rogers, and to some extent Grimshaw and Hopkins, even now. In this country we are so uptight – Frank would have shown us how to relax with architecture.'

Brighton and Hove City

Council is not expected to decide on its next steps until next week, but one option is to hand Karis and ING a reprieve for two years until the market picks up.

Valerie Paynter, chair of local campaign group SAVE Hove, which opposed the project, said: 'I do not believe that Karis was ever going to be able to meet the Section 106 obligations or fulfil the 91 conditions attached to planning permission.'

'Add the economic and banking collapse and the outcome was inevitable. A monstrous and disastrous mistake has been averted.' *Richard Vaughan*

Read Kieran Long's leader on page 16

TIMELINE

November 2002 Frank Gehry, Wilkinson Eyre, Richard Rogers Partnership and Sheppard Robson battle for King Alfred redevelopment

December 2003 Gehry wins the competition

July 2005 Brad Pitt reported to be working on the scheme

September 2005 Gehry unveils 'final' designs for King Alfred

March 2006 Gehry reworks his designs

April 2006 New designs attacked by opposition council members

November 2006 CABE backs redesigned towers

March 2007 Scheme goes before planning committee amid crowds of supporters

May 2007 Project wins go-ahead

June 2008 Cracks appear as the credit crunch takes its toll

July 2008 Gehry admits he has played little part in the scheme for nearly a year

July 2008 Backer ING pulls out

November 2008 Gehry's project is finally scrapped



Frank Gehry's King Alfred scheme for Brighton, dubbed 'Tin Can Towers'



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SILENT DANGER

FIRE – A look at the risks of plastic foam insulated cladding panels when compared with Euroclad Elite Systems.

The fire performance of any building system is paramount to the safety of the building occupants and is becoming an increasingly important consideration for building designers due to regulatory reform. Revisions to Part B of the Building Regulations have meant that, for the first time, designers are being asked to complete a fire risk assessment as the first stage of any design process - underlining a new fire prevention approach that asks designers to identify fire risks at an early stage, and try to remove them. The wide-ranging Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order (RRFSO), which came into effect in October 2006, also outlines key responsibilities, with the government publishing a series of guides that provide guidance on completing a fire risk assessment.

Key to any fire engineering solution is a building design that limits fire spread, and specifying non-combustible building materials is certainly the simplest means of achieving this. When it comes to selecting exterior cladding systems, attention should be paid to the insulating core material, as this is where the difference lies in terms of **resistance to fire**.

An exterior cladding system may claim to be fire safe, but only truly non-combustible systems can provide optimum fire performance. For example, when it comes to sandwich panels the use of plastic foam cores, such as polyurethane (PUR) or polyisocyanurate (PIR), should be questioned if **fire resistance** is key to specification.

When compared to Elite Systems utilising mineral wool insulation, PUR or PIR plastic foams pose a significantly higher risk in the event of a fire, as the material is combustible. Mineral wool, on the other hand, will not ignite or burn and will not contribute to fire spread.



Levels of fire resistance claimed by manufacturers of systems with PUR or PIR cores are only valid if that system is installed correctly and well maintained. Once the plastic foam insulation becomes exposed in any way, there is an increased risk in the case of a fire. Ultimately, even if the system is correctly fitted and maintained, in the event of a fully blown fire the steel faces will eventually bow, causing the panel joints to open and expose a core that will then ignite.

Comparatively, mineral wool insulation is non-combustible and so poses no risk of flame spread if they are exposed to a fire. This superior performance is certainly recognised. Within the supplementary guides to the RRFSO, for example, it states that "The potential for fire development involving mineral fibre core is less than that for panels containing polymeric cores. Therefore, in areas where there is a considerable life risk, it may be appropriate to consider replacing combustible panels".

The draft of the NHS FireCode goes even further, stating, "Selecting the appropriate

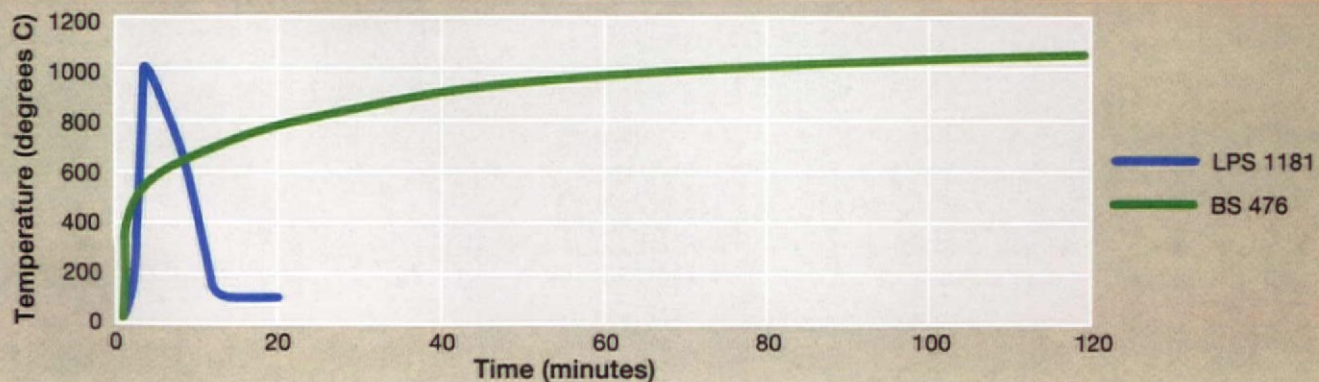
insulated core products for internal walls or partitions, or for external cladding material is vital for patient and building occupant safety... Wherever possible cladding with a non combustible core should be used". The publication, Building Bulletin 100: Design for Fire Safety in Schools states that the external envelope of a building should not provide a medium for fire spread if it is likely to be a risk to health or safety..." The use of combustible cladding system and extensive cavities may present such a risk..."

Specifiers may look to the Loss Prevention Certification Board (LPCB) LPS 1181: Part 1 test standard when evaluating the contribution a cladding system makes to a fire. However, the fire performance of LPS 1181 approved products varies considerably and most foam plastic insulation core panels are supplied to the lowest level - LPS 1181 Ext B that delivers no fire resistance. Essential Principles for Fire Protection of Buildings from the FPA [2007] warns on the use of "appropriate part of LPS 1181".

For a product to truly offer protection in relation to **'fire resistance'** rather than just **'reaction to fire'** it must resist the transfer of heat from the exposed to unexposed face and retain its integrity whilst being subjected to the conditions of a 'real fire'. BS 476 Part 22 simulates the post-flashover stage of a blaze through to a fully developed fire sustained for the duration of the test, as shown in the graph below.

Therefore, when identifying systems that offer fire resistance, rather than just 'reaction to fire' stipulations, specifiers must ideally look for the achievement of BS 476 Part 22.

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GREAT DANES

AJ Towers is, rest assured, a very highbrow place, but occasionally there's a need for some light relief. Hats off then to **Rambøll Whitbybird**, which has provided exactly that. The engineer combined two great Danish exports and sent the AJ a Lego kit for an off-shore drilling platform emblazoned with its logo (pictured above, and post-construction, above left). All that's missing is a Danish bacon sandwich. If we're not answering the phones, you know why.

ICY BLUES

Icicles, the stuff of White Christmas dreams and health and safety nightmares. According to

the local press, the 'one-in-a-million chance' of icy shards falling on unsuspecting football fans means that the **Norman Foster**-designed giant turbine outside Manchester City FC's Eastlands stadium will not be built. Come on, what are the chances of spiky things falling from the sky and... what's that? **Thomas Heatherwick**'s nearby B for the Bang? Ah, good point. Who needs a big windmill anyway?

GULF DREAM

In times of recession, one must have a contingency plan. Astragal has always firmly believed that, when the proverbial hits the fan, run as quickly as you can to the Middle East. And it seems that's exactly what the government and

the **Olympic Delivery Authority** plan to do – only they're bringing the Middle East to them. It is being reported that the Gulf state of Qatar has proposed to rescue the ailing Athletes' Village for the London 2012 Olympics, as developer **Lend Lease** struggles to find the cash to meet its end of the bargain. Astragal wonders if we could just bring the whole Middle East over here and save on commuting costs.

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DIGGING DEEP

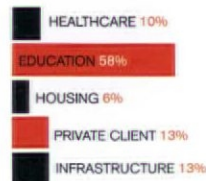
The pocket-emptying powers of fundraising dinners never cease to amaze Astragal, especially in this fiscal winter of discontent. This week, Astragal witnessed boundless generosity for the eminently honourable cause that is the **Stephen Lawrence Trust**, at the charity's annual fundraising dinner. But even Astragal's jaw dropped when a **David Adjaye** sketch went for £1,000. However, it wasn't the price paid for an Adjaye drawing that made Astragal's eyes water, it was the price paid for a reproduction of an Adjaye drawing. Still, all for a good cause!

THIS WEEK'S ONLINE POLL

Where do you think most of your work will come from in the next 18 months?

Next week's question: Is the UK losing out now Frank Gehry's King Alfred scheme for Brighton has been scrapped?

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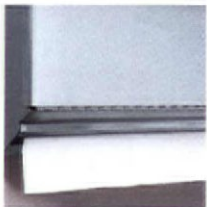
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BUILDING VALUE SINCE 1906



Leader King Alfred is dead. *Kieran Long* asks if this is the end of lazy, facade-focused housing

Is Frank Gehry's scrapped scheme in Brighton the first iconic victim of the credit crunch? The legendary Los Angeles architect's scheme for the King Alfred waterfront development has finally died, notwithstanding carping from the scheme's supporters. But this high-density project gives us pause to think about the mistakes of the housing boom.

The UK has not lost a distinguished scheme. Despite the pedigree of Gehry, what emerged from the long planning battle was a compromise, which, like so many of Gehry's recent buildings, achieves little at the ground level of public value.

