ĦAĠRA

FESTIVAL OF CONTEMPORARY MEDITERRANEAN ARCHITECTURE

CHANGING THE CLIMATE NARRATIVE

15 MAY 2025

IAN RITCHIE

It’s about ideas and imagination - the need for artists and engineers.

A need for collective action.

One exceptional individual might inspire, but rare.

Imbalance of climate impact between the richest 1% of humans and the poorest 50% is vulgar and diminishes my understanding of the beauty of humanity.

The 1% must change the way they think from short term gain to long term legacy.

This is not impossible. It is about the big investors (banks, pension funds) who promote fossil fuel extraction changing their portfolios!

Right now, your invested pension is more than likely doing more harm to the planet/climate than being a cycling vegan.

[I reacted in 1974 with the Fluy House…solar heated air / heat storage]

Change is possible. It happens to everyone, relentlessly.

So why wait to see what the future might bring? Why not try to make the future that most of us want?

We accept clean electricity is the future.

I wrote a paper ‘the future is all electric’ more than 40 years ago – 1990s.

Despite certainty being always uncertain we cannot leave the future to fate now that we have all experienced climate change.

The climate we know is rapidly disappearing unless we act collectively, on a big scale, and fast.

The alternative climate is in part unknown, but also in part already known.

Of course, the poorest will suffer more than the 1% and that is a big problem in trying to change the narrative.

This current narrative points to the 1% as evil, the selfish even solipsistic group! This will entrench them further in their short-term habit of gain at all costs! Such criticism will hurt them.

The narrative must include them as the real power guardians of the planet … and not a power based on fossil fuels that will only bring an ugly future of unimaginable climate change, even more extensive environmental and bio-destruction and pollution.

The new narrative and activism must change their thinking and engage them as the green responsible guardians of an all-electric future based upon the sun's radiation and wind, and require their huge investment in these technologies that we know work now.

Yes, energy storage up to 30 days in some overdeveloped parts of the world is vital.
Why? Sun and wind absent for a month is not uncommon in the winter months when power consumption is at its peak.
Currently, we can only store perhaps 48hrs electrical consumption.

Climate scientists are not often pessimists. They give us the best descriptions they can of the world around us. It is a beautiful world.

When they see aspects that are disturbing other scientists are stepping in to help find solutions to energy storage, and better ways to harness sun and wind generated energy.

However, it is reducing the scale of the extraction and the burning of fossil fuels, where the narrative focus has to have the most impact.

A global community was only created through technology and basically is for the 1% to exploit the rest. The rest being the consumers happy with their social media communications!

Yes, changing consumer behaviour is critical, but unlikely to have anywhere near the impact on climate that change in energy source will have.

This narrative must be turned on its head and the 1% encouraged to deliver benefits to a global community through known green energy industrial production.

Despite what I believed about the actual alternatives available 30 years ago, there has been a technical improvement in green electricity production (gearless wind turbines and now peaking at max 200m dia.) and a vast increase in deployment and production. We can no longer wait for super new technologies to be applied and available such as one photon activating 2 or more electrons in a pv cell - which would clearly be a massive game changer when it does happen, because it might be too late.
We have no choice if we wish to carry on living more or less as we do today but to act now.

And of course, it is more than just the way we produce electricity. The capacity of green technology and production can exist very soon to power our lifestyle.

What prevents it happening faster are the wrong stories and the politics.
The stories on social media have tended towards denial of climate change. Social media invites controversial opinions.

People have preferred during the past decade or more to believe the unqualified opinion makers on climate rather than the qualified and evidence based scientific opinion - (cf Like anti-vaxxers often arguing that it is big pharma behind it and don't trust the doctors).

However recent polls put global opinion nearer 80% that climate change is happening and is man-made.

So, we are left with politics.

And we can see in the second term of US Trump presidency how rapid progress can be almost stopped overnight in a major country.

Why are politicians subservient to the big oil and gas industries?

Because nearly all Western democracies energy suppliers have all been privatised! A-commodity rather than a service.

As a result, the argument made by them is that we cannot just switch off carbon fuels and become all-electric overnight.

We're not stupid. We all know that!

But the result is no urgency to change/invest on their part into green energy. We have recently seen the big boys cutting back even further on green energy production and investment.

Capitalism is what it is … it does not take responsibility for the environmental and it spins stories about transition to green all the while increasing output to deliver shareholder profit!

I recall being asked 20+ years ago by Lord (John) Browne then CEO of BP in the company of Peter Mandelson now British Ambassador to the US, at the end of a conference to give him three simple benefits of green energy for him to give to Gordon Brown, then the UK PM.

I replied: a huge number of jobs (green collar) in making the solar and wind products, and in science/engineering research jobs through investment in improving products and elec. storage and consequently getting ahead technically. All would increase economic output in both the short and long term.

I am an ambassador for Global Returns Project which focuses on only a few agencies that are regularly assessed by its scientific committee to have a very high impact on challenging and changing government political policies and the environment in different parts of the world.
I have also been a member of Scientists for Global Responsibility for more than 30 years… and most recently we have had a big focus in our activism on the carbon footprint of the global military industry… and informing and challenging governments' policies in this area.

As an architect I remain optimistic.

It is important to me to reduce the carbon profile of building materials. Cement is one.

I know that local stone is the very best ecological and environmental material for a low carbon structure. Better than timber.

To date we have quarried globally an area only just bigger than Malta! The size of the Isle of White.

I would like to use the hard Gozo/N Malta stone Globerijina here in constructing new buildings - no shipping import - no carbon costs.

However, this requires more research and perhaps political will given the actual level of excavation of this stone.

Clearly, avoiding air-conditioning is a target. We employed TABS and opening windows to achieve the indoor temperature levels as at TP1… culminating in a lifetime footprint of the development being 56% lower than current construction in Malta. We even designed a new low-energy, glare-free uplighter with my colleague Ulrike Brandi with Castaldi, an Italian lighting manufacturer for Trident Park.

Historically, 50 years ago I began using low-energy or energy conscious design in 1976 with the design of the Fluy House in France. Passive solar and high thermal insulation, and natural light.

I have never stopped pursuing and pushing this avenue of design and research.

Memory and understanding our collective history, and our historical experiences is vital in thinking about the future we want. I grew up just after the WWII in the UK. ‘Waste not Want not’ was the message. I collected metal bottle tops, glass bottles and jars. Everything was reused as we had little. It was evidently necessary, but sensible and fun.

The sense of joy is what is so crucial in the narrative about our collective future and the climate we wish to enjoy along with a healthy biosphere.