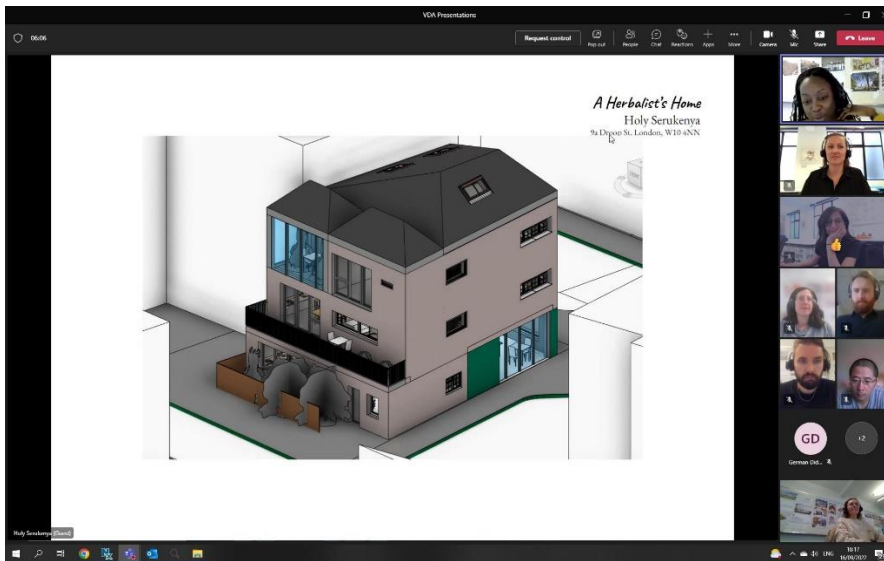


# DMA

## DMA's Virtual Design Academy: Real Career Skills in a Locked-down World



Holy Serukenya's Day 5 presentation on Teams



Students create their own designs in Virtual Reality

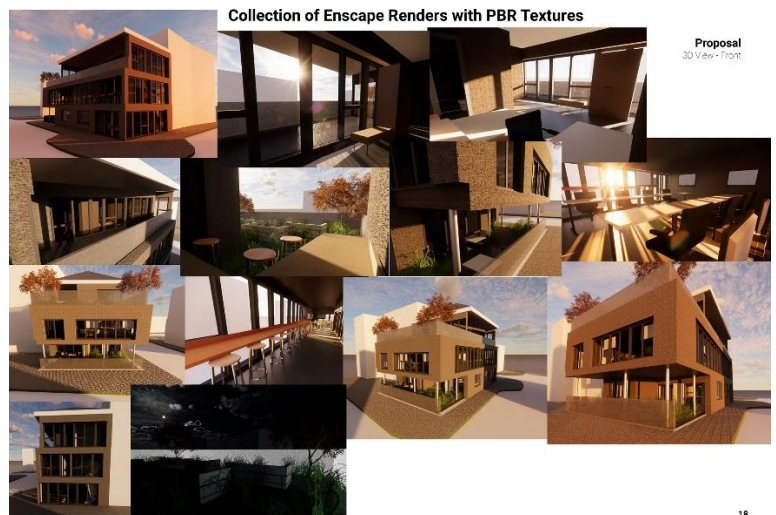


### Virtual Design Academy

**WELCOME TO THE VDA** Please find all the information you need to get started in the below pages, this includes a welcome pack to get you setup, guidance on using and learning levels, order of goals you will find your day by day aims, keep on track with those and you will stay on track for the week. You can also find other useful information and contact details below, as well as your calendar for the week.



VDA landing page on Notion – user friendly accessible content



Page from Jack Felipe Nolasco's design report - p.18\_renders

To hear testimonials from our VDA students, see our short video clip:

<https://www.david-miller.co.uk/news/hear-from-dmas-virtual-design-academy/>

To find out more about some of the awards our VDA has won:

- Constructing Excellence People Development Award 2022  
<https://www.david-miller.co.uk/news/dmas-inclusive-approach-wins-one-of-two-constructing-excellence-awards-2022/>
- Dragon Awards Inclusive Employer 2022  
<https://www.david-miller.co.uk/news/dma-wins-a-dragon-award-for-boosting-opportunity-and-tackling-inequality/>

See more about our social values initiatives on DMA's website:

