

# Why Scaffolding isn't Dull

Photo Blog May 2020

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## INTRODUCTION

It's easy to assume that scaffolding is a bit dull.

A load of metal tube connected in a grid with some planks of wood to stand on. How could it possibly be anything more than something temporary, practical and unimaginative?

But, a few days ago this image of the 'Christ The Redeemer' appeared in our social feed. The photo's about 10 years ago now, from when the statue underwent some cleaning and restoration work. It's a stunning structure, but what about the architecture around it?

Because while scaffolding is an indispensable accessory to architecture it can also lend itself to compelling installations and innovative access solutions. It can be in the lead role as well as the supporting one.

The humble scaffold has more to offer us than just vertical support and façade bracing.

## 'THE STAIRS'



In Rotterdam, this huge staircase named 'The Stairs' takes visitors up 180 steps leading to a roof top viewing platform. It's supported entirely by scaffolding and is part of the city's ambition to explore its 'second layer'. Here the scaffolding is bold and the structure dominates its space. This is scaffolding being the focus of the design rather than being seen as a messy but necessary evil.

The stairs are 57 meters (187ft) long, 10,35 meters (34ft) wide and 29 meters (95ft) high  
The scaffolding has a total weight of 59.000 kilogram (130073lb)





## WOULD YOU TRUST THIS?

In Hong Kong bamboo scaffolding is still used in the construction of all kinds of buildings. This traditional craft is as much about knowing the laws of weight and physics as it is about securing the poles together. Its tradesmen are revered as artists who are preserving the skill and knowledge that's been passed along for centuries. The trade is regulated, but it's popularity is decreasing and seen as backward in an ultra-modern world, not helped by the diminishing supply of bamboo.



## SPIDERMEN

The 'spidermen' of Hong Kong use a technique known as 'riding the bamboo' which involves wrapping an ankle around the poles to leave their hands free. Using only basic harnesses and helmets these acrobatic craftsmen scale heights often up to 80 floors high.



## TREEPLETS

Elsewhere in China bamboo scaffolding is celebrated in a different way. This sculpture 'Treeplets' in Macau uses bamboo scaffolding, as originally used in Macanese construction. The Chinese influence is apparent in the fresh, uncluttered space inside, which isn't clad or decorated in any way. There's nothing practical about this structure. It was created purely as a piece of art.



## UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA

These students from the Vienna University of Technology in Austria explored how scaffolding can be used to provide urban spaces or interesting modules for exhibiting art.

The installation was part of a larger exhibition, beginning with the history of scaffold and its evolution from wood to metal construction.

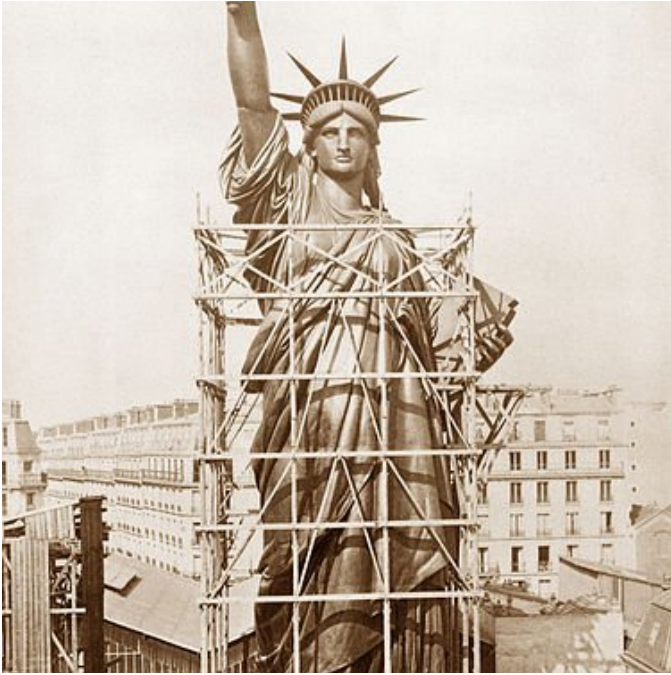
It seems that scaffolding in its early iterations is regarded as more interesting and aesthetically pleasing, perhaps because of the associated heritage or because wood is warmer and more tactile than steel.



## BEN LONG, ARTIST

The artist Ben Long is probably better known for his drawings done in the dust on the back of dirty vans. However, he branched out to produce some gritty urban art, all built with scaffolding. He worked on building sites as a teenager and combined the inspiration derived from this experience with his abstract concept of animals returning to urban settings.





