

Architecture and design office Research + Design won the Highly Commended category for CIAT's national award The Alan King Award 2009 for their first completed project-an innovative timber clad residential extension located in the Barbican area of Plymouth.



New York meets Plymouth

The Boho loft-living of Soho (NYC) comes to the South West in the form of an extension with a difference.

Award-winning architect Robert Bedner explains

After ten years living in the heart of Manhattan I relocated to Plymouth with my family in 2001. In New York City I had gained the opportunity to work on some great projects – luxury apartments for celebrity clients on Central Park West, the design of a museum for the underwater explorer and discoverer of the Titanic Robert Ballard, a new façade for the Soho art gallery Storefront for Art and Architecture. With the birth of my daughter priorities changed and my wife and I were attracted to thoughts of a life in the south west of England between the moors and the sea.

I was looking for a place that was urban, but still had connections with the power of nature, the coast and the countryside. I had been to Marfa Texas to see the home, art, and architecture of Donald Judd and driven to Arizona to see James Turrell's Volcano – these artists had rejected places like New York and LA for desert and big sky country and in a way this is how I liked to think of my exodus from New York to Plymouth.

Professional life began working for the architect Sverre Fehn in Oslo Norway. Inspired by a story I had heard about the architect Jorn Utzon working his way over to the States to work for Frank Lloyd Wright I managed to get on a ship and work my way over the Atlantic to Oslo. I knocked on his door and as luck and Prof Fehn's generous nature would have it, I had the opportunity to work for him practically on a one to one basis for almost a year.

Fehn's architecture (the actual buildings) and his way of speaking about architecture had a great effect on me and still inspire me to this day. Fehns work was about heart and technical precision and a type of built poetry about our existence in nature through construction.

I opened Research + Design in the Formation Zone at the Roland Levinsky Building at the University of Plymouth in 2008. The New Street project was already underway when we moved in – a small infill extension for a family in

the Barbican that had been referred to me by a friend and colleague who was relocating to London.

The project took nearly two years and came within budget. The clients were fantastic and supportive throughout the whole process – a designers dream. The team for the project was integral to its success and continues to work together on projects to this day. The main contractor responsible for overseeing all aspects of the build from start to finish was Milehouse Construction headed up by Tim Swabey and Michael Cassidy. The joinery and timber detailing utilising Siberian Larch throughout also played a major role in the success of the project – all expertly crafted by Plymouth joinery firm Watsun and Gardiner.

This past November Research + Design received the Alan King Award in Leeds in a black tie gala event for the project in the highly commended category. A plaque and local ceremony commemorating the award is planned for the project later this year.

The design of the project is as follows:

The Brief

The client brief was to design a very small contemporary two-storey infill extension – 'something special' to an existing 1970s development townhouse. The design was to provide a new children's bedroom and a multifunctional sunroom to be used for yoga, entertaining, study and as a children's play area. In addition, a new stair and "seagull proof" stair skylight were required. All of the above to be accommodated in a tiny existing balcony area 2.5 metres by 2 metres and in a sensitive historic conservation area of the city and to a tight budget.

The Solution

The sunroom can be configured in a variety of ways utilising custom panels that disappear into wall recesses. This space can accommodate yoga and study when closed