

Making Better Places

Hugh Petter introduces a book on the work of ADAM Architecture

Making Better Places from <https://adamarchitecture.com/publication/making-better-places/>



Those of us involved each day with development will know that the whole planning system is gummed up with red tape. We wrestle with endless single interest groups, and all too often the vision can get diluted in a battle where just getting to the end of the process becomes the main objective, rather than creating better places.

The Building Better Building Beautiful Commission's final report, launched in January this year acknowledges this core problem. Several directors of ADAM Architecture gave evidence to that Commission. The publication of ADAM's new book, *Making Better Places*, is timed to coincide with this launch, and to show by example how some of the reoccurant problems that blight too much new development in the UK can be overcome.

There is much to be learned from looking at local settlement patterns. Why are streets and squares the shape and size that they are; how do their characteristics relate to topography, climate, geology, local building materials, etc? Before cheap fossil fuels, settlements grew in a low carbon way because there was not the luxury to do otherwise, and the same is true for vernacular architecture. They are regionally distinctive, adaptable, beautiful and enduring. They encourage low carbon patterns of living, which can be com-

plemented with low carbon buildings. The latter on their own, are not enough. At a time of huge pent up demand for new housing, it is depressing how often successive Governments have focused upon the carbon footprint of the building. But in urban places, over time, buildings come and go, yet the layout of the place endures. Unless we get the place right, we are leaving a poisoned legacy for future generations.

In the early 1990s ADAM Architecture was commissioned to bring forward two developments in Somerset by the Duchy of Cornwall at the same time that Leon Krier was beginning work on Poundbury. Since then the practice has grown a significant portfolio of work with the Duchy and other landed estates, pension funds, developers and local authorities to bring development at various scales across the UK.

ADAM Architecture have developed ways of working in close collaboration with local interest groups and the community to tailor a vision and development brief that reflects their needs; providing good quality housing that reflects the best aspects of local architectural character; integrating affordable housing seamlessly in tenure-blind clusters through the site; promoting home working and small busi-



Hugh Petter is a director of ADAM Architecture

RIGHT FROM THE TOP:
Nansledan, Nansledan
and Poundbury

nesses, and ensuring that most if not all of the facilities one needs for everyday life are within a ten minute walk of each house on the development. These projects are rooted in their sites, and make a virtue both of topography and the natural attributes of the setting.

Conceived through a long term strategic masterplan to create a coherent vision and regulated through delivery, the larger sites can become fully functioning towns, capable of adaptation over time as needs change, and indeed of future expansion.

By working closely with local materials suppliers, the practice has developed ways of integrating local materials and details into their designs, so infusing the new places with local identity and spreading the economic warmth of the development to benefit the local economy. Working in partnership with housebuilders, many of the new homes on ADAM's schemes are standard housebuilder product with bespoke elevations and boundary treatments, so limiting the abnormal costs of development. In this way, the hierarchy of streets required by the movement network is reinforced by the character of the architecture that defines those streets.

Home working is increasingly popular - more than 20 per cent in some areas, and rising - so the wholesale provision of fibre optic broadband is imperative. Encouraging people to work from home helps at least to some degree in enabling new settlements to consume their own smoke, with people both living and working within their settlement. The Duchy's model is one job per household and at Poundbury they have more than achieved this. The early creation of small employment units at Nansledan in Cornwall has already proved extremely popular.

Food forms 22 per cent of our carbon footprint and so encouraging residents to take an interest in growing their own food is important. An edible streets planting strategy helps create a distinctive place, and allotments and community orchards are an effective way of bringing a new community together. ADAM's residential squares often combine play spaces and allotments.

Working with the Duchy, ADAM have applied these principles at Nansledan, the Duchy of Cornwall's urban extension to Newquay. The approach has proved very popular locally, on account of which the initial allocation of 400 homes has grown now to 4000.

