

There's superb new domestic architecture for all tastes and pockets, says Kieran Long, and it doesn't require a wholesale rethink of the way we've been living

Home sweet new home

We are encouraged to think of the future of housing as a series of stated goals: being innovative that wouldn't have got in place in the 1970s. Thoughts of the future assume a world with no existing built environment, indeed, some argue it's time for a future of sparse settlements and other than edge-of-town developments in space. These disconnected schemes have been fuelled by a generation of architects who have seen others as a series of icons... epitomised by Lord Cullen's comment that the 'best buildings in a lifetime' is:

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However, there is emerging a new consciousness of what people really want from housing, and what is likely to change the minds of developers away from architect-designed housing. A new generation of architects is embracing a more democratic which looks set to replace the popular conception of architect-designed housing: concrete estates with slatted metal railings, or modernised urbanised concrete one-off houses that are more emblem of the Hollywood hills than of every other England. Waking up to the sobering fact that 90% of buildings that will be in use in 30 years time are already built, developers are realising that the days of wholesale rethinking of housing typologies is over. There is a need to recognise what people like about the houses they already live in.

Moving contemporary housing away from the past and popular is as much in the minds of architects as in the interests of estate agents. A new house still impresses most private buyers a brick box in the middle of a road, however of late the best benefit of transport links apart from roads. This is the proven market leader, but one

which is justifiable environmentally and will not leave us with anything like the built heritage that previous generations have bequeathed us, but for nothing to pass in time is a waste in design terms, and people in the country want to live genuine homes. That this is a cause of the character of good properties is underlined, often has been wholly missed by developers in that building poor facsimiles of these much-loved at the end-of-terrace roads without endowing them with developments with that same character. The architects again are failing to keep up with housing that can seem as distinctive, but in contemporary — a contribution to the urban fabric rather than a contribution of it.

Younger cities are already happening. It has been the public sector, free of political constraints that has taken the lead, with housing associations such as the Peabody Trust building some of the finest housing in the country using good architects and cutting-edge technology. It is encouraging to see on the private sector that good design is a requirement, as well as creating better towns. In Leeds for instance, young architects with genuine design credentials such as Richard Meier, Monaghan Morris, Buxton Freely and Parker Hulme are impressing urban spaces while continuing and adding to existing traditions. AMM's mixed-use housing and commercial scheme, Newgate development in the key area of The Calls has several panels on its facade, borrowed from the panels of the historic shopping arcades in the city. This cultural reference influences the housing as intelligent to Leeds, while creating something commercially contemporary. This is a mixed-use development, with bars, restaurants and shops of ground level, and will create a new community in the city.

The south-west is also a well-documented example of good quality urban city housing development by private developers. Mainly chapter's last employer, but by architects such as Urban Splash and Ward KP, is be-

