

King's Student Perspectives Architecture

Josh, 2nd year

Why did you want to study Architecture and what attracted you to Cambridge?

I was initially torn between studying fine art and architecture but opted for architecture as the versatility of the course really appealed to me. The technical side has actually been very enjoyable and my studio teachers have constantly encouraged me to draw and paint as much as possible - to be

expressive with drawing space and making architectural decisions. I have not stopped drawing for two years, and have developed an entirely new method of thinking and seeing. The department are very friendly and encourage you to find your own creative control of the design process.

I chose Cambridge because of the course's strong focus on architectural history and theory. This understanding that develops through the course lectures and supervisions, integrates well with the studio work - where we are

challenged to be fully engaged and conscious with the context of our chosen sites, on a variety of different scales. It is a very small department and thus the attention each student gets in terms of contact hours and supervisions has to be the highest in the country.

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Josh

What was the application process like?

Out of all of the universities I applied to, Cambridge were the most thorough in terms of looking at all aspects of the application. The form for extenuating circumstances and the Supplementary Application Questionnaire meant that, by the time of the interview, the interviewers had a firm understanding of exactly where I was coming from, which made the whole

process much more personal.

I had two interviews, both of which were very enjoyable discussions. The first interview was more general, whilst the second presented the opportunity for me to really put forward all of the art work I had done during the A-level period.

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How do you recommend that sixth formers prepare for an application?

The portfolio is essential as it gives the interviewers a clear sense of the way you work and how that could possibly translate into design. I cannot advise what type of work to include as it is a very personal thing, but I would include a wide range of work if you have it. For instance, if you have been

going to life drawing classes or any other workshops, make sure you include that work. How you present your work is important, but I wouldn't get too hung up on presentation. I had all of my work piled into a portfolio case with no annotations and even included some unfinished articles.

There is no architecture A-level, and I hadn't studied History of Art either, so I was initially worried that I would be tested on material I knew very little about. I was glad to find out that in my case, the focus of the interview was mainly to do with material I had put forward in my personal statement. Making sure you have clearly researched and developed your own interests is crucial. I have spoken to friends on the course from other colleges, and their interview experiences varied, with some being more inclined to test maths than others. No matter which college you apply to, you never know what you'll be asked at the interviews.

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Are the course and teaching as you expected?

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In terms of intensity and expertise the teaching is how I expected it to be, although I have been pleasantly surprised by the friendliness within the department. My studio tutors and Director of Studies have been very understanding about how demanding the course can be and do not expect you to get things right straight away.

In my first year, I struggled to progress at the right times with my studio projects. My Director of Studies arranged

some extra studio supervisions to take place over the holidays. Those extra supervisions helped me come to terms with the technical aspects of my building proposal and showed how supportive the college and department are.

How does the timetable work for Architecture in second year?

The timetable is intense as you have to balance all of the lectures with studio projects. Michaelmas and Lent are both 8 week terms, whilst the Easter term is only 4 weeks long (before the exam period and then end-of-year activities). Thus the breaks in between terms are crucial for you to keep momentum with your design projects as well as keeping up to date with coursework and exam preparation.

Michaelmas and Lent terms:

Monday – Studio

Typically you will have one supervision with your studio masters on your design progress. Group work, day trips, project tasks and crits also take place on studio days.

Tuesday – Lectures

Structures lecture

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Environment lecture and class

Wednesday – Lectures

History and Theory Lectures

Thursday - Studio

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Friday - Lectures

History and Theory lecture

Construction lecture



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Crits

In a crit you are expected to pin up and present all of your design progress and engage in discussion with internal and external critics. The crits will typically run throughout the day and form a vital part of your architectural education. The number of crits varies during the different terms, but in the Lent and Easter terms we had a crit every 2 weeks.

Easter term and end-of-year examinations

There are no course lectures during Easter term. There are four weeks of studio and technical supervisions to really develop your design projects for portfolio submission. The portfolio counts for 60% of the final mark, which includes technical coursework that explains the construction, structures and environmental strategy for your main building proposal. In first year there are five exams, whereas in second year there are four exams as the written courseworks count for one history and theory paper.

