

MICHAEL WHYTE-VENABLES

CHARTERED ARCHITECT

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28th October 2014

It has been an interesting seven months and I have had little time to apply myself to this blog. Perhaps I should make this a weekly ritual?

I have just spent an early Half-Term break in Catalonia and as far as I am concerned it never does the designer any harm whatsoever to look at how others live their lives to put a perspective on our own lives back home.

Enjoying 30° Celsius in October, one wonders if the hot climate in Spain has always been seen as the blessing we now perceive it to be. The congested medieval Gothic Quarter of Barcelona demonstrates admirably how, in a world before air-conditioning, the dark streets keep out the sun and provide a cool gloom.



The nice thing about this arrangement is that when a roller shutters are raised the space inside can act as a room which *includes* the pavement outside. Thus passers by are instead walking through the shop rather than just *past* it.



Here is a wonderful example (just LOVE those scales). In the height of summer, one presumes that the awning is deployed to provide a pool of coolness at midday.

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I think that with our super insulated lives, for a considerable period of the year, the challenge becomes staying cool, not keeping warm. Although winters are, in this neck of the woods anyway, still wintery, they last only for a few months, and in my opinion the bulk of the year is preoccupied with comfort ventilation/cooling, for the health of the building and it's occupants.

In my ideal world the systems which achieve these aims of warmth, "coolth" and comfortable ventilation should wherever possible be passive.

We also visited the Picasso Museum, and I was reminded of the importance of light, and of the usefulness of sketches.



15th February 2014

I have been asked to work on some very interesting projects ranging from a major extension to a substantial turn-of-the-century house to a modest but critically important extension to a Listed building in Cambridgeshire. Big or small the change of technology in the last twenty-five years mean that updating even part of one's home can make all the difference to how we live our lives.

I have also been reflecting on how the glamour attached to celebrity chefs and their exposure in the media drive us to equip our kitchens very much as they would be in professional kitchens. Finishes may be cool but monster burners and immense vistas do not always meet with the actual needs of the user, they use up space, give one more to clean but as a bonus give the user more exercise!

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The terrible weather we continue to endure drives home the importance of improving the energy efficiency of our homes as does the size of the bills which appear on our door-mats.

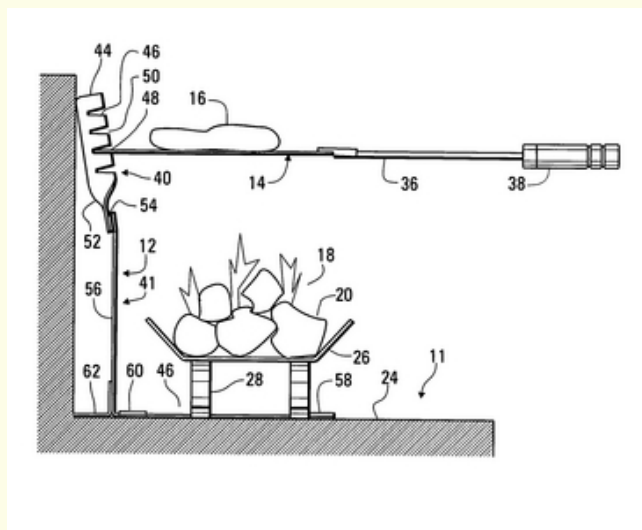
17th September 2013

It's been quite some time since I have contributed to this blog. This is on account of having been busier than ever. This leaves no time for musings or ponderings as my every thought is committed to juggling.

Watching my family and the way in which they now disport themselves in this i-World, I wonder if perhaps we should look again at how we use rooms. In the distant past, the main (and only) fixture in a house was the hearth/chimney. It was big and expensive, compared to everything else, but it enabled Survival. Boiling stewing grilling heating and hot water were all made possible by this wondrous device and in comparison, water supply, and waste water disposal (I think you know what I mean!!) were sporadic.

Today, with the exception of a few hardy souls, the opposite is the case. Piped water supplies, gas boilers, waste and foul water disposal systems mean that that part of our lives is anchored down, fixed to piped networks, and the Chimney is no more! Well very nearly. A few survive, but by no means does Hearth retain the status it once enjoyed as the twin of Home.

