

Le Corbusier (1887-1965)
Nationality: Swiss
Famous Buildings: L'Esprit Nouveau Pavilion (Paris, France)
Villa Savoye (Poissy, France)
Unite d'Habitation (Marseilles, France)

L'Esprit Nouveau

Le Corbusier is without doubt the most influential, most admired, and most maligned architect of the twentieth century. Through his writing and his buildings, he is the main player in the Modernist story, his visions of homes and cities as innovative as they are influential. Many of his ideas on urban living became the blueprint for post-war reconstruction, and the many failures of his would-be imitators led to Le Corbusier being blamed for the problems of western cities in the 1960s and 1970s.

Like Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe, and other architects of his generation, Le Corbusier had little architectural training. But he did have a strong conviction that the twentieth century would be an age of progress: an age when engineering and technological advances, and new ways of living, would change the world for good. Only architecture was failing to embrace the future, as new buildings continued to ape various historical styles.

In 1908, Le Corbusier went to work with Auguste Perret, the French architect who had pioneered the use of reinforced concrete, and then Peter Behrens, the German exponent of 'industrial design'. Behrens admired the engineer's ethic of mass production, logical design, and function over style, and Corbusier brought two of these early influences together in his '*Maison Dom-Ino*' plan of 1915. This house would be made of reinforced concrete and was intended for mass production, but was also flexible: none of the walls were load-bearing and so the interior could be re-arranged as the occupant wished.

A House Is A Machine For Living In

By 1918, Corbusier's ideas on how architecture should meet the demands of the machine age led him to develop, in collaboration with the artist Amédée Ozenfant, a new theory: Purism. Purist rules would lead the architect always to refine and simplify design, dispensing with ornamentation. Architecture would be as efficient as a factory assembly line. Soon, Le Corbusier was developing standardised housing 'types' like the '*Immeuble-villa*' (made real with the *Pavilion de l'Esprit Nouveau* of 1925), and the *Maison Citrohan* (a play on words suggesting the building industry should adopt the methods of the mass production automobile industry), which he hoped would solve the chronic housing problems of industrialised countries. His radical ideas were given full expression in his 1923 book *Vers Une Architecture* ("Towards a New Architecture"), an impassioned manifesto which is still the best-selling architecture book of all time. "A house", Le Corbusier intoned from its pages, "is a machine for living in."

But despite his love of the machine aesthetic, Le Corbusier was determined that his architecture would reintroduce nature into people's lives. Victorian cities were chaotic and dark prisons for many of their inhabitants. Le Corbusier was convinced that a rationally planned city, using the standardised housing types he had developed, could offer a healthy, humane alternative.

Urbanisme

The first of his grand urban plans was the *Ville Contemporaine* of 1922. This proposed city of three million would be divided into functional zones: twenty-four glass towers in the centre would form the commercial district, separated from the industrial and residential districts by expansive green belts. In 1925, Corbusier's ambitious *Plan Voisin* for Paris envisioned the destruction of virtually the entire north bank of the Seine to incorporate a mini version of the *Ville Contemporaine*. Understandably, it remained only a plan.

More realistic was the *Ville Radieuse* (1933-1935), in which long slab blocks were laid out in parkland and where the housing types were considerably cheaper than the *Immeuble-villas* which filled earlier plans. A version of this was built at the Alton West estate in Roehampton, England in 1958.

After the Second World War, with Europe's housing problems worse than ever, Le Corbusier got his chance to put his urban theories into practice. The *Unite d'Habitation* in Marseilles (1952) is a synthesis of three decades of Corbusian domestic and urban thinking; seventeen storeys high and designed to house 1,600 people, the *Unite* incorporates various types of apartment, shops, clubs and meeting room, all connected by raised 'streets'. There is also a hotel and recreation facilities. It is now an immensely popular building, and a coveted address for Marseille's middle-class professionals today.

When Le Corbusier died in 1965, the backlash against Modernism was gaining momentum. His theories on urban renewal were plagiarised by local authorities on tight budgets, which often failed to understand the essential humanism behind Le Corbusier's plans. Ronan Point was the result. But blaming Le Corbusier as the architect of post-war housing failure ignores the deep concern for human comfort and health that underpinned his work.

Bauhaus (1919- 1933)

A Unified Approach

The Bauhaus school of industrial design was founded in Germany in 1919. Although in existence for only fourteen years, its influence on modern architecture and design has been immense, and many of its famous students and masters gave the Modern Movement a philosophical, as well as practical, grounding in the volatile years of the early twentieth century.

The aim of the Bauhaus was to heal the schism between the arts and the crafts. Students (who usually numbered one hundred) were taught to be as proficient in artistic fields as in the technology of production. They were taught a multi-disciplined curriculum, often attending classes in photography, theatre production, painting, and design. The school's founders believed that the long-standing polarisation of arts and craftsmanship was damaging to human artistic and material development. However, for the first four years of its existence, the Bauhaus did not teach an architecture courses and was dominated by the Swiss artist Johannes Itten, a charismatic teacher who was fond of wearing a monk's outfit and tried, in 1921, to convert his students to an ancient Persian religion.

The Dessau Phase

Itten's relations became strained with his colleague Walter Gropius, a German architect and teacher, and the school's first director. In 1923, Itten resigned and Gropius became more influential. He was a great believer in mass production and insisted that students master the production process from start to finish, so that their artistic sensibilities would be informed by the possibilities of new technology. Gropius and the Hungarian artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy encouraged students to make contact with industrial companies around the town of Weimar, where the school was based. The drive for mass production, and consequently standardisation, were central to Modernist architects' vision of reshaping our cities.

Gropius gathered around him some of the brightest artists and designers of the time, including the painters Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky and the designer Marcel Breuer. But the avant-garde nature of the Bauhaus was anathema to the growing influence of National Socialism in Germany. In 1925, after the Ministry of Education had cut its grant, Gropius announced the school's closure. There it might have ended but for an offer from the industrial city of Dessau. In 1926, the Bauhaus relocated to a new purpose-built school, designed by Gropius and Swiss architect Hannes Meyer. Clean, modern, and confident, the new building signalled that the school's time had come.

The following years were the heyday of the Bauhaus. Marcel Breuer and his students began to produce revolutionary tubular lightweight chairs, and the department became a valuable source of income for the school. The form of these products increasingly became derived from function, an approach to design for which Bauhaus is still synonymous.

