

# The Temple of Wine

A pilgrimage to Antinori nel Chianti. Federico Manetti shows us around this subterranean architectural wonder.

## Copenhagen

A limestone-effect range, inspired by the Danish capital. p20

## Smithson Tower

New Brutalist landmark gets stunning refit. p50





## Welcome to Quarter 29!

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In this edition of Quarter, we feature exciting projects from zynk Design, ConForm Architects, TINTO, and DSK/Ryder, in Manchester, London, Aberdeen, and Birmingham. We present five fantastic new ranges chosen by our Product Manager, Justin Jennings, that capture all that is good in the world of ceramic design.

We meet Mauro Mazzi, CEO of Mirage, who talks us through the challenges and opportunities that face the ceramic industry as a consequence of rising energy costs and the climate crisis. We are given a tour of the Mirage plant in Pavullo – a futuristic mega-factory of laser-guided vehicles and alternative energy.

And we travel to Tuscany, to the district of Chianti on pilgrimage to a Temple of Wine. The Antinori Winery at Bargino is a marvel of architecture designed by Archea Associati of Florence and is built into a living hill. Federico Manetti of Cotto Manetti gives us a tour and explains the relationship between terracotta and wine, causing us to ask; if wine is 'sunlight, held together by water', is terracotta, 'earth, held together by fire'?

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“ As we emerge from the challenges of the last two years, the ceramics industry is finally seeing some positive changes. Volatile gas pricing and raw material shortages had forced producers to cut back and play it safe with their designs.

However, with things settling down, we're seeing a renewed sense of creativity and boldness in the industry. Producers are taking design risks, experimenting with new materials, and focusing on sustainability.

As we move into calendar Spring, we enter a springtime for our industry; and we can expect to see lots of innovation in the year ahead. There are plenty of exciting new collections in the pipeline that will enhance the Solus product offering, and we are excited to see what the future holds.”

**Justin Jennings**  
Solus Product Manager  
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# THE TEMPLE OF WINE

Cotto Manetti and the Antinori Winery;  
a tale of terracotta and wine.

The Antinori Winery sits a few miles outside Florence, inside a hill beside the village of Bargino in Chianti. It is invisible from the road: just another verdant Tuscan hill, striped with vines, sparkling in the sunlight. But then, a deep cut banked with terracotta-coloured concrete takes you into the hillside, to a liminal space of light and shadow. A Corten spiral staircase, its shape evocative of poured wine swirling in a glass, leads to a broad terrace: half-shaded by the structure in the hillside and half-bright with the Tuscan sky. Glass doors give access to the underhill and, deeper in, two monumental wood and iron doors slide apart to reveal the inner sanctum: the Temple of Wine.

Conceived by the Florentine practice, Archea Associati, the Antinori Winery is a functioning winery and the headquarters of a global company. It has a visitors' centre, a museum, a multi-media room, private dining and tasting rooms, an olive oil press, and a world-class restaurant. The winery employs a technique called 'gravity-flow vinification'. Harvested grapes arrive at the top of the building-in-the-hill and are transferred to a vibrating hopper; this destems the grapes while keeping the fruit intact. A gentle pressing allows the must and skins to drop through a steel conduit into the tanks on the floor below. >





The fruit falls through the hill, is transformed into wine, and comes to rest in the barrique room. This large, long, vaulted space is populated with stacked oak barrels in double rows. The walls of the vault are faced with terracotta and curve smoothly upward to an apex. The height and curvature of the walls render the environment passively dynamic, and the unique technical behaviour - specifically the microporosity - of the terracotta allows the air to circulate. This creates a microclimate that enables the wine to breathe correctly. It is quiet here, in the deepest and innermost part of the building, shielded from sunlight and rapid changes in temperature. The space has a mystical, sacred feeling: apt for the creation of *Sangiovese*, the blood of the god Jove (Sangius Jovis).

**Earthy terracotta is used as a flooring and facing material outside and continues inward, providing spatial continuity.**

We are visiting this remarkable place with Federico Manetti, whose family owns the factory that produced the terracotta used on floors and walls throughout the winery. The same earth that gives the finest wines in the world, gives the best terracotta. *Galestro* is a porous grey rock that is found in the top tier of the soil in Tuscany. When it is exposed to sunlight and air, it tends to break down resulting in well-drained land, which is perfect for growing grapes. When mixed into clay and fired, the resulting terracotta acquires unique characteristics of colour, resistance, and strength. Federico's family have been making *cotto*, as terracotta is called here, since 1780. They supply terracotta to the organisations responsible for the upkeep of the *Duomo di Firenze*, the *Galleria dell'Accademia*, the *Galleria degli Uffizi*, and the *Basilica di Santa Croce*.

The Manetti can claim a long ancestry but are not consumed by their past. Rather they look to the future while maintaining their connection to their history. In 1964, they branched out into winemaking when they bought the *Fontodi* estate which now produces award-winning wines. More recently, they acquired a neighbouring factory that produces handmade terracotta furniture favoured by designers in Australia. They also produce huge amphorae, popular all over the world but particularly in Georgia and Armenia where they are buried into the floors of houses to store oil and wine – a very ancient practice.

When we visit the Manetti factory, we see an artisan making an amphora using the based-work technique where the potter moves around the clay on a raised circular wooden step. Minus the roll-up cigarette, it's a scene that could have come from 50 BC. Next-door we see a special run of branded terracotta pieces for the Fendi headquarters in Milan. There are supplies for projects in Helsinki, Washington DC, Hobart, Shanghai. Federico explains "We're a small operation, but we're very agile and productive. We've been operating at a high level for a long time." This ability to hold onto the valuable parts of their legacy while adapting to new demands from the market explains their longevity. Longevity is a theme on this visit. Federico takes us to lunch at the Antinori Winery restaurant, *Rinuccio 1180*. *Rinuccio* is the name of the first recorded winemaker in the family, and 1180 was the year in which they began. >



Handmade amphorae - some able to hold 600l - are still made using the "based-work" technique where the potter moves around the pot, rather than using a wheel. *Galestro*-rich clay comes from the quarry behind the factory.

The official start of the Antinori winemaking business is 1385, when Giovanni di Piero Antinori was enrolled in the Florentine Guild of Winemakers. This makes Marchesi Antinori Srl. the 10th oldest family-run company in the world. And because the Tuscan earth gave us, not only clay and wine, but also the first flowers of the Renaissance, it is not inconceivable that Antinori wine refreshed Brunelleschi when he was building his *Duomo*, Dante as he composed his *Commedia*, or Michelangelo as he helped *David* emerge from a block of Carrara.

**“Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity.” – Charles Mingus**

Federico explains that the current head of the family, Marchesi Piero Antinori, perceived the need for a new winery in response to the success and growth of the business. The historical Marchesi Antinori wineries in San Casciano were not large enough to meet demand. The Palazzo Antinori in the centre of Florence where the Antinori have run their business for centuries - dining with high prelates, generals, and crowned heads, deciding the politics of Florence and the trade routes of Europe - had become too small to support a global operation. Alongside the practical, there was the desire to forge a legacy, to create a Temple of Wine that would honour the land, the wine, and the people that make it.

Lead Architect on the winery project, Marco Casamonti, writes, “This is...the desire of a customer conscious of owing his fortune and success to the land and to the fruits of a nature that is not wild, but ably guided by the hand of Man, by his culture and knowledge about treating, blending, waiting with great patience and respect for the process of fermentation and vinification to be complete. From this point of view, the fact that the building is covered by earth does not represent an attempt...to conceal the winery and confuse it with the vineyards...Rather, it aims to convey the deeper and more convinced search for a sense of equilibrium with the environment represented by the opening of the very hill in order to house in its womb – in “mother earth” – activities and actions capable of generating that union between nature and man-made, of which wine, as a product, is the most perfect and accomplished synthesis.”

With our feet resting on *cotto Manetti*, a glass of *Tignanello* in hand, a plate of food to share, we talk about clay, roots, rock, vines, time, and deep time. The roots of the vine that gave us the wine drew sustenance from the same clay that makes the terracotta beneath our feet. The wine, vibrant in the glass, also comes to us from a long prosperity won by political sagacity, generations of viticultural learning, and a profound apprehension of *terroir*. The terracotta, firm and warm, comes from clay enriched by metamorphic rock, formed deep beneath the Earth's surface long ago. Both commodities are born of the fertile earth and underpin the prosperity of this whole region: a prosperity which nurtured the Early Renaissance, the cultural rebirth that emphasised reason, scientific investigation, and the wonder of human potential; ideas and values that continue to shape our world today. ♦



Steam rises from extruded clay pressed through one of many custom-made 'keys' prior to firing in the kiln.





# MAURO MAZZI

The CEO of Mirage discusses the responses of the ceramic industry to the climate emergency with our Editor, Conleth Buckley.

Mauro Mazzi is well-prepared. As the CEO of one of the largest and most successful ceramic manufacturers in the world, this is to be expected. Prior to our interview, I have sent my questions, at his request, so that he can consult his team and provide us with the fullest and best answers.

Before meeting Mauro, we're given a tour of the facility in an eight-seater golf cart. The plant reminds me most forcibly of a port. Hundreds of lorries arrive, load, and leave, delivering 2 million kg per day to over 130 countries worldwide. Teams of autonomous loaders glide over the polished concrete, moving tonnes of material effortlessly. The production line produces a 1600x3200mm slab of porcelain every minute, the blade of the cutter angled to account for the constant speed of the conveyor. The kilns, some of which are longer than 200m, run day and night producing over 16,000,000sqm of ceramic every year.

He greets us warmly at the reception of the Mirage facility, a vast manufacturing plant extending 480,000sqm across the hills of Pavullo. He ushers us into his simple office – a four-person meeting table, a desk, an inconspicuous wooden crucifix, a faded family photograph. This is a man accustomed to the enactment of power but uninterested in its ostentation. He is well-groomed, tall, healthily tanned, with lively brown eyes and a face that enjoys laughter.

“Thanks for sending over your questions. I've prepared this eight-page document in answer. I thought we could use it as a basis for the interview.” As Mauro prints the document and hands it to me, I realise this will not be a rambling, eclectic conversation that I will have to pare and polish, but rather a precise communication of strategic significance for Mirage.

Mirage was founded in 1973 by Mauro's father-in-law and seven others; Mirage was acquired by Concorde Group in 2004. Before joining Mirage, Mauro had worked for Concorde so was well known by both parties. I ask him if the family connection has been useful, “It has positive and negative aspects. Truth is that if you are not good enough and do not deliver enough, you cannot keep a position for very long.”

“It has been really useful to prepare for this interview. Communicating who we are is something to which, historically, we haven't given priority. We're very pragmatic people. We spend most of our time dealing with facts. But it is one thing to do it, another to communicate it. In this sector, if you talk a lot, you can cast a big shadow; and if you don't talk a lot, people may wrongly assume you are smaller than you are. As part of a conglomerate that has been a strategy to some extent, but increasingly, clear communication is a driving factor in selection processes for customers.” >



A fleet of 54 battery-powered, laser-guided vehicles transport maximum loads of 4 tonnes around the plant. With the installation of solar panneling, they will be recharged with renewable energy.

