

shedkm



detail from the bunker building



the practice was created in june 1997 by **jonathan falkingham dave king & james weston** - all from the liverpool school of architecture, plus **miles falkingham** (a fine arts graduate running shed design). dave & james had recently been central to the award winning practice king mcallister (KM). it was a summer afternoon in concert sq liverpool when **shedkm** was born... at the very beginning brand, graphics, colour and form were avidly discussed. yellow had been used by KM since 1991 - also futura typeface (designed in 1924) - both have become central to shedkm's brand ethos, the geometric accuracy of the font being echoed by careful organised planning and the yellow being synomynous with the studio's work. the practice evolved very quickly - shed opted to become union north and shedkm continued to develop their particular style using futura, RAL 1023 yellow and the clear planning solutions with sharp accurate detailing that they are now widely known for.

shedkm's work story began in lark lane liverpool then rapidly moving to a re-fitted 4th floor canteen at the old 'tea factory' in the city centre. here, sharing space with union north we started on a series of projects - southport pier, the match factory, fort dunlop, which together with ongoing work on the collegiate (the first real job) quickly moved the practice forward. with expansion **hazel rounding** **ian killick** & **mark sidebotham** joined the team soon to become directors. these were interesting times - the first websites, brochures and a particular 'way of doing things' matured as the firm grew. shedkm then moved to 61a bold st - on old dance studio which was fitted out as an open office - without boundaries, but with a central 'pod' holding all the technical machinery. use of apple computers (KM had had macs since 1989) was always integral to the work ethic - good archiving becoming essential, graphic design too - early influences quickly evolving into a very specific house style - these were exciting times...

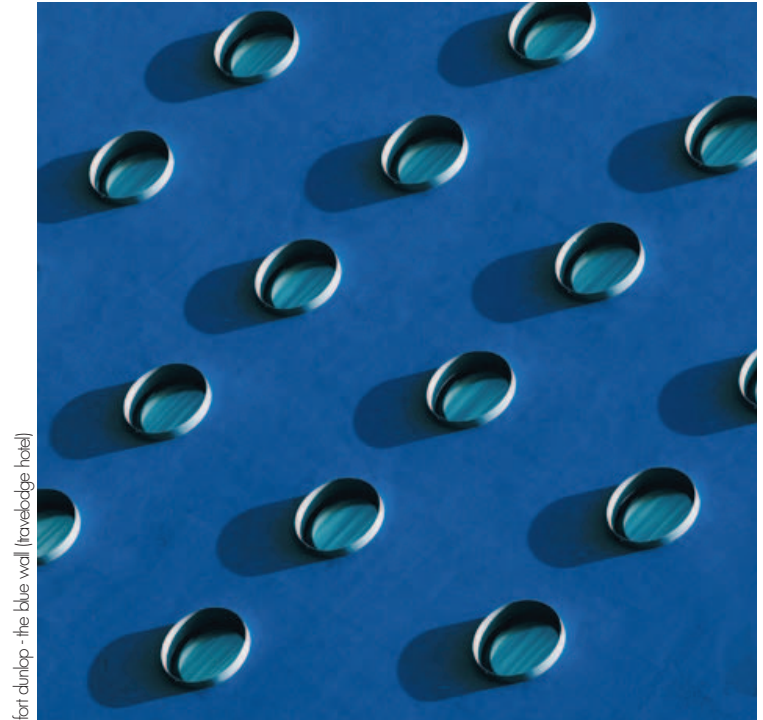
from shedkm 3 projects [red book]





these early days saw some long running client relationships develop with **urbansplash** (tom bloxham) and **frensons** (max stone & wendy dixon) - planning their buildings moved us further into colour and precision geometry - as clients they were very supportive. the idea that a design practice should develop then embody consistency is not new (it can also be restrictive), but for a studio trying to break into the national/international scene it's all important to pursue a recognizable graphic strategy - shedkm have tried to maintain this for nearly 20 years now. we are known for simple forms, sharp detail and an understanding of the importance of brand ethos and associated imagery... moving into the new millennium the studio then embarked on a 'book project' - the idea was to produce a set of art publications (the kind that were sufficiently uncommercial to be desirable). the result was three small square shiny softbacks printed in barcelona - yellow blue & red, marketed as a boxed set.

