

ALEX SKARSHELG

Embodying the Invisible





© Alex Skarshelg 2026. All rights reserved.

THE SAPIENS GARDEN, THE SAPIENS DISPATCH, THE SAPIENS LAB, VOX SAPIENS and THE LUMEN SAPIENS are titles of the author's works and projects.

Correspondence is quoted in brief from letters received by the author.

Nothing in this book constitutes a confirmed partnership, permission or funding.

thesapiensgarden.com · alexskarshelg@gmail.com

CONTENTS

In Short.....	4
<i>The Maker</i>	5
Who I Am.....	6
The NORLAFT Workshop.....	9
The Forest.....	16
IND.LAB — Sound as a Material, and a Shelter	17
Two Artefact Gestures.....	19
A-ETHERIA	28
<i>The Sapiens Garden</i>	32
THE SAPIENS GARDEN — a Lighthouse and Garden on the British Coast	33
THE SAPIENS DISPATCH — an International Gesture of Cultural Diplomacy.....	37
<i>London First</i>	45
The Greenwich Weather Beacon	46
THE SAPIENS LAB — a Craft and Culture Community in London	50
<i>Voices and the Road</i>	53
What the World Wrote Back	54
Roadmap 2027–2050+.....	57
How to Take Part	60
Timeline.....	61
Glossary.....	62

(Right-click → Update Field if page numbers are missing.)

In Short

MY NAME is Alex Skarshelg. I am a Norwegian-trained log-builder and carpenter, a composer of quiet music for piano and cello, and the author of THE SAPIENS GARDEN.

THE SAPIENS GARDEN is a timber lighthouse of forty-two metres and a Memory Garden of seventy-seven named trees on the coast of North Norfolk, England. Every tree in the Garden carries the name of a person who gave humanity light: a philosopher, a scientist, a poet, a composer, an artist. The Lighthouse is the sign; the Garden is gratitude with roots; the trees are memory that grows and bears fruit.

The project was born on 25 May 2025.

It will begin in London, with two smaller steps: the Greenwich Weather Beacon, a fourteen-metre timber prototype on the prime meridian, and THE SAPIENS LAB, a craft and cultural laboratory in the city. Both are planned from 2027-2031. The great Lighthouse on the coast is the work of long years.

Nothing in this book is a promise. No site is secured, no permission granted, no funding in place. What exists is a maker, a method, forty houses built by hand, a body of correspondence, and a plan. This book explains where the idea came from, what it is, and how one might take part.

Alex Skarshelg

SEPTEMBER 2026

P A R T I

The Maker

1

Who I Am

MY NAME is Alexander Tsvelev. I work under the name Alex Skarshelg.

One morning I went out to walk along the embankment. I wanted to gather myself and put the question properly: what can I tell you about myself, dear reader?

I walked past a lilac in bloom, thinking: ‘I build timber houses — warm ones, good to look at — and I build them well. So I am a carpenter. Perhaps even an architect. I have a decent engineering mind, and forty completed houses bear that out. An engineer, then? I suspect that is wide of the mark again.

‘Because my degree is in philology — five years of language and literature — and I handle a text as surely as I handle a beam. A writer, then?

‘That does not add up either. Because I also love to compose. These simple melodies for piano and cello seem to move more than just me. So — something of a composer? And yet my musical education amounts to four years of music school as a small boy, and where the melodies come from I have no idea. I simply sit down at the instrument in the evening and press the keys, and the rest happens by itself.’

So who am I?

The question asks to be handled gently, and it seems to me I am at the very beginning of this conversation — with myself, and with the world. For now I have one honest answer: my hands are a continuation of my soul, and I do everything I can to give form to what is inside me. To what has always been hidden, unseen, out of reach. Everything that follows grew out of that.

And the answer to the question — who am I — I should like to leave in your own careful hands.

Where It Comes From

Drawing and building run in the family. My grandfather was an architect and worked in the design teams of some of the tallest structures of his day. My father is a structural engineer. I grew up among drawing boards and calculations, in a house where a thing was judged by a single question: will it stand, and for how long?

The Craft

What I know, I learned from the Norwegians. In May 2014 I came to Rauland, in the Telemark highlands, where the log-building tradition has been kept strict and unbroken, and studied under

Ottar Romtveit, a master log-builder. He laid the groundwork and set the rules by which I have made every building since.

In 2019 I returned to Norway, to Lillehammer, to learn stavlaft — the Norwegian post-and-frame tradition — from a master builder of forty years' experience. He examined my refined version of the Norwegian corner joint himself and confirmed that it meets Scandinavian building standards. I keep that quiet approval more carefully than any certificate.

Over my years within that tradition, a method of my own took shape: my own techniques, my own tooling. The heart of a log building is the corner, and I worked out my own version of the Norwegian joint, which I call the Diamond Notch. The rest grew up around it: a drying process of my own devising, tooling for large sections, joints cut by hand, winter assembly with compensation for settlement, a production base with its own sawmill and planing line, and a lathe for turned columns up to 500 mm in diameter.

I hold the whole chain in one pair of hands: the idea and the drawings, the material, the assembly, the roof — and the handover of a finished house, down to the furniture, the curtains, the tableware and the planting.

Timber

I know timber by touch: the cracks, the tack of resin, the stubbornness of the grain. Pine is the slow speech of time. It grows for years, stands through weather and storm, and then becomes a warm house and a shelter for someone. Here is the thought that matters to me: in this way we extend the life of every trunk, and soak it through with our own life and meaning. On the cut face of every log you can see the fine rings, one for each year lived. It seems to me the most honest archive nature has.

What Memory Is Missing

For the last few years I have been turning one question over: how might timber architecture speak to us? What could a place become if landscape and heritage, symbol and the engineering of height, ecology, long stewardship, music and craft were all drawn together into a single symphony?

My thinking brought me here.

We have learned to keep our heritage well. Plaques, books, museums, concert halls, great churches and castles. We remember those who gave us light: streets carry their names, their work rests in libraries and archives, and now and then a tree or a garden is planted in their honour.

All of this is needed, and all of it is precious. Yet what it preserves, above all, is the result: what was written, built, discovered, made. The person is left out of the reckoning. Their tiredness, their loneliness, their pain, their vulnerability, the risks they took, the abyss they carried and their refusal to step back rarely enter cultural memory, and almost never enter anyone's personal care.

We take the fruit, and hardly remember how the tree itself held on to life by its roots.

The price was often beyond measure. Someone finished the most important work of their life in an unheated room, in debt, by candlelight, in illness, among letters that were never answered. Humanity goes on living by that light and that thought, while the person, for as long as they breathed and worked, often had no one to hold their hand on a hard day.

So I should like to offer, carefully and with attention, one more form of memory — alongside the museums, the books, the scores. An earthly and living one: a memory that can be cared for by hand, told to children, and handed on to the generations that follow — in flower, and literally bearing fruit.

The Lighthouse and the Garden

Out of these thoughts grew THE SAPIENS GARDEN: a timber lighthouse of forty-two metres and a garden of seventy-seven named trees on the British coast. I have imagined the Lighthouse so that it looks as though it has stood there always, for centuries: raised by old carpentry methods, with the most modern ecological materials and engineering systems inside. Around it a garden grows, where every tree is dedicated to someone who left a deep mark on culture, philosophy, science, art or music. A garden like this is grown across generations: watered, protected, and handed on together with the memory of whoever cared for it before.

The Lighthouse as a sign of the way. The Garden as gratitude with roots. The tree as memory that grows and bears fruit. The light as an undertaking to leave no one in the dark — for surely someone must hold a light for those who are on their way?

The whole of it is described in Part II. First, the ground it grew from.



2

NORLAFT Workshop

I BEGAN building in timber in 2010. In 2012 I founded my own carpentry workshop, NORLAFT, and made a decision I have never once regretted: to build timber houses with my own hands, thoughtfully and with pleasure. Everything else in this book grew out of that passion, that absorption in the work, and that patient daily labour.

In my workshop we make houses in dry laft, the old Norwegian log technique that goes back to the eleventh century. The house is built from solid dried pine, and we make the whole of it: from the idea and the drawing to the last detail of the finish and the furniture. The idea, the behaviour of the material, the design, the colour, the lighting decisions and the physical work itself are all held together in one practice. Authorship stays with one maker, and beside me works a small team of craftsmen in different trades, with whom I have seen several dozen houses through.



A post-and-frame house built in the Norwegian stavlaft tradition



Inside the stavlaft house, made entirely by hand



The stavlaft interior in evening light



The kitchen and its island



Winter by the fire in a NORLIFT house



The kitchen of a NORLIFT house in evening light



The terrace at dusk

What Has Been Built

Over these years the workshop has delivered more than forty projects.

The project we are proudest of is a flagship house of more than seven hundred square metres: pine beams of a bespoke section, 250×350 mm, cut to order in Siberia. We carried the full cycle ourselves — the design, clearing the site of old buildings and scrub, raising the log structure, fitting the windows and their casings, painting, finishing. I filmed that project in eleven parts, so that an honest record would remain of how a house like this is actually made.

