

PROJECTS

THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

WORDS BY
PAMELA BUXTON

Six practices tell us about the projects that had held much promise but for one reason or another were abandoned, changed or put on hold

Andrew Bromberg on Aedas's attempt to design a huge retail development in Beijing (below)

WE WON a competition back in 2011 for a development for a new commercial hub in Daxing in the south-east of Beijing. Our 360,000 sq m Xihongmen mixed-use development was particularly large, including a final phase of 150,000 sq m of retail and 35,000 sq m of hotel space following earlier phases of high-rise office development.

From our point of view, the retail site was the meat of the project and the commercial parts its accent – we'd won the competition against some very good international practices because judges liked the iconic quality of the retail and the way we used that to tie into the commercial centre. The retail site was at the transition between a long, urban green corridor and further development to the north. Our design sought to merge the more natural, open setting into the commercial district.

Despite the large scale, the geometry is broken down and organised to be approachable and user friendly. The strong formal gesture recalls a natural erosion of stones within a riverbed as the edges of the development smooth out and expose its interior components. Finally, the eroded mass dissolves completely into a public park that relates to the existing adjacent southern park.

Unfortunately, this key retail component hasn't been realised. Although our other phases either have been built or are under construction and the client is very happy with them, this

important final phase has been put on hold.

This is the result of an alignment of unfortunate events. First, the project was delayed for six months while the client sold the commercial properties. Then Chinese president Xi Jinping announced that he wanted no more 'weird' architecture in China. This created fear in the development world, with clients worrying about whether their developments weren't the type of projects the president wanted. By the time it had been decided that our project was OK, the anchor department-store tenant had dropped out and the Chinese economy started slowing. The client then decided to pursue traditional retail throughout rather than a department store, but now we're not sure what, if anything, it will be.

Instead, we're in the very strange situation where the accents to the development are being built, but what they're accenting isn't, even though it's the main feature of the overall design. The client may decide they still need some retail even if it is scaled back, or it might end up being speculative commercial space. Either way, they might not think they need us to do it, which would be very disappointing.

I'm very saddened – it was a fun project and one of our more special commercial developments.

– *Andrew Bromberg is global board director and Hong Kong executive director at Aedas*



Adam Brinkworth
on his unrealised
plan for a skate
ramp at Supreme's
flagship store
in London

MY ONE-THAT-GOT-AWAY isn't on a particularly grand scale, more like an element within a scheme I thought would have been a very dynamic and fitting idea.

It was very simple – a half-pipe skate ramp within a store for skateboarding brand Supreme. As I am a skateboarder myself, and Supreme is one of my favourite brands, getting to work with it was a dream come true. The client is a successful and unusual retailer who is very selective about his stores and their locations. We were invited to collaborate with the Wilson Brothers on his sole London store.

