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Welcome to the latest edition of **Space**. As former Chief Executive John Burns hands over the reins and reflects on the company he founded; the business continues apace with a number of schemes on site and underway. Fletcher Priest architects discuss the design process of the recently completed Brunel Building in Paddington, and we look in detail at 80 Charlotte Street, Fitzrovia and The Featherstone Building, Old Street, both projects currently on site.

Meanwhile significant changes are improving the Baker Street Quarter, restaurants are thriving at Tea Building in Shoreditch and we support a new initiative to encourage diversity in architectural writing.

We hope you enjoy the read.

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INK

Front Cover & Inside Front Cover

80 Charlotte Street W1

Looking Ahead

2019



Brunel Building
2 Canalside Walk W2

Architect: Fletcher Priest
243,200 sq ft (**pre-let** 237,700 sq ft)
Completed: H1 2019
brunelbuilding.com



Tea Building
56 Shoreditch High Street E1

Architect: AHMM
Office and reception refurbishment
Completion: H2 2019
teabuilding.co.uk

2020



80 Charlotte Street
W1

Architect: Make
380,000 sq ft
(**pre-let** 321,600 sq ft)
Completion: H1 2020
80charlottestreet.com



The Featherstone Building
EC1

Architect: Morris+Company
125,000 sq ft
Completion: H1 2022
thefeatherstonebuilding.london



Soho Place
W1

Architect: AHMM
285,000 sq ft (**pre-let** 142,600 sq ft)
Completion: H1 2022
Isohplace.london

2022



Holden House
W1

Architect: Hopkins
150,000 sq ft
holdenhousew1.com



19-35 Baker Street
W1

Architect: Hopkins
293,000 sq ft
derwentlondon.com

2022+



The Making of Brunel

Tim Fyles of Fletcher Priest architects talks us through their design inspiration for the Brunel Building.

Following a competition, **Derwent London** asked us to develop a plan for the replacement of the 1960s Bridge House in west London—so called because it spanned the Paddington Basin arm of the **Grand Union Canal**.

The site is opposite Paddington Station and close to the Westway and, from the design's inception, we considered the historic and physical context, particularly the Great Western Railway terminus and the canal. The scheme includes significant improvements to the public realm, and when complete will create a new section of canal towpath to link Paddington Basin with Little Venice.

We were inspired by this industrial context—the tight site geometry, below-ground constraints and new public realm generated the building forms. The 17-storey **Brunel Building** carefully nestles into a space alongside the Bakerloo Line, which runs below the corner of the site, while a 6m set-back from the canal wall allows the canal towpath to extend as far as Bishop's Bridge Road.

We celebrated the unorthodox plan form which was derived from these site constraints, and it also generated an external steel structure idea. This powerful exoskeleton reflects the engineering structures and suits the scale of the surrounding area, as well as providing shade to the façades and creating column-free interiors with exposed beams spanning up to 16m from exterior to core.

Working with **Arup**, we carefully studied the junctions and components of the exoskeleton. Their design was developed, using physical and digital modelling to test their efficiency and understand their visual appearance. It was a very close collaboration of engineering and architectural design.

Brunel Building's external steel frame rests on gigantic concrete feet 3m high, which are shaped to express the transfer of the structural load to the foundations. The junctions between the external and internal steel frame are fitted with an insulated collar using nanotechnology thermal protection. The same orange colour is used to mark the canalside entrance to the building.

Inside, the core—a robust, fair-faced concrete box—runs the full length and height of the building. It gives easy access to any point on each floor, making subdivision easy, and leads up to large roof terraces with views over London.

Throughout the building, the industrial material palette celebrates stripped-back, authentic materials, including concrete, saw-milled timber and salvaged light fittings. The shade from the external structure allows large windows that give panoramic views from each floor.

It was important to **Fletcher Priest** that the Brunel Building embraced its canalside location. The new towpath provides public amenity and leads to the entrance, reception space and restaurant which overlooks the canal. The reception area extends via vast motorised doors on to the towpath along the canal and at the first floor Juliet balconies provide views over the water side activity.

We aimed with the Brunel Building to further our exploration of what a workplace can be, and create a canalside industry-inspired architecture that the people who work there will enjoy—along with those who are walking by, cruising past or mooring up.
brunelbuilding.com





The Featherstone Building

Old Street

CGI

White Collar Factory's nearby sister will offer a variety of interesting spaces, says Caroline Haines, Development Manager.

Building on the huge success of Derwent London's **White Collar Factory**, another project in the Old Street cluster is moving forward, with demolition almost complete and marketing due to begin later this year.

On the corner of City Road and Featherstone Street, **The Featherstone Building**—fondly known as White Collar Factory's little sister—will deliver around 125,000 sq ft of new-build accommodation in early 2022.

The main theme of architect **Morris+Company's** design is the reimagining of a Victorian warehouse typology as a 21st century workplace. Inspired by warehouse buildings in nearby Clerkenwell, it uses contrasting brick over four distinct 'blocks' of varying heights and planes to break down the scale of the building and create a beautifully articulated façade.

At ground floor level, an expressive glazing system will provide plenty of character as well as a strong base for the entrances to the retail unit, integrated café and a prominent main office entrance from City Road. Dedicated cycle and small and medium sized enterprises (SME) workspace entrances also lead into the building from Featherstone Street.

SME space formed an important part of the planning consent for The Featherstone Building. Smaller startup companies will be fully supported, with the space fitted out ready for occupation.

