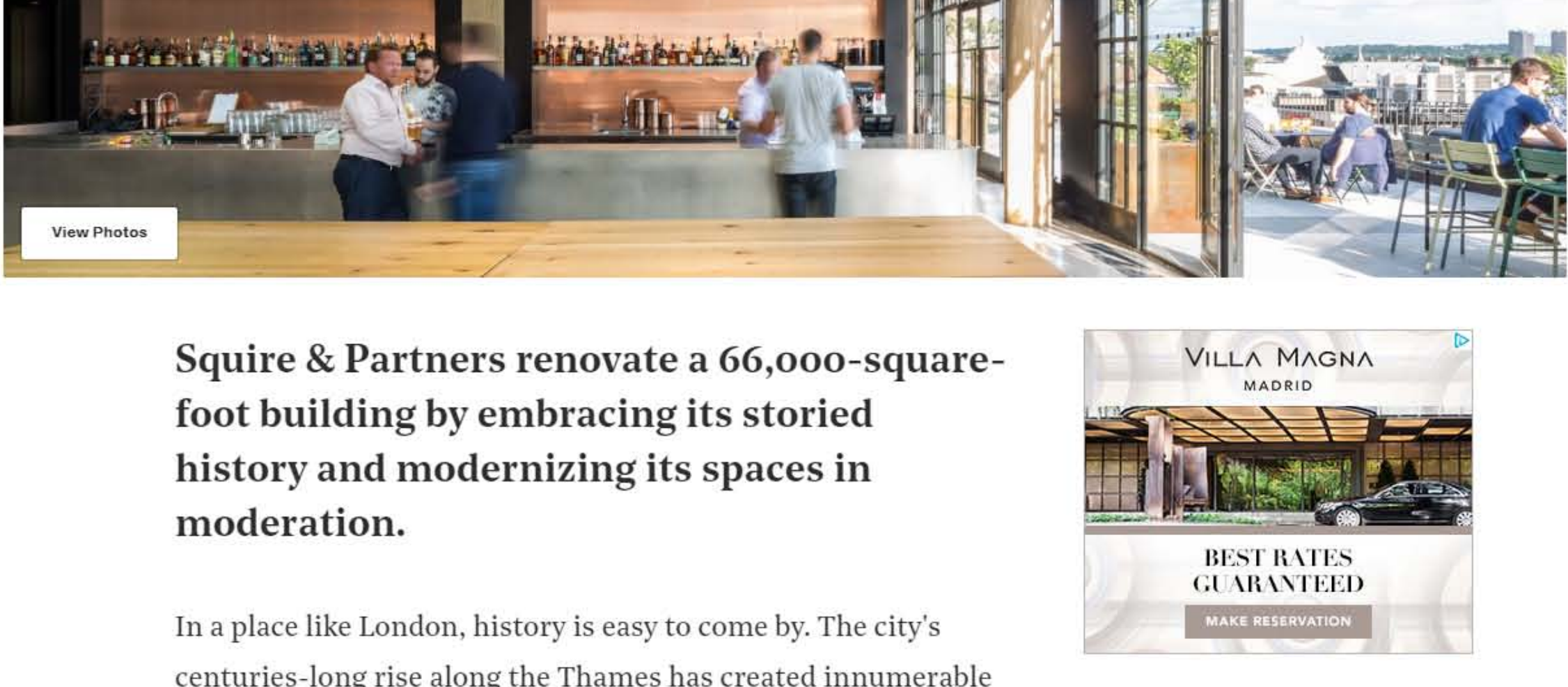


# A London Department Store Is Reborn as a Creative Workspace



By Kelly Dawson – January 30, 2019



Squire & Partners renovate a 66,000-square-foot building by embracing its storied history and modernizing its spaces in moderation.

In a place like London, history is easy to come by. The city's centuries-long rise along the Thames has created innumerable stories of well-known people and important landmarks, as well as countless reiterations of interesting facts and prized tidbits. History isn't so much an occasional thought here as it is a constant facet of modern life—and that sentiment wasn't lost on Tim Gledstone, a partner at [Squire & Partners](#), when his team decided to move into an address that's stood since 1906 in the South London district of Brixton.



