POBOX3

POBOX 3

^ *Photo: View through dining room, Crystal Palace, Suffolk.*

INTRO

"What is architecture if it is not alchemy? Take base materials: stone, wood, sand, water, metal and, following a set of cryptic instructions, impenetrable to common folk, turn it into a dwelling. No wonder then, that masonry is not just the art of constructing buildings, both rather a guardian of arcane secrets, passed down orally from time immemorial. [...] Setting out to transmute base metals into gold, alchemists promised not mere buildings but boundless riches, eternal youth and a universal solvent."
Leigha Dennis

I came across this quote a few weeks ago while preparing for some teaching, and in the back of my mind was something my wife had said to me earlier that morning:*"Isn't it funny that we have these rectangles, designated spaces that we come back to every day. Sometimes we go outside for a bit, or visit other people's rectangles for a while, but then we come back to our own."*

My wife is a sculptor and we think differently. This is a good thing. And of course she is right; when you think past the practicalities and efficiencies, beyond the human habitual nature, it is quite funny. That is why I am so fascinated by people and (their) space; the relationship is incalculable and immeasurable. I find delight in the indeterminacy, in the intangibility and the complexity. For me the reward and satisfaction comes from learning about things, and starting conversations rather than projecting solutions. This is exactly what **PO BOX** is about: not just starting focused conversations but poking the beast, irritating the oyster, cultivating unique thought and expression from their mighty young workforce. This kind of research is more about vaccination than it is about cure and the practice of architecture needs a much more regular dose!

Gem Barton

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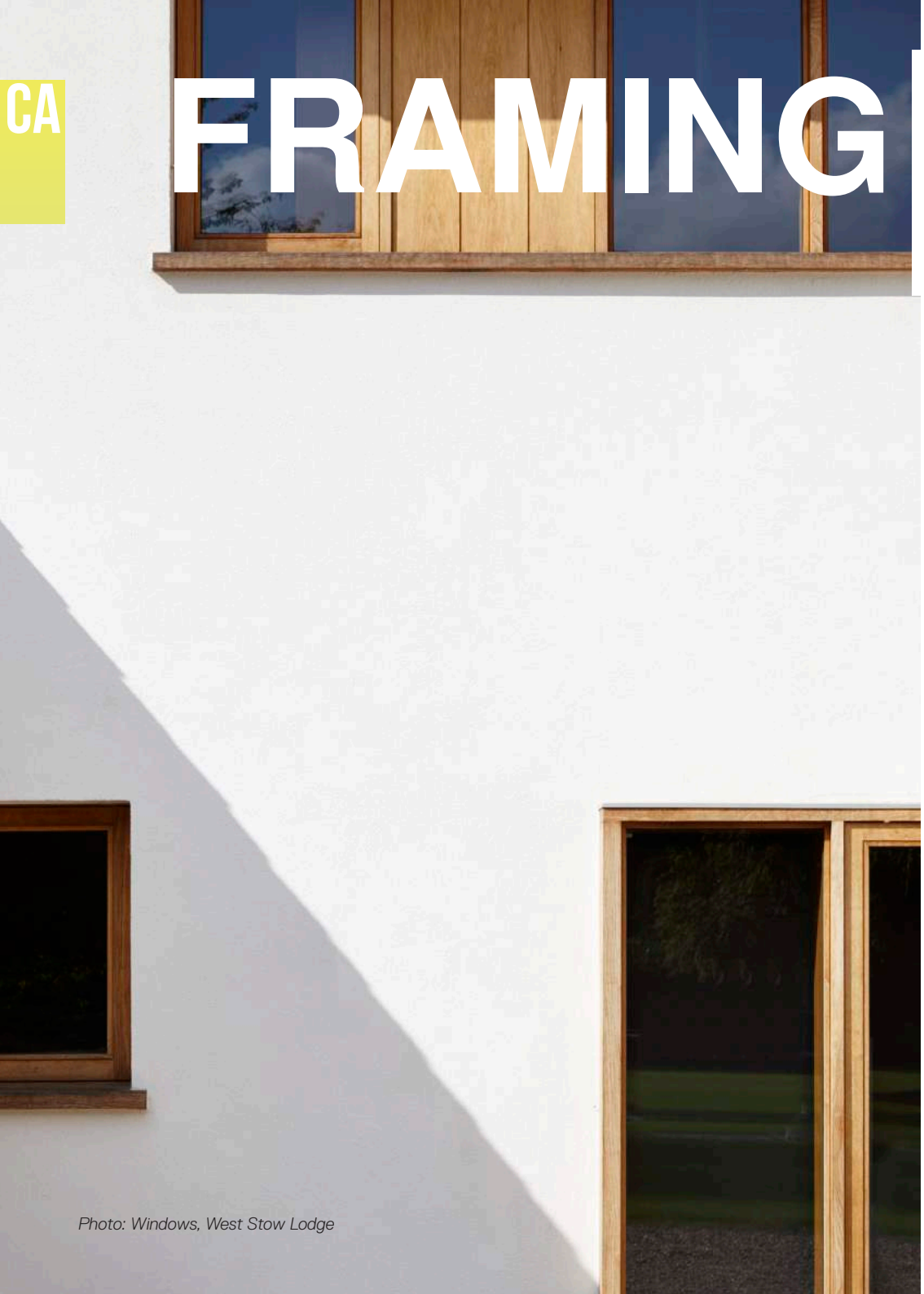


Photo: Windows, West Stow Lodge

FRAMING WINDOWS

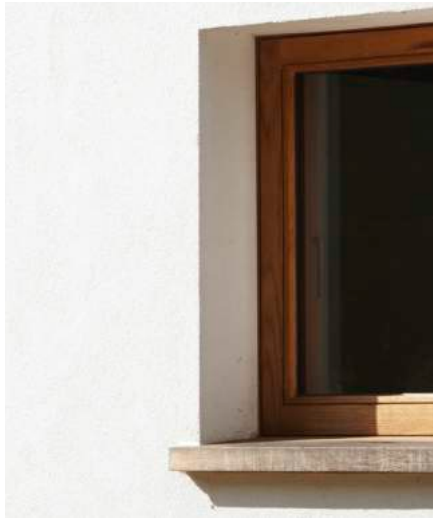
Christopher Ash

The mediator between inside and outside, the window is a defining component of domestic architecture. It is and always has been a primary building block and the quintessential expression of a given architectural style. Even in the most humble home the window, through scale, proportion, detail and function, fundamentally impacts the qualitative and aesthetic experience of the inhabitant.

It has been said that windows are the eyes to the house. Like an eye, a window gets its character from the detailing around it. Size, shape and spacing, type of sash, number of lights, and the ornamentation surrounding the window, are designed to give character. The 12-light double-hung sash is to the Georgian as the horizontal steel casement is to the Moderne. So established is the link between fenestration and architectural style that the wary architect must handle it with care if uncalled for historic reference is to be avoided. However at Project Orange we embrace the concept of style and believe it intrinsic to an architectural language.

Different projects, with their varying scales, contexts, briefs and budgets will always require different responses, but when the planning, the massing and the modelling is done there will always remain the question "what will it look like?"

Over a number of residential projects we have endeavoured to develop our language and generate style through the exploration of strategies and concepts for fenestration and its detailing. Where feasible we have resisted the use of off-the-peg systems in favour of considered bespoke solutions. Where this has not been possible we have conceived approaches for the adaptation of standard elements through detail of installation, elevational composition and colour. The outcomes have been diverse but apposite, the process in all cases generating a definitive aesthetic that is fundamental to the project.



^ Photo: Recessed window, West Stow Lodge

Example 1: Contemporary Rustic

In West Stow Lodge, bespoke oak fenestration is the primary ordering device in the design of this large country house in Suffolk. Aside from form and massing, it's all about the windows. Three types were developed, comprising vertical mullions on a 600mm module in all cases. Together with the avoidance of transoms, this module was used to imply the studs of timber frame construction, a contemporary evocation of the historic local vernacular.

The three window types denote a hierarchy of internal spaces and are rooted in, but do not ape, historical precedent. Windows to all secondary and service areas are recessive, set deep within the wall and heavily shadowed. The rendered wall finish is carried into the reveals and overlaps the oak frame to leave only a slim visible profile. It is an uncelebrated punctured opening. The impression from both inside and out is of discretion and privacy.

The second window type lights primary spaces including first floor bedrooms and a ground floor study. Whereas the first type recedes, these large windows project beyond the wall line signifying the importance of the space within and allowing a reading through the façade of the internal hierarchy. Deep oak internal reveals both frame the view and draw the gaze out onto the surrounding countryside whilst retaining a clear demarcation between inside and out, private and public. The window is itself a place of inhabitation, and draws on the historical precedent of the oriel window.

The final window type, reserved for the most public reception areas, is less window, more screen.

Photo: Window screen, West Stow Lodge

The junction of these screens with the external wall is the most articulated and is expressed with a recessed surround to the projecting frame. The deep shadow this casts encourages the screen to be read as an autonomous finessed piece of joinery. With floor to ceiling glazing, there is a flowing connection and dissolving of boundaries from inside to out when viewed on the perpendicular. Yet when viewed on the oblique, the rhythm of deep oak mullions compresses and a warm sense of enclosure is created defining a space which is both open and closed. The scale of the mullions and the length of the screens also introduces an ambiguity over their structural function and reinforces the reference to timber stud framing.

These window typologies, distinct yet unified, thus order and lend legibility to the building whilst mediating in diverse yet appropriate ways the relationship between inside and out.

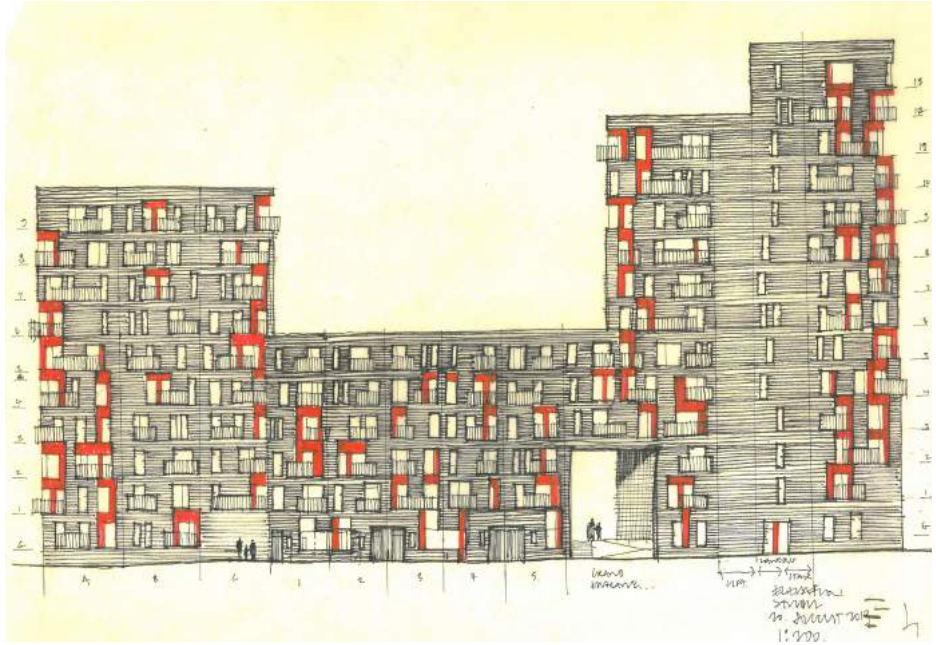
Example 2: Urban Cascades

Rathbone Market in Canning Town, London, is the largest project in the office. Comprising 216 apartments in a u-shaped block, the brick building ranges in height from six to fourteen storeys. From the outset, design concepts explored means by which the mass of the building and the inevitable repetition of stacking apartments could be subverted through manipulation of the fenestration and linking this with the placement of projecting balconies.

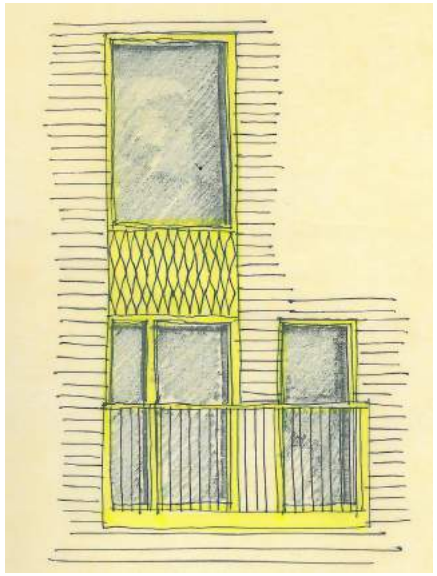
Contrary to West Stow Lodge where window typology was used to reveal a hierarchy of spaces within, in this case the placement of windows was used to create an impression of richness and variety of internal programme rather than reveal the repetitive stack of standardised apartments.

To achieve this, the window placement and configuration was altered from floor to floor, but within the allowances of plan and functionality. This lent some variety to otherwise similar flats and enlivened an otherwise repetitive façade.

The scale and budget of the project inevitably called for a standard window system. A composite aluminium/timber product was selected but as counterpoint to the imposed chaos and seemingly random placement, order was imposed through unifying the height of all windows and modularising the widths to a single, double and triple width unit and their various combinations. This same dimensional module was then also applied to the placement of windows to ensure that all offsets and (mis)alignments of units from floor to floor were a multiple of this module.



Sketch: Elevation, Rathbone Market



^ *Sketch: Window detail, Rathbone Market*

Again all transoms were avoided, and as the system selected rendered opening and fixed units indistinguishable, the impression created was a random yet ordered composition of solid (brick) and void (glass) with a secondary vertical grain overlaid in the mullions of the windows. This was the background for a macro compositional strategy that was then applied to provide movement and richness to the façade at a scale demanded by the size of the building and the wide but fleeting views afforded from the adjacent A13.

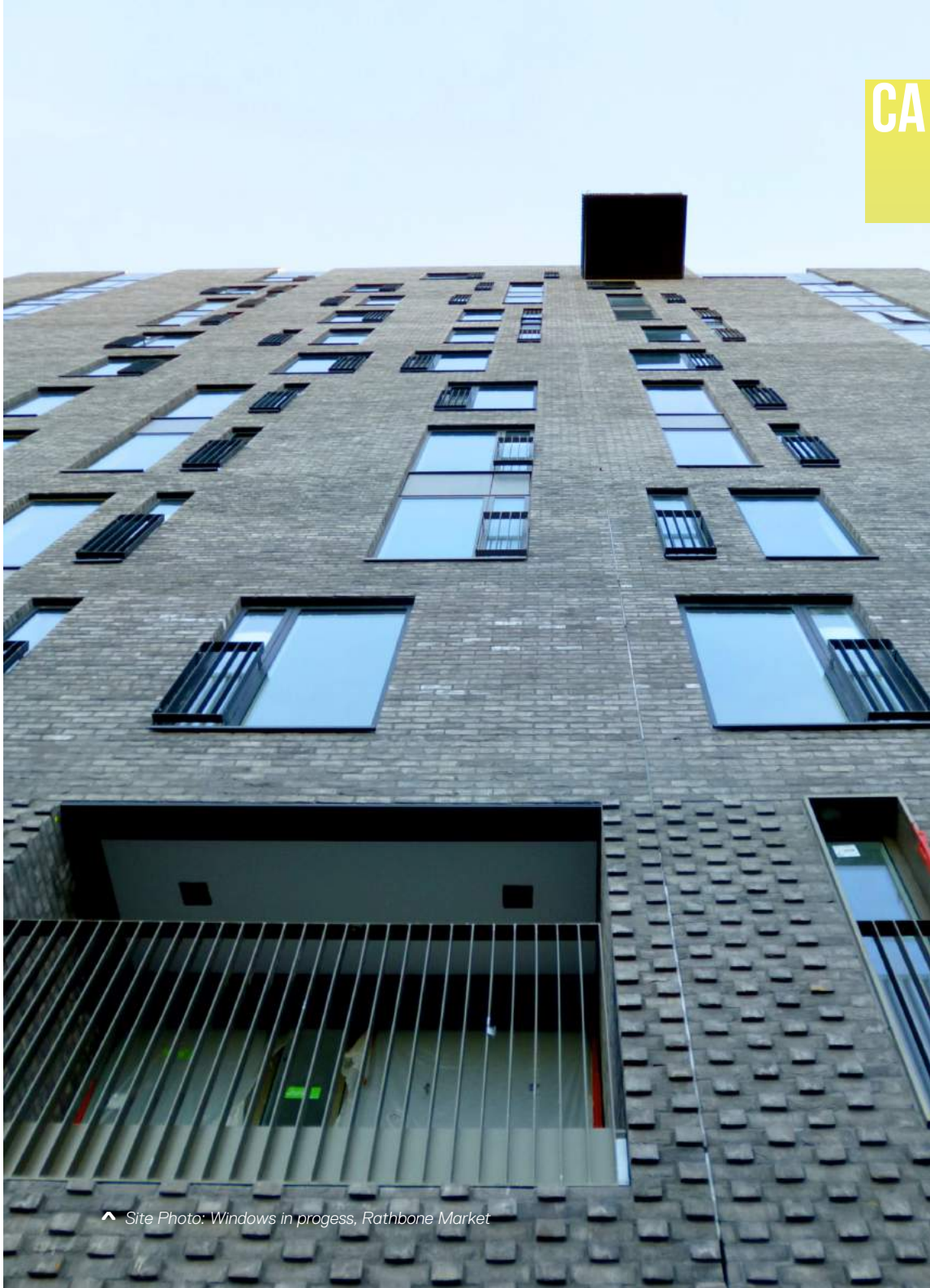
This involved creating vertical offsetting cascades of windows, balconies and linking spandrel panels in a unified bronze metal finish connecting between two and four floors at a time. To further highlight and foreground these cascades, the bronze framed windows were set flush in the facade whereas all other windows not linked in this way were colour matched to, and set deep within, the surrounding brickwork.