Entering the building from City Road, visitors will be greeted by a 7.5m floor to ceiling reception space demonstrating a strong materials palette of brick, concrete and timber. The office space volume is maximised, with floor-to-ceiling heights of just over 3m. Anything over 3m is unusual in modern offices, but we always strive to achieve it. We have full-height openable windows throughout—another of Derwent London's hallmarks.

Derwent is always looking to refine its projects and, building on the ground-breaking technology of the concrete core cooling system at White Collar Factory, we have taken the next step and provided the fresh air under the floor, to enable an even cleaner soffit and again maximise volume. The building has a BREEAM Outstanding design stage certificate and it is hoped to achieve a LEED Platinum rating.

Other amenities for occupiers include fantastic roof terraces that overlook Bunhill Fields. The building will also offer excellent cycle storage, massively exceeding the British Council for Offices (BCO) recommended ratios.

This is well timed, as Transport for London has started upgrade works on the Old Street roundabout, aiming to make the streets more pedestrian and cycle-friendly, and further enhancing the local area.

thefeatherstonebuilding.london



Entrance CGI

80 Charlotte Street Fitzrovia

Derwent's 80 Charlotte Street is a marathon achievement, says Development Manager, Tom French.

Derwent London owns almost 1.5 million sq ft of space in **Fitzrovia** and the **80 Charlotte Street** scheme is the jewel in its Fitzrovia crown.

Our ownership in the West End district dates back to post-war days when bomb-damaged sites were acquired for redevelopment. Originally developed for the Post Office, 80 Charlotte Street later became home to advertising agency **Saatchi & Saatchi**, and the birthplace of media campaigns such as 'The Pregnant Man'.

Here the phrase 'good things come to those who wait' certainly rings true—this 1.4 acre island site has seen a slow evolution. Consent was granted in 2011. A strategic relocation of Saatchi & Saatchi to our **Turnmill** and **40 Chancery Lane** schemes led to a start on site with **Multiplex** in 2016. We are now in the final race to completion, expected in early 2020.

Make Architects and **Arup** engineers have travelled with us through this journey of a decade. The design appears simple and timeless, but has layers of complexity behind it—the structural solution, the air distribution, and its planning history.

Yet it will have all the touches of detail that Derwent brings to its buildings. The journey through the building begins with a striking Donald Judd-inspired entrance, through the reception, with its considered palette of materials, complemented by the café, to the one acre (40,000 sq ft) floorplates, with their generous c. 3m floor-to-ceiling height.

All this is wrapped in a strong architectural language of board-mark concrete and Danish brick, topped off with over 20,000 sq ft of terraces.

Central to the building's DNA is its sustainability story. From the start, the strategy was to deliver an all-electric building on the principle that, as the electrical grid decarbonises, the building rapidly becomes greener. On that basis, if we source energy from REGOs (Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin), it will push us closer to a zero-carbon building—setting a genuinely high benchmark within the industry.

All these characteristics have played a strong part in drawing tenants **Arup** and **The Boston Consulting Group** to the building. In 2017 the building was predominantly pre-let—three years prior to completion.

As the marathon turns to the final mile, we start to welcome the tenants to the building to breathe life and energy into it. All eyes will be on 80 Charlotte Street over the next 12 months.

80charlottestreet.com





Field Trips & Craftmanship

80 Charlotte Street W1

Loveld factory Belgium

Finding the perfect materials for 80 Charlotte Street took Derwent's team far and wide, says Group Architect Tim Hyman.



Materiality is key to the vision Derwent London has for its buildings—and **80 Charlotte Street** is no exception.

The legibility of the architecture and the articulation of the building is a result of the combination and detailing of the palette of materials and finishes selected with our architects. Some materials, such as the hand-made Petersen bricks, are bespoke in their own right; some elements are crafted by expert manufacturers and suppliers—modern-day artisans.

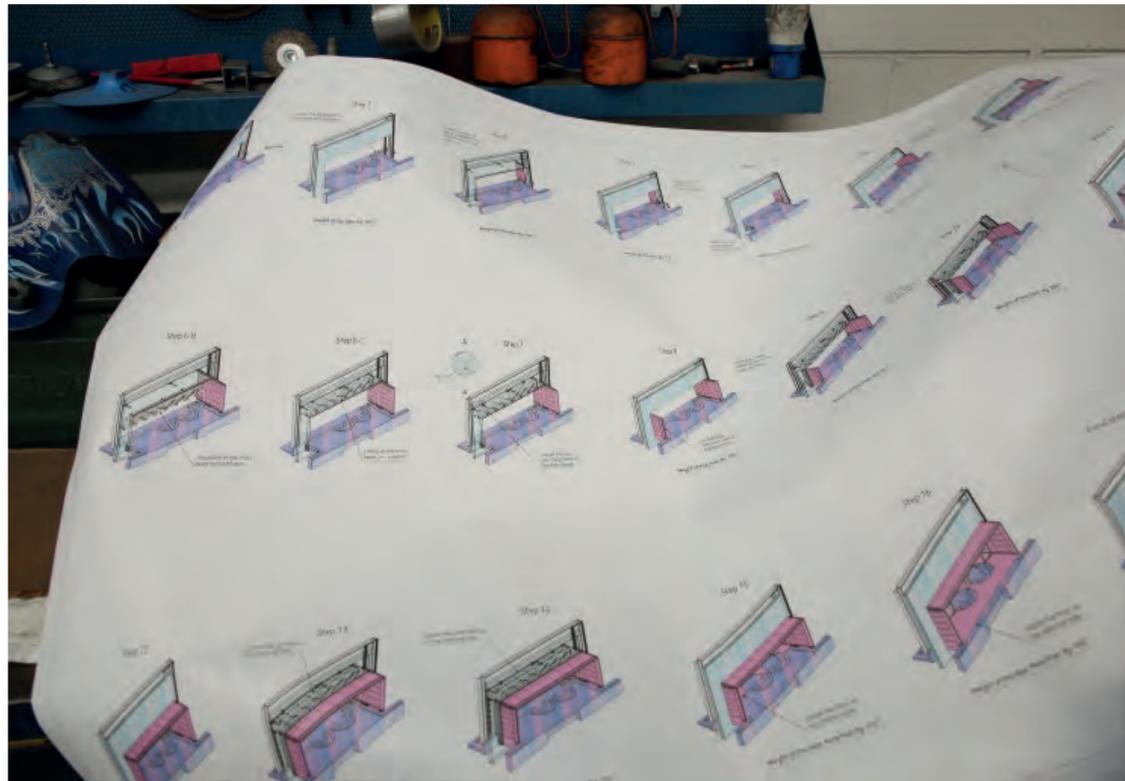
Two such elements of the façade of 80 Charlotte Street have taken us to **Belgium** and **Italy**.

