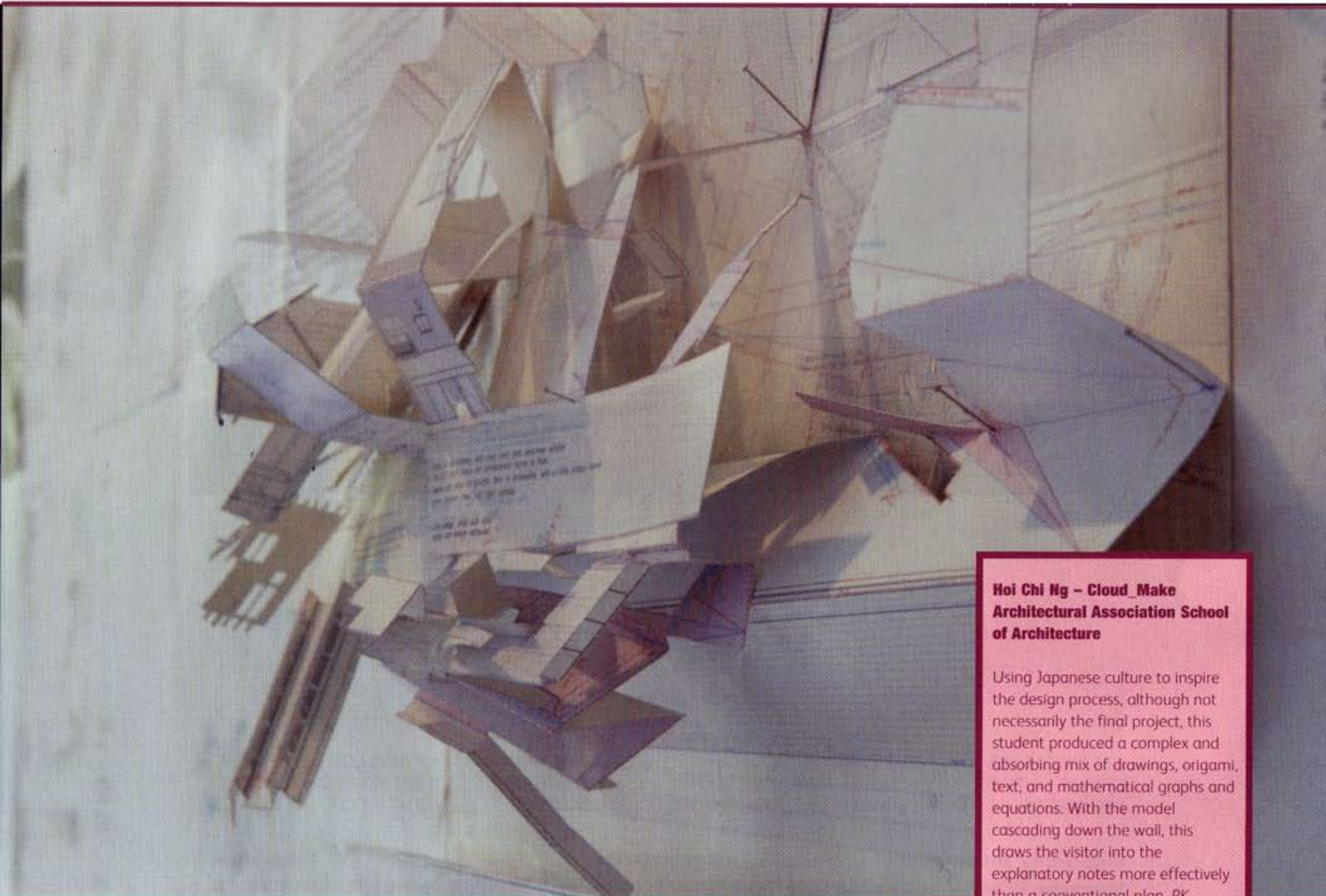




# PAPER TIGERS

This year's graduate architecture shows produced work that is intelligent, challenging and experimental. Blueprint's **Peter Kelly** and a team of critics pick out some of the most interesting projects

When discussing graduate shows the focus is often on the fortunes and quality of the university rather than the work itself. The issue of whether one school has produced a better crop than another, or improved on its past performance, can easily overshadow the wealth of imaginative pieces by the students. It also perpetuates the view of graduates as automatons being churned out on a conveyor belt, unworthy of specific attention until they have proved themselves in the harsh professional market. But the two main purposes of graduate shows – as a showcase for young architects, and as a source of inspiration for working professionals – aren't well served by this approach. And if you are looking for new architectural ideas, then there is more hope of finding them in the work of students than in the majority of commercial projects.