"The Brixton area has a welcoming and generous community spirit, along with a multitude of independent retail and food outlets on the high street," Gledstone says. The Department Store's ground level is open to independent retailers.

Photo by James Jones&rbop;

Photo Categories: exterior, flat roofing, brick siding material

"The Edwardian building was largely derelict and dilapidated, having had many different lives previously, including 50 years as a retail destination and a brief stint as a bomb shelter during World War II, before being sold and converted into offices in 1955," he says. "The building was used by various occupants who incrementally chopped up the internal spaces and added shopfronts to the exterior. In 2012, it became vacant and was taken over by squatters, who added their own legacy of street-inspired artwork to the building."

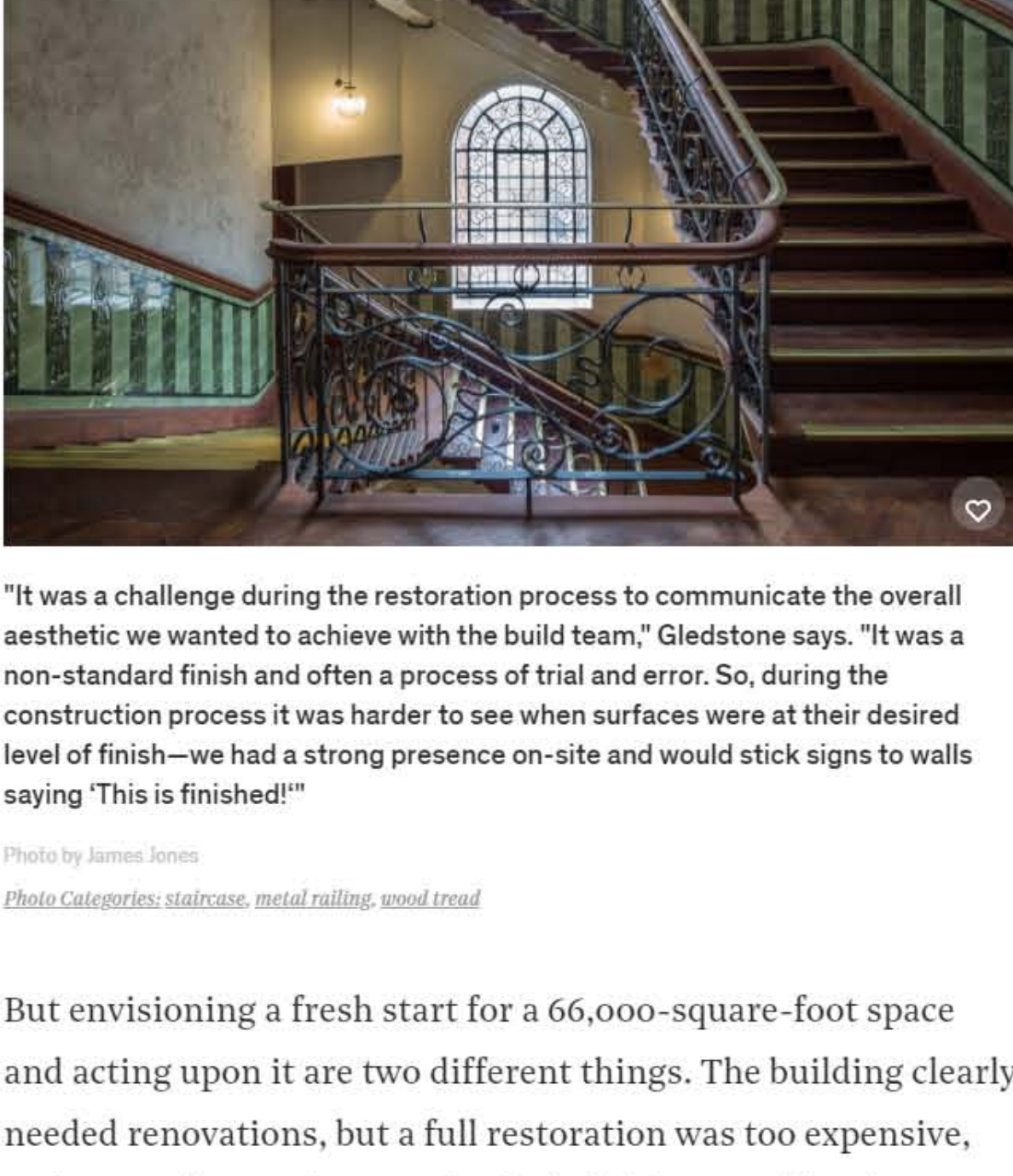


The downstairs event space is open to the community, and features a more modern design.