Inspired by Selldorf Architects' exterior for the David Zwirner Gallery in New York, a board-marked concrete

façade is being produced in Belgium by highly skilled concrete sub-contractor **Loveld**. An almost endless number of permutations of concrete mix, boards and wood grain were tried before the right recipe was found, involving dozens of samples and mock-ups.

Meanwhile, in Italy, the building's Cor-Ten steel entrance portal—inspired by artist Donald Judd—is being manufactured by **Metal Sistem**, the superb metalwork artisans responsible for Daniel Libeskind's Life Electric sculpture in their native Como. Our design team revelled in their engineering skill and material expertise, testing and pushing the boundaries of what is achievable.

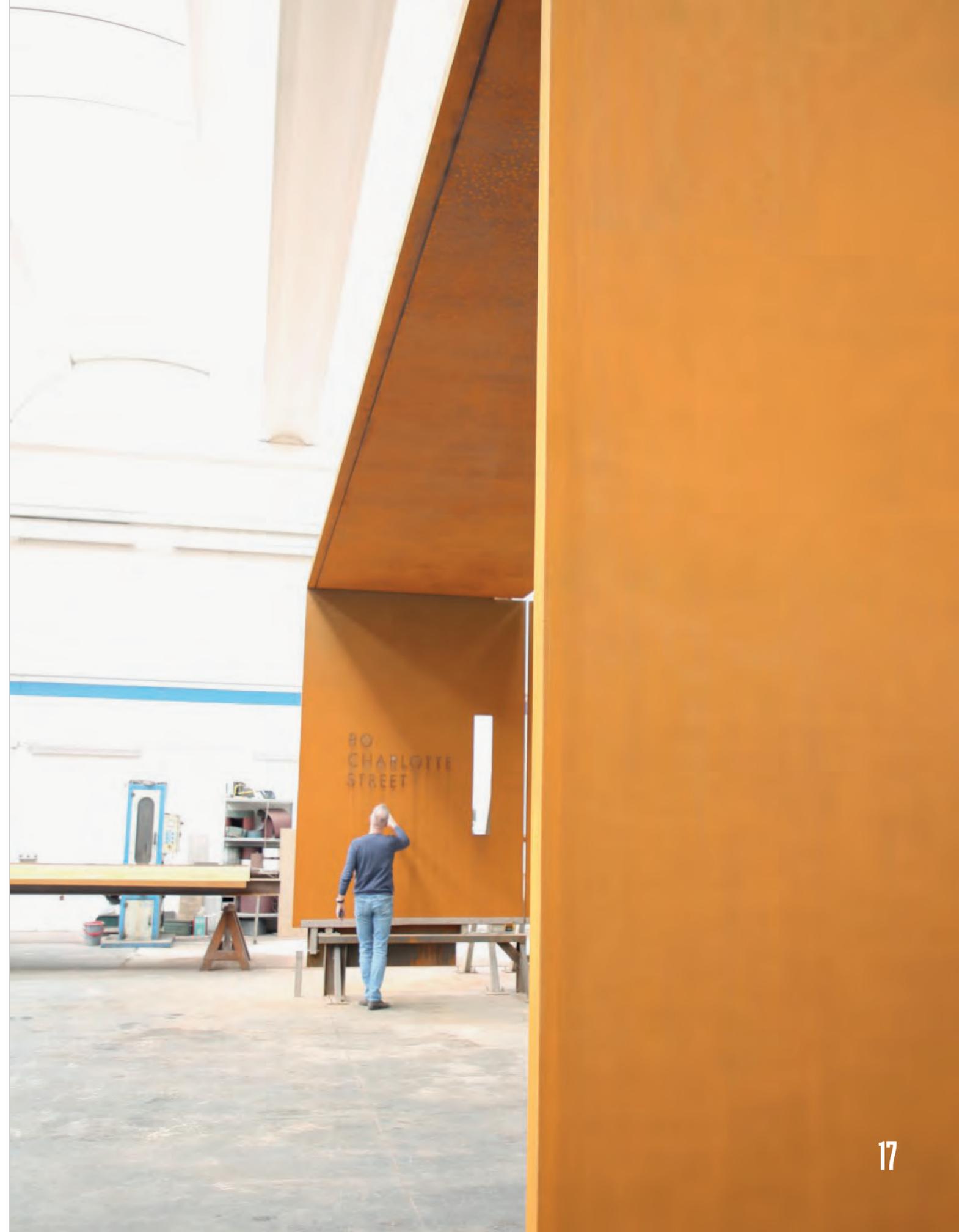
Metal Sistem factory
Italy



Engagement with specialist sub-contractors and artisans is essential in producing buildings of quality. Of course, none of this happens by accident: 80 Charlotte Street will be the product of many hours of design, debate, discussion and collaboration. We are willing learners and delight in the art of what is possible.

