

Creative workout: A month of daily challenges



Image: 'The Grammar of Ornament'

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

A series of small drawings and other creative tasks over time will add up!

Be creative every day!

Introduction

This resource pack is to encourage you to explore and be creative in small ways every day.

At home, indoors or anywhere, it's great for our wellbeing and health to do something new. We have a list of quick daily challenges you can try for a whole month (31 days), inspired by architecture and the buildings around us. It's an enjoyable mix of mini art projects, writing, singing and exercises. For those wanting to go further, there are optional 'extras' to provide an additional challenge with each exercise. This pack is illustrated throughout by images from the RIBA's world-class architectural collection. If an activity needs any equipment it will usually only require stationary or equipment found in most homes. Of course, you don't have to do the challenges in order, and you are not required to do all of them – though we suggest you try.

Share your achievements

Please send us anything you create and that you are happy for us to share with the world online and in print. We enjoy seeing participants' work and showing them to inspire others to enjoy learning and being creative. Share your work with us via:

- Twitter: Tag [@RIBALearning](#) and use the hashtag #ArchitectureAtHome
- Email: Learning@riba.org
- Post: RIBA Learning, RIBA, 66 Portland Place, London, W1B 1AD

Contents

✓	<i>Tick when done</i>	Page
	Introduction	2
	Day 1: A Memorable building	4
	Day 2: View from your window	4
	Day 3: Nearby details	5
	Day 4: Silhouettes	5
	Day 5: Faces in buildings	6
	Day 6: Famous characters	6
	Day 7: Poems about buildings	7
	Day 8: Observing patterns	7
	Day 9: Montage	8
	Day 10: Research	8
	Day 11: Words on walls	9
	Day 12: Model making from packaging	9
	Day 13: Architecture and music	10
	Day 14: Cinemas	10
	Day 15: Colour	11
	Day 16: What makes a home?	11
	Day 17: Travel	12
	Day 18: Navigating using touch	12
	Day 19: Landmarks	13
	Day 20: Learning a new language	13
	Day 21: Explore a local building	14
	Day 22: How big?	14
	Day 23: Humour	15
	Day 24: Writing a letter	15
	Day 25: Seeing things from a different angle	16
	Day 26: Places for singing and dancing	16
	Day 27: Follies	17
	Day 28: What Style is it?	17
	Day 29: Portrait	18
	Day 30: Future	18
	Day 31: Photography	19
	Additional resources	20

Day 1: A memorable building

You might have strong memories of certain buildings, memories which might be linked to important events in your life. Some may no longer exist or have been radically changed since you last visited them. As an example of change, the site of the Sydney Opera House was once a less glamorous tram depot.

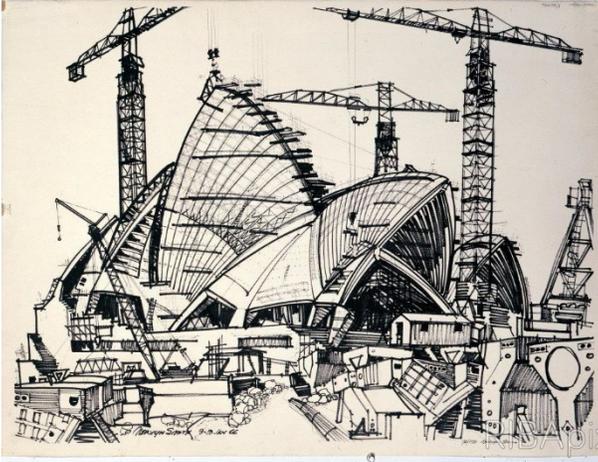


Image: Drawing of the Sydney Opera House under construction, 1966.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Challenge

- Using a pencil or pen and a piece of paper, draw a building that has strong memories for you. You can use a photograph of the building (or something similar) or use your memory.

Extra

- Add to your drawing further by writing down what those memories were - how do those memories make you feel?

Day 2: View from your window

Windows allow fresh air and light to come in, whilst allowing people inside a view out. The photo below shows an opening with no glass and is an opening and which overlooks the gardens and the apartments below.



Image: Mirador de Lindaraja, Alhambra, Granada.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- What can you see from the nearest window? Stare out for at least a minute - time yourself. Are you starting to spot things you never seen before?

Now, with a pencil and paper, sketch only the things that are interesting or new to you - don't sketch everything you see.

