

QUARTER

A publication by SOLUS



SOLUS
PLUS

An industry standard
for responsible sourcing.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to

QUARTER

34

Autumn, as John Keats wrote, is the "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness". A time for reflection, a time to enjoy the rewards of our labour. How wonderful then, that this autumn edition of Quarter coincides with the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of Solus.

From beginnings in Peter Bentley's front room and garage, Solus has grown into a company with showrooms in London, Manchester, and Birmingham, working with some of the most respected architecture and design practices in the world. Our tiles now help define spaces for brands that have become custodians of modern British identity.

Thirty years on, the company still feels young in spirit: curious, collaborative, and ambitious. This issue reflects that vitality. The product pages feature a stunning collection of new ranges: Contours, Fuso, Lumen, Circlet, Plica, and Paleon. This Quarter also sees the introduction of Solus Plus, a framework that formalises what has always guided us: a belief that beauty and responsibility belong together.

The projects section is a fascinating mix: from 20.20's elegant reimagining of Aston Villa's hospitality suites, to residential wonder, Douglas, historical marvel, Walker House, and gustatory masterpiece, Ceru, all demonstrating the power of design to connect story, material, and place.

We look back on Automatica and Staples, two installations that defined the past year for Solus. Playful, collaborative, and generous acts of design that turned porcelain into theatre and community. And we close with Under the Table, our conversation with Glenn Howells: a personal and profound exchange with one of Britain's most thoughtful architects.

As the leaves turn and the light softens, I find myself reflecting not just on what we've built, but on how we've built it, together. Here's to thirty fruitful years, and to all that still lies ahead.

Conleth Buckley, Editor

conlethbuckley@solusceramics.com



Welcome to the 34th issue of Quarter, our magazine for the architecture and design community.

In this latest issue we celebrate the launch of Solus Plus, our portfolio of responsibly sourced products, backed by industry-leading standards. Carefully curated for their strong sustainability credentials, our Solus Plus products showcase the most innovative and imaginative ceramic tiling solutions.

As we enter this new chapter, with renewed focus on ethical and sustainable product sourcing, we invite you to take a glimpse of the energy, enthusiasm and collaborative ethos that drives everything we do at Solus.

I would like to extend special thanks to my colleagues Ken Graham (Sustainability Manager), Holly Oag (Head of People) and Mark Williams (Warehouse and Samples Manager). Without their support, diligence and unwavering commitment to the spirit of sustainability, Solus Plus would not have been possible.

I hope you enjoy Quarter 34 and find it a source of inspiration.

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Quarter magazine is printed on Carbon Balanced Paper using vegetable-based ink. Written, designed, and produced in-house at Solus.



BRICK BY BRICK,

A NEW DESIGN CENTRE FOR
BIRMINGHAM'S CREATIVE QUARTER.

A DIGBETH RENAISSANCE



Solus is collaborating with EH Smith and Howells on the new Digbeth Design Centre: a space that celebrates material innovation, architecture, design, and collaboration in the heart of Birmingham's design district.

PHOTOGRAPHY:
Fraser McGee and Greg Holmes

To better understand the significance of this project, Editor Conleth Buckley sat down with John Cave of EH Smith and Glenn Howells of Howells.

CB: You have described yourselves as "brick geeks."

JC: We proudly wear that badge in our office. EH Smith started a mile up the road 103 years ago, so Birmingham is very much our patch. This is our first step into Digbeth proper, but our roots are close by.

CB: I've seen media chatter about gentrification in Digbeth. It seems important to show that the partners involved have genuine local roots.

JC: Absolutely.

GH: I've been working in Digbeth since the early '90s. It's always been on the cusp of regeneration, but speculation has inflated land values and pushed out manufacturers. Buildings sit empty as developers wait for big residential projects to kick off.

JC: There are successful pockets like the Custard Factory, which Glenn helped with, but much of the area's potential remains unrealised.

CB: How did your collaboration on the Design Centre begin?

GH: It started with a conversation with Architectural Advisor Matt Dobson, who I've known for 25 years. He'd moved to EH Smith and was excited about their work in Clerkenwell. When he mentioned plans for a West Midlands location, I suggested a building next to ours. I'd bought it to stop it falling into the wrong hands. Pepé's machine workshop had been there since the 1970s.

JC: I remember visiting during COVID. Glenn and I were the only ones in the office. At first, I thought the building was far too big. We spent about a year thinking through it and trying to build a consortium, but eventually realised the best approach was for us to lead the project.

GH: What excited me was the chance to do something creative, not just turn it into flats. And EH Smith is unique in how it works with great manufacturers and contractors.

CB: Why “Design Centre” and not “EH Smith’s showroom”?

JC: We want it to be a collaborative space used by the industry. Clerkenwell focuses on brick and façade, but Digbeth opens up a much wider story: lighting, furniture, tiles, and more. We want to bring different players together: architects, specifiers, contractors, manufacturers.

GH: The design reflects that. The main warehouse is left raw, barely heated, exposed surfaces, like an exhibition hall. It’s about letting the materials speak for themselves. The smaller building, which used to be Birmingham Machine Tools’ office, has been fully modernised for comfort and functionality. We’ve also created an external display garden to show how materials look in daylight.

CB: What role do you see design, and the Design Centre specifically, playing in Digbeth’s future?

GH: Now that the pressure of finishing the build is lifting, the focus shifts to programming. The goal is to create a dynamic calendar: talks, seminars, partnerships with local universities and makers. Birmingham doesn’t yet have a hub like Clerkenwell in London. This could be it.

JC: We’ve had interest from skills bodies, industry groups, even the Combined Authority. It’s not just a showroom. It’s a place for real conversations: about sustainability, fire safety, water reuse, regulation, everything the industry needs to address. It’s hands-on too: you can run demos, train people, explore new solutions.

CB: What does success look like?

JC: For us, it’s about making the space live. If it helps attract other small-scale developers or brings inward investment, that’s a success. If it helps Digbeth become a vibrant, mixed-use neighbourhood, not just a flat-pack zone, that’s success.

GH: I agree. We also want to engage civic leaders, forward-thinking clients, and new talent. Now that the building is open, we want to host events and encourage partnerships. We want this to be a regional asset, homegrown, not transplanted.

JC: EH Smith has the reach to bring people together. We’re not just a merchant; we can act as a facilitator. The Design Centre lets people make decisions faster, with the right people and the right materials all in one place.

GH: I don’t know when it happened, but I’m moving a lot of bricks and tiles. John’s got me on target.

JC: He’s smashing his KPIs. Commissions incoming.

A sign of Birmingham’s confidence, the Digbeth Design Centre is a shared commitment from EH Smith, Howells and Solus to support the city’s renaissance with a collaborative, design-led hub for the Midlands. Follow our socials for updates.



Sam Frith, Creative Director at Solus, adds his perspective.

Solus was founded in the Midlands 30 years ago and has strong ties to the region, yet for much of our history our commercial focus has been London. That made sense, most of our clients are there, but the question has often been asked: “What about Birmingham?”

We have always had good relationships in Birmingham, and we assumed that local businesses and customers knew we were active in the area. It became clear that we needed to communicate in the Midlands with the same clarity and purpose as we do in Manchester and London.

Birmingham is a makers’ town. Its forges, furnaces, and workshops fuelled the industrial revolution and helped shape the modern world. That legacy excites us. Yet our presence here didn’t match what we’ve achieved in London or Manchester. Our involvement in the Digbeth Design Centre changes that.

EH Smith and Solus are kindred spirits; they’re as obsessed with brick as we are with tile. We have a great relationship and often drop into each other’s showrooms in Clerkenwell. We’ve worked with Howells on several projects and are big fans of the work they are doing to reshape Birmingham. When we learned that they were collaborating on a new space in Digbeth we knew we wanted to be involved.

At the Digbeth Design Centre we have set up a ‘sample dispensary’. Its purpose, and our purpose as a company, is to help people find the right products with the right performance quickly. Designers will be able to drop in, check out a sample with QR code linking to technical data, and access all the information they need instantly.

Szczepaniak Teh have designed tile banks for the dispensary, aligning them aesthetically with their Solus library projects in London and Manchester. We’ve also supplied materials across the building, showing our products in use.

Beyond samples, we want to contribute to programming. In London, Manchester, Glasgow, and Cardiff we’ve seen how valuable it is to create real dialogue with the design community. Talks, workshops, panel events, anything that brings people together around materials and ideas, are what make a place like this thrive.

Working with EH Smith and Howells underlines the value of authenticity. They’re down-to-earth, and when you sit with them you get things done. That honesty is the foundation of long-term collaboration. It’s why this project feels exciting: built on genuine partnerships and opening a new chapter for Solus in Birmingham.

A customised dispensary system with tile banks designed by Szczepaniak Teh.



The measure of success of the Centre will be use; a place to gather, seek advice, and engage with materials. The space features a bespoke Spolia terrazzo countertop with brick debris inclusions.



Staples

by:
SMITHS

What are the staples of everyday life? Food, shelter, friendship, a place to gather. At Clerkenwell Design Week 2025, Solus, SMITHS and Casalgrande Padana set out to explore this question through Staples, an installation that celebrated both the quiet reliability of porcelain and the social rituals it helps sustain.



PHOTOGRAPHY:
Luis Kramer and Jess Gough

Casalgrande Padana provided the material starting point. For decades, their products have been an integral part of homes, workplaces, and public spaces across the world. Their reputation rests not on flamboyance but on a commitment to craft and consistency: a true staple of contemporary building.

Photographer Jess Gough was invited to document the processes inside Casalgrande's factories. Her large-format prints shot on film hung from the ceiling of the showroom, revealing the monumental scale of tile production. The images were both industrial and poetic, giving visitors a chance to glimpse the hidden life behind the surface of a floor or wall.

A vast white porcelain table designed by SMITHS formed the focal point of the installation. Ingeniously created from Casalgrande porcelain slabs, the tabletop and legs slotted together, their planes interlocking like joinery. The structure stood through balance and gravity alone, with each component bearing and counterbalancing the others: a metaphor of community, where strength arises from mutual reliance.

Founded by Rachael Davidson and Peter Jennings, SMITHS is known for projects that express material clarity, and the Staples table was no exception. It was both a monument and an invitation for leaning, writing, eating, and conversing.

Throughout the week, the table became the anchor for programmed events and spontaneous encounters. Visitors

gathered for tastings, design discussions, product activations, and informal workshops. But something unexpected also happened: the table became Clerkenwell's unofficial meeting point.

Strangers struck up conversations, friends regrouped between events, and weary attendees took a seat for a quiet pause. The aim of the design was to nurture community, and that ambition played out in real time.

Davidson and Jennings emphasised the importance of simplicity. "We wanted to design something elemental," said Davidson. "A table is perhaps the most universal piece of furniture. It's where families eat, colleagues plan, and communities gather." Jennings added, "Casalgrande's porcelain has that same universality. It's reliable, enduring, quietly present. We wanted the design to speak to that."

Architect Joe Walker, who played a critical role in the design and realisation of the installation reflected, "It was all we imagined and more. Observing the rich interactions around the table confirmed our belief in simplicity as a catalyst."

As the festival drew to a close, Staples revealed that the potency of design often lies in its quietest gestures. The porcelain table at its heart did not compete for attention; it simply gathered people, giving them space to sit, stay, and share. In fact, it continued to draw visitors well after CDW and will be missed by all of us at Solus!

A full programme of tastings, scent experiences, dining, and workshops filled seats around the Staples table, as well as more spontaneous interactions including dancing to Gilles Peterson on the last night.



DISCOVER DISPENSE DESIGN



IT AUTOMATICA

A playful celebration of process, product, and partnership.

S
LUS

ITALGRANITI
SUPERIOR ITALIAN SURFACES



Arcitile

Simon Astridge
Architecture Workshop

At Clerkenwell Design Week 2025, Automatica captured the attention and imagination of passersby with a curious invitation: insert a token, watch the light flicker, and receive a beautiful tile sample from one of three vending machines clad in porcelain. Part artwork, part provocation, and entirely delightful, the installation marked a bold collaboration between Solus, Italian manufacturer Italgraniti, architect Simon Astridge, and tile project delivery specialists Arcitile.

Automatica was conceived as an act of generosity and curiosity. The idea began, fittingly, with a conversation; a discussion between Solus, Astridge and Italgraniti about how to move beyond the conventional tile stand or countertop display. "We wanted to show that tiles can be more than surfaces," says Sam Frith, creative director at Solus, "they can be the beginning of stories, they can form memories, frame emotions."

It was Italgraniti's own manufacturing process that sparked the creative leap. In their Emilia-Romagna facility, pressed clay slabs travel on automated belts and robotic arms, transforming from raw mineral to precision product with speed, scale, and beauty. Architect Simon Astridge was struck by the choreography of it all:

"Watching those tiles move through the factory was like observing a kind of industrial ballet," he recalls.

That image seeded the idea: what if we echoed that experience in miniature? What if Clerkenwell Design Week visitors could witness an act of making (or at least distribution) that was performative, unexpected, and a little bit magical?

The resulting installation was deceptively simple in appearance but impressively complex behind the scenes. Three vending machines, each skinned in full-body porcelain, dispensed Italgraniti tile samples. Arcitile (with Italgraniti) managed the logistics; they adapted the machine and managed both site delivery and post-festival retrieval. Their skill made an ambitious idea executable.

Equally integral was the design of the machines. Astridge's aesthetic sensibility brought elegance and personality to the installation, balancing the industrial reference with moments of

calm, colour, and tactility. The tiles themselves embodied the manufacturer's technical mastery and design versatility: surfaces that were not only hardwearing but full of nuance, tone and texture.

