

Cambridge Central Mosque unfurls

Apprenticeship courses take root

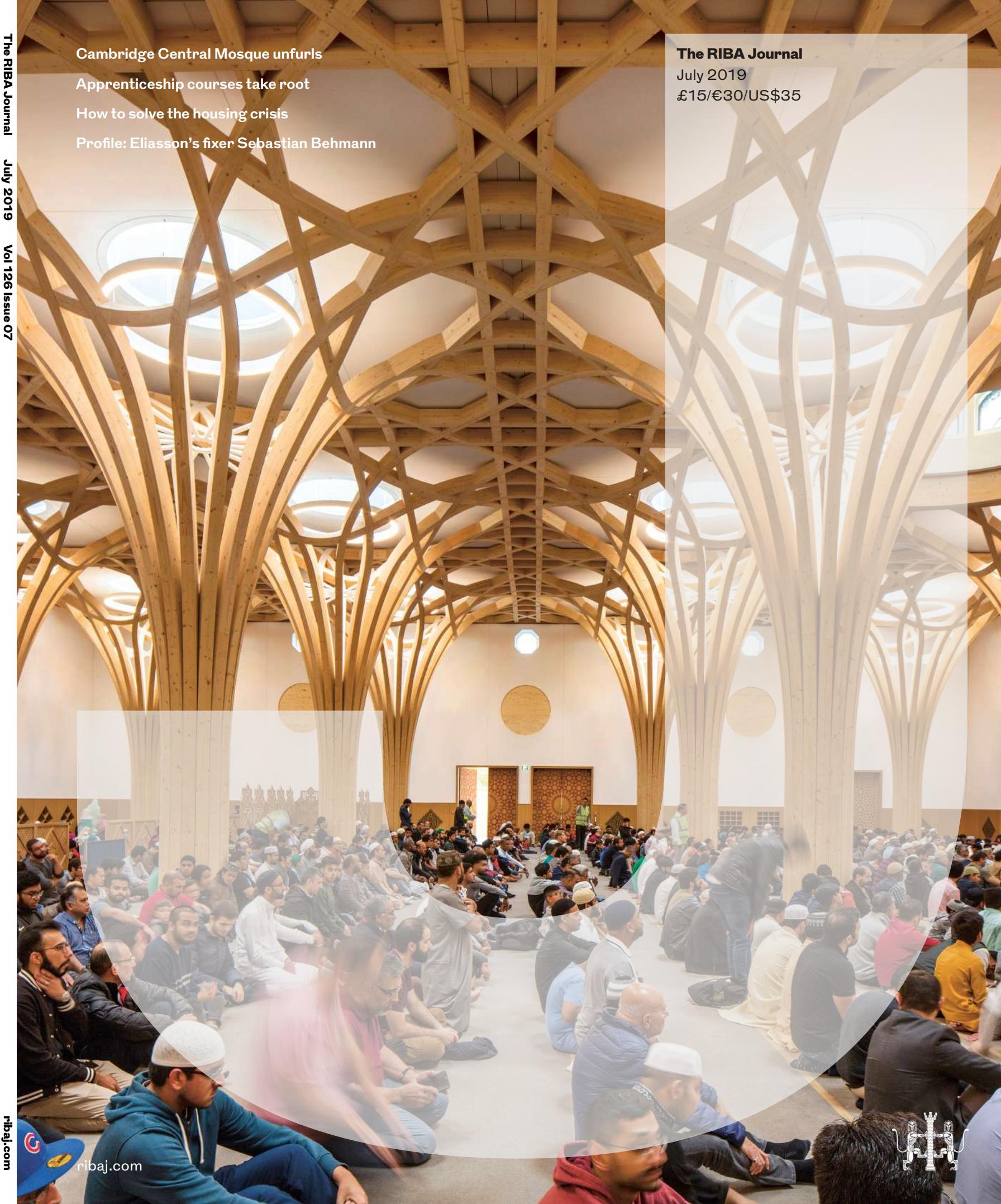
How to solve the housing crisis

Profile: Eliasson's fixer Sebastian Behmann

The RIBA Journal

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Heaps of history

RIBA International Prize nominee Philippe Prost's restoration of a mining village in northern France is helping transform the area's reputation too, as vegetation reclaims the once menacing slag heaps

Words: Isabelle Priest This image: Antéale

Buildings
Open air museum



ANTÉALE

When you're driving south along the A1 from Lille in northern France, or coming from Paris in the opposite direction, there's a moment when the relatively flat, uninteresting landscape recedes and suddenly you're in a valley formed by mountainous slag heaps. Nothing prepares you for it. One minute there's nothing, the next slag heaps are everywhere – all sizes, types and forms, conical, plateau, truncated and 'modern'.

