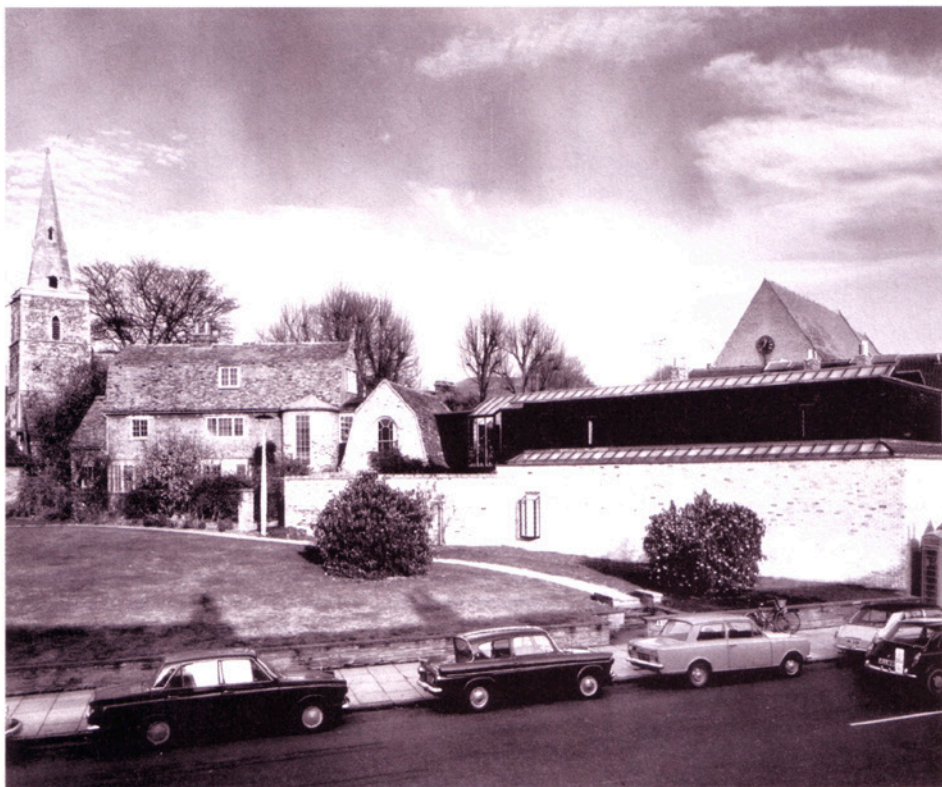


I wish I'd done that...

House



James Soane on the 'architecture of modesty' in Jim Ede's conversion of Kettle's Yard in Cambridge

Kettle's Yard is a collection of four cottages in Cambridge converted by Jim Ede in the late fifties into a "living place where works of art can be enjoyed". In 1970 the house was extended and a gallery added by Leslie Martin. I first discovered the house while a student, and it remains a place that you can go back to again and again and enjoy the very special ambience.

Indeed it is more about the interior than the exterior, although the forms of the building afford a range of spatial experiences from the very intimate space of the living room to the sublime openness of the library. Here is an architecture of modesty but one that is very particular.

There is a simple rustic use of materials; the whitewashed walls, brick and timber floors and casement windows.

Hanging on the walls is an incredible collection of period art work including works by John Piper, Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth.

These sit side by side with the Edes' collection of antiques, artefacts and found objects, creating a compelling interior world. Walking around the house one is struck by the timeless atmosphere: it seems to evoke memories of childhood and a forgotten age; yet balancing this are the clean lines of Martin's extension and the robust European language of his detailing.

It reminds one that old and new can sit harmoniously together and that a house is more than an object held in the gaze of architects; it is a container for its inhabitants whose mark remains a poetic reminder of a past life, but one that lives on through the place that they created and the thing that they collected and displayed.

In designing our own house in nearby Suffolk it became a touchstone as we knew that the form of the building would be vernacular and that we wanted to make an interior that was simple but not minimal, ordered but not uptight, and designed but not designer. It will be finished in three months, so we shall see.

● James Soane is a director of Project Orange.

Kettle's Yard in Cambridge
"reminds one that old and new can sit harmoniously together".

James also wished he'd designed

- Villa Mairea by Alvar Aalto;
- Maison à Bordeaux by Rem Koolhaas;
- High and Over by Amyas Connell;
- Nexus World by Steven Holl;
- Gwathmey House by Charles Gwathmey

