





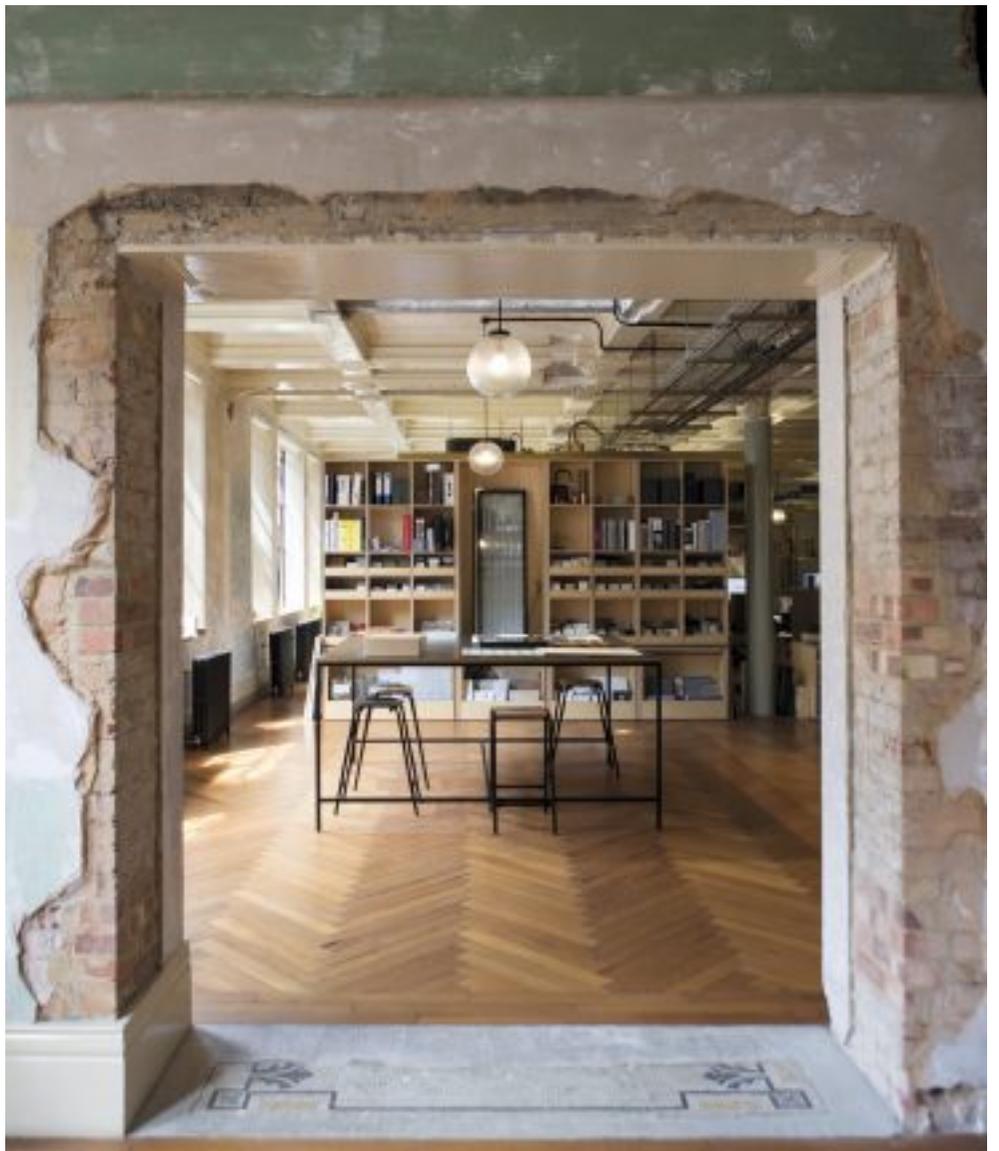
Materials library Squire & Partners

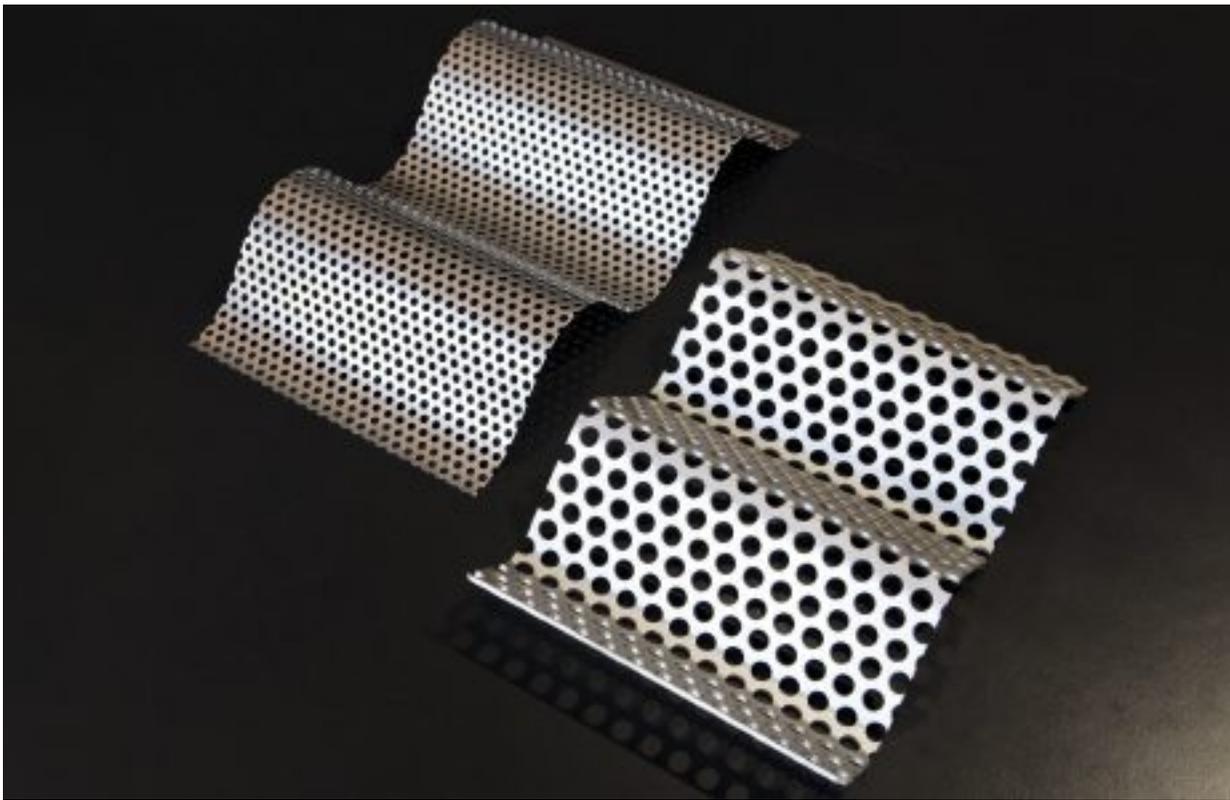
Maria Cheung explains how two meticulously organised materials libraries reflect the importance of materiality, craft and making to the practice's design approach

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Left: Maria Cheung pictured in front of the interiors library. Right: Materials in the architecture library are housed in bespoke, full-height timber display cases.





Perforated sinusoidal metal screen from Colorminium. “This wave-shaped mesh screen was employed as cladding for solar shading and privacy at Rolling Stock Yard, a new-build office in King’s Cross. The holes are punched into the material

before it’s pressed into shape, so we had to ensure that edges of the panels were made up of semicircular voids that would become whole when butted up against adjacent panels. This ensured a seamless aesthetic at the panel joints.”

Squire & Partners has operated from a converted Edwardian retail building in Brixton, south London, for the last five years. Built in 1876, the steel-framed structure housed the furniture department of what was the UK’s first department store. Following many years of retail use, it was converted into offices in the 1950s before falling into disrepair and then becoming a home to squatters. After acquiring the building in 2014, Squire & Partners set about reworking the interior spaces, skilfully revealing, conserving, and celebrating the historic fabric.

The restoration work involved carefully removing years of crude alterations, along with countless layers of paint, to reveal the original structure and fabric. Among the many architectural gems discovered and consequently retained are teak parquet floors, cast-iron radiators, decorative metal column capitals, and ornate green glazed wall tiles.

These items have in turn informed the design of new fixtures and fittings, such as the suspended blown glass lamps in the reception space, and the deep-pile Laguna

woven rugs. The latter incorporate organic patterns that evoke the motifs employed on the 19th-century wall tiles.

Inspired by the building’s department store past, the refurbishment is partly based on the idea of creating “concessions” within the space for the practice’s various in-house design disciplines. The development also houses amenities for local businesses and residents, including a music shop, cafe, bar, and multi-use event space. The restored and extended structure provides a rich array of workspaces – not least the materials library, which occupies part of the central atrium, as well as the interiors department.

Director and head of interior design Maria Cheung explains how this immaculately presented and organised resource is employed across the 180-strong practice.

How is the library organised and who is in charge?

We have two materials libraries: one for architecture and the other for interiors. The architecture library is a materials showcase with director Olga Gomez taking



Top: Conturax glass tubes and rods from Schott. “We used these German-made, medical-grade glass tubes to develop an innovative facade for a project on Bruton Street, which sadly did not go ahead. The tubes come in a range of different shapes, and would have been installed inside double-glazed units (made by Okalux) to give an alluring three-dimensional opaque effect.”

