

Ever wanted to° design a school?

Marks Barfield Architects designed Michael Tippett school in south London – the winner of the 2008 Building Schools for the Future awards. Julia Barfield and Magali Thomson from the practice, which also designed the London Eye, share their experiences of school design

How did you get involved in designing school buildings?

“In 2004 we exhibited school designs at the RIBA gallery and subsequently contributed an exemplar design for the Building Schools for the Future programme.”

What are the main considerations when designing a school?

“One of our priorities is to make sure a building has a good green specification and that the majority of the materials are sourced from England. For instance, the sustainable timber for Michael Tippett came from Sussex.”

How involved were the students?

“It was decided in this case that all consultation would go through the head teacher as Michael Tippett is a special education needs school. Once the design was finalised we gave the school a model of the new building which allowed the students to familiarise themselves with it in advance.”

What do you enjoy most about your work?

“It is very rewarding designing lasting buildings that cater for the changing generations and improve people’s quality of life. A well-designed school is incredibly valuable, and makes a positive impact on the local community. I also enjoy championing the importance of good design and getting construction companies to think about how things can be done differently.”

What do you enjoy least about your work?

“It can be tricky ensuring quality isn’t compromised under the tight time constraints. There was one occasion when the building contractors built a wall – designed with a series of colourful windows – without any windows at all! We had to rely on our good relationship with the foreman to persuade them to rebuild it.”

What qualifications do you need?

“A broad range of A-levels is preferable. The arts and sciences are both important to building design and people skills are particularly important. As your studies progress there are also many opportunities to specialise.”

Careers in the built environment professions appeal to people who:

- care about their communities and want to improve them
- care about the environment and want to work towards a greener future
- are creative, practical and enjoy solving problems
- are good communicators and enjoy working with people
- are curious about the natural or built environment and how it can be influenced, shaped and designed.

Could it be you?

What’s the money like?

“As a student you could expect to earn as little as £15,000, but the average architect earns £35,000 a year. The most successful architects, like Norman Foster, are worth millions.”



More information about built environment careers:
www.tinyurl.com/4n5hso
www.regen.net/careers

Ever wanted to is a guide to careers in the built environment. It is published by CABE as a poster with its education magazine 360°. For further information please visit www.cabe.org.uk or email education@cabe.org.uk



Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

Pictured left to right: Magali Thomson and Julia Barfield © Marks Barfield Architects Above © Tim Sear and Tim Crocker Below right © Peter Cook