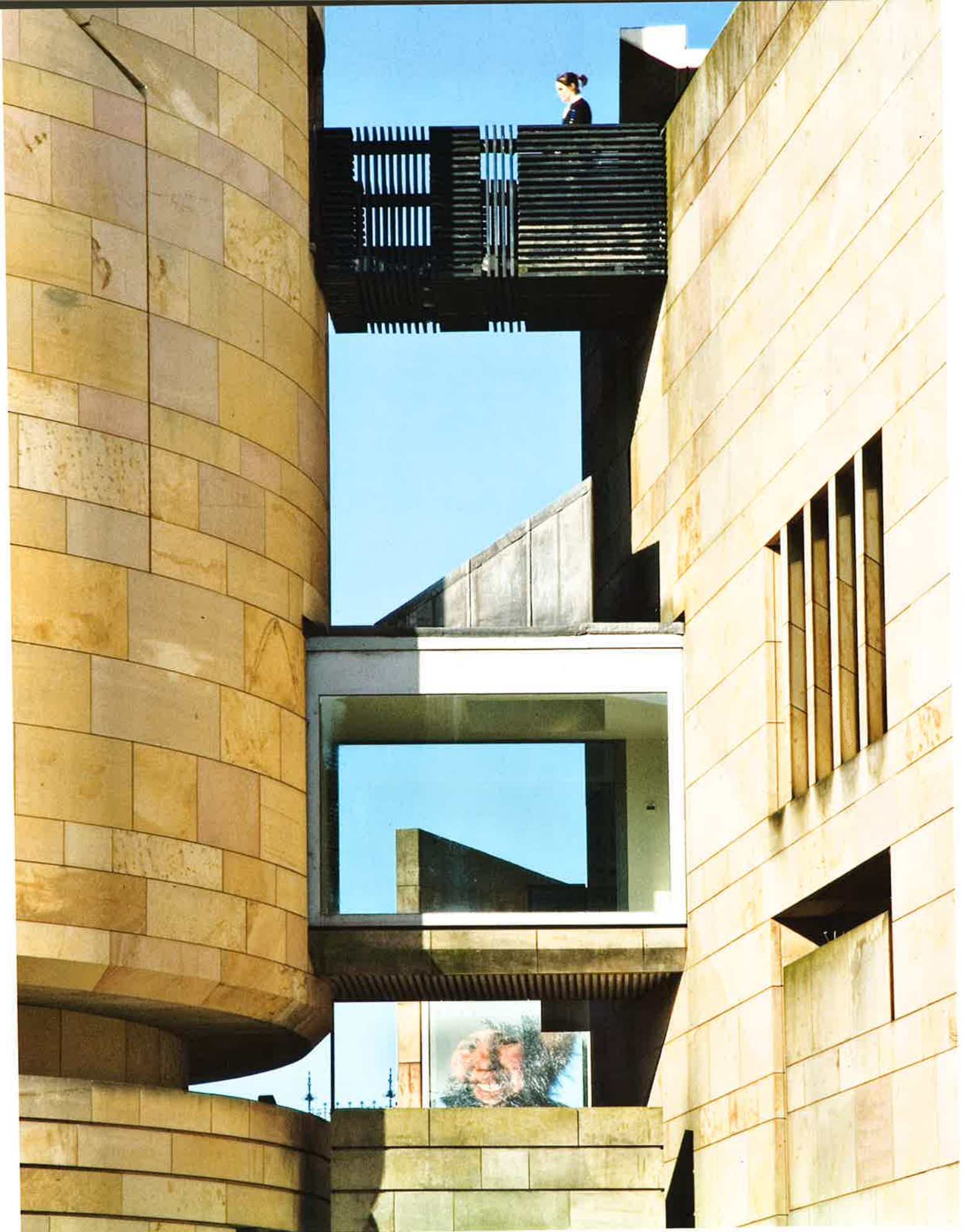


Sketch: Fran Silvestre



The section of the Museum of Scotland that was built by Benson & Forsyth in 1998 caused a great deal of controversy in the architectural world with respect to its design.  
Photo: John Baines, Ed Hurrell, UK

## Edinburgh – a contrast between medieval side streets and the Georgian New Town

While the Scottish city, home to one of the Royal Family's official residences, was the largest city in the country until the 18th century, nowadays it is the second largest after Glasgow and has a population of 490,000. The city is situated on the east coast of Scotland on the south side of the Firth of Forth, which flows into the North Sea. Edinburgh's skyline is dominated by the medieval fortress perched on top of Castle Rock. As indestructible as Scotland's national pride, Edinburgh Castle is an iconic symbol that is visible from far and wide and forms the historical heart of the city, which is considered one of the most beautiful in Europe.

Arthur's Seat, the highest point in the hilly city, offers the best views of the backdrop formed by the densely developed, high-rise Old Town and the even, horizontal lines of the Georgian New Town. Edinburgh's Classicist architecture even led to it being nicknamed "Athens of the North". These two historic districts form a unique juxtaposition and were listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995. Owing to its rich literary tradition and the influences it has had on famous authors – with characters such as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Inspector Rebus and Harry Potter – the city became the UNESCO City of Literature in 2004.