<https://www.david-miller.co.uk/social-values.php>

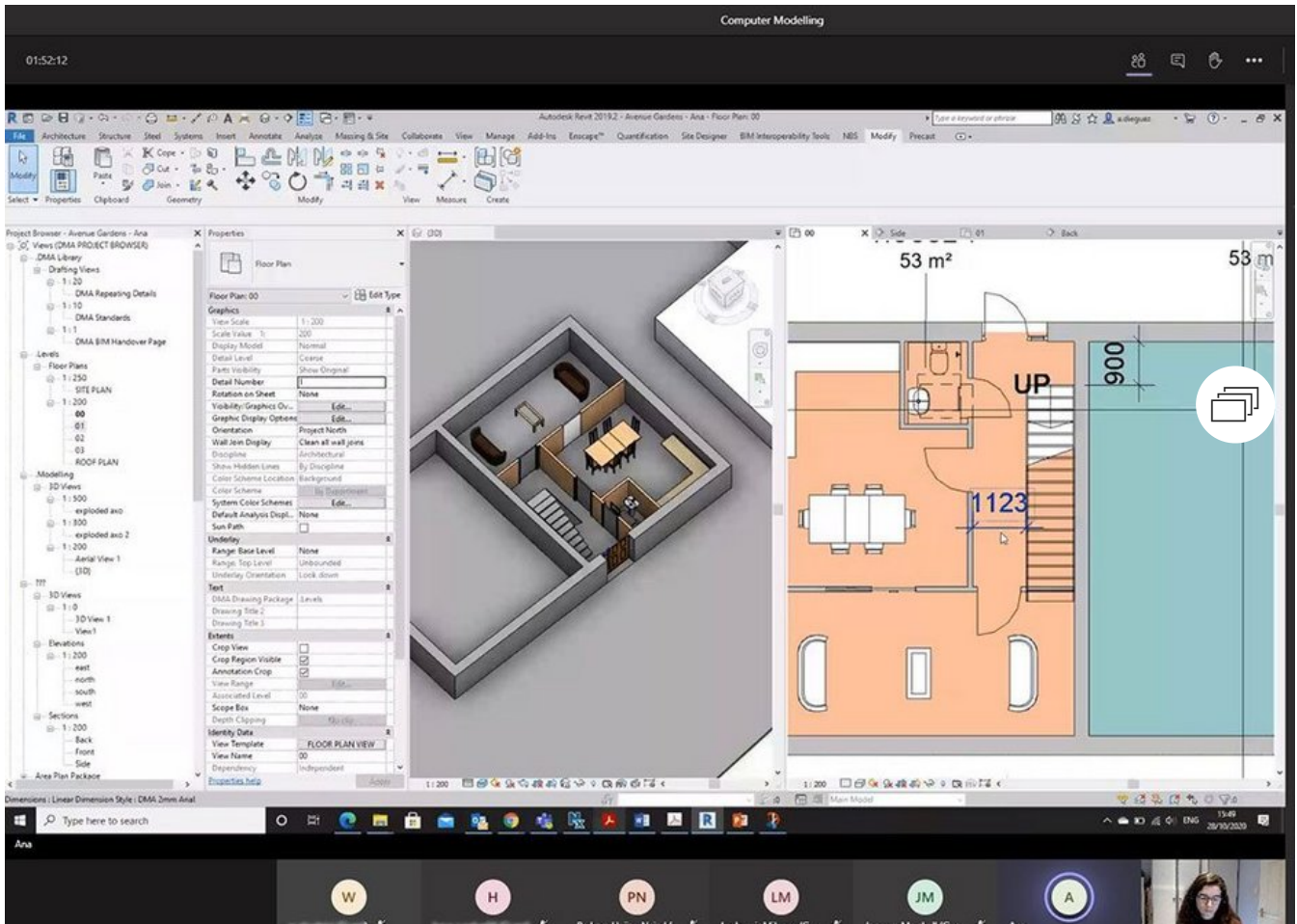
See an article about DMA's VDA in the RIBA Journal on the next pages:

# Virtual work experience teaches students the basics of how to design a house in five days

23 November 2020

Words: Rachel Stevenson

David Miller Architects' work placements programme for young people seemed scuppered by lockdown – but its virtual version has expanded its reach and given students hands-on skills



Revit demonstration page from DMA's Virtual Design Academy hub Credit: David Miller Architects

