

SWresident

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DIVE IN
*Cold water
swimming at
Tooting Bec Lido*

GEORGINA
CAMPBELL
*On Broadchurch,
Black Mirror and
buzzing Clapham*

BEDDING DOWN
Comforting designs to banish the January blues

A NEW DEPARTMENT

How Squire & Partners have transformed this Brixton building and embraced its fascinating history

Words GEORGINA BLASKEY

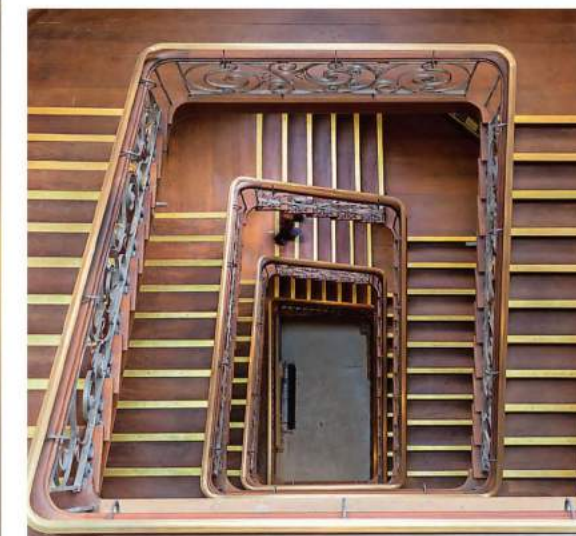
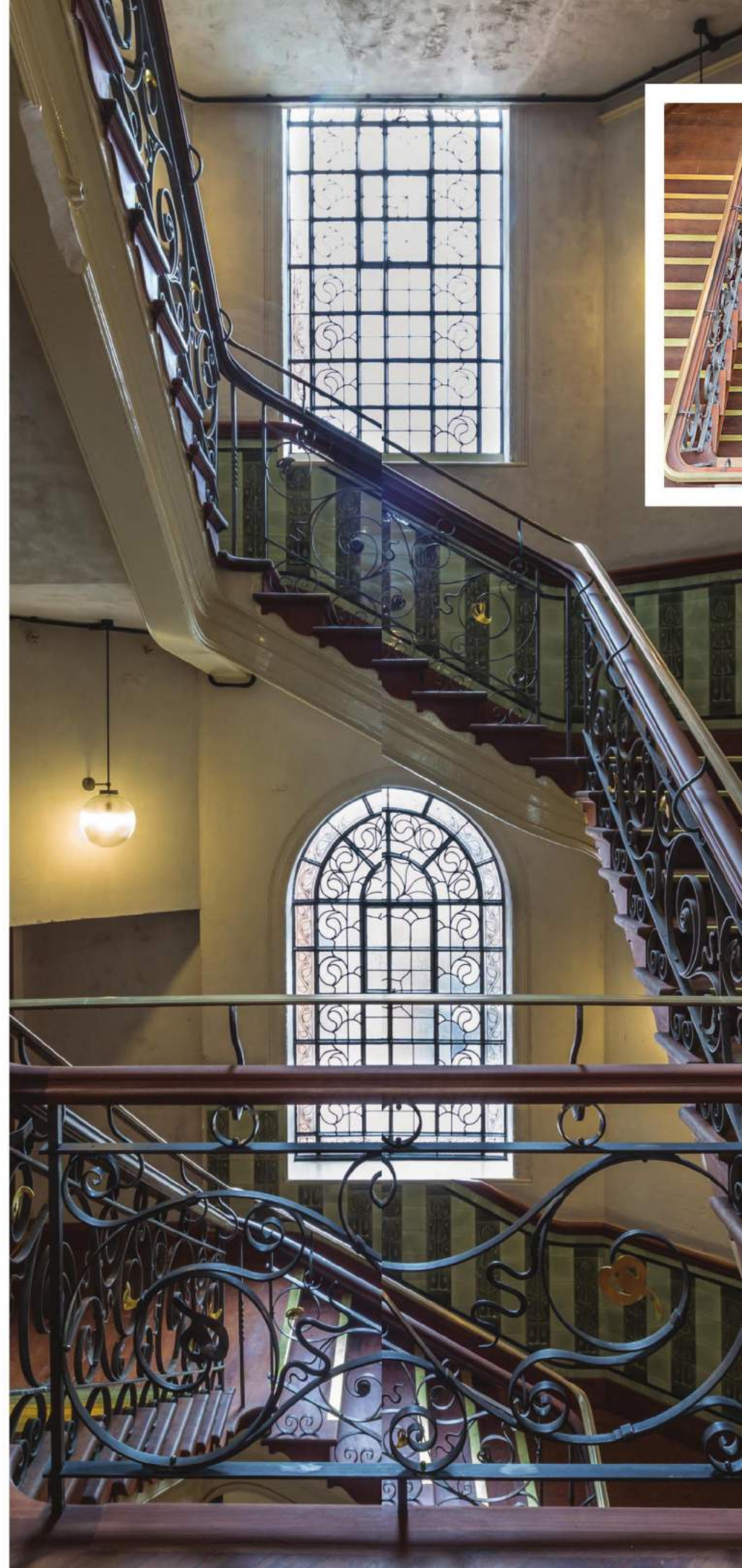
When London-based architects Squire & Partners decided to relocate to a new headquarters in Brixton in 2015, it may have seemed an unusual decision. For the 220 staff, the move from their previous King's Cross location was a complete game-changer, but one afternoon spent nosing around this landmark building and it's easy to understand how anyone with an eye for design, a sense of history, a love of collaboration, and a hunger for opportunity would be unable to resist the development promise the building presented. Welcome to The Department Store.

