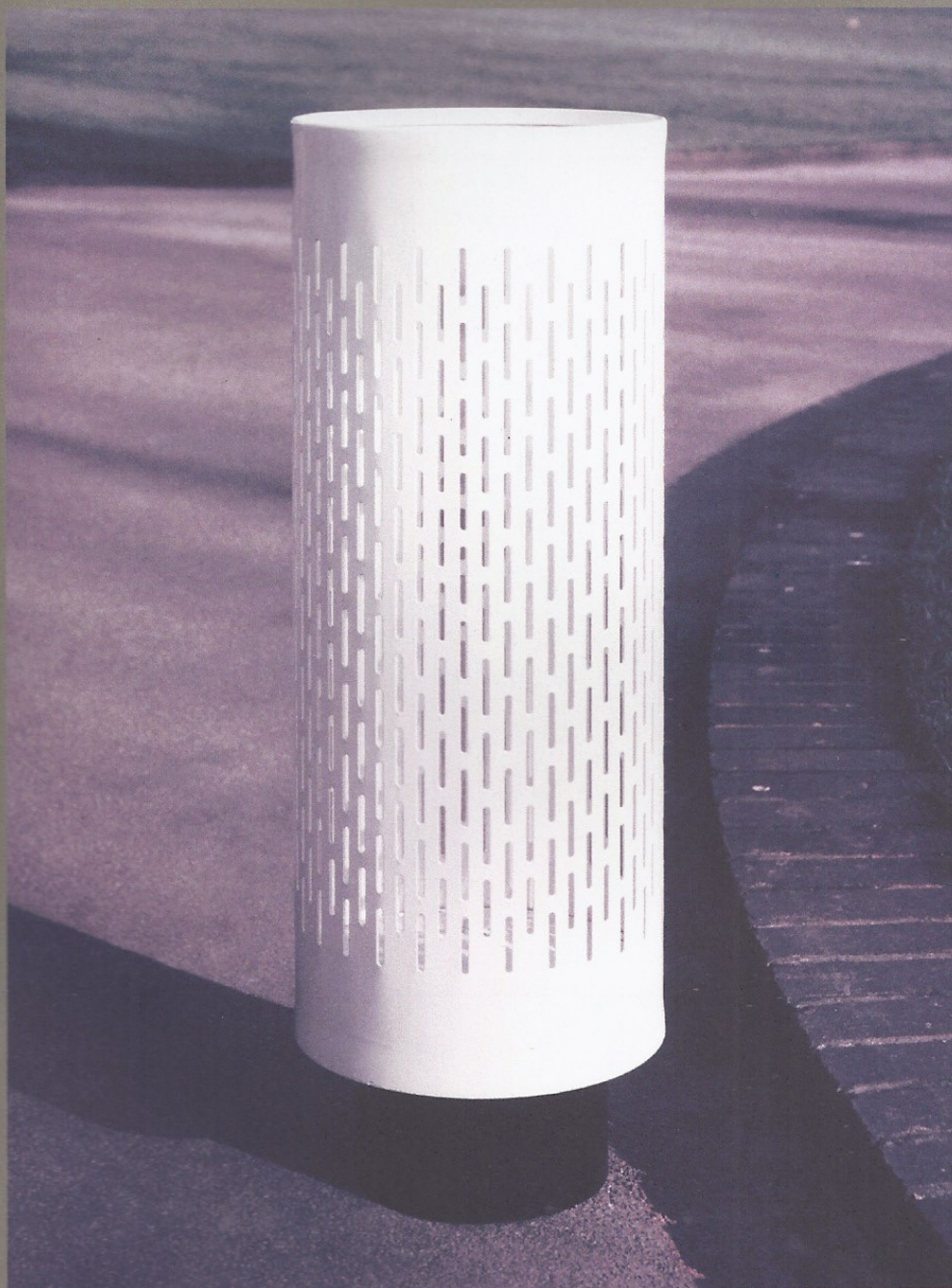


the modernist

34 juxtaposition



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In the enduring search for the peaceful rural ideal it can be easy to forget that the 'rural' acts as a conduit for the modern. Through their role in transport, militarisation or energy production, these pastoral, bucolic or rugged areas have evolved their own architectures and infrastructures. A dam halfway up a mountain, for example, is a surprise – a startling juxtaposition – but as with so many edifices it is there for one reason: to help us live.

The rural modern also deals with the consequences of this life, be it a litter bin for our detritus or a concrete bus shelter designed to protect us from the Hebridean elements. Larger structures become part of identity, embodying a community role which transcends their function. As symbols of working and social life, their memory persists long after the structures themselves have gone. The recent demolition of Ironbridge B's cooling towers – designed to blend with the landscape – will stand as testament to this. Whilst its industrial revolution neighbours are preserved in the nearby gorge, these modern structures are cleared to make way for a new modern: it is up to us to preserve these as best we can – through our words, memories, images and interpretations, something which will become more pressing as an increasing number of post-war examples reach the end of their working lives.

Join our contributors as we explore the diversity of rural modern juxtapositions, covering everything from domestic architecture to concrete 'listening ears' in the process.



[a] View into Turn End main bedroom with internal garden backed by ancient wicher wall. The cheese plant is 50+ years old. Folding doors and continuous flooring facilitate inside-outside integration.

