

CAGNI WILLIAMS

As a practice we are asked lots of interesting questions by clients and industry partners. We try to answer these in the most helpful and comprehensive way we can, to foster understanding and facilitate progress. We wanted to share some of those questions and our answers with you, and so we have produced this first edition of **You Ask, We Answer** (or its acronym **YAWA**).

Forget about AI, social media and glib explanations for a bit. Our answers will give you solid information based on technical facts, backed by our experience on real projects and commissioned studies.

We really enjoyed selecting the questions and developing answers that are clear, informative, and useful, so please get back to us with any technical questions you have. We will try to respond to them all, and we will publish those that we reckon are most topical and of the widest interest.

We'd love to hear which Q&A you found most interesting so do let us know.

Enjoy!

- Laura Carrara-Cagni

YA Can I see my project in real life before it's built?

WA Struggling to picture how your future home, workspace, or development will actually look and feel? You're not alone. Many clients find it challenging to interpret architectural drawings. Modern architectural visualisation transforms this process, converting technical data into visual clarity.

From Drawings to Reality
Everything begins with Autodesk Revit, industry-standard BIM software creating data-rich 3D models containing every design element—from structural details to finishes, lighting, and landscaping. This model is brought into Enscape, a real-time visualisation engine producing stunning still images, animated walkthroughs, and interactive experiences.

Want to see how your kitchen catches morning sun in March? Enscape makes that possible.

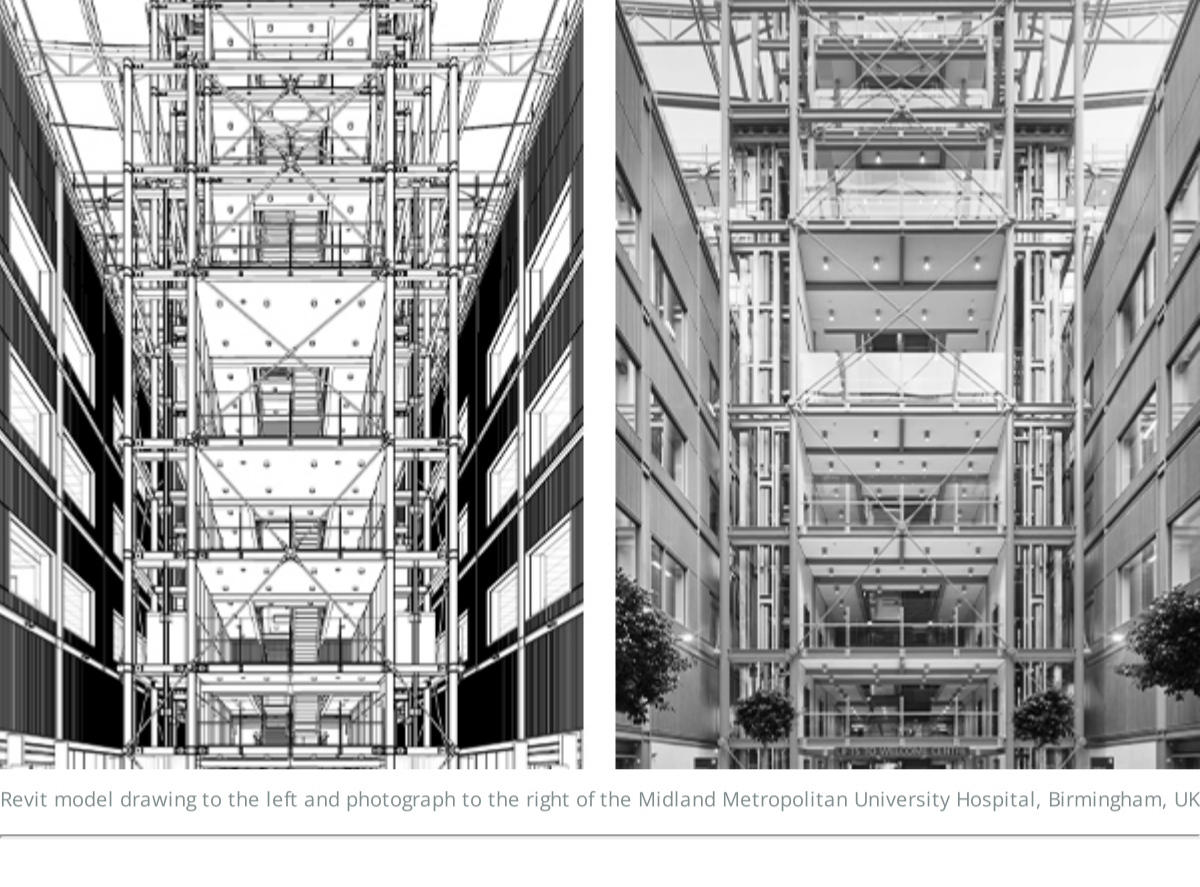
Visualisation Methods

- **Universal Use:** Hand sketches for early concepts; digital rendered views showing materials like wood, glass, and brick for client reviews.
- **Professional Use:** Photorealistic renders—highly polished images with lighting and reflections, ideal for marketing and planning submissions.
- **Advanced:** Virtual reality (VR) experiences allowing you to walk through spaces, assessing room proportions, natural lighting throughout the day, material finishes, and circulation patterns in real-time.