There is solid evidence to show that ADAM's approach to development creates a social and economic dividend. Cost and Value, researched and published by Charlie Dugdale of Knight Frank on behalf of the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission in early March 2020, includes several analysis and photographs of several ADAM projects, and demonstrates the added social and economic value of this approach. ■



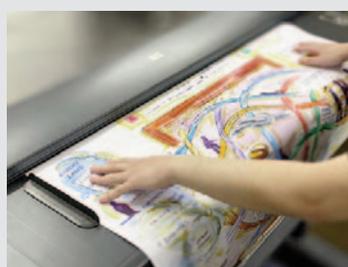
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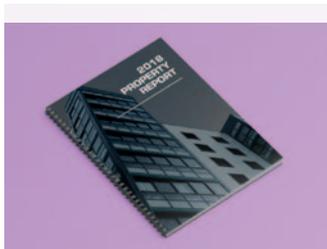
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On Intricacy: The Work of John Meunier

Patrick Lynch introduces the book he coauthored with John Meunier

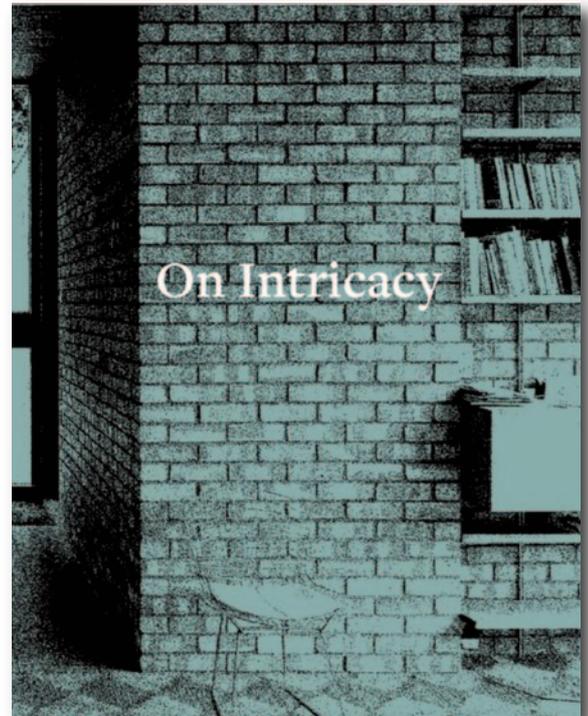
On Intricacy: The Work of John Meunier Architect
 John Meunier, Patrick Lynch (editor), Simon Henley and David Grandorge
 Clothbound Hardcover Book
 288pp
 £25 Canalside Press

On Intricacy is perhaps unusual in that it's not a monograph, nor is it a hagiography. John Meunier is still alive.

On Intricacy celebrates and proselytises the ideas that John has articulated throughout his career. On Intricacy is not a book about him as such, nor simply a book by him, but a book with him, and it reflects his life's work as an architect and teacher, in the UK and USA. On Intricacy continues conversations between John Meunier and Patrick Lynch that first appeared in Issue 2 of the Journal of Civic Architecture. It also includes essays by Meunier, Lynch and the architect Simon Henley, as well as new photography of the Meunier House at Cambridge by David Grandorge.

On Intricacy also documents projects undertaken in collaboration with other architects including The Burrell Collection at Glasgow (with Barry Gasson and Brit Andresen, colleagues in the department of architecture at Cambridge University); the Wendon House and Edington House at Cambridge, and the sports pavilion at Essex University (with Barry Gasson); student housing at New Hall Cambridge (with David Handlin); and the Gordon House at Cincinnati, where Meunier was head of the architecture school at the university.

Meunier discusses collaboration itself, with colleagues and with clients, as an aspect of the intricate character of architectural creativity. An essay concerning the intricate collaboration between Madame Schroeder and Gerrit Rietveld on the design of the Schroeder House at Utrecht, is complimented by Making Desert Cities, a meditation on the role of the natural world and social life in the architecture and urbanism of Phoenix (where John was head of the design and planning faculty and now lives), comparing this with the intricacy of traditional desert



cities. Intricacy is not only an aesthetic term, although it is a sign of quality in artistic work, as something intrinsic to human situations. Intricacy is something that architecture does or doesn't reflect, and when it does, it tends to be life-like, vital, and therefore good.