Photo by James Jones

Photo Categories: office, concrete floors

Gledstone and his team were drawn to the story of this property, and felt that its first chapter as an annex to the famed Bon Marché department store could be reimaged for the firm's overlapping departments in architecture, interior design, illustration, CGI, and model making. "It gave a lovely sense of the building coming full circle," Gledstone continues. "We also loved the notion of the space being used for display again, as in showing and retelling the story of our projects."

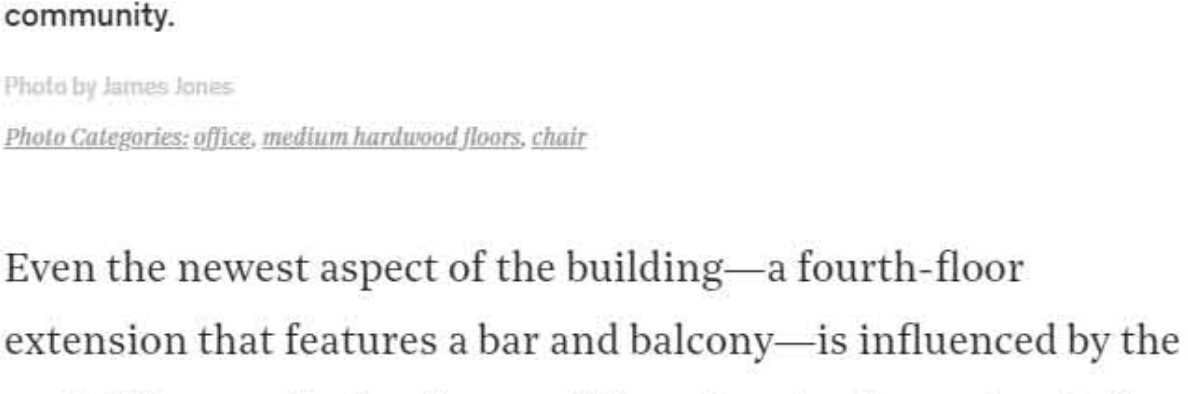


"It was a challenge during the restoration process to communicate the overall aesthetic we wanted to achieve with the build team," Gledstone says. "It was a non-standard finish and often a process of trial and error. So, during the construction process it was harder to see when surfaces were at their desired level of finish—we had a strong presence on-site and would stick signs to walls saying 'This is finished!'"

Photo by James Jones

Photo Categories: staircase, metal railing, wood tread

But envisioning a fresh start for a 66,000-square-foot space and acting upon it are two different things. The building clearly needed renovations, but a full restoration was too expensive, and a complete push toward today's finishes would strip away the past. So Gledstone focused instead on what could be salvaged and what needed to be thoughtfully changed. For instance, the open floor plates and ornate staircases were still in good condition, and could be used in a modern open-concept design. This compromise, Gledstone adds, was a way to "embrace its decayed decadence," while also repurposing aspects of the building for today's needs.



Pattern and print designers Eley Kishimoto were commissioned by Squire & Partners to create 20 bespoke rugs for the building. By working with local designers, Gledstone says that the company hoped to build a relationship with the community.

