



Moving offices

A host of architectural and other firms are practising what they preach by upping sticks and creating new kinds of offices for their staff, and the public. By David Taylor

Influenced by rising rents, a quest to rebrand themselves and to become more public facing, a clutch of practices are seeking pastures new, entering into new locations and embracing a different style of workplace. In so doing they are tackling new ways of working and even incorporating gardens and gallery spaces, reaching out more to the neighbourhoods in which they sit.

One such is Squire and Partners, which is taking a bold step in terms of its location. Having been in King's Cross for many years now, in offices it designed near to its own bar at St Chad's Place, it has decided to venture south to Brixton. Partner Henry Squire said the move, to a large, old department store called Toplin House on Ferndale Road (pictured overpage), was needed to get space to cope with its rapid expansion. The practice looked 'fall over town'. 'And then we found a building that we just fell in love with,' he says. Brixton is good in terms of accessibility and is a 'really fun area'

with a community that is not quite the case in King's Cross. 'It feels much more like London down there,' he said. 'It feels like it's a 24-hour place as opposed to King's Cross which feels a bit transient.' The practice will occupy the building and 'definitely' has plans to engage with the local community and local businesses, with which it aims to establish a 'creative hub'. It will create a social rooftop space expressed as pavilions, and is also thinking about a space for local people in the new building, along with 'making spaces', and will set up a St Chad's type bar and restaurant. The building, which it hopes will be ready next year, will also aim to be more of a 'shopfront' and Squire says it is a good opportunity to offer something of a practice rebrand via its own physical fabric: 'Going there is about trying to show people that we are really creative,' he said. 'It's a different stage in our development and we wanted to reflect that.'

Make Architects is another which has found a new home, using a fair

degree of nous in the process. It has curated a new space in a former basement car park a stone's throw away from its old home. The starting point for the practice was staying in the West End, with its accessibility to Tubes, airports, engineers and clients, says Ken Shuttleworth, as well as being easily commutable for its staff. But values had risen: 'So just to stay in the area we had to be really creative.'

The practice's new studio space in the basement of Middlesex House provides 15,100 square feet of offices and a garden under a 15-year lease from Derwent London. It includes plans for a new gallery space in the premises, presenting more of an outward, public-facing element to the firm and created to help local artists. Make says its design reflects the previous use of the space as a car park and is in keeping with the industrial feel of the rest of the building. It has turned the car park's old ramp into steps and incorporated ETFE, lightwells and a glass brick

floor to draw light down, while exposed pipework and services add to the effect. All the staff will be on one floor, open plan. 'We've left it fairly raw, fairly industrial. It has this workshop feel, which is what we've always wanted. It's just Make all over.' Make partner and lead project architect Charley Lacey said a key part of the design is a polished concrete slab which is both structural and also forms a floor finish, as well as providing the office with heating and cooling. 'It's great because you get these nice clear soffits across the space. People keep saying it's a poisoned chalice but for me it's just great to get a chance to do it.' And, says Ken Shuttleworth, the industrial feel of the place epitomises the practice's design ethos, while an extensive tree-filled 70 sqm garden will be where the practice can hold alfresco meetings and lunches. 'It's something we've never had, so to have a bit of external space bang in the middle of London will be fantastic.'

Or there is Woods Bagot, which moved from its Oxford House home on Oxford Street to a new site tucked away in Riding House Street.

The move here was about leaving accommodation that was giving out the wrong message to clients as it was

hemmed in by construction sites and Crossrail, and the noise and stressful hubbub of one of the world's busiest shopping street after a hard day at the 'high energy business'. The practice heads Jonathan Clarke and Jonathan French explain that this was not about saving money – the new three-floor office is more expensive. Rather, it is more about giving the impression of a buzzy, global practice with a real, local London presence, importantly in the West End around other consultants. But in a calmer area that retains links to the buzz staff may be keen on at lunchtime or after work.