Why It Matters
Visualisation avoids costly misunderstandings between clients, designers, and builders. It accelerates planning approvals, supports value engineering by testing design changes without redrawing, and creates emotional connection by transforming abstract designs into personal visions.

Good design begins with clear understanding. With visualisation, you don't have to imagine your future space—you can step inside it.

Read the whole article [here](#).



Revit model drawing to the left and photograph to the right of the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital, Birmingham, UK

YA What's best: 3D model or virtual tour?

WA Digital walkthroughs are impressive, but they can't be picked up, turned around, or spark an instant physical response from a town planner juggling three cases on a small laptop. Here's why physical models remain one of our most powerful design tools.

A Language Everyone Understands
Not every client confidently interprets technical drawings or digital visualisations. But almost everyone intuitively grasps an in-person model. You can pick it up, turn it around, and see how volumes interact, how spaces connect, and how a building sits on its site.

Planning Approval Advantage
Most UK local authorities no longer print large-format drawings—planning officers review complex proposals on small laptop screens. Walking into the room with a physical model changes the dynamic completely. Officers can pick it up, rotate it, and immediately understand your proposal. This often resolves questions before they're asked and can shave 1-2 iterative rounds off the pre-application process, equating to 8+ weeks of programme savings.

Cost-Effective Risk Management
A detailed building-scale model might cost less than 0.25% of your overall project budget, yet it can de-risk six-figure construction changes caught late on site. Physical mock-ups reveal awkward junctions that trigger late-stage fit-out extras—catching these early keeps budgets honest.

The Best of Both Worlds
We don't see physical and digital models as competing approaches. VR walkthroughs help you feel what it's like to stand in your future kitchen. Physical models show how that kitchen relates to your home, garden, and wider environment. Together, they provide complete picture, helping you understand both the experience of the space and the overall design in a way that's impossible through drawings alone.

Read the whole article [here](#).



3D printed physical model to the left and photograph to the right of the New Courtyard Housing in Stratford, London, UK

YA How can we design both hospitals and homes?

WA Our studio works across the full spectrum: from **large-scale healthcare buildings** like the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital, Birmingham, to **intimate private residences**. The scale changes, but our approach doesn't.

Whether we're designing a patient room where someone will recover from surgery or a kitchen where a family gathers every morning, we're asking the same fundamental questions:

- **How does this space make people feel?**
- **What do they need to thrive here?**
- **How can we create something that will serve them for decades to come?**

At every project level, our design philosophy remains constant: **human-centred, context-sensitive, sustainability-focused and detail-obsessed**. Residential projects require deep empathy, nuanced understanding of personal rhythms, and the ability to translate aspirations into liveable reality. Healthcare projects demand rigorous coordination, code compliance, and complex systems thinking. You're balancing infection control with comfort, efficiency with humanity.

The skills transfer more than you'd think. The attention to circulation flow in a busy emergency department translates directly to designing how a family moves through their daily routines. The patience required to navigate hospital regulatory requirements mirrors what's needed when guiding clients through complex residential decisions.

We believe all architecture, whether it's healing spaces or homes—should **serve people while respecting our planet**. Every project teaches us something that makes the next one better.

The question isn't whether we can design both. It's whether we can imagine a future where every space, regardless of scale, is truly liveable, sustainable, and deeply human.

Read the whole article [here](#).



The Midland metropolitan University Hospital, Birmingham to the left and the Edwardian Home in Wandsworth, London to the right.

YA How can I upgrade my Grade II listed windows?

WA The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) has introduced a Local Listed Building Consent Order (LLBCO) to simplify window upgrades in Grade II listed buildings enabling property owners to adopt modern solutions without compromising architectural integrity. The most promising innovation for listed buildings is **vacuum double glazing**—cutting-edge technology offering exceptional thermal and acoustic performance within a slim profile suitable for historic frames. It consists of two thin glass panes with a vacuum layer between them, preventing heat escape. Without air or gas between panes, it's much slimmer than traditional double glazing—perfect for historic frames.

Key Advantages

- **Lower Energy Bills:** Retains warmth in winter, blocks heat in summer.
- **Superior Soundproofing:** Significantly reduces external noise.
- **Heritage-Friendly:** Fits existing frames with minimal alterations.
- **Exceptional Durability:** 50+ year lifespan versus 20 years for standard double glazing.

Leading manufacturers (Fineo, LandVac) offer 20-year warranties with 50-60 year predicted service life, compared to 10-12 years for standard units. Vacuum glazing also weighs significantly less than traditional double-glazed units (which exceed 20 kg/m²), minimising stress on historic timber frames.

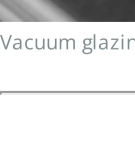
Installation Considerations
Older windows typically accommodate 3-4mm glass; vacuum glazing starts at 7.7mm thickness. However, many historic windows can be directly re-glazed—if your glazing bars are 22mm or wider (viewed from front), existing rebates likely accommodate vacuum units.

RBKC's LLBCO provides an ideal framework for implementing this technology without individual consent applications. Cagni Williams can advise and support property owners through this heritage-conscious upgrade process.

Read the whole article [here](#).



Vacuum glazing on the left and a Grade II listed building on the right in London, UK.



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