

Looking forward ... and back

Housing dominates this issue of **arq**. In his description of four recent projects designed for United Kingdom sites by his Netherlands practice, Hans van der Heiden considers housing as an element at the city scale (pp. 12 – 31). While in **arq**'s first 'revisit' article, Fiona McLachlan reviews the performance in use of a large 1960s Edinburgh housing scheme (pp. 33 – 50). Common to the schemes in both articles is the use of the perimeter block or enclave as a housing form.

The Netherlands and Britain have created vast areas of housing since 1945. The results have been both admired and reviled. But whereas in the UK the construction of social housing almost ceased in 1981, the Dutch (who have long had different and more stable development and tenure systems) have maintained a continuous programme and appear to have been far more successful at urban expansion. Just compare the Amsterdam and London docklands!

All over the world, changes in household formation and population shift are generating an enormous demand for homes. One example is the UK south-east, around London. There, the prospects for a successful outcome are not good. On the one hand, the UK architectural profession's housing design skills have partially atrophied. On the other, the British revulsion against 'planning', lack of concern for urban cohesion and infrastructure and an obsession with 'landmark' buildings has created an unfavourable context for new development. **arq**'s four projects show what might be done on this unfertile soil.

James Stirling once said that he never returned to his buildings after they were completed. But, if he didn't, others did: some of the most widely read articles in the professional journals of the 70s and 80s were 'revisits' to long-completed buildings – including Stirling and Gowan's engineering laboratories at Leicester. There is much to be learnt by looking at buildings in use and, over the past seven years **arq** has tried to persuade architecture academics to gain their research 'brownie points' by publishing appraisals of significant older buildings.

'Inside out: social housing at Southfield' is, we hope, the first of many such articles. Its author, Fiona McLachlan, is an architect and the Head of the Edinburgh University Department of Architecture. Her appraisal was warmly welcomed by the referees, who included one of the most experienced social housing architects in the UK. As in many cases, there's been a substantial editorial input – which we would be more than willing to repeat for further papers of this kind from other academics.

Building use specialists may claim that the average architect-academic hasn't got the skills for post occupancy evaluation. But architects will point to the dearth of broadly based available feedback. In the meantime, there is as much to be learnt from McLachlan's review of the past as there is from the design research described by van der Heijden.

THE EDITORS