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*Squire & Partners' sophisticated
new offices for British Land
are cut from the same cloth as
their Mayfair neighbours*

Words by Helen Parton
Pictures by Gareth Gardner



↑ Sliding walls draw back to open up the reception area

→ Blood red padded leather echoes the local members' clubs

Architect: **Squire & Partners**
Client: **British Land**
Location: **London**
Duration: **Feb 2015-June 2016**
Floorspace: **4,598sq m**
Cost: **Undisclosed**

Architect Squire & Partners has created a thoughtful, high-end design for this bespoke office project in Mayfair with a selection of materials and patterns that repay closer and repeated inspection.

Part of a family of new buildings including the nearby headquarters of the Kennel Club, the voyage of material discovery at 7 Clarges Street begins with the facade. This uses Portland stone as its main building material, in keeping with the Mayfair streetscape, with hand-carved fluted stone columns and bronze-framed windows and balconies. An illuminated, projecting canopy references architectural gems such as Claridge's and the Burlington Arcade.

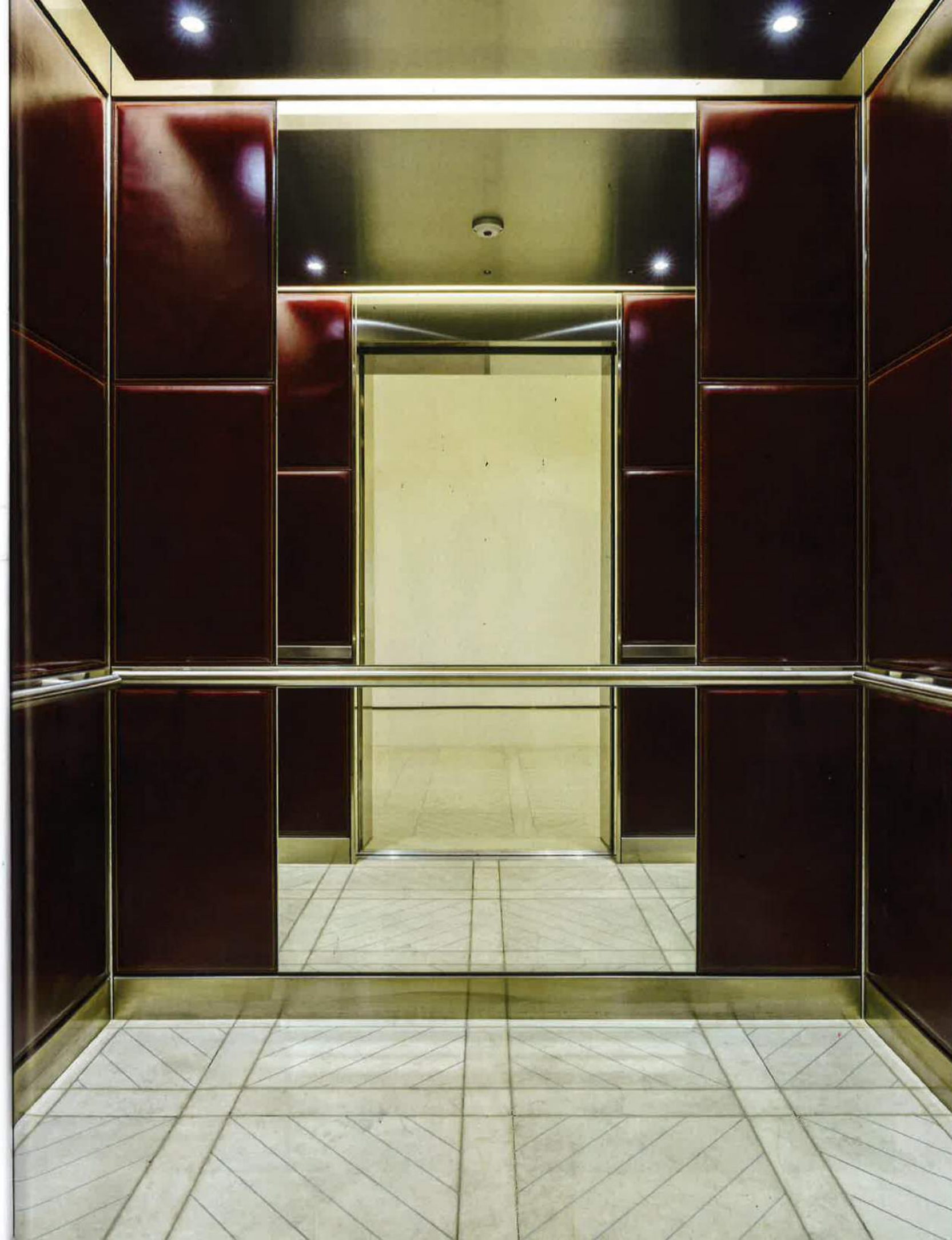
Stepping inside, visitors are greeted by an interior that, as architect Tim Gledstone says, "references Mayfair clubs, fashion and tailoring, British eccentricity, Vivienne Westwood and Alexander McQueen – it's a real melting pot of a destination". If all that sounds a bit in-your-face then the result is anything but. Instead, it has an assured, expensive-feeling but not ostentatious, aesthetic appeal.

At the centre of proceedings is a mass of bronze, commissioned from art studio Based Upon as a reception desk. Dark and

textured, a closer look shows that it has inlaid patterns that result from collecting leaves from nearby Green Park and using a process not unlike a dentist taking a mould of your teeth to reproduce the unique patterns of the foliage.

To your left as you enter is more bronze, in mesh form this time and encased in glazing which is illuminated. This acts as a fixed panel that allows a sliding wall to sit behind it when in the opened position. Cast your gaze to the floor and there is a pale Portuguese limestone floor with a pattern intended to represent the signature check of fashion house Daks. On the wall, to the right of this entrance area, hangs an artwork by Neil Canning, commissioned by British Land and again inspired by Green Park. The client has also installed a handful of smaller paintings by Gwen Hardie within the project.

