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DEVELOPMENT/GLOBAL
**Tools of
the trade**

Expectations of buildings are constantly changing. So how can developers keep pace? By arming themselves with forward-thinking architects and an open mind. These projects hammer the point home.

Edited by *Nolan Giles*

There's no standard approach to creating good architecture. Location, budget and purpose all play a part in defining a project's outcome. Yet there are certain design rules that are always worth acknowledging. That means using the best materials, maximising enjoyability for users and taking environmental impact into account.

With architecture commissions now motoring ahead after pandemic pauses, we've looked to best in practice in three very different categories. The reason? To shine the spotlight on a global cast of creative talent you might want to consult too. Whether it's an office your staff will want to return to or an overhaul of a run-down apartment, these three firms show how the principles of building better work across a wide range of projects. — (M)



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Best for public buildings
Gradolí & Sanz
Valencia

Over the past 30 years, Valencia-based practice Gradolí & Sanz has developed an impressive portfolio of public projects in its home region. To explain how their mindset has changed since they started, founders Carmel Gradolí and Arturo Sanz point to the financial crisis of 2008 as a turning point. “Suddenly we realised that maybe we shouldn’t be building more; we should be building less,” says Sanz. “We’ve become a bit more radical when it comes to sustainability. Our architecture is less aggressive, more tactful and respectful of the environment.”

The best example of this ethos is the firm’s Imagine Montessori School in the town of Paterna, a village near Valencia, designed in collaboration with architect Francisco López. Topped with an extensive green roof, the building is made from materials with a low ecological footprint: clay bricks and wood. Its structure is left entirely exposed. “The honesty of the materials means that the building is in itself educational,” says Gradolí. “The pupils can see how it works.” All of the classrooms look out onto the surrounding greenery and instead of long corridors and square

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classrooms, the architects designed open and versatile spaces. Some areas, such as below staircases, for example, incorporate lower windows and ceilings adapted to a child’s height.

Located on a plot of land containing a gully, the school perfectly embraces its setting. “Usually in Mediterranean culture, a gully is seen as a dumping site, a place that’s dangerous and dirty,” says Sanz. “We thought it would be interesting to challenge that and put it at the centre of the school. When it rains,



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PHOTOGRAPHER: Ben Roberts



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Project picks

**Escola Gavina
*Picanya***

A sprawling multi-purpose venue was added to a Valencian school, highlighting the firm’s intricate understanding of materials and the maximisation of natural ventilation – via many perforated openings.

**Blast Furnace 2
*Sagunto***

A decommissioned, towering furnace building was given new life as an award-winning cultural monument commemorating the town of Sagunto’s impressive industrial heritage.

**Intertronic Office Building
*Paterna***

While it’s a private project, rules for designing for the public have been adhered to in this office building with a lushly planted communal courtyard.



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(1) Sketches at Gradolí & Sanz office (2) Imagine Montessori School (3) Large windows allow in natural light (4) School’s façade (5) Pupils playing



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water flows down it. Lots of animals such as rabbits and birds live nearby. It was important for us to incorporate nature but not just as a decorative element.”

Aside from designing institutional buildings, the firm’s passion for vernacular architecture and recycling old materials means that it often gravitates towards refurbishing private residences. “We try to do more rehabilitations than new builds, reusing everything we can and rebuilding with the same materials: bricks and wood,” says Sanz, adding that they prefer working on houses within a village, where they must take into account neighbouring buildings and the town’s character. “Paying special attention to the location has always been fundamental for us,” says Gradolí. — JWE gradolisanz.acontrapeu.com



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(1) First floor classroom at Imagine Montessori School (2) Arturo Sanz, Francisco López, Carmel Gradolí (3) Ceiling beams at the school (4) TKA’s Barnim Haus (5) Erhardtstrasse 10 apartments (6) Thomas Kröger