**Hoi Chi Ng – Cloud\_Make**  
**Architectural Association School of Architecture**

Using Japanese culture to inspire the design process, although not necessarily the final project, this student produced a complex and absorbing mix of drawings, origami, text, and mathematical graphs and equations. With the model cascading down the wall, this draws the visitor into the explanatory notes more effectively than a conventional plan. PK

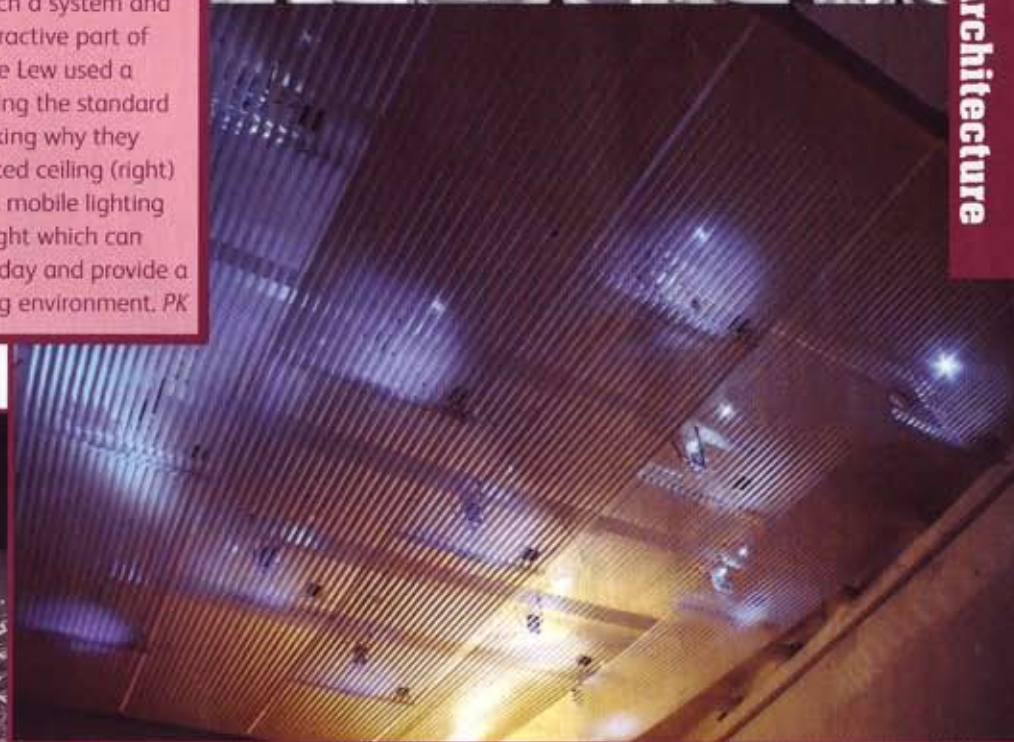
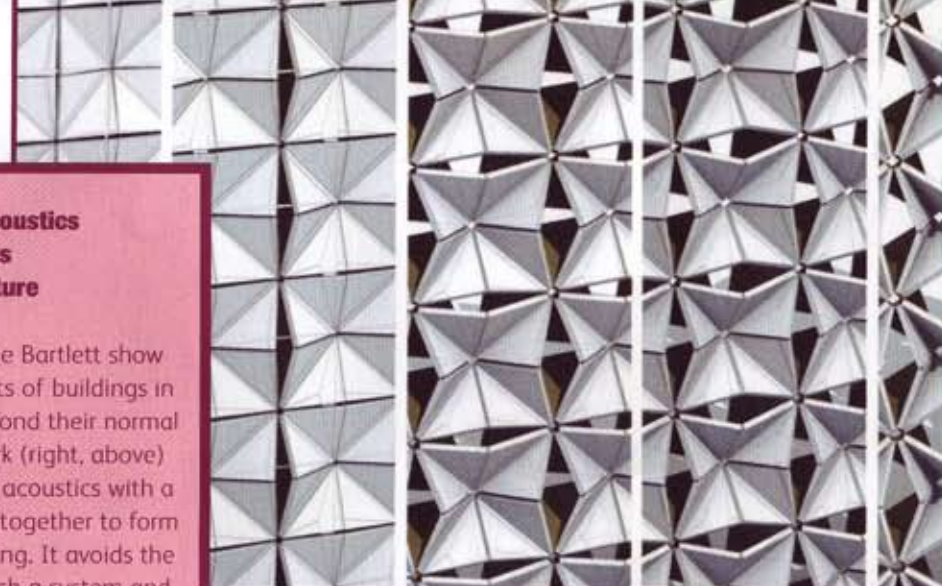
**Benjamin Guy Thomas – Arctic Ice-Scapes**  
**Bartlett School of Architecture**

