



April 2010

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of Ireland's construction boom**
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Jonathan Sergison on Eric Parry's urban ethos



BUILDING ■ 50 New Bond Street/ 14 St George Street

Eric Parry Architects' repair of an urban block in London's West End demonstrates its belief in the civic role of office buildings, says Jonathan Sergison. Photographs: Tim Soar.

In recent years, no practice in this country has considered the workspace as an area of programmatic investigation more profoundly than Eric Parry Architects. Often such projects are treated as technical exercises or become over-deferential to the client's fiscal interests. While Parry's work doesn't disregard such concerns, it has a different departure point. Each project begins as an urban work, makes accurate readings of a city and is clear about how it can be reasonably adjusted.

In the late 1980s, Parry's office refurbishment in Greek Street, Soho, made a series of insertions and adjustments to the existing building. More recently, the practice has completed a workspace project adjacent to St Martin-in-the-Fields, a work of masterly urban repair with a bold attitude to the question of heritage. These earlier projects rehearse and enforce an architectural position which is

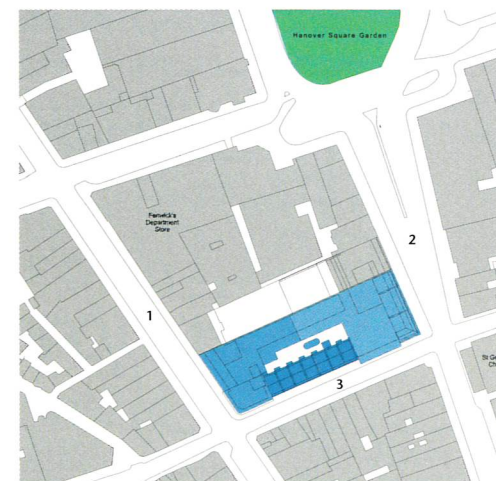
both generous, in that it offers a better sense of public realm, and exacting, as it considers the appropriate forms of intervention within sensitive preservation conditions.

At a recent talk about his experience of designing and constructing workspace, Parry began by referring to a project he undertook as a student of Dalibor Vesely, Peter Carl and Mohsen Mostafavi at the AA. This particular studio adopted a forceful intellectual position informed by an understanding of history. It had a highly personal and somewhat poetic attitude, richly layered in ideas and resulting in an intense, almost existential vision of architecture. At its core, this work is steeped in a humanistic tradition. Notions of meaning in the city as an inherited fabric continue to inform Eric Parry's work as much as the need to offer a sense of urban decorum and civic generosity.

Parry's office buildings, as places of work, could be viewed in the same way in which one considers housing. Office space contributes to a normative programme of the city and represents a large component of the urban

built fabric. Unlike housing, however, it has a more public role, and the manner in which an office building meets the city requires careful negotiation.

At 30 Finsbury Square (AT136), Parry proposed a solution that sensitively and boldly added to a somewhat fragmented square. At 5 Aldermanbury Square (AT188), the building acted as a tower in the city and became a formally bold example of this building type. It could be understood as a revision of a Miesian idea of an office building as tower, in the sense that it considers more than its own interest in purity, proportion and itself. Parry's approach takes all of these considerations as a starting point, but it adjusts to things that exist. The found situation is allowed to affect the formal and constructional ideas of each new project. Conversely, the project at 23 Savile Row (AT200) is a



Location plan The mixed-use scheme in London's West End comprises retail and office space divided between two buildings, 50 New Bond Street (1) and 14 St George Street (2), and residential and retail space in the refurbished terrace on Maddox Street (3).

Above left The corner of New Bond Street and Maddox Street. 50 New Bond Street (5438 sq m) has a new facade combining curved bay windows and sculptural faience (glazed terracotta) ribs. The Grade 2* listed 47-48 New Bond Street has been refurbished. The development also includes a large retail unit on New Bond Street, and the conversion to residential use of seven early Victorian houses on Maddox Street.

Above View west along Maddox Street. 14 St George Street (5846 sq m) has an additional storey above the existing listed facade, and a new facade to Maddox Street combining glass block and clear glass.

