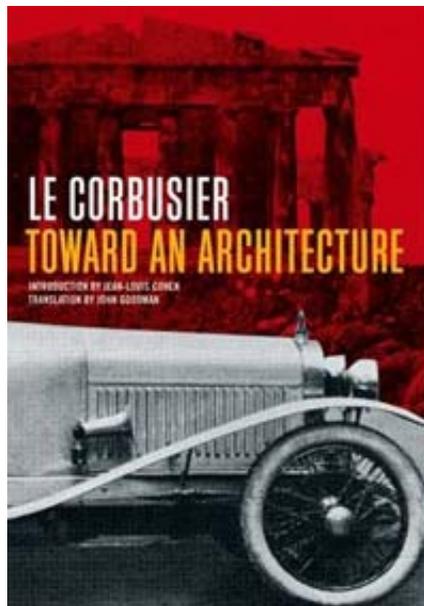


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## ARCHITECTS KNOW WHY?

But first, since I am going to be accused of being backward-looking and elitist, a potted history of architecture “Architecture has to do with the planning, designing and constructing form, space and ambience that reflect functional, technical, social, environmental, and aesthetic considerations. It requires the creative manipulation and coordination of material, technology, light and shadow. Architecture also encompasses the pragmatic aspects of realising buildings and structures, including scheduling, cost estimating and construction administration” - Wikipedia.

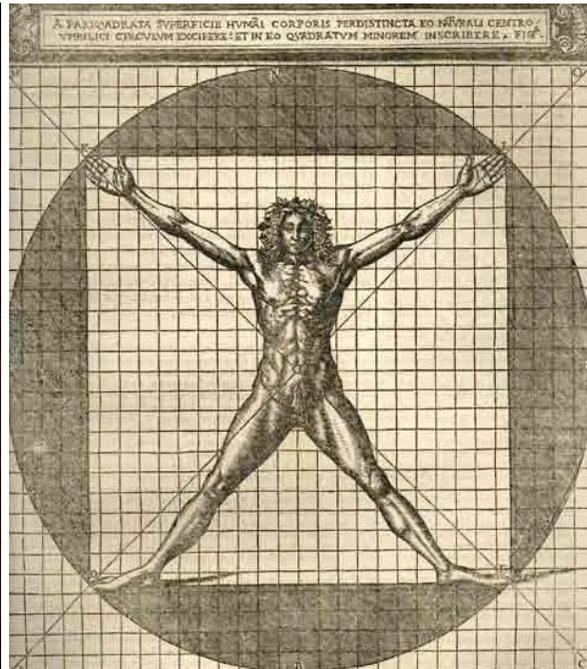
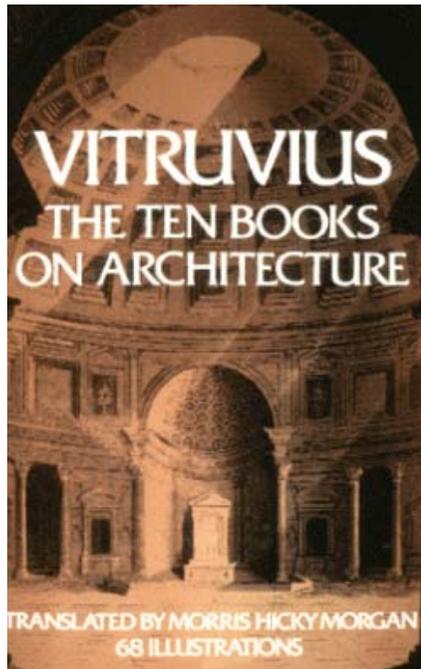
"You employ stone, wood, and concrete, and with these materials you build houses and palaces: that is construction. Ingenuity is at work. But suddenly you touch my heart, you do me good. I am happy and I say: This is beautiful. That is Architecture" – so wrote Le Corbusier in *Vers une Architecture*.