The project also revealed how far we have come away from acceptable space standards and liveable apartments. The most depressing part of this scheme was the rendered 12-storey perimeter blocks proposed to surround

the two 'Tin Can Towers'. These mediocre, moneymaking buildings are exactly the kind that I hope will be made redundant by the declining residential market. Crammed full of single-aspect flats, they look cheap and nasty, despite the modelled roofs, which are done more 'in the style of Frank Gehry' than actually drawn by the great man.

The supportive comments of CZWG's Piers Gough on page 10 are typical of the ageing avant-garde that wishes we would all just loosen up a bit so that a Gehry-clad sardine-can can be built to provide standard accommodation. The planning system slowed the project to a stop, says Gough, because it couldn't understand Gehry's genius.

But however much Gough would like to imagine Gehry's architecture sitting in an Edwardian tradition, it's clear that this

scheme means little to its context, with its fortress-like engagement with the street to the south (a result of the parking garage under the plaza). In its spatial planning, it is shown to be a building only possible at the height of a housing boom.

The bling exterior of the King Alfred proposal seduced the CABE design review panel and may seduce some architects, but I urge you to take a look at the drawings on Brighton and Hove City Council's website. Other design-led architects are still being given awards for projects with pretty exteriors but flat layouts that would embarrass a prison-warden. It's time for CABE and the planners to look critically at the housing we've been waving through the system over the last few years and ask if anyone would really want to live there. kieran.long@emap.com

Opinion Without any UK sites, European 10 is a missed opportunity for British cities – but not for British architects, says *Tom Russell*

The news (*see page 6*) that the UK will not be putting forward any sites for the European 10 competition next year is clearly frustrating for all concerned, and another big setback for the UK's involvement in the biennial competition. But while this marks a great missed opportunity, it is not necessarily Britain's young architects who will lose out. Rather, it's the towns and cities of Britain that will miss out on the opportunity to learn lessons from Europe's most enlightened cities and benefit from Europe's young design talent.

Two years ago, our practice, Tom Russell Architects took part in European 9, submitting designs for a site in Milton Keynes. We

approached it as we would any other contest: we were hoping to expand our portfolio and possibly win a commission for a large project. So, from the 73 sites on offer across Europe, it seemed to make sense to choose the site closest to home with the most realistic chance of being implemented. But in retrospect, this seems like a rather myopic approach.

European has always been as much about a cross-cultural exchange of ideas as it has

A client and designer from opposite ends of Europe found synergy

about the delivery of specific projects. And that applies not just to architects, but also to those working in agencies responsible for this. As an organisation, European brings together a vast array of people involved in shaping European towns and cities to discuss and exchange ideas and practical lessons.

The real value of European only really emerged for us at the final conference. It was there we realised that the lessons gained from European are for municipal clients as much as they are for design teams. Sponsors from

Milton Keynes and Stoke-on-Trent meet their counterparts from Graz or Groningen to see the benefits of enlightened investment.

One seminar at the conference featured the Mayor of Hamar, a Norwegian town 150km north of Oslo, talking about his town's experience of the European process. The Mayor enthused about the fresh ideas that a pair of young Spanish architects had brought to the problem of unlocking the town's waterfront. A client and a design team from opposite ends of Europe had found a genuine synergy.

For European 10, British architects will still have the opportunity of working on sites across Europe and continuing that dialogue. So while it's obviously sad that Britain cannot muster the enthusiasm for European 10, the lack of British sites should not hamper the ambitions of young architects working in Britain. On the contrary, our young practices will have the opportunity to branch out beyond our borders. At a time of domestic economic stagnation, that may be no bad thing.

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While canvassing for Barack Obama, *Jaffer Kolb* observes the power of the American suburb

A walk in the suburbs of North Carolina just before last week's American presidential election revealed a conflicting landscape of supportive signage. Like the famous Las Vegas strip studied by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown in *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), a bizarre syntax emerged from the signage, though here it was a binary code of 'Obama' and 'McCain'. These signs were bound to a system of signification based in large part on the built environment – associated as they were with particular kinds of architecture – and revealed both the proclivities and the type of the residents in these hotspots.

Neither Democratic candidate Barack Obama nor Republican hopeful John McCain campaigned in New York, California or Boston, Massachusetts. To much of the world, these places *are* America. They represent the centres of global capital and culture and, as a result, tend to attract well-educated, left-leaning elites. The population of these areas is vastly denser than the rest of the country, but given the USA's system of electoral colleges, where each state is allotted a certain number

of votes instead of a direct voting system, they don't count much in an election. New York, Massachusetts and California are given as Democratic states, and candidates don't bother giving them much attention.

And so, as was the case in the last election four years ago and the one four years before that, swing states like Florida, Ohio, Indiana, South Carolina and Pennsylvania dominated the American landscape for several months before the election. Walking the streets in at least two of these states – I canvassed for

largely overlooked part of the country. Their 15 minutes of fame on a four-year cycle cannot be overlooked in their importance to understanding America, particularly in the context of an election that saw Obama chiding Democrats of the past for creating a hierarchy of importance and ignoring the needs of vast geographical stretches of the country.

Even Obama's campaign-financing strategy represents his inclusive attitude: where Hillary Clinton, his rival for the Democratic nomination, and traditional fundraisers rely

Obama chided Democrats of the past for creating a hierarchy of importance and ignoring the needs of vast geographical stretches of the country

president-elect Obama in North Carolina and Pennsylvania – was eye-opening, not just for the experience itself, but also in terms of putting a picture to swathes of the country that see far less traffic than its cities.

The overwhelming response to our presence in these areas was weary excitement, and innumerable people remarked that once the election was over, they'd return to being a

primarily on massive donations from individuals, Obama devised a strategy to target millions of less wealthy donors via his website, who contributed smaller amounts to his campaign. This led to one of the most well-funded campaigns in the USA's political history, and suggests that, rather than catering to the prescribed hierarchy of 'importance', mass marketing can yield better results.

To this end, Obama has tapped back into the fundamental premise of democracy, and has proven that its tenets are unshakably superior to the kind of anti-populist pandering on which the Republican and Democratic parties have for so long based their outreach. By elevating outlying districts to a new level of importance, Obama's campaign highlighted the abstract shifting of the American landscape, which is predominantly manifest in regional architecture. Architecture, particularly in the domestic sphere, manifests the contradictory nature of our conflicting cultures.

Living in New York, as I do, it is easy to be seduced by the kind of romantic architecture that looks to the past and has a kind of gritty chic that, especially in recent years, has swept the city. Buildings like Herzog and de



'Obama' and 'McCain' signs seemed associated with particular types of architecture in the run-up to the American election



Meuron's 40 Bond Street and TEN Architectos' One York Street celebrate adaptive reuse and draw from industrial influences. Old brownstones and town houses are aggressively pursued as design magazines paint vivid portraits of yuppy lifestyles filled with edgy detailing and salvaged material accents, too complex to be reduced to Martha Stewart strongholds.

Yet the model of American residential architecture paradoxically accommodates the precise opposite when you leave its primate cities. The difference between custom and industrialised modes of production is the most basic difference between these two worlds. The McMansion model persists despite almost universal derision.

One neighbourhood just outside of Raleigh in North Carolina was a terrifying reminder of this enduring model of design and production. Approaching the residential area, we were confronted with uninspired clapboard-clad rowhouses snaking their way around a curving road. The overwhelming majority of these were faced with 'Obama' signposts. As the road bent, the rowhouses gave way to tightly spaced single family

houses, and increasingly 'McCain' signs wormed their way into the mix. Here children played outside as parents and siblings looked on. Even further in and, rather unsurprisingly, up a slight hill, houses were spaced further and further apart. They were larger, and the driveways showed no signs of their inhabitants. The curtains were drawn and

architecture should be equally recognised as demonstrative of the masses. These 'middle-class' families represent the demographic base of the USA, and their tastes should be as important to architects as their votes are to politicians.

What this election has taught us is that elitism need not be exclusive of populism,

These houses are a caricature of the 'fortress America' discourse, with constantly shuttered windows and a charmless lack of activity and life

McCain signs were everywhere. These houses are a caricature of the 'fortress America' discourse, with constantly shuttered windows and a charmless lack of activity and life. Even the local school buses, I was shocked to discover, resemble armoured tanks, with small windows so thick they appear bulletproof. That these homes all seemed to support McCain is unsurprising.

In terms of the intersection between democracy and architecture, it is necessary to understand that this lifestyle dominates the majority of the American landscape. If Obama recognised the importance of appealing to this demographic, then its

and that the apathy that has led many intellectuals to give up on and ignore the needs, proclivities and wants of the majority of the population only increases the divide between the two groups. With pressing social, environmental and economic issues clouding the profession, now more than ever architects should accept popular opinion and work within its potentially tasteless confines to better the lives of its users, instead of designing exclusively for institutions and a class that allows it the most freedom. This is a time for hope, and it should be adapted to every facet and every profession in society. *Jaffer Kolb is the AJ's former features editor*



Epoch defining doesn't have to be polemical, says Patrick Lynch. Just look at Glasgow's Burrell Collection

Barry Gasson, John Meunier and Brit Andresen won the competition to design the building to house the Burrell Collection in Glasgow in 1971. The gallery is one of my favourite buildings. It's also one that baffles me. For one thing, I'd like to know why all three architects left Britain following such a successful project. A year after it opened, the AJ reported the crush of crowds was damaging the glorious parkland in which it sat. The degree of media attention – and the popular and professional affection felt – is intriguing.

master to build a museum. This impression is tempered by the building's position in the 250-year-old wooded splendour of Pollok Country Park. Statues of the Buddha sit among mature trees, as if the architects found them there and simply built around them.

Geometry and tectonics are resolved in a way that suggests solutions for some of the essential problems we encounter everyday at the drawing board or computer screen. Craft and industry reach a happy entente, making the rhetorical oppositions between High-Tech,

corporate imitation of what German philosopher Friedrich Schiller called 'the sacred games of art'.

