ARCHITECTURE | 1 DAY AGO | BY JONATHAN BELL AND ELLIE STATHAKI

The finest brutalist architecture in London and beyond

Can't get enough of brutalism? Neither can we. Scroll below, for some of the world's finest brutalist architecture in London and beyond

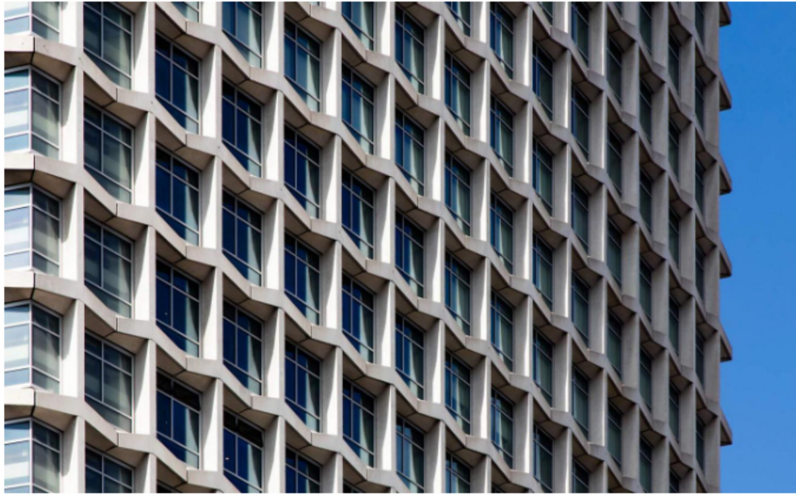
Centre Point (1963-1966, by Richard Seifert & Partners) has been acquired by developer Almacantar. They enlisted Conran and Partners to renovate the building. *Photography: Luke Hayes*

In London, neglected brutalist behemoths are being rebooted and given new life. The wave of savvy renovations is being led by a flock of eagle-eyed developers who wish to save – and capitalise on – these concrete urban structures' dramatic shapes. This is not just a London-focused trend as more brutalist architecture around the world is being given a new lease of life. In London alone we counted contemporary renovations of Centre Point and the Economist Building as part of the movement. Can't get enough of brutalism? Neither can we. Read this report of new developments at London's Balfron Tower or visit Brussels where a brutal behemoth is being converted into a co-working space, while in the States a Marcel Breuer buidling in Connecticut is being reimagined as a hotel. Or scroll below, for

some of the world's finest brutalist architecture in London and beyond.

Brutalist architecture in London

Centre Point, 1963-1966, by Richard Seifert & Partners



When completed in 1966, Centre Point represented a beacon of optimism within its original context of a run-down, post-war London, standing out for its avant-garde architecture and engineering. However, it remained underused for years until, in 2010, it was acquired by developer Almacantar, which enlisted Conran and Partners to bring the building into the 21st century. Now the design includes modern apartments, a lavish penthouse and a series of amenity spaces, including a pool and a private lounge/club house area with screening rooms and treatment rooms for residents and their guests. *Photography: Luke Hayes*

Brixton Recreation Centre, 1974-1985, by George Finch

Photography: Simon Phipps

The now listed Brixton Recreation Centre, designed by architect George Finch and completed in the mid 1980s is one of the new additions of remarkable brutalist architecture included in the refreshed Brutalist London Map (Second Edition) by Henrietta Billings and with photography by Simon Phipps, published by Blue Crow

Media. The map aims to highlight London's rich legacy in brutalist architecture in order to celebrate and help save many buildings from demolition. 'In 2022, seven years on from the first edition of the map, the environmental impact of demolishing these buildings and their vast stores of embodied carbon is alarmingly clear. From a sustainability, as well as a heritage perspective, we cannot afford to lose any more of them,' says the author. More buildings that made their way into the map for the first time are the National Archives at Kew; Blackheath Meeting House; the Royal College of Art's Darwin Building; and the Camden Town Hall Annexe, recently converted into the Standard Hotel.