### First settlement

The oldest archaeological findings date back to the Bronze Age and indicate that there were settlements across the seven volcanic hills that make up the present-day city. Castle Rock was fortified with a hill fort in the Iron Age. The Romans invaded Scotland for

the first time in 80 AD, occupying the south of the country and establishing military bases on the coast in Lothian. A fort was also located close to Leith, the port district situated three kilometres north of the present-day city centre. This is where the Water of Leith, which meanders through the city, flows into the sea via the Firth of Forth. Following the departure of the Romans in around 400 AD, the Celtic Scoti people emigrated from Ireland and later gave Scotland its name. Edwin, King of Northumbria, built a castle here in the 7th century. This is where the name "Edwin's Burgh", meaning "Edwin's city", came from. The Scottish Gaelic name "Din Eidyn" means "fortress on a slope".

### Seat of the Scottish kings

Edinburgh grew in importance as the seat of the king and administration under Malcolm I in 943 AD. Castle Rock, towering



Edinburgh Castle is visible from far and wide. The impressive fortress, with its rough appearance, serves as the Scottish capital's landmark.

Photo: Bert1127, iStock

135 metres above sea level and only accessible from one side, was expanded to become the royal centre of power and served as a defensive fortification for the court of Malcolm III Canmore in the late 11th century. The fort's impressive architecture, which has withstood sieges and destruction over the centuries, largely owes its present appearance to buildings constructed in the 16th century and restorations in the 19th century. Edinburgh Castle – a building complex complete with royal palace, fortress, treasure house, garrison and prison – is a main tourist attraction for visitors to the city. Nowadays, the castle houses various military museums such as the Royal Scots Regimental Museum, which is dedicated to the oldest infantry regiment in the British Army. The oldest extant building standing on the top of the hill is St Margaret's Chapel. The chapel, one of the oldest examples of Norman architecture in Scotland, was commissioned by

Queen Margaret of Scotland in around 1090. During her reign, she brought the practice of the Church of Scotland into line with that of the Church of England and replaced Gaelic with English as the language of the Scottish court. The Edinburgh Military Tattoo has been held in front of the castle esplanade every year since 1950. The large tattoo includes parades of bagpipe orchestras and folk dance performances by Scottish regiments of the British Armed Forces.

### **Capital of Scotland**

Robert the Bruce successfully fought for Scottish independence from England in 1320. He not only granted Edinburgh a charter as a royal burgh but also gave it control over the port of Leith and summoned parliament in 1327. The first monarch of the House of Stewart took to the throne in 1371. Spanning down



The Royal Mile, which forms the main thoroughfare of the Old Town, is home to the Late Gothic St Giles' Cathedral and its distinctive crown steeple.

Photo: havigerlach, iStock

from Castle Rock in an easterly direction, the Royal Mile forms the main thoroughfare of the Old Town and is a pedestrian zone. Buildings sprung up on both sides of the Royal Mile in a sheltered position along the crest of the rock. A centre of the former royal burgh was St Giles' Church (now St Giles' Cathedral), which was rebuilt in Late Gothic style at the end of the 14th century after suffering a fire at the hands of Richard II in 1385, leaving only the pillars that supported the Norman predecessor's 49-metre-high central tower behind. It was only in 1495 that its distinctive crown steeple, a typical feature of Scottish churches comprising a crown formed from eight flying buttresses made of stone, was added. The French name for Saint Giles, Saint Gilles, points to the "Auld Alliance" between the two nations. With its defensive walls and gates, Edinburgh was appointed capital of Scotland instead of Perth in 1437.

### **Holyrood**

King David I founded an Augustinian abbey at the eastern end of the Royal Mile in 1128, naming it "Holyrood" (meaning "holy cross") as an act of thanksgiving. According to legend, he was saved from being gored by a deer while on a hunt by the appearance of a holy cross. It was in the shadow of the abbey that James V, father of Mary, Queen of Scots (Mary Stuart), constructed Holyrood Palace, the new royal residence. After much of the palace was set on fire and destroyed, it was rebuilt from 1671-79 according to plans drawn up by Sir William Bruce. The design also incorporated the north-west tower, the only remaining tower dating back to 1528. While Holyrood Abbey is now ruined and merely hints at its former splendour, the Palace of Holyroodhouse, which houses the apartments of Mary, Queen of Scots, is still the official residence of the British monarch in Scotland. Queen Elizabeth II holds receptions in



Left: The medieval Old Town is characterised by narrow streets and high-rise architecture stretching along the steep slope of Castle Rock.

Photo: iStock, iStock

Right: Georgian buildings with colourful facades in blues and reds dominate the streets of the New Town.

Photo: Edinburgh Inspiring Capital, Edinburgh, UK

this palace, one of the earliest examples of Palladian architecture in Scotland, once a year. The burgh of Canongate grew around Holyrood until it was formally absorbed by Edinburgh in 1856.

