

We must preserve what the Stephen Lawrence Prize stands for

Words Laura Mark

Launched one year after the Stirling Prize, the RIBA's Stephen Lawrence Prize honours the memory of the murdered teenager who wanted to be an architect, and was conceived by former RIBA president Marco Goldschmied to promote projects unlikely to win the top accolade due to their size and budget (now less than £1 million). Its first winner was revealed in 1998 – this was the year Stephen Lawrence would have completed his Part 2 and when the Macpherson report found racism to be rife in the police force – and specifically in relation to the failed prosecution of those accused of Lawrence's murder.

Now almost 20 years later, Lawrence would have been in his 40s. It is hard to know whether those who benefit from the £5,000 prize fund and additional £5,000 bursary for young social and ethnic minority architects recognise the tragic series of events behind its foundation. 'There has been a generational change,' says Goldschmied. 'Many don't even know where the prize came from.'

But with well-established practices winning the prize, is it less relevant to emerging talent? Last year, after missing out on the Stirling Prize for its Peabody housing scheme, Niall McLaughlin Architects landed the Stephen Lawrence Prize for a small fishing hut in Hampshire.

Many on this year's list (explored in-depth across the following pages) are well-known names – Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios, Sarah Wigglesworth Architects, Ash Sakula and Coffey Architects – the last of which previously won the prize in 2011 for an extension to a London school. But also on the shortlist are the relatively unknown Tsuruta Architects, along with Henning Stummel Architects, while the FCBS project was in fact self-initiated and completed by architectural assistants in the office.

As a whole, the shortlist, with its wide range of projects, offers a snapshot of the kind of work being undertaken by most of the profession, while commercial office schemes and high-end commissions are reserved for the big boys.

That is what gives this prize its edge. These projects prove that good architecture can defy a small budget, and

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demonstrate innovation and a drive to push the industry forward. Look at Ash Sakula's prototype housing scheme – it has built three houses for an amazing £600,000. The projects are also more fun – take FCBS's rotating observatory and artists' studio, which was also shortlisted for the AJ Small Projects Award. For that the architects are deserving of the prize money – winnings no longer offered by the Stirling Prize.

'A £5,000 prize is unheard of in the architectural world. It is a fantastic award, which is very much overlooked. It is the second most important UK architecture prize after the Stirling,' says Philip Gumuchdjian, chair of the RIBA Awards Group and twice winner of the Stephen Lawrence Prize.

But for most of the winners, it is about more than the money. 'When I won for the Thinktank [in 2003] it was the first project I did as my own practice. Winning gave confidence and encouraged the practice to go forward,' recalls Gumuchdjian.

'It gave our practice recognition and an overall positive perception,' adds Yeoryia Manolopoulou, whose practice AY Architects won the prize for its first small public building back in 2013.

And 2006 winner Alison Brooks comments: 'What is important is the affirmation: that an architectural experiment, and the execution of that concept, stands up to the scrutiny of accomplished, critical peers.'

'The accolades are significant for your practice CV – they help you onto competition long and shortlists. Small project awards prove to any client that you can build, and that there may be great achievement at the end of a demanding, experimental project,' she adds.

But Denizen Works founder Murray Kerr hoped for more work to roll in after his house for his parents on the Scottish Isle of Tiree won the award in 2014.

'One outcome I had hoped that might be more forthcoming was invitations to competitions. Perhaps I just have to be patient and someone reading this will extend an invite,' says Kerr.

For this year's chosen shortlist, we can only hope that a flurry of extra commissions will come in. As for the winner, the judges' decision will be tough. Any one of these projects is good enough to win it. What's my bet? I'd like to see the Observatory by FCBS bag the prize but on the night I reckon Tsuruta Architects' House of Trace will clinch it.

The AJ's critics on the shortlist

This is architecture designed to endure, beyond the catwalk moment of its completion

'Biscuit or blancmange?' asked *The Observer's* architecture critic Rowan Moore recently, paraphrasing the current direly polarised state of British architecture. As it turns out, the shortlist for the Stephen Lawrence Prize is pretty biscuity. A family pack of plain digestives, in fact. The six schemes are modest, formally reticent and generally make virtues out of necessities. Four are either houses or house extensions, one is a primary school and the other a mobile studio for watching artists at work, which, if nothing else, is typologically titillating.

Intended to catalyse fresh talent, the prize celebrates projects with a budget ceiling of £1 million. This necessarily limits scale and scope, hence the perhaps inevitable bias towards the domestic. Collectively, they speak of pragmatic concerns, illuminated in a laconically poetic way by materials and tectonics.

