

QUARTER

A publication by SOLUS. Issue 35.



PROPORTIONS,
SCALING,
MATERIALITY.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to

QUARTER

35

I am delighted to welcome you to Quarter 35, a special edition in which we celebrate the opening of a new Solus showroom in Birmingham. Inside, an interview with CEO Marcus Bentley who talks us through the project.

We have a write-up of Hearing the Eyes of the Skin, an event held in February that brought together Juhani Pallasmaa, Steven Holl, Peter MacKeith and Roger Tyrrell at our Clerkenwell showroom to launch the audiobook version of Juhani's seminal work, The Eyes of the Skin.

We introduce an occasional feature on Spolia, our terrazzo range that uses debris as inclusions. Case studies show the versatility and successful application of this unique product.

Our products section features an array of spectacular tiles showcasing the many uses and forms that porcelain ceramic tiles can assume. ReCover is an innovative dry-lay system intended to facilitate circular design, whereas Sidequest is a mindbending mosaic range that will delight the creative designers, to name but two.

Three Chamberlain Square in the centre of Birmingham is a recent addition to the Paradise masterplan from Howells. Designed by Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios and realised by Weedon, it is a remarkable building both aesthetically and in terms of carbon impact. Aurora in Glasgow from HFD Group continues this theme by being a sector exemplar of retrofit, achieving outstanding sustainability metrics. Anomaly talk to us about Sunlight House in Manchester, a resuscitated Art Deco masterpiece, and Legado Restaurant from Applied Studio is a considered design that harmonises with the culinary excellence of the kitchen.

This edition is closed out by an interview with Catherine Ramsden as part of our Under the Table series. Catherine talks to us about Useful Studio, the permeability of membranes, wolves, bridges, tents and rocket science.

I hope you enjoy it.

Conleth Buckley, Editor
conlethbuckley@solusceramics.com



Welcome to Quarter 35. This edition holds particular significance for me. In it, you will find a full account of our new showroom here at our Birmingham headquarters in Tyseley, where Solus has been based since 2008. The project has been two years in the making and represents, I think, a genuine statement of where this company is and where it is going.

We already had beautiful showrooms in London and Manchester. What we lacked was something at home: a space at our head office worthy of the brand Solus has become, and one that could properly serve retail customers, luxury residential clients, architects, and interior designers alike. We wanted a showroom the whole company could be proud of. I believe we have one now.

The detail of how it came together, the partners, the design thinking, the people who made it happen, is told in the pages that follow. I am enormously grateful to everyone who contributed, and proud of what we have achieved together.

Good business is built on trust. We give our loyalty to people we like; to those who take the time to understand us. Our showrooms, and this magazine, are part of that effort: spaces for conversation, for exchange, for connection. I hope you find something of value in this issue, and that we see you in Birmingham, Clerkenwell, or Manchester.

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



SOLUS DOUBLES DOWN



Solus renews Birmingham commitment with new showroom.

Solus has opened a new showroom at its headquarters in Tyseley, where the company has been based since 2008. Eighteen years on, the investment represents a renewed commitment to Birmingham's industrial heartland and a belief that well-considered design should be encountered where work, making and trade already happen.

Tyseley is a district shaped by manufacture and infrastructure, long defined by railways, factories and workshops rather than retail gloss. The decision to create a carefully designed showroom here is deliberate. Rather than separating design from industry, the new space brings them into closer alignment: placing ceramic surfaces, material intelligence and craft within a working context that has always understood production.

For CEO Marcus Bentley, the project did not begin as a refurbishment exercise. "I didn't wake up one morning and think, that showroom needs to be renovated," he says. "I initially wanted to bring more people through the door." As discussions evolved, it became clear that the existing space needed a rethink. "The old showroom did not reflect the brand that Solus had become. It's our head office. We should really have an amazing showroom here, and we didn't."

Four ambitions, one space

Local design firm, 2G Design & Build, was brought in to deliver the project. The brief settled around four aims. The first was retail: to create a compelling environment for the retail customer and showcase products in an unforgettable way. The second was luxury residential: to create an appropriate space to discuss the needs of clients.

Third, the showroom needed to serve architects and designers across the Midlands as a credible destination. And finally, it had to



ON BIRMINGHAM

DESIGN AND CONTRACTOR

2G Design & Build

TILING CONTRACTOR

Arcitile

LIGHTING

J. Adams & Co, Wever & Ducre

FURNITURE

Boss Design

BATHWARE CONSULTANT

Inside the Box

PHOTOGRAPHY

Neil Perry

work for the team. "When staff enter the building, you want them to feel the brand as they walk through the door. You want them to feel the position Solus has in the market. That's achieved now."

Designed as a journey

The layout is organised around the customer journey. Visitors arrive at a calm welcome area with soft seating before moving to a reception desk formed from Spolia: crushed samples and sections of the old showroom floor reassembled into a single surface. Embedded within it are keys from the original building, folding Solus' own history into the new space.

The visual anchor of the showroom is the slab wall. "There are 110 large-format slabs, all angled," Bentley explains. "You only see a snippet of each as you walk past. When you come in and see it, it's pretty jaw-dropping." Materials are grouped by aesthetic family rather than brand: marble, stone, terracotta, wood, concrete and decorative collections. Alongside the slab wall are units with clapper and drawer displays. Free-standing cross displays demonstrate materials which work well together. Room sets further clarify how different products might look in a variety of contexts.

All samples are QR coded, giving instant access to technical and product information. Once decisions are reached, a dedicated pricing area supports specification, with approved fitters listed by postcode. A bar area nearby reinforces the idea of the showroom as a place to linger, not rush.

A space that reflects the brand

The refurbishment extends through the building, including staircases, landings and facilities. Where full-weight slabs proved impractical, lightweight three-millimetre porcelain 'skins' were

used to maintain visual continuity. Along the stairwell, Solus' three pillars, People, Product, Planet, are illuminated against a slab backdrop. "Every time staff come into the office, they walk past our three pillars," Bentley says. "I think that's wonderful!"

Confidence in place

The showroom opened to customers in mid-February, with launch events scheduled throughout March. Its impact will be commercial, cultural and internal: driving footfall, properly supporting luxury residential clients, offering a destination for architects and designers, and boosting team morale.

By investing in Tyseley, Solus is reaffirming its belief that design and industry are not opposing forces. The new showroom does not attempt to disguise its context; it builds on it. In doing so, it makes a clear case for keeping design grounded in the places where things are made, specified and put to work: firmly within Birmingham's industrial fabric.

Acknowledgements

The new Birmingham showroom is the result of collaboration across Solus' wider network of partners and teams. Solus' factory partners helped shape the material palette, including Pamesa, Marazzi, Mirage, Casalgrande Padana, Refin, Iris Ceramica, Florim and Quiligotti. Their products form much of the material language of the space.

Design and delivery support came from a range of partners including J Adams, Arcitile and Ken Plants. Within Solus, key contributions came from Mark Williams, the Samples and Sample Wallets Department, Jev, Nick, Ellen, Sarah, Lara, Isabella. Thanks also to the wider team who supported the project despite the daily disruption.



Above: The slab wall displays products in thematic groups.

Right: The bar countertop is Spolia.

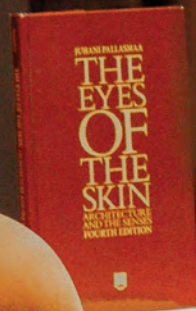
Below: Welcome to Solus!

Left: The new showroom offers a shift in perspective.





HEARING THE EYES OF THE SKIN



PHOTOGRAPHY

Luis Kramer

EVENT SPONSORS

izé, Dodds + Shute, Arcitile

VIDEOGRAPHY

Superbeam

AUDIOBOOK PRODUCER

Thin Ice

PUBLISHER

Wiley

On 12 February, architects, designers and cultural commentators gathered at Solus in Clerkenwell for the launch of the audiobook edition of Juhani Pallasmaa's *The Eyes of the Skin*. First published in 1996, the book makes one of the most searching arguments in architectural thought: that the dominance of vision in modern culture has impoverished our experience of the built environment, and that architecture reaches us most fully through touch, sound, smell and the moving body. The audiobook, produced by Thin Ice Productions, was conceived with the argument of the book in mind. Producer James Mason, who is dyslexic, wanted the text to be genuinely accessible: to readers for whom print creates distance rather than entry, and to the broader audience that architectural discourse too rarely reaches.

The evening opened with a yoiking performance by Plumm. Yoiking is a musical tradition of the Sámi people: a yoik does not describe its subject but evokes its essence, sound as direct apprehension. Mason worked closely with Plumm to make yoiking central to the audiobook's soundscape. Heard live, the choice was immediately legible.

A panel discussion between Pallasmaa, Steven Holl and Peter MacKeith followed, chaired by Roger Tyrrell. It moved between anecdote and principle with the ease of long acquaintance. Holl recalled how, on Pallasmaa's urging, he removed a courtyard from the Kiasma Museum scheme in Helsinki: aesthetic instinct trumped by climatic reality. MacKeith, who has edited many of Pallasmaa's published works, spoke with authority and with evident care for his subject. Pallasmaa, now in his nineties, urged the audience to hold the ideas of responsibility, rigour and poetics as practical wisdom. The conversation returned to friendship as a condition of serious work.

Pallasmaa once described his earliest apprehension of architecture as an echo between the buildings of his grandfather's farm, sound revealing space before sight. The evening had something of that quality. A film of the event, made by Superbeam, is available to watch at solusceramics.com.



[Watch the film here](#)



SPOLIA

Material continuity across scales.

Spolia is increasingly used as a way of carrying material memory into new architectural settings. Its appeal lies in the way it gathers fragments of previous lives into a robust, contemporary surface. This feature tracks projects where Spolia has been applied with care and intent, shaping space through reuse as a practical and cultural act. In this edition, two practices approach the material at different scales. At SimpsonHaugh, Spolia becomes part of the everyday life of the studio, shaped directly by the people who work there. At Stiff+Trevillion, it contributes to the character of a civic interior in the City of London, supporting a sense of assurance and longevity.



Elements of the past are preserved in the countertop, made for J. Adams & Co.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Mike Dinsdale

Philip Vile

Tian Khee Siong



SimpsonHaugh, 55 King Street, Manchester

The relocation to new premises on King Street marked a significant moment for SimpsonHaugh, the start of a new chapter for them in the city. After more than twenty-five years in their previous studio, the move prompted reflection on how the practice's history might be carried forward into a new setting.

Spolia offered a direct means of doing so. Glass and terracotta samples salvaged from their extensive material archive were taken to the manufacturing facility, where members of the practice embedded fragments into the countertop by hand, working with the material before it was cured, dried, and polished. That moment carried real weight for the practice, marking the transition between old and new through collective action. The clarity and legibility of the outcome echoes their design approach, rooted in a commitment to the creation of elegant, crafted, and timeless buildings and spaces.

Installed as a central countertop, Spolia now plays an active role in the daily rhythms of the studio. It is a place for gathering, dining, conversation, and informal exchange. The surface carries visible traces of its origin, with fragments held within a continuous field that speaks to accumulation and time. The making process remains legible in the finished object, maintaining a clear link between design intent and material outcome.

In this context, Spolia supports continuity through use and touch. It allows the practice's history to remain present in a form that is practical, robust, visually intriguing and responsive to how the studio works today.

Spolia as authorship, continuity, and shared making.



Stiff+Trevillion, One Basinghall Avenue, City of London

Spolia, marble inlay, and mid-century reassurance.

At One Basinghall Avenue, Stiff+Trevillion were responsible for reshaping the building's reception, as part of a wider scheme, following its transition to a multi-tenant commercial environment. The space needed to establish a renewed identity while retaining the authority expected in the City of London.

Spolia was introduced alongside marble inlay as part of a material language informed by mid-century precedents. The combination brings a measured richness to the reception and building arrival, drawing on architectural references associated with durability, craft, and permanence. This understated opulence feels appropriate in the heart of the City of London, where material presence plays a role in conveying stability and confidence.

Within the main reception, Spolia contributes texture and depth to the floor plane. Its composition gives the surface visual complexity and material weight, supporting the space as a civic interior. The use of reclaimed material also aligns with longer-term thinking around stewardship and adaptability, embedding ideas of care and continuity into the building's fabric.

