



Holiday house, Norfolk

ACME engages in some skilful architectural acrobatics in a rural landscape.

UNITED KINGDOM — TEXT: CORDULA ZEIDLER, PHOTOGRAPHY: CRISTOBAL PALMA

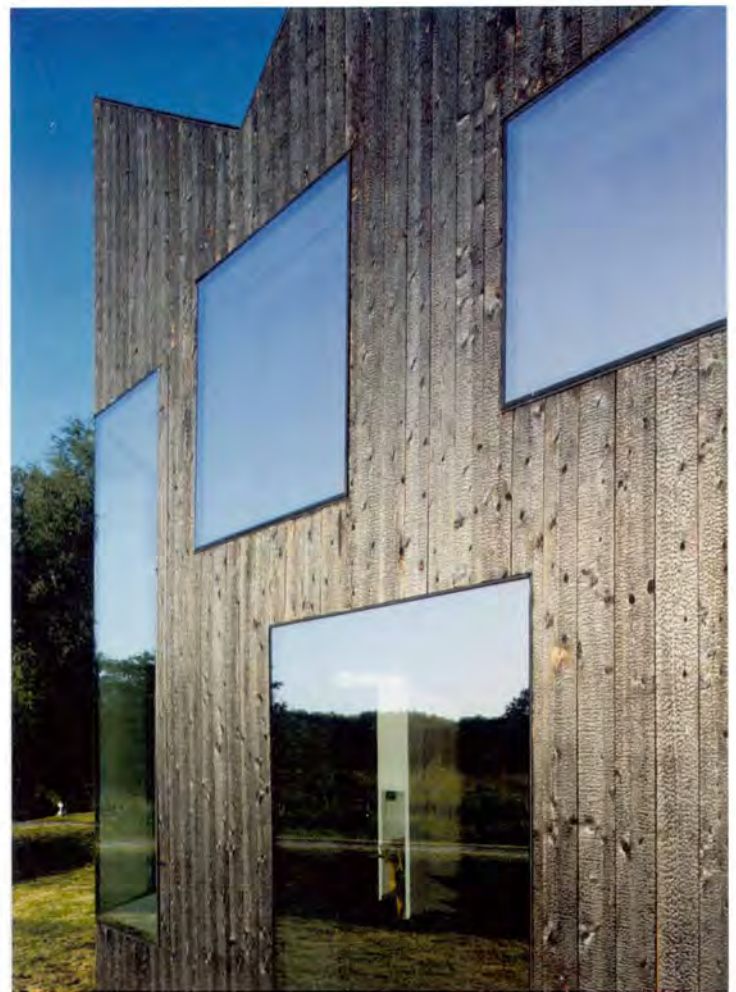
Hunsett Mill occupies an unusual location. At first sight it seems incredibly remote; the journey takes more than three hours by car from London, and the last half hour or so is along winding country roads. The nearest neighbour, once we arrive, is a large farmstead, just visible on the horizon behind a vast field, and when we walk around the building, a grass snake appears on the terrace. A wild and quiet spot if ever there were one. But this isn't really all there is to the location. In front of the mill and house passes the River Ant, part of the Norfolk Broads. The Broads are high on Britain's shortlist of popular holiday locations; a wide network of tranquil waterways, they tend to be swarming with holidaymaker-navigated boats which explore, at slow speed but with great persistency, every last nook and cranny of this flat landscape. The mill is therefore very much in the eye of the public. It sits, almost stage-like, near a bend in the Ant, exposed and presenting some mild excitement to the water travellers who, without fail, wave, and express their approval or dislike of the mill and the new building next to it. Friedrich Ludewig, the architect, compares the Ant to a motorway.

The mill dates back to the mid 19th century. Built as part of an effort to turn the marshy soil into arable land, it functioned as a drainage mill, shifting water back into the Ant. The building is well-known and popular, and

when questioned later in the day, the locals know it, of course, but whether from a boat trip or a post card they aren't so sure; but the building certainly has a firm place in the communal cannon of Norfolk landmarks.

On the site of the mill there also stands the former mill keeper's cottage, a small two-storey red brick house. When the architects arrived on the scene, the little building was bristling with extensions, having been added to over time and without much planning. Ludewig explains that the accommodation was almost unusable, featuring many level changes and tiny spaces. His clients had bought the building as a holiday home, and it needed to function as such for two couples and their children. It was decided to keep the cottage but clear the rest away and build a new extension, which would sit between cottage and mill.

