



A Londra, ospiti in casa di Richard Rogers

Visita alla Wimbledon House, progettata da Richard e Su Rogers per i genitori nel 1968, ora restaurata e destinata a residenza per la Rogers Fellowship della Harvard Graduate School of Design

LONDRA. Che cosa significa per un architetto la possibilità di fare ricerca in una città come Londra, ospite di una delle prime opere progettate da Richard Rogers? I **sei ricercatori** che per primi stanno vivendo l'esperienza alla Wimbledon House, sono stati **selezionati tra circa 200 candidati** e arrivano nella capitale britannica da **Norvegia, Germania, Olanda, America e Messico**.

La residenza, progettata da Richard e Su Rogers per i suoi genitori nel 1968 e realizzata nel 1970, è sempre stata una casa di famiglia. Qui Dada e William Nino Rogers diedero la possibilità al giovane architetto di **sperimentare per la prima volta molte soluzioni architettoniche che si sono poi rivelate fondamentali lungo l'intera sua carriera**. Ispirata dai ricordi dell'infanzia italiana di Richard, la configurazione del volume principale ruota intorno all'iconica cucina dove Dada, la madre, passava la maggior parte del tempo circondata dalla

famiglia e dagli amici, mentre il resto degli ambienti potevano essere adibiti ad usi diversi grazie alle enormi pareti scorrevoli, una delle prime sperimentazioni dello spazio generico.

Dopo la morte dei genitori vi abitò Ab, il figlio di Richard, con la sua famiglia fino al 2013, quando, appena entrata nel registro dei beni protetti come Grade 2*, fu messa in vendita per 3,2 milioni di sterline su [Modern House](#). Una mossa alquanto inaspettata da parte di Rogers. Rimase fortunatamente invenduta e la decisione di donarla all'Università di Harvard nel 2015, per ospitarne la Rogers Fellowship, ha permesso dopo due anni di restauri di vederla tornare a una nuova vita.

La formula di fellowship con programma di residenza ha rilevanti predecessori. Già nel 1932 **Frank Lloyd Wright** fondò la **Taliesin Fellowship** come un modello di ricerca architettonica alternativo alla tradizionale offerta accademica, attivo ancora oggi in Arizona. Numerosi sono gli esempi in America tra cui la **Casa sulla cascata**, sempre di Wright; o il **Mak Center a Los Angeles**, che dal 1995 a oggi ha ospitato più di 44 ricercatori negli appartamenti Mackey di **Rudolf Schindler**; o ancora, di recente istituzione, la **Indy Island a Indianapolis dell'artista Andrea Zittel**. Mentre in **Italia**, tra le più rinomate fellowship vi è quella istituita dall'**American Academy a Roma**.

La Wimbledon House è uno dei pochi esempi in Europa e l'unico di tale rilievo nella capitale britannica. La collaborazione di Rogers con l'Harvard Graduate School of Design ha dato vita a un **progetto gestito interamente nello spirito originario dell'opera**, secondo le dichiarazioni dell'assistant dean della GSD, **Ken Stewart** al nostro Giornale: *"Uguualmente importante al restauro dell'edificio è stata la conservazione del suo spirito originario, nel suo uso e nella selezione di ricercatori e architetti che, come Richard prima di loro, fossero interessati ad alcuni dei temi più complicati che la città sta affrontando di questi tempi"*. Anche lo studio **Gumuchdjian Architects**, che ha seguito il **restauro**, ha

interiorizzato la complessità e l'importanza di questo delicato passaggio nella riuscita dell'intera operazione, approcciandosi all'incarico con particolare consapevolezza.

Infine, incontrando **Jose Castrillo e Saidee Springall**, i **residenti estivi del programma**, abbiamo avuto il piacere di passare una serata di luglio a "Parkside 22" discutendo di architettura e della città di Londra; e di come la Wimbledon House possa diventare, secondo le parole di Castrillo, *"un'infrastruttura al servizio della cultura, un dispositivo per innescare dibattiti su temi importanti per la città"*. Un destino radicalmente diverso se invece l'acquisto fosse avvenuto per mano di uno dei feticisti di Modern House, con la conseguenza di una fruizione completamente privata. Nella biografia di un edificio, a volte è questione di fortuna: un'idea illuminata, solide istituzioni che la supportino e l'energia delle generazioni future.

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TRE DOMANDE A:



Richard Rogers

When and why did you first think about donating your parents house to a fellowship?

Ab and his family who had occupied the house for many years were moving on.

Was it easy to take this decision despite the personal attachment to the building?

Yes it was, knowing it was going to be used by Harvard, one of the world's great universities.