Together with marble, Spolia helps shape an environment that feels settled and assured, offering a composed architectural backdrop to one of the world's most concentrated centres of financial activity.

Across both projects, Spolia demonstrates its capacity to carry meaning through material presence. At the scale of the studio, it records shared authorship and daily use. In a commercial lobby, it supports continuity and confidence through texture and weight. In each case, Spolia gathers time, memory, and making into the life of a building.

USE.
REMOVE.
REUSE.



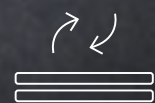
ReCover

Reuse materials and reduce waste.

12 COLOURS
4 FINISHES
1 SIZE

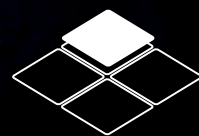


Key benefits



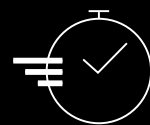
Replaceable

ReCover modules are easy to replace in the event of repairs or modifications.



Reusable

Installed without adhesives, ReCover modules can be reused, even several times.



Immediate connection

ReCover provides very quick installation times, up to 5 times faster than other systems, thanks to the innovative one-click interlocking joint system.



Clean

ReCover is installed without producing dirt or debris and no cement screeds or adhesives are required. This means less risk of dirtying the paving or flooring, reducing the need for time-consuming cleaning after installation.



Simple, low-cost installation

ReCover has extremely low installation costs thanks to a convenient, user-friendly male-female interlocking joint system.



Can be walked over at once

ReCover can be walked over immediately after installation, since there is no need to wait for cement screeds or adhesives to dry.

ReCover is a flooring system designed for circularity.

Most tiled floors are designed as if the plan will never change. Fixed permanently to the substrate, they are bonded to a moment in time. When that moment passes, they are stripped out, broken up and replaced, regardless of their condition.

ReCover begins with a different premise: buildings evolve, and floors should be able to evolve with them.

Developed as a dry-lay system, ReCover allows porcelain tiles to be installed without adhesive or permanent fixing. The tiles sit securely as an interlocked system, performing underfoot with the same stability and finish expected of a traditionally installed floor. When a layout changes, they can be lifted intact, without damage to the tile or the substrate, and reinstalled elsewhere. There is no hacking back to the slab, no broken material, no unnecessary write-off.

The principle is simple: use, remove, reuse.

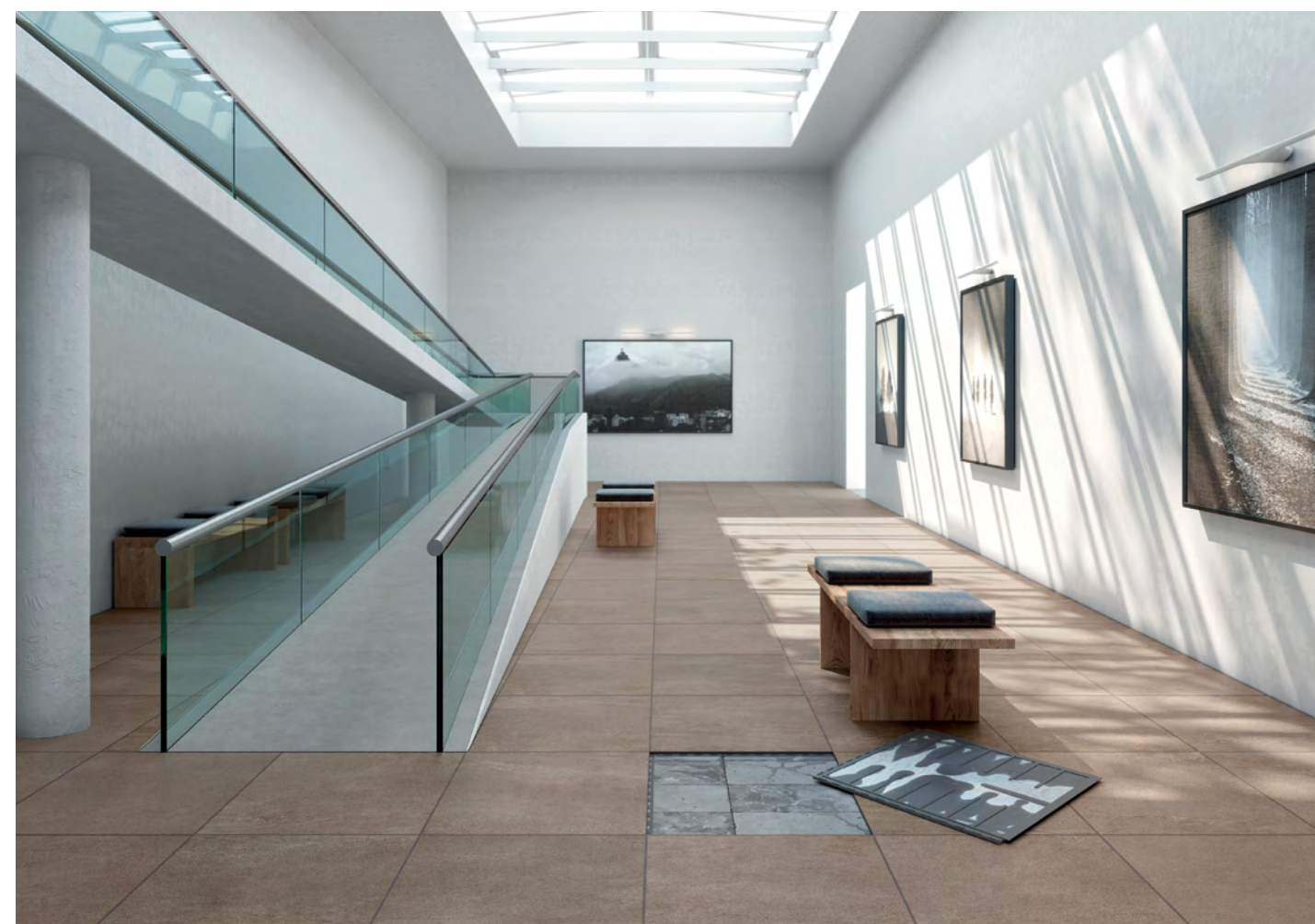
In large, uniform spaces where churn is anticipated, workplaces, retail environments, hospitality projects and exhibition settings, this shift in thinking has significant implications. Refurbishment

becomes less destructive. Downtime is reduced. High-quality material remains in circulation rather than entering the waste stream. The embodied carbon invested in the original manufacture continues to work, rather than being prematurely discarded.

The most meaningful environmental savings in the built environment often come from avoiding replacement in the first place. ReCover does not rely on recycling at end of life; it extends the useful life of the material itself. Each reinstallation preserves finish, performance and value, while deferring new production and minimising adhesives, remediation and strip-out.

Performance is not compromised. ReCover is designed to deliver the durability, aesthetic integrity and practical resilience expected of a porcelain floor in commercial use. The difference lies not in how it looks or feels on completion, but in what becomes possible afterwards.

ReCover asks specifiers to consider not only how a space will open, but how it might change. In doing so, it offers a radical proposition: design for adaptation, and waste becomes an option rather than an inevitability.



FINISHES

Natural, Natural R9, Natural R10, Natural R11 (A+B+C)

APPEARANCE

Stone, Concrete, Wood, Terrazzo, Metallic, Slate

MATERIAL

Porcelain

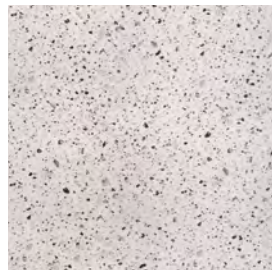
USAGE

Floors only

SIZE

600x600x28mm

INDOOR COLOURS



RCV-White
2RCV105



RCV-Grey
2RCV101



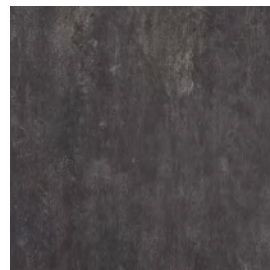
RCV-Warm
2RCV104



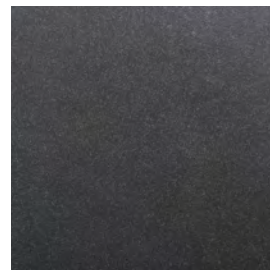
RCV-Brown
2RCV102



RCV-Cloud
2RCV103



RCV-Anthracite
2RCV107

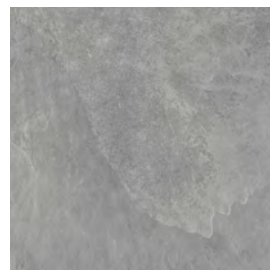


RCV-Peppered
2RCV106

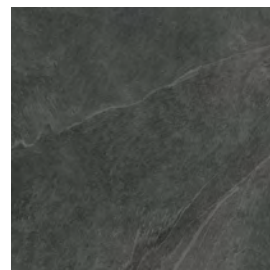
OUTDOOR COLOURS



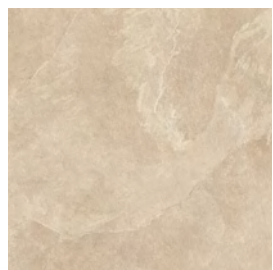
RCV-Ash
2RCV114



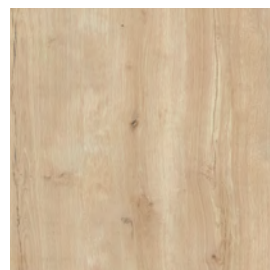
RCV-Silver
2RCV112



RCV-Black
2RCV111



RCV-Go1d
2RCV113

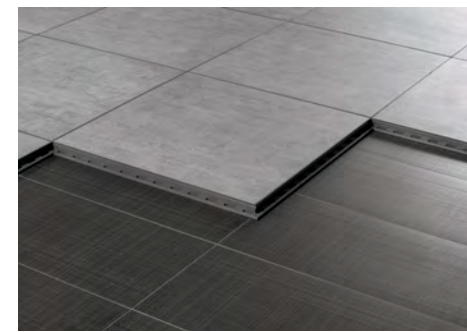


RCV-Dune
2RCV115

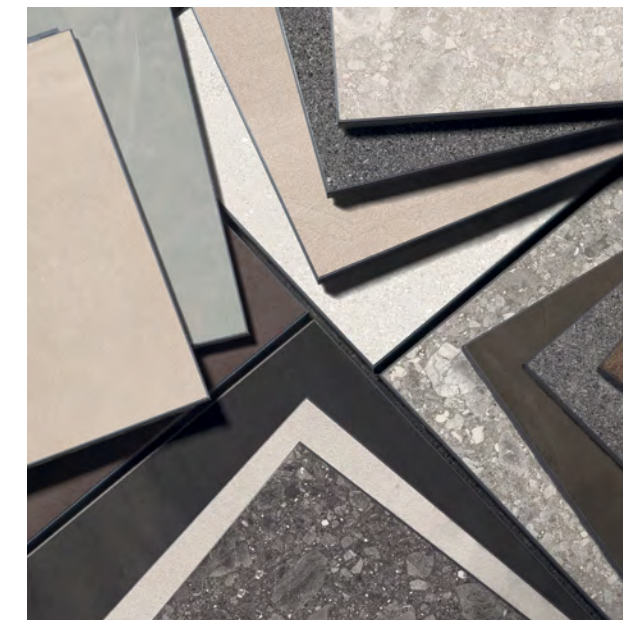
Bespoke colours are available with a minimum order quantity of 2500sqm.

“The ReCover system is the most robust and durable dry-lay system I’ve had the pleasure of experiencing. For designs that prioritise sustainability, it’s a compelling option. A good variety of popular colours and finishes legitimise it further.”

Justin Jennings,
Product Manager



The system is easy to install and remove, reducing costs and saving carbon.