The new extension could not be much bigger than what had previously occupied the site as the location is protected in various ways. The building's envelope was restricted in deference to the landscape and the listed mill building: the ridge of the new roof could not reach higher than that of the cottage but pushing the building lower into the ground was not an option because the site is prone to flooding. The architects solved the conundrum through some skilful architectural acrobatics which include hidden roofslopes, →





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Acme's house in Norfolk wins the 2010 Manser Medal

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Architecture



Determinedly modernist

Edwin Heathcote meets the man whose development of postwar architecture in Britain inspired a Riba award in his name

In the 18th century," writes Michael Manser, whose practice celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year, "Britain created the best housing and planning the world has ever seen. It was designed by educated and sophisticated clients. What depresses me is that since then it has been downhill all the way and 300 years on, Georgian is still estate agents' prime selling tool. For the last 90 years speculative housing has been generally lamentable."

But what can be done? "It's getting better," he says in his Whitehall mansion flat, overlooking London's Embankment. "Until recently 80 per cent of houses were not designed by architects and that is changing." Part of the reason it is changing is an Royal Institute of British Architects' award, the Manser Medal, which has been recognising innovative, intelligent and elegant houses since 2001.

Manser is an architect and former president of the Riba who has had a powerful, probably under-rated, influence on the development of postwar architecture in Britain. His own designs for houses, dozens of works of great modernist clarity throughout south-east England, showed what was possible – how modernism could be integrated into a seemingly resistant English landscape. There is his exquisite Chapel Manor, a crystalline glass box atop the ruined podium of an old Victorian manor house; there is the low-slung Californian chic of Forest Lodge; and the sheer simplicity of Buckland, which seems to float above the landscape. His larger works, most notably the Hilton hotel at Heathrow, leave an indelible image, a relentless modernity that chimes perfectly with the high-tech, Baldradian environs of the airport.

Though retired himself, his office continues, arguably more successful (and more international) than ever, with his son Jonathan in charge, as the Manser Practice – still based in a Hammersmith building designed by Michael. Recent buildings include embassies in Dar es Salaam and Harare as well as the swanky Sketch restaurant in London's Mayfair. His daughter Victoria, meanwhile, has her own eponymous practice. Over tea, Manser brings out an old copy of a 1962 magazine called Home. On the cover is his minimal self-designed house in Leatherhead, the children playing as toddlers in the garden. "Good photo," he says, "though it's a bit of a shame about the plastic daffodils."

"It was easier to build houses then," he recalls. "There were more sites. Since then, the speculative developers have been sending scouts out and have bought up all the



Domestic Clockwise from above: Furzey Hall farm, by Waugh Thistleton architects; John Christopher's Zero Carbon house; the windmill by which Acme Architects built Hunsett Mill house; Hunsett Mill; the interior of Furzey Hall; Michael Manser (centre) with his son Jonathan and daughter Victoria

Will Pryce; Martine Hamilton Knight

good land. But the trouble is most architects' careers begin with the building of a house, the situation was stifling them."

The Manser Medal (which comes with a £10,000 prize and is sponsored by HSBC Private Bank) was a reincarnation of an existing house building prize, which was taken over by the Riba. "I wasn't comfortable with the idea of a 'Manser Medal' at first," he says, with a slight wince. "It always sounded a bit pretentious. But I suppose there's a certain aliteration to it. And it has done some good – I suppose it's ultimately worth the embarrassment."

In its brief history the medal has launched the careers of a number of architects, often with their first buildings. The first winner was Cezary Bednarski, with his house in Barnes ingeniously shaped to inhabit an awkward leftover site. Subsequent winners included Burd Haward Marston, Jamie Fobert, Mole Architects, Robert Dye, Knox Bhavan and Alison Brooks. The past two years' winners exemplify the diversity encompassed by the medal and its potential as exemplar. In 2008 it went, unusually, to a large, established practice, RSHP, the former

Richard Rogers Partnership, for its affordable eco-houses at Oxley Woods in Milton Keynes. These showed what could be done, using much prefabrication and off-site assembly, generous space standards and a friendly yet determinedly modernist design. It also highlighted the dearth of big international practices getting involved in mass housing – still a sector generating low profits.