For Solus, Automatica was more than an aesthetic exercise; it was an invitation to rethink how materials are introduced, appreciated and remembered. "We're always looking for ways to bring tile to life," says Sam Frith. "With Automatica, we had the rare chance to stop people in their tracks, to turn a standard material into a moment of wonder."

That sense of wonder was perhaps the installation's greatest achievement. Over three days, thousands of tokens were handed out and inserted. People queued, laughed, filmed, and shared. Social media lit up. Children and grown-ups alike approached the machines with wide eyes and outstretched hands. For a moment, tile became theatre.

Of course, there were practical outcomes too. Italgraniti reported a significant increase in both sample requests and commercial orders in the weeks following Clerkenwell: a gratifying result for any manufacturer. But for all involved, those metrics felt secondary.

"The real measure of success," says Simon Astridge, "was seeing people smile. It was the joy. The fact that something so ordinary, a tile, could become a little act of generosity, a point of interaction, a shared memory."

That joy is what Solus will carry forward. In a sector often dominated by specification sheets and technical detail, Automatica offered a reminder of the emotional power of design and the value of collaboration. With Italgraniti's commitment to excellence, Astridge's visionary design thinking, and Arcitile's meticulous delivery, Solus was able to offer something unexpected, engaging, and lasting.

As the machines return to storage awaiting their final home (watch this space!) and the Clerkenwell crowds have long since dispersed, the spirit of Automatica remains: a small, tiled reminder that delight is always part of good design.



Watch the Automatica film by Superbeam



SOLUS PLUS: A NEW STANDARD

How Solus Plus is redefining responsible sourcing in tiles.

Tiles are often chosen for their performance and aesthetics, but what about how they're made? What are the environmental and ethical costs before a product reaches the showroom?

That question lies at the heart of Solus Plus: a new mark of trust that identifies responsibly sourced tile ranges from Solus. Backed by the respected BES 6001 standard, Solus Plus goes beyond sustainability marketing. It's an independently audited framework that rewards good practice, drives continual improvement, and makes responsible procurement easier for specifiers.

What Solus Plus means

Solus Plus highlights products that meet strict criteria on environmental impact, labour conditions, and supply chain transparency. Underwriting this is BES 6001, a certification developed by BRE (Building Research Establishment), which assesses how a company manages responsible sourcing, not just what it claims.

For specifiers, that means clarity. Solus Plus products don't just come with a sustainability promise, they come with credible, independently verified evidence.

"One architect recently told me: 'You're taking all the guesswork out.' With BES 6001, we've done the graft, asked the right questions, and had it all externally verified. That builds trust." Solus Sustainability Manager, Ken Graham.

Why BES 6001?

The idea took shape during research for internal training on industry certifications. Ken came across BES 6001 and saw its potential.

"Most of the certifications we share with clients come from our factories," he says. "Solus has always sourced responsibly, but we didn't have anything that was ours. BES 6001 bridges that gap."

Earning the certificate was no small feat. The framework goes well beyond sustainability, touching on health and safety, corporate governance, and social responsibility.

"Achieving the certification doesn't mean our work is complete," says Solus Business Systems Manager, Byron Nikolouzos, "but we now have a platform to build on."



SOLUS



Solus has always sourced responsibly, but we didn't have anything that was ours. BES 6001 bridges that gap."

Ken Graham
Sustainability Manager, Solus





Solus Plus is a commitment to sourcing that raises the bar across the industry.”

Byron Nikolouzos
Business Systems Manager, Solus

Investment in process and people underpins the standards behind Solus Plus.

Making the most of what’s already there

Solus was already doing much of the work required. Existing certifications like ISO 9001 and 14001, Investors in People, robust supplier audits, and well-documented procedures all helped. Byron credits teams across the business, from warehousing to CSR, for laying strong foundations.

Even so, the process required new thinking.

“It pushed us to find better ways to collect data,” Byron explains. “Things like automating how we track the carbon footprint of our sample deliveries, those systems didn’t exist before.”

This, says Ken, is what makes Solus stand out:

“No one else in the tile sector is tracking sample production emissions like we are. It’s technical, but it matters—and it came directly out of this process.”

Internal change, external impact

The benefits of Solus Plus aren’t just internal. They ripple across the supply chain. To qualify under BES 6001, at least 70% of products by weight must come from factories certified to ISO 9001, 14001 and 45001. This meant Solus had to exclude some long-standing suppliers who didn’t meet the standard.

“It was tough,” says Byron. “But we drew a line. If a supplier wants to be included in Solus Plus, they need to be up to scratch.”

That message is already having an effect. Several factories are now exploring new accreditations to remain part of the programme.

“We’re raising the bar,” says Ken. “And our suppliers are responding.”



A clear win for specifiers

Solus Plus is particularly valuable on large commercial projects where sustainability credentials carry weight. For BREEAM-certified buildings, for example, BES 6001 products can contribute up to five points, provided supporting documents like EPDs are also in place.

“It’s a cumulative effect,” says Ken. “Solus Plus products give specifiers a head start.”

The certification simplifies decision-making too. Instead of hunting down declarations and third-party proofs, specifiers can trust that Solus Plus products already meet the criteria.

“It’s about reassurance,” says Byron. “You know the products have been through a thorough process, and you know they’ll stand up to scrutiny.”

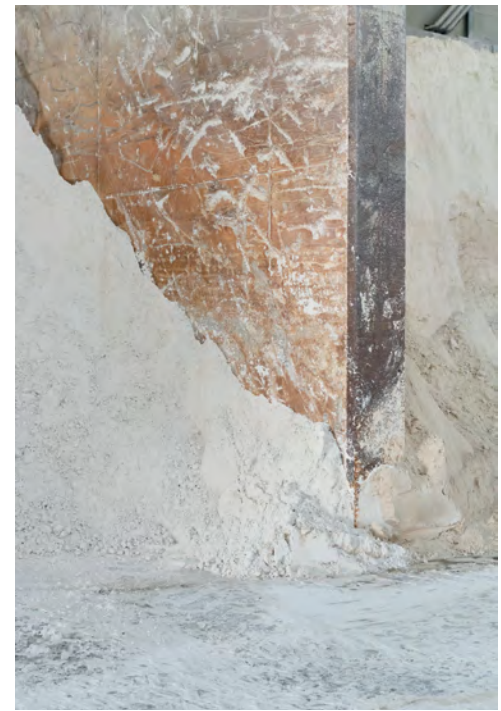
A focused scope

Solus Plus currently applies to ceramic and porcelain tiles from five of our core manufacturing partners. These factories were chosen not only for their technical capabilities and design strengths, but because we have long-standing relationships that allow for closer collaboration and deeper audits under BES 6001.

This focus doesn’t mean other suppliers fall short. In fact, many would meet or exceed the standard. But Solus Plus requires more than compliance: it depends on active engagement, data sharing, and the infrastructure to support continual improvement. That level of involvement is easier to achieve with selected partners.

“We originally looked at including glass, stone, terrazzo,” says Byron. “But every product type requires its own audit. Starting with porcelain and ceramic allowed us to go deep, not just broad.”

The result is a curated, high-performing tile portfolio backed by meaningful standards—and with room to grow.



Every product with the Solus Plus mark begins with a responsibly sourced foundation.

Room to grow

The journey doesn’t end with certification. Solus will undergo annual audits, and scores can rise or fall depending on progress.

“It’s not a badge you stick on and forget about,” says Ken. “It encourages continual development, and that’s the whole point.”

Future plans include a new charity partnership with the Canal & River Trust, focused on environmental projects. While this initiative will fall under the next audit, it’s already shaping how the company thinks about community and biodiversity.

Holly Oag, Head of People, sees BES 6001 as a springboard:

“It’s a starting point. It gives us the momentum to do more internally and with our partners.”

A higher standard, made simple

Solus Plus is about transparency, trust, and making responsible sourcing easier for clients, for contractors, and for the industry at large.

By embedding BES 6001 into every level of the business, Solus is proving that it’s possible to go beyond compliance and drive genuine improvement. The process has required commitment, but it’s paying off in credibility, clarity, and long-term value.

For specifiers, that’s a rare combination: a wide product choice with sustainability you don’t have to second-guess.



It’s a starting point. It gives us the momentum to do more internally and with our partners.”

Holly Oag
Head of People, Solus

Lumen

Designed to shine. Lumen's glossy glaze and refined proportions turn everyday walls into luminous focal points.

4 COLOURS
1 FINISH
1 SIZE



A gloss porcelain range that amplifies light and colour.

Lumen brings energy to wall surfaces through its subtle proportions and radiant glaze. The 100x390mm format offers an elongated, architectural rhythm, while the high-gloss finish gives the collection its defining character: light bounces across each tile, deepening the colour and enhancing the sense of space.

Available in four tones, White, Marine, Olive, and Moss, the palette is balanced and versatile, offering both calm neutrals and saturated hues. The gloss surface creates beautiful reflections that shift throughout the day, making Lumen ideal for interiors where light is a key part of the design concept.

Each tile is extruded porcelain, offering the clean lines and crisp edges of precision manufacture with the surface vitality of hand glazing. Though designed for walls only, Lumen's durability, frost resistance, and low water absorption make it a resilient choice for commercial and residential interiors alike.

Produced in a factory with robust environmental credentials, the range supports EPD certification and aligns with LEED, BREEAM, and WELL schemes. Lumen is a simple shape elevated by light, depth, and colour.

Bind the wall with
luminous colour.



Wall:
5LME101



Wall:
5LME104



"Lumen captures the beauty of light in motion. Its deep glazes settle softly into fluted forms, revealing tones that shift with every glance. Made in Spain using traditional extrusion techniques, the range demonstrates craftsmanship and permanence. These are tiles designed for spaces that will stand the test of time."

Sam Frith,
Creative Director

Tile:
5LME103

FINISH:
Gloss

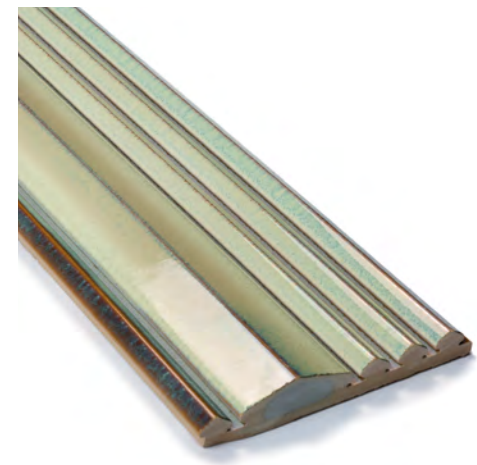
APPEARANCE:
Mono Colour

MATERIAL:
Porcelain

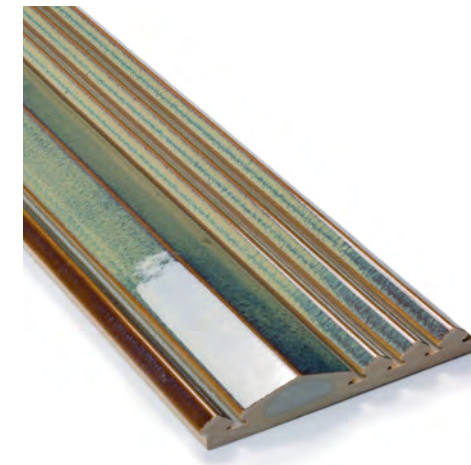
USAGE:
Walls only



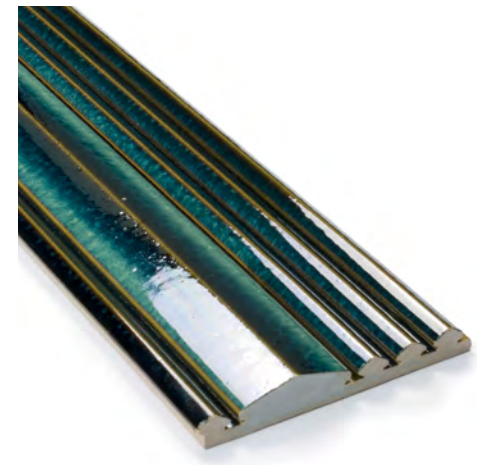
LME-White
5LME101



LME-Olive
5LME102

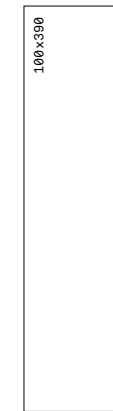


LME-Moss
5LME103



LME-Marine
5LME104

The profile of the tile
is unique and compelling.



All sizes are in mm. EPD available on request.
Search for Lumen at solusceramics.com for more information about this range.

12 COLOURS
3 FINISHES
9 SIZES
4 MOSAICS

A concrete-and-terrazzo-
inspired porcelain in 12
refined shades, with broad
formats and finishes for high-
performance spaces.

NEW RANGE

FUSO



Floor:
2FUS103
Staircase:
2FUS103

"Fuso is a blend of concrete and terrazzo aesthetics. You've got the familiar speckled look of terrazzo, but with a palette more akin to concrete. From slim slabs to full-body porcelain in 20mm, it works indoors, outdoors, in detail, or at scale. It's a range that combines beauty with real technical strength."

Justin Jennings,
Product Manager



Wall:
2FUS102



Floor:
2FUS109

Fuso offers depth, detail, and durability.

Fuso is the latest addition to the Solus Plus portfolio, offering a fresh take on terrazzo with an earthy, versatile palette. Speckled pumice flakes create a surface that feels both contemporary and timeless, while the range is designed to balance creativity with robust performance.

Available in slab sizes of 1200x2800mm and 1200x2400mm, Fuso also comes in 600x1200mm formats at a slim 6mm thickness, making it highly adaptable across interior applications. For exterior use, a 20mm structured option ensures excellent slip resistance and durability, opening up opportunities for seamless transitions between indoor and outdoor spaces.

