

Designing for Designers

**The Bartlett
School of Architecture
UCL**

Hawkins
Brown

Leading the strategic rethink

The Bartlett, a faculty of University College London (UCL), is considered one of the best architecture schools in the world. Its unit-based style of teaching introduced by Peter Cook in the 1990s broke the mould, producing provocative ideas, ground breaking research, and first class students.

As success built on success, it gradually outgrew its home – Wates House – a forbidding 1970s building originally designed to house the School of Environmental Studies. Anonymous on the outside, the interior was cramped - its small rooms, locked doors, dark corridors, and lack of communal spaces contrasting starkly with the luminous quality of its academic output. The fact that the building also performed poorly – too hot in the

summer, too cold in the winter, expensive to run – ensured that it was top of the list of priorities when the University published its estates renewal strategy.

Reprogramming for value

Initially brought in to address this poor performance, Hawkins\Brown saw that doing so would miss a trick. We demonstrated that a deep retrofit represented better long-term value for UCL.

It made sense to address the space constraints and outdated learning environments by rethinking the fundamental organisation of the faculty at the same time as addressing the building's poor performance.

Wates House became 22 Gordon Street. Completed in December 2016, the building now houses the School of Architecture alone and more than doubles the net internal area, making a teaching and research facility fit for the future.

The design of our new brick envelope respects its historic neighbours, flexing subtly on each of its façades. A stepped roofline and restrained colour palette balances the building's increased height and extended floorplates. This conscientious homework paid off: planning permission was granted in 2014 with the planning committee applauding its timeless and transformative design.

Expert user mediation

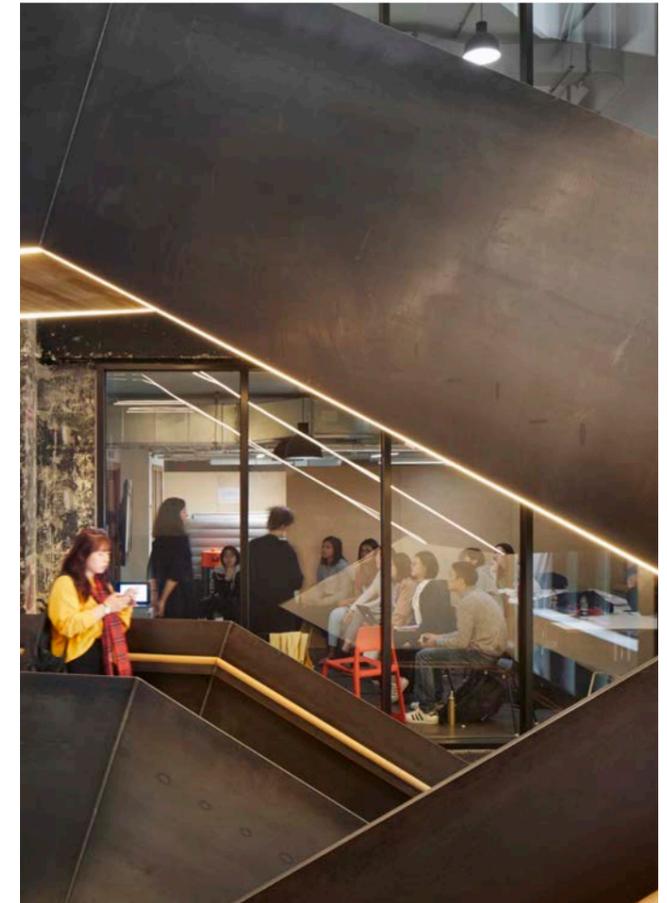
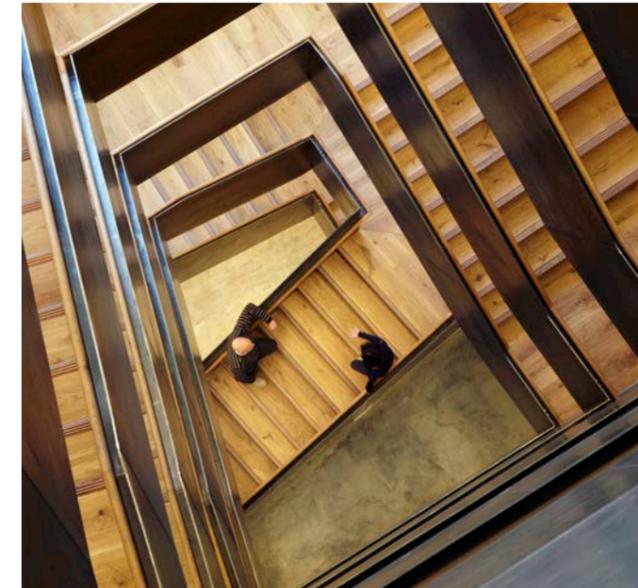
The key to constructive project management is good governance, especially in university settings where there are powerful and sometimes conflicting interests at play. Our first move was to identify the user groups – estate managers, academic staff and students – and listen to them.