At the Burrell, the marriage of nature and material culture is worth preserving, if only because it's a determined example of optimism and inspiration in architecture – and a confidence in its standing as the mother of the arts. But the marriage is also an autonomous and free thing, and it needs space to convince us that culture is still worth our time today.

It's as if Disney employed an unknown Modernist master to build a museum

It struck a chord then and now: Gasson later received an OBE, and in 2005 the Burrell was voted second in a poll of the best modern Scottish buildings by *Prospect* magazine.

Designed just before the epoch-defining oil crisis of 1974, built during a recession, and opened in a period when architects were public enemy number one, the Burrell should have flopped. Yet somehow it manages to distill all of the conflicts of the age into a cool summation of the possibilities – and still seems absolutely contemporary. Other exemplary buildings presage the endgame of certain epochs. The Neue Staatsgalerie at Stuttgart, Germany, by James Stirling, both fulfilled the ideals of and killed off Post-Modernism.

The Burrell, however, resists such polemical definitions. Partly reconstructed settings of sacked monastic settlements jostle with frankly filmic ersatz reconstructions of medieval manor houses. It's almost as if Disney had employed an unknown Modernist

Post-Modernism and the vernacular specious.

I'm excited and relieved by this building. Its intelligence is almost palpable. The dogma of a good idea runs through the structure with all of the lighthearted sincerity you find in great works of art.

It appears modern and ancient and feels like both a found object and a supreme fiction. I'm confused and intrigued by it. Herzog & de Meuron's de Young museum in San Francisco plays many of the same games, setting archetypes off against an intense experience of constructed nature, splicing obtuse geometry with a laconic attitude towards surfaces.

As if playing in the wood or the galleries wasn't enjoyable enough, Glasgow planners want to let 'high-wire forest adventure course' company Go Ape install an adventure playground for kids in the wood behind the gallery, turning the *spielraum* of the collage-like mirrored galleries into a deadening



Pollok Wood reflected in the Burrell Collection's facade

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A CIVIC ENDEAVOUR

5th Studio has designed a rural building in Cambridgeshire with urban resonance, writes *Peter Carl*. Photography by *Timothy Soar*



Creative Exchange, St Neots, Cambridgeshire, by 5th Studio

5th Studio's Creative Exchange for St Neots in Cambridgeshire is a wonderful example of why it's a good idea to hire a decent architect. In principle, an enterprise centre is a good thing; in practice, the architecture can bow to the economics, resulting in repetitive rentable space off a corridor. The ingenuity of Tom Holbrook and his team at 5th Studio allowed the Creative Exchange to fulfil its potential on several levels – socially, politically, urbanistically, architecturally.

Relics of the 4ft-tall monk named Saint Neot made their way from Cornwall to Cambridgeshire in the Middle Ages, and

christened this small town. Its market square has echoes of a forum or central square, with rich structure behind it. But today, agricultural market towns within commuting distance of London are forced to survive as part of the government's housing policy. This has several effects. Firstly, the corporate identity of the market square surrenders its authority to the extensive patterns of privacy that comprise housing today. Secondly, St Neots has become more directly related to London than to its neighbours, such as Cambridge or Bedford. Thirdly, renewal comes from the industries

located on the periphery of the town, not from the market square.

The Creative Exchange is adjacent to Longsands College, which specialises in technology, media and the arts. These are, of course, key areas of economic growth and potential creativity. The Creative Exchange will serve about 20 fledgling firms working in these areas, with the opportunity for exchange of ideas with college students, as well as with each other. The firms' activities will range from the physical making of prototypes or artworks to more ephemeral forms of creativity, which are not rooted to any >>



The Creative Exchange establishes an incipient urbanity

particular place and require broadband access more than the town. 5th Studio recognised the importance of a dialogue between these two forms of creativity, and was aware that the Creative Exchange was not only an addition to the college, but an important element in St Neots' urban transformation.

The college and the enterprise centre are located on the northern edge of St Neots, on a route that leads from the market square to the railway station. 5th Studio's site strategy placed the centre at the eastern end of a sequence of future buildings that ends in the

college. This sequence addresses Priory Park (although the college, a tangle of circumstantial accretion, does not). Priory Park lost its manor house in the 1960s, and the centre and the college now command its attractive allées of trees and sports pitches. As such, the centre takes on several roles at once: it marks a new hub of urban renewal; it establishes a sequence with the college that structures the town's relationship to Priory Park; and it is the gateway to this sequence.

The centre is vertical, rising four storeys above the plateau of the park and above the



roofs and back gardens of the suburbs to the south. This verticality is sufficient to organise and orient the relentless horizontality of the northern edge of St Neots, reclaiming the scale of the original manor house as well as establishing an incipient urbanity. One enters from the east, following a newly planted line of lime trees towards the open corner beneath the second floor.

An apparent optical illusion guides one's approach – a stair that ascends both towards and away across a skylight marking entry. This stair, clothed in polycarbonate that reveals the structure beneath its skin, commands the south facade. It is a bridge between a suspended plane and the building, creating a dramatic slot addressing the scale of the site. It also acts as the fire stair, and can be sealed off from the rest of the building, with the significant consequence that the vertical order of the centre can be allowed to develop freely, with openings between floors.

The primary achievement of this building is the continuity of the public realm – from the scale of St Neots to that of the site, and to the various collectives that will form in the centre itself. The vertical order (coupled with the fire-isolation of the stair) enables this, since what might ordinarily have been a corridor becomes here a generous public room on each floor, opening on to the park. In fact, the building exhibits the vertical hierarchy of a town house, with large public spaces on the first two floors and smaller, more particular rooms on the upper two floors. The progressive ascent to light culminates in a roof-garden that offers recesses for outdoor seminars or working, plus wireless access and wonderful views across St Neots, the park and the flood-plain of the River Ouse.

It is remarkable how consistently the centre plays on three registers at the same time: it is part of an incipient urban transformation; it is a prominent element in a landscape configuration; and it has its own business to accomplish, as the Creative Exchange. These registers are sustained on the interior, according to a diagonal organisation with entry from the east and the public rooms oriented north, to the park. The south facade above the first floor is blind, to prevent overlooking the neighbours' gardens.

The pillars of the reinforced concrete armature avoid the corners, allowing the glass to determine the primary envelope. At the same time, the exposed concrete constantly >>



This page The stairs, expressed externally on both the west (left) and south (above) facades, are 'clothed' in a polycarbonate skin' that reveals the centre's structure. The building is entered through the open corner of the east facade, marked by a lime tree (far left)



Sunlight rakes across rooms, grazing the elements and casting moving shadows

This page The interiors are open to Priory Park (above left) and connect with each other both vertically (above right) and

horizontally, contrasting with the 'rentable space off a corridor' model associated with creative business centres

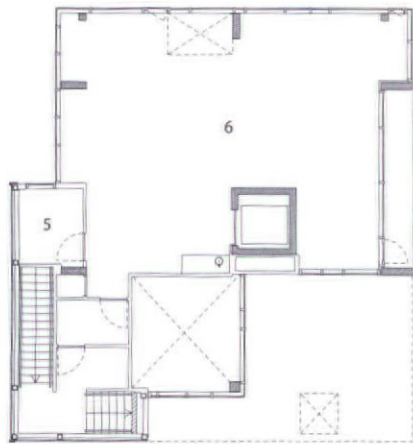
recalls the earth and, thus, the park, which is always in view from the public rooms. The ground and first floors frame the double-height reception, which is scaled to the site and allows access to the stair through its back wall, as if stepping outdoors before ascending. This gives on to a space that acts as a reception, exhibition room and seminar room. Like the open-plan office on the first floor, this room opens to the park.

The upper rooms extend beyond the armature, gaining space, shading the rooms below, and creating a public room that acts like a small forum (in which a spigot for coffee and tea plays the role of town fountain). These rooms are not just repetitive boxes – they adjust to their conditions with balconies or recesses that give each a locale; an identity. The building's exterior larch boarding will weather to a light grey, and the rooms' interiors are varnished plywood. These materials obviously respond to a stringent budget, but they are, in fact, more useful and more solid than your typical white wallboard and wall sockets.

Plywood and concrete work well together because they are both ambiguously natural and technical; materials that mediate between the earth and the emancipated world of computing and contemporary media.

The Creative Exchange is as much a vertical garden as it is a building; and this consistent appeal to the chthonic provides an orienting substrate for the monitors, posters, office kit, and generally busy lives of the eventual inhabitants. Mediating between these is the exposed galvanised piping for power and IT, which attains a celebratory status in the inventive light fixtures. The vertical-garden effect is largely a result of the way light is structured. The north orientation of the public rooms means that, firstly, Priory Park is always illuminated, viewed from a position of shadow. The rooms' centre of gravity is always determined by the horizons of the park and its activities. Secondly, the open configuration means that sunlight rakes across rooms, grazing the elements and casting moving shadows. Coupled with the >>