This habitable landscape in Hammerfest, northern Norway consists of an aluminium mesh structure above a topography of concrete platforms. Ice crystals form on the frozen aluminium mesh, which is able to control the snow flow over the accreted structure. In turn, wind-blown snow distribution alters the geometric relationship between each of the structural elements, creating more and less dense parts of the structure. During the summer, the mesh landscape provides shade for a fish market and a tourist ferry dock. In the winter, the snow-covered mesh provides shelter for a performing arts centre, while icicles are used to reflect and refract light into the interior spaces. *PK*



**Charis Tsang – Foldable Acoustics**  
**Ernie Lew – Lofty Ambitions**  
**Bartlett School of Architecture**

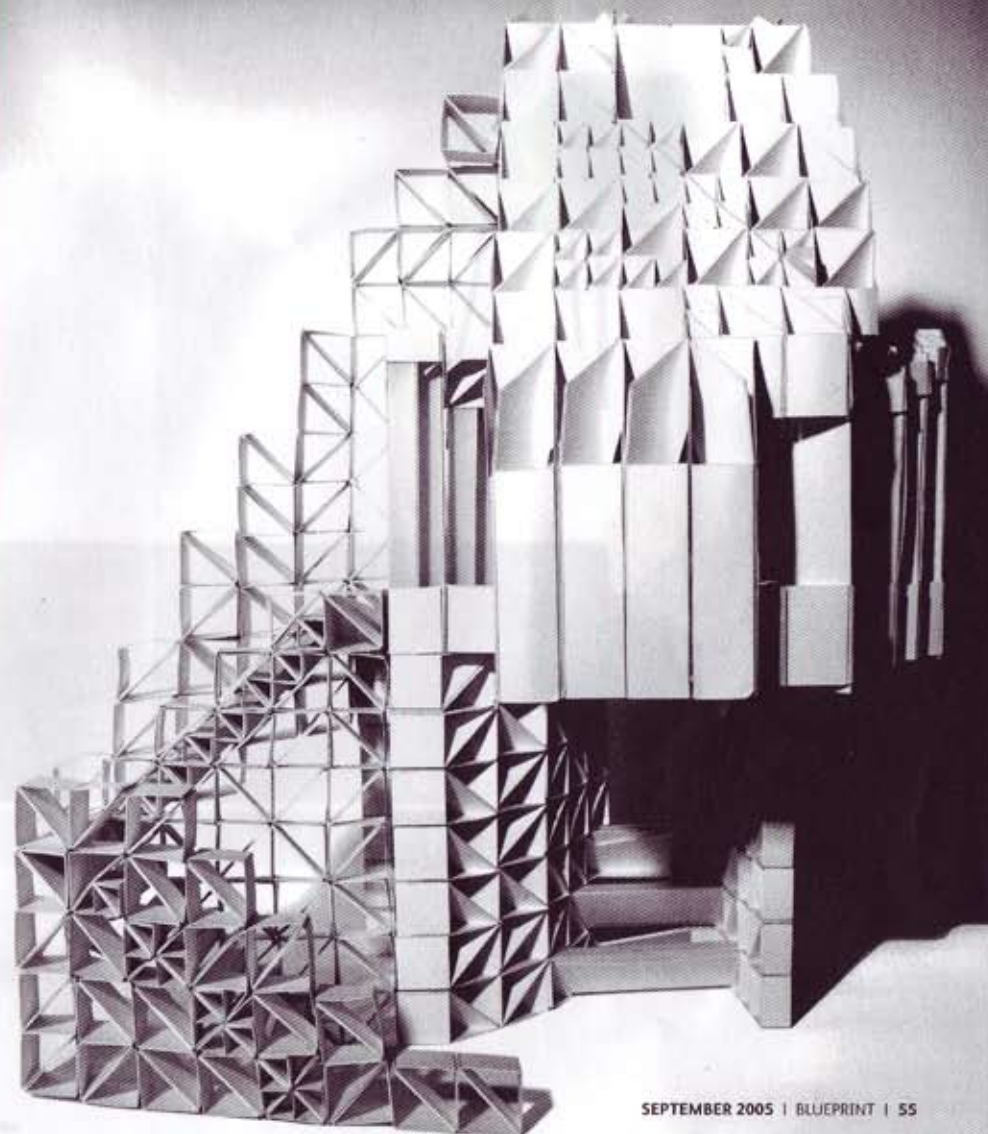
Some of the best work at the Bartlett show looked at individual elements of buildings in ways that pushed them beyond their normal function. Charis Tsang's work (right, above) approached the problem of acoustics with a single module that is linked together to form an adjustable interior cladding. It avoids the usual temptation to hide such a system and makes it an integral and attractive part of the interior architecture. Ernie Lew used a similar approach in questioning the standard blandness of flat ceilings, asking why they are rarely noticed. Lew's slatted ceiling (right) lets light spill through from a mobile lighting system, producing variable light which can change over the course of a day and provide a more natural working or living environment. *PK*



