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Unagru
Architecture
Urbanism

Homes

Introduction to the process

a.1



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We need a home in the psychological sense as much as we need one in the physical: to compensate for a vulnerability. We need a refuge to shore up our states of mind, because so much of the world is opposed to our allegiances. We need our rooms to align us to desirable versions of ourselves and to keep alive the important, evanescent sides of us.

Alain de Botton, *Architecture of Happiness*

Working together

Who we are

The exciting time when you think about transforming your home needs to be mostly about you. Your aspirations and goals, values and tastes will guide our work.

On the other hand, great design comes from great collaborations, trust and a little chemistry. During our first meetings, you should choose as much a consultant as a team member of an important life project. So here is a little about us: we are a young, dynamic, and playful architecture and urbanism practice. We want to connect architecture, nature, and society by creating beautiful, innovative designs and producing research that changes the built environment.

Our main focus is to design beautiful, joyful and very personal houses for our clients, but we are also versed in urbanism and landscape design. We see all types and scales of projects tied together to improve people's lives and the environment.

We have won a few awards that we see as recognition of our great relationships with our clients and our ambition and skills. After several years, we have learnt how a well-managed design process can be an exciting, life-changing experience for both the clients and the designers.



Working together

The very first steps

A project typically starts with a few requirements: an initial brief, floorplans and an address. In our first contact - a phone call or Zoom meeting - we discuss your ideas, aspirations and concerns about the project and working with an architect. We will discuss daily routines, hobbies, taste in design, sustainability, construction costs, and briefs.

After that, we will prepare a short report covering planning, construction costs and design challenges, together with a fee proposal.

Once you have decided to move forward, we will confirm the project particulars in our contract, which is based on the standard RIBA 2018 Domestic Professional Services Contract.

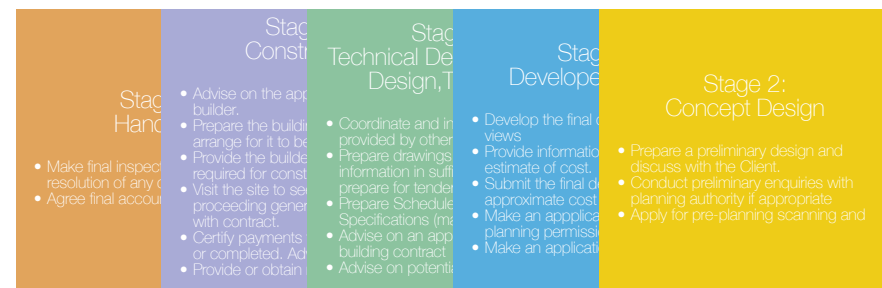
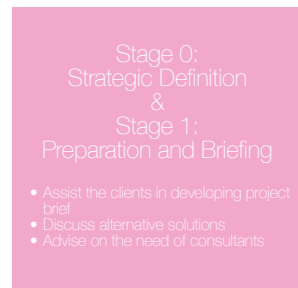
Zoom or in person meeting

You will choose the level of service and fee that suits you



Start work together: we set up a calendar of meetings and deliverables.

The journey goes on!
(Stage 2-6)



The project begins! The process in detail

A quick overview of the design and construction process: the RIBA Plan of Work

We are a RIBA* and ARB* chartered practice, and our contracts refer to the full RIBA scope of services. The RIBA has worked for decades on defining and describing all the stages of work, and the architect's role during each stage. By using the RIBA's guidelines we have outlined below the design and construction stages, so you know what to expect at each stage.

Stage 0: Strategic Definition Stage 1: Preparation and Brief

This is the most important part of the project and where the architect can add the most value. We will undertake some preliminary appraisals to assess the design options and feasibility of the project. This can range from a sketch design solution to a full feasibility study and will enable you to decide on the best way forward. Depending on the scale and brief of a project, we will identify which planning approvals or regulations are required. Generally appointing a structural engineer is compulsory, we will also suggest if any other consultants are needed (refer to Page 15 for more details).

- Visit the property and carry out an initial appraisal.
- Assist the Client in preparing the Client's requirements.
- Discuss alternative solutions for the project.
- Advise on the need for services by consultants or specialists.
- Arrange: survey of site and/or buildings.