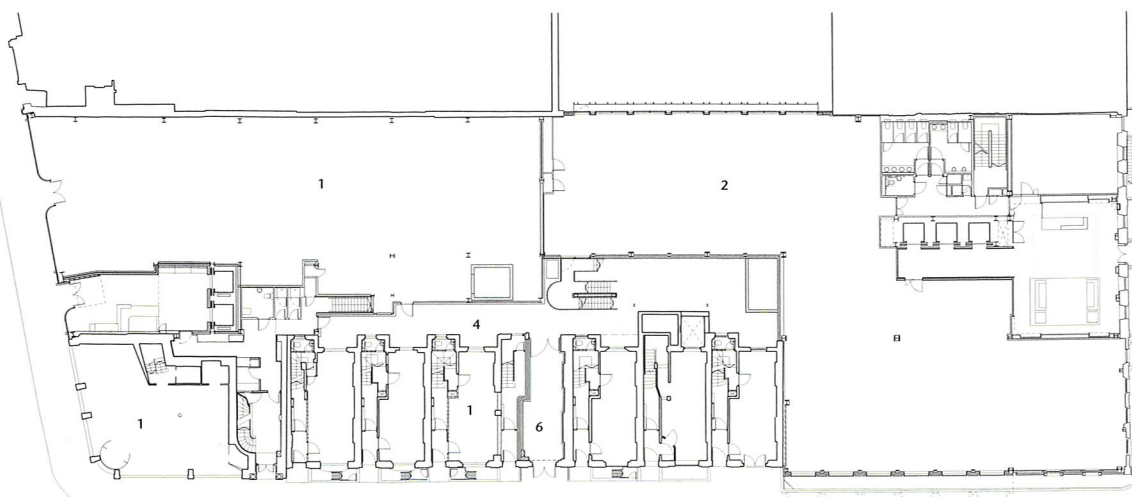
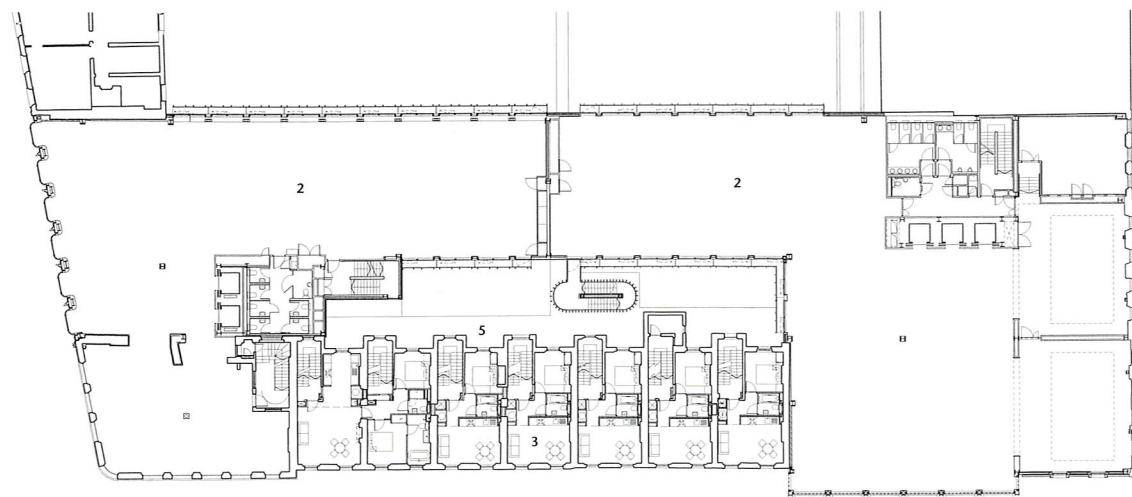


more sober example of a relaxed relationship to the normative. An essentially classical building with a sense of symmetry, it works, however, more boldly with tectonic interest and a highly personal sense of proportion.

I have reviewed briefly this body of built projects for two reasons. First, I believe that this body of work is a great lesson and a catalogue of solutions to this type of building programme in the city and, second, I would argue that the sum of the observations I have made (and many more that I have not) is explored further at 50 New Bond Street. However, this project is a much more complex undertaking than its predecessors – an act of urban repair as well as adjustment and extension.