Going back a bit more, to the early 1st century CE to be precise, Vitruvius in *De architectura*, said: “a good building should satisfy the three principles of firmitas, utilitas, venustas, which roughly mean:

- Durability – it should stand up robustly and remain in good condition.
- Utility – it should be useful and function well for the people using it
- Beauty – it should delight people and raise their spirits.

According to Vitruvius, the architect should strive to fulfill each of these three attributes as well as possible.



*From De Architectura by Marcus Vitruvius*

During the Medieval period [guilds](#) were formed by craftsmen to organize their trade and written contracts have survived, particularly in relation to ecclesiastical buildings. The role of architect was usually one with that of master mason.

In Renaissance Europe, from about 1400 onwards, there was a revival of Classical learning which placed greater emphasis on the role of the individual in society than had been the case during the Medieval period. Buildings were ascribed to specific architects – Brunelleschi, Alberti, Michelangelo, Palladio – and the cult of the individual had begun. There was still no dividing line between artist, architect and engineer, or any of the related vocations.

A revival of the Classical style in architecture was accompanied by a burgeoning of science and engineering which affected the proportions and structure of buildings. At this stage, it was still possible for an artist to design a bridge as the level of structural calculations involved was within the scope of the generalist.

In the mid 19th Century Wren brought us innovation. Until then tradesmen built as they knew how, but Wren dared to experiment, building structural models to try out new ideas. Hampton Court famously fell down and its novel suspended floor had to be rethought on site. I believe it was Wren who brought us the need for Professional Indemnity Insurance. Architects have revelled in innovation ever since.



*Wren introduced innovation: Hampton Court*

*With the emergence of new materials and technology, architecture and [engineering](#) began to diverge, and the architect began to concentrate on [aesthetics](#) and the humanist aspects, sometimes at the expense of technical aspects of building design.*

Around the turn of the 20th century, a general dissatisfaction with the emphasis on revivalist architecture and elaborate decoration gave rise to the precursors of Modern Architecture. (Read Peter Rayner-Banham!)

When [Modern architecture](#) was first practiced, it was an [avant-garde](#) movement with moral, philosophical, and aesthetic underpinnings. Immediately after [World War I](#), pioneering modernist architects sought to develop a completely new style appropriate for a new post-war social and economic order, focused on meeting the needs of the middle and working classes. They rejected the architectural practice of the academic refinement of historical styles which served the rapidly declining aristocratic order. The approach of the Modernist architects was to reduce buildings to pure forms, removing historical references and ornament in favor of functionalist details.

After WWII and with the Welfare State in the UK the profession rapidly expanded and was largely municipalised. Most architects were employed by government and engaged in building schools, housing, new towns and hospitals. This domination led in the 70s to the formation of the ACA by then recent president of the RIBA Eric Lyons and others as a splinter group representing the interests of the small minority of architects in private practice.

The Design Methodology Movement involving people such as [Christopher Alexander](#) started searching for more people-oriented designs. Extensive studies on areas such as behavioural, environmental, and social sciences were done and started informing the design process. As the complexity of buildings began to increase (in terms of structural systems, services, energy and technologies), architecture started becoming more multi-disciplinary and has fractured with allied professions into specialisms. Architecture today usually requires a team of specialist professionals, with the architect usually the team leader.

Wikipedia observes that from the 1980s and into the new millennium, the field of architecture saw the rise of specialisations for each project type, technological expertise or project delivery methods. In addition, there has been an increased separation of the 'design' architect from the 'project' architect. The main reason for the shift is because architectural processes for any large building have become increasingly complicated, involving preliminary studies of such matters as durability, sustainability, quality, money, and compliance with local laws. A large structure can no longer be the design of one person but must be the work of many. New technical concerns for sustainability and energy and their manifestation in our town planning system continue this trend today alongside the ever more sophisticated construction techniques needed to fulfill increasingly complex and ambitious building projects.

Interesting that the client gets no mention. History lesson over.

