

**INVISIBLE
STUDIO**

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PRESS RELEASE
June 2022

Westonbirt, The National Arboretum community shelter designed and built by many hands



An organically shaped community shelter has opened at Westonbirt, The National Arboretum in Gloucestershire. It is the product of a unique partnership between architects Invisible Studio, timber structure specialists Xylotek and hundreds of people from harder-to-reach community groups, as well as Forestry England volunteers and staff. While technically complex, the project was conceived, designed and constructed working alongside community participants with a range of abilities – demonstrating the mindful benefits of nature and co-creation. The result is an inclusive and protective space that sits comfortably in its woodland setting.

The shelter is made from trees that were due to be extracted from Westonbirt's own collection as part of its routine woodland management cycle, as well as recycled old,

aluminum signage from across the site. The project's carbon footprint is therefore small, and shows what can be achieved using locally grown and sourced timber.

The design process involved high levels of engagement from the outset, using sketches, small models, digital scanning, large scale mock-ups and onsite fabrication to involve the community groups at every stage of the project. Considering the varying skillsets of the participants, the shelter provided opportunities for individuals to join in on a range of traditional green timber carpentry techniques, including steam bending, laminating and shingle making to build the unusual structure.

The distinctive and innovative hyperbolic paraboloid shape of the shelter will offer protection from the elements, while offering important views through to the surrounding woodland. The aesthetic appears to a certain extent ad hoc but it has been deliberately created this way to allow inclusive design and offer the groups who will use the shelter a space that is non-prescriptive. The community that uses the shelter will feel a sense of ownership, while those participants involved in the build process have experienced the pride in making this project, with a positive outlook on what they can achieve next.

Dr Piers Taylor, Director, Invisible Studio:

"The Community Shelter was conceived as a truly collaborative project, playing to the strengths of a wider team that have worked together on multiple innovative and award-winning projects both at Westonbirt (with the Tree Management Centre) and also with projects at Hooke Park and elsewhere. The shelter was won as a joint bid between Invisible Studio and Xylotek, and set-up so that many others from a variety of community groups would work alongside the consultants on every aspect of the project, creating something ultimately far greater than a project from a single hand."

Martin Self, Director, Xylotek:

"It's been a privilege for Xylotek to work with the Westonbirt team and the community groups on this project. It's been amazing to see how a complex wood structure can be realised with mixed-skill community teams - reinventing techniques normally done in high-tech factories rather than deep in the woods."

Jude Shackell, Apperley Centre, said:

"The real life, interesting, fun and perceived 'riskiness' of the shelter build has been hugely motivating for the members of our group. While sometimes being a bit anxious about the tools, they have all had tremendous fun and learnt so much. They are moving on eager to learn more and try new things in all areas of their life."

The community shelter has been funded through generous donations from a range of sources including individuals and grants, Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum charity and investment from Forestry England.

Ends.

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Notes to Editors

About Invisible Studio

Invisible Studio is an innovative and award winning architecture practice founded by Piers Taylor. Taylor is a Chartered Architect, was the inaugural Studio Master at the Architectural Association for the Design & Make Programme at Hooke Park, a former Design Fellow at the University of Cambridge, a PhD Scholar at the University of Reading, an external examiner at the Arts University, Bournemouth and the Convenor of Studio in the Woods.

Invisible Studio aims to be a different organisation from a conventional practice. We operate through collaboration, experimentation, research and education. We work internationally and very locally, in a variety of fields and at a variety of scales. We operate from a self-built studio located in a working woodland which we also manage as an ongoing forest enterprise alongside practice, and have pioneered a number of academic programmes that rethink the relationship between design and making. We are not interested in making as a mechanism for simply providing us with some new form-making techniques which are inflected by their material realisation, but instead, in terms of how material practice can address social and political questions.

www.invisiblestudio.org

About Xylotek

Xylotek was founded in 2018 by directors Charley Brentnall, Oscar Emanuel and Martin Self with the aim of bringing together our diverse experience and shared passion for wood, to serve projects seeking high ambition for the application of timber in architecture. We operate internationally with a remote design and management team, and a design and workshop hub in Bristol UK.

Our clients include cultural and academic institutions, commercial developers and private individuals. We are typically appointed as specialist consultants within design teams; as subcontractors to main contractors on large projects; or as design-build contractors in our own right. We are able to design, fabricate, assemble and install – in both conventional and unusual contexts.

Our specialism is in the delivery of non-standard timber structures that need innovative solutions. For every project we formulate the correct technologies, processes and supply chain for that job – working with industry partners to ensure the best offering of value and expertise in the market. Some projects are prototyped or fabricated in our workshops; others – often at a larger scale – are procured through our fabricator partners. In all cases, we seek to bring overall control to delivery through our expertise.

In seeking a well-designed low-carbon future, our driving motive is to change the world with wood.

www.xylotek.co.uk