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AIA London/UK
Benjamin Franklin House
36 Craven Street
London WC2N 5NF
email: info@aiauk.org
Tel/Fax: 020 7930 9124

ANOTHER YEAR; ANOTHER BOAT TRIP - What is in store for next year?

Despite a violent rain storm hitting central London at 4:00pm, it was all clear and all go at 7:00pm when the AIA Boat Trip embarked from Westminster Pier, fully loaded with AIA members, partners and guests. The excellent weather enhanced the trip, providing a spectacular setting for the traditional journey through the heart of London.

After sightseeing, dinner, dancing and door prizes were awarded to lucky participants. This year, the coveted Herman Miller Aeron chair was won by a lucky guest of WML + Woods Bagot.

The Boat Trip was the 8th AIA summer social event. There have been two previous boat trips, two garden parties at the Orangery in Holland Park and three at Growthers of Sion Lodge.

The river trip - from Chelsea Bridge to beyond the Barrier - can be enjoyed time and time again. New buildings (often with Chapter input) and new sights provide an ever changing venue. Still, the issue arises every year - "What should we do next time?" Are we ready for a change?"



The AIA Boat Trip was organised by Elizabeth Casqueiro, AIA, from the European Bank for Reconstruction & Development with generous sponsorship from Herman Miller.

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Same River; Another Angle - Is this the Future?

The 1st (annual?) AIA Bike Tour, following in the wake of the Boat Trip, took in not only a long stretch of the Thames, but also ventured into parts of South London not previously reached by architectural enthusiasts.

Thirteen AIA members and guests left London Bridge at 11:00am on Sat, 4 Aug, and returned at 6:00pm - just in time to avoid an August cloud-burst (another weather control success).

Site visits were varied. Zandra Rhodes Textile & Design museum is not yet finished, but the potential can still be enjoyed, especially with a peak at the pattern archives and a sneak previews of current fashion production.

Weston Williamson Architects - of Jubilee Line renown - opened up their new offices at Tower Bridge. The offices sit comfortably in a neighbourhood unused to high-tech design.

Architects Dransfield Owens de Silva also saw the opportunity of Bromley several years ago, buying up an old paint factory to turn into viable live work units.

Continued next page...

2 participation... Contains Chapter news on events to attend,

membership issues and interest areas.

Calendar 2001

..... **SEPTEMBER**
20 Thursday
6:30

"Movement Analysis and Urban Design," seminar by Alan Baxter at his office 75 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EL. **CEU Credits!**

14-16 Weekend

"Continental Chapter's Conference in Budapest." Contact www.aiaeurope.org. **CEU Credits!**

..... **OCTOBER**
10 Wednesday
6:30pm

A presentation by IDEO. Details tba.

Late October

Pub night, lecture. Details tba.

..... **NOVEMBER**
10 Saturday
All Day

8th Annual Student Charette. **CEU Credits!**

14 Wednesday
6:30pm

Eden Project Seminar with input from both the Architects & Engineers. RSVPs will be necessary.

22 Thursday

Thanksgiving Dinner to benefit Benjamin Franklin House. Details tba.

Beaux Art Ball?? Perhaps next year.

Continued from previous page...AIA Bike Tour

After braving a full scale riot, complete with police vans and riot shields (football hooligans?), the tour discovered London's most obscure art gallery. Residing in what appeared to be a derelict old church (it claims to be a purpose built venue), the Southern Park Gallery is currently housing "Landscape Trauma," which seemed appropriate in the circumstances.

Southwark and Bromley contain some of the most extensive public housing in the country and the varied estates and neighbourhoods passed on the tour were a revelation. Above ground, Canada Water - that seemingly purposeless stop on the Jubilee Line - proved a hub of activity.

At the Brunel Museum in Rotherhithe, the tour was held captive by a Brunel enthusiast with fascinating insights into the career of this ex-pat (he was originally from France) engineer. Construction of Brunel's tunnel led to surprisingly few accidents for the time, but his risk assessment failed to take into account the high incidents of Cholera in the area, which caused the death of - perhaps - thousands.