The project on New Bond Street is the third occasion that Parry has been invited to design a building for the same client, Scottish Widows. Repeat business is indicative of client satisfaction, but what is noteworthy in this collaboration is the extent to which the architect has been allowed to develop ideas and construction proposals that many developers would hardly find acceptable.

Left Retained facade and additional storey on St George Street.
Plans Ground and typical upper floor: 1 retail, 2 office, 3 residential, 4 courtyard, 5 void, 6 shared service entrance.



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The facades to all the new-build public components of this project are deep. The new facade to 50 New Bond Street maintains a careful relationship to the surrounding nineteenth century buildings. It is, however, working much harder, as it contains structure, thermal barrier, external cladding and internal linings. The oriel windows offer a generous relationship with the street.

Parry's early sketches also explore another interest in this project: the faience, or ceramic elements create a vertical relief to the facade and reflect light into internal spaces in a subtle and unexpected manner. I am reminded of HP Berlage's Holland House in the City of London (1916) and the equivalent ordering of the elevation through a vertical element. Parry certainly understands the manner in which such an element is experienced obliquely in the street.

An early study of this component in the building – the ceramic pieces – suggests a somewhat playful interest. The projecting element shifts along its vertical length. It is an exercise in geometric manipulation, and clearly not structural, but it is not purely decorative because it contributes to the use of the building and does not simply embellish it. The handling of the joints, which are sometimes open and sometimes pointed in a dark pigmented lime mortar, makes it clear that in this instance the facade is not a further



Above, right Original panelling reinstated in meeting room in the 14 St George Street offices; interior views of 14 St George Street. Below Long section (W-E) through 50 New Bond Street and 14 St George Street, and cross section (N-S). The form of contract was JCT Design and Build (with amendments), and the duration on site was 21 months. Annual carbon dioxide emissions for 50 New Bond Street have been calculated at 22.58 kg/m², while those for 14 St George Street are calculated to be 22.72 kg/m². The building has an Excellent BREEAM rating.

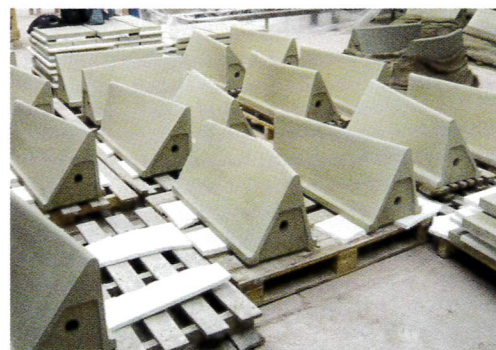




investigation of a tectonic expression. This is revealed in the sum of these details and most explicitly in the way that the ceramic facade sits over a substantial opening at ground level. In time, this will be filled in by a shop front with its own approach to display, and Parry has allowed the greatest freedom for this to happen.

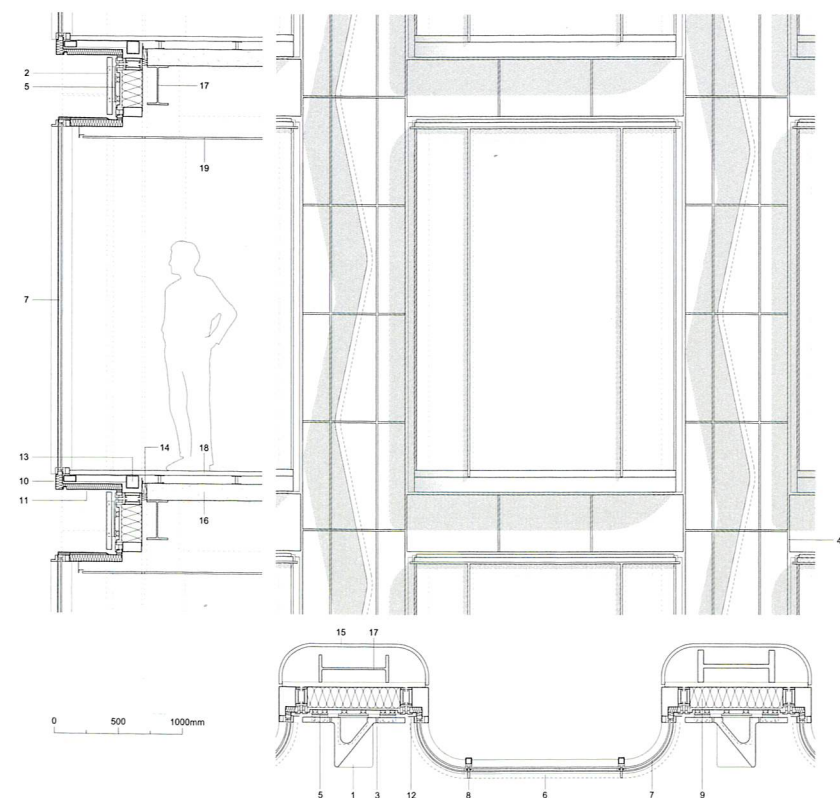
The new facade to Maddox Street explores an entirely different set of concerns. If the ceramic New Bond Street facade has a gentle

