

28 MAY 1995

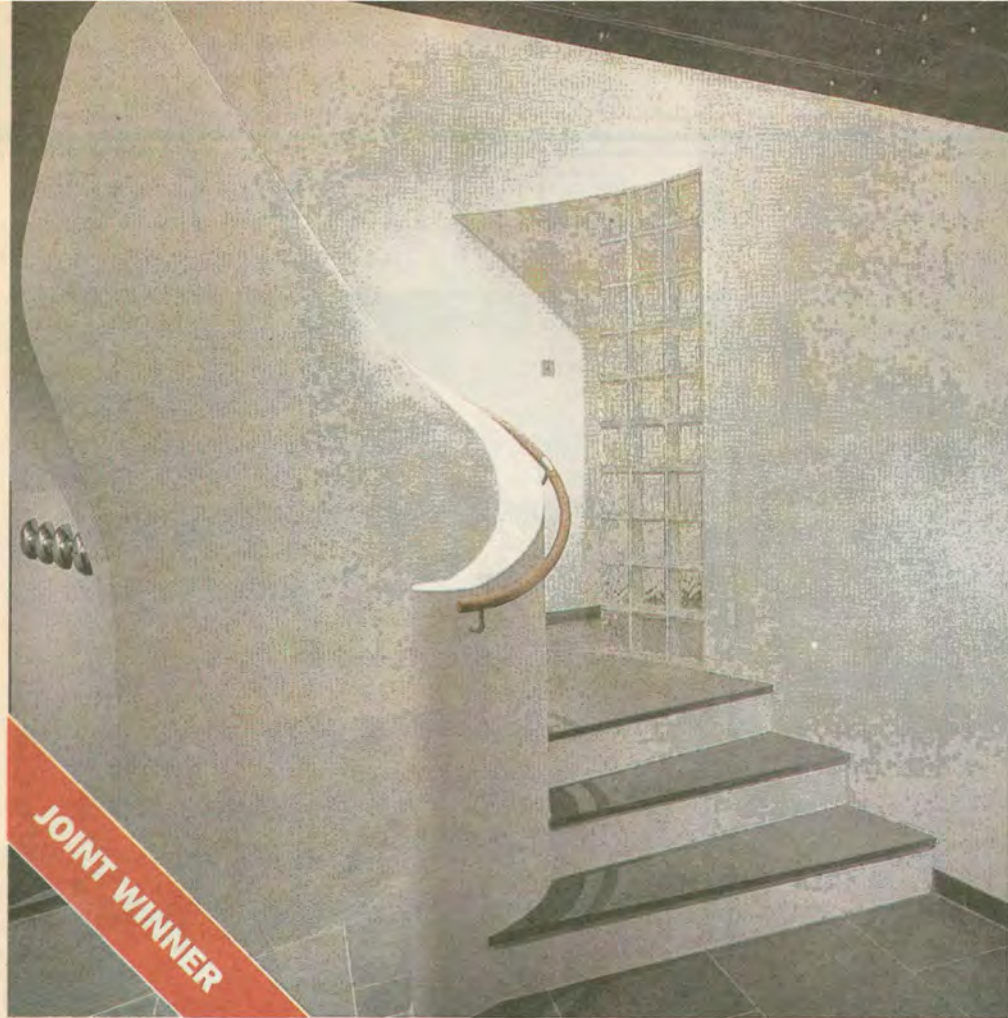
Section **10**



THE SUNDAY TIMES
THE CULTURE

**THE BEST
HOUSE IN
BRITAIN**





JOINT WINNER

Devon cream: a sculptural, ingeniously engineered and highly imaginative family home — Baggy House, in north Devon, by the architect Anthony Hudson. Photograph by Jo Reid and John Peck

BUILDING OF THE YEAR

This turned out, somewhat unexpectedly, to be the year of excellent houses. Armed with what must be the most eclectic shortlist of buildings yet chosen for the Building of the Year Award, a list ranging from a tiny Edinburgh house extension to the Channel 4 headquarters, we arrived at judgment day, after our travels, with open minds. Two hours later, the decision was made: two housing projects by young architects share the award. Baggy House on the north Devon coast is a highly imaginative private home by the architect Anthony Hudson. The new apartments at Broadwall, on London's South Bank, a new terrace and mini-tower rented to members of a co-operative, are by the architects Alex Lifschutz and Ian Davidson.

