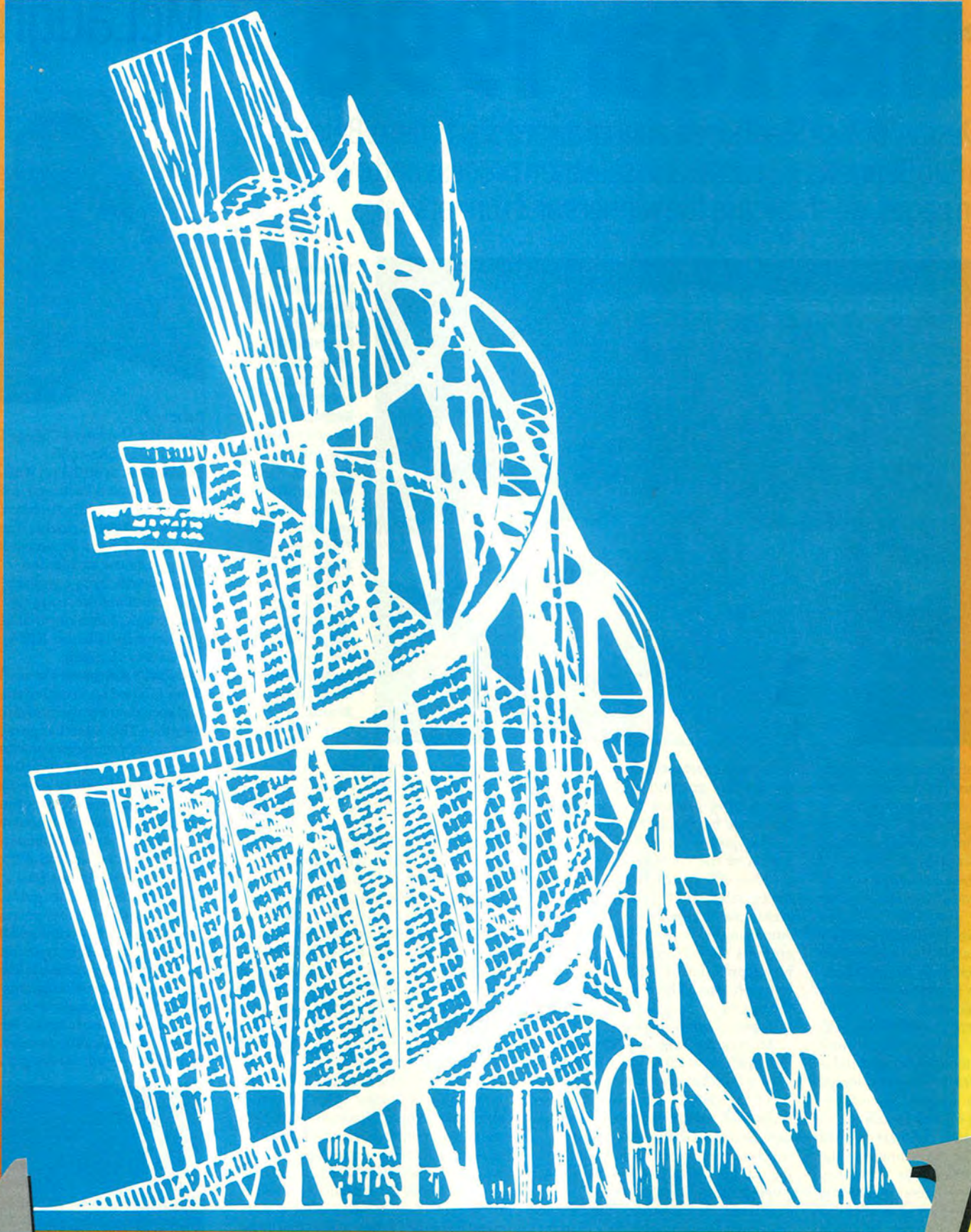


**YOUNG ARCHITECT
OF THE YEAR**



Award

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Young Architect of the Year 1998

Building Design/British Steel's new annual award starts here. Below, chairman Rab Bennetts discusses the selection process and over the next seven pages, we showcase the winners and runners-up



The judges were:
Rab Bennetts
 (chairman) **Lord Rogers of Riverside, Will Alsop, Alex de Rijke, Amanda Levete, Chris Wilkinson, Richard Frewer, Gabriele Bramante, Hugh Pearman, Nigel Coates, Doris Lockhart Saatchi, Peter Doig, Jeff Edington (British Steel), Architecture Foundation director Lucy Musgrave and Building Design editor Louise Rogers.**

This snapshot of emerging architectural talent – the beginning of an annual series – was always likely to raise more questions than it answered. The first of these concerns the prosaic matter of employment.