Detail 1 Faience column units, 2 faience spandrel units, 3 dark grey lime mortar joint, 4 mortar joint left open, 5 ss faience support, 6 oriel window unit, 7 dg unit w solar control coating, 8 steel-reinforced aluminium mullion w external fin, 9 column unit, 10 brown/black hyper-durable organic powder coat to exposed aluminium surfaces, 11 high gloss black polyester powder-coated aluminium panel, 12 angle track for LEDs, 13 galvanised steel frame, 14 fire/smoke stop, 15 curved grg panel, 16 in-situ concrete composite slab, 17 primary steel-work, 18 raised floor, 19 suspended ceiling.



relationship to the Arts and Crafts tradition, this part of the building is indebted to the modern movement. It adopts a form of industrial pragmatism and the freedom to employ repetition in the making of things. Here, also, the force behind Parry's work is based on urban observation. The manipulation of the section is skilfully handled to bring light into the basement and ground floor spaces. At first floor, the building cantilevers over the pavement, its soffit adorned with a mosaic by Antoni Malinowski.

Up until this point I have dealt with the facades that open out onto the public realm. It should be pointed out that the possibility of creating any new component of building was made possible through the demolition of a piano factory built on the site in the 1930s. Eric Parry has been ingenious in the way that a quantum of additional office space has been added to this site without significantly affecting the urban presence of the buildings in this block. This has been done not only through the construction of the new buildings described above, but also through the



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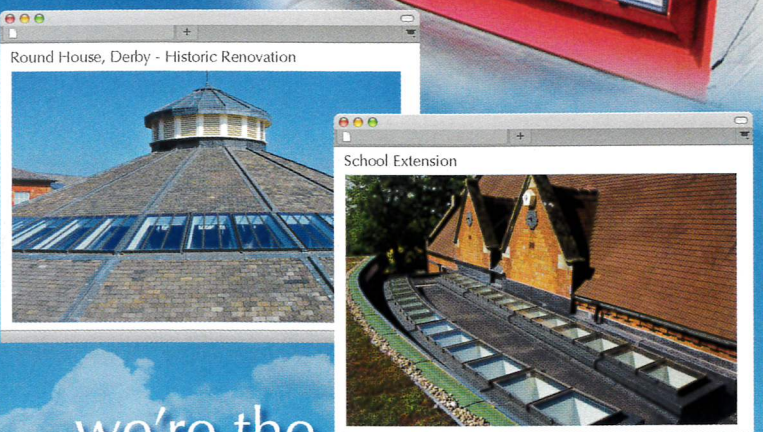
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addition of a new floor to the Hanoverian buildings on St George Street. A volume has been added here for compositional reasons, in terms of the relationship to the new facade on Maddox Street, but this has been done in a way that is impossible to read when you see the completed building from the street. Internally, however, this work becomes very evident.

Along Maddox Street, seven early Victorian buildings have been converted into apartments above ground floor. This fulfils a local planning requirement to provide a residential component that is at least 50 per cent of



the area of new office space. The requirement has been followed seriously and its purpose respected. It will positively contribute to the success of the building, because the mix of programme will bring a greater sense of life overall.