National Socialism and Exile

Gropius resigned in 1928, and was replaced by Meyer. Under Meyer, the school's curriculum became more leftwing, and many of the early masters left. In these years of increased Nazi

influence in Germany, the Bauhaus once again became a target of the far right. Meyer was forced out and replaced by Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe, who banned political activity and turned the Bauhaus into a more orthodox architectural school, in a vain attempt to save it. But in 1931, the Nazis gained control of the Dessau city government. They criticised the school as “Jewish” and “Oriental”, forced its Marxist teachers and students to leave, branded its work “decadent”, and even planned to put an “Aryan” pitched roof on top of Gropius’ school building. Mies took the school to an old warehouse outside Berlin in 1932, but in 1933, the year Hitler became Chancellor, the Bauhaus was closed for good.

Many of the Bauhaus leading lights fled Germany for good. Gropius and Breuer left for Britain where they stayed briefly in the Lawn Road Flats, and Mies eventually left for the United States in 1937, where he would complete his most celebrated work after World War Two.

The influence of Bauhaus, particularly its Dessau phase, on Modernist architecture was profound. The insistence on standardisation, the experiments in mass production, and the pioneering of the concept of industrial design, all influenced the Modernist approach to building and design.

CIAM (Congres Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) 1928-1956

Rethinking Architecture

CIAM was formed one year before the building of the German Pavilion in Barcelona. Its foundation marks the determination of Modernist architects to promote and refine their theories. For nearly thirty years the great questions of urban living, space, and belonging were discussed by CIAM members. The documents they produced, and the conclusions they reached, had a tremendous influence on the shape of cities and towns the world over.

The organisation's founding declaration was signed by twenty-four architects at La Sarraz, Switzerland, in 1928. None of the signatories was British. The La Sarraz Declaration asserted that architecture could no longer exist in an isolated state separate from governments and politics, but that economic and social conditions would fundamentally affect the buildings of the future. The Declaration also asserted that as society became more industrialised, it was vital that architects and the construction industry rationalise their methods, embrace new technologies and strive for greater efficiency. (Le Corbusier, one of the movement's founders, often liked to compare the standardised efficiency of the motor industry with the inefficiency of the building trade.)

CIAM's early attitudes towards town-planning were stark: "Urbanisation cannot be conditioned by the claims of a pre-existent aestheticism; its essence is of a functional order... the chaotic division of land, resulting from sales, speculations, inheritances, must be abolished by a collective and methodical land policy." At this early stage the desire to re-shape cities and towns is clear. Out is the "chaotic" jumble of streets, shops, and houses which existed in European cities at the time; in is a zoned city, comprising of standardised dwellings and different areas for work, home, and leisure.

The Athens Charter

The fourth CIAM Congress in 1933 (theme: "The Functional City") consisted of an analysis of thirty-four cities and proposed solutions to urban problems. The conclusions were published as "The Athens Charter" (so-called because the Congress was held on board the SS *Patris* en route from Marseilles to Athens). This document remains one of the most controversial ever produced by CIAM. The charter effectively committed CIAM to rigid functional cities, with citizens to be housed in high, widely-spaced apartment blocs. Green belts would separate each zone of the city. The Charter was not actually published until 1943, and its influence would be profound on public authorities in post-war Europe.

The End of CIAM

It didn't take long for architects to question the conclusions reached at Athens, and to worry publicly about the sterility of the city envisioned by CIAM. Chief among these doubters were young British architects Alison and Peter Smithson, who led a breakaway from CIAM in 1956. Three years previously they had outlined their concerns; "Man may readily identify himself with his own hearth, but not easily with the town within which it is placed. 'Belonging' is a basic emotional need- its associations are of the simplest order. From 'belonging'- identity- comes the enriching sense of neighbourliness. The short narrow street of the slum succeeds where spacious redevelopment frequently fails."

The Smithsons worried that CIAM's ideal city would lead to isolation and community breakdown, just as European governments were preparing to build tower blocks in their ruined cities.

The last CIAM meeting was held in 1956. By the mid-1950s it was clear that the official acceptance of Modernism was stronger than ever, and yet the concerns voiced by the Smithsons and their allies that the movement was in danger of creating an urban landscape which was hostile to social harmony, would rise to a crescendo in the decades to come. CIAM succeeded in developing new architectural ideas into a coherent movement, but Modernists would spend many years defending, and often undoing, its legacy.

Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe (1886-1969)
Nationality: German
Famous Buildings: The German Pavilion, Barcelona
Lake Shore Drive Apartments, Chicago
The Seagram Building, New York

Glass Boxes

Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe, along with Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius, is one of the twentieth century's most influential architects. Despite having no architectural training, his influence can be seen in cities the world over, from Anchorage to Adelaide, and the term 'Miesian' is now used to compliment the simplest, most elegant examples of Modernist architecture.

Mies was born the son of a stonemason in Aachen, Germany. As a teenager, he worked on construction sites with his father, before going on to design furniture with Bruno Paul. From 1908 until 1911, Mies worked in the office of architect Peter Behrens, who specialised in building modern industrial buildings. In Behren's office were Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius, later to become director of the Bauhaus. After the First World War, all three would shape the emerging Modern Movement.

In 1921, Mies produced his Glass Skyscraper proposal, which although never built, shows how he was already formulating the techniques of 'glass box' buildings which he would perfect after his relocation to the United States in 1937. The steel frame of the building in his proposal would be visible through acres of glass, like a skeleton barely concealed by a taut layer of skin. This emerging love of purity of form can also be seen in Mies' seminal German Pavilion, commissioned as Germany's 'stall' at the 1929 International Exposition in Barcelona. Here, a marble roof appears to float above a collection of travertine and marble slabs. Using subtle steel columns to support the roof, Mies was able to connect roof and ground with expansive glass 'walls'. The whole effect is a building zen-like in its simplicity, an astonishing contrast to the ornate architecture of the time.

The New World

Mies left Germany when it became clear that, unlike their Italian counterparts, the German fascists would never wholeheartedly embrace Modernist architecture. He had succeeded Walter Gropius as Bauhaus director, but the Nazis had closed the school for good in 1933. He settled in Chicago where, as director of the city's School of Architecture, he was to perfect the art of building minimalist, elegant, and often expensive homes for wealthy patrons and corporate clients. His famous phrase "less is more" perfectly captured his steadfast devotion to pure Modernist design, and encapsulated the Modernists' search for rational solutions to the complicated problems of urban existence.

