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# Man of substance

Architect Eric Parry shares his passion for the creative use of materials

ERIC PARRY ARCHITECTS | COVER FEATURE

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### 40 COVER STORY: ERIC PARRY

The undeniable cover star with an emphatic passion for all things materials



**ERIC PARRY ARCHITECTS | COVER FEATURE**

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# Beneath the surfaces

*Architect Eric Parry uses a multiplicity of interesting exterior effects to make his buildings stand out from the crowd. He tells OnOffice of his passion for materials and his love of London*

Words by Helen Parton

Portraits by Phil Sharp

ERIC PARRY ARCHITECTS | COVER FEATURE

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LEFT Polychromatic glazed ceramic on One Eagle Place

RIGHT Richard Deacon's sculptural cornice stands out visually

Considering he has just stepped off a flight, architect Eric Parry is in remarkably chipper spirits when he returns to his London office, a stone's throw from Old Street. He has recently been in Boston, where he is teaching at Harvard; Hamburg where he divides his non-work time; and Singapore, where his practice has an office.

Parry was born with an international outlook, having been raised for the first ten years of his life in Kuwait "in the desert", and indeed the Middle East has found its way back into his life at various junctures. After studying architecture at Newcastle University in the early 1970s, he went on to the Royal Academy and the Architecture Association, with a year studying nomadic settlements in Iran.

Some 40-odd years on, his work ranges from condominiums in the Middle East to large-scale office projects in London, which is where OnOffice's interest lies. That, and his love of the possibility of surfaces made him a

shoo-in for this, our materials issue. He talks passionately about the possibilities of Corten steel, terracotta and ceramic.

The latter forms the hero element of One Eagle Place in the West End, one of the first major projects for the Crown Estate in its St James's portfolio in 2013, which involved a mixture of conservation of existing elements and innovation in incorporating new facades. The ceramic facade features polychromatic glazes that delight the eye in terms of colour and the interplay with light.

"Casting clay has some fantastic qualities," Parry enthuses. "The product becomes eminently sculptural. We created the profiles then it was a question of glazes – and wow what a wonderful sense of artifice. It's no longer taking a known material like stone or brick." Sculptor Richard Deacon created an artistic flourish, creating a cornice that almost appears to have grown out of the building.

Number 50 New Bond Street is nearby, a project completed in 2012 that features ribs of faience – a fine tin-glazed pottery. Parry again talks with passion about the "depth achieved with glazing, of layering ☺





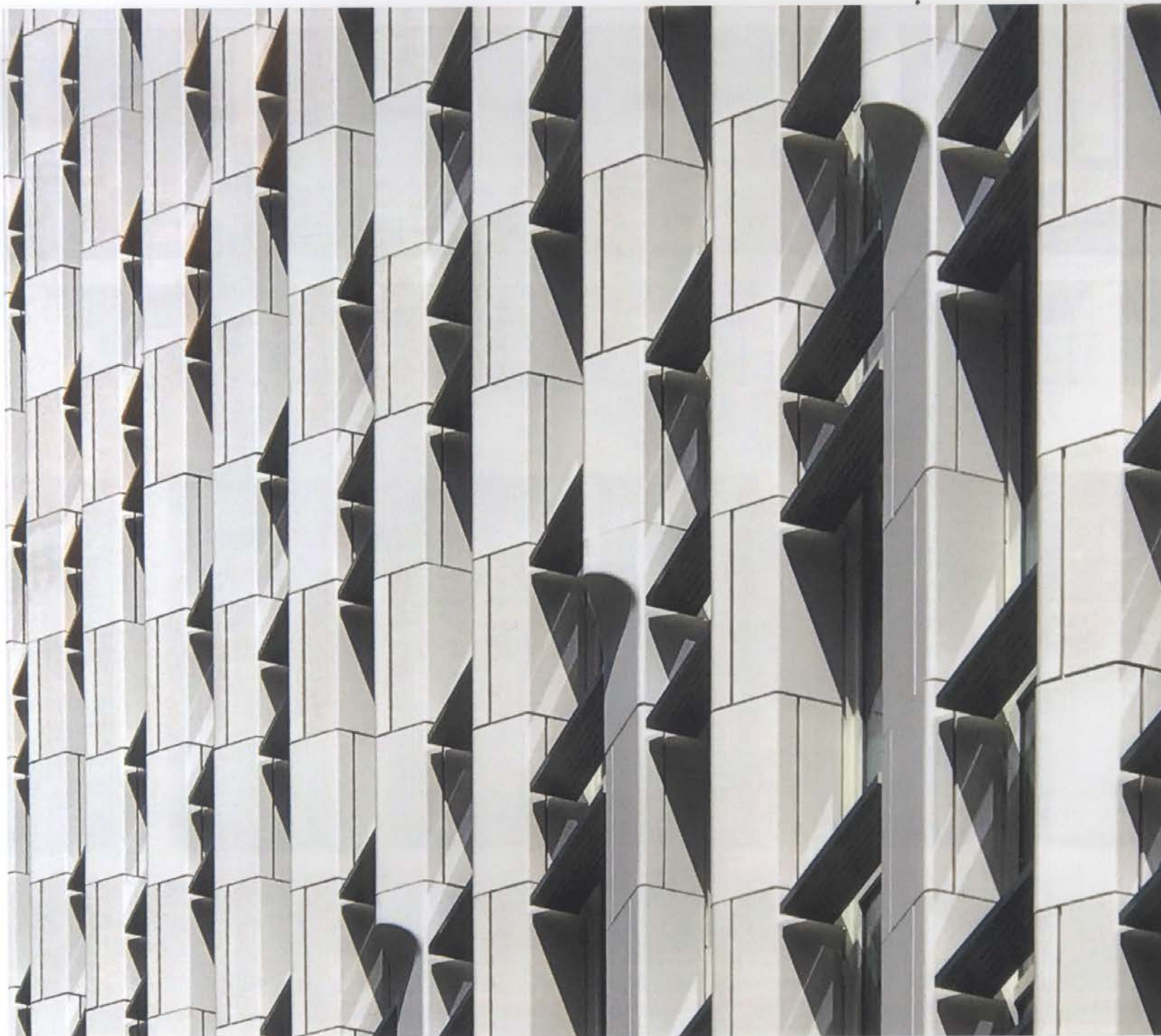
Dirk Lindner X2

## ERIC PARRY ARCHITECTS | COVER FEATURE

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*“It’s trial and error by the human hand, which is very different from using polychromatics and colour, which is more artificial”*



**ABOVE** The iridescent white ceramic frontage of 10 Fenchurch Avenue

**LEFT** Public roof gardens have been designed with Latz + Partner

and firing glazes. It’s trial and error by the human hand, which is very different from using polychromatics and colour, which becomes much more artificial.” This redevelopment, where New Bond Street meets St George Street, created two office buildings in what is a highly restricted site where listed buildings abound.

Both these projects have that glorious quality of reaffirming what a great city London is when you just look up. Parry’s love affair with the capital continues with 10 Fenchurch Avenue, a 15-storey, 40,000sq m, office building for Italy’s largest insurance company, Generali, which has retail at the lower levels and a public passageway at street level. The meeting room in which our interview and photoshoot takes place has an abundance of architectural models, among them a scaled-down version of this City of London scheme, which has a beer mug next



to it, the complex next to the mundane at first sight. The white of the drinking vessel was a way of keeping in mind the desire for iridescence, Parry explains.

Featuring a staggering 19 kilometres of ceramic in total, Fenchurch Avenue has a brise soleil facade which has an iridescent coating that plays with the light. This project also has a roof garden, designed with German landscape architect Latz + Partner, and Parry was keen that this be accessible to the public: "The greatest privilege is to be able to dedicate the top to London." This new structure, due to complete in summer 2018, will provide views from the Square Mile of the City's original incarnation, down to the Tower of London and into the expanse of greater London as we know it today.

Parry isn't burdened by the weight of history, however, but sensitively takes it in his stride, as evidenced by his work at the Leathersellers' Hall at St Helen's Place, a slice of another age among the bustle of Liverpool Street. The new elements marry with an original wall, where its south elevation is clad in ceramic tiles.

Leather-clad banquettes, bespoke rug and

table designs and a concrete oval stair for this livery company hall demonstrate his care and consideration for this project.

