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JANUARY 2012

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WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

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**W* DESIGN
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HEAD START

How to get ahead in architecture? It's one lengthy education. Big studios act as talent incubators, gathering up graduates, showing them the ropes and, occasionally, inspiring them to great things and a studio of their own. Five young firms of note, architects who've turned formative experiences into promising studios, reveal how they got started

PHOTOGRAPHY: DANIEL STIER WRITERS: JONATHAN BELL, ELLIE STATHAKI

TURN TO VIEW THE ARCHITECTS' PROFILES ►

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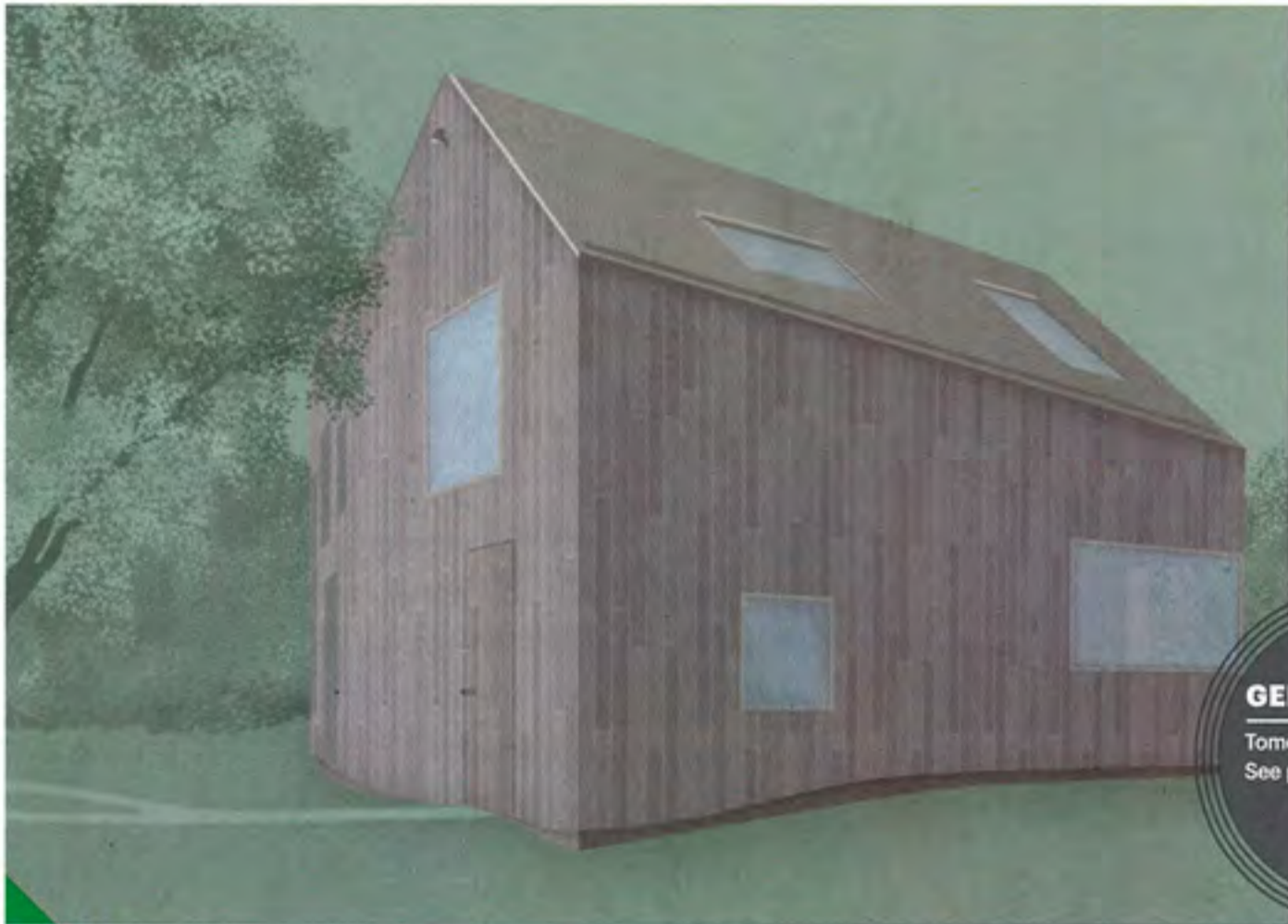
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ACME

