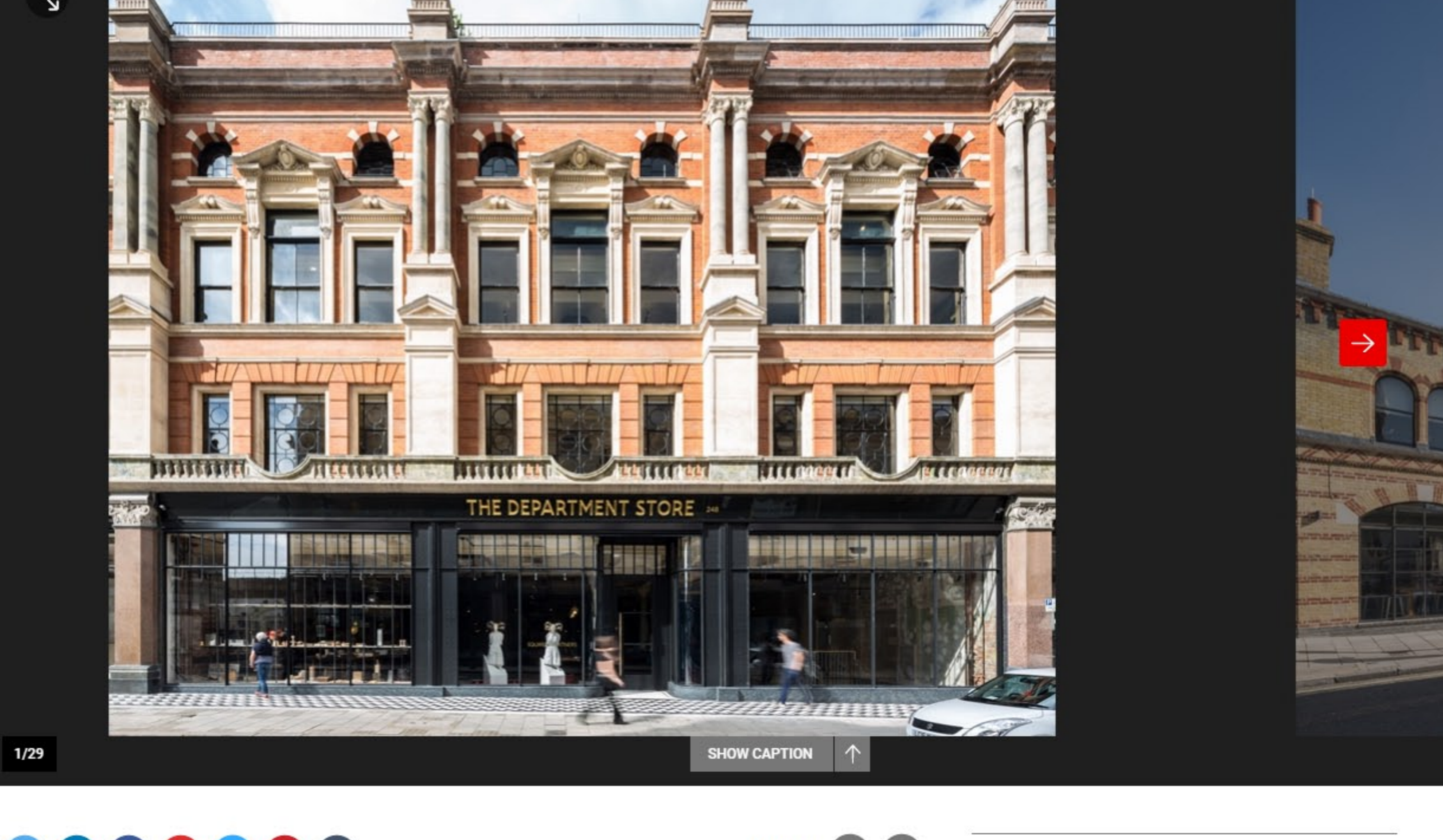


BUILDINGS

FIRST LOOK

Squire and Partners' new studio is a retrofit of a department store in Brixton

28 SEPTEMBER, 2017 • BY ROB WILSON



This clever retrofit showcases the work of the London-based practice in a highly animated, richly detailed new workplace

Squire and Partners – which ranked in ninth place in this year's AJ100 – purchased a dilapidated Edwardian department store in Brixton and has imaginatively reworked it as both their offices and a space to experiment, collaborate and showcase the work of some of their suppliers and the craftspeople they work with – and as a venue for events.