Lovers of blancmange might find this all a bit dull, but you sense this is architecture designed to endure, both physically and stylistically, beyond the catwalk moment of its completion. The only caveat is that there isn't much 'fresh talent' on display. Only Tsuruta Architects and Henning Stummel seem like genuinely new kids on the block. If this is truly going to be an award for sparky fledglings, there needs to be a more forensic focus on winking out gifted newcomers so they can claim their place in the RIBA spotlight. *Cathy Slessor*



Tin House by Henning Stummel Architects

FCBS's modest scheme will surely make many youngsters think: 'I could do this.'

I admit to a long-ingrained prejudice against domestic architecture that has a contradictory modest-luxe quality. Three of the projects fall into this undoubtedly unreasonable category. Henning Stummel Architects' Tin House is described as a 'serene' courtyard enfilade; it might be serene if the geometry was less imposing and its metal cladding wasn't orange. Coffey Architects' Modern Side Extension is crisp Modernist with a modicum of texture, rather than the 'subtle game of solid and void' claimed.

Tsuruta's House of Trace seems to have been a labour of misconstrued phenomenological love. The accentuations of historical traces in this otherwise modern extension are set out with such graphic precision, the effect verges on PoMo irony.

FCBS's charmingly charred Observatory cabins were designed by four young architectural assistants – very much in the spirit of the Stephen Lawrence Prize's central themes of social change and better life chances; this very modest scheme will surely make many youngsters think: 'I could do this.'

Ash Sakula's Exhibition Mews and Sarah Wigglesworth's Mellor Primary School demonstrate skilled commitments to material contrasts and architectural presence. The former celebrates pragmatic conjunctions of surface and form; the latter's show-and-tell structure and surfaces makes architecture look (quite rightly in this case) like kid's stuff. *Jay Merrick*



Modern Side Extension by Coffey Architects

Previous winners

- 2015 *The Fishing Hut, Hampshire* by Niall McLaughlin Architects
- 2014 *House No 7, Isle of Tiree* by Denizen Works
- 2013 *Montpelier Community Nursery, London* by AY Architects
- 2012 *King's Grove, London* by Duggan Morris Architects
- 2011 *St Patrick's School Library and Music Room, London* by Coffey Architects
- 2010 *Artists' House, London* by Gumuchdjian Architects
- 2009 *El Ray, Dungeness* by Simon Conder Associates
- 2008 *The Sackler Crossing, London* by John Pawson
- 2007 *Wooda Auditorium, Cornwall* by David Sheppard Architects
- 2006 *Wrap House, London* by Alison Brooks Architects
- 2005 *House, Clonakilly, by Niall McLaughlin Architects*
- 2004 *Vista, Dungeness* by Simon Conder Associates
- 2003 *Think Tank, Skibbereen* by Gumuchdjian Architects
- 2002 *Westborough Cardboard Building, Westcliff-on-Sea* by Cottrell & Vermeulen
- 2001 *Hatherley Studio, Winchester* by Richard Rose-Casemore
- 2000 *Kielder Belvedere, Northumberland* by Softroom
- 1999 *Roche Court Sculpture Gallery, Wiltshire* by Munkenbeck + Marshall
- 1998 *Terrasson, France* by Ian Ritchie Architects

The 2016 shortlist



Exhibition Mews by Ash Sakula



House of Trace by Tsuruta Architects



Mellor Primary School by Sarah Wigglesworth Architects



The Observatory by Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios



Mellor Primary School

Sarah Wigglesworth Architects

This extension to a small primary school close to the Peak District National Park provides a series of new spaces based around the school's 'forest school' ethos.

The 226m² building was designed to support the school's pedagogy, which holds that learning through the outdoor environment is key to helping children build resilience,

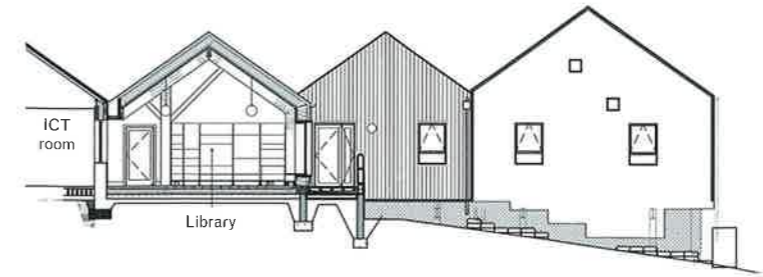
resourcefulness and an ability to work together.

