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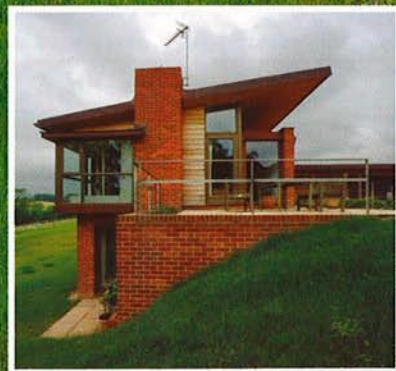
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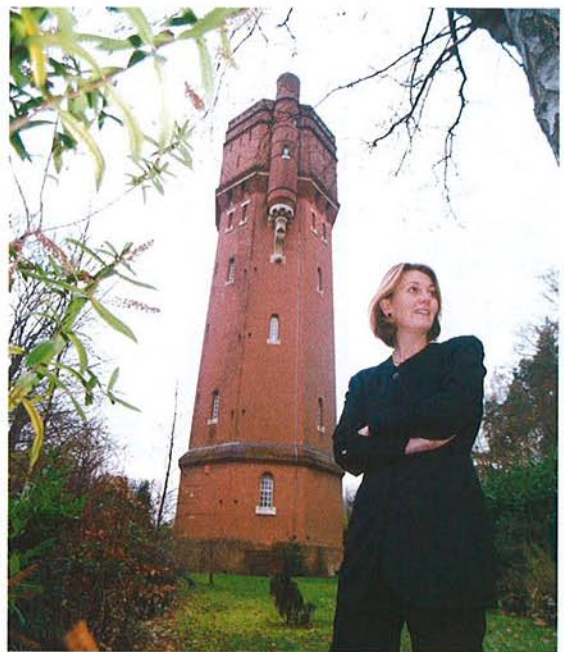
ARCHITECT ELSPETH BEARD'S projects are featured in magazines and TV programmes worldwide and have won numerous awards, starting with the ones she received for her first solo project, the Munstead Water Tower, which is currently her home.

Elspeth Beard Architects is based in a converted stable in the centre of Godalming in Surrey, and currently consists of Elspeth and a small team of architects and support staff. The practice works on sites and buildings of all sizes, but whatever their size Elspeth likes them to be out of the ordinary.

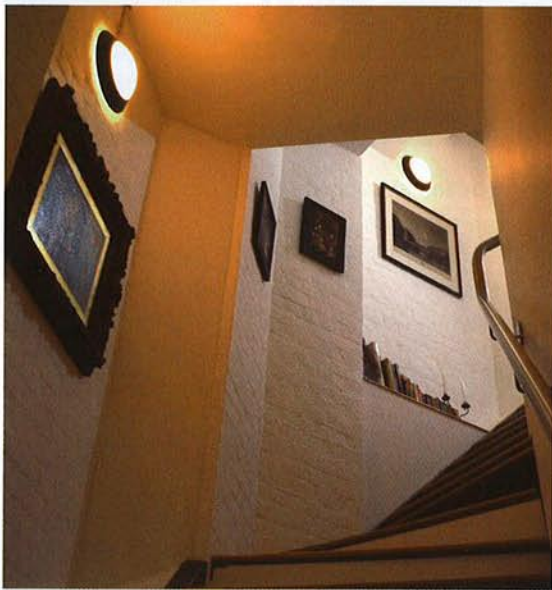
Bitten by the biker bug at the age of sixteen, when a friend taught her to ride on Salisbury Plain, she was the first British woman to circumnavigate the world solo by motorcycle and has been round it several times since. She spent two years riding 40,000 miles across thirty countries and currently organises major motorcycle group expeditions.



Elspeth on her world record breaking ride at 22.



Picture: Paul Blezard



Picture: Frederike Heim

BOLD AND ADVENTUROUS



WHAT MEMORIES DO YOU HAVE OF YOUR CHILDHOOD HOMES?