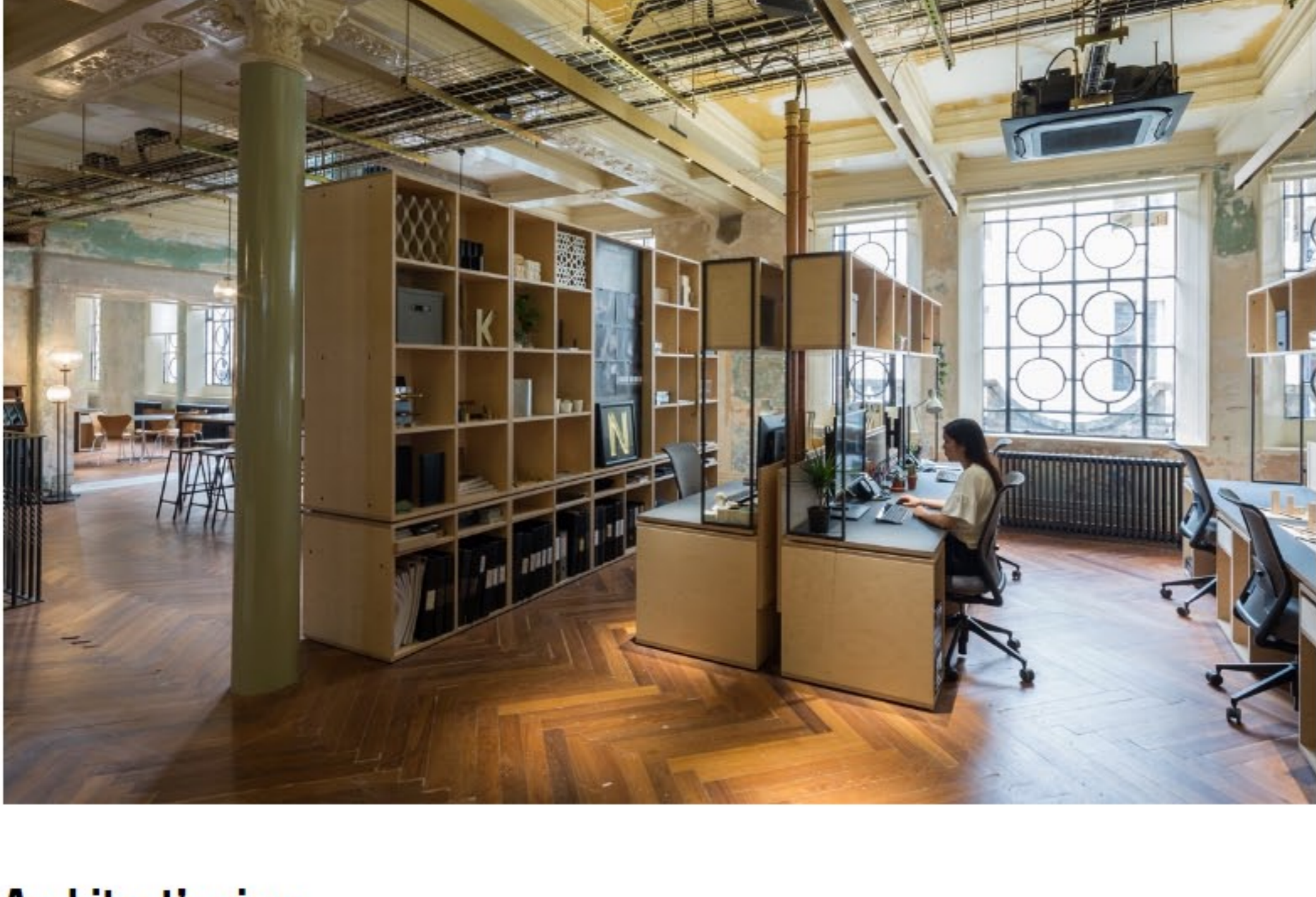
Stripping back the building – which was built as an extension to the Bon Marché store, the first purpose-built department store in the country – revealed its decayed grandeur and the craft and detail of the original workmanship. Squires has revealed and highlighted many of these elements as well as exposing more recent evidence of occupation, like graffiti from when the building was squatted, while at the same time repurposing the building as their workplace by adding a series of contemporary interventions.