The AIA Bike Trip was organised by Mike Hardiman AIA, Forge Llewelyn, with assistance from the London Cycling Initiative.



Cyclists approach the surprisingly bold Fashion & Textile Museum with preliminary trepidation. The future is orange (and fuchsia)?



The ride was held in conjunction with the London Cycling Campaign, people who take transportation seriously. However, despite its well designed underground and bus links, Canada Water's intense traffic was hard on cyclists.



One of several pub stops, this pub provided atmosphere and an assortment of frozen seafood but little else to eat, necessitating several additional stops.

STUDENT CHARETTE!

Plan now to attend this year's Student Charette. The theme - 'Vertically Inclined' - will address the future of high rise design in London.



2001 Design Awards!

The call for entries is expected in late December for the January Awards Gala.

Chapter Members, UK Architects and Architects from around the world who produce work in the UK are **all** welcome.

As always, the sole criterion for winning is **EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN.**

Ideas for CES Events, Building Tours and Pubs needed!

South African Experience Completes an Education

Amy Kaspar, last year's AIA London/UK Chapter's Student Representative and specialist in historic preservation, has left London and will be moving to Boston later this year. Before she starts her full time professional career, she has taken a three month intern position with US/ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) in South Africa, as part of an interdisciplinary team undertaking a trail survey on traditional architecture.

Kaspar is regularly publishing her African Tales, with amazing insights into the trials and tribulations of life in an emerging democracy. Her comments on the political and cultural scene are poignant and insightful; however, space limits mean we can only concentrate on the built environment and some of the more exotic aspects of her work.

"Though I flippanantly said before leaving the UK that I was off to study mud huts, I hadn't expected that. Actually, there's quite a lot more to mud, reeds, poles, mats cow dung and thatch than I'd anticipated...Indigenous architecture is living, breathing, transitory, organic...It is in a constant state of evolution and most of its infinite styles are on the verge of extinction...Our study is not purely about architecture...you need to understand the nature of the culture, to don the hats of anthropologist, sociologist, economist, politician and community worker. It's a mixed bag."

The South African heritage scene is closely linked to community development initiatives and that takes one directly into the energetic politics of an emerging democracy. For the recently franchised population, just being involved - speaking up (*"spouting off"*) at local meetings - becomes more important than getting results. But the more involved the local community, the greater chance of an initiative's success.

"Africa makes no sense. Once you accept that, the place suddenly starts to make perfect sense. Along highways in the middle of nowhere, in Pietermaritzburg and Durban, people just wander along. In Natal, deep in the heart of Zulu-land - the modern housing fades away into beehive huts.. and more people..and cows...and goats...Livestock costs money and most people own some. This isn't an impoverished starving Africa, but it is not an idyllic rural landscape either." The AIDs statistics are staggering, one army base in Natal reportedly has 95% HIV. Oral tradition carries more weight than formal education. ***"One recent 'myth' promises a cure for HIV if you sleep with a virgin...."***

With the people comes considerable creative energy, past and present. One initiative Kaspar is tracking involves a World Heritage site at Border Cave, a cradle for mankind, the first evidence of decorated tools. To reach a new visitor centre takes 2 1/2 hours from the main road in a 4x4, then scaling down a mountain side without ropes. Will anyone visit? Are they pinning too much hope on tourism?. ***"I sat staring out over the Swaziland landscape from deep within the cave and tried to imagine the passage of thousands of generations. I can't fathom it."***

Another project under consideration is a Heritage Trail, linking diverse historic sites from one time period, concentrated in one area; Ghandi's headquarters and printing press, the homes of two ANC founders, the foundation site for the pervasive Shembe church (in which 'churches' are stones laid out in a circle around trees).

Current energy is exemplified by local architect Rodney Harber, who now ranks as one of Kaspar's heroes. He has that rare ability to practice in architecture what he preaches in his writings and teachings. Not only does he design beautiful buildings - residences, housing, and community projects - but he is involved in the more basic aspects of life often missed by development programmes - a street market in Durham, flood protection advice for mud brick houses in Mozambique, a fly-less, self-cleaning, vandal-proof loo. ***"Real stuff that really matters."***



ARCHITECTURAL LINKS

Architectural Links has been created to develop the increasing number of projects linked to the annual London Open House Weekend as well as providing a year-round programme of initiatives in fostering awareness and appreciation of architecture and the built environment.