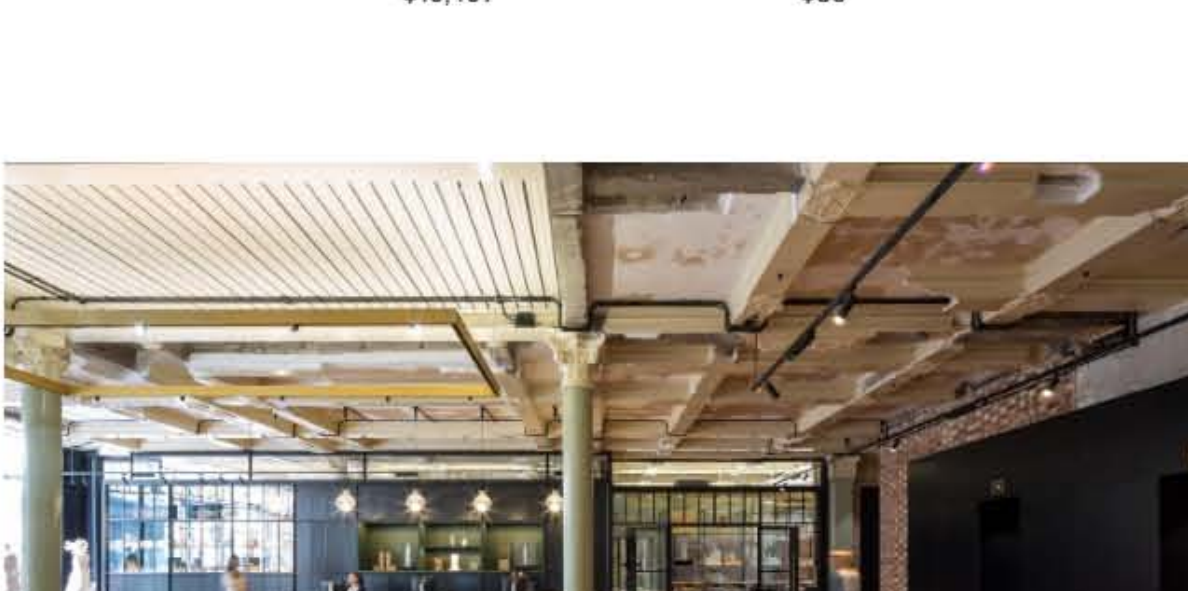
Photo by James Jones

Photo Categories: office, medium hardwood floors, chair

Even the newest aspect of the building—a fourth-floor extension that features a bar and balcony—is influenced by the past. "The new timber frame of the extension is constructed from green oak, which is sustainably grown in Forêt de Villandry in central France, creating a further link between the original Bon Marché stores in Paris and London," he says.

"Green oak was used in place of steel due to its sustainable characteristics, but also because its natural quality complemented the age and character of the building."

