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Space House

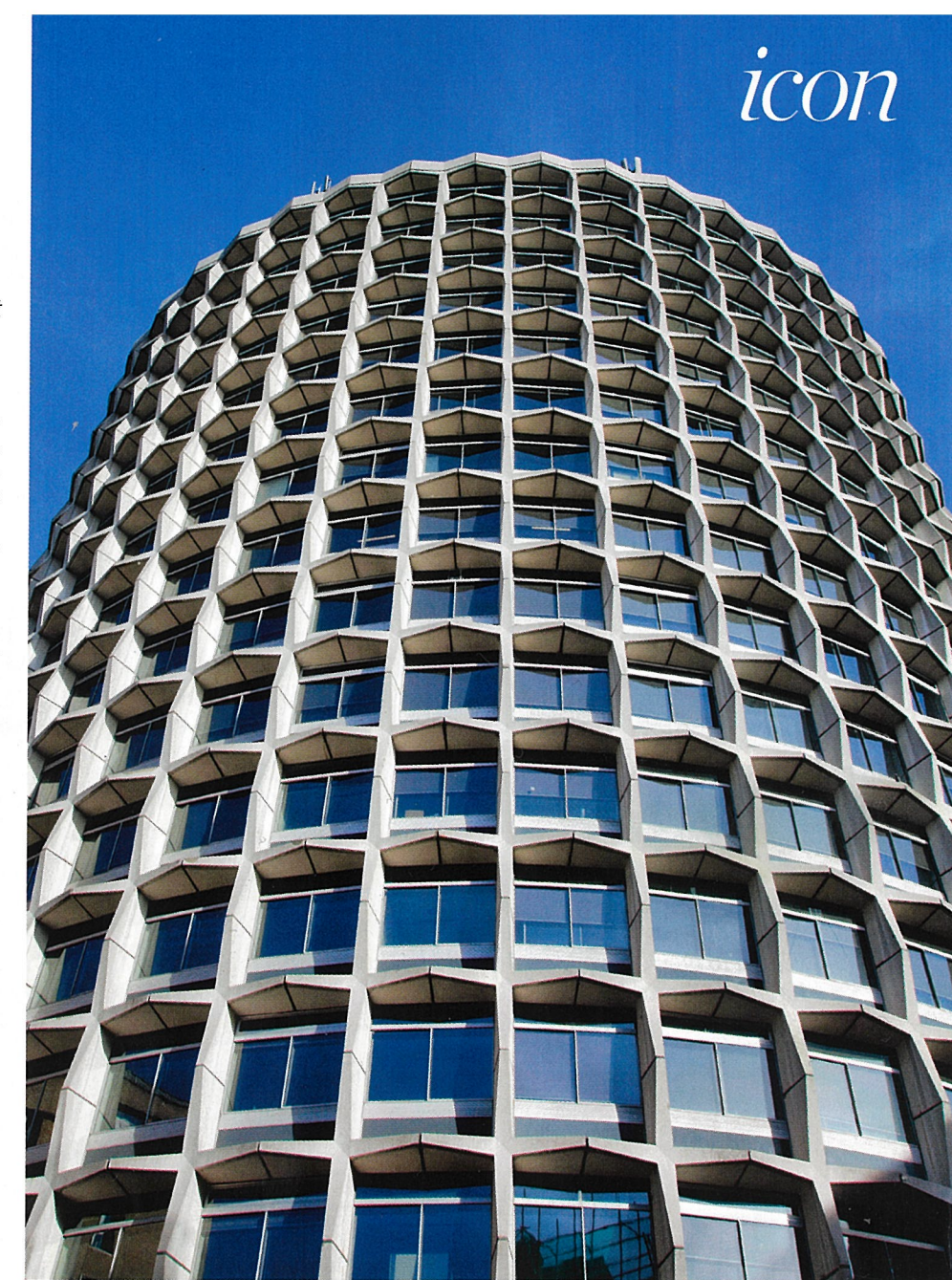
The iconic corn-cob-shaped block is about to embark on a new future as one of the UK's most eco-friendly listed buildings

British architectural firm R Seifert & Partners is best known for designing the monumental Centre Point, a 34-storey building that stands proudly at the junction where Oxford Street meets Tottenham Court Road and Charing Cross Road. Built in 1966, the tower is characterised by its elegant façade, a pre-cast concrete grid raised over large Y-shaped pilotis. In fact, it shares these details with Space House, completed by the same architect just two years later on nearby Kingsway. The latter stands at a more modest 17 storeys but, unlike Centre Point, it boasts a cylindrical shape that makes it unique.

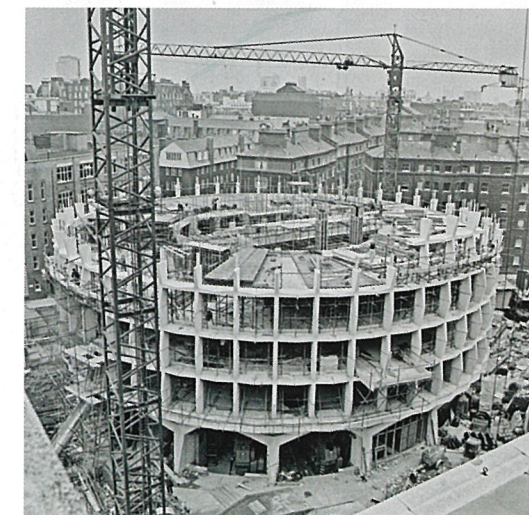
Both projects were born out of a collaboration between property developer Harry Hyams and practice founder Richard Seifert, although it was partner George Marsh who led the design of the two buildings. Influenced by modernist architects such as Gio Ponti and Oscar Niemeyer, Marsh developed a modular exterior formed of angular cruciform units. This highly innovative system facilitated fast construction without any need for scaffolding, and resulted in an attractive three-dimensionality. The effect is particularly sculptural in Space House's rotunda building, whose form could be likened to a giant corn-cob.

The Space House scheme included both the round tower and an eight-storey slab block, linked at first- and second-floor levels by a glazed bridge. To make space for the project, Hyams demolished a huge Edwardian building, Magnet House – a common practice at the time. More controversial, however, was the fact that Space House then stood empty for seven years before eventually being let to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in 1975. Hyams had insisted on a single tenant for the whole building – an approach that also led to Centre Point being unlet for 15 years. It was a devious move at a time when demand for office space outweighed supply, so developers stood to make more money by leaving properties vacant and waiting for the capital value to increase.

Today, with that saga mostly forgotten, Space House has returned to the spotlight. Seaforth Land, a developer that specialises in retrofit, has worked with architecture studio Squire & Partners on a renovation expected to achieve BREEAM 'Outstanding', a certification that would make it the most eco-friendly listed building in the country. Many of the upgraded circular office floors now offer unobstructed 360-degree views, while new additions include a restaurant (in place of what was previously a petrol filling station), a double-height eventspace, a rooftop members' club and terrace, and 500 bicycle-parking spots. spacehouse.london



The highly innovative modular exterior resulted in the building's attractive three-dimensionality



From top The distinctive façade of Space House; a preview of what one of the circular office floors will look like once renovation is completed; work underway on the original scaffold-less build in 1968