The result is a large building where the eye is invited to engage with and enjoy the façade, to find interest at both large and small scale and find variety and richness where there might otherwise be just repetition.

In both the above projects, one private and rural, the other urban and public, an architectural language has been developed that takes the window as its point of departure and fenestration as its lexicon. The window has been and will always be integral to the language of domestic architecture and the styles in which it is wrought.

One look at the degradation of our everyday townscape by the ubiquity of the plastic replacement window betrays all too painfully how the quality of even the most humble house is vested in its fenestration, the detail of how window meets wall, the finesse of the glazing bar, the colour of frame and the reflections in the glass.

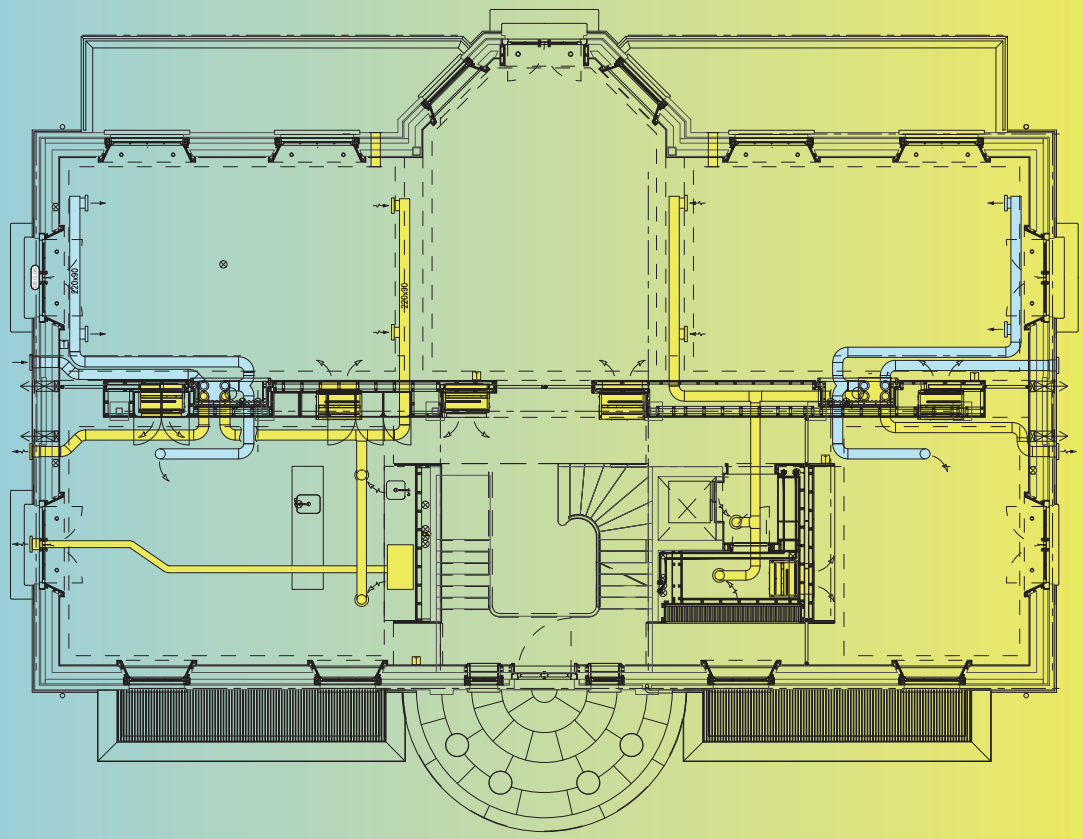
^ *Photo: uPVC windows, London*



^ *Site Photo: Windows in progess, Rathbone Market*

DON'T THINK, FEEL.

Guido Vericat



^ *Plan: Mechanical strategy, Haywood Green Farm*

There is a house that we are all familiar with.

It probably has a pitched roof and a chimney, a front door and at least a couple of windows. There is also likely to be a large yellow sun suspended above it. This too is important. When we are inside this house we know how it works. If it's hot we might open a window to catch a breeze, maybe we have to open both windows, draw the blinds. We might close the shutters if that yellow circle is really pounding. When it gets cooler we retreat. Windows are closed. Curtains, rather than blinds, are drawn this time. A fire is lit.

There are innumerable permutations to the above in the endless combinations of seasons and times of day, and subtler changes are made to accommodate this and achieve the desired internal environment that we are comfortable in. Comfort is what we seek. We make adjustments to strike a balance between light and dark, hot and cold. There is something very robust about this house.

In the age of Airbnb you could travel to almost any house in Europe, say, and all you would need would be the keys and your intuition could guide you from there. We all have an innate understanding of how to operate the tools that temper the internal environment of our homes: windows, shutters, curtains, fire. It is true that one has to live in a house for a considerable time to understand the full annual cycle and make adjustments that will deliver the desired effect at a later point.

For example, you may not know that a particular room gets very hot due to its orientation, or that keeping shutters closed during the day (a counter-intuitive move to Northern European dwellers) will prevent undesirable overheating to be felt throughout the night. There is a rich and sub-conscious interaction between the occupier and the building. These building elements are understood by the occupier and have an architectural presence that contribute to the spatial environment.

Buildings have always been the skin that tempers the environment and allows us to dwell in some challenging climates, but increasingly buildings have become high-tech serviced bubbles disconnected from their environment. There is a view that architecture, in all its regional variations, should be a manifestation of the local culture and how it seeks to address the local environment.

The two most powerful elements of a traditional house/home are the window and the hearth. The hearth with its symbolic power has outlived its functional necessity and has now mostly disappeared. Its status is challenged by the presence (and size) of TV screens.

^ *Site Photo: MVHR unit, Haywood Green Farm*

Site Photo: Sash windows, Haywood Green Farm

The previously primal connection/ understanding of the thermo-dynamic necessity of adding fuel to the house to maintain its function has disappeared. Our understanding of how our houses help us to dwell has been eroded.

Global pressures are being rightly exerted on the construction industry to minimise energy consumption in the construction and maintenance of buildings. Higher standards of insulation and energy efficiency are continually being introduced in Building Regulations. Talk of Zero-Carbon (now dropped by the current government) and Passivhaus is much more common than it was only five years ago. The concern is the way these increased standards are incorporated in the design of buildings. Some of the elements are 'boxes of tricks' which are concealed and are a mystery to all except the engineer. They are almost always hidden, and whilst their contribution to the internal environment may be understood by the designer, their invisibility may challenge the intuition of the occupier to control the environment in their own home.

On the positive side, there are elements of passive energy principles (which overlap with Passivhaus standards) that have the potential to make a responsive connection to their context, through basic principles of orientation and heat gain.

All of these have a very direct impact in the physical expression of the home and can be intuitively understood; size and location of windows, window fenestration. The sash window with its shutters and capability of small openings to top and bottom is a beautiful example of the delightful complexity of architectural environmental control. Other elements such as good levels of insulation, minimal thermal bridging and good air tightness are technical aspects which concern the designer and builder more than the occupier and ensures that the fabric performs optimally in its context.

However, whole house mechanical ventilation including heat recovery and complex heating systems are critical elements of the internal environmental control of the house. These present challenges for the designer as their physical integration into the home should be such that their operation becomes intuitive for the occupier.

As designers, Project Orange are always mindful of the passive principles informing the form-making of dwellings. Orientation, with its contingent aspects of daylight provision and heat gains, is a basic architectural principle present from the very beginning of the design process. Ensuring high levels of insulation and air tightness are part of the technical detail design. But it is the mechanical and ventilation systems that prove the most difficult. Due to their complexity, M&E consultants design these systems and the designer's input is to find space where the equipment can be located without fouling the spatial arrangements. Plant rooms in large houses, or cupboards and dropped ceilings in smaller ones, become the spaces where this important and costly equipment comes to rest.

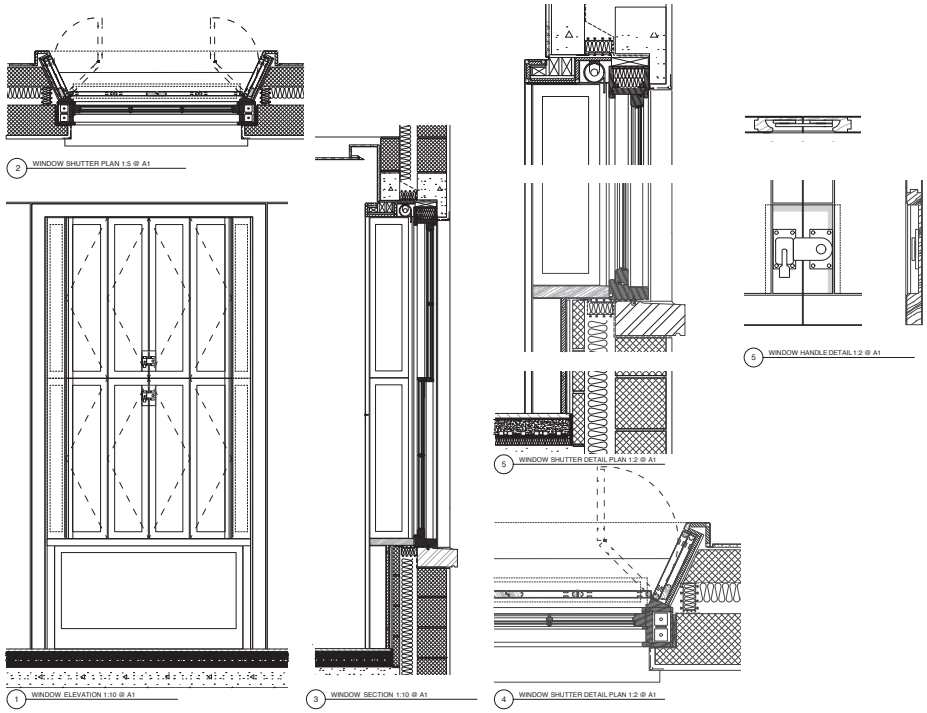
The visual clues that betray the presence of these systems are grilles in ceilings and walls and small control panels on walls, or on tablets, as their means of control.
The corollary of the importance of these systems is that they control the internal environment of the home whilst being hidden. Occupant behaviour is the dominant factor in energy consumption in the home.

It is not uncommon, or unsurprising, that even in houses designed to Passivhaus standards, it is occupant behavior that determines whether the tight energy targets are met. I would argue that if you neither understand nor see what controls the environment in your home and your only interaction with the system is via a control panel, the efficacy of the sophisticated system designed to ensure your comfort is compromised.

The image of driving in a car with the AC on and the windows open springs to mind. A desire for return to open fires and shutters on all windows is clearly misplaced. However, it is apparent that more thought and effort is required to make heating and ventilation systems more intuitive and integrated. If an occupier can see and understand what something in their home does, they are more likely to use it effectively.

Would you know if the Mechanical Ventilation Heat Recovery Unit wasn't working until you had a catastrophic failure that required you to call out an engineer?

Or you could always open the window.



Detail: Sash window with shutters, Haywood Green Farm

Photo: Fig. 1, Street View, Foundry Mews, Barnes

Photo: Fig. 2, Courtyard, Foundry Mews, Barnes

A TALE OF two PLANNING COMMITTEES

Jamie Hughes

"From early in its history, photography was adopted by architects as a means of idealising their buildings. As beautiful and heroic, as tokens of their ingenuity and mankind's progress, etc. this debased tradition continues to thrive. At its core lies the imperative to show the building out of context, as a monument, separate from street-scape, from awkward neighbours, from untidiness. A vast institutional lie is being told in architectural magazines the world over…"

Jonathan Meades,
'Museum Without Walls'

From the ten carefully curated images (Figs 2, 3 & 4) released to the press, you would be under the impression that Foundry Mews, a mixed-use residential development, is an inward looking courtyard scheme built in a grey-ish brick with industrial detailing; a reference to the site's previous incarnation as an MOT garage. This is not a lie; the scheme is all of these things. But it is also something else.

An image of the only street-facing façade of the development (Fig. 1), albeit located on a side-road away from the high street, was not selected as one of the images to showcase the scheme. From looking at the image the reason becomes apparent. It is difficult to conflate these differing versions of the same project.

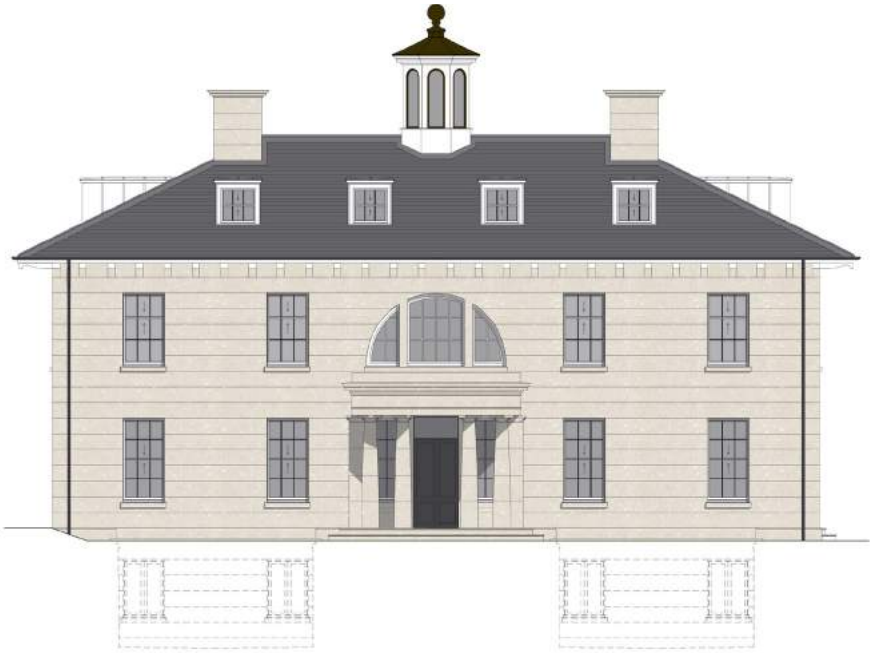
It was the planning department who strongly stipulated in a pre-application meeting that: "the design should reflect the predominant local architectural detail such as fenestration and materials, particularly on the more visible parts on the upper floors […]Brick would be the more appropriate option as a facing material, which should have a colour which blends in relatively easily."

There is no arguing that the finished scheme was well executed with this in mind and ticks the requisite planning boxes. However, discussing the actual success of this planning approach with reference to the finished scheme, an independent planning consultant I spoke to believed that: "in actual fact, continuing the grey brick façade to the rear elevation would arguably have enhanced the urban palimpsest, enriched the building stock of the area and allowed some visual connection to the industrial heritage of the site."

This is not to say that there is necessarily a right and wrong answer here, just that there is a degree of interpretation and that this is subject to change over time.

Photo: Fig. 3, Courtyard, Foundry Mews, Barnes

Photo: Fig. 4, Interior, Foundry Mews, Barnes



^ *Drawing: Haywood Green Farm Elevation*
v *Render: Interiors, Haywood Green Farm*

The defining features of the scheme – perforated brickwork terrace walls and steep pitched roofs – derived from the strict regulations relating to overlooking neighbouring properties and maintaining the roofline of a previously granted planning permission on the site. However, for architects there can be discomfort in bastardising a well-thought out scheme at the whim of draconian planning objectives. It is understandable to want to edit the project images accordingly but this visual deceit can also leave a bad taste.

Two-Faced

The planners on Foundry Mews had only one controversial elevation to contend with; a large private house in Berkshire is a more extreme Jekyll-and-Hyde project. The planning department insisted on a mock-Georgian villa while the client insisted on a luxury contemporary interior. Again, the interior images seem to originate from a different project when viewed alongside the porticoed stone-clad external façade.

The exterior of this house was inherited from a classical architect hired by the client with the sole objective of achieving planning permission. Once this had been achieved, Project Orange were employed to design the desired interior scheme, seemingly at odds with the external envelope.

There is no shame in the neo-classical exterior of the building; when the final photographs are taken there will be external shots released alongside internal. Project Orange are very proud of the subtle and exquisite detailing on the elevations and the attention to detail on the historically informed façades. Yet again, the planning department has exercised control over the aesthetics of the project, perhaps not in the best interest of the architecture or even the surrounding area. Both of these projects are located in typically conservative residential locales – Foundry Mews in the village-esque London neighbourhood of Barnes, and the large private house in the Berkshire landscape of countryside estates – which most definitely would have played a role in shaping the planning policies of each local authority.