Victoria Thornton, Director of the LOH charity, has highlighted one initiative that might appeal to AIA members. **Adopt a School** allows architectural practices to become involved with the local community. Read more about all the programmes under **WWW. architecturelink.org.uk**.

Are you aware that VOLUNTEERS for London Open House Weekend are able to jump the queues at other venues? Contact nspera@londonopen-house.org.

SMALLER PRACTICES; BIGGER POTENTIAL - Designing on One's Own in London

The AIA London/UK Chapter has often been dismissed - inaccurately and most unfairly - as a home for ex-pats in "mega" large offices. In fact, only 36% of our membership work in US-based practices and only 37% in practices with over 50 staff.

While its attractions to big corporate practices are obvious, London also continues to provide smaller practices with opportunities and potential. London can be daunting to the uninitiated, but several Americans - a few of them profiled below - have made it their own city. The different reasons why they came; how they started; and why they stayed exemplify the Chapter's variety and depth.

Rich Mather, Int'l Assoc AIA, RIBA,

Rich Mather, our best known independent American architect, is described by his biographer, Hugh Pearman in *Urban Approaches*, as "*the Londoner par excellence*." Early in his schooling and career in Oregon, Mather decided that only Europe offered the opportunities he craved - intense and demanding urban environments. He came to London purposefully and his development since has been gradual but determined.

Mather arrived in 1963 and began work with Lyons Israel Ellis - the same practice that offered James Stirling his early career. After studying urban design at the Architectural Association, he eventually joined the London Borough of Southwark to take part in its slum regeneration programme.

But it was a design competition for the Espoo new town in Finland that provided the recognition for a large scale urban development. Mather and his colleague finished in third place and he used his award money to develop his own office and town house.

In 1973, the practice - supplemented by teaching at the AA and Polytechnic of Central London - started to take off and begin its steady acquisition of prestige commissions and design awards. By 2001, projects such as the Dulwich Picture Gallery Extension & Renovation (2001 RIBA Award) and Wallace Collection Centenary Project, routinely feature in the popular as well as the architectural press.

Mather currently is working on master plans for the South Bank Centre in London, the World Heritage Site in Greenwich and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. From the small office start, Rick Mather Architects has fulfilled its potential and is making its own distinctive mark on London and the UK.



Rick Mather's award winning Dulwich Picture Gallery Extension with Lutyens' original in the distance.

M J Long, AIA, RIBA

MJ Long came to Europe for traditional travel after graduating from Yale in the mid sixties. Although it was not her original intention, she then decided to stay in London, "*for awhile*." Fate would have it that she ended up long term on the British Library project. Eventually, Long became a partner of Colin St John Wilson, only leaving in 1994 to establish her own practice, Long & Kentish.

Like Mather, Long's big independence start was through a competition - in her case for a library at Brighton University. The success of this project led to other BU commissions and gave the practice a firm footing away from its initial specialist library designer image.

Currently, Kentish & Long is working on a maritime museum complex in Falmouth, a £23 million project that received a £10 million Heritage Lottery Grant. With this museum and a smaller gallery under way in Chichester, Long & Kentish is now a well established design practice of 10 to 15 people.

Continued next page..Smaller Practices

Are you another "Small Practitioner?" Please contact us with details!

Continued from previous page....Smaller Practices

John Onken, AIA, RIBA

Study at the Architectural Association then at the Martin Centre in Cambridge for a M.Phil in Environmental Design brought John Onken to the UK. He initially divided study with work, then decided to stay and work full time when he met his wife here.

Onken worked with several UK architects - Munkenbeck + Marshall, David Chipperfield, MCH and ORMS (as project architect on the RIBA award winning Yarmouth House) - before starting his own Wimbledon based practice in 1998.