After becoming an American citizen in 1944, Mies' first major project in the US was at the Illinois Institute of Technology campus (1939-1956). His work here is a classic example of his "glass box" design. Simple cubes, framed in steel and covered in glass, became the homes for various Institute faculties. His Farnsworth House of 1951 (a private commission for a wealthy doctor), saw the lessons of Barcelona translated into a living home. And his stunning

twin Lake Shore Drive Apartment blocks in Chicago remain the ultimate expression in luxury high-rise living.

Corporate Modernism

By now, corporate America was keen to offer Mies the opportunity to build his pure glass cuboids on their expensive slices of real estate. The most celebrated example was the headquarters for the whisky company Seagram. Completed in 1958, this 38-storey masterpiece was clad in bronze, with its own plaza keeping the rest of New York at arm's length. The effect is an incredibly elegant addition to Manhattan's jumble of towers, and the Seagram Building remains the epitome of 20th century corporate Modernism.

The simplicity of Mies' buildings was deceptive however. It took a lot of effort to make skyscrapers like the Seagram building look uncomplicated, and the forest of inferior imitations which sprang up across the globe in the 1960s and 1970s did much to undermine Modernism's reputation. Nevertheless, Mies' ability to create simple, refined modern monuments is appreciated, even by critics of Modernism, to this day.

Erich Mendelsohn (1887-1953)
Nationality: German
Famous Buildings: Astrophysical Observatory (Einstein Tower),
Potsdam, Germany
Schocken Department Store, Stuttgart, Germany
De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea

The Forgotten Modernist

In the 1920s Erich Mendelsohn was one of the most prolific modern architects practising in Europe. His reputation at this time dwarfed those of his contemporaries Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe, yet today it is Mendelsohn who stands in the towering shadows of these two giants of the Modern Movement. However, Mendelsohn is remembered in this country for the De La Warr Pavilion, at Bexhill-on-Sea, which he designed in collaboration with the Russian-born Serge Chermayeff. And as the Pavilion remains one of the most important beachheads established by the Modern Movement in Britain in the 1930s, we can consider Mendelsohn to be one of British Modernism's most important pioneers.

The reasons for the eclipse of Erich Mendelsohn's reputation is more to do with the social and political climate in which he worked than his architecture. Being Jewish, his career in Germany was prematurely ended by the rise of the Nazis. His large department stores, many built for Jewish clients, were often seized and altered unsympathetically by their new owners, the Nazis destroyed some of his projects for cultural reasons, and much of what remained was damaged or destroyed during the Second World War. Whilst Mendelsohn was also prolific in Palestine, this was also a troubled land, and his work in the United States after the war consisted largely of synagogues, whilst his fellow émigrés Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe were building university campuses and prestigious skyscrapers.

Einstein, Hitler, and Bexhill-on-Sea

There also remains a suspicion that Erich Mendelsohn was never truly devoted to the Modernist cause: his Einstein Tower in Potsdam (built to test Albert Einstein's theory of relativity in 1921) is perhaps his most famous building on mainland Europe, squatting in a forest like a concrete tree-stump. The tower, and the Expressionist sketches on which much of his early work was based, suggest however a more organic approach to architecture, rather than the cool Modernism of his contemporaries.

Mendelsohn arrived in Britain in 1933, the year Adolf Hitler became Chancellor and the year that Wells Coates and others founded MARS, the British wing of CIAM. Within three months he had won this country's first explicitly Modernist construction competition, organised by the radical ninth Earl De La Warr, mayor of the small south coast resort of Bexhill. Amongst the 230 entrants were Marcel Breuer and Walter Gropius, fellow émigrés of Mendelsohn, and an indication of how the British Modern Movement benefited from events in Germany. Mendelsohn's partner was the Russian architect, interior designer, and former ballroom dancer, Serge Chermayeff.

Pleasure Palace

Mendelsohn and Chermayeff's original plan was far bigger than what was eventually built. They had planned to include a cinema and a hotel on each wing of the building as well as a circular swimming pool at the front. Nevertheless, what emerged is a striking pleasure palace which fulfilled Earl De La Warr's intention of bringing the state-of-the-art benefits of modern architecture to the wider community. Opened in 1935, the Pavilion's bars, restaurant, terraces, and rooftop games area were immediately popular with most of Bexhill's residents. However, local and national opposition to Mendelsohn's masterpiece tended to focus on his and Chermayeff's background. Mendelsohn, who had fled fascism in his home country, was the subject of letters to the Architect's Journal which complained about the employment of "these aliens".

Mendelsohn and Chermayeff's partnership ended in 1936. Mendelsohn began to work increasingly in Palestine, before moving to the USA in 1940. Perhaps because the bulk of his work consisted of department stores, synagogues, and one-off projects like the De La Warr Pavilion, and did not include social housing estates or grand plans for urban renewal, Mendelsohn's position as a true Modernist, committed as much to the Movement's social agenda as to its revolution in technique, has been questioned. But with the De La Warr Pavilion, he succeeded in introducing to the hitherto sceptical British the possibilities of Modernist architecture.

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| Maxwell Fry | (1899- 1987) |
| Nationality | British |
| Famous Buildings | Kensal House, London Impington Village College, Cambridge Chandigarh, Punjab, India (with Jane Drew, Pierre Jeanneret, Le Corbusier) |

Isolation

Edwin Maxwell Fry was one of the few active Modernist architects in pre-war Britain who was actually British. His long career saw him lay the solid foundations on which British Modernism would expand, and also pioneered Modernist building in the Third World, through his work in Nigeria after the Second World War and in the Punjab, India, with Le Corbusier.

Born in the last year of the nineteenth century, Maxwell Fry was part of the generation of architects who came of age just as it was becoming apparent that British architecture was being left behind by the innovative strands of Modernism developing on continental Europe. Whereas Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe, and the architects and designers of the Bauhaus were experimenting with new forms and materials, and exploring new ways to treat space, light and nature in their work, British architecture seemed to be stuck firmly in the Victorian age.

In 1933, Maxwell Fry was a co-founder of MARS (Modern Architectural Research group), the British affiliate of CIAM. This was the body responsible for formulating and promulgating the ideals of Modernist architecture in continental Europe. Coates, Fry and the four other co-founders of MARS were determined to end Britain's isolation from the momentous architectural movement occurring across the English Channel.

