Design Curator

Design inspiration from the worlds of retail, events, marketing, crafts & art.

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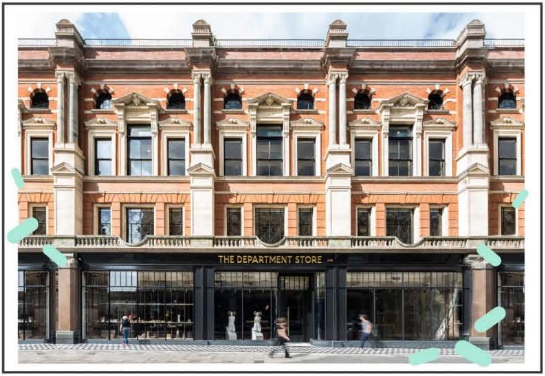
By GABRIELLE / FEBRUARY 23, 2018 @ 12:39 PM

THE AMATEUR ARCHITECT SERIES – PART 1. SQUIRE & PARTNERS



I want to introduce you to the inspiration for this Architecture Series – meet The Department Store. An old and new gem found right in the centre of Brixton.

The Edwardian exterior is the new home for Squire & Partners Architects which I mentioned a fair bit during my work on the Brixton Design Trail last September. I knew the company before the building but I have to tell you that it is the perfect embodiment showcasing their talent & potential.

ABOUT ME

After creating amazing creative content for others I felt it was time to do it for myself as well. This new blog will be dedicated to the best in design across all aspects of my work. Need design help? Maybe some marketing advice? My portfolio is at www.gabrielleftaylor.org Find me there too!

SAY HELLO!

Want me to write about you, collaborate on something or just ask a question?
EMAIL: GabrielleT91@gmail.com
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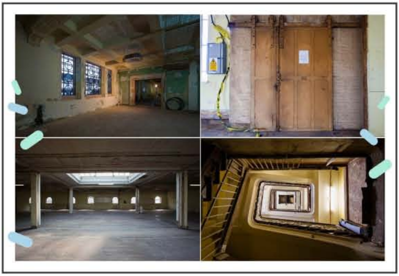
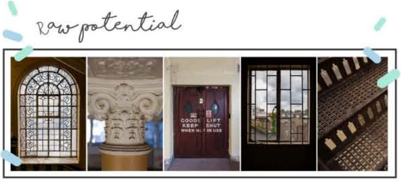
WE BLOG DESIGN

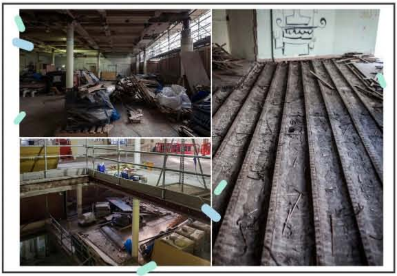
JUST A CARD

The building itself started life in 1906, as an addition to the successful Bon Marche store on the main Brixton Road; the annex was called Toplin House. It was modelled after its Parisian inspiration, opulent and vast; even with underground tunnels linking the buildings together. After 50 years as a retail destination and surviving World War Two as a bomb shelter, it was sold and used as unglamorous offices. Up until 2012 it had many users adding to its unofficial history, each leaving behind little hints to its occupants.

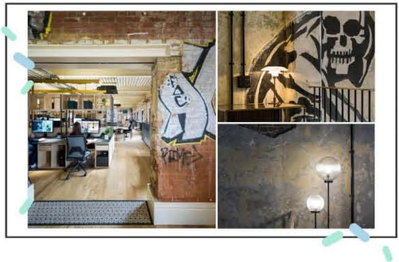




Each period added another layer to the building; Squires carefully pealed and peaked under each and considerately only removed the obstructive pieces leaving not a blank canvas but a mottled collection of plaster, brick, artwork and floor space.



However that is only half the story. Squire & Partners works seamlessly to create design schemes for their clients that are inspired by locality and contextual history. Their own building is now the shining glory of their portfolio that expresses this work ethic. Using a global network of high end designers they have taken those well preserved and treasured layers of history creating new and bespoke elements.



The new patterns are repeating geometric motifs from the hand of local Brixtonites Eley Kishimoto giving the interiors team a whole selection of new imagery to turn in to physical pieces including large scale rugs made by Laguna and doorway printed ply panels. Filling in the gaps with furniture finds from the buildings lifespan many gifted from achieves like Carl Hansen or bespoke made like the hand blown glass lighting by Lasvit custom to each fitting.

... new
old meets ...