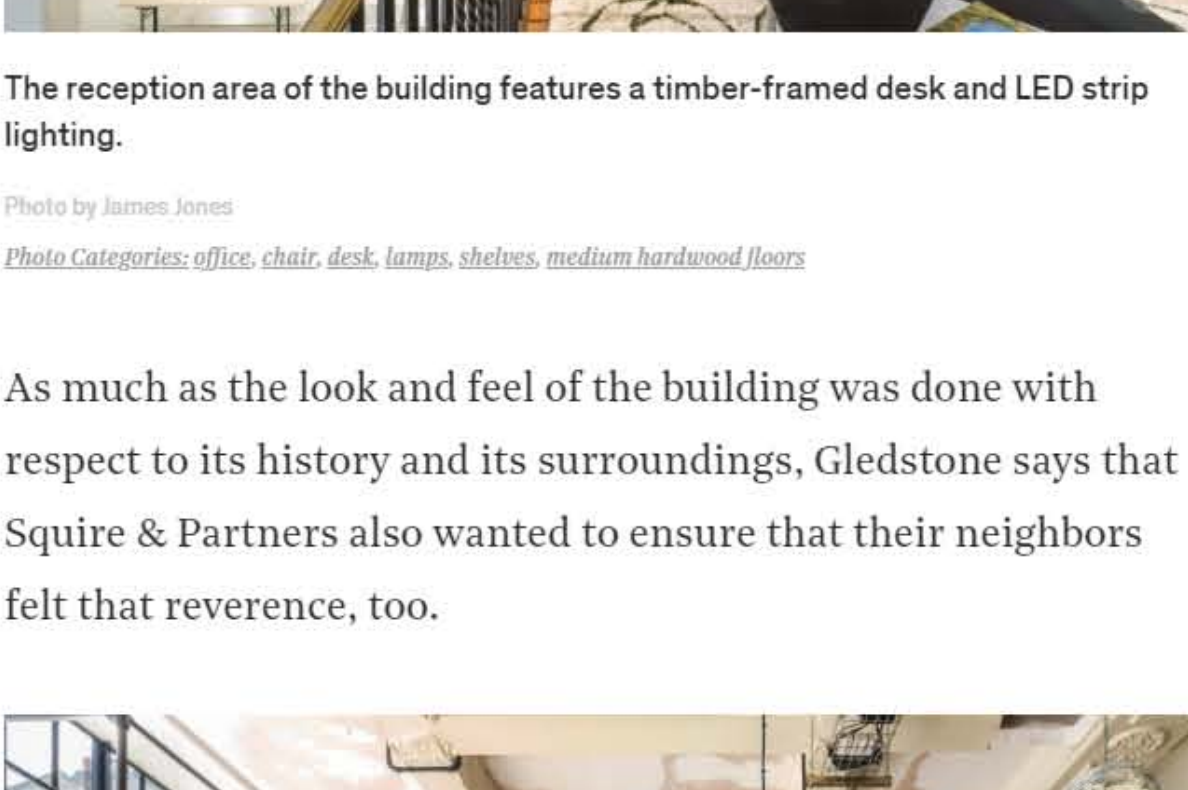
## Shop the Look



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YLiving  
\$3,843

Knoll Barcelona Couch  
Design Within Reach  
\$10,467

The Citizenry Sapon Terrazzo Desk Set  
The Citizenry  
\$85



The reception area of the building features a timber-framed desk and LED strip lighting.

Photo by James Jones

Photo Categories: office, chair, desk, lamps, shelves, medium hardwood floors

As much as the look and feel of the building was done with respect to its history and its surroundings, Gledstone says that Squire & Partners also wanted to ensure that their neighbors felt that reverence, too.

