



East

NEWS RELEASE

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RIBA East Press Officer: Carri Crook, Carisma Communications, Tel: 01842 811313; Email: carri@carismacommunications.co.uk

THE RSPB ENVIRONMENT & EDUCATION CENTRE AND A MODERNIST SEASIDE HOUSE IN ESSEX WIN NATIONAL ARCHITECTURE AWARD

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) celebrated on Friday, 22nd June, the latest architecture in the East of England by giving RIBA National Awards to two new buildings in the region. The two buildings won an RIBA Award in May this year and have now been elevated to a National RIBA Award.

The **RSPB Environment & Education Centre** in Rainham Marshes Nature Reserve, an important wetland area in the Thames Gateway, features a tough design made to withstand its harsh environment, while remaining accessible and friendly to visitors. It also boasts exemplary environmental credentials, including sheep's wool insulation and rainwater harvesting. The second winner, an **experimental beach house**, was described by the jury as "breathtaking in the rigour of its design, detailing and execution" which maximises the drama of its seaside landscape.

The two buildings in the east of England that have won RIBA National Awards are:

1. **RSPB Environment & Education Centre**, Rainham Marshes Nature Reserve, Essex by van Heyningen & Haward Architects
2. **The Salt House**, St Lawrence Bay, Essex by Alison Brooks Architects

The RIBA National Awards were presented on Friday 22 June, at a dinner in London at the Hilton Hotel, held during Architecture Week 2007 (15-24 June). The two East of England winning projects join 12 other buildings across the UK in receiving an RIBA National Award, which along with 5 RIBA European Award winners, form the midlist for the RIBA Stirling Prize.

The RIBA Stirling Prize in association with *The Architects' Journal* is awarded to the architects of the building that has made the greatest contribution to British architecture in the past year. The £20,000 prize will be presented on Saturday 6 October 2007 live on Channel 4 from the Roundhouse in London.

RIBA National Award winners, together with the winners of RIBA Awards, are also eligible for a series of special awards to be presented at the RIBA Stirling Prize. For details of these and the other RIBA National winners please visit www.architecture.com/awards.

Speaking at the awards dinner RIBA President Jack Pringle said:

“The RIBA’s awards are about celebrating beautiful buildings that work for people, whether it’s well designed schools which make it easier for children to learn in, innovative arts centres, excellent housing or improved public spaces – all of which enrich people’s lives. Congratulations to all the winners.”

Paul Finch, Publishing Director of *The Architects’ Journal* added:

“Like the RIBA, the AJ is dedicated to promoting great architecture, and is delighted to continue its support of the RIBA Awards, culminating in the RIBA Stirling Prize. I have no doubt that this year’s exciting new-look awards programme will continue to set ever higher standards for architecture.”

The Associate Sponsors of the RIBA National and International Awards are Faststream Recruitment Limited and Istock, with support from Hobs Reprographics. *The Architects’ Journal* is Media Partner with *The Architectural Review* Media Partner for the International Awards.

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Notes to editors:

1. For further information, images or interview, please contact Carri Crook, Press Officer for RIBA South, Carisma Communications, Tel: 01842 811313; Email: carri@carismacommunications.co.uk
2. For further information on the RIBA Awards programme, please contact Lorna Gemmell in the RIBA Press Office on 020 7307 3761 or lorna.gemmell@inst.riba.org. More information can also be found at www.architecture.com/awards.
3. Full citation follows:

RSPB Environment & Education Centre

Rainham Marshes Nature Reserve, New Tank Hill Rd, Purfleet, Essex, RM19 1SZ

Architect:	van Heyningen & Haward Architects
Client:	The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Contractor:	Haymills (Contractors) Ltd
Structural Engineer:	Price & Myers
Quantity Surveyor:	Trogal Griffin Associates
M&E Engineer:	Max Fordham LLP
Civil Engineer:	BTP – Hyder

Landscape Consultant: BTP - Hyder
Contract Value: £2.2m
Date of completion: November 2006
Gross internal area: 546 sq m

Despite its prettiness, the RSPB environment and education centre is as tough as boots. It is an uncomplicated and modest building that is a highly appropriate response to a demanding brief. The surrounding environment is bleak and untamed: an important wetland area in the Thames Gateway. The design had not only to be environmentally conscious, it has to be both defensive to resist attacks from vandals and arsonists, and accessible and friendly to visitors. All this requires intelligent architects and this building has them.

