I was so sad to hear of the death of Will Alsop. It was so sudden – I had only heard of his illness last Wednesday and I never had chance to go and see him. We met up many times over the years, usually accompanied by vats of red wine, and they were always funny and memorable occasions.

He was inspiring, witty, never afraid to say what he thought, and the work he showed was so creative. His Le Grand Bleu project [for the regional government of the Bouches-du-Rhône department] in Marseilles is a fantastic scheme – an architectural triumph by anyone’s standards.

We competed against each other for London’s City Hall, when I was at Foster + Partners. We were the last two in the running and were waiting together for the announcement and to be interviewed for live television. We had both prepared boards of our proposals; his scheme was in Bloomsbury and ours at More London on the Southbank. It felt like hours waiting for our slot, and we spent the time telling stories to each other. He was ever the gentleman, complimentary about our scheme, but still thought his was far better. I knew we would be firm friends. It was a great encounter and I grew to like him immensely.

He was enormous fun, a lovely man who encouraged me to take up painting, and we both had respect for each other’s architecture. I loved his Centre for Design building in Toronto and he was an early fan of our Cube in Birmingham.

He was one of the most creative architects I have ever met, and his death leaves the world of architecture a duller and far less enjoyable place.