Both projects are successfully realised when measured against their incredibly different briefs, budgets and locations, with genuinely exciting architectural spaces created. However, what is also apparent are the divergent approaches taken when dealing with their 'Mr Hyde'. Whereas with Foundry Mews the planning compromise has been redacted from the 'official' version of events, the Berkshire house celebrates its bipolar design making a virtue of the internal surprise.

It is the role of architects to juggle conflicting parameters but how do you measure success in these circumstances? Is it through negotiating complex local authority objectives to gain planning approval? Or perhaps bringing in a scheme on budget? Maybe it is the completion of a project which satisfies the client's needs, in a well executed elevation, or is it gaining 700 'likes' on Instagram?

"I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both."

Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde'

HERITAGE PASTS & PRESENTS

RE-PURPOSING THE RURAL HOUSING MODEL

Rachael Moon

The possibility of 'going modern' whilst 'being British' seemed controversial, observed the artist Paul Nash in 1932. It could be argued that modernism (as a deviation from classical forms and traditional values) was rejected, particularly in rural areas; tarnished by the trials and tribulations of the welfare state. Modernism was initially feared as a foreign invasion, though only became truly international after WW2, particularly with its emphasis on experimenting with new materials and techniques.

The rural environment and its diversity face great threats today, influenced by cultural globalisation. Depopulation in rural areas has brought about the requirement for a new housing model – a careful consideration of the landscape and built forms. How should historic towns and villages remain well preserved in the process?

A good place to start would be to recognise the value of our heritage. I recently attended a photography exhibition at the RIBA, a display of 'ordinary beauty' by Edwin Smith – or in other words, evocative British urban and landscaped scenes.

The notion of 'Englishness' itself intrigued me; I am fascinated by our national traditions and their ornamental and iconic perception today. Smith's recorded images were actually focused on post-war Britain. The portrayal of such conditions at the time is questionable but the collection does expose a dynamic between 'expired identity and a drive to rapidly modernise.'

Such depicted themes have a place in today's debate, perhaps why this work is undergoing a resurgence of sorts. Conscious efforts have been made not to depict current developments of the time, but picturesque charms of country houses, cottages, landscapes and scenes of popular culture. Maybe it's the pressures on landscape and the presence of standardisation looming today that labels these images as 'nostalgic.' An underlying indication of decay already seems to creep its way in.

The Garden City and Arts & Crafts movements continue to provoke a consideration of a national identity. An honest expression in particular was borne out of the latter, with reason and rationality rejecting the idea of architecture as canvas for decorative show.

Our recent design focus for the Lavenham housing scheme aims to acknowledge traditions of place but through symbols of the past, where appropriate, rather than replication. Designing from the outset, attention turned to the context of Lavenham village. It is of note that a sudden decline in trade and the town's fortune in the seventeenth century brought about the very signature of the medieval built heritage that remains today – a lack of wealth to build in more modern styles.

The traditional aspects of the vernacular style are familiar, solid and reliable representing the idyllic and aspirational home. But what is really intriguing is the way in which the Tudor style underwent a revival of sorts during the turn of the 20th Century. The style became considered as a symbol of old money and sprung up on the suburbs of New York, despite the originals standing for quite the opposite.

Now across the globe, Tudor homes represent Western style and wealth (China) and exclusivity and nostalgia for England (Australia).

The proposed housing scheme at Lavenham reveals a variety of architectural subtleties. The development respects the scale of neighbouring buildings and their form, adapting the iconic local steep pitched roof vernacular. Buildings are clad in render over a brick plinth, with brick also to the side elevations, incorporating a chimney. In this way, traditional building materials are used in a new way without trying to look 'old.'

The classic jetty feature of Tudor houses has found re-purposed use, functioning as a setback to the house front to form a sheltered entrance. Adopting the traditional timber stud frame structure in its most literal sense would lead to high build costs today and difficulty with replacing elements such as leaded-pane windows.

^ *Render: Lavenham Housing, view looking South*

^ *Render: Lavenham Housing, view looking West*

Instead, the new design evolves from the traditional style. It features large windows, no longer subject to such high glazing costs as in Tudor times, and without the resultant dark interiors. Basic requirements of light and also space inside have been kept a priority to ensure the quality of the living environment is not compromised for external aesthetics.

Meaning in the design is now extracted through functionalism and extra ornamentation deemed irrelevant. The housing scheme considers sociological conditions that a modern living environment should encapsulate. Adjoining house clusters not only reflect the interlocking house forms of Lavenham itself, but also encourage interaction.

The site, which occupies a triangular shaped plot of land at a transition with the edge of surrounding countryside, makes use of shared gardens and relates to the irregular surrounding field patterns. The alignment of houses around a yard creates a shared central area and an access point to all dwellings. This opens up private gardens around the perimeter to the rear of each house, along with new views out to the surroundings adding variety and texture to the setting. Much is to be made here of the landscape as the proposed density for this rural land plot is low.

The project has built on recognising and reinforcing such vernacular 'Englishness' in architecture, whilst making a modern vernacular that is appropriate for both its place and time. In contrast to the direct reuse of style, as highlighted, the scheme's design strives for relevance.

A new model for affordable homes is now necessary for supporting a diverse population in rural areas as the demographic is currently imbalanced. As a result, modern day lifestyles need careful consideration whilst designing for mixed communities. Success in place-making demands building on spiritual and cultural values already rooted to that place. This suggests the model may be used for its layout, but with adapted design features relating to the context where necessary. Design must take full advantage of contemporary efficient building techniques whilst remaining contextual. This may help to revive local traditions and skills, but without the aim of mindlessly imitating the past.

A new vernacular evolved out of the dynamic between need and means must be robust and regionally distinctive: a new modern day condition for the home.

^ *Plan: Lavenham Housing Scheme*

BACK OF BEYOND

Ian Ritson

As the price of land has increased over the preceding decades in London many backland or infill sites that were once financially unviable have become ripe for development. These backland sites are often challenging to develop but as many emerging and established London based architects are demonstrating these sites offer a rich source of opportunities for contemporary architectural expression, which can enrich the context as they react, respond and emerge from their unique physicality. In this short piece I would like to explore why these developments are of interest to architects and why architects are best placed to design buildings for these sites.

Trail blazers such as the architect-turned-developer Roger Zogolovitch of Solidspace explains in his recent book 'Development as Art' how he will wander the streets of London looking for these backland sites, which often have an interesting history. At times these left over sites are products of societal shifts. For example in the nineteenth century the most prevalent housing type was the terrace to the exclusion of all other housing types. When Victorian developers constructed rows of terraced houses there would often be small off-cuts of land where two rows would meet at an awkward angle. It wasn't worth the builders' time to think of a way to use this land and therefore it was simply left, often being filled by single story jerry-built buildings used as garages or for industry.

These developments are in contrast to other large-scale regeneration projects being carried out in London such as the 2012 Olympic Park, which involve wholesale site clearances.

^ *Office Entrance, Foundry Mews, Barnes*

Backland sites must respect and enhance their surroundings, where there are well-established communities who naturally wish to resist change. Convincing a local community and a local planning department to allow a new development is often the first hurdle after a site has been identified as financially viable.

Another shift in society that has freed up plots for development has been the recent decline in car ownership leading to an increase in redundant garages. Project Orange were appointed in 2012 as the architects to redevelop a former MOT garage on a backland site in Barnes, South West London. The scheme comprises eleven one and two bedroom flats with office space on the ground floor. The planning process was protracted by the local planning department's rejection of a contemporary design in favour of a more vernacular design that made reference to the site's light industrial heritage.

^ *External stair, Foundry Mews, Barnes*

^ *Balcony, Foundry Mews, Barnes*

This is a frustrating aspect of the planning process which pits the architects desire to push the boundaries of architectural expression against an established and often conservative local community. Architects must negotiate these complexities to find solutions that are acceptable to the local community while at the same time expressing aspects of contemporary architecture.

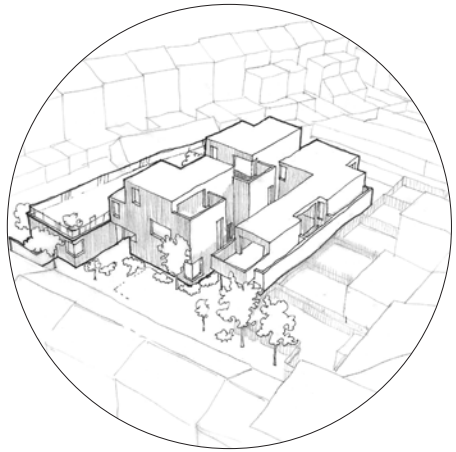
Other planning and design obstacles included a requirement for 1,500 square foot of B1 office space to replace the employment lost by the MOT garage. This requirement has in fact had a positive impact on the development, as the offices maintain a constant presence on the ground floor of the site keeping the development secure.

The other planning requirement was for the development not to overlook any neighbouring properties. This is a challenge but one that often leads to some of the most interesting architectural forms.

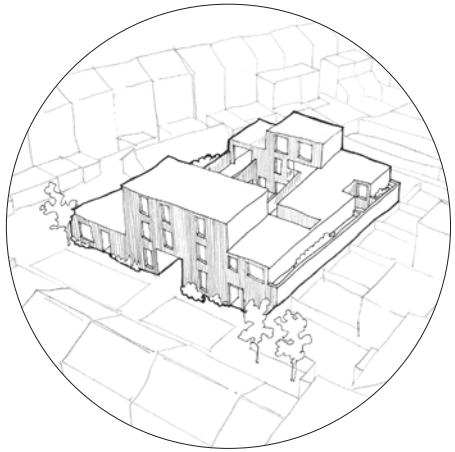
The strategy at Foundry Mews was to surround the residential balconies with hit and miss brickwork walls providing each flat with a private outdoor space that does not overlook existing properties and orientating windows to face a small courtyard. When successful this introverted architecture can result in interesting and intimate spaces, like Foundry Mews.

Following Barnes High Street, Project Orange was invited to pitch for a project in Clapham to replace an existing backland warehouse with a mixed-use development.

We used the experiences from Barnes High Street to design several options for the Clapham warehouse pitch. Each option illustrated the potential and limitations of the site, yet all three schemes were designed not to overlook neighbouring properties, not to impact on the existing party walls and to fit within the existing volume of the warehouse.



^ *The Alleys, Clapham*



^ *The Yard, Clapham*

^ *The Block, Clapham*

OPTION ONE: THE ALLEYS

This scheme maximised the south facing aspect of the site, gave a rich variety of residential units and the ground floor could easily be converted to commercial office spaces. This strategy required multiple party wall awards and a large built form which could be contentious with neighbours.

OPTION TWO: THE YARD

This design aimed to create a mews and a courtyard for residents, while maximizing the south facing aspect of the site. Complex party wall agreements and a degree of overlooking compromised this proposal.

OPTION THREE: THE BLOCK

Here we maintained the existing volume of the warehouse but pulled away from the site boundaries to minimize the need for party wall awards and used an efficient repetitive plan for economy. However risks associated were the lack of variety of units, difficulties adapting the ground floor for commercial use and the need for screened balconies to prevent overlooking neighbouring properties.

This design exercise demonstrated how as architects we can produce numerous viable options for a constricted backland site. It has also taught us that while these sites can be difficult they can also produce provocative contemporary architecture.

DOES SIZE MATTER?

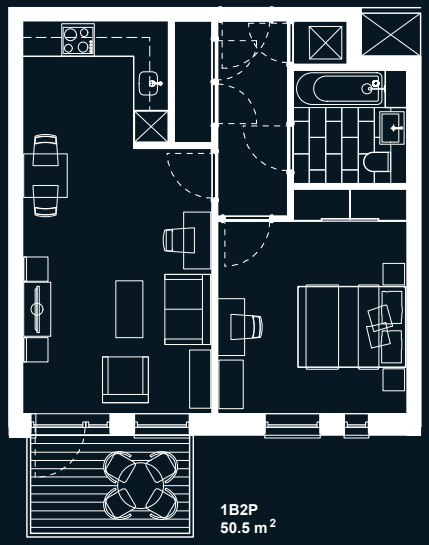
Barry Stirland

BS

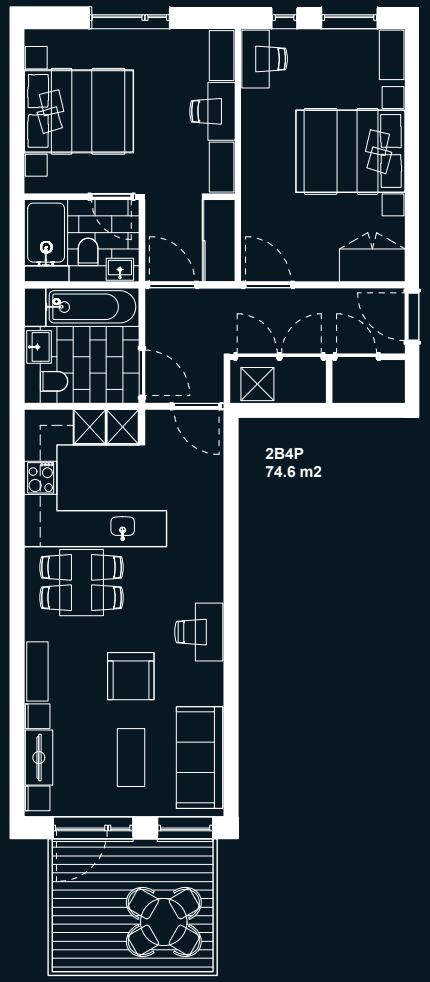
Since Boris Johnson, early in his role as Mayor of London in 2008, talked of re-establishing the space standards first promoted by Parker Morris in 1961, the topic of housing space standards has been hotly debated in England, and statutory requirements have steadily evolved. My interest in the subject was piqued working on our largest project to date: Rathbone Market Phase 3, a development of 216 new homes in Canning Town, London.

Conceived in 2008, when we collaborated with CZWG on the masterplan for the site overall, our work on the Reserved Matters application did not resume until 2013, during which time the London Housing Design Guide and its replacement the London Housing SPG (LH SPG) became established; essentially re-defining the standards that new housing in London had to meet. A 45sqm 1-bedroom apartment that was acceptable in 2008 now had to be 50sqm, yet the overall GIA of the building - strictly defined by the 2008 outline planning permission - could not be increased proportionately.

To achieve the 216 apartments within the defined fabric of the building, and meet the various other LH SPG criteria, took a comprehensive overhaul of the plans, and resulted in a building with a net-to-gross efficiency of 80% and highly optimised apartment layouts.



Plan : 1 Bed 2 Person Flat, Rathbone Market



Plan: 2 Bed 4 Person Flat, Rathbone Market

In March 2016, the LH SPG was revised to exclude all detail of space standards, with these now instead contained in the Nationally Described Space Standard (NDS) first introduced by the Government in March 2015. Whilst the NDS is applicable nationally, adoption of the standards by local authorities is (currently) optional. My objective with this paper is to examine how our space standards have evolved, and posit an answer to the title of this paper.

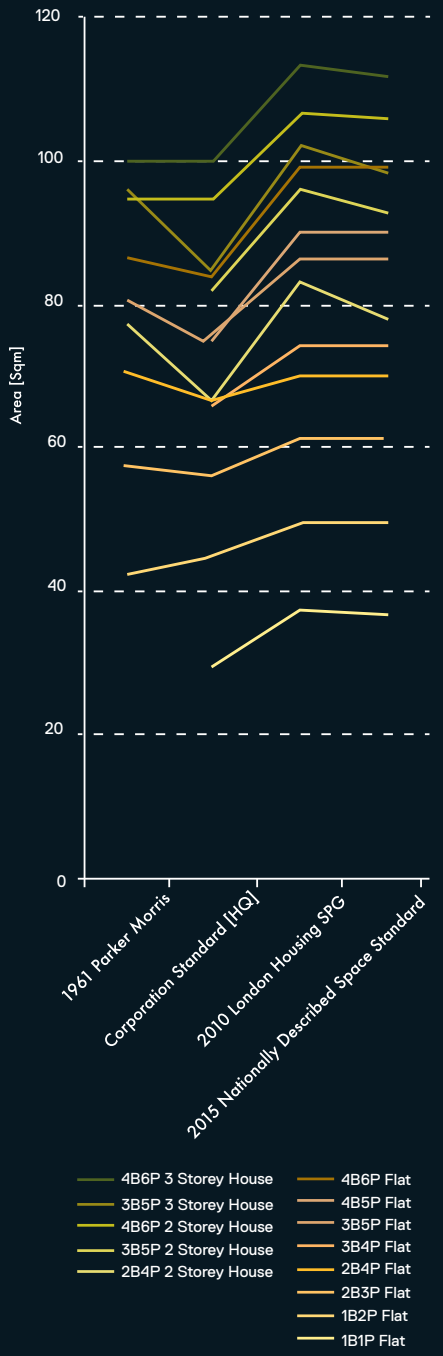
BS

To begin, it is useful to understand the timeline of housing space standards in the UK. Below, I have summarised the significant housing space standards set for England over the last 60 years:

PARKER MORRIS (1961):
Standards that were developed in response to a need to improve social housing in the UK. They were based on an assessment of the amount of space required for normal household activities, as well as what types of furniture, and the space needed in each room to move around it. They also include minimum internal storage space standards. Compliance with the Parker Morris standards was a condition of government subsidy for all new public sector housing from 1967 to 1982.

