



profile

▶▶▶haven't I? May not be always right, but it sometimes helps. In my experience the architect's not actually the messiah in this day and age, he's part of a team. The A&D can tend to guard their ideas, some don't want a builder from Bow to have an opinion. There can still be a bit of snobbishness I think, the old professional/trade divide. At the end of the day we've got to live with it. Looking good is important but I think architects still give too much emphasis to aesthetics. You can do all the grand designs you like but if you don't know how it's going to happen, the onus is on the contractors. It's why the design and build sector's grown. If a contractor says it can't work, then it can't work – it doesn't matter what colour it is.

'There have been a lot of changes in the fit-out industry over the last 20 years. Getting back to basics would be great. There's too much paperwork – particularly in health and safety – which distracts from getting the job done. Seriously, why does a carpet fitter have to work in Toetector boots and goggles? There's a lot of money spent wastefully because of risk aversion – being scared has become an industry in itself.

'Trust is a big thing for me. Trust in people. Companies will say anything they think you want to hear. At bids, an MD will say, 'Any

problem, just pick up the phone and call me'. I'm not being funny, but what's he going to do about it? I'd rather talk to the bloke on site who's going to sort it out. I build up relationships so that when, occasionally, things happen out of one's control, most contractors will do all they can to help – if you treat them with respect you will get the same in return. I don't like arrogance, it's all about trust and respect.'

We finished by asking one of the industry's characters about the industry characters he admires.

'John Prior of Navarre,' says Fred. 'He took me from being a builder to what I am now. He taught me to be patient, and to listen. I'm quick with opinions – John taught me to listen a bit more! I admire Brian Murray of Boss Design. Brian's a clever man, but he's no nonsense. He's a nice guy – and funny too. The people I admire are like that – genuine. Jason Leonard, Richard Hill and Ray Winstone are superstars, but absolutely genuine. I think there are plenty of characters about, but often people are too frightened to say what they think, which I think is a shame.

'Me? I go with the flow, but I keep my own agenda. At the end of the day, I'm still Big Fred from Bow!' ●