Slum Clearance

Well Coates' main contribution to bringing Modernism to these shores was his Lawn Road Flats (also known as the "Isokon Building") in 1934. An exercise in modernist minimalist living, these flats soon became, like that other great pre-war Modernist block, Highpoint One by Berthold Lubetkin, a haven for middle-class intellectuals. But if the Modernists were truly to achieve their goal of using architecture to improve the lives of the majority of people in Britain, then they would have to demonstrate that they could build housing for workers as well as intellectuals.

With Kensal House (completed in 1937), Maxwell Fry achieved just that. Kensal House represented a tremendous breakthrough for Modernism in Britain. Commissioned by the Gas Light and Coke Company, which wanted a showcase building to demonstrate the convenience and effectiveness of gas power, the estate was built on the site of an old gasworks in west London. Fry worked with Elizabeth Denby, a prominent social reformer of the time, to create an estate which would provide tenants with clean spacious housing and with shared amenities such as a creche, a laundry room and a canteen. Housing former slum dwellers, Kensal House was a clear example of what Modernists could achieve, if given the opportunity. His Impington Village College in Cambridge (built in collaboration with former Bauhaus director Walter Gropius) also served as a pointer for post-war educational architecture.

An Englishman Abroad

The Second World War put a brake on further housing developments like Kensal House, at least for a few years. Maxwell Fry served in West Africa during the war and later advised the Nigerian authorities on town-planning when hostilities ended. In 1951, Fry and his wife Jane Drew, who had collaborated on a book on architecture in a tropical climate, were invited to help design and build Chandigarh, the new capital of the Punjab in India. Le Corbusier designed most of the prestigious public buildings in the new city, whilst Fry and Drew oversaw much of the housing.

Unlike many of the early Modernists in Britain, Maxwell Fry was not a socialist. Instead he had a liberal, patriarchal outlook which informed his belief that professional middle class architects like himself should use their skills to help build a better environment for those less fortunate. As architect of the first Modernist social housing estate in the country, he is assured of his place as one of the most important Modernists in pre-war Britain.

Wells Coates: (1895-1958)
Nationality: Canadian
Famous Buildings: Lawn Road Flats (“the Isokon Building”), London

Modern Living for the Modern Man

Wells Coates was born in Japan in 1895, the eldest son of Canadian missionaries. He spent his childhood in the Far East, built his most important buildings in Britain, and retired to teach in Canada, where he died in 1958. His itinerant lifestyle fitted well with the ethos of the Lawn Road Flats, his most famous building, where every effort was made to cater for the modern man who liked to live life unburdened “with permanent tangible possessions”. Well Coates was an idealist. He would often boast of his voracious appetite for reading and learning, and frequently stressed that a rational, scientific, formulated approach to architecture was what was needed if society was to progress.

Coates was a founder member of MARS (Modern Architectural Research Group), the British wing of CIAM. He attended the famous 1933 CIAM Congress which produced the Athens Charter, and corresponded occasionally with Le Corbusier, Gropius, and other architectural giants of the time. When MARS was founded by Wells Coates and five colleagues (among them, Maxwell Fry, architect of Kensal House) in 1933, its founding principles adhered strictly to the guiding philosophy of CIAM. MARS would seek to: formulate contemporary architectural problems; to represent the modern architectural idea; to cause this idea to penetrate technical, economic, and social circles; and to work towards the solution of the contemporary problems of architecture.

A Future Which Must Be Planned

Wells Coates expanded his philosophy in his paper “Response to Tradition”, written in 1933; “As young men, we are concerned with a Future which must be planned rather than a Past which must be patched up, at all costs... As architects of the ultimate human and material scenes of the new order, we are not so much concerned with the formal problems of style as with an architectural solution of the social and economic problems of today. And the most fundamental technique is the replacement of natural materials by scientific ones, and more particularly the development of steel and concrete construction.”

However, the 1930s was a time of disappointment for many of the bright young men of Modernism. They wanted to change the world and yet commissions were few and far between. Coates saw it as his duty to keep the pure flame of Modernist doctrine burning, to formulate clearly what kind of buildings modern architects should be producing, until such time as the world caught up with their thinking.

The Lawn Road Flats

Lawn Road proved to be Wells Coates’ finest achievement. Heavily influenced by *Le Corbusier*, it epitomised not just the new architecture of the time, but attempted to offer a new, modern way of living to its tenants. On the opening day Molly Pritchard asked the assembled crowd; “How do we want to live, what sort of framework must we build round ourselves to make that living as pleasant as possible?” The answer, Coates believed, was in his block of fully-furnished, strikingly modern apartments.

Lawn Road soon became a popular haven for intellectuals and artists, many fleeing from the new National Socialist regime in Germany. Famous refugees included Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer. Agatha Christie also kept an apartment in the block before the War. But after the War, the block failed to attract a similar band of wealthy intellectual tenants. It was eventually taken over by Camden Council, and was sold in 2001 to the Notting Hill Housing Trust, which plans to renovate the block and sell eleven of the thirty-six apartments on the open market. The rest will form part of the government's 'Key Workers' scheme, offering public sector workers a rung on the daunting London property ladder.

Berthold Lubetkin (1901- 1990)
Nationality: Russian
Famous Buildings: Highpoint One, London
Finsbury Health Centre, London
Spa Green Estate, London

The Revolutionary Artist

Berthold Lubetkin is arguably the most important figure in the British Modern Movement in the pre-war period. As head of the prolific Tecton practice, he brought a Russian's revolutionary zeal to a British architectural scene which seemed to be completely out of step with the development of modernism on the continent. By the time he had effectively retired in 1950, Lubetkin and Tecton had built everything from zoo buildings, to luxury flats, to a pioneering health centre, to lauded examples of planned social housing estates.

Born in Tiflis, Georgia in 1901, into a middle-class Jewish family, Lubetkin witnessed the Russian Revolution through his bedroom window whilst he was a young art student in Moscow. A commitment to socialism remained with him throughout his career. For Lubetkin and many of his fellow countrymen, art, including architecture, should be an instrument of social renewal, a means to a political end. Lubetkin would insist that architecture was politics "pursued by other means".

Vanguard to Backwater

Before arriving in Britain in 1931, Lubetkin travelled widely in Europe, gaining formal training and meeting many of the giants of the Modern Movement. Arriving in Berlin in 1922, he worked in what was then the intellectual capital of the continent, before moving to Paris, the artistic capital, in 1925. In Paris he met Le Corbusier and studied under Auguste Perret, one of the pioneers of using reinforced concrete in architecture. Paris left a tremendous impression on the young Russian: its combination of the aesthetic and the deliberately planned confirmed to him that rational thinking could produce an emotional, beautiful urban environment.