In the current use and configuration, what reflects the original spirit of the project the

most?

The intention of the renovation was to bring it back to its original design and therefore it does reflect the spirit of my parents' house.



Ken Stewart (assistant dean at the Harvard Graduate School of Design)

Did you take inspiration from any other fellowship residency programs?

We took inspiration less from other institutions and more from Richard Rogers and the project of the house itself, which was very much an experiment toward a new kind of architectural practice. We felt that equally important to restoring the house was keeping the spirit of its origins alive in its use by researchers and practitioners who, like Richard before them, are engaging some of the most complicated issues cities are facing today.

When will the application date for the next fellowship be announced, and who can apply?

The next round of applications will open this fall, and anyone interested in applying should periodically check the fellowship's website for details. The fellowship is open to anyone whose work is focused on some aspect of the built environment.

How will the house be managed?

The GSD maintains a small staff in London to manage the house. Future programming will be organized by the School, but we are actively seeking to do so in collaboration with the incredible network of institutions in London centred around architecture, design, and the broader arts and sciences.

Have you planned a program of events, lectures, and public open days for the coming season?

We are in the process of planning a program for the fall that will be focused on the topic of food and the city, with exact details to come.



Philip Gumuchdjian (founder of Gumuchdjian Architects)

What were the main principles you used to guide the restoration project?

I describe our restoration as a 'gentle re-invention' of the original project. The building is Grade 2 along with the top 5 per cent of protected buildings in England. The building had morphed over the five decades of its use. Our proposition was to return the house to its condition in the 1980s, when I had first visited the house and when it was occupied by Rogers' parents. My Proustian recollection was a place of light and greenery, of spaces that flowed from interior to exterior. I had never experienced anything like it. Most importantly, the building was a prototype for future industrialised housing and there is a great deal of difference between a prototype and the first product off the assembly line. The former is experimental, flawed, the result of trial and error, the latter is forensically developed and aims for perfection. In restoring the building, we wanted to safeguard that 'prototypical' quality of the building, whilst improving its performance and without losing its essential patina. The building was 50 years old, and it was crucial for me to protect the accumulated feeling of the 'old' building as occupied by Rogers' parents and family, and that was characterised by the presence of 1930s furniture by Ernesto Rogers, Charles & Ray Eames, Alvar Alto and Charlotte Perriand. With this as a background to our understanding, the envelope itself was of less importance. We set ourselves the challenge of conserving the textures and proportions of the materials used. We nonetheless replaced 75 per cent of the external envelope, including most of its cladding elements, but retained its almost 'simplistic' detailing, a characteristic of the overall design that makes such a strong and clear architectural statement.*

What influence did the original concept of 'spatial flexibility' have on the architectural experience of the restoration project?

The main house building was conceived in 1968 as an entirely open space with sliding partitions that could be deployed to leave only a single bathroom enclosed. I know of few

examples of residential buildings adopting such a radical approach until at least the 1990s. Restoring this aspect of the original design was of great importance because by doing so we were able to re-establish a key element of the design that gives it its historic importance both for Rogers' own work and – in my mind – for architecture more broadly. Rogers was exploring the idea of freeing buildings from their traditional architectural assumptions. That meant a building as a long-life armature containing flexible, adaptable interior space. He went to develop the theme in both the Pompidou Centre and Lloyds of London. At 22 Parkside the 'flexible' space, although not at all traditionally composed, creates a powerful architectural experience.

What was the most difficult decision you made during the restoration project?

The Rogers design is a total composition of buildings and garden. His use of fully-glazed façades meant that the buildings literally de-materialise and the spaces of the gardens flowed through the enclosures. The single hardest – or riskiest – decision was to strip the garden out completely and start afresh. Fortunately the landscape architect, Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, has pulled off a wonderful new design that will only improve with age. In particular we developed a new frontage onto the street with a better expressed entrance. From there, the sequence of arrival into the central courtyard is carefully resolved and calibrated so that the visitor arrives into the position of maximum transparency where the gardens flow through the buildings. The new design has emphasised the original sense that the spaces flow into an endless garden.

What has changed at 22 Parkside to accommodate the new use of the house by Harvard University, and what has remained in it's original configuration despite the new use?

In Tancredi says that "for things to stay the same everything must change" and nowhere more so than at 22 Parkside. Two years of work has re-created the original feel of the building in a composition that is subtly different in almost every aspect save that it is conceptually right on track. We have carefully added Harvard's new requirements in a way that enhances the original idea/composition rather than distracts from it. I think the restoration has proved the validity of Rogers' visionary 1968 approach and, hopefully,

has intensified the overall experience.

About Author



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