

A10



#31
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Start

- Holiday houses, United Kingdom
- Residential landscape, Jürjala
- Cultural centre, Olomouc
- Physical education facilities, Belgrade

Ready

- Museum, Nottingham
- Seafarers' centre, Helsinki
- House, Brussels
- Offices and cultural space, Bucharest
- Town house, Landskrona
- Bank headquarters, Vilnius
- Home for the elderly, Zurich
- Office building, Podgorica
- Apartment building, Linz

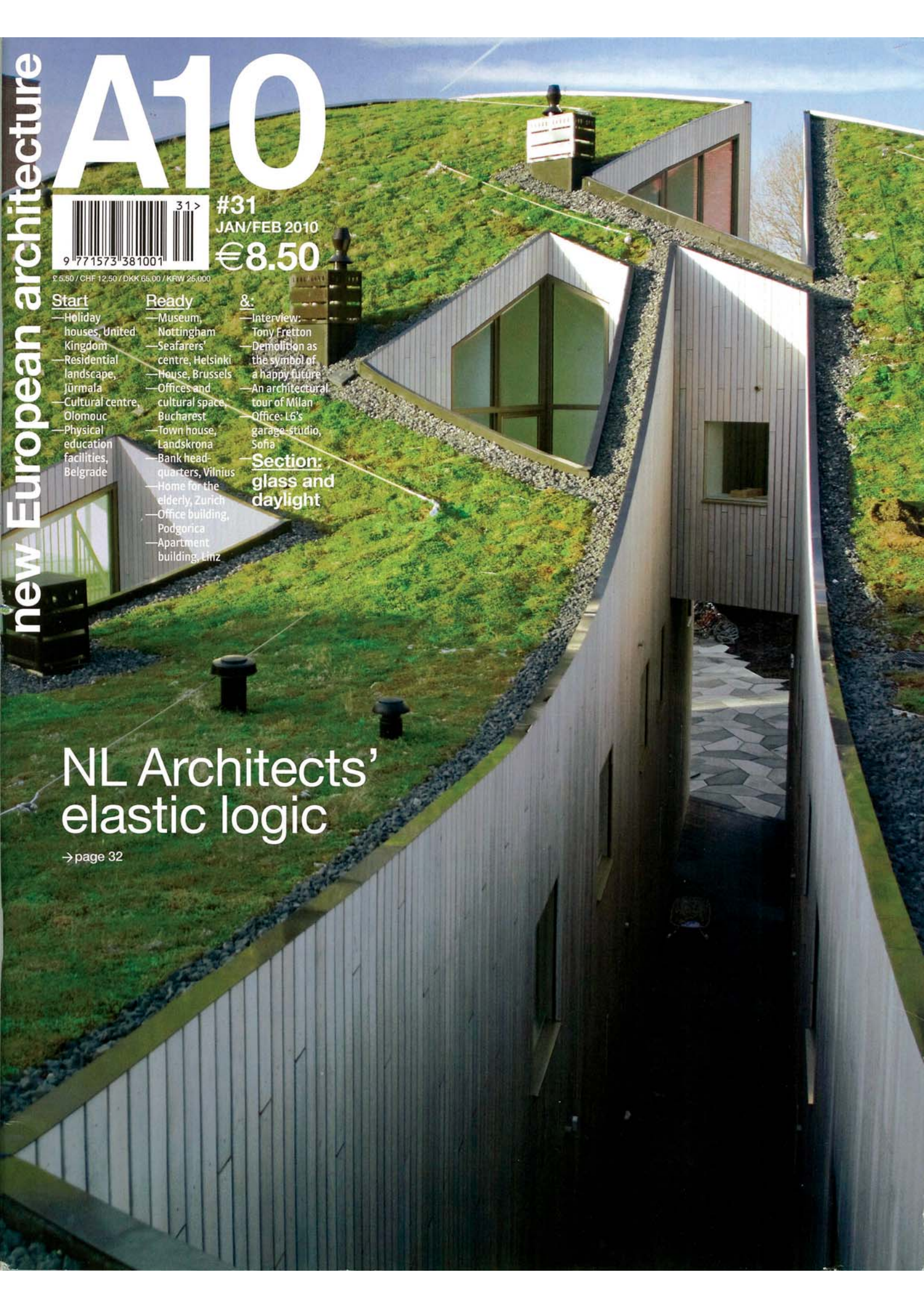
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- Interview: Tony Fretton
- Demolition as the symbol of a happy future
- An architectural tour of Milan
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NL Architects' elastic logic

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Update: Young Brits

UNITED KINGDOM — Along with the big and long-established players, Britain's young architectural studios have had to face the brunt of the economic recession during the last year or so. They have had to rethink where their work is going, and how to get it in the first place.

It has been an intense and interesting period for all the young practices I have spoken to. Strategies to survive the credit crunch vary; some of the youngsters are collaborating with bigger practices, others focus on competitions or work on their own ideas with a plan to 'sell' them later, but all are trying to break into as many markets as possible and to avoid 'pigeon-holing'. Client care and networking have never been so important, but success on this front varies.

