Observer critics' review of 2023

Review

Architecture: Rowan Moore's five best projects of 2023

An innovative almshouse, bright and breezy seaside landmark
and a playful rural folly all made their mark

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Rowan Moore
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1. **Appleby Blue almshouse, London SE16**
Witherford Watson Mann
The traditional almshouse reinvented in a modern urban setting. Sheltered housing that gives a haven of peace around a garden court, while connecting to the busy city life surrounding the site. If only all housing for older people could be designed this way.

2. **Greville Street/ 8 Bleeding Heart Yard, London, EC1**
Amin Taha/Groupwork
A drab 1970s office block renovated by veiling it in versions of the facades of the older buildings it replaced, realised in brass mesh. An architectural ghost that brings back a sense of time to the site. An inspired way to reuse a building.

3. **Croydon colonnade**
Atelier ANF

📷 Adam Furman's Croydon colonnade. Photograph: Gareth Gardner

A public route animated by three-dimensional vitreous tiles, tactile and weighty, with what their designer Adam Furman calls a "luscious depth" of colour and crazing. Inspirations include the zigzag patterns of Durham Cathedral and the architect of Centre Point, Richard Seifert. Beautiful and delightful, a work of real craft.

4. Sunspot, Jaywick Sands

HAT

A case of doing a lot with a little, a robust and playful structure that brings much-needed employment to Jaywick Sands, Essex, which started in the 1930s as a settlement of DIY seaside holiday homes. It's a new landmark for the resort, with the improvisational spirit of its pioneers.

5. Wedding Cake, Waddesdon Manor

Joana Vasconcelos

📷 Joana Vasconcelos's Wedding Cake at Waddesdon Manor, Aylesbury. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

An inspired folly for the Rothschild manor of Waddesdon in Buckinghamshire. A three-tier, house-sized wedding cake clad in pink, green and blue ceramic tiles and decorated with dolphins, candles and mermaids. Because why not?