



Critic's Choice

Frank Watson's photos reveal the character of the Thames Estuary, says Andrew Mead

The landscape of the Thames Estuary has evolved over centuries without anyone thinking twice about 'design'. Depending on where you stand, it can look like a traffic-dominated dystopia, a post-industrial wasteland, or a realm of sky and water that would delight a 19th-century Romantic. Few Thames Gateway developers have shown any sign that they appreciate its better features, but fortunately some other people do – I think particularly of the book by writer Ken Worpole and photographer Jason Orton, *350 Miles: An Essex Journey* (2005).

Now comes a London Festival of Architecture exhibition called Soundings from the Estuary, at the Novas Contemporary Urban Centre until 20 July (www.soundingsfromtheestuary.com). It's notable primarily for photographs by Frank Watson, which convey the multi-faceted character of the Thames-side landscape. Cylindrical storage tanks form a pale frieze on the horizon in one image; in another they almost fill the frame, but wild flowers flourish in the foreground. Power stations point tall chimneys skywards while birdwatchers peer through telescopic sights in terrain that's half-water, half-weed (see picture below). A mysterious chamber is earth-mounded to absorb explosions: this area speaks everywhere of its militarised past. The functioning and derelict sit side-by-side – and always the scene is changing with the motion of the tide. We must try to tread lightly here when the credit crunch is over.



This image Allies and Morrison's Highbury Square, two new housing blocks flanking the original Arsenal Stadium in north London



PAUL RIDDLE

EXHIBITION

The British Housing exhibition is an antidote to the 'carnavalesque' LFA, says Shumi Bose

Evolving Norms of British Housing, until 20 July at the RIBA, 66 Portland Place, London W1N 4AD

Amid some of the London Festival of Architecture's (LFA's) more carnivalesque events are pockets of activity that are firmly anchored to the ground. Evolving Norms of British Housing is one such show – a small exhibition of new housing design, showcasing 14 practices' recent contributions to this sector.

Curated by Matthew Lloyd of Matthew Lloyd Architects, Alex Ely and Michael Howe of mæ architects, Sam Price of engineer Price & Myers, and urban designer Mandar Puranik, a sense of peer appreciation and critique

permeates the show, lending the exhibition acuity. Broadly speaking, the schemes portrayed are modest in spirit; none seek to assert their own aesthetic individualism. Prosaic concerns and context shape the majority of designs. Most illustrate particular concerns for laconic contextuality, a flexibility, interspatial engagement and, most of all, a fashionable regard for free and unilateral access to outside space.

mæ contributes five housing typologies to the exhibition, which range from a five-bedroom detached house to a two-bedroom terrace. Though claiming to reference 19th-century American domestic architecture, a distinctly English feel is evoked by the graphics, which depict parapets overlooking cricket games and wildflower meadows. An even more bucolic resolve is held by DRDH Architects, with their pattern-book scheme derived from the notion of a village green. Learning from the 'anatomy' of a traditional English village, DRDH's plan focuses on the quality of relationships between the spaces enclosed and defined by the buildings.

In their humble sensitivity, some of the designs seem anthropomorphically communicative. Penoyre & Prasad's Elsdale Street scheme, part of the government's Rough Sleepers Initiative, presents a rounded brick corner which, like a solid and protective arm, nurtures an interior garden. Matthew Lloyd describes a Hawkins\Brown scheme as reassuring and untroubled. Others have perhaps allowed the recent economic tremors to consider building reuse: Tom Russell Architects, for example, has increased ceiling heights in its Milton Keynes development to accommodate future retail space.

The exhibition is accompanied by an excellent booklet. Essays from the curators illuminate their choices, providing a welcome level of analysis to this modest, unassuming show about unassuming architecture.

Resume: This show should be to the LFA as a strong black coffee is to a drunkard

LINCOLN DEGREE SHOW 2008

Ed Frith of Moving Architecture visits Lincoln School of Architecture's show

Lincoln School of Architecture end-of-year show, now closed, Architecture Building, Brayford Campus, Lincoln LN6 7TS

The School of Architecture at Lincoln (which relocated from Hull in 2003) has a rich tradition: Leslie Martin was its first head of school and Cho Padamsee introduced the country's first work-based learning in the '70s. I was unprepared for the slick new Brayford Pool campus, and for Rick Mather's School of Architecture building. Its vortex void sucked me up and spat me out into studios exhibiting lively student work, with projects ranging from exquisite Formalism to radical politics in urban planning, and with the laser-cutter producing everything from 1:1 studies of musical instruments to market landscapes.