One Undershaft, meanwhile, is set to be a more future-facing part of the City of London. A planning application for this 73-storey development was submitted in 2016 with a provision for 90,000sq m of office space. Echoing what's been achieved at Fenchurch Avenue in terms of accessibility, the top of the building will feature a public viewing gallery. A new public square will be created at the tower's base, creating a landmark at a more human level and benefiting not just the office workers who are based there, but the general public beyond. The building's reception is elevated and Parry talks in terms of "simply lifting the height like medieval churches".

Heading back in the opposite direction, one of Parry's most significant projects – completed last year – is at 4 Pancras Square in King's Cross. "It's a fascinating story of persistence," he says of the Argent development. "In terms of urban regeneration, it has been outstanding. There's a sense of urbanity to it." He'd ☺



ABOVE The 73-storey 1 Undershaft will have a public gallery at the top

RIGHT A public square will be created at the foot of 1 Undershaft



DBOX X2





*“It’s a fantastic story of persistence. In terms of urban regeneration, it has been outstanding. There’s a sense of urbanity to it”*

been an admirer of the developer’s work at Brindleyplace in Birmingham. Parry got involved in a series of charrettes organised by Argent and eventually was given what he describes as a “trapezoidal plug” of a site to play with, a “perspectival alley”. Structurally there is a vierendeel frame at the first floor – a type of truss used on difficult-shaped diagonal sites such as this to both aesthetic and load-bearing ends. This means the ground floor columns can be widely spaced.

The materials used for the facade of this ten-storey office building, now let to Universal Music, are a mix of weathering steel and, for the brise soleil shading, a white glazed ceramic, both of which have historical references points intertwined in the contemporary architecture. The use of steel is a nod to the railways and the engineering prowess of the industrial age, still seen in the 19th century gasholders that are this building’s neighbours.

In some ways, Parry says, 4 Pancras Square is a “raw version of Aldermanbury Square” in the City, which was completed in 2007 and nominated for the Stirling Prize. That 18-storey building has stainless steel cladding, which encloses the perimeter structure and where two wings are divided by a central section which lets light in to the triple-height reception space.

Parry’s work follows the railway line up to



**ABOVE** 4 Pancras Square mixes weathered steel and ceramic brise soleil



**LEFT** The steel exterior nods to the industrial heritage of the area



Cambridge – or a little way out, in fact, at Granta Park – where Eric Parry Architects was commissioned in the mid-1990s to design a masterplan, transforming the arable land which was once the economic cash cow of this part of East Anglia to the science park which is where the money is now. The Welding Institute, which is a national centre for materials, has three buildings. These house amenity operations, an NSIRC education facility, as well as light engineering laboratories and office accommodation. The outside of the buildings is clad with vertically hung 1.5m terracotta baguettes to spectacular visual effect.

Though he's modest enough to say he's not a collector, Parry cites a particular interest in ceramicists Bernard Leach, Nicholas Rena, Clare Conway and Carina Ciscato – his love of materials crossing effortlessly from his longstanding architectural practice into the whole of his life. ■



Dirk Lindner X4

**ABOVE** The Welding Institute reception looks out over the grounds

**BELOW** Vertically hung terracotta cladding on the Welding Institute





Culture  
Hindsight

# How a garage, a carpet and living on a bus helped shape Eric Parry



19 July 2023

Words: Pamela Buxton

Art and people have been critical to the career of the designer of the Holburne Museum, who reveals a relaxed and optimistic approach to his work and life



Eric Parry, founder of Eric Parry Architects. Credit: Jae Whan Kim

Eric Parry, 71, founded London and Singapore-based Eric Parry Architects in 1983. He has taught extensively, is a former president of the Architectural Association, and was chair of the RIBA Awards Group.

**Knowing what you know now, did you make the right decision to be an architect? How did this come about?**

It came about quite early on when I was around 15 from an interest in art and – with less capacity – science. After coming across Pevsner and doing art A level, I started to travel with an intent to study buildings. I got into architecture school, and after a while I suddenly realised that this was something I could do. I just felt comfortable doing it.

I wasn't spoilt for choice. There were no architects in my family but there were a lot of medics. My father was responsible for setting up a health service in the Middle East, so I grew up watching hospitals being built, and the old town being destroyed.

**You established your practice 40 years ago. Looking back, what do you regard as your breakthrough moments?**

Getting an assistant lectureship at the Cambridge transformed my set of possibilities. This breakthrough moment came after taking a long route into architecture. I took nine years to get my Part 2 – after my Part 1 I worked for a housing association architect for a year, and I spent a year researching nomadic settlements in Iran and elsewhere in the Middle East. Then I went back to art school to do a foundation at Hornsey College of Art, then to the Royal College of Art (RCA), which didn't have Part 2 status, and then to the Architectural Association for a year.

After a period at Cambridge, Sandy Wilson gave me the third year to run. Every year for eight years I co-ordinated case studies from all the best practices including site visits with the architects to see buildings under construction. As a result, I got to understand many wonderful buildings. I was teaching, but I was really being taught as well by being able to plug into contemporary practice.



Eric Parry in 1976 in the converted London bus where he lived for several years when a student.

< 1 of 3 >

I taught at Cambridge for 14 years. With history of art and the history and theory of architecture running side by side, there were many connections intellectually. Friends and colleagues were wonderful and the students were brilliantly multi-talented. At the same time, I set up my practice there above a garage, working on



small projects like artists' studios for Tom Phillips and Antony Gormley before doing a masterplan for Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1988. Designing Foundress Court at the college was a big breakthrough and set the practice on its way.

Ricky Burdett's Future Southwark project, which was about interventions in public space, was also important – I did the Southwark Gateway Needle at London Bridge. Working with stone there got me on the radar of Scottish Widows, which needed help with a problematic site at Finsbury Square. This, and getting to know Stuart Lipton, got me started on commercial work.

**What has given you the most satisfaction in your work as an architect to date?**

The great pleasure at the RCA, the AA and Cambridge was specific people who were remarkable in what they offered, first as teachers and then as friends. Kenneth Frampton gave eight particularly memorable lectures at the RCA on the European city – I still have my notes from those. The other person who was absolutely key was Dalibor Vesely, with whom I shared visits to nine cities. His intellectual reach was amazing, and our deep friendship was a huge source of inspiration.

I have also experienced great joy from being part of visual arts culture. It was a struggle to survive financially as a student in the early 1970s. I had to get a job, and for five years on and off I worked as a night guard at the Serpentine Gallery, which was the best job I ever had. I got to see the most fantastic exhibitions being set up – I watched Henry Moore come in and be critical about how his sculpture was being displayed, as well as Richard Hamilton, Howard Hodgkin and many more. It was completely wonderful, like an endless private view.

**Who have been your biggest influences?**

Dalibor Vesely and Kenneth Frampton



Finsbury Square, an office development for Scottish Widows completed in 2002. Credit: Hélène Binet



23 Savile Row, an office development in Mayfair, London. Completed in 2009, the project was a redevelopment of Fortress House, formerly the headquarters of English Heritage. Credit: Timothy Soar



### What buildings are you most proud of?

To have contributed to both the City of Westminster and the City of London is the most humbling thing. You can be walking through them and suddenly realise that there are parts of the city that you contributed to. At 23 Savile Row, we had to pull down English Heritage's old headquarters Fortress House and our new building has become iconic in the art world through its occupants. Then there's the urban collages from 50 New Bond Street through to 14 St George Street, One Eagle Place on Piccadilly and 7, 8 and 30 St James's Square.

Then there are the three music schools we've done – at Bedford School, Brighton College and Wells Cathedral School. The Holburne Museum in Bath was also a wonderful project – museology is fascinating – and then of course the two church renewal projects St Martin-in-the-Fields and St John's Waterloo.

### Have your priorities in practice changed over the years?

Projects have scaled up and become more complex, but our priority has always been not to have more than the number of projects you can juggle with in an intense way. Architecture practice is a collaborative exercise. I know what I can do and what I can't – don't give me a spreadsheet! Another priority is to make sure our office still has the buzz of a studio in an architecture school rather than that of a corporate office.

### What have been the biggest obstacles to overcome?

You have to create some sort of virtue out of the obstacles. In the 1970s, there was no work, and in 1991, all the work disappeared overnight. So you need to be self-propelled and have a parachute – a cushion for the bad times.

We were an early practice office to be registered as net zero carbon and we practise what we preach. Now we're carbon counting on all our projects – it's not an obstacle, it's an opportunity.