**Alex Mok: Paper Wedding Chapel, Silvertown, east London**  
**Bartlett School of Architecture**

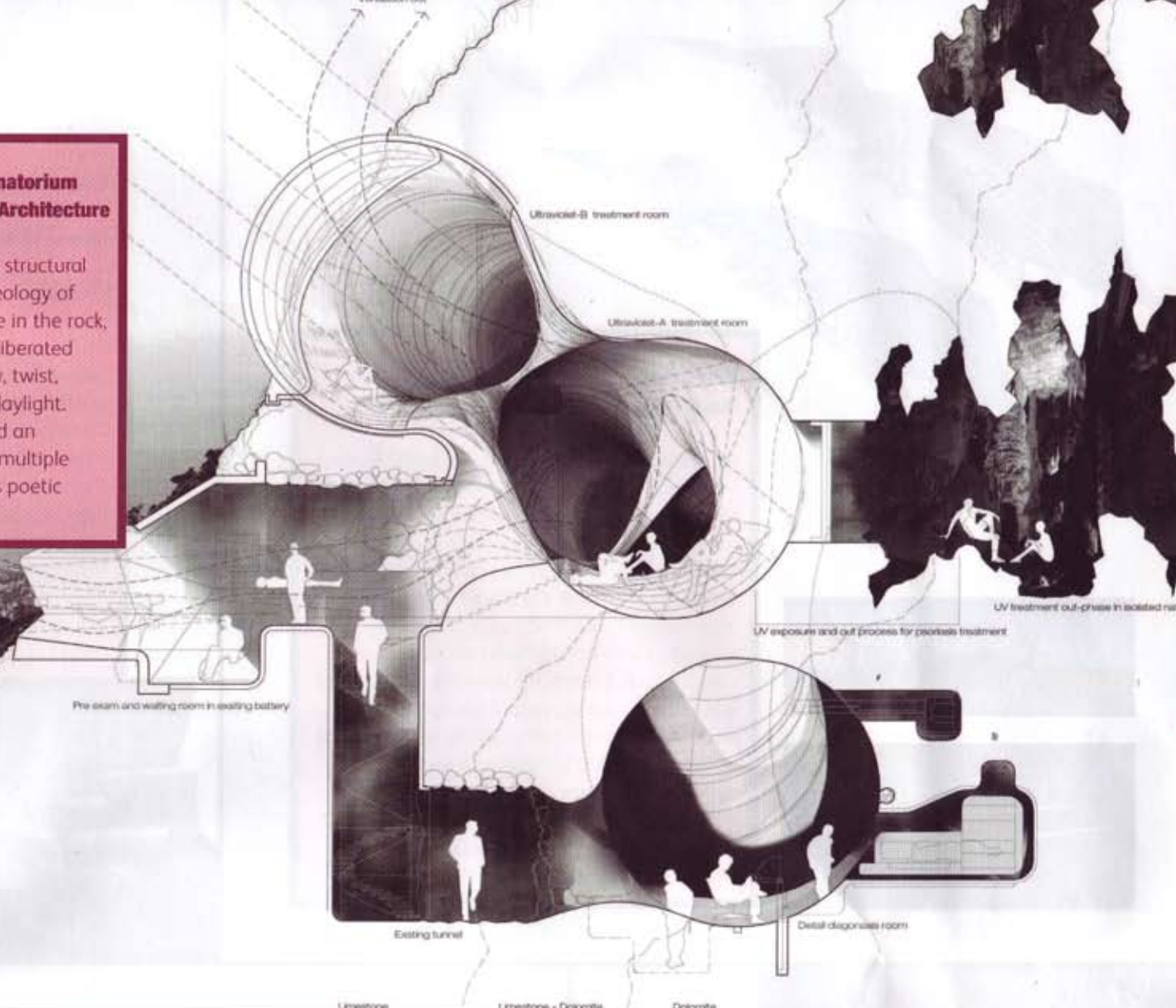
Bucking the tendency of religious buildings to appear permanent and imposing, this is an idea for a wedding chapel in east London to be constructed out of discarded and worthless post-consumer paper from the nearby Bow Waste

