



Foreword by Sir Peter Cook

Ken Powell sums up so well the very particular way in which the London office of HOK makes its own very particular trajectory: one that gives reference to its origins as a firm, yet must exist within a dense architectural milieu. It is as a ship making its own way down a busy sea-lane, in touch with the rest of the fleet but negotiating tricky tides and waters. Skilful piloting and a well-balanced crew are essential.

The pilot has surely been Larry Malcic, who has gained the confidence of the British by, in certain senses, becoming very much like them: sensing the ebbs and flows as much as charting them. Dealing with the wide mixture of cultures and talents on board. Encouraging both the confident and the shy amongst his crew with equal respect.

Yet in three years as an ‘insider/ outsider’ to the office, I have observed an unexpectedly valuable contingent of architects who really understand the culture of buildings – their fabric and nuances – and then respond in the most sensitive ways: calmly and without a mawkish over-valuation of the second-rate just because it is old. As a conspicuous ‘futurist’ it may seem odd that I single out the conservation element of HOK for special praise. Watching it at work, listening to its processes as it sets forth on an analysis of a building, a remnant or a site and developing a strategy of replacement, I find myself once again delighted to be in the role of a student of architecture.

London is a deceptive city: though apparently intact, it is far from homogeneous and it has flourished through an almost impossible collage of interventions and oddly interpreted dreams. Rarely are any of these sustained for more than half a block, and some of the best architectural ideas occur behind the façade, in the courtyard or round the back somewhere. At best, that same ingenuity and application of nuance can be applied to new building, so looking through this book I commend to you the careful corner, the charmed recess, the tucking and folding of surface, the accumulation of planes.

In those same three years there have been intriguing changes to the architectural community of London and to the ways in which it can apply itself to its task. The HOK office reflects this: no longer an Anglo-American set-up, any team may be made up of architects from every continent, educated in any of a hundred universities. Yet the Pole and the Malaysian, the Yorkshireman and the Sikh lady will probably have been to the same lectures and be referring to the same details. London architecture is part of world architecture. The computer homogenizes, the approaches to the tasks are hybrid and are then subjected to the regular occasions upon which Jan Pietrzak and I join Larry for the reviews. Not every office in London would submit to such interference, but not every office in London has such thoroughness either.

The relationship of the work to the waves of fashion and public utterance is a subtle one. I am not sure that

the office would really relish making an ‘icon’ building, for such things usually emanate from a bloody-minded position that deliberately bypasses the world of nuance and assimilation. Similarly, I am intrigued by its relationship to ‘High Tech’ – which has been the most successful British mannerism in recent years. The detailing that it has generated has become, effectively, part of our vernacular, with HOK’s take on it best seen in the Darwin Centre at the Natural History Museum. It is a rich and dense technology that parallels the intrigue with working parts and the lacework of surface that inspired the High Victorian context of South Kensington, in which this new piece finds itself.

Forty Grosvenor Place is another instance of technical architecture being enjoyed: particularly in the contained territory. HOK’s work is often at pains not to jar the behaviour of the street and much time and discussion lies behind the circumspection of its architecture. Pushing this all forward is the very active transportation group who get in there amongst state-of-the-art working parts and gizmos that surreptitiously affect our attitude towards fabric and the new vocabulary of architecture. Parametric formulation and the soft territory between digital drawing, digital assessment of criteria and simulation all parallel the new vocabulary with a new methodology.

Finally, one can observe that the new, young, multicultural crew bring an intriguing cross-current of influence into our English tradition of good behaviour

at the front and fun and games at the back, and I observe that Malcic is also intrigued by this and well able to absorb the challenge.

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