This process is as enjoyable as it is intense, as we strive to make our buildings 'just right' and stand the test of time. It takes a lot of early mornings, long days, late nights and sleeping in strange beds—it's a tough job, and we love doing it.

80charlottestreet.com





Two-way Street

Something wonderful is happening in the **West End**. The massive gyratories that have disrupted Fitzrovia and Marylebone for half a century are disappearing. These urban autobahns, these avenues of acceleration, these streets of speed, are history. Piccadilly and Pall Mall went two-way a couple of years ago. In March, Baker Street and Gloucester Place followed suit.

The improvements are part of big changes taking place in the **'Baker Street Quarter'**—the area north of Oxford Street and roughly covering the **Portman Estate** which was laid out in the 18th century with gridded streets that continued the pattern of the Howard de Walden estate to the east. This means the area has good 'bones'—a hierarchy of streets—wide, medium and mews; a number of green squares like Bryanston, Montague, Portman and Manchester, as well as fine private houses some of which have been converted for public use—the Wallace Collection took over Hertford House in 1900, while the Home House club now occupies the magnificent Georgian residence of the Countess of Home.

In the 1950s and 1960s during the office building boom The Portman Estate worked with developers to deliver new workspace in the area. One of those was Max Rayne whose **London Merchant Securities** company merged with **Derwent Valley** to form **Derwent London** in 2007. As a result, the Portman Estate and Derwent London are planning to redevelop most of the city block behind 19—35 Baker Street with **Hopkins Architects** providing the design.

The new buildings, instead of being book-ended by roaring traffic, will now connect with the rest of the neighbourhood and pedestrians will enjoy the benefits of a route through the site with an open courtyard at its heart. This is the new city. When the gyratories were installed, urban design was predicated on keeping the traffic moving. Today, the focus is on healthy streets, good placemaking and, above all, people.

Peter Murray

— Writer and commentator on Architecture and the Built Environment



John Burns: still making an impression

Derwent London's founding Chief Executive John Burns stepped down from his post in May after 35 years, seeing his brainchild grow to become one of the most significant organisations in the London property market. It was an important moment for the company as Robbie Rayne simultaneously retired as Chairman. A succession plan clicked into place: John steps into the Non-Executive Chairman role for the next two years, while his place as Chief Executive is taken by Paul Williams, who has been with Derwent since 1987 and a board member since 1998.

In a conversation in his Savile Row office before the handover, John—justly regarded as one of the most astute players in the property world—was in a typically self-deprecating mode. “I don’t think I was sure what I wanted to do when we started,” he confessed. “I did want to get away from being a property agent, and to act as a principal. And I was always intrigued by the workings of the capital markets and the stock exchange. I just thought that if we could find a shell company and get some backing, we could try and do some interesting things. But it was really based on asset management, not refurbishment or redevelopment—which we knew zero about.”

But quickly he realised that the trick was to add value to buildings others overlooked. “We learned on the job. We started by buying investments—properties we could improve. Other people’s cast-offs, secondary or tertiary property. And then we developed an interest in the architecture.”

The pattern was set, and by spotting opportunities in at first off-pitch locations, nurturing rising-star architects to produce workspaces with more flair than most, John grew