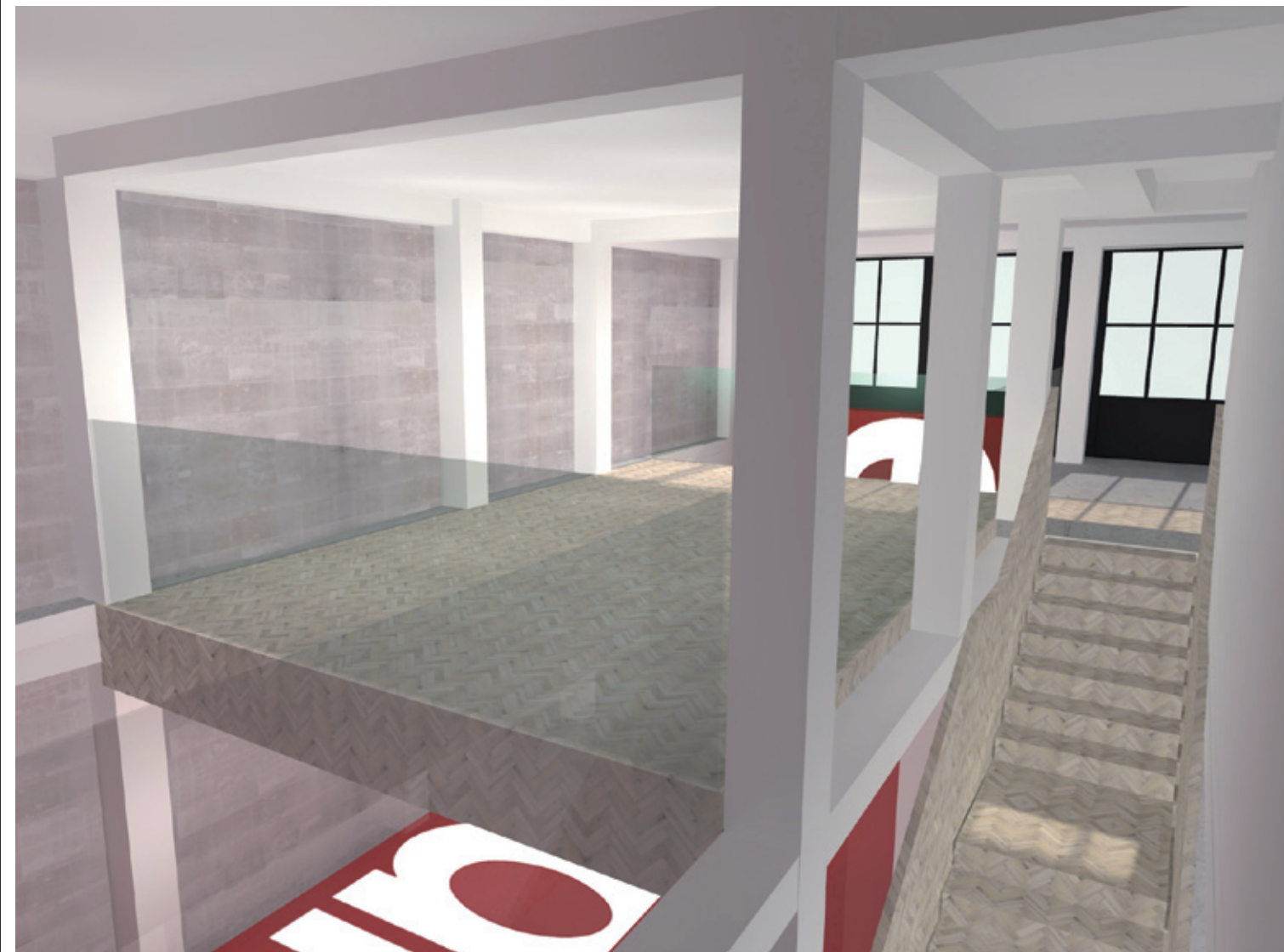
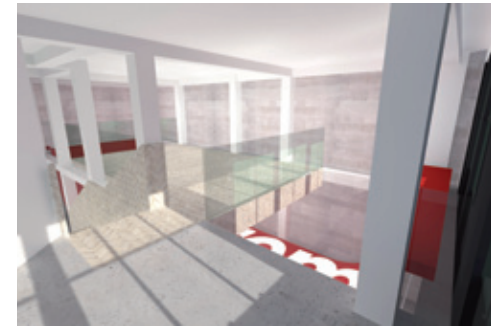
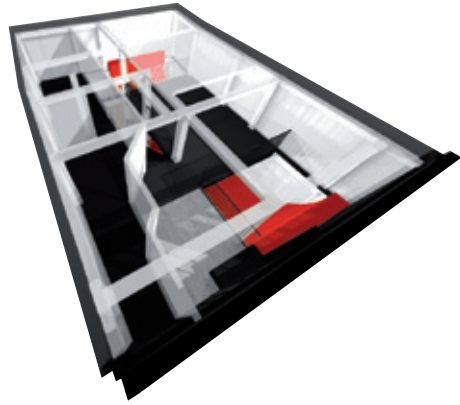
My idea was to take Supreme's red-and-white box logo and fold it up at either end to form a skate-able half-pipe. Because the client only needed 25 linear metres of merchandise display space, I worked out that the ramp would fit into the basement, by taking out two large sections of the ground floor. The ramp would have run from the front of the store to the back, breaking through the voids at either end. People walking past on the street would see a skateboarder fly up into the air and then drop back down again.

Downstairs there would still have plenty of room for the product and upstairs would have become a skateboard gallery. Despite seeming

like a major reconstruction project, due to the nature of the site it would have needed very few structural alterations to do it.

In the end, the Supreme store took a brilliantly simple direction, incorporating fantastic sculptures by skateboard artist, Mark Gonzales. I've never met a client who takes so much time and care over every detail. I really enjoy his dedication and tenacity. So even though the idea I had for the half-pipe ramp got away, I loved the whole process and am very proud of the final result.

–
Adam Brinkworth is CEO of the Brinkworth design agency



Russell Curtis
of RCKa on its
proposals for
community-led
housing in Church
Grove, Lewisham

RCKA HAS long had an interest in the potential of community-led housing and over the past few years we have had numerous discussions with self-build organisations about developing proposals for sites within London. But the cost of land has always proved too much of a barrier, so it was an exciting prospect when Lewisham Council – which has a history when it comes to innovative approaches to the solving the housing crisis – announced that it was making land available for a community-led housing scheme. What's more, the site in question – Church Grove – was one we were familiar with, having prepared some initial design ideas for a similar proposal 18 months before.

