



Case study Gallery

Compton Verney, Warwickshire
Grade 1 listed 18th century mansion house by Robert Adam with 16ha of parkland by Capability Brown
 Phase two, an education centre, completion 2003

Architect Stanton Williams
Conservation architect Rodney Melville & Partners. Separate contracts with Stanton Williams as lead architect

The relationship between Leamington Spa-based Rodney Melville & Partners and London-based Stanton Williams blossomed into a 10-year affair after the two were brought together by the client for Compton Verney, Sir Peter Moores, in 1993.

Last month the pair completed the second phase of work to the house and are now collaborating on Aston Hall for the City of Birmingham and the new head office for Cadbury Trebor Bassett in Bournville.

Due to open in Easter 2004, Compton Verney Art Gallery has been under wraps for months during construction of environmentally controlled galleries within the house and a new linked educational building to the north. The new facilities are based in the

restored brewhouse and butler's cottage. A new-build education centre creates a courtyard.

Melville believes strongly in breaking down the artificial barriers between conservation architecture and contemporary design, and says he fights the description 'conservation architect'. However at Compton Verney there were clear boundaries between the roles of each practice, and the architects feel this was the key to the success of their working relationship.

The specific contribution of Melville as conservation architect was to understand which elements made the house a good example of 18th century architecture, and which were less important. For example, the client wanted to make a bland background for art in a gallery which had a polychromatic 19th century ceiling and large, gilt plaster picture frames. Melville told them that they could not destroy these elements but that they could coat them with a removable paint system.

He was also able to advise on technology and traditional crafts: 'The Robert Adam doorway was made from fibrous plaster and mahogany veneered doors – we know how to do that,' he says. ■