

Building Beautiful

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In 2018, a British public initiative, the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission (BBBBC) was created as an advisory body to the British government on “how to promote and increase the use of high-quality design for new-build homes and neighbourhoods”. Lead, notably, by the arch-conservative late Roger Scruton, this commission and its report *Living with Beauty*, published in January 2020, has incited the fury of a few British architects, denouncing its right-wing, populist overtones. In Brexit times, what makes British architecture beautiful? Contrary to the ‘classical’ models honoured by the BBBBC, which revisits and smooths over history at will, numerous British architects see the complexities of history as fertile ground for a pluralist beauty. From conservatives to progressists, the architectural spectrum is at least as broad as the political world. In other words, the British architectural scene is certainly one of the most eclectic of the moment, sometimes fiercely traditionalist or downright uninhibited, but also one whose motivations are the least understood.

This issue of AA aims to unearth the challenges and motivations of some of British architects who are unafraid to address ‘beauty’ without pandering to the conservative and nationalist agenda of the BBBBC. From the controversial Amin Taha to the more ‘vernacular’ Peter Barber, practices and architects such as Carmody Groarke, Adam Khan, Adam Richards and others like the flamboyant Adam Nathaniel Furman or Muf, to name but a few, are reinvigorating British architecture by resuscitating “multiple narratives”.

“Erasure of history is a tool of power”, we are told by architect and critic Sam Jacob. “Resurrecting, retelling and recontextualising the histories, a form of resistance.” While he asserts the concept of ‘radical nostalgia’ to describe the British scene, Eva Franch i Gilabert, director of the Architectural Association School of Architecture, calls for another form of radicalism. “Whether it’s in the United Kingdom or elsewhere in the world, what will guide us now is radical empathy,” she confided to AA. This issue is about beauty at the service of architecture’s imperative: taking care.