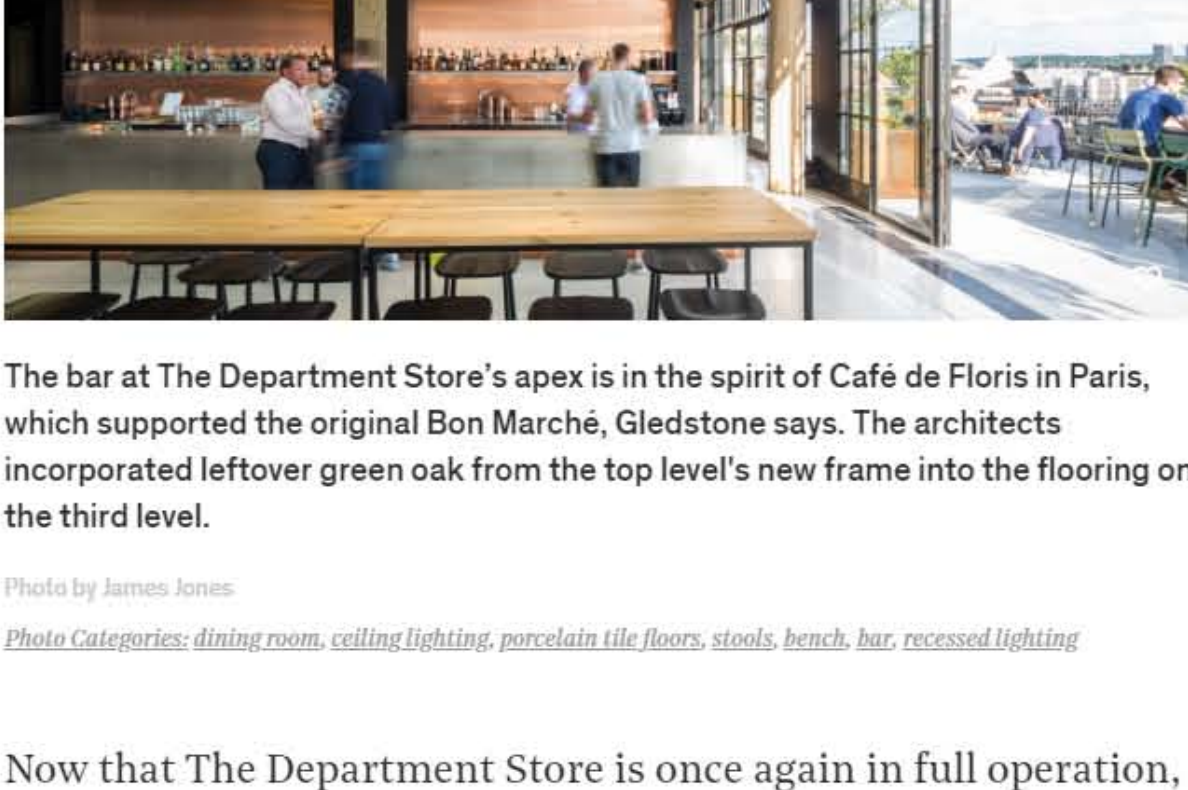


"Internally, despite 40 years of neglect, enough of the original fabric and character remained to provide a glimpse of the building's illustrious past," Gledstone says.

Photo by James Jones

Photo Categories: office, chair, storage, desk, lamps, shelves, medium hardwood floors

The company opened its ground-level storefronts to an independent coffee roaster, record shop, cafe, and post office. It also showcases local art in its windows, and hosts community events throughout the year. "This has transformed the building from an impermeable and hostile frontage into a friendly and open part of the community," he says. "It brings the building back into their hands following years of neglect."

