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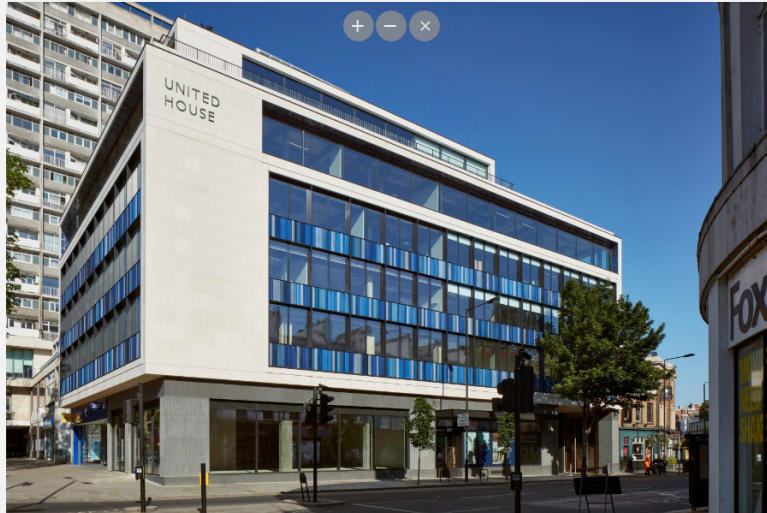
# AJ Architects' Journal

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## RetroFirst Stories: Squire & Partners on retrofitting a series of 50s office blocks in Notting Hill

10 DECEMBER 2020 - BY FRAN WILLIAMS



4/22 North Block  
Source: Matt Clayton

The latest in the AJ's series looking at architects who have saved buildings from the bulldozers or brought them back to life

To reduce carbon emissions from the construction industry, the default option for any project should be to adapt and reuse an existing building, one of the key demands of the AJ's **RetroFirst** campaign. Our ongoing **series** seeks to celebrate the projects that save buildings from ruin or demolition and to hear from the architects that designed them.

Today we hear from Henry Squire (*pictured*) on Squire & Partners' refurbishment of two 1950s office blocks in Notting Hill, London, as speculative projects for their developer client.



Henry Squire, partner, Squire & Partners

### Tell us about the schemes

The north and south blocks at Notting Hill Gate Estate are speculative developments for the client Frogmore, and form part of the large 1950s estate running along the whole of Notting Hill Gate. We're working on all of the buildings that make up the estate except Newcombe House, which was sold off separately and Campden Hill Towers, sold off to residents. The regeneration of this existing building stock will eventually provide 18,200m<sup>2</sup> of new contemporary office, retail and leisure spaces.

### ADVERTISEMENT



We refurbished, extended and re-clad the two blocks to bring new life and vitality to the buildings and street. In order to bring some of the vibrancies of Portobello Market and Hillgate Village into Notting Hill Gate, we used the eclectic colour palette from the houses behind the site to inform that of the glass panels on the south block.

On the north block, the colour palette of the handmade terracotta 'baguettes' was informed by the sequenced terraces on Pembridge Road opposite. The use of terracotta references Notting Hill's history with potteries. The long glazed slots of both buildings' new top floors pick up on the existing 1950s language, and coloured tiles in the recesses give an accent at high level, again referencing the 1950s detailing.

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Existing North Block  
CREDIT: SQUIRE & PARTNERS

**What were the challenges of the existing buildings?**

Working with an existing concrete frame was always going to be a challenge, and when the existing cladding was removed we uncovered many things that meant changes to details and design. The existing structure of the buildings also needed to be carefully assessed before adding extra floors.

As the existing floor-to-ceiling heights were compromised, we did all that we could to omit any form of suspended ceiling and minimise floor zones to maximise internal heights for the workspaces.

**'When the existing cladding was removed, we uncovered many things that meant changes to details and design'**

Both buildings have a challenging relationship to the high street, which can take bigger massing, and to the residential area behind them, which needed a more sensitive treatment.



**Had demolition ever been considered?**

No, we were determined to keep the structures as it was more sustainable and cost-effective.



Refurbished South Block  
CREDIT: MATT CLAYTON

**Aside from retaining the original fabric, what other aspects of your design reduce the whole-life carbon impact of the buildings?**

On the north block, we built the new floors from a hybrid steel and cross-laminated timber (CLT) construction. By using CLT for the floor slabs we omitted the use of new concrete, which has a high embodied carbon content.

**Were the planners supportive of the proposals?**

Yes, we received good support from Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea throughout the process.

**How have the completed buildings been received, and have you been back to see if it is performing as predicted?**

Both buildings were let well before they were completed and have been very successful. We have had a number of compliments from members of the public about the buildings.

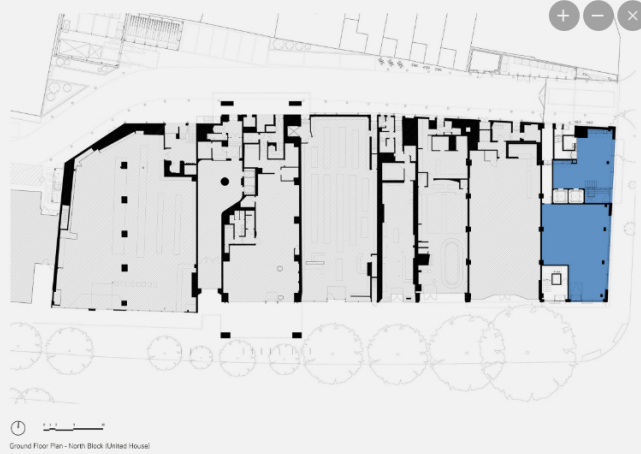
There are some issues with the CLT roofing slabs in terms of movement and leaking, but these are being resolved. As with all new technologies, there can be some early challenges.

**What have been the main lessons from the project that you could apply on other developments?**

To allow generous tolerance zones where structure is retained, and to permit sufficient time within the programme to undertake surveys in order to best co-ordinate proposals for the recladding of the façade. It was crucial to carry out early surveys to determine structural upstands and downstands, which informed strategies such as MEP and structure on the external envelope, and to minimise changes post planning

## 'Always allow time to undertake surveys to best co-ordinate proposals for the recladding of the façade'

Lastly, not to limit your creativity by the complexities or constraints of a retained structure, but rather engage with it to design something truly unique.



### Project data

**Start on site** 2018  
**Completion date** 2019  
**Gross internal floor area** North: 5,131m<sup>2</sup>; South GIA: 2,444m<sup>2</sup>  
**Form of contract or procurement route** Design & Build  
**Architect** Squire & Partners  
**Client** Frogmore  
**Structural engineer** Elliott Wood  
**M&E consultant** Peter Deer and Associates  
**Quantity surveyor** Quantem Consulting  
**Main contractor** North: Collins Construction; South: Iconic

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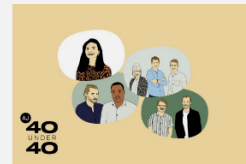
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