

How I got to be an Architect

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What triggered it is long forgotten, but I had made up my mind before the age of 10 that I wanted to be an architect – the only one in our family. As a result my route to qualification was fairly straight forward, except that my school careers master didn't know how I should go about it, and I ended up telling him!

Architecture is both art and technical. My A levels were Physics, Chemistry and Maths. Of these the Physics is probably the most useful, in helping me understand both building structures, and more mundane but important topics such as heating and drains, but art or history would have been a useful addition.

Qualification to become a registered architect takes at least seven years, involving a 3 year degree course (B Arch), a two year diploma course and a minimum of two years of relevant work experience before taking the final professional practice exam.

Normally, one of these years is taken between the degree and diploma courses, but for complex reasons I took the first two parts straight through at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, getting my AA diploma in 1973. The AA is the oldest school of architecture in Britain, with an international reputation, but is the only one not part of a university.

On graduating I got a job with Owen Luder's office, staying there until I took the RIBA professional Practice exam (Part III) and became a registered architect in 1976. Owen was at that time treasurer, and later twice president of the RIBA, the main professional body.

The next few years saw me take jobs with a range of architectural practices in London gaining experience of all stages of work, and different building types, learning construction and progressing to sole job architect in charge of many of these from outline design to construction, until in 1980 I was sent to Brunei in SE Asia to run a local team responsible for a large sports and social club redevelopment for Shell Oil.

After returning to London with the same firm I was offered the chance in 1983 to become a partner in a small practice, with offices in Barnes, mainly working on residential projects. The partnership dissolved after 16 years when we realised that James and I were developing our interests in different directions. By now I was used to running a small firm, and started again from home. The idea was just to find enough work to keep me going, but interest grew. Increasing workload meant assistants and moving to an office in Putney in 2002, and our present larger offices on Putney High Street in 2007. The firm now employs 4 architects, 2 architectural assistants and 1 part time administrator.

Our main workload is residential for both homeowners and small developers. As well as several private houses, we are currently on site with new build flats, flat conversions and conversion of a small office building to houses in Putney. On the commercial side, our work has included hotels, church renovations, special needs schools, complex alterations to listed buildings and extending a local supermarket whilst keeping the shop open.

Since 2001 I have been an elected council member of the Association of Consultant Architects, the leading professional body representing architectural practice, and Hon. Secretary since 2009. I also give time to the Putney Society, where I run the Buildings Panel responding to major planning applications and changes to the Local Plan on behalf of residents.

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