

# Will Alsop

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**Will (William) Alsop** (born 12 December 1947) is a British architect based in London. He is responsible for several distinctive and controversial modernist buildings, most in the United Kingdom. Alsop's buildings are usually distinguished by their vibrant use of bright colour and unusual forms. While Alsop has won praise from some critics and fans of *avant-garde* architecture, he has also faced criticism from fellow architects and some segments of the general public.

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## Biography

Alsop was born on 12 December 1947 in Northampton, Northamptonshire, England. He always wanted to be an architect, even before he really knew what architects did; when he was six years old, he designed a house for his mother to live in – its most striking specification was that it had to be built in New Zealand. When he was 16 his father, an accountant, died, and being bored with school he left to work for an architect, doing his A-levels at evening classes.<sup>[1]</sup>

After a foundation course at Northampton Art School, Alsop studied at the Architectural Association School of Architecture where at 23 he entered the competition to design the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and came second to the eventual winners, Richard Rogers & Renzo Piano.<sup>[1]</sup> After graduating he worked briefly for Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, a couple who had been instrumental in introducing modernism to Britain in the 1930s, then joined Cedric Price for four years.<sup>[2]</sup>

After a short period with Roderick Ham, in 1981 Alsop set up a practice, Alsop, Barnett & Lyall, with his classmate John Lyall in Hammersmith. Jan Störmer later joined the practice and a decade later, in 1991, the practice was renamed Alsop & Störmer after Lyall's departure.<sup>[2][3]</sup> Alsop's first real commission was a swimming pool for Sheringham in Norfolk in 1984, followed by a visitor centre for Cardiff Bay. Thereafter he worked on a number of projects in Germany, including the Hamburg Ferry Terminal, before beating Norman Foster in the competition to design the Hôtel du Département des Bouches-du-Rhône (seat of the regional government) in Marseille, France (the building has been nicknamed *Le Grand Bleu* – "The Big Blue" – and "The Whale" by the locals), in 1994.<sup>[1]</sup> Alsop and Störmer divided into separate practices in 2000, Alsop forming Alsop Architects.

Alsop admits to never being very good at handling finances, and his practice went through several difficult periods, including the cancellation in June 2004 of plans to build a "Fourth Grace" to be built on Liverpool's Pier Head waterfront<sup>[4]</sup> – the so-called "Cloud Building" – officially because of rising costs and unrealistic design.<sup>[5]</sup> In early

<b>Will Alsop</b>	
<b>Personal information</b>	
<b>Name</b>	Will Alsop
<b>Nationality</b>	<span><span></span></span> British
<b>Birth date</b>	December 12, 1947
<b>Birth place</b>	Northampton, Northamptonshire, England, UK
<b>Work</b>	
<b>Practice name</b>	SMC Alsop
<b>Significant buildings</b>	Peckham Library, Peckham, London (2000)  Sharp Centre for Design, Ontario College of Art & Design, Toronto (2004) Blizard Building, Whitechapel, London (2006)
<b>Significant projects</b>	Yonkers Power Plant project, Yonkers, New York, United States (completion due 2008)  Clarke Quay Redevelopment project, Clarke Quay, Singapore (estimated completion date unknown)
<b>Awards and prizes</b>	Stirling Prize (2000); RIBA Worldwide Award (2004); Civic Trust Award (2003, 2006); RIBA Regional Award (London) (2006)

2006, Alsop sold his practice to a design conglomerate called the SMC Group for £1.8 million in order to concentrate on architecture. The practice is now known as SMC Alsop.<sup>[1][6]</sup> Alsop currently has practices in Beijing, London, Shanghai, Singapore and Toronto, which he visits regularly.<sup>[1]</sup>

Alsop was a tutor of sculpture at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London for several years, and has held many other academic posts, among others at the Universities of Vienna, London and Hannover, and actively promotes the artistic contribution to built environments. His paintings and sketches have been exhibited alongside his architectural projects in dedicated exhibitions at Sir John Soane's Museum, Milton Keynes Gallery, Cube Gallery in Manchester, and the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, among other venues.<sup>[7]</sup>

Alsop has been made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE), and was elected to the Royal Academy on 18 May 2000.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Architectural style



THEpUBLIC, West Bromwich. The design has been likened to a massive fish tank or a Holstein cow.