Now a city with around 8,000 inhabitants, Edinburgh became the centre of the Scottish Reformation in 1559. The Puritan John Knox, a disciple of Calvin, established the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, known in the Scots language as the "Kirk". This subsequently led to conflict with the Catholic Queen of France and Scotland, Mary Stuart, in 1561. When Charles I raised St Giles' Church to the dignity of a cathedral and the see of Edinburgh was founded in 1633, he provided an Anglican interlude that would lead to revolts and civil wars. The formal establishment of the modern-day Presbyterian Church of Scotland did not take place until 1688.

The increasing lack of space in the Late Middle Ages led to the construction of towering buildings, which are staggered closely

behind and next to each other and dominate the Old Town. The number of storeys in buildings climbed along with population figures: while seven to eight were customary in the 17th century, ten or eleven were by no means exceptional. The tallest, the house of magistrate Mr Thomas Robertson, was 15 storeys tall. These first high-rise buildings in Europe were admired by contemporaries as Babylonian towers. One of these typical high-tenement houses, Gladstone's Land on Lawnmarket, was turned into a National Trust for Scotland property. It reveals the cramped living conditions of those who once lived there. By 1636, Edinburgh was home to 60,000 inhabitants within the old city walls.

### Union with England

The 1603 Union of the Crowns (a personal union) was followed by the Union of the Parliaments in 1707. Although the Act of Union





The impressive Forth Rail Bridge was designed by Sir John Fowler and Sir Benjamin Baker in 1879 and serves as a major connection between the Scottish Lowlands and Highlands.

Photo: Shutterstock

led to the formation of the centralised Parliament of Great Britain in London, Scotland was still able to preserve its education system, legal system and state church despite the dissolution of its own parliament. The throne passed to the House of Welf, resulting in George I ascending the throne in London in 1714 as the first British monarch of the House of Hanover. As part of the United Kingdom, Scotland was given access to the colonial markets and began to benefit from overseas trade. The economic upturn was accompanied by an intellectual and cultural renaissance, during which Edinburgh became a centre of the Scottish Enlightenment (1780-1820). In order to address the city's overpopulation – Edinburgh had the highest population density in Europe in the mid-18th century – the city authorities decided to extend Edinburgh's boundaries. The New Town was built on hilly terrain to the north of Castle Rock and the Old Town according to plans by James Craig. However,

before any work could take place, the marsh-like Waverley Valley and Nor Loch between the two areas had to be drained. Sprawling through the former loch nowadays are the lush-green Princes Street Gardens leading to Waverley Station, the capital's Victorian main railway station. Beyond the deep valley, the straight streets of the new, rationally planned city grid were constructed in Georgian style with buildings of up to 15 metres in height. A highlight of Classicist urban architecture in Scotland is Charlotte Square, which was designed in 1791 by Robert Adam, one of the United Kingdom's most renowned architects of the late 18th century. He adorned the rows of houses lining the squares with palatial facades. The Georgian House, which is situated on the square, recreates the life of a wealthy family from that time. With buildings only running the length of one side of Princes Street, passers-by can enjoy unique views of the Old Town.