Britain in 1931 was, in contrast, far from these intellectual and political developments. Here, the Modern Movement was truly foreign. Lubetkin commented that the country was fifty years behind Europe in its architectural maturity, and set about importing Modernism into Britain.

Concrete Legacy

Tecton, the practice he founded with six British architects in 1932, quickly became the most potent exponent of the exotic new Modern Movement in Britain. After designing the famous Penguin Pool and Gorilla House at London Zoo, Tecton started work on the seminal Highpoint One apartments in 1933. Originally designed as homes for factory workers, the block quickly attracted instead a thoroughly middle-class tenancy, eager to experience the joys of high-rise modern communal living in Lubetkin's beautiful white double-cruciform landmark, which high on its hill in Highgate, looked down on the smog-ridden city below. Along with Wells Coates' Lawn Road Flats of 1934, Highpoint One signalled the arrival of Modernist housing in Britain.

But it was in the much less salubrious borough of Finsbury that Lubetkin was given the chance to bring the revolutionary aspects of his architecture to the fore. Here the local leftwing council asked him to build a health centre to combat the dreadful conditions in the slums. The result, the Finsbury Health Centre, (FHC) is still in operation today. Built in 1938, ten years before the arrival of the NHS, the FHC exemplifies the marriage of the aesthetic (its graceful white curves and shining glass bricks contrasted sharply with the Victorian horror surrounding it) and the political (Churchill tried to ban an Army Bureau poster of the Centre which compared its promise with the reality of the nearby slums), which is the essence of Modernism in this 'heroic' period.

After the War, Tecton's main achievement was the Spa Green housing estate, also in Finsbury. Spa Green stands as a thoughtful precursor to the avalanche of social housing which would soon come to dominate British cities, many of which were not as generously funded, nor as well thought through. Tecton was dissolved in 1947, when Lubetkin began to spend more time working on plans for the abortive New Town of Peterlee, County Durham. He was never as prolific again, and a growing sense of disillusionment with Britain and with British architects led to his gradual retreat from architectural practice from 1950 onwards. Yet his legacy had already been secured through his determined effort to bring the beauty and vaulting social ambition of Modernist architecture to Britain.

Sir Denys Lasdun
Nationality
Famous Buildings

1914- 2001
British
Keeling House
Royal National Theatre
University of East Anglia

Back to Basics

Denys Lasdun is part of the 'third generation' of Modernist architects. He was heavily influenced by the early masters like Le Corbusier, and worked with prominent second generation pioneers Wells Coates and Berthold Lubetkin. After the war his distinctive style and the often large scale of his projects marked him as one of the most visible of Britain's Modernists, a position which made him a target of criticism. Prince Charles described Lasdun's masterpiece, the Royal National Theatre on the South Bank as "a clever way of building a nuclear power station in the middle of London without anyone objecting".

It is on the South Bank that the distinctiveness of Lasdun's Modernism can best be seen. The National Theatre (the 'Royal' was added later) stands in sharp contrast to its neighbouring, older, monument to British Modernism, the Royal Festival Hall. Lacking the gentle curves and seductive whiteness of the Festival Hall, the National- opened twenty-five years later- epitomises a harder, more heroic Modernism, perhaps accounting for the mixed reactions it continues to provoke. In a 2001 opinion poll conducted by Radio Four's *Today* programme, the National featured in the top five of the most liked, and most disliked, British buildings.

Urban Landscaping

Many of Lasdun's generation of Modernists objected to the whimsical nature of the Festival of Britain architecture, and were keen instead to refocus the Movement on the work of the 'heroic' pioneers such as Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe. The National Theatre's bush-hammered concrete exterior and thick slabs form an imposing exterior for three theatres and a complex variety of foyers.

But whilst the National appears to be an uncompromising Modernist monument, Lasdun was determined that it should be infused with the respect for environment and humanism which characterises much of his work. The horizontal slabs form concrete terraces which slope away from the Thames like a riverbank, and despite its imposing site at a wide bend in the river, Lasdun resists the temptation to build an overly dominant monument, in the vein of the great theatres of the past. St Paul's to the east and the Houses of Parliament to the west are not upstaged.

Lasdun's commitment to the environment can also be seen in his student housing at the University of East Anglia, in Norwich. Here, a group of ziggurat-shaped pyramids stand in landscaped parkland. The gentle slopes of the blocks, although a strict combination of the horizontal and the vertical like the National Theatre, blend well with the flat landscape of East Anglia.

High Society

Lasdun also had a commitment to humanism in his housing projects, and was deeply affected by the ambitious social goals of the Modern Movement. Like other far-sighted architects such as Alison and Peter Smithson, he was concerned that Modernist housing theory was guilty of ignoring the importance of 'belonging', and would destroy the strong sense of community fostered in narrow terraced streets. His solution was the 'cluster block', perfected at Keeling House in Bethnal Green, in the heart of London's east end. Four towers surround a central service core, with two-storey maisonettes arranged with communal laundry galleries and public spaces in an attempt to replicate vibrant streets high in the air.

But Keeling House suffered many of the problems that afflicted all forms of inner-city social housing in the 1970s and 1980s. Although popular with its tenants, Lasdun did not succeed in maintaining the social cohesion he saw and admired in traditional housing. Today, Keeling House has been renovated by a private developer and home to some of London's better-heeled residents. Nonetheless, this building, as well as his more famous public landmarks, are testament to an architect with an abiding faith in the Modernists' ability, and duty, to improve the lives of people through the buildings they use, and who was not afraid to reinterpret, or adjust, Modernist thinking in order to achieve this.

Alison Smithson (1928 -1993)
Peter Smithson (1923 -)
Nationality: British
Famous Buildings: Secondary School, Hunstanton
The Economist Building, London
Robin Hood Gardens, London

Post-War Reconstruction

Alison and Peter Smithson formed the most formidable British architectural partnership of the mid-twentieth century. Fiercely intellectual, they proselytised the cause of Modernism throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and were unafraid to criticise the prevailing orthodoxy or bring new ideas to the Modernist blueprint. Their long struggle with the outcomes of Modernism, particularly in relation to housing (and, arguably, never satisfactorily resolved) is a significant development in the story of British Modernist architecture.