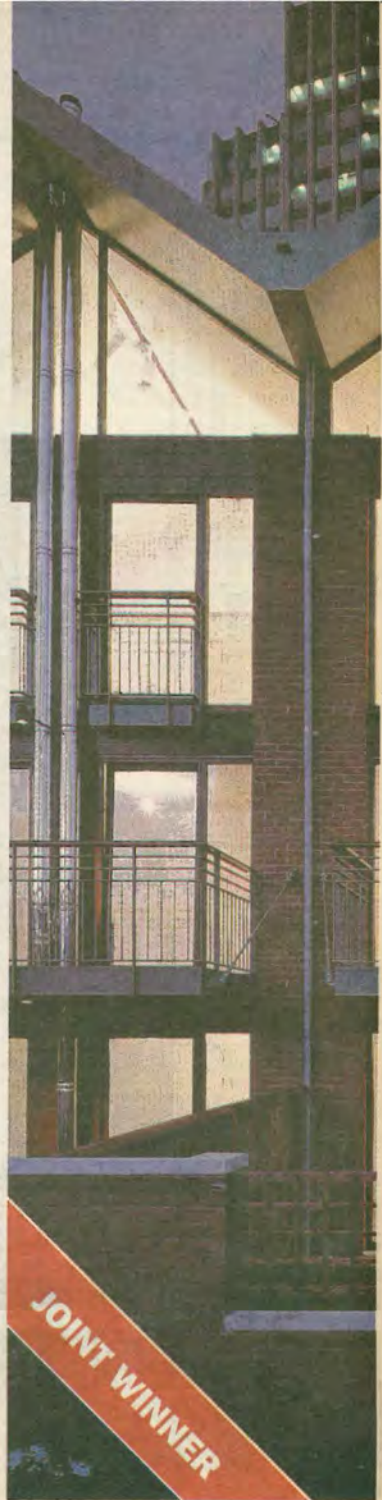
In the seven years of the award, our changing and catholic roll call of judges has acquired a

Two housing projects by young architects have snatched the Building of the Year Award from the heavyweight contenders. **HUGH PEARMAN** reports

reputation for being a little cool towards the obvious contenders for stardom. Big names do not necessarily receive red-carpet treatment here, and slight petulance on the part of the great has not been unknown in the past as we gazed over their shoulders at the promising work of the up-and-coming and the under-appreciated.

Like the Booker prize, which it occasionally resembles, there is, then, a long list of eligible candidates who have *not* won The Sunday Times/Royal Fine Art Commission Building of the Year Award. The upshot of this is that, although most of the other, previously somewhat rigid and narrow-based architecture awards have now loosened up and copied our format, ours still has the distinction of being the least predictable. This year our judges, chaired with aplomb as usual by Lord St John of Fawsley, also included David Carter, industrial designer; Eldred Evans, architect and a previous winner for her crown courts in Truro; Charles Saumarez Smith, director of the National Portrait Gallery; Henry Wrong, arts administrator and former director of the Barbican Centre; and me.