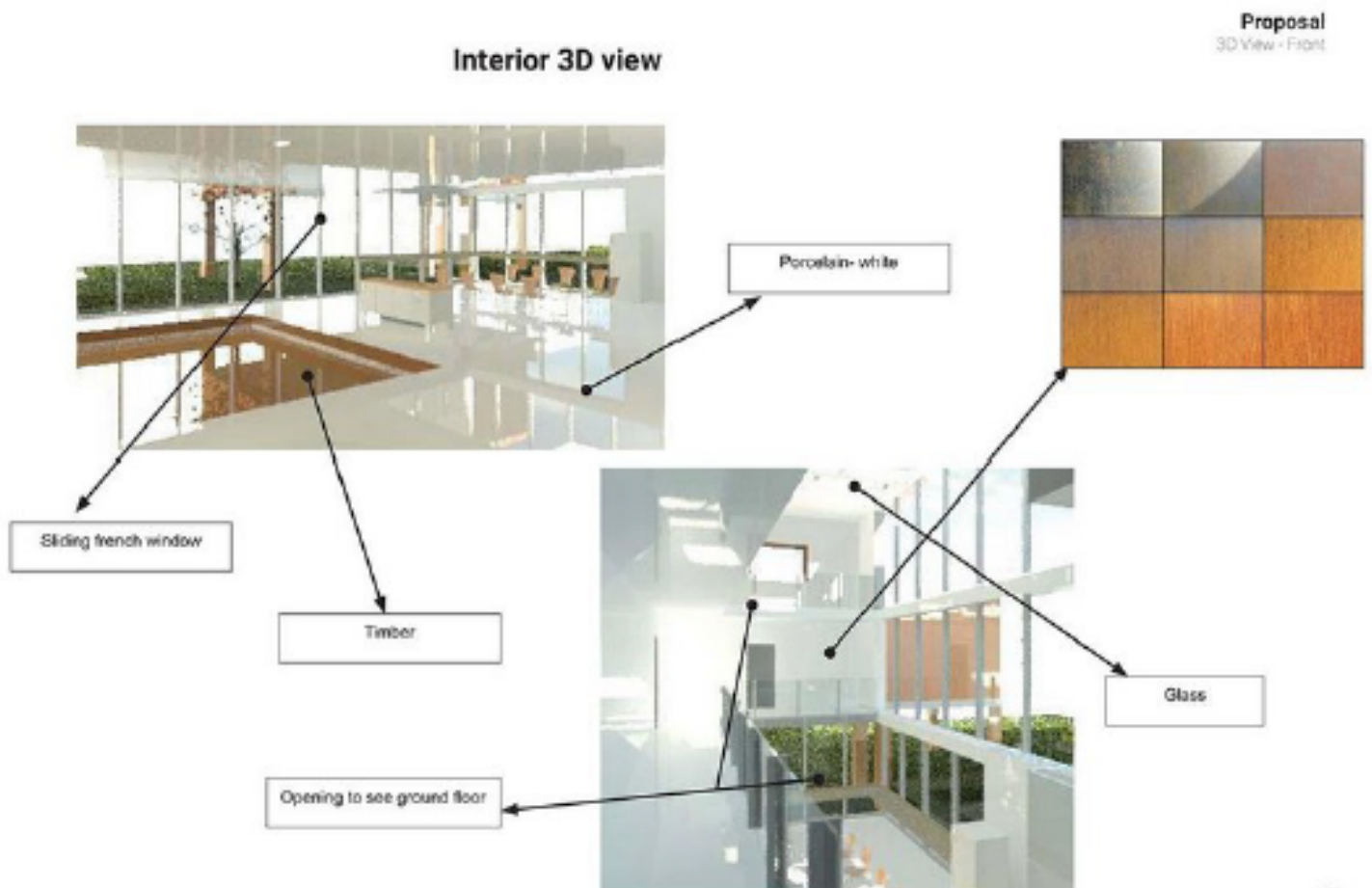
David Miller Architects has launched its Virtual Design Academy – a structured, online work experience programme that in only five days teaches young people across the UK how to design a house using BIM. During the October school half-term holiday, we trialled the programme with five secondary school pupils from two different schools in Westminster, working closely with the schools to ensure that pupils were supported and had access to a laptop. During the week, pupils learnt to analyse a brief and produce feasibility studies, mood boards and sketch proposals. A crash course in BIM then taught them to develop their sketch designs into a 3D model. On the last day, they presented their designs to a panel of DMA team members as well as taking away their completed design report for the building they had designed – all done remotely, from their own homes.

