

Tower of learning

Edward Cullinan's library and IT centre at Fitzwilliam College.

Designed by Edward Cullinan Architects, the new library and IT facility at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, extends and completes the east wing of the 1959 Denys Lasdun college masterplan. The junction between the library and the existing residential block is marked by a three-storey tower which contains reading spaces arranged around a helical stair. The tower serves not only as a device to extend the main body of the library above the roof line of the adjacent housing, but also as a pivot to rotate the western elevation in relation to the Grove, a house which predates the college and now sits in the centre of its grounds.

The reinforced concrete structure is clad in a dark brick with a quarter bond to soften the radius and emphasise the spiral expression implied by the windows. The masonry elements are interspersed with vertical oak timber panels which anticipate the chalky gault of the Grove's masonry facades.

The architect says brick was a natural choice for the library as Lasdun's original design for the college comprised a strong horizontal concrete frame carried on an army of vertical blue/black brick soldier courses. The library continues the theme of light brick tones at the college, evidenced in previous schemes by MJP, van Heyningen & Haward and Allies & Morrison.

Credits Photos Simon Feneley.



Boxing clever

Brick massing is used to skillful effect on a mixed-use development in Southwark by Panter Hudspith.

Bear Lane is a £14m mixed-use development located on a triangular site in Southwark, south London. The mass of the building is broken down through the use of stacked elements so the scheme is perceived as something other than a typical apartment building.

In selecting the facing brick two criteria were considered. First, they were to echo the stocks used in the nineteenth-century warehouses that once dominated the area. Second, it was felt that the use of two differing yet related brick types would emphasise the notion of the building being created from separate brick 'boxes'.

The stacked blocks are constructed from one of two shades of stock-type brick selected for the upper floors, with metal windows complementing the brickwork and board-lined balconies. The ground floor features grey metal shopfront windows between reconstituted stone columns that raise the stacked volumes off the ground.

Precast brick lintels are used not only to separate the brick boxes with the starting and stopping of the two main types of contrasting facing brickwork, but also to create single-brick-depth window reveals where required. These allow the windows to be located either flush with the facades or recessed by 200mm, further emphasising the movement within the massing.

To complete the illusion, it was essential that the exposed balcony soffits – formed by the contrasting facing masonry being 'pulled apart' – were constructed of brick, say the architects, since this would allow the masonry to feel like it was a volume and not merely a skin. Engineered brick-slip soffit panels formed part of the carpentry package, with the brickwork subcontractor pointing up the slips after they were installed to match the facing brickwork.

Below Typical upper floor plan.
Above Right Detail section through facade. Key: 1 in-situ cast concrete floor slab, 2 clay facing brickwork, 3 brick faced precast lintel and soffit edging, 4 brick support system, 5 brick-slip soffit, 6 powder-coated steel handrail, 7 composite timber/aluminium door.

Credits Photos Keith Collie.



