

# MA Architecture: Sustainability + Design at University of East London

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## Overview

The MA Architecture: Sustainability + Design at the University of East London is one of very few postgraduate courses that evaluates and examines sustainability through design at both the urban and architectural scale. Students research and critique prevailing environmental design principles and develop experimental and innovative environmental designs through the testing of theory into practice. Uniquely, students develop their own architectural language in response to this 'new' ethical and contextual thinking and in turn become fellow researchers with staff.

We deal with the "what", "why" and "how" of environmental architecture at different scales. We are interested in investigating, testing and generating experimental and innovative solutions which challenge current design practice.

The programme is delivered by architects, urban designers and environmental consultants. Within the European Union, architectural and urban practice is moving increasingly quickly towards energy efficiency and low environmental impact, and Sustainability and Design graduates are frequently recruited to prominent UK firms specialising in new environmental practices.

### **1 / Environmental Architecture**

This module investigates the principles and theories of environmental sustainability and environmental architecture, placed within a contextual framework for both judging but also generating environmentally sustainable design. This is vital, given the confusing 'green wash' present in architecture and often contradictory uses of the word 'sustainability', which refers to three kinds — social, economic and environmental sustainability (the 'triple bottom line'). This module focuses in on the true environmental impact of our designs, not only seeking to reduce this impact but also to negotiate between the different contextual parameters and their relative importance to the current 'zero carbon' debate.

### **2 / Urban Ecology**

The Urban Ecology Module critically assesses the concept of 'the sustainable city', the current debates surrounding the dominant models of urban sustainability, their relationship to competing approaches to urban analysis and design and the importance of urban ecology, both architecturally and environmentally.

Throughout this module we study and critique the environmental impact of these urban strategies and theories as well as the formulation of new ideas, whilst quantifying, questioning and testing the environmental impact and implications of these new ideas.

### **3 / Dissertation Module**

The Dissertation Module, which can be partly based on design practice, is the final module each student undertakes and requires more self-directed research than the two previously taught modules. Students can explore a question of their own interest, representing an accumulation of each student's skills, understanding, knowledge and personal interest and contribution in the field of environmental design. Thesis ideas are often developed from areas of interest students discovered on the course and leads to a diversity of topics.

## From Theory to Practice



### Without building, how can you learn to build?

During Construction Week, postgraduate students across the architecture programmes participate in the development, design and build of a 1:1 construction.

MA Architecture: Sustainability + Design students combine environmental design interests and research with innovative and experimental building solutions and methods. Students and staff collaboratively deliver a bespoke design to an often real brief and real client, involving the students and university with the community.

## Staff



### **Sofie Pelsmakers** **Programme Leader**

Sofie Pelsmakers, originally from Belgium, has lived and worked in the UK since 1997 and is a chartered RIBA architect. Since 2001, she has been a senior lecturer in Environmental and Sustainable Design, both at undergraduate and postgraduate courses, at the University of East London (UEL). Sofie has also undertaken freelance environmental design consultancy work for, amongst others, Cytex/DEFRA, CABE and private clients. From 2003 until 2007, Sofie worked as an architect and environmental designer with architects Levitt Bernstein, who still generously sponsor research at the [MA Architecture: Sustainability + Design](#). Sofie's special interests include the challenges of future proofing buildings to account for predicted climate changes and the expression of environmental ethics within architecture. She is a founding member of Architecture for Change (AfC) and author of the [AfC Environmental Design Handbook](#), due for publication in 2011. (RIBA Publications)

At present, Sofie is conducting research with regards to the UK Government's definition of 'Zero Carbon' and its architectural and urban implications. Sofie has most recently spoken at the Camden & Islington Passiv Haus Conference (Feb 2010) and spoke in Lausanne at the EPFL/ UNESCO 'Technologies for Sustainable Development' conference on 'Zero carbon in dense urban areas: Lessons learned from London, Tehran and Kumasi' (Feb 2010). Sofie is also a member of Sponge, RESET, AECB and the University's Sustainability Research Institute (SRI) as well as being a founding member of the Design4Change research group at AVA.