*RIBA : Royal Institute of British Architects



The project begins! The process in detail

Stage 2: Concept Design

Using the initial project brief we will develop outline proposals. We will present a number of initial concepts for you to choose from. We will also liaise with local planners as a priority. The final design brief should reflect your aspirations and provide you with a home that adds value and improves your quality of life.

- Prepare a preliminary design and discuss with the Client.
- Conduct preliminary enquiries with planning authority if appropriate.
- Apply for pre-planning scanning and advice if needed.

Stage 3: Developed Design

We will spend more time at this stage transforming ideas into something that can be built. This includes coordinating the work of other consultants into the designs. Once agreed, the design proposals will then be submitted for planning approval or lawfulness certificate.

- Develop the final design.
- Provide information for an approximate estimate of cost.
- Submit the final design proposals and approximate cost for approval.
- Make an application for detailed planning permission.



The project begins! The process in detail

Stage 4a: Technical Design

We will now prepare the technical drawings and a specification and/or a schedule of works that will be used to invite some contractors to price the tender package of the approved proposal. We will work on this while the planning applications are processing.

- Coordinate and integrate any designs provided by other consultants.
- Prepare drawings and other information in sufficient detail to prepare for tender calls and invitations.
- Make an application for Building Regulations approval.

Stage 4b: Detailed design

- Prepare Schedule of Works and Specifications (materials and finishes).
- Prepare the information required for construction.

Stage 4c: Tendering

Tendering is the process of selecting and inviting contractors to provide a quote to carry out the works described in our design package. It is crucial to identify contractors we can trust, that are financially solid, and have a track record of projects delivered on time and in budget. We would recommend to appoint a Quantity Surveyor if the construction cost exceeds £500,000 and above. This stage ends after the clients appointed a contractor. Typically, during this stage we will:

- Advise on an appropriate form of building contract, its conditions and the responsibilities of the Client, the consultants and the builder.
- Prepare documents required for tendering purposes.



The project begins! The process in detail

- Advise on potential builders to be invited to tender for the work.
- Invite, appraise and report on tenders.

Stage 5: Construction

Throughout the construction phase we will administer your contract with the builder, carry out regular inspections, deal with queries, instruct any additional work required, monitor progress on site, keep track of cost, value the works and certify payments due to the builder.

- Advise on the appointment of a builder.
- Prepare the building contract and arrange for it to be signed.
- Provide the builder with information required for construction.
- Visit the site to see that the work is proceeding generally in accordance with contract.
- Certify payments for work carried out or completed. Advise on final cost.
- Provide or obtain record drawings showing the building and its services.
- Give general advice on maintenance .

Stage 6: Handover

When the project is ready to handover we will inspect and value the works and issue a practical certificate. We will be available during the defects period - usually 3 months - to arrange for any remedial works and certifying the final payment (typically 2.5% retention rate of the contract's sum).

- Make final inspections and advise on resolution of any defects.



How much will it cost?

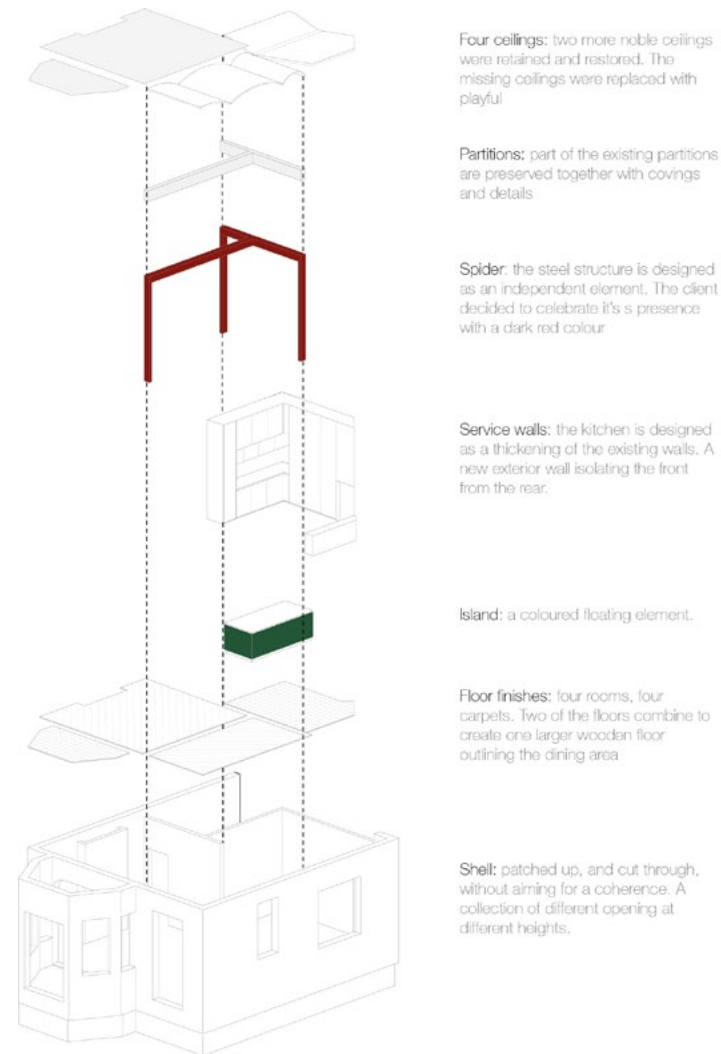
Our first conversations will focus on finding the right balance between brief and budget to produce an accurate description of the works. We always suggest starting with a very loose definition of the brief: to describe the needs rather than the solutions. This will allow us to begin with first principles and explore the potentials of a space you know so well.