Last year's winner was Pitman Tozer, for its ingenious sliver of west London urban infill for architect Luke Tozer's young family, the Gap House. It was up against schemes as diverse as dRMM's brilliantly quirky Sliding House (a conservatory which opens out on railway tracks) and S33's very fine social housing on east London's Tarling Estate. It was a list which acknowledged a burgeoning diversity of design across all sectors of the market.

This year's shortlist is similarly encouraging – albeit markedly more luxurious. It includes an eco-house, a historic conversion and the inevitable architect's dwelling. The combined house and gallery in London's Bateman's Row by Theis and Khan – a house for themselves and an office for their practice – was shortlisted for the Riba Stirling Prize, the UK's premier architectural award, and it is a skilful intervention into the chaotic fabric of Shoreditch. James Gorst has a more established practice and, unusually for the UK, one recognised for its houses. His central London Leaf House is billed as a contemporary interpretation of the Georgian house, restrained and relatively austere, but a dwelling that revels in space and light.

Three of the schemes reuse existing architectural fabric, weaving the contemporary into the texture of the old. Most striking is the Martello Tower. A collaboration between architects Percy Corner and product designers Billings Jackson, the interior of this Suffolk building revolves around a brick-built central space of Piranesian solidity and the rooms revel in the thickness of brick. Acme Architects' Hunsett Mill house extends a historic Norfolk dwelling beside an exquisite windmill to create a domestic ensemble that builds on the hybrid industrial/domestic language of architecture. Furzey Hall Farm by Waugh Thistleton similarly builds on a vernacular Cotswolds architecture of a particular place using modernist vocabulary to link and illuminate a pair of existing historic buildings. There is an almost west coast US feel to the new pool and glazed dining area, open to the landscape and minimally detailed. Finally John Christopher's Zero Carbon house is self-explanatory, a piece of clever urban infill in an ordinary Birmingham residential street which shows the potential of the contemporary house to radically reduce energy consumption.

Manser himself is adamant that the issue of energy will come to dominate future architectural discourse and practice. "Oil and gas is going to run out in 30 years," he says. "No one's done anything about it. It's extraordinary. That's why it's important that the winner of the medal each year is a prototype, an example of how it could be done."

Details

The Manser Medal awards ceremony takes place on November 11.
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HUNSETT MILL

LOCATION
STALHAM, NORFOLK, UK

ARCHITECT
ACME

WRITER
CLAIRE BARRETT

PHOTOGRAPHY
RACHAEL SMITH



On the Norfolk Broads' River Ant, the Grade II-listed Hunsett Mill is a local landmark. Until recently, though, the 19th-century cottage to its side, once the mill operator's home, has literally been in its shadow. However, a daring extension by emerging architectural practice Acme has changed all that.

The holiday home is co-owned by Jon Emery, former UK head of development at property firm Hammerson. Before the cottage was renovated, says Emery, 'the rooms were completely isolated, there was no communication between them.' It also had little connection to its incredible setting, with no views of the mill, and few of the river.

At the time, Emery was working with Acme founder Friedrich Ludewig, who was at Foreign Office Architects. In a chance discussion, Ludewig suggested a radical approach to reworking the house. To counter the effect of piecemeal


extensions, Acme chose to strip the cottage back to its historic tiny form and start again. 'We wanted to return the original view as you approach from the river,' says Ludewig. The extension is cleverly conceived as a 'shadow' of the original cottage, replicating its volume in three pitched pavilions behind, folded like origami to create a sharp, abstract outline.

The startling black, charred cedar exterior was chosen to distinguish it from the brick cottage. Traditionally wood was used locally for humbler, agricultural buildings. In Norfolk charring was once a method (now lost) of preserving the wood by removing its oils. Acme, however, had to turn to Japan, where a similar tradition of *yakisugi* is still vibrant.

The external vernacular expression belies its sophisticated construction technology. Cross-laminated timber panels were CNC-milled off-site, pre-fitted with services, and finally slotted together

in just two weeks. Planning restrictions limited the height to match the existing cottage so this light and slim self-supporting envelope was specified in order to maximise internal living space.

Inside, the first floor is hung from the structure, allowing Acme to cleverly use the vaulted roof space to create bedrooms. Three double-height voids with vast windows pierce the first-floor slab and help create a feeling of space in what is a surprisingly modest-sized house.