Paper Mill. The chapel nestles within the trees of the idyllic Lyle Park, which sits alongside the Thames and is surrounded by the declining industries of Silvertown. The building is constructed from a range of folds – heavy-duty structural packaging folds form the main construction and a veil of geometric tessellated origami provides a rainscreen. *PK*



**Myung Ho Lee – Gibraltar Cloud Sanatorium**  
**Architectural Association School of Architecture**

This enticing project interweaves two structural systems – the natural and random geology of fissures and caverns formed over time in the rock, and a happy tunnel boring machine liberated from its normal alignments to burrow, twist, intersect, polish and re-emerge into daylight. Vibrant, orthogonally cut sections and an engaging, explicit model made from multiple laser-cut sheets of card articulate this poetic project. *Matthew Priestman*



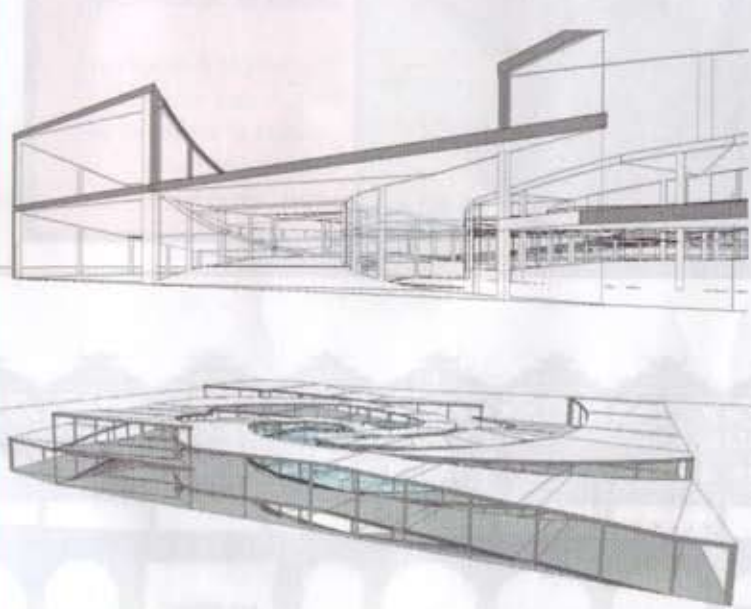
**Chris Gray**  
**Edinburgh College of Art**  
**School of Architecture**