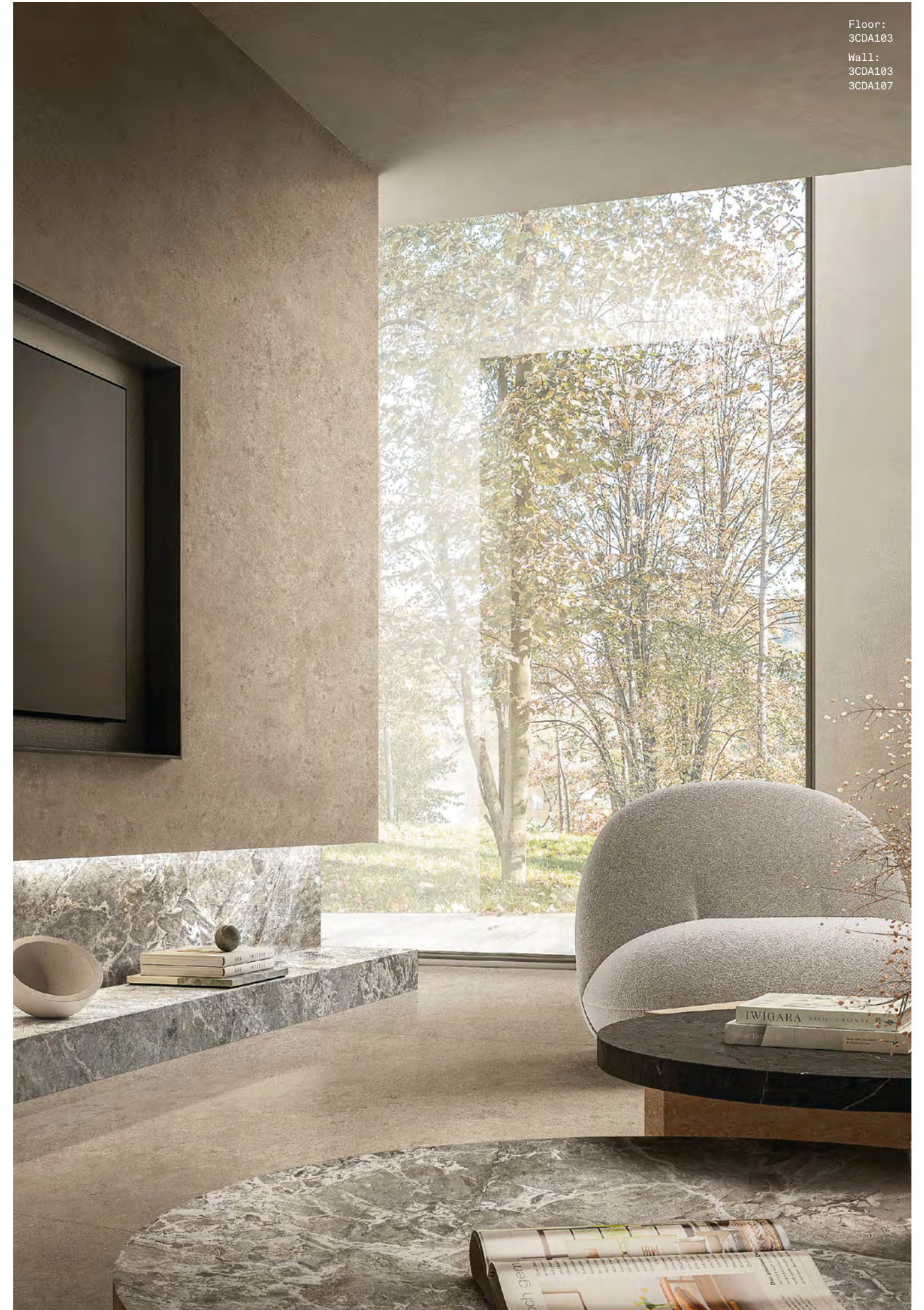


PTV results available on request. EPD available on request.
Search for ReCover at solusceramics.com for more information about this range.

Caldera

An exquisite marble-effect porcelain range offers stylish and understated opulence.

THIS RANGE IS PART OF SOLUS PLUS



8 COLOURS | 5 FINISHES | 10 SIZES | 1 MOSAIC | 3 DECORS

NEW RANGE



Floor:
3CDA104
Shelf:
3CDA104
Wall:
3CDA108

Caldera's colours are subtle, expressing the beauty of marble in porcelain.

Marble has always expressed opulence. It speaks of permanence, ceremony and refinement; of lobbies that aspire to grandeur and rooms designed to endure. Caldera revisits that tradition through the lens of contemporary porcelain technology.

Rather than replicating a single stone, the collection studies the expressive depth of high-value marbles: dramatic veining, tonal shifts, mineral inclusions and layered translucency. Caldera captures this movement with precision, translating it into large-format porcelain surfaces that retain clarity at scale. The result is a material that reads with the richness of natural stone while offering the consistency and performance demanded by dynamic settings.

Surface and proportion are central to its appeal. Large formats allow veining to flow uninterrupted across floors and walls, reducing visual fragmentation and reinforcing a sense of spatial continuity. In hospitality environments, Caldera can elevate reception areas and bathrooms with a sense of luxury; in retail and workplace settings, it introduces refinement without

sacrificing durability. The surface is robust, resistant and suited to high-traffic use, delivering the resilience expected of a contemporary porcelain specification.

As part of the Solus Plus portfolio, Caldera also speaks to a broader shift in procurement culture. Solus Plus ranges are selected not only for aesthetic and technical merit, but for their alignment with rigorous standards of responsible production and material traceability. In specifying Caldera, architects gain access to a surface that reconciles visual opulence with supply chain transparency, supporting compliance framework BES 6001 without aesthetic compromise.

Marble has historically been associated with extraction and rarity. Caldera reframes that narrative. By translating the drama of stone into high-performance porcelain, it offers the visual depth designers seek while contributing to a more considered and accountable material strategy.

Luxury, in this context, is not excess; it is durability, clarity and long-term value.



Floor:
3CDA102
Wall:
3CDA102



Wall:
3CDA101D002

Decors and finishes extend the aesthetic possibilities.



Floor:
3CDA106
Wall:
3CDA106



Floor:
3CDA103

"Subtle, unusual marble with warmth and depth. Great clarity in the patterns and an impressive range of formats. I'm happy to present Caldera."

Justin Jennings,
Product Manager

FINISHES
Polished, Satin R9, Matt R10 (A+B),
Matt Smooth R10 (A+B), Anti Slip R11 (A+B+C)

APPEARANCE

Stone
Travertine
Marble

MATERIAL

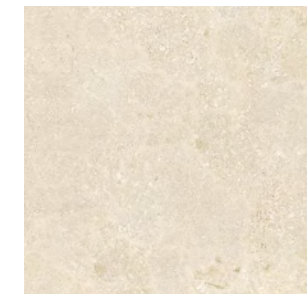
Porcelain

USAGE

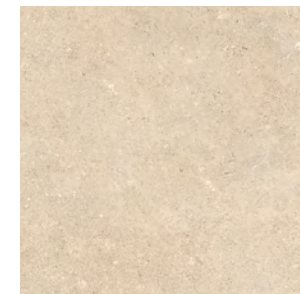
Floors and walls

SHADE VARIATION

V2 - Light
V3 - Moderate
V4 - Heavy
Please ask for more details.



CDA-Bone
3CDA104



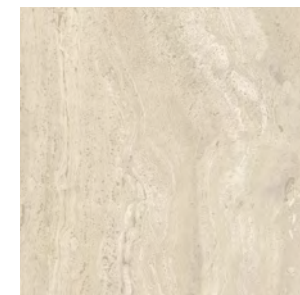
CDA-Beige
3CDA102



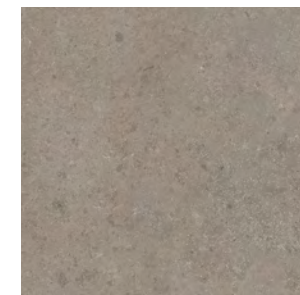
CDA-Greige
3CDA101



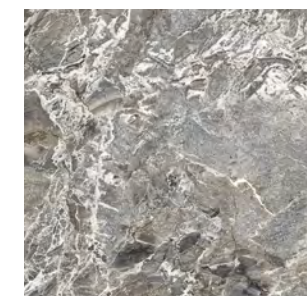
CDA-Pearl
3CDA106



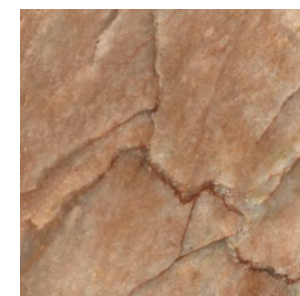
CDA-Champagne
3CDA105



CDA-Ash
3CDA103

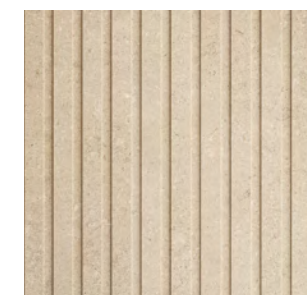


CDA-Grey
3CDA107

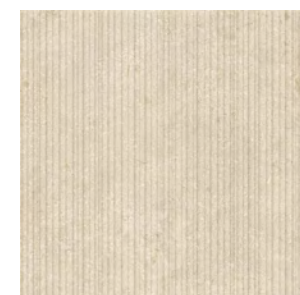


CDA-Ember
3CDA108

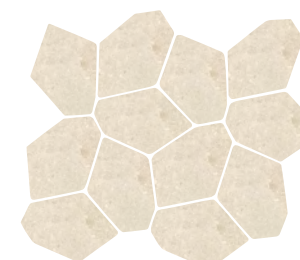
More decors available.
Mosaics and decors are available in
a variety of colours.
Please ask for details.



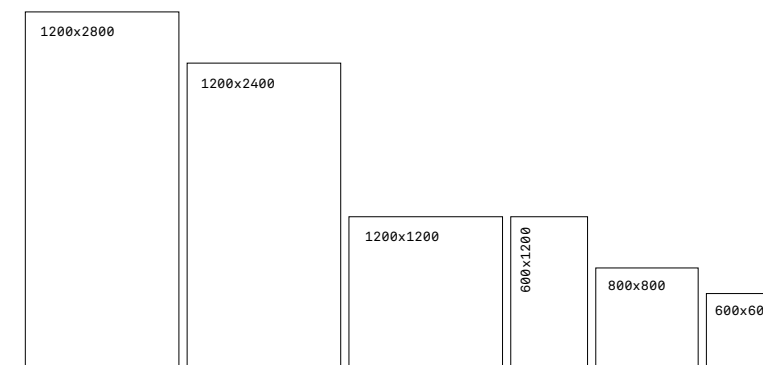
Decor B
300x2800x6mm
Matt R10 (A+B)



Decor C
600x1200x9mm
Textured R10



Mosaic
250x290x6mm
Matt R10 (A+B)



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

SOLUS THIS RANGE IS PART OF SOLUS PLUS

NEW RANGE



Wall:
3TIB102

A sophisticated take on travertine, available
in vein-cut, cross-cut and antique styles.

THIS RANGE IS PART OF SOLUS PLUS

Tibero

12 COLOURS | 4 FINISHES | 6 SIZES | 3 MOSAICS | 2 DECORS



Floor:
3TIB108
Wall:
3TIB104



Floor:
3TIB102
Wall:
3TIB102
Desk:
3TIB102

With its light tones and delicate veining, Tibero is an elegant and refined range.

Certain stones carry the weight of civilisation. Travertine, quarried for millennia around Tivoli near Rome, has shaped amphitheatres, basilicas and civic spaces whose material language still defines permanence. Tibero revisits this lineage.

Rather than romanticising irregularity, Tibero studies the composition of travertine: its linear veining, tonal stratification and porosity. The surface captures the ordered movement of sedimentary stone, translating it into calibrated porcelain formats that offer consistency at scale. The result is a material that conveys mass and continuity without the unpredictability inherent in natural extraction.

In architectural application, Tibero lends spaces a sense of gravitas. Used across floors and walls, it establishes visual cohesion; deployed in larger formats, it reinforces spatial breadth and structural clarity. In hospitality and workplace settings, it introduces understated authority; in residential projects, it provides warmth without ornament.

Performance remains central. Manufactured in durable porcelain suitable for high-traffic environments, Tibero delivers dimensional stability, resilience and ease of maintenance aligned with contemporary commercial demands. Slip-resistant options ensure confidence underfoot, while the surface retains a refined, tactile presence.

As part of the Solus Plus portfolio, Tibero also reflects a broader commitment to responsible specification. Solus Plus ranges are selected not only for aesthetic and technical merit, but for their alignment with transparent, accountable production standards. In translating the character of travertine into porcelain, Tibero reduces reliance on quarried stone while maintaining the architectural qualities designers value.