Holburne Museum, Bath, a refurbishment and extension completed in 2011. Credit: Hélène Binet



One Eagle Place, Piccadilly, London, a redevelopment of five Crown Estate buildings completed in 2013. Credit: Dirk Lindner



**Did you ever feel like giving up? What kept you carrying on?**

I still work predominantly at a drawing board. As soon as I sit down and start drawing, I am content. I'm always observing and thinking through the process of drawing. That's my sanity.

**What changes – good and bad – have you experienced in the role of the architect over your time in practice?**

One good thing is getting rid of the professional-on-a-pedestal idea. There's now much more collaboration between consultants in the creative process. In Europe, there's an assumption that architects can do more than they really adequately can, such as cost estimation, and the pedestal is even more the case in Japan. But here we have a pretty good thing going in terms of collaborative work that draws the best out of people.

One thing I rile against is the building industry's tendency to work from a kit-of-parts. I don't have anything against a reduced palette. But an awful lot of buildings are filmset flimsy – things are made to look heavy when they are really inconsequential. The opportunity to work internationally has offered an intense and rewarding comparative social environmental view.

**Do you think the profession was too slow to grasp the need to design more sustainably? What more needs to be done?**

Definitely. The industry tends to be reactive – from government to planning policy and only then does everyone step up to the mark. The RIBA has become more proactive. We should be railing against the procurement policy of government and demanding better practice with regard to sustainability. There's a lack of commitment, and a remarkable short sightedness. The most important thing about sustainability is durability, so we're nuts to be designing for a 60 year building life.



Music facility at Wells Cathedral School, Somerset, completed in 2016. Credit: Dirk Lindner

< 1 of 3 >

**Is there anything you wish you'd done differently over the course of your career so far?**

Opportunities were missed, but I've got no tears. You lose some, you win some. I can only count my blessings – many of our projects have long gestations so we have work stretching ahead for a good time.

**Is there anything more that you'd still like to achieve?**

Maybe I could have found another avenue to be more active socially and politically in the protection of fragile cultures such as the Marsh Arabs of southern Iraq. Having grown up close to seafarers and Bedouin who dealt with the environment so brilliantly, it's tragic to see these great cultures being obliterated by affluence, modernity and politics.

**What is your most treasured possession?**

A small Persian carpet that's older than me and was given to my parents in Kuwait. It's got imperfections but is beautifully constructed – you can see where the dyes have changed between one season and the next – and it has the most beautiful pattern.

I cherish that small carpet because it represents an amazing cultural tradition that the West has always been intrigued by. I've been somewhat nomadic myself – three of us converted a double-decker bus in Newcastle when we were at the end of our first year and I lived in that for many years. Nomads can be journeying anywhere but when they put a carpet on the ground, it can be a paradise.

The carpet tells the truth of its making when you turn it over and look at the back – that's when you understand what's really going on. For me, it's a metaphor for how you put buildings together. My knuckles are worn because I'm always tapping with them to see if buildings are what they pretend to be – but when you hug the stone facade at 30 Finsbury Square, there is no doubt that it's load-bearing. Like my carpet, it's a manifestation of how it was made.

**As told to Pamela Buxton**

**Read more brilliant architects as they reflect on their careers from Quinlan Terry and Eva Jiricna to Julia Barfield and Ken Yeang**

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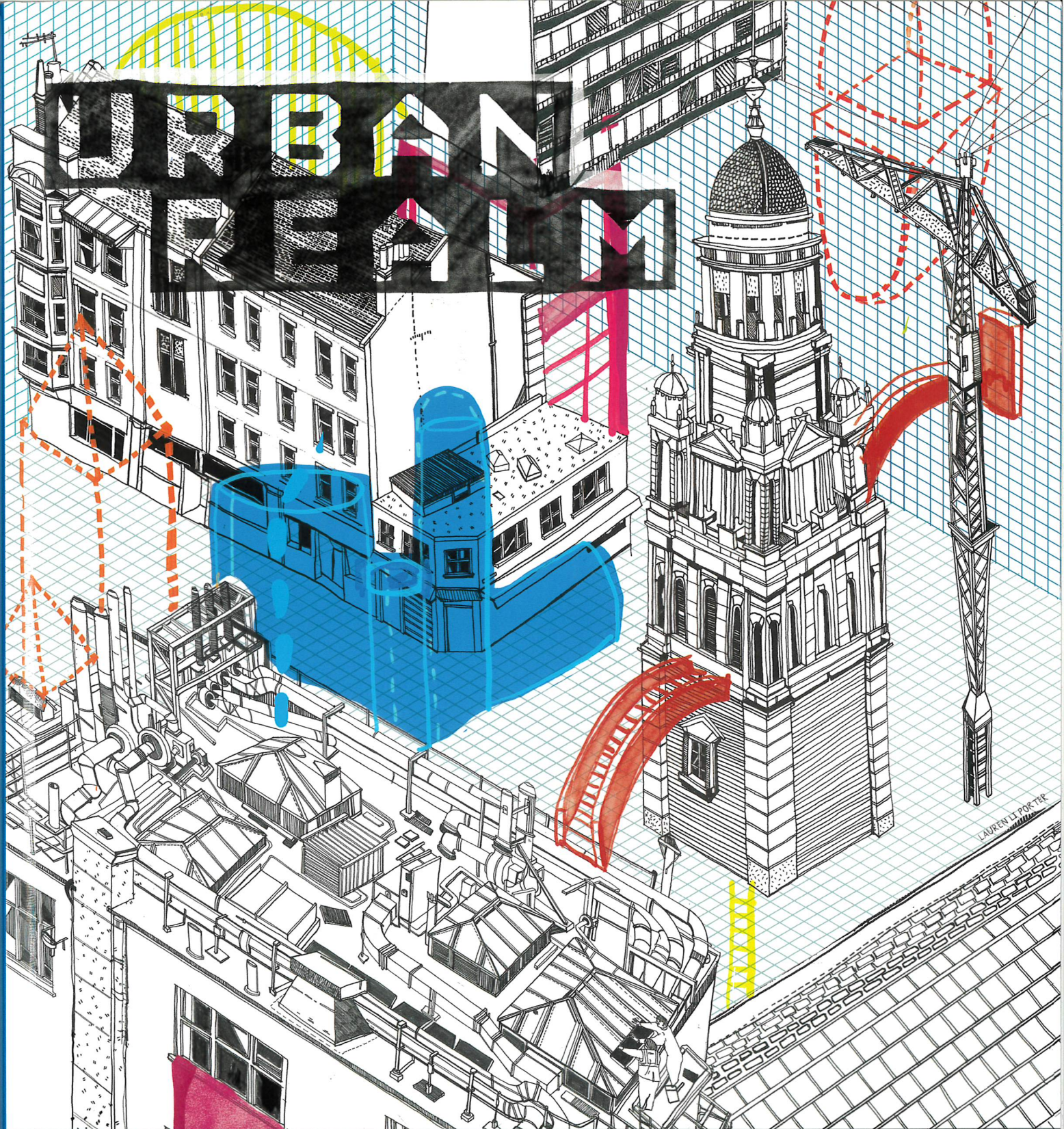
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VOL 5 ISSUE 22 SUMMER 2015

# VIRTUAL REALITY: DRAWING CLOSER

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**FRESH FROM PUBLICATION OF HIS NEW BOOK LOOKING AT THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT URBAN REALM SPOKE TO LONDON ARCHITECT ERIC PARRY TO DISCUSS THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT IN DESIGN AND WHETHER WE'VE LOST THE ABILITY TO BUILD STREETS. MIGHT THE NEW LONDON VERNACULAR HERALD A RETURN TO NO-NONSENSE ARCHITECTURE?**

A global arms race for recognition is seeing many architects choosing to disregard the subtle charms of background 'wallpaper' buildings in favour of the brash one-upmanship of icons and set-piece statements. In his new book, *Context: Architecture and the Genius of Place*, architect Eric Parry rails against this form of physical isolationism by urging practitioners and students to demonstrate how context can inspire design. As one of London's most eminent architects Parry is well placed to argue for a more dynamic response to setting that doesn't meekly kowtow to what has gone before.

Asked if we are witnessing a counter-reaction to the excesses of icon-itis, Parry told *Urban Realm*: "Not so much icon-itis but there is a mistrust of buildings which try to stand autonomously when they're not an absolutely unique stand-out monumental building that means a lot to a culture in terms of its condition as something sacred, such as a museum or major concert venue.

"Certainly here in London there is a profusion of these taller buildings that just don't know how to meet the ground, we need more residential, amenity and community space but buildings are designed in an absence of proactive planning that creates constraints in which architects can sensibly work to achieve something that is greater than the sum of its parts - like a street!"

