



Yoga studio design works at full stretch

Adrian James Architects has created a plywood-lined, copper-clad, sustainable haven of karma for Vishuddha Yoga Centre in Oxford

Words: Pamela Buxton Photographs: Fisher Studios

Hanging upside down using ropes fixed into the walls, the client of the Vishuddha Yoga Centre eloquently demonstrates the prowess of the bespoke yet economical wall socket system that lines the yoga studio. It's an example of the a-lot-with-a-little philosophy that underpins the creation of this low energy building, designed in Oxford by local practice Adrian James Architects.

A rare example of a purpose-designed yoga centre, the project has a great location alongside the River Thames in the Osney Island conversation area, close to the railway station. It's an area that James knows well – his own house is nearby on the other side of the river, with his practice office just behind,



both self-designed. And like his own house, the yoga centre is notable for its prominent use of copper, employed at Vishuddha as standing seam rainscreen cladding and roofing. As a result, this intriguing infill development cuts quite a dash among the neighbouring terrace, the copper weathering down to contrast boldly with the pre-patinated green of the splayed copper window reveals. However this clearly contemporary intervention didn't please everyone, and the development attracted deep opposition during the planning process from some neighbours.

Visiting not long after its opening, the 154 m² (GIA) centre presents as an instantly engaging and curious addition

Left The main yoga studio occupies the entire first floor of the Vishuddha Yoga Centre, Oxford.

Above Clad in a copper rainscreen, the new yoga centre is clearly legible as a new intervention in the terrace.

Below The centre replaces a garage building, latterly used as a sculptor's studio.



to the terrace. It replaces a modest, pitched-roof workshop that in recent times was the studio of sculptor Hugo Powell. Fortunately for the architect's ambitions for a legibly new addition, the local planners were keen that the infill should mark the historic break in the terrace – and its different usage – rather than attempting to 'mend' it by fitting in. In any case, its immediate neighbours sport difference facade treatments of render and brick respectively – and the yoga studio adds a third all of its own.

As eye-catching as the riverside front elevation is, an equally important aspect of the project is how James worked with the client to create a sustainable, low-key bespoke facility in harmony with its

Buildings Yoga studio

Right The walls of the main studio are lined with bespoke panels with special sockets to elegantly accommodate yoga accessories such as bars and ropes.

yogic philosophy. The brief called for a main studio for a maximum class size of 16, a small space for one-to-one sessions, and changing, shower and social spaces. An important underlying factor was the site's flood plain location so close to the river. In response the ground floor is designed to be floodable, with a poured concrete floor and valves that allow water – but not rats – to exit through the house in either direction.

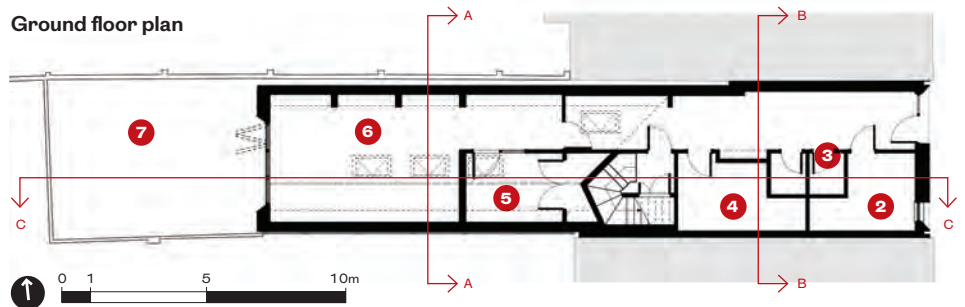
An initial three-storey proposal was withdrawn and reworked as two storeys, the final design falling into place with the decision to locate the 50m² main studio on the first rather than ground floor. All other facilities are located on the ground floor.

Stepping in off the pavement, the ultra-thick, well-insulated oak front door sets the standard for the high-performing building fabric found throughout. Both client James Pritchard and the architect were keen for the building to be as sustainable as possible in line with a modest budget and a truthful, no-frills yogic approach. As Vishuddha Yoga co-founder Pritchard says, it's about 'having a building that says what it is and doesn't cover anything up'. This starts with a pared-back aesthetic, with bare insulated blockwork providing thermal mass, and birch-faced plywood removing the need for plaster and plasterboard. There are no skirtings and services are exposed. The roof structure is timber, and the copper is recycled.

