

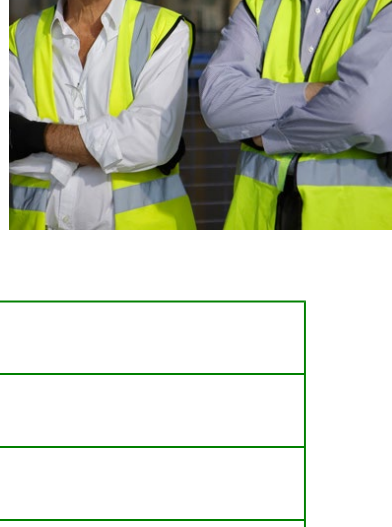
# Vol.14 Nacasa & Partners Web 10th anniversary special



## John Pawson x Deyan Sudjic in LONDON

This interview took place at the site of the new Design Museum in London, set to open in November 2016. This interview has long been a dream of Takeshi Nakasa. His long-time friend: John Pawson, his most favorite architectural critic: Deyan Sudjic. Finally it has come true. (October 2015)

Text : Megumi Yamashita (Freelance Editor)  
Photo : Koji Fujii (Nacása & Partners Inc.)  
Edit : Nobuko Ohara (Nacása & Partners Inc.)

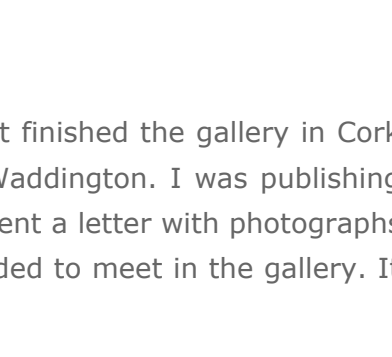


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### 01. First meeting in 1980s

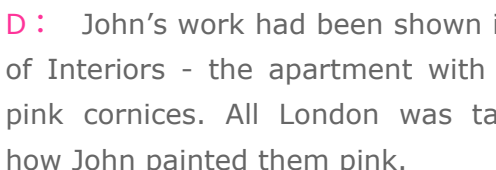
**- Despite not being able to attend, Mr Nakasa was pleased to organize this dialogue between Deyan and John at the construction site of the new Design Museum in London.**

**John Pawson (J) :** I met Nakasa-san for the first time in the 90s, when I gave a lecture in Tokyo. He kindly threw a party for me. I had actually known him long before that, through his photographs. When I was in Japan at the end of 1970s, his name came up a lot. Nakasa-san has documented Japanese architecture and beyond.



**Deyan Sudjic (D) :** When we first published Japanese architecture and design in Blueprint in the 80s, I remember we used his photographs of the projects by Fuji Takayama's Plastic Studio & Associates.

**- How did you first meet each other?**



**D :** John had just finished the gallery in Cork Street for Leslie Waddington. I was publishing Blueprint and he sent a letter with photographs to me, so we decided to meet in the gallery. It was 1984.

**J :** Deyan wasn't sure if the gallery was publishable as architecture, because there was nothing in it. It was just an empty box. .

**D :** So I made an article about the door handle.

**J :** Yes, the door handle designed by Shiro Kuramata.

**D :** John's work had been shown in the World of Interiors - the apartment with the famous pink cornices. All London was talking about how John painted them pink.



**J :** It was Kuramata's idea. He had been my friend and mentor since I met him in Japan in the 70s. When he visited London, I took him to the apartment and asked what he would do. He said he would paint the cornices pink. I was very surprised.

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### 02. High-tech and Minimal

**- At that time was Deyan living in a flat renovated by Jan Kaplicky of Future Systems in high-tech style?**

**D :** I was just about to move to that flat. John and I became friends very quickly and he came to see it. He said, 'It's not my cup of tea but it's well done'.

**J :** Some time later, Deyan kindly let my wife and me stay there while he was away. It was a really wonderful experience.

**D :** When I came back, I discovered the fridge full of Kirin beer!

**J :** I love Japanese beer. In those days it was very difficult to find. I had to buy from a wholesaler in bulk.

**D :** The design of the can was also exquisite.



**- Considering Jan's later work, the design of the flat was quite minimal.**

**J :** That's true. I like things to be well done, no matter what the style is.

**D :** I think the most shocking interiors in London then were yours and mine. It was almost annoying that people wouldn't stop talking about the flat as the 'spaceship', but John didn't do that.

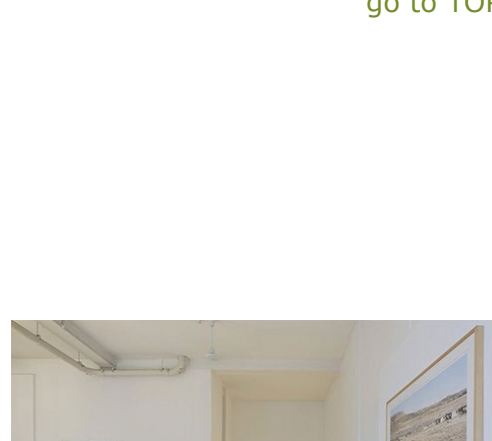
**J :** I didn't see it like that.