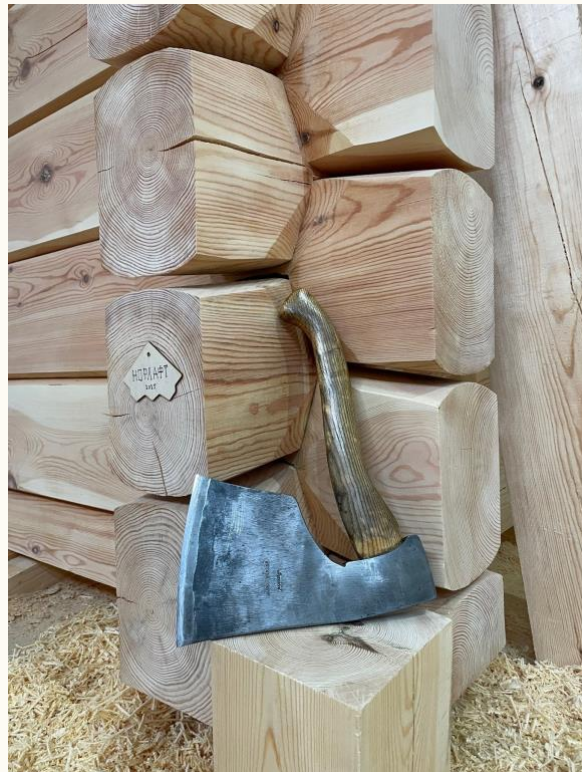
The second landmark project is a post-and-frame house built in the stavlaft technique. This is the second architectural and craft language the workshop speaks. The house rests on a heavy frame standing on carved posts, 280×280 mm in section. The distinctive feature of modern stavlaft is the full-height glazing of the façade: it gives the house a character of its own, and inside it brings a sense of freedom and of connection with the world outdoors, while the warmth of the house stays within. The squared timber, the trusses, the purlins, the boards, the beams, the floors, the architectural lighting and the atmosphere it makes — all of it done by our own hands, from first to last.



The flagship project: more than 700 square metres, built of 250×350 mm pine beams



A log shell of Siberian cedar at the NORLAFT workshop



An axe made for cutting Norwegian notches

Norlaft Carpentry School

In 2019 I ran my first carpentry school. It is a two-day masterclass for a small group of four: people come to learn the craft, to work with their hands, to find out how to hold an axe and a saw, and simply to spend time with timber in good company. More than twenty-five people have come through the school since then.

I pass on to them what I spent years learning myself — day by day, hand to hand. No drawing will explain how to see a joint before it exists, or how the invisible step is made from a single notch to a whole standing frame. It enters only through your own hands, and through the pleasure of the work itself: the harder the task, the keener the appetite for it.



Students at work: marking out



A student cutting a notch

Take Up the Axe

Out of the carpentry school grew one more story, a very small one. A single working day: you, an axe, and timber in the workshop.

I call this format ‘Take Up the Axe’. People come, most of them tired of screens and of office work. Each of them marks out and cuts a first real Norwegian notch. A couple of millimetres out and the joint will refuse to close: the timber tells you plainly how precise you are.

I work beside each of them, helping to find the right angle of the swing, showing how to hold the saw.

Sometimes people come to me who are going through a hard patch. By evening I can see the change in someone who has managed to make a thing with their own hands. The carpentry skill, it seems to me, is the least of it. The hands, the work and the smell of shavings remind a person how to be calm and collected, even when the head has forgotten and the heart aches.

Teaching is the part of this work that outlives any single house. The same model underlies THE SAPIENS LAB in London, the craft and cultural laboratory you will read about further on.



An axe forged by the Norwegian smith Øyvind Klausen

3

Norlaft Forest

IN 2010 a fierce fire swept through the Meshchera Nature Reserve and destroyed thousands of hectares of forest.

For me, timber is a living building material, one that asks for care and keeping. The thought of a forest of my own had been with me for a long time, and so, after the fire, together with friends who give themselves to bringing woodlands back, we planted hundreds of young pines in the reserve, on ground prepared in advance.

That is how a small forest came into being, the NORLAFT forest, set in the earth by hand.

For me this is an important continuation of my carpentry and my cultural practice. When you work with timber in earnest, you cannot treat nature as a mere resource.

These pines became my own quiet way of giving thanks, an attempt to return at least a part of what we take from the living world for the houses we raise.



A Scots pine seedling, newly planted



The author planting the NORLAFT forest

4

IND.LAB — Sound as a Material and a Shelter

MUSIC IS another way of speaking with the world and with myself. I would call it not so much a material as a quiet harbour, a place of shelter. The length of a note sets the distance; the silence between notes takes the walls away; the echo shapes the reflection and the voice; and the tempo fills that unseen space with movement.

The piano and the cello sound like two living voices, close and dear to me, each completing the other. The piano gives the ground — the rhythm, the footing, the mood. The cello, the instrument nearest to the human voice, carries the melody: it colours the score and tells its own story, at times deeply private and tender.

Composing lets me make the unseen tangible, give a shape to what is inside me, and — this matters to me — be heard.

What I Have Written

There is an ensemble score for violin, viola, cello, French horn, piano and bass guitar. It began as a quiet piano prelude and grew into something closer to film music.

And there are separate pieces:

- ‘Morning Stars Twinkle’ — the stillness of night before dawn;
- ‘Nocturne’ — evening rain, a ground-floor flat, and solitude;
- ‘Quantum of Being’ — with a closing solo about time, and about the wish to break through it towards another.

I am now preparing a vinyl album: seven pieces for piano and cello.

L I S T E N

Four pieces for piano and cello. Tap a title, or scan a code with your phone.



I

Morning Stars Twinkle

[LISTEN ↗](#)



II

Nocturne

[LISTEN ↗](#)



III

Arathea

[LISTEN ↗](#)



IV

Prologue

[LISTEN ↗](#)



One Song Not My Own, but Dear to Me

I made my own recording of ‘Strong’, by the British band London Grammar. Their music has long been precious to me, and while I was working on this piece I caught myself with a thought: that I wanted to thank them — and not with words alone.

That is where my first story with London began.

Two Artefact Gestures

London Grammar

ONE AUTUMN morning a thought came to me: to make something special for Hannah Reid, the singer of the band London Grammar. I wanted to build a large gift with my own hands and send it to England, as a gesture of respect, of admiration, and of thanks.

It began with a relief carved into a panel of solid beech, after the cover of the album *Californian Soil*. Then I sewed a linen sleeve for it, with the band's logo embroidered by hand, so that even after the main crate was opened a little mystery would remain: what is inside the sleeve?

My imagination did not stop there; if anything, it ran free. I wanted a separate gift for each member. For Hannah, handmade earrings in the antique style, set with lapis lazuli. For Dominic, a set of named drumsticks and brushes carrying the band's emblem. For Dan, a set of guitar plectrums bearing his initials and monogram.

Each piece I laid carefully into its own box of polished beech, with engraving and soft padding, so that nothing would come to harm on the way. The lids and the sides I covered with carved lines as well.

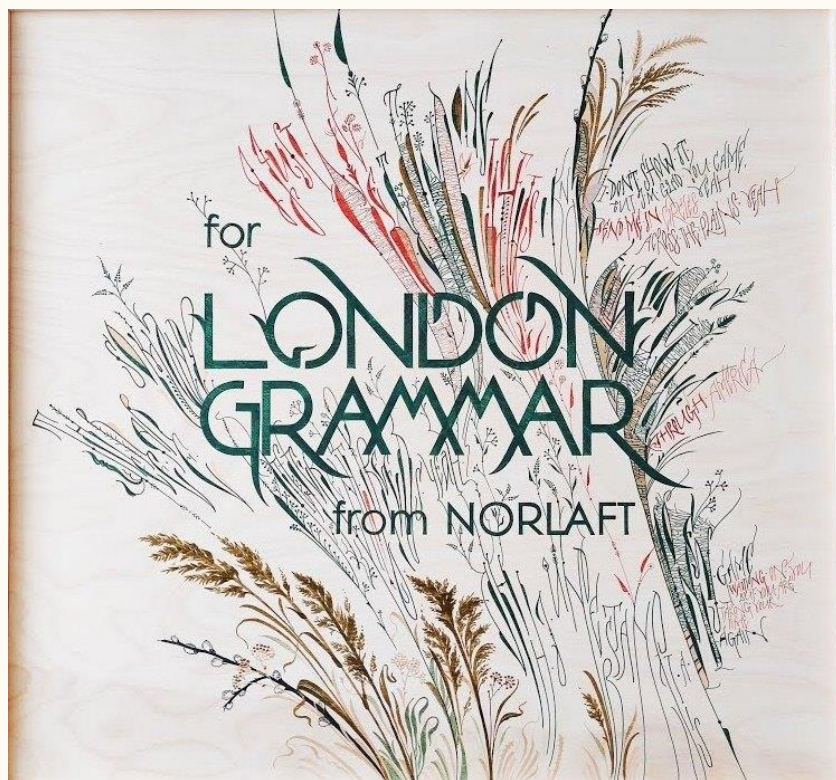
Then I built a large crate for the journey and gave it to one of the finest calligraphers I knew. I had only one wish: that the work be free and inspired. With all my heart I thank Dasha for her faultless hand. Across the panels she set quotations on music — Bach, Shakespeare, Pushkin, Plato.

