

Hooke Park

The AA's postgraduates have crafted a workshop out of timber in Dorset where future students will be able to develop their practical skills.

Big Shed is the first project to be built at the 350-acre woodland in Hooke Park, west Dorset as part of the Architectural Association's Design and Make course. Completed in April this year, the 500sq m workshop was conceived and constructed by a team of resident postgraduates, led by programme director Martin Self and course tutor Piers Taylor.

Described by Self as "the mothership" of the site's overall masterplan, Big Shed's hulking timber structure houses the course's core research activities in fabrication, assembly and prototyping. "The academic agenda at Hooke Park is one of providing [students with] real experience of construction and the testing of ambitions by physically mocking things up," Self says. Future cohorts will add to the masterplan, with a project for a student accommodation lodge currently underway.

The AA took ownership of Hooke Park in 2002, inheriting the site's three existing buildings: ABK and Frei Otto's long-span gridshell, Ted Cullinan's elevated dormitory and Buro Happold's prototype house with a tensile timber roof. These experimental campus buildings pioneered the use of forestry leftovers or "thinnings" – waste wood that has no commercial value but still has structural use. "The buildings are from the 1980s when

NEW

furniture designer John Makepeace established a branch of his school here," Self explains. "Design and Make's buildings are intended to be sensitive to that legacy."

Big Shed and subsequent structures at Hooke Park are also about using timber sustainably and "minimising processes". The structural frame is a system of un-milled timber columns and trusses. The unconventional faceted form is clad with larch strips from the surrounding forest.

The hands-on approach of the building programme at Hooke Park seems a far cry from some of the avant-garde goings on at Bedford Square shown in this year's graduate show. But Self says the off-site course is not so different from its central London counterparts. "It's about marrying craft knowledge with techniques like digital modelling," he says. "At Hooke Park we're able to feed our knowledge back and use research in a pragmatic way."

WORDS:
Riya Patel

Below
The 500sq m
Big Shed
workshop in
west Dorset