#### What made you want to work in the ceramic tile industry?

If you are born in this area of Italy, either you work in the ceramic industry or you work in a company that provides services/products to the ceramic industry. It is a unique industry and once you try it, you love it. This is because it combines two things that are usually difficult to resolve: the creation of beauty and design (typical of Italian craftsmanship), with the extraordinary efficiency of a strong industrial process.

This is our mission in Mirage: we know we cannot change the world with our porcelain tiles, but we do know that our contribution will touch the lives of many people as we aim, with our porcelain, to make the places where they live, study, work or spend their free time, better. Our brand tagline is 'Inspiring better living'. We know that porcelain tiles are still the most important piece of furniture in any room, even if taken for granted most of the time.

#### What distinguishes Mirage from other tile manufacturers?

I could say that Mirage produces some of the best porcelain tiles and slabs in the industry, with top technical qualities, exceptional performance, refined aesthetics, produced in a state-of-the-art plant in a sustainable way, but this would be only part of the truth. What really makes the difference is our people and the quality of the relationships we generate. We live in a world of abundance: you can find lots of different products for any choice you have to make; porcelain

is no exception. When you choose to buy something, that something must mean something to you. You need to have a sort of emotional attachment: to be sure that it not only fits your needs from a technical and performance point of view, but that it is produced in a way you would approve and that is brought to you by a person you can trust. To put it succinctly, you want the company you buy from, the people you buy from, to share your values.

#### What's the most challenging aspect of making tiles?

It is now a consolidated and mature industry. The real challenge is energy. This is also the challenge of the future. The truth is that energy has been effectively free for the last 20 years for Europe and the whole world. Gas was around 20 euro/MWh and electricity 40 euro/MWh. This has secured enormous progress in standards of living and generated tremendous economic growth.

Now, due to geopolitical issues rather than energy scarcity, we are discovering that energy has a cost; and due to environmental issues, we are discovering that energy has consequences for the environment. But we are just at the beginning of the process and there is a lot of confusion amongst people for two reasons: there is a lot of hypocrisy (particularly in politics, but also in company communication) and a lot of ignorance. It is still something that people know little about because it is complicated and highly technical.

#### Will tiles ever be made with 100% renewable energy?

We are in the middle of a huge transition where different >



The 220m kiln reaches a maximum temperature of 1230°C. Latest-generation burners provide a 15% energy consumption saving. The longer kiln allows the production of larger slabs and results in greater production efficiency.

countries are in very different situations. Anything can happen. Europe is focusing on CO2 neutrality by 2050 (The Paris Agreement). Industries such as cement, steel, energy production, tiles, glass, and paper are “hard-to-abate”, as they require a great amount of energy. Heat and energy are taken from gas which emits CO2 into the atmosphere. It is difficult to imagine living without those industries, but they can certainly reduce their carbon footprint, and we are all working hard to change processes; but it takes time.

First, we must not confuse ‘energy’ with ‘electricity’. Electricity is just one part of the final energy that we use. In fact, it is the least consumed final energy in the world. Heat accounts for 50% of energy consumption, electricity 22%, and fuel for transport 28%. Consider that in an average tile plant: 75% of gas is used for heating, 20% for cogeneration and 5% for electricity. Right now, only hydrogen can replace gas as heat energy without having a carbon footprint. It’s also important to remember that most of the electricity consumed today is generated by thermal power stations (i.e. still burning gas, if not coal or oil). Hydrogen seems like a great solution, but it has several problems that must still be overcome, and not everyone agrees that it is the perfect solution.

The real problem is how to generate hydrogen, specifically ‘green’ hydrogen, as opposed to ‘white’, ‘grey’, or ‘blue’ hydrogen. The challenge is to efficiently produce all the hydrogen needed in the future and to produce it in a sustainable way. Unfortunately, today most hydrogen is still produced from natural gas (CH4). Other options are carbon capture and storage, or carbon offsetting.

We are also considering another possibility: biogas, which is gas produced through the processing of various types of organic waste. It is a renewable and environmentally friendly fuel made from 100% local feedstocks. The impact of biogas production on the circular economy is further enhanced by the organic nutrients recovered in the production process. Biogas can be produced from a vast variety of raw materials (feedstocks). The biggest role in the biogas production process is played by microbes feeding on the biomass (organic matter). Even here the challenge is to produce enough of it, and still, it does emit CO2 in the air.

**Mirage seems to be investing heavily in new and sustainable manufacturing technologies like green hydrogen. Can you describe this journey and let us know the challenges and ultimate benefits?**

Mirage aims at carbon neutrality by 2050 at the latest. We are working and studying hard to make it happen well before. Besides investigating alternative and sustainable sources of energy to replace natural gas, we invest heavily in making our production plant as efficient and neutral as possible.

- All Mirage’s kilns are ‘hydrogen-ready’.
- Two engines generate enough electricity to run the whole plant, and generate excess, which we sell to the national provider. We recycle the heat coming from the engines and use it in the spray dryer saving about 300 tonnes of CO2 per year.



Our popular and transformative concrete-look collection, Construct, is made by Mirage.

- We will start installing around 2.3 MWh of solar panels. We are waiting for authorisation for another 5.5 MWh and 3.8 MWh. This will be needed the day we start producing green hydrogen.
- Mirage is building an artificial lake that will allow us to use only water coming from rain.
- Mirage recycles all the water in the production plant: nothing goes into the sewer.
- All our suppliers are certified to respect environmental, labour, and human rights laws.
- Mirage recycles 100% of fired scraps, 100% of raw scraps, and buys three times this amount of fired scraps from a waste recovery company to be recycled in our process.
- Mirage already has the following certifications:
  - o ISO 14001: environment
  - o ISO 45001: safety and health
  - o ISO 17889: sustainability in the ceramic industry
  - o PEF: Product Environmental Footprint
  - o EPD: Environmental Product Declaration
  - o Ecovadis: Business Sustainability (ESG) Strategy assessment

Ecovadis is a network of companies united by a common ESG assessment. Companies like Coca-Cola, Ferrero, Johnson&Johnson, Nestlé and LVMH, L’Oréal, and Henkel are all part of the Ecovadis network. As several of our partners were already in this network, it was natural for us to join them.



Featured on page 44, our exquisite porcelain stoneware range Tufa demonstrates the technical and aesthetic refinement of Mirage.

We are just at the beginning of this new route, but we strongly believe in it. We will appoint a Sustainability Manager with a team of people that will continuously challenge us on how to improve efficiency and circularity in Mirage’s processes, personal development of our people, and of the community we live in.

**Has the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) assessment been a complicated path?**

Not really: if you have always done the right thing and your structure is oriented to continuous improvement, it is just a simple process of paperwork. A few things may seem a little strange, but it is perfectly normal when you want to be part of a community that works in more than 175 countries where laws and practices are very different: for example, child labour. The Ecovadis assessment requires that we have a policy about it, but to ask a company in Italy if they use child labour sounds like the strangest thing on earth.

On one hand, because nobody in their right mind would hire a kid to work and, on the other hand, it is forbidden by the Constitution and the law! Nonetheless, we did not have a policy, so we had to write it, which was easy because it was embedded in the way we already are. The difficult part is now to start from where we are and continue to improve the way we do business. And there is still a long way to go to be CO2 neutral before 2050!

**What’s it like to work at Mirage as an employee?**

It is fun and exciting. We’ve put together an extraordinary group of people with a huge passion for what they do. They like it and you can see it: you can feel the energy. And passion is contagious and attracts like-minded people. We are far from being perfect, but we are proactive when there are problems. This has allowed us to grow every single year in the last 20 years.

We have invested a fortune in technology, production capacity and today, possibly, Mirage is the biggest Italian plant in the industry. This is just to say to our partners that we are with them: they can rely on us.

**What’s the most important message you would like to transmit about Mirage and the work you do?**

Every time that we ask the same question to our partners, we almost always get the same answer: Mirage is a company you want to work with because it is reliable and accountable. As a matter of fact, I would say that Mirage is in the business of building and nurturing partnerships, not in the porcelain business. Obviously, a quality product is a must, but it is not only that activity that defines the business.

The key message is that Mirage is firmly determined to reduce its impact on CO2 emissions, contribute to a circular economy, and promote responsible behaviour in general. Mirage wants to be ‘sustainable’ because we are responsible. We have always been responsible. We have always tried to do things better (recycling, saving energy, treating our people and suppliers fairly) to reduce costs: it was a way to be efficient. Now, we have an even more compelling reason: because it is our responsibility to preserve the environment and the community of which we are a part. ♦

# HOW DO MATERIALS SHAPE POSITIVE EXPERIENCES?

During London Design Festival, we hosted a panel discussion on the intersection of materials wellbeing and positive experiences. Our Editor, Conleth Buckley, was delighted to facilitate the discussion as our experts entertained and educated the audience.

### The panel:



**James Halliday** is an Associate at Squire & Partners, one of the largest practices in the UK with a global reputation for excellent, contextualised work.



**Ben Channon** is a Director at Ekkist, a design for well-being consultancy. The Author of "Happy by Design" and "The Happy Design Toolkit", Ben is an architect who has specialised in designing buildings that support better mental health.



**Dr Eleanor Ratcliffe** is a Lecturer in Environmental Psychology at the University of Surrey. Her work focuses on Restorative Environments; spaces that help people recover from everyday stress and fatigue.



**Roger Tyrrell** is Principal Lecturer in Architecture at the University of Portsmouth. Roger approaches the study of architecture from a philosophical, social, and cultural perspective.



The discussion was opened by asking James how he considers material choices when approaching a brief for a commercial project.

James explained that context was the critical consideration when approaching any brief. In-depth research into the building, area, or client and organisation would be the precursor to creating a palette of materials. Another consideration is how the materials change over time, particularly in commercial settings where you might expect high traffic.

**Researchers in Japan discovered there was an optimal ratio between timber and other materials that has a beneficial impact upon the physiology of a room's occupants.**

"Sometimes the aging process of materials is viewed as a bad thing, but materials can age very beautifully, becoming more beautiful over time. How metals patinate, leather wears, and timber floors gain character over time

are all things that we think about. For the ironmongery in our offices, we used unlacquered brass on the handles. This was a conscious choice as the building we were designing, in Brixton, is a building that celebrates history, celebrates change. Our concept was to strip back the layers of history, but as the brass has changed colour they seem to have settled into their environment and become part of the fabric of the building."

Conleth asked Ben, "Your book suggests that, if we spend 80% of our time in buildings, we should know how they make us feel. How does design effect feelings?"

