

01: Introductory Remarks

Jack Pringle

RIBA Immediate Past President, Pringle Brandon

Right up front I would like to thank our sponsors. It is almost impossible to put on these types of events without good sponsors; we really do value their participation and hope they get the maximum amount out of it. This year our principal sponsor is Urban Buzz; we also have 3D Reid, CITIN, Aedas, CABE, Ted Cullinan Architects, Rolfe Judd, Kohn Pedersen Fox and the BRE Trust.

A profession defines itself by its knowledge base so research is vital to our profession. Even commercially, if you are content to be bought and sold like a commodity, at the lowest price, do not do research. If you want to be differentiated, if you want to stick out from the crowd, if you want to have that knowledge that nobody else has and your clients know that they have to employ you to get it, do research.

I am delighted to be invited to open this year's symposium on Space at Home because the Research Committee and these symposia were started under my watch, so I am going to try and claim all the achievements that have been made over the last few years, even though I did not do any of the hard work. The hard work was vigorously done by the Research Committee, initially led by Alan Penn and now, equally ably, by Sebastian Macmillan. They have really solid achievements under their belt. The first was in reforming the Research Assessment Exercise – that is the dreaded RAE, which so many of our schools of architecture and universities fell down on, on the last round. We made it the very clear mission of the research group in the RIBA to have a look at the RAE to see how it could be made more friendly to the sort of research that is done in our schools of architecture. The Research Committee did a very good job in the most efficient way possible. Even the name of the RAE unit of assessments has been changed to Architecture and the Built Environment.

Connections have also been made between practising architects and the world of academia. This symposium itself is a great success of the endeavour. We are launching the RIBApedia, our own Wiki for information in the research world and are going on to work in sustainable futures.

Today's subject could not be more important: housing. Architects have been essentially out of housing for a generation, until very recently, and only last week John Calcutt laid the challenge to us that if we do not get our act together we will effectively stay out of housing for yet another generation. Housing is important and it is dangerous – it is playing with people's lives. We have seen only too graphically how some of the experiments in the post-war housing schemes have wrecked people's lives.

At the moment Britain's housing seems to be in a state of disarray. We probably have about half a million units too few, we have some of the smallest housing, some of the ugliest housing and certainly some of the most expensive housing in the developed world. Housing definitely needs architects.