

acme

CHARTER

We all arrived here on our own,
individual routes. How do we want
to work with each other, why, and for
whom? We are allowed to question
the prevalent economic model, to
choose a path together and to shape
our own future.

*“It is surely impossible to believe that
intelligent and rational people, starting
from scratch, would choose such a
structure as conventional capitalism
when organising activities which depend
on teamwork for their success.”*

Robert Oakeshott, Founder of the Employee Ownership Association,
The Sunday Times, 1978

Design is teamwork. We build little on our own. We build amazing things through our collective skills and experience. As we design and build together, we own a company together. Employee ownership allows us all to be involved in how ACME is run, and share its success.

ACME is owned by the ACME Employee Ownership Trust, for and on behalf of all employees. The Trust exists to promote and protect our long-term interests.

The employees' representatives on the Trust will enable all staff to influence how we do this.

This Charter sets out in writing the aims, values and ambitions of the practice, to provide a guide for the company and its Trustees to measure decisions against.

Friedrich Ludewig
Labour Day 2023, the first day of the 17th year of ACME

ACME strives to create outstanding projects, to enjoy what we do and to work profitably & sustainably.

This sentence was written many years ago, in the early days of ACME. There are three elements noted in the statement above. Outstanding projects, enjoyment, and sustainable profit. We strive to achieve all three. We rarely do. But whatever challenge we take on, we should achieve at least two out of three. Any two are fine.

A collage of various objects including a laptop, a camera, a book, a plant, and a small house, arranged in a grid-like pattern.

1. CREATE OUTSTANDING PROJECTS

BEAUTIFUL, UNIQUE, OF ITS PLACE, CONTEMPORARY

We believe in Place. Every place is unique. Every place has histories, materiality, social meaning and surprises, whenever we care to look. We must continue to value site visits, scour the local libraries and invest our time to become experts in the places, functions and materials of each location.

Working with the history and with the beauty found in each place is our guiding principle to achieve designs that are unique and different from any other project we have done before.

MEANING, SOCIAL PURPOSE, DEMOCRATIC, COMMUNICATIVE

We believe in design as a force for good. Great design can empower and create happiness. We must strive to create spaces where people want to live, to learn, to play, to celebrate, to pray and just to breathe. We believe in the dignity of the ordinary.

What normal people have to use every day deserves to be beautiful, to give joy, to become extraordinary. We must design for the society we want to see, where spaces are shared, open and democratic, and we will take equal care to design spaces for the poor as well as the rich.

CONTEMPORARY, BUILT TO LAST, SUSTAINABLE, SIMPLE, REDUNDANT

Every good building is of its time. We don't design to be timeless, we don't design to look like another time, we design to be of our time. We strive for our buildings to be the listed buildings of the future. To have any chance of achieving this, our buildings cannot just be defined by the use for which they were commissioned.

We must design buildings that are simple to adapt, with inbuilt generosity and redundancy for future use, and loveable enough for future generations to care.



2. ENJOY WHAT WE DO

Where does 'Joy' come from? What form can it take? How long can it last?

We design things, but we also design the process of designing and working. It is for us to design our own organisation, to shape our process, our communication and our collaborations. To enjoy what we do requires us to make all parts of our work enjoyable, from competitions to design reviews, task groups, tender submissions or Human Resource meetings.

Sometimes, the tasks we undertake are mundane and boring. It is for us to create joy by creating an atmosphere of friendship and support, where joy lies in how we help and lift each other.

COLLABORATIVE, FLAT, TRANSPARENT

The studio was founded with a flat hierarchy, based on mutual respect, clear communication and good humour. We must retain an environment where everyone can speak, and where all voices are heard. We want strong, opinionated, brilliant voices in a vibrant and egalitarian office environment with a strong sense of empowerment, ownership and possibility.

We design with flat hierarchies and clear, open and transparent processes. Wherever possible, we want all team members to participate in meetings and present their work. Openness, transparency and humour within our team and with our clients and collaborators have been key to our success. Retaining and preserving this is a responsibility for all of us.

EVOLVE

We need to continue to seek new solutions, avoiding the trap of copying ourselves or others. While some things we have done before will retain their value, we must question everything. No idea is stupid, no theory is wrong, every variation is worth drawing.

We use options to evolve. We push each other to do the best we can in every project we do. We pursue the best on merit, not authorship.