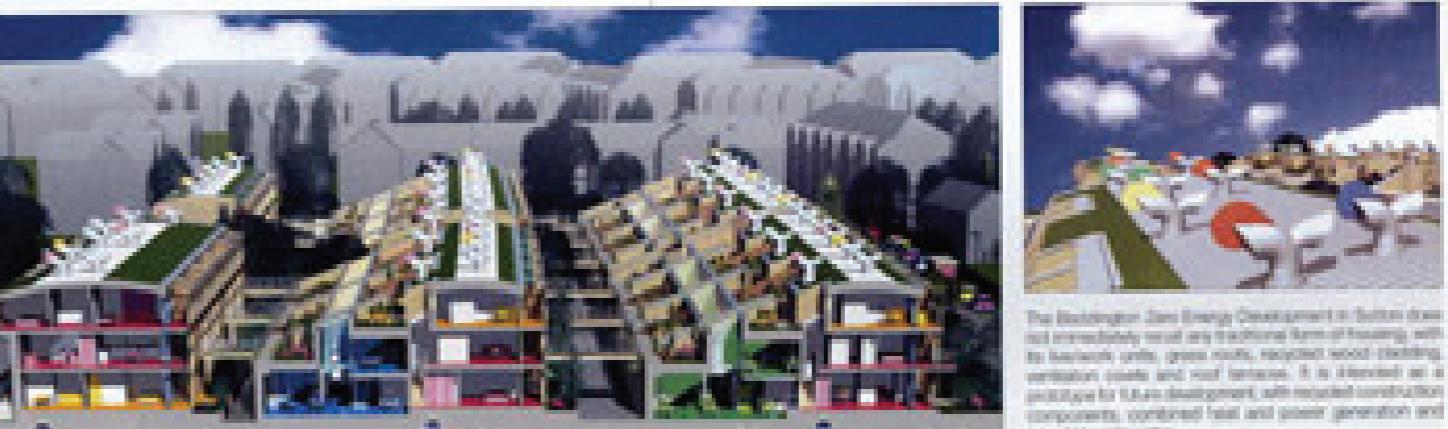
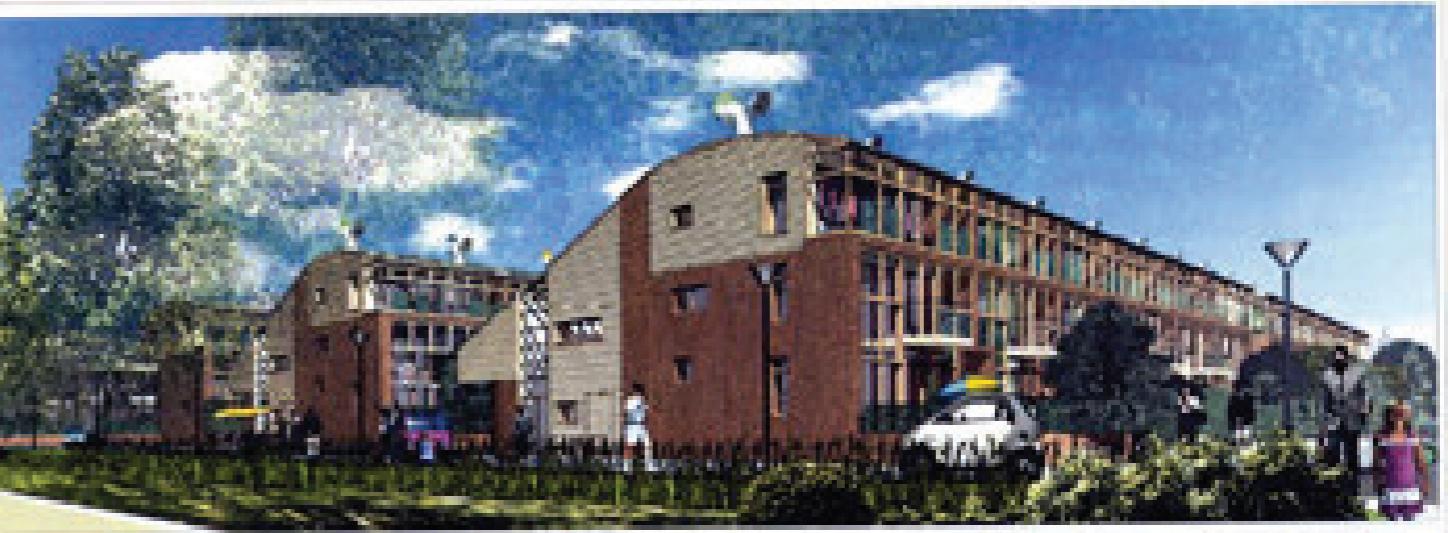
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"It's starting to dawn on the private sector that good design is a money spinner"

ing followed by Liverpool. These are high-density developments fulfilling long-term Bristol's PDR 100%. It is not just the design for rich people. While as much has focused on the capital's gated communities of apartments (that makes no effort to integrate with the city of Bristol), the Broadway Mayfair-designed apartment complex at Bishop's Cross in London being a typical example, smaller projects have made an effort to contribute to the city. Bristol has some good examples, with the Ashton Housing scheme for single young people by a small firm standing out. Developments like these are dragging people back to the inner cities. Most of these urban designers are young, single and married, brought up in suburban and mostly Northern cities that are rediscovering their social stories and cultural identities.

