

Julian Owen is a chartered architect and member the Royal Institute of British Architects. His practice, Julian Owen Associates Architects, is based in the East Midlands and undertakes a wide variety of projects including the alteration, extension and refurbishment of many hundreds of properties as well as designing one-

off houses. Julian's projects have featured widely in magazines and the national press. He has published four books, aimed at informing and empowering those considering building projects, and also delivers talks and seminars at exhibitions and shows explaining the design and construction process. His latest book, Home Extension Design, is published

by the RIBA. Julian has been a member of the RIBA national council and also works as an adjudicator of construction disputes. In 1993 he founded Associated Self Build Architects (ASBA), a national network of architectural practices who specialise in one-off houses, and is a director and the current chairman. He received an MBE in January 2003.



Julian Owen MBE

"I don't strive to develop an easily recognisable style, because visually I like every house to differ."

THE SELF BUILD specialist

Julian Owen has established a reputation as a specialist self build architect and was a founder of Associated Self Build Architects

Address Book

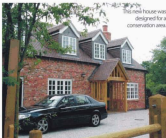
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A combined kitchen and dining area designed for a family in Nottinghamshire.

WHAT ARE YOUR MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD HOMES?

I only ever lived in one house as a child, and my parents are still there so I see it fairly regularly. It's an Edwardian property in Southern, Essex, with high ceilings and bay windows, which was previously owned by two sisters for nearly sixty years before my parents bought it in 1963. Living close to the seafront was a wonderful experience as a child, and it was certainly a great playground. I always think that seaside architecture has its own very particular character.



This new house was designed for a conservation area.

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO BECOME AN ARCHITECT?

My father is an architect, who's now retired, so I suppose it's in the blood! Actually, it's strange just how many architects do seem to follow in their parents' footsteps – often for several generations. It's the range of the work which interested me and still does, and I went straight into the seven year training course from school.

WHO OR WHAT HAS MOST INFLUENCED YOU?

I'm quite eclectic and, aside from my father, there have probably been two very different influences. One is John Betjeman, whose statue has recently been unveiled at the newly refurbished St Pancras station – a building that he fought to preserve. He was an ardent and controversial conservationist back in the sixties – when it wasn't a fashionable cause – and he made quite an impact on me as a child. The other early influence would have to be the modernist French architect Le Corbusier, although many of his designs aren't particularly appropriate for this country's weather!

HOW WOULD YOU SUM UP YOUR OWN STYLE?

Contrary to many architects I don't strive to develop an easily recognisable style, because visually I like every house to differ. It should be about the people who live there and the site conditions rather than imposing your own tastes and signature designs. You can create beautiful houses in all kinds of styles, and what interests me is the process of gathering information and producing a design which answers the brief.



Above and above right: Julian designed the balcony of this three storey house to extend the first floor lounge and make the most of some stunning views across the countryside.

Below: Interesting glazing and carefully designed details give the front of this house plenty of character.

Below middle: Julian is particularly interested in using natural light to create interesting spaces.

Below right: Even if a house is given traditional details, in the hands of the right designer it can still be individual and unique to the family who build it.



WHICH ASPECTS PARTICULARLY INTEREST YOU?

Sustainability is a catch-all term, but what's really interesting is how you actually make it happen. People often spend their money on quick fixes and gadgets such as photovoltaic panels and ground source heat pumps, but for me it's more important to design the envelope of the house thoughtfully using carefully chosen materials. Orientating a building correctly towards the sun and balancing the amounts of glazing correctly can have an enormous impact on maximising solar gain and reducing heat loss. I'm interested in the fundamental design issues that reduce the environmental impact of buildings, which are somehow seen as less sexy because they don't involve selling a bit of high tech kit with a button to press.

DESCRIBE YOUR CURRENT HOME

I live with my wife and two children in a 1930s suburban house which we bought in poor condition, gutted and refurbished before adding a side extension that, until recently, was used as an office for the architectural practice. Despite being seen as quite unfashionable I actually think suburbia has a great deal to offer. There's a fixation in this country with living in the countryside or with city living, but the suburbs offer the perfect balanced lifestyle from my point of view.



WOULD YOU LIKE TO BUILD YOUR OWN HOUSE?

I'm always looking for an affordable plot to build a house, but we're embedded in the community here and wouldn't want to move too far away, which is limiting. I've designed virtually every style there is for clients apart from Art Deco, which I love, so it would probably have stained glass and other Art Deco influences. The planners would have a fit. I have very broad tastes though, so if you asked me again next week it might be something totally different!

Julian Owen is the author of three books on architecture.

WHAT PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT HAS GIVEN YOU THE MOST SATISFACTION?

ASBA is very important to me, and I set it up with Adrian Spawforth as a way of bringing together architects around the country who specialise in one-off houses and often can't afford to advertise their services individually. Architects have a →