There has been much talk recently of a revival of a 'modern vernacular', drawing heavily on the heritage of Colin St John Wilson, Peter Aldington et al. The computer-generated formal language of architects such as FOA or, now, Acme is somehow often set in opposition to this. Yet here in one building the two approaches are fused in a remarkably mature and promising calling card for such a young practice. 

BROADS

Millkeeper's house wins award as 'a piece of art'

By TRACEY GRAY

A modern building in the Norfolk Broads has won a national award.

An extension to the millkeeper's house at Hunsett Mill, one mile north of Barton Broad on the River Ant, has scooped the Royal Institute of British Architects' (RIBA) prestigious Manser Medal 2010, for the best new house or major extension in the UK.

The extension was designed by Acme Architects and a presentation of the award took place at a ceremony yesterday with the winner receiving a top prize of £10,000 and a specially commissioned trophy designed by artist Petr Wieg.

The extension more than doubled the size of the millkeeper's house, which is next to the 19th century Grade II listed mill and is now a holiday home co-owned by Jon Emery, former UK head of development at property firm Hammerson.

Acme created the extension in the form of a shadow of the original house, in black, charred timber, which the judges described as "more akin to a piece of art than a piece of rural, domestic architecture".

Mr Emery said before it was renovated, the rooms of the cottage were completely isolated, with no communication between them. He added that it also had no views of the mill, and few of the river.

Speaking about the winning



WIND IN THEIR SAILS: The house next to Hunsett Mill, above and inset, which has won an architects' award for the best extension in the country.

building, Ruth Reed, president of the RIBA, said: "Hunsett Mill, like a lot of really good architecture, results from one simple, strong idea.

"Instead of creating either a pastiche of the Victorian red-brick cottage, or a self-effacing glass box, the architects' truly inventive solution was to create a kind of triple-shadow of the original, in black

charred timber, crossed by the shadow of the neighbouring windmill's arms.

"Houses like Hunsett Mill do not get built without the extraordinary faith in and commitment to the architects by their clients."

Stefano Dal Piva, from Acme, said: "We have been so busy, we have not really had time to take this in as yet

and realise what has happened. We are overwhelmed and very pleased as this is such an important award at a national level."

The windmill, which is about 12m high, was built in 1860 and once ran two scoop wheels.

It has been visually retained in its original historic condition, even though internal works to the mill in the 1960s have removed all mill equipment previously installed in the brick structure.

The house next to the mill was built about the same time as the mill, but to lower standards. It was built on a little raised earth mound to prevent flooding, and consisted of two spaces for the millkeeper, a ground floor room and an upper floor room connected by a staircase.

Because of its original limitations and repeated flooding, the millkeeper's house has been remodelled and extended extensively, in the 1910s, 1940s, 1950s, 1970s and the latest one in 2008.

The latest extension of the cottage has been shortlisted for a number of awards, including the Structural Awards 2009 by the Institution of Structural Engineers and the Sustainability Awards 2009 as one of the five most sustainable projects with a budget under £2 million by the UK Green Building Council and Building Magazine.

OUT OF SIGHT

ACME adds a barely-there extension to a 19th-century Norfolk cottage.

Text Arthur Wortmann | Photos Cristobal Palma

THE ORIGINAL MILL KEEPER'S HOUSE HAS BEEN RENOVATED WITH RECLAIMED BRICKS FROM THE OLD STRUCTURES THAT ACME PULLED DOWN BEFORE BEGINNING THE HUNSETT MILL PROJECT.



Hunsett Mill

Norfolk

Architect

Acme

Client

Confidential

Contractor

Willow Builders

Structural Engineer

AKT

Services Engineer

Hoare Lea

Gross internal area

215 sq m

Hunsett Mill is a very specific response to a very specific space: an arcadian setting on the Norfolk Broads. The windmill and its out-buildings appear on jigsaws, postcards and chocolate boxes as a famous view from narrow boats. The new building is conceived as a shadow sitting within the site lines of the retained cottage so that the new building is invisible from that specific viewpoint.

The new building is clad in black, charred timber so that it is truly a shadow, with flush glazing that adds to the sense of insubstantiality. The overall impact is very arresting – more akin to the response to a piece of art than an example of rural, domestic architecture.

