THE INTERVIEW

You may know his "wonky-legged" Peckham Library or other striking constructions in strong colours and 'blobby shapes'. But the name of the man who built them? Will Alsop is fast joining Foster and Rogers as one of the UK's top architects. Lynn Barber finds him as cheerful as his buildings. Portrait by Antonio Olmos

I thought architects came in Armani suits with shaven heads and peculiar glasses. Will Alsop, in his crumpled black shirt, black jacket and long, greying hair, looks more like a biker than a philosopher - amusingly scrawny and obviously not a man familiar with gym. His favourite watering hole is the Chelsea Arts Club, which to put it mildly is not the place to order wheatgrass juice. He smokes even more than me. At one point he tells me he is 59 years and 22 days old. I wasn't supposed to say that. He laughs. OK, OK, I tell him, leaving open the question of whether he looks older or younger. Actually 59 is still quite young for a top architect because architecture is a famously late-flowering profession - Philip Johnson started a new practice when he was 90. But with Alsop you feel slightly older than that - and more old-fashioned.

Since his Peckham Library won the Stirling Prize in 2000, Alsop has probably not made a more talked-about building than his own. His previous building for the Government was on the Electricity College, New Cross, and the Broadacres Building, his science institute for Queen Mary's University in Whitechapel, won tremendous praise - the Guardian called it the "visual tour de force of 1992".
I decided that I didn’t go through seven years of training and trying to educate myself to end up doing VAT returns.”

I cannot wait to eat that first meal of the year in the open-air Nigel Slater goes out with a bang

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