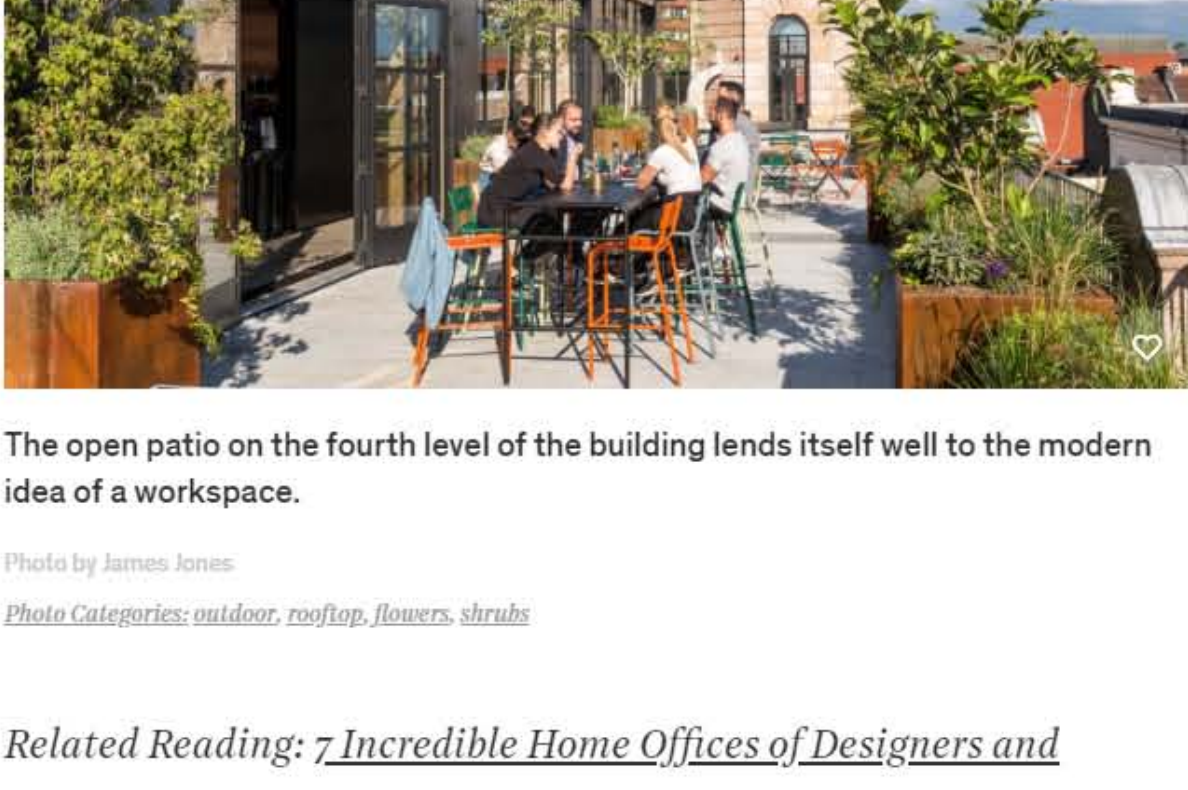


The bar at The Department Store's apex is in the spirit of Café de Floris in Paris, which supported the original Bon Marché, Gledstone says. The architects incorporated leftover green oak from the top level's new frame into the flooring on the third level.

Photo by James Jones

Photo Categories: dining room, ceiling lighting, porcelain tile floors, stools, bench, bar, recessed lighting

Now that The Department Store is once again in full operation, where 250 people come and go from work every day, it has become what Gledstone and his colleagues imagined when they first came across its past and saw potential for its future. "Our journey was guided by a constant search for the layers of history within the building, and a desire to reveal them," he says.



The open patio on the fourth level of the building lends itself well to the modern idea of a workspace.

Photo by James Jones

Photo Categories: outdoor, rooftop, flowers, shrubs

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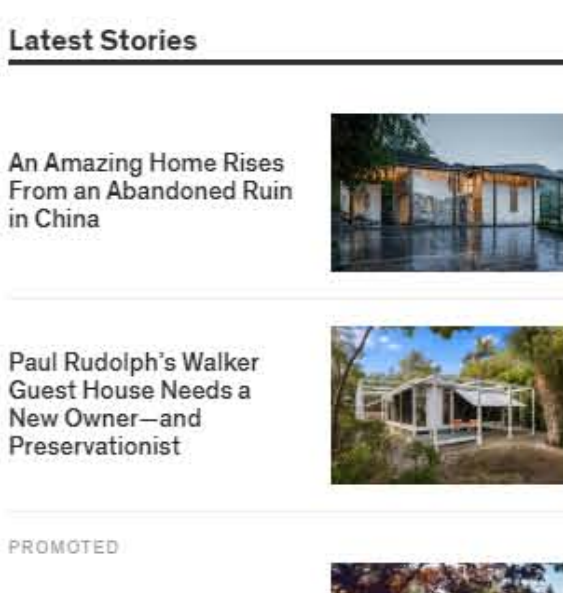
## Project Details:

Architect of Record, Interior Design: [Squire & Partners](#) / [@squirepartners](#)

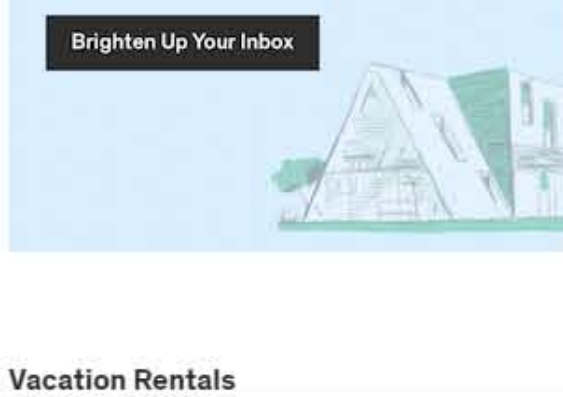
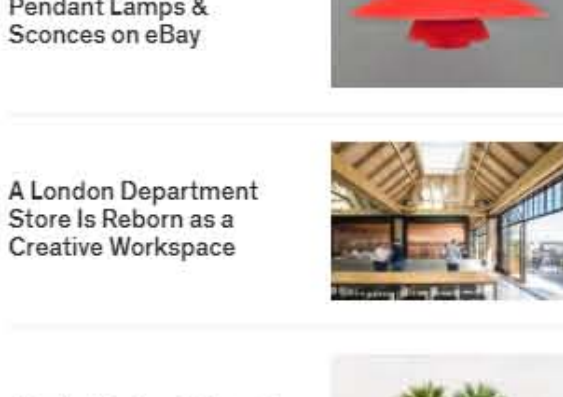
Builder: [Stoneforce](#)

Structural Engineer: [Davies Maguire](#)

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