Thirty years ago, the sight might have caused rear seat passengers in the car to hunker down and hold on tight. The mounds loomed large and dark above the landscape and so did everything they stood for. Man's activities prised nature from this place until they suffered the same fate. But today, green-



The mining valley is now a World Heritage site

Above La Cité des Électriciens was one of the first mining villages to be built in northern France.

Left Deserted and derelict, the Cité as found in 2013.

Right Map showing the Cité surrounded by other mining villages and multiple slag heaps.



ing at their bases, the slag heaps are the most visible remnants of a period in our social and industrial history whose passing people are just about coming to terms with. The fraught political ending that took place decades ago – strikes, unemployment and upheaval as the government closed down the then nationalised coal industry – has blown away with the coal dust and an appreciation of the people and places which enabled that history has descended, accompanied by a sprinkling of money and remembrance.

Now, when you cross that point on the motorway, it's not just slag heaps you see, there is also a sign explaining you are entering a UNESCO World Heritage Site – a protected landscape status that most would have found laughable until very recently.

The bassin minier – valley of miners – as it is known, stretches in an arc 120km long and 20km wide from the Belgian border east of Valenciennes over the départements of Nord and Pas-de-Calais to the west of Béthune. It was awarded its status in 2012 as a cultural, evolving, living heritage. It's not just the slag heaps (51 of the circa 350 are listed), that matter though, it's the whole set-up – the urbanism, methods of construction, materials and ways of life that look so ordinary until you think twice about them.

Coal mining on an industrial scale didn't

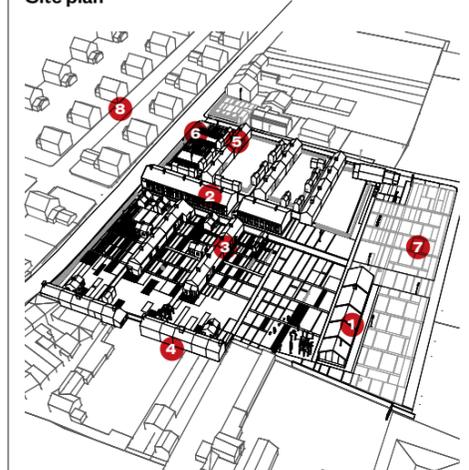
IN NUMBERS

€15m
Total contract cost

€2,600
Cost per m²

1,572m²
Total GIA renovated and new build

Site plan



- 1 Interpretation Centre
- 2 Museum about the Cité
- 3 Studios/accommodation
- 4 Holiday cottages
- 5 Renovated social housing
- 6 New square
- 7 Visitor car parking
- 8 Later miner housing

begin here in France, but the characteristics that developed in this region are unusual and intensive. The huge mural in the new centre of interpretation designed by Atelier d'Architecture Philippe Prost (AAPP) in Bruay-la-Buissière shows how from the 1720s deeper mines, advancing methods and greater volumes transformed a primarily rural landscape into an industrial one of pits, shafts, processing plants and worker housing.

Land was cheap so industrialists bought it speculatively to test for coal. If none was found, they would use it for equipment and ancillary buildings or housing for the vast numbers of people required to work in the mines, who came from all over the world. Buildings were mostly low-rise and horizontal because they cost less. Consequently in addition to the slag heaps the UNESCO valley contains 800 models of workers' housing; 80,000 homes spread over more than 700 mining villages or estates. Most of them were made using the red clay from the companies' land, fired using their own coal and designed by their own engineers.

AAPP's Interpretation Centre is in one of the earliest of these villages, la Cité des Électriciens, built by the Bruay Mining Company between 1856 and 1861. By 1918 production was 4.5m tonnes a year and the firm employed 20,505 people. But when the



The new Centre of Interpretation replicates the volume of the old terraces using more modern, lighter materials.

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This is the simplest type of architecture with its roots in agricultural buildings

houses were built, most of the miners would have been former agricultural day labourers. Without alternative reference points, the architecture of the Cité was equally transitional – 43 low, long narrow houses of 30 to 50m² in seven 'barreau' or terraces of four or five, some back-to-back, designed to accommodate families plus their chickens and rabbits.