### **Alan Chandler** **Leader of Research and** **Knowledge Exchange**

Alan Chandler is a Director of architects practice 'Arts Lettres Techniques' and Leader of Research and Knowledge Exchange for the School of Architecture and the Visual Arts. Chandler maintains a balance between practice and research teaching, creating a tension between 'real-life' and teaching that allows innovative processes of design, risk management, prototyping and construction to inform both. Chandler's practice brings to teaching the experience of fast-track modular construction, international infrastructure projects, listed buildings and conservation management, office developments and collaboration with artists.

Chandler's current research interests include 'Fabric Formed Rammed Earth' programme with Rowland Keable, which was presented at the International Fabric Formwork conference in the University of Manitoba, Canada in 2009 and at the NOCMAT conference in the University of Bath in 2010. Chandler's work with fabric formed concrete in collaboration with Prof. Remo Pedreschi from the University of Edinburgh was published in their book, [Fabric Formwork](#), which won a special commendation in the 2009 RIBA Presidents Awards for University based Research, leading to a commission from the Garden designer Paul Hensey to develop and construct a 7 tonne fabric formed concrete environment for the prestigious 2009 Chelsea Flower Show, which won a Silver Gilt and the 'Best Small Garden' award. Currently, Chandler is using University-based research within his own practice, and advises on the use of fabric concrete to practices such as Tonkin-Liu and Zaha Hadid Architects.

"By integrating ecology with architecture we should consider architecture as an element which has the potential of interacting with as many "players" in an ecosystem as possible. It appears that this potential has been vastly overlooked in the past. During more than ten years of professional practice I have never witnessed an ecologist advising on the biological potential of a building, even when the scale of the project affected the biodiversity of the site. Architecture until the present could be looked at as almost entirely anthropocentric — predominantly serving human needs. There are many examples where the term ecology with regard to architecture has been misused."

**Franz Schenkel, student**

# Staff



## **Roland Karthaus** **Senior Lecturer**

Roland has worked as both architect and client on a wide range of types and scales of project and has a particular interest in urban regeneration. At McDowell+Benedetti, he worked on the Castleford Bridge project and appeared in Kevin McCloud's Big Town Plan on Channel 4. He led the masterplan design team for the regeneration of Clapham Park: a £0.5 Billion project with 3,500 homes, community facilities and public park that is now under construction. Working for Lewisham Council as a client, he commissioned construction projects at New Cross Gate as part of the NDC regeneration programme. Roland is now an Associate at masterplanning consultancy, Think Place and is part-time lecturer at UEL, teaching Sustainable Cities/Urban Ecology on the [MA Architecture: Sustainability + Design](#) course and Professional Studies for degree and diploma architecture.

He holds an MA in Regeneration and is a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts which provides a forum for the advancement of ideas across traditional disciplines and is founding member of the Design4Change research group at AVA.

[www.think-place.co.uk](http://www.think-place.co.uk)

## **Stephen Choi** **Lecturer**

Stephen is an Associate at Broadway Malyan Architects — a multi-disciplinary design practice where he has been furthering his experience in ecological building design and environmentally-driven masterplanning.

Stephen has adopted a unique role in the practice, positioned between the in-house environmental engineers and the practice's town-planning consultants, to promote deliverable sustainable development with wide agendas at several scales, ranging from innovative individual domestic eco-retrofits to masterplanning that integrates low energy, water neutral and managed waste infrastructure.

Stephen is also the Training Manager for SusCon — a leading training centre in sustainable construction providing an innovative programme of activities to enable existing and future employees in construction to have the appropriate skills to meet the demands of sustainable construction and enabling SMEs to be ready and able to take up opportunities within the green economy, including new environmental technologies as they arise across the South East.

Student 1:1 design and build  
Construction Week 2009

## **For further information**

### **Sofie Pelsmakers**

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