

# International line-up gathers to debate future of profession

**RICHARD WAITE**

Given recent world events and the nervousness about the global economy, it was unsurprising that the focus of this year's AR/Protek roundtable discussion at MIPIM was not, unlike at previous events, tall buildings. Instead the international line-up, gathered in March at the property fair in Cannes, debated the future for the architectural profession post-downturn, the unrest in the Middle East, emerging markets and designing sustainable buildings.

Money was the hot topic. According to Ken Shuttleworth of London-based Make, developers were again looking to build projects in the UK capital if nowhere else. He said: 'Since November 2010, things have picked up a lot in London and we are again looking at groundscrapers, such as our scheme at Broadgate.'

Stephen Quinlan of Denton Corker Marshall agreed, and added that the developer interest in the UK was limited 'almost exclusively to London'. Likewise, John Bushell of KPF added: 'Some Saudi investors will only look at certain postcodes in London and Paris.'

Nabil Gholam, of AR Future Project Award-winning Nabil Gholam Architecture & Planning, believed the 'old cities'

in Europe will remain a safe haven for inward investment while uncertainty and revolution spreads through the Gulf and North Africa.

The Lebanese architect said: 'Our two projects in Egypt stopped six months before anything happened. There was no answer on the phone to the clients, one the largest developer in the country, and we couldn't understand why. But they had smelled change. Although everything in our natural market is frozen right now this may be positive for Europe. With this instability there are many potential buyers who would rather go to London.'

However, in contrast to the upheavals that are taking place on its doorstep, Gholam explained that Beirut was 'booming, in the good sense of the word... with property prices rising to crazy levels'.

Meanwhile, Sanjay Puri of Mumbai-based Sanjay Puri Architects has also witnessed 'an insane price escalation' recently in India. He said: 'This time last year, India was booming. Property prices have gone up by 40 per cent – which is too high to be sustained – driven by a lot of foreign investment.'

Puri added: 'Apartments in the Burj Kalifa are cheaper than



Above\_ The Protek roundtable  
From the top\_ Paul Finch; Gavin Clifford (Cundall), Simon Alford (Alford Hall Monaghan Morris); John Bushell (KPF),

Jackie Blanden (WMProtek); Ken Shuttleworth (Make); James Finestone (Arup), Gregoire Zundel (Atelier Zundel Cristea) and Stephen Quinlan

those in Mumbai and Delhi. Now most projects in the larger cities have stopped. Yet there are a whole lot of other cities in India, such as Lucknow, which are undergoing huge amounts of urban renewal.'

The debate moved on to how the sustainability agenda is being delivered in different countries. Putting together a sustainability plan was easier for large-scale masterplans, said SOM's Kent Jackson, whose practice is working on such schemes in China and Vietnam, than when taking a building by building basis. The drivers for 'going green' continues to vary widely across the globe, ranging from legislative coercion in the UK to market demands in Australia.

Gavin Clifford of Cundall explained: 'The low-energy agenda has been led by the end-user in Australia, not by the regulations. There is no equivalent of the UK's Part L there. The UK has fallen into the trap where it won't do anything unless there are regulations. And this legislation only drives the design of buildings, not about how they are used.'

Simon Allford of AHMM agreed, saying the profession in the UK had not taken the lead in the environmental agenda, but rather had been 'dragged kicking and screaming to where we are now by the building regulations and constraints'.

It was suggested these legislative checks could stifle innovation and flexibility for re-use and renewal. Gholam pointed to how new buildings in Qatar, which won the 2022 World Cup, are being designed for multiple uses. He said: 'Every building in the next 10 years will have to be able to be converted to hotel rooms to house the 100,000 people who will be there for the Mondial.'