Economist Building, 1959-1964, by Alison and Peter Smithson

'You'd originally sit with a typewriter on the windowsill, then swing round and write longhand at your desk,' says Deborah Saunt, explaining the Smithsons' tailor-made office space in the Economist Building for The Economist magazine. Saunt's practice, DSDHA, won the competition to refurbish this London icon, a building that took the raw pragmatism of brutalism in another, very different direction. The best-known shots of the structure – three 'roach bed' Portland stone-clad towers around a central plaza – were taken by a young Michael Carapetian, a friend of the Smithsons who brought a cinematic, reportage-like quality to his images. The AA-trained architect recalls that he 'wanted a day that was slightly misty and wet. It was the first time a new building had been photographed in the rain.' The imagery cast has a moody, atmospheric light. 'It wasn't seen as shocking, but the building was respected for its ability to blend in with the rest of the street,' he recalls. 'The idea was to elevate the plaza above the rest of the street – a sort of utopian idea.' Saunt says the practice envisaged the structure as a blueprint for a new form of urbanism, linked by walkways and quasi-public spaces. Her studio's modest but comprehensive refurbishment strips away interiors that themselves were wholesale replacements of Smithsons' careful original detailing. 'We've made it a lot more harmonious, but have embraced their vision of architecture as a framework,' she says. The revitalised building will see one of London's most elegant public spaces brought back to life. *Photography: Grant Smith*

National Theatre, 1976, by Denys Lasdun

The National Theatre courted controversy from the outset, with the UK's favourite architectural scourge, Prince Charles, casually dismissing the capital's new cultural flagship as a 'nuclear power station'. Sir Denys Lasdun's rigorously composed concrete statement still looks at fresh as ever, thanks to an £80m refurb by Haworth Tompkins in 2015, not to mention the quality of the original design. With generous terraces that step down to the Thames and a monumental assemblage of interior volumes, spaces and stages, it remains one of London's contemporary classics. The city is also home to Lasdun's other masterpiece, the 1964 Royal College of Physicians, a Brutalist stage set of concrete and stone, rising up amongst the genteel stucco terraces of Regents Park. Lasdun's Theatre refined the aesthetic that had already been established by the adjacent Hayward Gallery and the Queen Elizabeth Hall. These buildings still represent a substantial chunk of London's cultural infrastructure and were built between 1960 and 1968 on the site of the Festival of Britain, alongside the remodelled Royal Festival Hall. Designed by a team of architects employed by the Greater London Council – including key members of the iconoclastic Archigram studio – this group of buildings represents concrete at its most diverse and distracting, a collage of textures and forms that rises up beside the river in a thrilling urban jumble. Much loved, forever threatened, but an integral part of the London experience. *Photography: Ijclark*

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Alexandra Road Estate, 1968-1978, by Neave Brown

Social housing at its most optimistic, aesthetically sophisticated and single-minded best, the Alexandra Road Estate snakes alongside a railway line in Camden, containing over 500 homes in a variety of configurations. Created by the late Neave Brown – then working in Camden Council's Architecture Department – it went wildly over-budget and later found infamy as a location for dystopian films and television. Yet despite the controversy it continues to be a desirable place to live, with its shuttered concrete flanks rising steeply above a pedestrianised central street. *Photography: Banalities*

One Kemble Street, 1968, by George Marsh

This cylinder and box office block is a typical piece of Sixties grandstanding, almost entirely blasé about its immediate surroundings. These days it finds itself an integral part of the eclectic cityscape. Designed by George Marsh, one of the partners in Colonel Richard Seifert's massive commercial architecture outfit, the circular building showcased Seifert's trademark angular modular façade and muscular supporting columns. It was also the HQ to the UK's Civil Aviation Authority for many years. Currently, the central London structure - also known as Space House - is being given a new lease of life by developers Seaforth Land and architects Squire and Partners, who are on site with a transformation of the iconic shell into modern office and retail spaces. *Photography: Tomislav Medak*

Brunswick Centre, 1972, by Patrick Hodgkinson

Patrick Hodgkinson's original vision for Bloomsbury consisted of a vast trench of concrete dwellings and lecture halls, stomping across the remnants of Georgian London with Brutalist glee. The only chunk to be finished, the Brunswick Centre, is perhaps London's sole megastructure, a concrete valley of houses arranged above a shopping parade and cinema. It took three decades before a programme of refurbishment and upgrade works covered the raw concrete in the paint Hodgkinson originally specified. Now a highly desirable and light-filled place to live, it offers an insight into the grandiose schemes of decades past. *Photography: John K Thorne*