There will inevitably be a tension between brief and budget, which should be addressed early on. First thing will be to define what is the project budget that you wish to invest. Builders will refer to the works' net cost (which is their part of the works), excluding VAT, finishes, fees, fittings. Consultants, including architects, would usually propose their percentage fee, based on the construction cost (excluding VAT). In this case, the clients should have a rough idea on how much a project would cost.

We prioritize the satisfaction of the clients as the end user, where we always try to clarify the total costs and to be thoughtful in reducing the gap between brief and budget.

When allocating a budget, we suggest that you think of a sum that you are comfortable investing in your project. The construction process can be stressful, and we should avoid adding additional pressure to financial restrictions. It is also helpful to keep at the back of your mind (but not too far) a 5% contingency to cover unexpected expenses.

We'd like to inform our clients that consultancy fee be applied additionally if the construction cost, budget or complexity goes up.



Design concept diagram for Spider

What about the fees?

Most of the projects we have completed are supported by an Architect's Services as defined by the RIBA Plan of Work and percentage fees. We offer fee calculation with a lump-sum or hourly charged fee for projects with limited design tasks, site assessment and technical assistance.

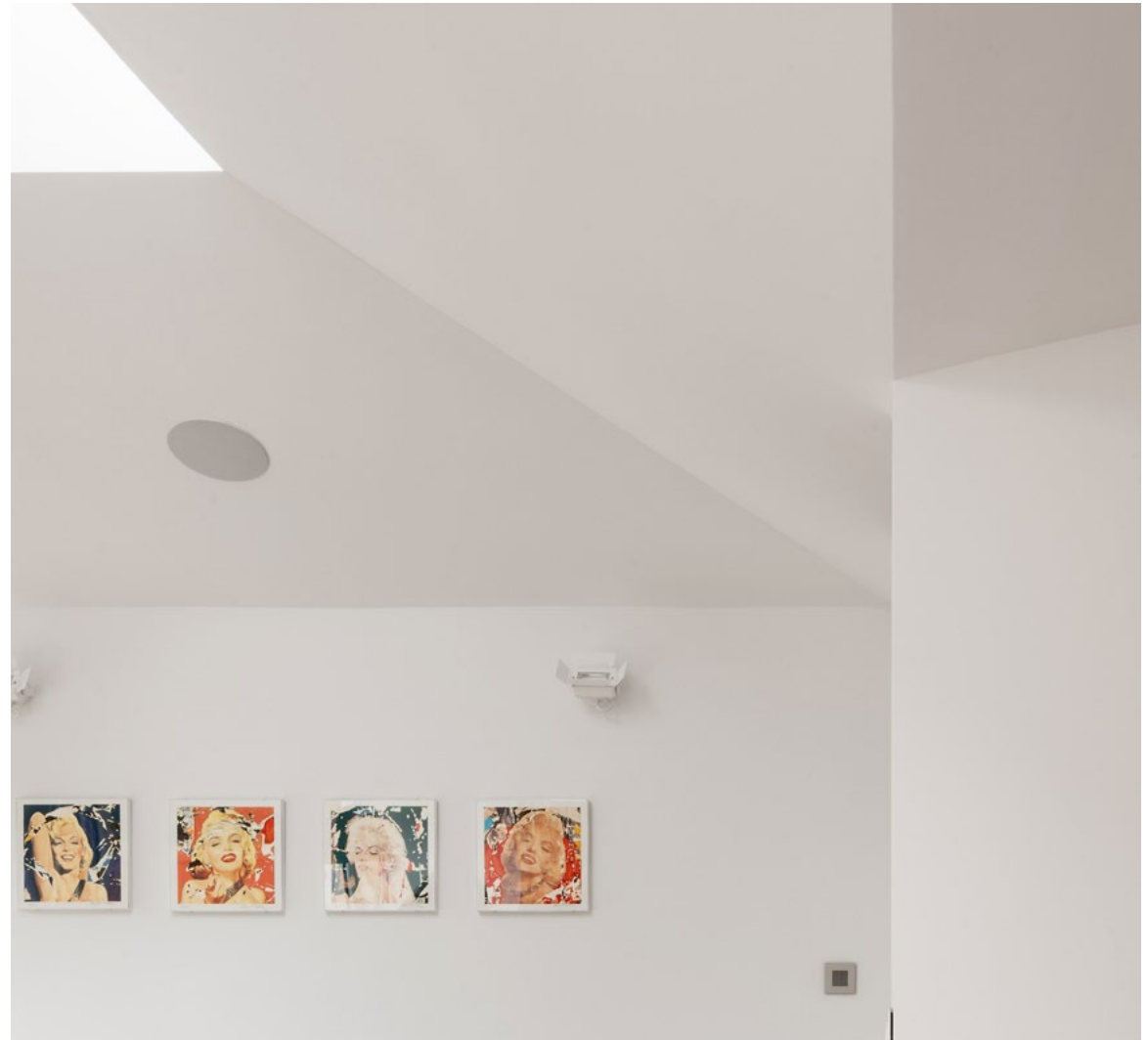
Three levels of service

Not all clients or projects require the same level of investment and commitment from an architect. Therefore, we offer three degrees of service.

[1] Basic: We would recommend this for clients who want to be involved during the construction process in managing the builders and budget. In this scenario, we will provide a substantial level of information.

[2] Standard: This is our typical benchmark to calculate fees and covers the project from inception to completion as outlined by the RIBA (see pages 8 above). We will also act as contract administrators, which includes checking on the construction quality, approving payments, making sure there is money set aside to fix defects, and resolving controversies.