We partnered with a local housing trust to develop a scheme that provided opportunities for local people from the council's waiting list to invest time and effort in creating a home for themselves. In return, they would also learn new skills and benefit from reduced rent. The prospect of working with local people on new homes in this way was an exciting one, allowing us to explore construction techniques and technologies that were suitable for the involvement of non-expert builders.

We felt our design successfully reconciled the commercial realities of a community housing scheme with a complex and challenging site. Our design included shared space for community events, allotments and wild landscaping to encourage biodiversity – all while encouraging interaction between not just residents of the development but also the wider community. We proposed building the

shell of the shared community building first and using it as a training centre and site office for the duration of the construction before it being fitted out, by those who were newly trained, to provide a space for events.

Unfortunately though, with a new funding regime for social housing providers announced over the summer, our client decided it couldn't accept the financial risks of proceeding with the scheme and pulled out just prior to submission. This was obviously a major disappointment – we had come up with what we thought was a compelling proposal that we would very much have liked to build.

But while it was a shame to lose the project, we're not too upset as the scheme will be progressing with a similar proposition that has an equally ambitious social agenda. The process has nonetheless been useful as a very interesting exercise on how to unlock complex and challenging urban sites – the sort of site that will have to be increasingly addressed to deal with the housing shortage.

The whole process was also very useful in thinking about how a co-housing scheme might differ from regular housing, particularly with regards to how housing design can be used to encourage community interaction.

And as the winning bid is from an organisation [RUSS] with similar ambitions and interests to our own, although we're disappointed we know that good will come of the process eventually, and that the project is in safe hands.

–
Russell Curtis is a director of London architecture practice RCKa



Caroline Robbie on Quadrangle Architects' plans for the Jack Layton Ferry Terminal & Harbour Square Park in Toronto

QUADRANGLE PARTNERED with Will Alsop (aLL Design) and Janet Rosenberg Studio to take part in a limited competition to produce a design for Toronto's Jack Layton Ferry Terminal & Harbour Square Park.

Toronto's waterfront has been in a sorry state for 150 years while the city effectively turned its back on the lake and the shore was given over to industrial uses. More recently there has been a change of consciousness about the waterfront, and Toronto has invested significantly in revitalising the area and drawing new connections between the lake and the city with many exciting initiatives, including water and brownfield rehabilitation, parks and trails, walkways and development projects.

The Toronto Islands are a magical destination, yet only a 15-minute ferry-ride away from the city. But the ferry docks have always been a rather grim experience, and as the waterfront redevelopment moves eastwards, Waterfront Toronto decided to hold a competition to mobilise a change to this area.

It's a project very close to my heart as I grew up in Toronto and, like many residents, I have a lot of fond memories of going over to the Islands by ferry.

Our starting point was threefold: to bring functionality to the terminal, to introduce whimsy into the place, and to open up views of the lake as much as possible. We created a hot-pink terminal building elevated on stilts, with increased berths for ferries and more open and efficient ways of funnelling people through. Vessel-shaped structures house

ticketing and WC facilities, and the entire concept was infused with a carefree feeling.

In addition to creating views out, an elevated approach seemed to us to be the best way of enlivening the ground plane with a waterside park including a pool and dunes/beaches adjacent to the terminal. This way people can spend time enjoying the terminal park as a destination in itself rather than just going there to get on and off the ferries. Nowadays, people are used to pre-booking online so for those using the ferries the boarding process is more relaxed, with less queuing and more opportunity to enjoy the park. Our entry also removes a prominent hillock that presently covers parking access for the nearby residential buildings and obstructs views of the waterfront.

Our proposal was not only playful and functional, it was also affordable and easily realised. Since there presently is no budget for the project, we designed it to be easily implemented in a sequence of phases over 10 to 15 years.

Of course everyone hates to lose design competitions, but I was very proud of what our team accomplished. The winning design by KPMB Architects, West 8 and Greenberg Consultants is a handsome wooden structure with a green roof that doubles as a park. We are all now waiting to see if the city can come up with the budget to see it realised.

Caroline Robbie is principal of Quadrangle Architects





THE GARDEN of Forgiveness has far-reaching aspirations beyond the realm of usual projects, spelling out hope for the future for the war-torn city of Beirut.

We won the project in competition in 1999 and then had a year of negotiations agreeing the contract with our client Solidere. The garden is conceived as a symbolic focal point for change and healing that creates a calm, uplifting place for both solitary reflection and togetherness. The 2.5ha location incorporates a key archaeological site and is overlooked by important religious buildings, including the main cathedrals for the three Christian religions and two major mosques. So during the design process we spent a lot of time in discussions with the department of archeology, and the various religious denominations and community leaders.