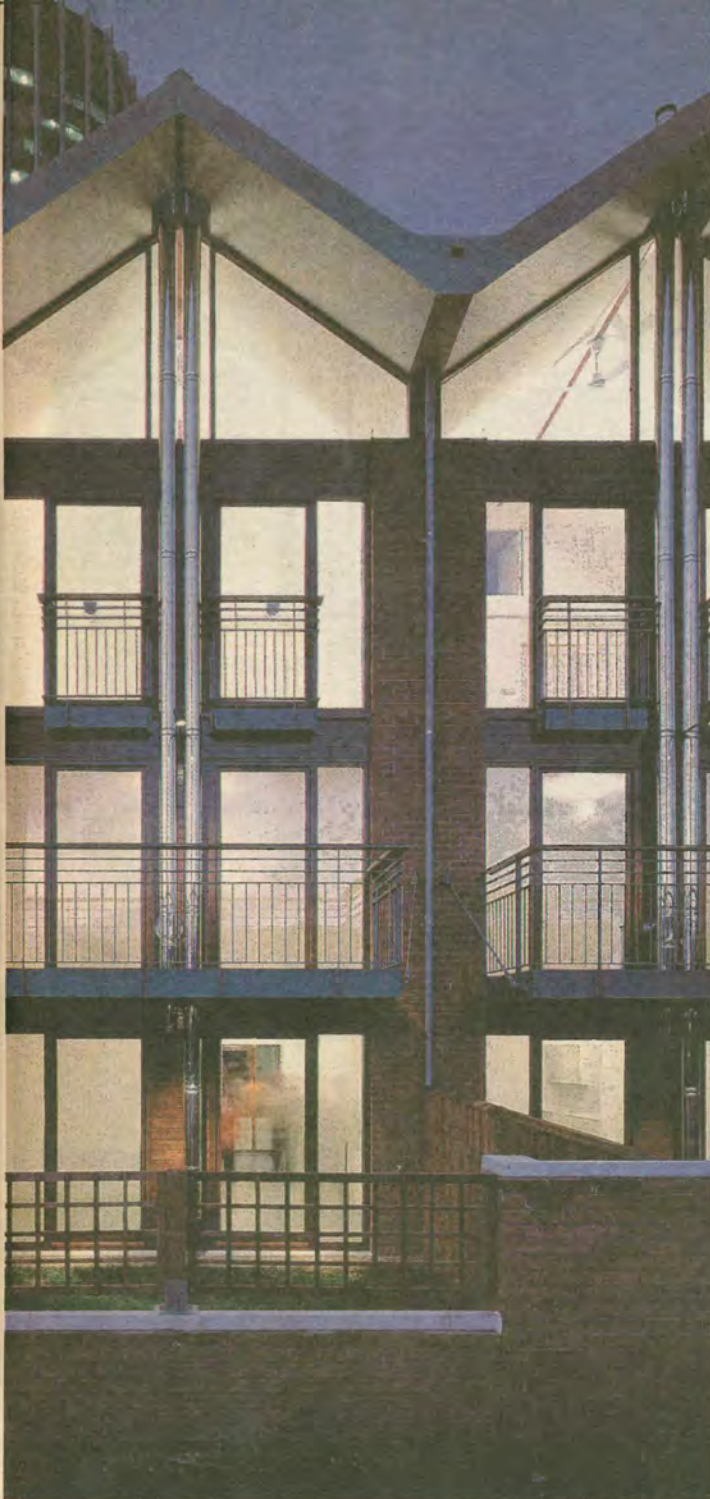
Most years I start off thinking I know what the winning building will be. Most years I am wrong because, along the way, we have stum-



JOINT WINNER

On the terraces: rented inner-injecting new life

bled upon some unexpected pleasure that casts a new light on proceedings. We did not anticipate, for instance, that Stephen Hodder's little swimming pool in Colne would share the honours with Sir Norman Foster's Sackler Galleries at the Royal Academy in 1992, nor that a subtle academic research building in Cambridge by an elderly Dane, Eric Sorensen,



city housing in Waterloo, London SE1, by Alex Lifschutz and Ian Davidson, into an old genre. Photograph by Chris Gascoigne

would triumph over the British in 1993. It seemed unlikely that anybody could do better last year than either Nicholas Grimshaw with his glittering serpentine Waterloo International Terminal, or Sir Michael Hopkins with his new coolie-hatted Glyndebourne, but then the overall award went instead to a Zen-inspired Midlands training centre, the Cable

and Wireless College, by MacCormac Jamieson Prichard.

This year, the new Channel 4 headquarters by Sir Richard Rogers and Partners near Westminster was clearly the one to beat. This is mainly an office building — Channel 4 is essentially a publishing house rather than a studio complex — but in its overtly theatrical



JEUX D'ESPRIT

Weather station: the Thames Tower in west London, principally a piece of sculpture, from the architects Brookes Stacey Randall Fursdon. Photograph by Morley von Sternberg

Given that housing is usually the Cinderella of architecture, the target of aesthetically challenged speculative builders and design-and-build package merchants, these two examples — one a bespoke dwelling for private clients, the other a highly crafted response to the needs of the less affluent — show the quality that can be achieved

way it acts as a beacon for the organisation it houses. Set against it, we had chosen a long shortlist of 15 other buildings.