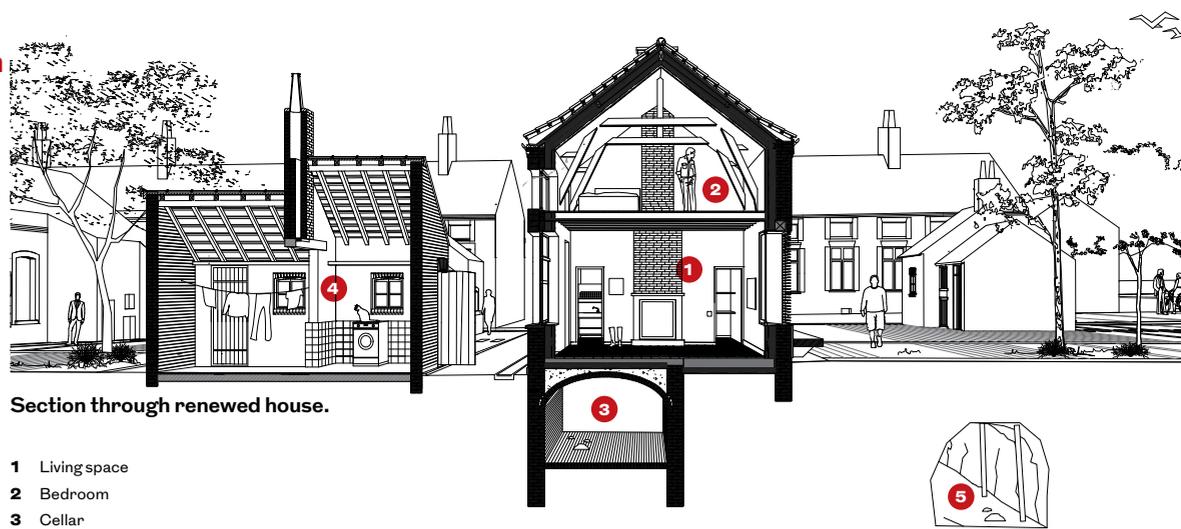
'We are at the first rung of the ladder,' explains Prost. 'This is the simplest type of architecture which has its roots in rural and agricultural buildings.' Each plot had a garden for growing vegetables, a fruit tree and house with a coal bunker in the cellar, open living space on the ground floor and bedrooms in the attic. Other facilities – the bakehouse, latrines, washhouses and wells – would initially have been communal before private outhouses were built by the company to improve hygiene and thereby productivity.

Today people from outside the bassin minier view it with new curiosity and wistfulness. But as recently as 2008, in the film *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*, this Cité played the role of a depressed, sparsely populated town of outrageously coarse and uncivilised people, a comical send-up of how the rest of France stereotyped this part of the north. The pits closed in Bruay in 1969 (coal mining finished across northern France in 1991) and it was in a state of 'extreme dilapidation'.

Yet the film became the highest grossing in France and shone a spotlight on what a unique and culturally significant place it is. By the time Prost arrived on the project after winning a competition in 2013, the last miner's widow had just departed, and walls moved if you touched them.

The aim of the project was to restore the site to its early condition. Half of it has been reinstated as social housing by Maisons et Cités. The other half has become a type of open-air museum, which director Isabelle Mauchin says was conceived to communicate to locals the importance of the mining valley and why it has been awarded protected status. It is a gateway for visitors to the region too.

As the architect of the lauded Ring of



Section through renewed house.

- 1 Living space
- 2 Bedroom
- 3 Cellar
- 4 Utility and drying room
- 5 Mine

Below View of the bedroom from the bathroom of one of the new holiday lets.



Bottom Some areas of wallpaper and flooring have been preserved in the museum about how people lived in the village.



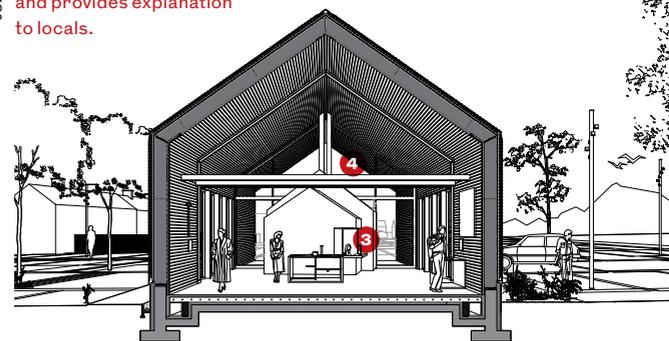
Remembrance nearby, for Prost the project is therefore a memorial and rescue. The inhabited houses have been refurbished and extended to provide modern accommodation with low fenced gardens and a square to the road. The rest of the site is open to the public. The largest terrace of back-to-backs is now the museum of the Cité itself, its collection of artefacts showing who lived in the village and what life was like. Openings between the 10 houses create a series of linked spaces that recall the previous houses but give a level of continuity to the exhibition – photographs, audio, news cuttings, snapshots of the layers of wallpaper and lino that were found in situ when the project began. You can peek down the horrendously steep stair to the cellars and enter two bedrooms as they would have been, washed with green and ultramarine.