Two finishes (Natural and Anti Slip) offer excellent underfoot performance without sacrificing a smooth tactile quality, while the Polished option highlights the terrazzo sparkle.

Complementary elements include 75x150mm bricks mounted on 300x300mm mesh and coordinating mosaics, enabling designers to extend the terrazzo character into finer details, feature walls and transitions. The range is manufactured as full-body porcelain, ensuring the colour and character run consistently through the tile. This makes Fuso ideal for technical detailing such as step treads and bullnosed edges, while also protecting against chips that might expose a contrasting body colour in high-traffic environments.

Behind the design is a factory with excellent sustainability credentials. Fuso is produced under B Corp certification and a carbon zero framework, reinforcing a commitment to responsible sourcing and resilient business practices.

Fuso combines design presence, technical strength and sustainable production, making it an ideal choice for commercial, residential and hospitality projects that demand both style and substance.

The Fuso terrazzo-effect comes with larger and smaller flecks.



Tiles:
2FUS104
2FUS112
2FUS111



Floor:
2FUS109
Wall:
2FUS102



Floor:
2FUS103
Staircase:
2FUS103
Wall:
2FUS112

Suitable for hard working spaces both indoors and outdoors, Fuso has excellent technical performance.

FINISHES:
Natural R10 (A+B), Anti Slip R11 (A+B+C), Polished

APPEARANCE:
Concrete

MATERIAL:
Porcelain - Full-Body

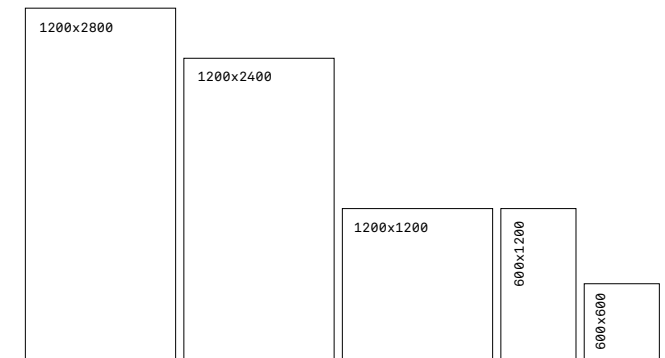
USAGE:
Floors and walls

SHADE VARIATION:
V2 - Light
V3 - Moderate



Mosaics are available in a variety of colours and sizes. Please ask for details.

SOLUS THIS RANGE IS PART OF SOLUS PLUS



All sizes are in mm. PTV results available on request. EPD available on request. Search for Fuso at solusceramics.com for more information about this range.

NEW RANGE

CONTOURS

Contours plays with light and relief to give walls depth and texture. Elegant, architectural surfaces that shift with every glance.



Wall:
5CTS136

41 COLOURS
6 FINISHES
1 SIZE



Wall:
5CTS141

“What I like about Contours is the way it plays with light. From a distance it reads as calm and unified, but as the light shifts you suddenly see these subtle patterns emerge. It’s not just a surface, it’s a material that changes character through the day, which makes it very powerful in design.”

Justin Jennings,
Product Manager



The images above show six finishes from the range.



Shaping light and texture through surface design.

Contours is a collection that explores the play of light, shadow and texture. Subtle reliefs ripple across the surface, transforming flat porcelain into something more architectural. Depending on the angle of the light or the time of day, the appearance shifts: soft in the morning, more defined by afternoon, and dynamic under artificial lighting.

The range is produced in 600x1200mm panels, creating a bold canvas for the relief patterns to unfold. Designers can choose from refined motifs including Matt Cane, Matt Flute, Matt Stripe, Matt Hammered, Matt Ribbed, and Matt Tweed finishes, each bringing a distinctive rhythm to the surface.

The primary palette centres on elegant whites, but Contours also extends into popular stones such as Calacatta Oro, blending texture with marble veining for a layered effect.

This fusion of relief and pattern is what sets Contours apart. It isn't only a decorative surface but an intelligent material that combines depth, tactility and tonal variation. From afar, walls read as calm and unified; up close, the detailing invites touch and rewards attention.

Contours is ideally suited to design-led interiors where surfaces are expected to contribute to the atmosphere of the space: feature walls in lobbies, reception areas, galleries and hospitality venues. Used sparingly, it adds refinement; in larger compositions, it creates a striking architectural backdrop.

The range comes from a factory committed to sustainable production, recognised for excellent environmental standards and responsible sourcing. This commitment underpins the quality of Contours, giving specifiers confidence that its visual innovation is matched by a conscientious approach to manufacture.

Contours demonstrates how subtlety can be powerful: a surface that shifts with light, offers layered visual interest, and expands the creative vocabulary for designers working with texture.



Wall:
5CTS108



Wall:
5CTS103

Moving clockwise: flute, cane, and stripe.

MATT CANE



CTS-White Cane 5CTS101 CTS-Snow Cane 5CTS107 CTS-Almond Cane 5CTS102 CTS-Beige Cane 5CTS105 CTS-Grey Cane 5CTS106 CTS-Honey Cane 5CTS103 CTS-Natural Cane 5CTS104

MATT FLUTE



CTS-White Flute 5CTS108 CTS-Design A Flute 5CTS109 CTS-Design B Flute 5CTS110 CTS-Design C Flute 5CTS111 CTS-Design D Flute 5CTS112 CTS-Design E Flute 5CTS113 CTS-Beige Flute 5CTS114



CTS-Snow Flute 5CTS115 CTS-Grey Flute 5CTS116

MATT STRIPE



CTS-White Stripe 5CTS135 CTS-Ivory Stripe 5CTS136 CTS-Snow Stripe 5CTS138 CTS-Beige Stripe 5CTS139 CTS-Pale Stripe 5CTS140 CTS-Pearl Stripe 5CTS137



Wall:
5CTS135


FINISHES:
 Matt Cane, Matt Flute, Matt Stripe,
 Matt Hammered, Matt Ribbed, Matt Tweed

APPEARANCE:
 Textured

MATERIAL:
 Porcelain

USAGE:
 Walls only

SHADE VARIATION:
 V1 - Uniform to V4 - Heavy
 Ask for details

SOLUS  THIS RANGE IS PART OF SOLUS PLUS



Wall:
5CTS123

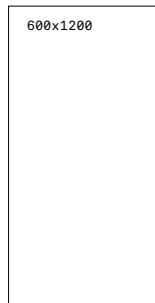


Wall:
5CTS133

Moving clockwise: ribbed,
 hammered, and tweed.

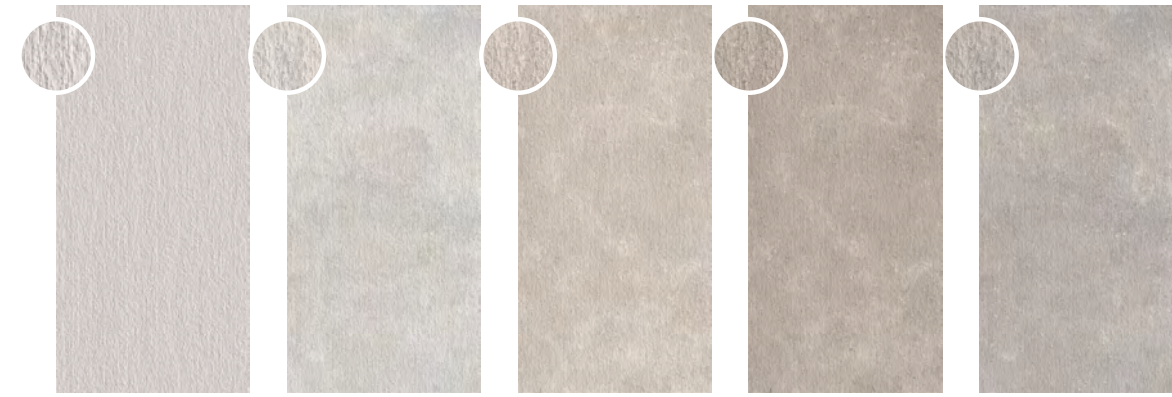


Wall:
5CTS141



All sizes are in mm. EPD available on request.
 Search for Contours at solusceramics.com for more information about this range.

MATT HAMMERED



CTS-White Hammered 5CTS117 CTS-Pearl Hammered 5CTS120 CTS-Champagne Hammered 5CTS118 CTS-Sand Hammered 5CTS121 CTS-Grey Hammered 5CTS119

MATT RIBBED



CTS-White Ribbed 5CTS126 CTS-Snow Ribbed 5CTS131 CTS-Camel Ribbed 5CTS133 CTS-Almond Ribbed 5CTS127 CTS-Beige Ribbed 5CTS128 CTS-Linen Ribbed 5CTS134 CTS-Grey Ribbed 5CTS129



CTS-Mud Ribbed 5CTS130 CTS-Brown Ribbed 5CTS132

MATT TWEED



CTS-White Tweed 5CTS141 CTS-Snow Tweed 5CTS145 CTS-Ivory Tweed 5CTS143 CTS-Ash Tweed 5CTS144 CTS-Desert Tweed 5CTS142



NEW RANGE

Plica

Delicately structured ceramic wall tiles in a refined, chalky palette. Compact and softly contoured, Plica is ideal for tactile, intimate spaces.

5 COLOURS
1 FINISH
1 SIZE

An artisanal surface with industrial strength.

Plica is a ceramic wall tile that combines a handcrafted aesthetic with the precision of industrial production. Its softly irregular surface recalls the look of freshly plastered walls, while the use of traditional glazes gives each piece a richness and depth of colour that feels artisanal and expressive.

The range reflects a simple yet refined design philosophy. Produced in an unusual 65x261mm format, Plica offers a distinctive rhythm that is difficult to replicate with more conventional sizes. This makes it a confident specification choice, one that maintains design integrity and resists substitution.

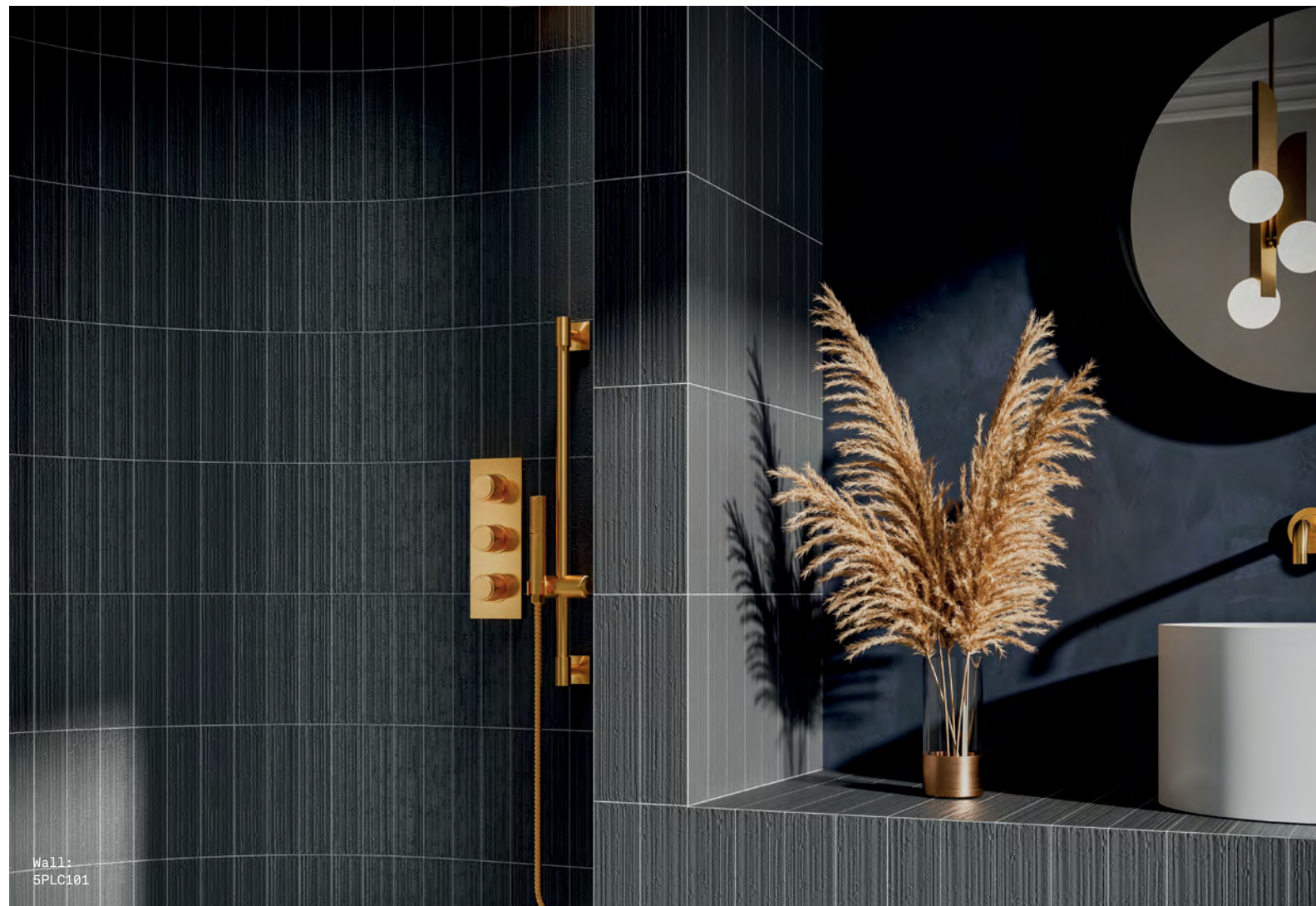
What sets Plica apart is the way glaze and surface interact. Natural pigments settle differently across the tile's structured surface, pooling in grooves and ridges to create deeper tones and subtle variations. Even in matt finishes, this interplay produces a lively surface that shifts in appearance under changing light conditions, enhancing the sense of material depth.