Like many things fragile and extraordinary, this building needed to be treated with care and attention above and beyond the usual office development, and the evidence of the passion that drove this forward is clear from the moment you enter the lobby. At the helm was Tim Gledstone, one of the firm's four partners and a true

visionary in this scheme, which was completed in summer 2017.

The building was built in 1876 by James Smith, a local businessman from Tooting who won £80,000 in prize money when his racehorse Roseberry won an inconceivable double at Newmarket. Inspired by the opulence of the original Bon Marche department store in Paris, Smith embarked on creating an unrivalled shopping destination in Brixton, which would also be the first steel-framed building in the UK. After almost 50 years as a retail destination and a brief stint as a bomb shelter during World War II, the building went from office block to vacant site, when squatters moved in and left their legacy of street-inspired artwork.

Embracing the history of the building in all its guises, Squire & Partners stripped it back to its raw state to reveal a decayed grandeur and an extraordinary commitment to craft and detail by the original artisans of the day. The practice



sought to reveal and highlight these elements as well as exposing remnants left by more recent inhabitants (the squatters' graffiti tags and artworks harmoniously share space with the original 1906 Burmese teak floor), whilst adding a series of sensitive contemporary interventions to repurpose the building as an inspiring workspace.

Each office floor has a bespoke furniture system by London joinery company Opus Magnum and project areas have been designed to showcase the process of design and development each team is working on, with multiple areas for presentation found throughout.

Each office floor has a tea point, expressed as a copper-lined box encased within a black ply storage wall. Informal tables at tea points and on a series of external terraces encourage interaction between staff. Each tea point also provides an entry point to a 'secret stair', designed to create a connection between the three office floors.

The grand central staircase was revealed when an existing lift shaft was removed, uncovering striking original elements such as decorative metalwork, carved mahogany handrails and green patterned tiles.

Double-height, original stained-glass windows displaying a variety of organic motifs combine with a new timber-framed roof lantern at the fourth floor to create a bright, naturally lit staircase.

Part of the legacy of this extraordinary development is to

share it with the Brixton community. Collaborating with local artists and businesses has remained the focus of the scheme from start to finish. Squire & Partners championed the area to become one of seven Design Districts at the London Design Festival and last September during the festival it hosted a nine-day series of events.

Monthly talks throughout the year connect local businesses to each other and projects involving neighbourhood schools are already well established – this Christmas, Stockwell Primary School designed lights for the ground-floor display windows on Ferndale Road. With prime street frontage, Squire & Partners' in-house modelshop reveals the process of experiment and making within the office, which can be seen from the street. Along this stretch at street level there are also local businesses occupying a series of further creative and retail units, including a roastery for Volcano Coffee, a record shop for Brixton-based Pure Vinyl, community Post Office and Canova Hall.

The Department Store is a record of what can be done when Lady Luck delivers on race day, of how years of dilapidation can be embraced, and how collaboration with the local community is celebrated. But ultimately this building is a testament to creative vision: from James Smith to Tim Gledstone, it's all in the bricks and mortar. **T**

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