

firm of architects, who themselves are extremely young to be handling a project valued at nearly £20 million. One cannot help feeling that Sir Hugh's weight in the legal world (and his much-admired term of office as secretary general of the Arts Council added much conviction; as must Hammersmith Council's enthusiastic backing once they grasped its potentialities.

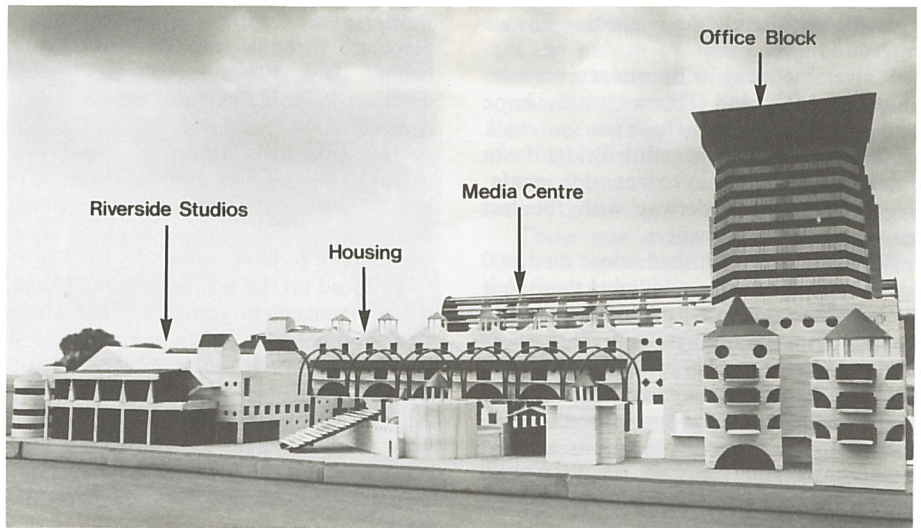
Will Alsop explained the development and the influences behind the flamboyant style of architecture to Cue before leaving for the United States for a few months.

His partnership, Alsop, Finch & Lyall, evolved a couple of years ago, when they put in for a competition to design a new Westminster Pier, with Grand Metropolitan as clients. As luck would have it, they won, and building of the £6 million floating pier, restaurant, bars, and moorings may take place in the near future, when financing has been settled. Siting, by the way, would be by Westminster Bridge, opposite County Hall. But the partnership has eschewed a distinctive style as such, like say, Denys Lasdun, Norman Foster or Richard Rogers (Pompidou Centre in Paris). Alsop's views are honest and uncluttered by theoretical notions.

"Most of this century, architects have been trying to do something they consider beautiful, but not in the name of aesthetics, but of function, which is really an extension of the Modern Movement. For an example, look at Richard Rogers' Pompidou Centre in Paris: the justification for putting all the guts of the building on the outside is to get that clean, anonymous space inside.

