

New Architects

Not so much a Post-Modernist as a pluralist, David Quigley is willing to buck the trends of his young peer group and build cheerful oases from Modernist austerity, finds Colin Davies.

ARCHITECTS hate to have their work pigeonholed and labelled with an "-ism". Modernism, Post-Modernism, Neo-Modernism – these are categories used by critics, not architects.

But they are a useful shorthand and sometimes they reflect more truth than architects care to admit.

All of the three previous subjects in this series of New Architects, for example, could be loosely categorised as New Modernists. Gearing up their fledgling practices for the 1990s, they have decided that decorative Post-Modernism has no future and it is time to rediscover the austerity and honesty of the Modernist tradition. The Modernist revival is rapidly becoming a new orthodoxy among talented and ambitious architects in their mid-30s.

David Quigley is the exception. He is 34 years old, and the two major projects he has so far built are cheerfully decorative and definitely not austere. In fact they are Post-Modernist.

This is hardly surprising as he worked for Terry Farrell in his formative years, and one of the jobs he worked on was Charles Jencks's house; he also spent

some time in America working for Robert Venturi.

Design meetings with Farrell and Jencks at the Soane Museum were bound to make a powerful impression on a young Lancastrian who left school at 15 and came to architecture via the joinery workshop and drawing office of a local builder.

Is Quigley perhaps thinking in terms of a Post-Modernist revival? Well, no. Because, of course, he is an architect and he hates to be pigeonholed.

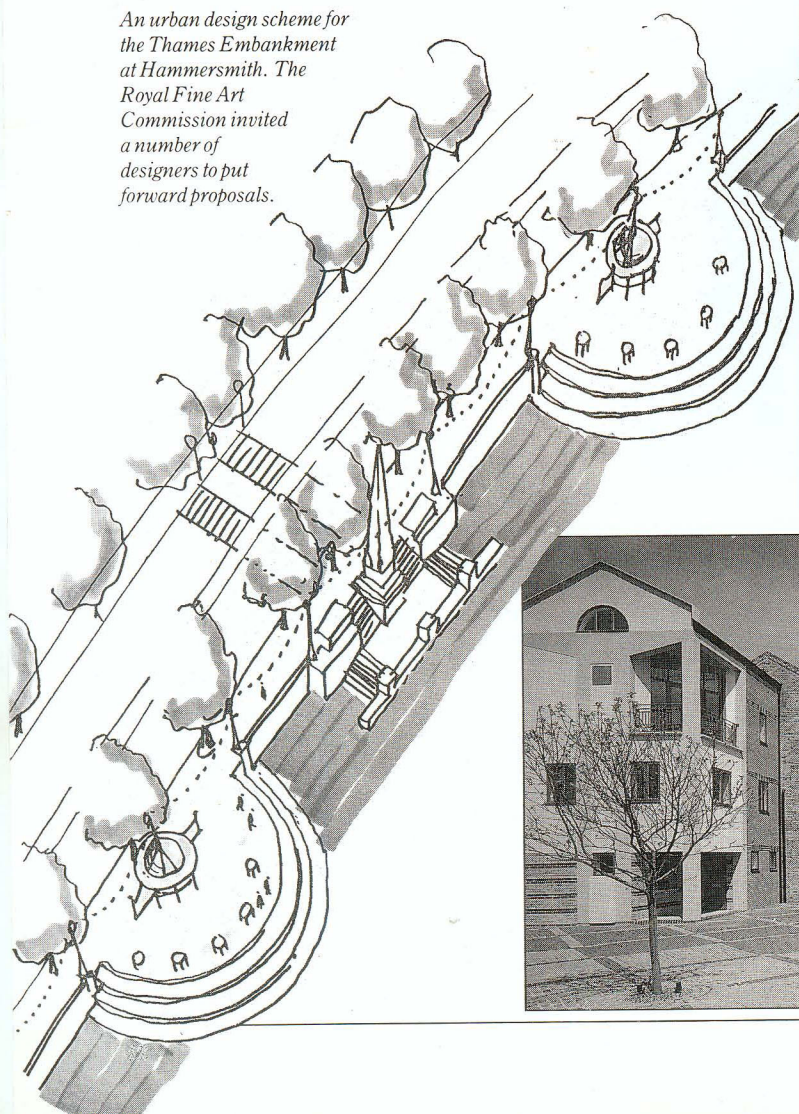
According to Quigley, the Blackpool Winter Gardens refit and the Hopewell Street housing project in Camberwell look the way they do not because of any stylistic dogma, but in response to the special conditions of site and brief.