First-floor plan

1. Foyer
2. Reception
3. Office
4. Lounge
5. Meeting room
6. Studio
7. Park lounge
8. Workshop 'huts'
9. Plant



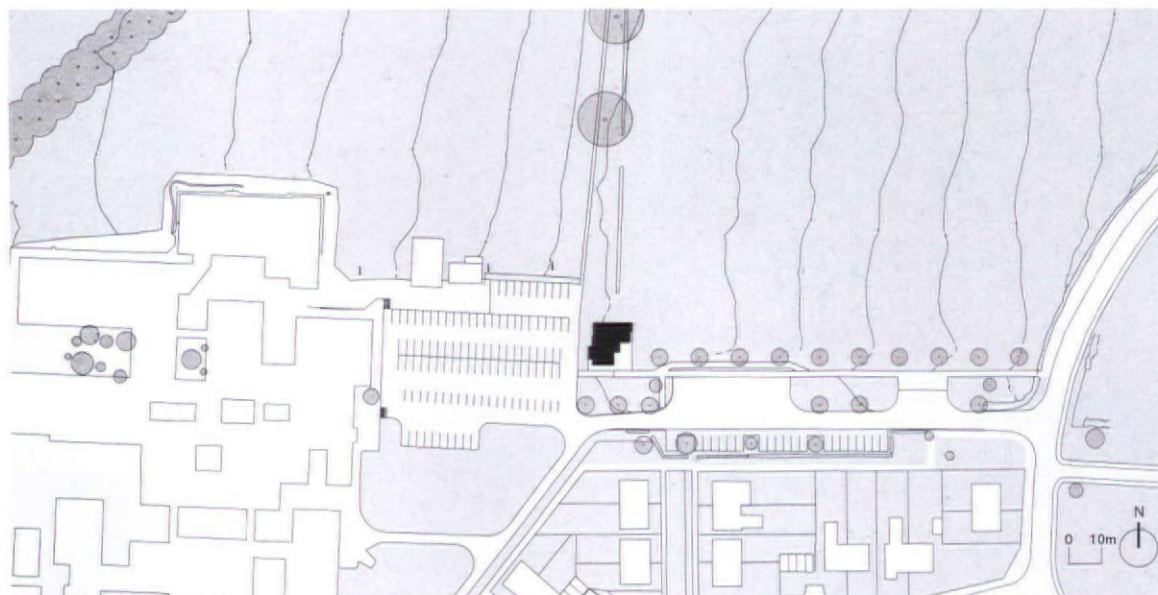
Second-floor plan



Ground-floor plan



Third-floor plan



Left The site plan shows that the centre is approached from the east along a route defined by trees
Above left The plans reveal an internal order similar to that of a town house: large public rooms on the first two floors, with smaller particular rooms on the upper floors
Above The concrete columns of the structure avoid the corners, allowing the glass to determine the primary envelope



openings to the central skylight, this literally lightens the building, anticipating the culmination of the ascent from earthly shadow to the roof garden.

Aristotle identified civic praxis as action and reflection for the common good (ethical), divided between the know-how to produce something (a shoe, a building, a speech) and things done for their own sake (morals and politics). This building could have been a decorated shed – an autonomous form framed by grass. Pure form is the architectural equivalent of a credit default swap (insurance against purchase of a fictitious principal), by which the appearance of a building is taken for its substance.¹ The several forces that the Creative Exchange elects to negotiate – urban and rural, natural and technical, education and service, economics and ethos, making and

politics – are not, so to speak, added value. Rather it is a matter of basic honesty – these forces acknowledge the conflicts inherent in the proposition. Once it was common, but now it is rare for one to be able to hear in a rural building the urban resonances – the deep consistency of town – of civic praxis. ■ [Peter Carl teaches architecture at Cambridge University and will take up a chair at London Metropolitan University in January](#)

1. The credit default swap was invented as cover for dodgy financial instruments rooted in, for example, sub-prime mortgages. It is a fictitious insurance against a fictitious principal, capitalism without the capital, a sort of simulated economy. Similarly, form is simulated architecture. The conversion of architecture into form – roughly speaking, an Enlightenment project – made it easier to innovate, but disconnected architecture from use, place, local materials and modes of construction, etc. Digital design is all form (defined ultimately by code and algorithms), to which everything needs to be supplied, including scale, to make 'architecture'.

Tender date July 2007
Start on site date October 2008
Contract duration 11 months
Gross external floor area 812.2m². Roof garden 224m²
Form of contract JCT 98 Intermediate Contract. Single-stage tender with negotiations
Total cost £1.4 million
Client/planning supervisor Huntingdonshire District Council
Architect 5th Studio
Structural engineer Scott Wilson
Services engineer ZEF
Quantity surveyor Davis Langdon
Main contractor SDC Special Projects
Annual CO₂ emissions Predicted rate of 15.9kgCO₂/m²

THE ART WAREHOUSE

Nissen Adams' conversion of a Royal Mail sorting office is flexible and straightforward, says *James Pallister*

'Once, twice and sold!' The gavel comes down, and someone on the other end of an agent's phone is the proud owner of Gilbert and George's 1980 canvas, *Viking*.

The man with the gavel is Simon de Pury, chairman of auction house Phillips de Pury. In 2007, Phillips de Pury commissioned London-based practice Nissen Adams to rebuild and fit out a vast former Royal Mail sorting office in Victoria, central London, to double up as a gallery and auction venue. The practice had carried out some preliminary work in 2006 to make the building suitable for exhibitions.

Before the arrival of automation, post-sorting required a large floor plan and column-free space. Nearly a century later, this building proves an ideal place to display and sell artwork. It's now one of the largest private galleries in London, with over 1,800m² of gallery space.

On my visit, the largest of the eight connected gallery spaces on the first floor is being used for an auction. It's 17.5m long and comfortably holds over 400 seated punters. I stand at the entrance to the room. On the other side, against the back wall, is a raised platform where about 20 dealers sit >>





Simon de Pury leads an auction in one of the larger gallery spaces

with phones clamped to their ears.

It's a big contrast to how the gallery appeared the previous day. I arrived at noon, when the building was relatively empty and there was plenty of room to stroll around from space to space. It's a very large building, with a series of galleries on the first floor arranged around the large space used for auctions. The gallery is open to the public and at ground level is a generous lobby. To the left of the reception desk are stairs to the spaces on the lower ground floor, which have a slightly smaller footprint to the ones above.

It's not a gallery of the sealed-white-cube variety. The building's deep plan (approximately 40m from front to back) is lit with a mix of artificial and natural light. 'The rooflights [that run the width of the building] drop light into the plan, and the back is lit by a glazed winter garden,' says Nissen Adams co-founder Ben Adams. This means that the quality of light changes throughout the day. Though the basement space offers a more controllable environment in which to show, for example, video art, I imagine that, for displaying some other artworks, the modulation of natural light could be a bugbear.

'We tried to keep things really simple

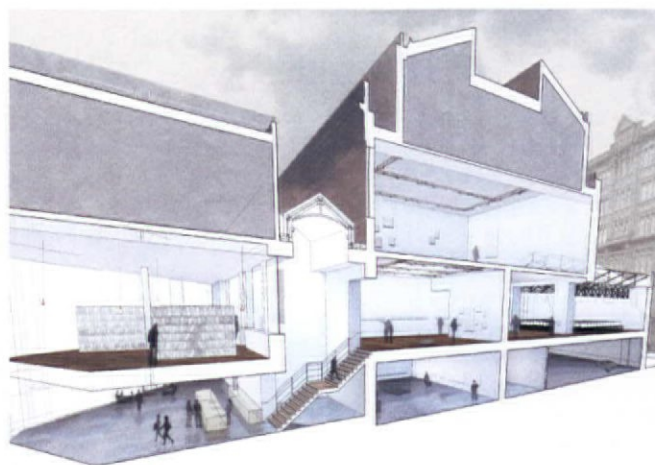
'The way you circulate through the building has a real clarity to it'

but clever,' says Adams. Services running along the roof are left exposed. The ground-floor lobby has a concrete floor; the main gallery space has untreated timber. Like the first floor, the basement display spaces are arranged around a large central room, with each opening between the gallery walls a standard size of 1.2m or 2.4m. Gesturing at the exposed services and concrete floor, Adams says: 'With this approach you retain the idea of selling art in a warehouse.'

Nissen Adams' light touch means it is difficult to gauge the extent of the practice's work and the impact it has had on the building. Adams argues that the circulation is the crucial intervention. He says: 'The way you circulate through the building has a real clarity to it.



Clockwise from this image The winter garden's roof trusses were retained and the windows replaced; The first floor in 2006, before Nissen Adams' permanent fit-out; Ground-floor plan; This room will eventually be office space; Axonometric



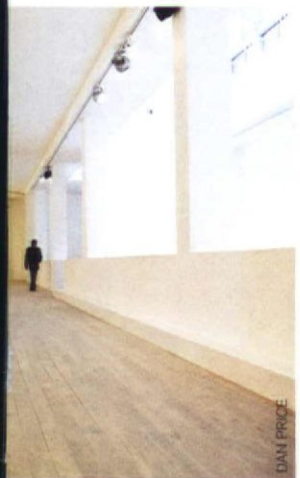


DAN PRICE

There's a very definite sequence that is important.' In my wanderings round the gallery, it seemed to have an unobtrusive logic.

One of the charming things about this project is the extent to which the architect had to accommodate the client's use of the building. Auction days dominate Phillips de Pury's calendar and all of the work had to fit in around them. Nissen Adams has experience of theatre design, and co-founder Pippa Nissen studied it for an MA between Part 1 and Part 2, so the practice is used to the temporary stage set. Here though, it's the client who is doing the moving. As Adams explains, walls are taken down, partitions adjusted, and platforms added as the client rearranges the gallery for different shows. Adams winces at a piece of aluminium trim fixed to an impromptu platform that was knocked up to raise a show's centrepiece artwork. But gripes about trim aside, he seems to respect that the client makes such a thorough use of the building that it extends to altering its fabric.