The Vale of Aylesbury is a gently rolling agricultural landscape in the county of Buckinghamshire. The ancient village of Haddenham, which lies west of Aylesbury, stretches out in a stacked linear format, the layers joined by a network of small lanes enclosed by wicher walls. Originally constructed for the practical purposes of shelter and animal husbandry, these mud walls, which define the village, have a particular rustic and textured beauty. The local lime-rich subsoil provides an immediate source for this traditional and sustainable building technique.

This village landscape has adapted to many changes over the centuries, not least those presented by 20th century industrialisation including the arrival of the railway in 1905 and electrification in 1928. A 1930s airfield was converted to military

use in WWII and is now an industrial estate. Later, motorway improvements propelled the village into London's commuter belt orbit and resulted in an expanded and mostly bland housing stock alien to the historic nature of the village. Turn End is the antithesis to such expansion. It is one of three houses designed in 1963 by the architect Peter Aldington as part of a village housing scheme, a striking example of British domestic rural modernity informed by village vernacular.

The story begins in 1963 when newlyweds Margaret and Peter Aldington purchased a half-acre site in the heart of the village for £3,000. Formerly part of the garden of a large Victorian building, it was overgrown, full of large trees and magical. The site came with outline planning permission for three detached



[b] The arrival forecourt for The Turn, Middle Turn and Turn End. The large sentinel walnut tree was transplanted from the courtyard garden some 55 years ago.

bungalows with garages, but these were unimaginatively spread over the entire plot and would have resulted in the loss of the trees and the enchanting character of the site.

Peter and Margaret were determined to show that mature trees and buildings could cohabit. They wanted to 'add to the history of the village, not eliminate it'.¹ Inspired by cottage tradition, he grouped the houses in a cluster in the south west corner of the site, thereby saving all of the trees, especially a mature walnut tree around which the entire development pivots. This left the remainder of the plot for garden creation. Inherited wicket walls determined the locations of the houses and were incorporated into Turn End.

Despite the site already having outline planning permission for three unimaginative houses,

securing permission for Peter's more sensitive proposals was complicated. Planning battles ensued, but gutsy determination on the part of the Aldingtons continued and planning was eventually secured. The vicissitudes of the tortuous planning process and eventual happy turnaround in proceedings generated the naming of the houses – The Turn, Middle Turn and Turn End which is the Aldington's home.

Inspired by the 1956 Whitechapel Gallery exhibition *This is Tomorrow*, Peter appreciated how commonplace building components could have their own intrinsic aesthetic character.² As a result modest materials such as wood, durox block and glass were employed. Self-built by Margaret and Peter, each house has a layout that maximises sunlight and privacy



[c] View from Turn End dining area into courtyard garden. Clematis topped wichert wall flows into adjacent room with just visible cactus garden. The pond was formed in the depression left when a walnut tree was transplanted to arrival forecourt.

and contains a central kitchen-dining area, a living area that opens onto a secluded courtyard, sleeping quarters and gallery spaces. Turn End additionally has a large study and separate artist studio.

Intrigue abounds at this site, commencing at the peaceful haven of the elegantly planted arrival forecourt, enclosed by a white rendered boundary wall. The roof lines of the clustered houses dip down into the space with tall, mullioned clerestory dormers anthropomorphically eyeing arriving visitors. Slowly the carefully detailed entrances are revealed – redwood front doors, a small shelf for milk bottles, a bespoke timber letterbox, terracotta quarry-tiled entrance steps.

The houses hold few full height partitions. The construction is evident throughout and maintains

duality of function: a roof beam sits atop a three-quarter height block wall which extrudes horizontally further down to become built-in shelves, in turn becoming seats. Everything flows from one to the other. The wichert walls incorporated into Turn End provide a textured backdrop for two internal gardens. Covetable, mature house plants abound, worthy of envy from the hippest Instagrammer. Clerestories allow light, sky and tree tops to filter through to the interiors whilst maintaining privacy. It is impossible not to be aware of the outside when inside. The visual access to greenery creates a great sense of space and calm within a modest building footprint.

Full height glazing onto the courtyards articulates the inside-outside connection. As one stands in the dining area of Turn End an L-shaped axis takes the eye to the



[d] Expressed internal construction and axis through sitting room to woodland garden and Monica Young pot.

fish pond courtyard, through the arched opening in the wichert wall to the open sunny garden beyond, called No-mans. The other axis draws the eye through a glazed door to the Woodland Garden and a voluptuous Monica Young pot. From there an axis leads northwards to a contrasting, open, sunny flower border and grassy glade. A daisy garden, box court and water garden pivot around the old coach house, now used as an atmospheric potting shed. Throughout, planting is simultaneously sculptural, architectural and romantic. Discrete views of ancient neighbouring properties are gathered, emphasising Turn End's central village location and the juxtaposition of modernism with the traditional.

In 1969 when their integrity as an architectural entity could be appreciated. They received a

RIBA Award for Architecture in 1970 and became Grade II* listed in 2006. Turn End garden is Grade II listed on the Register of Parks & Gardens. Turn End is also notable for being one of the few post-war listed houses and gardens created by the same hand.

For details on the work of the Turn End Trust and open days, visit turnend.org.uk

- 1 Brown, Jane (words), Bryant, Richard (pictures), *a garden and three houses*, (1999 reprinted 2010), p.31.

- 2 *Ibid.* p.24.

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