Travertine has long symbolised endurance. Tibero carries that sensibility forward, offering a surface that speaks of structure, light and proportion, while meeting the environmental and practical realities of contemporary construction.



"Tibero is an outstanding product both aesthetically and technically. As part of our Solus Plus portfolio, it offers sustainability too."

Justin Jennings,
Product Manager


FINISHES
Natural R9, Satin, Textured R10, Anti Slip R11

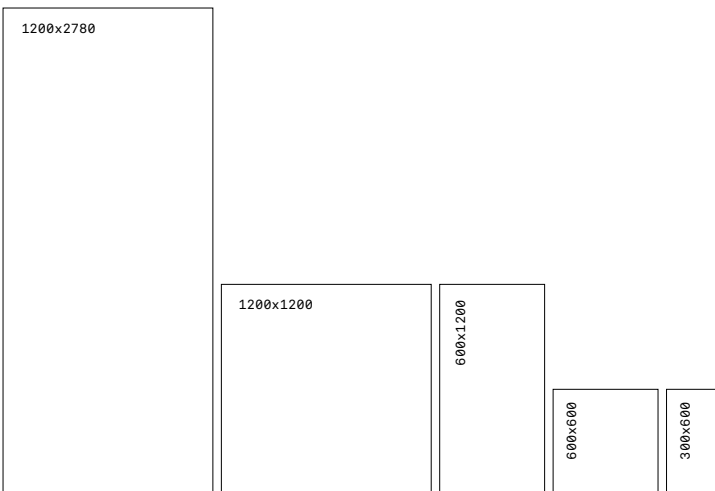
APPEARANCE
Travertine

MATERIAL
Porcelain

USAGE
Floors and walls

SHADE VARIATION
V2 - Light

SOLUS  **LUS** THIS RANGE IS PART OF SOLUS PLUS



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



TIB-Bone Vein
3TIB101

TIB-Cream Vein
3TIB102

TIB-Beige Vein
3TIB103

TIB-Ash Vein
3TIB104



TIB-Bone Cross
3TIB105

TIB-Cream Cross
3TIB106

TIB-Beige Cross
3TIB107

TIB-Ash Cross
3TIB108



TIB-Bone Antique Cross
3TIB109

TIB-Cream Antique Cross
3TIB110

TIB-Beige Antique Cross
3TIB111

TIB-Ash Antique Cross
3TIB112



Mosaic A
300x300x9mm
(50x50 chips)
Natural R9



Mosaic B
300x300x9mm
(50x150 chips)
Natural R9



Mosaic C
361x576x9mm
Natural R9
Satin



Decor A
1200x2780x6mm
Natural R9



Decor B
600x1200x9mm
Natural

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

29 COLOURS | 2 FINISHES | 7 SIZES

Damier



Floor:
3DAM102
3DAM109

Checkmate!

NEW RANGE

Damier is a timeless pattern. A reassuring rhythm that speaks of tradition and order.

Few patterns carry as much architectural memory as the checkerboard. From Renaissance cloisters to Parisian cafés, Victorian entrance halls to contemporary boutiques, the alternating square has long been a device for rhythm, orientation and theatricality. Damier revisits that lineage and places it firmly back into the hands of designers.

The proposition is simple: a refined square format, a durable porcelain body, and a breadth of colour that allows the pattern to be reinterpreted again and again. Traditional black and white remains available, but the range extends far beyond monochrome. Deep mineral tones, warm neutrals, muted pastels and more saturated statements allow the checker to shift from classical restraint to contemporary boldness.

This flexibility is what makes Damier particularly suited to hospitality, retail and residential projects. In a restaurant, it can anchor a dining room with familiar elegance; in a boutique, it can introduce graphic contrast and direction; in a domestic setting, it can lend entrance halls and kitchens a sense of permanence and order. The square becomes both surface and signal.

Technically, the range is designed for real use. Durable porcelain construction ensures longevity in high-traffic environments, while an R10 slip resistance rating provides reassurance underfoot.

The calibrated sizing allows for clean alignment and consistent joint widths, supporting the clarity that makes the checkerboard so effective as a compositional device.

By offering a wide palette within a disciplined format, Damier allows designers to calibrate contrast, tone and scale to suit context. Subtle tonal pairings create depth without drama; high-contrast combinations heighten impact. The pattern can be expansive and formal, or cropped and playful.

In revisiting the checkerboard, Damier acknowledges that some ideas endure because they work. The grid delineates space, guides movement and lends visual structure. Through colour and proportion, it also offers expression. With Damier, a familiar motif becomes once again a live design tool, ready to be tuned to the character of each project.



Floor:
3DAM128
3DAM125



Floor:
3DAM128
3DAM126



Floor:
3DAM118
3DAM128



Floor:
3DAM118
3DAM128

A variety of colours and shapes offers many possible combinations.

FINISHES
Matt R9 (A+B), Matt R10 (A+B)

APPEARANCE
Marble
Concrete
Ceppo di Gre

MATERIAL
Porcelain

USAGE
Floors and walls

SHADE VARIATION
V2 - Light
V3 - Moderate

"I love the binary of checkerboard patterns. There's something deeply comforting about the framing and order. Damier is a particularly good expression of this aesthetic."

Justin Jennings,
Product Manager

CALIBRE A COLOURS

Only mix and match colours from the same calibre.



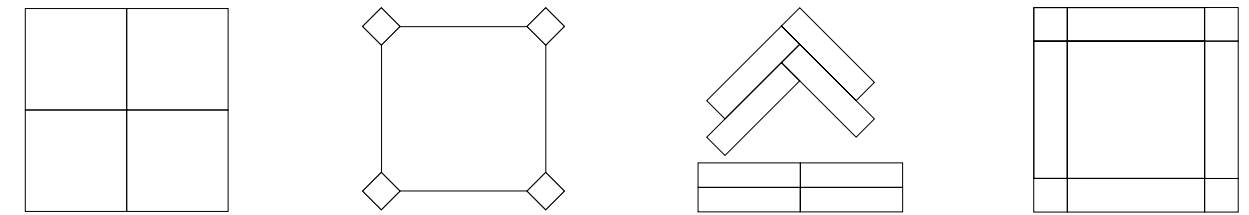
CALIBRE B COLOURS

Only mix and match colours from the same calibre.

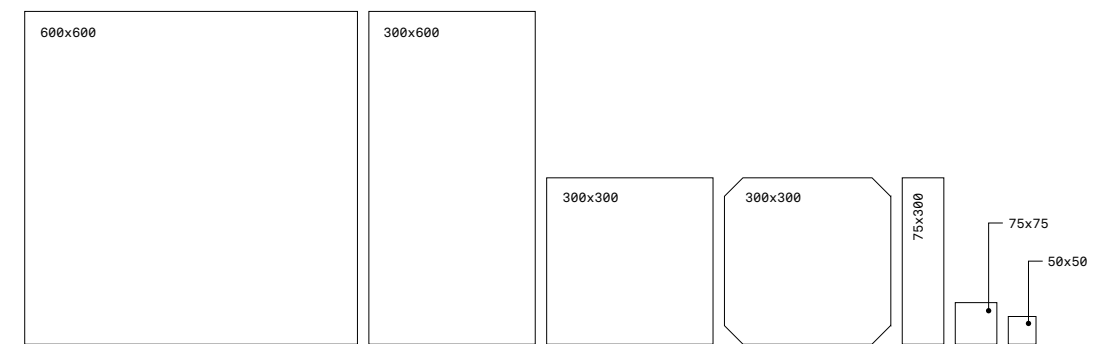


Floor:
3DAM103
3DAM108

Combine colour and shape to create patterns of your own design. Layout options are varied and extensive.



01 Checkerboard	02 Octagon	03 Herringbone / Linear Checkerboard	04 Trellis
Composition: 300x300mm or 600x600mm	Composition: 300x300mm 50x50mm (tozzeto)	Composition: 75x300mm	Composition: 300x300mm 75x300mm 75x75mm



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

NEW RANGE

Sidequest

Unleash your inner pixel artist with our definitive mosaic range. Featuring a dizzying array of rich colours, expansive hues and lustrous sheens. Your next level starts now.

170 COLOURS | 3 FINISHES | 2 SIZES



Create your own mosaic art with Sidequest.

There is something inherently democratic about a mosaic. It begins with the smallest possible unit, a single chip, and builds outward into something collective, expressive and precise. With Sidequest, Solus has taken that principle and turned it on its head. Instead of presenting a curated set of patterns, it presents 170 colours and asks a different question: what would you like to make?

The range comprises 20x20mm glass chips, 4mm thick, supplied on 316x316mm mesh sheets. Three finishes introduce subtle shifts in depth and reflection, while selected colours carry an iridescent sheen that catches and fractures the light. From Wasabi and Pistachio to Pink Flamingo, Mystic Unicorn and Peacock Yawn, the palette resists neutrality. The names are playful; the capability is serious.

Sidequest approaches mosaic from a pixel perspective. Rather than beginning with pre-set decorative motifs, the range treats each chip as data, as colour information.

Designers can work at three levels of resolution: deliberately

pixelated compositions that celebrate the grid; mid-resolution imagery that balances abstraction and legibility; or highly detailed bespoke artwork that reads almost photographically once installed. Images are translated via CAD, produced on mesh with a clear installation plan, and delivered sheet by sheet with sequencing to ensure accuracy on site.

This depth of customisation sits alongside everyday practicality. Sidequest is suitable for floors and walls, offers R10 slip resistance in selected finishes, and conforms to relevant performance standards including thermal shock and frost resistance. It is robust enough for commercial application yet refined enough for expressive interiors.

The emphasis, however, is creative freedom. Sidequest will feature in Solus' Clerkenwell Design Week installation in collaboration with artist Lakwena, a setting that underscores its potential as a medium rather than merely a surface. Whether deployed as a subtle tonal field, a graphic checker, a corporate crest or a full-scale artwork, the proposition remains the same: here are the pixels. Now build the picture.



Created by IDA Global in collaboration with Hamrk Real Estate Development Mosaic by TREND Group.

FINISHES
Matt R10 (A+B+C), Satin Shine R10 (A+B+C),
Satin R10 (A+B+C)

APPEARANCE
Mosaic

MATERIAL
Glass

USAGE
Floors and walls

SHADE VARIATION
V2 - Light

SIZE
20x20x4mm chips
(Supplied on 316x316mm mesh sheets)

10x10mm chips are also available.
Please ask for more details.

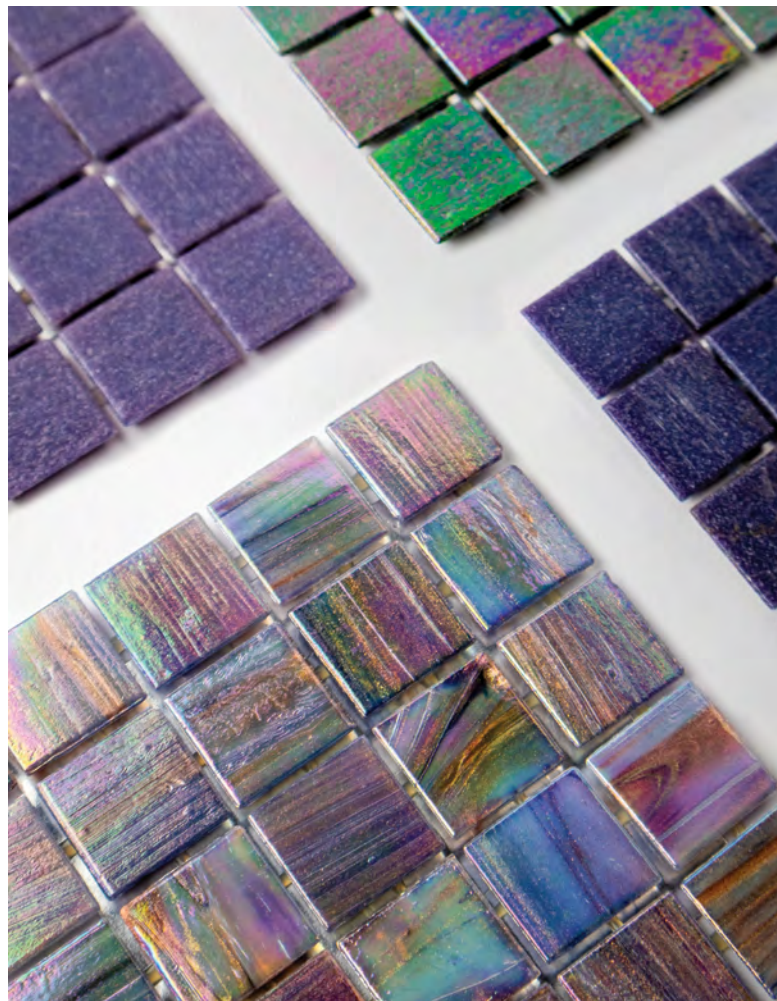
EPD available on request.
Search for Sidequest at solusceramics.com for more information about this range.



