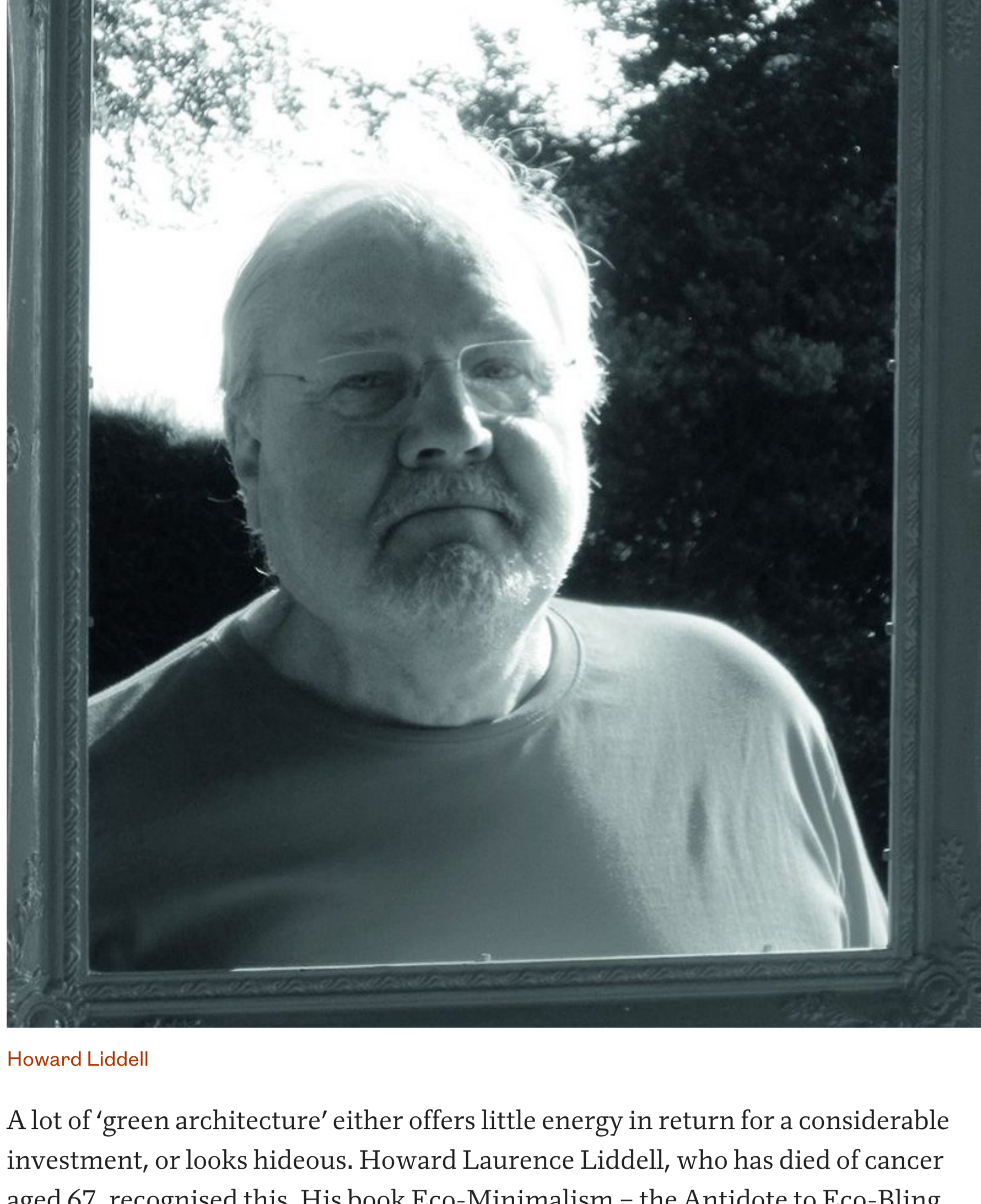


# Howard Liddell, (1945 - 2013)

1 May 2013

Words: [Elain Harwood](#)

**Energetic pioneer in the theory and practice of green architecture, multi award winner and volunteer, OBE**



Howard Liddell

A lot of 'green architecture' either offers little energy in return for a considerable investment, or looks hideous. Howard Laurence Liddell, who has died of cancer aged 67, recognised this. His book *Eco-Minimalism – the Antidote to Eco-Bling*, brought out in 2008 and just republished by RIBA Publications, is a master class of commonsense, decrying technical solutions and arguing that energy-saving is more effective than energy making. His own houses were unusual among eco-led designs in also being beautiful, notably Plummerswood in the Tweed Valley, which is prefabricated from timber and uses minimal energy for heating.