Above: Expanded metal lath from Focchi. “The lath forms part of the glazed facade at The Broadway, a mixed-use commercial and residential development under construction in Victoria. It is set within double-glazed units, reinforcing a diamond-shape motif that repeats throughout the project and provides both privacy and protection from glare.”



Crema d'Orcia limestone from Salvatori

"These sample tiles are all made from the same material, but each one incorporates a different surface finish, whether it be honed, hammered,

textured, routed or cut. We used this finishing technique on an installation for the Stone Federation, designed to highlight the versatility, tactility and aesthetic diversity of stone products."

overall responsibility for its operation. We used to have a librarian and a comprehensive filing system for all the catalogues and brochures, but people weren't using the library to research specific items; they were instead going online.

The library's main focus is to provide inspiration. We have clearly defined sections for timber, brickwork, ceramics, metals, glass, paints and finishes, as well as room for full-size project mock-ups. Practically everything is contained within a pair of full-height timber display cases, which include removable open-faced draws, made by our model-shop team. Everything here is about display; showing off what the design teams are doing and inspiring other members of staff.

How do you curate the architecture library?

Whenever we finish a project, the design team brings all the materials and samples they've been working on to the library. Olga then curates the selection, putting new items on display, returning frequently used samples to the collection, and disposing of

products that are no longer needed. We try to send the latter back to suppliers or reuse them for in-house craft projects. They're also given to local schools for children to make things with. Binning materials is always the last resort for us.

How is the interiors library organised?

The interiors library, which is within the interiors department, is very much a live resource – it's constantly updated with new materials that are displayed and stored in purpose-made wall units. Each project also has its own material palette, which is assigned a labelled tray and then slotted into the wall unit when not in use. The trays can be transported to meetings using specially made carry bags.

Unlike with the architecture library, every member of the interiors team (10 in total) is responsible for a specific section of this library. As a result, they become experts in their respective fields and can help inspire or advise other members of the department. Material types tend to be arranged by colour and texture. This is very



Top: Glass bricks from Nippon Electric Glass. "We were intending to use these beautiful glass bricks for a hotel project in Borough, which unfortunately did not go ahead. The products match traditional brick modules, making them easy to incorporate into masonry structures. Our aim was to create glowing sections of facade by illuminating the bricks from inside."

Above: Bespoke red brick from Lambs Bricks & Stone. "The desire to introduce brick craftsmanship at the Hans Place residential development in Knightsbridge led us to develop a series of CNC waterjet-cut bricks that form a repeating geometric pattern across the facade. A high degree of manufacturing precision allowed the bricks to be laid with 1mm mortar joints."



Black and gold Tramazite from Based Upon. “This synthetic internal facing material is made from resin infused with metals and coloured pigments. Available in different colours, as well as matt and

polished finishes, it has incredible depth and visual appeal. We used it for our own office reception desk and more recently on a spa feature wall at the mixed-use Lancer Square development in Kensington.”

important to us, as the starting point for a project often involves getting the materials out and seeing how they look and feel.

Time is always of the essence, so making sure the library works effectively and is up to date is vital.

Every sample must be clearly marked. We find that some manufacturers, such as Element 7 (timber flooring), label and display their products in terms of tone or other visual characteristics, which helps speed up the specification process. Outdated or non-useful materials are culled every three months.

Fabric swatches form a sizeable section of the library. They are arranged by type, such as upholstery, curtains or wall linings. Kvadrat supplies its samples on neat hangers, which makes display and selection much easier. The company clearly knows how designers work and we tend to use them a lot! Finally, we reserve some space for displaying inspirational materials. Current favourites include a three-dimensional concrete cladding tile, lava stone with a textured surface, and marquetry panels made from recycled timber.

What materials most interest the practice?

All materials interest us, but crafted items are particularly appealing. We try to push materials in new directions, revealing unseen qualities and nuances. This is important given the practice’s high output – we don’t want to produce buildings that all look and feel alike.

How do you research and find materials?

We adopt two different approaches. The first is more technical, involving researching supplier and manufacturer data – usually online – for a material that we already know we want to use. The second is using the architecture materials showcase for inspiration because we don’t know what we want yet. It’s a learning process; if you don’t see the materials out on display, you tend to go back to what you know.

On the interiors side, we have a ‘show and tell’ session every Friday morning where we invite suppliers to come in and talk about their materials.



Top: Woven leather from Marine Leather. “We like to use this material for wall finishes or to line the surface of joinery items and the outside of chairs. Its crafted, tactile nature is highly appealing.”

Above: Etched and printed plywoods developed by Squire & Partners. “This etched plywood design was created in-house using a laser machine. Our illustration and model-shop teams worked together to establish a range of line thicknesses and cutting depths that could be used to create different graphic effects.”