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### 03. New Design Museum

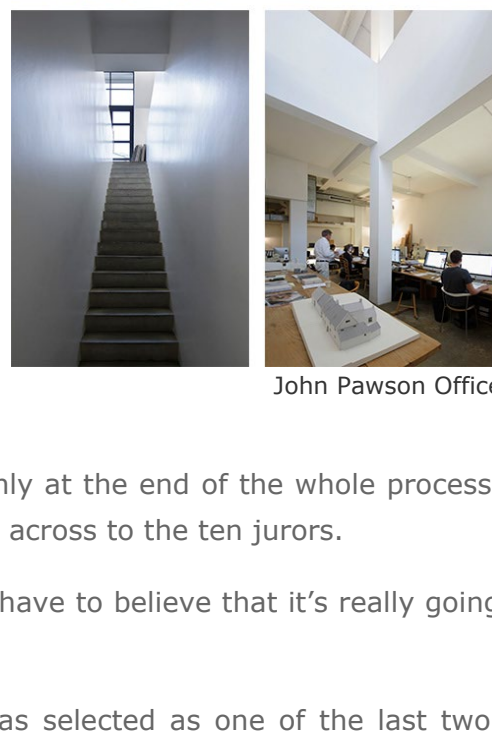
**- You got on very well from the beginning. When did you start working together?**

**D :** The first time I worked with John was when I was directing Glasgow City of Architecture in 1999. I asked him to design an installation. In 2002, John designed the exhibition for the Venice Architecture Biennale I directed.



**- From Shad Thames River to Kensington. Why is the Design Museum moving to this new location?**

**D :** The current Museum, which opened in 1989, is limited in space. When I joined in 2007, they were talking about buying a site next to Tate Modern to build a new Museum behind the Turbine Hall. We were looking at the possibility for about a year, before we started looking for other sites. Then a developer, who had acquired the former Commonwealth Institute, approached us.



Previous Design Museum

**- What was the Commonwealth Institute?**

**J :** It was originally a place for the 52 Commonwealth countries to exhibit. The building was designed by RMJM and opened in 1962. It had been empty since 2002 and Grade II\* listed

**D :** A property company bought the whole site to redevelop and OMA was selected to draw a master plan. To get their planning permission to build residential blocks, they needed to keep and find a cultural user for the iconic building. As the developer would give us a 175-year rent-free lease and £10 million towards the repair of the building, we decided to go with it. That's why the building is now surrounded by new apartment blocks designed by OMA.

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### 04. Design Competition

**- When the museum announced the competition for the Museum in 2009, did Deyan encourage John to enter the competition?**

**J :** Deyan occasionally just said, 'you should enter this competition', so I got the message. It was a very low voice. I don't normally do competitions, but once you've decided to do it, you have to go the whole way. It was a very tense exercise, but I hadn't realized how excited the office would be. Everyone wanted to stay working late. It created a new kind of intensity and atmosphere in the office. For me the odds weren't good enough. To have a chance of winning, you have to put in so much more. They said to us that all they wanted was an idea: 'you don't have to make models - just give us an idea'. But we usually have an idea only at the end of the whole process. It wasn't easy to know how best to get the ideas across to the ten jurors.



John Pawson Office

**D :** I think competitions have to feel real. You have to believe that it's really going to happen. Otherwise it's difficult.

**J :** The worst moment for me came after I was selected as one of the last two, with David Chipperfield. While I was waiting for the final presentation in a car with my model, a van parked nearby. Out came a huge architectural model, four or five times bigger than mine, followed by David Chipperfield. I thought this was it; I had surely lost. Of course, David's plan was also very good.

**D :** I admire the architects that go through this process, because they have to deal with the pain of not getting it, quite often

**J :** However rational the person is, the rejection is really painful. It can be very emotional and hurtful. Probably it's a good thing, as it makes us humble. Luckily I didn't have to go through it this time. During the process of competition, Deyan was even quieter than usual. We didn't talk about the project at all.

**D :** I knew he was going to do a good job. That's what we got.

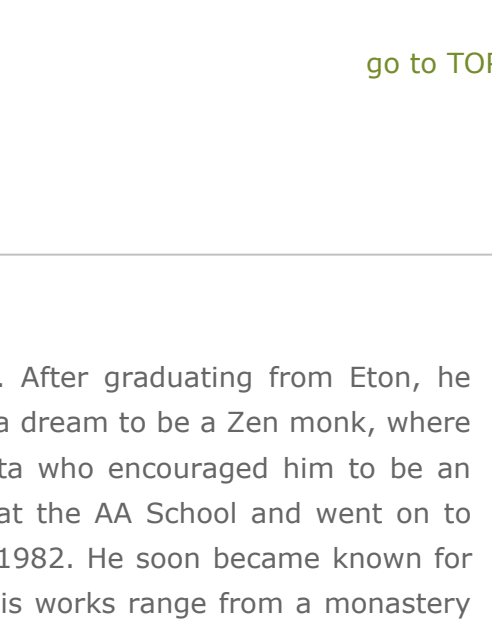
**J :** The great thing to me is that Deyan is also an architect, so he can read plans. He is also very quick and bright. It makes the process much easier. I think a possible advantage for me is that he has open access to everything about my office. I obviously want to be much more careful, as he is a friend. You have to make even more effort.