Liddell was one of the first to write on energy saving in 1974, when oil prices soared by 420%, in an article seeking new approaches to light and heating, *Therm-ware over the Rainbow*. His views were inspired by an anarchist group who created the Street Farm experimental ecohouse. Liddell quickly built a reputation for his policies on sustainable building, chairing the RIBA Architecture and Ecology Group from 1974 to 1979, and founding the Scottish Ecological Design Association in 1991.

Liddell was born in Askrigg, Yorkshire, but grew up in Newcastle upon Tyne, whence came a lifelong passion for Newcastle United. His family moved to Edinburgh in the late 1950s, and he talked his way into the School of Architecture despite having no appropriate qualifications. He graduated with a first. After practising in London, he became a senior lecturer and director of research at Hull School of Architecture in 1971. This was followed in 1979 by two years as a guest professor in Oslo where the Green Association of Idealistic Architects (GAIA) was formed, and where he returned to teach each summer for 25 years.

Meanwhile, Liddell moved to Aberfeldy in the Tay Valley in 1978, his base for integrating the triad of place, work and people that became the feature of his career. Inspired by Patrick Geddes to believe that stronger communities could be encouraged with better sports, leisure and tourism facilities, he set out his principles with an action body for local regeneration, the Breadalbane Institute. Liddell founded Gaia Architects (Scotland), responsible for some of the country's first ecological buildings using minimal technology. Architectural work included the Aberfeldy Recreation Centre, and he became chairman of Aberfeldy Community Council and co-founder of a local newspaper. User participation was key to his philosophy.

From 1986 Liddell helped revive the Fairfield area of Perth, working with residents and the authorities. The final phase of affordable, ecological housing was designed to minimise environmentally-caused allergies and won a UN World Habitat award in 2003. In 1993 his practice won the UK House of the Year award for Tressour Wood, an all-timber house near Aberfeldy heated by solar gain and a wood-fired stove. Acharacle School, Ardnamurchan, was Gaia's first building to be made from Brettstapel (stacked planks) panels fixed by dowels rather than glue, and was followed by the Glentress visitor centre. The Glencoe visitor centre of 2003 also won many awards, and Plummerswood was the Scottish Architectural House of the Year for 2012.

In 1996 Liddell returned to Edinburgh with his second wife Sandy Halliday to form the interdisciplinary Gaia Group, combining architecture, engineering, planning and research. Its cutting-edge environmental solutions focussed on local context, nature preservation and simplicity. He also ran many children's workshops, including Children's Eco-City events in Scotland and Belfast, and in 1996, a Children's Parliament in Edinburgh.

Liddell was awarded an OBE last January for his services to ecological design and voluntary work, which was presented posthumously at his funeral. After the award was announced, he spoke with typical fervour against 'greenwash and tokenism', hoping for better opportunities for truly sustainable architecture in 2013.

Howard Liddell is survived by Sandy and the children of his first marriage to Jenny: Becky, Emma, Briony and Jamie, plus eight grandchildren.

## IN MEMORIAM

- Sarah Lucy Gale**,  
Elected 2010, Abingdon, Oxfordshire
- Alan Morgan**,  
Elected 1950, Pinner, Middlesex
- Victor Stanley Glasstone**,  
Elected 1950, Lucca, Italy
- John David Adshead Austin**,  
Elected 1953, Poole, Dorset
- Alistair Maclachlan Smith**,  
Elected 1955, Dingwall, Ross-Shire
- Paul Russell Taylor**,  
Elected 1956, London
- George Aldridge**,  
Elected 1957, Bolton
- Raymond Barton Todd**,  
Elected 1958, Stockton-On-Tees
- Gerald James Elves**,  
Elected 1959, Bromley
- John Philip Hares**,  
Elected 1959, Bridgnorth, Shropshire
- Richard Paul Bunyan**,  
Elected 1962, Truro, Cornwall
- John James George Waller**,  
Elected 1963, London
- Richard John Davies**,  
Elected 1963, Chertsey, Surrey
- Myles Moorby**,  
Elected 1964, York
- Abdul Rashid Abdul Rehman Yusuf**,  
Elected 1966
- Jeffrey Clive Malim**,  
Elected 1966, Redruth, Cornwall
- Peter Alastair Mills**,  
Elected 1966, Betchworth, Surrey
- Christopher Thomas Inglis Rayson**,  
Elected 1967, Wittern, Oxon
- Graeme Fraser Butterworth**,  
Elected 1968, Bermuda
- Philip Graham Lancashire**,  
Elected 1970, London
- Leonard Horn Coulthard**,  
Elected 1974, Cumbria
- Ian Graham Thompson**,  
Elected 1977
- Jonathan Knight**,  
Elected 2004, Dubai
- Nigel Boyd Farquhar**,  
Elected 1989, Altrincham, Cheshire
- Adela Lucia Lyndon Wright**,  
Elected 1947, Oxford
- Richard Brown**,  
Elected 1948, Poole, Dorset

