

THE SAPIENS LAB

Craft and Cultural Laboratory · London · July 2026

A project by **Alex Skarshelg** — independent timber architecture practitioner · Founder, The Sapiens Garden
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The project is open to conversation — institutions, artists, craftspeople, educators, funders, community groups and interested individuals.
Please write.

PART I — THE SAPIENS LAB

WHAT IS THE SAPIENS LAB?

THE SAPIENS LAB is a proposed London-based cultural and craft laboratory where people enter culture through action: making, seeing, writing, listening, gathering, caring, and building.

The Lab is the first public urban form of THE SAPIENS GARDEN — a long-term cultural and architectural initiative in the United Kingdom centred on a timber lighthouse, a 77-tree Memory Garden, and the idea of a cultural place designed to endure across generations.

If THE SAPIENS GARDEN is the larger horizon, THE SAPIENS LAB is its first living body and its first voice in the city. The Lab works as a public cultural platform before the major architectural phases begin. It creates programmes, community, archive, educational formats, supported participation, and public life around the project from the very beginning.

The curatorial logic of the Lab is built around the synthesis of disciplines: from material to form, from form to word, from word to sound, from sound to public action and archive.

THE SEVEN DIRECTIONS

The Lab is structured around seven interconnected directions — together forming a single cultural and craft ecosystem:

Make	See	Write	Sound	Gather	Care	Build
Timber, objects, joinery, prototypes	Drawing, colour, calligraphy, form	Word, text, memory, name	Music, voice, performance, listening	Community, salon, stage, archive	Plants, flowers, supported participation	Lighthouse, prototype, future

Wood gives the space structure and weight. Drawing teaches the eye to see form and proportion. Calligraphy turns word into material trace. Music and voice give the space public presence. Plants connect the Lab with seasonality and the future Memory Garden. The café creates an everyday threshold: a person may come in simply to observe life in the Lab, see works in progress, hear a rehearsal — and gradually encounter the philosophy of THE SAPIENS GARDEN.

WHAT HAPPENS INSIDE

The Lab consists of four working studios, a shared stage, and a living archive wall:

Hands & Wood	Timber, tools, wooden craft, small objects, joints, models, and prototypes.
Eyes & Colour	Drawing, colour, calligraphy, architectural sketching, paper, and visual memory.
Voice & Sound	Music, voice, rehearsals, readings, storytelling, and chamber sound practice.
Breath & Flower	Plants, floristry, seasonal compositions, and supported participation for young people.
The Stage	Chamber public platform — concerts, readings, performances, talks, showcases, and evenings of memory connected to THE SAPIENS GARDEN.
Prototype / Archive Wall	Ongoing trace of THE SAPIENS GARDEN across shared areas: sketches, materials, models, names, texts, and photographs.

By day, the Lab is a place of practice: workshops, rehearsals, timber work, drawing, floristry, writing. By evening, the transformable shared hall — with an acoustic system and a Cavendish grand piano — becomes a chamber cultural venue. The space lives in two rhythms at once: inward practice and public presence.

PROGRAMMES

Weekly workshops, monthly salons, seasonal programmes, evenings of memory, prototype showings, and an annual exhibition and stage programme:

The Sapiens Object	A small wooden object connected to memory, heritage, and landscape.
Axe & Timber	Author-led demonstration of working with timber by hand.
Intro to Timber Joinery	Basic timber joints and the logic of construction.
From Sketch to Structure	Drawing → model → timber detail.
Name & Memory	Chamber cultural evenings dedicated to people whose ideas shaped humanity.
Flower & Memory	Seasonal bouquets connected to the future Memory Garden.
Voice & Presence	Voice, reading, monologue, and stage presence.
Sound, Word & Timber	Chamber evening: music, text, and wood together.
The Sapiens Salon	Intimate cultural evenings for partners, patrons, and invited guests.
The Prototype Table	Regular gatherings on the development of the 14-metre lighthouse prototype.
Breath & Flower Sessions	Supported participation for young people — flowers, simple tasks, safe environment.

WHO IT IS FOR

Londoners & local communities	A place to make something by hand, hear music, attend an evening event, meet people, and encounter living culture in an accessible urban setting.
Architects, designers & students	Rare practical contact with timber, material, prototypes, joints, and craft-led architecture.
Artists, musicians & performers	A chamber environment for working, rehearsing, showing, reading, and taking part in an interdisciplinary programme.
People in supported participation	Regular practice through plants, simple tasks, small groups, and respectful participation.
Patrons & partners	The first visible urban platform of a larger project — community, working programmes, archive, and cultural value already taking form.

THE SAPIENS LAB — MEANING

THE SAPIENS LAB creates a place where culture is not only shown, but made and lived by its participants — through hands, voice, drawing, music, timber, flowers, stage, and shared rhythm.

Wood is connected to the lighthouse. A name is connected to memory. A flower is connected to the Garden. A voice is connected to the stage. Craft is connected to future architecture. A person is connected to a shared work.