Portfolio: 60% (10% of which is awarded based on technical coursework)

Written papers: 40%

The five written papers are as follows:

Paper 1: History and Theory (essays)

Paper 2: History and Theory (written examination)

Paper 3: Principles of Construction

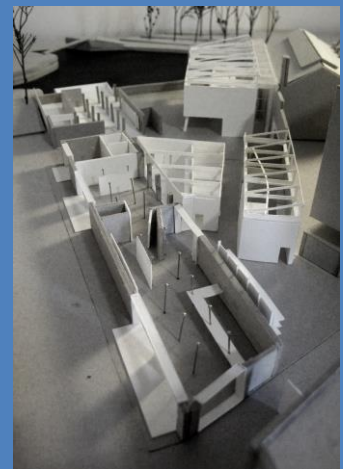
Paper 4: Principles of Structural Design

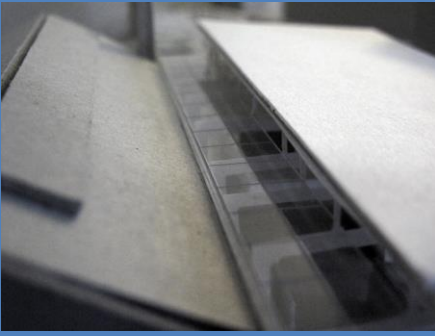
Paper 5: Principles of Environmental Design

Whilst there are quite a lot of lectures and material covered in first and second years, you are not required to know all of the material covered. There is some scope, within certain courses, to choose to revise topics that interest you more.

History and Theory coursework – preparation for the dissertation

Extra History and Theory supervisions also take place during the Michaelmas and Lent terms, which provide the opportunity for you to look at lecture material in a lot more depth and practice / prepare





some essays for the exam. These are especially important in second year as you have to submit two essays as coursework in preparation for the dissertation in third year. I particularly enjoyed the 'Studies in Urban Planning and Design' course, where I chose to challenge the conceptions of Sir Ebenezer Howard's Garden City ideal, focusing on the socio-

economic nature of his book. Writing is an integral part of the architecture tripos and I really benefited from having studied History at A-level.

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How do supervisions work in Architecture?

Studio supervisions are vital for you to progress and mature with your design projects, as you are constantly expected to be changing and developing a range of work. Design is an iterative process, and it is good to be quick on your feet with making decisions. Other supervisions such as History and Theory, work similarly to standard supervisions within the university, where you are

expected to have done additional reading on the lecture material and engage in discussions to prepare you for coursework or exams. The great thing about the supervisions is that there are never more than 3-4 students, so the level of demand and engagement is high.

What about Studio Projects?

First year

In first year everyone shares the same studio and has similar briefing for projects. In the first term these projects are small in scale and can appear to be very abstract and conceptual. I particularly enjoyed a group task that involved making a vehicle to explore Cambridge. Although these projects can be tedious, they are essential for establishing drawing and modelling techniques. The second and third terms involved a larger scale building project that combined a theatre and gallery space in Dalston, East London.

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For me, the best part of first year was the Rome trip that takes place during the Easter break nearer the end of the year. All of the different elements of the course seem to really make sense as we spent a whole week walking, exploring and drawing the historic quarters of Rome; as well as more recent developments by architects such as Zaha Hadid and Renzo Piano. As there are only forty students in the year, the trip meant you really started to form some incredible friendships within the year.



Rome trip



Being involved with the end of year exhibition was an invaluable experience as we managed to curate, transform and create an installation to display our work

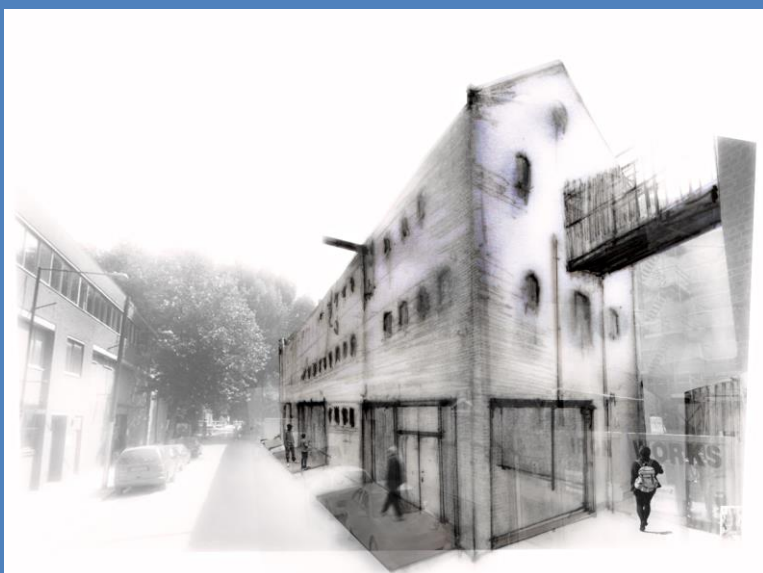
in the dairy gallery space in Bloomsbury. This is a lot of fun, as students are given the full responsibility to fund and create the exhibition, which is done through various schemes and organised cabarets throughout the year.

Second year

The scale of work, complexity of design and technical demands increase during second year. The year starts with the choice of three studios, all of which have different briefs and approaches to design. I chose my studio because of the tutors' presentation at the start of the year, as their hands-on approach and strong interest in materials and construction appealed to me. Generally the studios consist of two tutors, both of which are practicing architects or artists.

