

# .Cent

The Jules Wright Issue Memories

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# .Cent

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O'Connor wears white tie collar coat  
by Louis Vuitton, flower shape metal  
ring, round ring w/crystals encrusted,  
long necklace with white feather/  
pearl/crystal pendant, silver and pearl  
bracelet, big pearl flower bracelet all  
by Erickson Beamon.

## *Our Philosophy*

.Cent is a quarterly magazine celebrating creativity in all its forms. In each issue we invite a well respected creative to act as guest editor, choosing a title that expresses something core to their beliefs. They then invite people they have worked with, or admire, to interpret the title from their own imaginative perspectives, giving readers the opportunity to see the guest editor in a more personal light whilst also showing all the facets that encompasses them. .Cent then welcomes a worldwide network of creatives from fashion, art, music, design, illustration, literature and others, to contribute with their own interpretation of the title. These contributions are then shared with the readers without the heavy hand of an intrusive editorial opinion. This inimitable concept allows contributors to speak directly to the readers creating an intimate, yet open debates.

In a final step, .Cent encourages readers to offer their ideas and suggestions for contribution to the following issue. The distinctive process as a whole, .Cent calls Circlical Publishing™.

.Cent's aim is to provide an open platform for creative discussion, through intelligent yet accessible editorial; directly from the world's most influential creative figures. .Cent believes this is a time to celebrate beauty, optimism and empowerment in a dynamic way that is relevant to contemporary issues. .Cent does not dictate, it opens up debate.

The summer 07 edition will be guest edited by Paul Priestman and will be entitled 'reach out and touch'. The designer, Paul Priestman, founded the agency Priestman Goode in 1986, and has gone on to work with some of the biggest names in the world including Airbus, Virgin Atlantic and Hutchinson, as well as designing the Virtual Keyboard.

If you would like to contribute to this issue, please send in your ideas on 'reach out and touch' via our website [www.centmagazine.co.uk](http://www.centmagazine.co.uk) or by email [info@centmagazine.co.uk](mailto:info@centmagazine.co.uk)

Enjoy, Be inspired and Get involved.





ii Interior view of the Alaca Imaret Mosque, Salonica. Photograph by Marcello Bastéa-Forte, 2004

Although history and memory are not one and the same, the two concepts are often intertwined in architectural writing. In 2002, in a website about the London Bridge, Renzo Piano wrote: 'The tower is designed to be a sharp and light presence in the London skyline. Architecture is about telling stories and expressing visions, and memory is part of it. Our memory is permeated by history'.

But do we really design from memory? And if so, is it only from our own memory? Maya Lin, who designed the winning entry for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial competition in Washington DC (built in 1982), described an experience of handed down memory in her book *Boundaries* (2000). Although both of her parents emigrated from China to the US, she had always found herself attracted to Japanese architecture. It was not until she visited her father's childhood home that she was able to trace her attraction to Japanese aesthetics. As it turns out, her grandfather loved Japanese architecture and had built a Japanese-inspired home. The influence was passed down to her father, a ceramist and fine arts professor, and on to her. Lin also described how a particular war memorial marked her own design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. In an architectural history class, she saw the Monument to the Missing of the Battle of the Somme in Thiepval, France, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens (1932). 'Formally' she wrote, 'the two memorials could not be more different. But for me, the experiences of these two memorials describe a similar passage to an awareness

about loss.'

Yet making a building does not involve only looking back. As we design a new work, we have to be able to imagine it and visualise it completed. This 'memory of the future' is an integral part of the design process, as it pulls one towards its realisation. Christopher Alexander, whose books include *A Pattern Language* and *The Nature of Order*, made a reference to this process of visualising the completion of a design in a small book titled *The Linz Café* (1982). The aim, he wrote, was 'to make something in which we see the whole world, in which we see ourselves... in which we feel not only simply happiness, but a vision of an ordinary person, at home with a cup of tea'. My own thesis project for the completion of the Master's of Architecture degree included the design of a café. During the design process, I was inspired by Alexander's image, as it eased the anxiety of the still-to-be-designed work, replacing it with a calming certainty: if I could imagine customers sitting at this café, at home with a cup of tea, then I would be able to design the café itself.