The palette is carefully curated and versatile, offering both neutral tones and stronger shades. Each colour feels grounded, with a tactile quality that lends character to interiors.

Whether used as a full wall covering or as a detail within a broader scheme, Plica has the ability to bring warmth, movement and authenticity into a space.

Behind its artisanal look lies robust, large-scale production. The factory responsible for Plica is known for combining design-led innovation with sustainable manufacturing practices, ensuring the range is as responsible as it is distinctive.

Plica is ideal for hospitality venues, retail interiors, or residential projects where designers want to introduce texture, depth, and a handcrafted feel without compromising on durability. It is a tile that plays with light, enriches surfaces, and elevates walls into expressive design features.



Wall:
5PLC102



FINISH:
Matt

APPEARANCE:
Mono Colour

MATERIAL:
Ceramic

USAGE:
Walls only

SHADE VARIATION:
V2 - Light



PLC-Bone
5PLC104



PLC-Grey
5PLC105



PLC-Sage
5PLC102



PLC-Moon
5PLC103



PLC-Dark
5PLC101

“Plica is all about the interplay of glaze and form. The unusual size sets it apart straight away, but it’s the way the glaze settles into the ridges and grooves that really gives it depth. Even in matt you get this richness of tone, which makes the surface feel alive when the light hits it.”

Justin Jennings,
Product Manager



All sizes are in mm. EPD available on request.
Search for Plica at solusceramics.com for more information about this range.

Floor:
2PEL102



A soft limestone effect with decorative textures and mosaics. Elegant tones in large formats and anti-slip finishes.

P A L

E O N

4 COLOURS
3 FINISHES
10 SIZES
2 MOSAICS
1 DECOR



Floor:
2PEL102
Wall:
2PEL103

A limestone effect with fossil-like depth.

Paleon is a refined limestone-inspired porcelain range that captures the intricate detail of fossils and shells embedded in stone. Its surfaces invite closer inspection, drawing the eye into subtle patterns that suggest movement, depth, and history. This quiet complexity makes Paleon an engaging choice for designers seeking a natural aesthetic with a contemporary edge.

The colour palette is elegant and versatile: Champagne, Grey, Pearl and Sable. Each tone offers a distinctive character, from warm and inviting to cool and understated, allowing Paleon to adapt across interior and exterior environments.

The range is available in 6mm, 9mm and 20mm thicknesses, with formats that include 1200x1200mm slabs and a standout 800x800mm size in 20mm. These larger formats lend projects a sense of scale and grandeur, particularly in outdoor applications where the thicker tiles provide excellent strength and performance.

Surface finishes are engineered for both beauty and function. The Matt R10 (A+B) finish delivers a smooth, comfortable feel

underfoot while ensuring stability in everyday use. For more demanding environments such as showers, pool surrounds or terraces, the Anti Slip R11 (A+B+C) finish enhances slip resistance without compromising the stone's natural look. Slip performance across the range is generally stable, though as with many collections, lighter tones such as Pearl may test closer to the margins.

Paleon is an ideal choice for projects that demand continuity between indoor and outdoor spaces. Its durable construction, varied formats, and slip-resistant options make it as practical for hospitality terraces and commercial lobbies as it is for residential bathrooms.

Manufactured by a factory committed to responsible production and environmental transparency, Paleon combines the authenticity of natural limestone with the resilience of porcelain and the reassurance of sustainable practices.

Paleon is a stone effect collection that rewards both touch and attention.



Floor:
2PEL102
Wall:
2PEL104


FINISHES:
 Matt, Matt R10 (A+B), Anti Slip R11 (A+B+C)

APPEARANCE:
 Limestone

MATERIAL:
 Porcelain

USAGE:
 Floors and walls

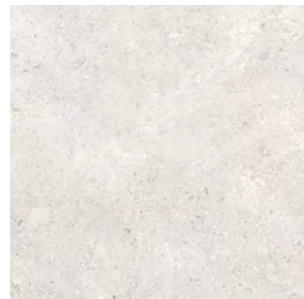
SHADE VARIATION:
 V3 - Moderate

SOLUS  THIS RANGE IS PART OF SOLUS PLUS



Floor:
 2PEL103

Wall:
 2PEL103
 2PEL106M001



PEL-Pearl
 2PEL103



PEL-Champagne
 2PEL101



Decor. Available in all colours
 in 600x1200x9mm, Textured finish.



PEL-Grey
 2PEL102



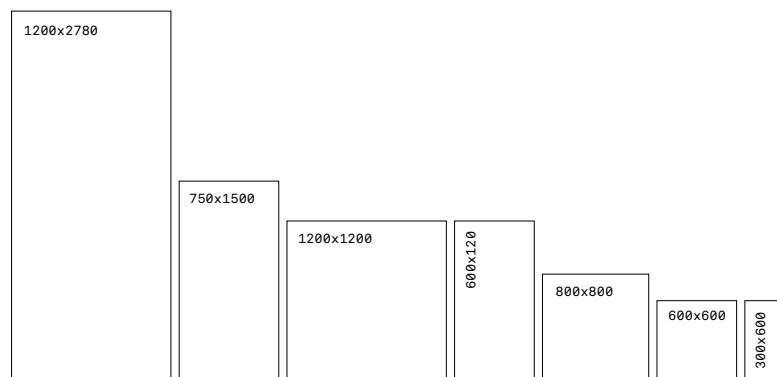
PEL-Sable
 2PEL104



PEL-Mosaic A
 2PEL105M001
 235x260x9mm Chevron
 Matt R10 (A+B)



PEL-Mosaic B
 2PEL106M001
 235x260x9mm Chevron
 Matt R10 (A+B)



All sizes are in mm. PTV results available on request. Full EPD available on request.
 Search for Paleon at solusceramics.com for more information about this range.



Wall:
 2PEL104D001

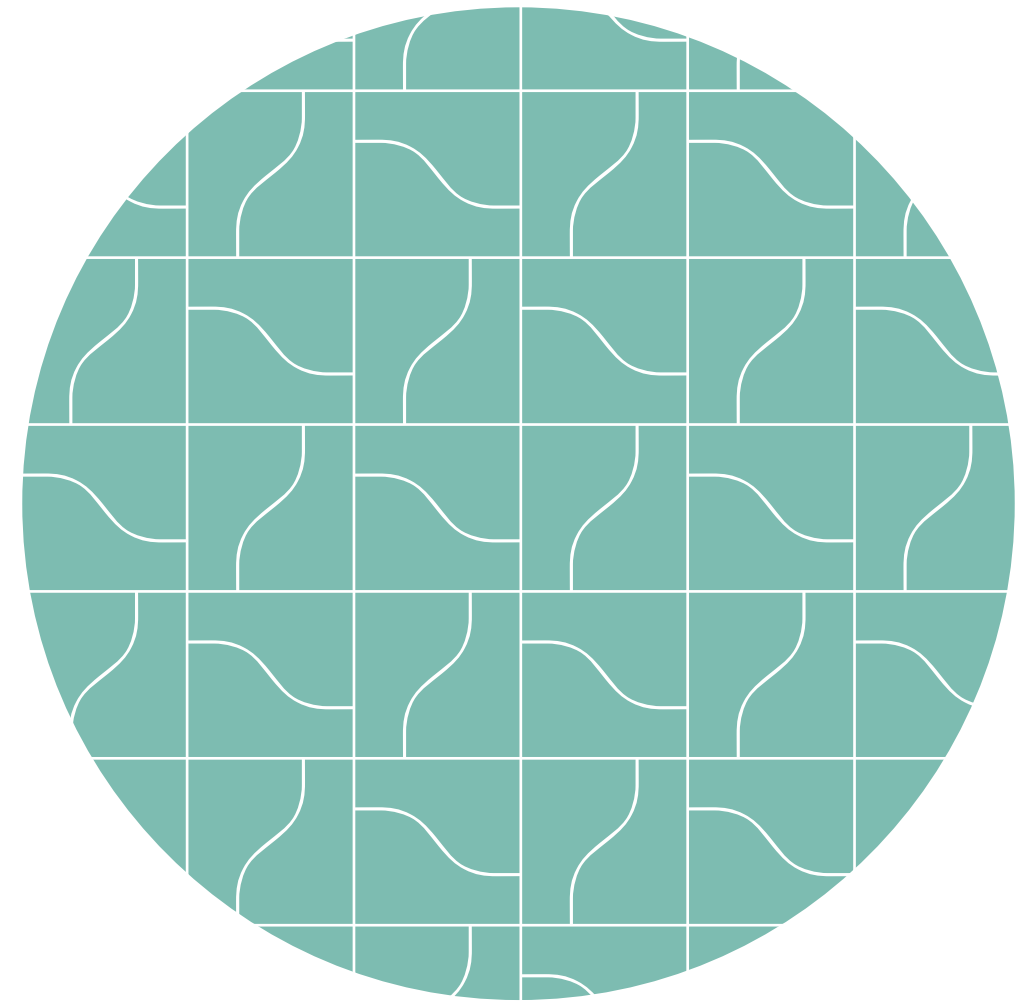
"Paleon has this quiet detail that makes you want to look closer. The fossil and shell markings give depth to the surface without overwhelming it. Add the large outdoor formats and slip-resistant finishes, and it's a range that delivers both character and performance across different settings."

Justin Jennings,
 Product Manager



NEW RANGE

The curved shape allows you to create a playful,
unique aesthetic.



CIRCLE T

11 COLOURS | 2 FINISHES | 1 SIZE

Geometry, gloss and grout: a surface that invites play.

Circlet is a small-format wall tile with a strong geometric profile and a simple premise: curves that create endless design opportunities. Each piece is shaped to interlock with its neighbour, forming a rhythmic pattern that can be emphasised or subdued depending on finish and grout choice.

Available in both Matt and Gloss, Circlet offers designers a flexible palette of effects. Used in Gloss, the surface catches and reflects light, accentuating the curved relief. In Matt, the pattern reads more softly, adding quiet depth and texture. The two can also be combined, with separate boxes ordered for each finish, to create striking juxtapositions of sheen and shadow.

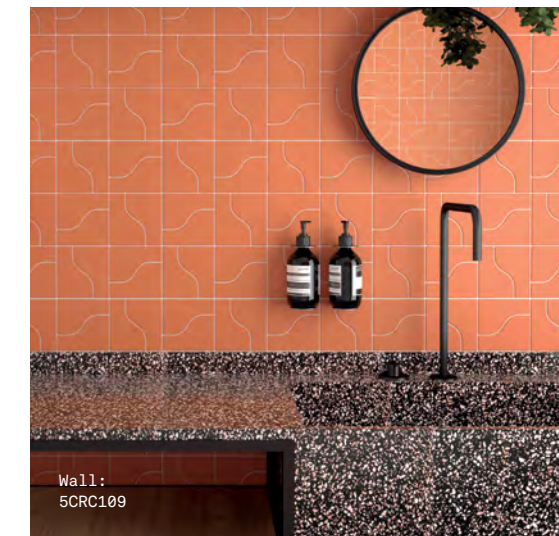
Format is key to Circlet's identity. At approximately 83x120mm, it is unusual enough to stand apart and difficult to substitute, while small enough to invite experimentation with layouts, rotations and colour blocking. Grout joints are integral to the design: the minimum recommended joint is 3mm, in line with

British Standards, but varying the grout colour can completely transform the look. A deep blue joint against black tiles, for example, produces a sharp graphic effect; a pale joint against neutral shades softens the overall rhythm.

Circlet's palette is versatile, ranging from bold tones such as Teal to understated neutrals and rich darks. This flexibility allows it to move across applications, from playful feature walls in hospitality settings to more refined compositions in residential bathrooms or commercial lobbies.

Produced by a factory known for its design-led approach and sustainable standards, Circlet is both distinctive and dependable. It encourages designers to think not just about the tile itself but about how light, finish and grout can be combined to elevate surfaces into creative, bespoke statements.

Circlet is more than a tile: it is a toolkit for surface design, inviting experimentation with geometry, gloss and grout.



Flowing patterns and static geometrical shapes are possible.



A characterful palette affords playful expression.



FINISHES:

Matt, Gloss

APPEARANCE:

Mono Colour

MATERIAL:

Ceramic

USAGE:

Walls only

SHADE VARIATION:

V1 - Uniform

SIZE (MM):

83x120

Wall:
5CRC108



“Circlet is playful by nature. The curved shape means you can build rhythmic patterns, then change the feel completely by switching between Matt and Gloss finishes or different grout colours. It’s a small format tile with a big personality, and it really encourages designers to experiment.”

Justin Jennings,
Product Manager, Solus



CRC-White
5CRC110

CRC-Pink
5CRC107

CRC-Yellow
5CRC111

CRC-Honey
5CRC109



CRC-Blush
5CRC108

CRC-Grey
5CRC104

CRC-Marine
5CRC101

CRC-Teal
5CRC106



CRC-Navy
5CRC105

CRC-Green
5CRC103

CRC-Black
5CRC102

Full EPD available on request. Search for Circlet at solusceramics.com for more information about this range.

Wall:
5CRC106

Aston Villa

Hospitality

The Holte Standard: Aston
Villa's new era of hospitality.

DESIGN:
20.20

LOCATION:
Birmingham, UK

PHOTOGRAPHY:
20.20

RANGES USED IN THIS PROJECT:

Bespoke tiles and mosaics
Rockstone
Palos
Format
Carnival
Blockwork
Ornamentation
Aspiration
Archway
Additional ranges sourced by Solus



Aston Villa welcomes guests to their redesigned hospitality suites.

