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## Different Strokes

Reactions to home-working differ even between close relatives and practice partners, find Michael Squire and Henry Squire



**Words**  
Michael Squire



**Words**  
Henry Squire

Michael Squire and his son Henry, both partners at Squire & Partners, share their thoughts about how they are personally responding to the situation of operating remotely and what the longer-term impacts might be.

### Environment

**MS** I am fortunate enough to occupy a house which we designed and built for our family in 2015, which I personally feel I have never had the time to enjoy living in. Working from home means I can enjoy the space and particularly the garden, which at this time of year provides much needed positivity with fresh green life and colour. I also have the advantage of

## Explore more

### Event



For an AT/Schueco online discussion, an expert panel considered how we should design for an ageing population

### Awards



New entry deadline announced for the 2020 Schueco Excellence Awards, for buildings that feature Schueco's facades, windows and door systems

### Coronavirus Crisis

being isolated with my wife and grown-up daughter, so we have a peaceful and positive home.

**HS** My family situation is very different. I am isolating with my wife, 2-year-old son and newborn daughter (who started her life in lockdown, thankfully oblivious). Clearly this creates challenges in the separation I'm able to make between the support I need to provide to my family and the focus I require for my work.

### Routine

**MS** I have always worked relatively long hours and there is obviously a significant advantage in the lack of frustrating time lost to commuting or travelling between meetings. Now, when I put my pen down, I am immediately at home and can focus on the next task.

**HS** I find travelling to and from office creates an important mental shift – my cycle provides time to decompress. Home is where I switch off from the pressures of work to relax with family and friends. It's harder to separate the two aspects when their physical spaces overlap.



Michael Squire working at home

### Meetings

**MS** My experience is that virtual meetings are more efficient; people are more inclined to have thought about what they want from a meeting in advance, and only speak to achieve that objective rather than for the sake of it. At our Brixton office, The Department Store, all four partners occupy the same space, giving us the advantage of being able to quickly address issues as they arise, but in our new situation we have structured remote meetings which I find more efficient.

**HS** In our usual practice we hold regular informal meetings both internally and externally, to ensure that knowledge, opinions and experience are shared and that we evolve designs together. This is difficult to achieve remotely as video links can stifle collaborative discussion, and internal catch ups would have often happened unplanned throughout the day. While the remote meeting technology is impressive, there is no substitute for sitting around a table and getting a feel from the room.

### Creativity and culture

**MS** In my usual working day, I find that I am constantly distracted by day-to-day issues which draw my attention away from the focus I can give to conceptual design and exploring drawn solutions. Working from home I



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Working in isolation is surprisingly productive, but I miss the buzz of the studio, says Chris Dyson

### Viewpoint



There has never been a better time to learn from the post-war new towns, says Katy Lock

Architecture Today  
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can put my administrative and business tasks in an orderly row, leaving more time to draw and focus on the creative side of my work.

**HS** Our office culture has always been important, and something we invest in heavily both during the working day and after hours. We have weekly whole office meetings, shared dining spaces, an in-house events programme, yoga classes, evening drinks and an annual office trip, which all rely on relaxed time together. Humour is also an essential ingredient in our culture, something which is hard to create via a video link.



### Business operations

**MS** The business outcomes of Covid-19 require enormous attention at present, but in isolation it is easier to be more considered and have a sense of perspective. In the first couple of weeks of lockdown we created a detailed pitch for an exciting competition. The additional design time that I personally had sped up other practice outputs, such as CGI and physical models, as the concepts were further progressed when I briefed the teams.

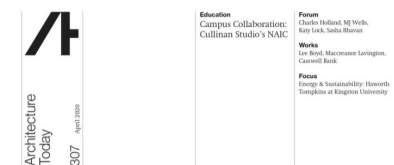
The downside was that the pitch was presented to ten people via Microsoft Teams, all muted and with their cameras off meaning that there was no communication or feedback. Any attempt at humour appeared to go down like a lead balloon because there was no response.

**HS** Our best work is always the result of a collaborative creative process and relies on being part of a team – both internally and with a wider group of clients and consultants – so the experience of operating remotely has been an interesting one to navigate. Mental and emotional support between team members is also essential, something I believe happens best in person.

### Conclusions

**MS** While I initially felt resentful at the idea of being obliged to work from home with limited access to the world at large, I have come to realise that there are positive aspects to my new way of life. I have enjoyed the additional time for creative thought and ability to spend more time in my own home, but there is no replacement for face-to-face communication which is far more complex and subtle than can be delivered by video.

**HS** For me the positive aspects of home working – like efficiency and lack of travel time – are outweighed by the impact on our office culture which has been built on comradery, team spirit and sense of fun. I'm looking forward a time when I can see everyone's faces again, and enjoy a beer together on our rooftop.



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## Specification Today April 2020



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