To keep the crate safe on the road, I put together a sturdy outer frame with engravings and emblems, and tucked in an unpacking note, a small screwdriver and a pair of silk gloves — so that Hannah's hands would come to no harm as she opened it. Just in case of a stray splinter. I had sanded every part to perfection, of course, yet such care, it seems to me, is never wasted.

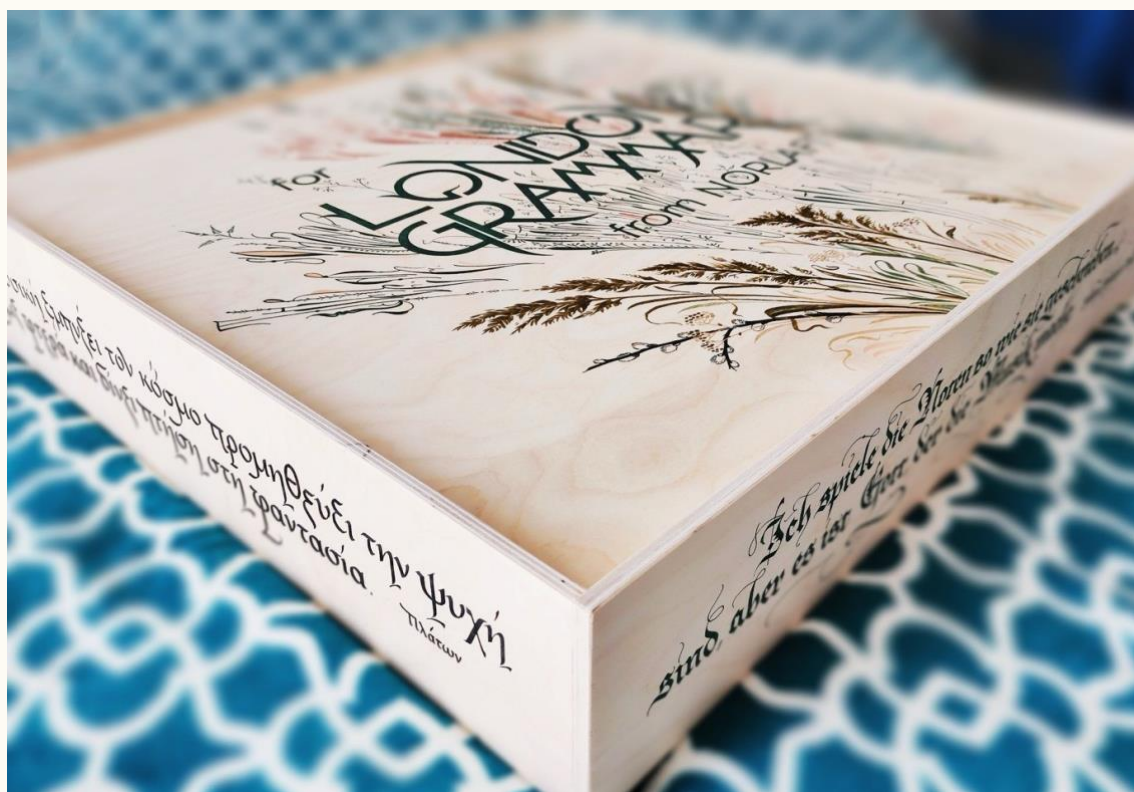
The parcel weighed thirty-two kilograms and set off for London by roundabout and, I confess, intriguing routes. Almost a year later, through titanic effort, the gift reached Hannah and the band.

London Grammar shared their delight on Instagram, and later Dan Rothman thanked me himself.

By this winding and rather improbable route I managed to voice a feeling I had about their music — through wood, calligraphy, packaging, attention and care. And to be heard.



The lid of the gift crate: 1000 × 1000 mm, 32 kg in all



The sides of the crate, lettered with calligraphic quotations on music



A box of natural beech for Hannah Reid, holding antique-style earrings of silver and lapis lazuli



Named drumsticks and brushes for Dominic 'Dot' Major; plectrums with a monogram for Dan Rothman



A bas-relief carved into a beech panel, after the cover of Californian Soil



The gifts laid out together



A miniature screndriver, silk gloves and the unpacking note



The crate's outer frame and engraved plywood lid



Pine shavings as inner padding: a soft bed for each piece, and the scent of the forest

A Music Box for Jasmine van den Bogaerde (Birdy)

My search within these artefact gestures — this quiet, human kind of diplomacy — did not end with the London Grammar story.

Just now I am making a new object: a small music box of bog oak, with compartments inside and a soft light powered by a built-in power bank. Within it a few smaller pieces will gather: a fountain pen of my own making, its bog-oak body set with amethyst; a miniature handmade notebook; silver earrings and a ring in the antique style; a tiny model of a lighthouse and a sailing ship; and a seascape painted in oils in the spirit of Aivazovsky. And the heart of it — a hand-cranked musical movement that plays the refrain of Birdy's song 'Quietly Yours'.

The London Grammar crate was the first artefact gesture; here the gesture became a method. Music, wood, calligraphy, the packing, and even the journey to the recipient all become a way of saying what needs no explaining.

To make these strange, tender, painstaking things is one of my gifts and one of my afflictions at once. And I do not think I could ever stop now.



A plywood prototype of the music box: a rough draft to settle its proportions



A fountain pen in bog oak: brass, engraving, monogram



Natural amethyst in the cap, framed in aged brass



The piston filler: brass and bog oak, made by hand



The music box from above, with its engraving



The music box from the side: a small hatch hides the USB port that charges the built-in power bank



A model of an old sailing ship, under 4 cm long, for the panorama beneath the lid

6

A-ETHERIA

THE NAME A-ETHERIA comes from the ancient Greek *aether* — pure air, celestial light, the first matter.

A-ETHERIA is a book of my own, written before this one. Its pieces grew in the midst of a terrible storm in my life. A-ETHERIA is like a true friend who, in a hard hour, comes with a cup of warm honeyed milk and simply sits beside you, so that you are not left alone in your trouble.

These are deeply personal, unguarded stories — about vulnerability, loneliness, invisibility and love. About the passages in a life after which a person cannot stay the same: something has to be left on the threshold, while the self, the soul and the heart must be carried out of the dark and guarded with all one's strength.

My A-ETHERIA is about stillness, care, tenderness, and the return of oneself to oneself. About the chance to find the inner home again, even when it seems you are lost for good and the path was long ago worn away and forgotten.

The book is built of portraits — figures who come to a person at a certain hour — and of letters addressed to the reader. Three of each are given here.

From the Acknowledgements in A-ETHERIA

Hannah May Reid — for turning darkness into a place where I could be.

Jasmine van den Bogaerde — for proving that vulnerability is the glue in the cracks of life.

Dolores O'Riordan — you are no longer with us, but your voice sounds, unseen, through the architecture of that book.

Aetheria

Light. The Source. The Transcendent Self.

She comes like the first ray of light into the void. In her presence worlds are born, feelings come into bloom, and dreams take root.

In her hand is a torch — the flame of life that never goes out.

Look into her eyes, and you will see the beginning that was there before the stars.

When she is near, you remember that you were made boundless.

With Aetheria there is no need to explain the meaning, or to walk towards the light. They are already within you...

A L E T T E R

'You came to believe that your kindness was weakness'

Do you remember how you held back your tears, only so as not to hear: 'Kind? Ha! So — weak!?' How you clenched your fists, trying to grow harder. And still you cradled stray kittens and wrote 'everything will be all right' on the mirror.

Kindness guards your soul. It remains your support when the world shouts: 'Break! Be like everyone else!'

Your 'I'm sorry' is a stubborn rope bridge flung across an abyss — an abyss others do not even dare to look into. Strength is not in striking or wounding; it is in believing, after a thousand hurts, that people still deserve warmth. You do not have to hide your softness. Wear it like a cloak in foul weather, and show the world that kindness is a choice.

Astelia

Will. Resolve. The Urge to Rise.

She goes first. She does not wait for things to grow easier or brighter. She appears where it is still cold, but something inside already pulls you onward. Astelia helps you rise from bed when a blizzard blows outside and there is ice within you.

She is the impulse. The step no one applauded.

The voice that whispers: 'Fear is not a wall, it is only snow.'

In her palms are snowdrops, chilled by the morning frost.

There are two of them. Like choice and action, like a step and its print, like 'I want' and 'I go'.

They grew out of a fierce need to live, come what may.

With Astelia it will not be easy, nor perfect.

It will come with scraped knees, with scars, and a handful of earth in your palms.

A L E T T E R

'You are afraid to choose yourself'

You have learned to live on tiptoe, only so as not to disturb the expectations of others. You know how to pretend you do not see the wounds in your own soul. Your dreams, like letters with no address, are hidden under the pillow, so that no one will find them and say: 'You have not earned this!'

This is more than pain. It is an underground rumble, with words caught inside it:

'I want!'

'I can!'

'I am!'

And they cannot break through the asphalt of other people's 'musts'.

Choosing yourself is no revolution. It is a return.

It is seizing the calendar of endless 'laters' and throwing it into the fire. It is letting yourself cry out in the voice you hid behind 'quiet' and 'obedient'.

