

# Comment by Justin Bere

## Building Design, New Architects

### 16 February 2001

We were first involved with the Architecture Foundation through the publication *New Architects*, published in 1998. As a fledgling practice, we had just reached that magic three years lifespan that is widely regarded as a benchmark. If you last three years you're probably a survivor.

During that time we developed our approach to building, and it was naturally pleasing that this was recognised by the AF. In the period following the publication, we felt an increased responsibility to continue to develop our own approach.

For us, the book was not a vehicle to go asking for bigger projects, and it was important not to be blinded by our own hype. It was certainly a boost to receive some praise but important not to be overwhelmed by it.

When clients referred to the book, it helped to establish a good foundation for our relationship. However, it is most important to work with clients who really understand and trust you, and for this there's nothing like personal referrals, which is where most of our work comes from.

It was particularly exciting, however, to receive three invitations to limited competitions for public buildings, directly from the book. We were second in two of these so the financial costs were forgotten.

Those who were selected in the first *New Architects* and those who will be selected in the coming weeks for the next edition, will know that with the honour comes the extra burden of responsibility to uphold the aims of the foundation.

What are these aims?

1. To encourage public participation, education and debate on the design, planning and sustainability of our cities.
2. To emphasise the importance of and to explore ways of humanising the public domain.

3. To celebrate the work of emerging talent and established practices.

The challenge to those who are no longer "new" is to continue to live up to (1) and (2) by contributing charitably to the wider community and to remain engaged with the foundation. The challenge to those who succeed in being selected for the second edition of *New Architects* is to be prepared to give as well as receive.

If you're thinking of entering for selection, but may feel, modestly, that you're being a bit presumptuous, you're probably exactly the kind of individual or small practice that should be entering.

Justin Bere is the director of Bere Architects.

At night the notion of invisibility is turned on its head as a clever lighting system, incorporated into the columns by means of stainless steel lighting rods, transfigure them into glittering illuminated sculptures and the room into a habitable piece of art. A purpose-built circular island unit in glass and aluminium has lights built into its central core, providing extra drama as well as unexpectedly useful spot for keeping the vegetables warm during kitchen suppers. Blinds can be fitted for privacy or to avoid overheating in a south- or west-facing room. In this case, the aspect is north and east, and the owners prefer to moderate their kitchen behaviour rather than detract from the purity of the construction with blinds at night.

While the initial cost of construction was fairly high, it enhances the value of a listed building and has the enthusiastic approval of English Heritage. Wood and the increasingly ubiquitous UPVC are much more susceptible to deterioration than glass and in the long term, the cost compares favourably with those so-called "period" conservatories with their often over-detailed, expensive twiddles.

Bere:architects have now completed four more schemes based on the same principle as well as two restaurant facades, one at Pizza Express near the Barbican in the City of London.

Back at the office, the table with its skeletal base looks ready to walk off at any minute - but it wouldn't get very far, particularly as it took six people to carry the glass top up the three flights of stairs, a feat that Justin Bere is unwilling to repeat in reverse. Unfortunately, its current home being unsuitable for photography means that the table has had very little exposure - and consequently, no commissions.

If you need a very swanky dining table or a splendid centrepiece for a boardroom, bere:architects would be delighted to make one to your specifications - and may be prepared to give a small discount in return for a photograph.'