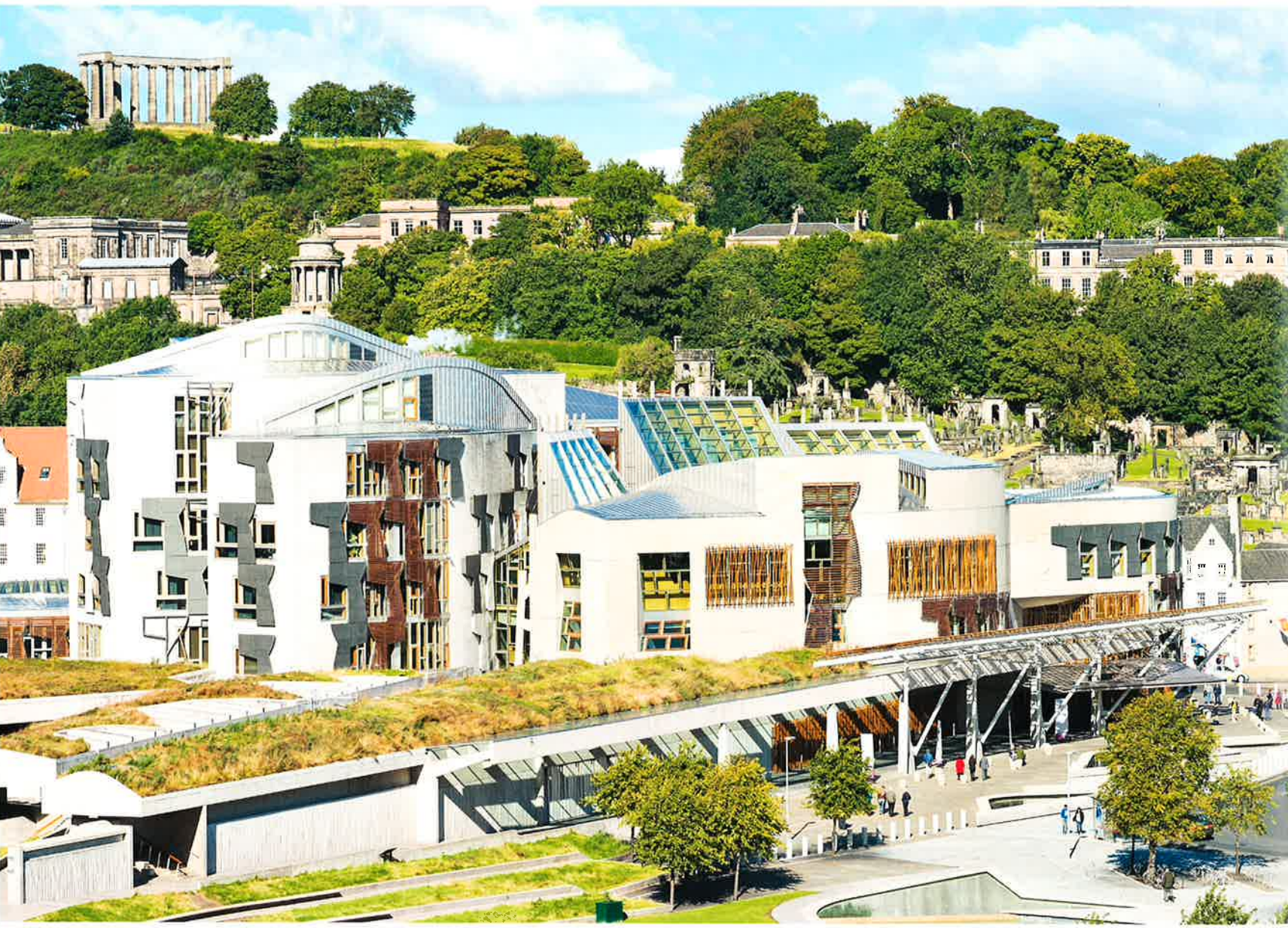


### Focus of the nation

At the eastern end of the boulevard-like Princes Street is Calton Hill, on which William Henry Playfair built the National Monument of Scotland, the country's national memorial to the Scots who died fighting in the Napoleonic Wars. The foundation stone was laid in 1822 in the presence of the King. However, the monument, which was modelled on the Parthenon, was left unfinished – an exposed fragment of an ancient ruin. It's not least because of these twelve Doric columns that the city gained the name "Athens of the North". Kilt-wearing King George IV confirmed the reconciliation between England and Scotland with his state visit to Edinburgh in 1822. During his reign, prosperous urban development activities expanded beyond the New Town. In the West End, James Gillespie Graham designed an urban space for the noble architecture of the

Georgian era in the form of a sequence of three squares. The technical masterpiece that is the Dean Bridge was built on the adjacent side of the Water of Leith: this spans 30 metres above the river valley with four flat arches. It was designed in 1829 by civil engineer Thomas Telford.

During the long reign of Queen Victoria between 1837 and 1901, Edinburgh was expanded with many museums, archives and institutions of national importance in the prevailing Historicist style. As a result, the capital remained the focal point of Scotland and its profile was raised at a national level, even without a court or parliament. All around Robert Adams' Classicist building for the University of Edinburgh, which was founded back in 1582, the southern Old Town began to develop into a renowned centre of education. This is where the Royal Scottish Museum was built in Neo-Renaissance style.