It is not only architects who at once imagine and remember the completion of a project. Writers often describe a similar process. The novelist AS Byatt likened writing to remembering: 'If you are writing a long novel there is a sense in which you do, precisely, remember all of it, including in some sense the part which is not written, which feels like a projected memory-image or mnemonic' (*Memory*, Patricia Fara and Karalyn Patterson editors, 1998)

Maya Lin was only 21 when she won the competition for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Her unorthodox proposal for the memorial – reflective, powerful, unheroic – was faced with mounting opposition from some conservative members of the public and the government. At the end, however, thanks in part to the support of many veterans, her scheme was realized almost unaltered. 'I remember' she recounts, 'one of the veterans asking me before the wall was built what I thought people's reactions would be to it. I realised then that these veterans were willing to defend a design they really didn't quite understand. I was too afraid to tell him what I was thinking, that I knew a returning veteran would cry' (i).

## Buildings and Memory

I grew up in an apartment building across from a 15th-century mosque (ii). It was used by the local boy scout chapter until the 1980s, when it was spruced up and turned into an art exhibition space. I discovered vernacular architecture by visiting Salonica's Upper Town, a short walk uphill from our house. The narrow streets and the old, decaying, houses, painted in ochre tones, became the subject of high school art and photography projects. Years later, I came to realise that those powerful and indelible experiences of space were also selective, eclectic and a historical. Growing up in a city of homogeneous, Greek population in the 1960s and 70s, I subconsciously transposed that homogeneity to the past, assuming that most of the older buildings belonged to a similar, but earlier era of the city. Even the powerful presence of the mosque did not make me realise that it was originally part of an Ottoman–Turkish community of buildings and people. It did not occur to me until much later that our apartment building, like all others around us, must have been built on land that was owned by Turkish families. The houses we loved to photograph were probably inhabited by Moslem Turks, who, until the early 1920s, constituted over a quarter of the city's population.

iii. (below) Akropoleos Street, Upper Town, Salonica. House recently demolished. Photograph by Mark Forte, 1982 i. (right) The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington DC. Photo by Frank Van Gool, www.FABdp.com.





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Part and parcel of my academic training in architectural history was the idea that buildings, street corners and cities communicate their history to us – inhabitants, curious visitors, or writers. Slowly, I have come to realise that buildings do not reveal their past to us any more than families reveal their own past to strangers (iii).

### **What Remains**

I am sitting at my younger son's piano recital. Here in Albuquerque, New Mexico, this is an informal affair. Twice a year, his piano teacher asks all her students (ages 5-13) to perform one or two pieces from memory in front of all the parents. I close my eyes and think of Salonica because I am working on this essay and I am trying to determine what remains in your memory when all else is gone. What part of your home or town might come to your mind? What may be the last images you will ever see? I see the waterfront and the sea of Salonica. (There is no sea for the miles here. We are in the high desert in the American southwest.) And I think of my late father and our walks by the waterfront, years ago (iv).



iv. Waterfront, Salonica. Photograph by Eleni Bastéa, 2004.

### **Issey Miyake**

In Tokyo's leafy Roppongi suburb, fashion designer Issey Miyake is bringing to life his latest project. '21\_21 Design Sight' is an innovative space created to explore 'What defines design' and challenge its implications on our future existence. The project will be part of a major reconstruction called Tokyo Midtown, a new area funded by the Mitsui Real Estate Company.

At the heart of the project is the desire to understand and promote the future of design, celebrating young design talent that are seeking to make their mark on the world and promoting those whose creations will forge a position in our memories.

Designed by architect Tadao Andros, the gallery will consist of a low-rise building, most of which is buried underground, cached away beneath the green hillside. Joining Tadao in making this project a success will be seasoned product designer Naoto Fukasawa and innovative art director Taku Satoh.

The '21\_21 Design Sight' team have designed a space aiming to remind us that design is an integral part of our modern lives, playing a role in our day to day activities, often without our awareness. The aim is to be a forum where the nature and meaning of design can be discussed and future ideas will be collated and examined then shared with the world.

'21\_21 Design Sight' will be opening in April 2007. For further information, contact Nancy Knox, US Liaison, Miyake Design Studio. [nancy@mds.isseymiyake.com](mailto:nancy@mds.isseymiyake.com) or in Japan, Masako Omori, Miyake Issey Foundation [omori@miyakeissey.org](mailto:omori@miyakeissey.org)

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series of narratives, each thread a plot line made by a new commission. These stories, like Chinese whispers, are passed on by the visitors who come and are defined by the work they have seen here. Like fables they are elaborated and distorted and it is this that has made Wapping an exceptional place, sometimes mysterious and hard to define place, in the collective minds of those who know it.