Back to the auction, and de Pury is charming the punters. The fine suits on display at tonight's sale are far removed from the rough cloth the postal workers might have worn. But appearances are deceptive. Though all interventions are slight, this is still a project and a building that works hard. Nissen Adams has ensured that it can be moulded to the ever-changing wishes of its dynamic owners, who make it sweat for its living. The practice has given the building enough flexibility to suit the diverse demands placed upon it. ■

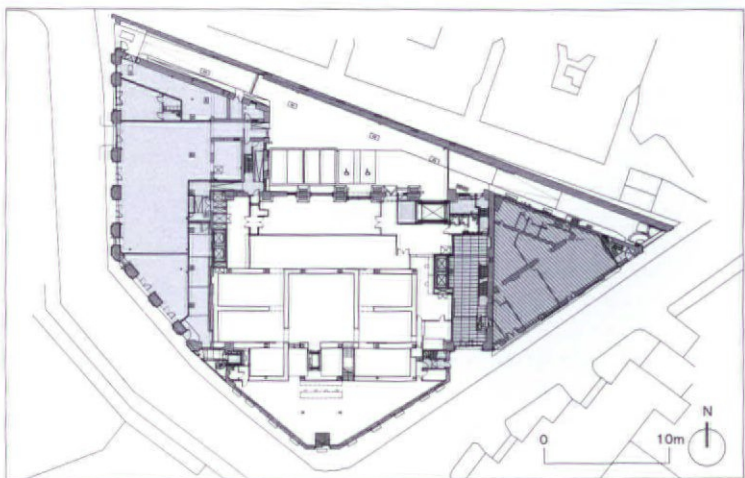


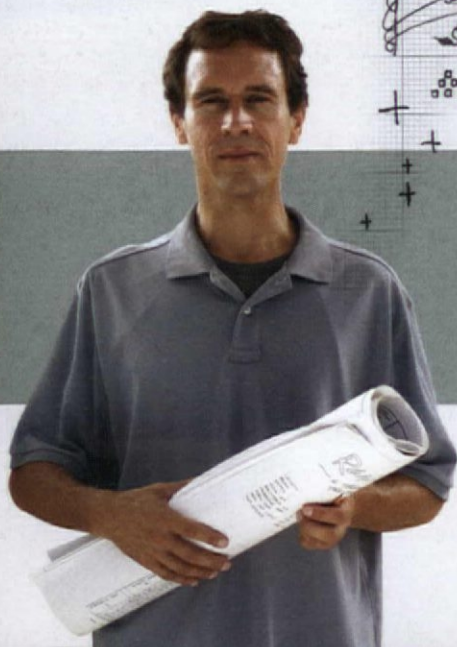
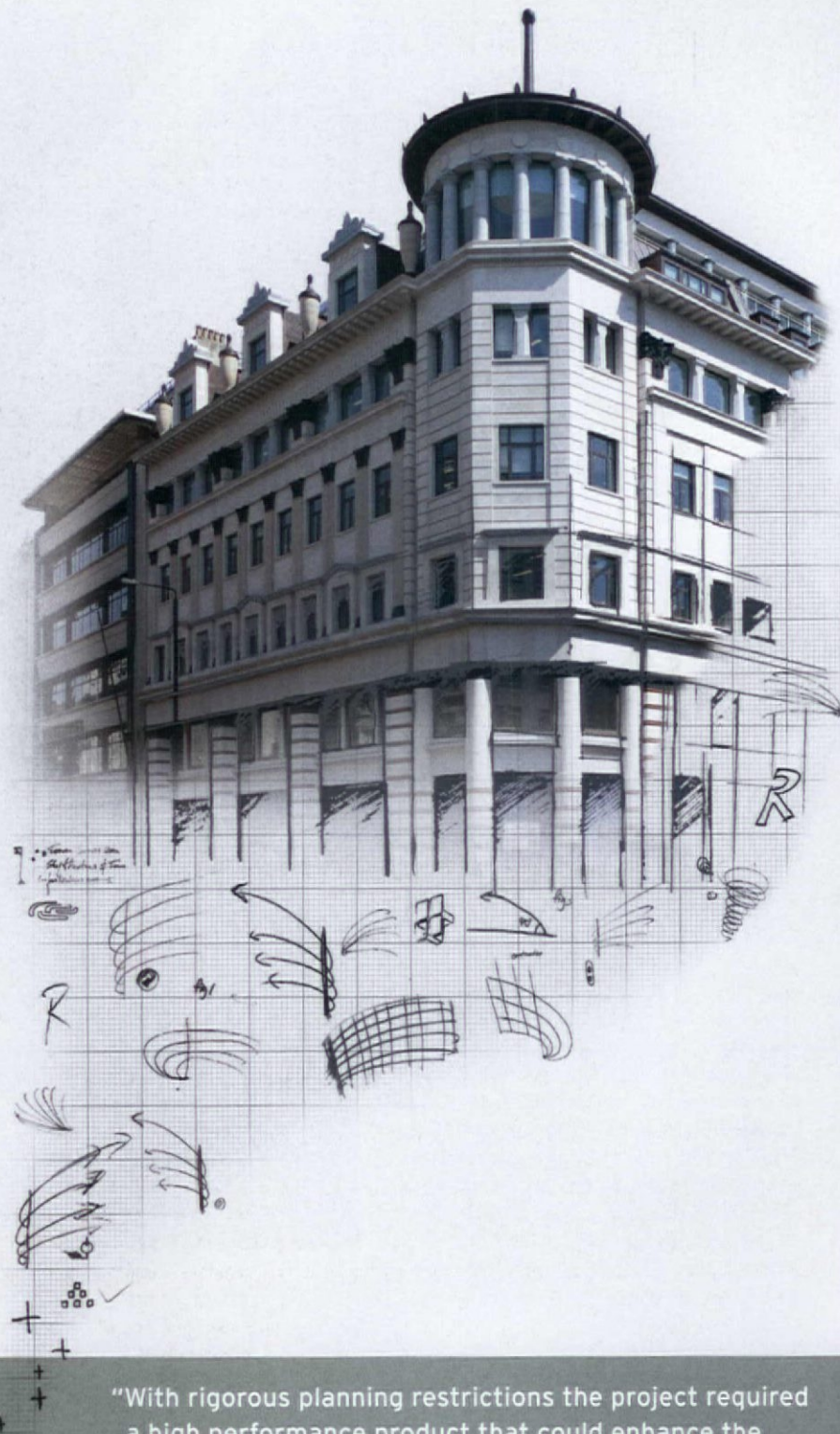
DAN PRICE

Tender date April 2007
Start on site date July 2007
Contract duration 30 weeks
Gross external floor area 3,235m²
Form of contract JCT 98
Total cost £4,167,000
Client Phillips de Pury
Architect Nissen Adams
Structural engineer Heyne Tillett Steel
Services engineer GDM
Quantity surveyor Davis Langdon
Planning supervisor LST Consultants
Main contractor ISG Interior/Exterior
Annual CO₂ emissions Under review



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HOW TO REPAIR CONCRETE

As concrete buildings begin to take on greater historical importance, the challenge for architects is restoring the material sensitively, writes *Catherine Croft*

For firms taking on a restoration contract, concrete repair can cause a major headache. The threat of litigation looms large, buildings are shrouded in plastic at the very mention of spalling, and huge skirts festoon any publicly accessible areas, lest falling debris hit a passer-by. The evidence of testing – sometimes performed without much expertise – is frequently left exposed for far longer than is

necessary. The red-stained scars of excavated reinforcement bars all too often stand accusingly as dramatic evidence of a problem, eroding the quality of the environment for building users. All this leads to an ‘anything has to be better than this’ acceptance of poor-quality patching.

The term ‘concrete cancer’ (see box on page 40) may have lost popular currency in the last 20 years, but the view of concrete

decay as terminal is still widely held. This is a rather bizarre attitude: all building materials are, in effect, gradually decaying, and maintenance and repair is never about creating a time-defying product, but about controlling natural entropy.

We appreciate that stone crumbles and wood moldings lose crispness, but concrete that is no longer pristine is often seen as problematic. We need

to develop an understanding of concrete’s life cycle and tailor solutions accordingly.

This links to the question of patina: can dirty, patched or scarred concrete ever look beautiful? We accept – and even preserve – evidence of the passage of time on traditional stone buildings, but there still lingers a belief that concrete which has got a bit grubby needs a vigorous scrub or a coat of paint. There >>

are frequently valid technical reasons for applying coatings to concrete, but these always alter its appearance. Much as a glass extension is never invisible, there is no such thing as a truly transparent protective barrier.

A walk round the wonderfully aged exterior of London's Barbican Centre should convert even the most determined adherent of the 'make it look like it was built yesterday' strategy think twice. The streaking on the

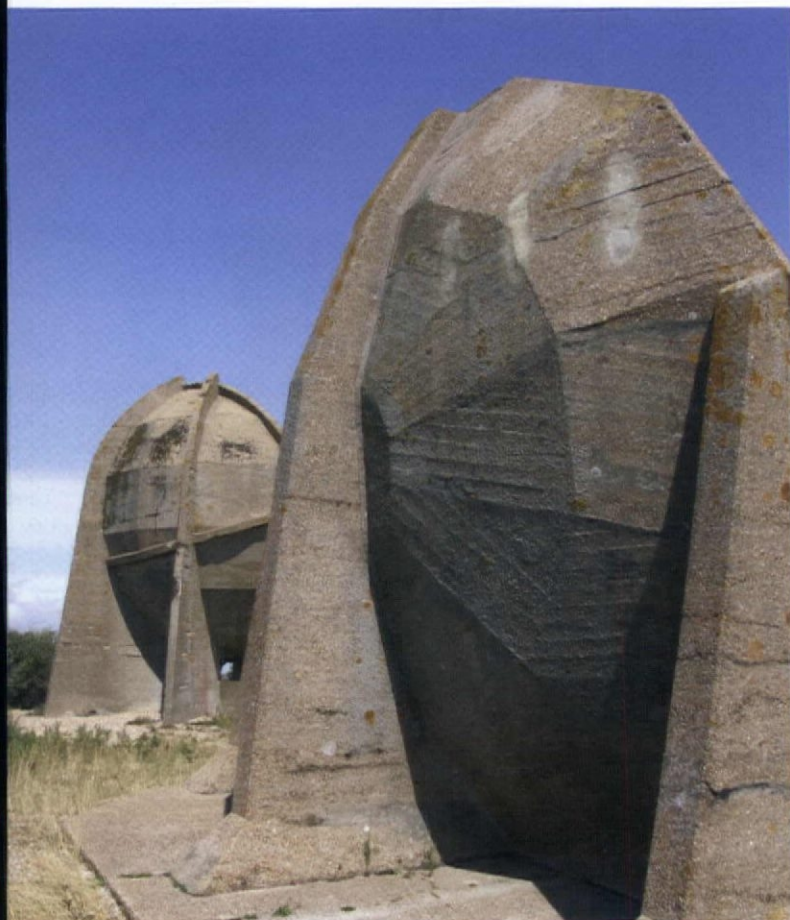
balcony fronts add an extra dimension of scale and tone, emphasising the monumentality of the form and the richness of the surface texture. A recent photography competition held by the Twentieth Century Society via the Flickr photo-sharing website generated many entrants, celebrating concrete that was far from crisp and newly formed. The café at the Hayward Gallery in London, which opened under the name Concrete in November

2007, markets itself with cards showing a close-up of a concrete surface – complete with a stain.