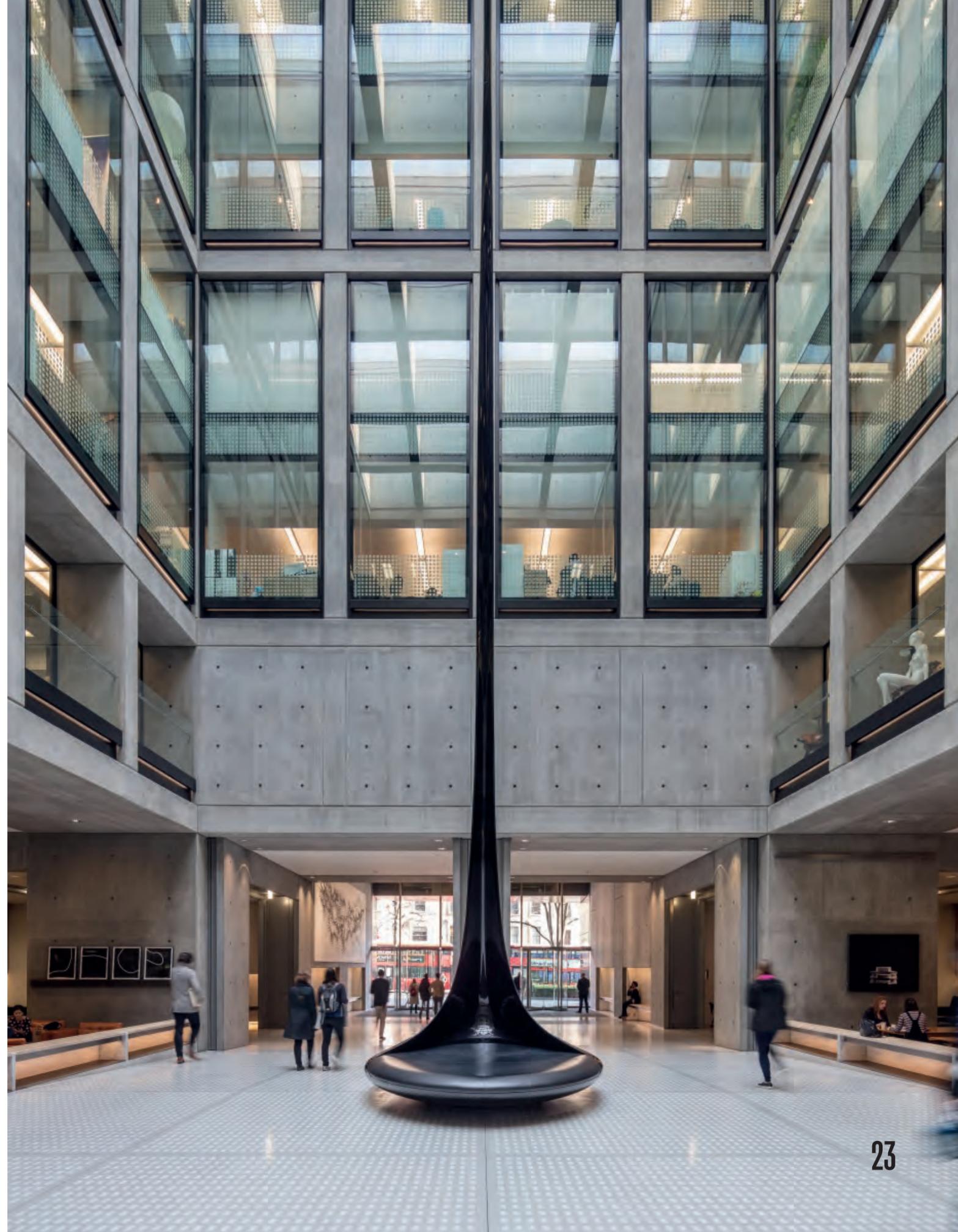


Tea Building E1

his company from one worth £1.5 million to one now valued at some £3.4 billion. The way he puts it, it's easy. "It's a fairly simple business model," he says. "We always have a couple of good projects on the go. At the end of the day we are basically buyers and managers of assets."

London has changed a lot in those 35 years—John singles out the transformation of the Clerkenwell, Shoreditch and Paddington districts as among the most impressive and under his leadership Derwent has had a lot to do with the transformation of these areas. For instance, the **Tea Building** in Shoreditch kick-started the creative-industries surge in the area, and few developers bothered to look at Islington until the success of the **Angel Building**.

His top tip? Knowing what tenants appreciate, and can relate to, and that is, quite literally, a good reception. "You never get a second chance at making a first impression" he says.





Shoreditch Stars

There's been a near insatiable appetite for new restaurants in London over the last decade, but have we finally had our fill? Relentless competition and an uncertain political and economic future have seen a raft of closures across the capital, but in amongst the gloom two restaurants shine bright. Perhaps it's the beaming gleam of their Michelin stars; **Lyle's** and **Brat**, both in the iconic **Tea Building** are certainly doing something right. So, we sat down with co-owner **John Ogier** (Lyle's), and Owner-Chef **Tomos Parry** (Brat) to find out.

SPACE: *How long have you been up and running?*

JO: We turned five in April. But the dates for how long you have to be open before the business seems safe keep changing. At first it was a year, then five, and now there's Brexit... so who knows.

TP: We opened mid-March last year, so we've survived the first year!

SPACE: *Why Shoreditch, why Tea Building?*

JO: We thought what we were planning would work in this area. And we just thought it was a beautiful building and knew this would be an amazing place to have a restaurant.

TP: I loved the site. The room has a lot of character—with the wood panelling it feels like old London. The big windows are incredible. And the first floor is exciting. I love Shoreditch but it was really about the site itself.

SPACE: *Sum up the culinary ethos of your restaurant in a sentence.*

JO: We want to showcase British produce in a welcoming, relaxing atmosphere and we want to show that British produce is amongst the best in the world.

TP: Cooking over fire, driven by purity and product, influenced by the approach of the Basque country in that respect, but we're not a Spanish restaurant.

SPACE: *What inspired you to get into the food business?*

JO: My dad had a massive love of cooking and he tried his hand at a pub then a small restaurant, and I caught the bug way back then from washing pots.

TP: Kitchens are a bit of a leveller. It doesn't matter where you come from or who you are, when you're in the kitchen, everyone has to graft, and I like that.

SPACE: *What do you put your success down to?*

JO: I think we're always challenging ourselves. Our menu very rarely stays the same because of seasonality and that's true of our drinks offering too, even our coffee changes throughout the year based on where in the world it's in season.

TP: I think it's attention to detail, and the hard work that goes into sourcing our produce. And there's a depth of understanding to everything we put on the plate and in the service style.

SPACE: *How does it feel to get a Michelin Star?*

JO: It's great. We never set out for one, but it certainly helps. People can relate to it, but there can be a perception of what a Michelin Star means for a restaurant and whether that rings true is another thing.

TP: It's a bit nuts because we got it after about 6 months. So yeah, it's pretty surreal.

SPACE: *What advice would you give to anyone thinking of opening a restaurant in London?*

JO: I think you can achieve anything you want to achieve. It's about doing what you believe is right and sticking to your guns, which is hard when other people are sometimes questioning what you're doing.

TP: Have a focus, a clarity of vision of what you want to do and stop trying to please every single person.