In Edinburgh we had the new Festival Theatre by a famous Scottish practice, Law and Dunbar-Nasmith, and a tiny house extension by Richard Murphy, acknowledged as a significant talent-in-waiting. In Wales we had the timber-and-glass Dyfed Wildlife Centre by another burgeoning talent, the Bristol-based Niall Philips.

The universities always produce a handful of good buildings, and this year we saw four. Previous winner Stephen Hodder had completed new student housing at St Catherine's College, Oxford, where he had to work with the ghost of Arne Jacobsen, designer of the now-listed 1964 main college. Casson Conder presented the McDonald Institute for Archeological Research in Cambridge, where Edward Cullinan Architects was responsible for the new St John's College building. The

new universities were represented by Sunderland's St Peter's Campus by Tony McQuirk of BDP, a Scandinavian-influenced complex on the site of old shipyards by the River Wear. Not far away was Hartlepool's Town Hall Theatre extension by Tim Ronalds, while over the Pennines was the extraordinary engineering spectacle of the world's tallest big dipper, the Pepsi Max Big One at Blackpool Pleasure Beach by Philip England and Fiona Gilje with Allott and Lomax.

London yielded the Broadwall housing at Waterloo, a new urban terrace and tower for the Coin Street housing co-operative by Lifschutz Davidson that shows an injection of new life into an old genre; and the intriguing Thames Tower on the Shepherd's Bush roundabout, a giant barometric device symbolising the Thames Water ring main beneath. This was originally the idea of two students at the Royal

Continued on page 22



**UNIVERSITY
WINNER**

Advanced class: Sunderland university's St Peter's Campus by Tony McGuirk shows how well-designed universities can be a spur to urban regeneration. Photograph by M Hamilton Knight

Building of the year

Continued from page 21

College of Art, Tania Doufa and Damien O'Sullivan, and realised by architects Brookes Stacey Randall Fursdon and engineers Atelier One. East London offered a tented playground shelter at St Anne's School by last year's winner, MacCormac Jamieson Prichard.

Two unusual candidates in Southampton were the city's new airport, by Manser Associates — an excellent example of how to build with flair on a budget — and the Harbour Lights film theatre on the dockside, by Burrell Foley Fischer — the first good all-new cinema for years. Finally, on the edge of the village of Croyde, out on the headland of Baggy Point in north Devon, we went to see Anthony Hudson's remarkably assured and daring new family house, built on the site of a run-down hotel.

Baggy House is a sculptural and ingeniously engineered work (Matthew Wells of Techniker was the design engineer) in which echoes of several pioneering modern architects can be detected. Two of its glass and timber walls vanish into the ground to open the house up on summer days, and its seductive sequence of internal spaces on several levels revives a tradition of progressive, well-designed country living. Its joint winner, Broadwall, serves a very different purpose as rented inner-city housing, but shares its confident form-making and its belief in a high order of domestic design.

It is a place that dares to be urban rather than suburban, re-creating one side of a complete street. At the same time it respects the importance of its Thames-side setting by changing suddenly from a relatively modest modern terrace with little back gardens to a human-scale tower at its northern end (amazingly, with two lifts serving each flat), commanding one of the best views in London.

We decided on three "specialist" category winners in addition. The latter-day technological gothic of the Channel 4 HQ by Richard Rogers, John Young and others in the practice — so nearly the overall winner — garners a "media and communications" award. Channel 4 shows what can be done when what could be a very ordinary building — a corner office block — is given intensive design treatment. It is marked out by the structural gym-

nastics of the great concave glass wall to the foyer, rising the full height of the building, and by the offset tower of lifts, air-handling equipment and mast. Even the flanks of the standard office wings, however, are impeccably crafted.

