

DESIGN

If you care about the buildings we live and work in, and about the towns and cities those buildings make, the Festival of Architecture in Norwich and Norfolk (FANN-XI) is for you. Charlie Watson meets Jon Greenfield, chair of the FANN-XI steering group

Research by Isambard Dexter and Daisy Nickerson

THE WORLD

Architecture is a strangely low-profile profession. Strangely, because we're surrounded by its products: our homes, schools, offices, factories, hospitals, airports and stadiums, and the spaces inside and around and between them. Although they affect us every day, determining the way we live and work and move, most of us know next to nothing about them. Why is the building you're in now that particular size and shape, for example? Who designed it? Could it have been imagined and built differently? Could it be improved now or in the future?

"We're taught at school to read a piece of literature and to analyse it and to be able to form an opinion about it," says Jon Greenfield, principal architect at NPS South East and chair of the FANN-XI steering group. "And maybe, if we're lucky, we're taught to look at a picture, a painting, and analyse it and formulate an opinion and talk about it. But nobody teaches us at school to look at the built environment and understand what we're looking at, to formulate an opinion and articulate a response. But we should! In fact, it might even be more important to do that than in literature. I think [for people] to be more visually educated is a big mission, actually, and if the festival can achieve that in a small way... Often if you ask people about a building, they say, 'Oh, I don't like it.' Well, why don't you like it? 'I just don't like it.' It's important to get people beyond that."



Above: Jim Stephenson's photograph of a Tayler and Green project in Loddon
Below: the award-winning Pennoyer Centre, Pulham St Mary

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A HOTBED OF IDEAS

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On that note, why not step outside and have a good look at the building you're in? See what you think. ■■■■

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FANN-XI HIGHLIGHTS

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was of this sort of dowdy, funny place with timber-framed buildings, when people wanted something Victorian and modern. I think that carried on really, and it's always surprising to me how after the war, when the city had been damaged but not as much as it seemed now, because it was really the post-war planning which took out huge areas of the city. Post-war redevelopment was probably more damaging to the city than anything that fell from the sky.

"The first desire of early modern architecture was to start a new history, a product of just wanting to get away from political and economic disasters of the past and start with a brave new world. [Whereas] we're now in a very different era, where people are much more comfortable with having something super-modern and of its time cohabiting with something very old and of another time. In the '50s and '60s and maybe even into the '70s, things were much more ideological."

But where, in the city centre at least, are the opportunities to build super-modern buildings to cohabit with the city's medieval glories? Haven't all the vacant sites been filled in over the last decade or two?

"Maybe the very central sites have buildings on them now," agrees Greenfield, "but there's a very close inner ring that still needs transforming, I think. A good example of transformation is the marketplace and the Forum. I was at the watercolour exhibition at the Tate recently and there's a watercolour of Norwich market, which doesn't look so very different from 200 to 250 years ago. There's something really timeless about it, but it's been updated recently. [Now] you've got a wonderful, powerful '30s building in City Hall right at the top of the hill, then a building that was added



Right: Snoring Barn, Hindringham, by Charles Emberson
Below: the Balancing Barn by Dutch architects MVRDV
Bottom: the Long House, Cley, by Hopkins Architects
Opposite page: Professor John Last, principal of NUCA



to it, the Forum, which has created spaces around it and brought so much street life to that area. I think there are just hundreds more opportunities like that in Norwich."

THE ROAD TO PECHA KUCHA

The various events during FANN-XI will both look at completed projects and reveal some of the opportunities. The Perspectives talks, for instance include Meredith Bowles of Cambridge-based Mole Architects on Alain de Botton's Living Architecture project (which offers 'holidays in modern architecture' through contemporary rental properties), with Patty Hopkins of Hopkins Architects, who will present the Long House, Cley, Living Architecture's only Norfolk project. Professor Alan Powers of the Twentieth Century Society will address Norfolk's architectural anti-heroes Tayler and Green, who built homes for Loddon Rural District Council from 1945 to 1975. Jonathan Smales, a former MD of Greenpeace UK, will focus on sustainable urbanism – how the design of towns and villages shapes our behaviour. Anthony Hudson will talk about his practice's recent Salvation Army headquarters building, and ask what makes a building special and unique to its setting. And Terry Hickman Smith of Wymondham-based architects Lucas Hickman Smith will present the award-winning Pennoyer Centre, Pulham St Mary.

For Greenfield, one of the most interesting events is Norfolk Art and Architecture, a series of six short →p22



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