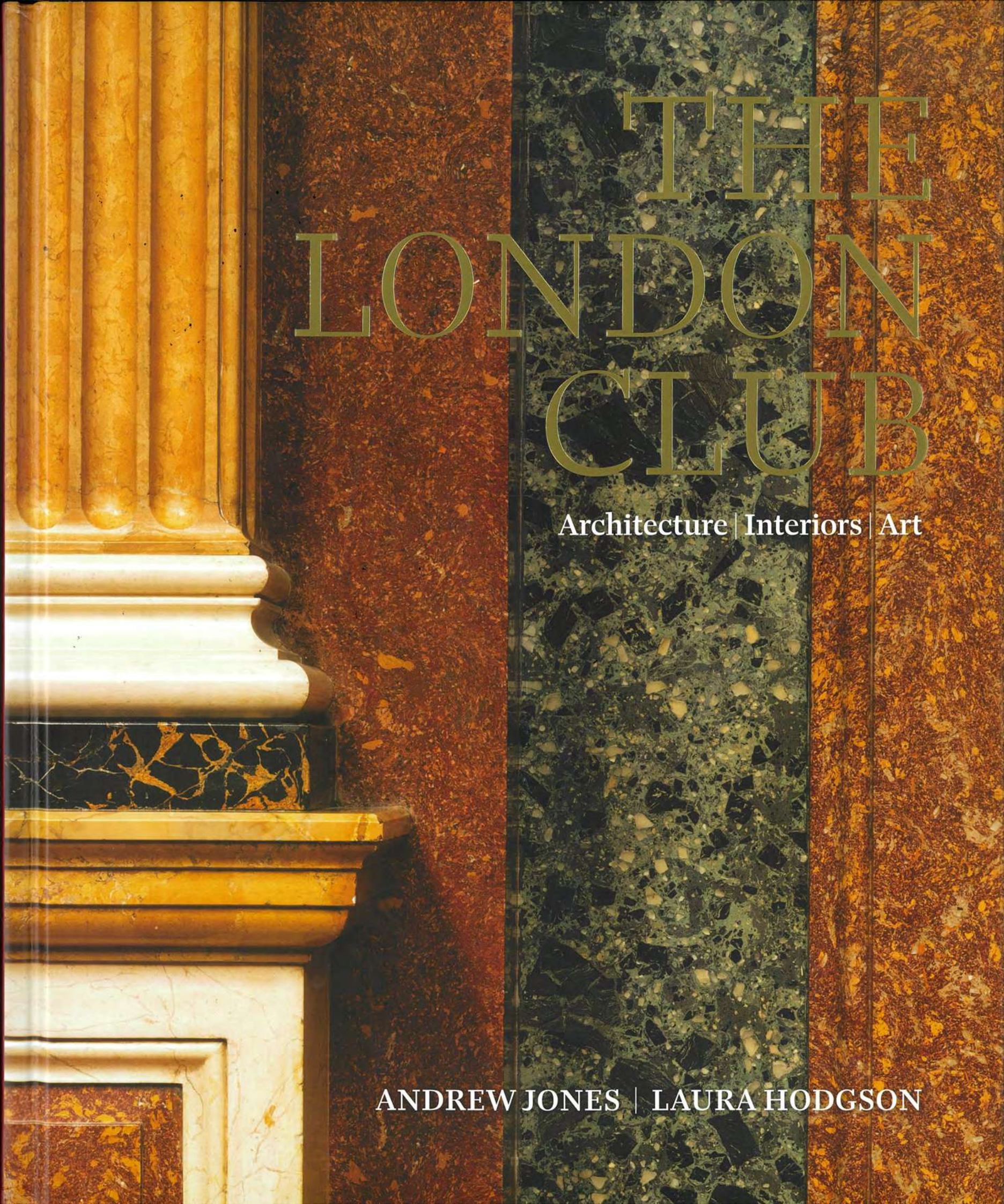




THE LONDON CLUB

Architecture | Interiors | Art

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Upstairs at The Department Store

Founded 2018



OPPOSITE The turret rises from the roof garden like an Elizabethan banqueting house. The glass lozenge dome was made in Switzerland by Tuchschnid

BELOW The copper top of the old dome is preserved in the roof garden



UPSTAIRS AT THE DEPARTMENT STORE is the first wholly new London club building in over 50 years, a luminous pavilion rising from the roof of what was once the Bon Marché department store. It is built with the precision of an architectural model, the work of Squire & Partners whose offices occupy the beautifully converted Edwardian department store downstairs. This is total design, which brings together a number of Squire's departments: architects, interior designers, model makers and graphic designers, all of which remain involved as users (the club doubles up as the staff restaurant).

Visually, the club is all about its architecture. You marvel at the construction, the materials, the furnishings and the setting, and how all of them work together. The club is centred around a giant open-plan room, with different areas for the bar, for lounging and for dining, and a screened section for the kitchen and a private dining room. The ceiling is divided into compartments each with its own skylight, so that light pours in from above as well as from the full-height glass walls. Winter nights are made cosy by a log fireplace.

The glass walls of the main pavilion open on to a luxuriant terrace: apple, pear and olive trees and hedges of fragrant lavender abuzz with Brixton bees. At the end of the terrace sits the department store's turret, a private dining room, whose postwar cupola has been replaced with a remarkable emerald glass dome topped by a pale-gold finial, a modern-day version of an Elizabethan banqueting house, but with the added glamour of having been made in Switzerland. London has a number of skilfully converted domes, but, whereas the interiors of most of them have an enclosed grotto-like charm, from the inside of this dome you can see the sky above. A grotto with a sunroof.

