John Pawson

(HaliFax, UK 1949)

John Pawson CBE has spent over thirty years making rigorously simple architecture that speaks of the fundamentals but is also modest in character. His body of work spans a broad range of scales and typologies, from private houses, sacred commissions, galleries, museums, hotels, ballet sets, yacht interiors and a bridge across a lake.

As Alvar Aalto’s bronze door handle has been characterised as the ‘handshake of a building’, so a sense of engaging with the essence of a philosophy of space through everything the eye sees or the hand touches is a defining aspect of Pawson’s work. His method is to approach buildings and design commissions in precisely the same manner, on the basis that ‘it’s all architecture’.

Whether at the scale of a monastery, a house, a saucepan or a ballet, everything is traceable back to a consistent set of preoccupations with mass, volume, surface, proportion, junction, geometry, repetition, light and ritual. In this way, even something as modest as a fork can become a vehicle for much broader ideas about how we live and what we value.