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AJ 10.10.14 London Aquatics Centre: Zaha Hadid Architects

AJ 19.12.14 The Path of Khan

AJ 06.03.15 Silicon Valley Starchitects

“It's not over. They're still here. And they're not going away.”

It's not over. They're still here. And they're not going away. I'm talking starchitects, icons, and landmark designs. For most architecture critics – and for some architects - these are dirty words. You know: “Iconic architecture is soooo pre-crash...now it's all about corners and bricks”. The credit crunch, the recession, was supposed to have killed it off.

Fat chance. If anything, like the rich, starchitects and their icons have come back stronger. Perhaps then, it's time to write fairly, and incisively, about this phenomena.

This phenomena has popular appeal. London's starchitects - Rogers, Zaha, Chipppo, Foster, Heatherwick – have the same allure as the fashion houses of Paris; the same cachet as New York's art scene; the same buzz as California's tech pioneers. Architectural writing however has been polarised for years now, when it comes to assessing starchitectural culture: PRs typically overpraise while critics, with relish, slam too hard.

With these points in mind, I have selected three articles from the past year that embody the reasonable and provocative approach this fascinating subject demands. So one article examines the user-friendliness of a so-called icon, another provides a portrait of a starchitect-in-waiting, while a third explores this highfalutin world from the client's perspective. Each has been carefully designed, with images and a layout complimenting the text.

Article one, is a building study of Zaha Hadid's London Aquatics Centre. But instead of seeing it solely as an icon, or a landmark building, I've chosen to describe what it's like to swim there. This is the reality of the cult of personality in this wonderfully ego-centric profession: buildings designed for you and me. Do they work? Did you enjoy being there? Would you go back again? Simple questions that too often go unasked.

My second article asks, 'Who is Asif Khan?' – the young British architect shortlisted to design the Guggenheim Museum in Helsinki. Jobs like these – rare as giant diamonds – make stars of architects for life. That Khan was named as a contender is news in itself, and made him worthy of a profile. Yet even more startling is the way this young architect is retooling his profession, with ideas borrowed from social media, PR and branding that is leaving his peers and older rivals standing. Alongside the writing, I commissioned the illustration, a caricature, to complement the incisive text, with a detailed brief detailing exactly what to draw.

The third article, 'Silicon Valley Starchitects' looks at the motivations behind the world's leading tech firms in hiring big-name architects to design their new headquarters. Are the values of a company reflected in its buildings? Is the war for talent inspiring clients to commission jaw-dropping design? Has architecture itself become PR?

Finally, each article is carefully designed: the words and pictures work together to enhance the reading experience. AJ we take great pride in the art of magazine craft.