

Meet the Architects



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Architect Profile:

Paula Willmore

Willmore Iles Architects, Bristol

Paula Willmore is a founding director at Willmore Iles Architects, a RIBA chartered practice that specialises in high quality student accommodation and large residential schemes. While based in Bristol, Willmore Iles Architects works across the UK.

We find that being in Bristol means we have access to a good pool of new staff and students, with three very good schools of architecture nearby. They each offer a different 'type' of student. It's also a great location for accessing the rest of the UK – there are good transport networks, so we can fairly easily go from the South West to the North East, to London or to Wales. We feel central; as we work nationally, that's important to us.

For staff, there are both professional and personal benefits. Professionally there's a real choice. There are several London practices with Bristol offices that offer the opportunity to work for big names if that's what you are looking for. But there are a lot of small to mid-size practices as well; they offer an alternative to the larger commercial offices you might find in London.

Willmore Iles Architects are a 100% employee owned trust [EOT]. We believe being an EOT helps to attract and retain high quality, engaged people; it's an approach to ownership that gives employees a collective voice. Across the region, there's also good professional support and a very active network programme, particularly for 'young' professionals. There are regular events and talks from all parts of the construction industry. There's important cross-over between the professional bodies, but there still needs to be more.

As for the personal benefits, we all seem to like living in Bristol. It's a relaxed, welcoming, friendly, cosmopolitan city where people from a wide variety of backgrounds mix happily together. It's a creative city too and its residents have a real ambition to provide a sustainable city for people to live and enjoy. It's not just a place for young professionals. With many parks and open spaces within walking distance, it's also a wonderful place to bring up a young family.





Architect Profile: Natalia Maximova Sheppard Robson, Manchester

Natalia, from Sheppard Robson in Manchester, tells RIBA Future Architects about her journey from Russia to Manchester, and why the North West is for her.

Originally from Russia, on a President Yeltsin scholarship to study architecture at Oxford, I had never visited the North West until my job interview in Manchester. With a first-class degree and RIBA regional student awards, I had offers in different places but chose Manchester as it had something promising about it from the start: the inner energy, honesty and grit, and a sense of happening. That initial impulse rose from a visual experience of a not always harmonious mixture of Victorian splendour and sixties concrete towers, and the warmth and openness of its people.

Initially, with no friends or family in the area, I soon became a part of the community, especially after being approached by the local Russian parish to design a new church. I have now lived and worked in Manchester for nearly two decades. Moving north allowed me to discover the country in its entirety: the colourful regional accents, historic cities and market towns, beautiful landscapes and countryside and rich culture.

Manchester's location is superb: 37 minutes' train journey to Liverpool, under an hour to Leeds and Sheffield, and only a couple hours away from London. Living here allowed me to work on amazing, unique schemes such as Stirling Prize shortlisted Liverpool One and Manchester Met's sustainable Birley Campus. The church commission led to setting up my own practice and award-winning community projects.

To fulfil my appetite for larger scale schemes I've since joined Sheppard Robson and have led high profile regeneration, educational and commercial developments across the North. Manchester's choice of architectural practices is great, from big national and multidisciplinary companies to local heroes and a plethora of small studios. There are exciting projects of all scales, thanks to successful universities and the likes of the BBC moving some operations out of the capital, as well as iconic cultural institutions such as Everyman Theatre in Liverpool or Contact Theatre in Manchester and, of course, a wonderfully diverse growing population.



The difference is that these projects perhaps have more impact on the area and create a stronger architectural event than they would in the capital.

I enjoy being a part of the local community and helping to form its environment. There is a strong sense of community among the architects too. Perhaps the renowned RIBA North West diploma course in professional practice has something to do with it? I have fond memories of Part III residential weekends away in Chester: attending day-long lectures, going out late at night, becoming a student again, making new friends and supporting each other during a traditional Manchester v Liverpool football match. I liked it so much I became a Part III examiner myself.

In the North you are never too far away from anywhere: it is easy to get to all major cities and towns with their local delicacies (Bury Market for its famous black pudding or Eccles cake, anyone?), Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Lake District boats, Welsh dragons plus two international airports. In fact, Manchester is as cosmopolitan as London: there are over a dozen different nationalities in our office. And the time – there seems to be more of it here as you don't have to travel over four boroughs to see a friend or to attend an evening lecture. I can walk from the office to my son's school in 15 minutes. As a parent you relate to the city differently – through its green parks, buggy-friendly pavements and galleries with comfortable cafés (the almost Stirling Prize winner Whitworth gallery was my regular cultural retreat during both maternity leaves). My children love the city too: 'There are so many beautiful buildings here. But yours, mum, are the best!' Why should I be anywhere else?

RIBA Future Architects is our community for future and emerging architects, designed to support and inspire as you transition from study to practice.

Would you like to share your journey? Do you have a project to show off, a review to share, or an event to promote? Whatever your idea, get in touch and we'll help make it a feature for the RIBA Future Architects community.



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