

Tunbridge Wells

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Pushing back the design boundaries

A host of activities was organised locally for Architecture Week which aimed to change the way people think about modern structures. The occasion was run by the Royal Institute of British Architects with the Arts Council of England. Francesca Packer and Emily Pennink report

NESTLED in a leafy glade in Tunbridge Wells, The Boundary House may look like Tarzan's luxury pad but is built on solid foundations of practical award-winning eco-design.

The environmentally-friendly house is home to architect Michael Winter, 38, and his wife Elizabeth. The features are designed to minimise the impact on the environment by harnessing nature. It is heated directly from the sun, and rainwater flows hot and cold from the taps.

Mr Winter's brainchild was conceived in 1993 when he drew on his experience and training from Brighton Polytechnic to design a green house in a contemporary style.

He bought the wooded site, wedged between Nevill Cricket Ground and the railway line, in 1995 and finished construction of the four bedroom house on stilts in 1996.

His home retains warmth by a layered effect. South-facing windows let heat in to the open-plan living area and bedrooms. And a solid wall on the north side, stuffed with re-cycled newspaper insulation — specially treated to be non-flammable — stops it escaping.

Only three trees were felled to make way for the construction because the house is moulded against the tree-line and the raised foundations on stilts do not hamper root growth.

The surrounding trees play an important part in its heating design. In the summer the foliage shields it from the sun's glare and after the autumn fall, naked branches expose the house to the sun's full force, keeping the climate inside constant.

For the bitter winter months, Mr Winter installed a wood-burning fire which, he says, minimises carbon emissions.

Telegraph and the Royal Institute of British Architecture.

While enjoying a prize weekend in Venice, Mr Winter proposed to his partner, Elizabeth, who stood by him throughout the building project.

He said they made a good team because as an accountant, Elizabeth was able to keep his plans within the bounds of financial possibility.

The whole project cost £235,000 but was recently valued by Denise Barnes estate agents at £400,000. House-keeping bills are low.

Reactions to Mr Winter's visionary construction have been mixed. He said visitors showed interest and admiration for the design but "you can never please everyone".

He said: "I don't really care if people think it's horrible if it gets people talking. "Tunbridge Wells people are too hung up on the past." Planning permission did not present a serious obstacle he said.

Mr Winter is a founding member of the Tunbridge Wells-based Environment-Conscious Design Group set up this year to promote green ideas in design.

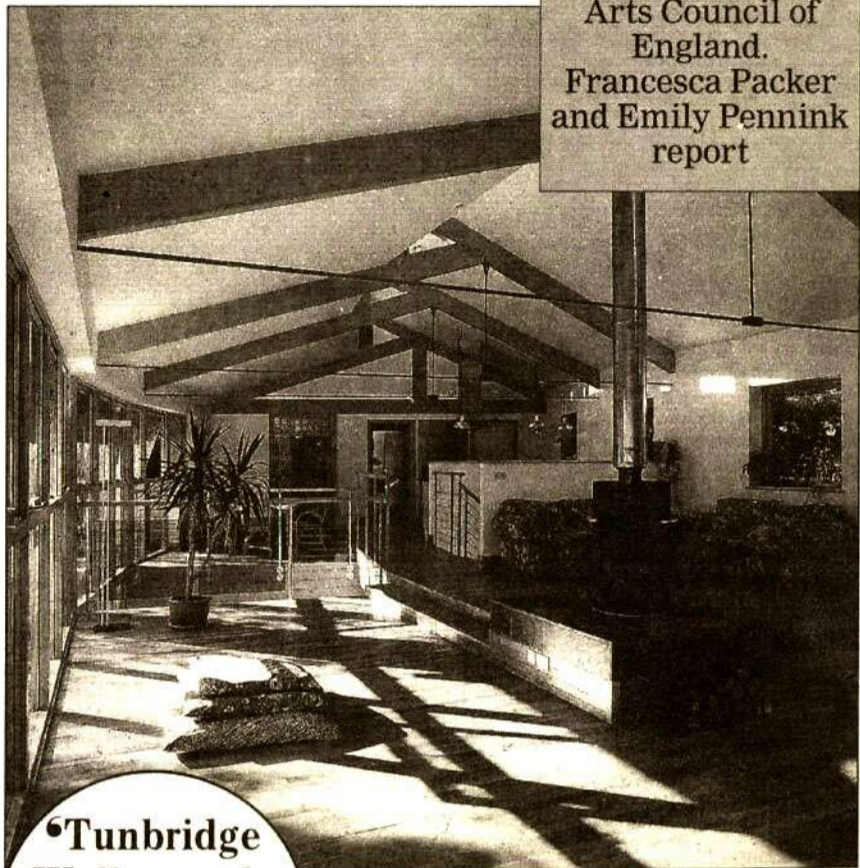
To mark national architecture week, Mr Winter's palace was opened to the public.

For more information about The Boundary House and environmental design call Mr Winter on 01892 539709.



Michael Winter

The Boundary House has won Mr Winter a host of top architectural awards from the Daily



Rise and shine: sun floods through the south windows of Mr Winter's home

'Tunbridge Wells people are too hung up on the past'

Tune in to an expert

CAMERAS rolled for Tunbridge Wells architect Edmund Byrne who was filmed during architecture week.

The managing director of Joyce and Partners appeared on BBC TV's Business Breakfast and Working Lunch on Thursday last week.

He was speaking about changes the High Street firm had made to a house in Langton Green.

