

#2 BRIXTON, LONDON
UK

The Department Store

Squire and Partners

When an architectural firm needs to look for its own new office you can bet there will be some pretty demanding boxes to tick. The space needs to be completely bespoke in order to accommodate the particularities of the practice: high impact to showcase what the team can achieve without being overblown or superficial – the benchmark of good design.



Above: Pre Construction

Below: Current day The Department Store, Squire and Partners

Photo©James Jones





Squire and Partners headquarters, in the heart of Brixton, London, is an excellent case in point. Having walked away with both a RIBA London and RIBA National Award in 2018, we're clearly not the only ones who think the project is worth trumpeting.

Taking a dilapidated department store first finished in 1906, since left to the ravages of time, and nursing it back to prime, the finished article is a striking example of what can happen when you lovingly restore antiquities, while adding a 21st Century edge that neither detracts from the original grandeur nor tries to recreate it.

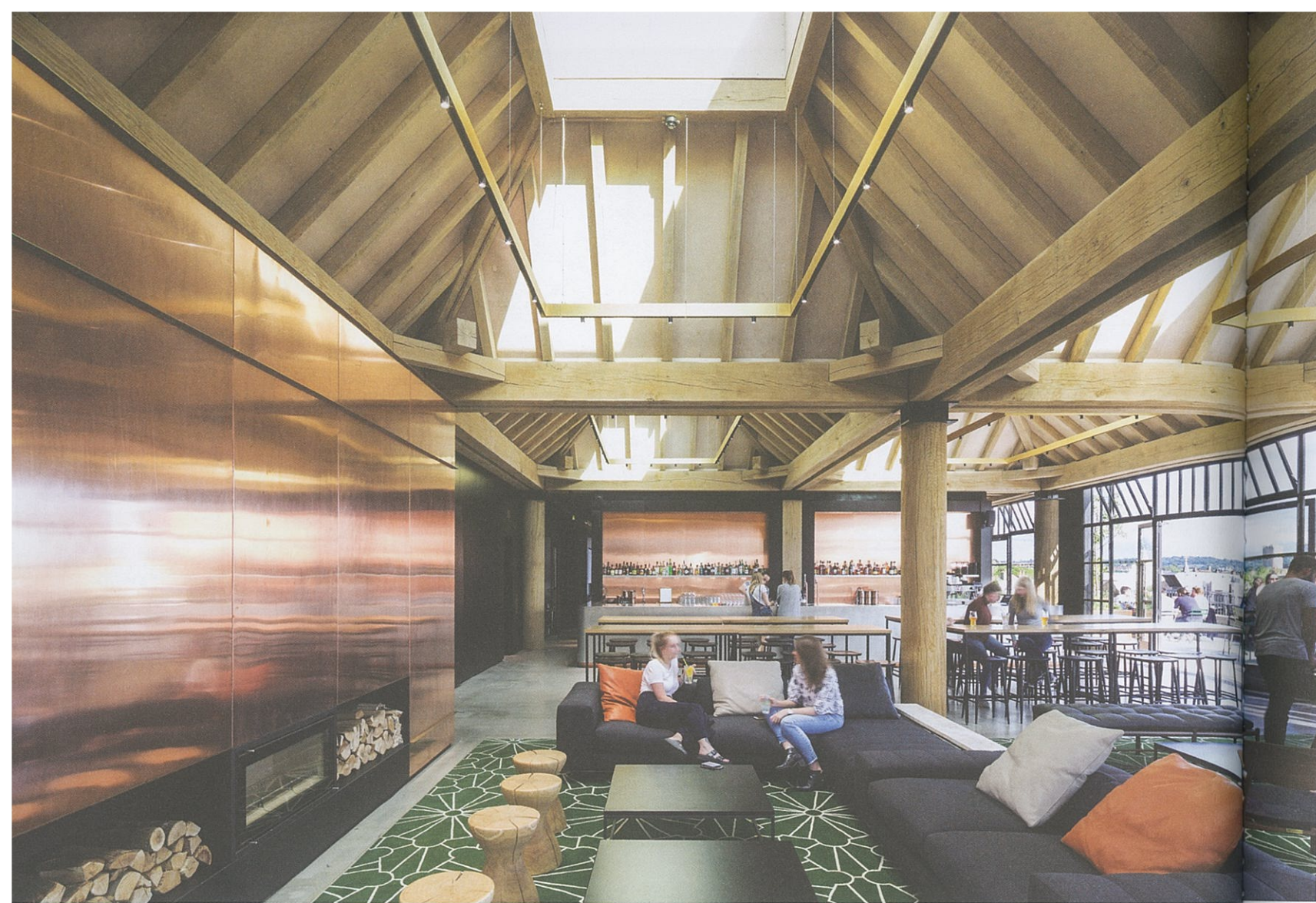
Basking in its own neglect, to some extent at least, The Department Store now boasts historic features such as the stunning grand tiled staircase, exposed brickwork and marble

details, alongside fresh additions such as a beautiful roof terrace complete with oak framed pavilions and crafted glass dome. Workspaces are designed to suit various disciplines, effectively giving each department a purpose-built area, and additional creative and retail units have been created.

