

The Business of Design / designcurial.com / October 2018 / £7

44 WAYS TO ARTFUL LIGHTING

*Light Installation 44, from
Bocci, is in the foyer at the
Barbican. See page 137*



Right Henry Squire, Dreams of rock stardom lives on as lead singer with rock band Corky Nips

Below, clockwise from top left The Knightsbridge luxury apartment development; St James HSBC private bank; sketch of the Department Store (due to complete 2017), the planned new offices for Squire & Partners plus housing and bar/restaurant in the Edwardian building

PROFILE

Henry Squire

Going in to the family firm wasn't for the young Henry Squire: rock musician or actor was what appealed. But here he is, a partner at Squire & Partners, and helping drive changes at the practice to enhance his father Michael's founding principles

WORDS BY
EMILY MARTIN

A FAMILY BUSINESS is something many people speak fondly of. It can offer assurances of getting a job done well, thanks to that nostalgic, romantic idea of passing on the business, or trade, to future generations, who in turn will carry on a well-established legacy.

'I definitely didn't want to be an architect. My granddad was an architect and my dad is an architect,' says Henry Squire who, when younger, resisted following his family's career route. 'Every man and woman probably wants to follow their own path rather than something being set out before them,' he says.

Instead Squire wanted to study English or history at university. Either that or be a rock star, or an actor. 'I probably wasn't very good at either so I was going to go and do history at university,' he says, although perhaps not as bad as he suggests, being lead singer of rock band the Corky Nips. Yet for reasons that he keeps to himself, Squire chose to study architecture at university and found enjoyment in its 'more intellectual side', which is typically linked to English or history in subject matter. But despite completing his degree Squire still maintained his intention of not becoming an architect.

Yet now he is one of Squire & Partners' leading partners, a practice set up by his father Michael. A co-leader of the company, alongside Tim Gledstone, Murray Levinson and Michael Squire – a 'four-headed Cerberus' as he puts it – Henry Squire's views have changed dramatically. 'I absolutely love it. And I really glad I am [an architect],' he says. He decided to continue his architecture education after being

offered a place at the RCA. Squire says this was the turning point for him: turning down the opportunity to study at the RCA was something even he wasn't prepared to do.

Squire joined his father's practice after gaining his Part 2 qualification, briefly leaving to undertake a property development before returning to the practice. He and Gledstone became partners at the practice eight years ago, joining Levinson who had been made partner two years previously. Along with Michael Squire they would dramatically transform the business, including its size.

Although opting to become an architect, Squire says it has been a challenge to his relationship with his father when the younger Squire was pushing for change in the business. 'I think the recent success of the practice has been, a lot, down to that dynamic of the three of us younger partners pushing Dad hard in directions [stylistically and in management] that weren't always comfortable to him', he says.

'Useful madness and ideas' – as Henry calls it – was tempered by Michael Squire's knowledge and experience. Although initially unsure, he was receptive and embraced many of the new ideas proposed by these radical young architects. 'He's amazing like that, it can't be easy,' says Squire. 'We love having him here and he's an enormous benefit to us and the practice.'

Squire & Partners, which Squire describes as a 'contemporary practice', has seen an overhaul of the business, including its architectural style. 'But in terms of the spiritual core of the practice, it hasn't changed at all,' says Squire. Maintaining a socially focused practice is fundamental to the practice's founding roots; it treats all its 250 staff more as a large family rather than simply employees. In its current location in King's Cross, ahead of a scheduled move to Brixton, the office includes a discounted bar for staff to relax and socialise in, which is also open to the public. The same will feature in the new Brixton office.

'We also take everyone away on an office trip every year – the whole office goes – to a foreign city to learn about architecture, but also to have fun together' and, adds Squire, to reinforce a workforce appreciation.

But Squire says its change is through evolution, not revolution. In a culture established by Michael Squire, with a shared platform rather than 'one egotistical architect at the top', staff are invited to get involved, whether through a company netball team or by design, says Henry. 'The spirit of what the practice is about – in terms of embracing people, design philosophy, and that crafted architecture you need to place – is something that Dad has believed in since we were all born. We've...just helped developed a contemporary version of it.' **FX**