Extra

- If you have time, try this again at another window or at a different time of the day and compare.

Day 3: Nearby details

Have you ever looked at buildings closeup? You might be amazed at the details that you miss, even in the most familiar of buildings.



Image: Wooden and steel walls, Nordic Embassies, Berlin.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Choose an A4-size (or any other small size) surface anywhere in the room or building you are in; sketch your chosen patch and describe in words the different textures and colours you see.

Extra

- Does it make you look at the room or building around you differently? What was it like concentrating on such a small area?

Day 4: Silhouettes

Buildings come in a wide variety of shapes; these add variety to the environment around us.



Image: Silhouette design for furniture.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Draw a silhouette of the buildings from your window, memory or any printed and online sources. What shapes can you pick out from your silhouette? Does this make you look differently at these buildings?

Extra

- Cut it out and put it against different coloured or patterned backgrounds and compare.

Day 5: Faces in buildings

Humans see faces in many objects, including buildings, a natural process called '*pareidolia*'. Can you spot a face in this image of a Venetian church (hint: look at the door and two rounded windows)?



Image: San Simeone Grande, Venice, 1961.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Look around you, from your window or when you go out, can you spot faces in buildings? Count how many you see.

Extra

- Sketch these 'faces' and draw versions with actual human features. Do these 'faces' give the buildings personality?

Day 6: Famous characters

Articles in newspapers, magazines, television and the internet often allow us to see the real homes of celebrities, entertainers, architects and designers. Sometimes they can seem very glamorous or very ordinary.



Image: Stained glass window depicting scenes from Through the Looking Glass, 1972.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action:

- Pick a fictional literary or cinematic character and imagine what their house would be like. Think about: what would their house be made of, what size would it be, where would it be located and what would be inside?

Extra

- Write down your thoughts and describe this house. When writing, you could use the language or style of the book or film the character is from.

Day 7: Poems about buildings

Architecture can inspire many forms of writing; Philip Larkin wrote a [poem about the Hull Royal Infirmary](#) whilst William Wordsworth wrote about the [River Thames and London](#).



Image: Hull Royal Infirmary, Anlaby Road, Hull
Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Write a poem about a building or place you know.

Extra

- In what ways was writing your poem difficult or easy?
- At a library or through the internet, find other poems that mention buildings or places.

Day 8: Observing patterns

These examples of decoration come from Chinese porcelain, fabric, pictures and painted wooden boxes, and were gathered in the 'Grammar of Ornament' published in 1856.



Image: Chinese decorative patterns.
Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Challenge

- Can you spot the shapes in this picture and describe the patterns you see?

Extra

- Have a look around you, do these or any similar patterns appear in the objects and surfaces near you? How do they compare?
- Explore other patterns from the 'Grammar of Ornament' via [this link](#).

Day 9: Montage

Montages have been used for graphic effect or showcase new, often radical, ideas. Buildings have been a popular subject for montages, a famous example being Paul Citroen's [Metropolis \(City of My Birth\)](#)



Image: Montage of the marina for a proposed new city in Warwickshire, 1971.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Buildings can appear everywhere, from magazines, newspapers and packaging, make a montage of the different buildings and places you find.

Extra

- What do you think of your montage? Give it a name that you feel sums up what it is about.

Day 10: Research

How much do you know about your favourite building, a famous building or even your own home? The amount and quality of information about individual buildings varies and are often held in different sources and places, for example the RIBA Library holds 150,000 books.



Image: The Library, RIBA, London.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Choose a building and see what you can discover/learn about it. Try any sources that are accessible to you such as through a search online, at any books in your library, exploring an institutional archive or by asking someone you know.

Extra

- Note down anything new you've discovered and share it if you can via a conversation or online via a blog post or social media.

Day 11: Words on walls

Do any of the buildings around you have writing on them? What do they say? Chiselled or painted onto the walls or printed on signage, they may record the building name, date they were built, commemorate a person or are a form of advertising.



Image: The foundation stone plaque, Town Hall, Douglas, Isle of Man.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action:

- From where you are, from memory or on a journey outside, can you see or remember any words on buildings?

Extra

- Study and try to describe the style or typeface of the lettering. What do you think of them and what they say? Why do you think each was created?

Day 12: Model making from packaging

Some buildings and items of household packaging have similar cuboid or box shapes. It could be easy to imagine a Modernist office block, like the one in this image of this skyscraper in Ibadan, recreated from a cereal box.