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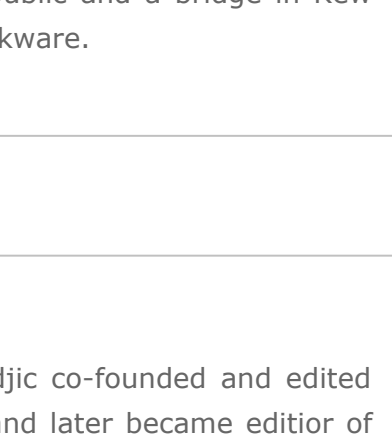
### 05. The first public building

**- Is this the biggest project for John so far?**

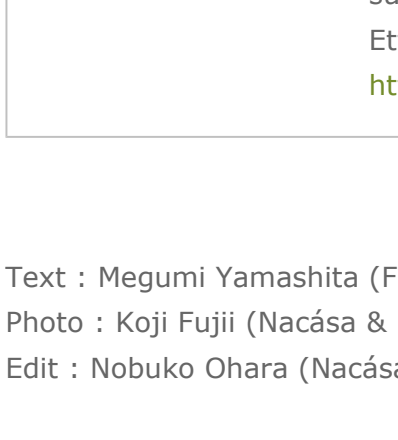
**J :** Not financially, but this is my first public building. Many of my projects are houses, which are obviously private. It's also in London, so much more accessible for many people.



**D :** I actually grew up near here. I came here often as a child and I loved it. People really love it or hate it. It was built just after wartime restrictions on materials were lifted. The hyperbolic paraboloid roof was very fashionable then. It's almost Saarinen's TWA terminal at JFK or Tange's Yoyogi National Gymnasium, but not quite as good. It's the *Monkees* not the *Beatles*



**J :** The roof is like a handkerchief pulled up in the middle. Two sides of the building have been clear glazed, opening up views across the park. The two elevations facing the apartment buildings are fitted with fritted glass. The centre of the building is open up to the roof so that, wherever you go, you can see where you are going next.



**D :** Some people have said we changed too much of the listed building, but we had to. John's changes make the space work much better. We have two galleries for temporary exhibitions, permanent exhibition space, library, education space, studios, a restaurant and bar, members room, auditorium and other facilities.

**J :** I invited Roger Cunliffe, who designed the original building, to my office, to ask his opinions.

**D :** He is an interesting man. He gave up architecture soon after building the Commonwealth Institute and moved to a farm. He is actually a hereditary Baron.

**- Is it a tempting idea to become a farmer after this project?**

**J :** Well, I have bought a farmhouse in the country that I'm in the process of renovating...

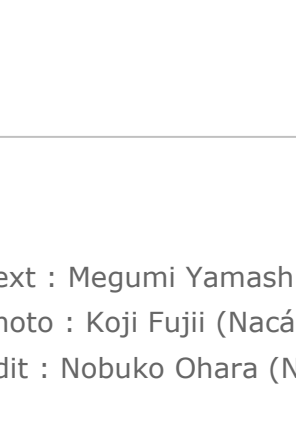
**D :** The museum is planning to open in November 2016. I hope Mr Nakasa will come to take photographs.

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#### Message to John and Deyan from Takeshi Nakasa

Once Deyan used our photographs of Toyo Ito's Sendai Mediateque in *Domus*. I remember how excited I was to see the beautifully designed pages. I was also very impressed by his book "The Edifice Complex" which critically examines contemporary architecture, but was I always interested with Deyan's affinity with John's work. It was great to learn how the relationship between them developed and resulted in some great projects. I wish them all the best and I am really looking forward their new projects in the future.

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John Pawson

Born in York in 1949. After graduating from Eton, he headed to Japan with a dream to be a Zen monk, where he met Shiro Kuramata who encouraged him to be an architect. He studied at the AA School and went on to set up his practice in 1982. He soon became known for his minimalist style. His works range from a monastery in Bohemia in the Czech Republic and a bridge in Kew Gardens, to furniture and cookware.  
<http://www.johnpawson.com>



Deyan Sudjic

Born in London in 1952, Sudjic co-founded and edited Blueprint Magazine in 1982 and later became editor of Domus Magazine. In 2002 he was appointed director of the Venice Architecture Biennale, and director of the Design Museum in London in 2007. He has written many acclaimed books about design and architecture, such as books on the works of Shiro Kuramata and Ettore Sottsass.  
<http://designmuseum.org>

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