Alsop regards as his architectural heroes Le Corbusier, Sir John Soane, Mies van der Rohe and John Vanbrugh.<sup>[1]</sup> His *avant-garde*, modernist buildings are usually distinguished by their vibrant use of bright colour and unusual forms; they have won praise and criticism in equal measure.

In 2004, Alsop published a book entitled *Supercity* which elicited much debate. It was the subject of a Channel 4 television documentary and an exhibition at the Urbis museum in Manchester. This book described his vision of a "Supercity" – a futuristic conurbation – stretching along the M62 corridor from Liverpool to Hull. It included a discussion of how the increasing interconnectivity of the cities along this corridor is changing the concepts of a "city", and how they can be developed to merge the idea of the rural and urban. It also included a number of architectural ideas of possible buildings and communities in this city.



Although there was some political support for his ideas, with *The Times* claiming that former British Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott was a supporter,<sup>[8]</sup> the Supercity has its critics. It has been claimed that his book and his visions show signs of parochialism, and a misunderstanding of how people travel and self-identify. He is also accused of taking a highly globalist stance and ignoring the needs of those who cannot afford to travel.



Alsop's architectural talents may be the subject of controversy but he has managed to build up an international reputation and a certain degree of fame – he has been called "number three in the hierarchy of British architects after Lords Rogers and Foster". Notwithstanding this, like fellow avantgardist Zaha Hadid, he has actualised relatively few buildings from his designs. Alsop has estimated that only about 10% of his designs have been built. However, this does not worry him because he enjoys designing buildings even when he has no particular commission or competition in mind. "It's like tennis – you have to keep doing it all the time, whether you have a client or not. I believe that absolutely. You can speculate in your sketchbook – you're allowed to think about anything, with or without a client."<sup>[1]</sup>

In April 2007, *The Observer* commented that Alsop's approach to architecture could broadly be defined by his statement: "I like people. I hope it shows."<sup>[1]</sup>

## Major architectural projects

Image	Information	Awards and nominations
	<p><b>Cardiff Bay Visitor Centre</b> Cardiff, Wales Date of completion unknown</p>	

	<p><b>Hamburg Ferry Terminal</b> Hamburg, Germany Date of completion unknown</p>	
	<p><b>Hôtel du Département des Bouches-du-Rhône (<i>Le Grand Bleu</i>)</b> Marseille, Bouches-du-Rhône, France Completed 1994</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Stirling Prize nominee (1997)</li> </ul>
	<p><b>North Greenwich Tube Station</b> Greenwich, London, England Completed 1999</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Stirling Prize nominee (1999)</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Peckham Library</b> Peckham, London, England Completed 2000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Stirling Prize (2000)</li> <li>■ Civic Trust Award (2003)</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Sharp Centre for Design, Ontario College of Art &amp; Design</b> Toronto, Canada Completed 2004</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ RIBA Worldwide Award (2004)</li> <li>■ City of Toronto Urban Design Award (2006)<sup>[9]</sup></li> </ul>
	<p><b>Fawood Children's Centre</b><sup>[10][11]</sup> Harlesden, North London, England Completed in 2004</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Stirling Prize nominee (2005)</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Ben Pimlott Building, Goldsmiths, University of London</b> New Cross, London, England Completed 2005</p>	
	<p><b>Blizard Building, Barts and The London, Queen Mary's School of Medicine and</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Civic Trust Award (2006)</li> <li>■ RIBA Regional Award (London) (2006)</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Dentistry</b> Whitechapel, London, England Completed March 2005</p>	
	<p><b>Alsop Toronto Sales Centre</b> Toronto, Canada Completed 2006</p>	
	<p><b>Palestra, 197</b> Blackfriars Road, Southwark, London, England Completed 2006</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ RIBA Regional Award (London) (2007)</li> <li>■ <i>Private Eye</i> magazine's Worst New Building (2006)</li> </ul>
	<p><b>The Public, West Bromwich</b> West Bromwich, West Midlands, England Completed 2006</p>	
	<p><b>Stratford Docklands Light Railway Station</b> [12] Stratford, London, England Commissioned in 2003, completion expected in 2007</p>	
	<p><b>Yonkers Power Plant project</b><sup>[13]</sup> Glenwood Waterfront, Yonkers, New York, United States Completion expected in 2008</p>	
	<p><b>Adelphi Street, Salford</b> Salford, Greater Manchester, England Completion due 2009</p>	
	<p><b>Clarke Quay Redevelopment project</b><sup>[14]</sup> Clarke Quay, Singapore Estimated completion date unknown</p>	
	<p><b>KingTowns</b><sup>[15]</sup> King West Village, Toronto, Canada Estimated completion date unknown</p>	
	<p><b>New Islington</b> Manchester, England Estimated completion date unknown</p>	
	<p><b>Westside Lofts</b> Toronto, Canada Estimated completion date unknown</p>	