In the decade since the last significant survey of young architects – the Forty-under-40 exhibition – the longest recession in living memory has shaped the early careers of a whole generation, as relatively few will have had the freedom to choose when or if to start up on their own.

Those who were propelled into self-employment by redundancy feature strongly among today's younger architects but, in contrast, those who served an involuntarily lengthy apprenticeship by hanging on to a secure job in one of the better, well-established firms may emerge the stronger in the long term by virtue of the skills they acquired in the process. Architects from this latter category should not be discouraged if they have failed to shine in this year's competition.

Whether it was for necessity or personal ambition, those who did set up their own practices are of course following a well-worn path towards individual recognition – an increasingly dubious concept in an industry that depends almost exclusively on teamwork. But on the evidence of the competition submissions, it still represents the mainstream for architects seeking artistic expression. Therein lies one of the profession's main weaknesses: it largely comprises small firms which are mostly inexperienced with larger buildings, and remains fragmented at a difficult time for the industry when architectural leadership could be at its most effective.

As with most architectural competitions, there are also questions about the judging process and the lessons that could be learned for future years.

The jury – as indeed the whole notion of the competition – was the creation of a sponsor and a magazine editor, reflecting the more prominent architectural impulses of the day. Not surprisingly, a few strong-minded entrants who did not conform to the jury's preferences did not fare well, but there was a clear consensus about the top six or so and an extremely lively debate about the winners.

Most of the jury were surprised by the quality and range of submissions. Only a handful who blatantly failed to meet the criteria (eg: over 35 or not registered architects) were disqualified. During the first day's judging, a trio comprising Louise Rogers (*Building Design* editor), Peter Trebilcock (representing British Steel) and I examined all the entries and divided them into broad grades of A, B and C. Where the assessment was not unanimous, entrants were always given the benefit of the doubt.

The second day's assessment a week later carried out by the full jury (except Professor Richard Frewer and Will Alsop who could not attend) reviewed all the A and B category submissions in detail – 28 in total – and carried out spot-checks on the C category to ensure that there were no injustices. Jury members were obliged to declare an interest if the entrant was known to them. Around 10 portfolios emerged from this process as worthy of a prize or commendation.

Quite apart from the intellect and creativity of the entries, the jury looked for evidence of consistency –

something which was rare even among the winners – and at least a few examples of built work. The fiercest debate sought to find a balance between those entries which were entirely theoretical and, therefore may not have demonstrated sufficient application, and those where the completed projects were impressive but sometimes flawed in their execution.

In contrast to the Forty-under-40 show, this was indeed a competition with a winner. Perhaps it is not fair to burden a young architect with the title of "best" and certainly the disparity between the first prize of £5,000 and the runners-up of £1,000 is greater than can be justified by the differences between the entries. This is something that should be addressed in next year's competition along with the idea that an interview is probably a better way to separate shortlisted candidates.

This would be particularly relevant to those entrants who continue to work for other firms and whose individual output was impossible to separate on paper from the prevailing quality of their employer. In my view, it is extremely important that this kind of competition does not simply increase the peer pressure to seek premature independence.

There are also some searching questions for the successful entrants. Will those who successfully cut their teeth on domestic projects be able or willing to translate their work to a larger scale? Will those with early success in large competitions disappear without trace for want of organisational or technical expertise? Finally, how long should it take for an architect to reach maturity? Ten years after qualification – surely not?

Winner: Niall McLaughlin



Born: 1962.

Education: University College Dublin, 1979-1982, 1982-1986.

Employment: Scott Tallon Walker (Michael Scott & Partners), 1984-9; set up Niall McLaughlin Architects in 1990.

Projects include: Carmelite monastery, Kensington, 1991-97; house, Kenmere, 1993-95; house and garden, Wandsworth, 1993-94; shack, Northamptonshire, 1994-95; phototropic, Northamptonshire, 1995-97; Bloom installation, RIBA, 1997; Ben Uri Gallery, Camden.

Architect's statement: The work of this office is based on a combination of real and speculative projects each informing the other. This interchange of ideas and contingency provides a powerful engine to develop ideas in the practice. By teaching and building at the same time it is possible to extend this culture of speculation and experimentation.

In the Wandsworth house a group of ex-students cast and laid all the precious slabs for the pavement. I use a great range of materials from gold to Daz. I enjoy it most when they present a confluence of the arcane and the future. I relish unexpected juxtapositions.