Original interior elements that have been retained, or even rediscovered, are 111-year-old mahogany and teak parquet flooring, a grand tiled staircase and a series of cast-iron radiators. A remarkable patina of colours and textures which document the different stages of the building's history have, in places, been preserved.

On the exterior, the layers of paint on the shopfronts have been removed to reveal original brickwork, stone, marble and terracotta, while some of the workings of the practice – models are on display in the old shop windows – animate the street frontage.

The most notable addition is at rooftop level, where a new floor has been added with a staff bar, café and restaurant – created by a series of oak-framed aedicule-like pavilions with copper shingle roofs, their massive columns formed of whole tree trunks selected from a French forest. Meanwhile at the prominent prow of the building facing Brixton Road, the dilapidated existing cupola has been replaced by a new glazed dome.

At ground level, the reception desk is formed like a traditional display case, with cabinets for displaying the work of the practice or temporary exhibitions. This faces a triple-height void, one of a series that cuts through the building creating a variety of volumes and caught views between levels. Several social and event spaces are provided on the lower ground and fourth floors, while the main workspaces occupy the first to third floors, supported by a series of meeting and breakout areas as well as a central landscaped courtyard which provides breathing space. Multiple areas for presentation can be found throughout the office with display cases, shelving, libraries for materials and books, models and explorative studies, which showcase the work of the practice, its collaborators and the history of the building in a highly animated but rich, new workplace – the antithesis of a sterile minimal workplace.



Architect's view

The Department Store has taken us on a journey of exploration and discovery, involving delicate restoration and sensitive interpretation combined with a few bold interventions.