In the universities section, Oxbridge's loss was the University of Sunderland's gain: the award went to its St Peter's Campus by Tony McGuirk and others in BDP (Building Design Partnership, Britain's largest design firm but the first time it has scored in this award). The Sunderland campus, the source of much local pride, shows how well-designed new universities can be a spur to urban regeneration. Its big curving roofs and rough-sawn timber flanks and walkways, plus its multi-level internal spaces giving views of the surrounding cityscape, clearly owe a debt to the veteran Anglo-Swedish architect Ralph Erskine, with whom McGuirk occasionally collaborates.

For the second year running, we have given a *Jeux d'Esprit* award, this time to the mysterious blue barometer of the Thames Tower in Shepherd's Bush, which, given its location, is possibly the most-viewed piece of new architecture in London. It is, however, principally a piece of kinetic sculpture, a giant solar-powered barometer taking the form of a column of blue water rising and falling according to the weather. Considering that it was commissioned by Thames Water to disguise a prosaic but necessary "surge shaft" attached to the London ring main far below, this is arts patronage of a high order.

So: another unexpected outcome, but a welcome one. Given that housing is usually the Cinderella of architecture, the target of aesthetically challenged speculative builders and design-and-build package merchants, these two examples — one a bespoke dwelling for private clients, the other a highly crafted response to the needs of the less affluent — show the quality that can be achieved. The fact that both are by young architects rather than established stars augurs well for the future. □

How Did They Do That? The Building Of Baggy House runs in Gallery 2 of the RIBA Architecture Centre, 66 Portland Place, London W1, from June 1 to July 15. Tel 0171-580 5533



**MEDIA
WINNER**

Station master: the overtly theatrical Channel 4 building by Richard Rogers shows what can be done when what could be a very ordinary building is given intensive design treatment. Photograph by Morley von Sternberg

And the losers are . . .

There is a dark side to any architectural award. The few buildings that receive accolades tacitly imply the existence of beastly alter egos. To show what this architectural underworld can produce, we have picked from our readers' nominations two new court buildings, in Leeds and Gloucester, for our alternative wooden-spoon award.

Of the thousands of buildings completed in the United Kingdom every year, the great mass — warehouses, speculative housing estates, multiplex cinemas, business parks, superstores, shopping centres — are merely not very good or averagely bad. Some, however, are actively offensive: most new hotels, for instance, are stomach-turning.

We have singled out the courts because they are always right in the public gaze. Symbols of the power of the state and the rule of law, they ought to set an example of architectural and urbanistic good manners. For years now, dignified old courts have been closing down and new ones built to cope with the growing mass of litigation. A few of these are good — one, by Evans and Shalev in Truro, was joint winner of our first Building of the Year award in 1989. Others are just about acceptable —

Now for the bad and the ugly. By
HUGH PEARMAN

Newcastle, Hull and Edinburgh. The Leeds city magistrates' court, however, is unbelievably awful in its awkward massing and crude post-modern details. Designed by the city's architects department, it fails to hit the target visually by a mile. There is a phenomenon known as the Leeds Look which was coined to describe the unpleasant, fussily detailed, mostly brick buildings that seemed to be all the rage with the city planners in the mid-1980s. This building, designed at the end of that decade but only recently finished, encapsulates the Leeds Look. It bears no relation to the town's history — you have only to view the stately town hall or Corn Exchange to realise that — and no relation to anything else either, apart from a passing fad to tack meaningless bits all over a building's facade. Our anonymous nominator said: "It looks as if it's been made out of the rejected bits of Asdas — a symbol of the full ridiculousness of the law."

The Gloucester county courts, built beside the city's docks, commits

two sins: failing to make good use of a prominent corner site, and then compounding that error by resorting to very bad pastiche (nothing wrong with good pastiche) — trying, without success, to look a bit like a group of old warehouse buildings. Tracking down the perpetrators was difficult: nobody seemed prepared to admit to having designed it. The result of a typical commercial free-for-all in which a former dockland area is put up for grabs, its designers appear to be not a named firm of architects or a public design office, but — according to the developer, Crest Nicholson of Bristol — the drawing boards of Pearce Construction, which built it.