Elsewhere, the former miners' houses have become studios, gallery spaces and accommodation for artists in residence, as well

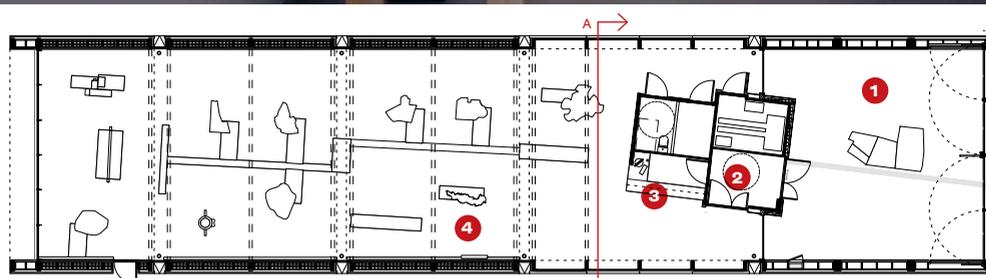


JULIEN LANOÛ

Left The Interpretation Centre is a gateway to the region for visitors and provides explanation to locals.



Interpretation Centre, section A-A.



Interpretation Centre ground floor plan.

- 1 Covered entrance
- 2 Lobby
- 3 Reception
- 4 Main exhibition space

Credits
Architect Atelier d'Architecture Philippe Prost
Client Communauté d'agglomération de Béthune-Bruay, Artois-Lys Romane
Engineer Verdi Ingénierie
Landscape FORR
Exhibition design Du&Ma with Catherine Mariette

Below The outhouses (right) were added later. Each is a series of attached buildings with a latrine, washhouse and chicken coop.



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as five holiday lets. Here, again, the approach has been to knock multiple homes together to make bigger, more contemporary spaces. If ceilings had collapsed the spaces have been left double-height.

The only new building is the interpretation centre, which sits on the footprint of a temporary shelter to house refugees, built by the mining company during World War I and destroyed by fire in the '90s. Volumetrically it is a replica of the larger barreau, constructed using lighter, more sustainable materials of today; wood, recycled denim insulation and glazed tiles. The design bridges inside and out, providing an open space that, Prost discovered, would not have been possible within any of the old terraces because of their fragile condition. The new building's glazing repeats the rhythm of the houses opposite and its red glazed tiles transfigure the brick as a rainscreen. A reception cabin at the threshold playfully recalls the outbuildings.

Overall, from the exterior the project is masterful – faithful and inventive. The gardens have also been recreated by landscape designer FORR to demonstrate how miners used their plots, based on analysis of hundreds of photographs and intense research into the flora found, including dozens of grains brought by immigrants. The new centre feels very much of the red and black, clay and coal it was intended to evoke. The restor-

ation transports you to an in-between time at the dawn of the industrial revolution in this part of France: semi-bucolic, communal, if portrayed quaintly.

However, when it comes to the interiors of the restored buildings, too much has been stripped away, joined together, plastered over, concreted and renewed. The buildings have lost touch with their previous lives and inhabitants; they have been sanitised into generic contemporary spaces. Surely the charm of renting one of the cottages is to live, just for a few days, like a miner may have done, a bit cramped but cosy? That cannot be undone, but the project is still an enjoyable, important and admirable one that raises the profile of the mining valley and shows there is more to it than just its slag heaps – a change of mindset that could be useful elsewhere. ●

Geometry of compassion

Marks Barfield's long-awaited, £23m Cambridge Mosque marries Islamic tradition and contemporary form to make an optimistic landmark for the city

Words: Shahed Saleem Photographs: Morley Von Sternberg

Left All worshippers enter the building through the atrium, which serves as a multi-purpose space. On a Friday shoes are arranged across the floor as the prayer hall fills up.

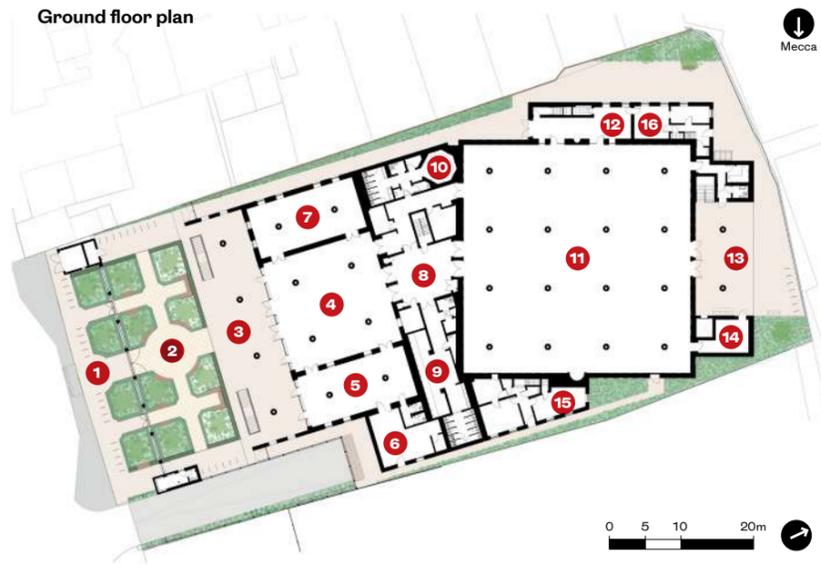
Below The building is low rise with a facade formed of a structural timber colonnade and portico, set behind a public garden.