Containing an additional classroom, a special educational needs room, a library, an extended hall, new toilets, and a wellington boot and outdoor equipment store, the new building was conceived as a tree house. Constructed from locally sourced materials

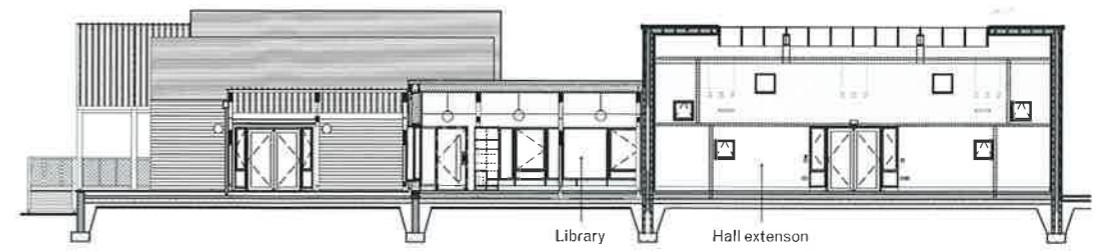
and glulam timber frames, a cluster of pitched roof forms sit on a deck which extends out into the landscape. A habitat wall on the east elevation has been built from recycled and found materials as a framework to accommodate different types of habitats from birds, insects, small animals and plants.

Project data
Location
Mellor, Cheshire
Type of project
School
Client
Mellor Primary School
Architect
Sarah Wigglesworth Architects
Main contractor
MPS Construction
Start on site date
September 2014
Completion date
August 2015
Gross internal floor area
226m²
Total cost
£591,000
Cost per m²
£2,615

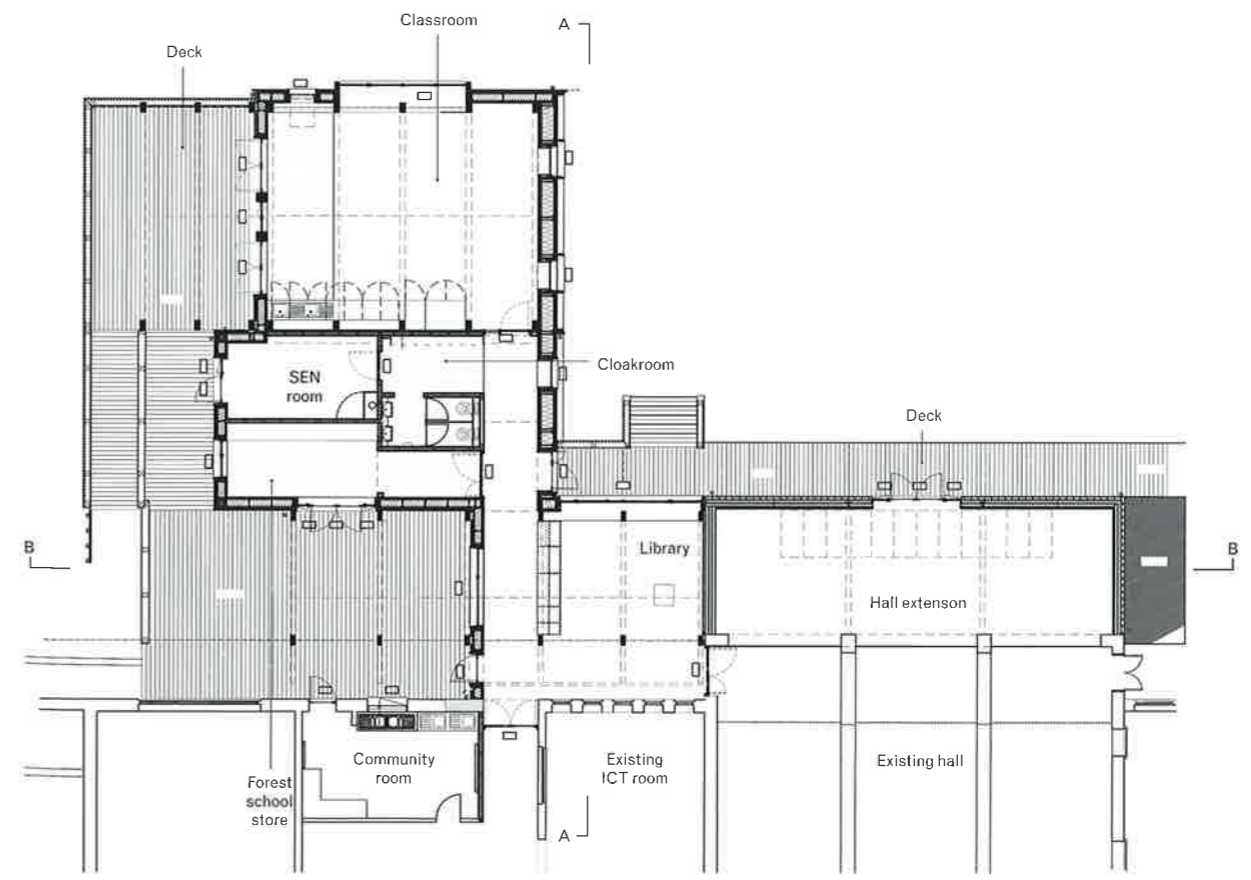




Section A-A



Section B-B



Ground floor plan