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波司登

23.05.13

China clay

DSDHA's South Molton Street flatiron
PLUS CZWG's East London tower

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Mayfair flatiron

DSDHA's crafted approach to scale and tectonics has revitalised South Molton Street, writes *Felix Mara*. Photography by *Dennis Gilbert*

Outside Bond Street station people wait for friends, tap their phones, and take shelter from wind, rain and relentless footfall down London's Oxford Street. Many gravitate towards a new six-storey wedge at the apex of Davies and South Molton Street, a burgundy tongue in the notional bird's mouth, where they meet to form one of the few public spaces relieving the canyon of Europe's busiest shopping street. This is what director Deborah Saunt of DSDHA, designer of the wedge, wanted to see when it opened in July, riding a wave of West End retail development

Opposite View down South Molton Street from Oxford Street. DSDHA intended that people should gravitate towards the facade

targeting visitors to the London 2012 Games. 'It's the sign of a good public space: you can pause and get out your phone', she reflects. Known as the South Molton Street Building, this mixed-use development for the Chinese clothing giant Bosideng doubles the floor space of the pub and offices it replaces. Wanting a landmark to assist orientation, Westminster Council approved increased height to accommodate upper floor offices and flats as well as generous side projections and an elongated prow, even joining those who likened it to Manhattan's Flatiron building. The prow's radius is as tight as double-glazing technology permits.

There's arguably less public realm space now. But could the sitting-out area of the demolished pub, the type of space where children and others feel unwelcome, really be seen as public realm space? Westminster prescribed the project's accommodation mix as well as its urban profile and its form was driven by the surrounding cityscape's geometry and grain. The diagonal of South Molton Street tracks the course of the Tyburn, a diverted underground stream below, whereas Davies Street follows the Grosvenor Estate grid. It's not just a fancy nose job. DSDHA honed its three-dimensional form, conceived in the round and framed by multiple vistas, with projecting bays inserted to terminate routes. Its upper >>



Site plan







floors neatly conceal the gables and chimneys of 27 South Molton Street to the south. Apart from the view, its interiors have limited interest and DSDHA had no involvement in their fit out. Along with most buildings in Oxford Street, the focus of architectural interest is its facade. Much of this work, for example Emberton's HMV building, Amanda Leveté Architects' 10 Hills Place (AJ 10.09.09) and Future Systems' 187-195 Oxford Street, has architectural quality, although the norm is one or two floors of ephemeral shop-fitting crowned by more permanent but frothy upper stories.