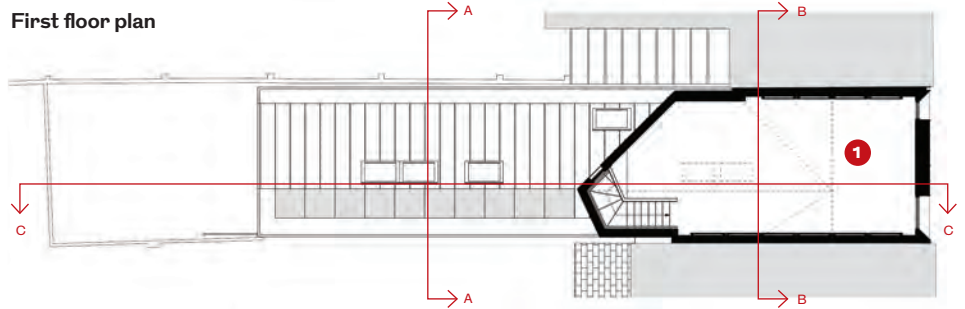
The aspiration is to be zero carbon in operation for most of the year, perhaps with the need to top-up with small amounts of space heating in winter, but otherwise largely avoiding the need to take even renewable power from the grid. To achieve this, the building incorporates the maximum PV array possible for the site, as well as two Tesla Powerwall batteries and a large MVHR system. Pritchard has a background as a mechanical engineer and is an enthusiastic guardian of the low-carbon



Ground floor plan



First floor plan



Section AA



Section BB



Section CC



Key

- 1 Yoga studio
- 2 Accessible WC + change
- 3 WC
- 4 Changing room
- 5 Meeting room
- 6 Social space
- 7 Garden



Buildings Yoga studio

Left The design's honest, no-frills approach of exposed services and simple materials is in harmony with yogic principles.

Below Pre-patinated copper reveals contrast with the main rainscreen cladding.

energy systems, the kit neatly tucked away in bespoke cupboards or in the case of the sleek Tesla batteries, wall mounted for all to see.

There is however a generosity of space where it counts. On arrival, yoga students enter a corridor wide enough to park six bikes with plenty of circulation space to spare. This leads to the pleasant, Scandi-chic kitchen and socialising space at the rear – the plan is to be able to accommodate a class of students for events or refreshments. In a nice nod to the sculptor who previously occupied the site, the small courtyard garden will feature one of his works, and a number of lights salvaged from his workshop have been incorporated into the kitchen.

A bamboo staircase leads to the main studio, which occupies the whole first floor. It is a beautiful, quirky space, adorned at one end by a bright mural depicting the river that lies nearby. The space soars to 4.1m at its tallest, lit by two front windows and roof lights in the plywood ceiling admitting soft north light. A slim rear window jauntily-angled in response to the pitch of the roof. A cellular steel beam enables hanging equipment. But the most practical elements are the aforementioned bespoke wall panels, where metal sockets to plug in bars or ropes at intervals up the wall neatly avoid any protuberances when not in use. LED strip lighting along the bottom of the wall can be set to different colours.

By creating such a bold infill, the architect has certainly – and commendably – seized the opportunity to make a distinctive contribution to the urban fabric rather than playing safe, a move that inevitably will not be welcomed by all. But James says the reaction since it completed is the most positive he's ever had for a building. And Pritchard is also happy: 'The building is more than we'd have hoped for – a magical place.' ●

IN NUMBERS

154 m²
GIA

**JCT intermediate
2016**

fit out client managed

400 kgCO₂e/m²
embodied carbon

Credits

Client Vishuddha Yoga Centre

Structural engineer Stantec

QS Clarkson Alliance

Principal designer Adrian James Architects

Approved building inspector

Oxford City Council

Main contractor Total

Construction

CAD software Vectorworks