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It is many years since, as RIBA vice-president of Marketing, I found myself lunching at the Savoy as a guest of the Aluminium Windows Association. At my table I was overwhelmingly outnumbered by contractors and subcontractors – the boss of Schüco Windows, Laing Construction and all the rest. They ganged-up on me, demanding to know why we architects were wingeing about having to win work by fee bidding when we spent our days putting all of them through the competitive tendering process. What made us so different, they chorused.

What we do is fundamentally different I responded.

Oh Yeah! – how so? they demanded to know.

I put it to them that they all could answer the question **How?** How to fabricate a curtain wall to meet a performance specification, how to manage a site to achieve a programme, how to supply a traction lift, and that no architect could do these things. But the question they couldn't answer, and which only the architect

can is: **Why?** Why aluminium frames and not timber or steel? Why build to this height on this part of the site? Why electric traction and not hydraulic lifts?

He's got a point, they muttered.

All the more so, given that when the architect gets hired, the client has little idea of what it is he is going to build –sometimes whether he really needs to build at all. There is rarely a well defined brief when the client first calls on his architect, and it is the architect who often takes the lead in articulating the client's objectives. He evolves options which have to take account of the client's stated requirements, a site analysis, a development appraisal, town planning policies, sustainability and building regulation constraints, amongst many others. Not surprising bearing in mind that the majority of clients only build once in both the commercial and the domestic worlds.

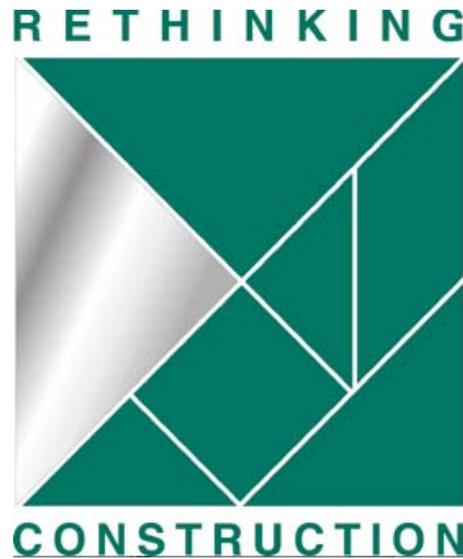
With the end product so ill-defined is it surprising that the same often goes for the scope of the service which is to be required?

At the early stage in the game, is the difference between say 5.8 and 6.2 per cent of the ultimate construction cost (a reasonable fee for the 'Normal Service' for a large new building) really the determining factor in the choice of which architect is likely to get the client the building he needs?

David may have silenced Goliath that day, but the argument still rumbles on and has subsequently reached new heights (or lows!).

In 1994 the DTI was persuaded that the design and production of the building should be integrated. A report *Constructing the Team* by Sir Michael Latham advised that a package deal where the main contractor would be in total control was the answer. His report failed to achieve the desired effect so it was followed in 1999 by *Rethinking Construction*, a report by Sir John Egan. This promoted partnering and based its case on the

proposition that the established procedure whereby architects provided the drawings and specifications, invited tenders and awarded contracts, was too confrontational. Owing to the lack of response which this drew, *Rethinking Construction* had to be relaunched as *Accelerating Change*.



*Accelerating Change* suggested that the management of a contract should be through a cluster of all parties working together from day one. In 2001 the DTI issued a guidance note advising clients to assemble the integrated team before the design of the building was started – thus promoting for the public sector something which is never likely to be accepted in the private sector. “Putting the client as head of the supply chain is quite a wheeze”, said one commentator: “Having everyone participate in the design is clearly a bureaucratic approach: imagine the time executives will need to spend in meetings which will have to be paid for by the client”.

No wonder the scheme needed to be launched three times.