We used to throw up terraces and tenements around the country but seem to have lost that knack? Is that a skill we need to re-learn? "I think it is actually, walk around

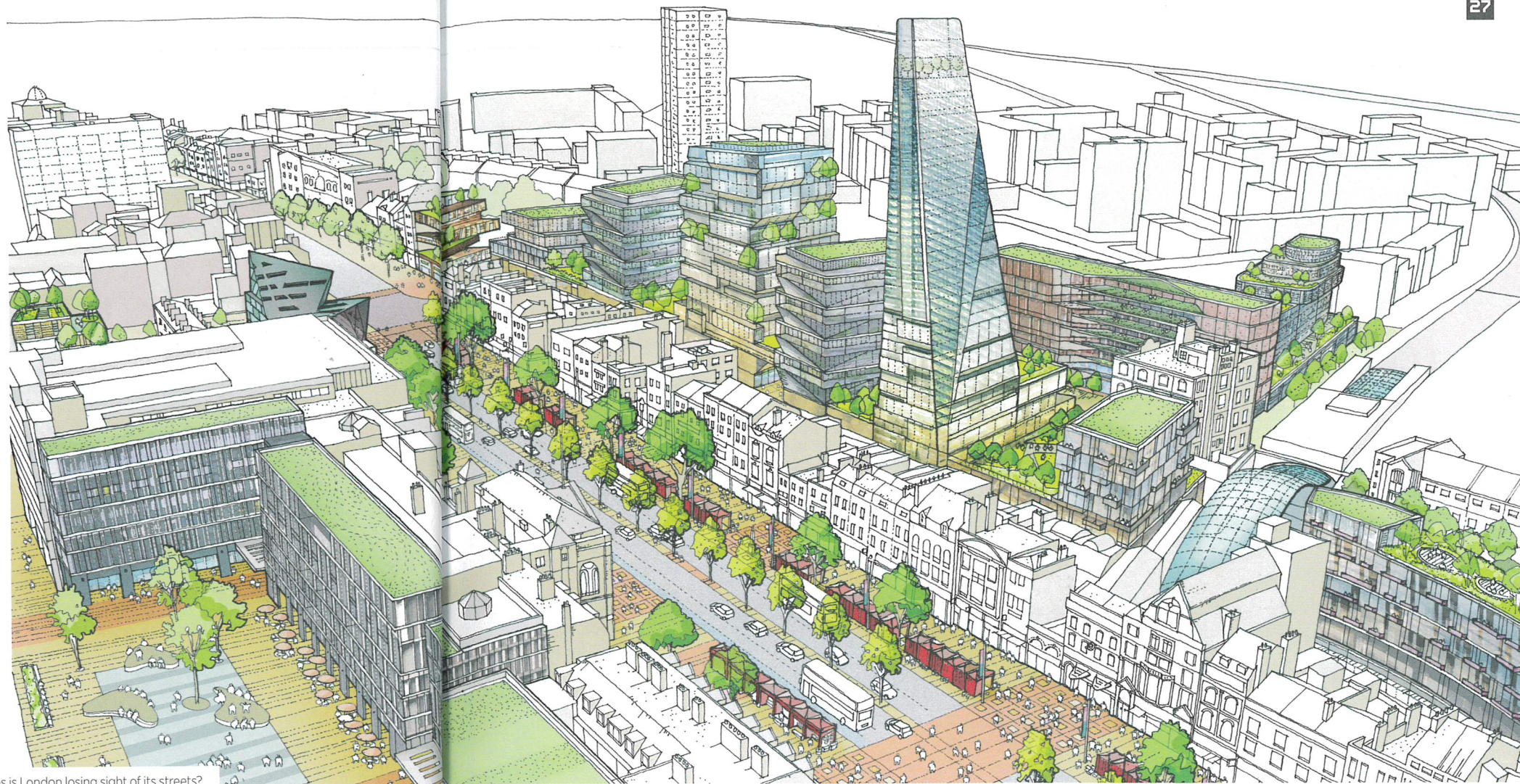


Parry frets that a new generation of taller buildings have lost the art of meeting the ground





Left - Richard Rogers is introducing a new office quarter at Stratford Right - In a rush for the skies is London losing sight of its streets?



Glasgow or Liverpool and you've got an exquisite set of urban experiences and streets with wonderful buildings and they don't have to pronounce their author loudly to contribute mightily. The thing is that what you've got is a way in which polarity has come to exist with architects sworn to create individual masterpieces on the one hand and planners involved in policy making and traffic engineering on the other.

"There's a dearth in-between which is a natural centre point around which these things could balance which would be the urban planner, the architect and the local authority somehow creating something that is joined up. But local authorities got rid of their architects departments long ago. Maybe the business of civic design as it was coined has been downgraded. It's a sorely missing core to thinking about cities."

With space increasingly at a premium in our urban centres plots are becoming smaller and more existing structures are being re-used, allowing a new intensity of use. Parry observed: "Urban repair is a great way to recreate intensity; it's also to do with use in streets and what happens in the background in terms of the public dimension rather than it simply being a front door to a terraced house - which we can't really afford now in terms of space. On the other hand huge

amounts of brownfield sites, some better than others, are coming back such as Docklands, White City and the Clyde."

Dismissing suggestions that the book could be seen as precluding the shock of the new Parry added: "I'm not coming up with a new design manual. It's about thinking not just in formal terms of pattern book, materials and sensitivity to what's next door to you. Think about it in terms of the importance of the ground, horizon and connectivity between parts. It's about wasking people to think about where meaning can be re-instilled in areas we might take for granted such as trying to be clear about what a garden is in relation to urban landscapes and pavements. I've got a real bee in my bonnet about what makes a good street and garden."

"I am not necessarily dealing with the tradition of terraces when I talk about streets, I'm much more interested in the street as something social and more than just a front door to a house or an apartment building, although that's always part of it. The communicative aspect of urban space is a thing which interests me a lot when it's densely compacted and how it works in a place like Mumbai. How on can rekindle the spirit of blocks and streets, reducing massive areas for service and dead frontage? I'm very excited by what it is that actually contribute in the passage along a street, both in terms of

the sequence and its depth and how that works in terms of the major streets feeding into smaller streets and more conspiratorial spaces, there is a wonderful story to be had in that."

But are we building new streets which meet these standards? Why are we still getting cul-de-sacs, roundabouts and dead frontages, why aren't we learning any lessons? "I don't know. There's a lot of good work in terms of movement by people like Space Syntax and how we can actually get that good thinking to contribute to greater scales where there is that horizon of what one wants to do. That means proactive planning rather than a system that is simply reactive. I think that's where we're missing a trick. Everyone is shouting about how we need x million new homes but nobody is really thinking in terms of what the structure is into which those homes should go - or very few people in my mind."

An explosion of tower construction is shrinking the horizon of cities such as London and Manchester as we lose broad vistas in our shift from horizontal to vertical development. Who decides what the skyline of a city should be? Parry answered: "It's amazing how quickly it's happening. There are 350 buildings over 20 storeys from the last count here in London, it's an interesting anarchy. It's not just the

tall buildings but what those in the tall buildings look down on. Has anybody ever talked about a middle horizon which is also complementary in a dense city, 15 storeys rather than 40 storeys? If you go on building more densely in the City of London there's a certain point where people just don't want to be there because there is no public space and no amenity.

"They woke up to that in New York with the ordinances of 1916 when Wall Street became a canyon but we're a bit slow in grasping not just the constraint but the opportunity to think more broadly in terms of how to make the city more liveable as a gregarious and convivial place - as well as meeting the demands of workspace or residential.

"Taller buildings tends to stick around longest, it's very rare that you get a building over 20 storeys pulled down because it's expensive to do. The question is who is designing the skyline? Obviously there are lots of buildings being built in London just now which skulk behind the shadow of St Pauls from various views and that tends to be the criteria for their formal presence. Are the public admitted to the top of the building without booking this that or the other? How does the top manifest itself? It's a vexed question and needs to be considered more holistically I don't think any individual has the answer.





Left - Parry is a disciple of urbanism. Photo by Grant Smith Right - The streets of London are no longer paved with gold

"We have a skyline that was very much developed here during the mayorship of Ken Livingstone with Richard Rogers and others but the scrutiny of it in advance is incredibly important and I just don't know how in a democratic condition that is decided. Is there a forum where one can debate in intense ways what the skyline means, I don't think that forum is available."

