



When he is not exploring old water mills or winning awards you will find him off-piste on the more challenging slopes of Europe. Jim Delbridge meets architect Andrew Dyke to discuss why it is important to have a structure in your life.

Growing up in Somerset I was fascinated by the beauty of the old buildings,' says Andrew Dyke over a cup of tea in his office.

'We had no new buildings where I lived but plenty of old water mills, churches, manor houses and cottages and I loved exploring them. This was in the days before Grand Designs, most people did not think about architecture very much and neither did I. I don't think I knew what it was but I was drawn to these fascinating old functional spaces.'

The enterprising young glove-maker's son originally wanted to be an artist and would set up his canvas stool outside properties and sketch what he saw.

'You could guarantee that curiosity would get the better of the owners and within 15 minutes they would come to see what I was doing. "Oooh! I don't suppose you would consider selling it when it's finished would you?" I was about 13 and I'd sell them for about £5 which was quite a bit of money.'

'I tell young architects that there is nothing like drawing for getting to understand how a building works, how it is put together as you have to stare at every detail to get it right. A pencil, a piece of paper, a good eye and an inquisitive mind are all you need.'

SUCCESSFUL

Andrew is one of Guernsey's most recognisable and most successful architects. His company CCD Architects were the Commerce and Employment Guernsey Business of the Year for 2011 and have won numerous design and RIBA awards since the firm started in 1981. But, as a teenager he did not know what architecture entailed.

'When I went to Liverpool University to study architecture I had never set foot in an architect's office. Where I grew up the nearest one was 40 miles away in Bristol or Taunton. I had never spoken to an architect. I just knew that I wanted to do something to do with buildings and being an artist was my first thought. A cousin suggested architecture so I could be artistic, get paid for it and have a proper job.'

Liverpool in the 1970s was rough, rundown and a huge culture shock for the young yokel, so much so that he almost packed his bags and went home, but he found his course exciting.

'I remember the architecture school wanting to remove students' preconceptions about art and design. They wanted a clean palette. So we

went back to drawing with wax crayons like in kindergarten and on another occasion we had to observe live nude models in the Liverpool College of Art. We then had to run to the other side of the college and draw from memory what we had seen while listening to the Grateful Dead at full volume. That was pretty good! I enjoyed that!

'I grew to like Liverpool and I met my wife, Helen, there who was studying to become a vet. I took a year out to get experience working for a practice in Chester before we moved to Burnley once Helen qualified.'

FASCINATION

Andrew's fascination with old vernacular buildings from the Somerset countryside transferred to the textile mills of Burnley. Cotton mills, as illustrated by LS Lowry, were still running in that part of Lancashire and some still used steam engines to power the machinery. Burnley, where Helen came from, had what Andrew describes as a forest of mill chimneys attached to really strong industrial buildings.

'The opening ceremony of the London Olympics captured the essence of the Lancashire landscape when they featured the industrial revolution. I got really interested in these mills and wrote theses on cotton weaving and cotton spinning mills. I was interested in how they were built in local materials and how they blended in with the landscape. My knowledge of water mills started in Somerset, then I discovered a very different kind in Burnley and very recently I have been working on one in Guernsey.'

As economic power shifted from the north of England and textile manufacture moved to the Far East, the mills of Burnley were being pulled down. Andrew was a key figure in a movement to save these buildings from the demolition crew. One particular area of importance to the milling community had a canal running through the centre of it and had yet to be knocked down but developers were eyeing it lustfully.

'We formed a preservation group and identified that we had to give a name to this important area that still had operational steam mills. We called it The Weavers' Triangle and the name stuck and the group grew. We left the town soon after but it is gratifying to see it is still known by that name and was visited by Prince Charles and is considered an excellent example of industrial preservation. I was proud of that!' ▶

Design for Life

👉 A pencil, a piece of paper, a good eye and an inquisitive mind are all you need. 👈



Projects that Cresswell, Cuttle and Dyke have worked on L-R: Les Prevosts Farm; St Stephen's Community Centre; Les Bourgs Hospice.

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When Helen and Andrew got married, a kindly aunt offered them a free honeymoon at her holiday home in Alderney. This was their first experience of the Channel Islands and they were smitten.