It has dispensed with the four formal meeting rooms it had in the old place in favour of two, as they noticed that too many internal meetings and design review sessions were taking place there rather than on the 'shop floor'. Now, for non-private meetings they favour more mixing zones – an oversized bench-cum-desk at the building's new entrance, crafted for impromptu meetings to keep the receptionist as part of the action, a lower ground floor kitchen area, a pin-up area where schemes are shown and discussed. 'We found that clients like to see the buzz of the studio,' says Clarke. 'They liked to see people working and they liked to be involved.' French feels this

is a differentiator, and that clients can 'sample' the practice when they visit. And every Friday at 5pm the firm opens up to stage the London Salon – a series of talks and events lubricated by drinks from the in-practice bar. A new entrance for the building aims at more street presence, while there are shower rooms for its many cyclist commuters, and secure storage for around 25 bikes, as well as spaces that allow glimpses of models and 3D rendering kit for visitors and for those from the street.

"We found that clients like to see the buzz of the studio'. They liked to see people working and to be involved'

Aided by Pilcher Hershman, Woods Bagot considered the usual outposts in Clerkenwell, as well as toying with the idea of Shoreditch, Southwark, King's Cross and even areas west like Holland Park. All before stumbling on the 'lucky accident' that was their new, three-floor home. 'I think there is a definite move to self-promotion for other architectural practices,' says Clarke. 'We're committed to getting people in through the studio, not just other professions, but people that are part of the community. It's important for us to make this relevant London practice.'

Rogers Stirk Harbour has opted to make a more fundamental move in location terms, deciding to fly its nest next to Ruthie Rogers' Michelin-starred River Café in Hammersmith to take up a new space in a building it also designed itself – the Cheesegrater. The practice has been in Hammersmith for the last 30 years but will move into level 14 of the 47-storey Leadenhall Building, taking a 15-year lease (with 10-year break) on the 18,000 sq ft office space on the largest remaining floor of the scheme.

McAslan + Partners has gone down a different route, transforming an



Shopping for architecture - McAslan's new studio on Tottenham High Road



Woods Bagot's new offices are aimed to convey its status as a buzzy, global office, with local roots



Making a place - Make Architects' new offices are a conversion of a former car park

empty Tottenham shop into a 'design hub' in a partnership with Haringey Council, offering work placements and training to local people. The N17 Design Studio opened last December and is collaborating with the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London on a 12-month pilot project to give local students the chance to learn key skills. Haringey Council has taken a five-year lease on the building and it has been refurbished to create a community facility on the High Road, showcasing regeneration plans and engaging with local people on

the future of Tottenham. Haringey Council leader Claire Kober said the practice's enthusiasm for the area is testament to its potential to be one of London's centres for creativity, training and opportunity. McAslan's Aidan Potter said the space 'in the front line' on Tottenham High Road opposite the police station has room for eight full architects and has a significant and important educational outreach with a programme with local schools and to allow for more to engage with the creative industries. 'It is a small but significant attempt to

engage experientially and understand if not necessarily provide solutions to many of the issues that completely obsess and concern local people around the profound changes that will be happening there.'

Or there is Cathedral, the developer that is moving from its church near The Shard to 7a Howick Place – the former Phillips the Auctioneers European HQ – in Victoria. The firm and Development Securities are moving their combined 80 staff to the 33,000 sq ft premises, which is being designed by Coffey Architects and Ab Rogers Design, will have its own front door and will incorporate a new public space within the ground floor with a gallery and café.

Matthew Weiner, chief executive of Development Securities, said: 'We have been looking for the right building in which to make our home ever since we acquired Cathedral last year. This one is quite unique. We've challenged our architects and designers to deliver us something very special that will inspire our two teams.' Phil Coffey of Coffey Architects added that the building has 'a rich heritage but is a great blank canvas and offers us tremendous scope to create a modern, flexible office environment that is inspiring to work in'

Wordsearch has also found new pastures, having outgrown its Clerkenwell home after, according to director William Murray, having balked at the prospect of signing a renewal for what would have been a record rent for the area. Instead, the property marketing firm has ventured south of the river to offices on Tooley Street, hugger mugger with Roger Zogolovitch's Solidspace and dRMM, with a space plan by Carmody Groarke. So is Clerkenwell just becoming out of reach? Is its traditional place as the home for architects, long after the printers, brewers and watchmakers, wearing micro-thin? It appears it might be. London is blurring. ■