SPACE: *If you could have anyone in for dinner, who would it be and what would you serve?*

JO: I'm a big Liverpool fan so having Jurgen Klopp down would be good fun. And it'd have to be a pale ale with a traditional British Sunday roast, wouldn't it?

TP: Well it would've been David Bowie. He'd probably have some dietary issue we'd need to consider though.

SPACE: *What's next for you?*

JO: We have just opened a new restaurant, actually. A wine bar and bakery in Borough Market called Flor.

TP: Second year's a different pressure. It's maintaining what we've started. And also developing the team so they continue to feel inspired, and then probably at some point starting to think of a second project, but I have no idea when or where yet.



his question
urgence of
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chambers —

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have such capacity for v

listening to Radio
4's Desert Island
Discs in the office
instead of Tierra
Whack on repeat.

Tierra Whack
Flea Market



When clients
ask where you
are from, don't
say "Tooting"
because it
will always be
followed by the
question: "But
where are you
really from?"

Stormzy
Know Me From



purpose of
Architectural ed

RIBA needs to stop glorifying good buildings instead talk about social and spatial injustice across the UK. p24

The educational system as a whole leads to change come in you. The time to come first in education. Architects and spend of



I've never seen so much momentum around social mobility, diversity and inclusion but it's still not enough. p44

The lessons you learn are through failure. p10

THE TIME FOR FAILURE IS NOW

It's a power dynamic. Who has the power?

We have to become political in the sense of guardianship. And that will build the space for all of us as architects not more responsibly. p32

We have to challenge how spatial and environmental injustice and violence is occurring everyday. p16

Bring the justice of space to people. Build a new political conversation. You are all agents of change. p22

The purpose of architectural education is to disrupt practice of the future. It's not to provide fodder for a machine. p12



articles about diversity in the profession. Diversity will become your pigeonholed area of expertise.

Neneh Cherry
Natural Skin Deep



You are the definition of the "new architectural professional". Be proud.

Solange
Don't Touch My Hair



white male member.

IAMDBB
Shade



"Isn't it great we have such a diverse panel?"

Beyoncé
Formation



as your white counterparts.

Blood Orange
You're Not Good Enough



The New Writers on the Block

Introduction by Hugh Pearman

The New Architecture Writers (NAW) programme brings forward diverse new voices to energise what is traditionally too much of a white middle-class enclave. A collaboration between the **Architecture Foundation** and the **Architectural Review**, it is backed by the **Royal College of Art** and the **RIBA Journal** which I edit plus a wide group of journalists and critics—and supported by Derwent London. As Simon Silver, Director of Derwent London, remarks, the initiative "will plug an important gap in ensuring wider perspectives are heard and appreciated across the sector—something we value as part of our own commitment to diversity." For me it's rewarding to take a small part in the programme through editorial crit sessions and one-to-one tuition—and now to see the first cohort start to move into the world of writing commissions. Here one of that first group, **Josh Fenton**, sums up his year.

Committed to Conversation:
AFTERPARTI's Nine New Architecture Writers

The blurred line between subjective and objective reality plays an important part in journalism—perhaps increasingly so, in light of recent 'fake news' scandals and doctored truths in the mainstream media. Aside from these extremes, however, we are all aware of the way in which journalists and writers

must moderate their biases to represent the facts and story even-handedly. These latent perspectives and biases can be derived from various sources such as: ethnicity, class, education and gender. It follows then, that a monocultural environment creates a narrow perspective on any given set of issues.

Architectural criticism is one such monoculture. The New Architecture Writers programme was initiated in an attempt to address the issue of a limited range of voices. Founded by Phineas Harper and Tom Wilkinson, both experienced in their craft, the vision was to provide a platform for strengthening the presence of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals within architectural criticism. Through interaction with architects, writers, editors, curators and publishers there was intent to create an aspirational environment through which journalistic skills and critical voices would emerge.

The NAW programme has had a successful first year. The founding members—Siufan Adey, Thomas Aquilina, Nile Bridgeman, Marwa El Mubark, Samson Famusan, Josh Fenton, Tara Okeke, Aoi Phillips and Shukri Sultan—have actively relished the challenge of what has been a steep learning curve.

Beginning with a tour of R7 in King's Cross by Morris+Company, then taking in Peter Barber's Mount Pleasant scheme almost a year later, a foundational understanding of how to critique built space was a key part of the programme. Alongside this, we were actively encouraged to find and present stories that were particularly relevant to us within the urban context.

As part of understanding design criticism beyond the page, the nine of us organised an event entitled **'The Time For Failure is Now'**, which featured conversations on and around these themes. Following conversations with writer and editor Jack Self, an idea emerged to make these passionate, open sessions into a regular occasion: a series of events followed by a 'zine that extends the conversation. It was at this point that the first cohort became the **Afterparti** collective.

Afterparti's prototype 'zine Issue #00 launched in March 2019, and is intrinsically linked to the interviews and discussions held at The Time For Failure is Now; with each of the nine members contributing articles that respond to excerpts, quotes or themes presented by the invited guests. Beyond the theme of failure, the pieces are linked by their desire to foreground ideas that are anything but clichéd in standard architectural discourse. Having now established a loose framework, we hope that the 'zine continues as a vibrant platform for radical ideas and under-represented voices.

@afterpartizine

R - L Top Row First:
Nile Bridgeman,
Thomas Aquilina,
Samson Famusan,
(Mid Row) Aoi Phillips,
Tara Okeke, Shukri
Sultan, (Bottom) Josh
Fenton, Siufan Adey





Art of the matter

Public art is at the heart of the Brunel Building
says Design Consultant Rebecca Lesser

James Capper
TREADPAD (1400 Dia)
Components for a
40-ton Walking Ship
2018

The boldness of **Fletcher Priest** architects' design for the Brunel Building in **Paddington** was always going to need artwork which had presence and was eye-catching. Blending quietly into the background was not an option.