HOUSING CORPORATION (2007):
Derived from the Scheme Development Standards (SDS) and linked to the Housing Quality Index (HQI), these standards set out minimum and maximum space requirements for publicly funded housing.

LONDON HOUSING DESIGN GUIDE (2010) / LONDON HOUSING SPG (2012):
Set a new benchmark for housing design in London. All housing built on London Development Agency land, plus housing schemes applying for funding from the London Homes and Communities Agency, were expected to meet these standards.



^ *Fig 1: Graph showing Space Standards against time*

NATIONAL SPACE STANDARDS (2015):

Replaces all existing space standards used by local authorities, and sets out minimum requirements for new housing developments. Note, these are not a building regulation and adoption is enabled only by reference in Local Plans.

Fig 1 plots the minimum gross internal area (GIA) for a selection of dwelling types on the basis of these space standards. Standards clearly drop from Parker Morris to the Housing Corporation Standards; however what the graph does not illustrate is the interlude between the two where space standards were not a significant criterion of development. The LH SPG subsequently built on the Housing Corporation Standards, and these standards have largely been upheld in the National Space Standard.

However, when the finer details of the National Space Standard are examined more closely, there are some significant regressions from the standards defined by the LH SPG. There is no reference to private amenity space; the conclusion being that Local Plan policies should determine outdoor space requirements in light of local evidence. Whilst there is a risk this could return developments with little or no private amenity space, it is at least an aspect that local authorities can control.

Perhaps of more concern is the requirement that ceilings should be a minimum height of 2.3m (for at least 75% of the dwelling), which is down from the 2.5m required under the LH SPG.

The tangible benefits of ceiling height and volume are notoriously difficult to define, but research has shown that we instinctively prefer airy rooms to those with low ceilings. A 2014 study lead by psychologist Dr Oshin Vartanian used neuroimaging to analyse brain activity whilst volunteers looked at images of 200 rooms, half of which had high ceilings. The results showed that tall rooms excite the brain and trigger our tendencies toward spatial exploration[1]. At a non-scientific level, surveys have indicated that the best-loved housing in Britain is from the Georgian era, homes characterise by their generous ceiling heights (typically 3.6m to principal rooms).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, attention to ceiling height is not a new phenomenon in architecture. Palladio devoted significant weight to rules governing ceiling height in his major treatise 'The Four Books of Architecture'.

Influenced by the notion of harmony, he listed a series of mathematical proportions and ratios that represented ideal relations between the width, length, and height of rooms; affirming that preference for architectural spaces is a function of perceived proportion.

In the context of our Nationally Described Space Standard, the question is thus raised: how was the minimum ceiling height of 2.3m defined? Was there a technical study in which ceiling heights were analysed and determined?

1 Vartanian, O., 18 Sept 2015, Architectural Design & the brain: Effects of ceiling height and perceived enclosure on beauty judgments and approach-avoidance decisions, Journal of Environmental Psychology 41,

In September 2014, the government consulted on the detail of the proposed national space standards. The position on ceiling heights at the time was summarised as follows:

"Many current space standards require minimum ceiling heights, though these vary from absolute minima (e.g. 2.1m), or standard heights such as 2.3m through to non-standard heights of 2.5, 2.6 or even 2.7m." [2]

Positive reasons for providing higher ceilings were noted: "Higher ceilings are intended to increase daylight penetration and improve indoor air quality. Increasing ceiling height to ensure good indoor lighting quality can be particularly important in high density development where ambient light is already limited, and particularly at ground or basement levels of multi storey development."

The document goes on to state that, in the government's evaluation of existing space standards, a ceiling height of 2.5m is commonly adopted. The question then posed was whether ceiling heights should be harmonised at 2.5m for all properties to simplify compliance at a national level. In March 2015 the Government issued a summary of responses to the consultation. In response to the proposed approach to ceiling heights, whilst nearly 70% of respondents supported proposals or had no strong views, it was recorded that there was particular concern amongst the 23% of respondents who disagreed about this aspect of a possible standard.

2 Department for Communities and Local Government, Sept 2014, Housing Standards Review - Technical Consultation, p.17

Arguments against included:

- Cost of additional brick courses
- Greater waste and cost of plasterboard
- Impact of stairs taking up greater part of a dwelling
- Possible adverse impact on scaffolding techniques due to greater storey height
- Possible eventual impact on fire safety requirements for tall buildings
- Challenges in matching building heights and window lines to surrounding buildings
- Possible 8% energy increase required for heating

Looking critically at this list, one can argue that at best the issues are manageable – for instance, additional cost[3] - and at worst preposterous - for example the suggestion that the interminable flexibility of scaffolding would be adversely affected by the proposals. Nevertheless, the Government proceeded to stipulate a revised minimum ceiling height of 2.3m to new housing, announcing the decision in the Housing Standards Review Final Implementation Impact Assessment, acknowledging that: *"this is a lower height than required by some local planning authorities"* and *"there may be some additional savings for home-builders."* [4] This discussion brings into clear focus the conflict between prescribed minimum space standards and building costs. There may also be a tension between the amount of space allocated to each dwelling and desirable planning densities.

Separating out the issues of density and affordability, there is a clear argument in favour of minimum defined space standards. In a 2010 study[5], CABE drew evidence from a detailed historical review of the evolution of standards and from contemporary research studies to define the following critically important benefits:

- The general health and well-being benefits that accrue from living in a well designed home that offers both privacy and sociability, and that in all respects provides adequate space to function well;
- The contribution that adequate space makes to family life and the opportunity it affords children to engage in uninterrupted private study and therefore achieve against their potential;
- The forward link from educational attainment to productivity, and also the opportunity space provides to work from home and address the life/work balance;
- The flexibility of homes that have adequate space, meaning they are easier to adapt to changing needs and lifestyles, and to future living habits;
- The inclusivity provided by homes that have space to respond to occupiers changing physical requirements over their life-times, and the knock-on impact this has on creating more balanced and stable neighbourhoods;

3 Harris, E.C. Housing Standards Review Cost Impact Report, Sept 2014: "The proposed ceiling height of 2.5m is considered cost neutral compared to the counterfactual where space standards currently apply, but does have a material cost which is relevant for viability purposes." p.32

4 Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2015, Housing Standards Review – Final Implementation Impact Assessment. p.39

5 Prof Carmona, M., Prof Gallent, N., Sarkar, R., April 2010, Housing Standards: Evidence and Research. A report prepared by University College London for CABE, p.13.

^ *Render: Kitchen, Rathbone Market*
v *Render: Bathroom, Rathbone Market*

- The societal benefits stemming from reduced overcrowding and consequential reductions in aggressive and anti-social behaviour;
- Creating a potentially more stable housing market, driven by a more complete understanding

In May 2016, during consideration of the Housing and Planning Bill in the Lords, Department for Communities and Local Government minister Baroness Williams confirmed that the standard would be reviewed again, saying: *"Now that the national space standard has been in place for more than a year, we agree that the time is right to assess how it is being used by local authorities. We therefore propose to undertake a review to see how the space standard is operating in practice."*

Whether the current standards – essentially an update on the 55-year-old Parker Morris standards – are adequate to suit contemporary living is debatable. I would argue that more research is needed into what constitutes adequate space to suit our needs today, and conclude by raising the following questions:

- How do the space requirements of different kinds of households vary?
- Should there be different space standards for high-density urban areas?
- Are space standards right for all users? (eg. single first-time buyers).
- What is an appropriate ceiling height for the home? Can a minimum relationship between room area and ceiling height be defined?
- How do our space standards relate to those of other countries, and who is on the right path?
- Is the dominant focus on space standards at the expense of other important factors that determine the quality of our homes; views, light, volume and materials, for example?

Ultimately, are space standards too blunt an instrument for housing in the UK? Is there a more appropriate subtler – perhaps holistic – approach we can take to ensure we build homes that are appropriate both for the needs of today, and that will stand the test of time?

^ *Plan: Compact suite for a proposed apart-hotel.*

Spaced Out

Thomas Bend

The Nationally Described Space Standards for Housing were introduced in March 2015, replacing a range of existing requirements that had been developed independently by local authorities across the country. Though the standards are not compulsory, many local authorities now require housing developers to achieve the minimum areas and dimensions described, having formally adopted the standards into their local planning policies.

There is a general consensus that the introduction of minimum space standards was both necessary and overdue, with the size of the average new home having been gradually reduced over recent years and now being amongst the smallest in Europe. Overcrowded accommodation can have a direct impact on the lives of occupants, with inadequate space for daily activities and storage having a negative effect on physical and social well-being. Ensuring that the future housing stock is appropriately sized and sufficiently flexible to meet the requirements of households is therefore understandably an important concern for policy makers.

The blanket imposition of minimum space standards across entire geographical areas is a questionable policy however, and it comes with significant consequences for affordability.

Introducing the requirements will often result in fewer homes being delivered on a given site, with properties likely be more expensive as a result. Whilst nobody would object to more spacious homes, couples and individuals on average incomes are presently excluded from home ownership in many parts of the country and would prefer the security of owning a smaller and more affordable apartment to the precarious alternative of renting from private sector landlords.

Delivering smaller and more affordable homes could potentially extend the possibility of home ownership to a greater proportion of the population through a reduction in the entry-level price of new housing. This would be a development welcomed by many, with intelligent and careful design able to mitigate some of the negative aspects of more compact living.

A greater degree of flexibility in space standards could therefore be a beneficial change, acknowledging that for some households a smaller property would be equally suitable and could provide a valuable bridge to home ownership.

First time buyers with fewer possessions are unlikely to have extensive spatial requirements, though the standards do not acknowledge the different types of households within an area or the different lifestyles of potential occupants. With the imposition of the fixed space standards as currently described the housing market is unable to respond to the demand for smaller and more affordable properties.

One possible option that could be explored is an exception or lower standard for one-bedroom starter homes. This could be limited to a small proportion of new units and made available exclusively to first time buyers with restrictions on resale. Such a strategy could acknowledge the demand for smaller properties from prospective homeowners without impacting the quality of housing provision in the general market.

There is of course a limit to which the size of new apartments can be reduced without compromising the ability of occupants to undertake the typical activities of daily life, and Project Orange was recently able to explore opportunities for more compact living through the development of a series of suites for a proposed apart-hotel.

A number of design exercises were completed with suites of differing floor areas, and whilst smaller suites were appropriate for a short-term stay, a number of configurations of thirty square metres were found to provide sufficient space for an individual to live comfortably.

With the nationally described space standards now under review one year after their introduction, a move towards greater spatial flexibility would surely be worth exploring, acknowledging the crisis of affordability in housing whilst securing the benefits of minimum space standards for the future quality of the national housing stock.

^ *Renders: Suite for a proposed apart-hotel.*

Josh's Front door

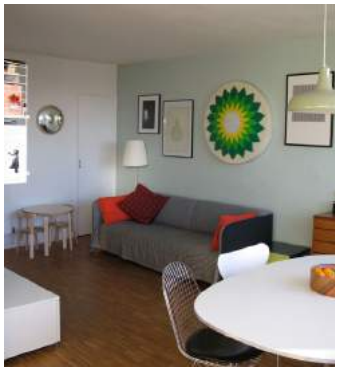
Holly's Lounge

Barry's Bedroom

Ruth's Lounge

Rachel's House

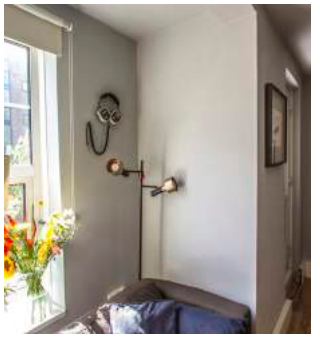
Jamie's Lounge



Guido's Kitchen

Billy's Living Room

Josh's Kitchen



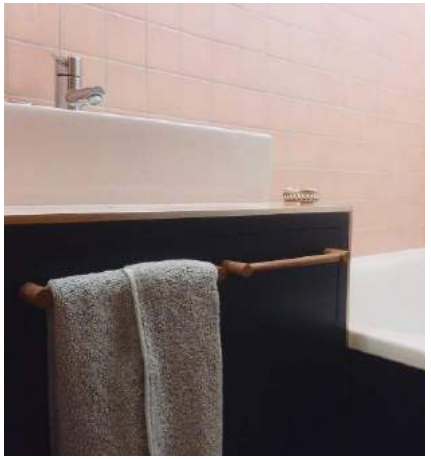
Emma's Study

James' Dining Room

Tom's Bedroom

Ian's House

Christopher's Kitchen

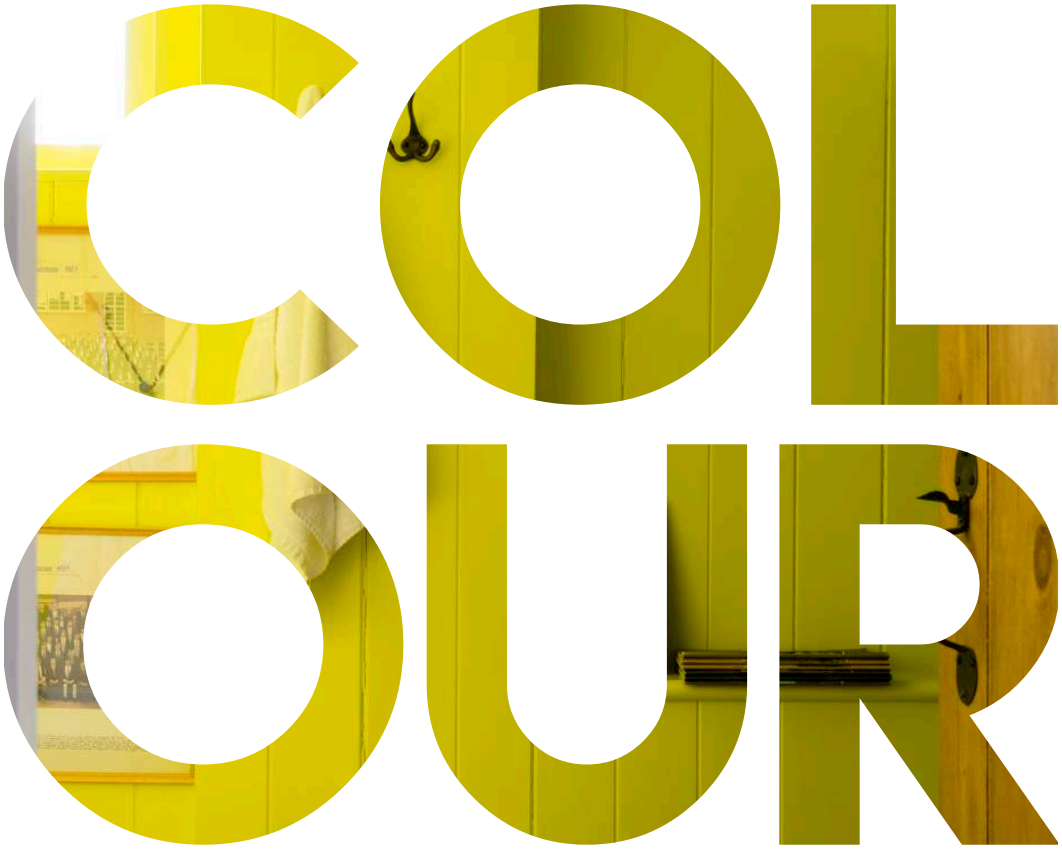


Tom's Bathroom

P O @ H O M E

Alesia's Lounge

Alesia's House



Alesia Sirokina

Like death and taxes, there is no escaping colour.

It seems to be in all places. But what does it mean? Colours often resonate distinctive meanings within different societies. In Western societies, the meaning of various colours have changed over the years. As a powerful form of communication, colour is irreplaceable. In short, colour matters!

Colour plays a vitally important role in the world in which we live. Colour can sway thinking, change actions and cause reactions. It can irritate or soothe your eyes, raise your blood pressure or suppress your appetite. When used in the right ways, colour can even save on energy consumption.

Colour theory is a science in itself. Studying how colour can influence diverse individuals, either independently or collectively, is something some people build their professions on. Something as simple as changing the exact hue or saturation of a colour can inspire a totally distinctive feeling.

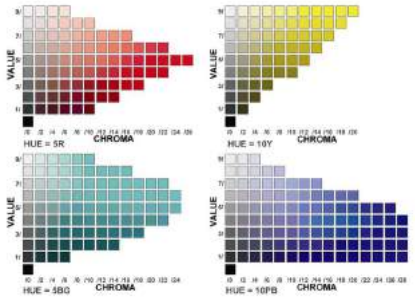
THE SCIENCE PART:
Looking back through the history of colour, the colour choices were limited until Albert H. Munsell's colour hypothesis was introduced.