[3] Outstanding: The Outstanding service includes 30% more time and meetings dedicated to the design and detailing stages. Therefore this package costs approximately 20% more than the Basic service. It also includes more visuals that cover most of the rooms, detailed bathrooms and kitchen elevations with materials, and a physical model of the project. We will dedicate more time on the design and the possibility of experimenting with cutting-edge technologies and design solutions. Examples of this service are House for A Cellist, The Sponge and The Boat and Pavilion, which have proven to be able to attract more attention and additional market value.



Fee Benchmark

Our most common form of appointment is the percentage fee: where charges are calculated in proportion to the net construction cost. Percentage may vary depending on the complexity of the project, but the following table provides a good estimate for most situations. We will apply additional fee charge based on the variations made if the changes on the contract sum has been made.

18%	at	£50,000
15%	at	£100,000
12%	at	£250,000
11%	at	£500,000
10%	at	£1,000,000
9%	at	£2,000,000

An additional 1-2% should be added for works to Listed Buildings, depending on the complexity of the services required.

Additional fees may apply for Planning and Building Control applications.

We offer our service in handling and purchasing items such as furniture or accessories on behalf of the clients, at a percentage of 15% of net cost



A second option: Hourly fees

Given the uncertainty of construction costs and the variety of options clients like to explore, we are increasingly being requested to prepare feasibility studies or early design solutions for hourly fees. Therefore, this fee calculation is flexible and ideal for the clients who choose to be more hands-on in the project, such as material choice and purchase, while the architects can invest in the aspects of the design, pricing and construction that matter the most to the clients.

With each invoices issued by end of a month, we attach the real-time recorded time sheet where we derive our fee amount. Our time-based hourly charge for each position is outlined below (+ VAT):

Director	£175
Project Architect	£125
Architectural Technologist	£75
Architectural Assistant	£65

Insurance

We carry a Professional Indemnity Insurance of £500,000 in accordance with the ARB Code of Conduct and Practice. Our Public Liability Insurance is for £1 mil, and our employer's liability Insurance is of £10 mil.



