

Cecil Balmond

By Daniel Scheffler Photographer Stephen Hird © ArcelorMittal

CECIL BALMOND, a Sri Lankan-British native, is an internationally awarded and renowned designer, structural engineer, author, architect and artist. Hailed as one of the most crucial practitioners in contemporary architecture and recipient of the most prestigious awards for engineering in Japan, the Gengo Matsui prize, this Londoner spends his time travelling the globe working on various projects. They include the ArcelorMittal Orbit sculpture for this year's Olympics and the Star of Caledonia that marks the border between England and Scotland. He also teaches extensively and currently holds the Paul Philippe Cret chair at Penn Design as Professor of Architecture.

This summer's Olympic Games are almost upon the world and your project with Anish Kapoor is attracting a lot of attention. You have described this ArcelorMittal Orbit sculpture as a narrative in space. Where did you get the idea for this project?

All the towers are continuously connected along the vertical. Orbit is a scatter of points that literally orbits and gains strength from its overlap as it connects and passes itself. Instead of leaving the ground and ascending as in a normal tower, in Orbit the work itself winds around you in a complex narrative of space that is being made around you. Orbit is a hybrid, a network of art and

structure. The dynamic of Orbit is the argument of the non-linear, which I've been studying and researching for many years.

Your daughter has joined you at your studio. Tell me about new projects coming out of your newly opened London studio, Balmond Studio.

The studio is cross-disciplinary – a design continuum. Research drives the agenda. The work is scaleless, applicable to large-scale architecture as well as smaller privately commissioned artworks. We're currently working on The Star of Caledonia, a public art sculpture to mark the England/Scotland border crossing at Gretna Green, a \$550 million large mixed-use master plan development in Asia and an immersive artwork for a luxury hotel in Saint Tropez.

As a London resident, what are your expectations for this year's Olympics in your city?

I've lived in London for over 30 years so I wouldn't count myself as a new resident – I know the city so well. I'm hoping for a festive atmosphere – our lives are always too rushed in this city. But once the party ends, I want the legacy to become clear. There has been no other tower like Orbit. It has poetic sensibilities, aesthetic sensibilities

'I PLAYED CRICKET FROM AN EARLY AGE – GROWING UP IN SRI LANKA IT'S IN OUR BLOOD.'

and structural sensibilities.

Do you have a love for sports?

I played cricket on the beach from an early age – growing up in Sri Lanka, it's in our blood. At school, I played basketball, rugby and tennis. My mother was a tennis champion and we had her trophies in the house. At university I rowed. Throughout my career I've always kept fit – running, swimming, going to the gym and hiking. Work and exercise go hand in hand.

With so much travel and seeing so many different places, people and things, what would your current inspiration be?

I'm constantly travelling – it's a way of life for me. My inspiration comes on the move, from peoples' cultures, seeing nature's work in different places. Also the work of Bach always inspires – he is a constant compiler of musical narratives.

Your sense of personal style is rather inspiring. Tell me about how you dress.

I like neutral clothes. So I love wearing black – Johnny Cash-style. But I love wearing dark shades; in particular blue, purple and brown.

www.balmondstudio.com
@BalmondStudio

