



February 2009

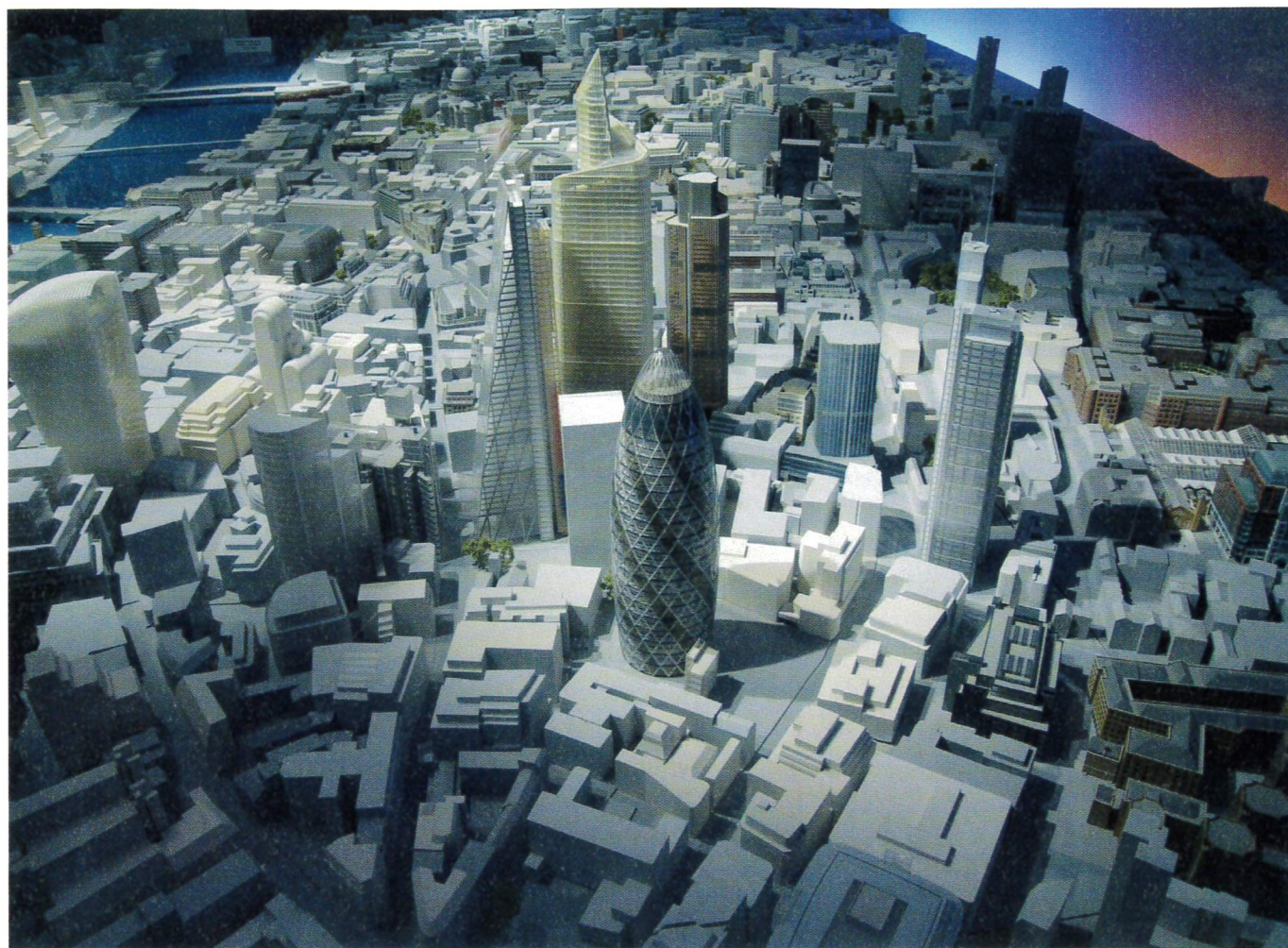
A last hurrah? New architecture in the Square Mile

City planner Peter Rees on its past and future, Maxwell Hutchinson on SOM, Patrick Lynch on Eric Parry, plus Grimshaw and GMW