Image: Co-operative Bank of Western Nigeria, Ibadan, 1962. **Credit:** [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Turn a piece of packaging into a building - real or imagined. Most boxes are blank inside, turn them inside out by carefully opening them flat and stick them back together in reverse using glue or tape.

Indicate the windows or doors by cutting out holes or use pen to colour in their shapes.

Extra

- You can glue cut outs from magazines to add surface textures or decorative features.

This is what some architects and designers do, create models quickly to help figure out forms and scale of a building, often from rough materials at the early design stages.

Day 13: Architecture and music

The recording studios in the Capitol Records building have seen the likes of Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Tina Turner and Michael Bublé record there. It was opened in 1956 and designed by the architecture firm Welton Beckett Associates.

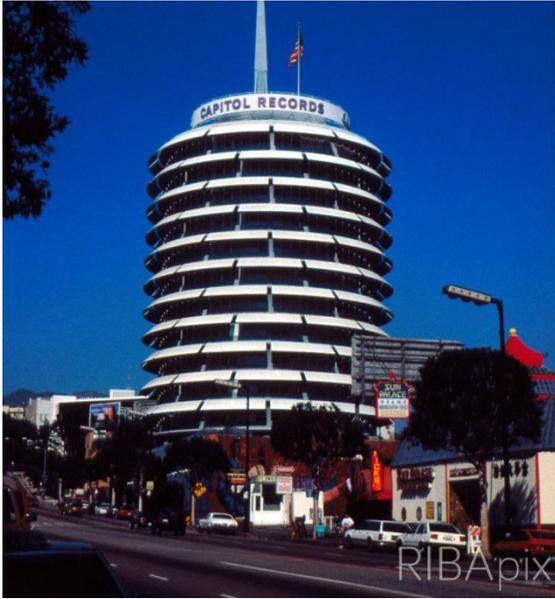


Image: Capitol Records, Hollywood, Los Angeles.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Sing or listen to your favourite songs.

Can you think of any songs that reference places or buildings?

Extra

- Do you know where your favourite songs were recorded or written? Reading the biographies or autobiographies of artists will often reveal this or you can search the internet or ask a musically minded friend.

Day 14: Cinemas

Many historic cinema buildings are now listed, though some have been converted to other uses, and are often local landmarks evoking strong memories in people who once used them as a cinema.



Image: Odeon, Scarborough, North Yorkshire

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- What is your earliest memory of a cinema? Where was it and what did you see? Is the building still there?

Extra

- Many of our best-loved cinema buildings were designed by architects. What would you include if you were to design your own cinema? Make a sketch if you can.
- Discover images of cinemas buildings from across the world via [RIBApix](#).

Day 15: Colour

Friedensreich Hundertwasser was an artist and architect who used lots of colour in his buildings as a reaction to what he saw as monotonous modern architecture. A good example is Hundertwasserhaus, Vienna, completed in 1985.



Image: Hundertwasserhaus, Vienna

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action:

- What do you think about the use of colour on the outside and inside of buildings? Would you like to see more or less colour in buildings and interiors?

Extra

- How does colour effect your mood? You can compare by spending time in different coloured rooms or observe differently coloured buildings when you're next outside.

Day 16: What makes a home?

Everyone has different opinions about what makes an ideal home, based on size, layout, furniture, appliances and who else might be living under the same roof. An adult might think a slide connecting floors is not a good idea, but we might guess a child would feel differently!



Image: Kitchen, 63b Elizabeth Street, London, 1959.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Think about what makes a good home, what would be on your list?

Extra

- What we thought makes a great home changes as we grow up and as we get older. Imagine what your list would look like when you were younger, how do they compare?

Day 17: Travel

Visiting buildings and enjoying what's inside are often an enjoyable part of any holiday itinerary. They can even be useful landmarks when we get lost!



Image: Piazza San Marco, Venice.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Think of a trip locally or abroad.

Which buildings do you remember well, and would you recommend anyone else visit them and why?

Extra

- Share with a neighbour, friend or family member your recommendations and memories of those buildings and find out what their own thoughts are. Alternatively, if your visit was recent, you can share your experience online with travel sites such as TripAdvisor.

Day 18: Navigating using touch

Buildings and places can be experienced through all the sense, not just sight. Have you ever navigated a route using just touch? Indoors or out, buildings and interior surfaces have different materials, temperatures and textures that can be detected by touch.