In this way, THE SAPIENS GARDEN begins to exist before the lighthouse and the Garden are built — in the city, in hands, in voices, in objects, in rhythm, and above all, in people. This is the first living form of the larger project.

PART II — THE GREENWICH WEATHER BEACON: THE FIRST PROJECT



The Greenwich Weather Beacon — 14-metre prototype (concept drawing)

WHAT IS THE GREENWICH WEATHER BEACON?

The Greenwich Weather Beacon is a proposed 14-metre handmade timber structure for London: a quiet public beacon that reads the live weather of the city and translates it into light, music, poetry, image and cultural memory. It is open to everyone. It costs nothing to approach. You need no invitation to stand beside it.

THE SAPIENS GARDEN takes its first physical form through this 14-metre timber lighthouse prototype for Greenwich Park. THE SAPIENS LAB is developed first as a planned urban cultural and craft platform in London — through this environment, the architectural language, structural logic, materials, assembly process, public interest, and forms of community participation can be tested.

The prototype becomes the first material step of the larger cultural vision — the point at which THE SAPIENS GARDEN begins to take form in reality through craft, architecture, documentation, community participation, and professional dialogue.

WHY GREENWICH?

Greenwich already holds the essential vocabulary of this project: world time, the Prime Meridian, the Royal Observatory, navigation, maritime history, weather, measurement, astronomy and London's public landscape. The Beacon belongs in a place where humanity learned to measure time. Through timber, light, weather, sound and local authorship, time receives a public cultural voice.

Greenwich Park is the primary working site hypothesis. The formal route is being prepared through The Royal Parks; the exact location would be determined through full professional review of heritage, planning, landscape, access and public safety.

THE 14-METRE TIMBER BEACON

The prototype is designed as a **temporary, reversible and demountable** public structure, entirely handmade. Its working form: an octagonal timber frame with visible construction logic, built in larch, oak and pine from responsible sources; a circular plinth and terrace at ground level; a softly illuminated lantern; engraved timber elements carrying short cultural texts; and a calm, low-impact public presence.

Its architectural character is calm, crafted and materially sincere — a beacon that belongs quietly to its place. The Beacon is also a material argument: solid timber worked by hand, load-bearing joints whose origins reach back to the eleventh century, and embodied knowledge passed from hand to hand.

WEATHER AS CULTURE

*city → atmosphere → data → lantern light → cultural interface →
music → image → text → memory → public participation*

Weather becomes a way of sensing the city. Rain, fog, wind, snow, clear sky and sunset are treated as cultural conditions: they become visible, audible, readable and culturally tangible through architecture.

A person approaches the Beacon during rain: they see a rain-based light mode, open the companion application, hear music, read a poem, see a drawing, encounter a historical fragment or a local sound recording. In fog, another state unfolds — milky light, slow sound, London fog references: Turner, Dickens — alongside contemporary images and selected local works.

THE SEVEN ATMOSPHERIC MODES

Seven atmospheric modes form the weather system. Each carries its own light, feeling, music, images and texts:

Clear sky	White light — clarity, morning calm, still air. Bach, Satie, Constable, Monet, Woolf; local clear-sky compositions and drawings.
Fog	Milky light — diffusion and quiet. Debussy, Pärt, Turner, Whistler, Dickens; fog drawings, Thames recordings, short poems.
Rain	Grey light — melancholy and reflection. Chopin, Richter, Hopper; rainy London photography, local rain poems and sound pieces.
Wind and cloud	Orange light — squall, downpour, thunderstorm. Britten, Glass; seascapes, northern skies, field recordings and cloud studies.
Storm	Deep blue light — force and resilience. Rachmaninoff, Britten, Turner's storms; works on intensity and fragility.
Sunset/sunrise	Soft orange-pink light — transition. Sibelius, Arnalds, Turner's sunsets; local evening photography and reflective texts.
Snow	Silver light — stillness and fragility. Pärt, Jóhannsson, Friedrich; local winter photographs and silent sound works.

THE LIVING ARCHIVE: HISTORICAL AND COMMUNITY LAYERS

The Beacon connects **inherited memory** and **living memory**. The historical layer draws on figures connected with philosophy, science, architecture, literature, music, art and contemplation — from Socrates and Marcus Aurelius to Newton, Faraday, Rosalind Franklin and Turing; from Shakespeare, Blake, Woolf and Eliot to William Morris, John Soane, Bach and Britten.

The contemporary layer belongs to the city's own people. Artists, poets, composers, illustrators, photographers, calligraphers, sound artists, students, schools and community groups create works connected with the weather, atmosphere and memory of their city — poems, drawings, field recordings, weather diaries, oral histories and seasonal observations. Each work appears according to the live weather.