The smallest of the royal parks provides yet further creative cues for the imaginative collaborations on the opposite side of the reception. Here a rug features a graphic interpretation of the park's walkways; a glass coffee table on top creates an interesting distortion of these desire lines. Up above, a lighting installation by Haberdashery features hundreds of suspended glass shards, etched with a leaf motif. Arranged in a herringbone pattern, these give another nod to





"It's a changeable space and somewhere you can use for entertaining. It combines generosity with intimacy"

↑ High-end materials such as bronze and leather set the mood

↓ Full-height glazing opens directly on to the sixth-floor terrace

to the tailoring traditions of nearby Savile Row. This area features plush soft seating in shades of green, brown and red, with oak doors to a kitchen servicing workers and corporate events.

To this end, this section of the reception can be closed off by the leather-clad sliding walls that recede behind the aforementioned bronze panel. Each side is clad in a different shade of bespoke leather – the blood red tone facing the reception evokes the colourways of the Doc Marten boot, while the side that presents itself to the seating area is British racing green.

"This is somewhere the occupiers can do business. People want this more and more, it creates value. The building's done in quite an anti-corporate way but this sort of design is very contextual. Projects of this kind have been well received by the market," says Michael Wiseman, head of office leasing at British Land. "This [the reception] has been really important, it could easily have been a third of the size but we wanted it to serve as a function for the rest of the building." ☺



LACEY

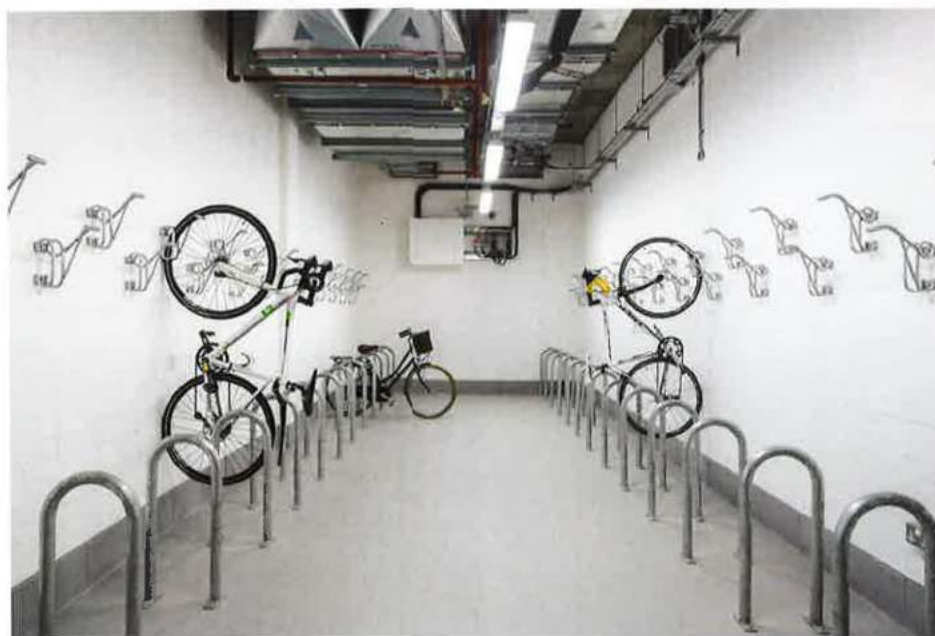
DAVISON HIGHLEY





← Spacious toilet areas are detailed with veneered wood

"It's about becoming less vanilla – we wanted the building to have personality"



↑ Brightly lit cycle facilities offer storage and changing options

Gledstone echoes his view: "It's a relaxed but generous space. It's a curated space, a changeable space and somewhere you can use for entertaining. It combines generosity with intimacy."

Moving up from the reception, a lift lined with hand-stitched leather panels adds to that feeling of a private members' establishment. "It's intended to be a club of like-minded businesses or high-end co-working," Gledstone says. The doors open on the sixth floor, at the top of the building, to reveal a triple-aspect space devoid of columns with full-height glazing – if not a blank canvas, then maybe a bronze-framed one upon which would-be tenants can create their dream workspace.

He adds: "It's about becoming less vanilla – we wanted the building to have personality. We were trying to design in a sectorless way, the function [of the businesses] is almost secondary."

Of course, no site visit to an office interior would be complete without an inspection of the toilets. Those at 7 Clarges Street are well worth pausing in, being generously proportioned with rich-coloured veneered timber.

Finally, stepping out on to the roof terrace, complete with sedum roof – all fresco areas are now de rigueur for cool places to work, we've noticed – we see what Gledstone quips are the "Mary Poppins views and where you can also see how the royal parks related to each other". Above the doors on the outside area are pin-striped details – again a reference to the art of tailoring.

Coming back to earth, at the other extreme of the building there is also plenty to talk about. The basement is home to the cycle facilities. Well signposted in white and green graphics, these are brightly lit and easily accessible from the goods entrance. No scrapping for places to park your bike either, with more than enough places for your Brompton, Cannondale, Santa Cruz or whichever brand is flavour of the month with Mamilis (middle aged men in Lycra, to the uninitiated). There's even a spot to whip out your Allen keys for a bit of essential maintenance.

Far from the usual afterthought with a few token showers is an impressive suite of changing facilities with lockers aplenty and fresh towels on tap. And, as Wiseman points out: "Decision-makers often have bikes and often this is where they want to start a tour of building." ■

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In the next issue

We take a ride to Hong Kong to look at the new offices of taxi firm Uber

rooms reshaped



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