Degree students playing hard included Matthew Rust with his birch-faced ply instrument and star student Mark King with his House for J Ballard (a character from the 1996 film *Crash*). King suspended a crashed car in the exhibition, alongside explorations

of impact sequence through drawing.

If Lincoln deepens its intellectual base, its attraction will continue to broaden.

Resume: Unlike its subject matter, Lincoln's show is no car crash

WELSH SCHOOL DEGREE SHOW 2008

Stephen Cairns reviews the Welsh School of Architecture's degree show

Welsh School of Architecture degree show, now closed, Bute Building, Cardiff University, CF10 3NB

Muted colours – sepia tones, watery blues, muddy stains – are punctuated with the default bright reds, blues and yellows of environmental modelling software at the Welsh School of Architecture's show. Drawings that register the marks of wear-and-tear on built fabrics also carry the hard calculations of lux and lumens.

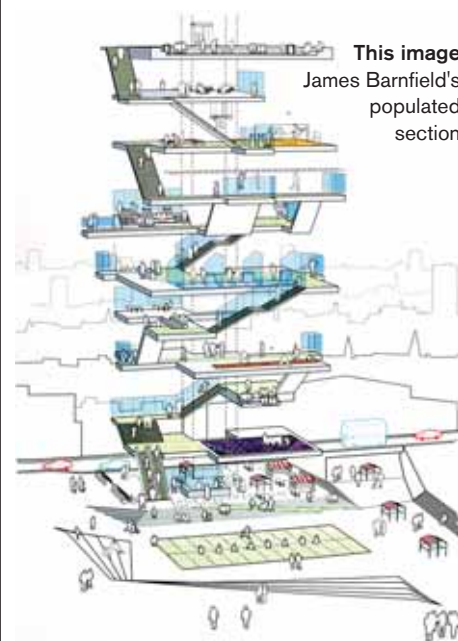
The relationship between the phenomenological and the quantitative is a tricky one, but is given a novel twist by a tight MArch (Part 2) structure that sees students completing their first year in practices around the country, and returning to Cardiff for the second year, in which they undertake an urban study before proceeding to a thesis project. Students negotiate this curriculum with evident

commitment. There is a strong sense of the experiential, and a revelling in the elements – storms, high tides, floods.

James Barnfield's nocturnal map of downtown Birmingham caught my eye, and his wonderful populated section (pictured below).

Stephen Cairns lectures in architectural design and theory at the University of Edinburgh

Resume: A Welsh rarebit of talent at the Cardiff show



This image James Barnfield's populated section

5 THINGS TO DO THIS WEEK

1 The Thames Estuary – A Sense of Place

A talk to accompany the Soundings from the Estuary exhibition (see *Critic's Choice*). 11 July, 6.30pm at the Tate Modern, Bankside, London SE1. To book a free ticket email info@soundingsfromtheestuary.com

2 Eco Machines

The Architectural Association's contribution to the National Architecture Student Festival. Until 30 July. More London Riverside, by City Hall, London SE1. www.lfa2008.org/students.php

3 Root Index

See this exhibition drawn from archive material, film footage and radio to celebrate 60 years of Plymouth's cultural life.

Until 7 September, Plymouth Arts Centre, 38 Looe Street, Plymouth, Devon PL4 0EB. www.plymouthartscentre.org

4 Sheffield Student Show

The BA and Masters architecture exhibition continues.

Until 25 July, Lower Ground Floor, The Arts Tower, University of Sheffield, S10 2TN. www.shef.ac.uk/architecture

5 SIX Student Awards for Architecture 2008

The best work from Scotland's six schools of architecture.

12 July-3 September, The Lighthouse, 11 Mitchell Lane, Glasgow G1 3NU. www.thelighthouse.co.uk