

Market Focus **UK**

Playing Games

What sort of design legacy will the 2012 London Olympics generate? **Robert Urquhart** finds out.



Velodrome CGI

Much has been made of the 2012 'design legacy'. The word legacy, interspersed between other words like 'cohesion', 'sustainability' and 'integration' form the part of the message that governmental public relations on a global scale, such as the Olympics, demand. Everyone from The London Mayor and local government, through to design pundits, press and design community seem to touch upon the phrase so often it borders on overkill, another cycle of cultural spin with a political yarn. But on closer inspection the future looks promising.

Immediately after London 2012 and for the foreseeable future, there should be a worthwhile cultural legacy in the Olympic Park area, thanks to erstwhile strategy and design forethought. Nigel Campbell, head of communications at the Design Council captures the spirit by saying "Good design has helped deliver venues that are scaleable, sustainable and reusable. A design-centred approach has been taken at all levels for London 2012." He nods to the legacy by stating that London's approach may "Influence how future Games are constructed and staged in a more sustainable and legacy-oriented way." Without disappearing down a hyperbole alley this is an intended legacy of the legacy; to set a global benchmark for cultural regeneration around the Olympic Games for the future.

And it's not just the policy makers and the marketers that are promoting the narrative, there is even an academic course entitled The Design Legacy of Global Sporting Events at University of the Arts London, Central St Martins, running this Summer.

Vincenzo Di Maria and Cristina Lladó I Mor, course leaders and developers of The Design Legacy of Global Sporting Events are running the course over two cities, London and Barcelona, looking at the cities' responses to design legacy, before, during and after the games. When asked about the cultural challenges that London 2012 has presented, and how London compares with former Olympiad cities, Di Maria notes: "The Games had a deep economical and cultural impact for Barcelona, radically transforming some of its urban settings and global perception of the city worldwide. London can do even better, the level of awareness and expectations are high. In London nothing seems to be stable, it is already such a melting pot of cultures and events, with its own strong identity. On the other hand, London has also been able to preserve many of the best moments of its glorious history."

One of the masterminds behind the cultural plans for the 2012 Olympics, Sarah Weir, OBE, can chart her involvement with the Olympic committee back to 2004 when she was the executive director of the Arts Council. She recalls "We were told by the

Sydney games committee to build in the cultural legacy from the start, not wait until it was too late. That art and design should be built into the fabric of what we do."

When the Olympic committee decided on London for the 2012 games, Weir became head of arts & cultural strategy at London 2012, followed by a position as chief executive of The Legacy List and latterly Arts and Culture Director of the Olympic Park Legacy Company. Her career trajectory reveals how close the bond of arts and design culture is in relation to the notion of legacy. "I'm in it for the long haul," explains Weir brightly, adding: "My head was always in 2020, a longer-term vision. Let's keep things simple." ▶



Royal Artillery Barracks



Basketball Arena, London 2012



Olympic Stadium, London 2012



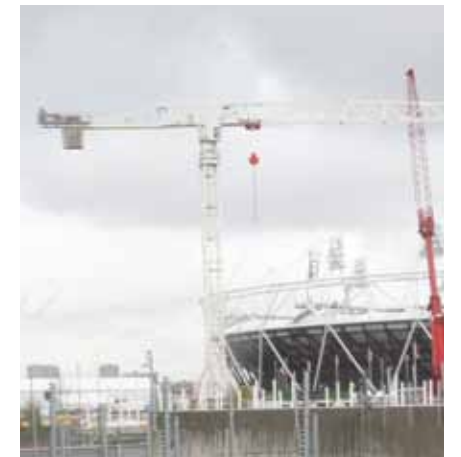
London 2012



Olympic legacy



Mascots in the Olympic Stadium, London 2012



London 2012



Olympic Torch, BarberOsgerby



BMX Track, London 2012



Aquatics Centre, London 2012



Olympic Stadium, London 2012



Aquatics Centre in legacy



Olympic medals, London 2012



Olympics site during construction

◀ Weir continues: "I see arts and culture being part of the fabric of the smaller and simpler things. It's about taking part in culture, active participation, I'm interested in seeing how a space becomes a place. In ten years time I hope you'll go to swim, look at gardens and go there to be surprised by art, design and culture."

One of Weir's latest projects is View Tube, a set of basic shipping containers, turned into a pop up art gallery, on the fringe of the Olympic Park. Over looking the stadium and the Olympic Village, the site was conceived by Weir as a place to unwind. View Tube is typical of the sort of reactive, upfront creative problem solving for which Britain has carved an international reputation. There are also many lesser-known stories to the cultural plans, including a flower bed outlining the shape of a former factory on the Olympic Park, nodding to the rich social history of the site and providing a sensitive resting place for a community replanted.

There is a twang of The Great Exhibition of 1841 about the place. However Clare Woods, one of the artists involved, alongside collaborator DJ Simpson, in the Art in the

Park events at London 2012 is adamant that legacy should not be confused with the construction of monuments when she says "Making a monument was never my intention. The idea of a monument is static, holding a point in time and I don't feel this way about the walls or in fact about any of the art on the park. Making a monument to one's art is a little Victorian in sentiment and not something that interests me."

The fact that the likes of Anish Kapoor, Zaha Hadid, Barber Osgerby et al. have tended to soak up the limelight when it comes to column inches dedicated to design at the London 2012 is fair enough in a way. Investors like to take comfort in celebrity, the upper echelons of the design community drink heavily from the heady cocktail of public and private investment that occasions like this cater to.

But what could have been an invite only affair has been handled admirably by Weir and her team and one gets the feeling that, for once, those deserving will be rewarded. "I hope its been a balance between household names and newcomers, I like to keep in mind that Terence Conran got one

of his first breaks at the Festival of Britain," explains Weir in response. "I've always wanted a range of design and artistic voices and I was very clear that the Olympic location has many different voices and stories to tell."

Although there are no signs of support for the idea of bringing back medals for cultural activity as part of the Olympics (a scheme that was phased out by the UK the last time the Olympics were held in London, in 1948) Weir, hesitates for a moment before smiling and saying "I think, we can do it in other ways rather than just giving out the medals..." ■

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Clare Woods Art in the Park



Olympic Park CGI

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