On Intricacy is a visual and written polemic reflecting the hard-won wisdom of a practical life. On Intricacy is also a biog- >>>



John Meunier at home



Intricacy and Collaboration at the Schroeder House

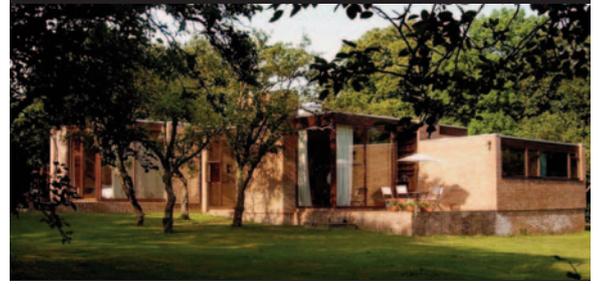
John Meunier

Although there is no question that Gerrit Rietveld is the designer of this house, in that it bears the unmistakable imprint of a formal language developed by him in his previous work as a furniture and interior designer, it is also clear that this house stands out as an example of intricacy—largely because of his client and collaborator, Madame Schroeder. It was she whose program for the house drove him into territory more daring and elaborate than was perhaps natural to him.

The house is famous for its second floor plan of moveable sliding partitions that offer a rich array of options between totally open or closed, between a set of individual spaces identified with specific uses and ownership, and a single large space with overlapping functions. That was Madame Schroeder's idea. The following are some quotations from an interview with her on May 12 and 14, 1982, three years before she died, having lived in the house and actively promoted the work of Gerrit Rietveld for over sixty years:

I think that in this house Rietveld isn't so completely 'Rietveld'. I think he adapted himself somewhat to what I wanted. And I believe I loved this house more than he did.

>>> raphy of sorts of a man born into a relatively recent, but also a very different age. It tells an inspiring story from a period of hope and opportunity in the 20th century. On Intricacy will be welcomed by students, historians and practising architects, and by anyone concerned with the deep reciprocity of ethics and aesthetics in human ecology and culture. ■



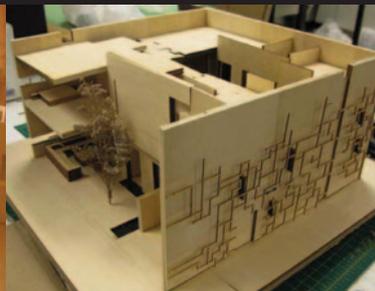
Research and Teaching



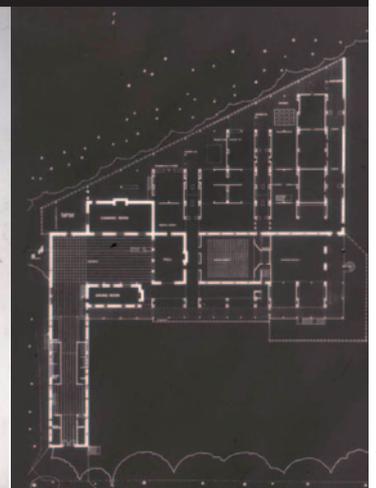
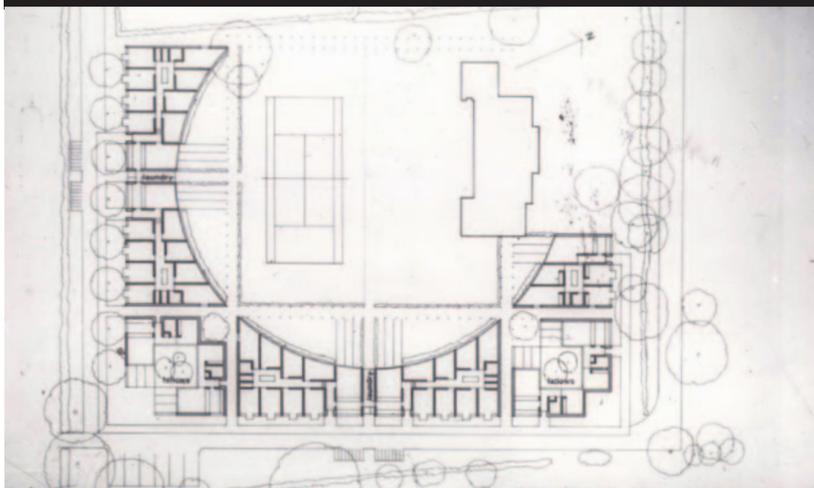
These images illustrate lessons derived from the study of ancient high density desert cities applied to Phoenix. One has a colonial grid, such as Lima, Peru; the other, from a study of Marrakesh, Morocco, and Sana'a, Yemen, has a pedestrian logic of radial and concentric paths, rich in incident, focusing on a major public space, with communal sunken gardens relieving the density, and retaining the water on the site. Both have markets, schools, university buildings, and living/working places.