Urban family homes are also getting a makeover. David Adjaye's Elberry House for a family in Whetstone, east London is featured on the cover, in an acquisition, but is an audacious and impudent rejection of conventional Edwardian terms. A solidious black facade looks at first glance like a safe banking, but on closer inspection is a haphazard made-over-cast ironwork shell. Inside on the other side is a white interior with soft-facing plaster and a series of beautiful, idiosyncratic spaces. The project has caused a storm on the pages of architectural journals, debates about it of 'artistic bankruptcy' and being 'tightening', supporting its 'extraordinary typology', representing "a long awaited reawakening of architecture in this country".

If this chaotic reawakening is one end of new housing design, then Chris Jones Architects' extraordinary new family house in Harrow could be the other. This is a stylised version of home, a subtle reference to the vernacular, which regards itself as contemporary as you get closer to it. A brickwork podium and timber structure



The BedZED Zero Energy Development in Sutton does not immediately recall any traditional form of housing, with its rounded units, green roofs, recycled wood cladding, corrugated metals and local materials. It is intended as a prototype for future development, with reduced construction components, combined heat and power generation and recycled water reuse.





Ulrica Frind's thatched poolhouse extension is high-tech modern yet continues local traditions



An MVA's mixed-use housing and commercial scheme in Leeds adopts a shopping arcade aesthetic



The terrace is a proven way of creating lively, safe streets

for £185,000, and has since had it valued at £315,000, a very high price in Scotland. The structure is predominantly of wood, with extensive glazing and an open-plan living space. This is a fitting return to the rest of Horncastle's kit Housing that infects rural Scotland, and could become a model where there were very few good examples before.

Another major issue that will undoubtedly come to define the look of housing in the future is the need to make housing environmentally sustainable. Already, high-profile examples of a new sustainability aesthetic have been completed: Michael Hopkins' new MP's' block opposite the Houses of Parliament, and Short Associates' Lanchester Library at Coventry University to name but two. Buildings like these wear their sustainability like a badge, with natural ventilation being the in-your-face sign of an ecological building strategy. This is taking some time to trickle into housing design, but is beginning to, with the Biggs House, seen on a television documentary last year, and other one-off sustainable houses.

The most important large-scale ecological housing scheme so far attempted on these shores is nearing completion in Sutton, Surrey. The Beddington Zero Energy Development (BedZed) is dauntingly ambitious — a collaboration between the Peabody Trust Housing Association, environmental charity Bioregional and architect Bill Dunster.

The look of these does not immediately recall any traditional form of housing, with its brickwork units, green roofs, recycled wood cladding, ventilation cores and roof terraces. The form has been arrived at through research into how the shape and orientation of a house can maximise the benefits of natural light and ventilation. It is intended as a prototype for future development, with recycled construction components, combined heat and power generation and recycled waste water, and could well be the shapes of things. These may not have the sleek, modern lines of the best new housing, but they may well prove attractive to

homebuyers, especially as utility bills will be cut by up to a third compared to a conventional house of the same size.

These houses are laid out as a terrace, a house type that is a proven way of creating lively, safe streets and sociable communities. The density is much higher than conventional suburban development, and comparable to that of Georgian terraces. At street level, rows of front doors create a recognisable street scene, and set a good precedent for future development, ending the proliferation of self-contained and inward-looking housing developments, and starting a street grid that could be extended to create a legible residential quarter.

Densification of the suburbs is also a big issue; making this comfortable is an even bigger one. At BedZed, high-density does not mean a lack of space. Every flat has external space, be it a roof terrace, garden or balcony, and its sustainable credentials make it even more attractive to the cash-conscious family.

Similar layout principles are applied in an urban context in Peter Barber Architects and Jodrell & Whalen's masterplan for two large estates in Hackney. A return to terraced housing, at high-density, but with plenty of outdoor space and good surveillance on to the street is helping to design out crime in these areas. This is the kind of development that aims to end the urban wildernesses of the worst council estates through high-quality design. The surrounding environment is equally important: a mile-long linear park shows that housing design alone cannot improve communities, but good master-planning and landscaping are needed too.

These examples show that there is a lot to be positive about in British housing design. With good designers and far-sighted planners, perhaps we can start to imagine our futures as being in our existing cities, rather than imagining a place where we can start all over again.

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