this use of primary colours did have advantages - a limited rather than a 'limitless' palette eased decision making - using a white or neutral grey canvas the same. non of this is new - **mondriaan. de stijl, breuer** - it's all been done before of course. nevertheless our approach has evolved into a recognizable visual 'personality'... drive up the M6 and **fort dunlop's** massive blue wall with it's grid of round windows is pure shedkm... the blue was based on yves klein '62. it's a colour that's difficult to match - it can't be printed in CMYK and the makeup of the pigment is a well kept secret. blue changes dramatically with light - more so than any other colour. shedkm's handling of primaries is not without careful appraisal - never just gratuitous but always a significant element in our design. orange (a breuer favourite) was introduced in the fort project and two more comprehensive books followed - even urbanplash's own published book has been marketed with red/blue/yellow insignia!



fort dunlop - the blue wall (travelodge hotel)

shedkm

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logo has been an important element in shedkm's brand development. at first it was a series of letters in small separated circles (designed by miles falkingham). this was used on letterheads and drawings, but it was difficult in those early days to align and print correctly. Shed KM was often used but it wasn't until we acquired a franking machine that the simple **shedkm** (futura bold lower case) became the standard. we've always believed this to be important - a consistent logo... we have sometimes been referred to as 'shed', but this sends out the wrong signals - there are other architecture practices called shed, one in sidney australia). there are garden sheds, design sheds, sheds of grey - but only one shedkm... a good logo has a certain power. the barbican arts centre for instance insist on bold lettering arranged vertically. they are adamant about this (have published a book on the subject). we are too, in having a logo which holds attention right through to the strong imagery of built forms.

there's also been a tendency to use squares as a graphic device - particularly nine. obviously 9 squares have formed the base grid for symbols throughout history celtic cross onwards, but shedkm's use of them was inspired by a **jo delahaut** poster which hangs to this day in the bold street studio. the poster was bought in venice by students and given to dave as a birthday present. our very first website attempted to replicate this, but the subtle colours proved almost impossible to match and we soon reverted to those 3 primaries - red, blue and yellow. in the early days we were all much concerned about choice, but soon there was feedback from prospective clients and others in the industry saying that shedkm definitely had an 'image' - something to do with strong graphic geometry and colour - difficult to define, but memorable... it was of course was all about PR style, as we didn't have much in the way of built projects - these were all to come later...

poster by jo delahaut



from a shedkm's first website



our first website (1998) was a story in itself - hard to imagine in 2015, but few architects had even moved to computers as their main drafting aid at that time let alone have websites. shedkm's was produced inhouse by barbel gamm, a german architect who was studying graphic design at st helen's college. she arranged the 9 square title page attempting to echo the delahaut poster with sections formatted behind each square. our next site (which lasted for about 7 years) was much more complex - a 200 square grid arranged on a fluid moving background where a click on any one image would reveal text and pictures of projects people and places - at the time the only server that was powerful enough to engine that adobe 'flash' arrangement was in california... our current website improves on the format but is powered in html which allows it to be accessed on iPhones and iPads - devices that are in common use for both web material and photographic image display.

robust steel detailing, use of colour (particularly yellow) had previously been developing in KM's lark lane studio. the **SSC** (student services centre) & **G94** (guild of undergraduates building) both national award winners. had used this approach to effect. shedkm though developed its own aesthetic ethos taking encouragement from both the work of KM allied with the skills and resolve of its founding and new directors.

'the studio quickly established a reputation for its iconic design approach - clear expression of modernist principles, limited colour palette, and a concentration on plan forms generated by strong geometries'

this text, taken from shedkm's first published book "five years in liverpool, has been quoted many times over - clarity in terms of direction and application has endured through to today.

SSC liverpool university - photo by dennis gilbert



the matchbox - exhibited in the RIBA - photo moiley von sternberg



the use of narrative and quotations grew to be important in establishing the studio as having something special - not 'special' in a freeform or fashion conscious way - more an approach to design respectful of art movement antecedents, the clarity of sharp steel and where possible, simple expression of structural elements - this philosophy carried through into how the studio dealt with people - clients, contractors, architects and students.

