Architect Will Alsop admits bending truth about ‘quitting’

Will Alsop, one of Britain’s most renowned architects, has admitted that his announcement in August that he had quit the profession to take up painting was a smokescreen and that he has moved to a rival practice.

The architect, whose designs include North Greenwich Tube station and Peckham Library, which won the Stirling Prize in 2000, said he was leaving the company bearing his name after 30 years because “I need time to pursue my painting”.

It was rumoured that he had become disillusioned with his practice, which he had sold to Archial, a larger company, after he ran into financial difficulties in 2004.

He said yesterday that he had moved to RMJM, the company that has attracted controversy for its designs for the Gazprom Tower in St Petersburg, which, if approved, will be the tallest building in Europe. It is considered such a threat to the city’s image that Unesco will withdraw St Petersburg from the list of World Heritage sites if the project goes ahead.

Alsop admitted that his claim about devoting his time to painting had not been the whole truth. “You have to understand that at that time . . . I was not in a position to say what I really thought,” he said.

He will continue to act as a consultant to Alsop’s until February 1.

Alsop said that he would paint while working at his studio at RMJM and that the abstract designs he created would be incorporated into designs for buildings. “I’m trying to do a beautiful painting, but I’m trying to think what we can do with a project. You can take a photograph of the painting and turn it into a building. There are no rules. It might be a complete failure, but then you can do another one, and you’ve still got a lovely painting.”

He said that his mission was to create designs that would provide relief from “bloody awful buildings” put up by other architects. He said that he had sympathy with the Prince of Wales’s opinions on some modern architecture.
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