The work shown here is less interested in the expression of technology by bolts, junctions and gaskets; more in the overall presence of a space: the way in which materials alter space by modulating light; combing it, diffusing

it, reflecting it, dulling it or changing its speed.

Most of the projects here are developed in relation to particular narratives. In many cases the history of the site is the starting point for architectural speculation. It is important that these stories are absorbed into the architecture so that they are only ever implicit. They are ways of bringing the project into being, not of explaining it when it is there.

I work with a small group of builders and craftsmen. Two-thirds of the work shown here has been done by the same few individuals. All of the designs are discussed with the makers, not just in terms of performance, but as aesthetic propositions. A good builder generally has a good eye.

Lead assessor's comments: We were all intrigued by this submission. Many of us had not come across his work before and he did not seem to conform to the current stereotype which was refreshing. He was someone who had been developing a strong line in his own fashion for some years and has developed it in both theoretical and built projects, working with artists and craftspeople. A very strong submission document, clearly written and well presented – if anything including too much material.

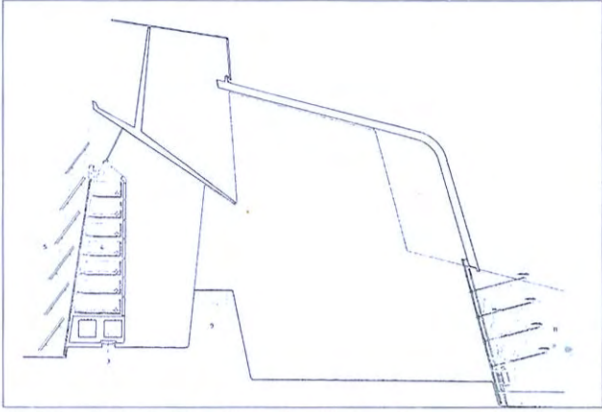
Other assessors commented: "Way above everyone else", "Original, attention to detail" and "Excellent".



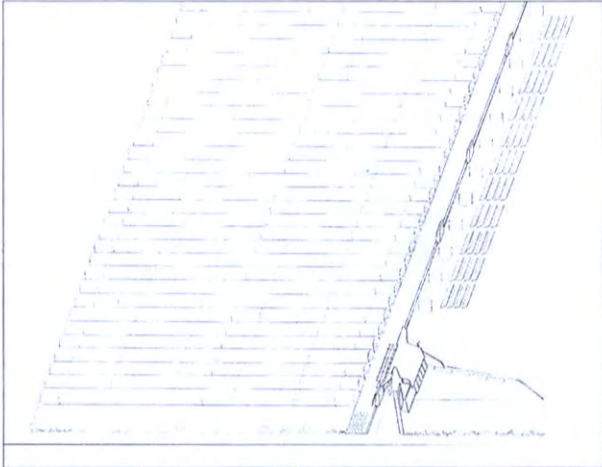
Bloom installation with Martin Richman, RIBA.

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Today, British designers lead the architectural world. Names like Rogers, Foster, Wilkinson and Grimshaw have become bywords for stylish, elegant and innovative building design and set the standard for today's young design professionals. By sponsoring this exciting award, British Steel is delighted to be championing the next generation of architects who will take the profession on to even greater heights.