## LIBERTY

The 151-foot-tall Statue of Liberty, officially Liberty Enlightening the World, designed by Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi and Gustave Eiffel, was a gift to the United States from the people of France in 1886.

During its restoration, scaffolding was designed specifically for the statue, and required ingenuity from its designers, as it could only be attached to the granite pedestal and not the statue, plus it had to accommodate the intricate contours of the statue as well. Additionally, the exterior scaffolding had to maintain a distance of at least 18 inches from any exposed section of the copper sheathing. The 6,000 or so separate components of the scaffold, made of a high load capacity aluminum (alloy 6061 T6), were unloaded onto Liberty Island on January 23, 1984.





## A LA RONDE

This picture shows arguably the most difficult of scaffolding jobs – a sixteen-sided 'hexadecagon' structure built to protect a unique 223-year-old British building.

The 'A la Ronde' house is the National Trust's quirky 16-sided property and it had grown in need of some roof repairs. To protect the unique building and keep the contents dry, scaffolding was needed – but none could properly protect the house due to its unusual design. Then workmen came up with this design and soon built the world's first scaffolding hexadecagon in Exmouth, Devon.

A la Ronde contains a shell gallery, made up of thousands of delicate artefacts ranging from sea shells to bird feathers.

The repair work meant that the vital conservation work to the gallery and house could continue.



## HANGING GARDEN

Celebrity gardener Diarmuid Gavin, known for his contemporary and unique gardens, used scaffolding to create a modern version of The Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

His creation was designed for the Chelsea Flower Show.

A pyramid was built in tube and fitting, standing 80 feet high with seven different levels. A Geda Hoist taking you to the top, the scaffolding was filled with plants including 30ft high bamboo, a vegetable garden, greenhouse, an outdoor shower that waters the garden and a slide taking you down to the ground.





## TRICKY

What's the link between brown sauce and scaffolding? The story goes that HP sauce is named after the Houses of Parliament due to the sauce being a favourite with MPs.

When restoration work began on Big Ben (or the Elizabethan Tower to give the landmark its proper name), witty marketers at HP even changed the label on their brown sauce to reflect its change in appearance. The scaffolding was going to be around for several years so it made sense to mark the change.



## TRICKIER

Some structures, or their tricky locations, call for creativity in the scaffolding design and erection which is far beyond the demands of most installations. Water towers, gravity defying bridges, the tallest man-made structures in the world – they all need scaffolding.

Much respect is due to the skillful tradesmen for whom constructing these sky-scraping structures is just another day at the office. And when you look at some of these images it's no surprise that scaffolding is regarded as one of the top three most dangerous professions in the UK along with construction and farming.



## TRICKIEST

This installation typifies the term 'extreme scaffolding'. Although this image can be found on several websites, no one is owing up to the job. What the purpose of this was, or how it was erected, remain a mystery but for sheer ingenuity we had to include it in here.





## PINGJIANG COUNTY

Our celebration of the best should also include a nod at the worst.

We're back in China, and these workmen are constructing a mountain road on rickety scaffolding in Hunan province. The Mufu Mountain range attracts thousands of sightseers, so to capitalise on the tourism the Chinese officials decided to build this precarious mountain road.



## DORSET

Where's the access ladder?

This botch job did the rounds of social media and it's no surprise it was scorned by many. No scaffolding? No problem. Strap a couple of ladders together. Job done.



## MOBILE TOWER?

There's nothing worse than realising you haven't got enough equipment for the job. Not to worry, there's always a solution.

This is either ingenious or insane, depending on how you look at it.



# ART OR ARCHITECTURE?

In here we've seen the best and the worst of the trade we've come to know and love.

But is scaffolding just a means to an end or is it something to be celebrated in its own right?

Scaffolding is fundamental to architecture, - the 'practice of designing and constructing buildings,' but it's usually temporary.

it art then? It's more accepted that art can be short-term, sometimes it's even part of the appeal. Ice and sand sculptures, floral displays, even Ben Long's dirt doodlings - none of them last for ever. Certainly, some of the scaffold examples in here are works of art - they require creativity and imagination, skill and knowledge.

Whatever your view, we hope you've enjoyed our tour of the best and worst that scaffolding has to offer.

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We have two hugely successful scaffolding companies in the Fidelis Group, and we know a thing or two about the trade. But this has given us a brand new appreciation for the skill involved and the endless and complex possibilities which can be achieved from something which seems so simple.



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