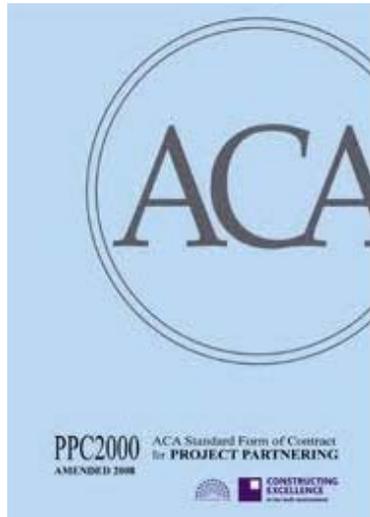
In 2002 the chief executive of NHS Estates claimed that the failure of UK architects to adapt to the PFI, and the successes of US architects here, meant that hospitals were too deep and lacked natural light. He even suggested that these architects were breaching their duty of care by submitting to cost pressures and designing hospitals with too little room. He told *BD*: If you are an architect you have a duty of care to ensure you design a building that is fit for purpose... It is getting to the point where buildings become inoperable. This despite the near certainty that the PFI architects he was referring to had not breached any contractual duty.

The same year the Office of Government Commerce published a joint report with CABI saying that overall standards of design in new public buildings, including schools and hospitals, must improve. It made eleven recommendations for change which included: clear procedures to ensure that projects which are not of an acceptable level of design quality will no longer receive funding – the adoption of new minimum design standards – giving adequate weighting to the quality of design in making decisions as to which projects to select from the private sector – building in safeguards to ensure that public sector clients do not try to build too many projects too quickly using a single contractual team.

Does all this sound familiar?

In the report's foreword the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury wrote "Good design is integral to delivery of best value. However we are not yet achieving consistently the design standards that the Prime Minister called for. We have concerns about the capabilities of all levels of government to act as intelligent customers and the recommendations reinforce the work that OGC and CABI are doing to redress this." Sir Stuart Lipton, then the first Chairman of CABI, said "This report shows that Government has accepted that all forms of procurement processes are not delivering high quality buildings on a consistent basis. These recommendations are a call for action across the public sector. We need to deliver a step change in quality in our new public buildings or we will be failing communities across the UK".

But I think they were all missing the point. What is the status given to the designer in the processes they are criticising? You may have guessed that I am a firm believer in the independent professional role in carrying out the responsibility of the architect and you may accuse me of being a bit old-fashioned in that. I also have to tread with care, being immediate past president of the ACA whose status has been transformed by the astounding success of our suite of partnering contracts 'PPC 2000'.



Oddly, you may think, I am a believer in partnering, though I am more convinced of the organic rather than the GM or forced variety. When the client or customer has enough confidence in you or your firm to hire you again – that I call partnering. In my view that is not the same as tendering for a partnering relationship – just look at what happened to many of those who fell for that game when first tried by John Egan's BAA and who then got de-listed from the 'framework' with not a job for their costly trouble. (It was Egan's Jaguar car plant which was described by Ford after they bought it as "the worst they had seen outside the Soviet Union!")

Writing in *Building*, Tony Bingham has argued that partnership and trust are great, but that's not what contracts are there to promote. He offered the following thoughts. "The idea that a spirit of trust and co-operation can be contractually embodied in a building contract is a non-starter. – The threat of litigation is effective for improving the output of the construction process. – The purpose of a contract is to enable parties to simultaneously achieve their private ends. This is only the case if the law enforces their promises. A contract that aims to avoid the courts is a contradiction. – A contract that has the objectives of flexibility and clarity is doubtful. When drafting contracts, flexibility is not compatible with fairness. – Contracts need to be, to some extent, adversarial and the interpretation of them should not rely too much on good relations continuing through the life of a project. – A breach of contract that meets with a robust contractual remedy gives businesses confidence that their interests will be protected by a court.

I would just make the observation that the better the form of contract the fewer will be the disputes which arise under it. Compare the still popular decades-old ACA building agreement with NO case law to its name with the plethora of cases required to keep the JCT forms going! I believe the PPC2000 suite has a similar good record.