"As an architecture student I was never taught enough about how materials can affect feelings, or even, shape behaviour. Yet there is a huge body of work emerging from Environmental Psychology that addresses this. Recent studies from Japan looked at how subjects responded to rooms clad in different materials. They found heart rates and blood pressure would lower in a timber room. The researchers believe it is because the materials are activating the parasympathetic nervous system, the opposite of our 'fight or flight' mechanism. So how do we encourage people to be more mindful of tactility and texture as they use a building? Can we engage more of the senses in a world that is dominated by the visual? >

Materials are a fantastic way to re-engage the senses: that can be through touch, it can also be through smell, but anything that involves the body in a more holistic way is to be applauded.”

Eleanor expanded upon Ben's point and drew upon her research into the role of sound in wellbeing.

“Sound has a profound effect upon people's psychology. Much of the evidence is related to the negative impact of sound, how it relates to stress, anxiety, reduced quality of life, even physiological effects like increased risk of cardiovascular issues. Over the past ten years Environmental Psychology has sought to better understand how sound affects people's wellbeing. The Japanese studies you mentioned marry with the concept of shinrin-yoku or forest bathing, and an increase in interest in nature as a therapeutic aid. This sense of being immersed in nature is something you can achieve with materials in the built environment. Natural materials are an obvious place to start, but soundscapes and structures that give haptic feedback are also possibilities.”

**“The idea of ‘place’ as ‘a space with an identity’, imbued with memories, attachments or associations must play a role in how much it can support a person's wellbeing.”**

Conleth asked Roger how materials are related to his area of interest, the phenomenology of architecture and design.

“Phenomenology is a much-misunderstood concept. Simply put, it's about going back and understanding the essence of things. When Alvar Aalto visited the hill villages of Morocco he said, ‘I went to Morocco, not to find new things, but to rediscover the things we've forgotten.’ He visited settlements in the high Atlas Mountains so adapted to their environment that the only way to differentiate

the built environment from the natural was by the fall of shadow on the vertical surfaces. You take the ground plane, you erect it, and it becomes place. Absolute affinity between place and material.”

Eleanor, “I would like to pick up on this idea of place, because in this field of restorative environments ‘place’ is not often mentioned, we more frequently talk about ‘space’ which seems more generic. But of course, when you ask people to go to a restorative natural ‘space’, they often go somewhere with positive associations, a favourite park or garden, somewhere they have an attachment to. The idea of ‘place’ as ‘a space with an identity’, imbued with memories, attachments or associations must play a role in how much it can support a person's wellbeing.”

Conleth asked Ben to comment upon making supportive environments and alluded to the work he has done on inclusive spaces.

“I would not call myself an expert on inclusive spaces, but the work that I have done in that area suggests that choice of materials plays a huge role. Designing for neurodiversity can mean incorporating recommendations on colour, on light. And usually, spaces designed this way make everyone comfortable. Extreme contrasts in colour can be problematic for neurodivergent people, but we also find that low contrast environments are better for eye health; what benefits a minority is potentially good for everyone else. Similarly designing for older people, say creating more textured, tactile floors that can prevent falls, are more pleasant to use for everybody. The engagement of all the senses can have a calming effect on autistic people, say, when there are a lot of other things going on and they may be feeling overloaded.

“Coming back to Roger's point about going back, we find that new materials are not necessarily good for health and wellbeing. It is traditional materials like timber, stone, or ceramics that have been around for millennia that have these supportive effects. Throwing down AstroTurf and saying, ‘This is great because I don't have to mow it!’, yet exposing yourself and your children to microplastics is a



The Department Store by Squire & Partners.  
Image credit: James Jones

disaster. A recent study from Germany found that 97% of 8-year-olds have plastic by-products in their blood or urine. It is estimated that by 2040, 4 out of every 5 men are going to be infertile because of this contamination, which is terrifying. So, we must reconsider our relationship with materials, as Alvar Aalto said, rediscover what we have forgotten and work with these classic robust materials that are not going to be harming us.”

Bringing the conversation back to the notion of sustainability and how that relates to materials and wellbeing, James commented:

“Sustainability has become a primary concern of all practices and suppliers that we work with, but it requires a different way of thinking. We make too much stuff; we throw away too much stuff. We need to fundamentally change our thinking. Materials that we specify can have good sustainable credentials but that is not going to prevent us from going off the cliff.

“That is why much of the work that we do as a practice is in repurposing and restoration. We approach a site and ask, ‘How can we use what is already there? What is the minimum amount we can do to this building to help it function in its new guise, or how it now needs to be used?’ And that is a genuinely sustainable approach. Relating to Eleanor's point about space and place, I connect to a place by seeing the history, through the materials that are living their second life.”

Roger too commented on the relationship between materials and sustainability.

“Ah! The ‘S’ word! It may be a heretical position to take, but I loathe that word with a passion because it is used as a catchall, and it means all things to all people. I would like to use the ‘R’ word, responsibility, because it is much less passive, it involves us taking a position individually and collectively and thinking powerfully into the future about the consequences of the actions that we take now on those that come after us.”

**“We make too much stuff; we throw away too much stuff. We need to fundamentally change our thinking. Materials that we specify can have good sustainable credentials but that is not going to prevent us from going off the cliff.”**

Conleth asked Eleanor how we create our own restorative environments, to help us recover from trauma or stress.

“Most of us have fewer opportunities to make a whole new house completely, but there is a lot we can do, even as renters if not homeowners. Within the limitations of renting, we can look at furniture and fixtures to achieve a sense of comfort, of support. I know when I have had stress at work all I want to do is get into bed! There is a lot you can do with the materials in your bedroom; you do not have to remodel your house. It is about making that place the safest place for you: having things that remind you



of where you have come from, having a blanket that you made or was made for you. These solutions do not have to be huge, but materials that have some special significance to you can help create a supportive environment.”

Opening the discussion to the floor, an audience member asked the question about the importance of light as a material given recent studies that show negative effects of fluorescent light.

James takes the question. “In many commercial projects there are strict regulations for light levels. Personal taste is not always a consideration. But I agree with you that light is a material and a significant one. Junichiro Tanizaki in ‘In Praise of Shadows’ meditates extensively on the role of light in traditional Japanese architecture. He writes about the use of gold paint and lacquer and how, in low light situations, the beauty of gold is more exquisite; how it can be used to illuminate a space by almost drawing light to it.”

Ben picks up the point, “To me fluorescent lights are the devil. They are bright and tend to have a cold colour temperature. They are often bad for our eye health, as they pulse and flicker, and they can also disrupt our circadian rhythms. Sitting under a cold blue light in the evening means when we get home, we find it difficult to sleep. So, I would recommend a warmer light, particularly in the afternoons, and something less bright.”

Conleth concludes the discussion by observing that when we started a discussion about the impact of materials on wellbeing, he thought we would talk about wood, concrete, steel, ceramics, but not light, time, memory, sound, and the sustainability of materials. The narrative around materials is just as significant to our wellbeing as the nature of the materials themselves. ♦



New range

# Copenhagen

“It is a pleasure to present this collection inspired by the cityscape and architecture of its namesake that includes a tactile Textured R11 finish allowing for a contrast of light and shadow in any space.”

Justin Jennings, Solus Product Manager



Porcelain | Floors and walls | 5 Colours | 2 Finishes | 4 Sizes  
Limestone appearance



## Copenhagen

A stunning limestone-effect porcelain from Norm Architects of Copenhagen

Continuing their innovative initiative of working with some of the most exciting architects and designers, Decoratori Bassanesi have collaborated with Norm Architects to produce a collection inspired by the city of Copenhagen.

The tiles are offered with a linear, textured surface finish and a smoother finish, creating combinations that resemble ones you might find on a stroll through the oldest parts of Copenhagen.

This stunning limestone-effect porcelain collection is designed to elevate the look and feel of any space and is available in four sizes: 225x450mm, 225x900mm, 450x900mm, and 900x900mm. With a Natural R10 (A+B) rating and a Textured R11 (A+B) option, these tiles provide both style and safety, and extensive design possibilities for walls and floors. Additionally,

two mosaic options allow for even more creativity and personalization in your space.

Choose from a selection of five stunning, earthy hues: Ivory, Sand, Grey, Steel, and Fawn. These colours have been carefully selected to evoke the natural beauty of limestone and are sure to create a sense of warmth and comfort in any room.

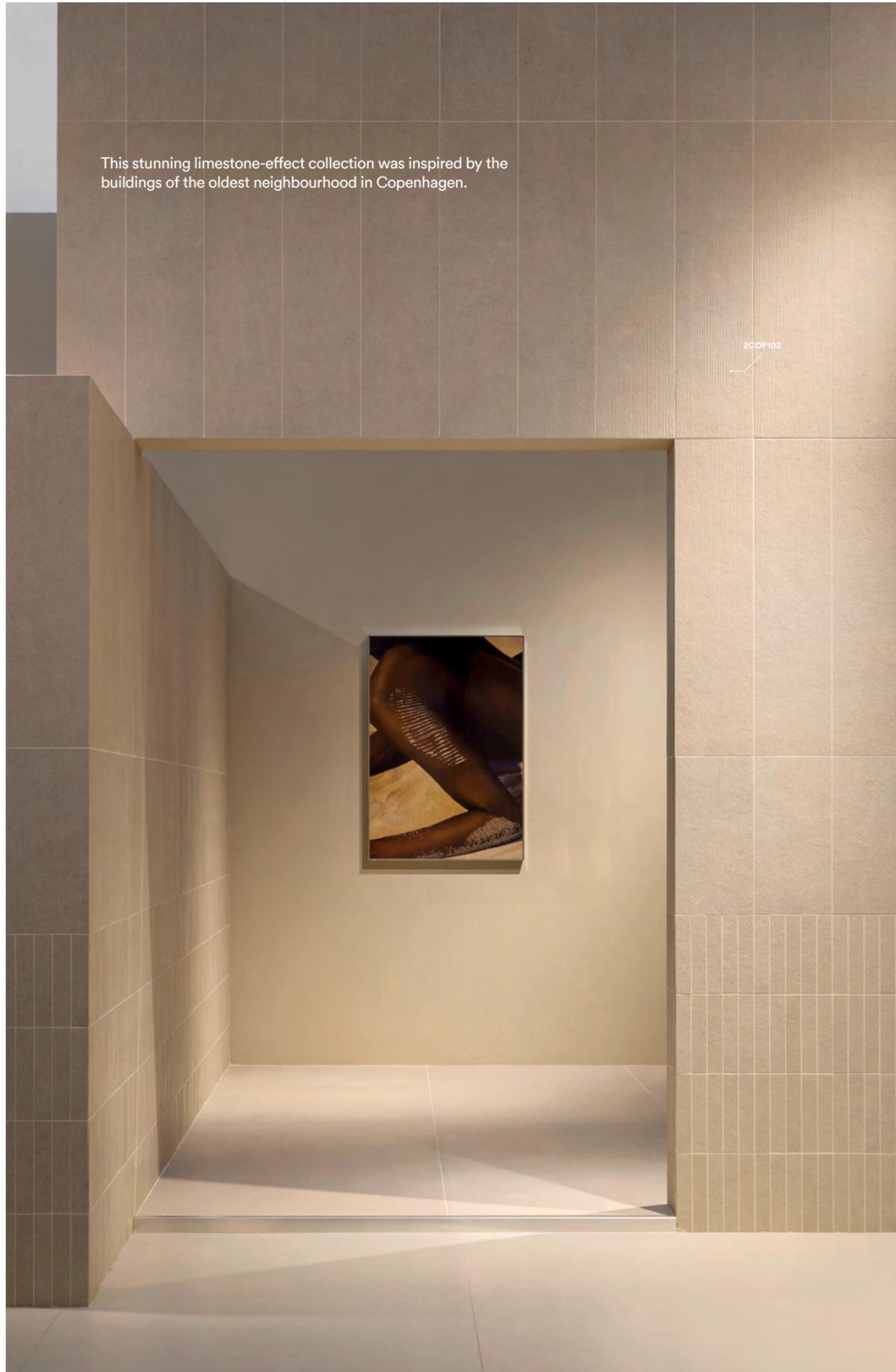
This collection embodies a sense of history and craftsmanship that is truly unique. The linear and textured surface finish options offer a range of design possibilities, while maintaining a calm and minimalist aesthetic.

