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at the Bluecoat.

19 January 2015

To Whom It May Concern

Biq Architecten, represented by its director Hans van der Heijden, were chosen by the Bluecoat, against stiff competition, to be lead architects on what became the £14.75 million capital development of the UK's oldest arts centre and Liverpool's oldest city centre building.

We reopened in 2008, and Hans and his team were contracted for further work following an unfortunate fire affecting the bistro later that year. Hans has continued its relationship with the Bluecoat, providing an ongoing advice and design service, most recently in 2013 on a further capital scheme we are researching. The engagement also operates at a discursive level, for instance the jointly organised Habitat symposium in 2013, which looked at the Bluecoat scheme in relation to culture-led urban regeneration.

Apart from Hans' coolheaded enthusiasm, what appealed to us was his sympathetic understanding of the context of the Bluecoat within Liverpool city centre. He also grasped the significance of our organisation within Merseyside's cultural offer and how it was important to protect its historical position at the same time as articulating the arts centre's contemporary ambitions.

It was a highly complex project, in terms of the Bluecoat's Grade One Listed status, the difficult access and circulation issues that needed to be addressed, the disruptive construction environment that surrounded the Bluecoat, notably the huge Liverpool One project, and the complications of delivering a public/private arts facility in the UK. The brief too was for a complete overhaul of the Bluecoat's existing facilities, which were to be complemented and vastly improved, with the addition of a new arts wing and reorganisation of existing spaces.

Hans' approach was exemplary, it was consultative, imaginative, rigorous and rational, yet at the same time challenging. The subsequent design had exceeded our expectations and we knew the Bluecoat would be a worthy flagship for Liverpool European Capital of Culture, 2008. Hans and his team designed a solution that worked on all levels, marrying perfectly the old building with an exciting contemporary wing.

Their proposal when first presented was surprisingly provocative, and at public meetings to discuss the proposal was warmly received – a minor miracle given the heavy leanings towards conservation in Britain. But this positive response was very

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much down to a combination of coherence and adventurousness that exemplifies Hans' approach, as well as his sensitive use of materials.

Hans' proposal was well received by both Liverpool's city planning advisory committee and CABA (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) and was signalled out from other current Liverpool projects by UNESCO who praised the way it harmoniously enhances an historic building with a bold modern intervention.

The building was awarded a Royal Institute of British Architects North West Award, the first of several awards, which have been accompanied by wide critical acclaim since the building reopened that year. RIBA awards are given for buildings that have high architectural standards and make a substantial contribution to the local environment.

Hans and the design team that he was leading met every deadline, and as leaders of a large design team for this project, Hans managed the process well, maintaining an excellent client relationship throughout the project and building trust. He brought to the process an unfailing good humour and enthusiasm, which was refreshing and helped make what was an ambitious and highly complex development all the more enjoyable.

As a result of our experience with Hans van der Heijden over the past ten or so years, we have no reservation in recommending him and his new office wholeheartedly.

Yours truly

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bryan Biggs". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bryan Biggs
Artistic Director