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ARCHITECTURE

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M A G A Z I N E

TIMBER TREASURES

Shaping warmth, welcome, character and connection

PRIDE OF PLACE

Designing communities people are proud to call home

ALASDAIR & NEIL STEPHEN

Meet the architect twins redefining rural living



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WELCOME



Introducing the latest edition of *Architecture Magazine* – and my first as editor.

Timber takes centre stage in this issue, with three projects that underline how the material influences the way people connect with a space.

Whether welcoming visitors to a science campus, an Icelandic landscape (above) or a historic French performance hall, timber shapes not just architectural expression, but mood, warmth and the emotional experience of arrival. The theme continues in Question Time, where expert panellists from three studios weigh up whether the UK is ready to build with timber at scale – and what must change to make it happen.

In our interview, we meet twin brothers Alasdair and Neil Stephen, founders of Dualchas and HebHomes, whose work has helped redefine contemporary Scottish design. From buildings rooted in landscape and local identity to energy-efficient modular homes designed for rural living, their shared approach proves that thoughtful design can be both beautiful and practical.

We also spotlight Ström Architects' transformation of a long-derelict coastal property into a striking forever home in North Wales, as well as John Robertson Architects' reimagining of 20 Gresham Street, where thoughtful interventions have reshaped a prominent workplace in the heart of the City.

Elsewhere, we turn to the spaces that shape everyday living – from kitchen design defined by craft, innovation and enduring style, to bathroom spaces where wellness-led thinking is elevating comfort, function and routine.

Finally, we turn to one of the nation's biggest challenges: how to grow our towns and cities while shaping communities with real identity and character. John Mason explores how East Barnwell in Cambridge uses council-led planning to balance density through public realm and a clear civic presence. In our Last Word, meanwhile, James Small-Edwards argues the capital's housing crisis is not just about increasing supply, but designing neighbourhoods Londoners want to see built. What both make clear is this: if we are to address demand at scale, we must create places people are genuinely proud to call home.

Enjoy the issue.

Eamonn Duff Editor
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GÍGUR VISITOR CENTRE, ICELAND, BY NISSEN RICHARDS STUDIO AND SP(R)INT STUDIO

Nissen Richards Studio, together with local Icelandic design partner SP(R)INT STUDIO, has created the permanent exhibition, interior and graphic design for the Gígur Visitor Centre in Iceland, where timber acts as a mediator between building and landscape

The brief for the project was to create a new permanent exhibition relating to the Mývatn nature reserve and the northern highlights of Vatnajökull National Park. Nearby Lake Mývatn and its surrounding wetlands are a significant designated nature reserve, renowned for their birdlife

and unique volcanic and geothermal activity. As well as the exhibition, the two studios also created a new interior layout for the overall building, alongside a light refurbishment to the exterior, ensuring a holistic overall look and feel for the project.

The centre features content that relates directly to the stunning surrounding landscape. It also examines the way in which that landscape interacts with people, including the threats and forced adaptations taking place as a result of climate change. Subject matter takes in the region's flora and fauna, geology and natural phenomena, as well as an exploration of the cultural significance of the landscape and the folklore associated with it. The critical importance of the nearby lake is also underlined, together with its ecosystem and insect life, which maintain the lifecycle of the region's birds and fish. The word Mývatn translates literally as 'Midge Lake'.

The exhibition is not only an interior environment but was conceived to be in active dialogue with the surrounding landscape, drawing meaning from the site's distinctive geology, light and atmosphere. In this way, the visitor



experience extends beyond the building itself and remains continuously attuned to the natural setting outside. The centre also operates as a landmark in its own right – an unmistakable point of orientation within the terrain. As the exterior photographs make clear, its presence is legible from a distance against the open landscape.

The area's fascinating geological surroundings also include pseudo craters, which are rootless forms caused not by the actual explosion of volcanoes, but instead by hot lava flowing over cool, wet ground, trapping steam and pressurising the earth beneath. The pseudo craters were formed during the eruption of the Lúdentaborgir and Brengslaborgir volcanoes around 2,300 years ago.

"A key design decision was not to compete with the stunning panoramic views the centre offers over Lake Mývatn, the pseudo craters and the mountains, but to harmonise with them," said Pippa Nissen, Director of Nissen Richards Studio. "The bespoke exhibition furniture therefore frames the views, with interventions sitting at a lower level and individual exhibits acting like landscape elements themselves, rising from the table level. Inspired by the summer's beautiful greens and blues, the central timber tables in the space have been stained to match, whilst the perimeter view is enriched by opportunities to look at the views whilst listening to stories, music and poetry."

The 400 sq m exhibition space is located within an existing building with glazing to all sides. The building, with an existing rooflight and external terrace, was lightly refurbished during the project, with its existing character retained. The welcome desk, shop and café areas follow the same timber design language as the permanent exhibition space.



"The aim of the design approach for The Gigur Visitor Centre was to create both a tourist destination and a resource for local communities," said Karl Kvaran, Architect and Director of SP(R)INT STUDIO. "The centre has been structured with the overall aim of fostering a sense of awe and wonder at the surrounding landscape that also will hopefully inspire visitors with a desire to protect the environment."

This exhibition raises broader questions too about the relationship between humans and nature – how people inhabit, interpret, and affect the landscapes they depend on. It speaks to future generations, not only by communicating scientific knowledge but by encouraging a sense of responsibility, care, and stewardship, inviting younger visitors to imagine their role in preserving fragile ecosystems over time.

More broadly, the exhibition provides a powerful lens through which to understand the uniqueness of the site and, more broadly, the distinct character of Iceland itself. By grounding the visitor experience in the particularities of this landscape – its geology, ecology and cultural narratives – the exhibition frames nature not as a neutral backdrop, but as an active presence that shapes human life. In doing so, it positions the Visitor Centre as both a place of learning and a space for reflection, where environmental knowledge is inseparable from questions of ethics, belonging, and the future.

www.nissenrichardsstudio.com

www.sprint-studio.com

Photography: Studio CAPN