Swiss doubles: Brendan Woods on Christian Kerez and Valerio Olgiati

Jørn Utzon's final work • Stamp on Palladio • Sam Jacob on the M25

Envelope: Massimiliano Fuksas, Clash Associates, Sauerbruch Hutton



another bone of contention with heritage campaigners. But Rees is at pains to establish that these towers are the product of necessity, not vanity: 'There's nothing particularly good about a tall building. We didn't say we must have tall buildings in the City of London. We've run out of land in our small area, therefore we need to go up. Grouping two or

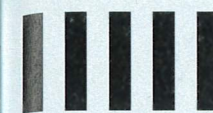
Above Proposed tower cluster. At the beginning of 2009, the development of Richard Rogers' wedge-shaped 122 Leadenhall (the Cheesegrater) was on hold, and the fate of 20 Fenchurch Street (the Walkie Talkie) by Rafael Viñoly was unconfirmed. Construction is underway on both the 288m Pinnacle on Bishopsgate (aka the Helter Skelter) and the 242m Heron Tower, both designed by KPF.

three buildings together minimises the impact and maximises the benefit, because the more you create density in one area, the more synergy there is.'

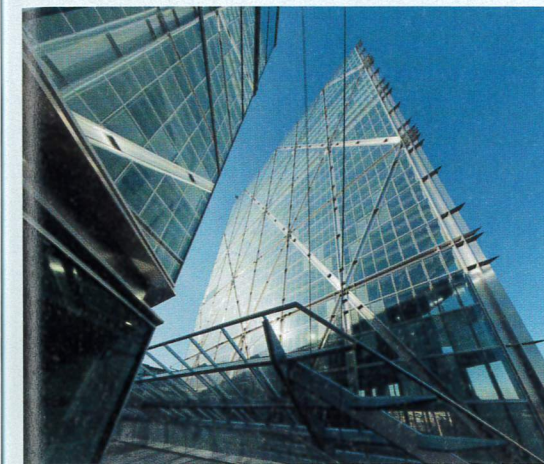
The City's solution, he says, is urbanistically responsible, unlike the forest of 'demented telegraph poles' proposed in other parts of London. 'We were careful to position the cluster at a point where it wouldn't damage the views of St Paul's,' he insists. Not that this represents a concession to English Heritage. 'We've been protecting the views of St Paul's since before planning legislation was introduced, going back to the mid-1930s when the St Paul's Heights strategy was created.'

Rees credits Foster & Partners' 30 St Mary Axe with changing the game in the City, demonstrating that tall buildings and unconventional forms could win popular acceptance. And while he is dismissive of buildings that are self-consciously iconic – 'if you set out to design an icon all you do is create wackiness' – he welcomes the increasing diversity. 'We didn't want another London Wall, as it

Left Location plan and visualisations of One New Change, designed by Jean Nouvel and currently under construction at the end of Cheapside opposite St Paul's Cathedral (due to complete in 2010). The development comprises 20,000 square metres of retail space over three storeys and 32,000 square metres of offices. Nouvel has described his intervention in this most sensitive of contexts as being like a stealth bomber – the faceted glazed facades are intended to reflect the stone of surrounding structures.



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BUILDING

Eric Parry Architects' 60 Threadneedle Street simultaneously satisfies the demands of art and commerce, says Patrick Lynch. Photos by Tim Soar.

Eric Parry's office building on Threadneedle Street sits halfway between James Stirling's No 1 Poultry and Richard Rogers' Lloyd's building, in more than a simple geographical sense. If the former posthumous work exudes an almost science fiction attitude towards the past – like one of Joseph Gandy's ruination watercolours – then Lloyd's too can be seen today as an example of nostalgia for the future. Rogers' atrium is reminiscent of Georgian industrial architecture as well as 1980s dystopian movies such as *Blade Runner* and *Brazil*. No 1 Poultry is infused with a similar collagist sensibility, and Parry has been known in the past to adopt a similarly eclectic approach. His neighbours Soane and Cockerell and Tite were inspired by antiquity and the Renaissance, and the City of London is a kind of museum of grand architecture, both of the foolish and ambitious attempts to