Its ability to play with light and shadow means this collection changes expressions throughout the day, making it a truly dynamic and engaging addition to your space. ♦



Copenhagen adds a natural touch to any space with its tactile and textured surface.

This stunning limestone-effect collection was inspired by the buildings of the oldest neighbourhood in Copenhagen.

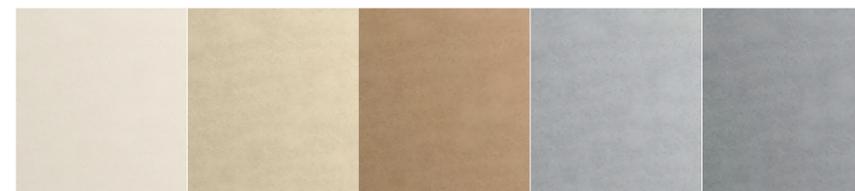


**Copenhagen technical details:**

Full EPD available on request. Search for Copenhagen at [soluseramics.com](http://soluseramics.com) for more information about this range.

Finishes: **Natural R10 (A+B) and Textured R11 (A+B)**  
 Appearance: **Limestone**  
 Material: **Porcelain**  
 Usage: **Floors and walls**

**Colours and finishes**



COP-Ivory 2COP101 Natural R10 (A+B)	COP-Sand 2COP102 Natural R10 (A+B)	COP-Fawn 2COP105 Natural R10 (A+B)	COP-Steel 2COP104 Natural R10 (A+B)	COP-Grey 2COP103 Natural R10 (A+B)
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COP-Ivory 2COP101 Textured R11 (A+B)	COP-Sand 2COP102 Textured R11 (A+B)	COP-Fawn 2COP105 Textured R11 (A+B)	COP-Steel 2COP104 Textured R11 (A+B)	COP-Grey 2COP103 Textured R11 (A+B)
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**Sizes (mm)**



PTV results available on request.

Two mosaic options are available in all colours and finishes. Please ask for details.

ARRIVALS

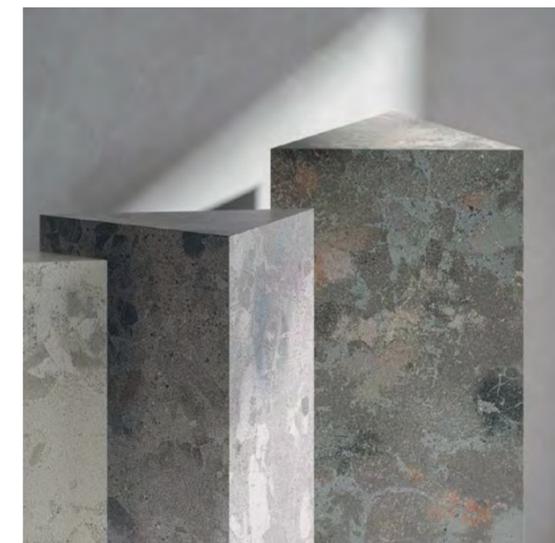


New range

## Compress

“Compress is a perfect combination of beauty and technique, produced in full-body porcelain using the latest in innovative production techniques to deliver a unique stone-effect.”

Justin Jennings, Solus Product Manager



Porcelain (Full-body) | Floors and walls | 4 Colours | 3 Finishes | 3 Sizes  
Ceppo di Gre appearance



## Compress

A 'Ceppo di Gre'-inspired, full-bodied porcelain stoneware collection with unique patterning created by a new technology

Introducing Compress, a stunning porcelain stoneware collection that is inspired by 'Ceppo di Gre', and is unlike anything else in the market. This innovative collection is produced using a unique technology that compresses different components to create a variegated surface that is beautifully textured and full-bodied.

Available in three finishes – Natural R10 (A+B), Satin, and Natural R11 (A+B+C) – and in 600×600mm, 600×1200mm, and 1200×1200mm sizes, this collection is suitable for walls or floors. It comes in four beautiful colours - Sand, Snow, Ash, and Coal - and the same four colours are also available in a mosaic size of 300×300mm. The thickness of the tiles is 10.5mm, ensuring durability and longevity.

Compress is the perfect choice for anyone who wants to combine beauty and functionality. The patterns created by the inclusions are unique and harmonious, with light variation between individual pieces.

In addition to the natural finish, Compress also offers a newly introduced 'satin' finish. This gives the tiles an opaque, cloudy surface that appears worn by time. The overall effect is a deep, intense ceramic surface that is sure to impress.

If you are looking for a collection that combines beauty, durability, and innovation, Compress is the perfect choice for you. Its unique patterning, full-bodied material, and beautiful finishes make it a standout collection. ♦





2COM102



2COM103

**Compress technical details:**

Full EPD available on request. Search for Compress at [solusceramics.com](http://solusceramics.com) for more information about this range.

Finishes: **Natural R10 (A+B), Natural R11 (A+B+C) and Satin**  
 Appearance: **Ceppo di Gre**  
 Material: **Porcelain (Full-body)**  
 Usage: **Floors and walls**  
 Shade Variation: **V2 - Light**



The finishes have a pleasing haptic quality and interact with light in an intriguing manner.

**Colours**



COM-Snow  
2COM102

COM-Ash  
2COM103

COM-Sand  
2COM101

COM-Coal  
2COM104

**Sizes (mm)**



PTV results available on request.

Mosaics are available in all colours in Natural R10 (A+B), 300x300x10.5mm. Please ask for details.



New range

# Corinthian

“This range features a Terrazzo-effect with calming colour configurations and high technical performance combinable with our Halogen collection. A great addition to our offer.”

Justin Jennings, Solus Product Manager



Porcelain | Floors and walls | 7 Colours | 3 Finishes | 3 Sizes  
Terrazzo appearance



## Corinthian

A terrazzo-inspired design that can be matched with our extensive Halogen collection

Corinthian is a welcome addition to our porcelain range. The collection is inspired by the classic and timeless design of terrazzo, a material dating back to ancient Egyptian and even Neolithic times. Terrazzo was employed more recently by Venetian builders in the 1400s, who used leftover marble chips to create flooring that was both durable and beautiful.

Corinthian pays homage to the history and design significance of terrazzo, while also offering high technical performance. Made from porcelain, these tiles are even more durable and long-lasting than their inspiration, making them ideal for high-traffic areas.

The Corinthian range is available in seven different colour configurations: White, Ash, Grey, Beige, Blush, Green, and Blue. Each of the seven colour

configurations contain a combination of four coloured speckles, drawn from a spectrum of sixteen different coloured speckles. The colours of the speckles can be matched with our Halogen range, featured in this magazine, offering a cohesive design solution for any space.

All colours are available in 600x600mm and White, Blush, Green and Blue are also available in 890x890mm. The range features three different finishes, including a Matt R10 (A), Honed, and Grip R11 (A+B).

The Corinthian range is a perfect combination of classic and contemporary design that offers high technical performance, durability, and versatility. Its terrazzo-inspired design is a perfect choice for any commercial or residential space. ♦





The colours of the speckles in Corinthian correspond to the colours of our Halogen range.



**Corinthian** technical details:

Full EPD available on request. Search for Corinthian at [solusceramics.com](http://solusceramics.com) for more information about this range.

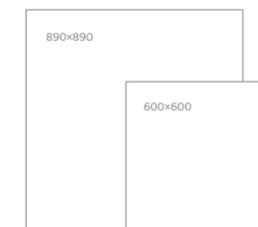
Finishes: **Matt R10 (A), Honed and Grip R11 (A+B)**  
 Appearance: **Terrazzo**  
 Material: **Porcelain**  
 Usage: **Floors and walls**

**Colours**



- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p><b>COR-White 3COR101 *</b></p> <p>Speckles composed of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Flesk 2RPV530</li> <li>■ Llandeilo 2RPV409</li> <li>■ Garnant 2RPV406</li> <li>■ Bann 2RPV528</li> </ul> | <p><b>COR-Blush 3COR105 *</b></p> <p>Speckles composed of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Blushman 2RPV555</li> <li>■ Ostman 2RPV554</li> <li>■ Tan 2RPV552</li> <li>■ Hirwaun 2RPV407</li> </ul> | <p><b>COR-Green 3COR107 *</b></p> <p>Speckles composed of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Avocado 2RPV557</li> <li>■ Cairngorms 2RPV431</li> <li>■ Blond 2RPV553</li> <li>■ Hirwaun 2RPV407</li> </ul> | <p><b>COR-Blue 3COR108 *</b></p> <p>Speckles composed of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Jeans 2RPV559</li> <li>■ Blueand 2RPV558</li> <li>■ Carnian 2RPV425</li> <li>■ Hirwaun 2RPV407</li> </ul> |
|--|---|--|--|

**Sizes (mm)**



PTV results available on request.

\* Selected tiles' speckles are composed of pieces from our Halogen range.



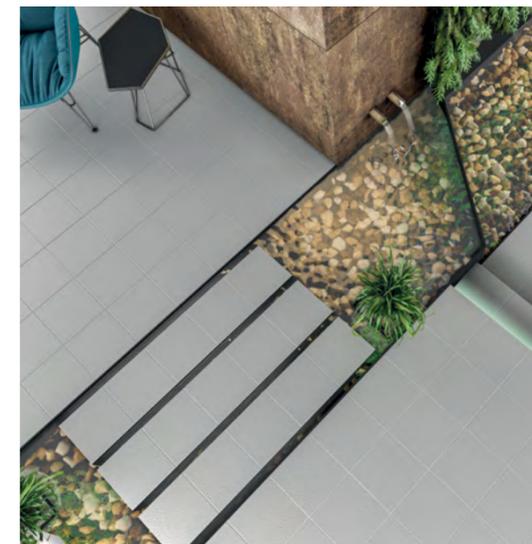
- |                          |                         |                        |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>COR-Beige 3COR104</b> | <b>COR-Grey 3COR103</b> | <b>COR-Ash 3COR102</b> |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|



# Halogen

“I’m delighted to present this range with its spectrum of colour vividly represented in full-body porcelain that allows for choice, functionality, and technical performance.”