In their 150th anniversary season, Aston Villa have unveiled a suite of reimagined hospitality spaces at Villa Park. Designed by 20.20, the project brings together fine dining, history, and atmosphere in a way few football grounds can match.

The commission, awarded in spring 2024, asked for more than an upgrade. Villa wanted to broaden its premium offer, creating a collection of spaces that could flex between matchday and non-matchday use, all while staying true to the club's story.

For designers, the challenge was significant: seven distinct destinations, each with its own narrative, within the physical limits of a historic stadium.

"Villa Park is steeped in history and when it came to our part in bringing elements of history and unique details into the design, we were spoilt for choice," says Jon Lee, Executive Creative Director at 20.20. "It's been a wonderful journey learning about the richness of the club, and we are delighted with how the design of all the spaces has come together."

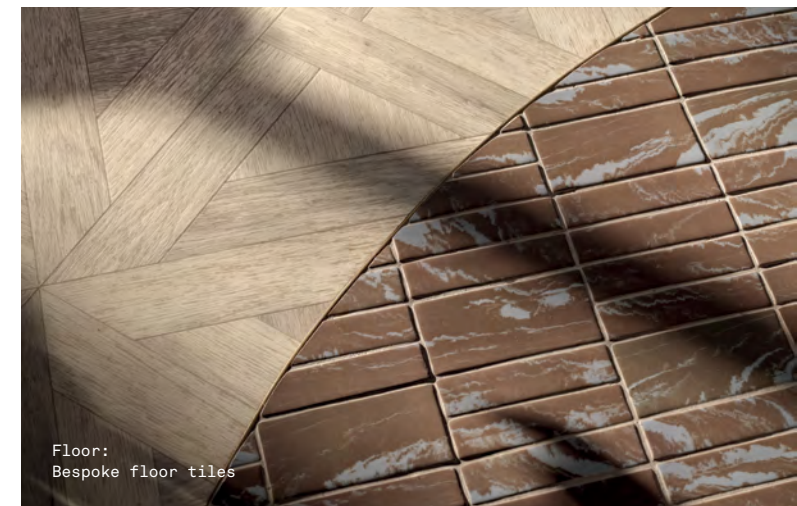
The Oak Room

The Oak Room is a contemporary reinvention of the original restaurant first opened at Villa Park more than a century ago: the first of its kind in any football stadium. Here, history takes centre stage. Trophies including the 1982 European Cup and the original Football League trophy are displayed alongside stained glass windows, Italian mosaics and timber panelling. The design balances warmth and grandeur: natural stone floors, patterned timber, and art deco touches frame a space that feels both rooted in the club's past and ready for the future.

A collection of stories

The Oak Room is one of several new experiences now available to Villa's most discerning guests. The Chairman's Suite and Trophy Suite provide invite-only fine dining with black marble, brushed gold and panelled ceilings. The Aston, inspired by nearby Jacobean mansion Aston Hall, offers tapestry hangings and pitch-facing loges for intimate dining. Legends Lounge opens into the treetops of Aston Park, creating a more social, relaxed setting with lighter timbers and mid-blue tones.

Bars, restaurants and spaces for events on match days and other times are all offered by the refit.



Floor:
Bespoke floor tiles



Floor:
2WDR005
2WDR003
2WDR006
Bar front:
5TCR102



Wall:
6PLS101

A wide selection of Solus ranges elevate the space offering clients a premium experience.



Wall:
5PRY512
Bar front:
Bespoke wall tiles
Bar apron:
Bespoke floor tiles



Floor:
3JDT112
Bar apron:
Bespoke mosaics
Wall:
5SNC101
5ORN102



Floor:
3JDT112

Our custom mosaics at the bar apron.



Floor:
2WDR005
2WDR003
2WDR006
Bar front:
5TCR102



Working with 20.20 on Villa Park was a reminder of what good design can do. They've taken history, heritage and atmosphere and layered them into spaces that feel natural for football but extraordinary as hospitality.

For us, it was about supporting that vision and making sure every detail lived up to the story they were telling."

John Rose, Area Sales Manager
johnrose@solusceramics.com



Floor:
3JDT112
Wall:
6JDV115
6JDV112

Other venues carry a more contemporary edge. The Villans Lounge celebrates the community, its design accented by blue and green tiling and views directly onto the pitch. The 150 Club reclaims an under-used part of the Doug Ellis Stand, transforming it into a moody, energetic bar and dining space that stretches the length of the stand.

For Ashley Macfarlane, Design Director at 20.20, it was about renewal through storytelling. "We thoroughly enjoyed working with the team at Aston Villa to re-design the spaces while instilling deep narratives for this unique and dedicated audience. They are now fresher, beautifully laid out and a modern take using classic materials. We wanted to inspire new memories while telling stories of old."

Legacy and innovation

The Trinity Road Stand, designed in 1922 by Club Chairman Frederick Rinder, was once considered the grandest in English football. With its Dutch gables, stained glass and mosaics, it echoed Aston Hall and helped establish Villa Park as a benchmark for stadium architecture. That spirit of ambition runs through this latest redevelopment. Each space respects Villa's heritage while enhancing

the experience for supporters, sponsors, and visitors.

John Rose of Solus sums it up: "This project is about more than interiors. It's about restoring Villa Park's reputation as a place where football history, architecture and hospitality meet. As suppliers and as fans, we could see how much care 20.20 put into weaving those threads together. These spaces don't just look extraordinary, they feel like Villa."

For the fans

For supporters, the project is another sign of Aston Villa's upward momentum. Just as the team has returned to European competition, so too has the stadium re-asserted its position as one of football's great landmarks. Few clubs can boast a restaurant legacy that began before most stadiums even had tea rooms, let alone a collection of ultra-premium spaces designed for a new century of football.

Villa Park remains what it has always been: a ground where heritage is honoured and ambition is alive. With The Oak Room and its companion venues, 20.20 have helped ensure that the matchday experience is as memorable off the pitch as on it.



Cem Akin creates an aesthetically thrilling and highly contextual home in Hackney.

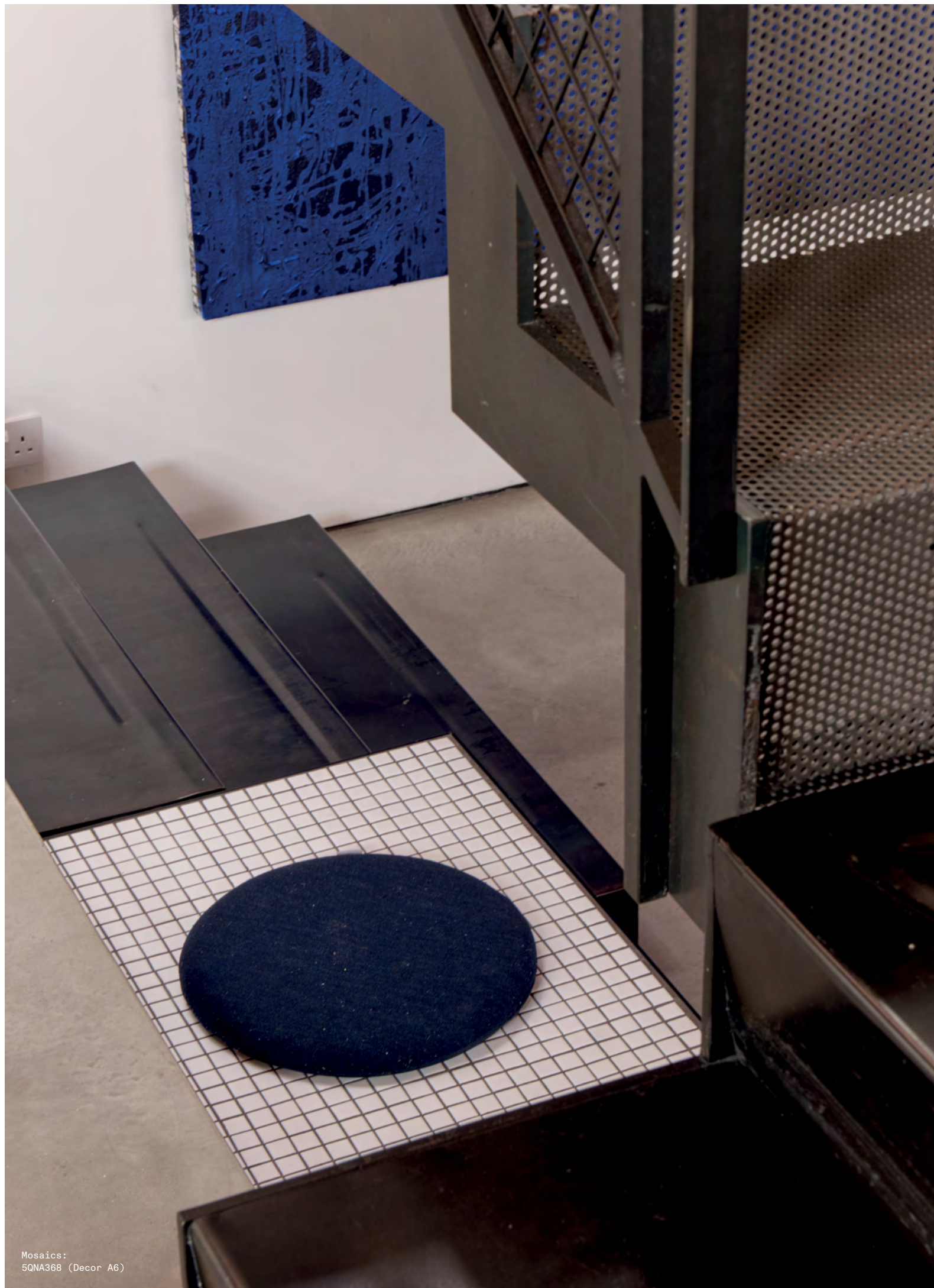
Downstairs

INTERIOR ARCHITECT:
Cem Akin

LOCATION:
London, UK

PHOTOGRAPHY:
Richard Oxford

RANGES USED IN THIS PROJECT:
Modular



Mosaics:
5QNA368 (Decor A6)

A home shaped by light, calm, and circumstance.

It began with a moment of chaos. Interior Architect Cem Akin and his partner had sold their house in North London and were ready to move into a new home when their lender abruptly pulled the mortgage. “We were practically homeless,” Cem recalls. “It was a shock. Everything just fell through, and suddenly we were left without a plan.”

In that disorienting moment, the plot in East London appeared: a brownfield site near London Fields. It had something, a certain understated presence, the suggestion of potential, and a location near London Fields in Hackney. “It was frightening, but also compelling,” Cem says. “The possibility was there, and the idea of building something from scratch started to feel like the right kind of challenge.”

Fast forward to today, and the house that emerged from that upheaval tells a very different story. Douglas, named for the Douglas fir vertical cladding on its exterior, is calm and composed, a study in restraint and light. Its pale brick exterior and textured grey timber sit confidently within the local context, referencing the neighbourhood’s industrial character without

mimicking it. Inside, the home opens up gently: quiet volumes, generous glazing, soft surfaces and crisp geometry create an atmosphere that feels grounded, luminous, and serene.

“We weren’t trying to do anything flashy,” Cem explains. “The idea was always to create something calm, clean, and considered, something that felt settled in its place.” Budget constraints required careful thinking, but the guiding principle never shifted. The house would be shaped by its materials, and those materials would be honest: concrete, timber, glass and brick, each chosen for its texture, durability, and integrity.

Large panes of glass bring light deep into the plan, while mirrored surfaces extend and reflect it with precision. In the central stairwell, a perforated steel stair becomes a sculptural moment, catching the light and casting fine shadows, while nodding discreetly to the building’s industrial setting. “Hackney has this great mix of grit and imagination, old industry and new ideas,” Cem says. “I wanted the house to feel like it belonged here, without copying anything directly.”



The influence of stripped-back European modernism is also clear. “Architects like Peter Zumthor or Vincent Van Duysen were definitely in my mind,” he notes. “They work with this incredible restraint but never lose warmth. It’s architecture that breathes.” That influence surfaces not only in the home’s compositional clarity, but in its material expression: precise yet tactile, minimal but not sterile.

Tiles, too, became a defining detail. “Solus had exactly what I was looking for,” Cem says. “I’ve always loved working with graph paper. It’s how I think when I draw. So, I brought that idea into the house with a mix of tiles and smaller mosaics, both in matt white, which I aligned across the space.” The contrasting scales introduce a sense of rhythm and structure, like drawing in three dimensions. “There’s something quietly playful about it,” he adds. “It felt personal, and practical.”

The project, however, was anything but easy. “It was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done,” Cem admits. “There were moments of real doubt. You think, what have I taken on? But then there are these moments where it clicks—when you see it taking shape, and it feels right.” Working within a tight budget pushed him to lean on his professional contacts, sourcing high-quality materials at the best possible value. “It became a bit of a balancing act,” he says. “I was probably relentless. But it paid off.”

What emerged is a house that honours its origins while moving deliberately beyond them. “There’s always a gap between concept and completion,” Cem reflects. “But this came pretty

close. It feels calm. That was always the aim.” The ground floor flows with ease from kitchen to dining to living space, connected by polished concrete underfoot and softened by timber joinery. Upstairs, bedrooms feel tucked away and private, yet still visually connected to the courtyard and sky.

“It’s very much a home,” he says, “but one that was always meant to be flexible. We’ve always enjoyed a good house party, and the layout reflects that. It needed to feel peaceful day-to-day, but able to shift gears when we’re entertaining.” That adaptability is everywhere—from the open-plan ground floor to the way the outdoor spaces act as extensions of the interior. Nothing feels overly formal or precious; the house embraces use.