Break the lock on the cage of 'I must' that suits everyone else.

You are not bound to bury your desires.

Let them break free, however they can.

This is not weakness.

This is you.

Alive, and sounding...

Esfelaya

The Inner Girl. The Fullness of Feeling. Freedom.

She appears all at once, like a whirl of summer rain that pours without warning. In a second it turns the heat into a myriad of merry, cooling drops.

Esfelaya catches the drops on her lashes and laughs so loudly that the whole world seems ready to join in.

Her laughter is not only lightness and fun; it is aliveness. It is proof that the impossible becomes possible when you are truly yourself.

In her palms is a clear spring — it glows like the sun that burns inside those who dance barefoot in the rain.

While others take shelter, frowning, under black umbrellas, she spins in the arms of the downpour, making you smile and wonder:

‘What if wet hair and bare feet are what real beauty is?’

A L E T T E R

‘You became the heroine of someone else’s script’

Do you remember, as a child, putting on a dress from your mother’s wardrobe? It hung off your shoulders, tangled at the sleeves, and you spun in it as though it were a pair of wings.

And now you wear other people’s roles. Tight ones, prickly ones. With labels:

‘How convenient you are!’

‘And so dependable!’

‘Don’t get in the way!’

You no longer hear your own voice, as though it had been dusted over with ash and with phrases you never wrote:

‘Yes, of course.’

‘I agree.’

‘I’m perfectly fine...’

But your pain is not your fault.

It is weariness from other people’s ‘musts’, which have crowded out your own ‘I want’.

Listen, my friend. You can take off that prickly, stifling dress. Let down your hair, step out into the rain and write on the pavement:

‘I am here! I am alive! I choose myself!’

For you are no episode in someone else’s story.

You are a whole epic.

A free wind.

P A R T I I

The Sapiens Garden

THE SAPIENS GARDEN — a Timber Lighthouse and Garden of Memory on the British Coast

[Read the full proposal \(PDF\) ↗](#)

THAT FIRST object sent to London slowly became a question: how craft, memory, heritage, music and culture might become a quiet address to a place. And what if a whole landscape could speak in the same language? Out of that question, and the wish to understand it, THE SAPIENS GARDEN grew. Its birthday is 25 May 2025.

THE SAPIENS GARDEN is a place where feeling, thought and the body learn to be together. Where culture takes its living breath again, and a person is free to be real. Here gesture, sound, landscape and text serve one thing — the return to presence. It is a space where a person learns again how to live, where a maker, a teacher, a doctor and a diplomat share one language.

When we truly meet, a fine thread appears between us, one that asks for no proof. It is born of attention, of a respect for silence, of a readiness to witness another's light and dark. In this way a person recovers the capacity to stand beside another without losing themselves. At that very point culture becomes a living relationship between people.

The Sapiens Lighthouse

The symbol and the architectural embodiment of this philosophy is the Lighthouse: seven-sided, forty-two metres high — among the tallest timber lighthouses ever raised — built by the traditional English timber-frame method in oak and clad in larch, like an old sailing ship.

Why oak and an English frame, from a builder trained in Norwegian pine? Because a building belongs to its place. On the Norfolk coast the wind is salt and the winters are wet; English oak has stood in that weather for a thousand years, in barns, churches and ships, and the timber-frame tradition of this island is the right language for it. The Norwegian craft gives the hand, the joint and the discipline; the English oak frame gives the building its home. Inside, the most modern ecological materials and engineering systems do their work unseen.

As you climb the stairs, you will see lines cut into the inner load-bearing beams — words from the great minds of humanity. The ascent begins with the foundations laid by Socrates, Plato

and Aristotle, passes through science, form, word and sound, and arrives at the summit of light: the mystics and the visionaries — Blake, Rumi, Hildegard of Bingen.



The Lighthouse and the Memory Garden: a concept view from the air

Seven Halls

Within the Lighthouse, seven halls are planned, joined by a central spiral staircase.

The first is given to the philosophers — those who first asked what truth, goodness and being are. The second to the scientists: the laws of motion and light, the make-up of matter and of life. The third to the architects and artists who gave themselves to line, colour and light. The fourth to those who live and create today: music, cinema, painting, the science of living nature. The fifth to the poets and writers. The sixth to the composers, whose music said what lies beyond words. The seventh, beneath the dome, to those who thought beyond their own time.

In each hall there will be a small museum display: artefacts, books and authentic objects.

The Memory Garden

Around the Lighthouse lies the Memory Garden, where every one of seventy-seven trees bears the name of a philosopher, a poet, a scientist, a composer or an artist whose ideas changed the way humanity sees the world. It is a place where experience and memory have roots, and grow together.

A garden like this is grown across generations: watered, protected, and handed on together with the memory of whoever cared for it before. Then care becomes a promise — for as long as the tree grows and bears fruit, our gratitude lasts.

This is a living body, and we grow it together. Everyone who comes — an artist, a poet, a craftsman, a child, someone who has planted a single tree — becomes a living cell of this growing tree of culture. We are branches of one trunk, and the future of heritage comes together the way a tree grows: slowly, in company, out of a multitude of living cells. A diplomat, a patron, an artist, an architect, a carpenter, a museum director — here they all speak one language.

VOX SAPIENS — a Consecration Like No Other

The Garden will have a single day that will never come again. This is VOX SAPIENS — a choral and symphonic invocation for seventy-two voices: the moment when sound, silence and presence become one. It will be performed only once, at the opening ceremony, and never repeated. Thus the Lighthouse and the Garden will begin their life.

THE LUMEN SAPIENS — an Annual Award and Ceremony of Recognition

In time THE SAPIENS GARDEN will have a tradition of its own — THE LUMEN SAPIENS, an award for depth, honesty and clarity, given to those who have chosen them amid the common

noise. Once a year, beneath the canopies of the Garden, a single name is spoken. A new tree is set in the earth, and the Garden gains another root.

To the laureate I mean to give a small sculpture: a wooden lighthouse with a rock crystal at its summit and a handful of soil from the Garden itself — a token binding a person to place, to time, and to the shared cultural memory. The award goes to a person or an institution whose contribution to cultural memory, to knowledge and to stewardship truly carries weight.

The Future Site

The principal working hypothesis for the site is Beacon Hill, near West Runton in North Norfolk: the highest point in the county, one hundred and five metres above sea level, roughly 1.7 kilometres from the shore. It stands on the glacial sands and gravels of the Cromer Ridge, a terminal moraine, and has borne the name Beacon Hill for many hundreds of years. We would be giving this place back its true memory and purpose.

What the Institution Believes

THE SAPIENS GARDEN has an inner charter — the measure by which the institution will weigh every decision it makes. Of its twenty principles, here are seven.

We serve time, not the moment: decisions are made from the long horizon and from responsibility to those who will come after us.

We keep, we do not own: neither the founder, nor the trustees, nor the donors are proprietors — every role is a temporary stewardship.

Public benefit stands above elitism: depth of form is never used to keep anyone out. The benefit may be quiet, yet it must be real and within reach.

We build no cult: work with the symbolic and the ritual never hardens into doctrine, teaching, or a system of initiation.

We depend on no single source: resilience rules out any critical dependence on one donor or patron.

We speak with restraint: the institution's language is deliberately plainer than the scale of the idea, and that restraint is itself a source of trust.

We do not betray the form to survive: faced with a choice between a compromise that would break the foundation and a pause, the institution chooses the pause.

THE SAPIENS GARDEN exists to outlast time.

THE SAPIENS DISPATCH — an International Gesture of Cultural Diplomacy

AN IDEA of this scale and ambition does not introduce itself by email. It was conceived and carried out the way the gift for London Grammar once was — as an object made entirely by hand, with the same reverence, the same strictness of form, and the same inner necessity.

THE SAPIENS DISPATCH is a limited series of handmade manuscripts and calligraphic letters, gathered to carry THE SAPIENS GARDEN to cultural institutions of the first rank.

Each holds a book, handmade letters and crafted elements, in considered, almost ritual packaging. The object itself opens a quiet and respectful conversation before a single meeting takes place.

How It Was Made

Each dispatch I prepared on the finest paper, with a rough deckled edge. The letters were neither printed nor scanned — every one was drawn in hand calligraphy, with illuminated initials, and certain passages written in ecclesiastical Latin and in French, as an act of authorship in itself.