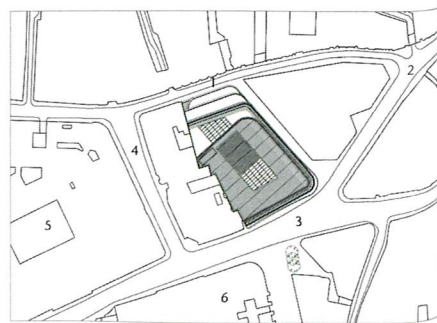


engage money with civility. The City has a latent urbanity, whereby medieval streets and arcane rituals force neoclassical facades into displays of decorum that never quite come off. It is as if the Anglican fudge of 'English Catholicism' compromises both architecture and commerce and what results are marooned examples of Grand Architecture on tight plots, mean and exaggerated. On Threadneedle Street, in retrospect, it is



obvious that something else was called for than yet more stone. Yet the temptation to join in the choir of Soane, Cockerell et al must have been difficult to resist, and one could be forgiven for expecting Parry to have adapted his success at Finsbury Square (AT136) to this similarly masonry setting.

He resisted, and the result is an intriguing and singular act of imagination that appears like a shadow or a lacuna in the streetscape,



one that reflects as much as it absorbs. He confidently holds his own amongst his fellow Royal Academicians.

A new street amplifies the medieval setting, and 'glass vitrines' offer up the hope at least of a commercial public realm. Opposite the entrance an existing square is given scale and definition by the new building, and a forgotten space now seems obviously lovely. Breaking away from the former Stock



Exchange tower (refurbished by Grimshaw/GMW, see p40) defines Parry's building as a block and the planners must be applauded for encouraging this. It enables Parry to put his energy into focusing and directing the movement of the sun and of pedestrians, in a context where both are usually subservient to cars or the bogus classicism of overblown porticos. Instead, his building can play a delightful game of repressed recession and

Above View from Old Broad Street towards the Royal Exchange (far left); view of the principal atrium from the lift lobby (centre); Threadneedle Street is a new east passage descending towards Throgmorton Street to the right, whose creation re-established an urban block and created the opportunity for the design of two corners. *Location plan* 1 Throgmorton Street, 2 Old Broad Street, 3 Threadneedle Street, 4 Bartholomew Lane, 5 Bank of England, 6 Royal Exchange.