DSDHA's building is a burgundy tongue in the notional bird's mouth



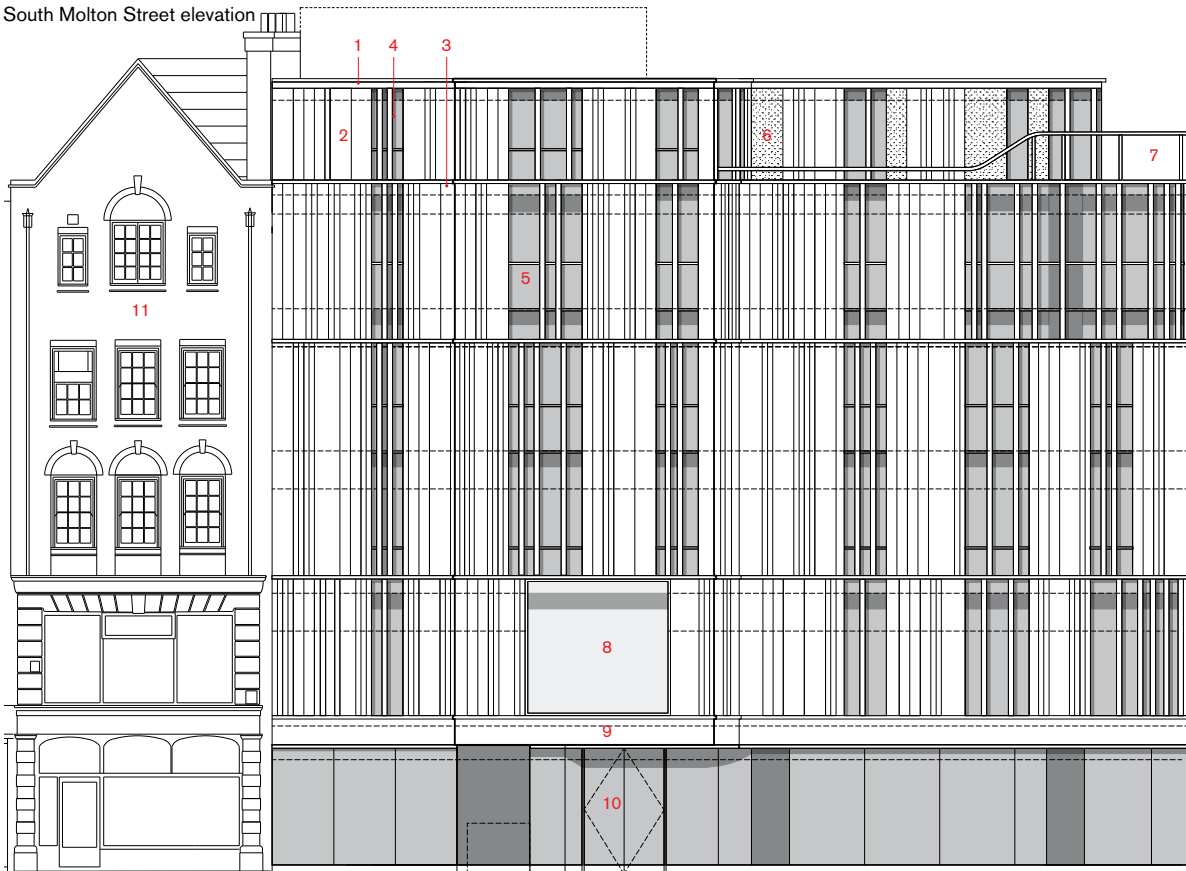
The essential qualities of DSDHA's facade can be seen where it meets 27 South Molton Street, home since 1970 to high-end fashion retailer Browns which helped establish this as one of London's choice shopping destinations. This junction shows how research and imaginative reflection on the context informed decisions involving the facade's scale, grain, proportion, composition, hierarchies, layering, texture and materials. Its motley terracotta army of standing profiles is captured by black metal horizontal bands levelled with its neighbour's creamy stucco cornices and its colour harmonises with number 27's fine brickwork, with gauged blind arches and quoins. Black back-painted glass spandrels rhyme with cast ironwork and its mullions, vertical rhythm and vertical layers resonate with its neighbour's. Conceived as a red bookend, like the elegant >>

Above Aerial view down South Molton Street with HMV building now occupied by Foot Locker
Far right The 'prow' is conceived as thrusting into the path of Oxford Street's hordes of shoppers
Centre right Junction with no 27 South Molton Street
Right The demolished pub



DSDHA

South Molton Street elevation



1. Black metal coping
2. Profiled, glazed terracotta cladding panel
3. Black metal horizontal band
4. Profiled, glazed terracotta mullion/fin
5. Recessed black metal framed window
6. Irrigated, integral green wall panel
7. Glazed balustrade
8. Flush metal framed glazing
9. Black metal fascia as shop front glazing
10. Black metal framed shop front glazing
11. 27 South Molton Street

