

SCORCHING

WAYPOINT

INTERVIEWS ANNIKA LUNDKVIST  
JAN KATTEIN

FEATURE TREES ARE CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE  
LESS IS NOW MORE  
THE BOWERBIRD  
THE KING OF ZONING

TACTICAL DEMOCRACY LISTENING SPECTRUM

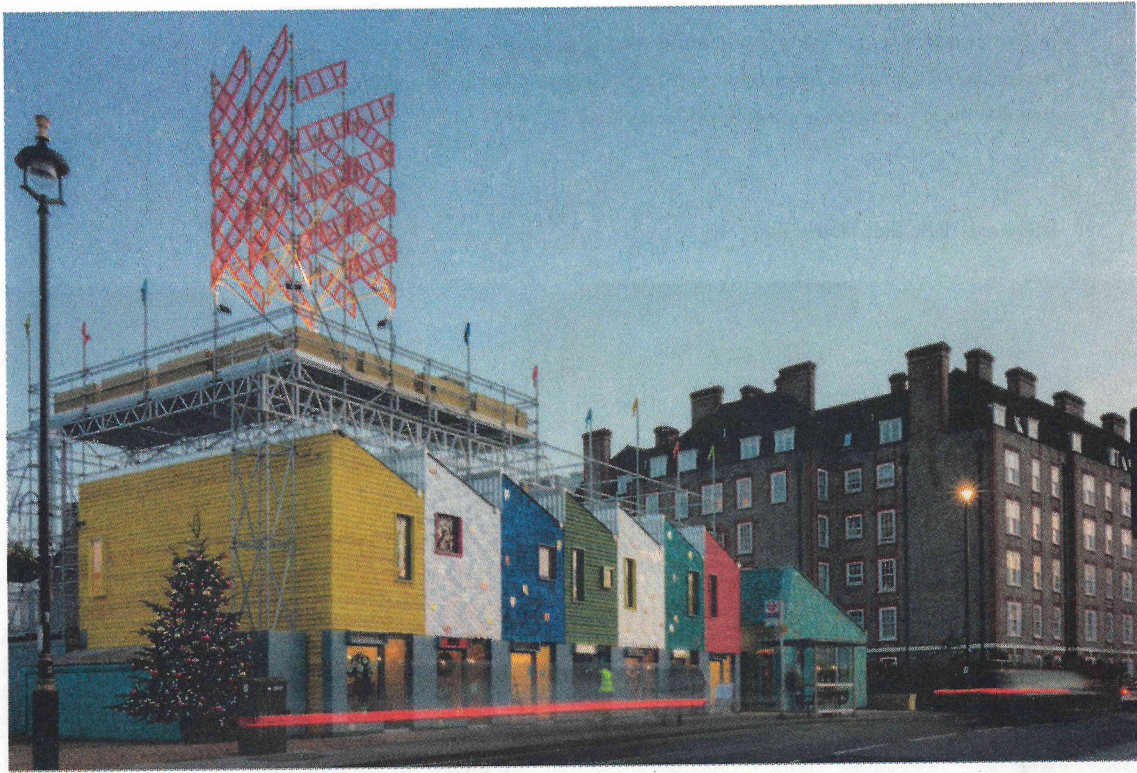


Temporary urbanism for  
a contingent community

JAN KATTEIN – JAN KATTEIN ARCHITECTS

Cities are the epicentre of conflicting priorities, divergent opinions and mismatched expectations. Whilst most people are naturally inclined to evade disagreement, the reality is that dissent and compromise are vital to upholding and evolving democratic structures.

When we start to work in a new place, we often ask ourselves: ‘who actually is the community here?’ That question is not always easy to answer and once you think that you have finally found the answer you realise that things on the ground are actually very different from what you had thought. On a number of occasions, we have found that those purporting to represent their community are by no means endorsed by those they claim to speak for.



JOURNEY WITH PURPOSE

TEMPORARY URBANISM FOR A CONTINGENT COMMUNITY

Ebury Edge and Sayer Street are both temporary structures, but we have adopted radical strategies that will allow them to be entirely re-used elsewhere once their tenure on site comes to an end. Both buildings make use of scaffolding for access, and a large part of their structure. The scaffolding can be re-configured or simply re-used as scaffolding in the future. Ebury is built entirely for disassembly, but not just that, it can also be re-configured in a different arrangement in the future.

Lendlease, the client for Sayer Street, has just commissioned us to look into the re-configuration of the structure on a new site, elsewhere in London. Interestingly, we are at a moment in time where impermanence and permanence are starting to swap places. In that sense and because of their circular design, some of our temporary structures are much more permanent than elements of the city conceived only two decades ago and now subject to demolition.

We are building an educational building at the moment made entirely from found and reclaimed materials. It’s incredibly challenging because the project sees us regularly and unwittingly stumble over the constraints of our profession.