Concurrently, we urged the appointment of a project champion and a design champion empowered to make quick decisions, with clear lines of communication to the client's board. With the enthusiastic support of the School's Dean, we also programmed a series of fact-finding missions to comparable schools of architecture in the UK, Europe and the US. This revealed critical lessons, but more importantly helped to build our team, smoothing the way to a common vision for the project.

Resolving the planning context

Previous efforts to redevelop the site had fallen at the planning hurdle. The end-of terrace site is complex and sensitive. Located to the north of UCL's central London Bloomsbury campus with its eclectic mix of institutional buildings, it also borders terraces of stately listed four-storey Georgian townhouses. The Grade II listed Neo-classical Friends Meeting House is directly opposite. Very unusually, the site straddles the boundary between two distinct conservation sub-areas. In short, it would take considerable skill to satisfy the local London Borough of Camden planning authority.

Our response is the result of wide consultation, deep research into historic building footprints and street patterns as well as testing views and vistas.



\When we saw all the students arriving back in the first week, there were smiles on their faces

Tom Noonan Associate

Designing for long-term value

There is nothing frivolous or wasteful in the final building, balancing architectural elegance with optimising value. Raw, hardwearing finishes tell the tale of the building's 1970s concrete origins. They will also survive intense use by notoriously hands-on maker students, a suitable backdrop to pinning up work, storing 3D models and staging exhibitions.

Resource instead was focused on mining extra space from the same plot and the strategic reconfiguration of the layout. Extra floors, the extended floor plate and a full-height infill extension double the usable area. Meanwhile, other departments – the faculty library and the School of Planning – have moved to other sites, allowing the School of Architecture to expand into the vacated space.

Breaking down the walls

Generous glazing at street level opens the building up to the local community, a welcoming transparency that signals its place as a public building.

Inside, breakout spaces radiate from the new centrepiece staircase, providing the physical and psychological room for staff and students to interact, explore, and exchange ideas.

The unit-based style of learning lives on, accommodated now in open-sided bays to alleviate the former pressure-cooker atmosphere. No longer stratified away from student activity, staff offices are interspersed with the learning studios, levelling hierarchies.

Project: The Bartlett School of Architecture

Location: Bloomsbury, London, UK

Client: University College London

Service: Architecture, interior design

Scope: New build, retrofit

Value: £25m

Status: Complete

Intelligent resilience

Our rigorous user consultation suggested design solutions. We took advantage of the opportunity to test them in the school's temporary decant home – a converted warehouse on Hampstead Road. Through this consultation process we were able to fine-tune our designs for furniture and joinery and confirm that students adjusted their behaviour to suit the open plan configuration of the unit studios.

Sustain

The building achieved BREEAM Excellent, exceeding UCL's campus-wide energy efficiency targets and transforming the life-cycle cost and comfort of using the building. Retaining the original concrete frame not only saved money and build-time, it saved 400 tonnes of carbon.

Flex

Communal spaces are deliberately versatile. Designed-in features actively encourage staff and students to bend them to their will, limited only by imagination. End-of-year shows can once again be accommodated in the school.

Adapt

Walls either pivot open or are lightweight, simplifying future layout reconfigurations as teaching and learning needs develop over time.

400

tonnes of carbon saved by retaining the original concrete frame.

\It was a privilege to lead the design of this project, and even better to collaborate so closely with an engaged client to design a building where the next generation of architects are now thriving

Euan Macdonald Partner



Making the most of your site

Hawkins\Brown is a modern British architectural practice with an award-winning approach to design. We put our hearts and minds into realising your project's potential. You'll discover creativity, commitment and a desire to collaborate to reach the best solution.

To find out more about our practice or talk to us about your project, contact:

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