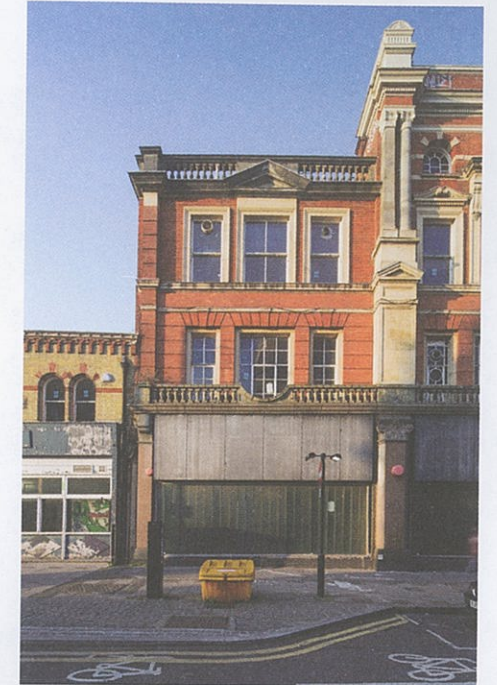
"Focussing our search on the Victoria line, which has an excellent service connecting to virtually all other London Underground lines, we found ourselves looking for affordable workspace outside of central London, in Vauxhall, Stockwell and Brixton. We came across The Department Store, which was actually owned by one of our clients," says Maria Cheung, Interior Design Director at Squire and Partners, when asked how the hunt for a property brought them to this corner of the UK capital.



Left Page: Reception & Interior. The Department Store, Squire and Partners
Above: Workspace
Left: Pre Construction
 Photos ©James Jones



“A challenge during the restoration process was conveying to the builders the level of rawness we wanted in the building and the aesthetic we wanted to achieve.”



Left Page: Upstairs Bar & Restaurant
 Right: Pre Construction
 Below: PureVinyl Record Shop
 Photos ©James Jones

“The fact that the building was formerly a department store resonated with us as a practice, as we are also made up of departments, incorporating architecture, interior design, CGI, illustration and model-making. So it gave a lovely sense of the building coming full circle,” she continues, explaining why the address appealed.

“We also loved the notion of the space being used for display; showing and retelling the story of our work to ourselves, the work being our products on display. The large open floorplates of the building were attractive in turning it into workspace, as well as the existing high quality materials and beautiful detailing.

“A year later, we can now display our own products in the window, which feature designs that were borne out of the aesthetic of The Department Store, and are sold online at www.thedepartmentstore.com/shop.”

Although plenty has been preserved, profound re-imaginings have also taken place. Connecting walls between central office and wings have been removed, aside from a first floor section containing graffiti left by squatters who occupied the address in the 1990s. Deemed too important within the context of the building’s history, this was preserved, dictating an entirely different approach to completing this level and accentuating the overall intended feel of the place. A ‘salvaged’ look that was harder to accomplish than many may assume, considering the state of the site when work began.

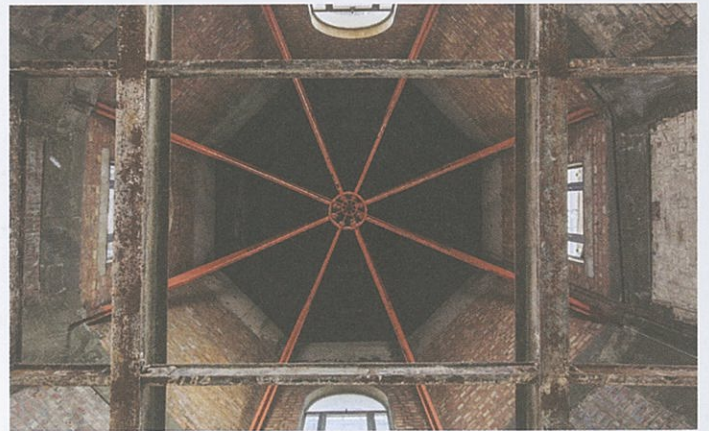
“A challenge during the restoration process was conveying to the builders the level of rawness we wanted in the building and the aesthetic we wanted to achieve,” says Cheung. “When they were in the building all day every day and we were offsite, we had to make clear when to stop sanding the walls by putting up signs saying ‘This is finished!’”







In our opinion, the results speak for themselves. London is currently flooded with new commercial developments, from off-the-shelf bores to towering statement properties. Whether tenants of the future will deem these worthy of painstaking resuscitation and bring them back from the brink of despairing demolition when their time comes remains to be seen. A reality that makes any project aimed at safeguarding the kind of spaces that are considered invaluable more than deserving of attention. **DE**



Top: Patterns, Inside Tower
Below: Pre Construction
Photos ©James Jones