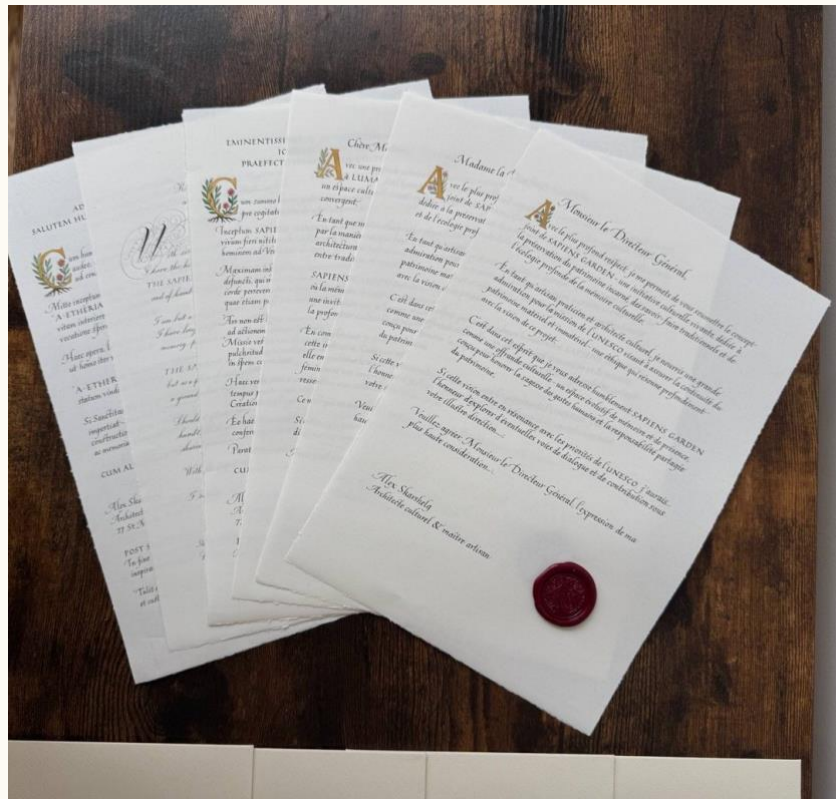
The documents were held together by a wax seal bearing my monogram and a silk band with embroidery. When the box was opened, it released the scent of pine oil — a sensory signature binding the message to the forests and the timber from which all my work grows.



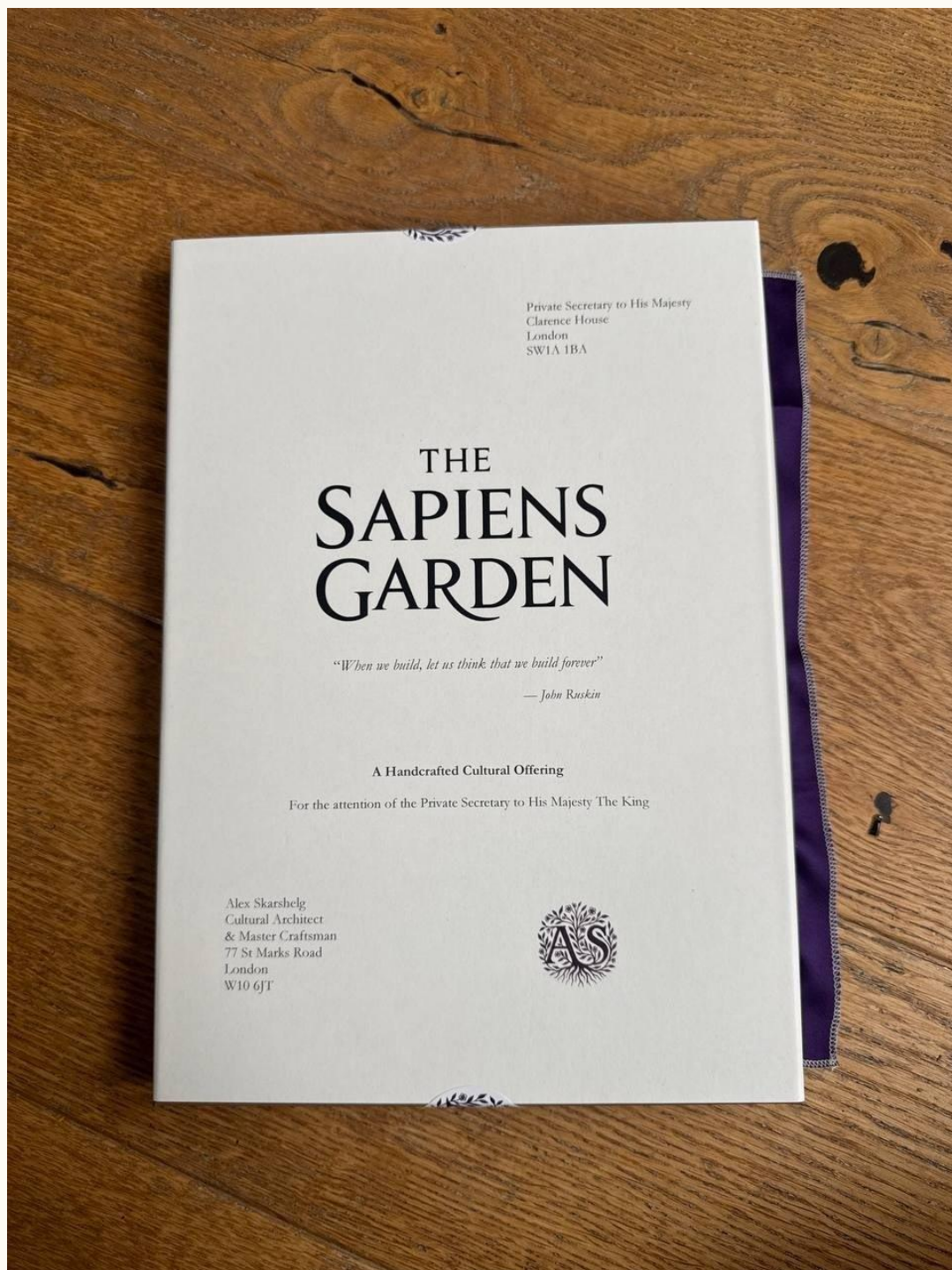
Embroidered purple silk and the envelopes of the dispatch



Finished dispatches, ready to be sent



Hand-calligraphed letters under wax seal



The dispatch for His Majesty King Charles III

AD SANCTITATEM TUAM, PAPAM LEONEM XIV,
SALUTEM HUMILLIMAM AC DEVOTISSIMAM IN DOMINO IESU CHRISTO,
SANCTITATIS TUAE PEDIBUS ME PROICIENS



um humilitate ac sincera reverentia hanc epistolam offerre Sanctitati Tuae
audeo, ut exprimam sensum gratitudinis ac admirationis pro visione Ecclesiae
ad conservandam memoriam culturalem, contemplationem et curam Creationis.

Mitto inceptum meum, "SAPIENS GARDEN", una cum libro comitante
"A-ETHERIA" - meditationem litterariam, quae traditionem artis manu factae,
vitam interiorem et silentium contemplationis coniungit, in spiritu concordis cum
vocatione spirituali Ecclesiae.

Haec opera, licet humilia sint, ex desiderio interiore ad spatia creanda orta sunt,
ut homo iter reversionis ad Veritatem, Pulchritudinem et Sacrum incipere possit.

"A-ETHERIA", quamquam arte poetica imbuta est, non theologici vel dogmatici textus
statum vindicat, sed fructus meditationis interioris ac reverentiae culturalis est.

Si Sanctitas Tua benigne hoc consideraverit, emixte peto ut Apostolicam benedictionem
impertiat - tum pro editione libri "A-ETHERIA" in Italia, tum pro progressionem ac
constructionem operis "SAPIENS GARDEN" - ut fructus huius laboris culturae spirituali
ac memoriae humanae inservire possint.

CUM ALTISSIMA REVERENTIA AC DEVOTIONE ANIMI.

Alex Skarshelg
Architectus Culturalis et Magister Artifex
77 St. Mark's Road, Londinium, W10 6JT, Britannia



POST SCRIPTUM:

In fine huius epistolae, cum humilitate verba Sacrae Scripturae referre audeo, quae fons
inspirationis atque tranquillae sustentationis ab initio huiusmodi laboris humilis mihi fuerunt:

"Tulit ergo Dominus Deus hominem, et posuit eum in paradiso voluptatis, ut operaretur
et custodiret illum".

Datum Londinii, die V mensis Novembris, anno MMXXV

A calligraphic letter to His Holiness Pope Leo XIV

EMINENTISSIMO AC REVERENDISSIMO DOMINO CARDINALI
IOSEPHO TOLENTINO DE MENDONÇA
PRAEFECTO DICASTERII DE CULTURA ET EDUCATIONE

SALUTEM IN CHRISTO!



um summo honore gratias ago pro ministerio pastoralis Eminentiae Vestrae, necnon pro cogitationibus de arte tamquam de vocatione spirituali ac officio Ecclesiae.

Inceptum SAPIENS GARDEN, una cum libro comitante A-ETHERIA, spatium vivum fieri nititur; ubi traditio artis, memoria culturalis et praesentia contemplativa hominem ad Veritatem dirigant – in concordia cum sensu spirituali Ecclesiae.

Maximam inspirationem hausi ex verbis Sanctissimi Patris Papae Francisci, pie defuncti, qui memorandus est et in universae Ecclesiae atque totius humani generis corde perseveranter manet; ab Eminentia Vestra in homilia ad artifices prolatis, – verbis, quae etiam post eius obitum tamquam normae spirituales permanent.

Ars non est luxus, sed necessitas spiritus. Non est fuga, sed responsabilitas, vocatio ad actionem, clamor, invitatio.

Missio vestra non est solum pulchritudinem creare, sed etiam veritatem, bonitatem et pulchritudinem revelare, quae in plicis historiae latent, vocem dare silentibus, dolorem in spem convertere.