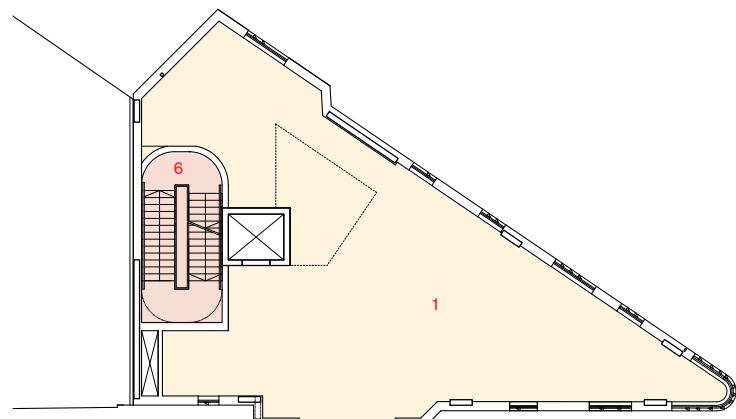
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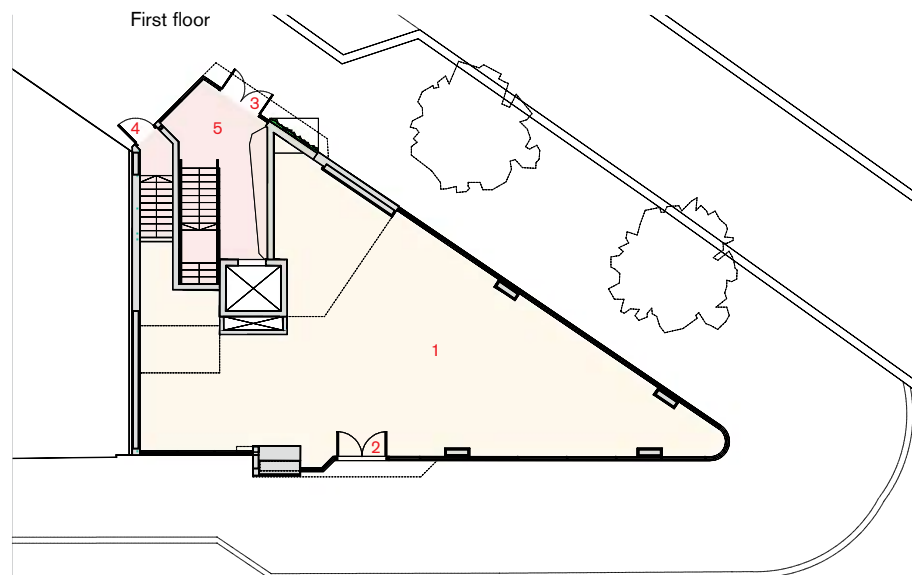
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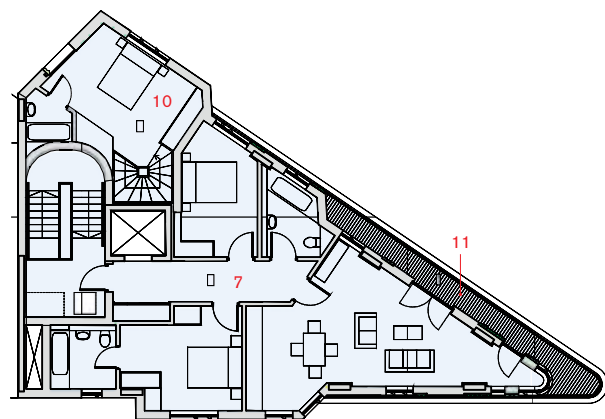
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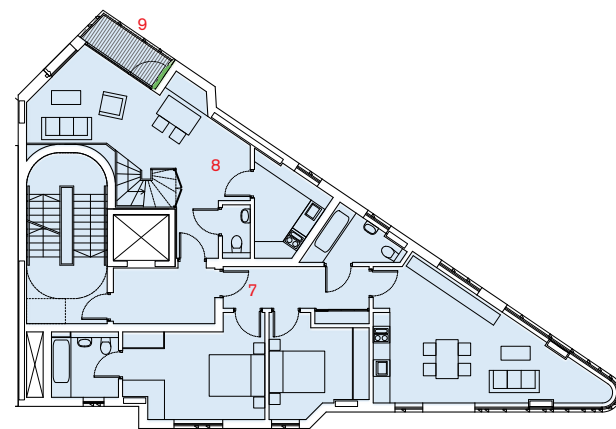
First floor



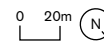
Ground floor



Fifth floor



Fourth floor



facade at the south end of the street, its projecting bay also acknowledges the way its neighbours, being outside the Grosvenor Estate, occupy narrow freehold plots. On the ground plain, as part of DSDHA's public realm improvements, granite paving to the pedestrianised street, forming a serpentine pattern, has replaced salmon and mustard-coloured cracked concrete.

A feel for scale distinguishes the best architects. This is evident when you visit the best work of Wright, Kahn or Le Corbusier. DSDHA's detailed design responds to the scale of South Molton Street's narrow frontages and finely crafted details, elaborating doorway surrounds and

articulating facade components as small units that look like they could be lifted by one or two workers. This counterbalances the development's size, height and vertical thrust. But there is also a deliberate ambivalence when the facade is viewed from afar. Saunt compares it to the late 18th-century facade of Stratford House at the end of a wide close on the opposite side of Oxford Street. Its double height Ionic columns, tall windows and rustication make no concessions to human scale. Similarly, DSDHA's building, intended to 'talk to' Stratford House, avoids expressing the level of its second floor, masked by glass spandrels flushed into the curtain wall and overlaid by terracotta drapes

1. Retail space
2. Retail entrance
3. Residential and office entrance
4. Basement entrance
5. Entrance lobby
6. Shared space
7. Two-bedroom flat
8. One-bedroom flat
9. Balcony
10. One-bedroom duplex upper floor flat
11. Terrace

Right Integral green wall units on the South Molton Street Building elevation indicate residential accommodation

with hairline joints. The second and third floor offices form a *piano nobile* below the residential attic storey and rooftop pavilion. Punched in windows are avoided to deny scale. So in a subtle duality, scale is suppressed from afar but expressed close up, an accomplished feat in DSDHA's first large urban building.