I grew up in a large Victorian house in Finchley, North London, and all I can remember is that it had quite flowery decorative wallpaper and what seemed at the time like a huge garden. My father was a doctor and had a practice in Marylebone, so we moved to a five storey Georgian house in Wimpole Street with high ceilings and floor to ceiling windows. After that I bought my water tower, so I've only ever had three permanent homes throughout my life.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO BECOME AN ARCHITECT?

Actually, I never really knew whether I wanted to be an architect. When I left school I didn't have any idea what I wanted to do, and I went to Chelsea Art College and found that I was quite interested in sculpture and three dimensional

design. Someone suggested that I go on to study architecture, so I did my first three years – which I have to say I didn't really enjoy because I didn't fully understand what I was trying to achieve. After that I realised that I didn't want to carry on with my studies, so I decided to go off around the world on my motorbike instead.

WHAT IMPACT DID YOUR TRAVELS HAVE ON YOUR LIFE?

Completing the trip gave me a can-do attitude, and I was a completely different person when I came back. I left when I was 22 and returned three years later having grown up on the road. When I set out to travel solo around the world I didn't realise that I'd be breaking any records – that wasn't the point. The whole thing was so difficult and I crashed three times, somersaulting the bike in Australia where I spent two weeks in hospital. Then later it caught fire.

"I LIKE BLENDING THE STRUCTURES OF OLD BUILDINGS WITH MODERN INTERIORS."



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MUNSTEAD WATER TOWER

MUNSTEAD WATER TOWER stands on top of a hill four miles south west of Guildford. Brick-built and 130 feet high, it was erected in 1898 to supply water to the surrounding houses in Munstead and neighbouring villages. The water tower had been out of use for nearly twenty years by the time that it was bought at auction by Elspeth Beard in 1989, when the only residents were a large colony of squatting birds whose droppings were several feet deep in the base of the tower. It consisted of six levels with quarter landings and a timber stair,

which was bolted to the inside of the external walls on three sides. The turret on the north-west side contains a Victorian spiral staircase which provided access around the tank and onto the roof.

The refurbished and re-designed tower now consists of six floors with a reception room on the ground floor, and one bedroom on each of the first, second and third floors. One large room occupies each floor, with suspended hanging bathrooms in the bedroom levels and a gallery within the living room. Internally, new steel stairs and floors were constructed using the original main floor levels.

Allowing this beautiful old water tower to be converted into a residence has assured its future and provided an appropriate alternative use, as well as winning Elspeth five architectural awards.

Pictures: Frederike Heim



LEADINGLIGHT

I lived in a garage in Sydney and did nine month's work experience with an architect there to earn enough money to get back home. It was the first time that I went to a building site and actually saw my plans being built, and I realised why every line I drew was so important. When I returned to the UK I reluctantly went back to college to finish my diploma, and began working for a practice which specialised in converting listed buildings. It took me two or three years to complete my final exams – I was definitely a very reluctant architect!

DESCRIBE YOUR CURRENT HOME

Munstead Water Tower is a 130 foot high listed Victorian building which had been derelict for decades when I took the gamble of buying it at auction without planning permission or listed building consent. I'd only ever rented before I owned the tower, and I moved in with my son when it was barely habitable. I kept the original six floors and added mezzanines and gallery areas – positioning the living room at the top to appreciate views through the 27 windows. There are 142 stairs in the building, and the whole task of making the structure watertight and fitting it out with plumbing and electrics was a mammoth undertaking.

It was also my first job as project architect, and there was so much space that I had complete freedom to do virtually what I wanted. To keep costs down I tackled a lot of the work myself, but after six years spent juggling a full time job and a home life with the renovation I was having serious second thoughts because it had ruled my life throughout my thirties.

WOULD YOU EVER LEAVE THE TOWER?