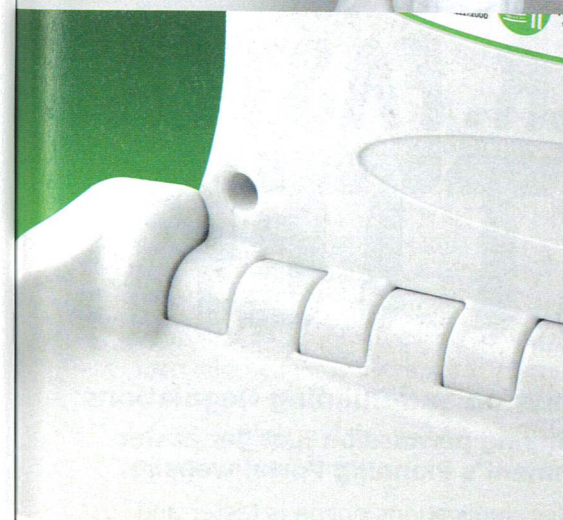


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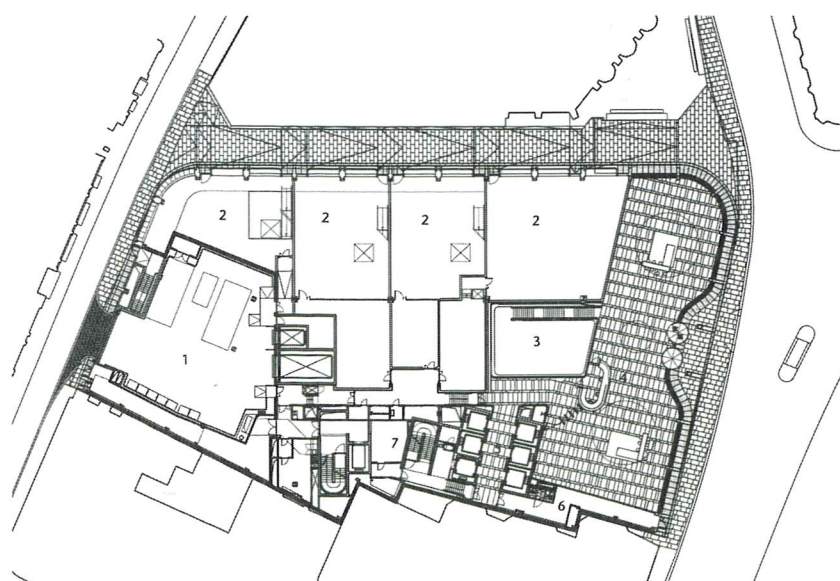
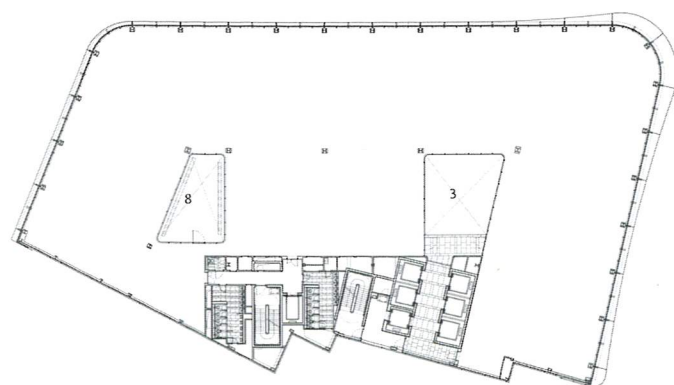
surprise on the one hand – the glass skin – and sexy, slightly louche enticement on the other. Cast into shadow but illuminated within from above, the lobby seems to extend the public realm deep into the plan and section.

Upon arrival the lobby ceiling compresses your view until the startling full-height south atrium offers release. Glass is cast in elliptical curves that appear solid and reflective. From inside the wells appear like bodies of light, densifying the space. On the floors above they appear also as dense pools of light and reflections, and the edges of the floors dissolve so that your peripheral vision is drawn out to the landscape of rooftops beyond. Standing on the upper floors is a fresh and exhilarating experience, more akin to being in the natural world than the deadening interiors of most offices. I cannot think of any other commercial building where the world beyond the interior is brought into focus by the experience of being in one.

Parry is justly proud of the structural clarity of the 15 metre spans achieved, and this canny

Above Principal atrium; the curved exterior is echoed in the delicate and more intimate atrium detailing. Two atriums penetrate the 60m floorplate, bringing natural light into the necessarily deep plan. The smaller north atrium stops at third floor to maximise the area of two dealing floors below.

Plans Ground and third floors: 1 loading bay, 2 retail unit, 3 south atrium void, 4 reception lobby, 5 lift lobby, 6 escape corridor, 7 fire-fighting stairs, 8 north atrium void.



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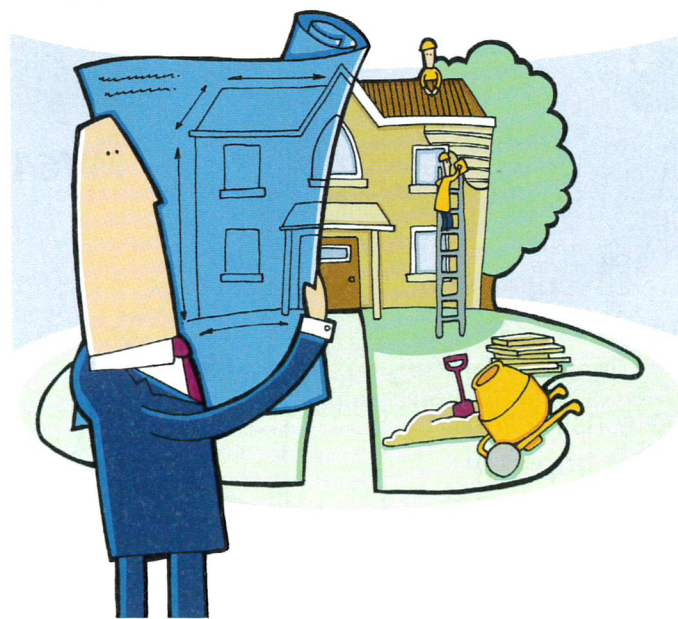