Is there a counterargument that actually London thrives on this cacophony of styles and the jumble of buildings... is this chaos its strength allowing the city to innovate whilst others such as Paris, with less room to breathe, stagnate? "London is a city of cities. I think Haussmann is really interesting, you can't imagine Haussmann happening without the pre-existing medieval fabric but it's still about as good as it gets in terms of streetscape. Paris is still wonderful with hundreds of kilometres of wide roads and enough pavements to spill out their cafes. There's a good role model there although I'm not suggesting repeating it in London, although others have tried."

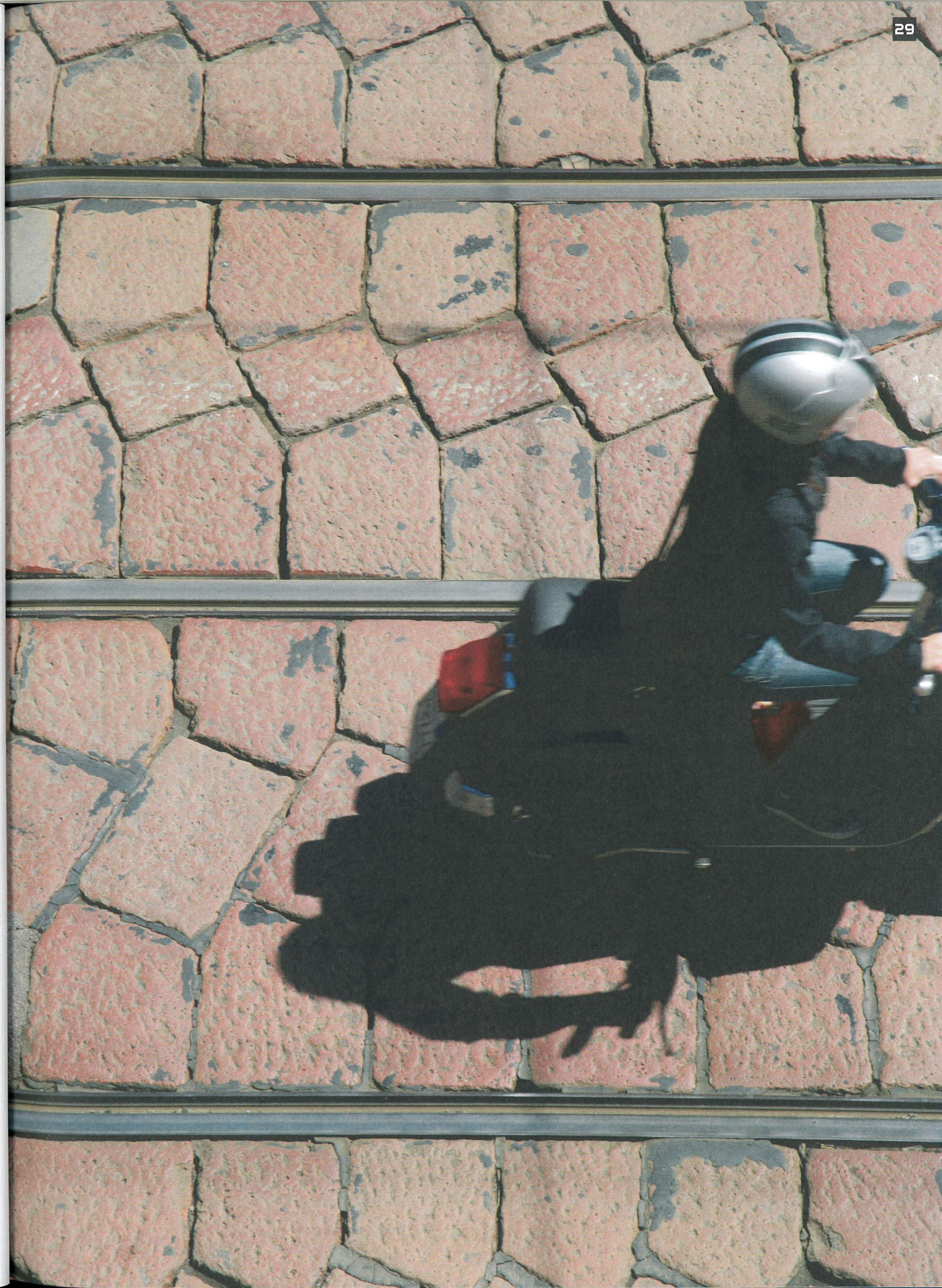
What's your stance on the New London Vernacular? Can it raise standards, or is it just lazy and stifling? "Brick can be wonderful but it does need to be judiciously used. Is it a new vernacular? It's fine and higher is fine but what is important

is it's not just the front it's how you find an interior beyond the street to which taller buildings work so they're not just an object to walk around. It's not just a gated entrance, there is some porosity and there is a way of drawing a more complex whole maybe into urban blocks - Something that is part-street but has a greater scale to it would be interesting.

"I don't think the Olympic Village got it right but there was something about eight storeys and what that means and an interior that is shared although it could have been much more generous and more interesting. It could be an answer with more variety of materials but it comes down to how the piece fits within the jigsaw."

"I think the book has good lessons to draw attention to which allow people to think again about what has been successful and good in order to think about what may be successful and good."

With Britain requiring an unprecedented volume of housing and infrastructure just to regain ground lost to years of inertia there has never been a more urgent need to re-think how our cities are organised and built. The recession was an opportunity lost but with the economy showing signs of life it is imperative that we get to grips with this challenge or we are forever destined to repeat the mistakes of the past.





# British architect Eric Parry praises Singapore's success with building skyscrapers



British Architect Eric Parry (above). PHOTOS: ERIC PARRY ARCHITECTS

Architect Eric Parry designs a simple facade for 1 Undershaft to add sobriety to the London skyline, which is full of buildings with unusual shapes and forms

🕒 PUBLISHED: JUN 10, 2017, 5:00 AM SGT



Natasha Ann Zachariah ✉

Sandwiched between the wedge-like Cheesegrater and the pickle-shaped Gherkin, the design for the latest skyscraper in London's financial district may come off as a tad regular.

With its simple rectangular facade, 1 Undershaft does not challenge the novelty silhouettes in the neighbourhood.

Not that its British architect Eric Parry was looking to outdo the neighbours with a more outlandish spectacle. Instead, he was hoping to add some "sobriety" to the skyline. the neighbourhood.

Not that its British architect Eric Parry was looking to outdo the neighbours with a more outlandish spectacle. Instead, he was hoping to add some "sobriety" to the skyline.



But there is no disputing that, height-wise, the building, slated for completion within six to 10 years, will be an imposing presence in the city. At 73 storeys and 304.94m high, it will be the tallest building in the City of London financial district and the second tallest in Western Europe.

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The "tallest building in Western Europe" title goes to The Shard, a 95-storey spire-like skyscraper by Italian architect Renzo Piano that stands across the River Thames from 1 Undershaft.

But Mr Parry, 64, is not interested in a height competition. "With the increasing number of tall buildings, the designers were all trying to do something different," he tells The Straits Times in a recent interview. "But the skyline has become like a strange theatre set, where the pieces don't really speak to one another."

"There's such a predisposition to (unusual) shapes and forms that my immediate response was that we needed some dignified calm here."



1 Undershaft, with a simple rectangular facade, is sandwiched between the wedge-like Cheesegrater and the pickle-shaped Gherkin. PHOTO: ERIC PARRY ARCHITECTS

The Guardian reported in 2015 that 1 Undershaft got its name as a tall maypole loomed over the site in mediaeval times.

The skyscraper has a strong Singapore connection. The building, which will provide office space for 10,000 people, is commissioned by Aroland Holdings, a Singapore-based real estate developer.

Aroland is partly held by HPRY Holdings, which is, in turn, owned by Singaporean billionaire Kuok Khoon Hong. He is the co-founder of Wilmar International, the world's largest palm-oil processor.

Aroland had put out a design competition for the building, which Mr Parry's 34-year-old firm, Eric Parry Architects, won in 2014. The firm provided an understated blueprint for a building that combines commercial office spaces with several public areas at its highest and lowest spots.

The building sits on the west side of the site and in the centre of the plot will be a sunken plaza with cafes and shops to attract human traffic. There will be a 360-degree public viewing gallery, spread across the two highest floors, which Mr Parry will develop in collaboration with the Museum of London.

He hopes that the bird's-eye view of the city from the gallery will give visitors a comprehensive history lesson of London's architecture and its influences. A restaurant will be housed below the gallery.