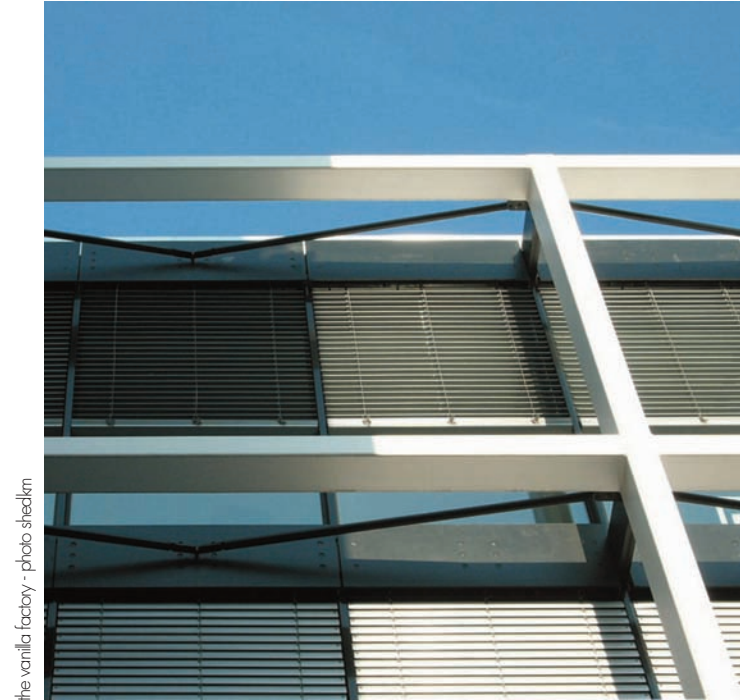
'clear geometry reminiscent of the hard minimalism of 1960's artists such as judd, morris and andre'

(part of a report by civic trust assessors after visiting the **matchworks** project before recommending it for an award).

'shedkm makes buildings in its own manner. a clutch of signatures; plate steel, circular cuts, cylindrical balustrades, post rietveld, pet modriaan, de stijl with a liverpool twist'

text by phil griffin

in following this, it's important to bring attention to the use of framework in shedkm's design approach. 'framework' - not in the business jargon sense, but as an expression of the structural raison d'être of a building. the 'plan' had always been pivotal in our design philosophy - strong, geometric and often axial - structure the most important element in achieving this... a supporting skeleton, but (unlike any anthropomorphic equivalent) often expressed externally. not all buildings respond to this objective, but where possible shedkm have always taken the stance that it's worth the effort. this will be seen to good effect at **ruskin square** croydon, where our latest building now under construction avoids the current trend for commercial cladding or brickwork in favour of a strong expressed structure... previous examples are the **matchbox**, the **vanilla factory** and the existing concrete framed structure of both the **matchworks**, the **bunker building** and the **soapworks**.



the vanilla factory - photo shedkm

the bunker building



the **bunker building** in liverpool is a recent project that says much about our approach in one simple statement. firstly it's a regeneration of an existing factory. secondly it has a very strong plan form and a dominant structural frame. thirdly (and perhaps most importantly) a limited budget. shedkm's design ethos responds well to such parameters and the result epitomises our approach in it's clarity of purpose and elegantly simple style. the **soapworks** at salford quays manchester similarly so - strong frame leading to an equally strong planning solution. simple forms and judicious use of colour. economy of means again demonstrating simplicity of detail. such buildings have formed the backbone of our (now nearly 20 year old) approach. there have been other building types of course - housing both flats and individual residences. **moho** in manchester demonstrates an experimental side to the practice - again a strong axial plan, but using factory built units in an 8 storey courtyard plan.

and as a case in point **moho** was arranged on a clear and strong axial plan... it's no secret that james weston (one of the founding directors) final year dissertation at the liverpool school of architecture was entitled 'framework' - he was also lead architect on moho - but this particular project also had great significance in bringing us into the world of prefabrication. moho's individual units comprised a single apartment made offsite by **yorkon** (well known makers of portable site huts) and as construction proceeded the learning curve was high - placing one unit above another and solving all the intricate connections both in structure and services put shedkm in the forefront of modular design in the UK. sadly another project suitable for unitised construction didn't emerge until after the 2008 crash when a long period of research led to the emergence of ho**USe** - a modular terrace typology prototype units of which are currently being tested on site for developers **urbansplash**