The couple's first significant building was their Secondary School in Hunstanton, Norfolk. Work started on this building in 1949 and was completed in 1954. The immediate post-war years were a time of political change in Britain, with an ambitious new leftwing government determined to turn the carnage of the War into an opportunity to rebuild the nation, both in a literal and social sense. For Modernists like the Smithsons, these were heady days.

Belonging Is A Human Need

At the time, Hunstanton caused much excitement in the architectural profession and was widely praised. The exposed steel frames and walls of glass were a conscious imitation of Mies Van Der Rohe and the service elements such as the pipes were exposed. The water tank was made into a tower. In intervening years, many of the school's glass panels have been purposely covered in order to provide shade in the summer, and to prevent heat loss in the winter. Nevertheless, this is a much-imitated building and one of the highpoints of British Modernist design in the post-war years.

But even before it was completed, the Smithsons were already expressing serious doubts at the Modernist orthodoxy, particularly in the crucial field of urban planning where CIAM's 1933 Athen's Charter (written by Le Corbusier) remained dominant. This charter encouraged Modernists to design cities full of high, widely spaced apartment blocks and carefully planned functional zones, separated from one another by acres of landscaped green belt. A younger generation of architects, led by the Smithsons, worried that this vision would lead to sterile cities, devoid of community spirit and characterised by individual isolation. At CIAM's 1953 Congress, the Smithsons wrote; "'Belonging' is a basic emotional need- its associations are of the simplest order. From 'belonging'- identity- comes the enriching sense of neighbourliness. The short narrow street of the slum succeeds where spacious redevelopment frequently fails."

Streets In The Sky

At the 10th and final CIAM Congress in 1956, the Smithsons and their allies (known as Team 10), broke with CIAM for good. Their alternative to Athens was the 'Golden Lane' project, first mooted in 1952. This was a low-rise snake of housing, with wide, 'streets in the sky'- an

attempt to humanise Modernist urban theory. But the houses were all on the one side of the street, therefore losing the enclosed element which preserved community on the ground, and even the Smithsons noted that once you get above six storeys, the sense of being on a street had disappeared anyway. In 1961, this plan inspired Sheffield city council's Park Hill Estate. The Smithsons themselves built Robin Hood Gardens in 1972, but by then the wider deficiencies of Modernism, first noted by the couple twenty years previously, were becoming apparent to the general public as well.

Robin Hood Lane was not a popular development. Its grim concrete and prison-like appearance, as well as its setting next to two of London's busiest roads certainly didn't help. Its birth a mere twelve months before the end of the post-war economic boom ensured that it (along with the similarly unlucky Trellick Tower) would soon be swept away by the rising problems of economic crisis, despite the Smithsons' protests that one day people would be proud to say that they lived there. The couple's reputation has never recovered, despite the popularity of Hunstanton and their Economist building of 1964.

Brutalism

A Human Modernism

Brutalism was a movement in architecture which flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. Pioneered in continental Europe by Le Corbusier, its main protagonists in Britain were the husband and wife team of Peter and Alison Smithson. The Smithsons were determined to preserve the best aspects of the heroic Modernism of Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe and other early pioneers, and to save British Modernism from what they considered a creeping whimsiness. The term itself (often credited to the critic Reynar Banham) is perhaps unfortunate- suggesting as it does a type of building which is ugly and unfriendly, and its association with much of Britain's welfare state architecture has not helped the movement's reputation, at least in the eyes of the public.

After the Second World War, British Modernists were increasingly sought after by the authorities who wanted to rebuild a physically shattered country and enact social change through the construction of a cradle-to-grave welfare state. But the architecture of the early welfare state avoided the stringent Modernism advocated by the pre-war pioneers in CIAM, opting instead to ape the gentle style of Sweden's long established social architecture. The apotheosis of this 'humanist' Modernism came in 1951, with the Festival of Britain, centred on the South Bank in London. The architecture of the Festival was consciously 'modern', but some of the buildings attracted criticism for their supposed frivolity, and were accused of parodying the heroic Modernism of the pre-war years.

Truth to Materials

For Peter and Alison Smithson, this gentle populism and watered-down design was not what Modernism was all about. They demanded a return to a more rigid, formal architecture and put their ideas to work with their Secondary School in Hunstanton, Norfolk, completed in 1954. At Hunstanton, the Smithsons made a virtue of the construction process of the building: structural and service elements were left exposed and the austere steel and glass frame gave the building a skeletal appearance. This "truth to materials" approach was anti-aesthetic, but, the Smithsons believed, more honest and true to Modernism's basic principles. Reynar Banham dubbed the school 'the New Brutalism', a movement which aimed, in his words, to "make the whole conception of the building plain and comprehensible. No mystery, no romanticism, no obscurities about function and circulation."

In France, Le Corbusier was also experimenting with new ways of using the Modernists' favourite material, concrete. His "*breton brut*" (literally, "raw concrete") technique characterised his *Unite d'Habitation* in Marseilles: a giant housing block with shops and other amenities built into its internal streets (a version of which was built at the Alton West Estate in Roehampton). The concrete exterior here is bush-hammered to create a pebbled effect. Other versions of this technique involve exposing the shuttering from which the concrete was poured. Le Corbusier further experimented with the Brutalist approach in his Monastery of *Saint Marie de la Tourette*, near Lyons.

Brutal, As In Ugly

But whereas raw concrete in the hands of Le Corbusier (aided by the sunshine of France) became something beautiful and almost spiritual, in Britain, Brutalist buildings often seemed tough, hard, and uncompromising. The Smithsons' Robin Hood Gardens housing estate, Park Hill Estate in Sheffield, Erno Goldfinger's Trellick Tower, the Hayward Gallery on the South Bank, and Basil Spence's tower blocks in Glasgow's Gorbals, are all large-scale celebrations of the sculptural qualities of concrete. But the honesty in the Brutalist treatment of materials means that these buildings are often considered to be simply ugly, and what's more, have not proved immune to the crippling social problems which spread in the 1970s in particular. With many Brutalist buildings, the feeling exists that the needs of expressing an architectural ideal comes before the needs of the human beings who have to use them. By the time the backlash against Modernism was in full swing in the 1970s, Brutalist buildings often bore the brunt of the criticism.

