

ISSUE 207

Squire & Partners celebrate the industrial at Rolling Stock Yard

Squire & Partners has completed Rolling Stock Yard, a new development in King's Cross designed as a contemporary response to its industrial setting.

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Project Team

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Mammal

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

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M&E ENGINEER

Atelier Ten

We ask Olga Gomez, Director at [Squire & Partners](#), to tell us about the origins of the project. 'We previously worked with Newmark Properties on an apartment building on Berwick Street in Soho, however Rolling Stock Yard is their first office development with Squire & Partners. The client was heavily involved during all stages of the project, including the construction phase.'

'The client's vision for the site – just north of Granary Square and Coal Drops Yard – centred around creating a new destination for creative enterprise, which builds on Tileyard's growing cultural community in the area. They wanted the building to have a strong connection with post-industrial King's Cross, and celebrate contemporary architecture. Our approach established a strong aesthetic drawn from the historic roots of the area, and created generous and light filled workspaces with inspiring communal spaces to bring people together.'

'The project brief was flexible and we worked closely with the client to define the concept, unit sizes and letting options. We started with a proposal for a small, elegant tower offering duplex units but, following discussions with the planners, we evolved the design to deliver the same concept with a different massing. The approved design was for a long linear form with the façade split into three elements, instead of a tower and a lower block. The project started on site in September 2018 and completed in March 2020.'

'Both the interior and exterior design of Rolling Stock Yard are inspired by the railway tracks that are synonymous with King's Cross,' Olga tells us. 'We took inspiration from the stacked metal containers of freight trains, using dynamic timber fins to represent sleepers as if they were seen from a train in motion. The juxtaposition of these two elements creates an interesting and dynamic façade.'

'The building has nine storeys, with a double-height entrance space addressing York Way. We wanted to continue the industrial rail and freight aesthetic internally, so the reception area features a backlit perforated screen made from the same façade cladding system as the exterior. This feature wall has two openings, the reception desk and a bar, which mimic the interior of a freight container. Lined with plywood, these niches bring warmth to the space.'





'Connecting the ground and mezzanine levels on the far wall is a 12m x 6m mural by artist [Barry Reigate](#), commissioned by the client to animate the space. At the top of the building, the roof terrace has linear granite pavers and staggered feature lights, representing the movement of trains at night and provides far-reaching views of the city.

As Olga says, the design concept draws on the area north of King's Cross St Pancras, historically characterised by the machinations of transport, freight and industry, and now an emerging creative quarter.

Converging railway lines and shipping containers are subtly referenced throughout the building, expressed as a series of stacked elements, with a black profiled steel structure emulating parallel railway tracks running horizontally across the facades.

Within this horizontal grid, full height glazing is softened by a layer of vertical solid oak sleepers and sinusoidal perforated metal screens to offer privacy and shade during daylight hours, and emit a diffused glow at night.

At pavement level, the building animates the street with bespoke illuminated entrance signage behind a corrugated metal screen, and a double-height office entrance addressing York Way.



'The perforations on the metal façade offer privacy and shade during the day, and emanate a diffused glow at night,' Olga says. 'Also incorporated internally as a light box to the core walls at each level, the mesh provides an attractive glow to each unit. This is very unusual as, traditionally in office buildings, the core walls are clad in standard materials rather than using them as an opportunity to create a light installation. This same mesh is used on the external signage of the building, and on the wall of the reception space.'

Internally, an industrial palette of exposed concrete, blackened steel and perforated aluminium is balanced by a pair of timber-lined recesses for the reception and café. Unifying the space is a pale grey poured resin floor with inlaid track patterns, which define routes from the entrance to the reception, lifts and café.

Suspended filament lighting elements hang vertically at assorted heights above a bespoke rug, which continues the graphic of converging rail tracks. Low comfortable seating on leather sofas, wing backed armchairs and upholstered benches create a comfortable waiting area for visitors.

For building users and guests, the Rolling Stock Café within the main entrance offers raised seating at high tables, with access to power and data, and additional space on a mezzanine level with more informal and lounge seating.