Part of the current problem with concrete repair is that we still have a tendency to place blind faith in contractors, or in the manufacturers and suppliers of patented products. Unsurprisingly, many clients are unwilling to support innovation when told that any deviation from factory-batched mixes or standard methods will result

in an end product not eligible for guarantee cover. But has anyone ever made a successful claim? I have yet to come across a case.

In fact, much work has been done to improve repair methods, provide sound and accessible advice and share best practice, and many architects (not necessarily those specialising in conservation) have been working intelligently from first principles to come up with innovative solutions. I am currently >>



Above

The concrete 'listening ears' at Dungeness

Above right The experimental patchwork of the concrete
Opposite page, bottom left

Badly damaged

painted concrete at the National Theatre Studio's ground level

Opposite page, bottom right The newly restored facade



DUNGENESS SOUND MIRRORS, KENT

The three sound mirrors, or 'listening ears', on the beach at Dungeness, Kent, were built in the 1920s and '30s to detect enemy aircraft approaching across the channel, before radar rendered them obsolete. Their proximity to the sea has accelerated the rate of decay and there is widespread corrosion of reinforcement and delamination of the concrete.

English Heritage has commissioned a series of investigative repairs on the mirrors – which are

now scheduled as monuments (legal protection specifically for archaeological sites) – that will explore treatments that might be transferable elsewhere. The richly patinated surface of the mirrors is a complex amalgam of weathered aggregate and many varieties of lichen. Chris Wood from English Heritage's building conservation team is also experimenting with yoghurt to encourage lichen reinstatement. The works were carried out by Rowan Technologies.



Far left
The tonal contrasts of Priory Heights Estate's facade were restored rather than overclad

Left An artist applies multi-coloured dots of paint to reinstate the original tonal effect

PRIORY HEIGHTS ESTATE, LONDON

Avanti Architects' refurbishment of these 1950s housing blocks in north London, designed by Berthold Lubetkin's practice Tecton, is now nearly 10 years old, but is still radical in its sensitive approach to regeneration.

Avanti director John Allan, Lubetkin's biographer and an expert on his work, was determined

to avoid the conventional options of overcladding or blanket white coating. Instead, a solution was found that would restore the original tonal contrasts – where exposed aggregate concrete was the mid tone between light cornices, copings, tiled panels, planters and the dark bricks. Because the client wanted to

achieve a warranted result, a proprietary product repair system from Sika was used, avoiding the introduction of aggregates, which could have invalidated the guarantee. The correct visual effect was then created by distressing the surface to create texture, and a team of 24 artists was brought in to paint the 'aggregate' in the

form of multi-coloured dots using Sika Sikagard 680S Cosmetic. The overall effect is a very convincing optical illusion. A clear anti-carbonation coating (Sika 680S Clear Glaze) was then applied over the panels as a whole, which Allan admits 'gives the game away a bit' with its slightly increased reflectivity in the repair areas.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE STUDIO, LONDON

This Grade II-listed building was completed in 1958 to house facilities including scenery and workshops for the adjacent Old Vic Theatre. Architect Lyons Israel Ellis specialised in low-cost buildings with robust, high-quality detailing. A conservation statement, commissioned by the National Theatre (the current owner)



identified the board-marked concrete as being of outstanding significance, although it had already been somewhat compromised after being painted with a thick elastomeric-type paint.

Sadly, the extent and quality of previous repairs made the ideal of removing the paint and leaving the original surface exposed visually

unacceptable, but architect Haworth Tompkins worked with contractor Rise Contracts and subcontractor PAYE to find a coating to blend accurately with the board-marked surface. The solution involved painting a light silica textured wash over the whole surface and then applying opaque Keim Concretal paint.



FARNBOROUGH WIND TUNNELS, HAMPSHIRE



working on a guide to concrete repair to be published by English Heritage. This is part of a wholesale revision of its highly respected series of Practical Building Conservation technical handbooks. It's a sign of the times – back in 1988, when the first series came out, there was no volume on concrete. Now, with so many listed buildings made from concrete, and English Heritage's skilled masons turning their hands to concrete patchwork, it has become a necessity.

Armed with a better understanding of decay processes and the confidence to look beyond the standard proprietary solutions, concrete repair in the future should become a fascinating art requiring skill and sensitivity where the quality of the building deserves it. ■

Catherine Croft is director of the Twentieth Century Society

The Concrete Centre
www.concretecentre.com
 Concrete Repair Association
www.concretere.org.uk

Above View of the restored transonic wind tunnel

Right Late-stage carbonation, showing expanded reinforcement

These two Grade I-listed wind tunnels, once used for testing aircraft, sit in a brownfield site in Farnborough, Hampshire, which is currently being developed by Julian Harrap Architects. In addition to the usual problems, the tunnels suffered from a lack of movement joints. Another issue was the difference between the structures, with one building constructed from fine-grained concrete and the other from aggregate.

All patch repairs were square-

cut and filled with a proprietary repair mortar (supplied by Sika). Next, cosmetic layers were added. The aggregate building has a top-coat of render.

This render was scored to mimic the original board-marking and daywork joints. The repair mortar matched the fine concrete's texture reasonably well, so a quartz-textured furring coat was applied to emulate the original bag-rubbed finish. Both buildings were painted to restrict carbon-dioxide penetration.



KEY REASONS FOR CONCRETE DECAY

Concrete cancer or alkali-silica reaction (ASR)

ASR is caused by the reaction between unreacted calcium oxide in the cement mixture dissolving in water and reacting with the silica used as an aggregate. This produces a gel that swells as it draws water from the surrounding cement, inducing pressure and subsequent cracking of the aggregate and surrounding paste.

Expansion of metal reinforcement

Corrosion of metal reinforcements causes them to expand. Corrosion is speeded up if the reinforcement is too near to the surface of the concrete.

This is because carbon dioxide in the air dissolves in any moisture (usually rainwater or condensation) on or under the surface of the concrete. It forms carbonic acid that migrates into the concrete, reducing its alkalinity and hence its ability to protect the reinforcement against corrosion.

It is possible to measure the 'carbonation front' (the depth to which the concrete is affected in this way), and to judge if, or how soon, the reinforcement will be reached.

There may also be some other destructive chemical agent present, either in the environment or as an impurity or misguided additive in the mix. Specific concrete types can be more vulnerable.

Examples include concrete formed with experimental additives to make it set faster, make it set in colder conditions, or allow it to flow more freely. The use of poorly washed aggregates can also be a problem.

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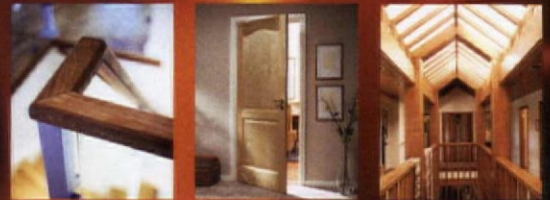
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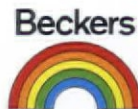
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Léon Krier (right)
and Charles Jencks
(far right) at
Supercrit #6

CRIT

Poundbury unpicked

Léon Krier excels in the Supercrit format, but his work fares less well, says Gillian Darley

Supercrit #6: Léon Krier presents Poundbury. 31 October. Room M421, University of Westminster, 35 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5LS

Who'd have thought that last Friday's Supercrit #6, Léon Krier's discussion of his Poundbury masterplan, would prove the most popular of the series? The man behind the Dorset 'urban village' masterplan – now approaching adulthood – beat previous participants such as Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Cedric Price and Rem Koolhaas, and filled a studio up on the fourth floor at the University of Westminster. The organisers, Kester Rattenbury and Samantha Hardingham of the university's Research Centre for Experimental Practice (EXP), chose a topic with surprisingly broad appeal in this ongoing series that places key international projects under renewed and expert scrutiny.

Krier is a natural at this kind of disquisition – an easy polemicist with a well-honed presentation who is quick to show off his skills as a draughtsman. Charles Jencks, who chaired the event, praised Krier as a master of the dialectical method, the lecture as thinking process, and so it was – even if it was all too familiar in the pegs for its arguments. If the

audience is to take away one message, Krier said, it is the philosophical error of distinguishing between high and low tech. There is, he holds, 'only one technology'. His objective is to clarify planning issues and to strip away the Modernist agenda. 'Vast repetitions don't make real societies,' said Krier, after laying into high rise ('vertical cul-

Krier sees Poundbury as a 60 per cent success, let down by intransigent local authorities and the British construction industry

de-sac') and insisting that Poundbury's prime objective was to produce a 'network of towns which can survive the loss of fossil fuels', cutting back on car use. In Dorset, it is simple: for the Poundbury masterplanner, 'length of legs' determines the scale.

In the audience, forced to crane our necks sharp right to see the screens, we listened as Krier expounded the masterplan for Poundbury, the four concentric urban villages (with no acknowledgement made to Ebenezer

Howard's garden cities), the taming of the car, a design code (backed, at every turn, by 'solid drawings') and the wholesale rejection of Modernism – the message as delivered for almost 20 years. But Poundbury is atypical, an estate town with an unusually high-profile lord of the manor. Resolute anti-Modernist Prince Charles, who, as the Duke of Cornwall, owns the land on which Poundbury sits, has shown great fortitude, says Krier. So, it must be said, has Krier.