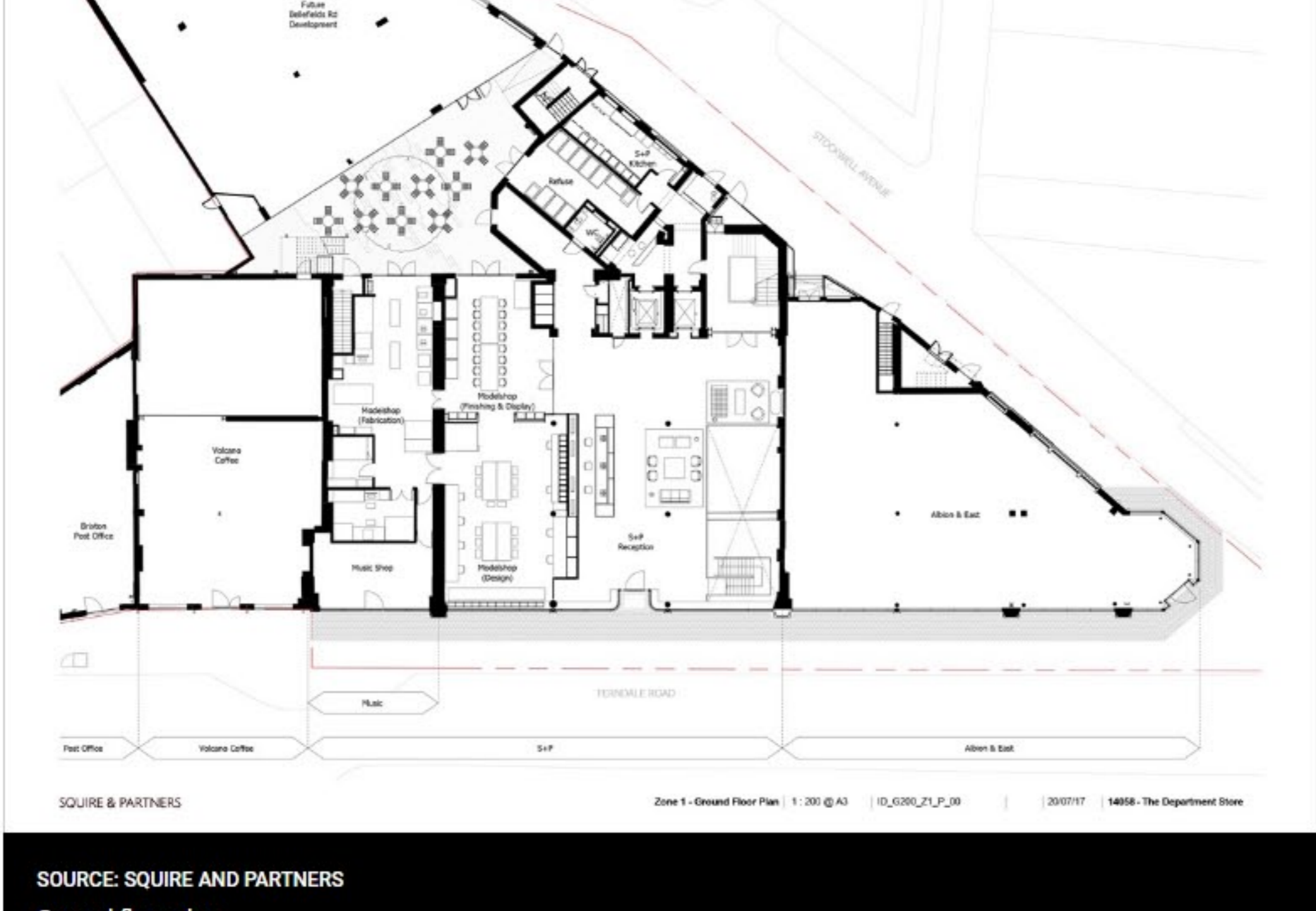
The Edwardian furnishings annexe of Bon Marché, originally built in 1906 with an extraordinary commitment to craft and detail when Brixton was a flourishing destination for retail and culture, was purchased in a state of disrepair. Its former grandeur was buried under layers of partitions, carpets, linoleum and false ceilings, left behind by decades of piecemeal conversions.

The building had housed a variety of uses from high-end retail to government offices and the Refugee Council, as well as a brief stint as a bomb shelter until squatters moved in and graffitied another layer onto its colourful history. Our aim was to celebrate this history, revealing the decayed decadence of its past as well more recent uses. We have been able to preserve original mouldings, teak and mahogany floors and decorative metalwork.

Adding our own contemporary layer to the building has been a triumph of collaboration, working with over 50 artists, craftspeople and innovators to create a bespoke approach for a unique building. The project has enabled us to build on existing relationships from past projects and to forge new ones.

In addition to the physical restoration of a Brixton landmark, we strived to restore its original purpose – a department store that showcases creativity, craft and the process of making, and acts as a showcase to promote collaboration and exploration.

Maria Cheung, director, Squire and Partners



SOURCE: SQUIRE AND PARTNERS Ground floor plan

Project data

- Site purchased February 2015
Completion Summer 2017
Gross internal floor area 6,147m²
Construction cost Undisclosed
Client Squire and Partners
Architect and interior designer Squire and Partners
Planning consultant Jon Dingle Ltd
Structural engineer Davies Maguire
M&E consultant DSA Engineering
Main contractor Stoneforce

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