The deciding commission - headquarters for the management training company, Quest Worldwide - came via "*a friend of a friend of a friend*" and coincided with growing family commitments. Working on his own, Onken was able to make the daily school run and actively participate in community life.

After a steady stream of local lofts and extension projects, Onken joined forces with another architect, forming 3s Architects LLP. The firm has grown to five people and supplements residential with commercial fit-outs, restaurants, hotel and retail work.

Dan Smith, AIA, RIBA

Dan Smith's arrival in London was more circuitous, more capricious than most. Having grown up in India, he found himself - on a return visit there - inundated with project offers. He set up an office in India and completed twenty projects in the course of two years. He has maintained his contacts in India and still collaborates on developments there.

Then, coming to London for a family get-together in 1991, he met a British developer who invited him to work in the UK, primarily pursuing large hotel projects in Saudi Arabia. Smith Lance Larcade & Bechtol came into existence and "*the expected one year stint has now lasted twelve.*"

SLLB is finishing work on an 4,350 sq ft house in London, for which it has been developer, architect and project manager. SLLB combines self-originated projects with traditional client-driven ones to give the practice the financial strength to allow experimentation in project delivery.



An Onken detail from a recent residential project.

Michael Lischer, AIA, RIBA

Michael Lischer initially worked as an ex-pat in a large US office. He came to London in 1989 with HOK and eventually became head of its Sports Facilities Group.

Coming to London with his home firm made the transition to UK practice easy. But, after seventeen years at HOK, Lischer decided it was "*now or never*" to work on his own. His transition from group to independent practice was facilitated by having a speciality - in this case - sports design. It was an easy choice to remain in London and make use of his extensive network of European based contacts rather than return to the US.

Sport Concepts started with minor consulting work from HOK, but without a significant first commission of its own. Lischer was convinced the potential was there and - indeed - the first independent work came within just a few weeks.. The firm is now providing conceptual design expertise for several buildings for the Athens Olympics, a National Arena in Budapest and a master plan for a Leisure Resort Centre in Poland.

Big Offices Support the Board

Notwithstanding the value of our smaller practices, the London/UK Chapter clearly benefits from the concentration of large US firms in London. Not only do they provide employment for our membership, they also host our monthly Board meetings and this gives us a unique opportunity to experience their differing versions of American hospitality first hand.

Gensler must surely top the league for quality refreshments. Not only does it routinely provide the Board with freshly squeezed orange juice, it also serves the snazziest of little designer canapes.

SOM makes up for the humdrum quality of its refreshments (which have improved, by the way, with its move to Millbank) by its generosity in accepting more than its share of meeting dates.

HOK goes for quantity; one can make a full meal out of its chicken drumsticks and variety of sandwiches.

KPF and RTKL both provide routine quality food, but - unfortunately - their staff rarely attend the meetings, making feedback impossible.

In a quest for variety, Studio Architects came up with a fine selection of Indian food and beer for its first meeting that adapted well to its East End residency.

Not to be outdone by the Americans, Foster and Partners finally hosted a meeting and provided good basic canapes, but no one can remember if there was any wine forthcoming.

Our own Ben Franklin House is a favourite choice despite the utilitarian fare, especially in winter time when the lack of heat shortens the meetings considerably.

Working anywhere exotic? Tell us and we'll include you next issue.



AIA / U K N E W S

AIA / U K

Benjamin Franklin House
36 Craven Street
London WC2N 5NF
England

Tel/Fax: 44 (0)20 7930 9124

email: AIA-UK@usa.net
www.aiauk.org

Lester Korzilius **President**
Lorraine Dale King **Vice President**
Elizabeth Casquero **Vice President**
Bruce Danzer **Secretary**
Jennifer Kyner **Treasurer**

Stephanie Groom **Chapter**
Executive

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Notes to the editor, suggestions, criticism, etc. are welcome. Submissions may be sent to AIA-UK@usa.net or posted to "News" at the above address. Typed material and images intended for publication must reach the editor by the listed deadline date. Appropriate submissions are edited and published as space and time permit and at the discretion of the AIA London/UK Board of Directors.

Lorraine Dale King, AIA,
Editor

May-Aug 2001

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