Working with the artists **James Capper** for the interior, and **Gavin Turk** for the exterior, Derwent London endeavoured to create dynamic pieces which would engage those within the reception and public realm.

James Capper's ambitious, multi-scale **WALKING SHIP** family of sculptures are embedded in the reciprocal dialogue between biomechanics and civilisation. The history of evolution is echoed in his frequent references to the organic or biological, pitched alongside an interest in technology, innovation and the systems of heavy industry.

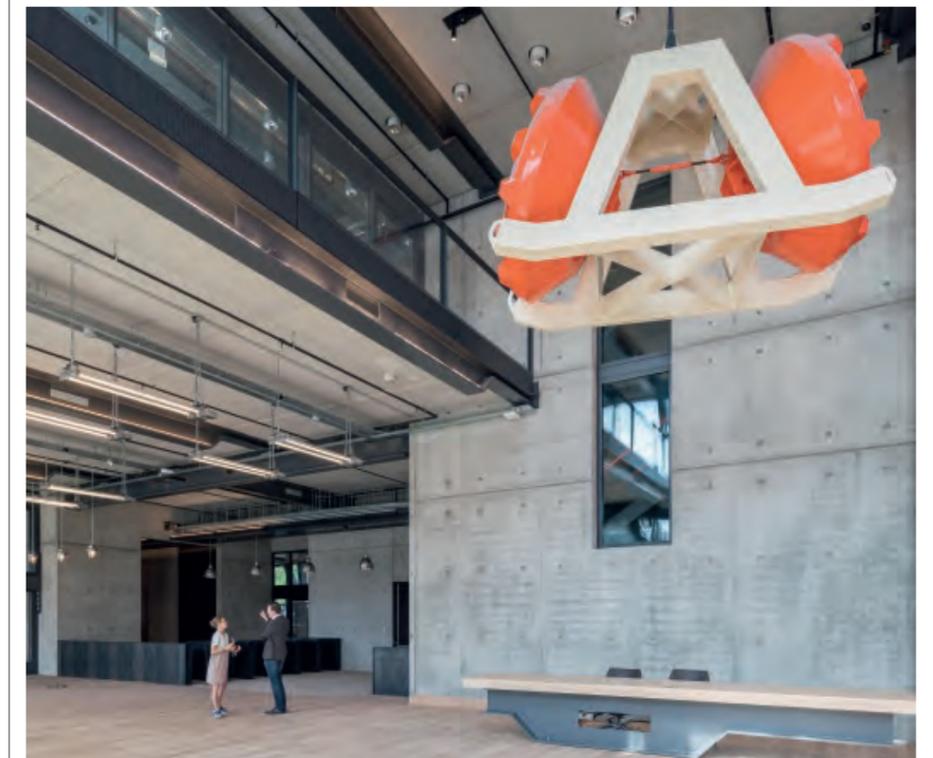
Capper's unique sculptural language combines speculative engineering and evolves along different modular chains he terms 'Divisions'—a network of interrelated sculpture families grouped by application. The **WALKING SHIP** family of sculptures is part of the Offshore Division. These amphibious mobile sculptures are informed by evolution and the planet's perpetually changing landscapes.

Capper has developed a wide variety of sculpture components which are attachment parts for his large mobile works but which also can be viewed autonomously. In the Offshore Division these are called **TREADPADS**—custom fabricated components which permit the speculated sculpture to be fully mobile.

The diameter of a **TREADPAD** depends on the size and weight of the sculpture it carries, and the shapes patterning the surface of the pad—diamond, convex, frustum—are determined by the geology of its terrain.

All Capper's works are sculpture and sculptural tools in, or ready for, action: an aesthetic representation of the reciprocal relationships between technology, organism and industrial process.

Recalling the eccentric personas of Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* or Wes Anderson's *Steve Zissou* in *The Life Aquatic*, Capper's vision confronts the precarity of humanity's technological desire, articulating the mutual cooperation of the mechanical and the organic.



Gavin Turk
Axis Mundi 2019
Bronze and steel



Gavin Turk plays with trompe-l'oeil and the illusion of art—what is real? His public works engage the audience to look at the world through the eyes of an artist. As a response to the location and the concept for the well cover, he is referencing *Bouche-évier* (Sink Stopper) by Marcel Duchamp which is a life sized cast of a plug hole.

Gavin Turk's bronze plug is a scaled up size sculpture resembling an aged and historic giant bath plug which is both a whimsical artwork in a public landscape, as well as having the functional purpose of a lid to the bore hole below.

The work continues in the spirit of the artist's previous public art commissions, which include a 12m bronze nail outside St Paul's Cathedral and a series of freestanding painted bronze door frames referencing Magritte—both with poetic narratives engaging the audience.

The name of the sculpture **Axis Mundi** means 'centre of the earth' which not only highlights the borehole but also is a playful reminder of the building's location in the Paddington Basin.

brunelbuilding.com



Unknown London: The New River

Hugh Pearman
— Editor of the RIBA Journal

The New River is neither new, nor a river. You could call it a canal but it is unnavigable and it predated the Georgian “Canal Age” by nearly 200 years. It starts in a beautiful glade of springs at Great Amwell in **Hertfordshire** and it terminates at a pumping station in **North London** that looks like a fairytale castle. It used to run further, down through Islington to a final large pond close to the top of, funnily enough, Amwell Street. You can find traces of it in parks and gardens, and walk along it in upstream stretches where it still bubbles along. This Jacobean watercourse was London’s first reliable supply of fresh drinking water and it still contributes to the capital’s taps. It is also part of Derwent London’s history.

