

# IDEAS AND BUILDINGS

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We are interested in the manner in which concepts can be translated into tangible, physical things: buildings. This is an ambition we share with most architects, and certainly those that are committed to a practice that prioritises building.

From the outset we organised our studio around a form of research that is sustained by the opportunities we have found to build. In all our projects, right from the outset, we ask ourselves questions about a building's form of construction and what materials we should employ.

When we started in practice nearly twenty years ago, we spent more time on construction research than we do today. This was obviously because we did not have a body of work to draw upon, and many of the things we found ourselves doing, we were doing for the first time. Clearly this is no longer the case. Now the task is one of refining and developing ways of building we have the experience of seeing perform over time.

Our very first buildings were produced by Stephen Bates, Mark Tuff and myself working in a very intimate and structured way. We were, and still are, interested in a procedure that mediates between strategy and detail. Drawings were produced in a manner that enabled us to make our strategy manifest in the detail and allow the detail to contribute to a conceptual framework.

Over time, the scale of the projects we are invited to

work on has increased, as has the complexity of the building programmes. In parallel to this the structure of building commissioning and procurement has evolved, and it is necessary to engage with these changes, rather than to lament the loss of a way of doing things that is no longer relevant.

One of the biggest challenges we face is that of geography. In recent years more of our work has been outside the United Kingdom. Naturally this requires us to become familiar with the differing forms of local building practice and all that goes with it. In all cases the questioning of an appropriate form of construction is influenced by a sense of what is both reasonable and possible, as building in Chile is not the same as building in China or Switzerland. This requires us to reconcile constructional ambition and rigour with what



can reasonably be achieved.

Building is still a rather low-tech form of industry, and requires finding some common basis between the different interests of the various building trades involved, which is rarely a straightforward process. The two images that accompany this text represent an attitude to building tolerance. Both are records of our social housing projects being built on site. One shows a bricklayer on a UK building site working in a rather casual way, the other, taken in Switzerland, shows very precise precast concrete panels being craned into position. The two photographs represent two very different building industries, but rather than judge whether one is

better than the other, it is important to know what it is possible to achieve in the particular building culture we have to work with. The success of these projects is to some extent based on the conscious acceptance of an appropriate level of tolerance.