In 1992 I wrote a chapter in the beautiful book *Century Tower, Foster Associates build in Japan*. It was headed "Conflict and Harmony" and compares Japanese and Western ways of building. That £60m project was built by Obayashi Corporation using the standard four-page Japanese private sector contract. Its opening words are "The owner and the contractor shall perform this contract sincerely through co-operation, good faith and equality".



*Foster's Century Tower, Tokyo*

This was evidenced by there being only three equal payments: one on signature, one on topping-out and the third on handover. No need for a quantity surveyor there then. As Fosters' team discovered, partnering was so deeply engrained in the Japanese system that Obayashi would only work, for example, with one lift manufacturer, since that was their company tradition. The outcome was successful and honourable but at what cost? I think the current state of the Japanese economy gives us an indication of that. If we conducted contracts in that manner they would be considered thoroughly corrupt.

The Latham-Egan agenda for the contractual process has a limitation in its scope which all the papers and discussions seem to neglect: that, as I have already noted, the great majority of clients build just once. Where there is repeat work it is obviously good business for all concerned that partnering relationships should evolve. This is as true for the public sector, and there is no denying that government needs to emulate the procurement efficiencies possible in the private sector.

In the 1970s I developed a series for *Building* magazine called *Building On Site*. The editor's idea was that, since in those days a journalist would never be allowed near a construction site, an architect might just be trusted enough to be able to get the story of the process while it was still under way. I certainly learned a lot!

As well as visiting construction sites like Lloyd's and the Hong Kong Bank, I was allowed to write up zany projects for the summer silly seasons and wrote, for example, about building oil rig modules in Lowestoft and the sets for Star Wars. On that one I interviewed the set designer John Barry at Pinewood. I asked him to explain the management structure for a movie project. Simple he said. "At the top you have a producer and a director. Think of them as the husband and the wife: he gets the money and she spends it, maintaining a dynamic tension all the while".

In our game we have the client (reinforced maybe by a quantity surveyor and project manager) and the architect (with his team of consultants) – the **How Much?** and the **What?** – implemented by a vast and talented cast of contractors, subcontractors and specialists: **The How to.**

That's show business.

Paul Finch writing of one of the RIBA's reports on the future of the profession, says they got it wrong. "Is it true for instance", he asks, "that clients in general wish to have all their professional services in relation to buildings supplied by one mega-organisation? In general, no. Clients are not wild about putting all their eggs in one basket; if they were, the multi-discipline practices, like Arup Associates, would have wiped everyone else out years ago.

"Do most clients want to do business with very large organisations? Again the answer must be no, though some do." "If from the client's side, if your main interest is in single point responsibility, then the mega-firm might look like a good bet. It is a short step to think that it would be even better if the contractor owned all

the professionals... But does it work in practice? No. And the reason is: client attitude to architects and what they provide.”

“I can’t help noticing that when developers extend their homes, or have new ones built, these most hard-headed of people a) use architects and b) tend to use the sort of practices that RIBA reports always say won’t be with us much longer. They must know something the RIBA has missed”.

Paul concluded: “The question for the architectural profession and its institutions, including the schools, is how to ensure that architects design in the fullest sense of that word. That is to say synthesise the myriad elements in any programme... These include physical and historical context, cost, construction, delivery, energy use and longevity. Architects are more than capable of taking this on”, he says, “ provided they have the knowledge and appetite to focus on client requirements (including the public interest)”.

John Assael, ACA and RIBA Council member, writing in RIBA Journal last year, asks whether the future of practice requires us to specialise or to diversify. He is exactly on the point when he says “The paradox is that we need both to specialise and remain generalists”. He is reluctant to get accredited as a specialist relying instead on his own reputation as an architect. Vitruvius argued that the architects’ education should be general. As Ed Hollis in *BD* has written “We aren’t and shouldn’t be specialists. It is our ability to think socially, spatially and strategically that makes us valuable. Lawyers and GPs are (or increasingly not, sadly) able to articulate their skills as renaissance men. Why can’t we?”