Another aspect of this project that should be noted is its environmental strategy. This building has an Excellent BREEAM rating, reflecting the serious attitude adopted. Decisions about the possibility of retaining and extending the life of buildings have been taken carefully. When it was felt appropriate to demolish a building, the replacement has been responsibly considered. The depth of the plan is in all cases reasonable and the level of natural daylighting is excellent. Natural ventilation is available as an option as all new office spaces have opening windows, and a brown/green roof allows natural habitats to be established. This is an environmentally responsible set of decisions rather than a box-ticking exercise, and the building does not overtly display the intention at work.

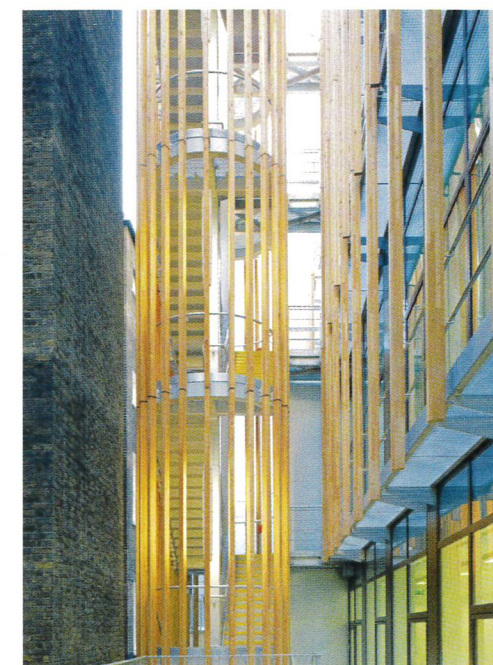
Overall this project is complex, rich and urbanistically subtle. It makes for an interesting complement to what is an impressive



body of work demonstrating how to make buildings for office use in London. I now eagerly await the next instalment.

Jonathan Sergison is a principal at Sergison Bates Architects, whose projects include office buildings in London and Shanghai. He is also associate professor at the school of architecture at Mendrisio, Switzerland.

Above Aluminium and glass block facade to Maddox Street. A mosaic by artist Antoni Malinowski was commissioned for the soffit. **Left** Timber-mullioned galleries to the internal court provide solar shading and access for maintenance. The court provides outdoor terraces for the offices.



Project team
Architect: Eric Parry Architects; design team: Eric Parry, Nick Jackson, Justin Sayer, Jeremy Foster, Damien Lee, Mohammed Ageli, Chloe Robinson, Nicholas Hornig, Krystin Schwendel, Vania Ramos; development manager: Hanover Cube; structural engineer: Ramboll; services engineer: Hilson Moran; qs: Gardiner & Theobald; townscape consultant: Richard Coleman Citydesigner; planning consultant: Gerald Eve; cladding consultant: Arup Facade Engineering; approved inspector: Approved Inspector Services; party wall surveyor: Joel Michaels; main contractor: Bovis Lend Lease; art consultant: Modus Operandi; artists: Martin Richman (facade lighting), Antoni Malinowski (mosaic); acoustic engineer: Deane Austin Associates; fire safety engineer: Safe Consulting; client: Scottish Widows.

Selected suppliers and subcontractors
Cladding subcontractor: GIG Fassaden, Bassett & Findley; stone: Szerelmey; joinery: Ellmer Construction; faience installation: Irvine Whitlock; mosaic: Orsoni; facade lighting: the Colour Light Company; brickwork: Lesterose Builders; metalwork: Balguard Engineering; roofing: SM; faience: Shaws of Darwen; ironmongery: Allgood; fibrous plaster ceilings: Ribbon & Reed; Purbeck stone: Haysom; brick: Ibstock; paint: Dulux, Farrow & Ball; timber floors: Arden & Hodges; glass blocks: Pittsburgh Corning; glazing: Flachglas Wernberg, Eckelt, St Gobain, Finiglas; cladding coatings: Agru.