It helped to communicate and reference colour more easily and accurately - his system was based on the three dimensions as irregular colour solids.

HUE:
Colour dimensions measured by degrees around horizontal circles.

CHROMA:
Measured radially outward from the neutral (grey);

VERTICAL AXIS & VALUE:
Measured vertically from 0 (black) to 10 (white), this relates to brightness, quality and purity.



^ *Diagram: Albert Munsell's colour chart*

Colours were separated into autonomous measurements and then referenced, which explains the rational approach to describe colour we utilise today.

Be that as it may, colour trends change rapidly. The colour white was mostly embraced during the Modernist era. In the design world, white is typically considered a neutral backdrop that allows other colours in the design to acheive louder voices. A pioneer of 'white' architecture, Le Corbusier described white as *'clean, clear, healthy, moral, rational and masterful...'* He also described white as the colour of modern times, which meant that white 'indulges' everything.

‘There is no such thing as the colour white, white is a myth that does not exist, a fantasy.’

David Bachelor, Chromophobia

Mark Whigley observed in Le Corbusier’s manifesto building ‘The Pavilion de l’Esprit Nouveau’ that the building is painted in ten diverse colours which are: white, black, light grey, dark grey, yellow ochre, pale yellow, burnt sienna, dark burnt sienna and light blue. We see colour in the form of the face, we see shadows, we see colour around the building and through the window.

^ *Photo: Whitewashed wall, Eaton Terrace.*

^ *Photo: Indigo & Gold Room, Eynsham Hall*

On the other hand, Post-Modernists loved their hues: bold, contrasting and energentic colours. The most common colours were olive, burnt orange and warm browns. This palette was considered natural, a reflection of the movement’s desire to get nearer to nature. Today bright Post-Modern colours are used to add a dash of ‘retro-chic’ to an interior.

So how does this translate into the home? Remember your childhood....that playfulness, your willingness to embrace the new and the joy and wonder in the smallest of things? Embrace your inner child and be spontaneous, add that bold, happy colour you’ve always loved for a touch of fun. Colours should inspire you, help you feel at home and reflect who you are.

There is a sense of rejuvenation in returning to the colours of our childhood. By re-introducing happy memories of the past to the present, people can bring childhood favorites into their current lives, and share with their family.

There is no doubt that the most ‘on trend’ colour today is grey and the many shades of grey. Paint manufacturers now make swatch booklets that contain just greys.

People often intuit that dark colours are cold and unwelcoming yet black is associated with power and elegance - a shade that relates to the hidden, the secretive and obscure. It is said to give protection from external emotional stress. This can be acheived in the home by painting the walls and ceiling a similar dark colour, cocooning the space whilst also lifting it. The dark colour softens the room and can minimise the effects of harsh corners and shadows.

Trend prediction is cyclical, it’s open to scrutiny and soon enough everything goes out of fashion. Colour prediction is still key to many industries, and architecture too is subject to these forces. Coming to the fore today are a series of calmer tones, which feel timeless and gently weathered.

But what if existing colours weren’t simply recycled decade in and decade out? What if new colours were discovered in nature? What if new colours were invented in the colour chemistry laboratory? What colour would you make?

^ *Render: MyFortune Rajharat Bedroom*

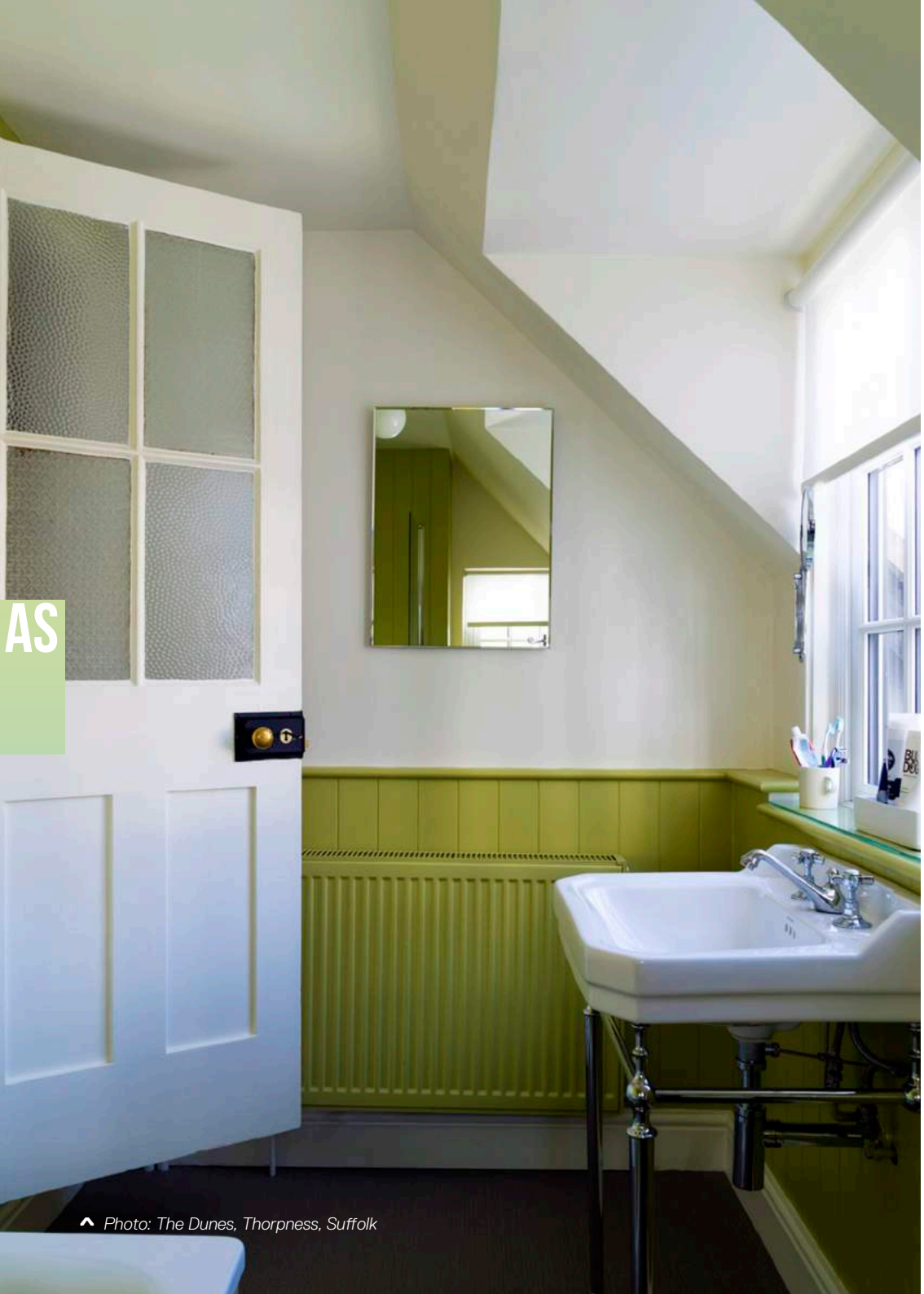


Photo: The Dunes, Thorpness, Suffolk

Photo: The Dunes, Thorpness, Suffolk

A STREAM OF VISUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Ruth Silver

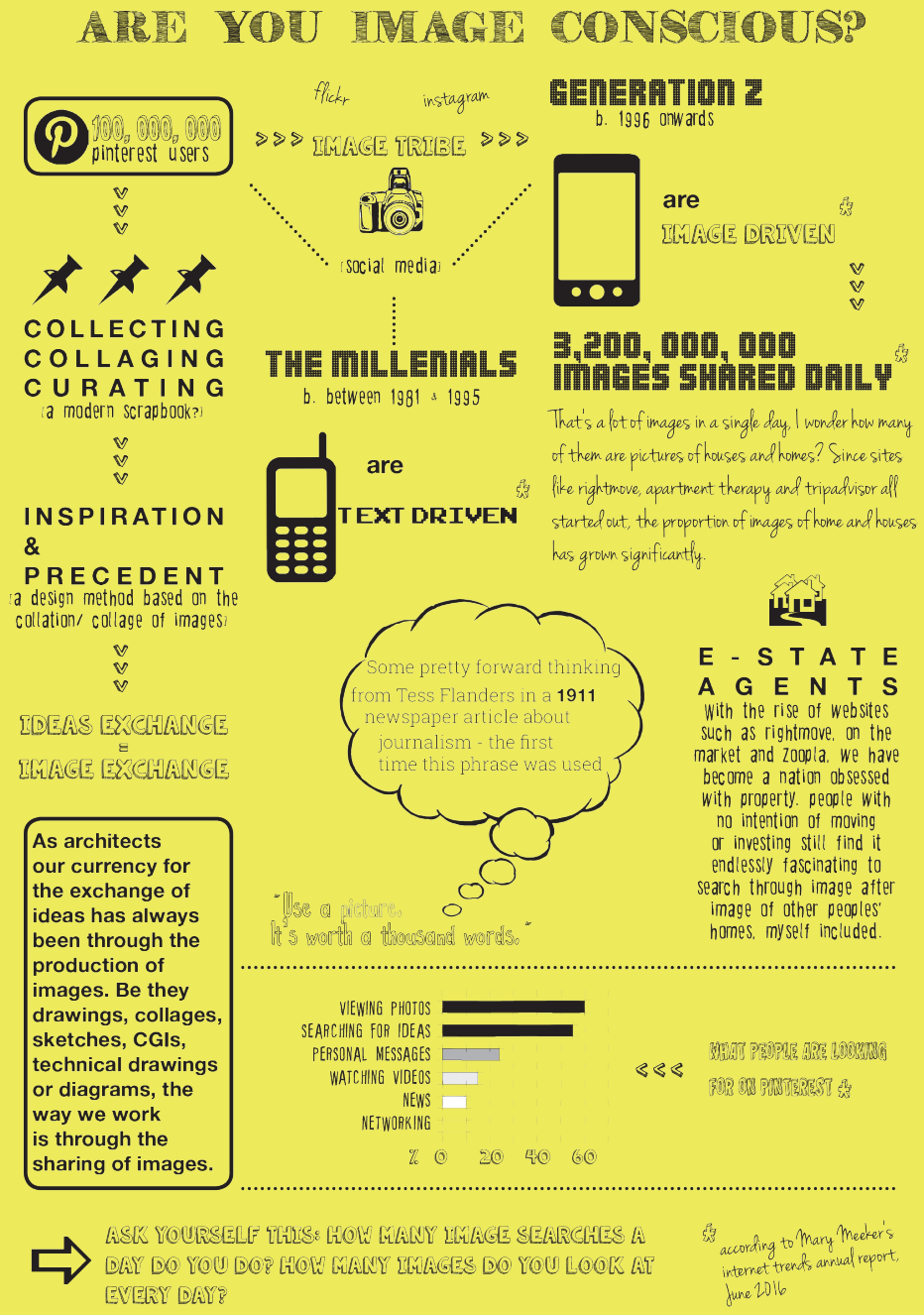
Images are addictive. Along with millions of others I absorb online property images daily; Rightmove, The Modern House, Apartment Therapy, Dezeen and Pinterest. In fact, my husband and I even have a pinterest page ready for precedent images for the interior of the house that we don't yet own.

This addiction is not surprising; we live in an image rich society. We have unprecedented access to visual material, both digital and tangible like never before. Given that now practically every mobile phone is also a camera, there are more photographs being taken than ever before. For businesses, your image profile matters.

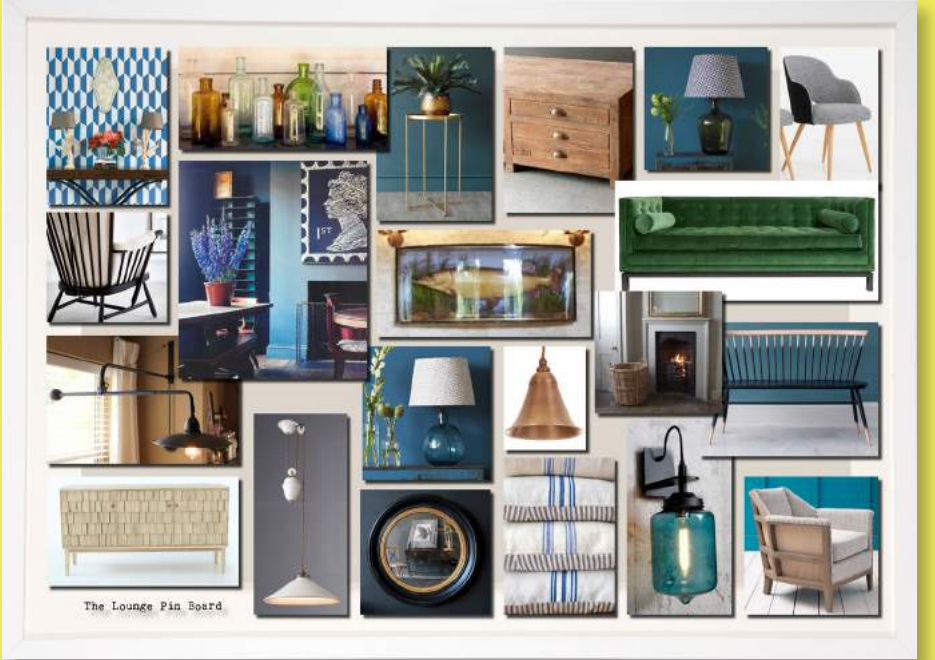
Take going out to a restaurant for example; chances are you have already looked up the map for how to get there, looked at the street view to make sure you know what the outside looks and I'll bet you've looked up the restaurant itself so that you know what the interior looks like. The die-hard image geeks among us have probably looked at a few photos of the food they serve and will probably take a photo of their own plate of food when they get there. That's a pretty healthy helping of images for starters, without even trying particularly hard.

The rise of applications like Pinterest has seen a dramatic increase in people collaging images together to help inspire anything from their wedding to their own home. The carefully curated grids of images are inspiring online users to make clear, calculated design decisions, what they like and what they don't like. This is a positive thing. Instagram is also dramatically on the rise indicating that people are not only thirsty for images, they are responding to streams of images in favour of streams of text.

Until recently, one of my office roles was looking after the Project Orange website, updating project material, publishing new projects, news pieces and press. It got me thinking about how many images actually exist on the web and how many images are uploaded every day? The answer astonished me, so much so in fact that it seemed appropriate to represent this and some of my other findings as a sort of image of its own. The info-graphic, a hybrid between text and image is a fast growing industry. Specialist "information designers" are becoming more and more sought after to simplify and communicate even the most complex information to a wide-ranging audience, yet more proof that people respond to images over text.



^ *Diagram: Are You Image Conscious?, Ruth Silver*



^ *Pinboard: The Tap Room, the Swan, Southwold*
v *Pinboard: The Lounge, the Swan, Southwold*

Even within our office, we have turned to the info-graphic as a design tool, as a way to summarise the overriding design narrative or timeline for a proposal.

With particular reference to designing our own homes and housing in general, image production has escalated to an exponential high. At Project Orange we generate more images for each project, be they sketches, collages or computer-generated images than ever before.

The days of a series of plans, sections, elevations and one “key image” are gone. The sheer volume of images produced as part of the design process has most certainly increased within our own office and without a doubt in the profession as a whole. We explore more ideas and schemes before we commit to an idea to develop and refine. This is of course in part due to evolving software programmes that allow us to work faster and more efficiently, but crucially it allows more choice for both the architect and the client, more confidence that the right decision is being made in favour of others.

These images are critical but they are also the images that you will rarely get to see, they represent a decision making process, they are not for public consumption. Images released in the public domain are a different story entirely. All of the hard work and decision making is over, these snapshots are about telling the story of the proposal, or convincing a local planning authority to approve a proposal. In these instances the right balance needs to be struck.

Enough to tantalise and sell an idea but not too much that you leave nothing to the imagination. It is here where the tangled web of images begins to grow. Do architects really need to release every image into the public domain? Or is there a hint of vanity? It is analogous to the film trailer, you want to spark interest but you don’t want any spoilers.

It could be argued that the ever-increasing presence of images in our society means that an element of surprise is being lost. The delight in experiencing a series of spaces on a building site for the first time is now a very rare occurrence and you already know what your plate of food is going to look like when you go out for dinner later. Expectations have increased. For example the number of visualisations demanded can often be fixed by the client from the outset, before any design work has started. As will always be the case these images go a long way to describe the architecture, but they will always fall short of the real thing. That’s the problem with two dimensions, there’s just not enough space.