'It is the most incredible masjid I have ever seen', says my Afghan taxi driver, barely able to contain his pride, and refusing to take a fare for bringing me here. Mill Road's radical political history still leaves the area with a bohemian feel, rows of 19th century workers' terraces sit behind small businesses, charities and independent shops. Sitting calmly amid this low rise and eclectic landscape, set back from the street and behind newly planted trees, is the city's first purpose built mosque, by Marks Barfield Architects.

A new mosque for Cambridge has been a decades long vision of Muslims in the city, the extant mosques being converted premises which were inadequate for the growing local, student and international Muslim population. Spearheaded by Dr Tim Winter, a Cambridge academic and Islamic scholar, a group of



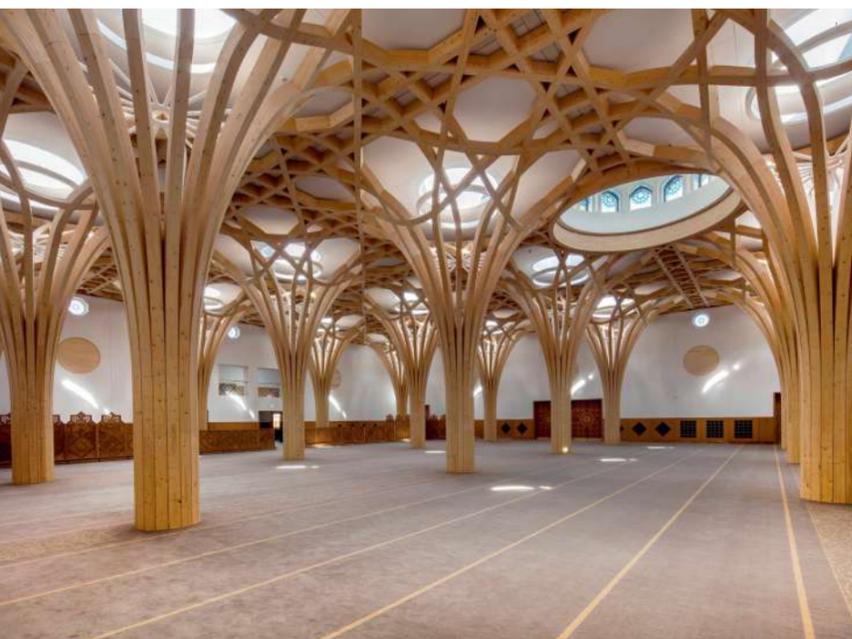
Ground floor plan



the city's Muslims came together to realise this vision. Large sites for new builds are scant in the city, so when a former John Lewis warehouse on Mill Road was offered to them in 2008 they frantically fundraised the £4 million required to purchase it.

And so the Cambridge Mosque Project was formed, a coalition of community activists, academics and religious figures, and the new mosque initiative began in earnest. At the heart of its design was a simple question; what should an English mosque look like? The question resonated with the multi-cultural Muslim community of the city, and was intended to be a continuation of the

- 1 Community garden
- 2 Islamic garden
- 3 Front portico
- 4 Atrium
- 5 Cafe
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Teaching
- 8 Lobby
- 9 Male ablutions
- 10 Female ablutions
- 11 Prayer hall
- 12 Mother and child space
- 13 Rear portico
- 14 Mortuary
- 15 Imam residence
- 16 Student residence