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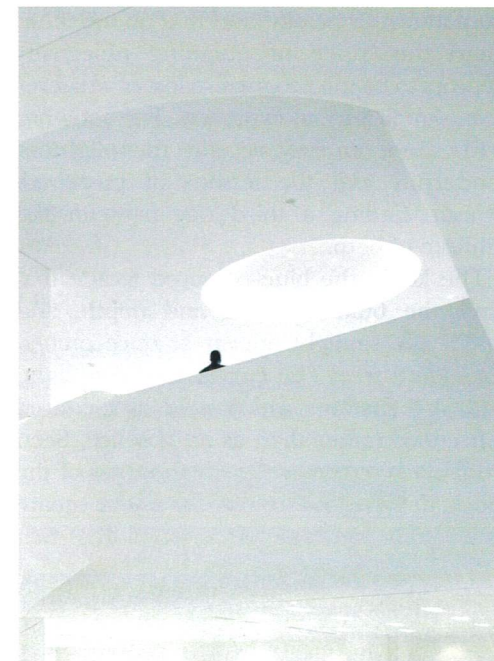
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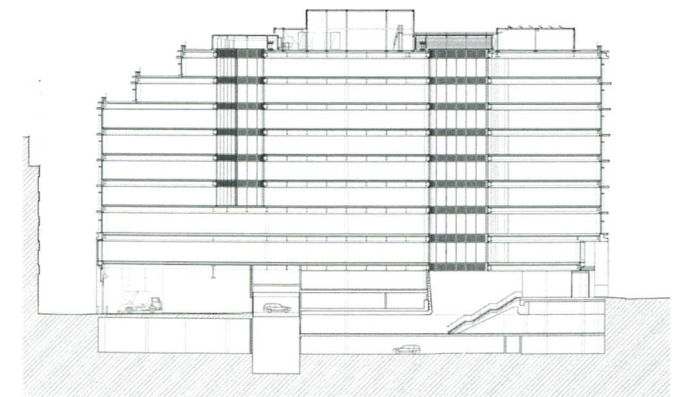
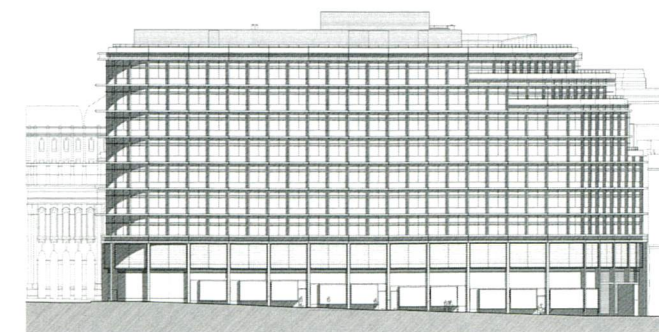
agility has enabled money to be spent on the special paint finish of the aluminium facade. While the building received planning consent before Part L2 changes to the Building Regulations the design team worked hard to achieve an 'excellent' BREEAM rating. The facade shades the interiors while also responding to the scale and rhythm of its neighbours. Both inner and outer worlds are brought together by a facade composed as a multiplication of the ubiquitous 1.5m tiling grid that is to modern commercial buildings – what the Venetian Piedra was to Sansovino or the Mantovan Bracchia was to Alberti.



Proportion, order, scale and tectonics were the lingua franca of educated architects until recently, and Parry manages to make architecture that seems at once appropriate and also catalytic. He understands the technical and economic challenges facing the architect today yet somehow his rigorous approach to problem solving is not dominant and neither is his rhetoric. Instead, his building recalls the most optimistic aspects of modernism and the more sensual aspects of classical architecture.



Above View to reception from lower ground floor; base of principal atrium, lower ground floor; atrium corner detail.
Below East elevation and N-S section.



Allowing the midnight blue structural frame to oscillate between solar shade and portico liberates the facade from a literal obsession with structural purity. It is both responsive to questions of scale and decorum whilst being a 'state of the art' response to practical questions in a way that both Lloyd's and Poultry never were. Parry's architecture sits at the threshold between instrumental and representational notions of ecology, fusing a contemporary attitude towards energy usage with the best aspects of what



Left Detail of shadow shelves, Threadneedle Street.
Below/below left East passage with retail vitrines. The double-height base of the building reflects the muscularity of several neighbours, most notably Soane's Bank of England wall.
Bottom Preliminary facade study.

Karsten Harries calls for in *Infinity and Perspective* (2001): 'an altogether new post-postmodernist geocentrism'.

