

hinge

ARCHITECTURE
INTERIOR DESIGN

FROM BLOOMBERG TO HEATHERWICK SIX FOCUS FEATURES TO BATHE THE EYES

PRITZKER GOES TO INDIA
2018 Laureate Balkrishna Doshi

ROCCO GOES BACK TO SCHOOL
Chu Hai College Hong Kong

NERI AND HU GO TO THE NEXT LEVEL
Tsingpu Yangzhou Retreat

www.hinge.hk



ISSN 1561-781-5
9 771561 781004
HK\$80
RMB80
US\$11

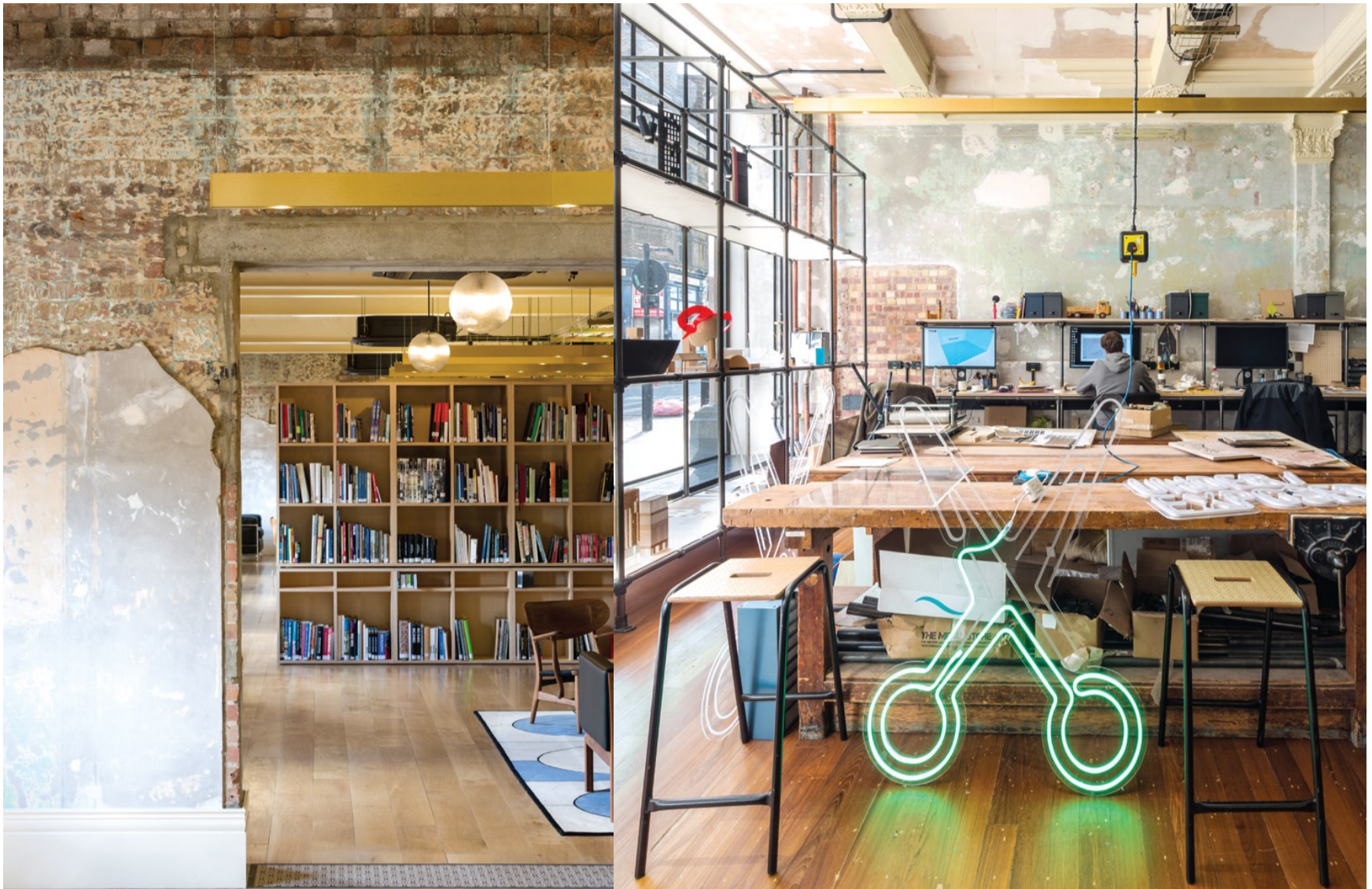
[focus - interior design]



The Department Store

Brixton, London, United Kingdom
Squire and Partners

Photography by James Jones



If this project weren't so convincing at a design level, it would invoke jealous ire. UK architecture and design firm Squire and Partners purchased the neglected Edwardian building, a former department store, in order to reconfigure it for its own staff (and clients). Then the team quickly got down to the task at hand: to have a ball of a time. The design is a storm of eclecticism, creating a riotous fantasy world of different spaces, nooks and crannies, amenities and features. The variety suits the firm's needs, as Squire and Partners is a practice of many parts, holding different specialist departments under the umbrella agency.