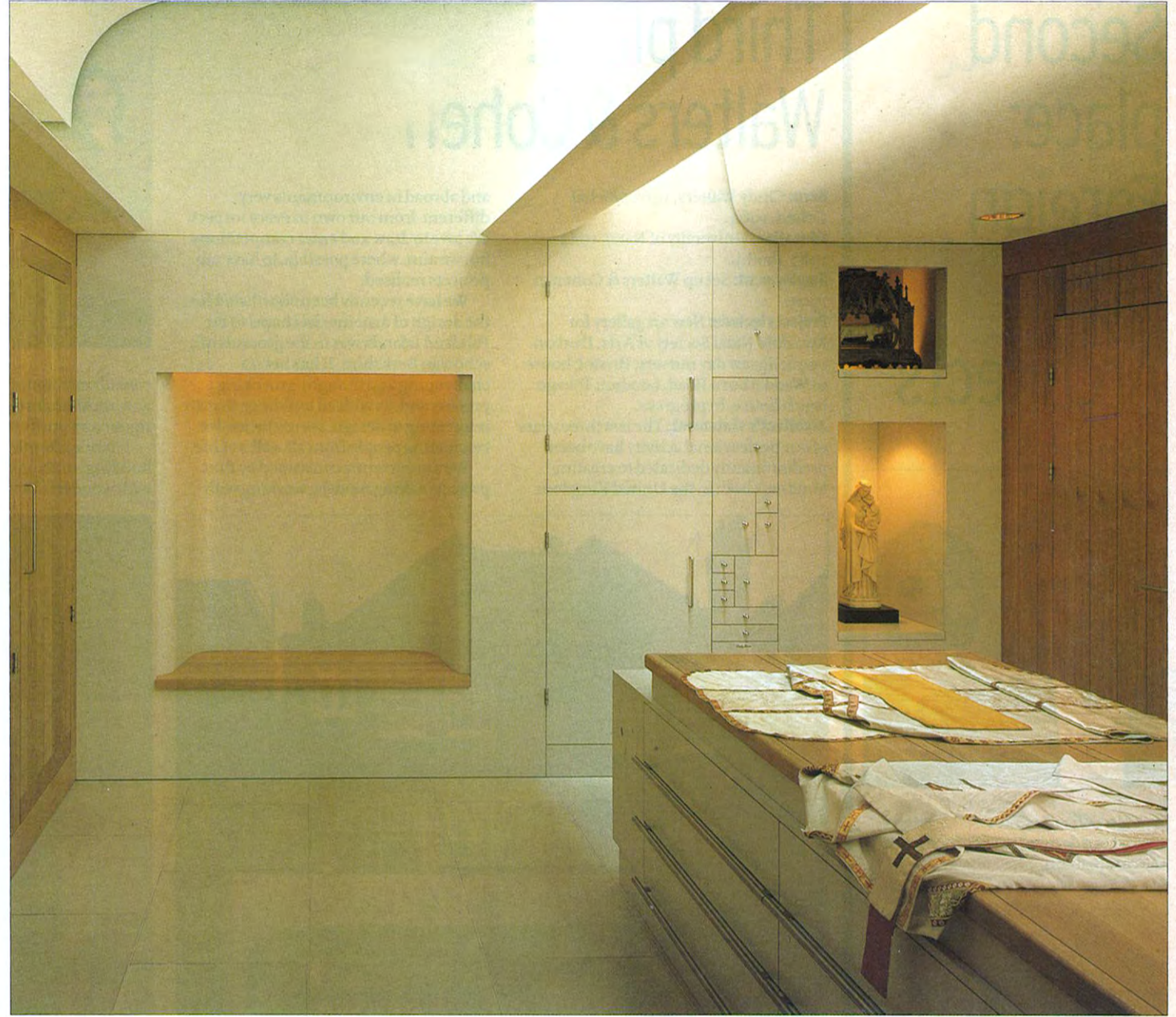
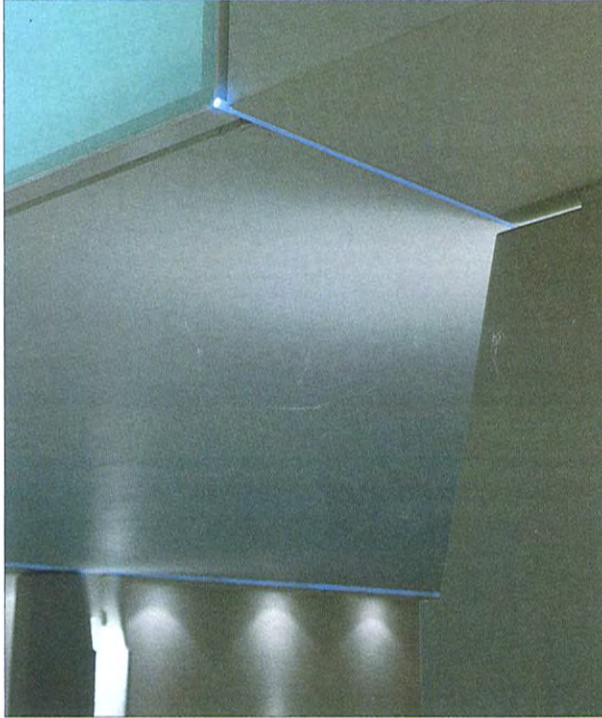


Phototropic, Foxhall, Northamptonshire, section.



Above: Phototropic, Foxhall, Northamptonshire, axonometric.

Below: Swimming pool, glass and fibre-optics.



Carmelite monastery, sacristy.



Left: Carmelite monastery, tabernacle.



Right: Carmelite monastery, furniture.



Left: Wandsworth house, silver wall.



Left: Wandsworth house, paving, brass and seed pod.



Wandsworth house, window.