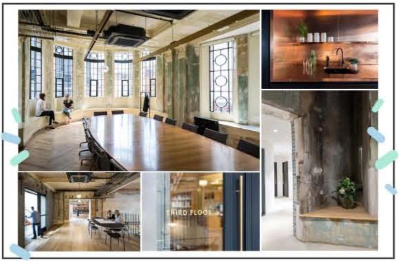
From roman esc plaster almost peeling off interior columns to slick monochrome herringbone tiles, each piece of this building is thought of, oozing money spent and time consumed in its creation. It is the most interesting feature of the building in my opinion this attention to old, whilst mixing in new creative to sustain it and keep it beautiful.

My stand out interior features include the lush custom green Babe armchairs by Munna, the rug on the top floor another Laguna silk/wool combination using the Eley Kishimoto 'Wired Clematis' design. Then the Loop coat stands by HAY that dot doorways and boardrooms, adorned with copper hangers to match the rest of the buildings shiny additions.

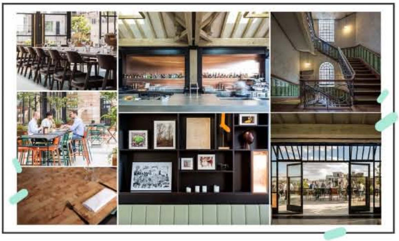
There is so much to explore from reading libraries & sample shelves to hidden alcoves and refreshing annexes. There is a quality of well thought out consistency throughout but no two spaces are identical, allowing each department to put its own stamp and feel to their environment.

So what does this attention to detail and the buildings original purpose do for those inside it? Why is it so impressive & important? The building has become a gallery of ideals and ideas for the company, each member of staff works in an environment that practises what it preaches which is no a small thing.

An earlier investigation commissioned by SpaceLab looked in to the practices previous workspace exploring not just the science of circulation but the changing way the team use space. Identifying unused areas giving them purpose creating a very design orientated approach to the new headquarters layout. Meaningful meeting rooms, mid floor annex's, discrete entry points, copper lined tea points; I could go on with the points of contact as there are many. Allowing people to meet, pause, relax, engage, present whatever the task there is a space to accommodate which encourages success and general wellbeing.



No sad windowless canteen here, the Upstairs is a restaurant in its own right, which at this exact moment is being expanded due to popularity. A new solid oak framed structure and a landscaped roof terrace offer views across Brixton and beyond. With a separate meeting room, the Roseberry Room provides private dining, which I only mention for the table. A feature created in collaboration with Opus Magnum using end grain from beams salvaged from the building. The talking points are endless, giving pride to anyone they entertain there, leaving them feeling wowed and I am sure it will become a destination in its own right in the future.



From the top to the bottom, the stripped back roomy event space Downstairs hosts twice-weekly yoga classes and office-wide presentations. It's also home to an extensive staff facilities including bike racks, full showers and changing rooms. It acts as a polished blank slate to showcase events; it was a focal point during BDT when they hosted UNDEREXPOSED where the community was invited in for the first time, but definitely not the last.

Due to the care that is taken not to disturb but impress the area it sits in, the buildings footprint is at the moment bold but by actively engaging with their own industry and a wider local audience I hope that it blends in with time. They now have to act as a recorder of the present as well as what stood before, sharing that with everyone so they can appreciate it.

An example of a recent wonderful creative project, local school children were invited in to the state of the art Model shop to create designs for a neon winter window display. 2018 has a calendar of more engaging events including hosting graduate shows, industry panels and even an up coming quick fire portrait workshops with Viktorija from AndSmile .

When Squire & Partners bought the building in 2015, they also obtained a selection of other buildings on Ferndale road, adding local business Pure Vinyl, Kaboola Kitchen, Volcano Coffee, Canova Hall restaurant & work space and now inside they own space branding agency Mammal (more on that later). They are creating their own village of businesses to engage with the community and have high hopes to continue to expand.

> **“The future aspiration for The Department Store is to foster a creative group of makers and do-ers, opening their doors to the wider community and celebrating the current best practice in architecture, design, art, fashion, music, food and drink. Further down the line the collective could evolve to new destinations and communities in London and the UK”.**
>
> - tim gledstone
> partner

So the building itself is now a beautiful beacon, with Squire and Partners as it’s custodian but the love story isn’t over yet. It is still a high-end firm in the centre of a much conflicted Brixton community, so like most good stories it is to be continued…

I want to thank Julia Nicholls Director of Public Relations – who introduced me to not just this creative project but also several others and got me to start writing about architecture again.

Partner Tim Gledstone for answering a few of my questions, Director Maria Cheung for touring me around the building way back when and to the whole team for hopefully continuing to put up with my visits to marvel at the scenery.

Most if not all of these beautiful photographs were taken by James Jones, the building is a trap for avid camera bugs but to do it justice a professional was only appropriate.

Follow my blog to find out first when my next Amateur Architect post comes out, here’s a hint… it’s going to be another South London destination but with a very different aesthetic.

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