

A Muse boost: Green Sky Studio day at Bere Architecture

6 October, 2008

By **Michael Willoughby**

Michael Willoughby went to visit Bere Architecture's Muse, a proto-PassivHaus in Newington Green, east London, with his camera



On 24-26 September, environmentally aware architects opened up their studios for Green Sky Studios, this year's addition to the highly popular Open House event. One of the venues was Justin Bere's Muse project. There's the fresh water pool, there's monitoring the computer usage, there's upgrading the heat recovery system and selling the old one on to hedge the cost, there's the blinds - in fact a dizzying array of highly complex projects need doing that it would make the average B&Qer fall off his stepladder.

Nonetheless, those of us who looked around his studio were of no doubt that the Muse was already a very accomplished project and - especially given the fact that he had just moved his office into his former home - found ourselves marvelling at the possibilities of energy conservative design and wondering - as he seems to himself - why can't we be more like the Germans?

A (non-native) palm touches the triple-glazed windows at the Muse house. Highly-efficient windows are key to the PassivHaus model which Justin Bere has been following. He and his environmental engineer, Max Fordham, started on site to parallel principles as those espoused by the PassivHaus insititute before the team had heard about the German model. Firm owner, Justin Bere, thinks that the 15kWh/(m2a) as required by PassivHaus is possible in the Muse ... with a few minor tweaks.





All sorts came to see the building ...





... many were loathe to miss a single word from Justin Bere ...

... especially when he showed us the filter from his heat-recovery system. The system is around 90% efficient, though the PassivHaus Institute regularly docks 12% efficiency from manufacturers' claims. The PassivHaus model was first developed by Swede, Prof. Bo Adamson and German, Dr. Wolfgang Feist as a healthy house model back in 1996. Now Justin Bere frequently uses the health argument when he's trying to convince his clients to go passive.

The house is very much a work in progress - some might say Mr Bere bites off more than he can chew. He is friends with some of the biggest names in sustainability who use the Muse as a kind of lab. Here he shows off his own prototype for the blind system that will be able to take two types of fabric; reflective white in the summer clearer in the winter.



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The roof garden is comprised of wholly native species, including a small hazel woodland, two wild flower meadows. Greenery includes osmanthus, dog's mercury and Solomon's seal. It was designed by plantsman, Kim Wilkie. A wide variety of wild homesteads are included to support the animals that might graze on the plants - bat boxes, bumble bee sleeping quarters and stag beetle sandpits.

Jane Dennett-Thorpe of the Government Office for London peeks at the Green Roof. At the end of the season, it's looking a bit scruffy ...

The roof was designed by the redoubtable living roof expert, Dusty Gedge of livingroofs.org. Gedge says that solar PV and green roofs can co-exist provided there is a 15cm gap beneath your solar panels.





Jess Hrivnak of Max Fordham Associates examines her bosses' voluntary project. Although Fordham was involved, he wasn't paid, so specifics were hard for Bere to get hold of. Meanwhile, Bere has got won a planning battle to building the UK's first PassivHaus solely based on the building's environmental credentials.

Postscript :

Readers' comments

- **Susan Schnadhorst** 7 October, 2008

I agree that Justin Bere's project is highly ambitious and should be lauded. Regarding the Passiv Haus Institute's adjustment of the efficiency claims made by manufacturers of MVHR units, this is made based upon a scientific approach. Also the redjustment is 12% not 8% as mentioned above. The main feeling I had from the visit was how refreshing it was for Justin to be unthreatened by questions and that his team was very generous in sharing the hard won knowledge and skills they have obtained through using the PH planning package. May the knowledge sharing ethos which is common in Germany and Austria and contributes to the success of PH be continued here in the UK!!

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