

(Piers Taylor is Director of Bath based architects Mitchell Taylor Workshop and head of third year at the University of Bath Department of Architecture)

All too often we don't take the time just to stop and think. We pride ourselves on being 'busy'. In fact I can't think of the last time an architect didn't tell me how stressed they were, how busy they were, and how they just don't have time to do anything perceived as extra-curricular. However, it's the pursuit of the extra curricular that can give added meaning to the everyday. Some may call it having a life...

We also forget just how much we've got to learn from those other architects around us. Many people think that CPD is attending seminars on Part E or DPCs, whereas real CPD can be life affirming or even life changing – and by real CPD I mean taking part in a Masterclass with Glenn Murcutt, one of the most celebrated architects practicing today.

Although many architects acknowledge Glenn Murcutt as a key source of inspiration, strangely, his work is in some ways misunderstood in that it is considered to be either to be about the perfect execution and assembly of the bourgeois villa, or to be concerned with romantic regionalism. The lessons in Murcutt's work, however are universal and timeless. His three core strengths are an acute understanding of 'place', an ecological sensitivity, and an obsessive interest in the tectonics of construction.

I studied in Australia in the early '90s, and the first lecture I went to in week one was by Glenn Murcutt, just after he'd won the Alvar Aalto medal. That lecture defined the path of my career, and still, I carry with me Murcutt as my architectural conscience in much the same way as Murcutt carries Mies.

When I came back to the UK to complete my training at the AA and then Bath, no one understood, then, the nature of a contextual architecture that wasn't parochial. The concept of an architecture that could have an ecological sensitivity was an alien one, with ecological concerns limited too often to that 'Building that Performs Well' syndrome that so often has no sensitivity to place. I was given a hard time for being interested in anything other than formal object making, or effectively architecture as glorified industrial design. I lost my way for a while, went to work for a few rubbish practices, and thought of quitting architecture.

In 2001, however, my faith was restored. I was e mailed details of the inaugural Glenn Murcutt Masterclass that was scheduled to run in the Author Boyd Centre at Bundanon, NSW, which is perhaps Murcutt's best building. Without a moments thought, I'd borrowed the fee from my dad, enrolled, and was on the flight back to Sydney to do the masterclass, which is taught by not just Murcutt, but also perhaps the most inspiring and thoughtful architect in the southern hemisphere – Richard Leplastrier.

Organised by the maverick Lindsay Johnston, The Masterclass centres around Murcutt and Leplastrier's teaching studio at Bundanon, with support from the leader of the next generation of Australian Rational Ecological Contextualists – Peter Stutchbury. Before decamping to the University of Sydney, participants spend two weeks living together, eating together, and forming associations that will last a lifetime, in addition to receiving unlimited 1:1 tuition from Murcutt, Leplastrier and Stutchbury.

My faith restored, I returned to the UK to resign from my job, start a practice (Mitchell Taylor Workshop) buy some land, and build a house (Moonshine) that adhered to Murcutt's key principles while adapting them for the northern hemisphere. The house was a reinterpretation of that quintessential Murcuttian theme of a lightweight pavilion (some may say shed), touching the earth lightly, that offered prospect and refuge, with a carefully orchestrated sequence of arrival, observation, and transformation, while engaging with the subtleties of place and responding to the wind, rain, sun path, flora, fauna, geology and geography.

Following setting up the Place of Place lecture series, which Murcutt came to Bath to deliver, I then established a masterclass programme in the woods around the house – Studio in the Woods – where students camp in the woods and build 1:1 installations that explore key Murcuttian themes to do with the relationship with place – so often thought to be about cultural and vernacular tradition instead of the more Murcuttian ecological sensitivity. Tutors have included Ted Cullinan, Peter Clegg, Gianni Botsford, and my fellow masterclass participant and perhaps the nicest guy in East Anglia, Meredith Bowles.

Without the catalyst of the Murcutt Masterclass, I'd probably still be scratching around in the woods. Maybe I still am...

For information on the forthcoming 2007 Glenn Murcutt Masterclass, contact www.ozecture.org

For information on the forthcoming 2007 Studio in the Woods, contact pt@mitchelltaylorworkshop.co.uk