**Justin Jennings**, Solus Product Manager



Porcelain | Floors and walls | 31 Colours | 5 Finishes | 14 Sizes  
Mono colour appearance



## Halogen

A comprehensive, full-bodied, porcelain range for high-traffic and heavy-use spaces

To call Halogen a large collection is somewhat of an understatement; it is a comprehensive surfacing solution. Entire projects are accommodated by Halogen; schools, hospitals, airports, shopping malls have used this collection, and only this collection, to achieve the full tiling design brief.

Halogen is a stunning full-bodied porcelain collection that is designed to provide a complete solution for high-traffic spaces. It offers a wide range of colours, as well as a variety of formats that allow for endless design possibilities. This collection is engineered to provide exceptional technical performance, making it perfect for use in demanding environments.

The collection is available in five different finishes - Matt R9, Polished, Matt R10, Structured R11 (A+B+C), and Anti Slip R12 (A+B+C) - making it suitable for various spaces and applications.

It is offered in 14 different sizes ranging from 75x150x8.3mm to 900x900x10.5mm. Special pieces, such as square and round top plinths, step treads, and sit-on and sit-in skirtings, are also available to complete the overall look of your project.

A unique feature of this collection is that it connects to the colours in our Corinthian terrazzo-effect tile, featured in this magazine. The 'terrazzo' chips in Corinthian can be matched to their exact colour twin in the Halogen range, extending design possibilities even further.

This collection is perfect for those who want to create a stunning and functional space that is both durable and beautiful. With its exceptional technical performance, wide range of colours, and variety of formats, Halogen is the perfect solution for those who demand the best in design and quality for their heavy-use spaces. ♦

A 'true' full-bodied porcelain, Halogen, is durable and wears well without compromising aesthetics.

2RPV556



Halogen lends itself to large projects with its variety of sizes and monochromatic colours.

**Halogen technical details:**

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

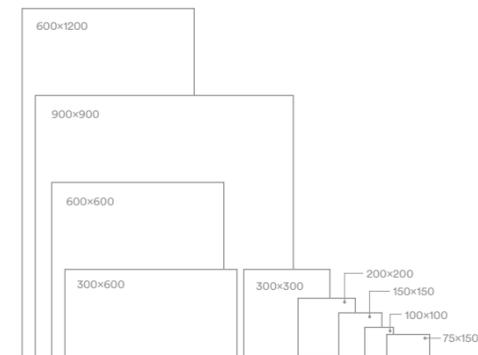
Finishes: **Matt R9, Polished, Matt R10, Structured R11 (A+B+C) and Anti Slip R12 (A+B+C)**  
 Appearance: **Mono Colour**  
 Material: **Porcelain (Full-body)**  
 Usage: **Floors and walls**  
 Shade Variation: **V1 - Uniform**

**Colours**

Brexon 2RPV401	Hirwaun 2RPV407	Kingussie 2RPV417	Gairn 2RPV415	Crickhow 2RPV405	Llangatt 2RPV411	Ammanford 2RPV403	Bronzore 2RPV551	Blond 2RPV553
Olenkian 2RPV428	Aviomore 2RPV432	Tan 2RPV552	Ryeland 2RPV556	Ostman 2RPV554	Blushman 2RPV555			
Eternity 2RPV440	Wexford 2RPV523	Tipperary 2RPV520	Avocado 2RPV557	Erne 2RPV524	Cairngorms 2RPV431			
Ballater 2RPV420	Carnian 2RPV425	Nebulous 2RPV439	Blueland 2RPV558	Jeans 2RPV559				
Garten 2RPV418	Bann 2RPV528	Garnant 2RPV406	Llandeilo 2RPV409	Flesk 2RPV530				

**Sizes (mm)**

*PTV results available on request.*





New range

# Tufa

“I’m happy to present this balanced yet elevated collection, showcasing some of the more familiar architectural stones from around the world, represented in their truest forms.”

Justin Jennings, Solus Product Manager



Porcelain | Floors and walls | 8 Colours | 3 Finishes | 12 Sizes  
Travertine appearance



3TUF102

## Tufa

An exquisite porcelain collection inspired by some of the most beautiful and beloved stones used in architecture, elevated to their highest aesthetic potential

Tufa, a collection of porcelain stoneware, is both versatile and exquisite. Inspired by the best-known stones used in architecture, Tufa takes the beauty of these materials to new heights. The result is a range of tiles that are minimal in design, but rich in surface and material details.

Each piece in the Tufa collection boasts balanced colours, delicate nuances, reflections, and mineral effects. The light and dark colours replicate vein-cut travertine, offering a gorgeous and unique look that will enhance any space.

With eight colours to choose from, including Cream, Sand, Beige, Gold, Grey, Ash, Light, and Dark, there are many possibilities for creative expression.

The Tufa collection is incredibly versatile when it comes to sizing. With many different sizes and thicknesses to choose from, Tufa allows for innovative wall and floor surfacing. Whether you are looking to create a bold statement or a subtle accent, Tufa has the versatility to achieve your vision.

Choose from three finishes, including Natural R10 (A+B), Satin R9, and Grip R11 (A+B+C), to customize your space. A unique offering of the Tufa range is the 1200x2780x6mm slab produced through the 'continua' process. This large yet thin format is perfect for covering larger walls, for example, in hotel lobbies.

Tufa is a stunning collection that recreates the finest finishes of the most popular stones. ♦



3TUF108

Tufa recreates the splendour of the most beautiful and desirable architectural stone finishes.



The 1200x2780mm slabs are only 6mm thick, making them ideal for wall coverings.

3TUF101



3TUF105

**Tufa technical details:**

*Full EPD available on request. Search for Tufa at soluseramics.com for more information about this range.*

Finishes: **Natural R10 (A+B), Grip R11 (A+B+C) and Satin R9**  
 Appearance: **Travertine**  
 Material: **Porcelain**  
 Usage: **Floors and walls**  
 Shade Variation: **V2 - Light**

**Colours**



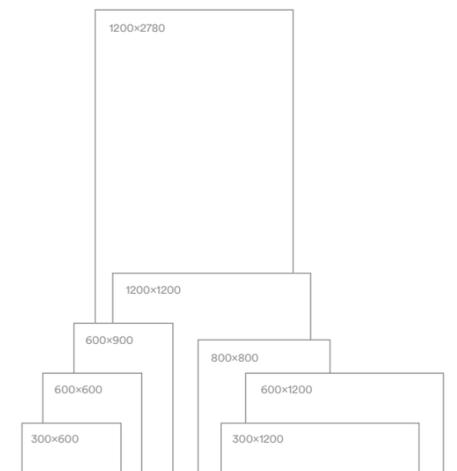
TUF-Cream 3TUF101    TUF-Sand 3TUF102    TUF-Beige 3TUF103    TUF-Gold 3TUF104



TUF-Grey 3TUF105    TUF-Ash 3TUF106    TUF-Light 3TUF107    TUF-Dark 3TUF108

**Sizes (mm)**

*PTV results available on request.*



Mosaics are available in all colours in Natural R10 (A+B), 300x300x9mm and 300x600x9mm. Please ask for details.



# SMITHSON TOWER

**Architecture and Design:**  
ConForm Architects

**Main Contractor:**  
OD Group

**Photography:**  
Lorenzo Zandri, Nick Worley

**Ranges used in this project:**  
Trench

## PROJECT

# Smithson Tower, Mayfair

ConForm Architects complete stunning fit-out in historic  
New Brutalist landmark



Smithson Tower, formerly The Economist Tower, sits at 25 St James's Street in the heart of Mayfair. It was designed by Alison and Peter Smithson and built between 1960 and 1964. The Smithsons were prominent architects of the post-war period, perhaps most strongly associated with the New Brutalism movement. The tower used to be the home of The Economist magazine which departed in 2016. Since then, the building has undergone extensive refurbishment by DSDHA.

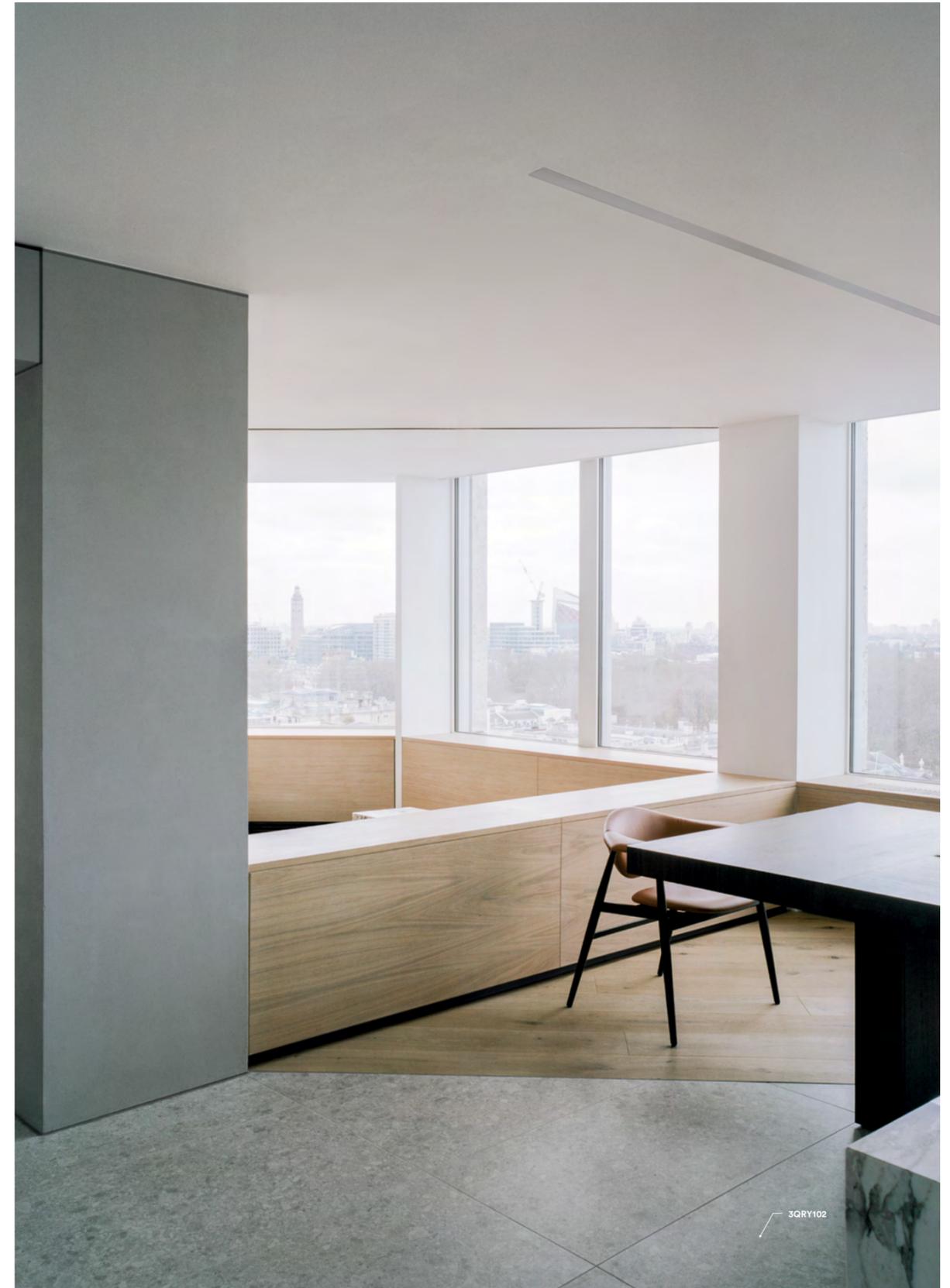
ConForm Architects were asked by a private client to refit the 11th floor to create an office that combined the operational need for privacy whilst accommodating the social contexts of a contemporary workspace. We spoke with Ben Edgely, a partner at ConForm Architects, who gave us a greater insight into the project.

