# AJ Retrofit & Reuse Awards celebrate innovative strategies for sustainable building renovation in 2023



The 2023 AJ Retrofit & Reuse Awards celebrated architectural excellence in renewing and repurposing existing buildings, with a strong focus on sustainability, reuse of materials, and strategic design. The awards, covering 16 categories, highlighted projects that demonstrate forward-thinking clients and thoughtful approaches to retrofit, emphasising the importance of sustainability and prudent spending in challenging times.

The awards recognised a wide range of projects, from the sensitive restoration of heritage buildings like Walworth Town Hall in South London, to innovative conversions such as Inventa, a former Argos retail warehouse in Oxford transformed into vibrant life science offices. Walworth Town Hall, a Grade II-listed building damaged by fire, was praised for retaining 95% of its original fabric while integrating mass timber inserts and creating a flexible community space. Judges lauded the community engagement involved throughout the project’s lifecycle. Meanwhile, Inventa was commended for pioneering the adaptive reuse of retail sheds, achieving a 42% reduction in predicted operational energy demand, and setting a precedent for sustainable urban science districts.

Other standout projects included the HOME Arches in Manchester, which converted derelict railway arches into arts spaces with highly technical and bespoke detailing to accommodate Network Rail’s maintenance requirements. The project’s clever use of materials and acoustic solutions impressed the jury. Similarly, the transformation of a 1970s office building in Milton Keynes into 200 new flats—Station House Retrofit by Scapolan Burney—combined environmental upgrades with sensitive preservation of a modernist façade and interior features, addressing both housing and climate challenges.

Conservation projects also featured prominently, such as the Buttermarket restoration in Redruth, Cornwall, which recycled historic materials and revitalised the building as a socio-economic hub, and the Edinburgh Futures Institute, a significant remodeling of a Category A-listed Victorian hospital. The latter project demonstrated the embodied carbon savings achievable through retention and repair, resulting in emissions less than half of a typical new build, while creating a vibrant academic environment.

In the realm of decarbonisation and net zero retrofit, Studio PDP’s Claridge House in Mayfair showcased how heritage buildings could be future-proofed while occupied, using minimalist interventions, air source heat pumps, and PV panels to exceed energy efficiency targets. The project was praised as a replicable best-practice model in a challenging context.

Notably, the awards showed a broad spectrum of projects focusing on reuse, sustainability, and community value. The Retrofit Revisited category winner, The BIS in Hartlepool by Group Ginger, stood out for its ongoing post-occupancy evaluation and deep community engagement, highlighting how retrofit can foster lasting social and cultural impacts beyond mere structural improvements.

While the AJ Retrofit & Reuse Awards primarily spotlight innovative architectural responses to retrofitting challenges, other notable projects such as the Burrell Collection in Glasgow, awarded Retrofit of the Year by Architects Journal, exemplify how meticulous restoration and modernisation can balance historical preservation with contemporary needs. The Burrell Collection project was distinguished by its sensitive design, improved accessibility, and achievement of BREEAM Excellent rating, setting a benchmark in sustainable practices.

The awards reflect a growing architectural commitment to sustainability, material reuse, and thoughtful adaptation of existing buildings as essential strategies in addressing climate change, conserving heritage, and enhancing community wellbeing. The emphasis on strategic design and forward-looking clients illustrates how retrofit is evolving from a necessary intervention into a design opportunity with long-lasting environmental and social benefits.

### 📌 Reference Map:

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* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/who-has-won-this-years-aj-retrofit-reuse-awards)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/who-has-won-this-years-aj-retrofit-reuse-awards> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/aj-retrofit-awards-2023-winners-revealed> - The Architects Journal announced the winners of the AJ Retrofit & Reuse Awards 2023, highlighting projects that exemplify excellence in building retrofit and reuse. The Burrell Collection in Glasgow received the Retrofit of the Year award for its meticulous restoration and modernization, balancing historical preservation with contemporary needs. The judges praised the project for its intelligent design and attention to detail, noting the creation of additional display space and improved accessibility. The project also achieved a BREEAM Excellent rating, marking it as a leading example in sustainable building practices.