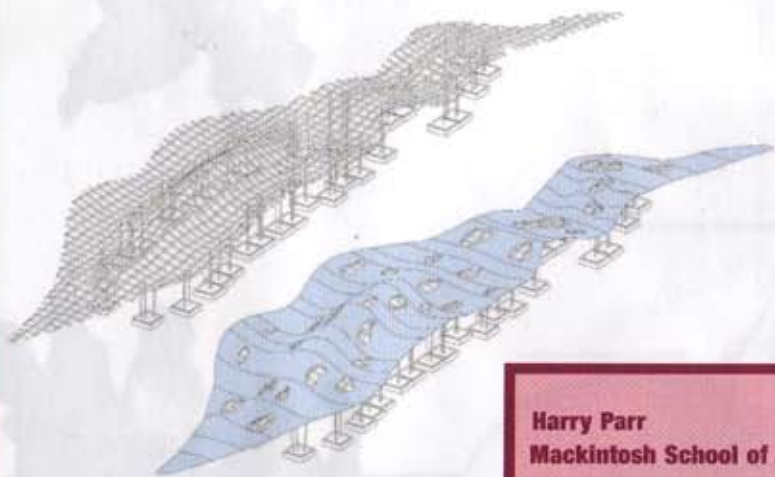
For their final project on the subject Future Academy, several students envisioned predictable organic spaces dedicated to vague notions of self-empowerment. Gray's seemed a more mature response, however. His design consists of an assemblage of workshops and studios teaching the art of working

with tools and machinery – subjects not usually covered by schools. His building is a contemporary version of the traditional Edinburgh backstreet workshop, taking its cues 'from the heavy-duty activities within it and the clean and beautiful products that are produced'. The main workshop is a massive shed of weathered steel, while a second block of refined copper cladding and glass wraps around the main block. *Katy Dunn*

**Maysam Al-Nasser**  
**Edinburgh College of Art**  
**School of Architecture**

Al-Nasser didn't need words to explain his concept, as the design speaks for itself. His spiralling fractal of a building draws visitors into its centre through a system of ramps and dual-function corridors, with shops and marketing spaces becoming private libraries and studios the closer you get to the heart of the building. Its swirling circulation flow reflects the multiculturalism of its proposed context in Leith. *Katy Dunn*





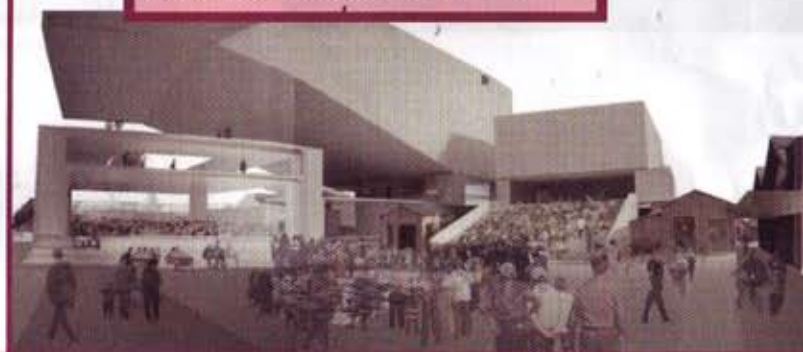
**Harry Parr  
Mackintosh School of Architecture**

For those who admire the work of Enric Miralles but find the Scottish Parliament too rich for their tastes, the Scottish degree shows provided cause for much optimism. Parr's scheme for a school in Milton of Campsie expresses all that is bold and simple in the work of the Catalan. The town was once no more than a hamlet, but is rapidly expanding with holiday homeowners. As a consequence, it needs the amenities this scheme provides. The classroom facilities are strung out along three organic prongs reaching out into the landscape. On Parr's previous project – a hydrotherapy centre – he collaborated with an engineering undergraduate at Paisley University. Miralles's model of organic progress works well with this discipline. *Tim Abrahams*