<>

Illustrations from Down to Earth, 'A Gendered Profession', RIBA 2016, Tom Partridge

"WE KNOW FROM OUR OWN HISTORY THAT CHANGE HAPPENS BECAUSE PEOPLE PUSH TO MAKE IT HAPPEN"

BARACK OBAMA

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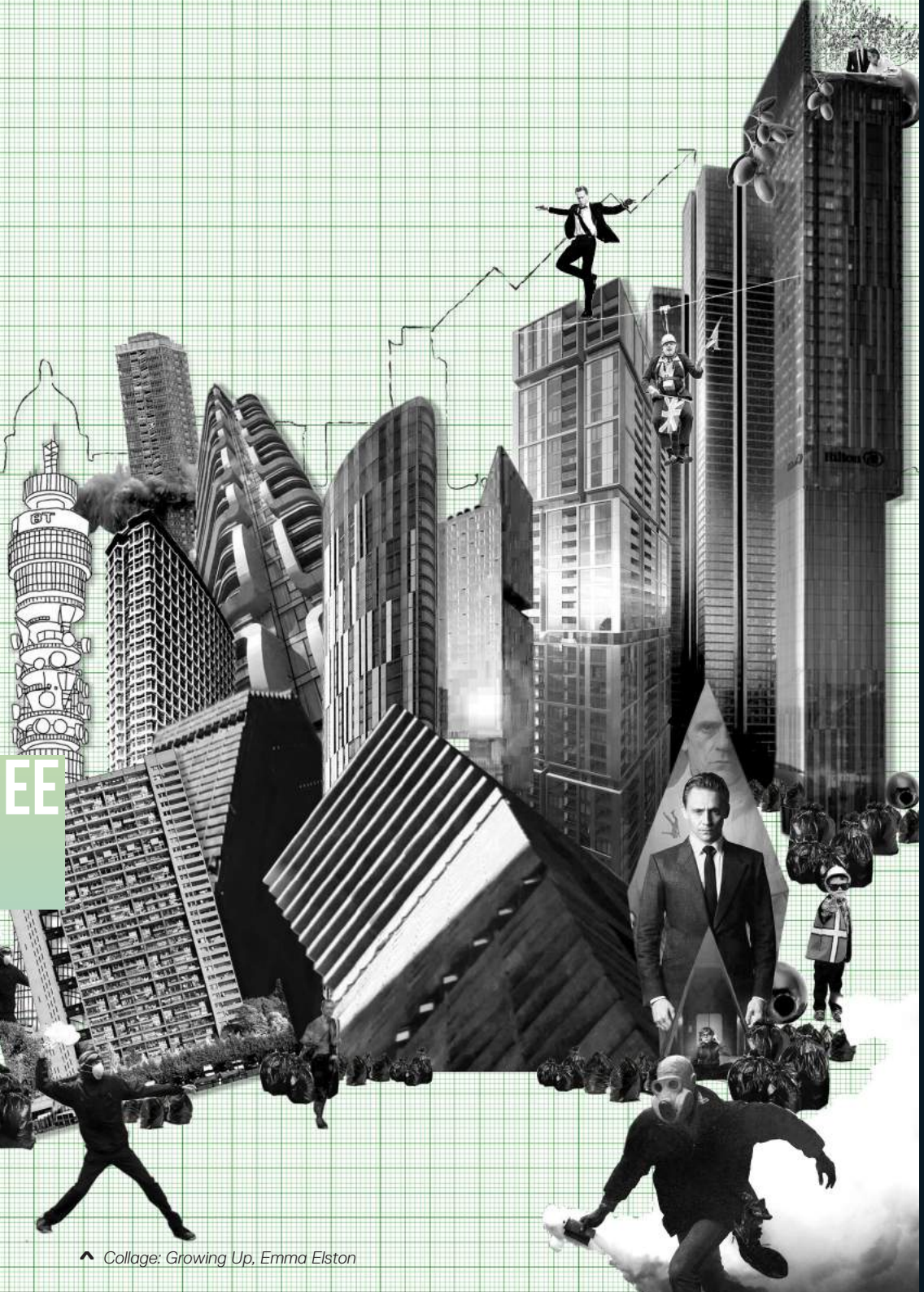


^ *Collage: Growing Up, Emma Elston*

GROWING UP

Emma Elston

I've lived in London for 26 years but haven't ever lived above the third storey. In this sense I have much in common with the majority of urban Londoners - estimates vary but somewhere between only 5%-9% of Londoners live above the fifth floor and London typically is a low-rise, mid density city, unlike peak urban centres such as Hong Kong or New York.

All this could be set to change, with planning applications for high-rise buildings above 25 stories in April 2016 reaching 128 – almost double the number proposed in the whole of 2015.

As someone whose own three story flat is scheduled for demolition to make way for a 46 storey luxury tower, I confess to a having a vested interest in the high-rise debate, but will temper this with a professional objectivity. Touted as the only solution to ever increasing densities in today's urban centres, can we look at this typology as a source of inspiration for the future?

What affect does high-rise living have on the quality of spaces and the psyche of residents?

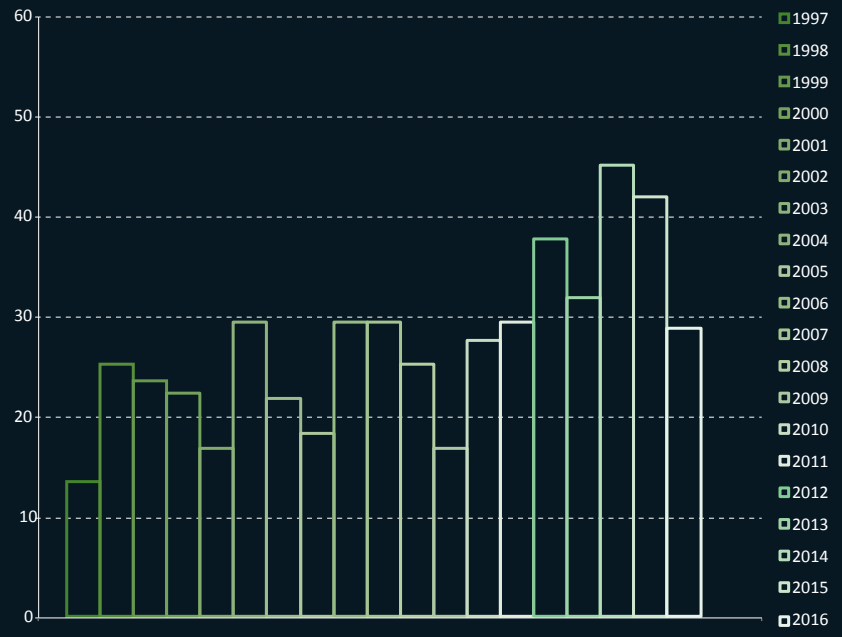
If the twentieth century was the realisation of the deep-rooted desire to live high above ground, aided by the inventions of the elevator and steel-framed construction methods, then the twenty-first century must consider the implications of this upwards movement, on both design and social criteria.

Londoners have for longer than most other global citizens avoided the temptation to live at the upper limit of the skyline; there were almost no residential buildings above 40 metres built during the 1980s-90s. But since the millennium, fostered by favourable policies and an intense increase in demand for accommodation, tall residential buildings are being built again, and at a rate faster than ever before.

Seemingly high-rise can provide the answer to most urban problems: protecting public space at ground level, providing health and pollution free dwellings at high level, offering a healthy alternative to sprawling car-centric suburban centres. But in reality desired outcomes have been limited; affordable housing, green technologies, and social amenities are difficult to achieve with a building type that needs greater efficiency to make it viable.

High-rise living has also previously been blamed for inciting anti-social activities - most notably in David Cameron's promise to bulldoze *'brutal high-rise towers'* which he linked directly to the riots of 2011. What does this mean for architectural design? Along with all the ethical and ecological arguments for and against high-rise, how does building tall affect design priorities?

Having done a little digging into Project Orange's current stats, the average housing project from the last 19 years is a 10 unit, 3.5 storey building. However the number of stories has increased steadily year on year and is set to increase dramatically if current trends continue: we are working on our first residential building of fourteen storeys; and consulting on a scheme which with residential towers of 42 and 36 storeys. According to the construction group CRBE, 13,600 high-rise apartments are currently being built, with another 70,000 in the pipeline.



^ *Graph showing number of stories of PO built projects, 1997-2016*

How can Project Orange adapt their design techniques for building higher and bring benefits to those who live at height? High-rise living is a niche market long dominated by tower blocks in housing estates, which continually receive less satisfactory responses than other housing forms for most people. It has been suggested that they are not optimal for children, that social relations are more impersonal and helping behaviour is less than in other housing forms. Crime and fear of crime is also said to be higher.

Lower levels of satisfaction in high-rise living may be unfairly skewed by the overwhelming use of the high-rise tower as social housing, where inhabitants from impoverished backgrounds are placed in close proximity without being given alternative options. Despite the fact social tenants make up only 21% of families with children, they make up 79% of those families living on the fifth floor or above.

On the other hand, high-rise offers great views to upper-level residents, and relative urban privacy. Their usually central urban location reduces pressure on transport services, and larger numbers of nearby neighbours affords better social support. Where communal spaces are properly serviced and appointed, they create a series of opportunities for engagement that are not limited to street level.

These tenets are an extension of the modernist ideas of 'streets-in-the-sky', which the post-war developments at Pruitt-Igoe in the US and Robin Hood Gardens in Poplar, embodied. The failures of these buildings were not just architectural; a lack of mixed-use programs, poor maintenance and little broader occupant social support also contibuted to their demise.

What can designers do to address these issues? Communal spaces and services such as concierges that create a sense of security can come with significant running costs. The largest penthouses in the Barbican incur annual service charges of more than £15,000 a year and one of the factors cited for the early deterioration of UK high-rise social housing was a failure to provide for ongoing costs.

The new generation of high-rise which is currently emerging caters almost exclusively to the urban luxury flat market which can bankroll these costs, and are marketed with names such as 'City Pride', 'Manhattan Loft Gardens' and 'The Stage'. But despite these marketing-friendly names, high-rises find it hard to shake off their reputation as isolationist and crime centric.

Ultimately, architects need to mitigate these issues through holistic design wherever possible and lobby for the protection and maintenance of the social spaces that mean so much to residents. Working to create more social experiences across the public spaces of the high-rise tower is key to creating coherent communities and a more positive experience, but in the traditional high-rise building it's essntial to have as small a core as possible - services, like lifts and entrance lobbies, and public amenities are shrunk in order to try to squeeze in more units.

Mitigating these efficiencies is difficult in today's climate of developer-centric building; but it can be done. Programmes to introduce more amenities are prominent in Asia, and examples include the Pinnacle Sky Gardens in Singapore, where regulations allow developers who include community spaces at height to build taller, and to exclude these from the taxable area of their developments.

Render: Mezzanine deck, Rathbon Market

In Rathbone Market Phase Three, a fourteen storey residential development, Project Orange have created multiple shared cores across the building, which are crossed by a series of mezzanine decks to allow observation and light from the floor above without impacting on the efficiency of the building.

But architecture hasn't yet found a solution to the crux of vertical living - that it potentially establishes an inescapable hierarchy. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in JG Ballard's novel, High-Rise, where the tower becomes a microcosm of society in which class differences are as clearly signposted as the numbers on the floors and apartments.

In a delicious parody of life imitating art, the architect, Anthony Royal, designs his "crucible for change" in a garden folly on the top floor of the building, reminiscent of Ian Simpson's olive grove at the top of Beetham Tower, Machester. In High-Rise, the building's domineering design and escalating class friction quickly lead to social collapse, aided by systematic power failures and food shortages, and residents engage in increasingly debauched parties, eventually eating pets and killing each other.

With an average 43% uplift in construction costs per sq ft above the 10th floor, how can the traditional vertical hierarchy be challenged? Height comes at a premium and it means the richest residents rise to the top. Unless architects can challenge the premiums that penthouses demand and allow high level living to become accessible to all, there's not much to separate the towers of tomorrow from Ballard's dystopian vision.

At Project Orange, investigating the extremities of this housing type which is simultaneously loved and loathed has produced some of our most innovative work. Looking through the lens of the current housing crisis, maybe, finally, we can view high-rise living as a symbol of housing for all and a towering achievement.

Render: Park Hill Phase Two, Elevation with inhabited walkway

“AVON CALLING!”

Tom Partridge

....my late grandmother would loudly exclaim, answering the door to her bungalow.

Even in my moody teens this rather worn out joke would reliably draw a wry smile. But the iconic Avon caller who once roamed the local cul-de-sacs was not only a popular icon; she performed a social function beyond that of a saleswoman.

As well as empowering women to work flexibly and earn their own income, the Avon caller was a familiar, friendly face, reliant on creating community connections in order to sell her wares.

Since 1959, when Avon expanded into the UK, the idea of shopping at home has been totally transformed. In 1979, English entrepreneur Michael Aldrich invented online shopping. His invention, Videotex, was developed throughout the 1980s but would soon be replaced by the World Wide Web.

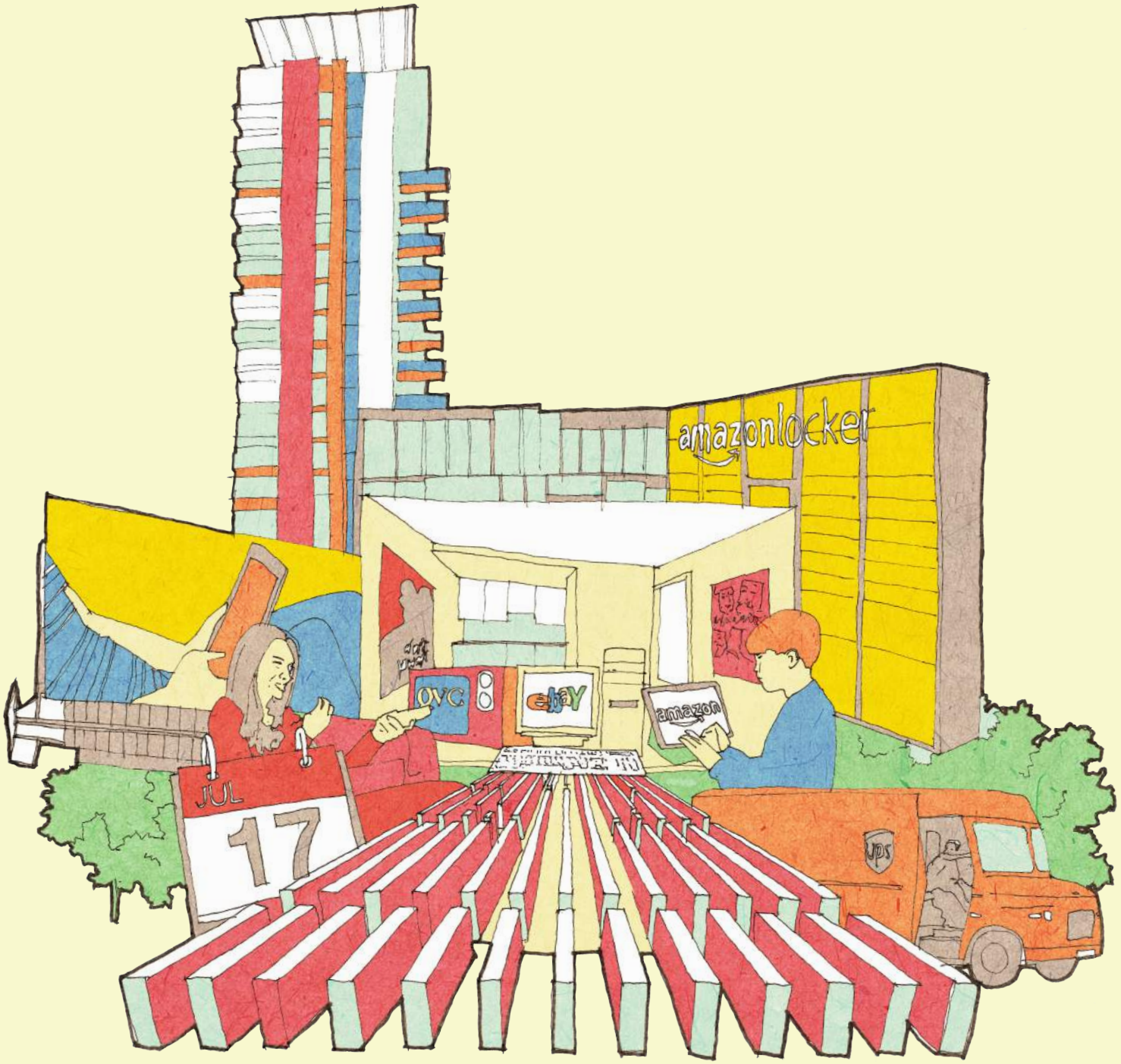
By 1995 both Ebay and Amazon were online, transforming the way we shop from home. While the Internet and the postman replaced a journey to the shops, the Avon lady and associated culture fell into decline. Community connections and chance interactions were not only removed from our high streets but from our doorsteps as well.

Now even the postman is due to be relegated to the history books. In the not-too-distant future our purchases will be airlifted to us by a super-smart drone infrastructure, using data collected through our smartphones to anticipate when we are home. The connection between customer and retailer are direct and immediate – the inefficiencies of human interaction removed.

This ongoing transformation in the way we shop reveals something of architecture’s complex relationship with wider societal and technological changes. As we increasingly shop without leaving the house, our homes are decoupling themselves from reality.

This has become manifest in the homes we build, with hotel-like lobby spaces and long corridors creating spatial segregation between front door and street; private and public.