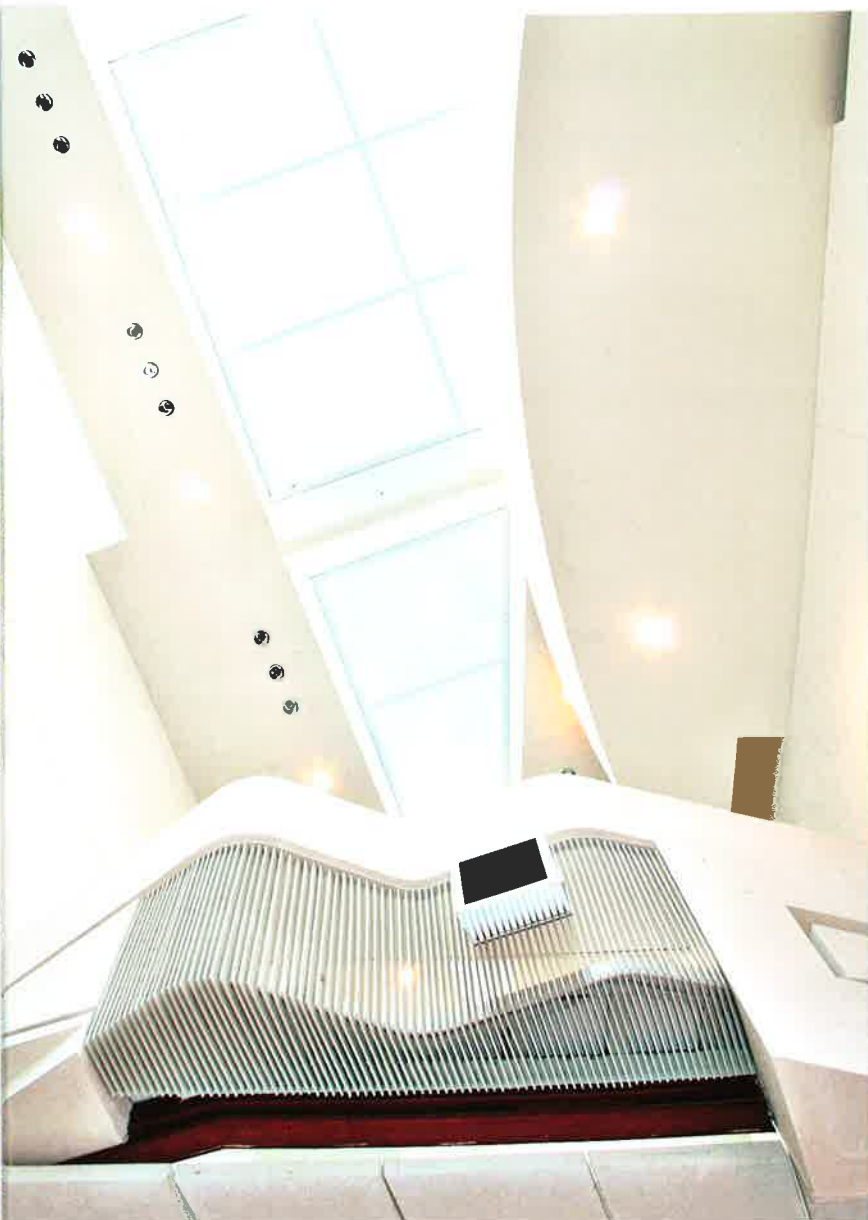
The main features of the Parliament Building by Catalan architect Enric Miralles are its colourful wooden louvres and unusual roof shape. The building was constructed close to Holyrood Palace in 2004.

Photo: andrzejki, iStock

Behind the facade, a feature that was designed by Francis Fowke in 1861, lies Scotland's most elegant cast iron construction of the 19th century. The Victorian building, which was opened in 1866, was restored by Gareth Hoskins Architects in 2011 and transformed into the National Museum of Scotland. In addition, the Museum of Scotland, which boasts a postmodern round castle tower designed by architects Benson and Forsyth in 1998, was incorporated into the new museum complex. During the Industrial Revolution, the city grew rapidly and continued to expand towards the coast. The Forth Rail Bridge opened in 1890. The enormous steel structure, which is 2.5 kilometres long, has diamond-shaped towers and was the crowning achievement of engineers Sir John Fowler and Sir Benjamin Baker, has become a Scottish icon. It was extended westwards in 1964 by means of a road bridge, one of the longest suspension bridges in Europe.

### Historical heritage

Unlike the industrial city of Glasgow, which is situated only 80 kilometres away and has been the largest city in Scotland since the 19th century, Edinburgh was less affected by the decline of industry and the shipyards. Just like the industrial areas and docks, new residential districts were developed on the outskirts of the city, which meant that the capital's historic centre remained almost completely intact. After the decision was made to redevelop the city centre and the Old Town was listed in 1919, a strict conservation policy was put in place that left little room for anything new. When the 310-hectare Georgian New Town became the largest listed area in Great Britain in 1970, the historic fabric here could also be restored. Edinburgh was initially awarded the Gold Medal for Outstanding Achievements in Heritage Conservation for these exemplary



The new building for the Museum of Scotland was designed by Benson & Forsyth in 1998 and was a matter of much debate in the architectural world. Together, it and the Victorian-style Royal Museum located directly adjacent to it form the National Museum of Scotland.

Foto: Edinburgh Inspiring Capital, Edinburgh, UK, Stouletcho, Flickr

efforts before UNESCO declared both city districts – containing just over 4,500 buildings across around four-and-a-half square kilometres – a World Heritage Site in 1995. An exceptional piece of architectural history was unearthed and made accessible in 1980: the Edinburgh Vaults, a series of underground chambers three to four storeys deep under the streets of the Old Town. In the Royal Mile, the labyrinth of the once plague-ridden subterranean city was bricked up and the Edinburgh City Chambers were built on top of it in 1753. The warren of cobbled streets and dwellings down in the underworld remained hidden, but they can be visited by taking a guided tour at The Real Mary King's Close. Thanks to the International Festival, founded in 1947 to promote cultural exchange in Europe, the Scottish metropolis became a cultural stronghold and gained worldwide appeal. Tourism became an important pillar of the economy for Edinburgh – the

second-most visited city in the United Kingdom after London. After almost 300 years, the Scottish Parliament assembled again in 1999. A modern landmark of Scotland's devolved government is the Parliament Building, which was inaugurated in 2004 and caused a great deal of controversy. The ensemble was designed by Enric Miralles and comprises ten buildings at the foot of the Royal Mile, directly opposite Holyroodhouse. The spectacular architecture contains a wealth of impressive details that allude to Scottish nature and culture. Unlike in London, the debating chamber here contains a horseshoe of seating for the MSPs. The Scottish National Party formed a majority government in the Scottish Parliament in 2011 and is campaigning for Scottish independence. Whether the majority of Scots will vote for independence, however, will be decided by the referendum due to take place on 19 September 2014.