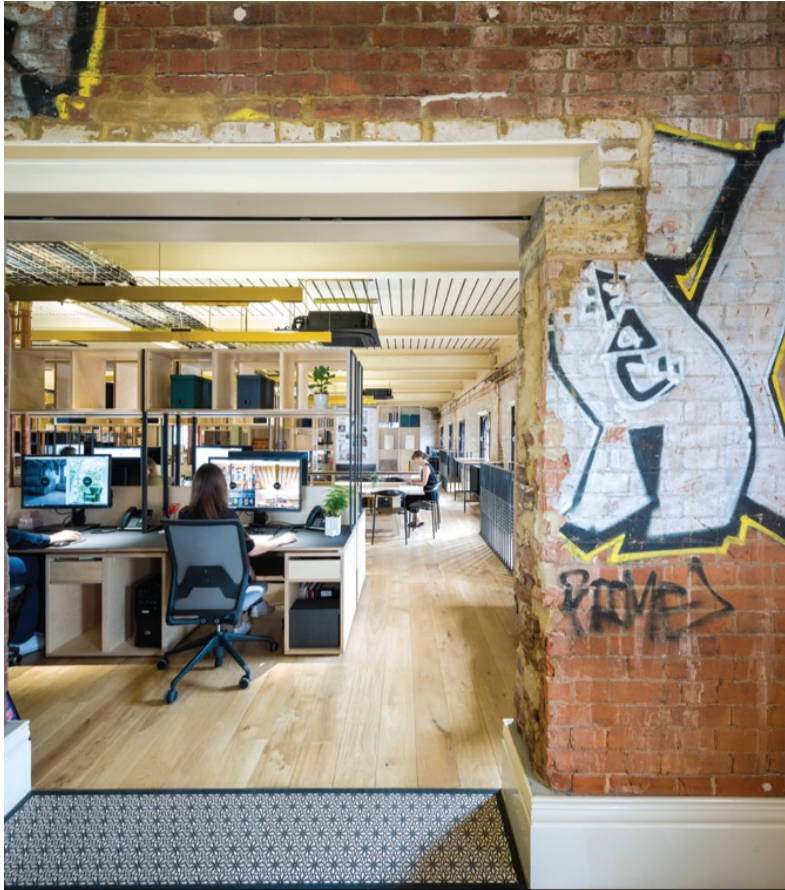
The approach to the building was binary: discover, reveal and restore many of the better bits that the historical building boasted, then add a plethora of new parts to complement them. The existing structure had charm, grace and grandeur despite aeons of neglect, so the archaeological aspect of the project was rewarding. But the attitude toward what was already there wasn't determined by the conventional principles of restoration. Many times, decay, damage or even misinformed alterations were left visible, the better for occupants

and visitors to understand the history of the structure over time – and to produce the desired juxtapositional end product.

At the street level, a facade of elegant high-ceilinged shopfronts was restored to glory, with exquisite vitrine window-fronts in black mullions between grand pilasters in stone and brick. The windows now display models, prototypes and artistic installations, all evidence of the firm's design oeuvre. The three levels above this were cleaned and stripped of detritus, so that the main elevations constitute a time-honoured standout in the neighbourhood. Atop all this a new level has been added as a gathering of wood-framed pavilions under copper shingle roofs, and a new glass dome replaced an existing cupola that had crumbled at the building's corner.

The internal organisation places a dramatic reception area at grade, along with a huge model-making workshop which is visible from the street. As models are the most directly





accessible tools of design communication, putting this on show to the public was a very clever move – it's a touch of free advertising that's hard to beat. Squire and Partners sliced a three-storey cut through the section in one area to create a unifying atrium. It links event spaces at the basement and fourth-floor levels, as well as the work studios on floors one to three. Scattered through The Department Store are smaller meeting rooms, ideation areas and breakout spaces. Other voids were also cut through the floor slabs in places, to enhance visual connections and make sure that the layout encourages cohesion now that the building is used by a single company. The areas where the gist of the firm's activity takes place are conceived as showcases for the team's work, with models and drawings displayed near desk and meeting areas. This encourages staff from other teams, or clients visiting the premises, to wander through the building as if it were a living gallery of busy creative endeavours. Open

metal-and-wood shelving also hold books, samples and archive material. Throughout, the rustic remnants of the original structure are evident, in walls and ceilings bearing the markings of age, scratched paint and plaster, classic mouldings and frames, and delightful Corinthian columns. Bare brick walls, some with graffiti, are left in situ, and at certain moments it's difficult to tell if a steel lintel or a patch of wood floor is old or new.

On the roof level, the sun-filled pavilions hold a casual social area perfect for lunch, coffee, parties and events. It all spills out onto the roof terrace. This level is an amenity few companies could surpass, and one could be forgiven for thinking Squire and Partners staff rather coddled. But good help is so hard to keep these days, so The Department Store has pulled out all the stops. Going to 'work' here must feel like a fantasy.