"It demonstrated that architects can be useful on relatively small jobs," he said.

Work on the house in

The Boundary (not to be confused with the house of the same name, featured above) has involved turning the staircase round to let in more light and changes to windows.

It came about through an initiative introduced last year where architects would talk to home owners about small problems in their homes.

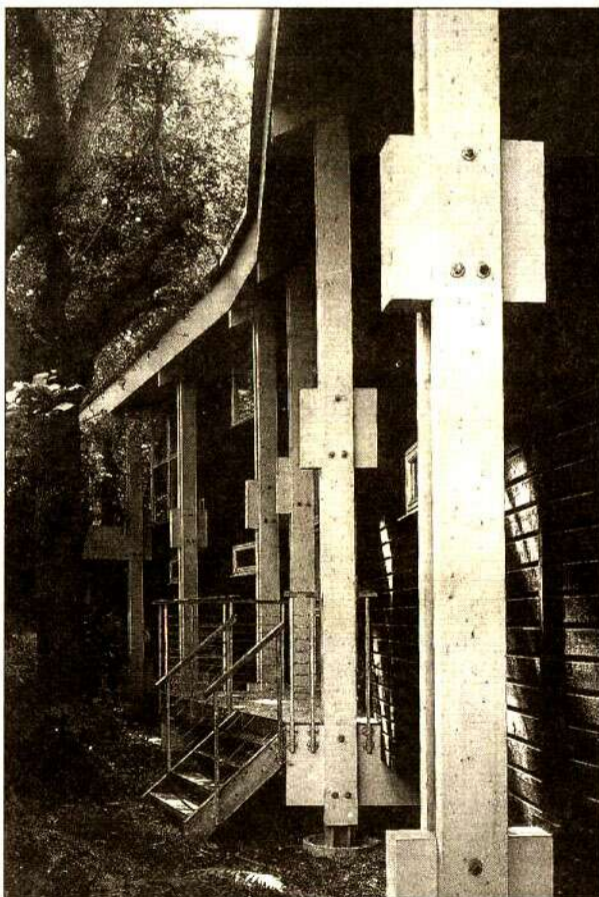
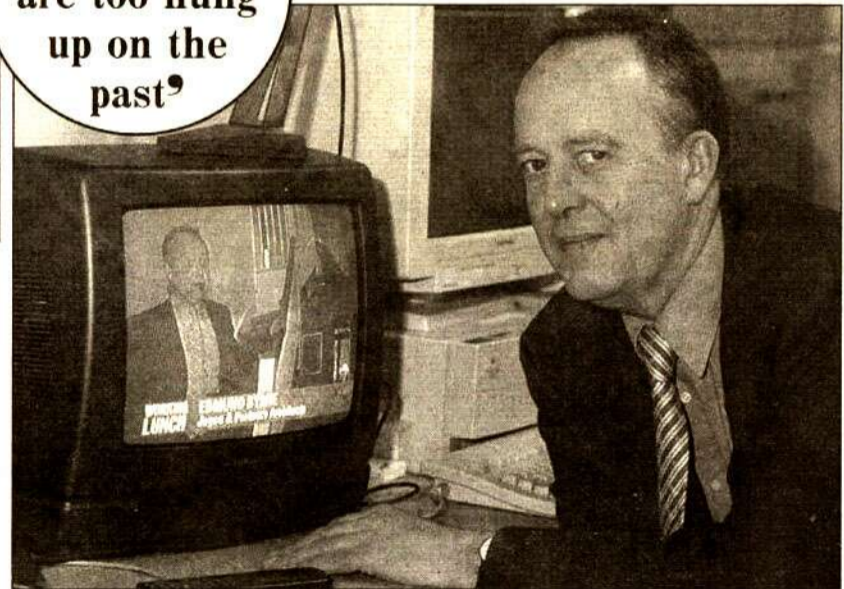
Mr Byrne (pictured) said of architecture week: "It's good for the image of architects. As a nation we are not particularly aware of our surroundings.

The more people who are aware the better." The owner of The Boundary house, Lynn

Jeffreys, said: "I heard about architecture week last year and decided I wanted someone to give

me advice. I am very happy with everything that's been done."

Courier photo 117248/05



Standing tall: The Boundary House's raised foundations allow tree roots to grow freely

Archie-itecture

TUNBRIDGE WELLS MP Archie Norman built on the theme of architecture week when he picked out his favourite building in the town.

The redesign of the Alexandre Boyes' offices in Mount Ephraim won his vote when he visited it to celebrate national event which ended yesterday.

Mr Norman said: "I am aware of the impact the

design of new buildings can have on Tunbridge Wells.

"I have been particularly struck by the Alexandre Boyes office, designed by local architect Wyatt Glass, which sits very comfortably across the road from the Conservative Association office, so it is a building I see very often.

"The design incorporates progressive details and the overall result is attractive."



Students gain a firm foundation

THE IMPORTANCE of architecture was also brought home to local schools.

Sixth formers at schools in the Tunbridge Wells area attended a workshop about sustainable design at the Nevill Ground.

Pictured working on their plans are (seated from left) Simon Appleyard, Aaron Down and Ben Miller from Tunbridge Wells Boys Grammar School with Cathy Grant of the West Kent Education Business Part-

nership and KK Chiang and Andrew Street of the University of Greenwich School of Architecture.

Courier photo 117130/15

● What's your favourite or worst building in the town? Write to the editor