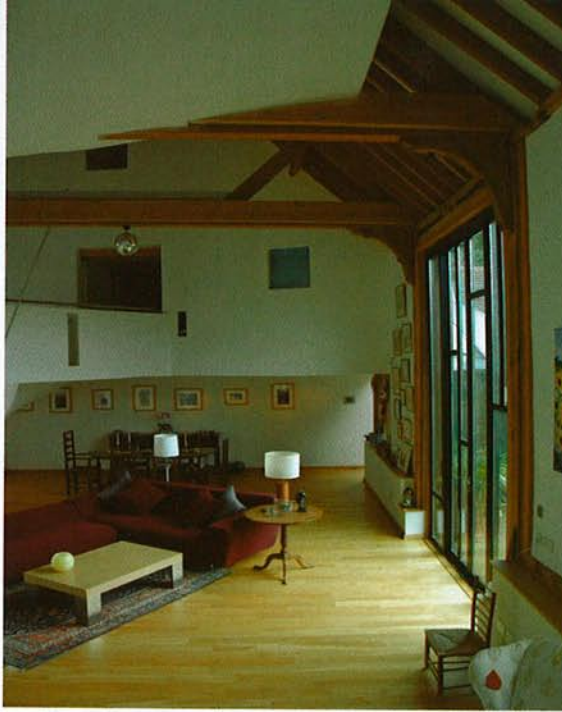
It's been a real love/hate relationship, but the more I live there the more I grow to appreciate it. I suppose every architect's dream is to build their own house from scratch, and I've bought some land in Wales and am considering the idea of designing a single-storey earth sheltered eco-house for when I'm too old to manage all the stairs in the tower. I certainly wouldn't be inclined to do the physical building work again, though.

WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR INSPIRATION?

I like strong, powerful, industrial buildings, and my travels abroad have probably influenced me, but I don't admire one particular architect. In fact, as I'm dyslexic and find reading a chore, I'm not particularly knowledgeable on that subject at all. I tend to live in a bubble when it comes to my contemporaries.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

I like blending the structures of old buildings with modern interiors, and converting buildings in a traditional way doesn't interest me at all. If clients asked for twiddly oak balustrades in a barn conversion then they've come to the wrong architect. I love a challenge, and once I've done something I rarely enjoy a repeat performance. If a project has an obvious solution then I'm not interested – I prefer quirky buildings which really tax the mind and require some lateral thinking, and I also really enjoy designing one-off new builds as well.



Pictures: Philip Traill



THE THRESHING BARN

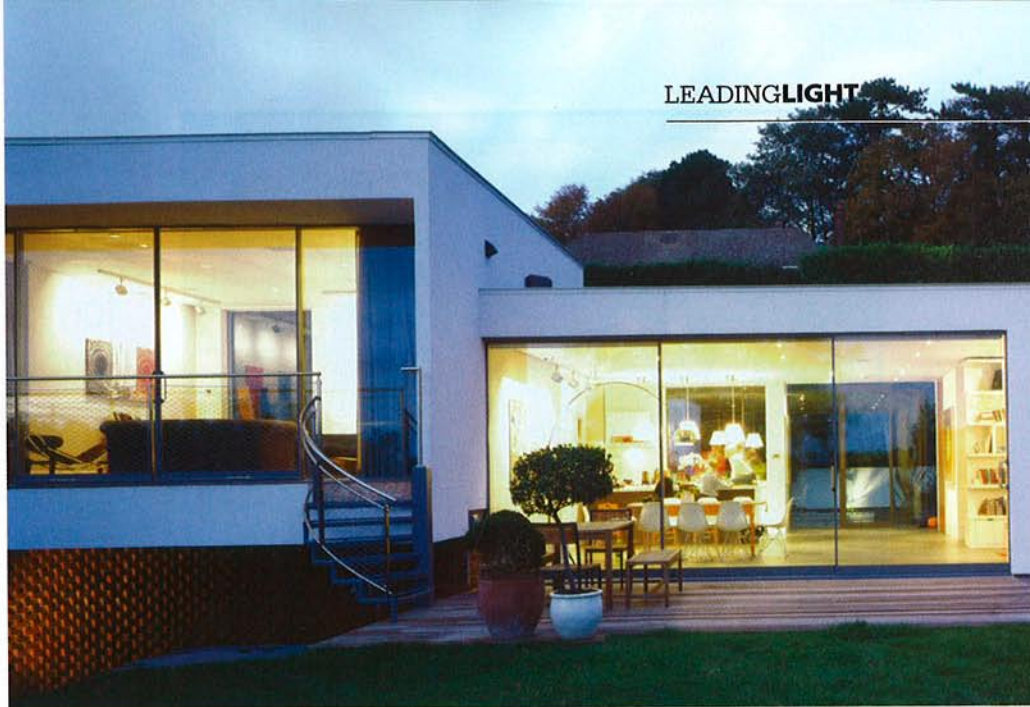
The barn is a Grade II listed building in Surrey which was originally used as a threshing barn within a farm development. Constructed mainly of softwood over machine-cut oak wall frames and a brick base, the building is divided into a total of six bays, including a former root store and a hayloft.