Other Costs:

Depending on the extent of works, we might need the assistance of the following consultants:

1. Structural Engineer: We will write separately about their appointment and the fees entailed.

2. Building Control Consultants: A 'Full Plans application' to the Council Building Control would take up to eight weeks to determine before issuing a 'Full Plans Approval'. If you wish to instruct Council Building Control to deal with the Building Regulations inspections and issue of final Completion Certificate, either you (or your constructor on your behalf) will need to serve a Building Notice on the Council, together with the requisite fee. Alternatively, you can instruct a government approved Private Building Control Firm, as opposed to the Council Building Control.

3. Party Wall Surveyor: When the extent of any work affecting the common wall with the adjoining property is determined, we can discuss the application of the Party Wall Act.

4. Professional Measured Survey: We will appoint a professional surveyor to provide drawings of the existing conditions. It is a small initial investment that provides a better understanding and certainty in the design stage.

It may be necessary to appoint other consultants, such as Landscape Designer, Quantity Surveyor etc.



All the costs at a glance

For an example of a loft conversion or an interior refurbishment project, let's assume the allocated budget for the construction work is £100k, with finishes and fittings included. Usually we would suggest 8% contingency, for both the construction cost and consultancy fee, in case of some changes or additional works that you wish to proceed during the process.

Example 1:

Initial budget for the construction includes finishes and fittings	£	100,000
15% fee of the total construction cost	£	15,000
8% contingency of the total construction cost and fees	£	9,200
20% VAT of all the total sum	£	24,840
Total cost of the project	£	149,040

Let's say the clients wish to proceed with a rear extension or side return for a kitchen or dining place under the same allocated budget,

Example 2:

Initial budget for the construction includes finishes and fittings	£	100,000
structural and finishes works for an extension	£	50,000
kitchen, joinery and appliances	£	30,000
15% fee of the total construction cost	£	27,000
8% contingency of the total construction cost and fees	£	16,560
20% VAT of all the total sum	£	44,712
Total cost of the project	£	268,272

The cost figures can be varied based on the size and type of project, choice of materials and bespoke design (eg. design of kitchen, joinery, and bathroom).

We find that the best way to determine the client's construction budget is to start from the sum they are comfortable to invest and spend on the project. Then we can start working backwards to determine the figures that are feasible for the builders and other consultants.

In the case of Example 1, we would start from the allocated budget of £100k, where we will come to a point where the construction cost of somewhere around £50k, after the deduction of consultant's fee, VAT and contingencies.

But worry not! We provide a cost estimation service based on the your project brief and need. We can discuss and review the feasibility of a project with you.

How long will it take?

Project timeline depends on a few main aspects:

- Planning requirements
- Level of detailing and specifying
- Tendering process

From our experiences, a rear or side extension project takes about ten to twelve months from the appointment of an architect to the completion and handover date. This is based on a full refurbishment of a two-storey Victorian house with a ground-floor extension, within a conservation area. See below the timeline below as an example.

[1] Planning requirements: The more complex and ambitious a project is, the more time will be taken to design, coordinate and obtain a planning permission. For us, a complex project requires more works on preservation or demolition of the existing conditions. These are subjective to the regulations imposed by Council Boroughs on Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, Flood Risk, tree protection, dust control,

safety of excavation for drainage or basement (especially in boroughs of Camden and Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea).