Now, however, the theory of Poundbury has to be measured against reality: two phases are complete, a third is about to start on site. Krier sees the plan as a 60 per cent success, let down by intransigent local authorities, the British construction industry and, he implied, by the growing imbalance (and resulting tensions) between the established outer areas of Dorchester and the new extension. He is bullish about the next phase. It will be better built and finally includes a feature for the skyline which is, to my eyes, strangely reminiscent of mud-brick towers in sub-Saharan Africa. With Krier's alarm about >>

the pending resource crisis, the towers at Poundbury might contain water tanks similar to those at Thorpeness on the Suffolk coast.

Poundbury is a highly planned, coded environment. Krier varied its plot sizes and mixed uses in civility and the hope that a coherent community would emerge. Yet attempts to create social diversity were less than successful, even before the current downturn. A bit of reflection, even a sense of history, might have helped – it was a century ago that Dame Henrietta Barnett had the same difficulty with her ‘workmen’s cottages’ at Hampstead Garden Suburb. Nor can Krier (or his client) grapple with the radical ideas that lay behind the garden cities and co-partnership estates; experiments with tenure and the wider benefits of sharing rising land values are not for the Duchy of Cornwall. From the start, Poundbury was simply an attempt to better the quality of a development that was already on the cards.

Krier faced not only a full audience, but a five-strong panel of critics. Sean Griffiths of FAT confined himself to enjoying the strangeness of Poundbury while questioning its wider application. Jules Lubbock was Prince Charles’ architectural adviser when Krier was chosen to mastermind the Duchy of Cornwall venture. Architect Michael Wilford, formerly of James Stirling Michael Wilford & Associates has, oddly enough, never been tempted to visit Poundbury despite often driving by. He questioned the relationship of the sectors to the historic town centre and the lack of topographical information.

Krier worked in the Stirling Wilford office until epic battles with Stirling – exacerbated by the Prince of Wales, as Jencks reminded us – brought that phase of his career to a close. Panellist James Woudhuysen detected a misanthropic note in the scheme, or at least, a detachment from reality leavened by privilege. As the panellists asked, if Poundbury aspired to self-sufficiency, where was the hospital – and where was the power plant?

But until a spirited intervention by panellist Sarah Wigglesworth the elephant in the room – style – was not acknowledged. Where was, she asked, the ‘readily available ordinariness’ of the vernacular? The architecture under discussion was, by definition, expensive, and Wigglesworth questioned the references to authenticity. Krier was rattled; he found it ‘touching’ that Poundbury isn’t seen as looking contemporary enough. Wigglesworth pursued

the point, though, taking issue with Krier’s emphasis on form and suggesting that suitable ingredients for a contemporary vernacular might include ‘history, memory, making and aesthetics’. Krier admitted that, thus far, Poundbury was more ‘cottagey’ than he wanted, his own image of the town having been rather closer to Georgian urbanism. He is less worried by accusations of ‘cultural kitsch’ than by the loss of control over the skyline and the shoddy quality of the construction – at least when builders have been required to return to traditional materials and forms.

The results, Krier admitted, have all too often been achieved ‘with glue’. He originally wanted towers, and described making a presentation to district councillors in which he showed them familiar Dorset villages with the towers and spires photoshopped out. They were unable to identify even one.

Venerable housing consultant Stephen Mullin took issue with Krier’s postulations: the vast majority were, for him, so non-specific that they could result in anything at all – from Cedric Price to the town of Carmel in California. Mullin was unconvinced about what he saw as Krier’s overly prescriptive ways of creating a ‘balanced community’. Then, from the back of the room, came the voice of a Poundbury resident: for him, the theory was compelling but the reality was a form of banishment. Enough said. ■

Resume: Krier fails to convince as a Poundbury resident gets the last word



Charles Jencks (left) and Léon Krier

LECTURE

Comics have a lot to tell us about the modern metropolis, writes James Pallister

Moderne Nocturne: The Graphic Novel and the Metropolis, by Raymond Quek. 4 November. University of Greenwich School of Architecture and Construction, London SE9 2PQ

‘Look at these powerful black and white images... you will be captivated from beginning to end.’ So wrote Thomas Mann in his introduction to Frans Masereel’s wordless book *The City*, published in 1925. Despite referring to Mann’s endorsement of Masereel in his lecture on the relationship between the graphic novel and the metropolis, held earlier this month at Greenwich University, architect and academic Raymond Quek said that ‘there has always been a lowly status to the graphic narrative because of its disposable nature’.

Not half, Raymond. Most commentary in the mainstream press on 20th-century sequential art – comics, if you will – falls into one of two categories. On one hand is an incredulity that this medium has ‘finally come of age’; on the other, a desperate attempt to intellectualise the work.

If anything, Quek falls into the latter category. His habit of threading the names of great thinkers (Walter Benjamin, Aristotle, Hannah Arendt and Friedrich Nietzsche) into his argument made me instantly wary, but rather than being off-puttingly pseudo-intellectual, his considerable knowledge of theory actually enriched his interpretation of the work. Like Mann (who, as Nobel Prize Laureate, has fairly impeccable intellectual credentials), Quek can see the value of using graphic art as a tool to interrogate the city.

Quek began his lecture by focusing on the work of Masereel and American artist Lynd Ward. Masereel’s *The City* (pictured above right) is a set of woodcuts that tell a metropolitan tale of oppression, power and poverty, and here the city is one that – like the woodcuts – has no room for midtones. The book’s caricatures are the portly capitalist, the harlot, the hard-working common man. They are very poor or very rich. We never see the

An illustration from Frans Masereel's wordless book *The City* (1925)



open skyline, technology is present only as the oppressor, and the city's scenery has much in common, Quek points out, with the work of Masereel's German contemporaries, the painters Otto Dix and George Grosz.

Ward's *Gods' Man* (1929) is a Faustian tale which follows the protagonist from the country to the city, where he is corrupted. Quek showed all 150 of the panels in a quick slideshow. This book's city, like Masereel's, is one of active caricature. It is never passive – it is seducer, corruptor and oppressor, and is relentless to the end.

The figure of the flaneur, who interrogates the city by walking it, appeared again and again in Quek's lecture. This 'botanist of the asphalt', in the words of Walter Benjamin, is echoed in the private detectives of 1940s film noir – and precedes the emergence of the superhero. Quek held that the superhero's impressive musculature overcame the normal weaknesses of man's physiology, and argued that the superhero provides reassurance that man can triumph over the city. There's comfort in the quintessential bird's-eye-view of the superhero looking down on to the rooftops – Batman leaping, Spiderman swinging, Superman flying. It's an extension of man's desire to master gravity and the city itself, argued Quek. The superhuman is a hyper-flaneur, who sees the city in a 'zoomscape'.

Towards the end of the lecture, an interesting diversion took us through French literature, fin-de-siecle German philosophy and the 1970s emergence of the 'graphic novel', ending up with the Bible. The book of Genesis, to be precise. Quek described Cain's banishment from the Garden of Eden after killing his brother. Seeking the refuge that God no longer provided, Cain built not a house, but a city, referred to by Joseph Rykwert in *The Idea of a Town* (1988). It's the city as a direct consequence of The Fall.

Plundering the canon of big names is seductive yet dangerous; a distracting slight of hand used to legitimise a line of thought. But Quek's use of theory was an asset rather than an affectation, and, as he said after the lecture, it is a useful way of introducing students to late 19th-century political theory.

Quek brought his lecture to an end with a killer sentence, which brought us back to Mann: 'The city is a character that regrets its past, despises its present and aspires for the future.' If an endnote like that doesn't captivate, then what will?

Resume: Quek soars over the comic's metropolis on the wings of theory
 Raymond Quek's *Fiction, Image, Tone: Architecture and the Representation of the Metropolis* will be published by Routledge in 2009



Critic's Choice

Look beyond the visual for a fuller experience of architecture and space, writes **Andrew Mead**

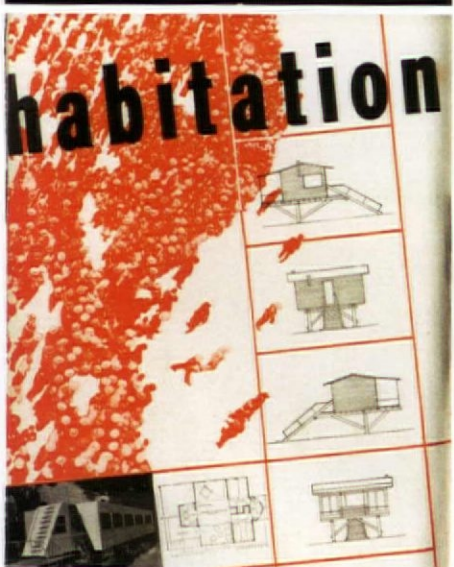
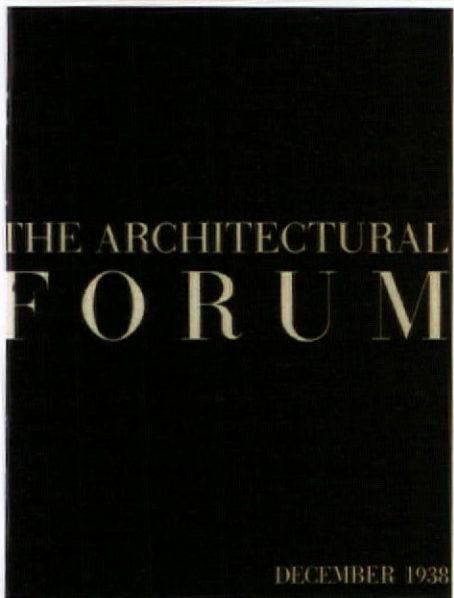
Canadian artist Janet Cardiff has found a powerful way to make architecture and the city a part of her work. During the last decade or more, she has devised 'audio walks' for locations that range from the streets of Whitechapel in East London to the Villa Medici in Rome.

