



And the winner should be...

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In the round

A new apartment block designed by Manchester practice Andrew Wallace Architects is under construction in the Ancoats area of Manchester.

The seven-storey, £5 million circular housing scheme overlooks the New Islington development in east Manchester masterplanned by Will Alsop.

The striking building, called Albion Works, includes 36

apartments and is clad in coloured glass panels. It also features a large elliptical atrium in the centre of the building.

The atrium is used for access and also helps to naturally ventilate the apartments.

The space also features a glass-clad, freestanding lift in the centre of the atrium and a hanging glass, stainless-steel and oak staircase (pictured right).



Holyrood fall-out continues as project architect quits

More RMJM staff resign

Will Hurst

The project architect on the Stirling Prize-shortlisted Scottish Parliament building has resigned in solidarity with his former boss at RMJM, Brian Stewart, who left the practice in controversial circumstances.

Associate John Kinsley left RMJM on Friday as it was claimed that Stewart had been forced out by senior figures at the practice. At the time of his departure in April, RMJM suggested he had taken indefinite leave suffering stress caused by the seven-year project and the resulting public inquiry.

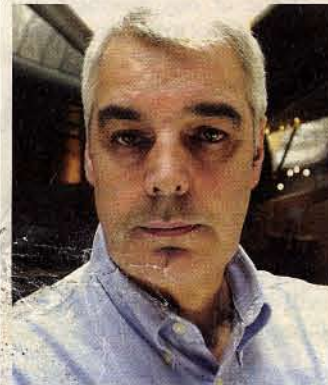
Kinsley is one of six senior staff at RMJM in Scotland to resign following Stewart's departure. He joins associates John Miller, John Ramsey and Russell Bissett, senior architect Fiona McNeil and landscape architect Kenny Fraser.

RMJM, which had previously claimed Stewart was on indefinite leave, confirmed he had left the firm.

A spokeswoman added: "In the nature of our business, staff levels fluctuate due to project commitments and resources. Often, at the end of large projects such as the Scottish Parliament, staff move on."

Kinsley, who still has shares in RMJM declined to comment, but sources close to some of the departing architects said their decision to leave was triggered by Stewart's departure.

"Clearly a lot of people made the decision they did not want anything to do with it," said one source, who asked not to be named.



Stewart: In clash with RMJM directors.

While Stewart is bound by a confidentiality agreement, it is now claimed he did not leave of his own accord. Instead, it is understood Stewart clashed with non-executive directors nominated by shareholder Fraser Morrison over the post-Holyrood direction of the firm.

Sources close to Stewart say he wanted to forge a common design approach across RMJM's international offices building on the critical plaudits received for Holyrood, while the other camp preferred to treat architectural services as a commodity for sale.

"There's a real concern RMJM seems to be heading in a much more commercial direction," said one source close to RMJM.

RMJM declined to comment on this version of the dispute.

Former director Mick Duncan, who worked at RMJM for 40 years before retiring last October, called the firm's actions "outrageous" and rubbished its claims that Stewart had left because of the strains of the Holyrood project.

"He did not leave of his own

accord, it was not an amicable separation and it was absolutely nothing to do with his state of health," he said, referring to suggestions of exhaustion made in the local press in June.

"They [the nonexecutive directors] did not like the way he was running the business and there was a conflict between him and the non-executive directors which had been festering and reached boiling point. It is completely outrageous. Brian Stewart has been the backbone of this business for something like 30 years. He has shaped the business into what it is now and spent the last seven years on the Parliament building — a project of huge kudos for RMJM."

Architectural adviser to the parliament John Gibbons said RMJM would struggle to replace such experience. He called the departures very sad and predicted RMJM would be "very busy" replacing the skills lost.

"RMJM seem to have lost a lot of key people in the last six to eight weeks," he said. "We have not been given any explanation other than that they are restructuring. I have every confidence in [UK managing director] Tony Kettle, but he does not have the experience which came with the parliament."

Property director at developer Forth Ports, Terry Smith, who is working with RMJM on an 18,000-home development in Leith, offered his support to the company.

"I'm very happy with RMJM's performance and have not noticed any difference with the changes of staff," he said.

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