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BEST OF THE REST

Knox Bhavan –Southwark, London

Knox Bhavan's latest work, a RIBA-award-winning house in Hertfordshire, is entirely single-storey and is strongly reminiscent of the finest houses of the mid-20th century. The practice's enthusiasm for natural materials and fine craftsmanship also point to its preference for timeless design rather than occupying the cutting-edge. knoxbhavan.co.uk

Carmody Groarke –Tottenham Court Road, London

Carmody Groarke has been much fêted in recent years for its intelligent yet simple approach to commercial and public design. It has yet to get any significant residential projects completed, but it's only a matter of time – work starts on a private house in Highgate later this year. carmodygroarke.com

Platform 5 –Hackney, London

Platform 5's elegant, no-nonsense approach to design has seen it win increasingly impressive commissions. Its work bears strong echoes of cool, classic modernism but with a distinct contemporary edge. platform5architects.com

BUILDING SUCCESS

How John Pardey eschewed the fads of architecture and the pitfalls of technology to become an award-winning designer of one-off houses

Photographs by James Morris

From a barn in rural Hampshire, the architect John Pardey creates one-off houses that routinely win award after award. The latest is Trewarren, a spectacular coastal home in Pembrokeshire that has landed the accolade of the 'Best Building in Wales'. Awarded the prestigious Gold Medal for Architecture at the National Eisteddfod of Wales, judges described it as 'truly an outstanding building'.

Prospective clients appear to be forming an orderly queue outside the door of the architect, who is fast becoming considered one of the world's outstanding designers of one-off houses. Needless to say, it wasn't always so. While his Hampshire barn is now fully converted into a thriving office, it wasn't too long ago when he could only afford to occupy a sliver of the large barn space. His firm, John Pardey Architects, started life back

in 1983, but it has only been in recent years that his star began its dizzying ascent. As Pardey himself says, 'It has taken 25 years of hard graft to become an overnight success.'

Clearly, this is an architect now at the peak of his powers. Having completed over 30 one-off houses he has some hard-won experience behind him and has, as he says, 'got better and better at it'.

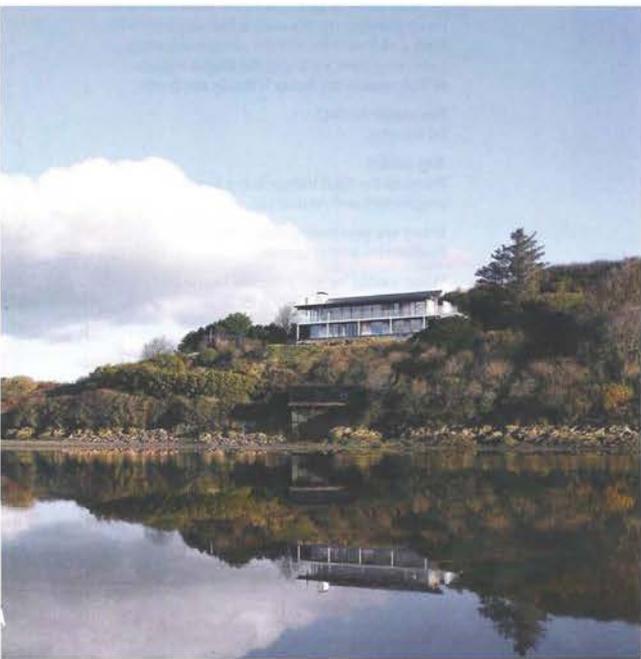
What's interesting about Pardey is the way that he has stuck with one-off houses when the traditional trajectory of a successful architect sees them moving away from them as soon as bigger projects arise. But houses are his passion. It was, he says, what started him on his career in architecture in the first place: 'It was things like Mies, Corb and the Schröder House that got me going,' he says, 'and then I developed a love of English Arts & Crafts and Scandinavian modernism.'

To translate the architect-speak, Pardey is referring to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, the legendary former Bauhaus teacher whose maxim 'less is more' saw him become one of the most influential architects of the century.

'Corb' is Le Corbusier, the colossus of 20th-century European architecture and the man who really lit the touch paper for modernism. The Schröder House, meanwhile, is the extraordinarily forward-thinking home of Mrs Truus Schröder-Schräder in Utrecht, designed by Dutch architect Gerrit Rietveld and built in 1924.

The Schröder House is now 90 years old, and Pardey is not shy of looking backwards in his search for inspiration: 'Nothing I've seen in the past 10 years has inspired me.' This is not a man likely to get caught up in the latest architectural fads – he has stationed himself off the beaten track in Hampshire to remain, as he puts it, 'completely out of the fashion bubble... somewhere that I can carve my own niche'. Talk of technology brings a heavy sigh from Pardey. 'Ultimately,' he says, 'it lets you down,' adding, 'it's the simple things that turn me on – such as the positioning of the house or the use of beautiful materials.'

Pardey's consistency in the face of the architectural fashions has clearly stood him in good stead. His latest project, just started on site in the Surrey Hills, is his biggest and most ambitious yet. It will, undoubtedly, attract even more awards and attention for Pardey. While he might not be seeking the limelight, the limelight is clearly seeking him. So if you are wondering which architect to use for your one-off house and think Pardey might be the man, you'd better get in touch before the waiting list gets too long. ■ johnpardeyarchitects.com



Architecture MATT & ALBERT

Modern property experts Matt Gibberd and Albert Hill on the hottest names in architecture

'Best Building in Wales': Trewarren is a spectacular coastal home in Pembrokeshire that landed John Pardey the Gold Medal for Architecture at the National Eisteddfod of Wales