

Merchant Taylors' School, Hertfordshire
Completion November 2015
Contract Value £5m
Client Merchant Taylors' School

Merchant Taylors' School appointed ArchitecturePLB to design their new Design Centre following a successful invited RIBA design competition. The building, which provides state of the art facilities for the school's celebrated design department was sensitively designed to respect the adjacent Listed school buildings and the Metropolitan Green Belt landscape. ArchitecturePLB's design solution placed the new building in a highly prominent location, terminating an existing formal axis and helping to bridge the current divide between two halves of the campus. The building is inherently energy efficient, and is designed to help the school achieve their long-term aspirations as part of a wider campus master plan.

The new building provides the Design & Technology department with facilities that deliver a quality of learning environment in keeping with the department's academic success; the school has received the most Arkwright Scholarships since the scholarship programme began in 1991. The building looks to outwardly celebrate the department's work to both visitors, from its prominent location at the heart of the school, and to pupils; the large areas of glazing in the workshops acting as display windows as students circulate around the school.

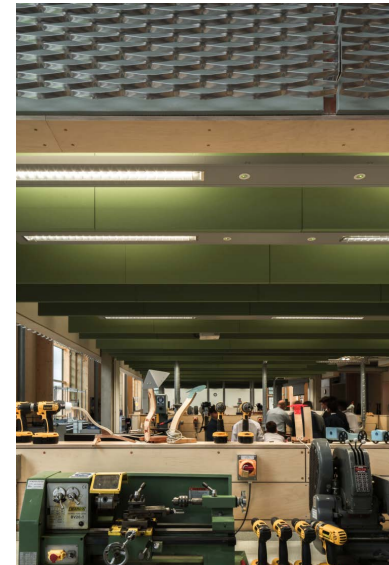
01



02

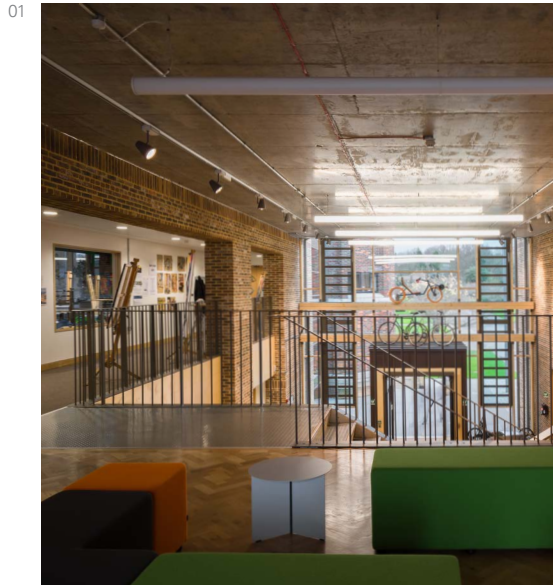


03



- 01 New Technology Building
- 02 Entrance hall used to display student work
- 03 Interior of teaching space

Photographs by Mark Hadden



01 Entrance hall and mezzanine
02 Integrated display space
03 Concept design stage masterplan



The accommodation comprises of; four technology workshops, areas for physical and computer modelling, a technician's prep room, spray room, heat bay, three design classrooms, two art classrooms, sixth form breakout space and a large projects workshop intended for longer term and collaborative projects. The location of the new building also allows the Design & Technology department to work closer with the Art department, located in the adjacent building. A bridge link at first floor level between the new and existing buildings providing a physical connection between the departments; additionally, the lift in the new building will provide step-free access to the first floor in the existing building.

The original brief stated that the building should become an educational tool for the department, to demonstrate different materials and techniques to the boys. ArchitecturePLB have therefore celebrated the materials and their construction methods; this is particularly evident in the main workshop.

The workshop's primary structure is of cross-laminated timber panels. Chosen primarily for structural reasons (no structural bracing is required in their 7.8m height), they also provide an attractive and robust finish appropriate to the environment. This structure is supported by Glu-lam and galvanised steel bow string trusses mounted on galvanised steel columns. The other workshop finishes; polished concrete floor, Birch plywood shelving (chosen for the finer joinery items to contrast with the Spruce CLT panels), aluminium checkerplate and expanded aluminium mesh were all selected to be robust and finished to express their materiality.

The new Design Centre is designed to fit within an extremely sensitive setting, adjacent to the Grade II listed 1930's school buildings and the open countryside of the Metropolitan Green Belt. While the form of the building is unambiguously of the present, materials have been selected to reflect its setting and historical context. Distinctive 2" red facing bricks match those used on the original buildings, as do the use of an English Garden Wall bond, soldier courses and areas of rustication. Modern technologies however are also on display, the exposed cross-laminated timber structure and photovoltaic arrays located on the south facing roofs to the large north lights over the main workshops.

As part of a wider masterplan, and in response to the school's desire to forge closer links and cross-curricular opportunities, the new building has been located to adjoin and connect with the existing Art & Design department. The siting provides a positive termination to the formal axis of the school's 'East Drive' and a fitting backdrop for the relocated Listed founder's statue. By bridging the 'East Drive' it also serves to improve connections between the buildings on either side, and to screen a new perimeter road from public and student-accessible parts of the campus. In so doing it allows the area in front of the main school hall to be transformed into a high quality pedestrian-only space for the amenity of staff and students.

The Design & Technology department's move has freed their previous building for conversion to a new History department, also designed by ArchitecturePLB and currently under construction.