Materdei Metro Station, Naples



The collection has an astonishing range of colours and hues, with pleasing variation and iridescence.



"The satisfaction of working with this range cannot be overstated. Total creative freedom to get abstract, figurative, patterned. My inner mosaicist is delighted."

Justin Jennings,
Product Manager





Colours are indicative only and may vary; please consult product literature for full colour and variation details.

* Selected colours have an iridescent sheen on each chip.

Paletta

Inspired by Goethe's "Italian Journey"
Paletta is a catalogue of colour.



Colour, contour, and softness. A range inspired by a poet's journey through Italy.

Colour can describe a place as clearly as stone. Light on terracotta in the late afternoon; oxidised greens against pale façades; the chalk of southern towns under high sun. Paletta, designed by Matteo Thun, draws on this idea directly.

The collection takes inspiration from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's journey through Italy, an attempt to translate the tones and atmosphere of the bel paese into a contemporary material language. Rather than imitating stone or concrete, Paletta works with pigment as substance. Each colour is calibrated to evoke depth and light without becoming decorative, offering saturation that feels architectural rather than applied.

The range functions as a chromatic system. Surfaces can be deployed in expansive, monolithic fields or combined to create rhythm, zoning and contrast. In hospitality settings, Paletta can shape mood through tonal continuity; in retail, it becomes

a spatial cue that guides movement and frames display; in residential interiors, it introduces warmth and clarity without reliance on pattern.

Technically, the collection remains grounded in the performance expected of high-quality porcelain. Durable and stable, it preserves the subtle tactility of the surface and is best suited to wall applications, where its chromatic depth can be expressed without compromise.

The format and finish allow colour to be deployed as an architectural element, shaping surfaces that read as calm fields or articulated backdrops within contemporary interiors.

"We are all pilgrims who seek Italy," wrote Goethe after his return to the cold north. Paletta channels that same pursuit, offering designers a disciplined yet evocative palette through which atmosphere can be constructed with precision and permanence.





Wall:
2PLL114

FINISH

Polished

APPEARANCE

Mono Colour

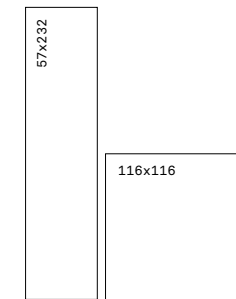
MATERIAL

Porcelain

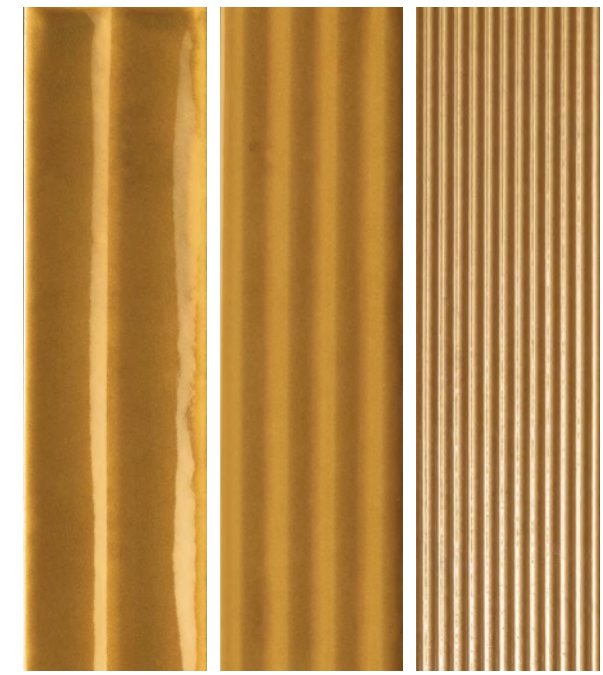
USAGE

Floors and walls

For use on floors, please ask for more information.



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



Decor A

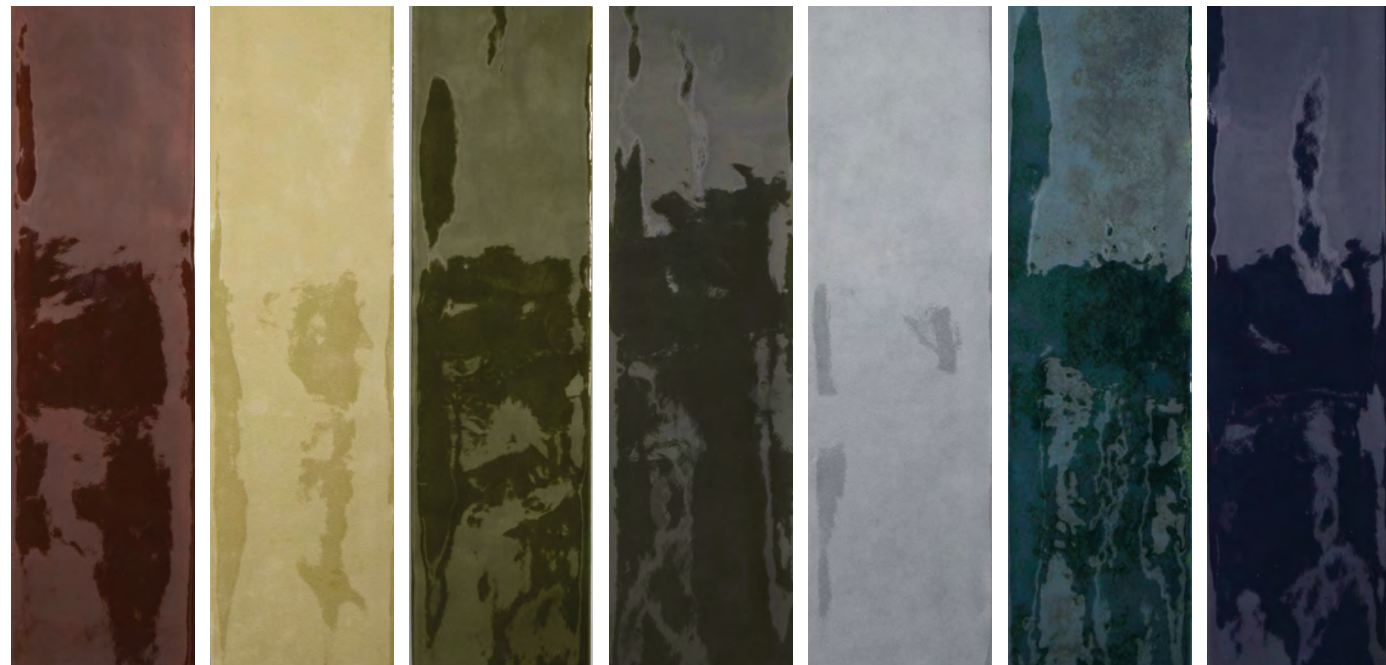
Decor B

Decor C

Decors are available in all colours,
57x232x8.5mm in a Polished finish.

“Vibrant, beautiful colours in this range, soft undulation and variation across the surface, and complementary decors. A really fabulous range.”

Justin Jennings,
Product Manager



PLL-Maroon
2PLL109

PLL-Olive
2PLL110

PLL-Fern
2PLL111

PLL-Green
2PLL112

PLL-Marine
2PLL113

PLL-Lagoon
2PLL114

PLL-Blue
2PLL115



PLL-White
2PLL101

PLL-Grey
2PLL102

PLL-Latte
2PLL103

PLL-Cream
2PLL104

PLL-Pink
2PLL105

PLL-Rouge
2PLL106

PLL-Mustard
2PLL107

PLL-Caramel
2PLL108

A LEGACY OF FIRE

ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

Applied Studio

LOCATION

London, UK

PHOTOGRAPHY

Billy Bolton, @_billybolton

RANGES USED IN THIS PROJECT

Terracotta

Peninsula

Takumi



LEGGADO



Floor:
3YCT107

“Good food doesn’t start on the plate, it doesn’t start in the pan, it starts with the ingredients.”
Nieves Barragán Mohacho

Zellige-style tiles are a feature on the façade and internally behind and on the front of the bar.

Legado means ‘legacy’ in Spanish and, as chef Nieves Barragán Mohacho’s follow-up to her Michelin-starred Sabor in Mayfair, it’s an emphatic affair. Designed by Applied Studio, with Patrick Abrams and Faye Greenwood as lead architects, Legado extends Mohacho’s culinary language and the architecture follows suit: informed by Spanish traditions, but consciously situated in London (Shoreditch, para ser precisos).

Two vast, traditional wood-fired ovens, built on site by Spanish craftsmen, anchor both the kitchen and the spatial logic of the restaurant. They are operational first, symbolic second: a working heart around which the entire project has been organised.

This balance is where the project finds its confidence. Greenwood describes the guiding principle succinctly: inspired by Spain but belonging in London. Instead of importing motifs wholesale, the design abstracts them through material, proportion and process.

Kitchen first

As with any Michelin-level operation, the kitchen dictated the brief. The site had been tested early for feasibility, with spatial requirements locked in before the architectural language was allowed to develop. The result is a fully open kitchen, visible from almost

every table, where culinary choreography and craft are on display. Movement, workflow and extraction were resolved alongside aesthetics, with continual coordination between kitchen designers, M&E engineers and contractors.

A sage-green tiled wall lines the kitchen, a deliberate departure from the clinical white typically associated with professional kitchens. Greenwood frames it as an act of restraint: the green sits quietly behind the food, enhancing colour and texture without competing for attention. This sense of theatre without excess is mirrored in the dining experience itself, where spectacle comes from the act of cooking rather than from overt design gestures.

Material honesty

Materiality carries the narrative. Terracotta flooring defines the threshold space, laid in a hybrid pattern that combines traditional Spanish fan motifs with contemporary stack bonding. The tiles themselves, supplied by Solus, have subtly curved edges, creating a gentle undulation underfoot and catching the light as diners move through the space. Extensive sampling and on-site mock-ups ensured grout lines were minimised, allowing the material to read as a unified whole.

Elsewhere, exposed plaster is left deliberately unpainted. Rather than imitating age, it is



Floor:
3YCT107



Tiles are arranged in traditional Spanish fan patterns and contemporary stack bonding, giving the floor both visual and haptic character.



crisp where it meets the retained brickwork of the shell, an addition that acknowledges the building's past without pretending to be part of it. High-level relief patterns introduce texture at scale, particularly along the mezzanine, while remaining subdued enough to act as backdrop.

Zellige tiles, sourced from Morocco, appear across counter fronts and kitchen walls, all nominally the same colour but varied through firing and glaze. Their irregularity reinforces the project's interest in craft and authentic variation, qualities that resonate strongly with the food itself.

Light, volume and restraint

The site offered unusual generosity: a double-height volume, a central skylight and a mezzanine overlooking the dining room. Rather than subdividing aggressively, Applied Studio allowed the space to read as a sequence of smaller rooms defined by furniture, ceiling height and material shifts. Timber counters and stone-topped feature tables introduce warmth while remaining intentionally neutral, ensuring that plates, not surfaces, become the focal point.

Externally, the architects faced tighter constraints. The glazed curtain-wall frontage limited intervention, prompting a more tactical

response: tiled infill panels and a fluted fascia introduce texture without altering the landlord's envelope. Even here, material continuity is maintained, extending the internal language into the public realm.

A fluid process

Legado's design developed in parallel with the menu. As dishes were refined, spatial and technical requirements evolved in response, prompting adjustments to extraction, prep areas and storage deep into the build. Weekly site meetings and a tightly coordinated team allowed this fluidity without compromising delivery. From feasibility to completion, the project ran for roughly a year, with sixteen weeks on site.