The two levels are connected by a folding metal stair, behind which the aforementioned large-scale mural by Barry Reigate provides a playful backdrop.

Combining cartoon imagery and graffiti with geometric shapes and cultural references to King's

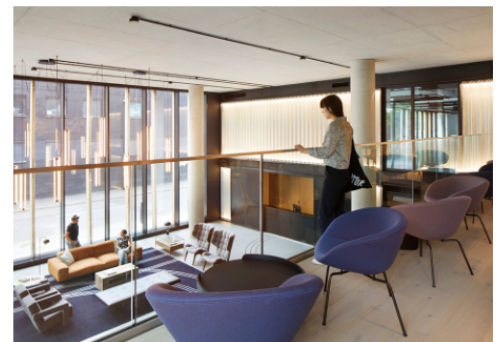
Cross, the specially commissioned work projects a dynamic urban attitude. We're told that the installation is Barry's largest work to date, and was applied layer by layer over five weeks using monochromatic tones to complement the building's industrial palette. The work is presented as an architectural element within the space, drawing on the local built environment and encouraging people to move around the space to discover different aspects of the painting.

Lift lobbies feature bespoke floor-numbering graphics on the reveal and blackened steel lift doors. Wayfinding tracks within the resin floor continue into the lift car.

Meanwhile, the WC's are designed as 'superloos'; self-contained cubicles, which include a black Corian worktop and splashback, sink, large mirror and vertical feature lights. The back wall of each cubicle is lined with panels of natural ply featuring an engraved pattern depicting freight containers.

Office spaces benefit from natural light on three sides (and all four sides on the upper level) and every floor has openable windows to allow for natural cross ventilation. Exposed concrete ceilings continue the industrial aesthetic, with suspended lighting tracks directing light up and down. Circulation on each level is marked with a backlit perforated metal screen, leading to the lift lobby and toilets.

Some 300 sq m of roof space has been planted with wildflowers and grasses chosen to support local populations of birds, bees and butterflies. On top of this planted bed are 120 solar panels, with a further 80 panels on the south façade, providing the building with a sustainable energy source. The 140 sq m private roof terrace offers views across the skyline.



'One of the biggest challenges was to incorporate solar panels into the façade, as well as achieving a sustainable building despite the large amounts of glass on the façade,' Olga explains. 'We worked closely to achieve an elegant solution with black solar panels, analysing the design in detail to manage solar gain whilst maximising the views and transparency of the building.'

Capable of responding to the needs of growing companies, the building is presented as an adaptable collection of working spaces, offering units ranging in size from 150 to 680 sq m. Rolling Stock Yard tenants have access to generous cycle storage, showers, lockers and a reception café and breakout space.

Branding and wayfinding were conceived as an evolution of the architecture and interiors concept, by Squire & Partners' in-house branding agency, Mammal. Referencing the railways and freight industry of King's Cross, Mammal established a graphic identity based on parallel and converging lines.



'The selection of finishes was extremely important,' Olga tells us. 'We wanted to stick to four main materials to create consistency throughout the scheme: timber, steel, aluminium and concrete. Due to cost and technical reasons, it was not possible to use blackened steel, natural oak and concrete in all elements of the building internally and externally. Therefore, we had to find convincing alternatives; plywood, PPC black aluminium and a micro screed floor were used to mimic the materials and achieve consistency in the materiality.'

Finally, we ask Olga to reveal her own personal favourite elements of the space.



'My personal favourite elements are the double-height backlit screen and the embedded black wayfinding tracks in the flooring of the reception space,' she says. 'We also created a bespoke rug in reception with lines that align with the flooring, to represent parked trains.'

Photography: Jack Hobhouse

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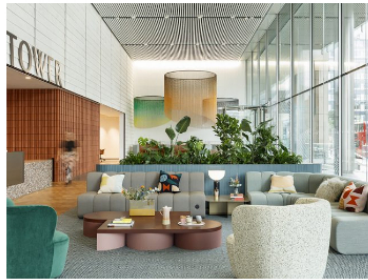
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