The basic design moves are clever: raising the building above the marshes both for security reasons and to provide good views across the marshes: drawbridges that can be raised when it is not occupied; shutters that slide across the windows to repel boarders. The reference in the brief was to a Martello tower, yet it escapes a fortress-like appearance and does not look at all unfriendly. Unexpectedly the strange colours of the painted wood boarding of the walls look exactly right in this landscape. Whilst the design is tough, with exposed ducts and conduits throughout the occupied spaces, exposed concrete ceilings and gantries and vents ranged across the roof, it is a pleasant internal environment bathed in natural light and exposed to panoramic views.

The site posed many technical challenges and the project needed to provide much of its own infrastructure. The environmental measures are exemplary and include several sustainable initiatives: a ground source heat pump, photovoltaic arrays, rainwater harvesting, use of the building's thermal mass, sheep's wool insulation, natural lighting, good air-tightness with controlled ventilation, a sewage treatment facility and possibly even a wind turbine in the future. Heating demands are reduced to about 50% of those of a typical building.

The client is to be congratulated on holding a design competition and taking the risk of going with the most adventurous entry, with evidently successful results. The building works well at every level, providing a highly functional facility with good visitor circulation, exemplary sustainable credentials, a great response to the security demands and yet one also responsive to its context.

The Salt House

St Lawrence Bay, Essex

Architect: Alison Brooks Architects
Client: John & Margaret Skerritt
Contractor: EO Jones + Sons
Structural Engineer: Price & Myers
Contract Value: £467,000
Date of completion: May 2005
Gross internal area: 270 sq m

The Salt House harks back to a tradition of the first half of the 20th century: the modernist seaside house. But instead of white render, here all is smooth timber. This experimental beach house is breathtaking in the rigour of its design, detailing and execution. The architecture of apparently random distorted forms is in fact underpinned by a convincing logic.

It is a fusion of a series of internal volumes, arranged around a central atrium, blending with the hipped forms of the neighbouring oyster fishermen's cottages. The new forms sit next to its neighbours in a natural and seemingly inevitable way. The whole building is raised above ground

level to allow flood waters to pass under the timber decks and the first floor seems to float above the site with no visible means of support, so that it touches the landscape lightly.

The handling of materials and structure is assured and gives the whole building a tactile quality that lifts the design above a mere exercise in form-making. The timber boarding of the envelope covers not just walls but also sections of the roof. It is highly refined and crisply detailed. There is just enough information about the steel frame that underpins the three-dimensional volumes, where it bursts through the continuous skin revealing cruciform columns. The interior is largely seamless: white plaster walls and ceilings provide a neutral background for the slate and timber floors and the timber and glass staircase.

Each space inside and out has a distinct presence and the forms are handled expertly. They link together seamlessly to provide a memorable sequence of spaces, revolving around the roof-lit central atrium that has a beautiful quality of light and airiness. Each space has a new and unexpected view, aided by the geometry of the windows and balconies. The drama of the seaside landscape is exploited well.

Despite its unusual crystalline geometry the house is not a 'look-at-me' statement and fits very comfortably into the surrounding landscape. The budget was surprisingly modest bearing in mind the sumptuousness of the materials and the consistently high standard of finish throughout the scheme.

4. The RIBA awards programme, supported by *The Architects' Journal*, has been re-organised in 2007 in a pyramid structure. **RIBA Awards** are judged and presented locally. The next level is the **RIBA National Awards** which are judged and presented nationally. **The RIBA Stirling Prize** shortlist is selected following further visits to winners of the RIBA National Awards and of **RIBA European Awards** for buildings in the rest of the EU.

5. ^{AJ} Established in 1895, *The Architects' Journal* has consistently been at the forefront of architectural publishing. Its weekly news coverage, comprehensive building studies and in-depth technical and practice features make it essential reading for the profession, and its incisive commentary makes it a must-read for opinion formers. The AJ is the UK's leading independent architectural magazine, whose authoritative voice has informed generations of architects. For more information on the RIBA Awards visit the AJ website at www.ajplus.co.uk.

6. The RIBA Trust manages the cultural assets of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), including the internationally recognised collections of the British Architectural Library. It is the UK's national architecture centre, delivering the RIBA Awards and RIBA Stirling Prize (live on Channel 4); the Royal Gold Medal; International and Honorary Fellowships; Architecture Week (with Arts Council England and the Architecture Centre Network); a full programme of lectures, exhibitions, tours and other events; and an education programme.

7. **Architecture Week**, the annual celebration of contemporary architecture, takes place from 15-24 June 2007. Full details are at www.architectureweek.org.uk. Over 800 events are taking place throughout the country. Architecture Week is organised and managed by Arts Council England and is an Arts Council England and Royal Institute of British Architects joint initiative, in association with the Architecture Centre Network. For further information contact Dorelia Adeane in the RIBA Press Office on 020 7307 3884 or dorelia.adeane@inst.riba.org