

Introduction

Forget politics, let's get passionate about architecture,' this year's RIBA National and EU Awards seem to be saying. The judges' citations are not short on praise for ecological merit, responsibly low-cost profiles for certain types of work, catalysts for regeneration and big urban ideas. But, whether or not you buy architecture as an art which is political, and even if it were possible to absolve individual guilt for past negligence, social concerns this year are eclipsed by the sheer quality and creative passion of the award-winners.

There is an unusually hefty phalanx of respectable blockbusters, which includes McAslan + Partners' urbanistic King's Cross Station redevelopment, Renzo Piano Building Workshop's regal, enigmatic London Bridge Tower (The Shard, *pictured*), Hopkins Architects' commanding Brent Civic Centre and O'Donnell + Tuomey's uniquely Irish marriage of monument and text in its LSE student centre. There are also moments of pure tectonic ecstasy, such as David Chipperfield Architects' historicising One Pancras Square Grecian commercial palazzo, which is hauntingly rational, despite its cosmetic cast iron columns; Zaha Hadid Architects' formally sublime and technically virtuosic London Aquatics Centre; and Foster + Partners' otherworldly Marseille Vieux Port (*pictured*), like a chance encounter between Mies van der Rohe and Superstudio. This passion for quality and craftsmanship, generally expressed in sober rectilinear geometry, filters through to every

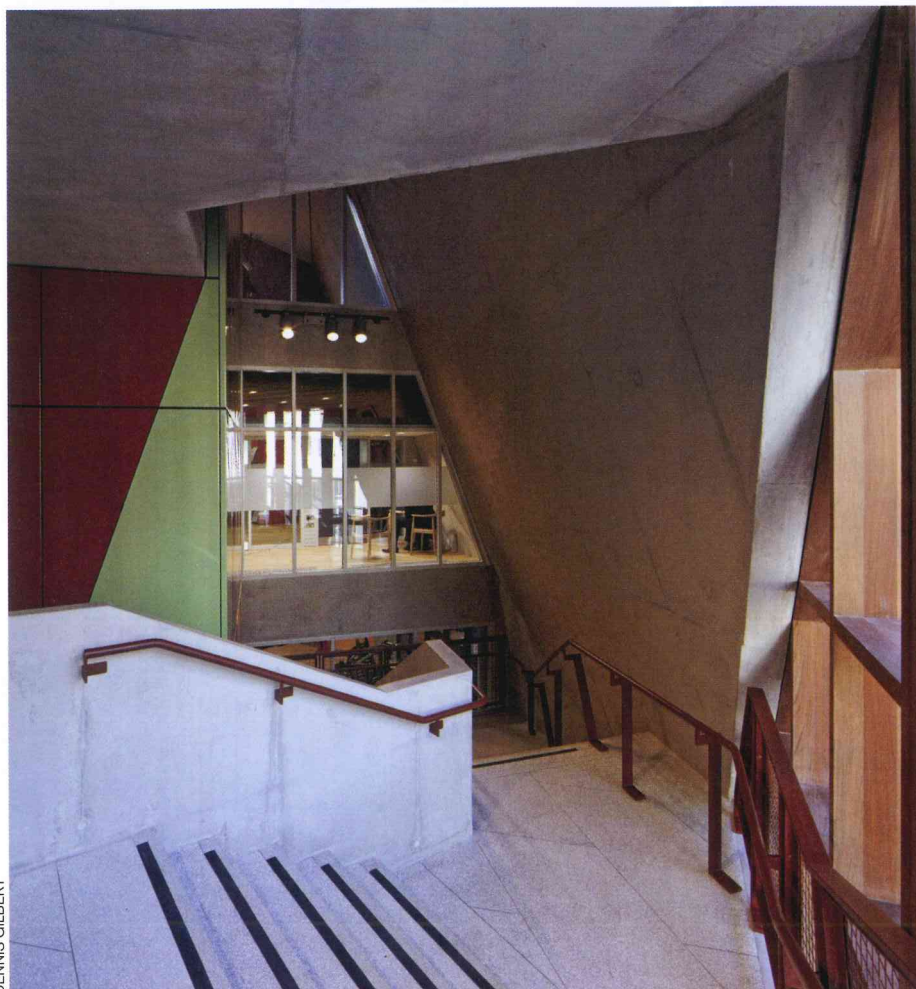
level, from Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands' JW3 and Chipperfield's ode to concrete in Berlin's Joachimstrasse to subtle work in more low-key traditional idioms and retrofits, such as Long & Kentish's featherlight-touch Porthmeor Artists Studios and Fishermen's Cellars.

No healthcare projects won National Awards this year, and less than half as many schools as in 2013; nor was the recent escalation in housing work matched by recognition of this building type.

On the other hand, nearly a third of the award-winners are public projects. So the political with a small 'p', or, as I prefer to call it, social merit, may yet be recognised in this year's Stirling shortlist, which will surely be fiendishly difficult to agree. There's also a 25 per cent increase in the proportion of London projects in this year's list of National Awards, which is a frank register of where the quality is.

The judges' citations, which accompany the photographs of each project, are long on positive appreciation and short on judicious faint praise. As in previous years, we've grouped the award winners according to use groups. We have fewer use types this year: some earned little or no recognition by the judges and, in order to beef up housing, we've added two student accommodation projects that ordinarily would have been classed as 'campus'. The introductions to the sections for each use type have been written by authorities in these areas and this year the EU Award winners are grouped in a separate section.

Felix Mara



DENNIS GILBERT

Saw Swee Hock Student Centre, London School of Economics
O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects

An object lesson in mobilising limitations of a site into a surprising and original building (*above*). A building like this requires a high degree of craftsmanship and care, and one feels this was achieved through the sheer willpower of the architects. It has a striking appearance while at the same time fitting happily into its context. Similarly, it has a complex and unusual plan form that accommodates functions with ease. (AJ 28.02.14)

Client · LSE Estates Division
 Contractor · Geoffrey Osborne
 Contract value · £24.1 million
 Gross internal area · 6,100m²
 Region · London West

Manchester School of Art
Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios

This major refurbishment and extension (*top right*) has been executed with great skill. Design excellence is coupled with the brief of a visionary client to break down traditional art and design units, encouraging staff and students to work together and explore common ground. The 'vertical gallery' enables students and visitors to perambulate up gently rising flying staircases. This is a building where the exploration of design and creativity will flourish. (AJ 29.11.13)

Client · Manchester Metropolitan University
 Contractor · Morgan Sindall
 Contract value · £23.6 million
 Gross internal area · 17,320m²
 Region · North West



HUFTON + CROW



NICK GUITTRIDGE

Rambert, South Bank, London
Allies and Morrison

Rambert's new home (*above*) will eventually form part of a terrace as dictated by Coin Street Community Builders' master-plan. Its dance studio spaces, three of them double-height, are arranged on a split level to the front and back of a central zone, the upper two floors of which contain an external courtyard. The jury was impressed by the seemingly effortless crispness of the detailing and deep attention to dancers' needs within ancillary areas, both achieved within a surprisingly low budget.

Client · Rambert
 Contractor · Vinci Construction UK
 Contract value · Undisclosed
 Gross internal area · 3,465m²
 Region · London South