**Daniel Koo – New Beijing Art Academy  
Architectural Association  
School of Architecture**

Concerned with the city block and its relations to the interior, this project investigates the urban condition and the gradation of public space from street to garden. The courtyard plan is a commentary on timeless patterns of Chinese architecture, from the Forbidden City, through squares and gardens, to the hutongs of old Beijing. Developed as a quadrangular perimeter structure of folding rectilinear tubes, the project is beautifully presented with calligraphic line drawings in conventional section and plan. *Matthew Priestman*



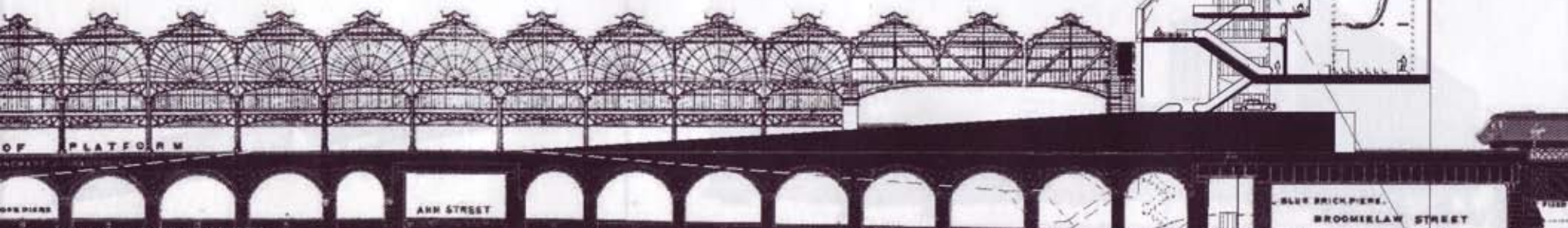
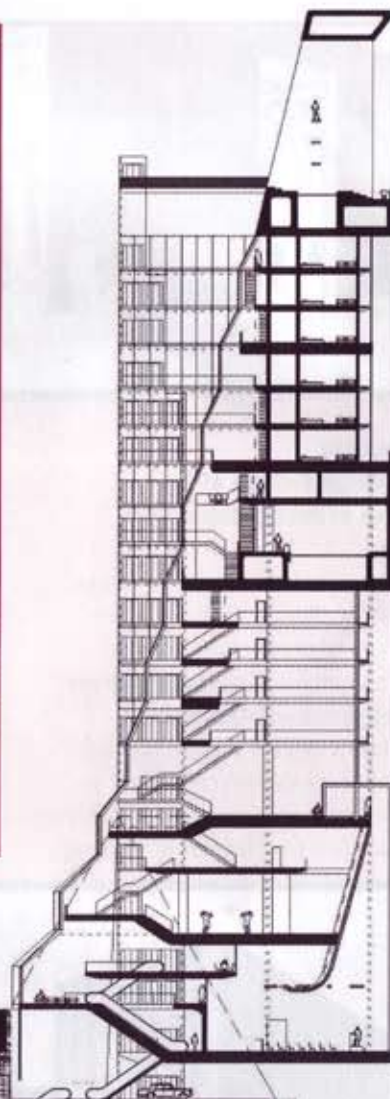
**Helena Westerlind –  
Architectural Association  
School of Architecture**

This simple exploration of texture and material consists of a cabinet with drawers filled with imprinted clay. *PK*

SUE BARR/AA

**Edward Cluer  
Mackintosh School of Architecture**

When Edward Cluer attended the recent Archiprix Awards in Glasgow he was surprised by how prescient his design for a new tower was. The awards themselves revealed how divergent the approach of politicians and architects were to the regeneration of the river Clyde. Cluer didn't mention his diploma project, which is a shame because it finds a middle way between the two sides in the debate. Cluer's treatment pushes the brutalism of the form while expressing its more subtle intentions. His combination of auction room and hotel gives the Clyde project the scale that the locals want and the vision the Archiprix workshop leaders felt was lacking. Cluer's design performs another vital function by addressing ship building, an industry that still clings to the Clyde. Its polycarbon skin, however, references modern ship manufacture rather than some archaic historical notion. *Tim Abrahams* **B**



# WHEN WORDS GET IN THE WAY

Architecture shows are the graduates' one chance to reach a wider public and explain their work. So why, asks Peter Kelly, are they so terrible at communicating?