The facade's other keynote is its craftsmanship: the choice of materials and the way they are worked and articulated. For lovers of brickwork's imperfections and patina, glazed terracotta is problematic. The most durable of finishes, its brazen character is fixed at birth. DSDHA chose a rich burgundy foundation that resonates with red brick and terracotta



neighbours and distant landmarks and then splattered it with a grey that responds to nearby stone and silver aluminium facades. With its reflective finish it is a sensitive index to diurnal and seasonal changes in the weather. The varied configurations of the four batten profiles create movement, with shifting vertical and horizontal rhythms across the facade and the undulations in the terracotta aptly suggest ripples in a pool of mud. All this transcends the usual rainscreen tectonic of metal sections, boarding, rails and brackets supporting the icing on the cake facade.

The more spindly terracotta profiles, which continue across balconies and cast dark shadows with undertones of half-timbering also traverse windows and, where not backed by curtain wall mullions, are masked from internal view by dot-patterned fritted tape on the glass behind them. Arts & Crafts purists might insist their backs should be expressed, but the notion of craft needn't involve this level of integrity. In another nuance, craft suggests not only skilled workmanship, but deception. Seen positively as multiple readings and ambiguities, this is the milieu of the South Molton Street Building and it is in this sense that DSDHA can be seen as crafting the city. ■

Project data

START ON SITE October 2011
COMPLETION July 2012
GROSS INTERNAL FLOOR AREA 1,228m²
PROCUREMENT Design and build
CONTRACT VALUE £4.6 million
COST PER m² £3,748
CLIENT Bosideng UK
ARCHITECT DSDHA
DELIVERY ARCHITECT Ward McHugh Associates
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER Ramboll and
BWB Consulting
FACADE CONSULTANT Procare
M&E CONSULTANT Ramboll, Walker Walker
CIVIL ENGINEER Ramboll
QUANTITY SURVEYOR Stace
PLANNING CONSULTANT Montagu Evans
MAIN CONTRACTOR McLaren Group
TERRACOTTA RAINSCREEN MANUFACTURER NBK
ESTIMATED ANNUAL CO₂ EMISSIONS Not confirmed

Working detail

South Molton Street Building, London W1 DSDHA

Terracotta facade

The facade is composed of a series of subtly varying profiled and glazed terracotta tiles, designed specifically for the project, following extensive design development alongside manufacturer NBK. Taking inspiration from the aqueous historic reference of the River Tyburn flowing along South Molton Street, the facade has been developed to create a perceived sense of movement or undulation when viewed from street level. A number of terracotta profiles continue in front of the window apertures, referencing stone mullions in the surrounding area,

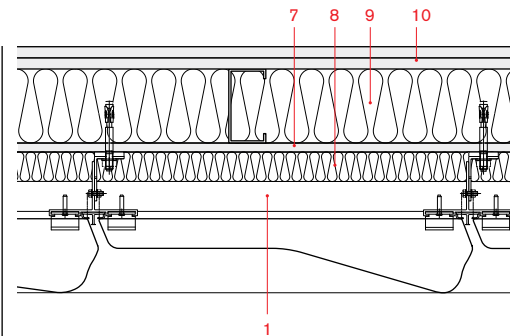
and preventing a sense of repetitiveness or large exposed planes of glass. The red brick and terracotta architecture of Mayfair resonates with the glazed battens DSDHA developed, shaped to capture shadow and reflect light so, as architecture, the elevations evolve and shift over time. Black detailing and articulation relates to the contextual use of cast iron in Edwardian precedents, such as Claridge's on Davies Street.

As the facade gracefully turns the curved corner facing Oxford Street, the building reveals greater transparency on the retail and residential floors, evoking a sense of movement and change across the elevation. The use of varying height horizontal bands and vertical articulation carefully adjusts the scale of the elevations to avoid the overall height, bulk and mass appearing out of place.

Deborah Saunt, director, DSDHA



1. 40mm clear ventilated cavity
2. Cladding support vertical 'T' rail
3. Terracotta rainscreen cladding panel
4. Anodised aluminium profile and support structure fixed back to Metsec
5. Profile removable for reglazing
6. Cladding support bracket fixed back to metsec
7. 12mm sheathing board
8. 40mm Kingspan insulation
9. 100mm Rockwool insulation
10. Two layers 15mm fireline board
11. 2mm horizontal joint between cladding panels
12. 30mm retail floor build up
13. Ceiling void
14. Two layers 15mm fireline board
15. Line of terracotta panels
16. Terracotta projection
17. Ceramic fritted 'back-painted' glass
18. 300mm slab
19. Solid ceramic fritted back-painted glass
20. Clear double-glazed unit



Part proposed plan

Left The sense of transparency is strongest at the cantilevered prow