



Roderick James Architects LLP

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SOME OUTLINE NOTES ON OUR PHILOSOPHY – RODERICK JAMES-JUNE 2003

Roderick James Architects is aiming to put more fun and informality back into buildings; trying to avoid the stereotype square room, square corner, but providing an efficient thermal envelope with dramatic spatial quality. Versatility is a key advantage of heavy timber framing; flexibility over window positions, cladding material, wall, floor and roof. It is ideal for extension or separate outbuilding. By building extensions as outbuildings with covered link to the main house it is often possible to make buildings fit in less obtrusively with their surroundings whilst following the strong outbuilding tradition of rural vernacular architecture. The structure can have a barn feel or be finished to far smoother specification; the aim is to combine the two so that the feeling of barn predominates.

Contemporary architectural practice is also losing spontaneity – (Client;Architect;Builder;Sub-contractor). Each link has potential for losing creative and personal aspects of a building, some things have to be carefully designed, some can be left entirely to personal choice. Current building contracts make change in detail difficult and expensive. Fear of litigation makes architects wary of trying new materials and ideas. Over-emphasis on maximising profit in the short term has often meant that the other key ingredient – maximising client satisfaction – is jeopardised. Often the tying down of architect, builder and sub-contractor to the lowest possible price means the bits which really make buildings work and feel better are omitted. Curiously these items are often not expensive, but they emerge from a close relationship between client, architect, frame-maker and builder, or any combination of these. Some people need just an architect or just a builder; some only need an erected frame.

I believe we must return to a more responsive style of building. It is quite clear that people need to change their living space from time to time, but these events should be relatively straightforward and simple. With a timber frame they can be. Virtually all our work is one-off designs for individual clients and we rarely seem to duplicate work we have already done. If you're building from scratch you may as well have what you want!

One of the reasons for the charm of old buildings is their idiosyncrasies; the gaps, the joints, the odd corners and spaces, the blocked up doorways, nooks, nails and old empty mortices. We have been conditioned to expect a sterile, smooth, uniform building type whether or not that is really what we want. In our practice we build by eye where the effects are visual rather than practical; we do not concern ourselves with making ridges dead straight, but neither do we make them intentionally crooked. Over the past twenty five years we have built up a language and style of structure which is more subtle than might appear at first glance, but seems to give our buildings a lived-in feel even when they have only just been built. Gradually we are finding builders across the country who can provide the finishes we require without appearing either contrived or scrappy. Through Carpenter Oak Limited, we have twenty carpenters who can provide the type of work we want without having to be supervised every minute. Our buildings put strong emphasis on strong colouring, texture and shadow, and quality of light both inside and out.

Increasingly we have been involved in far more contemporary designs, using stainless steel, simpler framing, marine architecture, 'loft' style homes, curved roofs and so on. This is in addition to more traditional work, but it has added an exciting new dimension to our portfolio and we will be delighted to discuss new ideas with you.

We are able to provide part or full architectural service designing a Barnhouse, conservatory or extension for you, or adapting an oak frame to suit plans that may have already been prepared; this may be the most economic approach if you live well outside our areas. Our own architects are based in Devon, Somerset, Oxford and work all over the UK.

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