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NEW BOND STREET

Patrick Lynch on Eric Parry Architects' sumptuous Mayfair office scheme – page 20

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BUSINESS CLASS

Eric Parry Architects' latest office scheme on New Bond Street reflects the charm and elegance of its Mayfair location, says *Patrick Lynch*. Photography by *Timothy Soar*

Eric Parry graduated from the Architectural Association exactly 30 years ago. His diploma project was undertaken in Unit 1, then taught by Dalibor Vesely, Mohsen Mostafavi and Peter Carl. *AA Projects Review 1978-9* presents an axonometric drawing of Parry's *Forum Project*, in which the facade oscillates between figuration and fragmentation. Classicised tectonic frames and sculptural figures coalesce around broken arches. It evokes a clear sense of orchestrated movement from street towards a shaded background, a threshold between the theatricality of the city and the background beyond. Vesely declared that 'It is not always easy, but it is always revealing to discover that behind the directly visible order of the city and its conventional representations (morphology, typology, figure-ground plans, etc), there is not a chaos but an order of a different kind, more profound and more permanent than the visible order itself.' The unit drew on the writings of Jean Genet on theatre, demanding that 'architecture (city) if necessary should look for support and enrichments of meaning in different territories of culture which happen to be in better shape or more meaningful'. Note the elision of architecture with city.

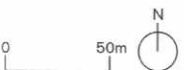
New Bond Street is a particularly rich vertical city. Viewing rooms of major

international art galleries sit above couture shops in courtyards overlooked by Edwardian office buildings, Georgian houses (now mostly flats) and quite chi-chi, often rather bald modernist blocks. The tension between the elaborate and gentlemanly facades of Mayfair and its curiously libertine interior worlds is the perfect territory for what Vesely called the 'deeper order of the city'. The question is then, can a speculative office and retail development – even if for a venerable institution such as Scottish Widows – contribute to 'the transformation of the urban space and restoration of its meaning'? >>

