



# SETTING THE

I was rather taken aback when my fellow directors asked me to produce a special issue to mark the end of my tenure of the editorial chair. The request was embarrassing and daunting. What on earth was I to do? In the end, it seemed that the only response could be an analysis of what *The Architectural Review* has been up to for the last 25 years,<sup>1</sup> and what has happened in the world of architecture during that time. A quarter of a century is no longer a huge proportion of an average Western life, but culture, politics and economics alter so rapidly over such a period that it is impossible to compress all the changes into a manageable compass. So these pages are highly selective.

When he retired in 1971 after 36 years with the magazine, my revered precursor J. M. Richards remarked that 'we are all modernists now'.<sup>2</sup> The battle for modern architecture versus 'period-revival' building had been won, and in Richards' eyes, modernism was becoming enriched because architects 'now know that there is not one answer but any number of answers'. Even so, he could not have anticipated that within a dozen years Post-Modern Classicism (PoMo) was to emerge blowsily full blown from the drawers of Philip Johnson's AT&T Chippendale cabinet.

Few would disagree that we are all post-modernists now – though few, thank goodness, are adherents of PoMo. For all Richards' belief that architecture was becoming more plural towards the end of the Modern period, to many it seemed to be increasingly grim, bureaucratic and dull. PoMo was an early and noisy example of the many imaginative theoretical and built reactions against tired official Modernism (and each other) that have made the last quarter of a century so multi-faceted, culturally productive and challenging.

At the same time, radical changes were taking place in the role of the profession. Richards could still talk about the architect as the leader of the building team – though he argued that what really mattered is not so much formal leadership as the fact that the architect is the only member of the team 'who has been trained to create order' and who has the ability to 'construct a picture of what the future world will actually be like'. Largely, that remains true, but the role of the design professions – architects, engineers, landscape and urban designers – is increasingly threatened and restricted by both business and government. Neither trusts the professional role, which was invented in the early nineteenth century to curb the excesses of the unbridled market. Business hates any attempt to restrain it, and governments believe that they are the only proper source of restraint.

## Official philistinism

Official systems of building procurement have been set up to minimize the professional position. They are almost inevitably more expensive than traditional methods, more prone to corruption and, judging by results so far, much more likely to produce second-rate results. Absurd official reports are regularly produced that attempt to make professional imagination into a mere component (and a small one at that) of the development process. We do not undergo a long and difficult process of education and training to become cogs in the construction industry, and the buildings published in the AR show how architectural imagination can still triumph over the drag of mundane to produce places that enhance human life and spirit.

Richards believed that the AR had a complex role to play in communicating architectural ideas to clients and the general public; he thought of it as a 'bridge, carrying traffic in both directions' that 'can span the distance between architects and the public they serve'. It may still have been possible to make such a programme work even as late as the 1970s, but I doubt it. The difficulties of trying to generate a magazine that can appeal equally strongly to both general public and the design professions have been insurmountable in my time. In both busi-

# SCENE FOR THE FUTURE

ness and intellectual terms, it has been impossible to make a consumer product that has relevance to creative architects and designers or vice-versa – as the few examples that have been tried demonstrate. The successful ones seem to end up as superficial followers of fashion. They tend to go in for interviews illustrated by large pictures of designers rather than what they make. All are seduced by flashy gestures.

## Desperate straits

When I started, the AR was in desperate straits commercially, rapidly losing money and circulation. Something had to be done, and remedies ranged from turning it into a magazine covering earthquakes and natural disasters to becoming a colour supplement to *The Architects' Journal*, our sibling. I was convinced that the magazine could become successful again by building on its great days under Richards and his proprietor Hubert de Cronin Hastings. The AR had flirted with amateur sociology and various forms of graphic criticism: it was essential to bring the magazine back to being fundamentally about architecture and its immediately related disciplines.

The magazine clearly had to become international to a much greater degree than it had ever been. From its inception, the AR always carried articles about overseas architecture, and it had a rather small but faithful international readership. It was clear that the best architecture and the most important ideas could not be produced by one country, or even continent. And I very much doubted that it would be possible to generate enough money to make a magazine of the kind that the AR must be by focusing mainly on Britain, which has the most prolific and competitive architectural press in the world. Both the AR's content and its marketing had to change. One of the most immediately obvious alterations was to focus each issue on a particular theme of world-wide interest. This allowed us to bring some sort of focus to the nebulous mass of ideas and projects that surrounds an international magazine.<sup>3</sup>

It was relatively easy to begin to change the editorial content, though there was much to catch up on. Getting the financial side to work was a different proposition, particularly under the dunderheaded and doomed Maxwell regime of the late '80s, which actually attempted to reduce the overseas circulation – British Gas didn't approve apparently. Under Emap, which bought the magazine (and the AJ) from Maxwell's wreckage, we have had publishing directors who have pursued sensible international policies, and made it possible for us to innovate (for instance by setting up the very successful ar+d Emerging Architecture Awards).<sup>4</sup>

It may seem odd to spend so much time in my final leader talking about the business side of the operation. But there is no point in making a magazine if it does not generate a sensible profit.

