

Learning from Dalibor

Dalibor taught me that architecture is a philosophical practice, operating in the world of shared cultural experiences across time and place. A building is a fragment of architecture and the city a place of shared memory, with the capacity to embed our experiences in authenticity and meaning.

He taught with questions and not answers. When I left Cambridge and a few years later set up my practice, I struggled at first to find a way to reconcile what I had learned and believed with the realities of projects that we were working on. We searched in our office for a language that responded sufficiently to pragmatic requirements while at the same time situating our projects within a wider idea about memory and culture.

For us, that language has emerged through an approach to materials and construction which emerged from Dalibor's metaphoric understanding of materials into a way of talking about culture. We look for a relationship between the context of a project and a way of building.

Through emphasising a material language and articulating ideas about construction, we hope to situate our work in a wider understanding of culture.

Our first project, the Marshall House in Suffolk, is a new building in a field on the edge of a village. The site is empty and featureless, with the flattened topography of a glacial moraine. We used locally made bricks to build a new ground and chimney to embed the house. The timber-framed structure is clad with weatherboarding, with the windows pushed to the surface to enhance their reflective quality. This allows the interior window lining to be reduced and read like a frame to the



Marshall House, 2000



Dungeness hearth



Christ Church Spitalfields, 2015

view, providing a moment of stasis in the slipping plains of the landscape. Windows drift across the façade and range in size.

The volume of the house occupies the site with the impassive presence of a large haystack in a field; like the memory of a haystack, there is a sense that the brick ground and chimney will outlive the timber building. This idea about materials and making has become the way we articulate a cultural response.

At Christ Church crypt, we have used a material language to make a connection between the space of the city and the crypt interior. We laid a York stone floor which extends the London pavement down a new topography of ramp and ground into the hidden space of the crypt to explicitly connect it to the city outside. Hawksmoor's vaulted space is revealed and inhabited as a new piece of city.

New rooms within the space are made as oak buildings which mediate between public and private life and between the centre and edge of the city, reflected in Christ Church's location outside the old city wall and the iconography of the facade of the church. The oak is detailed as planes of staggered boards that recall Hawksmoor's joinery in the church upstairs, and which are used as organising elements to contain services so that the principal spaces retain their primary order.

Our project to extend the Garden Museum, which is on site, uses bronze tiles to create a textured skin to the cross-laminated timber structure which inhabits the interior of the building and extends out and around the garden. The lapping bronze cladding cover the exterior like the markings on the bark of the plane trees around the building, re-situating the museum alongside the tomb of the plant collector John Tradescant.



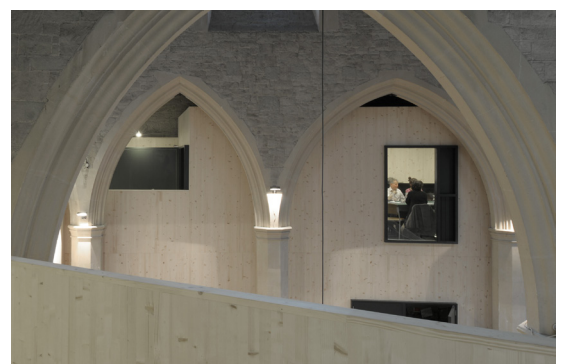
Christ Church Spitalfields, 2015



Christ Church Spitalfields, 2015



Garden Museum, ark study 2015



Garden Museum, 2008

Thinking about detailing as a way to emphasise material character allows us to make buildings which are both spatially responsive and present. Spatial character is developed through light and form but also through an awareness of the material.

We are currently developing a project which extends a nursery school in Redcliffe in Bristol. The site is between a medieval church tower, a seventeenth century timber framed house and a garden. We are developing a building which wraps the existing school and creates new rooms around it opening into the garden and providing winter-garden spaces.

The façade is being developed as a glassy veil with an expressed columnar structure that responds to the scale of the mature trees in the garden and the stepped timber framing of the seventeenth century buildings opposite. The intention is that the cloaking façade will both extend and reveal the nursery building behind.

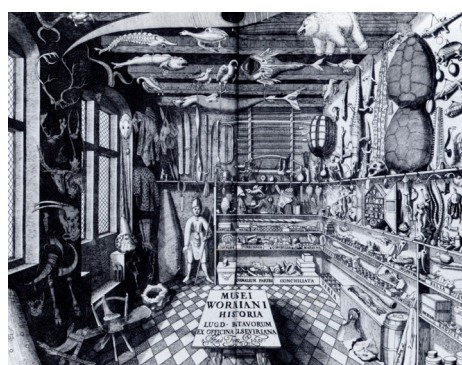
The material richness we look for is through a rigorous paring away in order that the presence of a material is brought to the fore, and a space or building is experienced as something made. The awareness of the construction and the ‘making’ of the building is very important to us, distancing itself from work which is based on its own image.

Our aim is to make work which is both quiet and rich, which finds its poetics through a cultural understanding of materials and making, and which responds to people and places both in the immediate and mimetic sense, finding a place in a continuum of shared cultural experiences, a Daliborian paradigmatic situation.

Biba Dow
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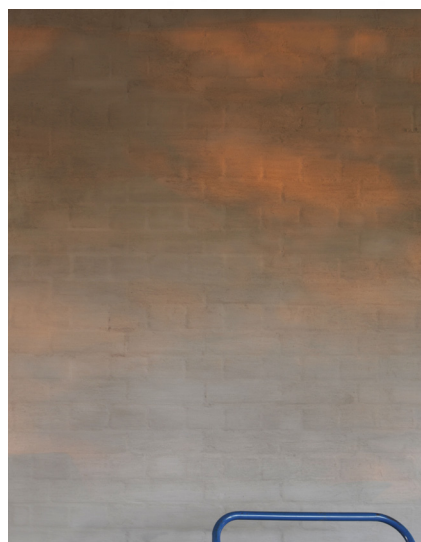
Garden Museum, site, 2016



Tradescant's Ark



Becket Hall, 2016



The Sett, bagged brick wall, 2014