To inform the RIBA of the death of a member, please email [membership.services@riba.org](mailto:membership.services@riba.org) with details of next of kin

Region: [United Kingdom](#)  
More: [Housing](#), [Environmental design](#), [Sustainability](#)

Share this article



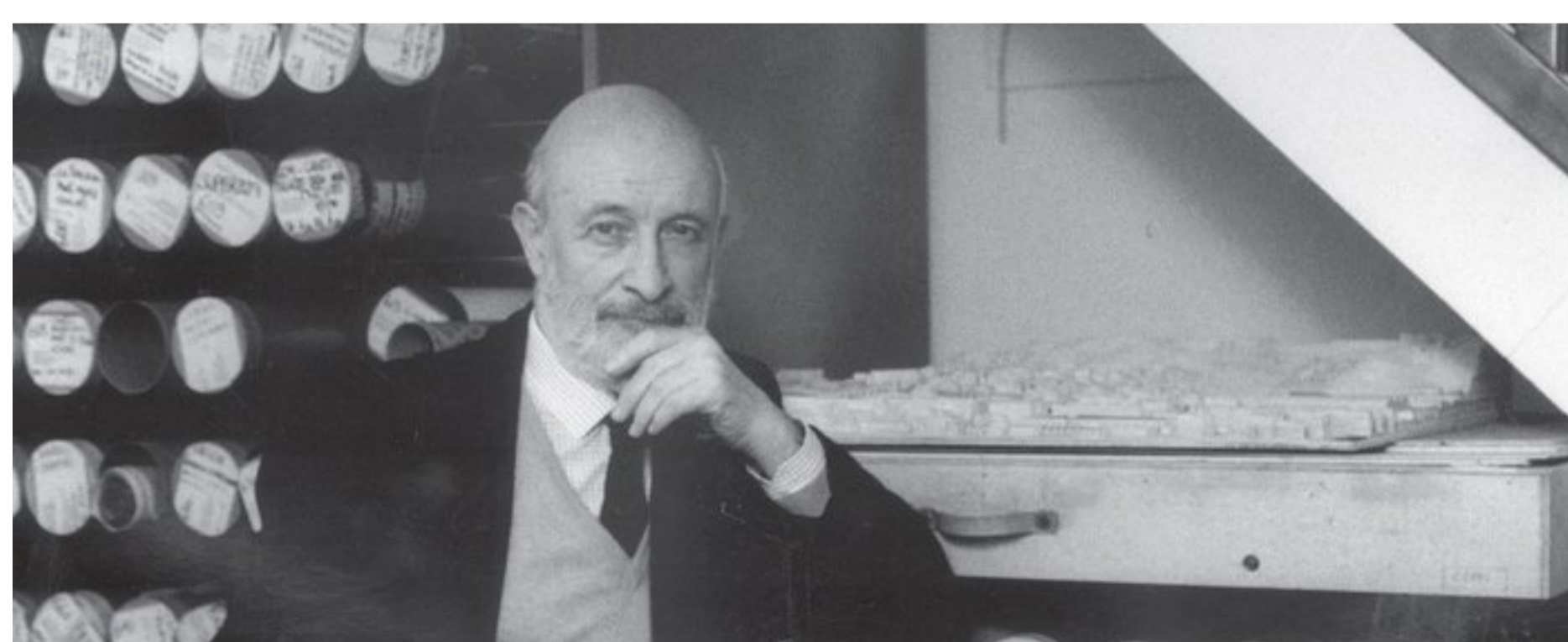
## Most popular

- 1 [Rethink: 2025 – Design for life after Covid-19](#)
- 2 [Workload lessons from past recessions](#)
- 3 [Maximalist pavilion makes waves in Southern Ontario](#)
- 4 [At home with Meredith Bowles](#)
- 5 [View from the Emirates: working through the global pandemic](#)
- 6 [Mill town terrace meets the 21st century](#)
- 7 [What's behind the updates to the 2020 Plan of Work](#)
- 8 [At home with Mary Arnold-Forsler](#)

## Related



Obituary Michael Sorokin (1948-2020)



Obituary: Vittorio Gregotti 1927 – 2020



Paul Koralek, whose success was curtailed by the National Gallery controversy

**Enter Now**  
Deadline: 8 June

**eye line**  
**DELTA LIGHT**

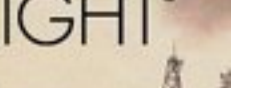
RIBA | Eye Line 2020 | The free online architectural drawing competition

## Newsletter signup

Sign up to receive regular briefings, updates and our weekly newsletter – all designed to bring you the best stories from [RIBA.com](#)

Register

## Subscribe to RIBA Journal



Sign up to receive regular briefings, updates and our weekly newsletter – all designed to bring you the best stories from [RIBA.com](#)