'It was 1975 and we flew with Aurigny from Southampton and it was the first time I had ever left the country and flown on a plane. It was fantastic, the weather was hot and Alderney was like a tropical island.'

A few years later when a vet's job became available in Guernsey Helen jumped at the chance and Andrew came too looking for a job. Fortunately he was offered a few.

'I think I made a couple of false starts job wise because I had such an inspirational mentor in Lancashire that my first jobs in Guernsey were a disappointment. When I was around 29 I formed a partnership with Tim Cuttle and we started to work in an office he had bought in Queen's Road that had been where Helen had worked as a vet. This was my introduction to the kind of amazing coincidences that happen in Guernsey regularly.'

Around 12 months later they merged with Nigel Cresswell and Cresswell Cuttle and Dyke was born. They moved into their headquarters in Le Bouet in the early 90s.

'One of my first large jobs was Town Mills and I was very pleased with what we achieved. It was basically two separate buildings with very different floor levels but had to function as one space. That is when I came up with the glass atrium that linked them together and little bridges that connected everything with a lift going up the middle. The Ancient Monuments Committee appreciated it as they recognised that this was how to give old buildings relevance in the modern commercial world. I was very proud with how it turned out.'

Andrew then worked on a number of farmhouses, the most significant of which was Manoir de Foret. This developed his interest in historic buildings and he joined the Ancient Monuments Committee in 1990 working for 10 years as technical advisor.

OPPORTUNITY

'A significant moment for the practice was when they changed the law on the demolition and redevelopment of open market properties. This gave me the opportunity to work on exciting modern designs. "A La Ronde" above Saints Bay was the first and then, more famously I designed the snail house "L'Escargot". Apparently a number of people have requested that it becomes a listed building which was a surprise – rather flattering too!

'I like to consider the context in which we are designing a building. Our work should be a response to the landscape. A building needs to show respect and be polite to its neighbours, because L'Escargot didn't have close neighbours in a valley I was able to come up with something different which related to the landscape rather than other buildings.

'I was on site with the owners and was asked how the plans were going. At this stage it was all in my head but I pulled out an envelope

A building needs to show respect and be polite to its neighbours...

and drew the iconic snail shape and the client said, 'I like that, keep on going like that!' I think they still have that envelope framed.

'One of our most challenging recent projects was the hospice at Les Bourgs. It was a privilege to be asked to design it, but there were a number of planning issues and we had to create something that would provide the care that was required in clinical terms as well as have a calm homely atmosphere. It was a special moment for the practice when it was opened by Prince Charles who was heard to say it was the finest hospice he had seen!'

ENTHUSIASTIC

Andrew is enthusiastic about the future for CCD Architects. 'We have a great team of 14 people. We trained all our technical staff, and are proud of their talents and achievements. My two co-directors, Stuart Pearce and Oliver Westgarth, are keen to develop the practice further and build on our strengths. Stuart is a specialist conservation surveyor, to my knowledge he's the only expert of his kind on the island. He maintains many of Guernsey's most important historic buildings, Victor Hugo's House, Town Church and many others.

'Oliver is, like me, a chartered architect. He has a great contemporary design background and he's rare for a designer architect as he's had lots of hands-on site and project management experience. The two of them really epitomise the best of what CCD has come to stand for over the years, old and new, design and hands-on crafting. Both contribute hugely to our bespoke project portfolio and as a trio we have a great camaraderie, it makes me really excited to be taking the practice forward together in this way.'

Andrew has been the buildings advisor for the National Trust for many years, is a director of St John and was chairman of Blanchelande College board of governors. In recent years he has discovered that he has a voice and enjoys singing, is a hard-core skier and he can often be seen driving his cream Morgan sports car around the Vale where he has lived in the same house for over 30 years.

'The biggest challenge the island faces is the growing population and all the utilities required. It is an aging population too and if we end up with more than 50 per cent of the island past retirement age that is a tremendous burden on the rest of us.

'Guernsey has it pretty good really. The island is beautiful and the people are friendly and from an architecture and planning point of view it could be a lot, lot worse. I don't agree with every decision that is made, I especially feel that as a community we haven't dealt successfully with the development of many of our large historic civic buildings, few of which now remain intact, but all in all, I'd say we have it pretty good.' ■