The Zany, Playful Brilliance of Will Alsop

Will Alsop was, above all, a showman, a master of showmanship. The buildings he created were as much about performance as they were about design. They were theatrical, grandiose, and often audacious. Alsop had an ability to captivate his audience, to make them laugh, to make them think. His work was a mix of extremes, a blend of high and low, of functionality and fantasy.

Alsop was a visionary architect, but he was also a pragmatist. He knew that in order to realize his dreams, he had to build. Sometimes, his designs were ahead of their time, but he never stopped trying. His work was a reflection of his spirit, a spirit of adventure and fun. This spirit was evident in his buildings, from the iconic Carnegie Pavilion in London to the more recent Tidewrack.

Alsop was a master of color. His use of color throughout his career, including another London Underground Station, was always surprising and yet still managed to surprise. It was as if Alsop could see things that others couldn’t, that he could bring to life what was otherwise ordinary.

Alsop was a man of contradictions. He was somewhat bohemian as well, but he had a real and continual passion for design. His approach to budgets may have been untested. Here, Alsop is a rare exception. When designing the Ben Pimlo Building in London, his interest in painting was evident in the design of the interior, which was a kind of assemblage that disguise sometimes clunky forms. The colored and stretched it into a cylinder. Again and again, there are elements of imagination of its creator and consumer, and never requires only a pivot to China.

Alsop's successes in the built environment were considerable. His work was exceptional, his approach refreshing. But it is important to recognize the limitations and delusions in the process of realizing a dream, and whatever flaws existed in Alsop's buildings, they also worked. There's an integrity to the fact that the vast majority of Alsop's work went unbuilt was a source of frustration for the architect but also a loss for everyone else. Alsop was ahead of the game in proposing eye-catching, surrealist-tinged composite that surpassed his earlier work. But it is important to recognize the limitations and delusions in the process of realizing a dream, and whatever flaws existed in Alsop's buildings, they also worked. There's an integrity to the fact that the vast majority of Alsop's work went unbuilt was a source of frustration for the architect but also a loss for everyone else. Alsop was ahead of the game in proposing eye-catching, surrealist-tinged composite that surpassed his earlier work.