You pick up a CD player and headset and follow Cardiff's instructions as she speaks confidently in your ear. But while she refers to specific features on the way – a flight of steps, a station concourse, a cul-de-sac – she doesn't act as an architectural guide. Instead, she creates a scenario or narrative, often redolent of a piece of film noir, implicating you in it as her voice and the sounds on the headset merge with the voices and sounds of the street. One result is to remind you that your experience of architecture and place is not through the eyes alone, as Finnish architect and academic Juhani Pallasmaa has argued eloquently in his books *Encounters* (Rakennustieto, 2008) and *The Eyes of the Skin* (Academy Press, 2005).

With fellow Canadian George Bures Miller, Cardiff also makes art installations, six of which feature in a terrific exhibition, 'The House of Books has No Windows', at Modern Art Oxford until 18 January (see picture). The soundtracks are just as integral to them as they are on the walks, while the visual effects are often spectacular in a show that is funny, nostalgic and surprising.

www.modernartoxford.org.uk





Back Issues *PLUS* gave pre-war America a fleeting introduction to the European avant-garde, says **Steve Parnell**

Before the Second World War, the intellectual level of the American architectural press was scarcely higher than a hardware catalogue. Howard Myers, editor of *Architectural Forum* magazine, which folded in the 1970s, wanted to address this by introducing the European avant-garde to the America. So he announced a new publication called *PLUS: Orientations of Contemporary Architecture* that was 'to add opinion, exploration and new controversy to reporting'. It was a free bi-monthly supplement to the *Architectural Forum*, and was published just three times.

The 16-page first issue of *PLUS* appeared in December 1938 and included 'Toward a Unity of the Constructive Arts' by Russian Constructivist sculptor Naum Gabo and a five-page article called 'Can Expositions Survive?' by Swiss critic Sigfried Giedion. Gabo bemoaned the fact that 'the period in which we are now living has anything but an exact or definite social organization or consciousness'. Giedion gave a brief history of the exposition, entwining it with the evolution of the new ornamentation-less design and showing the way forward for the architectural taste of the period: 'The problem of harmoniously uniting man and time cannot be superficially treated.'

However, it's not what was bluntly expounded in these pieces that might have influenced the 30,000 unsuspecting subscribers, but the visual vocabulary it was presented in. The credits show the typography and layout (pictured bottom left) to be by Herbert Matter, a young, unknown Swiss-born graphic designer.

The composition of photographs, text, drawings and copy must have been a revelation in itself. Compare the cover of the first issue of *PLUS* (top left) – an ice skater leaping over an armchair amid a celebration of wandering red title and line – with that of the spiral-bound *Architectural Forum* (centre left). It wouldn't have mattered if Giedion and Gabo had been writing a hardware catalogue, the message was simple: this is how the future should look.



5 THINGS TO DO THIS WEEK

1 *Somewhere Here* (pictured above)

Have a wander round Broadmead, a recently redeveloped area of Bristol, to see nine billboards by nine artists that have slipped into unoccupied advertising hoardings. Until 3 December. St Mary Redcliffe Way, Prince Street, St Phillip Barton Roundabout and other sites in Broadmead, Bristol. www.plan9.org.uk

2 *Broadgate Ice Rink, London*

Get your skates on at this no-frills rink for some winter fun. Until 19 December. Broadgate Circle, London EC2M 2QS. www.broadgateice.co.uk

3 *The Atlas of Hidden Water*

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4 *Towards a New Urbanism*

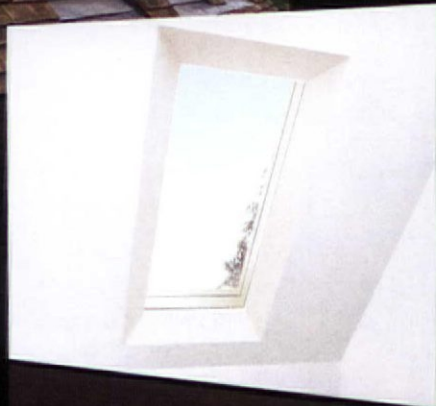
Book tickets for the two-day international symposium on the 21st-century city. 25-27 November. Venues across Liverpool. www.academyofurbanism.org.uk

5 *Eyes Over London*

Head down to this colloquium on over-head urbanism, subtitled 'Re-imagining the Metropolis in the Age of Aerial Vision'. 15 November. University of Westminster, 35 Marylebone Road, London NL1 5LS. www.westminster.ac.uk

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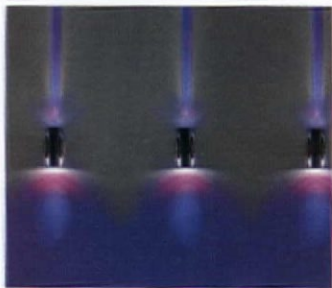
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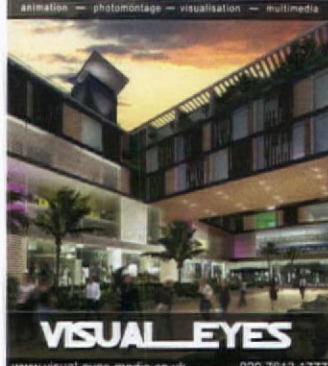
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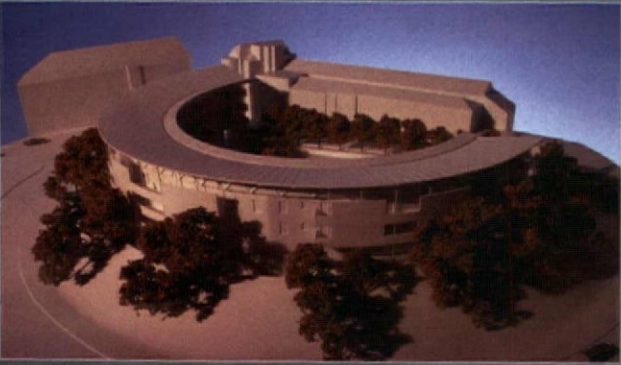
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For details contact: Revd Gillian Cooper, Dean's Clerk, Sheffield Cathedral, Sheffield, S1 1HA
T: 0114 263 6063
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MONDAY. To a global economic symposium hosted by the International Architects Network. Summary: customer mood shifting from huge buildings they can stare at to small buildings they can live in.

New-generation homes will be more like mobile phones and music players: tech-literate, sleek, compact, flexible, interactive, highly personalised and multi-platform. The architect's job will be to download any special features or add-ons and **make sure the builder puts them in the right way up**. It's steady work as returning clients will be peer-pressured into an upgrade every couple of years.

Welcome to the world of 'iTecture'. Ha ha, hmm...

TUESDAY. Gala dinner at the RIPBA, honouring those who gave their lives in the First International Style. I casually drop the word 'iTect' into conversations with journalists and architects. Even though I've just made it up they all pretend to know what I'm talking about. So then I ask them what 'iTect' means.

'Vanity architect?' 'Indented CAD monkey?' 'Optician?' Idiots. Only my friend Darcy, epic space correspondent for the *Creative on Sunday*, guesses correctly. 'Cross between a bespoke engineer and a lifestyle consultant?' He winks, inexpertly.

WEDNESDAY. Start a Facebook group for the discussion of iTecture. Then launch a Twitter feed. Then **create a memepool with everything on the internet starting with a lower case 'i'**.

THURSDAY. We brave commentators who toppled the tyrant Bush with our

sustained campaign of satire and snobbery were braced for the subsequent Republican sour grapes. Pff. Who cares what they think? Nobody's stupid enough to be a neo-con now except the president of Georgia and nearly everyone in the House of Commons.

Mr Obama's victory is an unequivocally good thing, and I will definitely get some work out of it. Already there are two invitations from Washington on my mantelpiece. The first is to join the 'White' House Rebadging Task Force. I will be one of several non-American voices internationalising change, shaping policy that's more 'hip-hop but not the explicit version'. The honorarium is small, although expenses are brilliant.

The second invitation is addressed jointly to me and my business associate Mr Darcy Farquar'say. **We recently set up an online design agency – Wap Biddly Pish** – offering our services discreetly, indeed remotely, to a select and interesting client base. Of course, Barack's human blogobots found us in a matter of days. They sensed in Wap Biddly Pish an acute awareness of the demands of today's iconic lifestyle, and saw an opportunity to buy that design awareness at competitive rates.

They are also intrigued by our specialism: iTecture. They'd never heard of it but have recently discovered it's all over the internet, which is great timing as Sandra, our website manager, only posted up our new mission statement yesterday.

FRIDAY. Darcy and I spend the morning staring hard at our notebooks. We promised Michelle's people we'd email over something called a Draft Style Transition Document by tonight.

Bauhaus, the yattering neo-Modernist dachshund, doesn't help. He looks attention-seeking enough as it is, in his poncey little winter coat. **It's a classic Álvaro Siza number, a long and elegant exercise in spatial revelation fashioned from white leather rectangles and frankly spoiled by having Bauhaus's head and arse sticking out of the ends.** Dog hair – ugh. I glance at the clock, five minutes past 11, and have a brainwave. To the pub, leaving Bauhaus in the nanoflat playing with his favourite chewy toy, a squeaky miniature Serpentine Pavilion.

After several rounds, Darcy and I have put together a pitch for Michelle O's Extreme White House Makeover. We will **CHANGE** floor coverings from deep-pile carpet to an enduring surface people can believe in. **CHANGE** exterior wall tones to an optimistic mixed-paint wash. **CHANGE** heavy curtains to light, opinion-forming shades. **CHANGE** McGeorgian fireplaces to smart, sassy hydrogen plasma burners. **CHANGE** the furniture, from lame-ass reproduction Regency bullshit to a network of urban 'perch points'.

Darcy and I share a high five, and a jug of Transparent Wallclimber.

SATURDAY. Call from Washington. The pitch has 'great traction'. Now, can Wap Biddly Pish work up a detailed iTectural profile for each member of the First Family? And the new puppy?

Yes, we can.

SUNDAY. Trawl papers in recliner. Long feature in the *CoS* in which **Darcy discusses iTecture with himself**. It's a draw.

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