"The client is quite discerning with a good eye for design. They wanted the project experience to be more

like a residential than a commercial project in how closely we worked together. It was quite a competitive bid, I believe, but we got on well and they liked our portfolio - the detail we put into our work really chimed with them.

"Intense investigation of context forms the backdrop to all our projects, and interpretation and expansion past physical context informs our process and designs. Our practice name is a portmanteau of context plus form. For Smithson Tower, the importance of the existing building and the influence of original architects were clear.

"Smithson Tower is one of the few towers in that area. Its strong geometry with its perimeter columns was designed for 1960s office culture, with individual single-aspect cubicles accessed via an internal circulation path. DSDHA had stripped out the individual offices from the days of The Economist and fitted the space to >



"New Brutalism is an ethic not an aesthetic" - Reyner Banham



“ Solus offers a variety of ranges inspired by Italian ‘Ceppo di Gre’ stone, including Trench, Rockstone, Stoneblend, and the new Compress range, each with their own unique characteristics. Trench boasts strongly contrasting light and dark areas and an overall cool tone, which in this project looks superb. It’s a pleasure to be involved with ConForm and they have done a fantastic job at an incredible location.”

**Pete Toule**  
Solus Area Sales Manager, London  
petetoule@solusceramics.com

Cat A standards. When the lift doors opened on the 11th floor, and we stepped out to these almost 360-degree views we knew we had to preserve them as far as possible.

“These views and orientations began to inform the initial layouts and programme, with meeting rooms set to the cooler north of the plan, and desks to the south, where the skyline and views were most impressive.

“A major catalyst for furthering our thinking in this regard was the Smithsons’ original concept sketch, dating back to 1960, that we found while conducting research. This unrealised fit-out celebrated the diagonal across the ceilings with intersecting junctions along the core being expressed with angled internal piers. We referenced these piers at key ‘anchor points’ in the proposed design, acting as thresholds between the four sides of the plan, along with helping the contemporary diagonal views and connections across the space intersect with the orthogonal geometry of the existing perimeter and core.

“One further peculiarity about the project was that the 11th floor was originally the archive store for the Economist and as such had a structural concrete slab substrate, rather than the raised access floors found throughout every other floor. This provided a significant challenge, as electrics, pipes, and cabling had to be chased into the Grade II\* listed fabric, requiring detailed layouts and locations to be submitted for Listed Building Consent.

“The scheme’s biggest challenge was adapting the existing air conditioning and heating/cooling



infrastructure in the building. The Economist Building was the first building in the UK to have air conditioning, a system geared around servicing the cellular perimeter offices with the original circulation route correlating to the air ducting. As the project evolved to include private and open spaces, we returned to this original design idea. We concealed the ducting with lowered ceilings and oak wall panels. As the client was sensitive to the soundscape of the space, we used acoustic panelling to create a librarial atmosphere.”

As Brutalists, the Smithsons valued the principle of “truth to materials”. Proponents of “truth to materials” believe that by using materials in their natural state, architects and designers can create structures and objects that are both aesthetically pleasing and environmentally sustainable, as they avoid the use of harmful chemicals and other materials used in the production of finishes and coatings. I asked Ben if the legacy of the Smithsons’ New Brutalism had influenced ConForm’s material choice.

“The exterior of the building is clad in Portland stone, and we wanted to bring this into the circulation area. Cost was prohibitive but we were able to source an excellent ‘Ceppo di Gre’ ceramic surface from Solus to fulfil this design goal. We softened the working spaces with timber, carpet, textured wall finishes including stretched fabric, polished plaster, and timber panelling.”

Despite the pandemic the project was finished on time, on budget and to an exemplary standard; impressive for ConForm’s first commercial project. Ben tells us that working with an ambitious client was a pleasure, as was working with a piece of architectural history. ♦

Architecture and Design:  
zynk Design  
Photography:  
zynk Design  
Ranges used in this project:  
Rockstone



3JDT101

# THG ICON

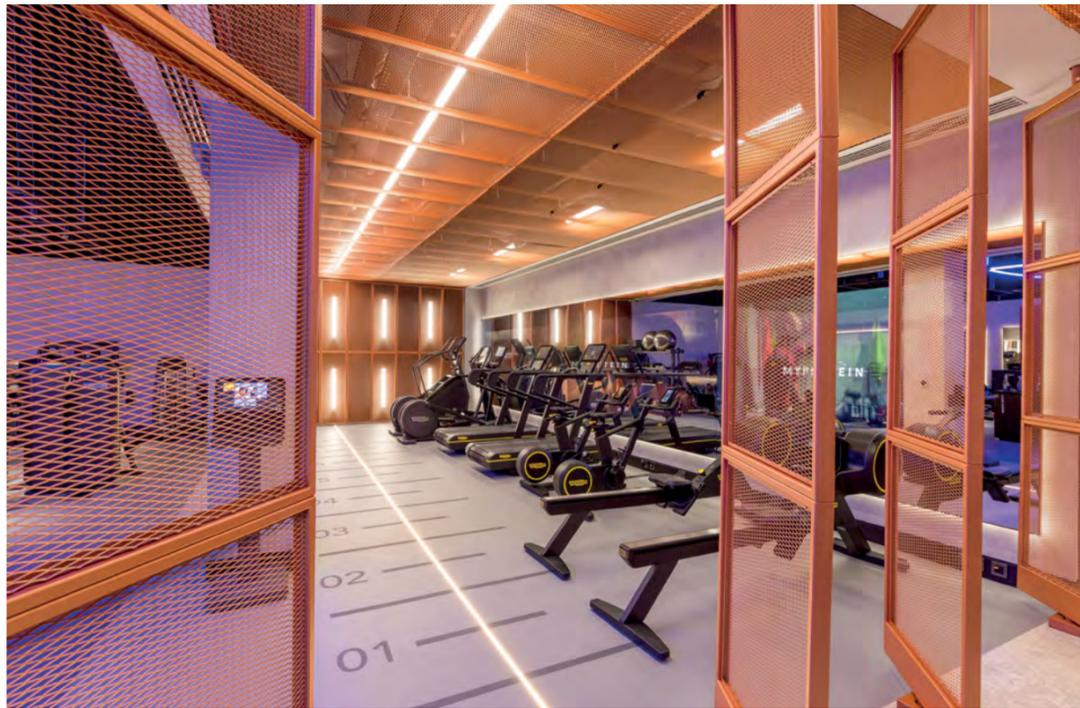
THG



PROJECT

# The Hut Group's ICON

zynk Design deliver an award-winning, hi-tech, gym for THG headquarters



The Hut Group (THG) is a British e-commerce company that specialises in the development, marketing, and sales of fashion, sports, beauty, and wellness products. Founded in 2004, THG has grown to become one of the largest online retailers in the world, operating over 200 websites and selling products in over 160 countries. THG's portfolio of brands includes LOOKFANTASTIC, Myprotein, and Coggles, among others. THG went public in September 2020 and is valued at over £5 billion.

THG Studios, at its ICON facility near Manchester Airport, is a cutting-edge creative hub featuring over 160,000 sq ft of creative studios: photography studios, editing suites, sound desks, and green rooms for 'the talent' are all utilised to create content that supports the numerous brands in THG's portfolio.

zynk Design, specialists in wellness and fitness design, were appointed to design the showpiece gym in THG Studios, right next to THG's head office. In collaboration with Pro-AV, they designed a space that won the Leisure and Hospitality Project AV Award for 2022. We spoke with the Lead Architect on the project, Alanna Brown, and asked her what makes this project special.

"The brief for the design of the gym was 'cutting-edge tech'. We had a concept that incorporated a big audio-visual element: a large structure that would hang over the functional zone. We partnered with Pro-Av, who were the preferred AV consultant of THG. Our brief to Pro-AV was for the feature to be spectacular, moveable, and to fill the triple height space. What we now have is a three-dimensional matrix of individually addressable LEDs: a >



cube of light hanging from the ceiling through which three-dimensional content can be presented.

“Each LED behaves as an individual pixel in a 3D matrix, so images appear three dimensional. The key feature is that the whole space is brandable. You can instantly convert the gym into a studio for a photoshoot or video by running brand specific content throughout the space. One idea here is that a virtual trainer can lead a session of functional training through the three-dimensional matrix.

“We mounted screens behind the large wall mirrors that can also display various content. Users can personalise their gym experience by connecting to these screens and playing their online training programmes like TECHNOGYM, FIIT, or Les Mills+. When the screens are off the mirrors just look like mirrors.”

As you enter the gym, there is a small reception area with hot-rolled steel panels and a high resolution, monolithic screen. The gym itself is broken up into four key areas: free weights, a functional zone, a cardio area, and a strength area with resistance machines. All the equipment is very high-end; Eleiko free weights and

TECHNOGYM machines. In the cardio zone, there is a mesh feature which brings the walls in and creates a sense of warmth.

As we turn towards the changing rooms, we see Solus' wonderful floor finishes, and entering the space we can see Solus wall coverings accented with a copper trim. Here the brief was, 'beautiful vanity' and 'luxury touchpoints'. The copper, the tan leather, the walnut lockers, the Gessi tapware, contrast beautifully with the gorgeous Rockstone collection. Rockstone really lifts the space conferring a luxury feel to it.

zynk Design have had a brilliant 2022 and are looking forward to the realisation of several projects this year. Along with the work arising from their longstanding relationship with The Gym Group, 2023 will see them unveil: a trampoline park which is being rolled out nationally and is a wonderful space for young people; as brand ambassadors for Forbes Travel Guide, they have designed a gym in a chateau in Cognac which houses Forbes' hotelier training facility; and a super high-end luxury wellness clinic in Knightsbridge, which Solus are supplying. ♦



“Alanna and the zynk Design team are always pushing the envelope and on the lookout for new, innovative materials, so when we started consulting on the project it was clear that our yet to be released Rockstone range would be a perfect fit.