Looking ahead, Cem is channelling the lessons of Douglas into new work. “I’m currently pitching for a really exciting office project with a major retail brand. The brief is all about rethinking how we work now, how spaces can support that shift. It’s early days, but there’s a lot of potential there.”

Throughout the day, light bounces off strategically placed mirrors beneath long linear skylights, casting beautiful spectrums that shift in appearance depending on the surface; whether it’s a painted wall, polished concrete floor, tiled splash-back, or the metal stairs.

From early disruption came something deeply grounded. Douglas is not loud or ornamental; its confidence lies in its clarity, its warmth, and its ability to adapt to life as it is lived.

The cooker surround was tiled in a way that recalls graph paper, the architect’s preferred drafting material.



Splashback: 5QNA368



Wall: 5QNA368
5QNA368 (Decor A6)



It was a real pleasure working with Cem on this project. His attention to detail and understanding of how materials can shape atmosphere made the collaboration really rewarding.

The tile choices were simple on the surface but carried such a strong design intention; it was all about rhythm, proportion, and light.”

Michael Irvine, Head of London Sales
michaelirvine@solusceramics.com



Splashback: 5QNA368

HOSPITALITY PROJECT

Ceru

From Farringdon to the Mediterranean in one step.

ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN:

Ceru

LOCATION:

London, UK

PHOTOGRAPHY:

Richard Oxford

RANGES USED IN THIS PROJECT:

Eonstone

Earth



“Light filtered through the essence of lemons.” Lawrence Durrell

Walk into Ceru’s newest restaurant in Farringdon and you leave London behind. The sun-washed walls, the warmth of timber and the gentle gleam of a cerulean back bar transport you several degrees south. “We want people to feel like they’re on holiday,” says Barry Hilton, Ceru’s founder. “Not necessarily in a specific place. Just away.”

Ceru isn’t bound by tradition. The menu draws inspiration from the eastern Mediterranean and offers crisp salads with fruit, bold vegetarian dishes and naturally gluten-free plates that feel both healthy and indulgent. Meat, fish and gluten lovers are equally well served, and if you can, try the scallops.

The same mindset shaped the interior. The space is comfortable but intentional, detailed without being overdone. Lemon-yellow walls are softened with fabric, decorative joinery and subtle carving. A sandy, stone-effect tile floor adds warmth and light. The room feels lived in, with just enough texture to make it memorable.

The seed of Ceru was planted when Barry was brought in to help a Lebanese chef grow their London business. “I knew nothing about Lebanese food,” he says. “The first thing I had to do was understand it.” That process revealed the pull of tradition, but also its limits. Many restaurateurs felt tied to family recipes. Barry, with no cultural obligations, had more freedom.

“I’m not from Lebanon or Syria or Jordan. Nobody expects me to be traditional,” he says. “So, we built a menu with no borders.” The first version played it safe. Then came the bolder ideas: fruit in savoury dishes, sharper spicing, bigger flavours and brighter colours.

Barry realised Ceru needed a distinct point of view. “I’m not a chef, but I do have a diverse palate.” He took over food development and began defining every flavour, from starters to house-made lemonades.

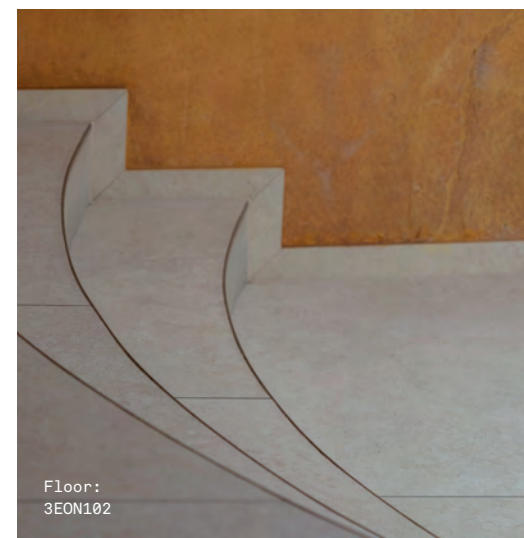
“I had a career in music, managing acts like The Alan Parsons Project, and at that time I frequented restaurants as a customer. As a restaurateur, I care about the full experience: the setting, the performance.” That experience blends bold food with warm, unobtrusive service and a sense of being looked after.

The Farringdon branch is Ceru’s most refined yet. It sits between Farringdon Station and Smithfield Market, on a site with a near-square footprint that gave the team freedom to shape the room. “I don’t like long, thin restaurants,” Barry says. “We wanted something that felt balanced.” An open kitchen occupies one quarter (a signature for Ceru). “I want people to see who’s cooking their food. It builds trust. It shows how calm and clean the team are.”

Happily, cleanliness and calm define the place.



Tucked into a busy stretch of Farringdon, Ceru offers calm, colour and warmth: an escape just steps from the street.



Floor:
3EON102

An elegant curve of tiled steps welcome the guest from street to dining room. Hand-carved Moroccan doors add detail to the interior.



Floor:
3EON102



Floor:
3EON102

Ceru avoids clutter. There is little to no artwork. The materials do the talking: colourful fabrics on the seats, the smooth curve of the entry step, carved wooden doors, the cool tone of the tiled bar. The space has depth and character without fuss.

"I've built about 15 or 20 restaurants in my career," Barry says. "This is definitely the best."

The relationship with Solus began serendipitously. Barry and life-and-business-partner Patricia were walking past the showroom when something in the window caught their attention. "We just saw things we liked, straight away," Barry says. "There was no compromise."

That chance encounter led to a close collaboration with John Rose and Sam Frith of Solus, who worked with Barry and Patricia throughout the design process. "They weren't just suppliers," Barry says. "They were creative partners. They understood what we were trying to achieve and helped us push it further."

Choosing the floor was a leap of faith. You select a tile from a small sample, then scale it up to fill a space. When the first few boxes were laid, Barry had doubts. "I thought, maybe we've chosen wrong. But then I remembered everything else that was coming: the painted ceiling, the darker walls, the furniture. And it came together."

The sandy, stone-effect porcelain flooring now grounds the entire space. In the spectacular bathrooms, Barry returned to Solus for a hexagonal beige tile that adds shape and contrast without overpowering the room.

Beyond the tiles, Solus promoted Ceru as a potential showcase location to the tile manufacturer, which helped secure a better price. They also shared ideas throughout the build, encouraging Barry to explore new options. "Even when we didn't go with something they suggested, it helped us refine our thinking," he says. "It felt like a real collaboration."

The team is already scouting for a fourth site. Farringdon proved that Ceru works in business-residential areas, and future growth will be steady rather than rushed. "We'd like to open another next year," Barry says. "But only if it's right."

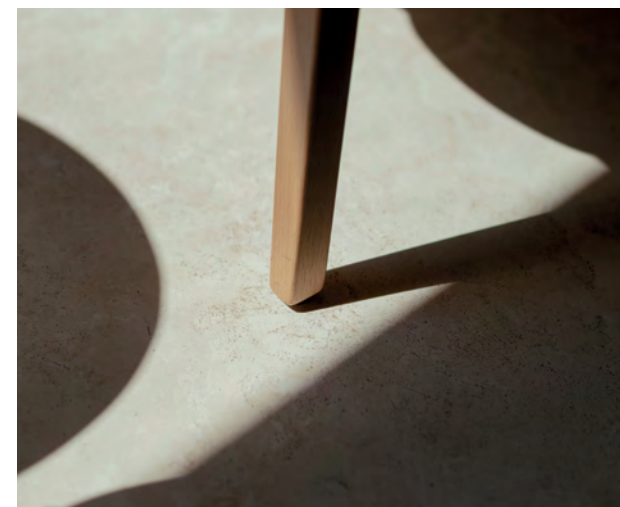
There's also international interest. Ceru has fielded overseas offers before, but growth has always been measured. "Once we have another restaurant open, we'll look at building the team to support expansion."

Closer in, a retail spice range is in development. A cookbook has been discussed, though Barry remains unconvinced. "It may work better as a coffee table book. It could offer another way to share the story. The search for new ideas never ends. That's what keeps it exciting."

Warm colours and soft lighting give the dining room a welcoming glow, while the hexagonal tiles in the restroom add contrast through shape and texture.



Floor: 3EON102



Floor: 3EON102



Floor: 2ERH107



Working with Barry and Patricia on the Farringdon restaurant was a real pleasure.

They care so deeply about every detail, from the feel of the space to the flavour on the plate. And the food is absolutely knockout.

It's always a good sign when you leave a site meeting full."

John Rose, Area Sales Manager
johnrose@solusceramics.com

WORKPLACE PROJECT

Exchange Flags, Liverpool.
An historic commercial office space revived.

Walker House



Wall:
Sourced by Solus

ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN:
Incognito

CONTRACTOR:
ICON Projects

LOCATION:
Liverpool, UK

PHOTOGRAPHY:
ICON Projects

RANGES USED IN THIS PROJECT:
Particulate
Additional ranges sourced by Solus



Floor:
2MDK104
Floor surround:
Sourced by Solus
Corridor:
Sourced by Solus

Exchange Flags, in the heart of Liverpool, is comprised of Walker and Horton House. ICON Projects and Incognito have delivered a sensitive and integrated refit to this historic building.

Liverpool has a wealth of architectural riches that point to its former global economic significance. There are over 2,500 listed buildings here, of which 27 are Grade I and 85 Grade II*. Exchange Flags falls into the latter category and includes a reinforced bunker that housed the Western Approaches Command Centre during the Second World War.

The eleven-storey building forms the back of a square with two wings, Horton House and Walker House. A column dedicated to Admiral Nelson doubles as a ventilation shaft for the bunker below the square, and Liverpool Town Hall, one of the grandest Georgian civic buildings in the country, faces it directly.

Exchange Flags itself has a history tied to the city's mercantile past, particularly its role in the cotton trade. Originally, it was an open-air space where merchants and brokers would meet to conduct business. The name, Exchange Flags, refers to the flags that identified the origin of the cotton and identity of the merchant.

Solus worked with fit-out specialists ICON Projects and design team Incognito on the recent refit of Walker and Horton House. Having previously collaborated with both firms

on the Solus Manchester Studio, we were delighted to be involved once again.

A significant challenge for ICON was working within a live, occupied building. They minimised disruption with temporary access systems and daily briefings, keeping everyone informed. With Grade II listed status, careful preservation was essential, and the logistics of a city-centre build added complexity. A clear plan and strong communication helped ensure the project ran smoothly.

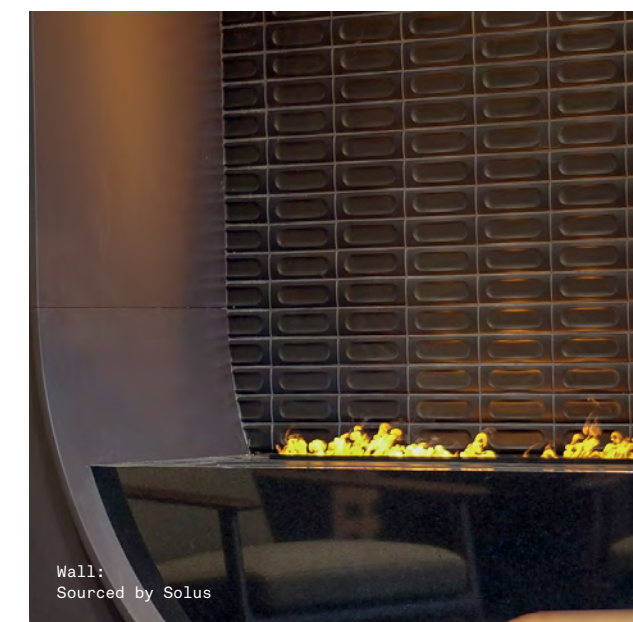
Richard Storton, Solus Area Sales Manager, explained: "Our relationship with Incognito and ICON is great, and we've been able to demonstrate the range of services Solus can offer through our collaboration on the Manchester Studio. Walker House was another opportunity to exceed expectations, and we did this with some lovely bespoke-cut tiles in the reception and elevator areas."

Incognito's Howard Powsney reflected on the design brief and approach: "One of the biggest challenges was respecting the building's history. It's a grand structure with a lot of heritage. Doing something ultra-modern would have felt wrong. We wanted the design to be sympathetic."



Floor:
2MDK104
Floor surround:
Sourced by Solus
Corridor:
Sourced by Solus

Bespoke-cut porcelain tiles echo the geometry of the suspended ceiling, with light and material working in harmony.



Wall:
Sourced by Solus

Walker House may be monumental in scale, but its reception area is modest. The design had to make an impression without overreaching. "The old layout was wrong," Howard noted. "There were layers of updates over the years, and the space had lost its soul. We mirrored the entire orientation; something that sounds simple but changed everything. Suddenly the circulation made sense. People coming in and out had a clear route to the lifts. It became intuitive."

That sense of logic and order extended to the tile layout. The floor pattern draws on the building's history and the story of Exchange Flags itself. "Formerly, it was where traders set up stalls in a grid," Howard explained. "We echoed that with a gridded floor design. Solus helped us recreate it through bespoke tile cutting. It gave the space rhythm."

The ceiling also held hidden inspiration. When layers were stripped back, Incognito discovered beautiful pot-and-beam tiles: terracotta with delicate indentations.

"They weren't in a good enough state to expose, and there were fire regulations to consider," said Howard, "but we didn't want to lose that detail. So, we photographed them and recreated the graphic as a motif within the suspended ceiling tiles."

Lighting was another careful choice. "Rather than going for bright downlighting, we created a secondary grid between the suspended tiles

and used ambient up-lighting in a heritage green. It gives the space this gentle, boutique feel. You move from the hard flags of the square into something much more organic."