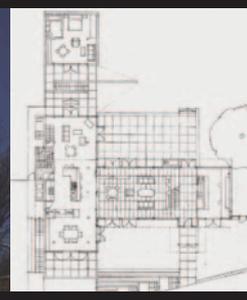
Making Desert Cities, Compact Cities, Intricacy in Architecture and Urbanism



Architecture



New Hall College, Cincinnati and Solana Beach Houses, The Burrell Museum



How to cope with climate change and extreme flooding

Nigel Moor reviews
Retrofitting for Flood Resilience: A Guide to Building & Community Design first edition by Edward Barsley, RIBA Publishing
 Hardback £32.85 Kindle £21.60



BELOW: The Slad Valley

RIGHT ABOVE: A "Leaky" Dam



Dr Nigel Moor is a chartered town planner

Climate Change

One of the most immediate impacts of climate change is the increased frequency of extreme flooding. To experience flooding is a traumatic experience for both households and businesses. It can take eighteen months to recover from and clear up. February 2020 was the wettest February on record, and in Gloucestershire there were anxious moments when a repeat of the devastating floods of 2010 was feared. Although water levels in the River Severn nearly reached those recorded in that year, the number of properties flooded was much lower.

Since 2010 almost £50 m had been invested by the County Council in flood defence and resilience. These projects were all bespoke, designed for the specific flooding circumstances of the locality. This is the central message of this remarkable book. Flood risk is inherently site specific. Copying and pasting approaches without a holistic understanding of the context and potential consequences can be foolhardy and dangerous, warns the author Ed Barsley, Founder and Director of The Environmental Design Studio. He is a specialist in environmental design in architecture aiming to improve the resilience of communities and the built environment.

Through six clear sections, each with exceptional charts and illustrations, the author guides the reader through an understanding of flood risk contexts and consequences, identifies the type of flood risk and describes the tools and techniques to understand the risk. A hugely valuable section deals with catchment and community flood risk management before subsequently discussing building – level strategies. In the final section he outlines how we can mitigate and adapt to the causes and effects of climate change in the way we design, plan, build and manage the built environment.

In his preface the author describes how over the years, when mentioning that his field of work was flood resilience, the reply he got was "Oh, right, flooding is quite a niche area, is `nt it Ed ?" Well



times, have changed, and the subject directly or indirectly affects us all.

Wealth of Examples

What makes this book outstanding and justify a place in the library of every building professional are the wealth of examples drawn from around the world of innovative building schemes that have been designed to protect people from >>> flooding. These include the BIG U – a 16 km system designed to protect Manhattan from flooding and a neighbourhood wide Sustainable Urban Design System (SuDS) underway in Copenhagen. Covering an area of over 105 hectares it brings together a variety of SuDS strategies. Streetscapes are being retrofitted into "Cloudburst Roads", which provide green routes for cyclists, pedestrians and vehicles. They also function in the event of heavy rainfall as channels through which water can be slowed, stored, conveyed and discharged into Copenhagen harbour. These examples of retrofitting schemes to increase flood resilience raise a fundamental question. Should we be building in huge flood risk areas at all?

Building in the floodplain?

In 2016/17 around 24,000 homes were built in these areas in England. A large proportion are protected by flood defences, which is why the Environment Agency did not object to them. Flood defences alone will not always be sufficient to protect properties. The increased likelihood of the severity of flooding, because of climate change, means that there will have to be changes to how new housing is constructed. Bright Blue, a centre ground think tank has recommended a reform of building regulations for homes being built in the most flood – prone areas. By 2025 resilience measures should be mandatory for all >>>

RIGHT:
The Thames Barrier
Opened in 1983



>>> new – build properties in flood risk zones 2 and 3 (where the annual probability of flooding is greater than 0.1%). Ed Barsley in section 5 provides an exhaustive inventory of building – level strategies which would provide this resilience.