It's always important that we are making clients aware of exciting new ranges and technologies to ensure they are at the forefront of what can be achieved, therefore we seized the opportunity to offer a preview of the range. Alanna and the team then worked their magic, and the result is stunning, with the various colours and finishes of the range fitting perfectly with the other luxury materials used on the project.

As always, it was a pleasure to assist on another beautiful zynk Design project.”

**Lee Simmonds**  
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Shropshire and Northern Home Counties  
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Architecture and Design:  
TINTO Architecture

Photography:  
AberdeenPhoto.com

Ranges used in this project:  
Multiform  
Metallico Wall

# UNION KIRK



PROJECT

# Union Kirk

A stunning refit of an iconic Aberdeen landmark showcases the work of TINTO

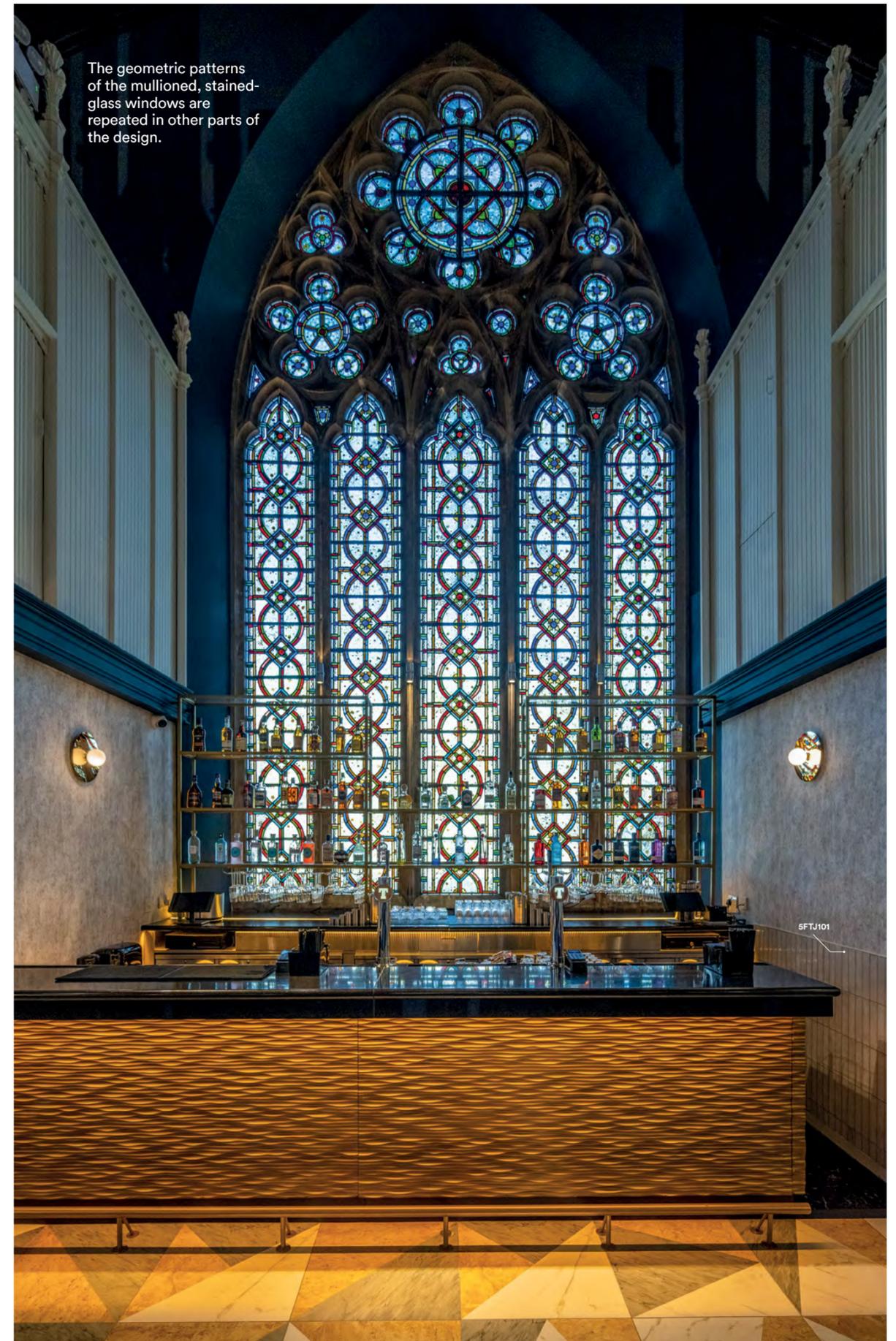


“Bon Accord” is the motto of the Granite City, Aberdeen, and as good a motto as any for those embarking on the marriage project. Union Kirk facilitates this endeavour as the newest special events venue in the city. Located in the centre of Aberdeen on Bon Accord Street, Union Street and Langstane Place, the imposing Victorian gothic church, formerly known as Langstane Kirk, now hosts a contemporary, multi-functional space that has retained traditional features.

Local architectural practice TINTO were tasked with repurposing the upper floor of this historic, listed building. The client wanted to create a unique, flexible, space to cater for a variety of events: from weddings, dinners to corporate functions. The redevelopment includes the addition of booth seating and the creation of a private bridal room on the upper floor.

Designed by James Matthew and built in 1869 this grade B listed building has been carefully and sympathetically converted whilst retaining many of the traditional features including the stunning stained-glass windows, vaulted ceiling, and intricate cornicing that you would expect to find in a kirk. We spoke with Lisa McGirr from TINTO who talked us through the project.

“The design throughout is sympathetic to the original and existing features. We worked with the branding team to ensure their logo was worked into the design and that these complemented each other. The key design element in the main space was to keep it simple, allowing the original features to stand out, but not without personality. The stained-glass windows give a lot of colour and pattern to the space and create beautiful natural lighting throughout. >



The geometric patterns of the mullioned, stained-glass windows are repeated in other parts of the design.

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“To add some richness to the space, we used a deep blue and navy colour palette and gave it a modern, luxury feel by adding brass details. The carpet complements the tone of the interior and highlights the stained-glass windows by replicating the patterns the windows create.

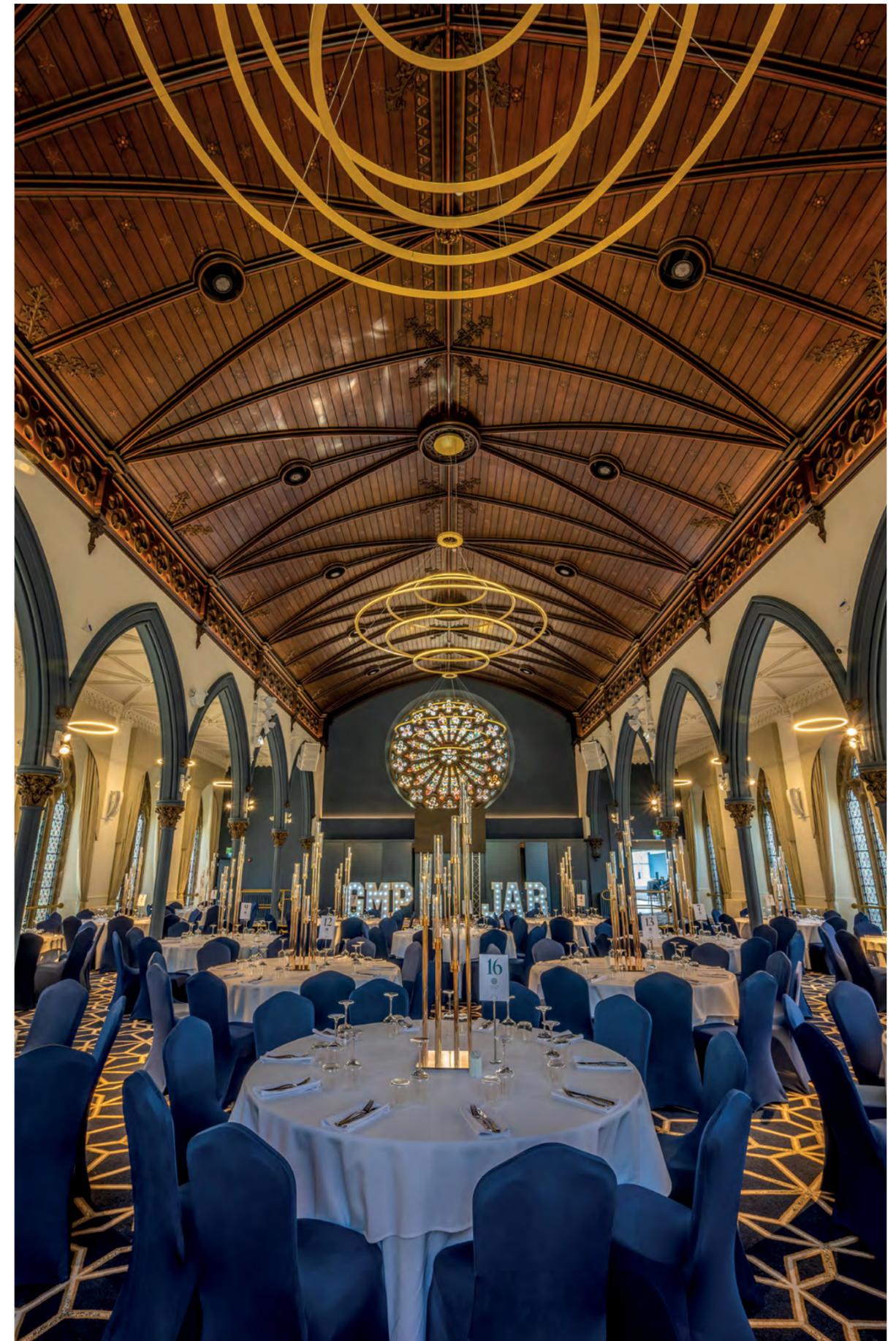
“Having previously worked with our clients on several other venues within Aberdeen City Centre, we wanted to keep the design distinct from their other venues, as they primarily cater to different markets. We wanted the bar areas to look stylish and aspirational, while tying into the design of the main interior space. The introduction of booth seating was important to allow this area to be flexible with other furniture, making it another multifunctional space. Again, the logo was used on the windows, which made a huge impact from the exterior too.

“The main addition to the upper mezzanine level is the private Bridal powder room, the perfect private space for a bridal party, special guests or events entertainment, a special addition to the venue.”