Haec verba intime cum proposito nostro consonant: memoriam non tamquam tempus praeteritum, sed tamquam afflatum spiritus atque vocationem ad curam Creationis intellegimus.

Eo haec documenta ad considerationem Dicasterii mitto – cum spe plurimum conferendi ad dialogum vivum inter fidem, culturam et artem.

Paratus sum communicare atque notitias ulteriores praebere ad primum Vestrum nutum.

CUM MAXIMA OBSERVANTIA AC DEVOTIONE ANIMI.

Alex Skarshelg
Architectus Culturalis et Magister Artifex
77 St Marks Road, Londinium, W10 6JT, Britannia



POST SCRIPTUM:

Hoc opus Memoriae et Lucis, ex corde et cum reverentia, in humilitate offertur.

Datum Londinii, die V mensis Novembris, anno MMXXV

Monsieur le Directeur Général,

Avec le plus profond respect, je me permets de vous soumettre le concept joint de SAPIENS GARDEN – une initiative culturelle vivante, dédiée à la préservation du patrimoine incarné, des savoir-faire traditionnels et de l'écologie profonde de la mémoire culturelle.

En tant qu'artisan praticien et architecte culturel, je nourris une grande admiration pour la mission de l'UNESCO visant à assurer la continuité du patrimoine matériel et immatériel – une éthique qui résonne profondément avec la vision de ce projet.

C'est dans cet esprit que je vous adresse humblement SAPIENS GARDEN comme une offrande culturelle – un espace évolutif de mémoire et de présence, conçu pour honorer la sagesse des gestes humains et la responsabilité partagée du patrimoine.

Si cette vision entre en résonance avec les priorités de l'UNESCO, j'aurais l'honneur d'explorer d'éventuelles voies de dialogue et de contribution sous votre illustre direction.

Veuillez agréer, Monsieur le Directeur Général, l'expression de ma plus haute considération.

Alex Skarshelg
Architecte culturel & maître artisan



A calligraphic letter to the Director-General of UNESCO, Paris

To Whom It Was Sent

- The Private Secretary to His Majesty The King (Buckingham Palace, London)
- The Apostolic Nunciature of the Holy See (London)
- UNESCO Headquarters (Paris)
- The LUMA Foundation (Arles)

- The King's Foundation (Dumfries)
- The Maison des Cultures du Monde (Vitré, France)

Each dispatch was documented with photographs and proof of delivery. What followed went beyond the expectations of one person posting handmade objects across Europe.

What Came in Reply

Buckingham Palace replied in writing on 19 February 2026.

From the Secretariat of the UNESCO 2003 Convention in Paris, signed by Fumiko Ohinata, Secretary of the Convention (Ref. CLT/LHE/26/277):

'We commend the dedication and far-reaching efforts demonstrated in The Sapiens Garden. The project closely aligns with the spirit of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.'

Copies of this letter were sent to the United Kingdom's Permanent Delegation to UNESCO and to the UK National Commission for UNESCO. A second letter came later from the German Commission for UNESCO.

From the Apostolic Nunciature of the Holy See in London, receipt was confirmed on 24 December 2025 — Christmas Eve, in the Jubilee Year — following the personal delivery of THE SAPIENS GARDEN and the letters addressed to Pope Leo XIV and Cardinal Tolentino.

The three remaining dispatches — to Arles, Dumfries and Vitré — were delivered; the conversations they may open are still ahead.

None of these replies began with an institution reaching out to me first. It all began with a maker who sent out into the world the thing he had built with his own hands.

P A R T I I I

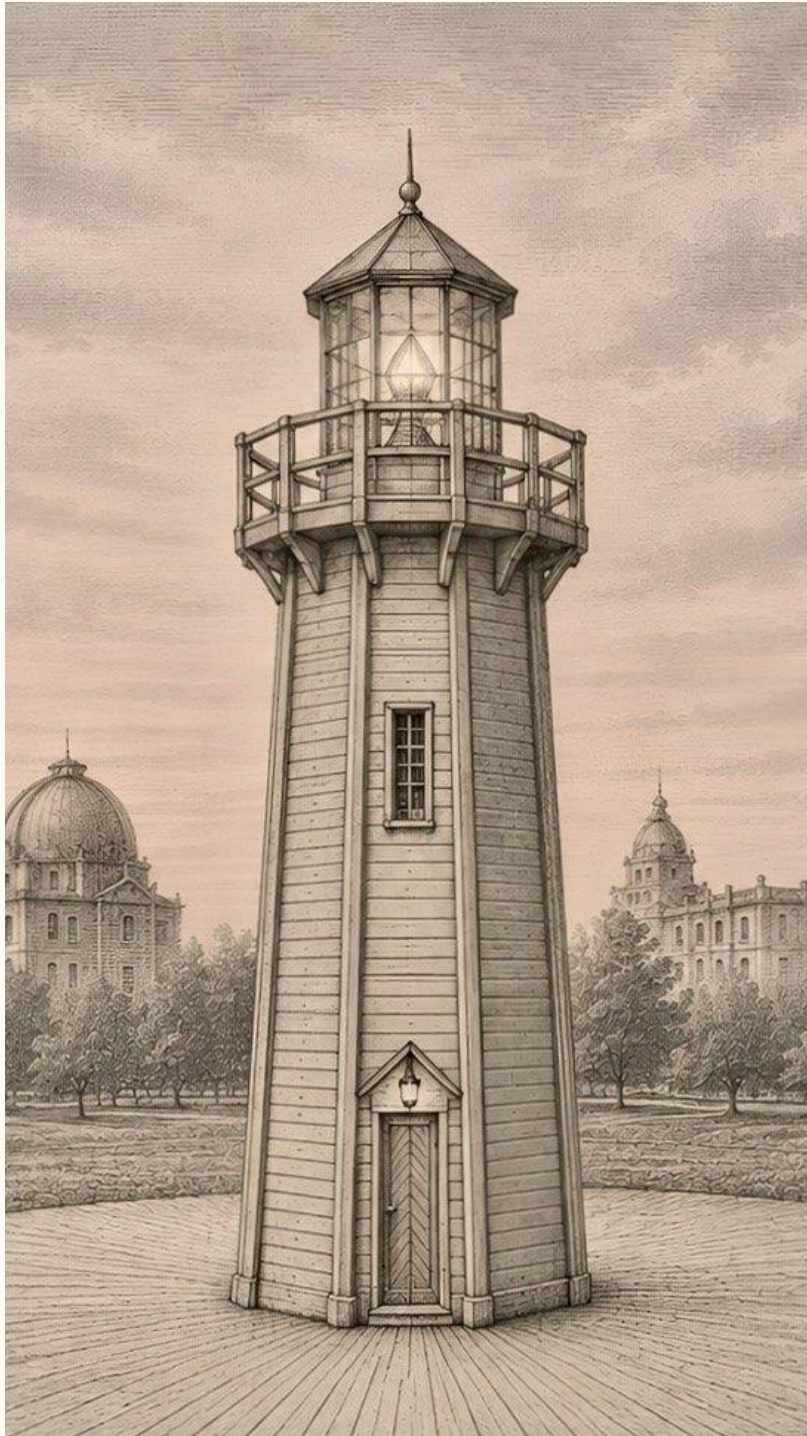
London First

The Greenwich Weather Beacon

[Read the concept note \(PDF\) ↗](#)

THE GREAT Lighthouse on the Norfolk coast is the work of long years. A thing of that size has to begin smaller, closer, and in a form one can touch now. So the first public step of THE SAPIENS GARDEN in Britain is a fourteen-metre prototype in Greenwich Park, on the prime meridian: the Greenwich Weather Beacon.

It is a timber tower of solid oak, clad in larch, about four and a half metres across at the base. It has a revolving lantern and a restrained evening light that shifts its hue with the weather of the city. Into the cladding will be carved short lines from the great minds of humanity, following the same upward order as the seven halls of the Lighthouse. Outside there are no ladders, no ledges, no holds: the Beacon cannot be climbed. In character it is quiet, and honest to its material, as though it had always stood here.



The Greenwich Weather Beacon: a concept drawing

Why Greenwich

The place already holds the whole vocabulary of the idea: world time, the prime meridian, the Royal Observatory, navigation, weather, astronomy, an open park above the river. The name itself is older than the Observatory — Old English for a green settlement by the water. Long before the meridian, Greenwich was a word about greenery and the river's edge, a direct line to

timber and to landscape. Since 1997 Maritime Greenwich has stood on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Twelve

The number is given by Greenwich itself — the dial divides the day into twelve. A circle of twelve trees reads as a dial, and the Beacon at its centre as the axis and the hand. Between the trees will stand twelve lanterns, and beneath them twelve benches facing the Beacon. I want all twelve trees to be apple trees: one genus, twelve different varieties and countries, all coming into flower within the same few weeks of spring, lighting up around the circle from the Siberian crab apple in April to the late varieties in May.

Greenwich has been a place of trysts for centuries — from Henry VIII dancing with Anne Boleyn beneath Queen Elizabeth's Oak, as the story goes, to the avenue still called Lovers' Walk today. I should like a few more quiet phrases to join them: 'Meet me at the Herschel tree', 'I'm on the Harrison bench'.

