

CONCRETE QUARTERLY

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LAUNCHING IN STYLE

Make reinvents the office – with exposed concrete, woven brick and a Soviet missile

SHAPE-SHIFTER

Herzog & de Meuron lands a mysterious object in the heart of historic Oxford

A MEETING WITH M

Paul Monaghan of Stirling winner AHMM on how the road to success was paved with concrete



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AGENDA



Guy Thompson

Head of architecture, housing and sustainability, The Concrete Centre

Known unknowns

Of the many specialist disciplines involved in shaping the built environment, one that is sadly lacking is clairvoyance. Sustainable design increasingly encompasses the whole-life impacts of buildings, which presents the impossible challenge of foreseeing what a building may have to contend with over its lifespan, and how it can be designed for a future that may look very different from today while meeting the demands of now.

One answer will surely be greater reuse and refurbishment compared to new build. Buildings do become outdated and replacement is an inevitable part of progress. But the sums are changing. It is far less carbon-intensive to reuse elements of buildings such as structure and foundations than to demolish and start again – a point that enlightened clients are just beginning to take on board. These elements can, in any case, last much longer than the commonly used 60-year study period, raising the question as to whether this remains a valid approach. Yes, 60 years is ambitious for some buildings, but it is far too short for others, especially housing – and half the typical span used for infrastructure such as bridges.

One architect that has successfully challenged perceptions over several decades is AHMM – the practice's Paul Monaghan offers some interesting insights on page 15, and will be speaking at The Concrete Centre's Cafe Concrete event on 18 May (see opposite). Unfortunately few clients can define their requirements as to the lifetime of a building, beyond the short-term or the point of sale. Notable exceptions to short-termism are the hallowed universities of Oxford and Cambridge, whose colleges have always been built not for five or 50 years, but hundreds – the Blavatnik School of Government in Oxford (page 4) exemplifies this continuing approach, a durable concrete shell that provides adaptable spaces within.

As teams wrestle with the problems of reusing building structures, it may cause them to think more seriously about how new buildings can be designed to be repurposed in the future. Answering that question may hold the key to designing truly sustainable buildings – and is perhaps as close to clairvoyance as we can hope to get.

YES, 60 YEARS IS AMBITIOUS FOR SOME BUILDINGS, BUT IT IS FAR TOO SHORT FOR OTHERS

ZAHA HADID: AHEAD OF THE CURVE

Few architects have graced the pages of Concrete Quarterly more often over the past decade than Zaha Hadid, who died suddenly in March. "But then few have done more to push concrete to the limits," writes This is Concrete blogger Nick Jones, "showing what often seemed like wilful disregard for the laws of gravity and the sound sleep of structural engineers." Since the extraordinary Phaeno Science Centre in Germany in issue 208, CQ's writers have struggled to find the words for exhibition spaces that "melted down", components that were both and neither walls and floors, surfaces that curve in two or even three dimensions. There will doubtless be more from ZHA in these pages. "In fact, the new ferry port in Salerno is surely a contender for the next issue ..."

Join the debate at www.thisisconcrete.co.uk



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VEIN GLORIOUS

Pamela Buxton finds out why a French architect took a splatter gun to the facade of his new music school

For two months, artists Max Coulon and Gabriel Khokha threw paint at the pristine concrete surfaces of the newly completed Henri Dutilleux Conservatoire of Music, Dance and Dramatic Arts in Belfort, north-east France.

This was no act of vandalism. Instead it is an entirely deliberate marbled effect conceived to enhance the monolithic form of the 3,895m² building. The conservatoire contains 36 classrooms as well as rehearsal rooms, drama studios, a library, amphitheatre and auditorium.

Architect Dominique Coulon & Associés had the idea for a surface embellishment to the concrete structure quite late in the design process. "The building backs onto woodland, and we felt it was a good idea to offer a texture that reflected that. The veins can be seen as tree branches or the veins found in natural stone," says Dominique Coulon, adding that the design was inspired by the paintings of Jackson Pollock. "We were looking for a texture in keeping with the presence of the concrete which would function as a filter."

The architects wanted the building to appear enigmatic. This explains its largely insular form – only the cantilevered dance room offers extensive views in and addresses the town's monumental Belfort Lion sculpture on the hillside opposite by Statue of Liberty sculptor Frédéric Bartholdi.

The artwork accentuates this sense of otherness,

covering all surfaces except those "hollowed out" of the building mass. "We wanted to emphasise the singularity of the building," says Coulon. "This strange texture raises questions. The building takes on an atypical character in relation to its environment."

The artists worked directly onto the concrete structural walls, which were cast in situ using metal formwork panels with lengths of 240cm. It was the first time that they had attempted such a work on a building and, unlike Pollock, they had the added difficulty of working on vertical surfaces and even undersides. They practised the splattered paint effects on derelict industrial buildings and made their own tools in order to achieve the right density of paint. The final work was carried out from a mobile cradle using a light and dark shade of blue, the two lines of paint splatters intertwining to produce a circular movement.

In the courtyard at the heart of the building, the walls were given a "negative drip" of white on a black background. According to the architect, this reversal of the treatment adds drama to the space and is the ultimate expression of density.

Internally, the concrete walls, floor and staircase of the entrance hall and circulation areas are left unadorned due to their "excellent texture", says Coulon, with no treatment other than a dust protection system.

PROJECT TEAM

Architect Dominique Coulon & Associés
Structural engineer Batiserf Ingénierie
Concrete contractor Albizzati Père & Fils

ABOVE The veined effect covers all external surfaces, and is reversed in the courtyard

RIGHT AND BELOW Inside, the concrete walls and soffits are left exposed