The concept of structured work experience isn't a new one for DMA which, in normal times, offers around 20 week-long placements at its studios in London and Liverpool, for young people (aged 14+) who are interested in finding out about careers in the built environment, but who may not otherwise have had the access or connections to do so. The practice partners with organisations, schools and local authorities to try to create

opportunities for as wide a range of students as possible. The programme uses digital technology to engage and inspire young people and it has won a number of awards recognising this, including a Lord Mayor's Dragon Award, a Westminster Lions Award and a BIM for Good Award.

As practice director Fiona Clark explains: 'We believe it is vital to open up our profession and industry, to make it more inclusive and reflective of the communities in which we work. It brings real benefits to the practice as well, both as a valuable source of recruitment and management training for our team.'

When we went into lockdown in March, DMA's architectural assistant Leila Naboulsi and architect Sundas Rohilla, had been working closely with Landsec and Construction Youth Trust, on 'Future Property School', an ideas competition for pupils from state schools in Westminster to design a mixed use scheme on a real site in the City of London. The final stages of the scheme had to be moved online (as with so much else) but it seemed to go really well. This sparked their imagination and they began to think about how they could move the work experience programme online. Naboulsi explains: 'Lockdown meant we had to close our doors to students and we were worried they wouldn't have any way of accessing this sort of opportunity. This is something that's really important to us and we weren't going to let Covid stop us. So, while we had some time on our hands, we worked on a solution to support and encourage them, even when we were all having a rubbish time stuck at home.'



So since April, a few members of the DMA team have adapted their usual work experience programme, setting up a virtual, interactive Design Hub for the students and taking the whole experience online. The Design Hub has been developed in Notion, a digital platform that can be customised to the users' needs, and it operates as a workspace for the students. While remaining playful in its aesthetic, it provides all the information they need to complete the week, along with templates and links to other software such as Autodesk Revit, Google Docs for producing their report and Microsoft Teams for presentations and meetings. It provides a welcome pack with a 'before you start' survey, timetable, site brief, project outcomes and previous examples of students' design booklets. There are links to pre-recorded 'how to' videos from the DMA team, tutorials on using the various software involved and information on how to become an architect. The Virtual Design Academy Hub 'walks' them through each step of the programme with regular contact from DMA staff, who introduce tasks first thing every morning and after lunch on Teams. This is left open so that they can ask questions of their mentors via the chat function at any point during the day.

Students' design reports are testament both to their enthusiasm and the potential of the scheme. On the feedback questionnaire, a Year 13 student commented: 'I learnt how to use Revit as well as learning about site analysis. Also I learnt the importance of looking at precedents and using them as well as making your building appropriate for the client. I honestly loved it and enjoyed it so much.'

It has been a learning experience for DMA as well, and with some very positive outcomes. 'We worked our way through a few technical difficulties at the beginning of the week, finding solutions to a very slow computer and someone without a mouse, but we got there in the end,' says Rohilla. 'We were even able to facilitate with the school obtaining a permanent educational version of Revit, so there have been some real long lasting benefits.'

DMA is very excited about this initiative because of the numbers involved. Architect Ana Dieguez, who normally hosts students in the Liverpool studio, says: 'It means we can offer a week of work experience to 5-10 young people at a time, instead of only one or two, and that means we can reach many more participants, including some who might have found it difficult to travel into Liverpool or central London.'

Clark adds: 'Of course, the experience of learning in an office environment can't be replaced, but this initiative has brought more benefits that we could possibly have imagined. We will run it alongside our more traditional work experience placements in the future, and we have already invited the students who have been through it into our studio when we reopen our doors. These relationships seem doubly important now, with a huge amount of uncertainty for young people coming out of school and limited opportunities to get into workplaces.'

No-one welcomed lockdown, but this project has found a silver lining by giving many more young people work experience and having a much greater impact.

**If you would like more information about the programme or if you know of a school near you who would like some virtual careers advice and experience, please contact [f.clark@david-miller.co.uk](mailto:f.clark@david-miller.co.uk).**

**Rachel Stevenson is a senior architect at David Miller Architect**

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