Weather as Culture

The Beacon has a layer that sets it apart from an ordinary tower with a lamp: it answers the weather. A small weather station inside it reads the city's fog, light, rain, wind and temperature and, following sequences composed in advance, shifts the hue of the lantern and the lighting of the trees around it. When the weather turns, the whole circle turns slowly with it.

Each month is led by one of the twelve trees of the circle, by the name of the person whose work it carries. Within the month, the weather of the day chooses one of seven tones — clear; overcast and windy; rain; storm; fog; heat; snow and frost. And in that tone the voices of the great and the work of living Londoners sound side by side, on the same shelf. In fog: the music of Debussy and Pärt, a page of Dickens's *Bleak House*, the paintings of Turner, and a poem written last week by a poet from Lewisham. When it clears, the same theme returns in Bach and Constable.

The App

At the foot of the Beacon stands a sign with a QR code. Point a camera at it and you step into the live broadcast of the sky above the clearing: the milky light of fog, the white radiance of a clear morning, the blue tone of wind. The same address opens as a website from anywhere in the world. Inside, everything is made by hand: calligraphy, poems on paper, paintings and photographs tuned to the tone of the day, fragments of music. Open the app while it is raining in London, and on the paper you will find a poem about water and hear Chopin. Open it from Birmingham, and you will hear how the sky above Greenwich Park sounds just now.

The Terrace

The ring around the tower works as a chamber stage all year round. The principle: live acoustics and the human voice only, not a single loudspeaker. A handmade piano lives inside the Beacon and is wheeled out onto the terrace before a performance. Volume is held by the very nature of the instrument — chamber music stays chamber music, the park stays quiet, the evening stays alive. London artists will be able to perform without a fee, on an open programme.

The Living Archive

The name of a great figure on the plaque beside a tree and a Londoner's work from yesterday stand together, under the same theme of the month and in the same tone of the day. History gives depth, living artists give life, the weather gives rhythm. The rights stay with the author: the Beacon takes only a non-exclusive licence to sound in the clearing and in the app, broadcasts nothing beyond the park, and sells nothing.

The Greenwich Trial

Greenwich has a forgotten tradition. Marine chronometers were tested at the Royal Observatory from 1766, when Harrison's famous watch was tried here, and from 1822 to 1914 the Observatory ran annual trials and published the chronometers' rates year after year. I want to bring that day back.

Once a year, on 13 October — the day in 1884 on which the prime meridian was given to Greenwich — twelve chronometers from twelve countries, each the work of its own maker, undergo their trial beside the Beacon. Alongside them run the watches of all who come of their own accord: mechanical, quartz, found in a drawer. The result is printed as a circle, like a dial: the steadier the rate, the closer to the centre, and the centre always stays empty. Within that circle no one stands above another.

Status

All of this is, for now, a concept. The site in Greenwich Park remains a working hypothesis, no permissions are yet in place, and design work will begin in 2027. The day can bear the name of Greenwich only when the institutions to which the place and the subject belong carry it together with me.

THE SAPIENS LAB — a Craft and Culture Community in London

thesapienslondon.com ↗

THE UNDERTAKING cannot wait for the great Lighthouse on the coast to rise. It needs a body and a mind in the city now. That place will be THE SAPIENS LAB — a craft and cultural laboratory in London, which a person enters through action: to make, to see, to write, to sound, to gather, to care, and to build.

It is the first form the institution of THE SAPIENS GARDEN will take in the city. While the architecture and the drawings of the Lighthouse are still ahead, the Laboratory is designed to begin work as an open studio from 2027: to teach crafts, gather people, keep an archive, and create the living public life of the project.

Here, within a single space, a person moves from one practice to another, each woven into the next. An artist comes to work with wood, a musician begins to understand the craft, a carpenter tries calligraphy or sits down at the piano. Someone comes simply to practise, to share what they know, to meet people, and to find their own rhythm.

Seven Actions

The Laboratory is gathered around seven root actions: to make, to see, to write, to sound, to gather, to care, and to build.

Timber gives the foundation and the link to the Beacon. Drawing teaches form, light and proportion. Calligraphy turns a word into a material trace of memory. Music, voice and the stage give sound and a public presence. Plants tie the Laboratory to the turning of the seasons and to the Memory Garden. And timber craft holds the prototype, the models, and the work that lies ahead.

What Is Inside

Four studios, a shared stage, a café and an archive wall.

Hands and Wood — the room of craft, tools and timber: carving, joints, small wooden objects, the Norwegian laft tradition and the timber frame, the care of tools.

Eyes and Colour — the room of drawing, colour, calligraphy and visual thinking: form, line, proportion, light, botanical drawing.

Ears and Sound — the room of music, voice, rehearsal and small recordings: piano and strings, work with the voice, preparation for performances.

Breath and Flower — the room of flowers and living material, tying the Laboratory to the seasons, to care, and to the Garden.

In the evening the stage turns the central hall into a chamber platform — readings, concerts, lectures, small productions. The Laboratory lives in two rhythms at once: inward practice by day, public presence by evening.

The Trace

What matters is what remains once the practice is over. A person leaves holding something: a wooden object, a piece of calligraphy, a bouquet, a drawing, a painting, a fragment of sound or a score — a material trace of having taken part. In this way the Laboratory gathers its own living archive, slowly and by hand.

The Heart of the Laboratory

Breath and Flower has a role of its own: it is also a space of supported participation. It is for young people and for adults who need some added support — for neurodivergent people, for disabled people, for those living in social isolation or rebuilding their confidence and the shape of their day.

The work goes on in small groups, under a master's guidance, within a clear professional framework. Participants do real, concrete work: they prepare flowers, make up and pack bouquets, and share in the everyday life of the workshop. Those it suits carry the deliveries across London too, going through the whole circle: the preparation, the journey through the city, and a courteous word exchanged with a stranger at the door.

What matters here is a completed circle of action and a visible result. The work brings together material, attention, responsibility and contribution, and opens a way towards real work through rhythm, care, and the seeing of a thing through to its end.

Who It Is For

For Londoners who want to make something with their hands and meet living culture in a room that is easy to walk into. For architects and students — rare direct contact with timber, with material, with the joint. For artists and musicians — a chamber space to work, rehearse and record. For people in supported participation — regular practice in respectful company. For

patrons and partners — the first visible urban form of a far larger undertaking, where community, programmes and archive take shape.

P A R T I V

Voices and the Road

What the World Wrote Back

I SENT these letters and these objects out into the world without expecting a reply. And then the answers began to come — hundreds of them, from more than thirty countries: from scientists, musicians, makers and artists. What I treasure most is not the titles but the kinship: people who work with their hands and their minds recognised something of their own in this work. Here are a few of the voices, quoted in brief from the letters I received.

Makers and Artists

‘A very interesting project... I attach a document explaining a project I regularly do around the concept of silence. Perhaps some day it could take place among your trees. Paper is made from them, after all.’

BRODY NEUENSCHWANDER, text artist and calligrapher, Bruges (a long-time collaborator of Peter Greenaway)

‘Indeed, building wooden structures intended to last for several centuries is one of the specificities of the Miyadaiku techniques... it would be interesting to exchange and share.’

HAMBARA MIYADAIKU, association of temple carpenters, Japan (an unbroken line of more than 230 years)

‘Your email seems very timely, as we are currently working on a bid proposal for an artwork involving a log cabin and a tree. I’ve just had time to take a proper look at your remarkable vision... the synchronicity of your contact appeals to me.’

ACKROYD & HARVEY, artists, London

‘The way you describe the project brings to mind Rossi’s Teatro del Mondo, and it aligns with our own way of talking about the work we do.’

STUDIO MUTT, architects, Liverpool

‘An exciting and ambitious project — big and bold!’

THE CARPENTERS’ COMPANY, a City of London livery company founded in 1271

Musicians

Lighthouses are icons, and even the name is iconic. To construct one in living wood is a beautiful idea, and I sincerely hope you realise this project, and do so in time for me to see it with my own eyes. Being a guitarist, I also have a profound affection for wood.'

JOHN McLAUGHLIN, guitarist (Miles Davis, the Mahavishnu Orchestra, Shakti)

'Congratulations on the creation of The Sapiens Garden! The lighthouse is an amazing masterpiece. It is fascinating to learn about the intersections between architecture and tintinnabuli music.'

THE ARVO PÄRT CENTRE, Estonia

'This is such a beautiful idea on every level.'

ANNA LAPWOOD, organist, the first official organist of the Royal Albert Hall

'Your project is truly wonderful, meaningful and inspiring... with my permission, you are welcome to use any of my existing music for your non-profit project. I would be delighted for my work to accompany such a beautiful initiative.'

BRUNO SANFILIPPO, pianist and composer, Barcelona

Scientists and Thinkers

'It was a real pleasure to read your letter. My father and my brother were carpenters, and for a time I thought I might become one too. There are close parallels between your work and mine. When the lighthouse is built, and if I am still around, I would like you to let me know. I would like to see it.'

RICHARD ROBSON, chemist, Melbourne, Nobel Prize in Chemistry 2025

'What you are doing is admirable and beautiful.'