The whole strength of our education is as generalist problem-solvers: we take the holistic view in a world overloaded with blinkered specialists. (Don’t get me onto the medical profession!). As a result we can be particularly effective as specialists since we see what we are doing within the bigger context. The key is not to lose sight of this advantage.

# One Marylebone

A new future for Sir John Soane's Holy Trinity



*Soane's Holy Trinity: BWCP*

I have found myself working on two grade 1 former churches recently, one by Sir John Soane. I applied my generalist skills as an architect and a town planner and relied on real specialists – a surveyor of the church fabric and an architectural historian. I got the jobs because I had worked with the client on other quite different projects over the years – The Sanctuary day spa in Covent Garden and the Aveda lifestyle stores amongst others – and he too saw the importance of the big picture: a consultant who could work with him to help achieve his objectives with the buildings.



*AVEDA in High Holborn*

The recent exemplary reworking of St Martin in the Field was by Eric Parry. After a failed attempt to achieve an acceptable scheme using architects with church experience, a new selection was made on the premise that they were looking for a top architect who did not need to have such experience.

In writing about the Lloyd's building I interviewed Courtney Blackmore the client representative. The shortlist of architects included multi-national mega-firms and Richard Rogers Partnership. Courtney told me that one reason they chose Rogers was that they only had eight people at the time and would give their all to the project, while he expected the others, if they won, to issue a press release and doubted he would ever see a partner again!

Big is not always beautiful. Despite the push coming out of the RIBA in recent years to merge and grow smaller practices, I note their Richard Brindley saying a year ago that larger practices had been hardest hit by the drop off in both public sector and commercial work. Lucky that 85 per cent of practices have fewer than ten staff then. (Recessions invariably spawn many new small practices and numbers employed by all but a few dozen large ones are not many.)

Sunand Prasad has said that fully 50 per cent of architects' income is paid by contractors! Are these architects providing a professional service I wonder? Do they have the ear of the client or the end users of the buildings or are they just a subcontractor doing a task for a payment?

I accept that we are in a changing world, that there are specialist, partial and new services open to architects to provide, far more than just the old 'Normal Service', and scope to reclaim lost territory from planning consultancies, project managers and so on – maybe helped by BIM – Building Information Modelling – if we take the lead on that.

The ACA is in draft with an architect-led construction management appointment agreement and a CM partnering contract under PPC 2000 to fit with it. In Paul Morrell's terms, where he claims that over 80 per cent of the construction industry's value is created 'on the drawing board', this will be one way of reasserting our presently lack-lustre leadership with more clients.

Paul also said, rather graphically, that we were pissing away our value because we are not team players. I fear he meant we should dumb down, get better at the How-to and forget our old leadership role in answering the Why? Forget the fancy stuff and be one of the boys!



*A Paul Morrell holiday snap*

Nevertheless we come back to the size of the profession and its relatively pathetic average incomes. A recent salary survey in *Building* suggests architects are paid only around £30,000 pa with some regional variation. This is less than surveyors, engineers and all the rest. Perhaps it is, as Russ Randall writing in *BD* says “After decades of refusing to acknowledge the economics we should at last accept that we need a drastic reduction in numbers. This could be achieved by raising the entry and qualification levels. The resultant qualifiers might

then enjoy the high levels of pay available in some other professions instead of competing with one another on price for the limited work available”.

He has a good point: supply and demand. However, I believe as I have said that the key is the role and the client relationship rather than the qualification. Define this properly and you will find that only a few thousand RIBA members have the professional relationship with their clients which (for me) defines an architect. And the available work is not limited except by us: let's stop conceding aspects of our once holistic service to niche playing 'specialists' – planning consultants, cost consultants, project managers – what next? – neighbourhood planners?

It's time to get a grip, take the lead and be honest about who in the profession really is an architect.

To seek to integrate design into the construction process to the extent that it becomes a minor commodity rather than a detached professional service is to reduce the architect to the role of an extra. The price for that, as the NHS Estate realised, is that there is nobody to direct the picture and have the answers to the questions:  
**Why?**

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