LEADERSHIP

Our time and resources are precious. Leadership must be mindful of waste. Sometimes, leadership means questioning the work being done, and seeking alternatives.

At other times, leadership is needed to reach a conclusion – to force a decision at the right time, and see it through. Efficient leadership is important to ensure people can achieve a healthy work life balance.

GROW

We want to be surrounded by people of all nations, class, colours, shapes, sizes, religion and language. We want to be surrounded by people we professionally respect and who become good personal friends. We want to be a model for fairness. To achieve this, we need to hire the right people. We must be innovative and rigorous in our recruitment, employment, promotion and pay. We involve a wide range of staff in the interview process, to convince the right people to join us.

We want people to stay and to grow in the company. We expect people to be ambitious, interested to seek out research, look for advice and prepared to acknowledge mistakes. In return, ACME will give people responsibility early, and give them support to help them to grow.

While we are all different, and have different skills and contributions to make, we expect equal investment and commitment in ACME. We rely on everyone doing their part. We need to be honest and unafraid to hold each other to account if one of us is not playing their part.

QUALITY, LEARN

There is real joy in seeing a project come together, authored by many hands. This requires trust and rigorous and regular review. We must draw upon all the experience in the office to help every member of staff to understand requirements and regulations, and to learn from our past mistakes and successes.

We must regularly present to each other, take each other's advice seriously and seek out others in the company that can teach us what we don't know. While we may choose to reinvent the wheel over and over again, we must always do so in full knowledge of all the wheels available.

LOYALTY, RESPECT

We believe in loyalty, internally and externally. We are loyal to our external friends and consultants. We will try to look after anyone who has successfully collaborated with us before. We are interested in long term relationships with a closely-knit team of collaborators, rather than an ever changing band of guest performers.

We value clients and consultants that communicate respectfully. Mistakes will be made, by us and by others. How we acknowledge and solve them collectively is how we build long term relationships. We don't take a commercial approach to every issue, we will invest our time to help out where needed and we must surround ourselves with professional teams sharing that attitude.

GO OUT

We want to share our work. There is joy in receiving recognition, acknowledgement and feedback from the outside world. We seek to celebrate our work in publications and encourage staff to talk about the work publicly in talks, lectures, and conferences.

We want to learn. We are happy for staff to teach, research, write and lecture, as these activities contribute to the exchange of ideas.

There are ACME companies elsewhere. We value a culture of exchange to share opportunities and knowledge. Exchange fosters creativity and cross-pollinates. It maximises the strength, agility, and resilience of all ACME companies.



3.

WORK PROFITABLY & SUSTAINABLY

Money is important to enable us to do what we want to do. We need money to thrive. We need money to support speculative work and competitions, to invest in research and development, and for staff to receive fair reward for their work.

Competitions, research, small projects, and charity work are important. We need to make enough profit elsewhere to enable us to continue these investments. Sustainable Profit is profit that is dependable and ethically sound.

THE RIGHT PROFIT

We want to make a fair profit, without pricing ourselves out of interesting work. We are based in an expensive country, and at times we will want to work in other, less expensive regions.

We need to ensure that we make enough money in some projects to be able to work less profitably elsewhere.

PITCH CORRECT, RUN EFFICIENTLY

Projects need to be pitched at a profitable level of fees. It is all of our responsibility to deliver projects with the agreed resourcing and within the limits defined by our fee.

Where a project provides both beauty and joy, not making a profit will be acceptable, provided that other projects can offset this loss.

TRANSPARENCY

We believe in financial transparency. We want everyone to know where ACME stands and where we are going, weekly and annually. We acknowledge that every project will go through more or less profitable phases, and staff cannot and should not feel that they are solely and personally responsible.

But every architect needs to understand the fees we are earning, and to work towards making every project as financially sustainable as possible.

ACCOUNTABILITY

We need to hold ourselves and our clients regularly accountable for how we spend our time and resources, to understand where we make money and where we lose money.

Being honest and learning from past experience are key to long term financial health.

SHARE

The company shall retain a conservative approach to financial management at all times. We do not use overdrafts or loans to fund regular business. Retained savings for bad times must be no less than one quarter of annual outgoings.

Financial resilience enables us to make the right decisions about which projects to take on and which to avoid, and thus supports our ambitions.

Profit must be invested in the company or paid out to staff, based on simple, egalitarian and public criteria.

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