

Photography played a crucial part in recording the design and architecture to emerge in the post-war period. RIBA Photograph Curator *Justine Sambrook* reveals the ways in which some of the most respected photographers in post-war Britain communicated the new interior aesthetic.

# Printed Pictures Pioneers of Modern architectural photography



Post-war Britain was consumed by a state of optimistic rebuilding and hopeful reaching towards a future where new technologies would make possible a more convenient, more stylish, more vibrant way of living. The Festival of Britain in 1951 showcased the best of modern design and architecture and the influence of 'Festival style' was evident almost immediately in British architecture and interior design, particularly within the home. During this period, photography, seen on the pages of the journals and magazines of the day, was the primary means of architectural communication. Modern design, with all the mod cons and furnishings that accompanied it, was trumpeted as the pathway to a better



tomorrow and photographs demonstrated what this aspirational lifestyle could look like.

One photographer who produced some of the most evocative imagery of British architecture and design during this period was John Maltby. Maltby had set up a photography business in 1935 after obtaining a commission to shoot four views of every new Odeon cinema for a fixed fee of £3 per building. It was after the war, however, that his career flourished and he became known as one of Britain's best photographers. One of his more interesting commissions was to photograph the Basil Spence designed *Britain Can Make It* exhibition held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1946. Organised by the Council of Industrial Design, it championed the best industrial and product design and its importance in everyday life.

Maltby's firm was at its most productive during the 1950s, with an increasing amount of time spent shooting for firms such as Heal's and Hille and magazines like *Ideal Home* and *Modern Woman*, reflecting the contemporary preoccupation with design in the home. Manufacturers and journals like these played a



**Previous: John Maltby, unidentified house, an open-plan living room. Above: John Maltby, house in Welwyn Garden City.**

**Right: John Donat, student flat in Manchester shot for the 'Living in Universities' issue of 'Architectural Design'.**

**Over page: John Maltby, Furnished Room Section, 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.**