Visiting too many architecture student shows can seriously loosen your grip on the English language. After a few hours spent reading texts written by undergraduates to explain their work, you can be tricked into believing that words like 'individuated' are in common usage, and that sentences should be as difficult to unravel as knots.

Architectural descriptions range from the vague, such as 'a catalyst for psychological experiences', to the bewildering: 'it is this "in-between" zone where the choreography of people becomes the choreography of space' spotted at The Bartlett's show. The problem here, and in many other degree show texts, is that the student is trying to express the project through words, rather than explain it.

Of course, there is a thin line between criticising these descriptions and saying: 'it's only a bloody building'. Understanding

the founding ideas of a project can be revealing and make the drawings become all the more comprehensible. Impenetrable language, however, just provokes dismissive responses. It makes you suspicious of the work, wondering whether this foggy language is caused by foggy thinking. If an idea cannot be articulated clearly, it probably means that the idea wasn't too clear in the first place.

This is not just facetious nit-picking; it is genuinely important that architects learn to express themselves clearly. As Adrian Forty, professor of architectural history at the Bartlett School of Architecture, notes in his book *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern*

*Architecture*: 'Language is vital to architects – their success in gaining commissions, and achieving the realisation of projects, frequently depends upon verbal presentations and persuasiveness.' It is much more vital for architecture students than it is for young product designers, for example, who can exhibit instantly recognisable prototypes of their work.

Katy Dunn, who visited the Edinburgh School of Architecture for *Blueprint*, notes: 'The trouble with degree shows is that by the time they come around, the graduates can't see the wood for the trees. They've become so immersed in the intricacies of their own design that they overlook the fact that exhibition visitors haven't been through the same exhaustive process. Just a word or two of introduction to the course and the subject matter of the final project would make all the difference between an

impenetrable forest of drawings and an accessible body of work.' Appealing to lay visitors should be one of the students' main aims, even at this stage of their careers.

So the question is: why are so many unable to articulate their projects in a comprehensible way? Tom Muirhead of TMA, who teaches at De Montfort and Nottingham University, sees it as a matter of jargon – something that would be the same with a group of doctors or lawyers. Brett Steele, the new chairman of the Architectural Association, believes that tutors do their best to guide students, but doesn't see it as a major concern: 'People tend to overreact to the problem. Because

community, Steele remarks: 'Students in architecture tend to share the assumptions of the profession.' This is sometimes apparent even in the course descriptions written by members of staff. A fairly typical example comes from the AA Projects Review: 'Barthes's text supports Diploma Unit 5's fondness for the elaboration of references over "individuated" formulations of meaning.' What hope can there be for students if this is their guidance? As design writer Michael Beirut notes: 'I have seen many architects – well-known ones, too – make presentations where they simply string together long passages of opaque

**IF AN IDEA CANNOT BE ARTICULATED CLEARLY, IT PROBABLY MEANS THAT THE IDEA WASN'T TOO CLEAR IN THE FIRST PLACE**

journalists and other academics are trained in words they emphasise written information over visual information.'

The difference here is that the degree shows are the one opportunity for the public and potential employers to see what architecture students are capable of. Also, this is rarely a matter of being blinded by technical terms – each individual word is perfectly understandable, it's just when they are put into labyrinthine paragraphs that the reader tends to lose their way.

This is really part of a broader issue – that students will learn habits of discourse from tutors and the wider architectural

archibabble. Part of this lack of interest in communicating may come from arrogance.'

While the problem is not universal – many of the students featured in this month's *Blueprint* (p54-58) produced explanations as clear and insightful as their work itself – it should be a serious issue for architecture schools.

For more insight into the thinking that goes into graduate projects it's worth looking at [www.archinect.com/schoolblog](http://www.archinect.com/schoolblog), in which students trace their progress towards the final show. It reveals that students can be articulate and engaging about complex work once freed from the conventions of academia.

## Next month...

In our biggest issue of the year: Herzog & de Meuron's de Young Museum opens in San Francisco; an exclusive preview of plans for London's Thames Gateway; new concepts in mobile phones; cycle stations to link London with Paris; talent spotters at the graduate design shows; the best work at New Designers, the RCA and Undu Graduates. Plus two new regular columnists