## City interview from Edinburgh, UK



**Richard Murphy**  
Richard Murphy Architects, Edinburgh, UK  
[www.richardmurphyarchitects.com](http://www.richardmurphyarchitects.com)

"Edinburgh needs to understand that tomorrow's listed buildings need imaginative risk-taking today."



**Malcolm Fraser**  
Malcolm Fraser Architects, Edinburgh, UK  
[www.malcolmfraser.co.uk](http://www.malcolmfraser.co.uk)

"We're a small city but intense and heart-stoppingly dramatic, and all the world's other cities appear to me [...] a little pale in comparison – two-dimensional to our three."

### What are the unique features of Edinburgh as a city?

**Richard Murphy:** When I first arrived in Edinburgh, 35 years ago, I was told an architectural joke, which is actually semi-serious: the difference between Glasgow and Edinburgh is that Glasgow is a very ordinary grid-iron urban plan but has some remarkable buildings within it; in contrast, Edinburgh has a superbly imaginative urban layout, but has very few interesting buildings. That was said in jest, but I have always thought that there was more than a grain of truth in it. The most obvious unique feature of Edinburgh is its very clear division in the centre into an Old Town and a New Town of completely different scales and urban structures. That in itself is not unique; there are many examples around Europe. However, in Edinburgh, this division is made more vivid with the remarkable topography on which the city sits (seven extinct volcanoes) and the division of the green valley of Princes Street Gardens between the two towns. Consequently the centre of the city is instantly legible. It is also remarkably homogeneous with

the vast majority of the historic stonework coming from a single quarry, sadly now defunct. Alongside this legibility (which includes distant, often-framed vistas of the sea) is the highly unusual juxtaposition of wild landscape in the form of Holyrood Park and Arthur's Seat with the city centre. Only Rio de Janeiro can compare!

**Malcolm Fraser:** Edinburgh is a three-dimensional dynamo of a place, formed by time and violent geology – volcanic outcrops scoured by ice sheets – that were then built on, up, down, through and across with extraordinary vigour and to a set of enlightened and contrasting master plans whose intellectual clarity and physical contrasts still shine. It is both particularly Scottish – our planned, early 12th century Old Towns are a unique fishbone pattern of elongated central markets with narrow closes – and international, the rigidly geometric, 18th century New Town, across from the Old, being the built embodiment of the enlightenment philosophy that radiated out from the city. We're a small city but intense and heart-stoppingly dramatic, and all the world's other cities appear to me, born and working here, a little pale in comparison – two-dimensional to our three.



The Scottish Poetry Library, which was designed by Malcolm Fraser and built in 1999, is a small piece that fits into the jigsaw that is Edinburgh. However, the building is to be converted due to space problems, with one notable casualty being its striking exterior staircase, which is used for readings in good weather. Photo: Jolien Rietveld, Edinburgh, UK

### What does it mean for you to work as an architect in Edinburgh?

Richard Murphy: It is a great privilege but at the same time it must also be one of the most frustrating places in which to work. So much of the city is considered protected historic fabric (the entire city centre is a World Heritage Site); the opportunities to build are quite rare and obviously have to be very carefully considered. One can feel the weight of history when making a proposition in the full knowledge that you are taking your place in a long tradition of urban planning. Sadly, the various agencies that control development have taken an exceptionally conservative line and so to introduce new interventions into historic buildings or occasional new buildings within an historic street inevitably results in massive, dispiriting and time consuming planning processes with no certain outcome. The negativity of the city towards change and contemporary design has been and continues to be a major drag anchor to the city's future.

**Malcolm Fraser:** In one sense it's the same as anywhere: you learn from how people have built before you, but then wear that learning as lightly as possible (I like new buildings that are at once deeply familiar and thrillingly new). But in Edinburgh, with its urban intensity and contrasting master plans, there is a lot to learn. The three-dimensional nature of the place, in particular, brings wonderful opportunities for manipulating slope and foot-fall to maximise both the commercial potential and social interaction on a site. But, in a greater sense, I want to learn how to be as clear as to why I am building today as my medieval, Georgian, Victorian and 20th century modernist forebears were in their time.

### What are your three favourite places in Edinburgh and why?

**Richard Murphy:** At the foot of the Royal Mile in the Old Town is a heavily restored courtyard, White Horse Close, where all the medieval apartments are accessed by external stairs. The court-

yard itself has a very narrow entrance from the busy life of the Royal Mile. The combination of this secret courtyard together with the external stairs has always struck me as one of the most attractive and dense form of habitation and comparable to other typologies elsewhere in other European cities. External staircases also find their expression in a unique Edinburgh working class housing type called "the Colonies" found all over the city and now recognised as a highly successful dense and sociable housing type that has informed many of our own urban housing projects. Away from the grandeur of some of the New Town streets and squares is a beautifully laid out and delicately proportioned 18th century development called Anne Street (much sought after today as a place to live). What is interesting about it is that the houses and gardens are relatively modestly sized, but the balance between privacy and communality is exquisitely struck and could be a model for contemporary housing. The extension to the Museum of Scotland by Benson & Forsyth, opened in 1999, is without doubt one of the most important buildings in Scotland, and indeed could be called the only important building in Edinburgh dating from the 20th century. It is brilliantly conceived, creates an astonishing variety of spaces and vistas, and provides unique places for the collection. At the same time it is locked into the immediate vicinity of the city with carefully considered sight lines connecting landmarks outside to the internal

experience. Such is the intensity of architectural ideas within the building, fifteen years later I still see new details each time I visit.