THE BIO FRIEZE
Shot at the V&A-EIBA
Architecture Gallery, the
UK's only permanent
gallery for architecture.
www.vam.ac.uk/architecture



MILL POWER
Left, the award-winning Hunsett Mill in Norfolk characterises ACME's expressive modernism and ability to expand and enhance the context of each project

Below, one of Feix & Merlin's first projects was Eyes Wide shut, the winning entry of a competition to design a beach hut for the 21st century in Lincolnshire

Bottom, 10 Design's plan for the Dalian public library, in north-east China, resembles a three-dimensional calligraphy brush stroke, and looks set to win a competition

NEXT GENERATION

Tomorrow's talent today.
 See page 081 for our
[Graduate Directory 2011](#)

▲ ACME
London

Founded in 2007 by Friedrich Ludewig, a former director at the now-defunct Foreign Office Architects (who was later joined by former colleague Stefano Dal Piva), this multinational office has enjoyed an explosive growth and now has a 30-strong team. 'Other people's offices are great places for testing ideas as well as ways to collaborate,' says Ludewig, explaining that most of his team have eclectic portfolios and citing Toyo Ito, SANAA and OMA 'for the quantity and quality of their ex-employees'. ACME's current works, in its trademark expressive modernism, are scattered from Colombia and Qatar to Lebanon and the UK. The firm has also chronicled its first three years in a series of elegant self-published monographs. www.acme.ac

▶ FEIX & MERLIN
London

Julia Feix and Tarek Merlin met while working for Will Alsop and went on to form Feix & Merlin in 2006. 'What we learned most out of working with Will is to retain a sense of humour in our work,' they say. While at Alsop Architects, the pair collaborated on open competitions (one of which, the reimagining of a beach hut, they won) and soon asked to work part time, to leave more scope to pursue their own path. 'If it wasn't for Will's gracious support, we wouldn't have been able to take on some of our projects that year.' Aiming to grow Feix & Merlin to about 15-20 employees, the architects have several ongoing projects, from residential conversions in London to landscaping concepts and commercial interiors. www.feixandmerlin.com



◀ 10 DESIGN
Hong Kong, Shanghai, Edinburgh, Denver

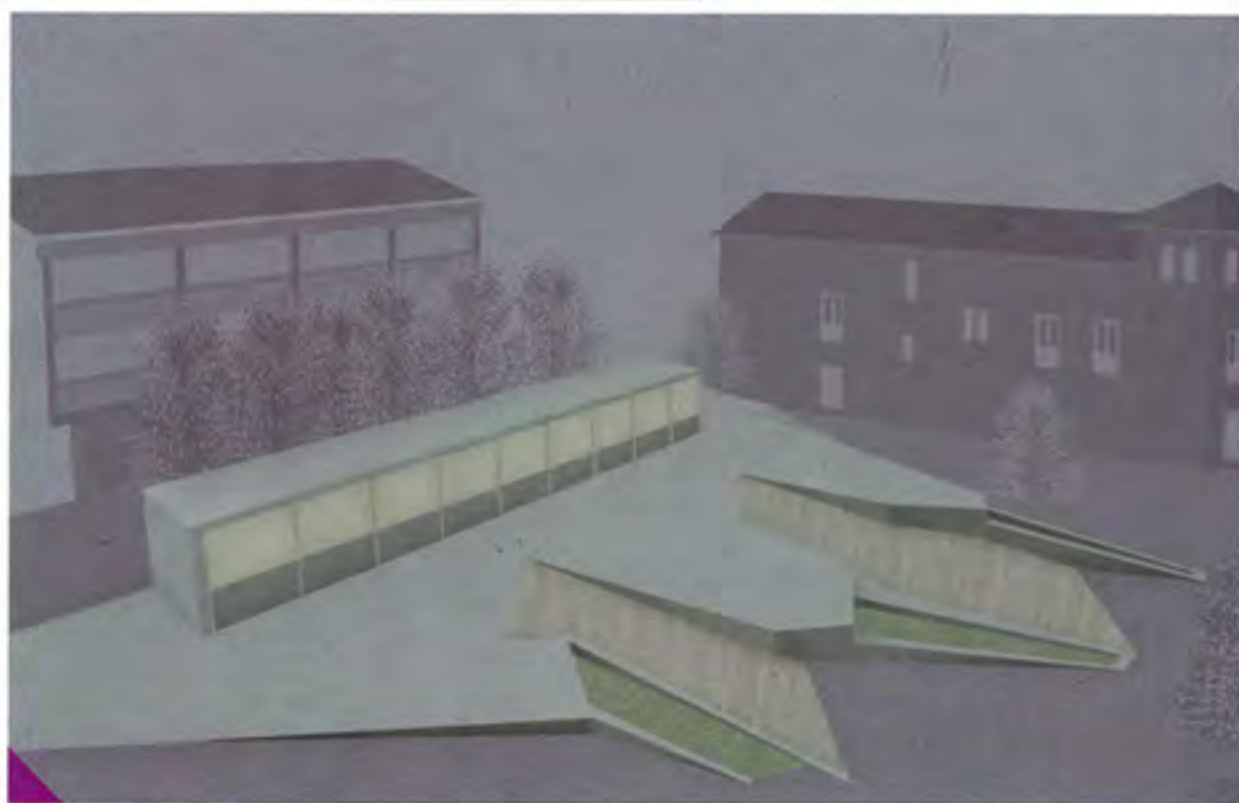
'We all started work at RMJM in China around the same time, about ten years ago,' says 10 Design partner Gordon Affleck of himself and his nine co-partners. With a main office in Hong Kong and three more around the globe, the firm currently employs 100 people – making it the right size, the partners feel, to take on bigger projects but still control the work personally. Just a year old, 10 Design has won several competitions in the last few months. Its current projects range from urban planning and large, mixed-use projects to smaller villas, while research is also a key part of the firm's work. www.10design.co