The Kuwait-born architect, who started his career as a lecturer at the department of architecture at the University of Cambridge in 1983, says: "Rather than having the top part of the building celebrating a corporate place, I strongly feel it should be a civic place of opportunity. Looking over London, you can see the fantastic layers of history."

He plans to clad the building with a white vitreous enamel that "acts as a skin to protect against solar penetration while allowing you to see out". In the sun, the building will shimmer white, instead of looking green from the tinted glass that many other buildings have.

He says: "The city is turning into a swamp of bottle green-coloured glass buildings. When light reflects off the green, people look sick. That's very unhealthy."

## ERIC PARRY ARCHITECTS | INTERVIEW

Publication: The Strait Times Singapore

Date: 10 June 2017

URL: <http://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/home-design/a-skyscraper-with-gravity>

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**The designers were all trying to do something different. But the skyline has become like a strange theatre set, where the pieces don't really speak to one another. There's such a predisposition to (unusual) shapes and forms that my immediate response was that we needed some dignified calm here."**

BRITISH ARCHITECT ERIC PARRY, on the 304.94m-high 1 Undershaft, the upcoming tallest building in the City of London financial district

”

has worked on lifestyle projects, such as the rooftop spa of the Four Seasons Hotel in London and two bars and a dance floor for the Ministry of Sound club there.

Mr Parry ventured into South-east Asia about two decades ago, designing two condominiums in Kuala Lumpur and taking on small interior projects for some residences and F&B outlets. He has an office in Singapore with two staff, which he started about four years ago.

But unlike his British compatriots such as Norman Foster and the late Zaha Hadid, who have put their names to major properties here, he has remained relatively low-key.

Designing buildings for the tropics, he says, is a welcome challenge after working with the English climate for so long. "I think the time has probably come and doors are open. Starting the Singapore office was a response to my feeling to wander more in my latter years."

He praises the Republic's success in building skyscrapers that have worked in greenery and carved out courtyards at high floors, such as home-grown firm Woha's Oasia Hotel Downtown in Tanjong Pagar, where this interview takes place.

He says: "Even though Singapore has only a short history of design, there's lots to learn from it. Architects here took on the idea of building bioclimate buildings and have done it well. Nowhere else in the world matches Singapore's level of sophistication for these buildings."

While he susses out business opportunities here, he will be busy with the construction work on 1 Undershaft. In December, its plans were formally approved by the City of London's Planning and Transport Committee.

Like its quirky neighbours, 1 Undershaft has been given a playful moniker that has Mr Parry cringing. It has been nicknamed The Trellis for the distinctive red steel crosses that run the length of the building.

He says: "I don't like it. I think its current name is quite dignified. But if it becomes The Trellis, I'll live with it."

He sounds like he is an old hand at designing skyscrapers, but 1 Undershaft is actually the tallest and biggest project he has done.

Eric Parry Architects has taken on mostly low-rise offices, cultural and residential projects, though these are no less significant.

It has worked on some of London's most notable contemporary structures. These include the Stirling Prize-nominated 5 Aldermanbury Square, an 18-storey commercial building; and a luxury apartment complex in Albemarle Street in the Mayfair district, which was converted from office space.

It is also behind the sensitive restoration of many old buildings, including the St Martin-in-the-Fields church in Trafalgar Square and the acclaimed new extension for the Holburne Museum of Art in Bath. It



## BUILDINGS RESTORED AND DESIGNED BY ERIC PARRY ARCHITECTS

### ST MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS, LONDON



The project to restore St Martin-in-the-Fields included seamlessly integrating various uses of the church and the other old buildings on site. PHOTOS: TIM SOAR, THE STAR, HELENE BINET, DIRK LINDNERN

Designed in 1726 by Scotland-born architect James Gibbs, St Martin-in-the-Fields is one of London's best-known churches.

Eric Parry Architects was tasked with restoration and renovation works for the multi-purpose space, which sits at the north-east corner of Trafalgar Square.

The architects decided to take out additions that were made through the years and detracted from the church's original Baroque look. Major restoration work included replacing the linoleum floor with a pale Isle of Purbeck stone and a thorough cleaning of the church's exterior.

The architects also had the complicated job of seamlessly integrating various uses of the church and the other old buildings on site. These spaces have vastly different uses, including providing housing for the homeless and a community centre.

So, they decided to dig under the delicate building to create more space to house a shop, a large hall, a small chapel, offices and a new rehearsal space. A new glass pavilion was built as the entrance to the new space below.

The £36-million refurbishment was completed in 2008, two years after building work began.

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## DAMAI SURIA, KUALA LUMPUR



Located on Jalan U-Thant in the Malaysian capital's ambassador district, Damai Suria is a low-rise condominium building with 32 apartments.

Designing for a tropical climate, Mr Eric Parry linked the units with wide passageways and installed windows that facilitate cross-ventilation. Completed in 1998, the RM24-million project spanning 10,117 sq m also has tropical landscaped gardens.

It became the first Malaysian building to be featured on the cover of the official journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects (Riba).

Mr Parry's other Malaysian project is Iringan Hijau, another low-rise residence with 26 units of different sizes in the affluent Ampang Hilir neighbourhood. It was completed in 2009.

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## HOLBURNE MUSEUM OF ART, BATH



In 2011, Eric Parry Architects completed work on an extension to the public art gallery in the city of Bath. This included new gallery spaces, archives as well as educational and visitor facilities.

Founded in 1882, the Holburne was Bath's first art museum and is filled with paintings, portrait miniatures, Renaissance bronzes, ceramics and furniture. It is also known for its collection of 18th- century British paintings.

The firm's proposal for the addition to the Georgian building did not always sit well with the local council, though it eventually came around.

The extension at the back of the museum is a glass box, with turquoise ceramic fins running down from the top of the building. It is also linked to the original museum building.

Prior to the £11.2-million restoration, the museum drew few visitors. In 2012, The Telegraph, a national British daily broadsheet, reported that the museum had become Bath's third-biggest tourist attraction. It has also won the Riba 2012 South West Building of the Year award.

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## THE LEATHERSELLERS COMPANY, LONDON



A glass sculpture by American artist Dale Chihuly hangs in the reception area of The Leathersellers Company.

The brief for the seventh headquarters of this historic livery company involved providing a new company hall in the basement of an existing building.

Eric Parry Architects carved out spaces for a library, dining hall, reception room and a meeting room called The Court Room.

The posh spaces feature lots of luxurious materials, as well as precious fixtures that have been with the company as it changed homes through the years.

For example, The Court Room has walls made of American walnut wood. Two 19th-century glass chandeliers, from its previous headquarters, hang above the meeting-room table.

Other highlights include a blue- and-white glass sculpture by American artist Dale Chihuly in the reception area.

Work started on the project in 2012 and was completed last year.

A version of this article appeared in the print edition of The Straits Times on June 10, 2017, with the headline 'A skyscraper with gravity'. [Print Edition](#) | [Subscribe](#)

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AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2017



ERIC PARRY ARCHITECTS | INTERVIEW - BRUNO TAUT'S GLASS HOUSE

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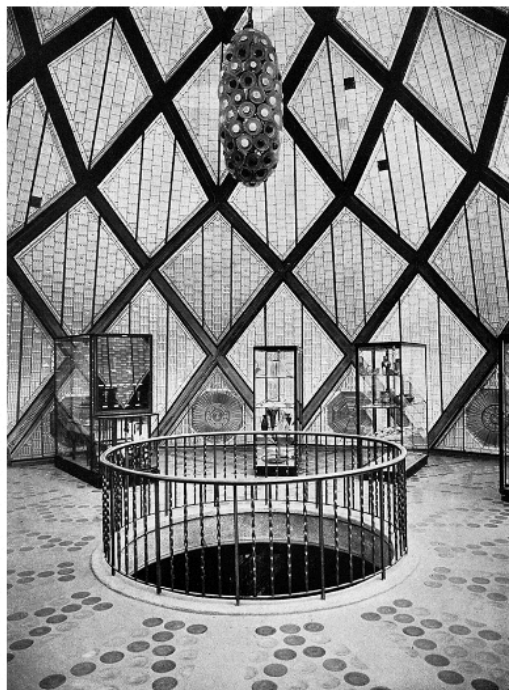
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I've only ever known Bruno Taut's Glass Pavilion through photographs and drawings, and they are always in black and white. But you have to imagine it as full of colour. Having climbed the concrete steps you would enter the dome where the roof was a grid of diamonds in yellow glass. Under your feet there was glass in the floor and a set of stairs to a level below, illuminated by an oculus. There the walls were silver and gold and a waterfall cascaded over underwater lights. It was a luminous world.



