

The Weston

Feilden Fowles draws on the landscape and Land Art at Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Words

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Photos

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Right

Location plan; site plan. The building sits on a former fence line at the edge of the park, among a row of cherry trees.

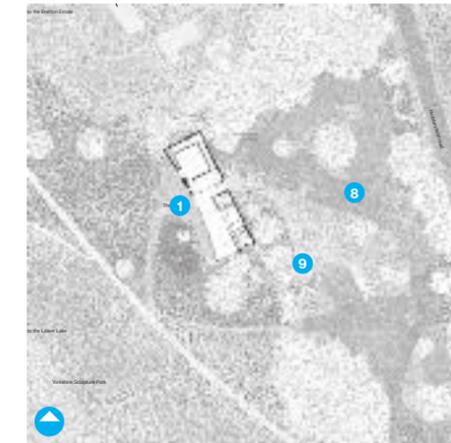
Yorkshire Sculpture Park, at West Bretton near Wakefield, was founded in 1977. It is situated in the grounds of Bretton Hall, a private estate later used as a teacher-training college.

Bottom

Entrance from the car park; the gently curved west elevation faces the estate's former deer park.

Key

- 1 The Weston
- 2 Main entrance
- 3 Visitor Centre and Underground Gallery
- 4 Bretton Chapel
- 5 Bretton Hall
- 6 Lake
- 7 Longsite Gallery
- 8 Car park
- 9 Ticket office



Feilden Fowles' new visitor centre on the edge of Yorkshire Sculpture Park is a small and apparently simple building, but does a lot of work. At one end, a concrete box with a saw-tooth roof wrapped in a fluted crown of translucent GRP contains an exhibition space. At the other, a cafe sits within a gently curved timber-framed pavilion, overlooking YSP's 500-acre 'gallery without walls'. A shop and a cosy interpretation area are also neatly integrated. The primary role of 'The Weston', however, is to form a threshold to the park and to enhance enjoyment and understanding of the landscape in which it sits.

Intended to encourage better dispersal of YSP's 500,000 annual visitors through the site, the structure provides a landmark or destination for walkers, and also a second entrance to the park, some distance from the main visitor facilities added by Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios from the 1990s onwards.

The chosen location was a small car park, once a quarry. It is an odd spot: to the west is a picturesque landscape largely shaped by the eighteenth-century designer Richard Woods, but 100 metres to the east, traffic thunders along the M1. In siting the building, the architects "tried to create a kind of holding space between these two conditions", says Edmund Fowles. Its form blocks views between the road and the park, but also "responds to prevailing conditions, some of which you don't see, like motorway noise and the wind".





Arriving visitors are met by a wall of rough-textured concrete, of a similar hue to blocks of local millstone grit that lie scattered about. Set into banks of earth and rock, it appears to have emerged from the site. The enigmatic mass, punctured only by a tall entrance, blocks all views of what lies ahead, but “the whole idea of a solid wall is to suggest that there is something to delight behind it”, says YSP founder and executive director Peter Murray.

On entering, the moment of revelation is immediate: a panoramic view through the building’s glazed west wall takes in the undulating terrain of the Old Deer Park, a shimmering lake at the heart of the estate and distant wooded hills.

It is the one ‘spectacular’ moment in what is otherwise a low-key intervention. “We felt that architecture should not compete with the landscape or the art; it should serve them”, says Fergus Feilden. Though the architects did not want to make an object-like building with a figure-ground relationship to its site, the design of The Weston does incorporate ideas present in the terrain and in the artworks that populate it. Edmund Fowles draws a parallel between the eighteenth-century project to “sculpt the land” and the work of Land Artists, represented at YSP by James Turrell and Andy Goldsworthy, among others.

While the monolithic part-buried concrete walls draw on works by Michael Heizer and others, and allude to the picturesque fondness for ruins, the timber facade recalls remote lodges and follies found on the estate — “to be ventured to and discovered; perched on the hillside, glimpsed from afar”, says Fowles.



Key

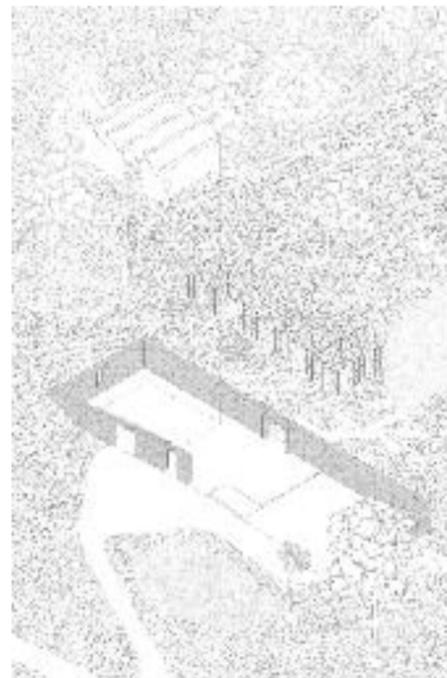
- 1 Gallery
- 2 Shop
- 3 Lobby
- 4 Toilets
- 5 Interpretation
- 6 Restaurant
- 7 Kitchen

Top

A ramp descending from the entrance lobby to the cafe is flanked by the interpretation area.

Right

Floor plan; exploded axonometric.





Above, right

The boardmarked north-light gallery roof was cast against narrow timber battens, and is wrapped in translucent GRP.

Concrete walls were made with local millstone grit, magnesium limestone and Leicestershire granite aggregates to give the sense that the building is “of the earth”.

Test panels were made to research pigmentation, and to find curing times that gave a partially blended junction between pours. Walls were shot-blasted and pressure-washed to add texture.

The north-west corner incorporates a labyrinth of 10,000 unfired clay bricks which moderates humidity in the naturally ventilated space.

Coupling two distinct constructional and material languages is least successful where both are simultaneously visible, but each plays its own part well. The massive walls ground the building, and the textured concrete of the gallery powerfully dramatises the north light, while the slender Douglas fir mullions, beams and cruciform columns of the cafe create an important warmth and informality. “We want people to relax in this building – inside and outside – so it’s somewhere they want to return to”, says YSP director of programme, Clare Lilley.

With sight and sound of the motorway baffled by the heavy walls, and the arc of the west facade seeming to embrace the park laid out below, The Weston does what the architects intended, drawing the visitor’s attention not to itself, but to light and the landscape in which it sits. ↗

Project team

Architect
Feilden Fowles
Structural engineer
Engineers HRW
M&E engineer
Skelly & Couch
Main contractor
William Birch & Sons
Project manager
Turner & Townsend
Quantity surveyor
BWA (Europe)
Clerk of Works
COWL
Concrete specialist
Jonathan Reid
Landscape architect
Jonathan Cook
Landscape Architects
Client
Yorkshire Sculpture
Park

Selected suppliers & subcontractors

Layered concrete
Northfield Construction
Timber structure and facade
Pacegrade
GRP screen
Diespeker GRP
Doors, windows and joinery
Image Development
Northern
Precast stone
Cornish Concrete Products
Lime plaster
Ty Mawr Lime
Gallery concrete repair/finishing
Grey Matter
M&E installations
Tricon
Landscape and groundworks contractor
Alive Construction

