

mix

FUTURE INTERIORS

Urban Architecture
New Markets: Russia
Cosmetics
Floor Art
Thomas Heatherwick
Architectural Forecast

€ 39/£27/\$55



9 771749 855008

13

THE CHALLENGES OF URBAN ARCHITECTURE



WITH EXPLODING POPULATIONS AND LIMITED SPACE, URBAN PLANNING NEEDS AN INCREASINGLY RADICAL APPROACH THAT BALANCES PEOPLE'S NEED FOR PRIVACY WITH A SENSE OF COMMUNITY SAYS **MARK LEWIS.**

Photo: Simon Lewis © Simon Lewis

House on Charlotte Road, London 2008, Architect Stephen Taylor.
Left: House A, Tokyo 2006, Office of Ryue Nishizawa.



Photo: Takashi Homma © Takashi Homma

The door to Stephen Taylor's office in Shoreditch, London, is open. There is no foyer. The glass-fronted façade is untinted, and the whole working floor is at street-level. This means that the four or five architects inside can easily be viewed from the pavement. The voyeurism is transformed into something more like community because the proximity of the street makes explicit the invitation to glance in.

The layout of his office offers a clue to Taylor's ethos on urban design. Much better that people are forced to interact through proximity than encouraged to disconnect by distance, notions of privacy, and burgeoning technology. His compact homes throughout Britain's capital deal with the issues touching the metropolises of rich countries across the world; how to plan for a wealthy and demanding population with housing which can sustain the ever more densely populated areas. And ultimately how best to make people happy.

In Tokyo, Ryue Nishizawa has tackled the issue of happiness and proximity by eliminating contemporary notions of privacy and seeking to recast the home from private dwelling to integral part of the public urban landscape. "There are people who never eat in their homes," says Giovanna Borassi, curator of *Some Ideas On Living*, an exhibition at the Canadian Centre For Architecture (CCA) in Montreal. "So maybe they do not need kitchens because they can use the city as part of their house." In that sense the home and the neighbourhood become almost inseparable.

The exhibition brings together the work and ideas of both Taylor and Nishizawa, who take on the challenges of urbanity's evolving needs. But while Borassi acknowledges the similarity of challenges faced by different cities across the world, she also stresses the geographical, environmental and cultural differences which each city faces.

The perpetually expanding Japanese capital shares many of the challenges inherent in other rich world capitals. But with a total population of 35m, Tokyo is the most populated city in the world and requires radical solutions. Nishizawa has obliged. The complexity and the density of the city informs the interior organisation of the houses he designs while its residents become a visible part of the city. Space inside the house becomes space inside the neighbourhood. And with its clusters of independent rooms connected by terraces and exterior courtyards, his Moriama House resembles a village or community.

Taylor's masterplan for Rainham East London, meanwhile, seeks to do the opposite, taking a series of houses and shrinking the distances between the living spaces to help create a community. "Architecture alone cannot make people happy," says Taylor. "There are other issues as well, but architecture is important. It is a start to make people feel close to one another." For him, physical closeness helps to engender the kind of communal closeness, which helps make people happier.

The ethos allows him to explore the limits of proximity, which he believes is around 7 metres from one dwelling's window to another. In his masterplan for Rainham Village in London's East End, housing developments are linked together by simple shared courtyards, separated by small fences, giving an outside space for half the homes of about seven square metres. The other half of the homes get a roof terrace. "If you want an outside space isn't that enough?" he asks.

For many the answer is 'no'. The typical dream home for people across the Anglo Saxon world is a single family dwelling with a large garden to the front and rear of the house, and close enough to the centre of town to easily get to work.

"We have never got over the relationship of proximity and poverty," says Taylor. But culture evolves, and Taylor hopes that the desire for space will be considered in the future a cultural abnormality which gave way to a new interpretation of intimate urban living. For him the idea that spreading out to the suburbs makes people happy is risible. The inevitable consequence of people's desire for the convenience of the city alongside their desire for a large home with a big garden is cities churning out identical suburbs with little public transport and even less interaction between individuals.

The suburban compromise between rural idyll and urban excitement creates a hybrid of neither. It is characterised instead by a sterile expansion of identical single family dwellings on

identical cul-de-sacs attached to identical arterial roads, which could be anywhere from Chicago to Montreal.

With information and communication technology making redundant the need for many urban knowledge workers to even meet the people they are working with, the cultural requirement to make physical connections is further diminished. It is not fanciful to imagine a stale slice of young urbanites living in a suburban dystopia, forging their relationships and communities in front of a computer screen on Second Life.

But claims of new technologies creating social disconnection are hardly new. And in the case of broadband and the devices available to tap into it, the technologies could even help urban planners and architects tackle urban alienation and foster real physical communities.

Mark Cohen, head of the Urban Information Architecture division for global engineering and architectural consultants, Arup, says the communication tools available today could easily be used to bring him closer together with his neighbours, provided they are used in the right way.

If all of his neighbours in parts of say Paris or New York had ultra-high speed broadband and devices in their homes like monitors, or even municipal signs, he could quickly discover that he doesn't have to communicate with someone in Korea to share his love of Manchester United Football Club; there may be someone just next

door. Likewise, a mother on maternity leave might discover there is a Facebook group for new mothers on her road. Or someone just looking for some exercise could find a squash partner for Tuesday nights.

Better still, by disseminating accurate information about exactly where, and how much, water and energy is being consumed within homes, the same technology could be used to help tackle issues surrounding sustainability.

This connection between technology and sustainability reaches its apogee in Arup's ongoing partnership with Shanghai Industrial Investment Corporation (SIIC), to build the Dongtan Eco-City on an island just outside Shanghai.

China's insatiable appetite for mucky fossil fuels has made it one of the chief villains of international sustainability. And yet the same lightning industrialisation responsible for sucking in raw materials has been equally accountable for sucking people into cities.

The challenge becomes one of accommodating ever more densely populated cities with ever more densely polluted air. The solution at Dongtan will be for the city to produce its own energy from wind, solar, bio-fuel and recycled city waste. Clean technologies such as hydrogen fuel cells will power public transport. A network of cycle and footpaths will help the city achieve close to zero vehicle emissions and farmland within the Dongtan site will use organic farming methods to grow food.



Above: Mori-yama House, Tokyo 2005, Office of Ryue Nishizawa.
Left: House A, Tokyo 2006, Office of Ryue Nishizawa.

OSA HOUSE

The Office of Subversive Architecture, a collective of pan-European architects led by Germans Berndt Truempler and Karsten Huneck parodied the Anglo-Saxon notion of a dream home with garden, when they broke into an abandoned railway checkpoint in East London and converted it into a typical suburban home.

"Happiness is as much to do with the spaces between the houses as it is to do with the houses themselves," says Huneck. The OSA believes that architecture can make people happy but it needn't be large housing projects or even iconic buildings. People can be made to feel happy and part of a community by sharing an architectural experience which makes them smile.

OSA House, The Office of Subversive Architecture.



House on Charlotte Road, London 2008, Architect Stephen Taylor.



Above and right: Micro-compact homes, Horden Cherry Lee Architects.