A Blackpool fun palace is not the place for a plain, minimalist exercise, and what the dismal crumbling housing estates of Camberwell needed most of all was a flamboyant and colourful new neighbour.

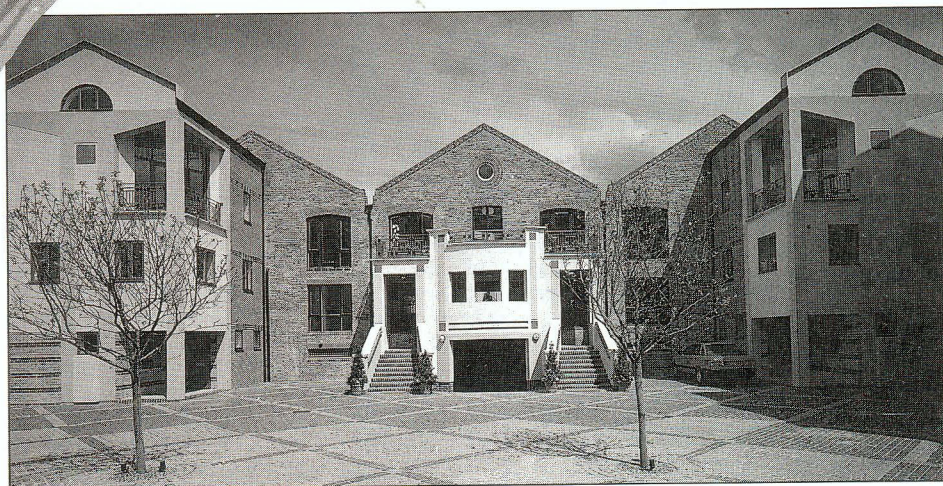
Quigley is suspicious of high architectural principles. His quarrel with the New Modernists is not over their architecture, but over their attitude.

"What concerns me about the so-called New Modernists and Neo-Modernists is that they have

An urban design scheme for the Thames Embankment at Hammersmith. The Royal Fine Art Commission invited a number of designers to put forward proposals.



Hopewell Street in Camberwell, south London. A flamboyant, Post-Modern development combining living space and workshops. See plan, right.



Mirrors were used to give a sense of space to a small flower shop within the Savoy Hotel in London.

one architectural bag of tools that they take to every project. I think you have to find the tools around the place where you are doing the job.

"I find it difficult to have a firm commitment to a set of values that are supposed to be constant. When I hear architects defending their principles it worries me, because today's principles are not necessarily tomorrow's."

But Quigley's position is itself defined by a kind of principle. If we want to give it an -ism, then we have to call it Pluralism – the principle that lies behind the now unfashionable architectural theories of Jencks and Venturi.

The great advantage of being a Pluralist is that you are not forced to dislike certain works of architecture just because they don't conform to your particular stylistic prejudices.

Norman Foster's recent work could hardly be more different from that of Farrell or Venturi, but Quigley doesn't hesitate to describe Stansted Airport as "a fantastic, absolutely marvellous building". Still, of the British Hi-Tec merchants, he prefers Michael Hopkins because he is "more liberal" and though he admits that "there is a lot of crappy Post-Modernism around" he maintains there are still a lot of good architects – Farrell, John Outram, Piers Gough – who are not encumbered by that single bag of tools.

Studying for his masters degree at the University of Pennsylvania, Quigley was taught by some of architecture's biggest international stars. Apart from Post-Modernists like Venturi, Robert Stern and Hans Hollein, there were visits from die-hard Modernists like Aldo Van Eyck and Herman Hertzberger.

Surprisingly, it was the Modernists that Quigley found



most interesting. "It seems to me that everyone talks about the same things – about a family of forms, about historical roots, about the importance of context – and people like Van Eyck are very inspiring on these subjects. They

seem to have the ambition to develop these themes, but their commitment to Modernism ties them down."

One of the ambitions of Post-Modernism is to create an architecture that is popular with the general public. Does this mean that Quigley has an easier time with planning departments? Apparently not. Like his sterner contemporaries, he has his battles with the planners. The difference is that he is prepared to take account of other people's views.

