Bio-based community garden by Jan Kattein Architects opens in London

Starr Charles | 29 July 2026 | 4 comments

Handmade bricks, wooden shakes and a cob wall enclose a trio of buildings at this community garden in London, which has been designed by local studio Jan Kattein Architects.

Nestled on a triangular plot in King's Cross, the garden serves as an educational space for the local community and permanent home for educational charity Global Generation.

Built primarily from bio-based materials, the garden was constructed over two years through a community build programme, which employed a team of on-site architects, builders and trainees, along with the help of 3,000 volunteers.

A community garden designed by Jan Kattein Architects has opened in King's Cross

"It was a very uncoventional construction process," studio founder Jan Kattein told Dezeen.

"We made Global Generation into the principal contractor because that would open up the door for volunteer development."

"The project was never about doing the buildings quickly," Kattein continued. "It was about involving and engaging as many people in the process as we could."

The garden serves as a community space and new home for Global Generation. Photo by Alex Sturrock

Three compact buildings housing a classroom, office and community kitchen occupy the site and converge at a small, central courtyard designed as a space for socialising.

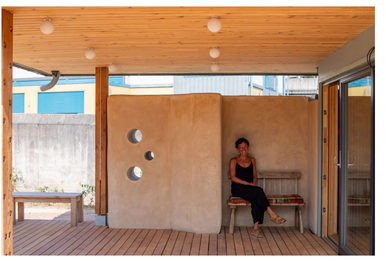
Wrapping around these structures is the garden, which features an "edible forest", rubble garden, polytunnel and pond.

Looking to embed the buildings within the surrounding garden, Jan Kattein Architects opted for distinct structures with direct access to the outdoors as opposed to one large volume.

The site's three buildings were constructed with the help of 3,000 volunteers

"It was really critical that the buildings connected to the garden," Kattein said. "We've done three small buildings rather than one big one because that means each of the buildings, as you step out of the door, you're in the garden," he continued.

"Whereas if you connected them all with the corridor, you wouldn't."



A thick cob wall frames the garden's classroom

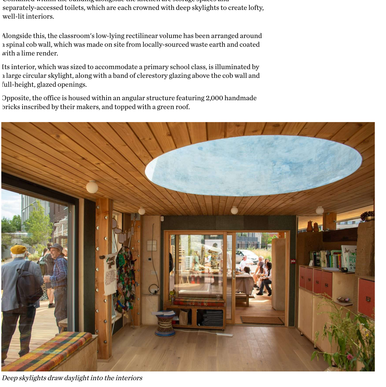
The largest of the volumes is the community kitchen, distinguished by its pyramidal roof structures and textured exterior clad with 12,000 handmade shakes.

Contained within the building alongside the kitchen are storage spaces and separately-accessed toilets, which are each crowned with deep skylights to create lofty, well-lit interiors.

Alongside this, the classroom's low-lying rectilinear volume has been arranged around a spinal cob wall, which was made on site from locally-sourced waste earth and coated with a lime render.

Its interior, which was sized to accommodate a primary school class, is illuminated by a large circular skylight, along with a band of clerestory glazing above the cob wall and full-height, glazed openings.

Opposite, the office is housed within an angular structure featuring 2,000 handmade bricks inscribed by their makers, and topped with a green roof.



Deep skylights draw daylight into the interiors

According to Kattein, the use of bio-based materials was guided by the build's participatory approach and an overarching goal to introduce new skills to the volunteers.

"The building materials and techniques used are all informed by the construction process," Kattein explained. "We needed to use skills that volunteers could acquire and where they would feel they could make a meaningful contribution."

Previous projects by the studio include the conversion of derelict garages into 35 affordable workspaces for entrepreneurs in north London.

Elsewhere, Assemble has transformed a pair of former dairy warehouses into a community centre and church in east London.

The photography is by Jan Kattein Architects unless otherwise stated.

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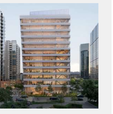

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