Taut built the pavilion in 1914. He had been working in Stuttgart for Theodor Fischer, an architect who was head of the Deutscher Werkbund, an association of designers and industrialists. In 1913 Konrad Adenauer, later chancellor of West Germany but at that time an aspiring inventor, organised an exhibition for the Werkbund. Taut was commissioned by the association of the German glass industry to design a building that would show their technical advances. The result, destroyed shortly after the exhibition finished, was groundbreaking.



On the one hand it is an expression of the rational trajectory of modern architecture, and looks forward to the kinds of buildings we're now familiar with, made from a kit of glass and steel. Yet it also has a poetic dimension. Taut was one of a number of German architects, later called the Crystal Chain group, who were interested in the iconography of the crystal, which was for them a profound metaphor – a mineral which allows light to pass through it, a rock without a shadow. It represented renewal and openness, a kind of Utopia. On the outside of Taut's pavilion were aphorisms by Paul Scheerbart, a writer and friend. One of them read "Coloured glass destroys hatred".

The way this building is a fulcrum between the industrial, the poetic and the social has always fascinated me. There was a period at university when I was spending more time in the sociology department than in the architecture department, particularly when I was a student in Newcastle, where we were thinking about social housing. Then I went to the Royal College of Art, where I was cheek by jowl with people working with glass, fabric, printing, painting or sculpture. Like Taut, I carry this dual mantle.

In 2008 I was commissioned to redevelop the church of

St Martin-in-the Fields in London. I designed a glass pavilion as an entrance to the crypt beneath the church, with an oculus illuminating the underground space. The pavilion stood between the church, by James Gibbs, and a set of buildings by John Nash, part of his plan for Trafalgar Square. The glass walls created a building with no shadow, a presence without a presence, and they connected the earth and the air. I wasn't thinking about Taut, but he was there subliminally. I feel charged by the poetic and metaphoric leanings of his work. ■



Eric Parry is a British architect whose most recent building is Four Pancras Square in London. He was talking to Simon Willis

IMAGES: WERKBUNDARCHIV, MUSEUM DER DINGE BERLIN/TIMOTHY SOAR

## ERIC PARRY ARCHITECTS | INTERVIEW - BRUNO TAUT'S GLASS HOUSE

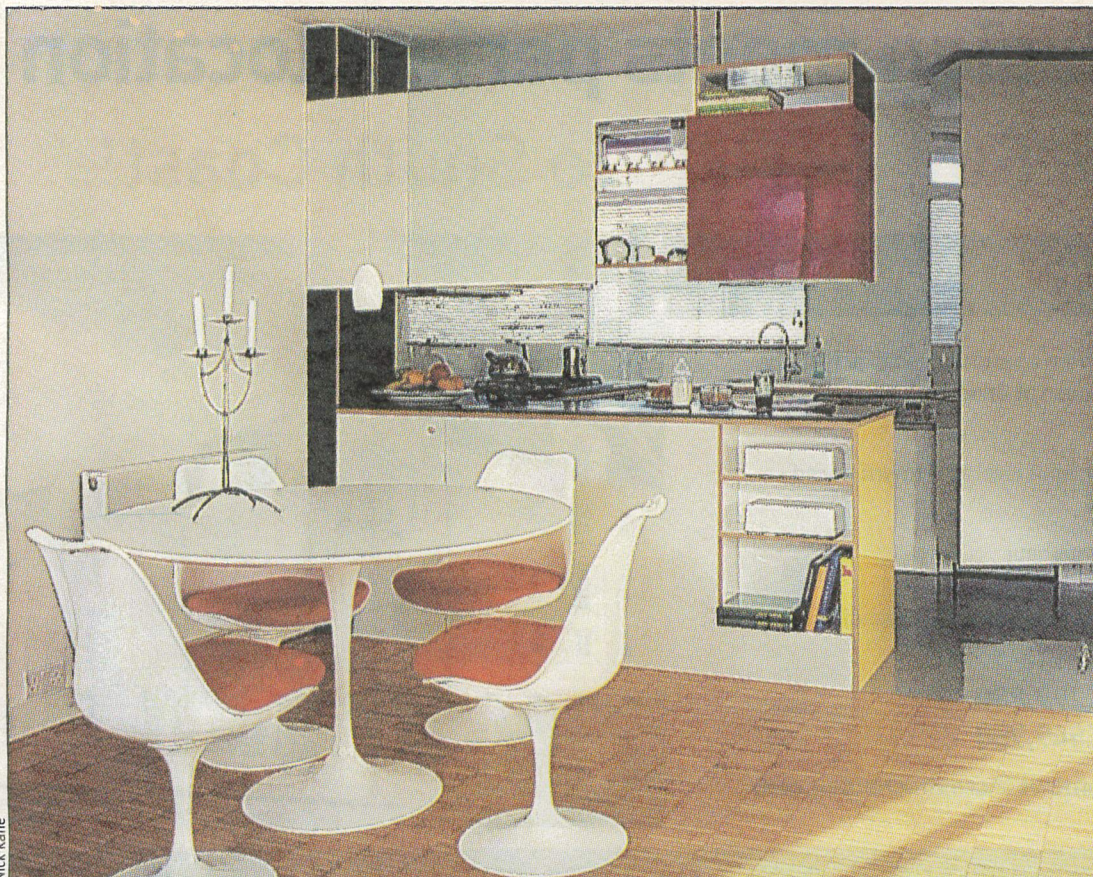
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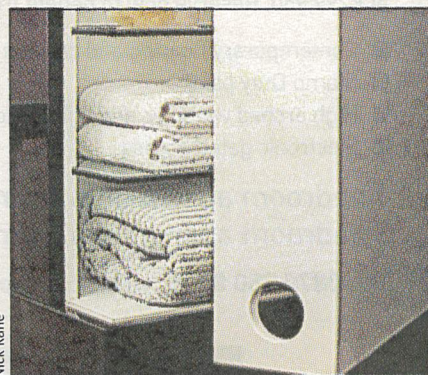




Architect Eric Parry's kitchen is a masterpiece of compact living, full of ingenious and sleek space-saving storage ideas



Golden Lane Estate, on the edge of the City, is an inspiring piece of post-war architecture that attracts admirers from around the globe



All elements harmonise with the building



Parry relaxes on his Mondrian-esque balcony

# A golden touch

**H**IGH-DENSITY housing can be both comfortable and stylish, as world-class architect Eric Parry's apartment demonstrates. Parry, 55, has just won a Georgian Group award for his work on the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, and is presently putting the finishing touches to Aldermanbury Square, a spectacular stainless-steel tower next to London Wall.

The project closest to his heart, however, is the modest £50,000 makeover just completed on his mid-20th century maisonette home on Golden Lane Estate. A community of more than 500 homes at the edge of the City, Golden Lane Estate

## 'Golden Lane Estate is an inspiring piece of post-war architecture'

is an inspiring piece of post-war architecture. It was designed as social housing in 1952 by Chamberlin, Powell and Bon, a decade before the same practice brought us the Barbican (1965-76).

Today, the ensemble still looks vibrant: opaque glass cladding in Mondrian-style primary colours contrasts with pale, pick-hammered concrete and dark brick. At roof level, there are extravagances such as the curving lines of Crescent House and the concrete cowboy-hat canopy of Great Arthur

Built as social housing in the 1950s, stylish Golden Lane Estate is admired around the world, says **Katrina Burroughs**

House. Outside, delightful landscaping includes ponds, paved areas and lawns; facilities feature a swimming pool and community centre.

Inside the flats are countless clever devices for the space-starved home: sliding partitions between living rooms and bedrooms, and clerestory windows at the top of internal walls to allow the small rooms to "share" daylight.

Worldwide, Golden Lane is considered a model estate: exceptional surroundings have framed a community that is graffiti-free with negligible crime. The peaceful atmosphere is disturbed only by hordes of architecture students and delegations of housing development officials from as far afield as Italy and Japan.

Many of the original residents remain but Golden Lane, which has been listed since 1997, has also attracted a new generation of artists, designers and architects. Of these, Parry is the most eminent, and the estate's greatest fan. He says: "This estate represents a type of building that's just not going on nowadays."