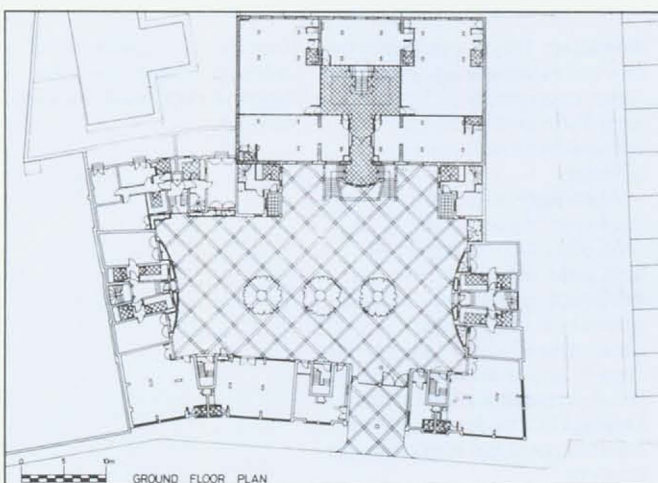
"One of the things I admire about Terry Farrell is the positive way he deals with planning committees, local pressure groups, the Royal Fine Art Commission and all the other people who get involved in a major scheme. It is a particularly English skill – part of living in a democracy – and often the architecture can benefit from it."

Quigley brings the same openness and tolerance to his dealings with other members of the building team. When asked about his relationships with builders, he talks not about contracts managers or site agents, but about the bricklayers, carpenters, plasterers and joiners who actually put the building together.

"I am very interested in the revealing, through construction, of the craft employed in the making of a building," Quigley says.

"I would rather spend my client's money on the skill of a man than on expensive materials. The most important thing about architecture, for me, is the way that it expresses human skill and effort."

It could be straight out of Ruskin or William Morris – very moral, very English and, in a way, very Modernist.



David Quigley

DAVID QUIGLEY left school at 15 and went to work for a local builder in Manchester. He worked on site, in the joinery workshop and in the drawing office while studying part-time for an ONC in building. With this qualification, he got a place on the architecture course at Manchester Polytechnic and began a process that he now describes as "loosening up".

After three years, he was sufficiently loosened up to leave for London, arriving at Euston Station in the time-honoured fashion, prepared to doorstep every well-known architect within walking distance until he found a job.

Turned away by Foster Associates, he had more success round the corner at Farrell and Grimshaw and started work the next day. Soon he was deeply immersed in the design of a house for the architectural critic and guru of Post-Modernism, Charles Jencks.

After two years, encouraged by Terry Farrell, he applied for a Harkness Fellowship to study at the University of Pennsylvania and was successful. He enjoyed his time at Penn, taking advantage of lecture courses in philosophy and fine art and working in the office of leading Post-Modernist Robert Venturi (architect of the National Gallery extension).

Having gained his masters degree, he returned to London via San Francisco and Hong Kong, where he worked for a short time in the office set up by Foster Associates to build the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank.

Back in London he was welcomed back by Farrell, became an associate and worked for the next three years on projects such as the air rights building over Charing Cross Station, an urban design scheme in Hammersmith and a new interior for the famous Rules Restaurant in Covent Garden.

By this time he was looking for opportunities to set up his own practice. After one false start,



when a £1m interior design job fell through after he had taken on five assistants, he was recommended by Farrell for the revitalisation of the 1.6 ha Winter Gardens complex in Blackpool. This provided two years' work, to a complex programme, using fast shop-fitting techniques. The result was a series of spectacularly theatrical interiors which gained wide publicity (see *Building* 25 May 1990).

The other major project built by the practice is a medium-sized mixed development of housing and workshop units at Hopewell Street in Camberwell for a private

developer. This design combines new and existing buildings in a clever courtyard plan, but its main distinguishing feature is its colourful and eclectic exterior.

At its biggest, the practice has employed 15 people. Hit by the recession, with many jobs on hold, it has now cut back to six, working from small basement premises in Marylebone. Current jobs include a shop in the Strand, an extension to the Savoy Hotel, a small housing scheme in London Docklands, and several refurbishment and interior design projects.

David Quigley: taught by some of architecture's biggest stars, after starting in a local builder's joinery workshop.