



## My design London

**Sarah Wigglesworth**  
Architect

Interview by Liz Hoggard

**S**ARAH WIGGLESWORTH founded her eponymous architectural practice in 1994 and is perhaps best known for Straw Bale House, the home/office in Islington she shares with partner Jeremy Till, Head of Central Saint Martins and Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of the Arts London. Since being in Channel 4's Grand Designs in 1999, it has achieved cult status for its pioneering green cred.



PHOTOGRAPHS: ALAMY, GRAHAM JEPSON



**Green in the city:** Straw Bale House, Sarah Wigglesworth's home in Islington showcases a range of materials. Set round sunny gardens, there's even a chicken coop, top left

### WHERE I LIVE

Islington. It's a self-build project. We designed and built some of it ourselves, partly to showcase that there's a big range of materials out there if you have the imagination to use them — such as recycled concrete in the walls, and straw. My house is in a backland site at the end of a cul-de-sac, it's quite discreet, next to a railway line. Because we're tucked away, you feel a little bit disconnected from the city. And the trains have a lovely rhythm around the day. All the spaces are organised around a sunny garden. We grow a lot of food and fruit trees. We live on one level but it's one level up from the ground, with a big space underneath the building which is on columns, so the garden extends all the way under the building. It's quite bucolic, and yet we're near central London.

### MY DECOR

The house has an experimental character. It doesn't take itself too seriously. It's quite crafted inside. Most of the walls are off-white and designed to be spacially interesting. We have an eclectic collection of things. It's certainly not heavily curated. Most of our furniture is inherited from parents. My father was an architect and he had a lovely collection of modernist furniture. We've designed some furniture ourselves. I've inherited a rug that my Dad commissioned from the architect/weaver **Patricia Tindale**. It has these amazing colours of the forest floor.

I buy pots from **Contemporary Ceramics** ([contemporaryceramics.uk](http://contemporaryceramics.uk)) on Great Russell Street, near the British Museum.

### BEST HOMEWARE

I feel like I'm at the stage in my life where I want to edit things down to just the stuff I really love. I'm very interested in everyday objects. **Skandium** ([skandium.com](http://skandium.com)) is a favourite. And I love kitchen shop **Divertimenti** ([divertimenti.co.uk](http://divertimenti.co.uk)). Our tableware ranges from French provincial through to colourful Portuguese pieces. I like corers, really old-fashioned potato peelers or **Pyrex** jugs with the measuring stick up the side, and those **Tala** stainless steel measuring jugs ([talacooking.com](http://talacooking.com)) for rice and tapioca. One of my favourite objects is an old-fashioned scales — just the brass tray and the weights. It's just really simple.

### MOST COVETED OBJECT

I've just had a new bike hand built to my specifications by **Richard Hallett** ([halletthandbuiltcycles.com](http://halletthandbuiltcycles.com)). It's like having a suit of clothing tailored to fit. Mine is a 38, a lightweight touring bike with quite small wheels and quite wide tyres so it can go over gravel. And we've also got a tandem.

### AMAZING ARCHITECTURE

I think it's got to be something like a really radical housing estate like **Alexandra**



**Road estate in Camden** by architect **Neave Brown**. The eight-storey block directly adjacent to the railway line is organised in the form of a zig-zag, and acts as a noise barrier, and it also has an amazing community. It's been rather vilified over its lifetime but people are really beginning to understand how it's coming into its own.

### HIDDEN SECRET

My hairdresser is called **4th Floor** ([4thfloor.co.uk](http://4thfloor.co.uk)) and is on Northington Street near Gray's Inn. It tops a modernist building and has been run for 25 years by a man called **Richard Stepney**. It's a fantastic rooftop space with a view across Gray's Inn Gardens and the rooftops of Bloomsbury. You reach it taking the goods lift to the fourth floor.

### Amazing architecture:

Alexandra Road estate in Camden, above, designed in 1968 by Neave Brown, is a brutalist masterpiece

### Hidden secret:

below, take the goods lift to Richard Stepney's 4th Floor rooftop hair salon in Holborn



### BEST COMMERCIAL GALLERY

**Large Glass** ([largeglass.co.uk](http://largeglass.co.uk)) on Caledonian Road is a wonderful small gallery owned by **Charlotte Schepke**, who curates the work there around very interesting themes. A recent one was about the labyrinth, based on **Charlotte Higgins's** book **Red Thread: On Mazes and Labyrinths**, and it included all **Mark Wallinger's** labyrinths that are in every Tube station. I think Cally Road is changing a lot, catching the buzz coming out of King's Cross as a destination.

### BEST WORKSHOP

I love **Loop London** knitting shop in Camden Passage ([loopknittingshop.com](http://loopknittingshop.com)). They do classes and drop-ins and there's the knitting circle, for when you're having difficulty. The women are so helpful.

● **Sarah Wigglesworth Architects** ([swarch.co.uk](http://swarch.co.uk)).

### Best workshop:

how-to-knit kits at Loop London in Camden Passage, N1, which holds classes, drop-in sessions and a monthly knitting circle to sort those knotty problems



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