

Fifteen Years - Chris Dyson Architects

Good evening and welcome – I'm delighted to see so many colleagues, clients, collaborators and other friends, and I hope you'll enjoy this celebration of the practice's 15th anniversary. Over the past 15 yrs. I have worked with some remarkably talented people and together we have generated some amazing projects of the highest calibre. I would like to take a few minutes this evening to share with you some of the highlights of our work.

So, in January 2004, after working for two great London-based international practices on a range projects all over the world....I started out on 'a wing and a prayer', with a massive project in South Africa, a new museum of African art and culture...a dream project for any architect. I spent the next six months honing and perfecting a design and masterplan working alongside my former boss Michael Wilford. Although this project never came to fruition, I realised it marked a turning point in my career and it made me more determined than ever to establish my own practice.

We have grown! From two people in a garret on the top floor of our old house in Princelet Street to this wonderful building where again I live above the shop, with my family and a jet-black dog called Milo! CDA has grown further since moving to Fashion Street, and we have made forays into larger scale projects and competitions, of which some are illustrated in this book.

I now have a talented team of twenty and have gradually learned to delegate, with the able help of partners Mathew and Gideon, Senior Associate Maria, and Associates Victoria and Clara. Together we are growing the team in response to larger commissions that are coming our way.

I love my work and over the years we have established a real empathy with the planners, heritage advisors, clients and consultants with whom we work – the sense of a shared enthusiasm is palpable, and incredibly important.

We build 'New into Old' all the time, it is our USP, whether it be a Café and Restaurant in the Grade 1 listed Crystal Palace Park or a small bespoke extension to a Grade 2 listed house in Wapping – we love the challenges such projects bring. Each project is born from a careful analysis of context and place – this defines the character of our new response, not some abstract ideology but the present, the now, the reality of the place.

Our mantra is *"Excellence and Quality, Architecture for everyone"* and for us design is an explicit and reiterative process, beginning with research and analysis which in turn leads to conceptual exploration and development. We like to think of ourselves as architects who have the vision and resource to make all new commissions a priority. I am fortunate to have a young, galvanized team – the office is resolutely low-tech: the hand is ever present.

While the majority of our work is still at a modest scale, most of us have experienced design studios handling large-scale civic projects. I believe the same intensity and thought is vital whatever the scale of the final project, as is the attention to the smallest details. We revisit and check throughout the critical process of design, from the meticulous definition of the working drawings and tenders through to the final build.

Good design is drawn and the effectiveness of drawing is based on the precision with which it succeeds in identifying and prefiguring the ways in which the building will be made. Everything has its purpose beyond mere style, perhaps the most intense example being the detail drawing and the more lucid the conceptual drawing. Although both may be generated by different mind sets, one is no good at all without the other: a vision of the whole project and its potential is critical to the process.

Our architects carry their responsibilities with great care and commitment, engaging with a variety of craftsmen, subcontractors and contractors on a wide range of projects. Whether drawn by computer or hand, the act of drawing requires clarity of mind and must always say something, *"here is the brick arch and this is how it sits in relation to the window frame and sill"*...for example. In so doing we gain the respect of the planners, our clients and the contractor. We are, in effect, masters of our craft – that is the making of well-built and useful buildings that will last for as long as the materials will allow.

We seek to vitalise contemporary architecture with a rich inclusive architectural language which fuses the modern movement's ideals of functionality, clarity, integrity and economy with the traditional architectural qualities of form and space, thereby ensuring that our work conveys a sense of historical continuity. We are also striving

for a synthesis between traditional buildings and the current requirement for more fluid and flexible design. Above all, we hope to maintain the connection between suitability of purpose and beauty.

Behind every successful building is an engaged and proactive client who makes a unique contribution to the development of the brief and the evolution of the design. Ideally, we become involved in a project when the initial activity and spatial brief of requirements and site have been established and we can then contribute with the client and specialist consultants, to the development of its full potential.

Initially, all aspirations for the project and indeed the constraints that may present themselves are reviewed with the client and reconciled into the brief. This brief forms the basis of a wide-ranging diagrammatic exercise to explore all possible ways of configuring the building. These alternatives are presented in basic sketches and models in sufficient detail to convey their fundamental characteristics appropriate to the stage of development.

In a practice of this size, from table top sketch, model, computer drawings to physical reality, a small army of people becomes involved. Some are present from beginning to end; others for a short time or a specific purpose. Everyone counts, everyone makes a difference. My gratitude goes out to all those and others too numerous to mention.

We've curated a modest exhibition of our projects, with drawings and models – if you want to learn more about our practice, please grab a member of staff and interrogate them!

Key projects for our office going forward are those recently built and receiving recognition:

- Albion Works, shortlisted for the RIBA awards this year
- The Sekforde Pub in Clerkenwell, already the winner of several awards
- Crystal Palace Park Café and restaurant
- 1 Fashion Street – our offices
- Cobb Street, a gem currently in the making

And those in planning: large and small...

- The Goodsyard Redevelopment
- Rosendale Road Housing
- Grade 2 * house Victoria Park square
- A new Boathouse in Teddington
- Keats Grove
- Highgate West Hill
- Shoreditch high street

On a lighter note and Inspired by the **resilience** displayed by the Japanese in last weekend's rugby match between Japan and Scotland!following Hurricane Hagibis...

With this in mind – I'd like to refer to the seven virtues of Bushido - which governed the lives of **the Samurai**, the skilful warrior-philosophers of medieval and early modern Japan.

For them, perfection was the highest value. Despite the passage of time and differences in culture, we could all learn something important from these ideas.

義

GI: morality, righteousness, justice

勇

YUU: bravery, courage, heroism

仁

JIN: virtue, benevolence, humanity, charity

礼

REI: gratitude

誠

MAKOTO: sincerity, honesty, integrity, fidelity

名譽

MEIYO: honor

忠義

CHUUGI: loyalty, devotion

Please enjoy the evening!