Natural Flood Management

If, because of the pressure to build more houses, the solution of simply not building in flood risk areas is not always open to planning authorities, catchment flood risk management is a proven cost – effective option. Natural Flood Management (NFM) which aims to slow, store and filter water as it moves from upper, to middle and lower catchment levels, is particularly promising. The system has the added benefit of reducing erosion, encouraging biodiversity and habitat creation. Where capital is scarce for large – scale engineering schemes, NFM interventions can support the need for targeted flood prevention schemes.

These will help combat the more extreme conditions associated with climate change. In the Slad Valley, Gloucestershire, made famous by Laurie Lee `s personal story of growing up in this secluded countryside near Stroud, the Environment Agency has worked with the local authorities and land owners to coppice trees along the river bank. These are then used to form "leaky" dams that hold back the flood water upstream and help regulate the flow of water together with bunds in the fields. The Slad Brook is a tributary of the River Frome which flows through Stroud and which experienced severe flooding in 2007. Over a fifth of the Frome catchment area has now been drained using a range of interventions.

The future of the Thames Barrier

Only briefly mentioned in Ed Barsley`s book as an example of

an adaptive defensive barrier, but of huge concern to the readers of this magazine is the Thames Barrier, and its anticipated design life. I vividly recall as a Building magazine correspondent, standing with others on a barge anchored downstream of the Isle of Dogs, as we waited with bated breath for the barrier gates to be raised for the first time. The barrier was built in 1983 to protect London from tidal surges from the North Sea until 2030. The Environment Agency has now forecast that the design life of the barrier can be extended to 2070, as current projections of sea level rise give a standard of protection much higher than originally expected.

Fluvial Flooding

Critics point to the increasing use of the barrier to prevent fluvial flooding in West London, and this was not anticipated. Fluvial flooding primarily occurs when rainfall from periods of sustained or intense downpour enters watercourses such as rivers and cause water levels to exceed the capacity of the channel. Closing the barrier provides more capacity in the Thames to accept this flood water.

The current stance of the Environment Agency that maintenance and upgrading of other flood defences in the catchment area together with monitoring of sea levels can take us to 2070 is contested by many including Dr Richard Bloore. He was chief project manager on the construction of the original barrier. In an interview with Building magazine he commented that "We have to at least start thinking about what comes next now rather than decades into the future." This outstanding book and the questions it poses has a particular resonance for London. It should be on the bucket list of all the mayoral candidates for London `s elections, now postponed because of the Covid-19 pandemic, until May 2021. ■

Dr Nigel Moor is a chartered town planner who began his career in London and has written two books: The Planner and the Market and The Look and Shape of England. He is now a Gloucestershire County Councillor and a cabinet member for Environment & Planning which includes flood resilience and combating climate change. Photographs by the author.

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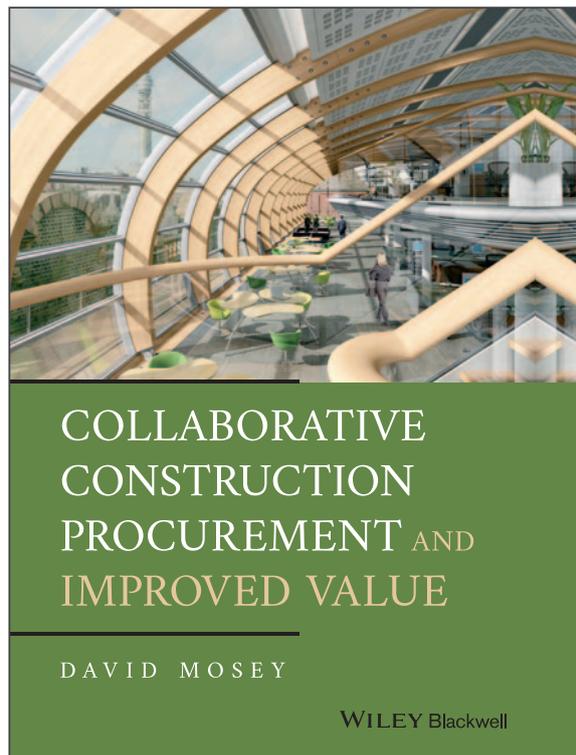
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