

Profile: Neil Spiller's academic ambition
Blow Up: O'Donnell and Tuomey's Photographers' Gallery
Rethink: Practitioners who teach
Not hot air: Alan Short builds on research



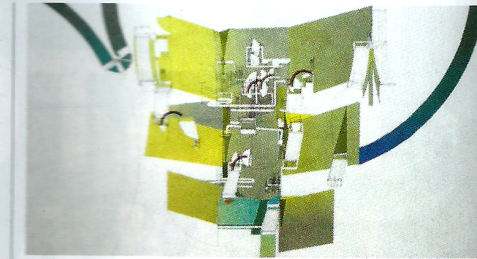
Pedagogy and practice

Laura Allen
Senior lecturer, the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London

Smout Allen
'I didn't even have a year out in practice,' admits Laura Allen. She came up through the Bartlett and was nabbed to work there by Peter Cook in the last recession. But as well as teaching, her work with fellow tutor Mark Smout as Smout Allen is making them a name in the artistic world of installations and small projects. Their latest was the centrepiece for Nevada Museum of Art where their interest in water from river flows to technical data was translated into a flowing, interactive, watery installation.

Allen describes the practice as very research related. 'We do put in for research bids when projects come through that we can contribute to,' says Allen. 'The projects don't pay any fees, just material costs and expenses.' She appreciates the 'twisted rigour' this brings to projects which are no longer about the cash or the client.

This feeds into more speculative practice work and provides the meat for their unit's



investigations. Allen talks enthusiastically about the new sewerage tunnel under the Thames, peak water and desalination prospects. She is proud of the way apparently speculative student projects arise from the facts around them. This year her MArch studio Unit 11 was entitled Super Urban Megalistic and included a trip to New York – valuable for discussing how architecture is not a totem but is deeply embedded, from taps to fire hydrants in the case of water.

Major research funding through the school comes with the expectation you take a sabbatical from teaching. But Allen prefers to drop out of admin. 'Teaching is what we are here for,' she says. **EV**



Piers Taylor
Studio master, Architectural Association Invisible Studio

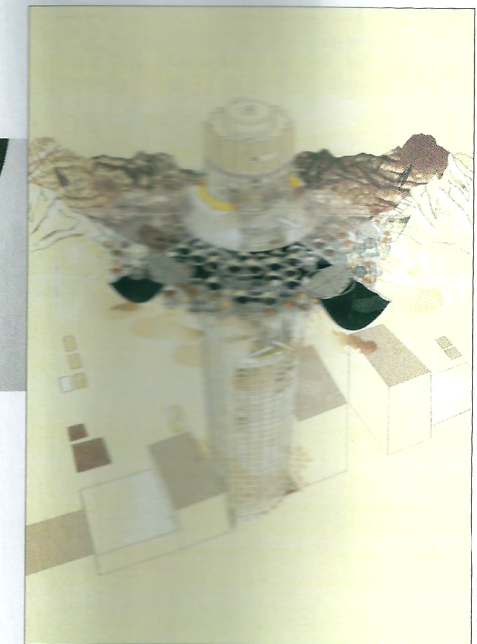
Piers Taylor recently split from Mitchell Taylor workshop to establish Invisible Studio, which tries to operate outside the constraints of what he calls 'the tyranny of the sanitised design studio, where projects are pre-imagined and predetermined in isolation from the visceral feedback obtained through physical making'. After several seasons running his 'Studio in the Woods' student projects at various locations with like-minded architects including Ted Cullinan, Peter Clegg, Gianni Botsford, Kate Darby, Meredith Bowles, Erect Architects and Studio Weave, his approach has been as formalised as it is ever likely to be. Having previously taught at Cambridge and Bath, he is now Studio Master for the AA's 'Design and Make' master's programme. This is based at one of the AA's great resources; the 350 acre forest at Hooke Park in Dorset, working woodland which has been the focus of several experiments down the years in making buildings out of forest thinnings. The latest,

the 'big shed', is the fruit of Taylor's unit, notably, he says, Nazomi Nakabayashi.

This is all about working at one-to-one, says Taylor, about simultaneously designing and making. In the new 'big shed' they mock up bits of structure, with a structural engineer on hand to advise. There's a place for computers, pencils and sketchbooks here, says Taylor, but never to replace making a building by hand.

Students must develop an attitude to structure landscape and context in this rural location. A full set of drawings is produced retrospectively. But how does Taylor, as a practising architect, avoid getting too involved in designs? 'I see myself curating buildings, not designing them. I always wanted to be part of a practice where there wasn't a single author. But knowing where to leap in is as important as holding back.'

The small course – eight students a year – is massively oversubscribed. What does Taylor gain from it? 'It makes you much more agile and less precious as a designer. The research aspect is important. My ability to design complex timber structures has vastly improved. It's incredibly useful.' **HP**



ABOVE LEFT: Smout Allen's exploration of 'porous architecture' at Tibury.

ABOVE: Digging deep below the surface in student's Rina Kukaj's 'purification blanket' air remediation system for a city of smog.



ABOVE: Building full-scale timber structure at Hooke Park.

ABOVE LEFT: Invisible Studio's mixed-use development in Bath includes a martial arts studio.