From the outset the clients, Philip and Angela, realised this was going to be a complicated project since the barn was a listed building on greenbelt land in an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB). The clients also had to make a case for the domestic use of the building as opposed to light commercial – a primary consideration for restoration of agricultural buildings.

Philip and Angela wanted an open, contemporary living space which would maintain the agricultural feel of the building and mean that the large central section of the barn could be retained. There is a deliberate contrast between the historic timber structure and the new curved living 'pods' which are suspended either side of the huge barn space and linked by a seemingly floating walkway.

CHALK HILL

This new building is a series of single storey white boxes, connected and punctuated with expanses of glass which allow light to flood through the house. It sits low, and literally dissolves into its magnificent hillside setting, enjoying panoramic views over the Wey valley and Guildford. The site was previously a tennis court and an orchard belonging to the adjacent property, and architect Douglas Bundy was commissioned to design the original dwelling, which was completed in 1962. This comprised a pavilion type timber clad room perched over a double garage, with a rectangular, pitched roof bungalow containing the rest of the accommodation. When the current owners purchased the property it was in a dilapidated state and too small for their needs. There were also height restrictions resulting from covenants imposed by the adjoining house behind the existing dwelling. As well as requiring additional bedrooms the client wanted to achieve flexible and very open-plan living spaces, designed to be multi-functional and adaptable. The new dwelling retains the original elevated living room 'box', set at a higher level to the rest of the house, with the additional accommodation provided in the new bedroom wing. A new study pod, partly buried into the hillside, completes the courtyard enclosure, and a glass hinge forms the transition between the living spaces and the bedroom wing.



Pictures: Ioana Marinescu



WISHANGER LODGE

Barbara and Karen bought Wishanger in 2003, when it was little more than a cluster of semi-derelict buildings that had served as stables to the recently divided Wishanger Estate. The mother and daughter team had almost given up hope of finding a property in the south of England within their price range which could accommodate themselves, Karen's three daughters and their horses.

The original property was in the right location, complete with stables and enough land, but the accommodation was basic to say the least. The L-shaped building was essentially a two storey wooden shed with a corrugated tin roof, containing accommodation for a groom, with stables and tack/storage rooms attached to either side. Barbara and Karen soon realised that what they needed was a completely new building and contacted Timberpeg, an American timber frame company – asking Elspeth Beard to help them design their home. They wanted an open plan design including four bedrooms, with an exposed timber frame. The design began as a grid-like drawing of the posts and beams, into which Elspeth worked the more fluid and uniquely laid-out living accommodation.

Wishanger Lodge was built in just 14 weeks from start to finish. The house is now a timber-clad four-bedroom dwelling with a wonderful sense of space and light, flanked by the stables that prompted the project in the first place. The clients have also added a large decked area from which to view the Surrey countryside.