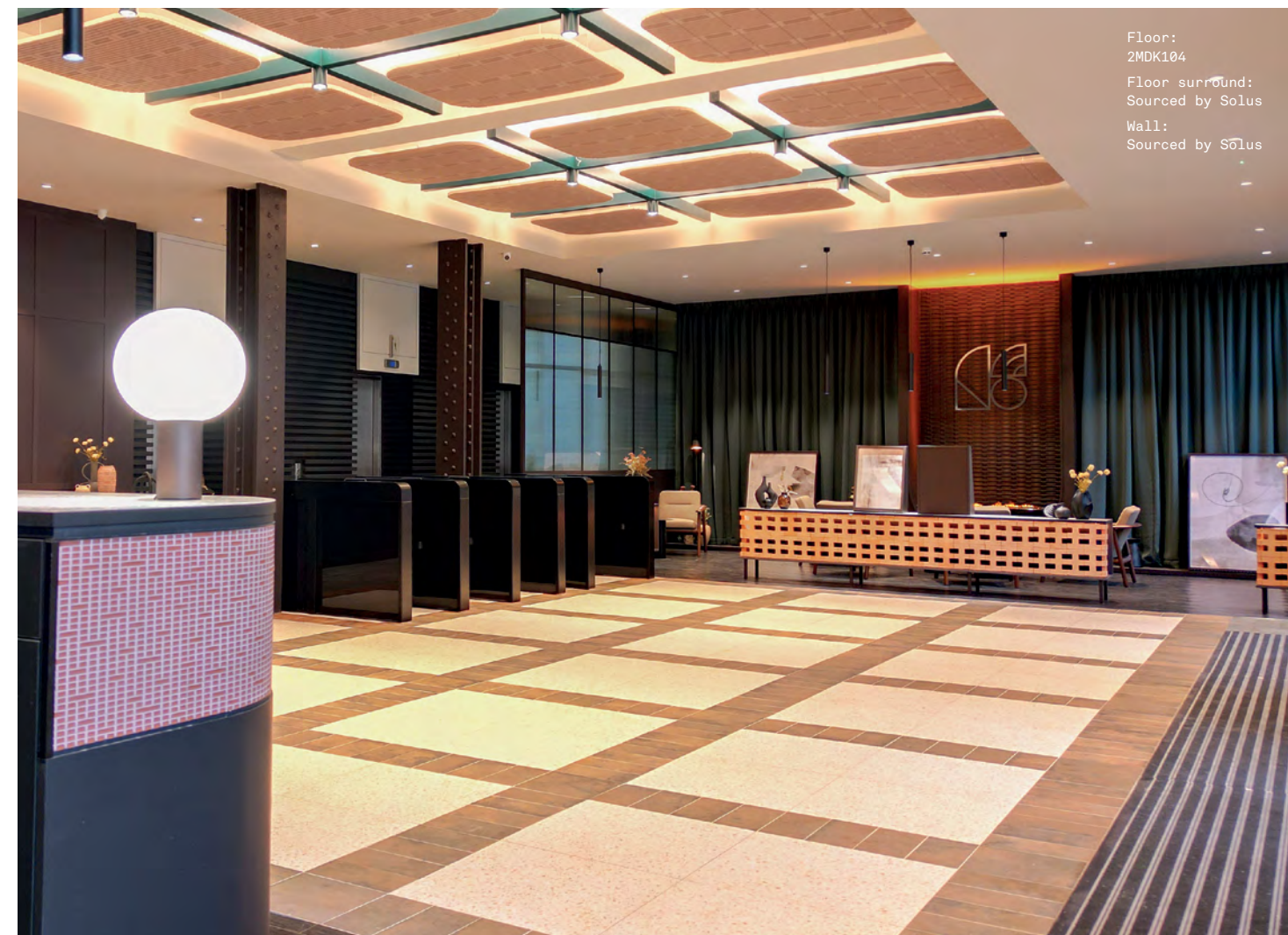
In addition to bespoke-cut tiles from Solus, the space includes warm detailing and furniture pieces that bring scale and softness: "We added a curved plinth, dressed with large-scale art. The space needed something commanding. And there's a beautiful water-vapour fireplace that the client was really pleased with, an atmospheric touch that works with the tone of the space."

The result is more than a visual update. As Howard put it: "We're not just about making spaces look good. We think about how people move through them. We consider the psychology of arrival, how the first impression resonates with the architecture. We also try to future-plan and phase our projects, even if we can't always talk about what's next."

While future plans remain under wraps, Incognito's approach is clear: a rejection of trend-led design in favour of spaces that respond to context. "We don't design to fashion. We listen to the building."

That ethos aligns with Solus' approach, too. "It's great to be part of a team that cares about the integrity of a project," said Richard Storton. "At Exchange Flags, we were able to add real value, not just through product, but through partnership."

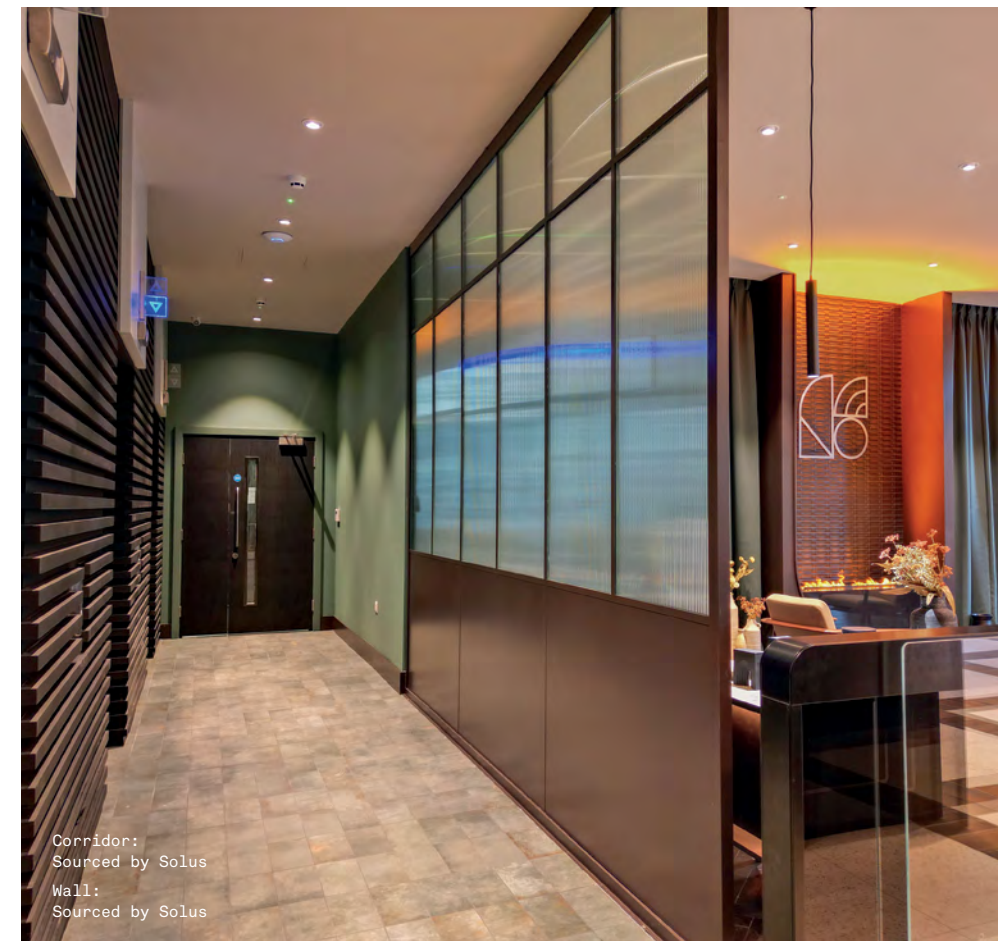
The reconfigured lobby improves circulation and creates a more intuitive flow, anchored by a sculptural water-vapour fireplace that brings warmth without mass.



Floor:
2MDK104
Floor surround:
Sourced by Solus
Wall:
Sourced by Solus



Floor surround:
Sourced by Solus
Wall:
Sourced by Solus



Corridor:
Sourced by Solus
Wall:
Sourced by Solus



Working on Walker House was a real pleasure. ICON brought a steady hand to a complex, live site, and Incognito's design vision was both respectful and quietly ambitious.

For us, it was about supporting that vision with precision, from bespoke cutting to practical laying advice. It's one of those projects where collaboration really shows in the finish."

Richard Storton, Area Sales Manager
richardstorton@solusceramics.com

under the table

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Ryan Bennett, Solus Managing Director
Conleth Buckley, Editor

PHOTOGRAPHY:
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Tim Crocker
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Jim Stephenson

Under the Table is a series of conversations that seeks to reveal the people behind architecture. In this edition we speak with Glenn Howells, founder of Howells: a practice recognised for reshaping Birmingham's cityscape and contributing to major urban transformations across the UK. Here, Howells reflects on the influences that shaped him and the values that continue to guide his work.



with

GLENN HOWELLS

Founder and Partner at Howells

“

For me, it's always about asking: what does the building want to do? What does the material want to do? If you can answer that, you're on the right path.”

Glenn Howells is not the sort of architect to dwell on legacy. In conversation, he is forward-facing: more interested in what's taking shape than what's already built. But it's hard to ignore the scale and substance of the practice that bears his full name: or rather, did. In 2023, Glenn Howells Architects became simply Howells: a quiet but deliberate shift that reflected deeper changes within the practice. Now led by a broader senior team and operating from studios in Birmingham, London and Dublin, the rebrand signalled a redistribution of authorship and an expression of intent.

It's a logical step for a practice whose output has long been defined by outstanding architecture, civic ambition, and collaborative ethos. The Howells' project list is long and significant. From the Custard Factory which kickstarted the ongoing renaissance of Digbeth, to the Savill Building in Windsor Great Park with its remarkable gridshell roof, to London City Island which holds within it the poised elegance of the English National Ballet's Mulryan Centre for Dance, to a redefined typology of motorway service stations in Gloucestershire. Howells' work has for some time framed the warp and weft of life in the UK.

Howells' contextually attentive and singularly imaginative approach to place-making has helped the practice grow into a sought-after master planner. In London, they have reimagined Canary Wharf as a water garden and Royal Wharf as a tapestry of spaces that stretches to the Thames Barrier. In Birmingham, with the Paradise plan, they unlocked the 19th century splendours of Chamberlain Square, giving the city back its heart. And the tenacious ambition of the Our Future City plan makes

sense of the palimpsest of urban development that characterises Birmingham, envisaging a more liveable city of thriving, connected neighbourhoods

Our Creative Director, Sam Frith and our Managing Director, Ryan Bennett met Glenn at Howells' London studio in Fitzrovia.

How did you come to architecture?

Architecture's an interesting one, isn't it? I've always been keen on the word building rather than architecture, to be honest: and I think that's because of how I grew up. My dad was a builder; he left school at 14. So, my first experience of buildings was as something you do: a verb, not a noun. I watched him, a trained carpenter, fashion things out of timber with real skill and put together quite amazing structures.

He was a first fix carpenter who specialised in roofs, and he was very good at them. He'd done a seven-year apprenticeship, so he could do everything from setting out to fine joinery. I've still got his tools: huge saws, delicate chisels, beautifully kept. I grew up with the sense that a building came from materials, from process. It wasn't abstract; it was a process of making.

I was the first in my family to go into higher education, so there wasn't a clear path into architecture. And I didn't go into it because it was a respected profession. I liked drawing. I liked buildings, and my dad was builder. That was enough for me. When we went on holiday, my dad would always point out how things were made from stone, metal, brick and wood; and he'd tell the story of how the properties of materials led to form and connections.

Your dad must have been delighted with the Savill Building in Windsor Great Park given his line of work?

Oh! He went and saw it. He was blown away. We also took him to the timber walkway at Westonbirt Arboretum. He loved the idea. Before Airfix kits came along, he'd grown up building model planes from balsa wood, so he was always fascinated by the Mosquito aircraft and the way it used timber lattices to form something incredibly strong. These were then covered in tissue paper and sealed with dope, which would shrink tight over the frame. He loved the idea that you could make incredibly strong structures using very little material.

That's exactly what he found interesting in the Savill Building. It uses a grid shell roof, which is a structural system that relies on curvature for strength. Like the shell of an egg, double curvature makes it inherently strong. It's the same principle as corrugating metal to increase stiffness. With timber, you're usually working with large, machined sections that function as beams. But with a grid shell, you use much thinner timbers, bend them into arches, and interlace them to create a dome-like structure. That curvature allows you to span far greater distances than you could with straight beams.

The Savill Building spans over 30 metres, and the roof is just 300 millimetres thick; that's a span ratio of 1:100, compared to the usual 1:20. It's elegant, efficient, and comes a kind of craft logic that my dad really appreciated.

How did growing up in the Midlands shape your outlook and career in architecture?

I was born in Stourbridge. Back then, the Midlands was a very different place. It wasn't a financial district like the Southeast: it was about making things. My grandfather worked in one of the largest steelworks in the world. My mum worked in a local factory that made beautiful cut glass by hand. And, as I've said, my dad was a builder. Everyone around me was involved in manufacturing or craft in some form.

Birmingham used to be called the city of a thousand trades: and rightly so. It made everything: tools, engines, bicycles, jewellery, buttons. That culture of making shaped everything. It made you think differently about materials, about work, about the value of things well made. After school, during the Winter of Discontent, I took a job driving between factories across the region. One day I'd be in a shed watching someone machine stainless steel parts; the next, I'd be in a foundry or light fitting assembly line. These weren't glamorous buildings, but the work was good and skilled. It left a deep impression.