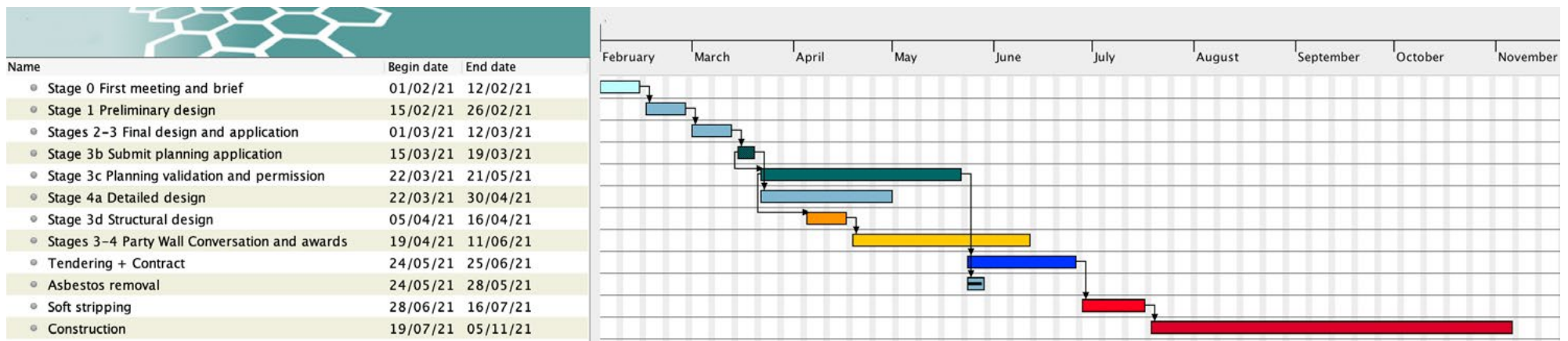
If a project involves a high intensity of the alteration that has not been done within the neighbourhood (our tip is to look into the planning portal or Google Maps for some research), we will require more time in convincing the Council. Internal refurbishment and interior works that do not change the building outlook are generally considered as simpler works.

We usually suggest approaching planners with a complex project through the pre-application process: we submit preliminary drawings in the early stages of design to receive feedback from the Council. Going through this route could take about one month, but this could save more time in the future. Most of our submissions to the council have been successful. We advise our clients on any potential risk on getting refused permission, and what are the next steps if we decide to appeal the decision. If

a planning application is refused, you may need to wait ten more weeks before re-submitting and awaiting a new response. Decision appeal could take up to five to seven months.

[2] Level of detailing and specifying: Complex design requires more time to elaborate and detail-specified. This might require specialist subcontractors for a particular type of cladding, floor finish or structure. It will involve more established, and sophisticated builders with more time to prepare and compare prices. A very detailed tender package will take about six weeks to prepare. Of course, good things come with patience!

[3] Tendering process: A substantially long tendering process can save money and reduce uncertainties by investing the time in looking for the right suppliers and contractors. This process usually takes one to three months, where we contact and follow up with the potential



Time saving strategies.

Some clients might be willing to take a few risks to save time. We have devised a few strategies for these cases. For example, we advise to proceed with the submission of an initial design for pre-application advice, which saves about six weeks on the standard programme. In the case of positive feedback, we then prepare the planning drawings and start the detailing simultaneously. We don't wait for the planning permission to engage in the detailed design because we assume the consent will be granted.

One of our strategies is to place our time in managing and coordinating the details before the construction so we can reduce the risk and therefore save more time and cost in the later stage.

Some clients have their preferred builder and wish to **avoid tendering process. We would not recommend as there is a degree of risk in not getting the best price and not knowing their experiences. We would suggest to invite a few builders to submit their interest and quotation**

Sometimes things do not go as planned.

We try to work our best to avoid unexpected risks, and we think far of the setbacks and back-up plans, where situations can happen when:

[1] The tendering process is not successful or smooth, where we do not find a builder we like, who is also available and within our budget. There might be times where the appointed builder delays the project timeline or turns out unavailable, and we need to start all over with a postpone of four to six weeks.

[2] The planners can be extremely slow in responding to a request for pre-application advice or judging a planning application.

[3] The neighbours who are strongly oppose the works and delay the preparation of the party wall agreement.



Testimonials



“We chose Davide unhesitatingly to be our architect after he described a vision utterly different to other Victorian conversions in Queens Park, melding cultural influences, sustainability concerns and lifestyle ‘needs’ with his design. We particularly love the angled polished plaster walls, allowing light and shadows to magically change the mood in the house from day to evening, different on each level, creating literally our dream space.”

Ash & Bee

A house renovation can be a very stressful process. You need competent professionals to be by your side with the right attitude and competence. We appointed Unagru twice in the past five years and would highly recommend them. The projects were very challenging, however thanks to their expertise and problem solving skills, Unagru delivered amazing results. We are so happy with their work and cannot recommend them enough!

Vincenzo & Emilia

“Unagru architect’s beautiful, elegantly detailed and very skillful adaptation of a simple terrace house into a place of comfort and tranquility. Thoughtful Clients and developers, hire them without a second thought!”

