

NEWS

Schools architects' role could be over

Elizabeth Hopkirk

Architects have found themselves at the centre of a fierce row over the future of school building in the era of standardisation.

Simon Lucas, head of education and children's services at multi-



Simon Lucas
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disciplinary firm EC Harris, likened schools architects to oxen after the invention of tractors.

Speaking to BD ahead of his appearance at the Building Schools Exhibition & Conference (BSEC), which opened on Wednesday, Lucas said: "If there's not an increasing role for architects – well, OK."

"After the invention of the internal combustion engine there was no longer a role for oxen-pulled ploughs. No one said, 'Should we keep on as we are because we've got lots of oxen?' That's an incredibly unkind analogy."

Lucas's vision of standardisation is for the buildings to be essentially kit-built so that the lion's share of the money could be

invested in innovative interiors.

Lucas, who is a former teacher, said classrooms needed to be capable of reconfiguration in minutes to be truly flexible. He said there would be a role for architects here and in designing exteriors – but also for product designers, interior designers and engineers.

But at a separate event, former RIBA president Sunand Prasad insisted architects could convince government that their skills remained relevant.

Speaking at a New London Architecture and Cabe seminar on Tuesday, Prasad said architects had allowed themselves to be pushed into a narrow role and needed to seize the opportunity to influence the coalition's agenda.

"There's a fight on," he said. "Some contractors have very low margins but others understand the future for them lies in producing quality."

Prasad also warned the policy of standardisation could fail because it was being introduced at a time when too few schools were being built to create economies of scale.

Other architects at the seminar warned that Britain must learn from the mistakes made by Australia's standardised equivalent of BSF. This cut costs but at the expense of context, aesthetics and architects, the audience was told.

Squire hired to design Harrods rooftop hotel

The practice behind the new-look Chelsea Barracks masterplan has been appointed to design a rooftop hotel for Harrods.

Squire & Partners was chosen from a shortlist including Allies & Morrison and Dixon Jones to oversee designs for the hotel, which is being considered by the store's new owner Qatari Holdings.

A source close to the project told BD: "The hotel would be about two or three storeys high and sit on top of the existing building. It's a difficult job because the new structure somehow needs to be supported."

Qatari Holdings bought the west London store from Mohamed Al-Fayed last year in a deal worth £1.5 billion and at the time announced it would review the business, with consideration



Harrods: hotel considered.

given to a rooftop hotel.

Harrods' managing director Michael Ward said: "Though the concept of a hotel has been raised no firm plans have been put forward and there are a number of ideas of equal magnitude."

If the proposals go ahead it is unlikely that Al-Fayed's wish of having a mausoleum constructed for himself on the roof will be granted.



Sheffield winner

DRDH Architects last week won the Best Building prize at the biennial Sheffield Design Awards 2010.

Its scheme, called The Workshop, provides office and studio space and redevelops and extends an existing 1960s extension to a large Victorian villa in the Nether Edge conservation area. Last year it won an RIBA national award.

The awards are organised by the Sheffield Civic Trust along with the city council and RIBA Yorkshire.

Jury chair Flora Samuel said: "The architects have cleverly maximised space to create a relaxed, airy and really pleasant working space."

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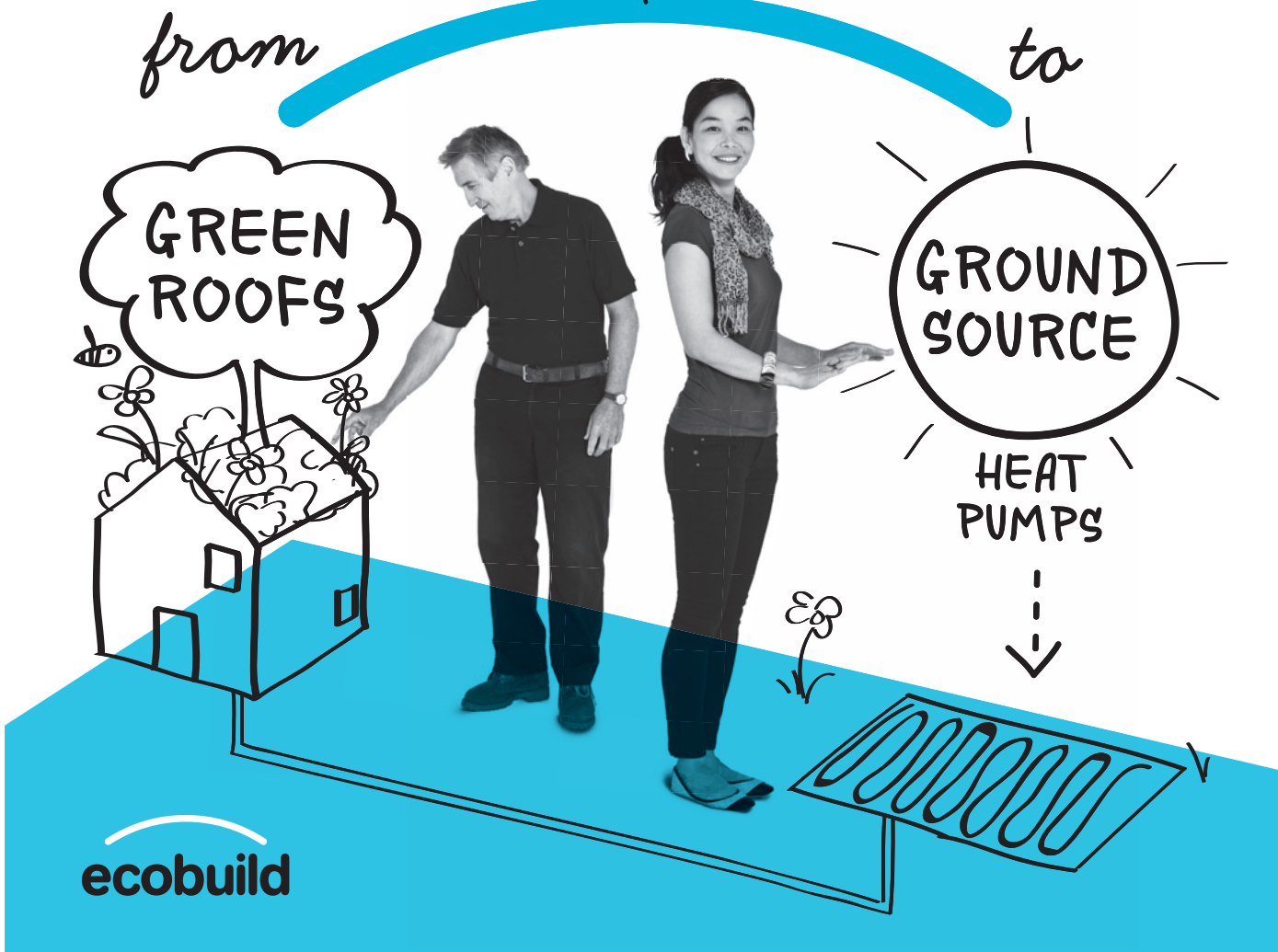
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