Image: Royal National Theatre, London.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Whether it's a journey to another destination or just to another room in the house, try to experience it with your fingertips. How was your experience of your journey changed by using touch?

Extra

- Next time use other senses that you may not use when moving around, like smell.

Day 19: Landmarks

Certain buildings are closely identified with their locations and often represent their cities or communities in the media and people's memories. Grand landmarks might represent a whole city, like the Hallgrímskirkja church in Iceland's capital, but a post office or even a particular tree might represent a smaller area.



Image: Hallgrímskirkja, Reykjavík

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Which buildings or places do you think represent your street, neighbourhood or local community and why?

Extra

- Think about buildings or places that you feel represent your whole city or county, how are they different from the ones you chose for your local area? Note them down and sketch them from memory.

Day 20: Learning new languages

Architecture can be a great way to learn new languages as some building types sound similar across different languages, e.g. 'the museum' is 'museet' in Swedish and 'musée' in French. Some architectural words used in English have their origins abroad.



Image: Biological Museum/Biologiska museet, Stockholm

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Using phrasebooks, asking native speakers or through the internet, find out what different buildings, rooms and architectural elements are called in a different language.

Extra

- Teach someone else these new words and use them in a conversation or letter. This is also a good way to memorise them.

Day 21: Explore a local building

Is there a local building you know or pass by and always wondered about its history or what it's used for? Curiosity is natural. Public buildings like museums and libraries are normally open to the public – do check before your visit about entry requirements and opening hours. Some, like the British Museum, offer virtual tours via their websites.



Image: British Museum, London

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Find out more about a local building. If it's a public building and it is safe to enter, go in and explore it. With private buildings, information might be available in a library, the internet or by asking locals or people living or working in or around it.

Extra

- How differently do you look at this building now that you know more about it?

Day 22: How big?

Buildings are often talked about in figures. Buckingham Palace is 108 metres / 254 feet in length along its front and 24 metres / 79 feet high.



Image: Buckingham Palace, London.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Challenge

- Explore the building or room where you are now or where you live, what are its measurements? You don't need to use a tape measure, you can measure in units of your own feet, steps or hands.

Extra

- Measure other rooms or buildings, how do they compare? Does it surprise you and why?

Day 23: Humour

We all enjoy a good joke. Here's an architectural one for you.
Who did Noah hire to build his boat? An ark-itect!



Image: Cartoon on how architects and their profession are viewed, 1983.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Challenge

- Can you think of an architecture or building-related joke? Or perhaps tell an amusing story. Write it down or share it with someone.

Extra

- Go further and illustrate your joke or story. On the right, to inspire you, is what cartoonist Louis Hellman created in 1983 for the Architects' Journal on how architects and their profession are viewed.

Day 24: Writing a letter

Some buildings seem to have a personality or gain a familiarity like an old friend or member of the family.



Image: Miner's home, Ashington, Northumberland, 1936.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Write a letter to your house or a place you have visited or worked in, include your memories or questions you'd like to ask of it as if it was a person.

Extra

- Imagine what letter this building would write to you? How do you think your experiences would compare?

Day 25: Seeing things from a different angle

Places can easily become familiar and when they do we stop looking, assuming we've seen it all. Can we become more observant or look at our familiar spaces with a fresh pair of eyes?



Image: Plan view of round dining table and chairs.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- In the room you are in or some other familiar space inside or out, safely look at it from a different view: sit down or stand up where you normally don't; use a mirror to see the room in reverse.

Do you notice anything different? How does it make you feel?

Extra

- Imagine your space if you're a bird or fly and you're seeing it from above – what shape would furniture look like from above? Draw what you think your space would look like in this plan/bird's-eye view.

Day 26: Places for singing and dancing

Buildings are not just designed for living or working in, they are places for entertainment: and these include cinemas, dance halls, nightclubs and concert halls. Architects play an essential role in creating specialised spaces and buildings suitable for people to enjoy entertainment, of course singing and dancing can happen anywhere.



Image: Orchestra playing to a crowd in Vauxhall Gardens, London.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Imagine when you were last in a concert hall, nightclub or dancehall, what music was playing and how were you dancing? Alternatively, think of a local venue, who played there recently?

Extra

- When you are ready, sing any of the music played there or recreate any of the dance moves that go with them.

