

RIBA best building of the year: 61 Oxford Street among several London buildings in running for this year's Stirling Prize

Revealed today, the RIBA national award winners list is dominated by social housing, schools, hospitals, and libraries. The coveted RIBA Stirling Prize for the UK's best building of the year will be drawn from these 46 award-winning buildings...

MATILDA BATTERSBY | Thursday 23 June 2016



A building featuring a striking, fluted glass façade over Oxford Street has been named as one of Britain's best new buildings by the Royal Institute of British Architects.

The 4,700 sq m property - home to fashion brand Zara's flagship store – is at the junction of Soho Street and Oxford Street in an area undergoing significant regeneration thanks to Crossrail.

Architects Allford Hall Monaghan Morris - which won the coveted Riba Stirling Prize last year - picked up another Riba national award for 61 Oxford Street, which judges said “breathed new life into a commercial building and raised the bar for Oxford Street”.

They said the undulating glass skin “reflects all the great traditions of department stores”, while stylishly wrapping up its multiple usages: retail on the ground floor, offices in the middle, and luxury apartments overlooking the city.



Greenwich Housing is a 60-dwelling block of council houses for the elderly and disabled (Edmund Sumner)

'Stirling' effort from housing sector

Some 46 Riba national award prizes were handed out this year, largely dominated by social housing and public services, and the Stirling Prize shortlist will be announced on July 14.

In London, the architects behind 60 cost-effective single-storey council homes for elderly and disabled people were recognised by the judges for providing “a new model for public housing”.

Greenwich Housing, by Bell Phillips Architects, was built on the site of former garages and was described by judges as “clean, simple and elegant”. The homes were designed on a “fabric first” principle, making heating costs very low – a particular concern when one in 10 households in England is in fuel poverty.

The bungalows, which span just 90sq m, have distinctive zinc-clad roofs rising above the brickwork with a large recessed window above the front door which provides “innovative, generous and light-filled homes” for residents, said the judges.



The Avenue in Essex is a new kind of housing estate (Tim Crocker)

“I am pleased to see a strong selection of new housing developments amongst our winners, including new models for public housing and semi-rural development,” said Riba president Jane Duncan.

“We urgently need new homes, but too often we see projects which have cut corners in quality which fails the people these new homes are meant to serve. I hope these achievements in housing inspire other developers.

The Avenue, by architects Pollard Thomas Edwards, a development of 76 new homes in Saffron Walden, Essex, “that challenges the blight of uninspiring new housing estates”, was also among the winners.

New schools of thought

Educational establishments also proliferated: a shimmering stainless steel library at Oxford’s The Investcorp Building by the late architect Zaha Hadid’s firm; and Walters & Cohen Architects’ bold and colourful reworking of a Victorian inner-city secondary, the Regent High School.



The late Zaha Hadid's firm also won with the sweeping steel curved Investcorp Building library in Oxford (Luke Hayes)

Allford Hall Monaghan Morris won another accolade for the transformation of a failing secondary and special needs school in Camberwell, ARK All Saints Academy and Highshore School, turning it into an urban block with “internal voids, open spaces, wide corridors creating an overall sense of connection, transparency and generosity”. Judges called it “an important part of raising ambition, expectations and standards in a challenging area”.



Allford Hall Monaghan Morris won two Riba awards, for 61 Oxford Street and ARK All Saints Academy (pictured) (Timothy Soar)

Another shining example of good design meeting a public service is Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool, by BDP architects, which was among the most striking winners with

its curved grass roof and three-finger plan form. The majority of wards offer a view of the park and there are balcony "playdecks" connecting children with the outdoors.



The Alder Hay Children's Hospital in Liverpool has been designed to bring the outside world in for children, overlooking a park and with 'play balconies' on each ward (David Barbour)

Music to theatre-lovers' ears

It wasn't all new builds, with a win for Tim Ronalds Architects, which were behind the restoration of the Wilton Music Hall in the City, believed to be the most important surviving venue of its kind in the country.



Wilton's Music Hall is believed to be one of the oldest examples of its kind. (Helene Binet)

The famously dilapidated theatre, near Wapping, appears much as it was as the architects followed a principle of putting “an enormous amount of care and ingenuity into apparently doing nothing” in order to preserve its character. It took nine years to raise the funds to restore the venue and it remained open to the public as a working theatre throughout building work.