Just for fun, and especially in winter, it could be reassuring to cook on an open fire, maybe in the lounge, and now that the role of the fireplace has become more psychological than once was the case, perhaps we could design you a fireplace better suited to occasional cooking than those recommended by the British Standard.



9th January 2013

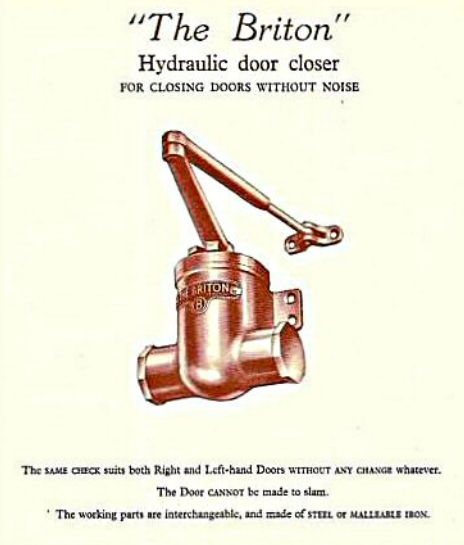
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Reclining in the bath (which is situated on the first floor directly above the front door) early this morning, I was violently reminded, as my son left the house three times, of the fact that, perhaps, even in our homes, an old fashioned hydraulic door closer has its place.



Obviously this is a device which persists in a more modern style but there is undoubtedly something majestic in this ancient example (and other door closers are available).

29th December 2012

So here we are! Not long now before the New Year.

Personally I feel sure that we all look forward to better conditions, and I want my new year do to bring greater opportunities to provide quality solutions for a wide range of people. It is easy to churn out dismal products. The challenge comes in producing something that is truly inspired!

24th July 2012

Changing your house can be easy, BUT when things go wrong, it can be expensive.

If you live in an unusual or significant house, and have exacting standards, then it is well worth taking precautions against things going wrong. The relatively modest sum expended on involving an Architect in your project can save you far more than you might spend had you not.

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27th May 2012

I am these days utterly convinced of the utility and sound sense of up-to-date wood burning on an open fire. It takes us back to the origins of society. It reassures and offers reliability and flexibility in a way that many of our modern machines cannot. Whilst we are no longer in a position to rely entirely on the open fire in the way we used to, so very recently, it remains an option in those house which support the lighting of fires. I can make fireplaces now which are efficient for the burning of wood, offering carbon neutral performance but also with elegance, efficiency and fascination. There was never a better time to rediscover the wood fire.

Many people are misled by events into believing in the inefficiency of an open fire, pinning all their hopes on cast iron stoves, but with a carefully designed and proportionate open fire, a wood fire will change all that. If you suffer a power cut in the depths of winter, no problem!

22nd May 2012

In the manner of all blogs this seeks to offer a picture into the way my mind works and the things you will find there were you to look.

In common with the rest of humanity, I am convinced that we have not quite got everything right just yet, but with a bit of care, considerable improvement in our circumstances is achievable.

In order to progress this initial weblog of mine, I am guessing that a short manifesto of main points will help.

One. What business has any individual to tell me how to feel? This applies to us all. If we like bright gloss paint that is good. If we are nervous of brash expressions and seek anonymity and modesty that must but up to us. Just so long as it is legal.

Two. We are caretakers, and need to conserve our resources rather than simply access more. Access more by all means, but be careful with what you have so as not to waste anything you may find.

Three. Keep it to yourself. Leave the religious alone to be religious (who knows, they may be right?) but the religious ought to leave the irreligious alone to be irreligious (who knows, they may be right?). Just so long as it is legal.

Four. I think just possibly, we should waste less, but if we do waste things we should do so carefully.

Five. In my humble opinion the world we make as opposed to the one we live in (which is lovely, by the way), is just not sufficiently decorative. Philosophy is grand for those who have the brilliance to understand it, but decoration is exciting and ephemeral. If you don't like it, don't worry it will soon be gone and then there will be more. Our noble ancestors thrived on it. Why should not we?

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