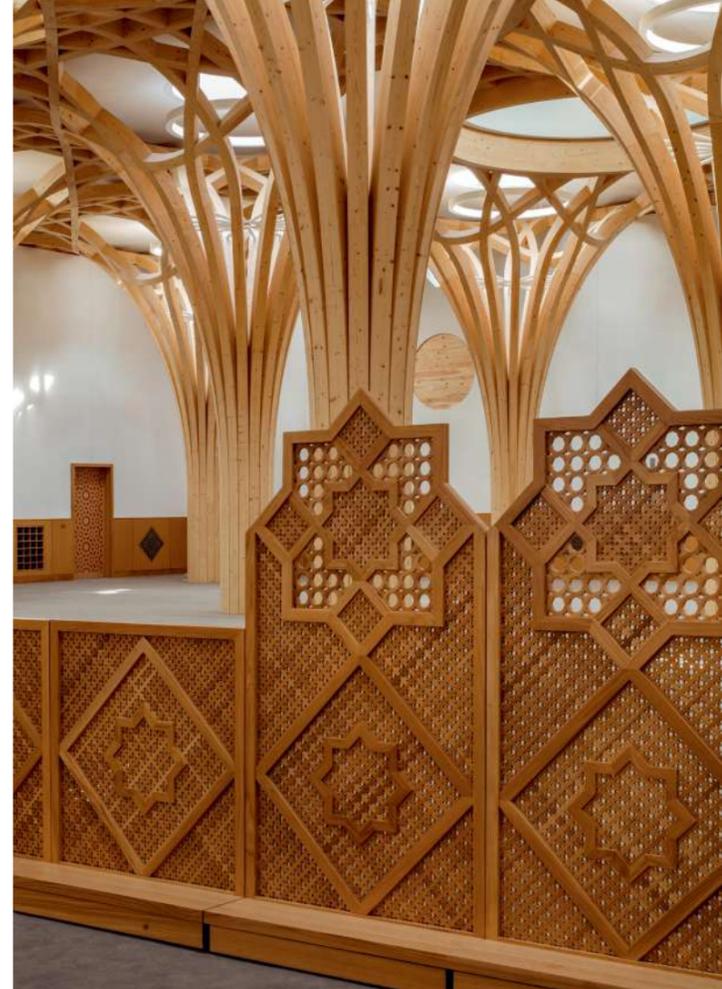


historical tradition of mosque architecture which has always adapted to the new places Muslims settled into.

An invited design competition was held which included entries from Mangera Yvars and 5th Studio, and a range of proposals described by Winter as varying from 'brutalist concrete... [to] Star Trek futurism, replicas of medieval Syrian buildings, and revivals of Victorian architecture'. But Marks Barfield prevailed with a scheme rooted in the symbolic and spatial traditions of Islamic architecture, delivered in contemporary form, material and method. This vision has been realised 10 years and £23 million later, the funds raised through tremendous community support bolstered by a few large donors from Qatar and Turkey.

Newly built mosques in Britain tend to be bold expressions of Muslim identity, usually deploying familiar tropes of domes, minarets and arabesque decoration. Cambridge Central Mosque avoids this, apart from the dome, and instead embeds its historical reference in the plan and the sequences of spaces that this creates. David Marks, speaking in 2013, explained how originality was the design's guiding principle, where the word is understood in its true meaning, 'from the origin,' not, as we might think, completely new.

Left In the main prayer hall a grid of structural trees spreads to form a geometric canopy. They evoke both gothic fan vaulting and the framed vistas of historic Islamic architecture.



Accordingly an underlying geometry, 'the breath of the compassionate' which is rooted in Islamic tradition, has been designed for the mosque by Keith Critchlow, an expert in sacred geometric art. This geometry, signifying the universal and sacred, infuses the building from the plan to brick bonding patterns, from the atrium floor tiling to the door marquetry. Though it is not about copying, Marks pointed out, but inventing anew.

The result is a building that prioritises inner experience over external expression. From the street you first enter a public Islamic garden, symbolising paradise, which leads to a portico, after which is an atrium leading onto a hallway, and then, angled slightly to face Makkah, the prayer hall. This procession of spaces leads systematically from the outside world into the sacred, a glazed curtain wall between portico and atrium forming the facade which, when the interior is lit at night, appears transparent.

What characterises this building, however, is not just the syntax of the plan, but the grid of dramatic spruce timber structural columns from portico to prayer hall that rise into flowing, curving, geometric patterns, fanning across the ceiling. Julia Barfield describes how gothic fan vaults, a specifically English invention and exemplified in the nearby 16th century King's College Chapel, as well as the repetitive arches of the Cordoba

IN NUMBERS

£25m
total contract cost

2,556m²
mosque GIFA

2,342m²
basement car park GIFA

Opposite The mosque places men and women in the same prayer hall, separated by a screen of varying heights.

Below Worshippers approach the mosque through an Islamic garden representing paradise, which is open to the public.

mosque, are conceptual references for the unfurling Islamic geometric structure vaulting across the Cambridge mosque ceiling. It is this merging of tradition and modernity, inner and outer, Muslim and non, that lies at the heart of the new mosque.

Alongside this conceptual underpinning, the mosque's ecological impact is explained as integral to its sacredness by both Winter and Barfield, who are passionate if not evangelical on this topic. The building aspires to a minimal carbon footprint, and describes itself as 'almost carbon neutral'. The superstructure is cross-laminated timber with external brick cladding patterned in traditional Kufic styles which, along with high levels of insulation and air tightness, ensures ultra-low U values. A series of mixed-mode systems keep energy use to a minimum; static heating, natural ventilation, air sourced heat pumps, a PV array, rainwater harvesting, natural daylighting throughout - this building has it all. For both client and architect, this is about ethics over and above meeting regulatory requirements.

Ethics are also at the heart of a new strategy that the mosque is pursuing, one often at the centre of religious debate - the question of gender. Men's and women's spaces are customarily separated in mosques, with differences of opinion over the method and degree of





Left The female ablution space is octagonal and lit naturally.