^ *Illustration: Yesterday: Community Connections on the doorstep, Tom Partridge*



^ *Illustration: Today: Technology has eroded the doorstep community, Tom Partridge*

This decoupling is also evident within the home, where aspirations are shifting away from open-plan living to more segregated arrangements. This trend has been dubbed ‘broken-plan’ and is linked to the way that online communication, media and retail are largely enjoyed in private. As virtual and physical worlds become more connected, we risk being so immersed in our homes that we have no need to leave them.

The privatisation of public space is being contested, but the segregation of domestic space is less often challenged. It is true that buildings are a manifestation of their time, and so it follows that our homes accommodate our increasingly transitional and technology-driven lives while neglecting arguably outmoded ideas, such as the importance of local community.

But technology also presents opportunities to create new types of community, which could affect not just the way we live, but the ways in which domestic space are produced and owned. Crowd funding, skill sharing and open source design could enable like-minded groups of people to construct their own communities, fit for the twenty-first century.

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Collage: Project Orange Hotel Moodboard

Holly Rees

At Project Orange, the majority of our projects fall into either the residential sector or the hotel sector, making it vital to keep abreast of the changes within the industry. Amidst a continually altering market the challenge is often how, as designers, we can manipulate a space in such a way as to make the customer feel comfortable, in short, to make them feel at home.

The introduction of the concept of leisure time and the subsequent development of the modern tourist industry followed the rise of the mercantile bourgeoisie in the early nineteenth century. The traditional inn, as a simple place to sleep, evolved into what we now identify as the modern hotel and has been evolving ever since.

In the English language, 'house' and 'home' are two words with overlapping but distinct meanings. 'House' is a purely architectural concept, 'home' has an overtone of humanity, is a place where we feel comfortable and can express our identities. But while travelling, how can this sense of comfort, privacy and individuality that we associate with our homes be replicated?

It is something that many have tried to discover over the last two centuries in the hotel and leisure industry. The success has been varied, with the forced "home away from home" concept being used to the detriment of authenticity and design expression. Unlike the traditional inn, with shared communal sleeping spaces, the introduction of small innovations in hotels in the early nineteenth century, such as private bedrooms with locking doors, reflected big changes in society. It was a time of rapid change following the Industrial Revolution and the new modes of transport widened the possibilities of travel for the middle class.

Industrial mass production and the increasing amount of standardized goods available to purchase also spurred a rising discomfort with total uniformity. A sense of individuality was central to the identity of this now emerging middle class and articulated the importance at the time of expression, personal identification and privacy.

By the end of the nineteenth century, hotels as the "home away from home" had become the testing ground for new technologies, ideas and innovations. Hotels allowed customers the chance to experience such things as electric lighting and central heating, before introducing them to the domestic market.

By the start of the 20th Century, the prosperity of the time had led to the age of the 'Grand Hotel', which had turned the architecture of the hotel into a theatrical and glamourous experience. Design had become more frivolous, extravagant and dramatic and provided escapist experiences for the clientele. Hotels began to draw local people out of their homes and into the prestigious restaurants and public areas, where they could mix with travellers from around the world.

HR

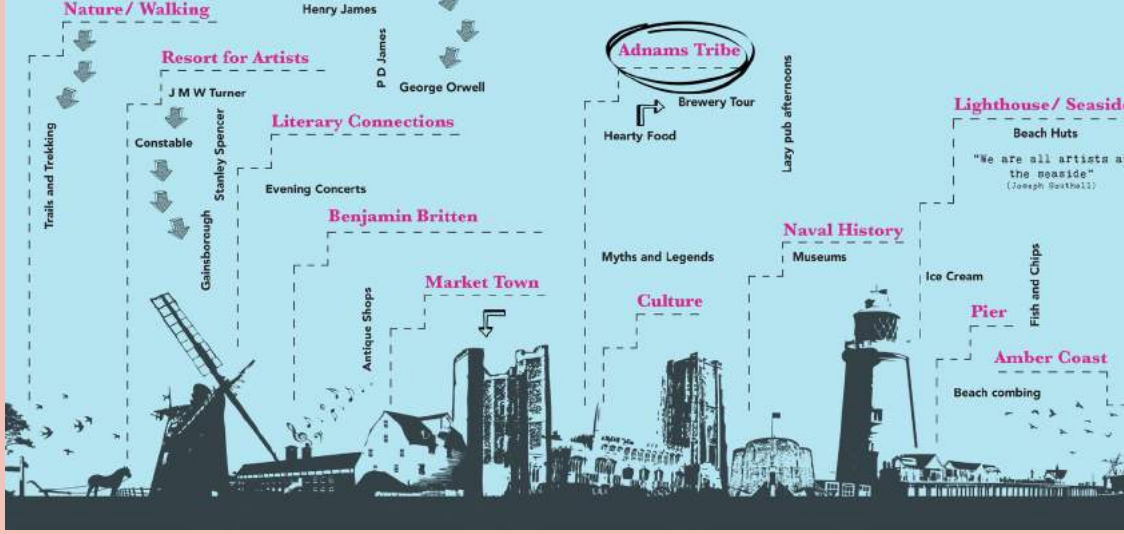
The boundary between public and private became more permeable and social customs were altered in these spaces, which gave Grand Hotels their social thrill. There were even people who chose to live in these hotels, surrounding themselves with these magnificently artificial environments and turning them into their homes, with dubious effects on their mental state. The American billionaire, Howard Hughes, spent the last twenty six years of his life living in penthouse suites of hotels around the world. Leading up to his death in 1976, he lived a life of complete seclusion and rumours spread of his Valium addiction, gaunt figure, scraggly beard and twisted fingernails.

People expected a certain level of service during their stay in a hotel, and quality, skill and attention to detail became key factors within the hotel industry. By the 1970s there was an emergence of hotels for business travellers, which led to the industrialisation of the hotel and the introduction of the chain hotel. Identical rooms, bland uniform design and customer service that was dictated by a manual became common themes; a world away from the model created by the Grand Hotel.

The identity of hotels became stifled, impersonal and lacked any sense of nationality or local culture. Design shied away from anything too personal, creating spaces that were void of any of the comforting characteristics of home. Corridors were filled with the identical carpets and bedroom colour schemes were selected for how they looked under artificial light, as business clientele only used them during out of office hours. The public areas of hotels became ghettos for lonely executives, having been designed to be flexible and decorated with identical contract furniture and abstract art that was purposefully inconspicuous and unobtrusive.

The anonymity and uniformity of chain hotels made them an emotional failure and led to a backlash in the late twentieth century with the introduction of the 'Boutique Hotel'. Designed to be cool and different, Boutique Hotels aimed to fill their public spaces with locals once more and targeted people based on their interests, not their wealth. Communities of like-minded people were offered an expanding variety of flavours, and designers began to take more risks to respond to the individuality and identity of their clientele.

^ *Render: The Swan, Southwold*



^ *Diagram: The Swan Traveller Identity.*

Moving into the twenty-first century, leisure travellers began to seek something more localised, personalised and authentic from their trips. While the importance of privacy in hotels was key during the twentieth century and the idea of staying in a stranger's home was unimaginable, the arrival of Airbnb in 2008 changed the rules of the entire hotel and travel industry.

As an organisation, Airbnb aimed to create a feeling of belonging, of feeling at home anywhere, by encouraging people to stay in other people's homes and to therefore experience a place with a greater sense of authentic warmth and emotional connection. Airbnb has become a huge success and signifies the evolution in perception of private and public, by blurring the boundaries between our sense of private space and the idea of public share-ability once again.

In the last decade and as a result of the shift in the behaviour of travellers, hotels have begun to reflect their location and more than ever before, the line between 'hotel' and 'home' is becoming blurred.

Hoteliers understand the importance of authenticity and rather than opting for standardised roll-out designs, many appoint specialist designers to look at the project with a unique perspective and provide a more distinct and authentic take on the local vernacular.

Hotel designers aim to provide atmosphere and fun while creating an environment that has uniqueness and identity through the influence of the distinct heritage, religion, place and time of its location. In today's market, some leaders in the industry are rejecting the concept of a "hotel that feels like a home" and opting for something more experimental, whimsical and imaginative. Hotels in themselves are intrinsically temporary, effectively absolving the guest of the need for the consistent identity that they maintain during their regular lives.

Maybe the future of hotel design will draw on this and provide a plethora of experimental worlds that encourage the guests to change their identity with each trip they take. Who would you like to be the next time you check in at reception?

HOME/WORK

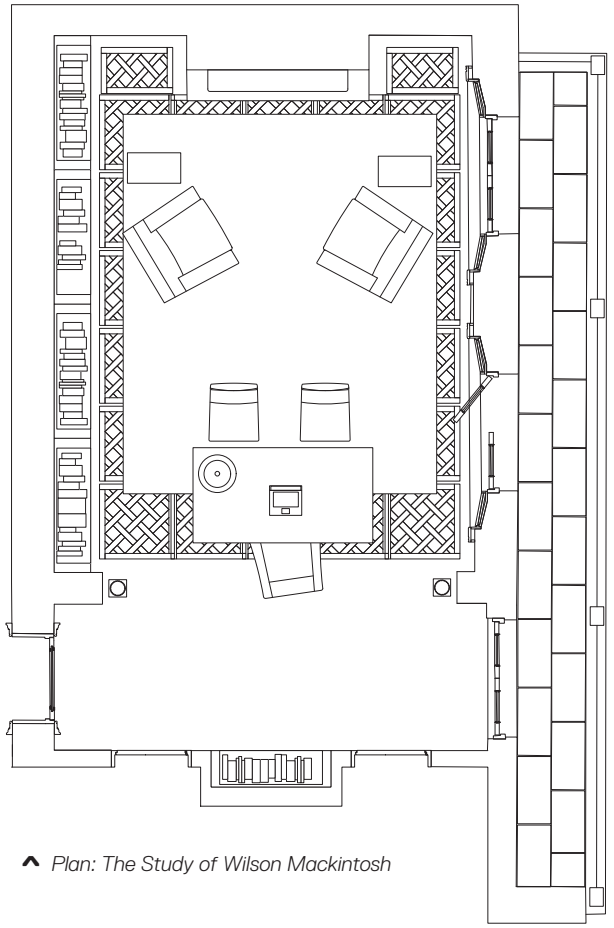
Billy Sinclair

Chapter One

To the untrained eye, this room, where a man sits studiously tapping on a well-worn keyboard, has all the hallmarks of a palatial library. Towering oak bookcases topped with Greek busts line the East wall while three tall French doors take advantage of the westerly light. A pair of Corinthian columns, which serve no purpose but to glamourise the space, frame a central writing desk, where he and his work reside. He looks up momentarily, distracted by the flight of a bird in the afternoon light, before returning to his studious tapping. The only other audible volume is the muffled rattle of pages being fed through a concealed printer, the day's work crystallised on paper. The man pulls a cigarette out of the top drawer of the desk, lights it and removes his tortoise-shell glasses. Closing his eyes for a moment of distilled silence, he then exhales smoke in a long easy action. This figure has the appearance of a man who has perfectly imitated the image of luxury.

'Mr Wilson…Mr Wilson!' a shrill voice and knocking from the only internal door in the room instantly kills the peace.
'Yes?'
'Mr Wilson, err, a Mr Samuels is here to see you'
'Send him up'
Feet are heard hurrying down the stone staircase. Wilson stubs out the cigarette, closes the lid of his laptop and turns to open one of the French doors. Footsteps return, this time in a more collective manner, and the door swings open to present a small plump lady followed by an even more plump man dressed in a pinstriped suit.

'Tom, good to see you, good to see you old boy!' Wilson announces jovially.
'Wilson, how the heck are you?' a wry smile appearing from a well-tanned round face.
'Good, very good.' Wilson takes Tom's hand with a firm grasp, as the door closes behind them.
'This is quite the place you've got here Wilson.' Tom says, looking round the room.
Wilson acknowledges the compliment with a smile. 'Take a seat,' hand raised towards the armchairs that address the fireplace. 'What can I get you?'
'What's the time?'



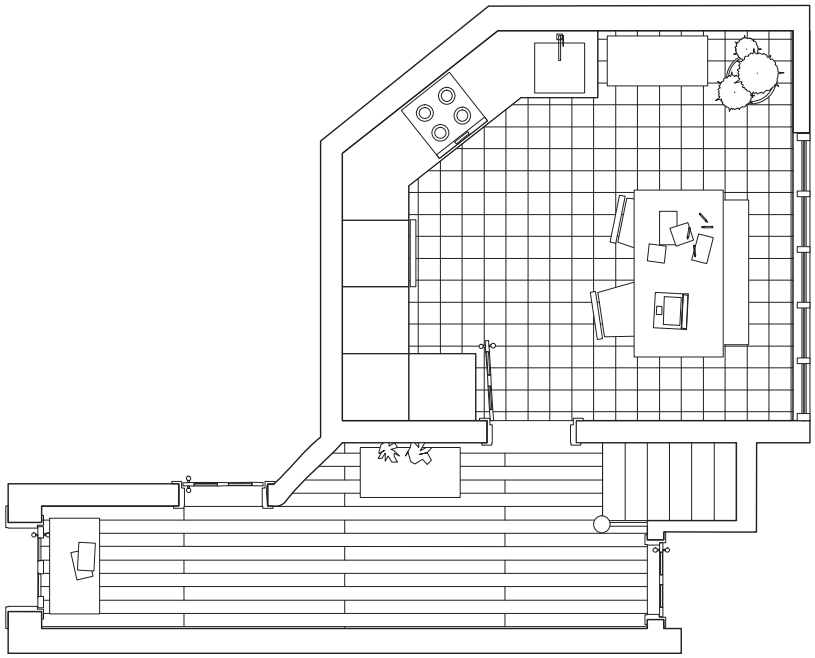
^ *Plan: The Study of Wilson Mackintosh*

'Half five,' Wilson responds.
'Better make it a strong one then.'
'Any excuse.'
Wilson opens a concealed door in the corner and pulls out two tumblers and a glass decanter. Filling them half full, he joins his guest by the fireplace.
'So will you get a more attractive housemaid then Wilson?' Tom announces without a hint of sarcasm.
'What, Ang? She's a good worker and she hasn't cottoned on to the living wage.'
Tom explodes in laughter, taking his half full tumbler and sloshing back a large mouthful.
'The bank could do with your thriftiness in times like these.'
'I left at the right moment.'
'But not before you made a killing on that Russia deal.'
'Well, everyone needs a bit of luck now and again.'
'You can say that again.' Tom says looking round the lavishly decorated library.

'It suits me well, what can I say? Not like working on the floor with those adrenaline fuelled junkies trying to find their next fix. I can work and relax at the same time.'
'Hey, we originally joined the floor to find that fix.''We've made good money Tom, no need to outstay our welcome. Anyway, shifting bits and pieces around from my desk here keeps me in caviar.'
'Now that I don't doubt'.

Chapter Two

'Come on Fin, hurry up'. A little blond headed boy, no taller than three feet, jumps on this bike and chases down the road after his father and big brother.
'Put your helmet on properly you little fuzz ball.' Tomas stops his bike and leans over this handle bars to help Fin clip the buckle under his chin.
'Wait for your brother Sam,' Tomas calls up the road and turns back to Fin.
'Now you're going to be just fine.' Smiling down at Fin, 'School's great and you've got your brother there to look after you.'
Fin looks to see his brother still cycling away.
'He's just excited to get to school and you should be too,'
Tomas says reassuringly.
'But can't I stay home with you Dad…?' Fin responds timidly.



^ *Plan: Tomas Larsen's Kitchen*

'Look, I promise you will love it, and if you don't, but I know you will, then when I come and pick you up we can do what ever you want, I promise.'
'Come on Fin!' Sam shouts back down the road, finally stopping to wait for his dad and brother.
'Ok, let's go.' says Tomas looking at Fin.
The three cycle down to the end of the road and across a 1970's estate that divides their home from the school. Tomas helps the boys tie up their bikes inside the school gates and gives Fin a warm embrace before Sam grabs his brother's arm and runs him into the school building. Tomas looks on as they disappear inside, then jumps back on his bike for the quick return journey home.

Opening the front door of their small, green terraced house, Tomas glimpses what looks like a letter from his ex-wife's lawyer, which he chooses to step on rather than over. He heads down the corridor and turns left, leading him into a small but comfortable kitchen. In the centre is an old oak dining table he reclaimed from a neighbour's furniture sale, with laptop surrounded by hand drawings and a scattering of crayons.

He moves to the fridge and reads the little phrase Sam has written in multi-coloured letters, smiling in the process, and takes out some milk. Tomas puts the kettle on the stove and sits down at the dining room table, opens his laptop and starts to plough through his morning emails. Weightloss supplements, virtual friends, flat for sale, he keeps scrolling until he finds something that resembles work; Titan Ltd – Website Design. A strong sense of anticipation strikes, brought on by the surprise that they responded so quickly, and he clicks to open the email immediately.