The result is a restaurant in which architecture, food and customer experience are aligned, each reinforcing the other without hierarchy. Legado succeeds because it avoids nostalgia while still feeling rooted. Applied Studio's contribution lies in translating that ethos into built form: a space that honours tradition through use, not imitation.

Legado is a working room, shaped by fire, craft and collaboration, and designed to let its true subject, the food, speak clearly.



“

Legado was about understanding the ambition from the outset and supporting it properly.

The team wanted a space with warmth and character, but it also had to perform day in, day out in a busy hospitality environment.

My role was to make sure the tiles didn't just look right on a sample board, but worked technically on site, with the right finishes, formats and lead times to keep the programme moving.

It's always satisfying when a project like this comes together and you can see the surfaces doing exactly what they were specified to do.”

Justin Lashley, Corporate New Business
justinlashley@solusceramics.com



THREE CHAMBERLAIN SQUARE

A collaborative landmark in
Birmingham's resurgent civic heart.

ARCHITECTS (DESIGN)

Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios

ARCHITECTS (DELIVERY)

Weedon Architects

LOCATION

Birmingham, UK

MAIN CONTRACTORS

Sir Robert McAlpine

DEVELOPER AND ASSET MANAGER

Federated Hermes MEPC

PHOTOGRAPHY

Ben McPhee

RANGES USED IN THIS PROJECT

Charmed

Clay

Additional ranges sourced by Solus



WORKPLACE PROJECT

The proportion, rhythm and boldness of the scheme echoes the confidence of the city's Victorian civic architecture.



A curved timber inlay set within large-format porcelain flooring marks the reception zone at Three Chamberlain Square, subtly organising the reception while introducing warmth to the expansive interior.



Over the past decade, Paradise Birmingham has decisively reshaped the city centre. The £1.2 billion masterplan removed the legacy ring road of the 1960s and 70s, re-opened long-concealed views of the Grade I listed Town Hall, and established a sequence of new public squares that reconnect Birmingham with its civic core. It is an act of urban repair and, in its careful removal of obstructions, a kind of pruning.

Set within this renewed context, Three Chamberlain Square adopts a poised, sculptural presence. Designed by Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios and delivered by Weedon Architects with Sir Robert McAlpine, the building is defined by fluted terracotta, curved tracery and a distinctive crown that draws the eye upwards from the square below. Its material language feels both contemporary and a continuation of Birmingham's history of civic craft.

For Weedon Architects, whose involvement in Paradise stretches back to 2015, Three Chamberlain Square represents a natural progression within a long-running collaboration. Years of working alongside MEPC and Sir Robert McAlpine established a shared culture of trust and technical rigour, one that shaped both the process and the outcome.

Senior Director Owen Doherty, who led Weedon's delivery of the project, is clear that this continuity mattered. The design intent, he notes, belonged to the concept architects, while Weedon's role was to realise that vision with the

technical discipline and compliance a project of this scale demands. What distinguished the experience was the depth of collaboration across the entire team, a genuine one-team approach that he describes as one of the most enjoyable projects of his four decades at the practice.

The building's architectural response is closely tied to its setting. Glenn Howells' wider masterplan set a clear expectation that each new structure should possess its own identity while remaining in dialogue with its surroundings. Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios responded with a form that acknowledges the city's Victorian civic architecture through proportion, rhythm, and materiality, while asserting its own sculptural confidence.

Behind the composed exterior lies a demanding brief. The ambition was to deliver approximately 16,900 m² of commercial office space that meets the expectations of today's businesses while setting a benchmark for environmental performance. Targets included BREEAM Outstanding, a five-star NABERS rating, EPC A, and platinum certifications for both WiredScore and ActiveScore, alongside an upfront embodied carbon target of less than 600 kgCO₂/m². Delivered by Sir Robert McAlpine at under 475 kgCO₂/m², the completed building demonstrates the alignment of design intent and execution.

As the building rises, its expression becomes more animated. The terracotta termination at the crown curves and opens, forming an

Building Brum:
The Team Behind Three
Chamberlain Square
Podcast on Spotify





Floor:
Sourced by Solus
Wall:
5LFC101
5LFC106

Linear bands set within the porcelain floor trace movement through the lobby at Three Chamberlain Square, organising circulation across the generous ground-floor interior.

almost pergola-like enclosure around the ninth-floor terrace. The complexity of this geometry required close coordination, and the contribution of façade contractor Inasus was instrumental in achieving the desired precision.

Wellbeing was a guiding influence throughout. Openable windows and generous external terraces are unusual in a city-centre office, yet here they are integral, supporting fresh air, movement and a more humane working environment. Inside, the reception continues this ethos using organic materials, including mycelium, wood wool, cork panels and repurposed timber. Even the washrooms reflect this careful approach to material selection and detailing.

Collaboration extended well beyond the core design team. Major engineering decisions, from post-tensioned slabs and glazing specifications to core planning and tile procurement, were taken collectively to save time, reduce waste and control cost.

Within this framework, Solus played a key role, supplying wall and floor tiles throughout the building. Our relationship with Weedon's technical team was strengthened over successive Paradise projects, enabling early engagement on specialist products and close

coordination through to site delivery. Similarly, Solus and Weedon have strengthened their relationship with W.B. Simpson (Midlands), the tiling contractor, over the course of the wider Paradise scheme.

Solus sourced the green wall tiles and large-format reception tiles early in the process, working with the design team to ensure precise alignment of joints as finishes transitioned from the concrete core into washroom spaces. Doherty summarises the approach succinctly: "If you get it right in design, it will look right when it's built."

Support from Solus extended into detailed technical reviews, from bedding compatibility to movement joint positions along curved profiles, and their input was noted by the contractor as part of a trusted supply chain that enabled practical completion in the summer of 2025.

Three Chamberlain Square is defined by the collective effort behind it. For Doherty, the project stands as a testament to teamwork, a sentiment he has echoed publicly and continues to hold. In contributing to the evolving fabric of Paradise, the building has already assumed its place within Birmingham's civic story, a contemporary landmark shaped by collaboration, craft and care.



Working with Weedon on Three Chamberlain Square was a genuinely collaborative process.

From early sample reviews through to final delivery, the focus was on getting the detail right and making sure the materials performed exactly as intended.

It's a landmark building in Birmingham, so there was no room for compromise; our role was to provide clarity, consistency and support at every stage, ensuring the specification translated seamlessly from drawing to finished surface.

Thanks must also go to W.B. Simpson who made it all happen

Lee Simmonds, Area Sales Manager Birmingham Lead
leesimmonds@solusceramics.com



Floor:
Sourced by Solus
Wall:
5LFC106



Floor:
2CLA103

WORKPLACE PROJECT

SUNLIGHT HOUSE

Revealing the architecture already there.



Floor:
7BAB008
7BAB019

ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN
Anomaly Architects

LOCATION
Manchester, UK

PHOTOGRAPHY
Peter Ghobrial

RANGES USED IN THIS PROJECT
Terrazzo, Tufa, Riverine, Construct, Program

Completed in 1932, Sunlight House is one of Manchester's defining interwar buildings, its Portland stone façade expressing the city's commercial confidence between the wars.



Floor:
7BAB008
7BAB019



Rising above the western edge of Manchester's commercial core, Sunlight House has always carried a certain urban confidence. Completed in 1932, its slender Art Deco massing announced a city looking outward, upward, and keen to assert itself as a modern commercial centre. It is often, and incorrectly, cited as Northern England's first skyscraper; that honour belongs to the Royal Liver Building in Liverpool. Yet the myth is telling. Sunlight House looks like a building that wanted to be first.

Commissioned by Joseph Sunlight, a prolific and colourful developer who built more than a thousand homes in Prestwich, the building was conceived as a statement of ambition. Sunlight himself was known as much for his showmanship as his output, and the building reflects that duality: serious, finely detailed architecture with a flair for drama. Clad in Portland stone and articulated with metalwork, stained glass and generous vertical rhythms, it remains one of Manchester's most recognisable early high-rise forms.

Nearly a century on, the question was how to adapt such a building for contemporary working life without dulling its edge or overwhelming it with nostalgia.

That challenge fell to Anomaly, appointed to deliver a large-scale Cat A and Cat B

refurbishment across the listed structure. Their response was neither a cosmetic refresh nor a theatrical re-imagining, but something closer to architectural archaeology: a careful process of uncovering, repairing and extending the logic of the original building.

The team worked closely with Manchester City Council planners, whose guidance shaped everything from the proportion of exposed historic fabric to the way new partitions could meet the façade and existing beams. In practice, this meant that demolition became an act of discovery.

As later layers were stripped back, original tiling, concealed windows and long-lost details re-emerged, each one assessed and, where possible, restored or repurposed rather than erased. What might once have been hidden behind suspended ceilings or stud walls is now part of the everyday experience of the building.

Materials are considered and restrained. The richness of the original Art Deco language, its ironwork, glazing, balustrades and stone, set a high bar. New interventions therefore aim to emulate rather than imitate. Bathrooms, receptions and shared amenities offered the greatest freedom, and here Anomaly allowed pattern, colour and curvature to do more of the talking.



Floor:
7BAB008
7BAB019

A vintage 'damier' patterned floor complements a scheme which seeks to restore and revive the authentic splendour of this landmark.



Floor:
7BAB008
7BAB019



Wall:
5DHC108
5DHC101

Tiling was a key device in preserving the aesthetic of the 1930s building.

Tiling becomes a key device: rhythmic, graphic, contemporary, yet clearly in conversation with the building's 1930s detailing. The intent, as the team describe it, was always to avoid pastiche: to nod to Deco without slipping into sequins and tassels.

Colour plays a consistent role. Greens drawn from the building's external domes and stained glass recur internally, stitching exterior and interior together, creating continuity. Elsewhere, curves soften transitions between old and new, whether in joinery, mirrors or bespoke fittings, acknowledging the geometry already embedded in the plan.

Spatially, the refurbishment addresses the mismatch between historic office planning and contemporary patterns of work. Where cellular layouts once dominated, the new scheme introduces flexibility, allowing floors to operate either as single tenancies or as smaller studio units. This was no simple exercise. Structural cores sit in unconventional positions, and planners were rightly protective of sightlines and original fabric. The result is a set of floorplates that may not chase the efficiencies of a new-build office, but instead offer character, variety and adaptability.

At ground and lower-ground level, the project takes on a more overtly public role. A former private leisure facility, complete with swimming pool, has been reimagined as a more open, outward-facing destination, celebrating a dramatic double-height volume beneath a stained-glass dome. The change shifts

the building's relationship with the street, reinforcing its civic presence and making its most theatrical spaces accessible once again.

Two of the street corners are three-sided towers which rise to a four-level octagonal turret, topped by a domed lantern and finial. Anomaly have turned these into the building's most distinctive new amenities. Colour-drenched and daylight, these generous circular rooms are neither formal meeting suites nor casual breakout spaces, but something in between: places to pause, talk, think, or simply look out over the city. Technically challenging to deliver (lighting and servicing could not intrude on the listed fabric) they showcase the boldness, imagination and ambition of Anomaly.

For Anomaly, the project represents a milestone: their largest listed Cat A refurbishment to date and a significant step in establishing a presence beyond London. Sunlight House is a demonstration of what can be achieved when heritage is treated as resource to be understood and extended. The successful collaboration with the city planners was acknowledged by Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham at the official opening.

Sunlight House today feels neither frozen in time nor stripped of its identity. Instead, it carries its history lightly, allowing new uses to settle into old forms with confidence. In revealing what was already there, the project ensures that Joseph Sunlight's most ambitious building continues to do what it always set out to do: stand tall, look forward, and catch the light.



Wall:
5DHC108



Floor:
7BAB008
7BAB019

“

Sunlight House is a building with real presence, so the material palette had to respect that history while feeling relevant for contemporary occupiers.

We worked closely with the design team to ensure the tiles carried that balance of durability and refinement, particularly in high-traffic communal areas.

It's a great example of how careful specification and early collaboration can elevate a refurbishment from functional to genuinely distinctive.”

Pete Toule, Area Sales Manager
petetoule@solusceramics.com





Floor:
3THA109
Staircase:
3HOM103

AURORA

GLASGOW

A NEW DAWN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

DEVELOPER
HFD Group

LOCATION
Glasgow, UK

PHOTOGRAPHY
McAteer

RANGES USED IN THIS PROJECT
Rocking
Homestead



A redesigned entrance marks the building's transformation.