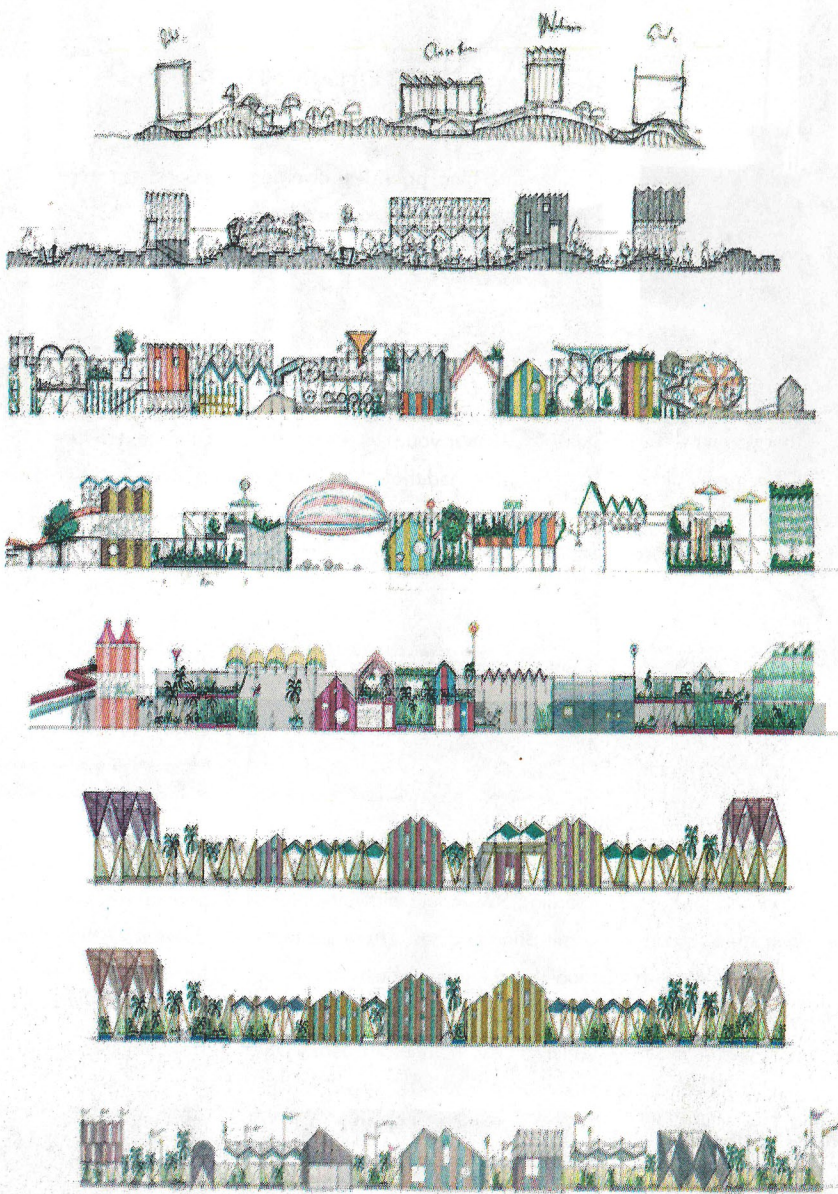
Design processes are riddled by procedures that govern every aspect of what we do as architects, apportion liability and ensure statutory compliance. It’s a beautiful building made using ancient cordwood techniques that we re-invented to meet current thermal performance standards. The build is undertaken by volunteers because we want to invest and inspire as many people as we can in making a building that represents a radical approach to eliminating embodied carbon. At the Paper Garden we are making a building and a community that is actively invested in addressing climate change.

Most of our projects are publicly funded and I feel entirely accountable for every penny that we spend. Owning the place does not really change my attitude towards my work. Being the owner and the contractor however frees me to an extent from the process and procedure associated with public sector projects. On Blue House Yard that allowed us to deliver the project as a community/volunteer built because I felt I knew the risks involved and how to mitigate them.

Thanks to Jan Kattein for this interview conducted over email, and edited for clarity. Visit their website for more work: <https://jankattein.com>



JOURNEY WITH PURPOSE



SCORCHING

JAN KATTEIN

TEMPORARY STRUCTURES  
FOR A LIVING CITY

The reality is that cities are living organisms that adapt to the changing needs of its inhabitants. In the 1960s we all thought that cities must be permanently re-shaped to accommodate cars. Now we are all working hard to undo the damage that this single-minded conviction has caused.

Much of our work is about questioning fixed ways of thinking and shifting people’s perception of places. Typologies have a cultural and historic significance i.e. people relate to them. Also, there are functional parameters that have shaped typologies through history. I am a huge fan of vernacular construction methods as they were often much more in tune with the natural environment. Form does follow function in my mind.

As a problem solver, learning from traditional typologies is hugely helpful to solve technical problems and to return to a type of construction that is more sustainable.

Temporary urbanism embraces the notion that impermanence can better provide for inevitable change, better cater for people’s needs and better respond to environmental challenges. In the future all structures and buildings in the city are life cycle designed. Only by recognising that the status quo is temporary and by fully embracing designing for repair, alteration and re-use will allow us to meet the environmental challenges that we face.

Temporary urbanism is an amazing tool to build the capacity of communities. We have seen businesses move from subsidised incubator space to permanent high street vacancies in several of our projects.

Much of the potential of temporary urban projects is invested in the conception and creation of these projects. The real value of what temporary urbanism creates is in the networks, relationships and learning that it fosters. If we can inspire, enable and empower those that participate in our temporary projects, then we have enacted their objectives.



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