The judges enjoyed the constant inventiveness of Acme's approach seeking new materials, using intriguing structural forms to create interesting forms, values and visual effects. The building is used as a weekend or holiday home by a number of families; this allows the inventiveness and drama of the exterior forms without too many domestic constraints.

The roof forms are particularly enjoyable, creating a series of linked gables that are asymmetric but rhythmic. Further changes of angle are added to create a series of interesting spaces, with the first floor walkway to the bedrooms particularly special. The whole is consistently detailed and well crafted with interesting use of off-site construction.

Overall the restoration of the cottage and the new building, which are linked internally, is an exciting and intellectually stimulating response to the strange rural setting. A cultured client has given free reign to the innovation of his chosen architects Acme and engineers Adams Kara Taylor.

Hunsett Mill proves that good architecture can be delivered on a budget and that it can be achieved in the most restrictive of situations – as a planning authority Norfolk is not renowned for risk-taking. The resulting project balances value and quality and is one that many people could aspire to.



Extend your imagination

These inspirational homes are among those in the running for this year's Riba Manser architecture medal. Emma Wells reports

If you're harbouring a desire to build your dream home, you've no doubt clocked up a few hours watching property reality shows such as Grand Designs in search of inspiration and advice. Yet, whether you want to build from scratch a house with heavyweight design status or add an unusual extension, you'd do just as well to turn instead to the slew of architecture awards that are handed out each year.

On Tuesday, the Royal Institute of British Architects will announce the longlist for the Manser Medal, which honours the best new houses in the UK. The 17 one-off properties will range from an undulating glass and oak family home in London to a futuristic conversion of a 19th-century martello tower in Suffolk, via a Norfolk holiday home built to dance in the shadow of a windmill.

The selection will be narrowed down to a shortlist on October 2, with the winner announced at a special dinner on November 11. One of the judges, Peter Mackie, the managing director of Property Vision, a top-end property finder and a subsidiary of HSBC Private Bank, says he will be looking for houses that actually work for their clients, rather than just clever pieces of design.

"There's a broad range of criteria," he says, "but first the house must fulfil a client's brief. It has to make best use of its site and it must engage its users and visitors. Above all, it's got to lift the soul. It must transport you."

Home has been given a sneak preview of the nominees so far — see if any of them inspire you.

Riba: 020 7580 5533, architecture.com

SUNDAY TIMES ONLINE

See more nominees, and a sliding house that was one of last year's finalists, at thesundaytimes.co.uk/home



Mill House Farm, Kent

This is no ordinary renovation and extension project. Guy Holloway Architects, a firm based in London and Kent, has worked closely with the farm's owners to blend the ancient fabric of the Georgian house with a sequence of natural-feeling spaces, culminating in an open-plan kitchen/dining/living area that opens onto the garden. The five-bedroom property,

completed in January for an undisclosed amount, now has 5,700 sq ft of living space. Sustainability is a key theme, with natural resources exploited as much as possible: water is heated by a ground-source system under the lawn and there are solar panels. Guy Holloway Architects: 01303 280515, guyholloway.co.uk



Bateman's Row, London EC2

In 2000, husband-and-wife architects Patrick Theis, 48, and Soraya Khan, 50 (right), bought a 1850s former furniture-polish factory in Shoreditch, east London. Although they had planned to use it solely as an office space for their practice, Theis + Khan, they soon decided they wanted to knock it down and create a live-work space for themselves and their four children, now aged between 7 and 21. After wrangling with local planners from 2005 until 2007, they obtained permission to put up a four-storey contemporary building with a gallery space in the basement, two commercial units, four residential units — one of which is their family home — and their office. "The place was finished last October, but we moved in last spring — so there was lots of camping out," says Theis. The couple spent about £1.6m on the build. Theis + Khan: 020 7729 8320, theisandkhan.com



Frankish Lighting



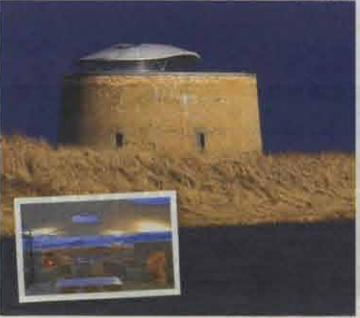
Hunsett Mill, Norfolk

This holiday cottage sits in the shadow of a windmill that is a noted sight from narrowboats on the Broads and appears on jigsaw puzzles, postcards and chocolate boxes. The east London architecture firm Acme has added an extension clad in black charred timber, conceived as a shadow of the original cottage, to create 2,315 sq ft of living space. Irregularly placed, flush-glazed, unframed windows echo the traditional materials and colours but add a sense of dislocation. The five-bedroom mill house — completed last August at a cost of about £600,000 — has ground-source heat pumps and a well in its grounds, making it largely self-sufficient. Acme: 020 7392 2087, acme.co