- Tony Fretton (one of the best British architects endorsed us after visiting our *Sponge* project during the London Open House Festival, 2021)

Davide and team are brilliant architects who are committed to doing work to the highest design and quality standards, and they are kind and thoughtful people too. Highly recommended.

Tom & Eleanor

Testimonials



“We decided to renovate the top floors of our outdated Victorian home - this involved knocking down walls, repositioning doorways, adding two full bathrooms and converting an existing small bathroom into a laundry room, as well as adding storage throughout. Davide was with us every step of the way, talking through ideas – ranging from very ambitious to more modest – discussing textures and materials and our vision for the house and sending us images and texts for inspiration during the planning phase. We’re living in the completed house now and couldn’t be happier with the way the designs turned out. Davide’s professional drawings were our saving grace. Even though we had ideas about what kind of finishes, etc., we wanted, there was no way we would have known how to specify things like the width of the shower, the height and positioning of fixtures, the placement of tiles, how to maximize light from the positioning of doorways, where to place lighting for best effect, how to get the most out of awkward spaces. Even builders with a lot of experience can make poor decisions about such things if they aren’t given guidance. Davide was on site often to communicate with the build team (he has a good sense of humour, which is very helpful!) and make sure everything was done properly. When the builders made mistakes, he was the one who stepped in to insist that things be done to our standards and specifications. When we encountered an unforeseen structural problem during the works, he was quick on his feet to come up with a solution and handled all of the communication with the structural engineer and planning permission officer to get things done safely and with the minimal amount of faff and delay. The project would have gone over time by many weeks, even months, if not for Davide’s intervention. He was upfront about cost, which was refreshing, and his rates were totally reasonable. We would recommend him in a heartbeat.”

- Abhi & Danielle, 2021

“Davide managed the pre-application process for us for a 5-bed residential home we were assessing to buy and refurbish. He went way out of his way to investigate what extension project had been done in the area and would be most Likely to be received positively by planning. He made elaborated light studies to support our case. He proposed unique creative solutions to structural - conceptual refurbishment challenges. He was extremely professional and polite to everyone involved throughout the entire process. Davide could be trusted with planning applications requiring to study complex regulations as well as with state of the art creative proposals using innovative products. We can highly recommend him!”

- R & L

About Us

Unagru Architecture Urbanism

Una gru stands for “a crane” in Italian, celebrating a happy and powerful encounter with a crane bird during a survey of a polluted landscape. In both English and Italian, the crane is also the most iconic building machine. The word’s double meaning symbolises today’s hybrid natural-artificial world and is an aspiration in our work.

Our works have been published on Don’t Move Improve, Open House Festival, BuildIt Awards, Design Awards and more.

Daide di Martino

MArch, PhD, RIBA, ARB

Daide graduated from architecture University in Venice, Italy, after a year of studies at ETSAB - the school of Architecture in Barcelona, Spain, and SUN in Naples, Italy.

He has a postgraduate Master’s Degree in Design Within Historical Contexts and a PhD in Ecological Urban Design from the University Federico II in Naples, Italy. He has followed his projects and collaborated with larger architecture practices in Italy and Spain. He was fortunate to join Ian Ritchie Architects in London in 2013, working on several residential schemes and competitions. He founded Unagru in 2018. He is passionate about unconventional spaces and ecology, sustainable design, and natural light.

Daide is Unit Leader at the Cardiff University Architecture MA AD Master in Architecture Design Research.



Aviv Amiel

MArch

Aviv is a qualified architect (registered in Israel) with more than 2 years of experience leading projects on various scales, from urban design, housing to public buildings. She is a recent graduate from the Housing & Urbanism MArch programme in the Architectural Association, with distinction.

Originally from Tel Aviv, now based in South London, Aviv is eager to enhance her understanding of details and materials by practicing in Unagru that includes context and its limitations into clearer proposals.



Thomas Barstow

MArch, ARB

Thomas attended Plymouth University where his studies included masterplanning, intervention and social sustainability. In his intervening years in practice, he worked at Stride Treglown gaining experience in a large range of sectors and contexts. He graduated with a Master of Architecture degree in 2017.

Shortly after graduating, Thomas moved to London looking for cultural influences, art, design opportunities, and vibrancy. Continuing to work for Stride Treglown’s London office, he worked on large schemes in Hackney and Kings Cross whilst studying for his part 3.