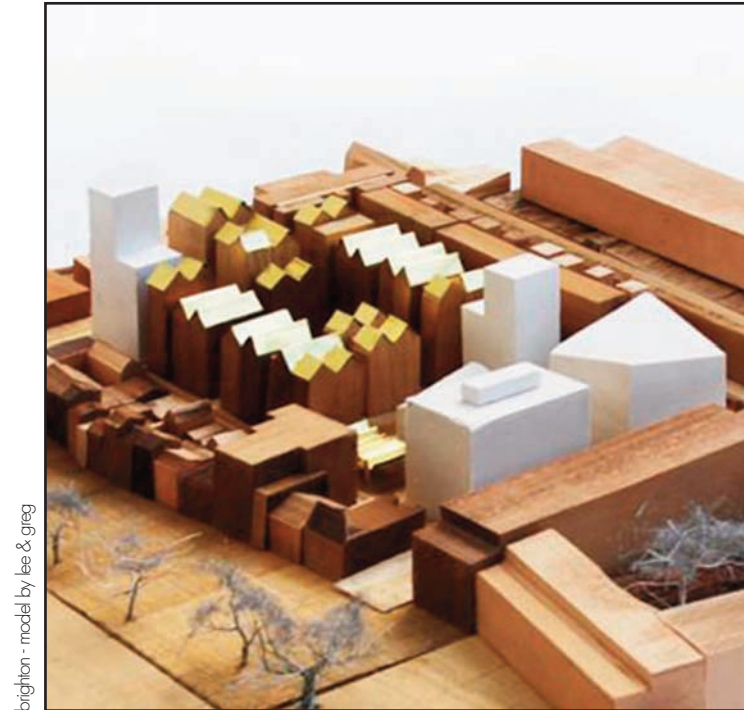
moho - photo shedkm





so as the shedkm story took hold of the first decade of the new millennium a multiplicity of projects were completed - we were during this period in possession of more awards than the whole of the **RIBA** northwest region put together! it was as though it would never end, but of course (like many other practices) the financial crash of 2008 took it's toll with almost 80% of our work axed overnight... the time had come to regroup, to tackle the problem at source and look for work outside the northwest. this of course meant london and a new beginning 200 miles from base. not an easy task - start slowly and build. a highly competitive environment with over 40% of the UK architects vying for jobs in the capital. nevertheless it happened.... lee halligan & greg blee (2 recent graduates from the bartlett school of architecture) by working on a competition entry for developers **cathedral** over the summer of 2008, won us a job large enough to envisage a move south... - establishing a satellite to liverpool...

circus st brighton (as that project came to be known) involved comprehensive redevelopment of a section of central brighton - housing, offices, student accommodation, a dance school and a major library for the university. this was a big scheme substantiating our desire for a presence in the south east (london). so funded by some development work on the **whitgift centre** croydon we started hiring space in upper regent st - then it was our **beak st soho** studio where it was full speed ahead developing the brighton scheme - dealing with a multiplicity of client/users and of course the local planning authority. before this, fort dunlop had been our biggest project but brighton was bigger, more complex and more demanding... nevertheless it moved ahead fast and although the scheme is now 'contractor led' - shedkm remain as concept architects with responsibility for ensuring that agreed planning conditions are adhered to in terms of design quality, materials and appearance...



brighton - model by lee & greg

a doll's house - model by marcus haworth



so although brighton needed a wider spectrum of materials and aesthetic generators than we had been used to, it still retained many of those elements that had come to be recognized as shedkm - sharp forms and detail and above all precise axial planning. we were also tasked with the '**doll's house**' competition. this was a charity initiative by developers cathedral - shedkm's entry was to be in collaboration with artist james ireland. for this we designed a complex cube of artist decorated rooms which pivoted and extended round a central core. in some senses this design was vintage shedkm - a micro scheme as opposed to the maxi brighton development. a scheme where art could flourish, whose freshness would filter into other projects. interestingly most of the other very well established london architects (who were also involved) were more conventional. our solution pivoted from a complex form to a simple **rubik** style cube in one easy action - it was also great fun....

then after a long period of gestation **ruskin square** emerged as a project. this was to be a large office building in a prominent position adjacent to east croydon station for developers **stanhope**. the job had it's beginnings when stanhope toured some of our jobs including **fort dunlop** several years ago. the detail design pace of ruskin square allied with the increasing complexity of dealing with brighton, meant a move from shedkm's studio in beak street soho... fortuitously a new premises was found in **golden lane** (next to the barbican) where we have a studio capable of accommodating up to 18. currently we share some of the space with **uniform** (a liverpool graphic and branding company whom shedkm have known and collaborated with for many years). with golden lane, shedkm in london working in concert with shedkm liverpool has matured into an established national practice and as a result has gained a steady flow of projects in both NW region and the south east.