The palette of materials consists mostly of unseasoned French oak, copper and plywood, often in different forms (stained and unstained oak; polished and oxidised copper) depending on their use. Sheets of polished copper gleam alongside the green oak ceilings and black plywood walls, lending a warm and reflective glow to the bar and the fireplace walls. Deep window niches in the east wall are lined in the same copper sheeting, framing and reflecting the





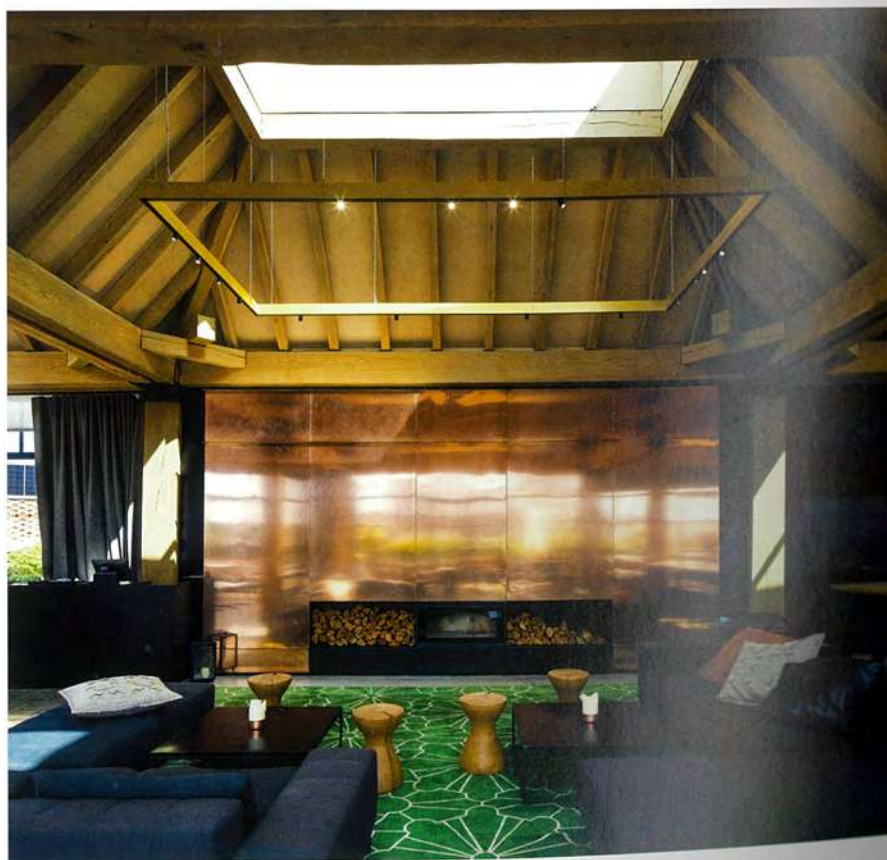
ABOVE Copper-lined window niches frame the views and glow in the afternoon light

RIGHT The fireplace wall is lined in copper. The carpet is by Eley Kishimoto and is based on Victorian patterns found elsewhere in the building. The seating is by Minotti

views, incandescent at sunset. The bar itself is covered in matt grey untreated pewter. Monumental oak columns have a tree-like presence and were turned in the Netherlands using ship mast-making techniques. On the terrace, large corten steel planters create sheltered compartments. The raw nature of many of the materials makes for an evolving aesthetic of patination and splash marks on the copper and dramatic cracks in the oak.

The architecture and furnishings of the club contain numerous references to their surroundings. The outside of the skylights is covered with scalloped oxidised copper, picking up the texture and colour of the dome of another Bon Marché building across the street. The pattern on a rug by Eley Kishimoto is a reference to the design of the glazing bars of a rooflight elsewhere in the building.

As befits a location that was once the furnishings department of the store, particular care has gone into the choice of furniture. A number of pieces were designed by Squire & Partners and made by the firm's model shop or specialist manufacturers including Benchmark and Goldfinger. Tabletops were made of pine salvaged from elsewhere in the building and, in the dome, copper benches and sideboards were constructed using scaffolding techniques. There are also customised pieces by Hans Wegner (Carl Hansen & Søn), Minotti and Flos.





ABOVE The dining area in the club room. Note the green oak columns and roof. The end wall displays Squire & Partners architectural memorabilia. The seating is by Hans Wegner

A wall of alcoves and shelves contains an assortment of mementos related to the architects' work and the building: antique brass hat and sock display stands salvaged from an old shop; the maquette of a figurine developed for an Asian fashion store; gifts from friends and clients; and a large stuffed white goose to evoke the nursery rhyme, "Goosey goosey gander, Whither shall I wander? **Upstairs** and downstairs".

Brixton is a low-rise neighbourhood on a hill, and the views from the fourth floor premises of the club are captivating. Close by are other Bon Marché buildings in their various states of repair and occupancy and the elaborate brickwork of Squire's new Department Store Studios; a little further afield you see the 1970s hulk of the Brixton Rec, the Edwardian baroque tower of Lambeth Town Hall and the "Tower of the Winds" steeple of St Matthew's Church. Beyond, a menu of London landmarks: the BT Tower, The Shard, the City, Canary Wharf. And there is sky, glorious expanses of it, criss-crossed with the vapour trails of passing aeroplanes.

Once Upstairs, you may never wish to come down. ♣