Below The view from the atrium looking through the front facade glazed curtain walls to the garden and street. The interior and exterior are here used as spaces of gathering and socialising after Friday prayer.

Men and women use the same prayer hall, with a screen between them that can move

separation. In a handful of mosques in the UK women take up a gallery overlooking (albeit screened from) the larger male prayer space, but for the most part they find themselves in a completely separate room, smaller and generally poorer in comparison to the male. While acknowledging the benefits of a secure and dedicated space for women, critics also point out that this leads to many feeling unwelcome and excluded.

Cambridge Central Mosque has responded by aspiring to be the most inclusive women's mosque in the UK. All spaces are shared up to the point of entry to the prayer areas. But even here men and women both use the same prayer hall, with a screen between them that can move depending on the ratio of men and

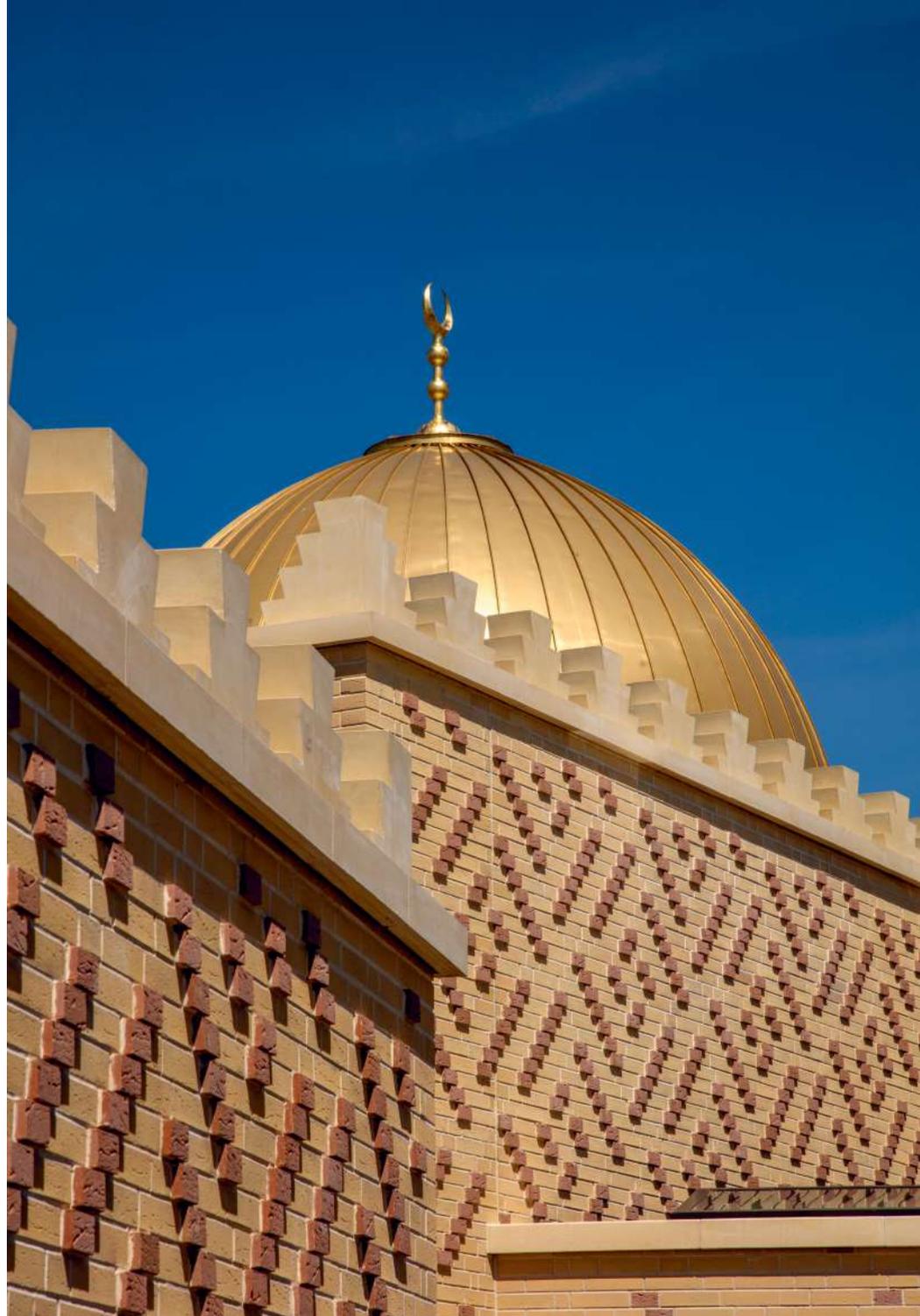


The building shifts the narrative of mosque architecture in Britain

women attending. The screen also ranges in height from a standing person, to waist high, to completely open, resulting in the possibility for women and men to pray in effectively the same space, probably a first for a mainstream UK mosque. This allows women who prefer separation to position themselves behind the screen, and for those who do seek further privacy, a first floor gallery is also provided.