✍️ Joshua Wright



Every Christmas, between the ages of four and seven, my father took me to see Father Christmas at a Christmas party for the employees of ICI. Dad was a boilermaker and he used to point out the massive tanks that held the chemicals ICI produced. He'd point far up into the sky at the places he had personally welded. I thought he was immensely brave to go up there with his oxy acetylene torch and a mask. As I grew up and away from my father, I realised that he was an incalculably clever man from a poor family and was entirely self educated – I learnt my politics at his knee, the piano and cello because he wanted me to play and my passion for reading and education from him – all these things ultimately distanced me from him and led to our estrangement.

When people ask me why I took on the Wapping Hydraulic Power Station, I recount part of the reason. The first day I was introduced to the building, it was locked and the security man took forever to find the right key. Eventually he scraped open the rusty front door and the smell hit me – ICI, my father and me. An old disused industrial giant, and yet it was peopled still. Picture Post cut outs of girls in bikinis, white metal cups with blue rims and fungus growing out of the old tea bags – people like my father, had spent their working lives in this building and done their jobs with pride and intelligence. I knew then that I would take it on, give it a new lease of life, make it mean something to me and my generation, as an acknowledgement of everything we had been gifted.

✍️ Jules Wright

## The Memory of Buildings

### Architects and Memory

One of the first assignments we were given in architecture graduate school was to design a detached, single-family house. That was back in 1979 at Berkeley, but my experience was not uncommon. We had all read Gaston Bachelard's evocative book *The Poetics of Space*, about an idealised childhood home, where one could hide in her own room, daydream in the attic and withdraw in the cellar. I was not about to reveal to anyone that I really didn't know what it's like to live in a detached house with interior stairs, since I had grown up in a flat in Salonica. Fortunately, I had spent the previous summer living with friends in an old stone house in Philadelphia. It was this Philadelphia house that I kept trying to recreate in my first designs; its comfortable window sill, generous stair and wild, tiny garden. I realised then and there that I could not design a house without being able to conjure one up in my memory.

I recounted this story in the introduction of my recent book, *Memory and Architecture* (2004), an anthology of fourteen essays written by different authors. Despite the diverse points of view discussed by these authors, whenever I presented the book in a lecture or an interview, this particular story caught people's attention. If the audience came from architecture, there was a shared sense of recognition. Yes, they, too, have had similar experiences at school, experiences that routinely remained private. When the audience represented the educated general public, they welcomed the story, as it helped demystify architecture for them. They were able to see the connection between the memory of an existing home and the design of a new home.

With a few noted exceptions, references to memory and the creative process were largely outside the mainstream of architectural writing

until the last decades. This was partly due to the legacy of the modern movement, which advocated a clean break with the past and promoted a uniform, industrial aesthetic for both domestic and institutional architecture. Earlier architectural traditions, with their fussy and derivative decorations, came to be considered part and parcel of a failed social and political system that acted as an impediment to progress and reform.

Postmodernism in architecture formed a counterpoint to modernism. Having rediscovered the architecture of the past, architects now proceeded to use it at times wisely, at times indiscriminately, as a historical backdrop in our post-industrial cities. Although as a movement, postmodern architecture did not succeed in displacing modernism, it did allow the reintroduction of historical references in buildings and writings about buildings. Architects today are more likely to acknowledge the influence of history and memory in their work. For example, Robert Venturi wrote in the preface to *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966): "As an architect I try to be guided not by habit but by a conscious sense of the past – by precedent, thoughtfully considered." (The firm Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates won an international limited competition for the design of the Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery in London, completed in 1991.) The architects and long-time friends Charles Moore and Donlyn Lyndon recorded their meditations on memorable places in their book, *Chambers for a Memory Palace* (1994). Interwoven with the act of memory, however, is the possibly more powerful and on-going act of forgetting. In *The Art of Forgetting* (1999), Adrian Forty argued that 'had architects... acknowledged more readily that perhaps, after all, architecture is and always has been above all an art of forgetting, their experiments with 'memory' might have been more successful'.