Floor:
3THA109
Staircase:
3HOM103

Aurora exemplifies how deep retrofit can deliver top-tier sustainability performance in existing buildings.

Originally completed in 2006, Aurora sits firmly within Glasgow's commercial core. It is not a heritage building, nor an obsolete one, and that is precisely the point. When Stephen Lewis, Managing Director of HFD Property Group, discusses the decision to refurbish rather than rebuild, the argument is neither sentimental nor cosmetic. It is forensic, data-led and pragmatic.

The structure was sound and the building relatively young. Demolition, Lewis argues, would have been wasteful. Instead, Aurora became a test case for what a refurbishment-first approach can achieve when sustainability is treated as a design driver rather than a post-rationalised credential. An in-depth embodied-carbon survey revealed a 77.4 per cent reduction compared with an equivalent new build.

The operational data reinforces the point. Compared with nearby new-build offices at Atlantic Square, Aurora achieves a carbon score of five, against around 15.5 for buildings only just meeting the threshold for an EPC A rating. Energy use follows the same pattern: 39 kWh/m² per annum versus 43. For occupiers, Lewis suggests, the proposition is straightforward: significant embodied-carbon savings alongside better day-to-day performance. "That's substantial," Lewis says, "and it dispels the myth that a refurbished building can't outperform a new one."

Flight to quality

Aurora reopened in August 2024. Within months it was almost fully let. Today, it is 96

per cent occupied, with only a small portion of the ground floor remaining. Letting 169,000 sq ft at that pace, in a post-COVID market, is notable. The tenant mix tells its own story: high-end corporate occupiers including PwC, Pinsent Masons, SSE, News International, Grant Thornton and Arcadis, alongside serviced office provider Cubo.

Lewis is unsurprised. The much-discussed "flight to quality", he suggests, is not rhetoric but reality. Whilst COVID means that overall demand for office space has reduced, demand for genuinely high-quality space has increased. At the same time, supply is constrained. New development is difficult to make viable, and large-scale refurbishments remain rare. In that context, buildings that combine performance, flexibility and amenity sit in a favourable position.

Fabric first, flexibility built in

Aurora's sustainability story begins with the fabric. Insulation behind the original stonework was comprehensively replaced, improving thermal performance before any consideration of the building's services. That thinking extends to how the building is delivered. Aurora office space is let shell and core, with no installed M&E systems or suspended ceilings imposed by the developer. The motivation is partly environmental, partly operational and partly financial.

On previous projects, Lewis recalls, tenants would routinely strip out newly installed ceilings and services, sending large quantities of usable material to landfill. HFD responded



Staircase:
3HOM103



Floor:
3THA109



Aurora wasn't about surface-level change. HFD had set very ambitious sustainability targets, and that meant every material had to justify its place.

We worked closely with the team to make sure the products we supplied supported their embodied-carbon goals while still delivering the durability you need in a busy commercial building.

When everyone is aligned on quality and long-term performance, the conversations are simpler and the result feels cohesive."

Chris McGlennon, Sales Agent
chris@stratisuk.com



At the centre of Glasgow's commercial district, Aurora demonstrates the case for deep retrofit over demolition and rebuild.

by rescuing and repurposing materials, salvaging around 190 pallets of brand-new components from a single building. Tenants are invited to deliver Cat A and Cat B together, avoiding abortive work and allowing more bespoke fit outs.

The retained raised-access floors exemplify the approach. Fully refurbished rather than replaced, they saved over 80,000 kg of carbon. The cost, Lewis notes, is broadly comparable to installing new tiles, and once covered, the difference is imperceptible. What matters is the cumulative impact.

The result is genuine diversity in occupation. PwC operates largely without suspended ceilings. Arcadis adopts a hybrid approach, mixing exposed soffits with rafts and solid ceilings. The nearly rectangular floorplates, around 20,000 sq ft each, with extensive glazing and a gentle curve, provide a highly adaptable base. "It gives occupiers a blank canvas," Lewis says.

Amenity as infrastructure

If flexibility underpins Aurora's floors, amenity defines its shared spaces. Retrofitting facilities into a building not designed for them

proved complex. Around 15 to 20 per cent of basement car parking was removed to create end-of-journey facilities, including bike storage, changing areas and showers. Creating what Lewis describes as a "warm space in a cold space" brought challenges around insulation, services and height.

The roof terrace posed a similar test. Straightforward in a new build, it becomes a structural and logistical puzzle in a refurbishment. Yet for HFD, terraces are non-negotiable. They provide outdoor space without the psychological barrier of leaving the building, and they have become a significant wellness driver for occupiers.

Questioning the metrics

Aurora has won both Best Refurbished/ Recycled Workplace and the ESG Award at the BCO Scotland Awards. Yet Lewis is candid about the limits of conventional certification. BREEAM, he argues, no longer meaningfully influences how HFD designs or delivers buildings. Occupiers are increasingly focused on embodied carbon, operational energy and wellbeing.

While HFD rigorously measures carbon

savings from retained elements, the full embodied-carbon benefit of its integrated Cat A/Cat B approach is still to be quantified. Lewis is clear that this will come. The evidence, he believes, is compelling.

First impressions

Aurora has impressive sustainability credentials, and it's no slouch aesthetically either. The reception space, expanded by 50 per cent without sacrificing net internal area simply by pulling the entrance line forward, is a study in restraint and quality. Timber-lined walls, subtly textured white tiles, biophilic planting and layered meeting pods arranged along the stair to the first floor create a sense of warmth and calm.

The all-important first impression, how the building addresses its user is powerful and effective.

"Even expanded it is not a huge reception," Lewis reflects, "but the volume isn't what makes the impact; it's the quality." At Aurora, that attention to detail, from the invisible carbon savings to the tactile first impression, makes a persuasive case for refurbishment as the future of the commercial office.

CATHERINE RAMSDEN

under
the table



HOSTED BY
Sam Frith, Solus Creative Director
Conleth Buckley, Editor

PHOTOGRAPHY
Useful Studio



I see the industry adopting systems and I worry that it creates a siloed approach. The systems are a tool, but they're not the answer."

Under the Table is a series of conversations with leading architects and designers. It aims to explore the experiences and influences from childhood onwards that shape a practitioner. The series takes its name from the place Roger Tyrrell, and I'm sure many of us, first experienced the essentials of dwelling - under his parents' kitchen table as a young child.

In this episode, we spoke with Catherine Ramsden, the Founding Director of Useful Studio, a multi-disciplinary collective of architects, engineers, and sustainability consultants working from a single open studio in London.

The practice is structured as an employee benefit trust and registered B Corp, a model Ramsden describes as a condition for freedom. Since founding the studio in 2013, she has led projects ranging from lean retrofit for heritage commercial assets to a family of motorway gantries for National Highways, and co-chairs the B Corp Built Environment Group. She sits on the National Highways Strategic Design Panel and the Dean's Council at the University of Pennsylvania's Weitzman School of Design. In 2025 she delivered the IABSE Annual Lecture, titled Beyond the Red Line and sits on the IABSE UK Executive Committee.

Before all of that, she was job captain on the Millennium Bridge in central London while at Foster and Partners.

This conversation took place across two sessions.

First Encounters

SOLUS: What was your first apprehension of architecture?

CATHERINE: It wasn't really architecture. It was more construction, I would say, and materials. We had an opportunity when I was in high school, a careers course where you could visit a workplace. We went to law offices and accountants, but we also went to a steel mill. This visit left the biggest impression and made me most excited about what was possible in the world: to work with materials and resource, to be careful and respectful of those materials,

and understand their potential, for cities, bridges and buildings. It was about craft, making and problem solving, really.

SOLUS: That respect for materials, that sense of responsibility toward them, where does it sit for you now?

CATHERINE: I feel humbled by them, genuinely. The behavioural shift in the studio is to look for a resource that exists already, or that is not interfered with, in its purest and most honest form, and go there first. Change the design sequence so that we capitalise on what exists before we start demanding new extraction. And be rigorous when considering new, highly machined and processed products that are manipulated to get to something then declared as innovative and circular. I'm not sure we're doing the right thing with that approach. I'm interested in clients and organisations that have extensive assets already alongside new needs, and how to transition what exists, if redundant or outdated, into a new use that better deals with the challenges we're facing. The beauty of something like tile: there's a huge level of respect, longevity and performance, and you think, why would I create an overly complicated version of this? It's so considered already.

SOLUS: Does your upbringing feed into this as well?

CATHERINE: Without doubt. We did a lot of travelling, road trips really, quite pared back. We spent time in tents; a lean approach, in nature. My father was a rocket scientist, a jet



College on the Coast



Chiswick Park Footbridge

propulsion engineer, with an equal appreciation of technology, innovation and science alongside nature and spending time in the mountains.

When we were in Colorado, we visited a solar village. This is ages ago, before all the contemporary discussions around sustainability. There was a whole village geared around utilising energy as a natural resource to power homes: solar, and also trombe walls, which are thermal walls behind a glass pane that gather energy through the day and emit it through the night. It was this link between lean living in a tent, the ability to harness climate to create places to dwell, and my love of materials. I think that led me to consider architecture.

SOLUS: Your father sounds like a significant figure.

CATHERINE: He was. There was regularly a selection of partially assembled VW Beetles in the driveway. A solar hot water experiment in the garden, and making our own furniture. Taking care with materials, a sensitivity to climate and nature, with an overlay of innovation and technology. A spirit of experimentation. We had significant independence as kids, a lot of roaming around and time for curiosity. I underestimated how much an impression this would make.

SOLUS: And your mother?

CATHERINE: She was a nurse, a children's nurse. Very musical, excelling in history, and cooking, all the things I'm not particularly good

at. But she had that same sense of not being wasteful. It was never an indulgent upbringing. There was a consistent set of behaviours around making the most of what we had. I talk about my father as the more obvious influence, but that quiet sense of responsibility and care, doing more with less... this could have been even more influential. When I go to a building and meet a client, I think: what have you got already? How can we problem-solve with the lightest touch? That's her, I think.

Education

SOLUS: You chose Environmental Design at Boulder rather than a straight architecture degree. Was that a deliberate decision?

CATHERINE: It was, yes. It's a multi-disciplinary course: architecture, planning, landscape, a bit of engineering and physics, all compressed into four years, so you have exposure to all those design disciplines collectively. It gave me a holistic sense from the very beginning and it was characteristic of the school. The first weekend, we were shipped off to the mountains, we lived in a three-walled lean-to and built shelters out of natural materials. That was the spirit of the place, and I think still the foundation today, and all the more relevant, of course.

The course introduced me very early on to Design with Nature, which is a book by Ian McHarg. It has that same philosophy around taking responsibility as a designer and considering all the natural, societal and

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Norman gets so much recognition for the projects, but that business is one of his most amazing contributions. What an outfit..”

communal influences, superimposing them in a layered mapping process and using this to inform decision making for the built environment. Rigorous analysis, testing, and listening. It was a formative thing to encounter at that stage.

SOLUS: You went on to work at the firm he co-founded.

CATHERINE: Yes, WRT, Wallace Roberts and Todd, in California. Working on significant environmental projects: strategic masterplans for Mission Bay and Balboa Park in San Diego. That was an important grounding, working at that scale, thinking about how places function for the people who use them, while still protecting, and ideally restoring, the natural world.

SOLUS: You're cautious about the phrase systems thinking, I know.

CATHERINE: I am. There is a lot of talk about systems and processes, and I think I'm grateful that we didn't describe it that way at Boulder, because I see the industry adopting systems and I worry that it creates a siloed approach. You think, "My responsibility in this system is this," and you risk missing the holistic overlapping of all the influences. The systems are a tool, but they're not the answer. You must keep that rigour and an ability to zero in on detail, and out to the wider context, and do it regularly, with diverse input around you.

SOLUS: From California you went east to Pennsylvania.

CATHERINE: Yes. The Weitzman School at the University of Pennsylvania, one of the Ivy Leagues. And I think that move, west to east, was part of a longer trajectory I was on, roaming, as I did in childhood, to learn, being around people doing things that mattered and doing them rigorously. Each move had a direction to it, even if I couldn't always have told you what it was at the time.