Day 27: Follies

Not all buildings are practical. Follies have no practical purpose other than to beautify a garden, park or landscape, and often have very elaborate and exaggerated designs.



Image: Painshill Park, Cobham, Surrey.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- What follies have you seen?
Write down a feature or folly you would like to see in your garden, outside space or park?

Extra

- Sketch your idea for a folly or draw an example that you like. Can you imagine what other people, either local or visitors, would think about this folly?

Day 28: What style is it?

Buildings vary in style depending on their age and sometimes the tastes of the people who commissioned or designed them. The image below is of a fountain, its material (cast iron) and elaborate decoration indicates its style is Victorian and from the 19th century.



Image: The Fountain, Merthyr Tydfil.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Do you have a favourite building style, or do you prefer buildings from a certain period of history? Find examples of these and record them in some way: sketch them, write down their names or what you like about them, photograph them or pinpoint them on a map.

Extra

- Next time you're out or see buildings on television, or in print, guess what age it's from or what style it is. You may discover the answers if you're interested through some research (see 'Day 10: Research').

Day 29: Portrait

Owen Jones was the architect who design the Crystal Palace now at Sydenham, London. He was known for his elaborate decoration, some of which is recorded in the book 'The Grammar of Ornament' (see Day 2), so it seems right the background to his portrait is richly decorated.



Image:

Portrait of Owen Jones.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- If you were to have a portrait painted, what would you include in it to represent your personality, interests, beliefs and experiences? These could be buildings, places, people or objects.

Extra

- Create a mood board of these things which can include your drawings, cut outs from magazines, old photos or annotations.

Day 30: Future

Some buildings and places look futuristic due to their unusual materials or design. The Media Centre at Lord's Cricket Ground was completed in 1999 but still has a futuristic look to it and its style is sometimes called 'High-Tech'.



Image: Media Centre, Lord's Cricket Ground, London.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- How do you think your street or local area might look and feel in the future, in five, 10, or even 100 years' time? Write down or sketch your thoughts, perhaps even find images that look like what you're thinking.

Watching futuristic films like 'Blade Runner' and 'Metropolis' or even TV programmes like 'Doctor Who' and taking note of their settings and backgrounds can be good research (and entertainment!).

Extra

- Try asking this question of someone else, especially if they are younger or older than yourself. How do your views compare? Does it surprise you and why?

Day 31: Photography

Architects and photographers work closely together to show buildings and projects at their best. Photographers also work on their own projects, aiming to capture the spirit of a place or tell a story. On our website we have some [photography tips](#), but there is no better teacher than practice. Most smartphone and tablets have cameras inbuilt in them, whilst there are a range of digital or disposable camera available.



Image: Architect Cedric Price with an Instamatic camera, 1972.

Credit: [RIBA Collections](#)

Action

- Use photography to capture the building or space that you live in. Try different viewpoints, angles and distances. Each photo could try to capture a different theme, person (with their permission) or object in a building or room.

Review your photos, do you notice anything you've not noticed before? How does that change your feelings or opinions about what you photographed?

Extra

- Try photographing at different times of the day or photographing in a different space and compare the results. Share your photographs to find what other people see in your images – what do they notice that perhaps you don't?

Additional resources

Online: Images

RIBApix

Search RIBApix, the RIBA's online image database, for over 100,000 inspiring images on architecture.

<https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix.html>

Victoria and Albert Museum

The Victoria and Albert Museum has a collection of half a million images on art, design and architecture.

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/>

Online: Other resources

Creative resource packs

A series of themed art resources from the RIBA, which use architecture to inspire a more in-depth look at creating art in different ways including: Digital drawing, keeping a sketchbook and experimental techniques. Download these for free.

<https://www.architecture.com/education-cpd-and-careers/learning/adults>

Creative Challenge Pack

Simple daily creative ideas to try at home, from 64 Million Artists with the Age of Creativity, Age UK Oxfordshire and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/bp-assets/globalassets/oxfordshire/original-blocks/a0fc-creative-activity-booklet-a5-v3.pdf>

RIBA Library and collections

The RIBA Collections are the world's greatest architectural collections, with books, drawings, photographs and models available to view from the RIBA Library, 66 Portland Place, London, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Free entry.

Please check opening hours and access policies before visiting.

<https://www.architecture.com/about/riba-library-and-collections>

Pack created by the RIBA (RIBA Learning), 2020.

More online resources available from www.architecture.com/Learning

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