shedkm beak street studio



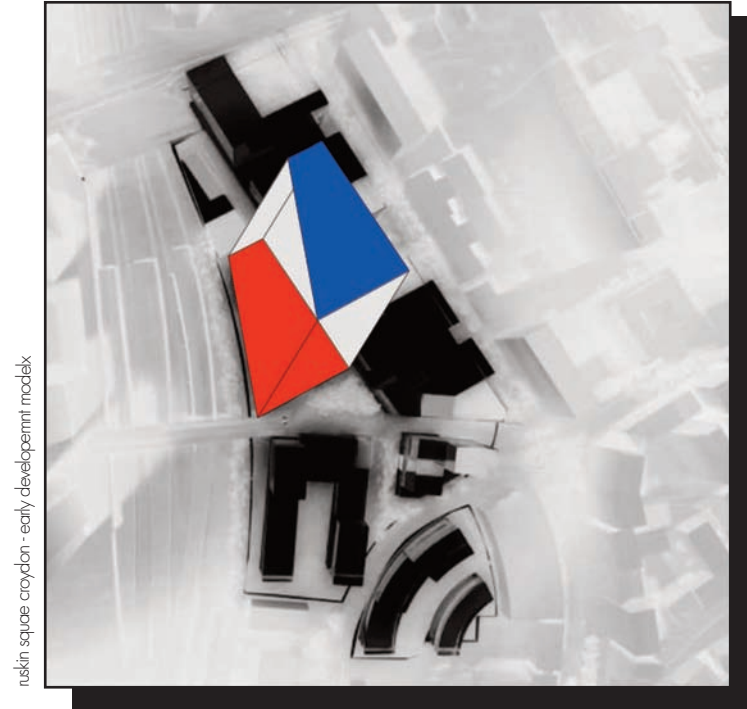


shedkm at the soapworks - christmas 2014

and then there are the **people**.... shedkm have been in business since 1997 - KM since '91. we started small, grew to around 24 architects - then there was 2008. now we're back to strength with space to grow. always a young firm, but as we grow older the studio hopes to stay fresh in outlook. our policy has always been to employ the very best qualified architects plus RIBA part 1 & 2 students (many of whom have qualified whilst working with us). there have been german architects - french, japanese, american, romanian, swedish, from finland and others bringing different ideas and culture to shedkm whilst contributing to our architectural ideals. together we've visited paris, amsterdam, turin, basel, lyon, marseilles, barcelona, madrid, stockholm & now **rotterdam** - always with architecture in mind but also get to know each other better. this then is the shedkm ethos - strive to create good honest clear and thoughtful architecture together as a group...

then there's the future... since 2008 we've survived on hope and hard work - all of which is now paying off. shedkm's never been short of either ingredient and there are new projects on the table substantial enough to allow a sense of confidence to take root. **ruskin square** is on site. **mark & ian** continue to lead the liverpool studio - **alex flint** has started to head up the london office with **alan ross + lee halligan** as specialist directors - alan leads the technical knowledge and delivery across the company and lee is starting to nurture new placemaking opportunities - **dave** remains as design consultant and **hazel** moves between liverpool and london providing continuity and leadership across the two cities. 2015 is nearly over... *'what happened informs what will happen'* and shedkm is enjoying forward motion again...

'you need to be marathon tuned to slice through fort dunlop, slot in a hotel and top it with a timber running track...'
phil griffin



ruskin square croydon - early development model



playful - *shedkm enjoys producing high profile architecture with a strong identity*

rational - *our architects give value to shedkm clients by designing with integrity and honesty*

innovative - *shedkm is always thinking from basic principles... exploring new technology & detail*

collaborative - *to give our work thoughtful context we work closely with planners and other architects*

narrative - *a project needs a storyboard. shedkm enjoy crafting people & place orientated narratives*

one entity - *shedkm is a single practice with two studios (london & liverpool) working in tandem*

the above texts are distilled from material provided by **caro** - the PR & lifestyle agency who are helping shedkm with strategic marketing for the studio's collective brand.

ferrari
mercedes
bugatti
shedkm

this slogan certainly raised a laugh in our first london seminar held in the hoxton hotel in 2012... nevertheless there is inspiration here - we have a growing business, we have ambition and we do everything we can to make good architecture. we promote attention to detail and our architects never let go of that fact. shedkm was born in liverpool - made its name and then expanded to london where there are many rivals. liverpool has always been like this - a sea city which expands outwards through the exploits of people rather than the acquisition of territory. shedkm too... there's a certain satisfaction to be had from careful expansion - the ability to retain an 'ethos' to have a reputation, a way of doing architecture - to be known for that and to allow reputation to mature and grow. at the end of each year we normally have a seminar then a party - 2015 we went to rotterdam to look a buildings (and have a party). so here's to **2016** - let's all make it a good year.....