



Amanda Levete

For the fans, the Arsenal stadium is a great result, but architecturally it's in the second division

Net result

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There's something about guys and football that I find extremely attractive. I think it's to do with their display of emotional abandonment and the passion they invest in the whole scene. And the bonding – that collective pride and despair they share so demonstrably with each other. So having a brand new football stadium on my doorstep is quite a treat.

I am an Arsenal season ticket holder who happens to be an architect and more recently a resident in Holloway so I view the new Arsenal stadium (I can't quite bring myself to call it the Emirates Stadium but more of that later) from three different perspectives.

As a fan I think the new stadium is fantastic. It's huge and the sheer increase in numbers has created a more exaggerated atmosphere. The seats are a little padded and far more comfortable than at Highbury although I am not the only one whose coat gets stuck every time I sit down. And with our seats now behind the goal, each time the ball comes anywhere near the goal everyone stands up. Very irritating. This didn't used to happen at Highbury because we had seats at the side but the new stadium does create a sense that everyone is together instead of in separate stands and this is important.

But really, £400m and you can't even get a drink at half time. They say they can pull 6,600 pints in five minutes but if you can't get a beer then something is wrong – and the US catering concession has a contract for the next 20 years...

There has clearly been some prevarication about the extent of advertising inside the stadium as the concrete edge beams remain brutal and unadorned. I really enjoy that and the lack of branding because for me the stadium's identity comes from the fans and the way Thierry Henry and his team play, but others feel there is a lack of identity.

"The stadium is ugly in its massing, resembling an over-risen soufflé by day. This is commercial sports design at its most banal"

No doubt the club could do with more advertising to help pay off their loan but the identity issue is a bit confusing. I really don't understand the logic of paying £100m to have the stadium named Emirates for 10 years – what happens after that? The name Emirates Stadium looks, feels and sounds unconvincing whereas the simple, super-sized concrete ARSENAL letters out front are far more effective.

As a very local resident I enjoy the stadium. There has been much written about broken promises from Arsenal to provide affordable housing in return for planning consent. But they have built a fantastic refuse plant where you can recycle almost anything and afterwards you are handed a damp towel to clean your hands just like you are in a five-star cloakroom (well, I was anyway). They are committed to improving Holloway tube station but until London Transport does its bit, they are unable to do so. The affordable housing they have built is ghastly and unnecessarily branded in Arsenal red. Much better if Islington council had insisted they held a design competition. But Arsenal makes a real contribution to north London (and to the nation even) just as much, if not more so, than a museum. What aspect of the public realm has the power to unite a community in victory and defeat? So I don't really understand why everyone gets so vexed about the issue of planning gain. I know premier division clubs make a fortune but surely part of the gain is that they are there.

As an architect? Well, it is a huge missed opportunity. Think of the new stadiums around the world, Munich, Beijing, Bari. This is commercial sports design at its most banal. There is the absence of an idea, no originality, no coherent language. Instead a melange of borrowed elements that don't hang together with any conviction. It is even ugly in its massing, resembling an over-risen soufflé by day. By night though it works a bit better with the roof appearing to hover, lit from below with a sulphurous glow.

Inside, the homage to corporations is rampant. The number of hospitality boxes has trebled, all linked by an exclusive corridor so you can network at half time, or at anytime if the game is dull. But the best bit is the teams' changing rooms. Arsenal has a wonderfully spacious horse shoe arrangement, uncluttered by columns so that no player is out of

Arsène's view at any time. By contrast the away team has a somewhat cramped L-shaped layout with plenty of scope for dissent and sulking – call that fair play?

A football stadium is like no other building type. Go to a game and the function marginalises the architecture. But on a non-match day [HOK](#) has created a monster.

Postscript :

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