Erno Goldfinger
Nationality:
Famous Buildings:

(1902- 1987)
Hungarian
1-3 Willow Road, London
Alexander Fleming House, London
Trellick Tower, London

Learning From the Masters

The long career of Erno Goldfinger in many ways mirrors the fortunes of the Modern Movement in his adopted country during the 20th century. He struggled to gain acceptance in Britain before World War Two, and only became truly prolific in the 1950s and 1960s, when high-rise was adopted as the official solution to Britain's chronic housing problems. Yet his monumental tower blocks of this era became icons of everything that the British public disliked about Modernism, and his reputation as an architect became indelibly tied to the fortunes of these later Brutalist projects.

Erno Goldfinger was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1902. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, his family made their way westward, with the young Erno eventually settling in Paris. Here he attended the prestigious *Ecole National Superieure des Beaux-Arts* in 1923. Goldfinger spent fourteen years in Paris, years which would shape his life and career. It was here that he met Le Corbusier, and it was here as part of a group of young architects, dissatisfied with the old-fashioned conservatism of the *Beaux-Arts*, that Goldfinger worked with Auguste Perret, the French architect who among the first to champion reinforced concrete. Perret also believed that architects should 'expose' elements of their buildings: a structural honesty which would later come to characterise the work of Goldfinger as well as influential British architects Alison and Peter Smithson.

The Lean Years

In 1934, Goldfinger moved to London with his new wife, Ursula Blackwell. As part of the Crosse & Blackwell food empire, Ursula's money meant that Goldfinger was now financially secure. Which was just as well, because he struggled with commissions, like many other Modernists in pre-war Britain. His three houses at Willow Road in Hampstead (one of which became his family home), encountered much local opposition, something he would come to know well in his career.

Like many Modernists, Goldfinger was an avowed leftist. This put him very much in the political mainstream immediately after the Second World War, yet his commissions remained meagre; the headquarters of the British Communist Party and the offices of the Daily Worker, both in London hardly made up for his conspicuously small role in Modernism's biggest public fanfare to date, the 1951 Festival of Britain. Several of Goldfinger's former apprentices actually had bigger roles in the Festival than he did.

Modernism's Last Stand

But Goldfinger persisted, and with public authorities keen to encourage high-rise (a premium on building above five floors was included in the 1956 Housing Act), Goldfinger found

himself in greater demand. The decade from the end of the 1950s onwards was his most productive. In this period, he completed his three most famous projects: Alexander Fleming House, Balfron Tower, and its sister, Trellick Tower (all in London). Balfron and Trellick are two of Britain's most striking buildings, and arguably two of the ugliest. Trellick was completed in 1972, four years after the collapse of Ronan Point and one year before the first shock would signal the end of the long post-war boom. In many ways it is brutalism's last stand; Goldfinger himself had spent several weeks living on the top floor of the older Balfron Tower in order to demonstrate to a sceptical public the joys of high-rise living, but he was fighting a losing battle. His reputation suffered as the Modern Movement itself hit the skids, with Trellick in particular becoming a byword for Modernist folly.

Today, thanks largely to the efforts of former colleague James Dunnett, recent years have seen a new appreciation of the work of Erno Goldfinger; and a very un-British architect whose work is central to the story of British Modernism.

Sir Richard (Lord) Rogers (1933-)

Nationality: British

**Famous Buildings: Centre Pompidou, Paris
Lloyds Building, London
Millennium Dome, London**

High Tech

Richard Rogers was born in Florence, Italy in 1933 into an Anglo-Italian family. Immediately before the outbreak of World War Two, he was taken to Britain, and spent an unhappy childhood in boarding schools where teachers mistook his dyslexia for laziness, and recommended that he become a policeman. Today, Richard (now Lord) Rogers vies with his one-time acquaintance Norman Foster for the title of Britain's most influential architect, with projects ranging from Shanghai's new business district to London's Millennium Dome, and has the ear of Britain's arts and political establishment.

Rogers met Norman Foster when both were scholarship students at Yale University in the United States. On their return to Britain, they joined forces to form the architectural practice Team 4, which was dissolved in 1967 after only four years, but not before their Reliance Controls Factory in Swindon had earned them the label 'high-tech', which would stick to each man through their careers. Despite persistent rumours of animosity between the two, Rogers insists that the rivalry is a friendly one. After the split of Team 4, Rogers and Foster went their separate ways, but both began to explore ways to celebrating new technologies in their work, resulting in a catalogue of spectacular buildings across the world which pushed the boundaries of Modernism, and increasingly began to redefine what modern urban buildings should look like.

Bowellism

Rogers' most famous example of this new style is the Pompidou Centre in Paris, which he designed with Renzo Piano and completed in 1977. With this amazing building, Rogers and Piano took their desire to celebrate the art of engineering and industrial design to spectacular extremes. Everything, from the lifts to the sewage pipes, is visible on the outside of the structure. The rationale was to allow the greatest possible amount of floor space for the interior, so that art lovers (it is, after all, an arts centre), could enjoy enough space to appreciate the exhibitions. Today, the building itself is one of Paris' most popular tourist attractions, but at the time reaction was decidedly mixed. Critics dubbed the inside-out style 'Bowellism'.

In 1986, venerable insurance brokers Lloyds of London unveiled their new headquarters in the City of London. Rogers had again designed a spectacular celebration of the engineering aesthetic. Once again, the services were on the outside, and despite criticisms from some of the 10,000 or so who worked in the giant tower, the Lloyds Building has become almost as famous a London landmark as Big Ben.

Urban Visions

In the 1990s, Rogers has turned his hand to city planning, and was appointed to the British government's Urban Task Force in 1998. A convinced urbanist, he believes that authorities should encourage people to live in cities and that these should be made to be more humanist and friendly. For Rogers, many of our cities fail because of a bad use of space, a neglect of human elements in their planning, and an often soulless emptiness in their most important public spaces. His ideas for high-density, open, user-friendly cities are perhaps not as ambitious as the grand plans of Le Corbusier and other early Modernists, but they represent a significant development in Modernists' attempts to solve the long-standing problems of living and working in a city in the modern world. A personal friend of Tony Blair and other members of the Cabinet, and with a host of official positions in the arts and architectural world, as well as his position as the Government's chief adviser on urban regeneration, Richard Rogers is arguably the most powerful British architect since Sir Christopher Wren.

