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Best Contemporary Architecture Design Practice - South East England & BUILD Excellence Award for Religious Architecture - South East England



Cohanim Architecture are a RIBA Chartered Practice based in Buckinghamshire and London and support a wide range of clients across the United Kingdom. We invited Joshua Harrison to tell us a bit more.

Cohanim Architecture are a chartered practice with big aspirations who are devoted to executing their client's projects to the highest standards. Having started trading as a limited company in 2015, the perseverance and commitment of their staff to each client and project has paid off and the company has experienced substantial growth in 2017. Joshua is the practice director, here he talks us through the practice's ethos and how this influences its work.

"The potential within the field of architecture is remarkable, perhaps directly affecting more people every day than any other profession. Architecture influences people and those who interact with it on multiple levels. In your town or city, it will affect hundreds of thousands of people, every week. Architecture can inspire learning, encourage a positive work ethic and improve your productivity. Architecture can evoke wonder in people's minds as they look up toward the skies, dreaming about their goals, or what sits behind shimmering glass walls. An uninspiring neighbourhood will do little to help retain talent, and will fail to set off the 'spark' that great architecture makes possible. Architecture also marks civilisation and greater progress; whether it's the Eiffel Tower, the 'Shard', a Victorian terrace, or the Hoover Dam - these creations are markers of our own progress within the world. Therefore, we realise that we can influence both the sociological and psychological to cause pragmatic changes in society through architecture."

"Architectural design is incredibly important to us - and as a practice it is in our ethos to work on projects that are not solely profit-driven but ones which actively aim to engage the client and thereby create an interest in building something both beautiful and functional. Often these elements go hand in glove - good architecture creates value. We found that those clients who value the architectural process more, also benefit more. This dynamic is healthy for both parties. It spawns new ideas, creativity and increased efficiency. The dialogue emanating from the first chat with our clients informs our design. This then allowed us to expand the brief and generally create better results than anyone initially envisioned."

Currently, the firm is undertaking an ambitious 2-acre masterplan and design scheme in Chesham, which Cohanim Architecture are running as lead architects. The derelict former allotment land is bordered on one side by a London Underground railway and commercial estate, with common land on two other sides, and both marshland and residential housing on the fourth. The plot is naturally bordered by a series of great soaring willow trees, each over 25m high. This context means that the plot is a fitting place to establish a local development, as Joshua emphasises.

"A thoughtful plan for our latest project shows a new neighbourhood of around 50 high quality homes designed to sit within natural borders, providing much needed housing for the upper, middle and entry sections of the property market.

"Constraints such as flood risk assessments, noise and vibration factors and natural trees blocking sunlight are all being navigated, whilst simultaneously factoring this, and more, against obvious economic concerns when building at this scale. Creating a high-quality neighbourhood which ensures that the residents feel proud of their property, helps to further integrate the neighbourhood into the town. It also creates a destination for locals too, through the development of new public spaces.

"Most of the derelict land is classified as Green Belt here. Often, there is good reason for this. Here, however, the Green Belt classification does not serve or achieve any of its five primary purposes, nor has the site provided public amenity in many years, instead remaining as uninhabitable hazardous land. For these reasons among others, this exciting opportunity is a great example of how to recycle derelict land, improve local towns and neighbourhoods and help people get on the housing ladder."

Drawing on its vast experience in ecclesiastical architecture, moving forward Cohanim Architecture has another exciting project currently under construction, as Joshua concludes.



"An incredible ecclesiastical project which we are currently running is that of the new extension to the 13th and 18th Century Grade I listed St Lawrence church in West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. The church, renovated and extended by the ancestor of Sir Edward Dashwood, Premier Baronet of Great Britain, and his architect in 1763, is topped by a great gilded ball which seats ten inside. Popular mythology surrounds its history and makes for fantastic, if not eccentric, reading. Internally, the 1763 rebuilding shows a nave surrounded by a continuous row of engaged Corinthian capped columns that mimic porphyry stone, with exquisite roocco plasterwork, all beneath a fine Borgnis fresco. The church forms an imposing and dramatically beautiful crown to West Wycombe Hill.

In 2016, we won planning permission for the scheme on the first attempt and a subsequent Faculty permission followed, along with permissions from 12 further organisations. The project is now on-site and progressing well."