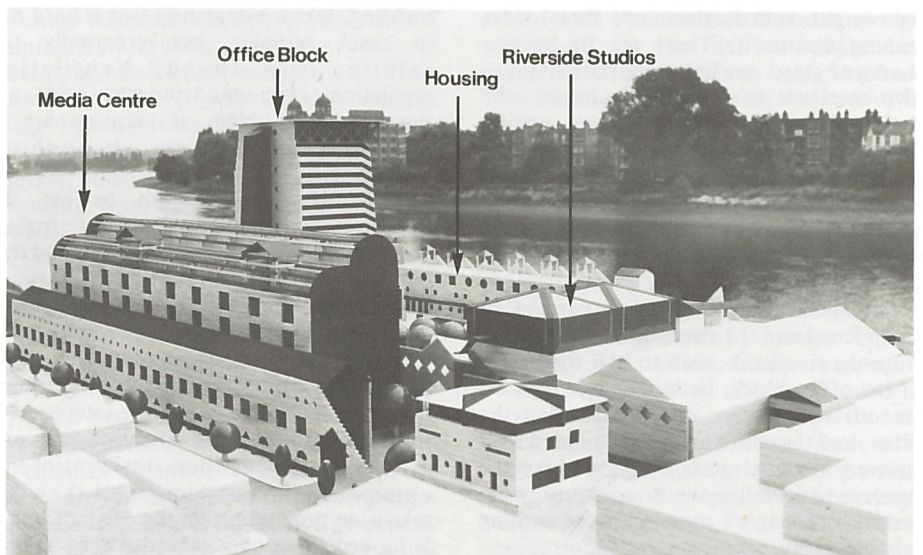
"Now I think in our generation (Alsop is 33, John Lyall, 31, and George Finch, 50, formerly in partnership with theatre architect, Roderick Ham) we've got out of that, into the position where we don't have to justify things in terms of function any more. If we want to decorate something, we'll decorate it—and to hell with its actual function, be it factory or arts centre. There's no need to be ashamed of doing something you consider to be beautiful; that's really a bit dishonest. Norman Foster's Sainsbury Centre, for instance, is very beautiful as an exhibition space, but still basically functional in its approach. For our part, we are not so concerned about expressing that function." It's not easy to encapsulate an architects' style in a few pithy sentences, still less that of a partnership, but to judge their style and their surprisingly well thought out work, two main points can be made.

There is no fear whatever of being *different*, completely different in fact, from anything you may have seen before, with an emphasis on sculpted, decorated shapes and finishing flourishes. Whilst using modern building methods and employing structural and visual techniques not available to earlier ages, such as sheet glass, modern insulation and materials like different coloured glazed bricks, they are influenced by the ideals of a former era: eclectic use of all manner of ideas in design, and a flamboyance, a sense of fun so often lacking in the harsh purposfulness of so much building this century. Indeed, they admit that two types of architecture in



Development seen from the river

(Photographs Roderick Coyne)



Development from Crisp Road side

(Photographs Roderick Coyne)

particular inform their tastes. "One is Japanese; and the other is Indian. There is some marvellous modern work going on in Japan, but their traditional structures, especially, are fantastic. They are simple, to the point, with marvellous proportions and height. Modern Indian is mostly rubbish, but many of their old buildings are extraordinary." In truth, most people will heave a sigh of relief to know that architecture might at last be escaping from its self-imposed discipline of 'cold' modernism, a style which, if nothing else, seems at variance with the human spirit. They also work closely with a sculptor, Gareth Jones, who comes in virtually every day—in itself an unusual collaboration.

So much for the Alsop, Finch & Lyall sense of aesthetic purpose, except to say that their last words were that each project is entirely different from the last. Alsop stresses that each project is large enough to draw its own references from the immediate surroundings, or from other influences. "The three main variables," he summed up, "are history, surroundings, and client. Take those three things into account and the design ought to add something worthwhile to its neighbourhood".

The development covers a site of 1.8 acres, excluding Riverside Studios. If you

add the development of that as well, it becomes 2.5 acres. In rough terms, the plans incorporate 80,000 sq. ft. of offices (a multi-storey building); about 60,000 sq. ft. of television studios (called a media centre); 18,000 sq. ft. of housing; and 14,000 sq. ft. of re-vamped, accommodation for Riverside, and another 24,000 sq. ft. of additional arts facilities. On top of that, there are to be dance facilities (possibly for a major national dance company to be based there) of 14,000 sq. ft.; and restaurants and wine bars, or other local amenities, would be on top of that.

A tour of the projected development gives a strong impression of fresh thinking, whether the ideas appeal or leave you cold.

Starting with Riverside's existing building, which readers may recall, housed the old BBC television studios at one time, there will be new rehearsal facilities, theatre workshop, a new cinema, new art gallery and general improvements throughout. Parts of the existing fabric will be demolished, but for the most part, the changes will come in the form of additions, not replacements. There will be a new get-in, from the west side, and most backstage facilities will be new. Large windows will overlook the river and the roof will be used as a private patio for actors and staff,