Sir Norman (Lord) Foster 1935 -
Nationality: British
Famous Buildings: Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (Hong Kong)
Commerzbank Tower (Frankfurt)
Stansted Airport (Essex)

In The Footsteps of Giants

No examination of British modernist architecture would be complete without reference to Sir Norman Foster, one of the world's most successful and highly regarded architects. With offices in London, Berlin, and Hong Kong, and a global staff of five hundred, Norman Foster is a genuinely international architect, and a household name. In a thirty-five year career, he has won over 150 awards including Gold Medals from the RIBA and the American Institute of Architects, France's Grande Medaille d'Or, and the Pritzker Prize (the profession's 'Nobel Prize').

Norman Foster had an interest in architecture from an early age, but being from a working class background there was no guarantee that he would be able to pursue such a career. Hard work in a variety of jobs (including a stint as a nightclub bouncer) enabled him to study architecture at Manchester University, where he won nearly every prize and scholarship going- many of which allowed him to travel and to visit the work of his heroes Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe. On one such scholarship at Yale University in the US, Foster could count among his teachers Serge Chermayeff and James Stirling. Among his fellow students was Richard Rogers.

'Anything Is Possible'

One year after his return to Britain in 1962, Foster and Rogers joined forces to form Team 4. This collaboration would only last four years, but saw Foster begin to experiment with his favourite materials of steel and glass, producing early examples of 'high tech' architecture, like the Reliance Controls factory in Swindon in 1965.

After parting company with Richard Rogers in 1967, Norman and his wife Wendy set up Foster Associates, and began a productive collaboration with the eminent American inventor and philosopher, Buckminster Fuller. Fuller believed that humanity's problems could be solved through the relentless pursuit of technological progress. The young Foster found him to be an inspiration, remarking "The thing about Bucky is that he made you believe anything is possible." Fuller's influence lives on: Foster's Swiss Reinsurance Building in London, on which work began in 1999, is a giant gherkin shaped glass tower which will include a series of 'skygardens', giving the building its own microclimate and eliminating the need for air conditioning, and is a concept which the two men had originally discussed in the 1970s.

The International Architect

And at the time of these discussions, Foster's star was rising. Through projects like 1975's Willis Faber & Dumas HQ in Ipswich (a curving glass-fronted building which incorporated an Olympic-sized swimming pool, restaurant and staff picnic area and was, according to Foster "a conscious effort to elevate the workplace"), and 1977's Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in

East Anglia, he forged his now trademark mastery of light, space and technology, building breathtakingly modern and socially sensitive projects at a time when British architecture was still suffering the fallout from the collapse of Ronan Point.

In 1979, Foster won the competition to build the headquarters of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, now recognised as one of the great buildings of the twentieth century. Housing 3,500 workers, and soaring fifty storeys high, the Bank is specially designed to allow light to flood into its interior, and includes a landscaped space at its base which has become one of Hong Kong's most popular public spaces. In the 1990s, Foster built the highest building in Europe (the Commerzbank Building), the world's biggest airport (Chep Lap Kok in Hong Kong, which is visible from space) as well as the critically acclaimed Stansted Airport outside London), and rebuilt Berlin's Reichstag, legislature of Europe's biggest democracy.

Foster's Modernism is not the bland modernism of the municipal council block, instead it is a grand, ambitious modernism, which seeks at every opportunity to harness technology to create ecologically sound, socially benign, and consistently spectacular architectural solutions to the problems of living, working, and travelling in a crowded world. The revival of the heroic aims of the Modern Movement in the 1990s is due in no small part to the efforts of an architect who has consistently championed the cause of human and technological progress in his work.

Will Alsop (1947-)
Nationality: British
Famous Buildings: Peckham Library
Hotel Du Departement Des Bouches-Du-Rhone, Marseilles
Cardiff Bay Visitors' Centre

Mr. Blobby

Will Alsop was born in Northampton in 1947. He studied architecture at the Architectural Association in the 1960s and, with fellow student John Lyall, he established Alsop & Lyall in 1981. Jan Stormer joined later, and upon the departure of Lyal, the practice was renamed Alsop & Stormer in 1991. The firm has offices in London, Rotterdam, Hamburg and Moscow.

Because of his avant-garde and strikingly different buildings, Will Alsop has always been considered something of a maverick in the British architectural scene. Until recently, nearly all his big commissions were in Europe, with his most famous British effort being the £4.5million Peckham Library and Media Centre, which won the Stirling Prize in 2000. Alsop has always had more success gaining commissions on mainland Europe than in his native (and perhaps more conservative) native land.

Once dubbed "architecture's Mr. Blobby" by the press, Alsop's buildings often don't look like buildings at all- most are a riot of bright colours, blobby pods, spindly supports and look nothing like the surrounding environment. His government offices in Marseilles are painted a garish blue and attract one million visitors a year, despite being intended only as the French equivalent of a county hall. Peckham Library itself, green-tinged and with what looks like a giant tongue on its roof, sits incongruously in a run-down corner of London.

In this sense, Will Alsop does not appear to be in any way a modernist. The form of the building seems to pay little heed to its function and there is none of the traditional seriousness of British Modernist buildings, (Peckham Library appears to owe very little to another public building, the rigid, austere Secondary School in Hunstanton). Even Alsop's way of working is unorthodox. He puts his ideas into a painting first, working from the outside in, rather than the other way around, then works out if what is on his canvass can actually be built. He also consults the local community on his designs before construction begins- a democratic approach which is at odds with the 'vanguard' image modernists often ascribe to themselves.

Pop Art

Alsop is part of a group of British architects who studied in the years of Pop Art in the 1960s and were encouraged to look beyond existing buildings for their inspiration. At the Architectural Association, Alsop absorbed ideas from pop music, science fiction films and even comic books for his inspiration. Looking at the buildings which result from this eclecticism, Alsop's career seems to suggest that Modernism is indeed dead and has been replaced by an ad hoc, post-modern approach to building. The architect himself maintains that he has been greatly influenced by the ideals of modernism and is keen to work with public sector clients where possible, and believes that architecture is still an important factor in shaping the quality of lives which people lead.

Alsop & Stormer is now turning its attention to public housing, where much of the Modern Movement's most controversial work was constructed. A giant tower-block in Dusseldorf is at the planning stage, and Alsop hopes soon to begin work on renovating the run-down Aylesbury estate in south London. Historians often assert that Modernism is an historical movement, stripped of its social mission and all that remains is a style, a "look". Will Alsop is one architect whose career suggests that Modernism's social zeal is alive and well, but it now comes packaged in pods, blobs, and bright colours.