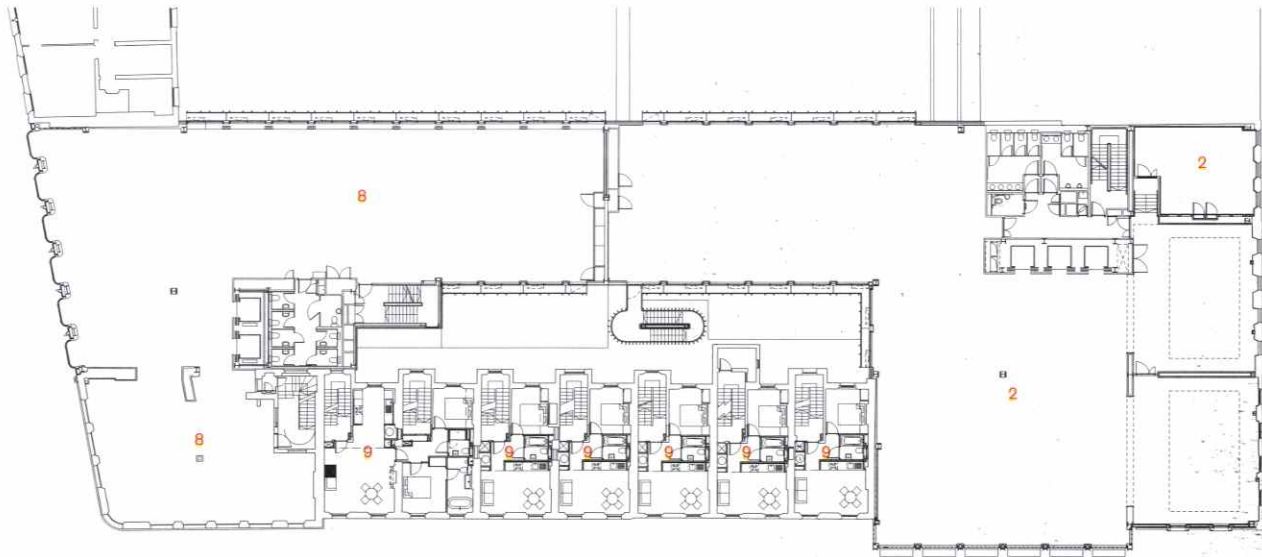
Site plan



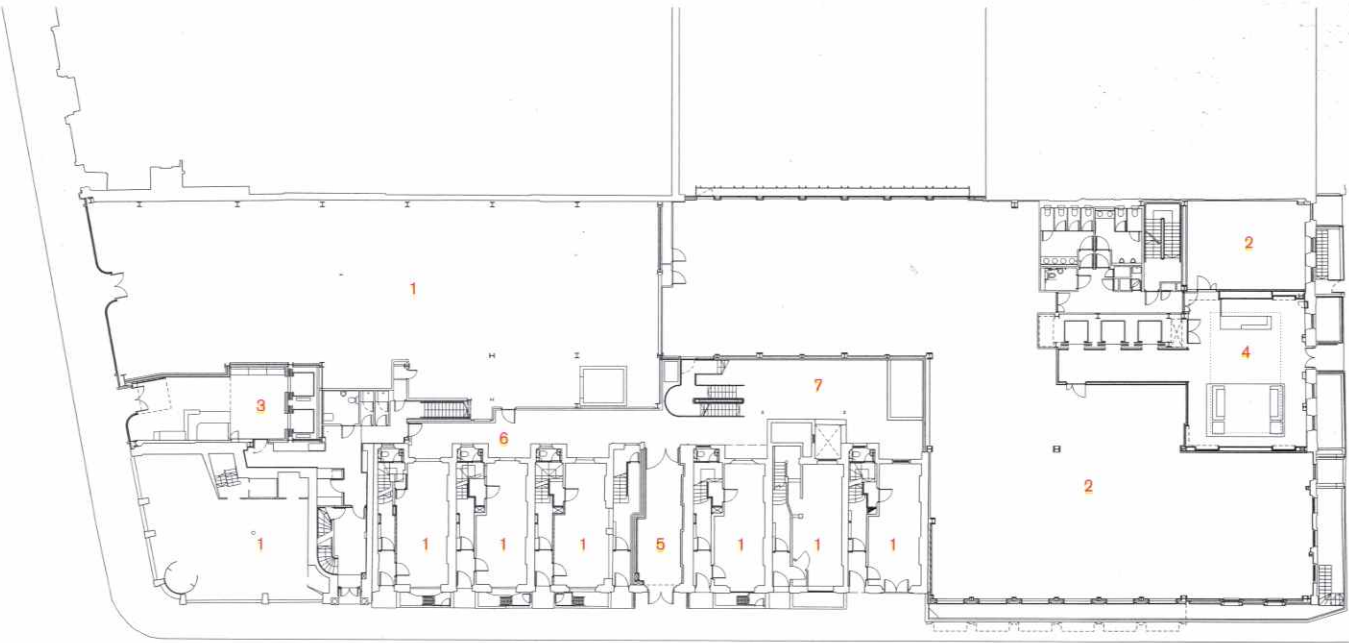
■ 14 St George St
■ 50 New Bond St
■ 46-48 Maddox St



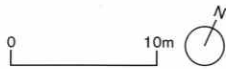
Second (typical) floor plan



Ground-floor plan



- 1. Retail unit
- 2. Office, 14 St George Street
- 3. Reception, 50 New Bond Street
- 4. Reception, 14 St George Street
- 5. Service entrance (shared)
- 6. Bicycle storage, 50 New Bond Street
- 7. Bicycle storage, 14 St George Street
- 8. Office, 50 New Bond Street
- 9. Residential units



This architect has so far realised three of the best office buildings in London since the 1980s, two of which, like New Bond Street, have been for client Scottish Widows. 30 Finsbury Square and 5 Aldermanbury Square were both shortlisted for the Stirling Prize and it is easy to imagine, looking at Timothy Soar's sumptuous photographs, that this will be, too. Commercial projects, unless they are by Foster or Rogers, don't win big awards in this country, yet the majority of buildings in London and indeed most cities of the world are funded by, and home to, business activities. The Medicis started off as pharmacists and commissioned both Filippo Brunelleschi and Michelangelo; Johnson Wax kept Frank Lloyd Wright engaged for 20 years. Architects have always negotiated the difficult task of representing both the needs and appetites of powerful institutions, attempting to ground these in either appropriate modesty (in Catholic countries) or appropriate generosity (in Protestant ones). For me, the key moment in an architect's commission is the point at which you ask yourself: what is my task here and what is important in what I am being asked to do, and is it appropriate here?