*Historical figures give depth. Local artists give life.
Weather gives rhythm. Architecture gives body.
The application gives access. Community gives renewal.*

THE SAPIENS LAB AND THE BEACON — HOW THEY CONNECT

The Sapiens Lab is the cultural operating base behind the Beacon: a craft-and-cultural laboratory in the city where timber, drawing, sound, word and public culture meet in one welcoming space. The beacon gives its signal; the Lab gathers the people, the making and the care that keep it alive.

The Lab runs: timber craft, woodworking, architectural model-making, calligraphy, drawing, poetry, field recording, chamber music sessions, sound-and-weather workshops, school visits, and talks on time, navigation, landscape and cultural memory. It collects the city's creative work for the living archive — open calls, a local jury, clear rights, credit and care.

*Beacon in Greenwich → atmosphere → attention → participation →
community → cultural production → living archive → public memory*

PART III — THE UK NETWORK AND THE LONG-TERM HORIZON

A UK BEACON NETWORK: CITY-SPECIFIC CULTURAL SCORES

After the London prototype has been tested, the project may grow into a network of cultural weather beacons across the United Kingdom — each Beacon responding to the cultural, climatic, historical and architectural memory of its own city, with its own artists, Sapiens Lab, public programme and cultural weather score:

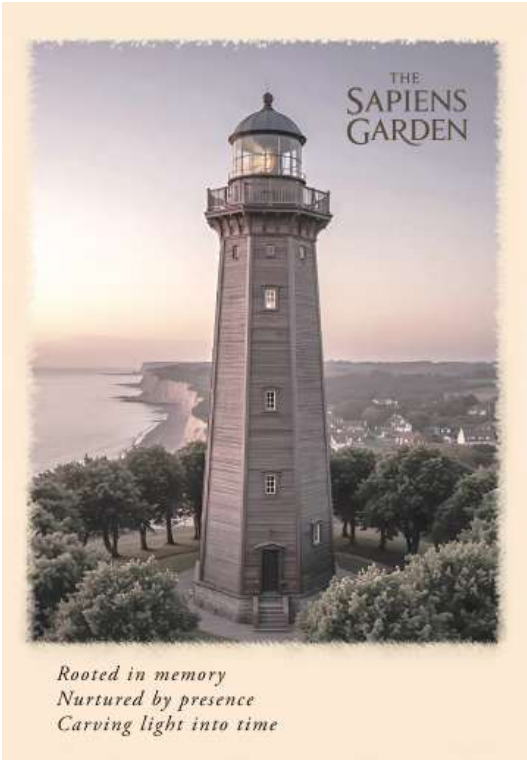
Oxford	Learning, libraries, scholarship, river mist, historic urban atmosphere and quiet thought.
Cambridge	Science, mathematics, river landscape, colleges, observation, stillness and knowledge.
London / Greenwich	Time, the Prime Meridian, the Royal Observatory, the Thames, fog, navigation and world measurement.
Edinburgh	Stone, literature, philosophy, northern skies, festival culture, hill landscape and winter atmosphere.
Manchester	Rain, industry, music, civic energy, innovation, brick, canals and sound culture.
Liverpool	Maritime memory, migration, river horizon, port culture, music and public voice.
Bristol	Harbour, engineering, craft, bridges, environmental culture and creative city identity.

THE 42-METRE SAPIENS LIGHTHOUSE: THE LONG-TERM LANDMARK

The Sapiens Lighthouse is the long-term horizon the 14-metre prototype is designed to test. A vertical timber lighthouse of approximately 42 metres; octagonal geometry with a wider base and narrower upper body; oak as primary structural timber, larch as outer cladding; seven thematic levels — Foundations, Science, Form, Presence, Words, Sound, and the Dome of Light and Horizon — rising to the lantern.

Around the Lighthouse grows the **Garden of Memory**: seventy-seven trees, each carrying the name of a philosopher, poet, scientist, composer or artist whose work shaped the path of human thought — a living landscape made for those who come after us.

The long-term landscape hypothesis is Beacon Hill, West Runton, North Norfolk coast. The 14-metre Greenwich Beacon is the responsible first step.



The Sapiens Garden — the timber lighthouse (conceptual visualisation)

WHERE THE PROJECT STANDS — JULY 2026

The formal route for the Greenwich Weather Beacon within The Royal Parks is confirmed and is being prepared in accordance with public procurement procedure.

THE AUTHOR

Alex Skarshelg is an independent timber architecture practitioner with more than fifteen years of experience in Norwegian timber-building methods and the full-cycle delivery of bespoke timber houses — more than forty buildings completed.

He trained in the Norwegian dry-laft log tradition under master log-builder Ottar Romtveit at Rauland (2013). He cuts the corners of his log walls with a hand-forged axe by master smith Øyvind Klausen. He founded a carpentry school, active since 2019, with more than twenty-five participants trained in his authored Diamond Notch joinery.

He is the founder and project lead of THE SAPIENS GARDEN, and the author of THE SAPIENS LAB and the Greenwich Weather Beacon.



Alex Skarshelg