Stourbridge itself was a creative place. As a teenager, all my closest mates were artists. My best friend went to Stourbridge Art School, and I spent a lot of time around that crowd. They were cooler than anyone else I knew. He went on to art school in London, and I followed him down a bit later. I met loads of people through

him. Everyone was in a band back then. I was in a decent one at school, but to earn money I played in a country and western band at working men's clubs around Cradley and Lye. We'd get fifteen quid for a three-hour set, which felt like good money in 1979. We wore Velcro-fastened nylon outfits and played until the bingo started, which was the main event.

But I started to see where that road led. I'd go into music shops like Modern Music in Dudley and see older guys, brilliant musicians, still playing Stairway to Heaven on display guitars. They were waiting for something to happen. And I thought: I don't want to end up like that.

Then one day I opened the New Musical Express and saw an ad on the back page: Why not study architecture in Plymouth? I'd always been interested, but that gave me the push. That's how it started.

Did Birmingham lose its way a little bit?

It's been a long journey. I do think Birmingham lost its way, especially in the '60s and '70s. There was so much damage done during that period, the Manzonni Plan in particular. All around the markets, you ended up with these bizarre five-metre level changes, roads that didn't go anywhere. If you look at old maps, you see it was once a marvellous hill town: connected streets, small squares, proper walkable neighbourhoods. And we just tore so much of that apart.



The role of the architect isn't to dominate the conversation, it's to contribute something meaningful and to work with others."



ABOVE:
Eden Dock, London

LEFT:
Royal Wharf, London

Most of what we've been involved in over the last 20 years has been about repairing that damage. Not through individual buildings (buildings will always change) but by reopening connections, stitching the city back together. Reinstating public space as the most important thing in the city. That's what matters.

For cities like Birmingham to thrive, they need to be attractive and accessible to young people. And right now, we're still seeing a migration of talent to London. The infrastructure just isn't there. You look at a transport map of London, then compare it to Birmingham at the same scale, it's shocking. There's ten times more connectivity in London. That stuff matters, especially for younger people who don't want to or can't afford to jump in a taxi every time they go somewhere. Our tram system's okay, but it's limited. We need more investment in regional cities, proper investment.

What is architecture to you?

I'll tell you what it's not. It's not about heroic ideas being handed down from above. It's not about shape-making for the sake of it and letting someone else figure out how to build it.

The architects I've admired and worked with have all said the same thing. Architecture is a synthesis: it's ideas, craftsmanship, a sense of place, a sense of purpose. You have to ask: what is this project actually doing for people?

It's not an art form, not in the traditional sense. It's not something you create for yourself to admire. It's always a collective act. Never solo: always a chorus. The best projects come from many minds working together.

And material knowledge matters. Makers matter. Craftspeople matter. I've just come out of a meeting on a timber project outside Manchester. The conversation wasn't just architects and engineers: the carpenters were there too. We were talking about species of wood, their properties, how that might affect the plan of the building. That's the level of intelligence and authenticity you get when you bring those people in at the beginning. If you just design something to look good on a rendering and hand it over, you lose all of that.

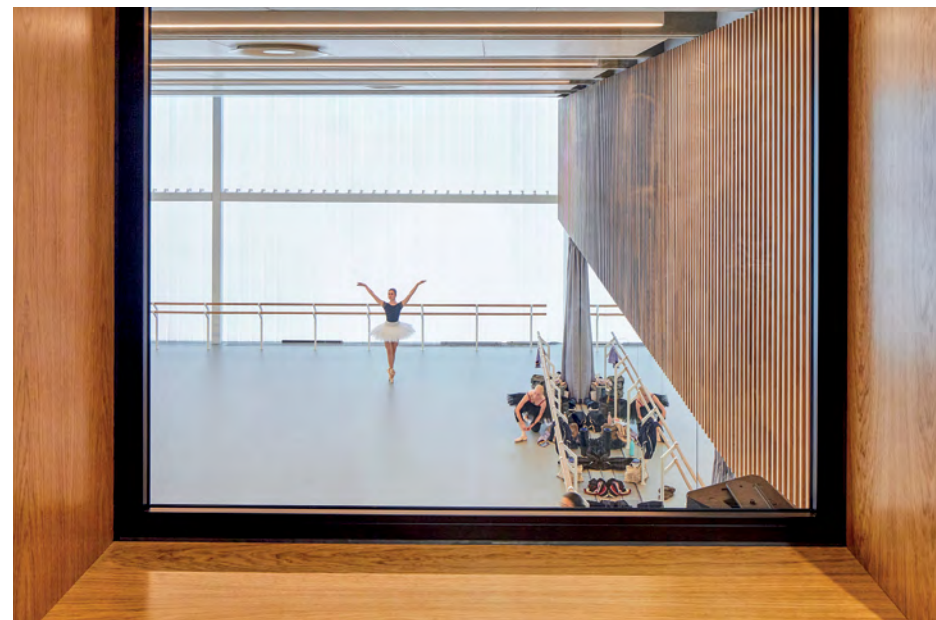
Can you expand on that? The relationship between architect and trade.

I've always said we're only architects; we're not the experts. Our job is to work with people who really know their materials: the people who make the tiles, the bricks, the steel, the timber. Especially the tradespeople on site. They bring an understanding you can't get from behind a desk.

On the Savill Building for the Crown Estate, we involved the Green Oak carpenters from the start. They showed us how they'd make the timber structure; we didn't design it in isolation. That kind of collaboration is essential. I've often asked builders, "What do you think we should do here?" And they'll say, "Well, if we build it the way it's drawn, this will happen." Usually, they're right. So, we adapt. You need to be open to that.

My dad, who very rarely swore, said once, after he retired, that he only just realised "fucking" and "architect" were two separate words. He spent decades listening to architects telling him how to build things, and often, they were wrong.

The Mulryan Centre for Dance,
London City Island





The Savill Building,
Windsor Great Park



Birmingham gave us room to experiment, to test ideas at scale, and to be part of its reinvention.”

You're always absorbing other people's ideas, whether consciously or not. When I work with younger architects, they bring their references, and I bring mine; things I was shown in my twenties or thirties. It's a rich job in that sense: you end up carrying a whole internal library of examples and moments and decisions that have stayed with you. You say: I remember, they did that on such-and-such a project, and it worked because of this. That kind of mental catalogue builds up over time.

So yes, I've admired a lot of people. But the ones who interest me most are the ones who immerse themselves in the making and thinking and doing; the ones who see architecture as a process, not a product.

What is the ethos of your practice (Howells)?

I think the ethos of Howells really comes down to curiosity. We're not interested in stock solutions or repeating ourselves. We don't want to replicate what we've done before or be boxed in by a rigid brand or style. Each project is a new opportunity: a chance to explore different materials, different ways of making, different urban patterns. That's what keeps it interesting.

What probably defines us most is the group of people at the heart of the practice. Some of us have been working together for nearly 40 years, even before the studio was formally set up. We've grown together. It's been an amazing journey, and we've always tried to keep that spirit of shared learning at the core of what we do.

There's a quote from Charles Eames that I love, he said, 'We take our enjoyment seriously.' That's very true of this place. We come into work not because it's easy, it's hard sometimes, but because it's genuinely enjoyable. It's stimulating. It's a privilege to work on the kind of projects we do, and with the people we get to work alongside.

So, I suppose the ethos is about always striving to do the best work we can and resisting the temptation to just roll out what we've done before. Every project should be a learning process. It's about staying open, staying curious, and always trying to do things better.

What's the difference between designing individual buildings and masterplanning?

I think the key difference is that when you're designing a building, you need to be very specific. You have to understand the materials, the structure, the environmental controls, how everything comes together to form a coherent whole. It's about precision, detail, and intent.

Masterplanning, on the other hand, requires a different mindset. You need a degree of selflessness, because you're creating something that others will interpret over time. The mistake is when architects apply building-design principles to masterplans. They become too shape-driven or form-led, when what's needed is flexibility. The best masterplans leave space for other designers to bring their own ideas, sometimes decades later.

For me, successful masterplans are like natural systems. They evolve. They're responsive. They accommodate change rather than resist it. It is creating a helpful framework, one that understands patterns of movement, connections, access to green space and water, without trying to fix everything in place. The towns and cities I enjoy the most are those that have developed over generations, shaped by many hands. They feel organic rather than imposed.

So yes, when it comes to masterplanning, I think our job is to guide, not control. To provide something that supports growth, rather than dictating form. It's a lighter touch, but no less deliberate.

How do we make architecture more accessible?

I think there are two sides to accessibility. The first is about the people who experience architecture, the users. Who is it for? That should be at the top of the list. But I'm not sure all architects put it there. It's easy to forget, sometimes, that we're not designing buildings to get published or win awards. The best buildings are the ones that are loved by the people who use them, live in them, work in them. They improve lives, make people healthier, happier, more connected. They strengthen communities, support businesses. That's what we should be aiming for.

And looking back, I've built a few buildings now, it's not always the most beautiful ones I'm proudest of. Some of the best buildings we've done are the ones that have exceeded expectations. They're still in use, still cared for, still delivering value. That's the real measure of success. So, if we want architecture to be more inclusive, we need to design for

Our ideas have to meet reality and the people who work with their hands every day often have the best grip on what's possible.

Which Architects do you admire?

I remember, when I was at university, I was always slightly suspicious of grand architects. We had some very grand ones come and teach us; some of them were brilliant, but there was a kind of mythology around them that I didn't fully trust. The surprising thing is some of the ones you'd expect to be quite grand were actually the opposite: humble, helpful, willing to let you in. They let you see how uncertain they were about things. That was interesting to me.

I used to spend a lot of time in the architecture library, and I'd travel to see buildings. I'd go out specifically to visit something famous by a well-known architect, and then, on the way there or just next to it, I'd find something much better. That happened all the time. One of the books I was shown when I was studying was *Architecture Without Architects* by Bernard Rudofsky. I think it was published in the 1960s. It's about vernacular buildings: anonymous buildings made before you had what we'd now call 'qualified' architects. They were built by masons, carpenters; people who knew how to make. And some of them are absolutely astonishing.

I've got a huge amount of time for that kind of architecture. There's an authenticity and honesty to those buildings. They weren't trying to hide materials, they were lean, efficient, what you saw was what they were made of. When I travel, I always try to learn from that kind of work. Rather than read a book, I prefer to look at and try to understand the building, understand where, how, why they were made and what they were made of, what the materials are telling you. It's a great hobby, actually.

I've always leaned more towards designers than architects. Buckminster Fuller's a good example. He came into design after the death of his daughter. He had a moment where his life was falling apart. He just lay on his back and looked at the stars and realised there was something that he could live for, he could rebuild his life around creation. He was a polymath, a systems thinker, he connected things. That's something I've always responded to.

Charles and Ray Eames along with Jean Prouvé, he had a factory of his own. People who made things, who were immersed in process. Cedric Price, Louis Kahn through to Renzo Piano: these are people who've understood architecture as a consequence of process, not just as a shape-making exercise. And if you go back before the 20th century, there are amazing craft led architects like Paxton and Berlage in Holland whose work is still truly innovative.



What matters most is not the monument, but the legacy of how people live and use the spaces we create.”



Gloucester Services,
M5

longevity, for openness, for joy for as many people as possible. Not just the short term.

The second side of inclusivity is about who gets to be part of the profession. And I worry about that. There's been a squeeze on arts and creative subjects in schools; they're not seen as a good return on investment anymore. So fewer young people are encouraged to go into design, photography, drawing, painting, all the things that feed into architecture. And yet these creative disciplines are absolutely essential.

We try to do a small bit, summer schools for 15-year-olds, that kind of thing but I think much more is needed. It's so important to give young people a glimpse of what architecture or design can be, before they make a big decision to study it. It's a long, expensive course. They need to know what they're getting into and more importantly, they need to be inspired.

I've got a strong belief that creativity is something we ignore at our peril. AI might be able to execute things, generate images, rephrase documents and it will get better at all that, but it still needs a spark. An idea. A bit of

human messiness and imagination. If we want a creative, inclusive profession, we've got to keep feeding that spark, especially in the next generation.

What advice would you give to a young person considering a career in architecture or design?

It's a great way to spend your life. It connects you to so many different things, you'll never be bored. If you're interested, try it: get immersed, get some experience. We run a programme here for young people to help them take that first step.

My advice is to stay open. Don't narrow down too quickly. You can only be a brilliant designer if you remain curious. Technologies change; AI is already shifting the way we work, and the profession evolves with them. You're in a process, not just making a thing.

Be interested in everything: politics, the planet, nature, finance. In the end, everything we do is shaped by people, resources, and environment. In our office, we use a framework: C-L-E-A-N.

- C is for Crafted.
- L is for Lean; using efficient materials and systems.
- A is for Appropriate; to context, climate, and society.
- N is for Narrative; every project has a strong story at its core.
- And E is for Elegant, but only after everything else has been considered.

We tell new people: please don't just show us an elevation; that's the fourth meeting. First, we talk about everything else. Otherwise, you short-circuit the process and end up designing the wrap before you've understood the contents.

Unfortunately, the profession has been through a phase of fetishising form. There's pressure, especially with AI-generated renders, to produce the killer image. But that can mislead young designers about what success really is. Is it being a 'starchitect'? Or is it doing work that genuinely changes lives?

For me, it's always about asking: what does the building want to do? What does the material want to do? If you can answer that, you're on the right path.



LEFT:
Our Future City,
Central Birmingham 2045

BELOW AND RIGHT:
One Centenary Way and Two Chamberlain Square,
Paradise, Birmingham



Villa mosaic



Villa Park gets a facelift for Aston Villa Football Club's 150th anniversary courtesy of Solus bespoke mosaics. p.56

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