First mooted in 1600, it was built between 1609 and 1613 as a kind of private-public partnership, between wealthy goldsmith and MP Hugh Myddelton and—when he ran out of money building it—the King, James I, to whom he was jeweller. James stumped up half of the £18,500 cost. Winding along a contour, engineered with a very slight gradient to keep the water flowing by gravity, the New River was 38 miles long. At the time it was finished Shakespeare, still active, had recently completed *The Tempest*.

It arrived in what were then fields, dotted with the odd hamlet, just outside London. As London expanded, the New River Company became a property company, building streets and squares over the fields it owned around New River Head as the terminus was known. Again, the names give a clue: River Street, Myddelton Square.

In 1974 the venerable New River Company was bought out by London Merchant Securities, which in 2007 merged with Derwent Valley Holdings to become today’s Derwent London. **Angel Building**—first fruit of that merger—stands on land with ownership that goes right back to Shakespearean times and the arrival of the New River. Let us doff our elaborate hats to Myddelton and King James: theirs was a daring piece of civil engineering and entrepreneurship that improved the lives of so many Londoners. We can relate to that.

Stoke Newington
Engine House &
Reservoir 1856
(Antiqua Print Gallery /
Alamy Stock Photo)

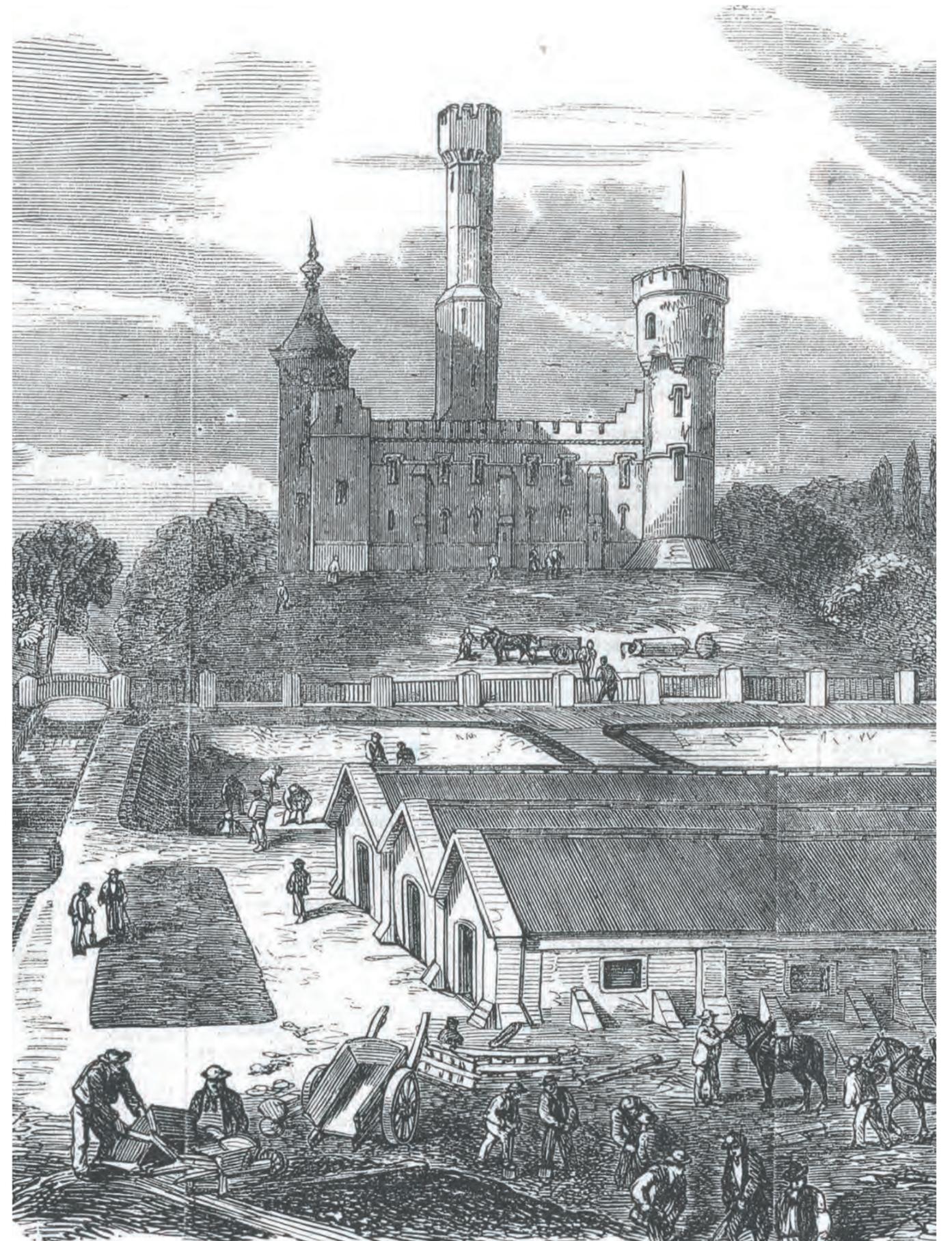




Photo by Fred W. McDarrah/Getty Images

“Art and architecture—all the arts—do not have to exist
in isolation.”
— Donald Judd