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MAGAZINE

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MY INSPIRATION

Jim Richards, Director, Nissen Richards Studio, shares a trio of inspirations, from quietly nostalgic memories to loud contemporary experiences.

Growing up in Weston-super-Mare, it was impossible not to be fixated on – and, in my case, inspired by – the town's Birnbeck Pier. Although created by the master architect of promenades and piers, Eugenius Birch, who put his name to a total of fourteen pier structures in Great British resorts, Birnbeck Pier was unique for several reasons. First, because the end of the pier is actually located on a rocky outcrop, which technically makes it an island, and secondly because local architect Hans Price, responsible for many of the town's notable buildings, created its unusual end-of-pier buildings, embodying an almost domestic vernacular many miles away from the usual pier-end pavilions. Its timber jetty used to serve the paddle steamers arriving from Wales - my Great Aunt and Uncle amongst them on their regular visits to see my grandmother.

As a child, I spent many hours playing beneath the pier's elegant iron walkway when the tide was out, watching as it was washed away, almost in real time, until it reached its current state of ruin. For my A Levels, I created a series of art projects based on it and, much later, I was part of an architectural team shortlisted for a scheme to rejuvenate it. Sadly, the project never went ahead. In spite of that near miss, the pier's industrial language and fascinating embodiment of the battle between the weather, tidal range and man-made architectural heritage, had a long-lasting effect. The new viewing tower we're just completing at Sutton Hoo for the National Trust, for example, embodies elements of this relationship.

The amazing black and white photographs of Bernd and Hilla Becher are also a continuing source of inspiration. The German photography duo, who met in the late 50s at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, specialised in shooting industrial structures - including water towers, coal bunkers, gas tanks and factories. Their work, which never included people, was shot in a documentary style and grouped according to sets or typologies. This grid arrangement, as well as their veneration for underloved industrial buildings, makes them a firm favourite. My third great inspiration comes from the common experience of being part of a large crowd – either at football grounds (Bristol City, now you ask) or music gigs. I love that shared emotional elevation as a crowd reacts to a particularly great goal or the sound of a guitar playing the first note of a well-loved song. Wanting to enable this feeling has very much fed into our recent series of performance and event spaces, such as Magazine London, the project we completed in 2019 on the Greenwich Peninsula, to serve as a backdrop for music or commercial sets, shows and events, and the ongoing redevelopment of iconic music venue Clwb Ifor Bach, in the heart of Cardiff.

www.nissenrichardsstudio.com