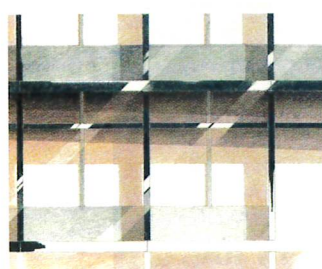
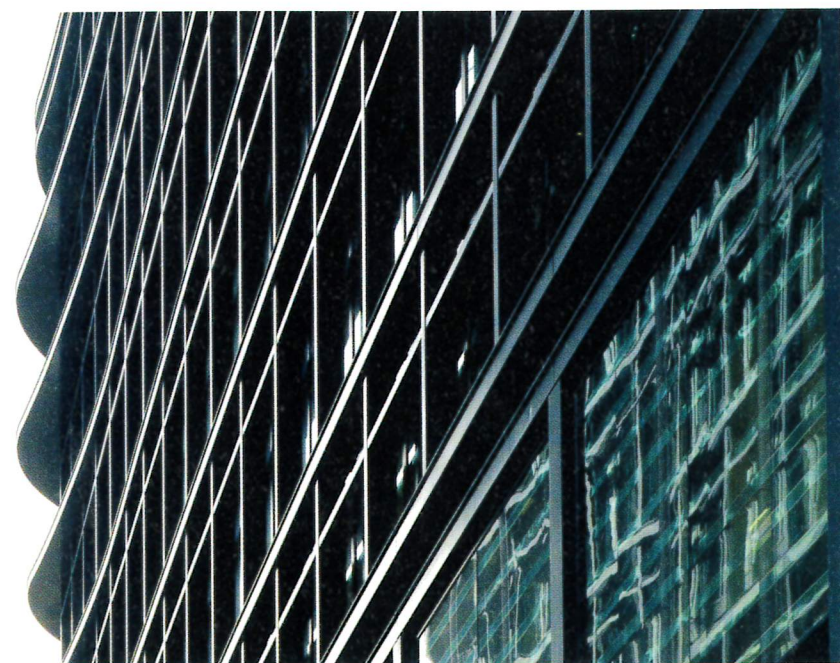
What do I mean by this? If architecture is to develop beyond the mutually antagonistic discourse of theory on the one hand and commercial opportunism on the other, then this building offers us another paradigm. Harries suggests that post-modernists valued 'sublimity over beauty' and that on the other hand the 'price of pursuing objectivity appears to be the progressive loss of whatever gives significance to existence'. Parry neither refuses nor entirely accepts the plight of modernity and the lessons of post-modernism, finding a third way between the nihilism of both.

The key is the blue coloured facade that gives the building body and depth, and makes the sunlight appear at once orchestrated and free. The curves modulate light, and also shadows which read as coloured reflections rather than as an absence. Seen from afar the curves densify the mass of the block, defining the scale of the public square as a volume, and operate as mouldings that



Project team
Architect: Eric Parry Architects; design team: Eric Parry, Nigel Lea, Merit Claussen, Robert Dawson, Thorsten Overberg, Claudia Tschunko, Alvaro Valdivia a l'Onions, Laura Miller, Deniza Moreau; structural engineer: WSP Group; services engineer: Hilson Moran Partnership; facade consultant: Arup Facade Engineering; fire engineer: SAFE; qs: Davis Langdon; project manager: GVA Second London Wall; environmental consultant: Hoare Lea; planning consultant: Montagu Evans; contractor: Bovis Lend Lease; client: Hammerson UK.

Selected suppliers and subcontractors
Envelope and atrium cladding: Josef Gartner; dichroic glass: Schott; precast concrete cladding: Techrete; louvre roof screening, internal blinds: Levolut; inverted roof, composite cladding and waterproofing: Prater; granite stone flooring: Cawdor; internal doors: Leaderflush, Profab; Accent Hansen; ironmongery: Allgood; GRG wall cladding: Simplicity; raised floors: Kingspan; substructure and concrete: McDermott.



modulate the face of the house. Seen obliquely they add vitality and seem to ripple, like muscles under a thin dress. At this point in his career you could expect Parry to become at once overly emphatic and cautious, yet his work is becoming both more direct and more nuanced. His imagination blossoms out of sturdy limbs.

Lynch Architects' current projects include an office building, affordable housing and a library at the Victoria transport interchange in London.

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