Lynette Douglas Photography

Martello Tower Y, Suffolk

Revamping a martello tower is one of the greatest challenges for any architect. Here, the London-based firm Percy Corner has succeeded in converting a scheduled ancient monument into a stunning high-tech home. Renovation of the 19th-century, 1,290 sq ft tower, which has walls 12ft thick, was completed in January at a cost of £400,000. The tower now has four bedrooms, while its original fabric, including exposed domed brickwork, is enhanced but not overwhelmed by light, simple furnishings. There are far-reaching sea views from the roof terrace, which has a salt-the canopy, but can be opened to the elements. Percy Corner Architects: 020 7430 7546, perycorner.co.uk



Edward Turner

Lewis House, Devon

In a conservation area in Exeter, this 1,990 sq ft, four-bedroom house was built for about £280,000 by the Devon firm David Sheppard Architects, and was completed last July. A lightweight wooden box floats above necklaces of clear and opaque glass, away from the heavy rendered case of the lower storey. The light and airy ground floor has fully glazed retractable screens leading from open-plan sitting, dining and kitchen areas into a walled garden. Views out into the floor, and a mirror beside the staircase, create unexpected views. David Sheppard Architects: 01752 698676, davidsheppard-architects.com



Julian Ryan

Park Avenue South, London N8

Completed last September at a cost of £246,000, this 1,008 sq ft extension makes a striking contrast to the five-bedroom, Edwardian end-of-terrace house to which it is attached. South London-based Studio Octopai has used geometric white planes and plenty of glass and zinc cladding to define the new kitchen/dining space. The impression is of sheets of paper folded origami-style, framed by a bamboo-planted garden. "I wanted to open up the back of the property," says the owner, Anvia Delgado, a partner in a law firm. "Having had the house for 14 years, I had the extension added instead of starting afresh somewhere else — I needed a change. The architects were so brilliantly creative. I love the contrast between the old part, which is furnished with antiques, and the Zen addition." Studio Octopai: 020 7633 0003, octopai.co.uk

Paul Fennell



Paul Fennell

RIBA Manser Medal 2010
for the best new house in the UK
in association with HSBC Private Bank

Shortlisted

Hunsett Mill
ACME

Client	Catriona and John Dodsworth, Joanna and Jon Emery
Contractors	Willow Builders / Eurban / Nuttall
Structural Engineer	Adams Kara Taylor
Services Engineer	Hoare Lea
Quantity Surveyor	Philip Panks & Partners
Sustainability	Hoare Lea
Landscape	ACME
Photographer	Cristobal Palma

Ruth Reed, RIBA President

RIBA Awards 2010

Hunsett Mill

Architect **ACME (Friedrich Ludewig, Stefano Dal Piva)**
with **Karoline Markus/Nerea Calvillo/Chris Yoo (Schematic design)**

Client **Catriona and John Dodsworth, Joanna and Jon Emery**
Contractor **Willow Builders/Eurban (Timber Structure)/Nuttall (Flood Defence)**

Structural Engineer **Adams Kara Taylor (Gerry O'Brien, Gary Lynch)**


Services Engineer **Hoare Lea (Phil Grew)**

Quantity Surveyor **Philip Panks & Partners/Cyril Sweett**

Sustainability **Hoare Lea (Phil Grew)**

Landscape **ACME (Julia Cano, Kelvin Chu, Stefano Dal Piva, Deena Fakhro, Michael Haller, Friedrich Ludewig)**

Photographer **Cristobal Palma**



Ruth Reed, President, RIBA

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Hunsett Mill

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick Baker".

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North Norfolk District Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gloria Lisher".

GLORIA LISHER
CHAIRMAN
North Norfolk District Council



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Shortlisted Project

Adams Kara Taylor

for

Hunsett Mill



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Project Team

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Mechanical & Electrical Engineer: Hoare Lea

Contractor: Willow Builders

Other consultants or Sub-contractors: EURBAN