



INTERVIEW: Andrew Khoury

A clear thinker

Andrew Khoury is the founder of award-winning Stourbridge-based practice Khoury Architects, which won two RIBA awards in 2016 – including Project Architect of the Year – and the LABC award for Best Individual New Home in 2018. The practice excels in the design of unique new-build houses, finished to an exceptional level of craftsmanship, and Andrew's ability to resolve complex design issues with sensitive, sustainable solutions has produced a growing portfolio of timeless and inspirational work.

Below: This dramatic single-storey extension sits within a Victorian terrace, and consists of a glass box enveloped by a timber facade that opens out on to a landscaped garden.

Describe your childhood home
We lived in a typical 1960s house in Loughborough until I was 10. My dad worked for the Bank of England and would take the train down to London for the week and come home at weekends. Then he got a job in Birmingham, as one of the directors for National Express, so we moved about 30 miles away to a large 1920s house on the edge of a village in Warwickshire. It was surrounded by fields and had been built by the church for the vicars, so it was quite grand – with stained-glass windows, tiled floors and a sweeping staircase. Dad also developed properties, and he built an extension onto the side of our house which doubled its size.

We also had a holiday home in the Dordogne, which we renovated, and my parents eventually moved to live in this old stone building, which has an exposed timber structure and is a typical French farmhouse. Dad retired very early, at the age of 40, but then went back to work full time developing property in the Dordogne. He's also built several houses and I generally do the initial plans for these, and help him organise the spatial arrangement before he works with French architects on the detailed designs.

What inspired you to become an architect?

I was quite good at art, and my mum's an art teacher, so we talked about the idea of me becoming an architect from about the age of five. When I was 14 my dad was working with a very charismatic architect who used to turn up in his Ferrari. I remember Dad saying that this architect did something different every day, and it helped me to make the decision to



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study architecture. We still joke that I've sadly never owned a Ferrari, as I now have three daughters!

After graduating from Cardiff University's Welsh School of Architecture in 1997 I spent several years working in London, on some large commercial projects, and then moved back to Birmingham with a view to establishing Khoury Architects, which I did in 2005.

How has the practice evolved?

In many ways my previous boss was my mentor. When he retired he offered to support me in my own practice as a consultant, as well as passing on several clients. I'd been thinking about starting up on my own for a while, and as my first daughter had just been born it felt like the right time – allowing me to work from home for six months.

Almost immediately I won a contract in London for a large scheme of almost 100 apartments, and soon began getting other enquiries. I took on a couple of staff and we rented an office in Birmingham, starting off with mainly commercial projects. Gradually, we took on more and more residential projects, where we were able to use our knowledge of working with glass and steel to design unique homes. We gained a bit of a name for our contemporary houses and were one of only a few practices outside of London to be shortlisted for Young Architect of the Year.



PICTURE: A. PEARMAN



PICTURE DAVID STILL



PICTURE ALASTAIR CAREW-COX



PICTURE DAVID STILL

Left: White render and glass rear extension which fuses contemporary and traditional styles.

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PICTURE: ALASTAIR CAREW-COX

The rear of a new build three-storey house on a narrow site has striking geometry and materiality that references its traditional surroundings.

Right: The plan forms this partially subterranean award-winning design punctuated by courtyards that reveal the lower levels and let in natural light through triple-glazed windows and sliding panels.



PICTURES: PAUL BUNDY

Andrew's top tips for selfbuilders

I think planning a project is very much like building a house: you've got to get the foundations right, and can't really go anywhere until you've done the groundwork, so put a lot of effort in at the front end. I know it may seem time consuming and expensive to buy in professional advice, but if you're clear about what you're doing then it minimises risk throughout a project and should enable it to run smoothly. There's bound to be an unknown, though, so embrace that and keep working through it.

I actually like a detailed brief, but I would say to people: don't make your brief too prescriptive – try to explain the feel of the place and how you live, then let the professionals organise that into the form. You can always tweak this retrospectively, but if you do their job for them it stifles creativity.

There's so much more to architecture than just laying out some spaces. It's how they all work together in three dimensions, with light and air – that's where the joy comes from, and that's what you should be trying to get from your architect by giving them some creative freedom.

We're now based in an office we own in Stourbridge and offer architectural and interior design services for buildings across the UK, in both the private and public sectors. The one-off houses are large-scale, high quality and sometimes ground-breaking, while the large commercial projects are very design orientated. It's taken 15 years, but now we're exactly where we always wanted to be.

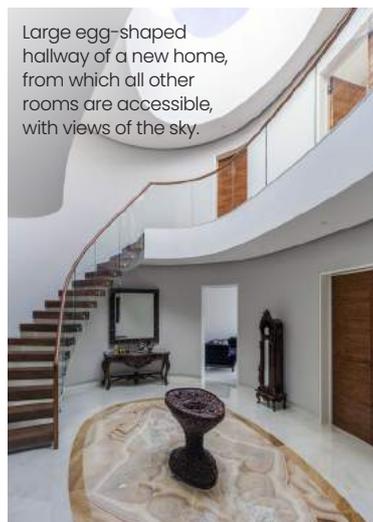
Seeing some of our projects come to fruition has been fantastic and we plan to remain a small, design-led practice with a good balance of projects – working hard but doing it with a bit of fun.

Do you have any design trademarks?

The common theme seems to be a very simple plan but quite a complex section; we'll often include changes in level and double-height spaces, even if we're renovating a period property. We might just drop a rear extension a couple of steps, so that the new living space seems more hunkered down into the garden. Often, you can walk in the front door and look straight up through three storeys of void to roof lights and out to the sky. It's also a bit of a joke in the practice that I always ask for a glass-to-glass corner when I'm reviewing a project.

Describe your own home

We live in an area of Stourbridge called Oldswinford, which was essentially a little village that's sprawled out. Our traditional Arts and Crafts house sits bang in the middle of a Conservation Area, surrounded by listed buildings, with a sandstone church to the rear. When we bought the house it had a large double garage to the side



Large egg-shaped hallway of a new home, from which all other rooms are accessible, with views of the sky.

PICTURE: MARC WILSON



PICTURES: MICHAEL OPPENHEIM

with a flat roof, and we took that down and built a two-storey extension. This gives us a double garage to the rear and a master bedroom, dressing room and en suite upstairs. Unlike a lot of our work it's quite a traditional design to the front, with glass opening up the back of the extension to the garden. Instead of aluminium-framed sliding doors we've chosen chunky timber frames to fit in with the older style of the house. Now we're finalising the furniture and artwork, so it's getting close to completion. (khouryarchitects.co.uk)

Above: Khoury Architects rose to the challenge of bridging a 20ft drop down to a Highland guest house by designing a safe and well-lit staircase using reclaimed stone and recycled slate.