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The site of Clerkenwell Workshops has a colourful history, writes Mackay & Partners. A nunnery and part of the Clerkenwell priory occupied the space in the Middle Ages, and the current structure was built in 1820 as a book depository for the new Central London Schools. It served the school opposite, itself on the site of the House of Detention linked to the Clerkenwell courthouse in Clerkenwell Green.

In the 1960s, the depository was converted into one of London's first workshops for small, local businesses. A community of smelters, platers,

book binders and artists thrived there, serving the needs of nearby Hanon Garden. At that time Clerkenwell was an overlooked backwater, and the design community – now strongly associated with the area – had little presence there.

Workspace Group bought the building in 2004 with the intention of maintaining its use as a centre for creative work. Housing small and medium-sized enterprises, the developers aimed to keep the Workshops 'locally focused', nurturing a range of small businesses that would continue to flourish and improve the quality and diversity of the area.

Local hero
Mackay & Partners' refurbishment of the Clerkenwell Workshops.
Photos: Tim Soar.



Above and right The external fabric has been extensively refurbished, with new double-glazed timber pivot windows to match the existing fenestration. The brickwork has been cleaned and repointed. The individual entrances to the old depository have been retained and certain current tenants have looked at re-using these as 'private' entrances off Clerkenwell Close.



Far right The rooftop extension.

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REFURBISHMENT & RENOVATION



Above The ETFE roof over the courtyard springs from a timber-clad rooftop extension to the curved AM Building.
Above right Photograph of the site as found and early proposals for a roofed courtyard and external circulation (ph: M&P).
Below Copolastic Rodex cladding to the lift tower is back-lit at night.

The architectural challenge of the project was to work with the building's fabric, historical context and Workspace's need for a diversity of units. Mackay & Partners' proposals maximised the internal loft space by pulling all of the horizontal and vertical circulation into the courtyard, which is protected by an all-encompassing roof. Mackay & Partners negotiated with the local authority's planning and listed buildings and conservation departments with regard to the scale and mass of this roof and roof extension. Local sight lines were observed and the new additions are not visible from the surrounding streets.

Internally, the character of the two buildings that compose the Workshops has been retained. The PM Building is a rectangular building with smaller units; the AM Building is its curved counterpart, and contains larger units. The units range from a two person office to a large studio for thirty or forty staff.

Mackay & Partners has kept the internal refurbishment simple, exposing the original Victorian



Plans Basement, ground, first, second, and fifth floor plans.
Above The courtyard cafe is open to both tenants of the Workshops and local residents. Its operators run a cafe on the site before the refurbishment.
Right External circulation.

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Top Victorian structure and glazed bricks have been exposed.
Above New lighting and balustrades in an internal stairwell.
Below Large studio.

Workspace product is offering a fully IT-connected building in a central location, with a very strong sense of community. We believe that the project has set a new benchmark for small and medium-sized business premises in the area.



Project team
Architect: Mackay & Partners; design team: Ken Mackay; Sean Madden; Ian Roney; Michael Sanders; Paolo Mancini; structural engineer: Hurley Palmer Farr; mda engineer: Platt Consulting; qd: Boyden Group; contractor: YL London; client: Workspace.

Selected subcontractors and suppliers
Steelwork: Alstade; carpentry on timber deck and windows: Doug Phillips; site roof: vector; demolition strip out: SD Demolition structural: Castle & Fryer; lift shaft cladding: Rodex; fabricated by Panettec; roofing: Alvista, installed by M&P Roofing; metalwork/balustrade: Premier Stairs; external blinds: Harter Douglas; Floorcover: Whiteways; roller shutter and industrial doors: Bolton Gate; lifts: Otis; ceramic tiling: Lavender; pavement lights: Lincrite; raised access floor: Arco; stair nosings: Fashion Flooring.

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