For more on each practice and a gallery of their work, see Wallpaper.com

▲ KONISHI GAFFNEY Edinburgh

Scottish architect Kieran Gaffney and Japanese designer Makiko Konishi first met at Studio Heatherwick about ten years ago. 'I spent six years at Thomas Heatherwick's studio, starting as the first employee and helping to develop the practice out of a live-work space in Camden,' Gaffney recalls. 'Makiko came to interview Tom for her thesis project (on humour in design) and we hit it off straight away.' Konishi soon joined the studio and before long the couple were married. In 2004 they left London and Studio Heatherwick to move to Japan and later set up their own business, Konishi Gaffney, in Edinburgh in 2007. The pair would like to keep their studio relatively small – they are currently a three-person team – as they find the benefits of a compact office central to their development. 'We like the flexibility that low overheads give the practice. Spotting opportunities and being open to leading clients in an entrepreneurial way is integral to being successful. Being small means we offer a personal, focused and bespoke service to clients with very close supervision and control,' they say. 'The main challenge is getting the opportunity to work on larger projects.' Already a multi-award winning firm, the practice is currently working on a number of commissions in the UK, including an innovative new house in Northern Ireland, as well as exploring their links with Japan. 'We are considering what role, if any, we should have in Miyagi – our home in Japan, and where many friends and family still live – which was extensively damaged in the March 2011 tsunami.' www.konishigaffney.com



DRAWN TO WIN

Top, Konishi Gaffney's Japanese House is a modest, elegant design for a corner site in Edinburgh's Portobello
Above, ESC-Studio was set up after the trio won a competition with this public square design for Mula, Spain
Illustrator: Andrew Clark

▲ ESC-STUDIO London, Seville, Montreal

Enrique Ramos, Silvia Polito and Ciriaco Castro all worked at Foster + Partners at the end of the last decade (Castro also collaborated with Amanda Levete and Polito with Wilkinson Eyre), which gives them all unrivalled experience of major masterplanning and building projects around the world. The trio, who all studied in Spain, broke away from the Riverside One mothership in 2009, and set up on their own as ESC-Studio following a competition win for a public space in Mula, Spain. Now with bases in London and Seville, as well as an outpost in Montreal, they say that they have

'always considered the experience of working for a large company as a natural step towards developing our own architecture'. Polito explains: 'When you work for a big company, there is always a moment when you have to decide if you want to become part of that system, or use what you have learnt to set up your own practice.' Currently working on a new arts centre in Ireland, as well as preliminary work on projects in Europe and Canada, the studio is also writing a monograph and researching the potential crossover between robotics and architecture. www.esc-studio.com