What is the character of the magazine that has had to be defended so carefully? Although one of the oldest architectural magazines in the world (it was founded in 1896), the AR has had only 11 editors.<sup>5</sup> I am honoured to be of their company. Save for D. S. MacColl who was in the chair for a short unhappy time a century ago, and the great historian Nikolaus Pevsner (who stepped in while Richards was away at the War), all of us trained fully or partly as architects. So the magazine is fundamentally about place-making and the art of architecture. All the early editors (again except MacColl) were members of the Arts and Crafts Movement and, from the AR's inception, its editors have promoted (often unconsciously) some of the movement's strongest tenets in a continuing tradition.

All of us have been deeply sceptical of the notion that architecture is an autonomous art. It must serve human purpose and be devoted to enhancing life (in terms of both quantity and quality). It is not about fashion, or what Richards called 'in-language<sup>6</sup> and plug-in gimmicks'. Nor is it a branch of the development industry. The chief inspirers of

the Arts and Crafts movement were Ruskin and Morris, both of whom were early environmental campaigners: learning from them, the AR has always believed that the world's resources are limited, and that development should respect the planet. Concern for tectonic integrity and for place are other abiding passions: buildings should be constructed right and feel right, and they should resonate (however quietly) in our subjective patterns of the physical world.

In addition to the continuing core tradition, I hope we have fostered inherited interests in developments of technology and in the other arts related to architecture – and in exploration of little-known places and people, in time as well as space. None of these has received as much coverage as it deserved because we have lacked resources. Similarly, I would have liked to have devoted more space and time to the disciplines of landscape and urban design, both of which have been developing remarkably in the last two decades.

Of course, I have made lots of mistakes of emphasis and omission, and am grateful to talented colleagues for preventing me from multiplying them. A magazine is a collaborative effort and in my earlier days, Jonathan Glancey, E. M. Farrelly and Frances Anderton enthusiastically explored new territories, while for many years, Peter Buchanan provided thoughtful analytical comment on the rapidly changing scene. Bill Slack enriched the mix with his special kind of graphic design. Penny McGuire brought an inimitable touch to coverage of interiors and product design. Dan Cruickshank reactivated the magazine's interest in history. The present editorial staff (almost all of whom have worked on the AR for years) have continually maintained and enriched the magazine's range and quality. I want to thank them all, and the contributors<sup>7</sup> who have added to the magazine's scope and mix.

## The future

As to the future, a magazine must respond to what happens, rather than trying to set the pace. It can encourage, emphasize and support but not (as I once arrogantly believed) truly initiate. Naturally, I have strong hopes for the future of architecture and the environment which I trust are made clear in the rest of this issue, but I have no more idea of what will really happen than Jim Richards had when he retired.

I leave the AR in the hands of my successor Paul Finch and those of the existing staff, all of whom want to expand energetically and imaginatively into new worlds of ideas, media<sup>8</sup> and creativity. The magazine will clearly change. But I hope that the staff and those who come after them will never forget that the aim of architecture and its related disciplines is to serve and ennoble humanity. And that, sometimes paradoxically, architecture, alone among the arts, can move every aspect of our senses and being. PETER DAVEY

1 I have been editor since 1982, but was involved with the AR for four years before that under my predecessor Lance Wright. Previously, I worked for a dozen years on our weekly UK sibling, *The AJ*.  
2 Richards, J. M., 'Retrospect', AR February 1971, p69  
3 And it adds to the attraction of the publication to the retail trade by giving individual issues prolonged shelf-life. But the themed format has problems: it can be very rigid, and it can prevent rapid response to unexpected events, such as the unanticipated completion of a major building.  
4 Open for completed work to all architects and designers, the awards are offered annually, and have regularly drawn hundreds of entries by (as yet) relatively little known people from all over the world.  
5 Henry Wilson 1896-1900, D. S. MacColl 1900-1904, Mervyn Macartney 1904-1921, Ernest Newton 1921-1922, William Godfrey Newton (Ernest's son) 1921-1927, H. de C. Hastings 1927-1971, Christian Barman (mid 1930s), J. M. Richards 1935 (joined as assistant)-1971, Nikolaus Pevsner (temporary and part time) 1942-1945, Lance Wright 1971-1980, Peter Davey 1982-2005.  
6 The AR has always tried (not always successfully) to analyse architecture and architectural ideas in ordinary language. This is often an extremely difficult task as, almost by definition, architecture operates on our psyches in non-verbal ways.  
7 Particularly Peter Blundell Jones, who has analytically chronicled the courses of organic architecture particularly in the German-speaking countries, Juhani Pallasmaa, whose profound essays on humanity and architecture have inspired us all, and Colin St John Wilson who has brought passion and scholarship to debate. Among photographers, Martin Charles and Richard Bryant have been outstanding.  
8 Perhaps uses of new media linked to the magazine will allow creation of Richards' 'bridge carrying traffic in both directions'.