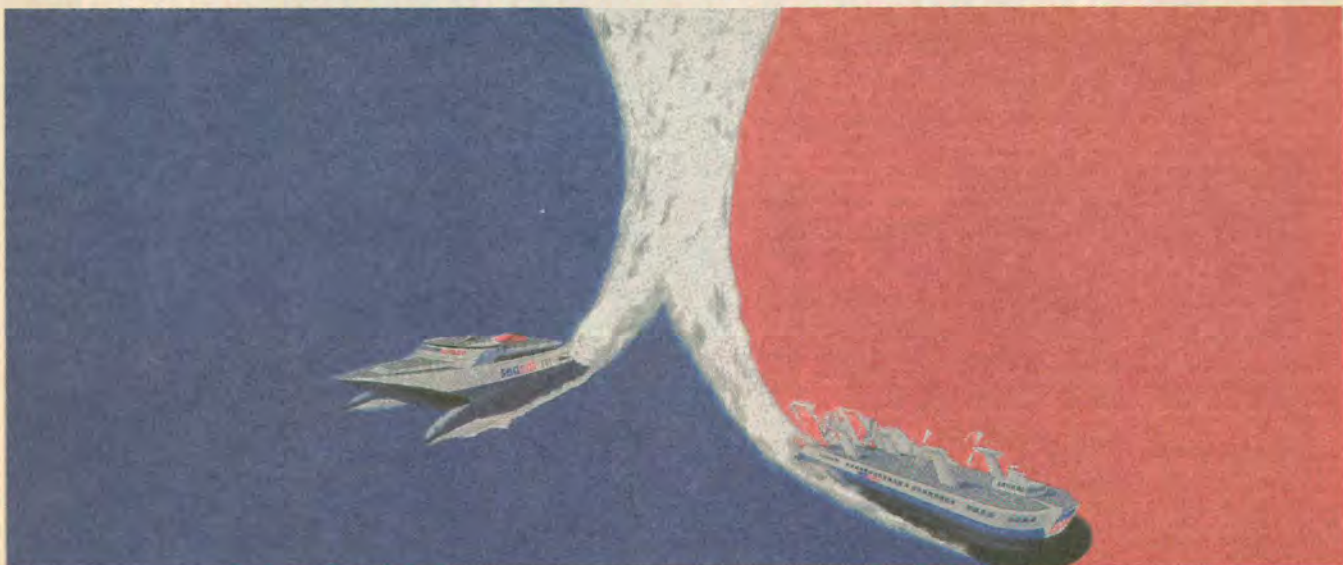
David Goodman, the Gloucester reader who put it forward, concludes: "My feeling is that a golden opportunity has been lost yet again on such an important and sensitive corner site betwixt the historic city centre and the regenerating Victorian dock area."

As much as active ugliness, it is this — an inability to grasp a prime opportunity when it is staring the designers in the face — that marks out both of these complexes for our Worst Building of 1995 award, with Leeds just beating Gloucester to the prized wooden spoon. We rest our case. □



Brick walls: Leeds magistrates' court, top, and Gloucester county and crown court. Photographs by Justin Slee, top, and Adrian Sherratt

BEFORE CROSSING, LOOK RIGHT THEN LEFT.



On the right is the Hovercraft. Dover to Calais in just 35 minutes.

It's still the fastest and most exciting way to take your car across the Channel.

While on the left is the stylish SeaCat.

Gliding between Folkestone and Boulogne in a mere 55 minutes. Whichever you choose, we'll wave you on board in minutes.

Then just sit back, relax and choose a drink or duty and tax free goods from the

comfort of your seat. You'll be there before you know it and then you can drive off to your holiday without any delay.

If you want to take your car across to France in speed and style, go with someone

who makes the others look pedestrian. Car and 5 to France from just £99* on the SeaCat or £149* on the Hovercraft.

For reservations or more information call 01304 240241 or see your travel agent.

FRANCE FROM £99*

HOVER SPEED
FAST FERRIES

FRANCE IN 35 MINUTES

*Subject to availability. All fares quoted are Apex. Bookings 50 days before departure.