In his *Historical Study Report* of October 2003, historical planning expert Richard Coleman noted that the various buildings



on the site had been adapted to the changing needs of retailing throughout the 20th century and had even added several new shop fronts quite recently. A case was also made for the demolition of Michael Rosenauer's building at 49-50 New Bond Street, since only part of his original design had been built and its facade drastically altered. Rosenauer was Bauhaus-trained and a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. His celebrated Time & Life Building (1953), also on New Bond Street, famously accommodates a sculpted screen by Henry Moore. Despite the elegance of Time & Life's travertine facades, Rosenauer adopted sculpture as if it were a logo, trapping it in a billboard.

Parry's project replaces the weaker Rosenauer scheme on New Bond Street with a much deeper office building. He has also refurbished the Georgian houses on Maddox Street, creating bijou apartments. In order to make the scheme work financially, Parry had to persuade Westminster Council of the necessity of adding another storey along St George Street. Overall, he has created three times as much office accommodation as before. The removal of a naff facade by Tribich Design Associates (1971) on Maddox Street enabled the architect to propose a new way to mend the broken Georgian street. >>



It is like being in a Max Ernst collage or a section drawing through a city

This page
A new
cantilevered
elevation of
black steel and
glass blocks
redefines
Maddox Street



A cantilevered black steel and glass block screen does this in an abstracted and inverted manner, suggesting the vertical character of the missing bit whilst opening up the pavement below.

Both new office buildings are mixed-mode and have opening windows that are linked to a sophisticated building management system. You look out onto the neighbouring buildings through elegant larch fins that shroud escape stairs and walkways. It is like being in a Max Ernst collage or a section drawing through a city. This incredibly complex topography is countered by a staggeringly clear *parti*. Parry's architecture appears simple, allowing the city to appear complex.

The west-facing New Bond Street green facade looks solid when viewed askance but is almost all glass. When you step out into the projecting bay windows you feel privileged to be part of London. Parry's architecture recalls the sumptuous waistcoats of gentleman publishers and the cravats of patrician gallerists: silk linings glimpsed through tweed and grey flannel. I can't help thinking

of clothes made in Mayfair and of the novels of Muriel Spark. Parry's imagination encompasses the glamour of shoe shops and the fecundity of trade and art galleries, placing each into a physical, actual, implied and potential dialogue. Gaudí, Victor Horta and Giuseppe Terragni seem to meet on a London street and master English and recover its eclectic roots. I would argue that it has taken 30 years for us to recover what the previous 50 years of destruction and bad faith obscured with its specious rhetoric of transparency. Parry's recent projects redeem tradition and modernity without betraying either. Whilst St Martin-in-the-Fields is so obviously richer in programmatic and topographic depth and fulfilled theatricality, Parry's 'business' projects seem to set up urban drama. Sometimes you have to stand out from the crowd, but the trick is to avoid looking like a clown. Vesely declared in 1979 that the 'city needs to point out itself, needs to make its presence felt'. Parry points us to what is not lost, and in doing this he recreates the context in which my generation and the next will work. ■

Left Deep plan floorplates yield three times more office space across the development
Opposite The New Bond Street facade with decorative faience fins

Start on site January 2008
Contract duration 21 months
Gross internal floor area 5,438m² (50 New Bond Street)
5,846m² (14 St George Street)
Form of contract JCT Design and Build (with amendments)
Total cost Not supplied
Client Scottish Widows
Architect Eric Parry Architects
Main contractor Bovis Lend Lease
Structural engineer Ramboll UK
Services engineer Hilson Moran
Mechanical engineer MJ Lonsdale
Electrical engineer Hills Building Services
Quantity surveyor Gardiner & Theobald
Townscape consultant Richard Coleman
Citydesigner
BREEAM rating Excellent
Annual CO₂ emissions 22.58kg/m²