**Malcolm Fraser:** Edinburgh is defined by the contrast between its airy, high places and its low, dark closes and warm city rooms. So my first involves a journey, from the top of Arthur's Seat (our urban mountain – we are a city with a wild mountain in its core!) down to one of our warm bars – say the Waverley on St Mary's Street or, further away, Bennets at Tollcross. My second is also defined by height and our third dimension: walk south from the High Street of an evening and find, to your surprise, that the street is really a bridge that carries Edinburgh's polite society over the heaving nightclub morass that is the Cowgate below. My third is the courts and closes behind my practice's Scottish Storytelling Centre, which we are hoping to develop into a literature quarter.

### What challenges will Edinburgh have to face in the future?

**Richard Murphy:** Since I have lived here, the city has grown considerably with virtually all previously unused sites now occupied. The density of occupation has increased, and rather late



Bennets Bar has been around since 1906 and the interior has not changed much since that time. The bar has been a popular meeting place for guests of the King's Theatre ever since opening. In addition to 150 Scotch whiskies and various global brands, the traditional offering of fish and chips is also on the menu. Photo: John Reedy, Edinburgh

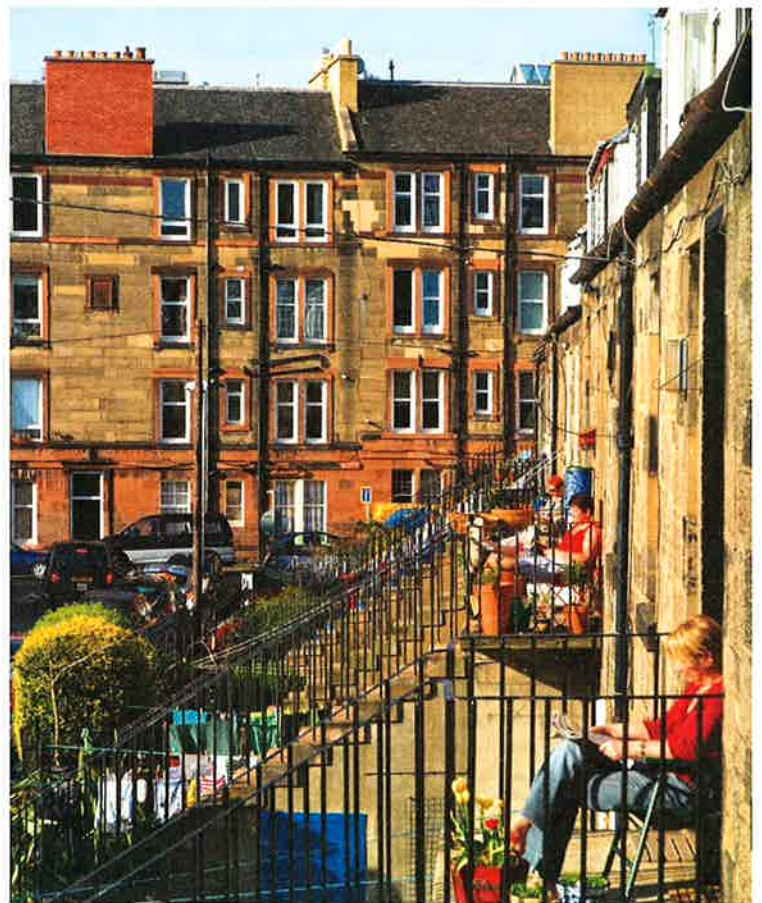


Arthur's Seat is located about 1.5 kilometres away from the city centre while at the same time being surrounded on all sides by residential developments. The volcanic mountain is 215 metres high, which is the highest point of Holyrood Park.

