



## Athena

Cultural Crusader

### Time to end capital punishment

**T**HE magnificent neo-Gothic Canadian Parliament buildings in Ottawa are on a scale to match our own at Westminster and, likewise, form part of a view that enjoys immediate national recognition. In this case, it's the prospect across the River Ottawa, where the parliament buildings rise above cliffs in juxtaposition to Château Laurier, a spectacular hotel opened in 1912. The view of the two together across the river even appeared for a period on the Canadian dollar bill.

By a strange coincidence, just as insensitive development along the River Thames threatens the setting of the Palace of Westminster, so does development in Ottawa threaten that of the Canadian Parliament. In the case of Ottawa, Athena hopes that the

authorities can learn from London's mistakes and act before irreparable damage is done.

Château Laurier was one of the most ambitious railway hotels of the early 20th century. It was commissioned by the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway immediately opposite its station in the capital and begun to designs by the New York architect Bradford Lee Gilbert. It takes the form of a *château* on the Loire, with a towering roofline enlivened by dormer windows and pinnacles.

### ‘Ottawa council is washing its hands of an embarrassing problem’

In December 2016, plans for a major addition to it in the form of a large, rectilinear block on the site of a garage (now demolished) were made public. At the time, the proposals generated a public outcry. They were widely judged to compromise the view and made no reference to the hotel's existing architecture or its Gothic character.

This year, those plans came back with changes that claimed to answer these

criticisms. However, they did nothing substantive to alter the fundamental problem with the design: that it's a box designed with complete indifference to its architectural context and visually sensitive location.

Certainly, the city planning committee agreed that the new design was not up to scratch when it recently met on June 26.

Rather than reject it, however, it took the very unusual step of approving it on condition that it was made 'more compatible' with the Château Laurier. Then, almost immediately, the elected city council endorsed that bizarre decision.

By so doing, the city council has accepted the revised design sight-unseen. It has also delegated its responsibility for the arbitration of future proposals to the planning committee and dodged the bullet of public opposition. In short, it's washing its hands of an embarrassing problem to the long-term detriment of Ottawa.

Such dereliction of civic duty would seem more reprehensible if London had not achieved something even more remarkable: an entire district of high-rise residential building as the Thames backdrop to Parliament. New towers continue to rise, but Athena is still waiting for even one new design of distinction.

Fred van Deelen; Tasha Marks

## What to see this week

**Made for the Table** is at the Goldsmiths' Centre, 42, Britton Street, London EC1, until August 31 ([www.thegoldsmiths.co.uk](http://www.thegoldsmiths.co.uk))

This exhibition explores the evolution of silver tableware and dining conventions from the 1600s to the present day. The central focus is a table laid with handcrafted silver, glass, ceramics and textiles by leading contemporary makers. The surrounding displays provide historic context, with pieces from the Goldsmiths' Company's dazzling collection, so that you can compare, for example, a 16th-century salt cellar with Adi Toch's *Pinch of Salt* bowl (2010). Observe how ancient silversmithing techniques continue alongside innovative new technologies. Also on show are 20 beakers specially commissioned from leading silversmiths by the Goldsmiths' Centre and available to buy.



**One of Rosalind Atkinson's photographic series 'The Silverware Still Lives' with beaker by Malcolm Appleby**

here, 'Elisabeth Frink Fragility and Power' (until September 29)

**Music & Memory** is at Boughton House, Kettering, Northamptonshire, until August 31 (01536 515731; [www.boughtonhouse.co.uk](http://www.boughtonhouse.co.uk))

Intriguing objects from the collections of the Dukes of Buccleuch hold hidden

memories, with music as a guiding thread to explore the theme. Among the displays are an altarpiece painted by a German prisoner for the chapel of the prisoner-of-war camp based here during the Second World War; porcelain and paintings from the Palace of Versailles, bought as souvenirs by the 5th Duke after the French Revolution, and the first African music ever to appear in the West, in 1688.

**Rodin: Rethinking the Fragment** is at Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal, Cumbria, August 10–October 27 ([www.abbothall.org.uk/rodin](http://www.abbothall.org.uk/rodin))

The first venue of this British Museum Partnership Spotlight Loan features three objects from the museum—a 1st-century Classical torso from a marble statuette of Venus, an RA medal featuring the Acropolis and the *Belvedere Torso* (1901) and a portrait of Rodin sculpting by Eugène Carrière (1900)—alongside Rodin's sculpture *The Thinker* from the Burrell Collection. This is the first time Roman art has been shown at Abbot Hall. It's presented in the context of Rodin's influences and, in turn, his influence on Elisabeth Frink, whose work is the subject of an exhibition

**Material Wood: Art & Design** is at Messums Wiltshire, Place Farm, Court Street, Tisbury, until September 9 (01747 445042; [www.messumswiltshire.com](http://www.messumswiltshire.com))

The third in Messums' 'Material' series, this is a threefold programme comprising exhibition, festival and hands-on making experiences. On show are pieces in wood (with a focus on chair design) by names such as Thomas Heatherwick, Gareth Neal, Chris Eckersley, Rob and Nick Carter and Alastair Mackie. Artists are exhibiting in the Long Gallery and a vibrant series of talks and makers' courses by some of today's best practitioners celebrates the use of wood in art and design.