



**OF ITS TIME AND PLACE - THE  
WORK OF RICHARD MURPHY  
ARCHITECTS**

ARTIFICE  
£29.95

Novitatem meam contemnunt ego illorum ignaviam – “They despise my novelty, I their timidity” - was an apt inscription on Richard Murphy’s letterhead when he started out in private practice. Twenty one years ago he was ploughing his architectural furrow in a harsh and stuffy Edinburgh climate, where pastiche was championed by planners and overtly modern architecture was confined to the back gardens of suburbia.

Murphy was an outspoken thorn in the establishment’s side, all the more so

because of the eloquence and clarity with which he delivered his arguments. The conservative burghers could only feebly counter ‘we don’t do that sort of thing around here’. Twenty one years on Richard Murphy Architect’s impressive body of work is not necessarily an indication of a wholesale climate change, but perhaps more of a dogged determination, and success in getting people to understand the practice’s work. This book is a comprehensive and clearly articulated summary not only of that work, but of the thinking and influences behind it.

In his introductory essay Richard MacCormac sets out RMA’s ‘DNA’, shared with makers like Cullinan and Stansfield Smith, and essentially arts and crafts. This is a tidy beginning to the narrative of the monograph. There is a clear linearity to the development of ideas in RMA’s work. This is illustrated nicely and reinforced through illustration of starting points and influences behind ideas: Aldington, Utzon, Mercurt, Wright, Mackintosh and Soane. While some ideas might be borrowed, RMA has developed, pushed, pulled and made many their own: the external stair, the opening corner, windows as places to

sit, ridgelights, flatbar balustrades and big sliding screens.

The Scarpian layered tectonic first seen in Edinburgh’s Fruitmarket Gallery has found iterations in Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre and Edinburgh’s Maggie’s Centre. Layering is not confined to an articulation of old and new and this is demonstrated in new build projects such as an office and hotel in Aberdeen and UEL’s Computer and Conference Centre.

However, it is the workings and experience of the practice’s buildings that is perhaps more important, and wherein lies the longevity of RMA’s success. Murphy’s understanding of how people interact and what makes them tick generates hugely successful social spaces, from the large scale melting pot at the heart of Dundee Contemporary Arts to shared external stairs at Graham Square Glasgow. Murphy notes ‘even the simple act of climbing the staircase becomes a little piece of theatre, an opportunity to stop and say hello to neighbours’.

Not only is this book substantial, it is accessible and jargon free, consistent in the high quality of its writing, photography and use of drawings. There is also great depth in the book, and the inclusion of unbuilt projects is valuable. In addition to MacCormac’s essay, there are contributions from a range of clients, but perhaps most illuminating is ‘A Builder’s Tale’ - Steve Evans of Inscape Joinery’s appreciative reflection on his working relationship with Murphy. ‘This may surprise some’, says Evans ‘but Richard Murphy is not a difficult man to deal with....he is not so blinded by self belief that he sometimes fails to see the sometime conflicting needs of the builder or the client.’ This underlines how important the making of buildings and understanding of people is in the creation of RMA’s architecture. And Murphy himself is now better understood, building his own town house in conspicuous sight in Edinburgh’s New Town. Today it seems his novelty is far from despised.



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