The main project brief called for a furniture workshop to be integrated into the Swan Wharf site, which falls within the Conservation Zone of Fish Island, London. We had a choice of sites and I chose the Swan Wharf site because of its rich material qualities, as well as the industrial heritage. This theme of conservation vs. regeneration was debated throughout the year, and central to our trip to Barcelona, where we studied how the 1992 Olympic Games had a positive economic effect towards urban planning and regeneration.

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I enjoyed looking at examples of regeneration in the historic quarter of the city that followed the Pro-Eixample scheme, where courtyards were renovated fantastically. The relevance of this trip in relation to our site was striking, as Fish Island sits between the London Olympic site and Victoria Park, and is going to be subject to various regeneration projects in the future. It is exciting to be engaged with the site on such a variety of scales, especially understanding how your scheme will fit in with the complexity of the urban fabric in Fish Island.

How do you find the work / social life balance?

I find managing my time and striking a fine work/life balance one of the hardest things about studying architecture at Cambridge. The terms are very short, and the course requires a fierce amount of dedication in terms of hours. However, King's has provided me with a platform to make some incredible friendships.

The sheer diversity within King's is great, and the college system ensures you will make friends studying other fields. I was initially worried about potential snobbery that would exist within the college, but glad to find that everyone is very grounded and passionate, regardless of their financial background.

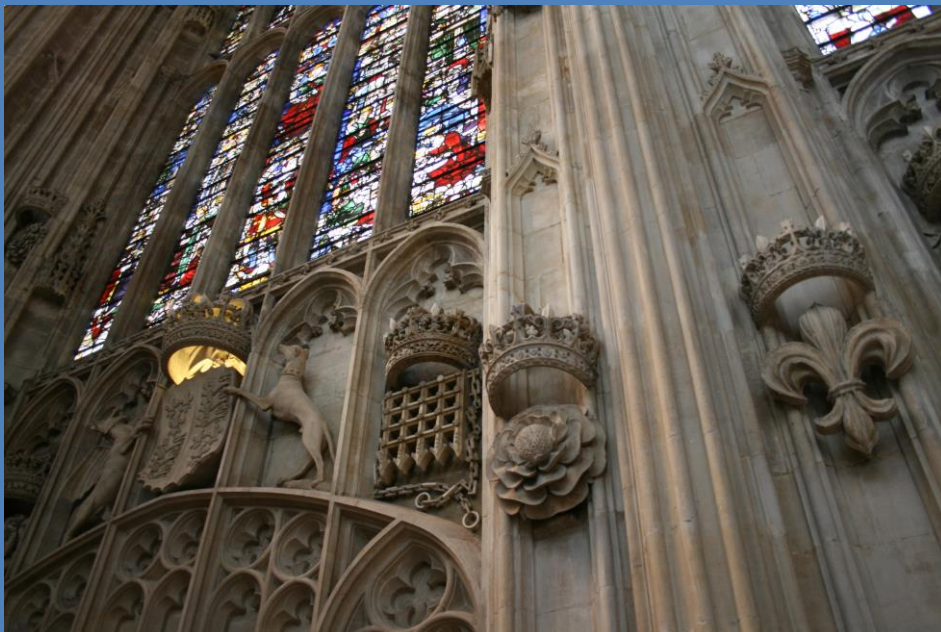
You have to be very disciplined in order to balance everything, and I make sure I go to the gym around 2-3 times a week in order to keep fit. The college food is great, and dinner is always a good time to

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catch up with some friends, whether in the bar or the grand hall.

The Chapel is one of the many beauties in the college and a perfect place to unwind and relax.

'Chapel chill out' sessions are organised in the evenings of exam term, where you can lie down on a bean bag, inside the Chapel, and really appreciate the carefully lit fan vault ceiling. I couldn't think of a more inspiring spot to lie down and relax. The accessibility of the Chapel is definitely a major benefit to studying at King's.



Inside King's College Chapel

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What are the best and worst things about studying Architecture at Cambridge?

The access you have to lecturers, professors and practicing architects, both within the department and the college, is what makes studying architecture at Cambridge a very personal experience. The department only has around forty students per year and therefore the advice you can get from these professionals is limitless.

I have found that short terms coupled with rather long breaks doesn't always complement the design process for your studio work, but there are options to organise extra supervisions so this is not too much of an issue.

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King's Avenue

A note to current King's Architecture students
If you would like to write about your experiences of studying Architecture at King's for our prospective students to read, please email Kristy in the Admissions Office for further details:
undergraduate.admissions@kings.cam.ac.uk



Bodley's Court, by the river in King's