We knew that if we brought religion close to the concept we'd have difficulties. Instead, our main concept is about sharing. Whatever their background, all the Beirut communities spoke of their love of landscape and we saw that sharing a landscape was symbolically very important. Added to this, the archaeological heritage on the site, dating back 5,000 years, represented a shared history. This sparked our vision of a shared city, and more specifically a public space within the city, which could be shared by everyone, containing gardens where people can meet and socialise. This multiuse landscape would be a major undertaking – we spent a lot of time demonstrating to archaeologists how the garden could bring the landscape up to the remains.

In our concept, visitors experience the changing fragrance and atmospheres of the Lebanese landscape as they descend through the garden alongside rills and irrigation channels. At the top of the ramp are trees of the mountain regions. These give way

to groves of olive and fruit trees and a plantation of citrus trees that represents the lush coastal plain. At the base of the ramp is a pedestrian bridge and square to the archaeology garden. The most striking archaeological feature is the *Cardo Maximus* Roman street, which is left partially exposed.

We got as far as starting on the retaining walls. One of the problems was the site's proximity to the Lebanon's Houses of Parliament, which meant that part of it was always filled with an army barracks. There were long – so far unsuccessful – negotiations to move this off the site to one nearby.

The other problem was the political situation. Just when you think there's stability there's another flare-up in tensions, when all focus moves away from the building project to the emergency in hand. We were working full speed until the Israeli bombing of Southern Lebanon in 2004. Momentum was regained after the war, only to be scuppered again by the Iraqi war. We were then moved sideways on to another square project elsewhere in the city. Then three or four years ago there was the idea of the Aga Khan becoming involved in the garden project, but nothing came of that.

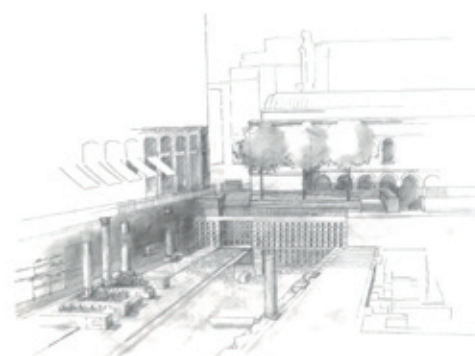
Given the nature of the scheme, it takes a lot of extra work to keep it in public minds, and over the years we've been motivated through raw passion for the project rather than payment. Every time you think you're building up energy again, another emergency happens. Meanwhile the archaeology is slowly disintegrating, and the project is still there waiting to be done.

But we haven't given up hope. We still hope to get a phone call to say that the army has moved off. Then, we'd be all systems go.

Neil Porter is a founding partner of landscape architecture practice Gustafson Porter

Neil Porter

on Gustafson Porter's concept for Hadiqat as-Samah – the Garden of Forgiveness – in Beirut



**Simon Henley
of Henley
Halebrown
Rorrison's plan
for the Unilever
Evaluation Centre,
Port Sunlight**

THE UNILEVER Evaluation Centre at Port Sunlight is very much a 'what-if' project for us. We won the job when we were making our mark in the design of working environments and were working on offices for TalkBack. Had Unilever been built we'd have probably have gone in a different direction as a practice by transferring our thinking on working environments to blue-chip companies and developer-led speculative offices. As it was, we went more into education, health and housing instead of workplace. Whether it would've turned out better, who knows?

It was an interesting brief that was really two projects in one. The first was to refurbish a Fifties Nuffield-type block, which Unilever used for R&D, general office space and labs. We were also designing a new two-storey extension that plugged into the existing building containing a foyer, box office and studios where the public would be invited to test prospective products, with viewing rooms for Unilever scientists to watch and work out how to apply their technical innovations for use as appealing products. Back in 2001 it was the first time we'd come across the use of 3D printing to make prototypes.

We conceived the building as clad in sinusoidal metal cladding but at the same time quite civic and pavilion-like with a huge cantilevered porch. There was a glazed courtyard where we were inspired by the work of the artist Dan Graham to create a transparent labyrinth effect, and inside we were going to use translucent ceilings.

The whole thing was quite crystalline. It would have been a really fascinating building to build - and a very unusual one for Unilever to undertake.

We've never taken a project so far and not got it built. We had planning permission, done a set of working drawings and were just about to go out to tender and then it was cancelled because the client - Unilever - decided to locate the centre in the Netherlands instead. In multinational blue-chip companies buildings are humble pawns in the business process. If the business model changes, the building doesn't happen.

Interestingly, we are now returning to the workplace field, but it's been a long hiatus.

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*Simon Henley is principal of Henley Halebrown Rorrison, previously Buschow Henley. **FX***