The new Cambridge mosque is a bold endeavour to bring Muslim culture, experience and history into dialogue with wider British society. Indeed, Winter himself embodies these crossing of cultures; the son of eminent British modernist architect John Winter, he is a long standing and well-respected academic at Cambridge's Faculty of Divinity. After converting to Islam he took the name Abdul Hakim Murad, and has since earned credibility and respect across the Muslim community as an Islamic religious scholar, being identified as Britain's most influential Muslim in 2012.

Julia Barfield is resolute that this design could not have happened without Winter at the helm, while



Above The castellated parapet evokes historic Islamic architecture and symbolises the meeting of heaven and earth. A dome symbolises the vault of heaven.

Winter deflects attention by stating: 'The vision was altogether David's, and as the client we were struck by the quickness with which he understood the subtle atmospherics of Islamic spaces and the need for a meditative sobriety – and delivered this in a very unforced way in the context of a building that is still resolutely modern.' The new Cambridge mosque shifts the narrative of mosque architecture in Britain. Driven by an ambition of intercultural exchange and dialogue, it is the architecture of hope, and if it succeeds it may come to be seen as one of the most significant religious buildings in Britain of a generation. ●

Shahed Saleem teaches architecture at the University of Westminster and is the author of 'The British Mosque, an architectural and social history'

Left A mother and child outside the prayer hall.



RIBA J Meets
Interview

Introducing RIBA J Meets

29 July 2019

Words: Eleanor Young

Our new podcast series lets you be a fly on the wall in conversations with noted architects – and suggest subjects and questions for future guests

Imagine being in a room with that architect you really admire... or who won the job you wanted... or designed that interesting building... or is just older than you and has seen it all before. What would you ask them? What stories would they tell?

As journalists we have the privilege of these sort of conversations, on the train, over lunch, in the studio. Their answers reveal – intentionally or otherwise – the pain as well as the joy of making buildings. They show how architects' view of themselves can differ from the common perception. Now we are sharing these insights with you through our [RIBA J Meets](#) podcast series. Follow the links or find us on your podcast app.

I went into the conversation with Rachel Haugh and Ian Simpson with great admiration for the clarity of the vision and execution on their super-tall glass towers but a niggling fear of all they represented in housing and the cityscape. Will you be convinced that the way the two of them live in their own buildings is a testament to city living?

Conversations like these challenge lazy characterisations. In the UK Caruso St John is known for its ground breaking galleries from Walsall through the Tate Britain to Newport Street Gallery for Damien Hirst. But its ever-wider range of work now includes sports stadia, so you can hear Peter St John talk seriously about ice hockey.

In others you can hear why clients might want to work with a practice. The ease of conversation, the laughter and a certain clarity of thinking make Andrew Waugh and Anthony Thistleton good to listen to. Their honesty about what they think makes a good project, as much as the way they talk movingly about their Bushey Cemetery, shortlisted for the Stirling in 2018, makes for a fascinating trip into a practice.

In [RIBA J Meets](#) you can listen to some of those stories and hear how other architects tick, how they have come to lead a sector – and perhaps how they have broken out of it – won clients and fallen into jobs, eyed up the competition, balanced work and life at a human level and felt the growing pains of practice. We get under the skin of the everyday workings of practice, place and people, on subjects from dodging recessions to proving yourself.

Listen in, you might be surprised at what you learn.



Peter St John of Caruso St John. Credit: Jenny Jacoby

[Ice-cool with Caruso St John - click here](#)

RIBA] meets Peter St John. Hugely admired gallery designers and committed teachers, but where is Caruso St John going next? Peter talks galleries, ice hockey and awards with Hugh Pearman.



Ian Simpson and Rachel Haugh of SimpsonHaugh. Credit: James Broome Photography

City living with SimpsonHaugh and Partners - click here

RIBAJ meets Rachel Haugh and Ian Simpson, visits Docklands' Dollar Bay and talks pulling pints, rebuilding Manchester after the IRA bomb and living high rise in Manchester. With Eleanor Young.



Anthony Thistleton (left) and Andrew Waugh of Waugh Thistleton. Credit: Agnese Sanvito

[Growing up in practice with Waugh Thistleton Architects - click here](#)

RIBA J meets Andrew Waugh and Anthony Thistleton. We explore the quiet virtues of timber, discuss clubs, artists and bringing up kids in Hoxton – and the need for a construction revolution. With Eleanor Young.

Let us know who you would like to hear from next – and your questions for them [@RIBA J](#) on Twitter or [RIBA Journal](#) on facebook and [linkedin](#).

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