## Personal life

Alsop and his wife live between an Edwardian mansion flat in London and a converted stable block in Norfolk. They have three adult children.<sup>[1]</sup>

Alsop tries to relax as much as possible on weekends and also takes a month off in the summer to go painting in Majorca with his friend Bruce McLean. Alsop enjoys smoking and drinking. He is, according to an April 2007 article in *The Observer*, "obviously not a man familiar with gyms".<sup>[1]</sup>

## Notes

- ↑ <sup>*a b c d e f g h i j*</sup> Barber, Lyn. "Firm Foundations : Will Alsop : The Interview", *The Observer*, 2007-04-08.
- ↑ <sup>*a b c*</sup> Will Alsop RA. Royal Academy of Arts. Retrieved on 2007-04-29.
- ↑ Will Alsop. Open2.net. Retrieved on 2007-04-29.
- ↑ Since 2001–2002, three historical buildings at the Pier Head in Liverpool have been known as the "Three Graces": they are the Royal Liver Building (1908–1911) by Walter Aubrey Thomas, the Cunard Building (1914–1916) by Willinck & Thicknesse with Arthur J. Davis, and the Port of Liverpool Building (1903–1907) by Briggs & Wolstenholme with Hobbs & Thornely.
- ↑ See Weaver, Matt. "Delays Dog Mersey's Grace", *The Guardian*, 2003-11-21. ; Ward, David. "Liverpool Scraps Plans for Cloud : Spiralling Cost and Design Change End Ambitious Waterfront Project", *The Guardian*, 2004-07-20. ; Carter, Helen. "Fall from Grace Angers Architect with Waterfront Vision", *The Guardian*, 2004-07-24. ; Glancey, Jonathan. "Risk-Taking Architect Bailed Out after Projects Founder", *The Guardian*, 2004-10-29.
- ↑ "SMC Acquires Will Alsop and His Team", *Construction and Maintenance News*, March 2006.
- ↑ William Alsop. British Council. Retrieved on 2007-04-29.
- ↑ Leake, Jonathan; Steven Shukor. "Prescott's Northern Supercity Could Make London Shrive!l", *The Sunday Times*, 2004-02-15.
- ↑ "Will Alsop Unveils Renderings for Waterfront Project in New York", *Canadian Architect*, 2007-04-05.
- ↑ Fawood Children[s] Centre, London, United Kingdom : Alsop Design's Stirling Entry. *World Architecture News.com* (2005-10-14). Retrieved on 2007-04-29.
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- ↑ Browne, Kelvin. "Will Alsop's New Condominium is Distinctly Him : Is There Danger in Designing Similar Buildings?", *National Post*, 2006-10-14.

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## External links

### General

- Official website of Alsop Architects
- Will Alsop at the British Council website
- Will Alsop at the "From Here to Modernity" website on Open2.net, the online learning portal from the Open University and the BBC
- Will Alsop at the Royal Academy of Arts website
- Radio interview of William Alsop on 4 April 2005 at the A Palaver website (available as stream)

### Architectural projects

- The Alsop House, Lower Mill Estate, Somerford Keynes, Gloucestershire
- The Peckham Library, London, on the Galinsky website
- The Sharp Centre for Design, Toronto, on the Galinsky website

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