Foster + Partners

SOLUS: You arrived at Foster + Partners in 1996. You'd applied the year before, I understand.

CATHERINE: I had, yes. I didn't get the offer I wanted first time. I tried again, with success - drawing on personal grit and determination, also key!

SOLUS: What drew you there?

CATHERINE: I don't think it was the so-called high-tech approach, prominent at the time, but the spirit of innovation, and constant pursuit of improvement. Powerful, with a lot of passion. It was a hugely intense environment to learn in, and quite small then, relatively but at the forefront of pioneering ideas, across the globe. I was keen to position myself in a place like London with people who were trailblazing in a highly collaborative and cross-disciplinary way. I wanted to learn how to be relevant: what it is that you need to do to enable change, to gain trust, build your skills, to innovate. There was a constant flow of inspiration, projects like Duxford, working very closely with engineers,

that beautiful shell to create a museum for flight. An unbelievably simple idea pared back to incredible elegance. Norman gets so much recognition for the projects, but that business is one of his most amazing contributions. What an outfit, to continue innovating like that and attract these minds, a cohesion of disciplines and spirit of innovation and experimentation. It was a perfect place to build on my background and extend the learning mission

SOLUS: The rigour specifically, that was inculcated there.

CATHERINE: It blew my mind at the time. Everything was questioned. Cycles of review, taking nothing as given, almost always leading to a better outcome. And so now I don't take anything for granted. We receive a brief, or a set of requirements, and we begin to probe, right at the outset. For efficiencies, improvements, opportunities, and the possible unknowns. It's important to do this effectively, without alienating your clients, the regs, the context: what do you accept and what do you think needs challenging? That's my default, fully instilled. This feels fairly critical, and is our responsibility as designers, but I'm not sure the education system nurtures this. The chasm between dream ideas and the reality of climate, financing, performance, efficiency,

standards, society, is too wide. This is risky for the profession, and our relevance.

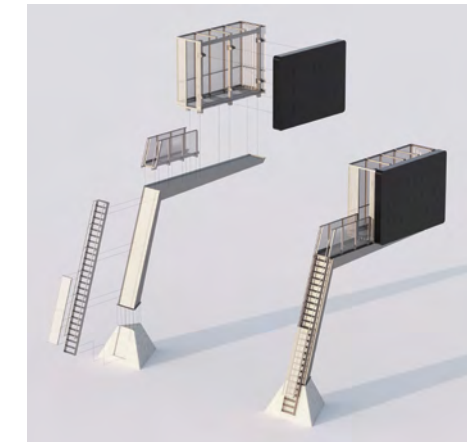
SOLUS: The Peabody housing was part of your time there.

CATHERINE: It was an important sideline to a major project. The developer was required to provide social housing, and I was fortunate to take this forward with Peabody. It was an exercise in creating excellent homes with care and identity within the confines of lean funds and less stuff – finding efficiencies in repetition without attracting a feeling of lesser quality. A small toolkit that required creativity and commitment. To be most effective, we adopted this approach throughout: how is the building assembled, how is it fixed together, what is it made of, is every square inch productive and useful. We made a big feature of the fire access stairs up through the middle of the courtyard, turned the decks into little floating gardens, and created light wells. I thrived on the challenge and would prefer this over an exotic coastal villa with an endless budget. Working within constraints is more rewarding, and more relevant. We, collectively, don't have enough space, enough money, enough fresh air, water, and definitely not enough time. Getting the most value, to help the many rather than the few.

Chiswick Park Footbridge



National Highways Gantries. The inclined upright permits maintenance access without safety caging.



The Millennium Bridge

SOLUS: You were job captain on the Millennium Bridge.

CATHERINE: I was, yes.

SOLUS: And it wobbled.

CATHERINE: It did. And I get this question a lot: how do you feel about the fact that it wobbled? And it's never a moment of regret. Not for a second. If we hadn't pushed like that, it just wouldn't be what it is. And of course we fixed it. A small 'glitch' in a 120-year design life, very likely to be significantly longer.

SOLUS: The team held together.

CATHERINE: If the team hadn't been so closely knit, it would have been much more of a struggle to navigate. I don't believe anyone lost faith. And that builds a kind of resilience and courage. Of course we must be careful with our responsibilities as designers, but this should not mean a default to only what has been done before or we risk stagnating.

SOLUS: And the principles of that bridge, do they persist?

CATHERINE: They're in everything. Working decades later, on the motorway gantries with Chris Wise and Ed McCann; so many of the drivers for this project, creating something light, lean, and elegant in the landscape, are the same drivers that were behind the Millennium Bridge.

Useful Studio

SOLUS: You founded Useful Studio in 2013. What made it the right moment?

CATHERINE: I think it was about freedom, really. Freedom for me, but also the business, in its governance. We are wholly independent, no one person has ownership, and that encourages a level of entrepreneurship. Here's an idea, what do we think as a group, does it stack up, maybe not initially, let's throw a bit of resource toward it and develop it for a while. There are all these little fires of interesting ideas which we're nurturing, watching, finding traction. That freedom and that spirit of entrepreneurial opportunity is a clear benefit of the business model, I would say.

SOLUS: The structure itself, the employee benefit trust, the B Corp, does that register with clients?

CATHERINE: Not so much, to be honest, at least not directly. But what they are getting is the next tier of benefit. The business model has attracted a series of individuals who are operating to be good, useful and relevant in a highly collaborative way, with a huge amount of respect. We have unbelievable people in the business who are real drivers for change, so we solve clients' problems with hugely creative responses, not because of the business model itself, but because of what the business model managed to attract and enable.



The business model has attracted a series of individuals who are operating to be good, useful and relevant in a highly collaborative way, with a huge amount of respect."



Salvaged Steel
Footbridge



SOLUS: What do you look for in the people you bring in?

CATHERINE: Passion is important. And I think intensity, curious, with a bit of furious – we need this now. The will to step out and say, it's not good enough.

SOLUS: The practice is multidisciplinary by design.

CATHERINE: Very much so. The studio sits within the trust, which is a collective of different disciplines: engineers, communicators, sustainability consultants, architects, all in one place. You can turn to your side, and it could be a civil engineer one day and a graphics designer the next. We work in a hot desk environment, which encourages a dynamic atmosphere, anti-silo, which keeps the mind sharp and open to challenge.

The Red Line

SOLUS: Your IABSE lecture was titled Beyond the Red Line. But the word you used was through, not beyond.

CATHERINE: Yes, and the choice of words was important. It's not going beyond the red line, it's moving through, and in two directions: thinking beyond a place and a site, but also being mindful of what's coming in. Outward and inward. I was trying to find a way in a simple title to capture this idea of being holistic, of being open-minded, and preparing oneself for the unknown.

SOLUS: The bridges taught you that.

CATHERINE: Even more so, yes. And there is so much that moves through boundaries which is completely invisible, that we just don't think about: air, light, noise, pollution, habitat. We've moved further and further away from creatures and biodiversity. By thinking about the line, and the irrelevance of the red line for so much of what influences a place, it's helped us build an approach. But it also helps with storytelling. I used it as a means to talk about those influences in the lecture, to make it tangible and easy to adopt as an approach.

SOLUS: The gantries are a living expression of all of this.

CATHERINE: I certainly didn't plan or expect to be designing a family of gantries for the road network. It brings us into a world of product design, which is fascinating and I suppose familiar, efficiency through repetition. We are valued for bringing lean thinking, circularity, ease of assembly, ease of access for maintenance. Everything is lean and thrifty in character, but still very elegant.

SOLUS: You spoke about wolves in the IABSE lecture.

CATHERINE: Yes. It's my final lesson or story, to reinforce the risks of adopting hard red lines, it's about ecosystems and the unexpected. Habitat loss is happening at a dreadful pace, at such a scale, and the UN are clear that it impacts everything that we rely on: water, food, air. We're wholly dependent on ecosystems.

Some think we don't need to worry too much. But we do.

So, the wolves. Community around Yellowstone had a perception that wolves were damaging, eating cattle and pets, a dangerous pest, with a bad reputation, which our fairy tales reinforce, Red Riding Hood and more. Over the course of fifty years, they removed them almost entirely from the Yellowstone region. Scientists knew they were removing a key part of the ecosystem, but they persevered in the pursuit of protecting livestock and leisure opportunity, I suppose. But the impact was devastating for the natural landscape. The elk and deer population boomed causing overgrazing. All the insects and songbirds left. The riparian habitats declined. The beavers left changing the way the rivers flowed, inviting flood damage. Yellowstone began to die.

They brought the wolves back in the nineties and the speed of repair was awe-inspiring. They call it a trophic cascade of ecological change. Within ten years the trees recovered. Twenty years, the aspen reestablished, the riverbanks stabilised, the beavers returned, the natural wetland and marshy character of Yellowstone is restoring. At such a pace. A good lesson in the danger of creating hard boundaries and not taking account of wider influences.

SOLUS: A point of hope.

CATHERINE: Yes, but not a get-out clause. You can't keep trashing the place and rely on mother nature to do a quick restoration. Much of our world is not Yellowstone. We need to take care. Carl Sagan put it better than I can, "Anything else you're interested in is not going to happen if you can't breathe the air and drink the water." So don't sit this one out. Do something.

The Planetary Emergency

SOLUS: You use the word fury a lot.

CATHERINE: I do. We were talking about our impact report for the business, and someone was describing the spirit of the document. They said: we're curious, we're humble, we're focused. And I thought they said furious, not curious. And I thought, yes! We are furious! And they were like, no, we didn't say that, Catherine. But I quite like it. Passion is important. A bit of fury, a bit of being the rebel who is willing to step out and say it's not good enough. It's a planetary emergency. Passive isn't going to get us out of this one.

SOLUS: And yet you're optimistic.

CATHERINE: I have to be. You can't afford not to be. But it's not a comfortable optimism. It's optimism with fury behind it. You feel this responsibility to the society around you, to the young people in the business, and you want to nurture a spirit of courage and questioning. Does the guideline feel appropriate, especially when we've got such challenges with climate and limited resource?

SOLUS: The architects you admire reflect that.

CATHERINE: I think so, yes. Yasmin Lari: I spent time in Pakistan, trekking the Karakoram to K2, moving through highly remote villages in extreme climate with very little resource. And I was really taken with the way the women played a strong role in those communities, building homes, contributing to daily life. That introduced me to Yasmin Lari, who spent her early career in corporate buildings but transitioned to what she calls barefoot architecture: empowering self-reliance, not doing to a place but with a place. Helping upskill locals to build their own dwellings. She went on to co-develop a cooking stove that was better for air quality and more efficient as a resource. I'm a huge fan. Humbled by what she's managed to do for society.

SOLUS: And Aino Aalto.

CATHERINE: She's not spoken about enough. Alvar gets so much recognition, but Aino was right alongside him, and I think so much of the sensory quality in that work, the material innovation, the bent timber, the cane wrapped around columns where the hand touches them, those moves feel like her hand. A real, humble innovator. We only have half the story.

SOLUS: Charlotte Perriand.

CATHERINE: Well done to the Design Museum for doing that exhibition. She was in Corbusier's studio, right in the thick of it, utilising technology transfer: taking tubular systems from other product design innovations and shifting that thinking across to furniture, seeing the elegance, the ability to curve, the lightweight, the sculptural strength. The chaise longue. That was Charlotte Perriand. But rather than despair about what we've missed in her contribution, I'm going to raise her name and others, at any opportunity.

Advice

SOLUS: What would you say to a young person considering architecture?

CATHERINE: Hit the road. Go out in a lean way, pack a tent, a few snacks, and a sketchbook, and just go, to look, watch and learn. Different cultures, different landscapes, being away from the day-to-day clutter that fills the head. It helps expand the mind and builds a holistic outlook. And don't take things for granted. Continue being a challenger. Stay grounded. Be more useful, more relevant, more closely connected to what is needed.

SOLUS: You were born here, raised in New York, studied and lived in Boulder Colorado, and in Philadelphia, worked in California and then London. You've done exactly that.

CATHERINE: I suppose I have. What it did for me, more than anything, was build a sense of independence and belief. The feeling that I can go anywhere and do anything. Which is, I think, the most valuable thing.



By thinking about the line, and the irrelevance of the red line for so much of what influences a place, it's helped us build an approach."

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