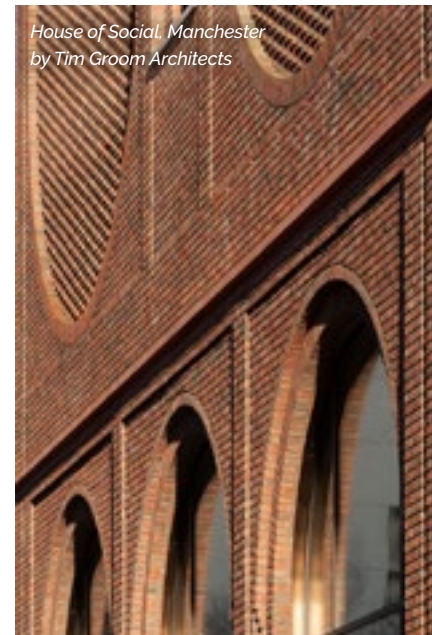




traditional craft, particularly recognising how materials weather, perform and age, remain just as relevant today. The responsibility remains the same: to understand materials properly and use them honestly and appropriately.

Good specification comes from understanding how a material performs in use – its qualities, limitations and long-term implications within the broader life of a building. On House of Social in Manchester, for example (above), we chose natural stone lintels to frame window openings as they were able to perform a dual structural and architectural role. There can be an assumption that contemporary alternatives offer lighter, quicker or more economical solutions. At House of Social, working with the properties of natural stone instead revealed a more efficient and structurally intelligent response: supporting the brickwork above while also creating an outcome that felt contextually appropriate. The approach drew on the material logic of Manchester's historic mill buildings, where stone lintels performed the same structural role over a century ago – creating continuity with the city's architectural language while remaining efficient and honest in its expression. Equally, there are projects where contemporary materials may be entirely appropriate – provided they are used with the same level of understanding and intent.

Natural stone brings qualities that remain highly relevant – permanence, tactility and a connection to place. Its use can bring legibility and authenticity, allowing buildings to feel rooted in their context and honest in their expression. Authenticity also needs to be considered alongside wider realities. Cost, performance and carbon considerations are realities that must be weighed carefully, and alternative materials can

have a place where they are specified with the same design rigour: chosen for how they perform, age, relate to context and contribute to the integrity of the design.

The question should not be whether one material is inherently more virtuous than another, but whether it is being used appropriately and to its fullest capacity. Ultimately, a material that performs well, ages well and remains appropriate over time is often the right choice as part of the wider design response, in relation to context, permanence and the coherence of the overall design.

Buildings inevitably outlast trends. As architects, our responsibility is to create places with longevity and integrity, where material choices contribute not only to immediate performance, but to the enduring quality of a building and its relationship with place. Truth to materials still matters because understanding materials properly remains fundamental to good architecture.

