



Moneypenny frontage
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LANDSCAPE

ARCHITECT'S JOURNAL

CW Studio



CW Studio team ©Helena Marie Photography



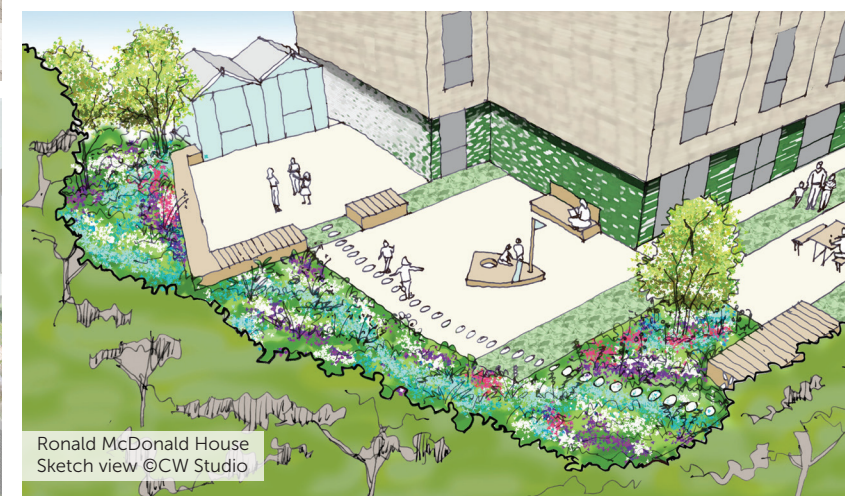
Erie Basin Terrace
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Ellesmere Street
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Moneypenny meadow
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Ronald McDonald House
Sketch view ©CW Studio

Pro Landscaper speaks to CW Studio about flagship projects and the crossover between landscape architecture and garden design

With a recent boom in construction, Manchester – known by many as the second city of the UK – is the perfect place for landscape architecture practice CW Studio to reside.

The practice, based in the city centre, is currently involved in a 1.25 acre high end residential development at Ellesmere Street, Castlefield, designing the public realm and private courtyard for 232 Private Rental Sector (PRS) apartments. With the project already on site, the landscape is expected to be implemented early next year, and one of the most impressive features of the private courtyard roof terrace is the oversized pebble seating, created by Cornish sculptor Ben Barrell using fibreglass and concrete, allowing them to be lightweight and comfortable.

A new public realm will be created in front of one of the three accommodation blocks designed by AEW Architects, with stone seating steps leading up to the terraces where bespoke planters will be included. CW Studio is passionate about including bespoke elements in its designs.

From theatre design to landscape architecture, founder Carolyn Willitts' route into the industry, and to setting up her own studio, has been unconventional, but it has lent an additional element to her designs – storytelling.

"I originally undertook a drama degree and then trained in theatre design, which I worked in for seven years, so there is definitely a theatrical, storytelling aspect to my designs," says Carolyn.

“THERE IS DEFINITELY A THEATRICAL, STORYTELLING ASPECT TO MY DESIGNS”

This has been applied to Erie Basin in Salford Quays. The 16-storey residential scheme for Glenbrook Property is the last remaining plot to be developed at what has become one of the largest regeneration projects in the UK.

CW Studio is designing a new public realm along the canal, as well as a residents' garden for the 270 apartments, and is using the site's history for inspiration, incorporating Manchester Docks' strong trading links with Canada before being closed in 1982.

"On the private terrace, as boats used to leave for Montreal right outside where the apartments are being constructed, we're looking to etch part of a letter into the stone seating.

We've found a wonderful letter from a brother, who left this dock, to his sister about how much he misses her. Part of the planting scheme will also include Canadian varieties of plants."

The public realm will run alongside the canal, which was constructed for the docks at the end of the 19th century, and will tie into the existing landscape, with *Alnus incana* 'Aurea' being planted to provide year-round interest. Planning permission has been granted for the 220,000ft² development, designed by architects Shepherd Robson, with work due to be completed in 2019.

For a fairly young company, founded in 2012, these are substantial schemes, but CW Studio's flagship project is the breathtaking Moneypenny headquarters in Wrexham. The £15m development in north Wales, completed last year, provides space for up to 1,000 employees, who can enjoy an orchard, meadow and wetland.

"Looking back, it was a one-in-a-million client, who wanted the very best for their staff. The client is thrilled. Since the company moved to these new headquarters, staff sickness has gone down and staff retention has increased. It's fantastic when you visit and people are having a picnic in the meadow."

The 10-acre rural plot required a naturalistic but contemporary landscape to accompany the new headquarters, and so includes tall, swaying grasses lining the Irish limestone walkway to the

entrance of the building. Stone benches are etched with greetings, and a timber deck leads to a wetland filled with filtered surface water, with a detention basin for any overflow.

Moneypenny also wanted an orchard with fruit which could be picked and eaten, so CW Studio incorporated trees of apples, damson plums and black cherries. Throughout the landscape, 1,750 trees were planted in total, with over 1,000 ornamental grasses and wetland plants, and 500 bulbs.

A year on and the planting is becoming well established, with the 12,000m² wildflower meadow being a popular place for staff to congregate. "One of the great things about the Moneypenny headquarters is that it only took two years from concept design to completion, plus a year for establishment, so it's brilliant to have photographs of the finished scheme for our website and social media. Some of the schemes we're working on will take years and years."

Carolyn is passionate about offering both garden design and landscape architecture, as they each complement the other. "They feed into each other. A lot of our projects seem to have a

garden incorporated in them. We entered a RIBA competition with Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios to design the landscape for a bereavement centre at Alder Hey Hospital – our design included a walled garden within a woodland, which was wonderful to design."

Though CW Studio was unsuccessful in this competition, the team is creating the environment surrounding a new Ronald McDonald House at John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford. The building will provide a comfortable place for families whose children are in the hospital, with a safe and fun exterior for the children.

"We put a story into the landscape which isn't actually based on the history of the site – it's a subtle seaside theme. A key part of the brief was to have sheds for storage in the garden, and so to make these attractive, we

thought we'd make them into beach huts. We then looked at how we could use timber groynes, and decided these might be fun for playing on, and could be used to divide the site into areas for different age groups and needs."

A linear exploratory zone will include a paved seating area in front of the two beach

huts, which act as a buffer to the car park, and green paving with embedded shells. A timber play boat will be nearby, and colourful poles leading to a story circle. A triangular public space will also be created with two mature pin oak trees.

Raised planting beds will be incorporated into the scheme, offering a place for volunteers to grow soft fruits and vegetables, but Carolyn explains they have not included these in the original planting scheme: "It's difficult to put vegetables into a scheme, as you don't want to be too prescriptive and cannot expect the volunteers to be able to maintain them, so we're starting off with colourful cutting flowers and herbs, and handing it over to see what people want to do with it."

The studio is expecting this project to go on site at the end of the year. Once completed, it will be yet another flagship scheme for the studio, which Carolyn says is growing in size, with four freelance landscape architects now undertaking projects. We look forward to following their story.

CONTACT

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