At Union Kirk, TINTO have achieved a ‘Bon Accord’ between new purposes and original features. ♦

“*Union Kirk is stunning example of the kind of work at which TINTO excel. Sympathetic restoration of this iconic Aberdeen landmark into a multi-functional venue has revived the building and brought a buzz to the area. It’s always a pleasure working with TINTO, and I look forward to collaborating again soon.*”

**Laura Birrell**  
Solus Area Sales Manager, Scotland and Ireland  
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**Interior Design:**  
Anya Gordon Clark,  
DSK/Ryder Architecture

**Tiling Contractor:**  
Shellard Tiles

**Photography:**  
Jean Cazals

**Ranges used in this project:**  
Chiltern Stone

# ORELLE



PROJECT  
**Orelle**

A new gastronomic experience for Birmingham really hits the high notes



Doone Silver Kerr, now part of Ryder Architecture, designed the new 103 Colmore Row building in Birmingham, which completed in 2021, replacing the former NatWest Tower designed by John Madin. The 108-metre skyscraper is one of the tallest buildings in the city and hosts the magnificent Orelle restaurant, by D&D London on the 24th floor, also designed by the practice.

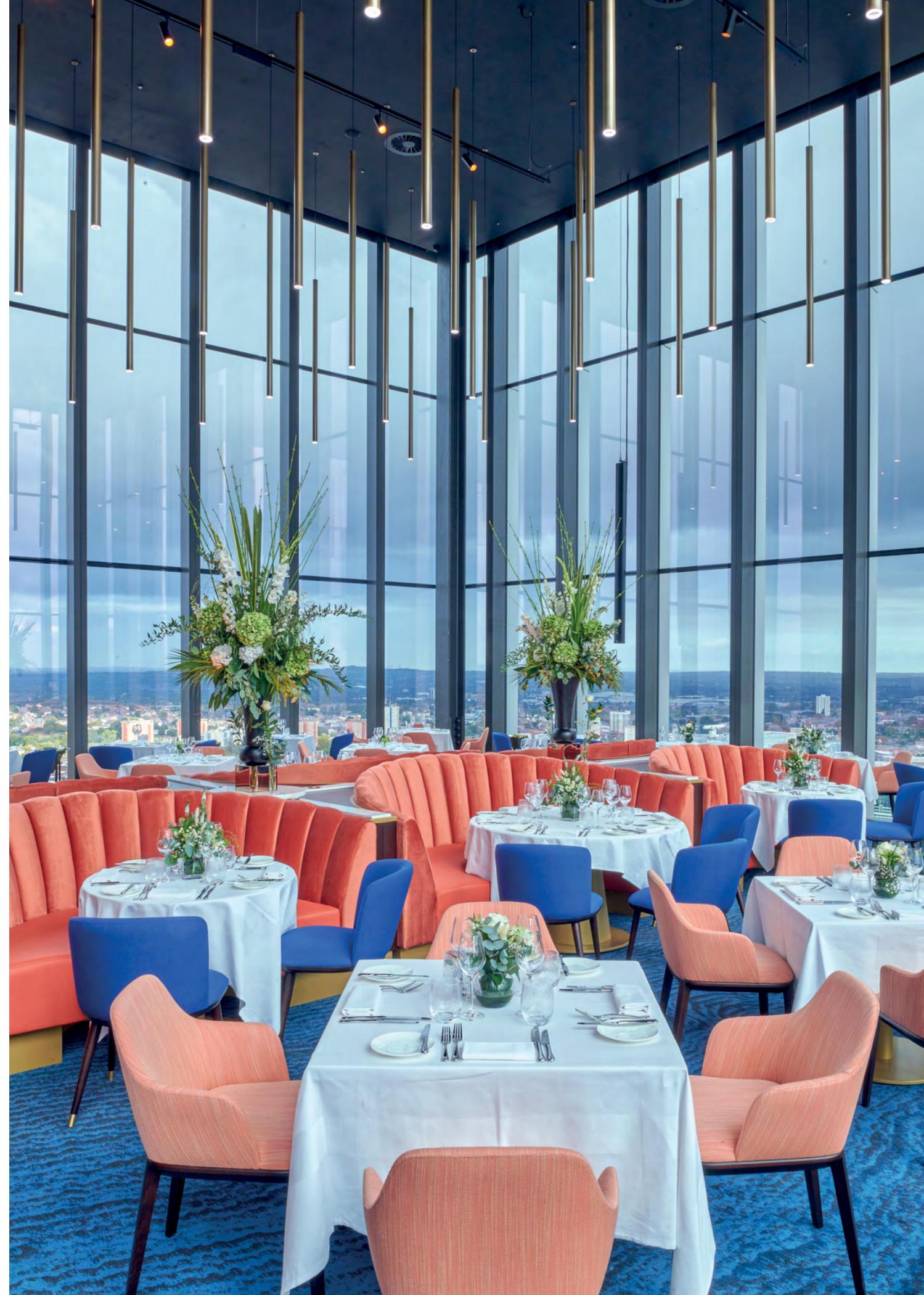
Orelle opened its doors in October last year. Anya Gordon Clark, Senior Interior Designer on the project, joined Doone Silver Kerr especially for the Orelle project in March 2020. We spoke with Anya about her work.

“D&D venues globally are high-end, they’re also independent and different from each other. We were asked to create a restaurant that embodied the D&D brand and was as iconic as the building itself. The restaurant scene in Birmingham is mature, with

numerous Michelin star restaurants, so we wanted to attract that audience as well as the companies occupying the office spaces in the building.

“The ground-floor café/cocktail bar is an important part of the venue as it captures footfall for the restaurant, which is not visible at ground level. It was in this space that we incorporated the old cast-aluminium doors from the John Madin NatWest Tower. They were designed by Henry Haig and, as part of the planning permission for the building, they had to be displayed prominently and be accessible to the public – which we were delighted to facilitate.

“This had an impact upon the concept of the space as we began to examine the banking heritage, the crafts associated with that, its connections to the Jewellery Quarter and the history of metalworking in the area. The use of richly veined marble floors, oak and walnut timbers, >





wall panelling and a generosity of scale were design responses to the banking heritage of the site.”

Ornate detailing inspired by the metallurgical history of the area has clearly found its way into a lot of the features of the space. The satin brass detailing that can be found on the chairs, the finely detailed golden metalwork of the café bar, the gold veining of the marble restaurant floor and bar, bespoke light fittings and the jewel-like colours used in the furniture fabrics are all suggestive of the historical context of this corner of Birmingham. The artworks are inspired by this history also, and jewellery boxes in the restrooms are mounted on the wall as framed pieces.

The name of the restaurant, Orelle, has a derivation from the French for gold, as well as being a French mountain village. It therefore makes references to the Jewellery Quarter, the location of the restaurant at the top of the building, and the modern French inspired menu. From its lofty seat atop 103 Colmore Row, Orelle commands incredible 360-degree views of the city.

Anya related her experience of working up in the clouds, “Working on the site and watching the transition from day to night, as the city lights up, and the sky changes colour is magical. We worked with a local artist, Anita Roye, who produced a mural for the 8-metre-high dining area. Her father was a member of the Windrush generation and worked in the Jewellery Quarter, in a pleasing piece of circularity that connects her to the history of the area.

She produced a work inspired by the design concept, her own history, and the views from the space. She used predominantly blue tones, and as the sky changes, the mural changes and shifts in an utterly magnificent way.”

We asked Anya what specific challenges she faced on this project, “Aside from the pandemic, the challenges were around designing for a space on the 24th floor. ‘Will this fit in the lift? Can it be constructed in the space?’ were questions we asked ourselves. As the space is triple height, we needed some key elements of scale; for example, the lights hang 5 metres from the ceiling. So, a big space that you want to feel exclusive but not empty. Working with D&D London to establish the correct amount of covers for the space was important in finding the right balance with the layout of the dining area.

“The kitchen is on the floor below, and a lot of work went into designing it. It needed to work hard for the size of the space available. The logistics of getting the food to table required careful consideration and precise calculation. You can have the best chefs in the world and the most stunning setting but if the food arrives the wrong temperature, you’ll not be back. Thankfully, Orelle has been very well received by the people of Birmingham.”

Anya acknowledged the important roles of the fit-out contractor McCue, Parla furniture, and the art consultant Elegant Clutter in helping DSK/Ryder achieve what promises to be an iconic Birmingham eatery. After all, design is a collaborative, team effort. ♦



Our Chiltern stone range, seen here in the unisex toilets, provides design continuity between the different zones of the restaurant.

The stone-effect collection complements the opulent design scheme, inspired by Birmingham’s Jewellery Quarter.

“I’m delighted to have supported DSK/Ryder to realise their design vision on this spectacular project. I worked with Anya (which is always great) to create an authentic, natural look. She wanted a space that was comfortable, relaxing but also boundary-pushing and breathtaking, in keeping with the remarkable location.

I think we’ve achieved something timeless and special, and I’m looking forward to dining at Orelle very soon.”

**John Rose**  
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Sophie Halliday is a Primary teacher from Lewisham, southeast London. In September 2022, she started a groundbreaking initiative that is bringing the worlds of education and design together. We spoke to Sophie to find out more.

# THE SAMPLE PROJECT

### What is The Sample Project?

With schools facing continuous cuts, battling with historic deficits, and recovering from the pandemic, children more than ever need a rich start to their education. The Sample Project aims to support primary schools in London, who are struggling to provide effective continuous provision within their Early Years Foundation Stage settings, using discontinued or out of season material samples. Every year, interior designers throw out tonnes of end-of-season samples from luxury fabrics to elevator door samples. One industry's trash is another's treasure!

### How are the samples used by educators and learners?

Children's imaginations work best when they are exposed to interesting and open-ended provision. Drawing from Froebel's Gifts Theory, The Sample Project offers children a chance to explore different materials to make sense of the world around them. The beauty of using donated sample materials lies in their powerful and open-ended nature. Children can manipulate them in different ways, making endless opportunities. When children are playing with 'loose parts' it is amazing to see the different ways they interpret the materials and expand and build upon what they know.

When teachers see children playing with samples, they see every single area of their learning being exercised. Samples are an invaluable resource to every early years setting and help children develop, extend, and push their imaginations to new dimensions. Schools are facing extreme budget cuts and are struggling to provide their settings with quality, durable and sustainable provision.

Samples not only allow children to create endless opportunities but also can be used for many, many years, meaning end-of-season samples don't have to end in a recycling bin but can live on in classrooms across the county.

### How did you come up with the idea for The Sample Project?

I studied Graphic Design at Kingston University and worked for a short while as a designer for a Design Council funded company called Creative Homes. We supported families with young children to build positive routines such as toothbrushing, toilet training etc. I realised my interest was more based around children's learning than designing and so I moved into education. I still love designing and have written a few picture books for young children.

One evening I went to my husband's workplace, at an architectural studio in Brixton, and was amazed by the golden tiles and velvet fabric catalogues, mesmerised by the metal circles and vibrant floor samples. All these treasures were sitting in an enormous bin ready to be thrown away. I rescued everything I could possibly fit into my bag and strapped it to my bike, to take to my classroom. It was then that I thought of the potential relationship between design practices and schools.

### What are your hopes or projections for The Sample Project?

I hope I can reach as many schools and homes as possible. There are challenges associated with scaling up. Ideally, I would find people to work with that could facilitate scale.

### How can people support the project?

People can help by getting in touch with any interesting surplus materials they have, or by buying a box for your local school. For every box I sell I give a free one away to a school or nursery. ♦

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