> *Hello Tomas,*
> *Thanks for sending through your initial ideas, which I'm pleased to say were very well received by the directors yesterday.*
> *A couple of comments were muttered about toning down colours in line with the branding but on the whole they were extremely positive. So positive in fact that they want you to put together a presentation outlining your ideas in more detail. Beforehand though they want to have a quick meeting to agree a fee for your involvement and put name to face and all that. This is great news mate, really happy for you and more than that, happy it didn't back fire on me putting your name in the mix! Will give you a call later to arrange a time for the meeting, more than likely happen sometime next week.*
>
> *Take care, Max.*

After re-reading it three times, Tomas leans back into his chair and looks up. The kettle hits boiling point and starts whistling as if a patron to his master's cause for celebration. Tomas pauses for a moment and waits for the crescendo, smiles and then jumps up with a new found vitality.

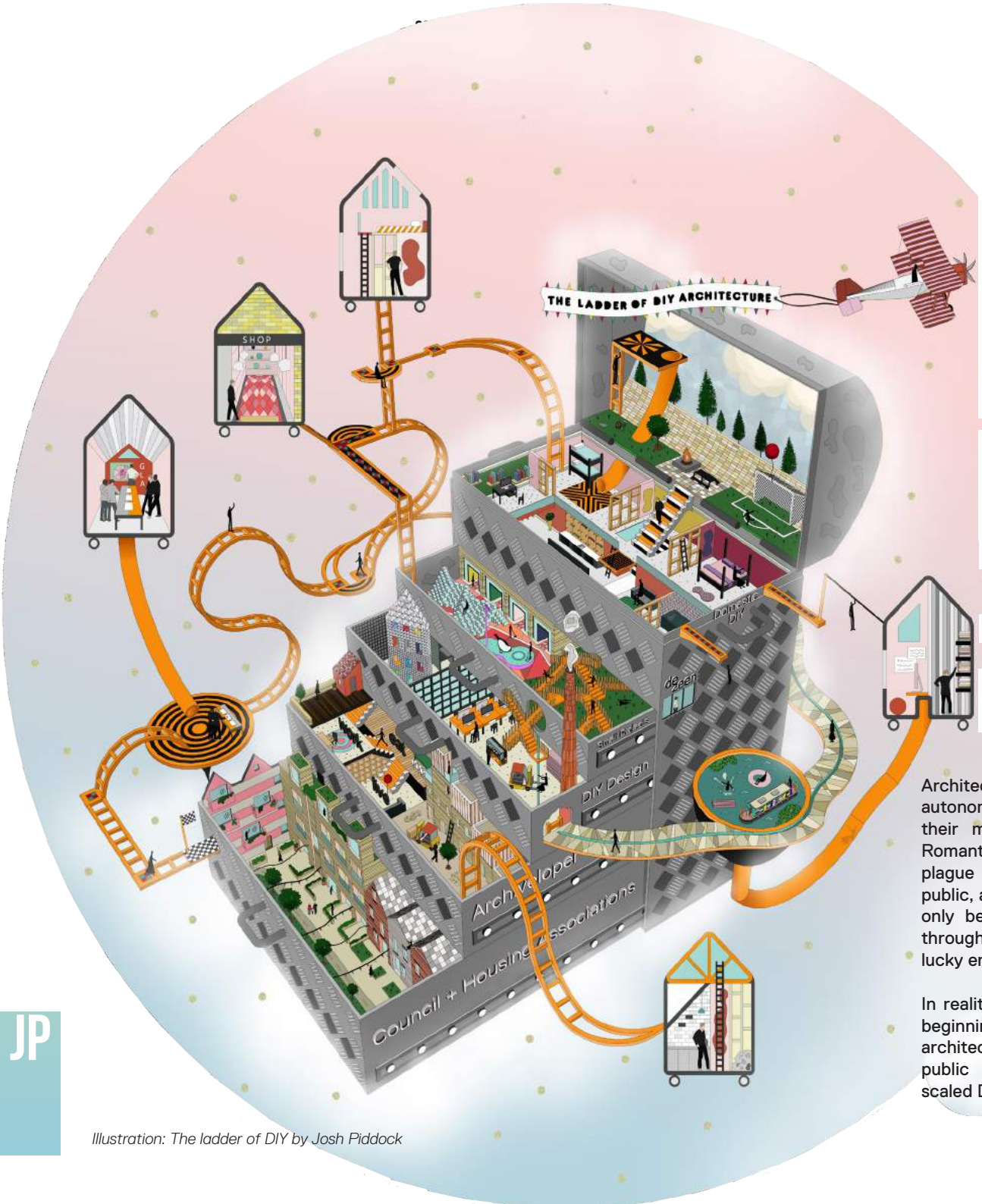


Illustration: The ladder of DIY by Josh Piddock

DO IT Yourself

Josh Piddock

When we think of the term DIY, the connotations that spring to mind are domestic and amateur.

Architects often separate this from architecture on the grounds of professionality and scale, but DIY is the only gateway that most people have to any control of the built environment around them.

DIY is an accessible gateway to architecture for the masses, but does DIY constitute anything more to architects?

What is DIY architecture?

+ How might architects engage with it?

Architects are often portrayed as autonomous creatives and buildings their medium for artistic expression. Romanticised views of the profession plague mainstream culture, yet the public, and most laymen, might in reality only become engaged with architects through public consultation, or if they're lucky enough, a house extension.

In reality, and as I'm finding out at the beginning of my career in practice, architecture is far removed from the public perception of glamorous up-scaled DIY.

Constraints may exist in the form of processes, time-scales, hierarchies, risk, compromises, cost cutting, contractor cartels and procurement vehicles.

Ultimately the business of architecture as a professional service mostly comes down to profit on the part of all stakeholders involved and can seem a long way from those idealistic associative attractions initially cited. Despite this, as long as design retains and builds value, there will always be opportunities for architects engaging with DIY practices to emerge and innovate at a variety of scales, whether that be through design, procurement or even the rewriting of the stakeholder map itself.

DIY Step 1: Personal Projects

Step 1:

The first hop onto the ladder of DIY architecture is obvious and can be viewed as solely domestic and personal. With professional knowledge applied there is potential for heightened ambition and execution with immaculate attention to detail. An architect-led traditional DIY project can act as the test bed for ideas suppressed and unused in professional practice. In recent years we have seen accessibility to precedents through social media platforms such as Pinterest spike. Suddenly a world of ideas is at our fingertips, ready for a reactive and design engaged mind to realise them.

Despite this undeniable boost to concept driven design there remains the problem that whilst architects possess a professional skill-set to put one over on the typical DIY-er, we simply aren't contractors. We lack tools and often the well practiced sleight of hand. Luckily, other twenty-first century advancements in technology have also raised the bar in this respect, with online databases of multimedia information supplied through platforms such as YouTube providing all the DIY tips needed for architects and others to tackle increasingly complicated DIY architecture projects.

DIY Step 2: Shop Window

Step 2:

Moving down the ladder, because of ever increasing competition Architects are engaging in DIY architecture through providing the design and expertise for others to build pro bono, undertaking small projects or simply through initiating projects themselves. Again there is little unusual about the notion of self -promotion, but in this social media age, and with media outlets such as Dezeen proving architecture and design isn't exactly a niche market (10 million page impressions per month), it has never been easier for architects of merit to have their projects receive significant exposure in the shop window through digital footfall.

Step 3:

As an opportunistic young architect in 2016 one might quite tangibly use cheap computing software to turn a novel idea into a set of flashy graphics, and, supplemented by a concrete financial case and programme, prepare an online crowd-funding campaign to raise the funds themselves to see it built, managed and succeed.

With the help of free online information distribution, a tactically chosen audience and enough entrepreneurial enthusiasm, such a strategy might just lead to a fledgling architectural practice's first self initiated job.

Even if the exercise doesn't reap any direct rewards and on face value appears to have failed, the mutually beneficial nature of exposure between the press and those who provide its content is what ultimately leads to future rewards.

Engagement is key, and even if a proposal isn't built a significant amount of marketing and brand identity establishment will have been achieved.

DIY Step 3: DIY Based Design

DIY Step 4: The Archi-veloper

Step 4:

The next rung down for the architect comes by taking control, risk and reward into one's own hands by becoming developers. Flipping the development dynamic on its head, archi-velopers and their heightened roles within projects see imposed constraints become reduced to self imposed compromises.

The attraction of this method of working are obvious, most notably because it facilitates the idea that practice is becoming more closely aligned to the autonomous manner in which the profession is portrayed, as already discussed. Whilst this scope-creeping form of practice is financially riskier, the benefits are not limited to financial ones.

Whilst control of the specific project is assured, the archi-veloper is also putting themselves in the shop window with a built project of larger scale, and this time he or she is also able to give free samples, and they are increasing the trust placed in them by prospective clients. This enables them to more strongly impose their design outlook on future non-DIY projects.

^ *DIY Step 5: The Reworked Stakeholder Map*

Step 5:

The last step of the ladder and by far the largest scale of DIY architecture is working for local authorities doing it themselves, both internally and externally in professional practice.

As holders of some of the largest land banks in the country, local authorities have a vast amount of leverage. In keeping hold of their leverage and developing sites themselves, councils are effectively able to pour any profit made from housing into other underfunded local authority departments, for example Camden's Community Investment programme.

In London today an architect might apply for a job as an in-house architect for a local borough, a job role that was all but disappearing until a couple of years ago. An architect with his or her own practice might tap into this market by joining the growing number of practices working as trusted architects directly for the council. With such power due to land resources, councils can take the precedented move of offering architects a map and an opportunity to bring projects to them. A self-initiated project of this manner could, with the right connections and processes followed, be attained by an architect simply through the identification of a site online, a check on the land registry and a feasibility study that stacks up.

Using this method of DIY architecture local authorities could in future augment this development method, extracting maximum public benefit by re-working the stakeholder map and utilising the growing power of 'the online platform' to provide systems that can democratically govern how the built environment takes shape.

Such a system could see projects chosen by people within a sphere of influence of the site and awarded to architects on the basis of best overall concept rather than simply the best response to a given set brief; making development decision making and place making inherently more holistic and above all local.

Whilst such a system is yet to be developed, one thing is clear - the concept of DIY, coupled with a reduction in the use of intermediaries through technological innovation, can, if utilised correctly, become far more than erecting a shelf.

^ *Summer House, Moscow, Russia*

HOME truths

INTERIOR INVESTMENT

Continuing our inter-office conversation 'Housing, House, Home' we need to question the current neoliberal perception that building homes is primarily seen as a financial investment (for the developer) with the 'promise' to the buyer of a lifestyle and an asset that will inevitably increase in value.

This premise has contributed not only to the housing crisis in London, but more fundamentally erased the architectural conviction which once understood housing as a civic and community action-led proposition. From intelligently integrating a building into the fabric of the city to creating homes that were functional and characterful, we now see iceberg developments divorced from their context and fitted out as bland four star hotels. The public appear to have been duped by glossy brochures, twinkly CGI's and an aspiration to join the property ladder at any price. On reflection have we, as a profession, been guilty of assisting in propagating these myths?

COOKIE CUTTING

At Project Orange we see the seismic difference between designing a house or home for an individual / family and proposing a 'roll-out' scheme for a development. With an individual we invest in the creation of a brief, understanding the particular circumstances and responding in a sympathetic and hopefully life-enhancing manner.

The process is long, complex and necessarily emotional resulting in a project all parties feel invested in. It is a home.

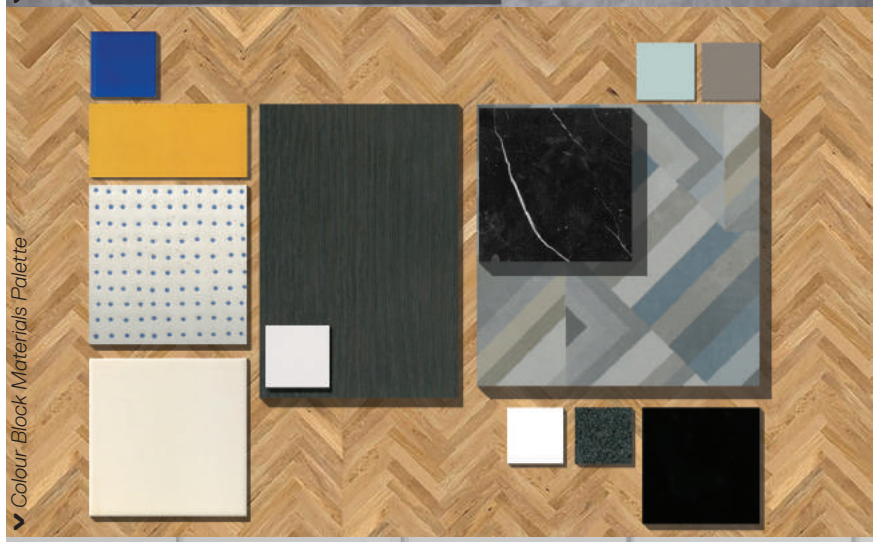
When it comes to the question of apartments within a development we find ourselves in a situation where the brief is a given – "it's what sells". When questioning this, we are told that the marketing team know best. There is no room for empathy and generosity.

Ironically when it comes to the exterior architecture there is much less interference or opinion unless it relates to the density (read profit) or a perception of popularity (read icon). It seems that the commodification of the home as a product is by definition market-led. But why don't people object and why are they apparently content with cookie cutter homes that are small, inflexible, banal and overpriced? In part the housing crisis means there is little choice.

However it also suggests that buyers have lost touch with the idea of what a home means, and the sense of community that forms around groups of households. As Reiner de Graff recently reported:

"Judgement of architecture is deferred to the market. The 'architectural style' of buildings no longer conveys an ideological choice but a commercial one."

Urban Sophisticate Materials Palette



Colour Block Materials Palette

Creative Studio Materials Palette

ESTATE AGENCY

In an effort to offer more creative and flexible homes we undertook a more experimental approach with a live project to see if we could push the idea of customisation with a developer client. Until recently it used to be possible; you could choose your kitchen and bathroom for instance. Not any more as it is apparently too expensive. What if we figured out a range of materials that had similar properties (thickness, cost, robustness etc) that could be substituted easily without any substantial changes?

To do this we created a single rendered view and exchanged the materials to illustrate the completely different ambiences that could be achieved – brick or timber floor, white or coloured kitchen, blue or yellow walls, exposed or closed ceilings etc. Each image conjured up a different sense of 'home'. While this met with enthusiasm, the predictable argument came back that it was too costly. What transpires is that it is not the price of the materials or even the workmanship – it is the headache and expense of project managing differences.

Next, inspired by the Masters Housing in Dessau, we moved to an even simpler concept – what if we clad the apartment in materials that could be painted: kitchen doors, blank doors, MDF panels, plaster walls etc and created an app where potential clients could play with the colours and textures of their apartment. This was presented to the marketing team, who responded that they were concerned people might choose the wrong colour which would be detrimental to the development.

Maybe there could be 2 or 3 different 'looks' over the whole development. What can they mean? We are left feeling that the role of the architect/designer is marginalised and that design is merely the packaging for a financial exchange.

HOMING INSTINCTS

So we have to work in other ways. We have to be less transparent. We need to become double agents and practice our resistance incognito. Not because we disdain our clients but because we believe there is more to offer. Does this sound arrogant? It could do, but that is not the starting point. Our evidence base is that the designs we have undertaken for individuals are more creative and that the outcomes are specialised, personal and negotiated.

In our own homes we chop and change, we personalise, we refresh and we live in spaces we have designed. Our instincts therefore lead us to see that the lack of design, the basic material choices and inflexible layouts in larger developments work against the idea of allowing families to create their own home. Look at the apartments in the Barbican with their strong aesthetic that is robust, resilient and characterful compared to our own specifications, where we often end up with painted plasterboard, engineered wood flooring, plastic switches, particle board cabinets and cheap down lights. Little of it is recycled or recyclable and there is a 10 year lifespan dictated by the NHBC insurance cover. We therefore need a new commitment between client, architect and purchaser to provide a home of lasting value. We need a manifesto.

HOME-i-FESTO

DESIGN houses and housing that are robust, resilient and can be knocked about in the future.

SPECIFY MATERIALS that are aesthetically rich, resource-light and that can be repurposed.

NO MORE LANDFILL FOR THE FUTURE.

Use design to

MAXIMISE THE LOCAL SITUATION.

From window sizes through to storage, the specificity adds value.

FORGET INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

This changes all the time and is a gimmick. Install services that can be exchanged in the future.

A place to go **OUTSIDE** is more than just a projecting deck or balcony. Creating a connection to nature means designing a garden however small.

CONSIDER *wear & tear in 25 years time, even in 50 years time. From the outside to inside design details that can be*

REPAIRED, RE-FINISHED *and* **MODIFIED** *by real people (not specialists).*

NEVER have a ***WASHING MACHINE*** in the kitchen.

Every home needs a proper UTILITY ROOM (not a cupboard). Minimum size 1200x2000mm.

IF YOU CANNOT ACHIEVE ANY OF THE ABOVE, THEN DESIGN A WELL CONSIDERED SHELL, WITH THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS SO PEOPLE CAN BUY CHEAP SPACE IN WHICH THEY CAN CRAFT THEIR OWN HOMES.

JS

JS


Swan
Hotel
Swan
Brand
Swan
Garden

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