Photo: David Montraux, wikipedia.de

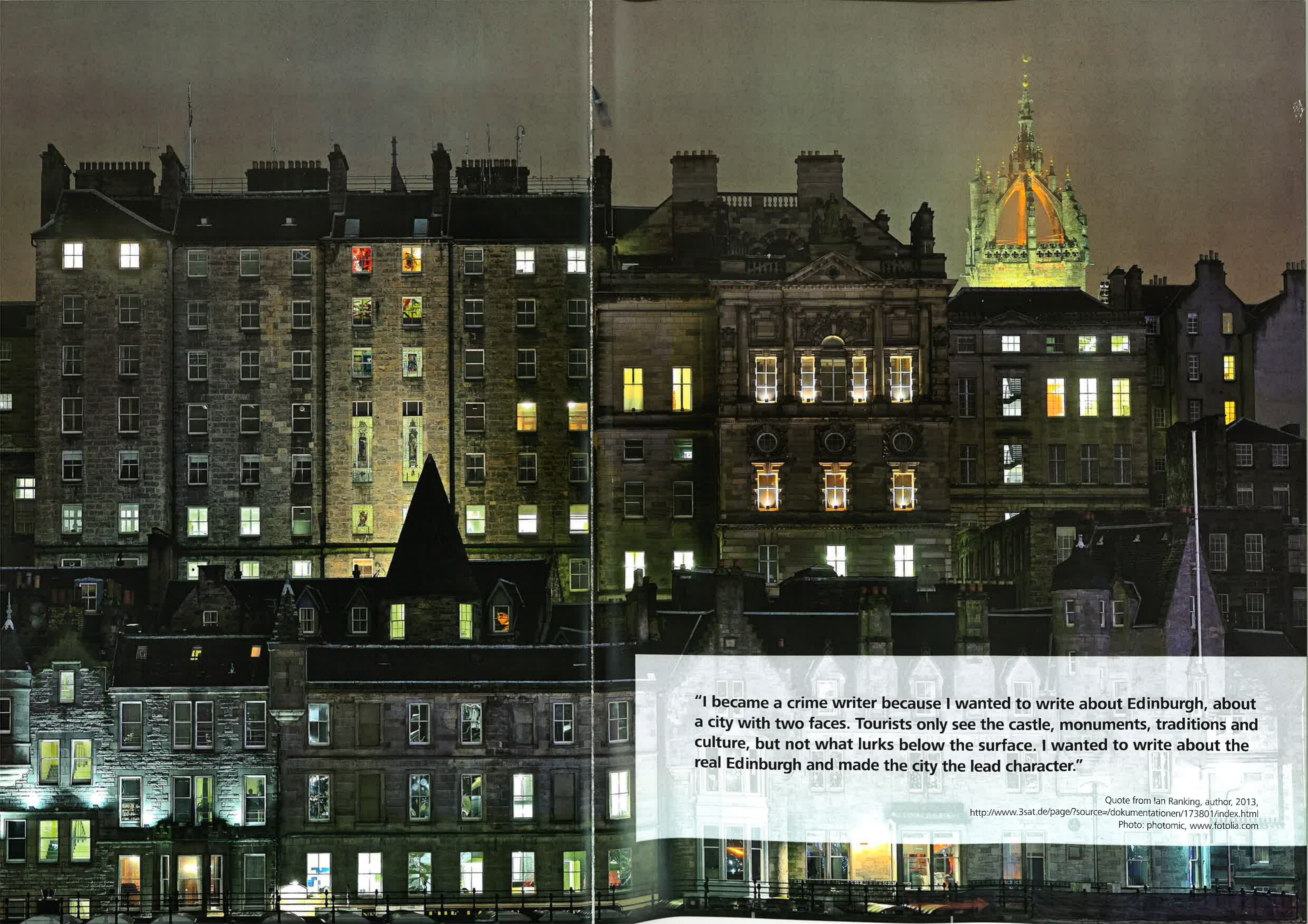
in the day, the city is now addressing the chronic transport problems that that has produced. Much more remains to be done, however. Architecturally, it could be said that Edinburgh is slowly dying, since the official agencies and well-meaning voluntary organisations which so jealously protect the city's heritage, take no architectural risks: the consequence being that the inevitable new development that is allowed to occur is universally inoffensive but at the same time sadly bland. As decades of this approach roll by we will all wake up one morning and realise that the city has been very slowly but gradually suffocated. I remember a notable secretary of the powerful Civic Trust organisation saying after a notorious hole in the ground was filled with an office building that "Edinburgh would shortly be finished!" But a city that is finished is finished in both senses of the word: "complete" but at the same time also "dead". William Morris said that "history is, after all, perpetual change": Edinburgh needs to understand that tomorrow's listed buildings need imaginative risk-taking today.

**Malcolm Fraser:** We have such a strong brand that it can – and does – take a considerable trashing. We had a moment, at the end of last century, when it felt like good architecture, with those qualities of familiarity and freshness, might lead an urban revival in Edinburgh, as it has in the past. But all that has been drowned by bureaucracy with a multitude of boxes to tick which, it is assumed, should guarantee "good design". What we get is a kind of box-tick-validated trash, with no place for joy or lightness – for architecture. I'm feeling this particularly keenly as my Scottish Poetry Library, from 1999, is proposed for being trashed at the prompting of a man from the property industry.



Colony housing: these housing developments were built in around 1900 as homes for tradesmen and working-class families.

Photo: Richard Murphy, Edinburgh, UK



**"I became a crime writer because I wanted to write about Edinburgh, about a city with two faces. Tourists only see the castle, monuments, traditions and culture, but not what lurks below the surface. I wanted to write about the real Edinburgh and made the city the lead character."**

Quote from Ian Ranking, author, 2013,  
<http://www.3sat.de/page?source=/dokumentationen/173801/index.html>  
Photo: photomic, www.fotolia.com