MARTIN REES, Lord Rees of Ludlow, Astronomer Royal, Cambridge

'You are undertaking a noble and righteous project that will be important for many generations. I fully support your drive and desire, and congratulate you on your dedication to an important art.'

DREW WEISSMAN, Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2023 (the mRNA vaccines)

'What a brilliant idea of intellectual and historical depth and breadth!... To make them each an apple tree is a delicious thought.'

CLAUDIA GOLDIN, Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences 2023, Harvard

'You can be proud to have built so many loft houses, and your project in London is both exciting and beautiful.'

JON FOSSE, Nobel Prize in Literature 2023, Norway

'You are obviously a creative soul, bound to the earth and with a great love for all that nature brings. Make your beacon a beautiful and spectacular capture of our perception of time.'

MORTEN MELDAL, Nobel Prize in Chemistry 2022, Copenhagen

'Thanks for sharing your remarkable vision! It is in these times of an encroaching digital takeover of our civilisation by corporations that visionary, hands-on creative contributions like yours are so important. They kindle our imagination, they tie us to human history, they can be beacons for a better future.'

JOACHIM FRANK, Nobel Prize in Chemistry 2017, Columbia University

'I enjoyed receiving your email, and wish you the best on your weather beacon and clock projects. If you are ever in Boulder, Colorado, you are very welcome to visit my lab.'

ERIC CORNELL, Nobel Prize in Physics 2001

'I really hope the Lighthouse is built. I want to see it... I fully empathise with any project that tries to pull people out of the short-term whimsies of existence.'

CHARLES COCKELL, astrobiologist, Edinburgh

'Your project looks very exciting and I hope it succeeds. Devising ways of making visible things that are beyond normal vision is a shared concept.'

FRANK CLOSE, physicist, Oxford

House, Land and Faith

'It sounds as if you are involved with an interesting project — we have a wood of goodwill, and trees planted to mark those who work or worked here with us!'

HIGHCLERE CASTLE, the estate office

'Thank you for your note and the details about this project. It was good to look at your website too... I would be very happy to receive occasional updates. This comes with the assurance of my prayers and all good wishes.'

GRAHAM USHER, Bishop of Norwich, the Church of England's lead bishop for the environment

Roadmap 2027–2050+

HERE I speak in a different voice — the language of a plan. What follows is how I see the project unfolding in time: by phases, honestly, with reservations, and without promising anything I do not yet control.

This is a working document for dialogue with partners. Everything in it is an assumption, and everything remains subject to professional, legal, planning, ecological and institutional review. Not one word here signifies a confirmed partnership, permission or funding.

Three Instruments, One Project

The project becomes visible in Britain through three linked instruments, each growing out of the last:

THE GREENWICH WEATHER BEACON — a fourteen-metre public prototype in London: the first public embodiment of the idea and its working engine.

THE SAPIENS LAB — a London craft and cultural laboratory: the place where prototypes are born, programmes are tested, and a community takes shape. In every future city of the network, a laboratory of its own will keep its beacon alive.

THE SAPIENS GARDEN — the culminating landmark: a forty-two-metre timber Lighthouse and a Memory Garden of seventy-seven trees on the North Norfolk coast, designed for a public life of two hundred years.

Between the London prototype and the coastal landmark lies a fourth horizon — a network of public timber beacons in the cultural cities of Britain, each with its own character and its own ‘weather’ voice.

Phases

Activation falls in 2027, the year of the move to London. The logic is simple: governance, the Laboratory and the first public beacon come before any major capital investment, so that every phase carries value in itself.

2026–2027 *Arrival, foundation, activation.* The move; legal preparation and registration of the EVERHELG FOUNDATION; a base and workshop near London; the launch of THE SAPIENS LAB; design development of the Greenwich prototype; the second wave of THE SAPIENS DISPATCH; a circle of allies, curators and patrons.

2028–2029	<i>Site, design, network pilots.</i> Pre-design work on the Norfolk hypothesis; ecological and landscape surveys; a concept brief; the first dialogue with cities for a second beacon.
2030–2031	<i>The road of consents.</i> The planning track, technical briefs, pilot programmes — subject to permissions.
2032–2035	<i>Phased realisation.</i> Construction of the landmark and roll-out of the beacon network — subject to consents and funding; public opening on completion.
2036–2050+	<i>Stewardship and the heritage horizon.</i> Stewardship, conservation, the long cultural archive. The phase for which everything is built, and which the project is designed to enter.

Governance

The institution is conceived as a British charity — the EVERHELG FOUNDATION. I have carried out the legal groundwork with British charity-law consultants; it will resume once I am resident. Responsibility is divided among three functions: a board of trustees (oversight and protection of the mission), an Advisory and Cultural Council (expertise and recommendations), and a delivery function (coordination, documentation, programme). Around them: annual reporting, phased approvals, management of restricted funds, and a cultural risk register kept as a living working tool.

Funding

Funding is intended to be diverse, transparent and gradually growing: structured patronage, institutional grants and programme funding, British and international cultural and philanthropic organisations, and the Laboratory’s own earned income where appropriate. Scenario planning — base, optimistic and constrained cases — keeps the project meaningful even on modest means and rules out dependence on any single source. Annual reporting goes to donors, partners and an independent advisory function.

British Frameworks

The project sits naturally within recognised British frameworks of cultural and natural stewardship: the priorities of Arts Council England, DCMS, Historic England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Crafts Council; its craft-education side aligns with the UK Creative Industries Sector Plan. Internationally, its resonance with the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has been confirmed in writing. Ecologically, it

answers Sustainable Development Goals 4, 11, 13 and 15: education through craft, sustainable cities and cultural places, climate-conscious timber, and long stewardship of the land.

Heritage to 2100 and Beyond

The Lighthouse has a design life of more than two hundred years, and that commitment outlives any founder: cycles of conservation and monitoring, a succession plan for its keepers, and a hybrid physical and digital archive designed to reach past the year 2100. An idea that asks people to think in generations must itself be governed across generations — independent of any single person, stage or generation, the author included.

Where the Project Stands Now

Honesty about the present state matters more than pace. The EVERHELG FOUNDATION is not yet established. Beacon Hill in Norfolk and the site in Greenwich are early working hypotheses: there is no landowner's consent, no allocation, no planning permission. The Royal Parks have confirmed, in separate correspondence, that an installation in their parks is possible through a competitive process; that is a path still to be tested, and it grants no permission yet. Funding is not secured; the work to date has rested on my own practice and on the recognition it has gathered.

The Far Horizon

UNESCO has answered this work in writing twice — from the Paris Secretariat of the 2003 Convention and from the German Commission. The horizon of World Heritage I name here once, quietly, as a possibility still to be earned by years of work: it would depend on British state procedures, on the consent of all parties, and on accumulated evidence. I mention it only because a project designed for two centuries must be honest about how far it looks.

How to Take Part

THE EARLY phase sets the language of the project, the quality of its institutional presence and its governability for a long time to come. What is built now decides what can be trusted later.

The project can be supported in several ways: early help with the prototypes and with public proof of the work; support for craft-education programmes, for the archive and documentation; support for the launch and growth of THE SAPIENS LAB; patronage in the long logic of stewardship; and programme support for public cultural formats.

If something in this book has spoken to you — as a maker, a patron, an institution, a landowner, a musician, or simply as a reader — write to me.

Every reply I have received began with one person deciding to answer.

Alex Skarshelg

alexskarshelg@gmail.com

www.thesapiensgarden.com

www.thesapienslondon.com

Timeline

2010	First timber building; the Meshchera fire and the planting of the NORLAFT forest.
2012	The NORLAFT workshop founded.
2014	Rauland, Telemark: study under Ottar Romtveit.
2019	Lillehammer: stavlaft; the first carpentry school.
25 May 2025	THE SAPIENS GARDEN is born.
24 December 2025	Receipt confirmed by the Apostolic Nunciature, London.
2026	Reply from the UNESCO Secretariat of the 2003 Convention, Paris. Reply from Buckingham Palace and hundreds of replies from more than thirty countries.
2027	The move to London; design of the Greenwich Weather Beacon
2028–2031	THE SAPIENS LAB, Site, design, consents.
2032–2035	Construction of the Lighthouse and the Memory Garden.
2036–2050+	Stewardship; a design life of two hundred years.

Glossary

LÅFT — the Norwegian log-building technique: horizontal logs locked at the corners with hand-cut notches. *Dry låft* uses dried timber.

STAVLÅFT — the Norwegian post-and-frame tradition: a heavy frame on carved posts, with the walls filled in.

DIAMOND NOTCH — the author's own version of the Norwegian corner joint.

TIMBER FRAME — the traditional English method of building in jointed oak.

MEMORY GARDEN — the garden of seventy-seven named trees around the Lighthouse.

VOX SAPIENS — the choral and symphonic work for seventy-two voices, to be performed once, at the opening.

THE LUMEN SAPIENS — the annual award and tree-planting ceremony of THE SAPIENS GARDEN.

THE SAPIENS DISPATCH — the series of handmade manuscripts and calligraphic letters sent to cultural institutions.

THE SAPIENS LAB — the craft and cultural laboratory planned in London.

EVERHELG FOUNDATION — the British charity through which the project is intended to be governed.

STEWARDSHIP — keeping something in trust for those who come after, rather than owning it.