

IN STORE

Squire and Partners is making a fresh start with new offices in a former department store in Brixton, covering all bases for a bright, flexible future. By *Michael Squire*



As a practice, we see office relocations as an opportunity for change and to express the evolving philosophy of the firm. Our move to King's Cross in 2001 was led by a desire to improve internal communication and demonstrate to clients that we were a serious corporate contender in the architectural field. By 2014, our growth to 200+ staff meant we were spilling out into satellite offices nearby, rented at figures well in excess of our expectations, which forced us to search for new accommodation.

When we viewed a dilapidated former Edwardian department store just off Brixton high street, we immediately fell in love with both the

building and the area for its character and strong sense of community. We recognised the location's connectivity, being less than 10 minutes from central London on the Victoria Line, and were encouraged to find that our costs would be half of what we were paying in King's Cross.

The building design allowed the narrative and history of the existing building to guide the process through a period of exploration and discovery. Stripping the building back to its raw state revealed a decayed grandeur and an extraordinary commitment to craft and detail. The practice sought to reveal and highlight these elements – in their found state – as

well as exposing remnants left by more recent inhabitants, while adding a series of sensitive contemporary interventions in order to repurpose the building as an inspiring and efficient modern workspace.

Internally we adopted a deliberately anti-corporate approach, moving away from industry standards to prioritise personal expression, exploration and social interaction.

No two floors are the same, and all have opening windows and outside terraces. Project team areas provide communal making spaces as well as individual desks, while informal shared spaces are furnished with large rugs, sofas and lounge chairs.

Large open-plan areas facilitate weekly design reviews, and connections are made between the three workplace floors through voids and openings. Significant investment has also been made in our Modelshop, Interior Design, Illustration, CGI and IT departments to ensure we can explore and interrogate all aspects of design in-house.

Staff facilities comprise 76 secure cycle spaces with high-quality showers, drying and changing areas. In our 3,000 sq ft Downstairs event space we host twice-weekly yoga classes, and office-wide presentations as well as outside events. A new fourth floor provides 5,000 sq ft of social space with table football,

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ping pong and a large outside terrace. Freshly cooked lunch is served daily, subsidised by the practice, and a bar operates into the evening.

Moving to The Department Store in Brixton facilitates the long-term stability for the firm, in what we see as an uncertain economic landscape. While we are currently the predominant occupier, the building can accommodate expansion or contraction within the practice, absorb co-working or sublet arrangements, and offers future development opportunities including a plan to create a new creative co-working hub next door. The Upstairs restaurant and Downstairs event space offer alternative revenue streams, and ensure that the building serves the community in which it sits.

We are absolutely delighted with our move to Brixton, and look forward to being here for many years ahead. ●



← Interiors celebrate the decayed grandeur, craft and detail of the original building



↑ Shopping for architecture – the practice's new front door

← Life at the top – a new fourth floor includes a large outside terrace