The practices featured here are small; they range just two at Feix & Merlin to a staff of ten. This means there is no office hierarchy, and most studios relish the close team play and the sense of commitment. All say they benefit from a recent increase in public awareness of quality in architecture; tv programmes like 'Grand Designs' have given architects a public arena and raised the stakes. So what drives young British architects today, and what are their future plans? (CORDULA ZEIDLER)



← FEIX AND MERLIN

Tarek Merlin and German-born Julia Feix met at Will Alsop's practice where they still have a desk. While employed at Alsop's, they started collaborating on competitions. A winning entry gave them the exposure and confidence to set up on their own: their beach hut in Lincolnshire (above) attracted trendy developers Urban Splash who commissioned them to design marketing suites (Wharfinger's Cottage, left), recognizing Feix&Merlin's strong potential to come up with unique ideas and objects full of character and humour. The practice's intelligent light-heartedness also attracted the retail consultant for the Newburgh Quarter, an area in London's West End which is currently rebranding itself. For Newburgh the architects devised work which is more of an art project than straight architecture; 'Wish you were here' entailed shipping fifteen small boutiques from London to New York's Lower East Side, and vice versa, in a celebration of independent retail.

At the moment the practice is awaiting the outcome of stage two of a competition for a new use for a gas holder near King's Cross Station, a high profile job, and their shortlisted stage one entry makes them hopeful of success.

www.feixandmerlin.com



↓ SURFACE ARCHITECTS

Strictly speaking Surface are no longer among the youngest British architects; the practice was set up in 1996. As was typical in the '90s, founding member Richard Scott says, Surface weren't interested in building buildings, but in a wider architectural discourse that involved music, poetry and philosophy. The practice focuses on phenomenology, as a reaction against complex, computer-generated architecture, and concentrates on questions such as: what would happen if one reintroduced the physical experience into design?

While the practice initially focused on theory, and on teaching at the Bartlett School and the Architectural Association, it has since started to build. Experimentation remains a focus, Scott says, and creating stimulating places and spaces one wants to be in is key.

Surface's recent work includes a Film Centre for the University of London (below left), and a Graduate Centre for Queen Mary University in London. On the drawing board is a new Baptist Church in West London (below right), and the practice has just been declared 'Design Champion' for a Building Schools for the Future programme in Hull, north England.

www.surfacearchitects.com



↑ MOXON ARCHITECTS

Moxon was formed five years ago by Ben Addy on the back of a commission to rework a house in Notting Hill. Addy was cheaper than his competitors and this allowed him to break into a small private market consisting of his client's friends who then commissioned him to do residential jobs. The larger projects his firm is working on come via competitions: in 2007 Moxon won a competition to design a new office building in Preston, in north-west England (above left, see also A10 #25). This project is on the backburner but Addy hopes it will happen next year. Moxon, who once worked for Wilkinson Eyre, also designs bridges like the Glen Tanar footbridge in Scotland. Addy's business partner Tim Murray brings in commercial jobs, which include interior design work like the studio for Makkina Ltd (above right). While Moxon are ambitious and have been successful, Addy says that their bank balance is currently 'zero', due to the recession. But he firmly believes in hanging on to his staff, whom he values highly, and in paying them decent salaries. Meanwhile Moxon are working on self-initiated work that is still under wraps.

www.moxonarchitects.co.uk



← CARMODY GROARKE

Kevin Carmody and Andy Groarke met at David Chipperfield's studio but later decided to go it alone. Work came largely via their astoundingly successful competition forays: in the first eighteen months they won five out of six.

They believe firmly there is an opportunity for young practices to do high-profile if small projects and quote their own temporary structure 'Skywalk', designed for New London Architecture, and their recently completed fit-out for the Architecture Foundation's Head Quarters in London (top) which is a Gesamtkunstwerk in plywood, intended to be in place for three years. When asked how the practice finances itself, they insist that there are no 'bread-and-butter' jobs, and that all their work is of quality. It is also important to them that the practice maintains a varied output. This includes collaborations with artists. The practice has completed a memorial for the bereaved families of the 7/7 bombings in London, and is currently waiting for funding to begin their competition-winning Sheffield Festival Centre project.

www.carmodygroarke.com



→ DUGGAN MORRIS

Joe Morris set up on his own when he decided he did not want to commit to the growing hierarchy at AHMM, where he was working. Morris jumped in at the deep end, but old contacts, including one at developer Mac Donald Egan, proved fruitful. His practice, soon including Mary Duggan, was commissioned to work on a masterplan for a large residential project in Lewisham, South London. Yew Tree Lodge (bottom right), a sheltered housing project, was challenging from the start: the practice was asked to implement an existing planning permission, and they did not like the scheme. But Duggan Morris turned a confused and clumsy design into something of elegance, and satisfyingly stimulated a debate about sheltered housing. Recently the firm has won a competition for a new pavilion structure near Liverpool. How are they dealing with the recession? Joe Morris thinks it isn't all bad; his practice, he says has refocused on their strengths and has been productive as a result.

www.dugganmorrisarchitects.com



↑ LEVITATE

Levitate are a modest bunch. Tim Sloane, one of the directors, says publicizing his work before the building is finished isn't his thing. The completed project is what counts in his view. Despite this unfashionable attitude which goes against today's craze for sending out a press release as soon as a project's first computer-generated image comes out of the printer, the practice is successful. Levitate's strength seems to be their adaptability. They do conservation-based work and are interested in creative re-use of historic buildings. Recent projects include work at Dunster Castle for the National Trust, and an international competition for Birmbeck Pier (above) which they won from of a field of ninety or so competitors. But the practice is also involved in juicy new-build schemes; a £37 million mixed-use project in Nottingham, including apartments, a hotel and offices, will be completed next year, and a swimming pool project in the same town is also under way. Sloan says his practice enjoys the diversity. Tips for fighting the recession: maintaining client contacts and building on trusted relationships is one answer, working on their own ideas another; an idea for a floating house is being developed, and Sloan hopes someone will buy it. Don't wait for people to come knocking at your door, is Sloan's advice.

www.levitate.uk.com