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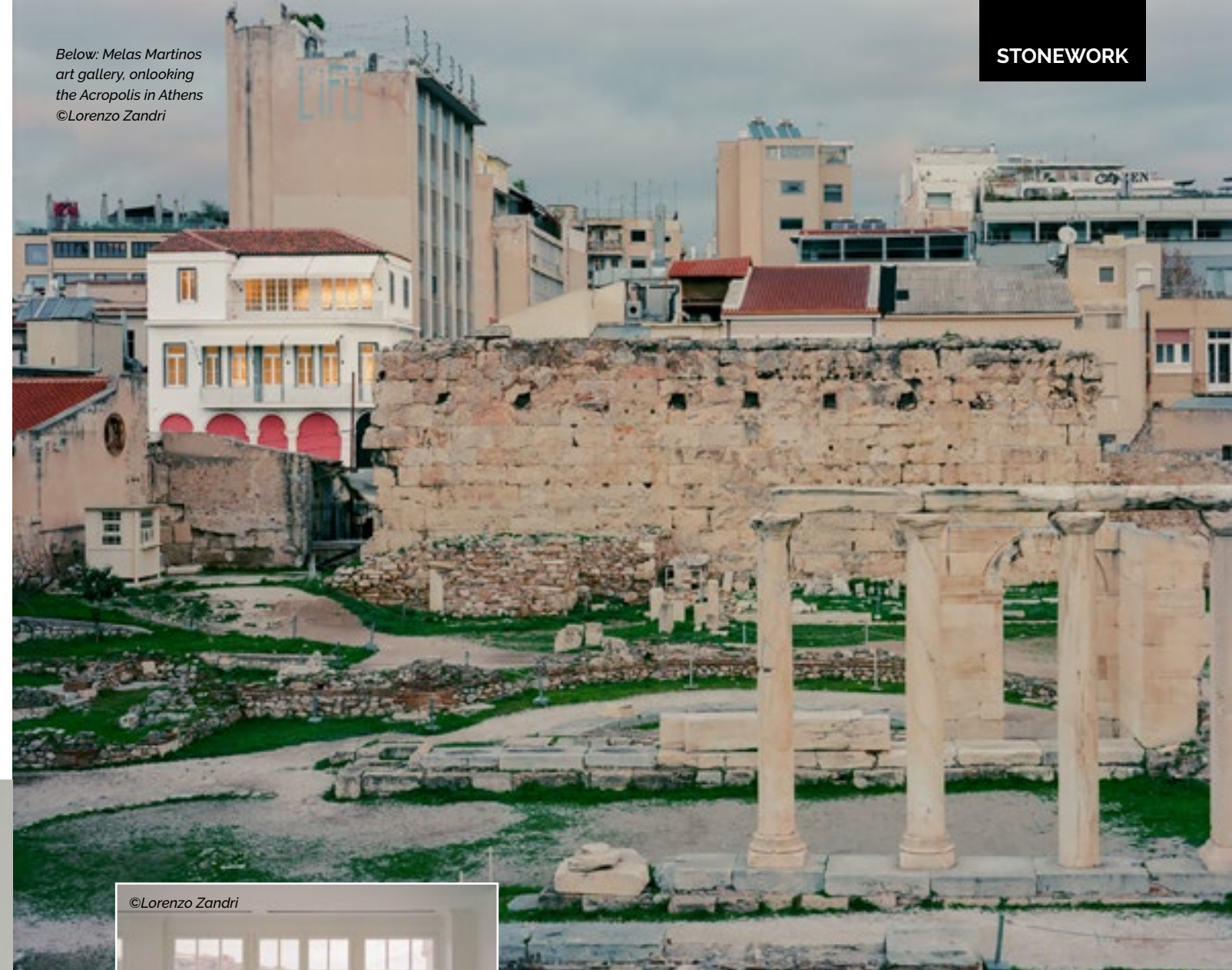
SOFIA XANTHAKOU, DIRECTOR, LOCAL LOCAL

Speaking about my own practice, truth to materials is very important to the work we do. As a small-scale firm based in Athens, we work on projects across mainland and rural Greece, where using local materials is at the heart of our philosophy.



Melas Martinos art gallery, Athens, by Local Local ©Lorenzo Zandri

Below: Melas Martinos art gallery, onlooking the Acropolis in Athens
 ©Lorenzo Zandri



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For Sofia Xanthakou, good specification begins with understanding not only a material's inherent qualities, but its relationship to place. That thinking is evident in Local Local's work at Melas Martinos gallery in Athens, where local skills and a sensitive restoration of the building's historic fabric come together. From terrazzo floors laid by a local craftsman – one of only a few in the area still using the traditional technique – to careful preservation of layers of architectural history accumulated over more than a century, the project demonstrates how contemporary architecture can remain connected to its context through the resources, skills and cultural knowledge that shape it.

We believe that projects should blend into the surrounding landscape and history of a place, and the choice of materials is central to that contextual relationship.

Choosing a material because it looks like natural stone feels counterintuitive to me because I prefer to choose materials for their inherent properties and qualities. If I specify porcelain or an engineered material, I'd want to do so because its properties make it the right material for the job, not just because it resembles natural stone.

Aesthetic is an important aspect, but it is the properties of a material that are crucial. I like to interrogate how materials feel, work and age over time. Working with a material's inherent qualities is a design tool in itself. I believe in a

culture of understanding a material's properties, characteristics, its strengths and limitations, as well as considering the historical use of materials in relation to those qualities.

In addition, material specification should be an interrogative process. The manufacturing of engineered quartz, for example, is highly carbon-intensive, requiring crushing and processing, resin additives and high-temperature curing. Additionally, Greece, where LocalLocal mainly works, does not produce such materials, meaning it must be imported, adding further to its carbon footprint. Accessibility, proximity and local technical know-how are important factors in sustainable design, which is

why turning to local stone manufacturers and nearby quarries often feels like a more responsible choice for us. Beyond reducing transport emissions, local materials support regional economies, preserve traditional craftsmanship and create supply chains that are easier to maintain and repair over the lifespan of a building. For me, sustainability is not only about embodied carbon but also about durability, stewardship and creating architecture that remains connected to its place through the resources, skills and cultural knowledge that shape it.

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