When he moved into his top-floor maisonette, he remembers: "It was a complete shambles. Worse than neglected, it had been glorified, with brass knockers and a Jacuzzi." His programme of

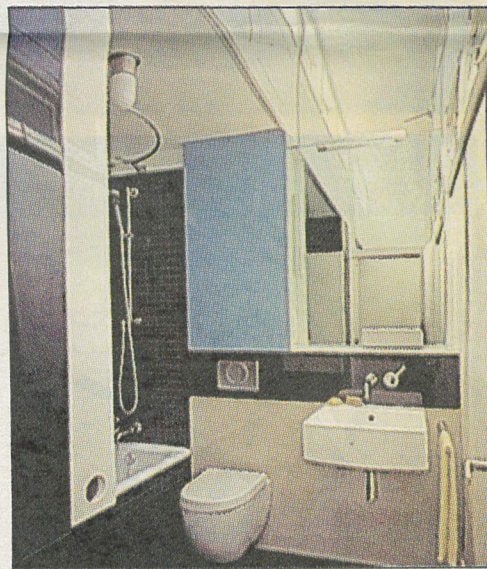
replumbing, rewiring and redecorating included a new kitchen and bathroom and plenty of storage.

Parry's kitchen is a masterpiece of compact living. "The project was to take an Ikea kitchen base of £1,000 and customise it," he says. Plywood and veneer cabinetry is mixed with more luxurious laminated panels and topped with dark Corian. Ingenious touches include double storage spaces: a narrow coat closet swings back to

## 'This estate represents a type of building that's just not going on nowadays'

reveal a tiny utility/boiler cupboard, with washing machine and shelving arranged around the boiler. Throughout the duplex, materials are modest and harmonious. And, though there are design icons among the furniture (Eero Saarinen dining table and chairs, an Eames footstool), fixtures and fittings are consistently simple and workmanlike. In a bedroom, the shelving system by Vitsoe is the same as Parry uses in his office.

Upstairs, storage for suits and shirts is set into



Fixtures and fittings are stylish but workmanlike

the wall of the landing. The new bathroom has a foldaway medicine cabinet and a towel rail in a recessed area behind the door. The bath is truly tiny. Parry stoutly says: "Most people would say they can't get into a 5ft bath, but it's fine."

Parry loves the sense of society conjured up by the felicitous arrangement of the flats: "I know everyone on my deck," he says. "We're part of a community without being claustrophobic." He stands on his balcony, watches the dramatic view of the moon passing over the Barbican towers and offers the opinion that the art of "high-density housing, done with humanity" — developed in the 1920s and 1930s in visionary European public-housing projects such as the building programme in Frankfurt — has virtually been lost. The time has come to rediscover that skill, he reckons, and the place to start looking is Golden Lane Estate.

■ For more on Parry's projects, visit [www.ericparryarchitects.co.uk](http://www.ericparryarchitects.co.uk). For flats for sale on the estate, try Hamilton Brooks, 73 Long Lane, EC1 (020 7606 8000; [www.hamiltonbrooks.co.uk](http://www.hamiltonbrooks.co.uk)).

FOR MORE STORIES LIKE THIS, VISIT [homesandproperty.co.uk](http://homesandproperty.co.uk)



The Scotts moved into their flat just before the estate was listed

## 'The architecture is incredibly well considered'

FRED Scott, 68, is a writer and lecturer in architecture at University of Greenwich. His wife, Buffi Davis, 63, is a painter. They moved into their Grade II listed maisonette on the Golden Lane Estate in July 1996, with three children: Stella, 22, still lives at home and Danny, 36, has a flat on the estate; only Kay, 34, has flown the nest to west London.

The Scotts bought their home shortly before the estate was listed and were delighted that the previous owners had retained key original features, such as the parquet flooring. Fred says: "I'd used the estate as an example of good public housing in my teaching. The architecture is incredibly well considered. All these big windows get such terrific light that in midwinter it's almost brighter than summer because the low rays of the sun go right through the block. The materials are excellent — no scrimping: lots of hardwood and beautiful tiles on the floor."

Any drawbacks to living in an architectural gem? "We are all so keen to preserve the building that it's difficult to blow your nose without permission. You can lose the will to live in the residents' meetings."

■ Fred Scott's latest book, *On Altering Architecture* (Routledge), is out next month.



## Luxury | Property & Architecture

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# My Foundations: British Architect Eric Parry



Architect Eric Parry CREDIT: GRANT SMITH

By Bethan Ryder

29 JUNE 2016 • 3:55PM

**L**eading British architect Eric Parry is responsible for many of London's most notable contemporary buildings including 5 Aldermanbury Square, 30 Finsbury Square, the multi-award winning renewal project at St Martin-in-the-Fields in Westminster, and the recently completed 8 St James's Square, in St James's.

He studied architecture at the University of Newcastle, the Royal College of Art and the Architectural Association before establishing Eric Parry Architects in 1983, the same year he was appointed as a lecturer in architecture at the University of Cambridge, where he taught until 1997.

ERIC PARRY | MY FOUNDATIONS

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10 Fenchurch Avenue

In 2006 Eric Parry was elected Royal Academician (RA). He is currently working on the 10 Fenchurch Avenue building in the City and the refurbishment of The Leathersellers Building at St Helen's Place. He is also the mastermind behind 1 Undershaft, the latest addition to the skyline in the City of London. Here he shares his architectural inspirations.

**Which building first made you want to become an architect?** The Acropolis, seen at dawn from an Athenian hotel window, aged about five.



The Acropolis CREDIT: ALAMY

**Which architect most inspired you to follow this profession?** Isidore of Miletus and Anthemius of Tralles. Hagia Sophia is their building. The metaphor of the dome "suspended by a golden thread from heaven" to describe the interior caught my early adolescent imagination and set me going.





View of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul CREDIT: DEA / ARCHIVIO J. LANGE / CONTRIBUTOR

**Which piece of primitive architecture are you most impressed by?** The Turkmen's yurts, a movable dwelling stimulated by animal husbandry and the need to search out grass by summer and winter for their flocks that has evolved over centuries as a portable protective cave. It is made of prefabricated elements, the skeleton a central wheel with spokes tied to a wall of concertinaed sections, with decorative textile belts and outer felts. The whole is packable onto a camel or two. It is a lesson in practical design where every piece plays its environmental part including a remarkably low carbon footprint – eat your heart out Buckminster Fuller.



Turkmen yurt in middle of Kyzylkum Desert CREDIT: MARTIN MOOS/LONELY PLANET IMAGES



**Which piece of architecture do you wish you'd designed?** The Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, by Louis Kahn, 1966-72. The design process is enthralling to understand, and the synthesis most fitting and beautiful.



The Kimbell Art Museum CREDIT: GETTY

**Is there a historical building you particularly admire?** The Hotel Tassel, Brussels, designed by Victor Horta and built between 1893 and 1895. It turned domestic architecture on its head opening a three dimensional world of possibilities with the introduction of cast and wrought iron structural framing. It is also the visual manifestation of an intense literary and cultural movement, Symbolism.



The Hotel Tassel, Brussels

**Is there an artist you admire that you find inspirational?** There are many but if forced to choose it is Prunella Clough (1919 – 1999) I am drawn to. She is one of the most distinguished artists of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her work just got better and better and she had a remarkable capacity to draw a poetic resonance from the most unexpected places. Both modest and knowledgeable, she was also a significant teacher of art and was the niece of the great architect-designer Eileen Gray. Both were undeservedly overlooked during their lifetimes.

**Which building has most influenced your work?** The Casa del Fascio designed by Giuseppe Terragni. He exhibits a very particular ability to combine the tectonic and proportional daring of the interwar period with the material and detail qualities of his northern Italian architectural history and context.





Italian flag in front of Casa Del Fascio, Lake Como, Italy CREDIT: GETTY

**Which building generates the most emotive response in you?** The 14th-century nave of Canterbury Cathedral never fails to lift my spirits to a state of wonder.



Canterbury Cathedral nave CREDIT: GETTY



**Is there a building that you would like to add an extension to?** The British Library, because the government curtailed its original ambition and the site is confronted by the brutality of its northern neighbour.



The British Library

**Which building most impresses you for the contrast between its exterior and interior?** The whole complex of St Martin-in-the-Fields, firstly its relationship - socially and physically - to its context and the amazing framework for the spiritual and the everyday needs of life.



St Martin-in-the-Fields CREDIT: GETTY

**Which city do you admire most for its architecture?** If I had to choose other than London, such a magnificently multifaceted and complex place, it would of course be Paris.

*Volume III a monograph on recent work by Eric Parry Architects is out now*