

Portfolio

GIANNI BOTSFORD ARCHITECTS

Gianni Botsford uses an analytical, scientific approach to maximise the space and light on the sites he builds on, well before he comes to the design phase. This, he contends, eliminates any preconceived ideas he might have.

In schemes such as his first major project, a large house at St John's Mews in Notting Hill, Botsford teamed up with Arup for a precise idea of the optimum layout to capture the light. He combined this with the clients' request for dark bedrooms and light living spaces, meaning that the normal upstairs-for-bedrooms and downstairs-for-living-spaces typology was

inverted, and the predominantly exposed concrete project was laid out below, around ornamental gardens and an internal strip pool.

Inspired by 'morphogenetic processes of nature', the practice has, in Botsford's own words, built computational models that, through a 'generate and simulate' cycle, are able to explore the space and optimise its potential. The next step is to make that process quicker and, in doing so, easier to use.

Italian born Botsford trained at the Architectural Association and set up his firm in Berwick Street, Soho, with around six staff in

1996. Botsford enters a lot of competitions, and feels, like many, that nothing is wasted from the research undertaken. Some aspects will be used in future schemes even if the firm doesn't win.

The practice is working on house projects in Costa Rica and Virginia, using the same analytical tools but in different climates and physical circumstances. GBA is also working on a new treatment for cladding on two schemes in the Travelodge chain, partly to challenge a sector that Botsford feels too often adopts the "lowest common denominator" approach. David Taylor



In their own words

1a & 1b. House in west London (2005)

An 800 sq m house on a backland site in west London. The inward-looking nature of the site led to the development of a sky facade, which moderates sunlight and daylight through layers of transparency and opacity.

2. Shop for Giovanni Valentino, Milan (1998)

A flexible, lightweight system for this or any site was provided by a series of free-standing, triangulated geometrical units which work both as display and shelving.

3. Building Envelope Optimisation (2004 -)

A research project with Arup. Following work to optimise the sky facade at the west London house, we have been developing software to generate a set of optimal building envelopes, based upon a series of conflicting criteria such as form, orientation, daylight, acoustics and heat gain.

4. IT Campus, Cambridgeshire (2001)

In collaboration with Urban Future Organisation, this unbuilt proposal extended the existing research facility by 20,000 sq m

with a naturally ventilated floorplate perforated by a grid of courtyard gardens that allows occupiers to have direct contact with the outside space.

5. Water Mountain, The Seoul Performing Arts Centre (2005 competition entry)

A series of horizontal landscape strata are flooded both naturally and artificially, registering the shifting level of the river. There are two parallel worlds that inhabit the landscape – the public area and the backstage area. Their meeting point is the stage.

Q&A

What was GBA's first project?

I set up the practice on the back of winning a project, the house at St John's Mews, Notting Hill.

What mistakes did you make, and how did you learn from them?

I always have to be optimistic, and keep pushing for what I believe to be right. This may be a mistake, but I see no way round it. Also, using the right consultants is key, and not doing that is a mistake we have made in the past.

How often do you experiment, and what form does this take?

As often as possible. We'd like to think that there is an element of research in every project we do. Everything we do is about balancing conflicting criteria.

What was your aim when you started and how has it changed?

My aim was to build interesting buildings. I'm more conscious now of the kind of work we want to be doing. Museums interest me more than the private world, which is very narrow

and restrictive in terms of who will experience it and enjoy it.

What inspires you?

Nature is my primary inspiration, definitely. The processes we are developing have all been developed in nature – animals, plants and insects have all learnt to deal with their environments and we haven't done as well.

What would your dream commission be?

I've just finished one. It's a huge first project and encompasses so many aspects.