His desire to connect with end-users and clients and design based on social, material, and atmospheric context led him to Unagru in 2021.



About Us

Jamie Kelly

MArch, ARB

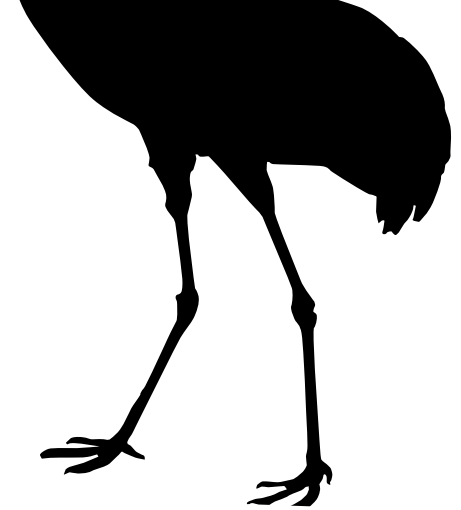
Jamie studied at Manchester School of Architecture gaining a First at BA and Distinction at MArch. He gained invaluable lessons in robust, timeless design from his time studying on Erasmus exchange at IUAV, Venice. He got his coursework in early, preferring to visit and sketch 40 Italian and French cities instead. Social sustainability is critical to Jamie's work and he won the Hawkins\ Brown award for the most socially sustainable project at masters. Before joining Unagru, he worked at Stanton Williams gaining experience of regeneration in complex urban sites. He enjoys taking a contextual approach to architecture with emphasis on natural materials, sensitive detailing, and a careful modelling of light. Outside of architecture, music is his biggest passion: he collects good, but writes bad, music.



Gary Yeow

MArch

Gary Yeow is a recent Masters graduate student from University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. He is also co-founder of projectxyz – a design collective engaged in wide-ranging projects from competitions to furniture and installation design, always rooted in user experience and architecture. He hosts the xyzpodcast, and is exploring writing, event and curation with a keen interest on connecting architectural education and practice. He is an enthusiast designer, but also passionate about administration, marketing and communication. In other words he is the perfect office manager, and much more! In his spare time, he likes to cycle to visit exhibitions.



Mission Statement

Our mission

To expand the agency of ecological design through practice, research and activism.

To design beautiful and healthy spaces with a critical relationship to their broadest context.

To explore and expand the context in an innovative way: to include energy and material resources, social, urban fabric.

To achieve simplicity and lightness through complex reasoning and refined detailing.

We strive to achieve happiness through architecture by reflecting on the feeling of spaces: to build with the clients' aspirations and emotions in mind.

To focus on the collective impact of our choices.

Where do materials come from. What does our building say? How are money (=energy), water, and energy saved? How do the design and scope fit in the city? Can the design create a social bond, a more expansive form of happiness?

We are research oriented.

We are a research hub.

We look for opportunities to understand better the world with every project and every project is an opportunity to create new knowledge.

Every project is an opportunity to reflect and act on the city, society and landscape (a real ecology).

Clients and Society at large.

We approach every project through the eyes of the client and end user.

We are in control of the process and will act on behalf of the client to avoid wasting time, energies and money.

We never have excuses, never shift responsibilities. We communicate efficiently.

We provide enduring design and construction quality.

We conduct ourselves honourably.

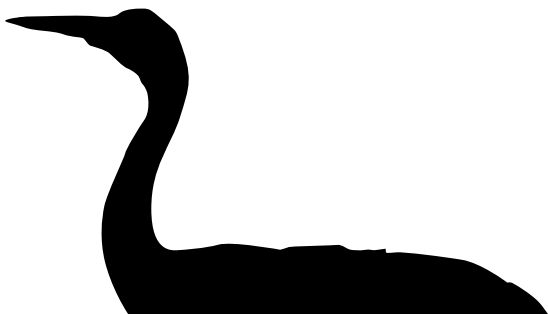
We are ecological.

We embrace natural and artificial as one.

We provide solutions that can significantly reduce the carbon footprint of our buildings, increase biodiversity, liberate potential.

We are urban: we like complexity and thrive in large-scale, longterm commitments. Building several beautiful and ecological private houses is one such commitment.

We care about people, and work to empower as many as possible.



unaru

Contact

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