

Alan Powers is a self-effacing but crucial figure in the contemporary interpretation of Britain and especially of British modernism. He is an academic and architectural historian: his extraordinary exposition of what went right (and wrong) in the built environment in the twentieth century, *Britain*, was published in 2007 by Reaktion in their 'Modern Architectures in History' series. He is a conservationist and ecologist, who has campaigned especially for the preservation and appreciation of the architecture of the twentieth century. He is a scholar and collector of mid-twentieth century British visual art, especially of the painter Eric Ravilious, whose sense of the poetry of everyday places (allotments, seashores) and special occasions (fairgrounds, fireworks) he shares in his own work. He has a long knowledge of printmaking, especially lithography, as historian and practitioner.

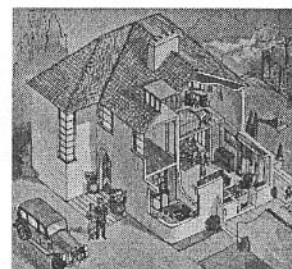
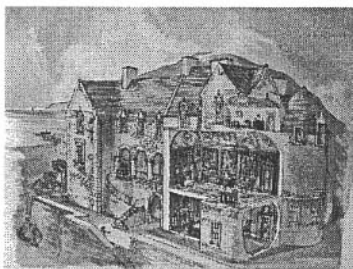
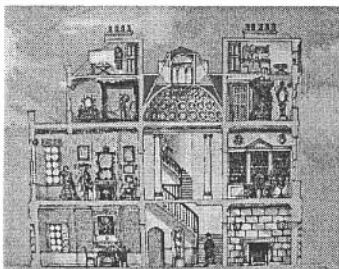
Like the late Sir Osbert Lancaster, he can distill deep knowledge into elegant architectural cartoons. As an active member of the Art Worker's Guild, he celebrates his inheritance from the long-lived Arts and Crafts element in British aesthetics. His related scholarly interest in popular art, in toys and toy theatres, continues a tradition from the 1920s and 1930s. Early in his career he painted a series of murals of great fantasy and invention, and despite many publications and many commitments, he has continued to draw, paint, and make prints throughout the last three decades.

Every year he publishes one more in his series of unclassifiable small books made as a Christmas gift for friends. This exhibition offers only a sample of his work: watercolours and prints, toy theatres and Christmas books, all linked by his unusual ability to find and convey the poetry of architecture and place.

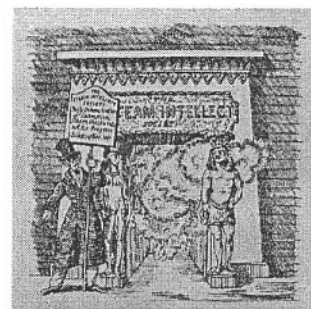
Peter Davidson

*Before I began writing about places and buildings, I drew them. Before I had seen them, I imagined them with the ease of childhood. Age and experience obstruct these compelling visions, and they appear only fleetingly in dreams, or by luck on paper. The Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa has written the entry code for the city of the other side: 'A writer, a film director, or painter has to give the human event he is presenting a setting, a place, and thus in fact to perform a job of architectural design without a client, structural calculations, or a building permit. The presentation of architecture in other arts is the "pure looking" of a child's way of experiencing things, for the rules of architectural discipline do not regulate the experience of the way it is presented.' If I were to seek the thread connecting my interest over the years in imaginative topography, graphic architectural satire, toy theatres, peep shows, Italian cities and walls that cannot quite be seen over, all would lead to the city on the other side.*

Alan Powers



This series of good-humoured architectural histories, showing the exteriors and interiors of British houses, were drawn for the magazine *House and Garden*, 1996-7, with texts by James Maclean. The first "cutaway" house is a Scottish historicist shooting-lodge of the late nineteenth century in the manner of Sir Robert Lorimer. The second is a Georgian town house of some grandeur, dating from the 1750s, based on villas by Sir Robert Taylor. The third cutaway house is a mildly 'moderne' villa of the 1930s, an era whose architecture Alan Powers has campaigned tirelessly and effectively to promote and protect.



These three images are from an article, 'Ethereal Emporia', written by Alan Powers for *Country Life* in 1996, one of several Christmas entertainments of this kind. They are all fantasies of Regency London. *The Last Alchemist* is a pastiche of the drawings of George Scharf (1788-1860), *Cramp's Ornament Shop* recalls Pugin's satire on Sir John Soane in *Contrasts*, while *The Steam Intellect Society* borrows its title from an invention by the novelist Thomas Love Peacock.