THE MAGAZINE OF THE CONCRETE SOCIETY

CONCRETE

Volume 60, Issue 4 May 2026

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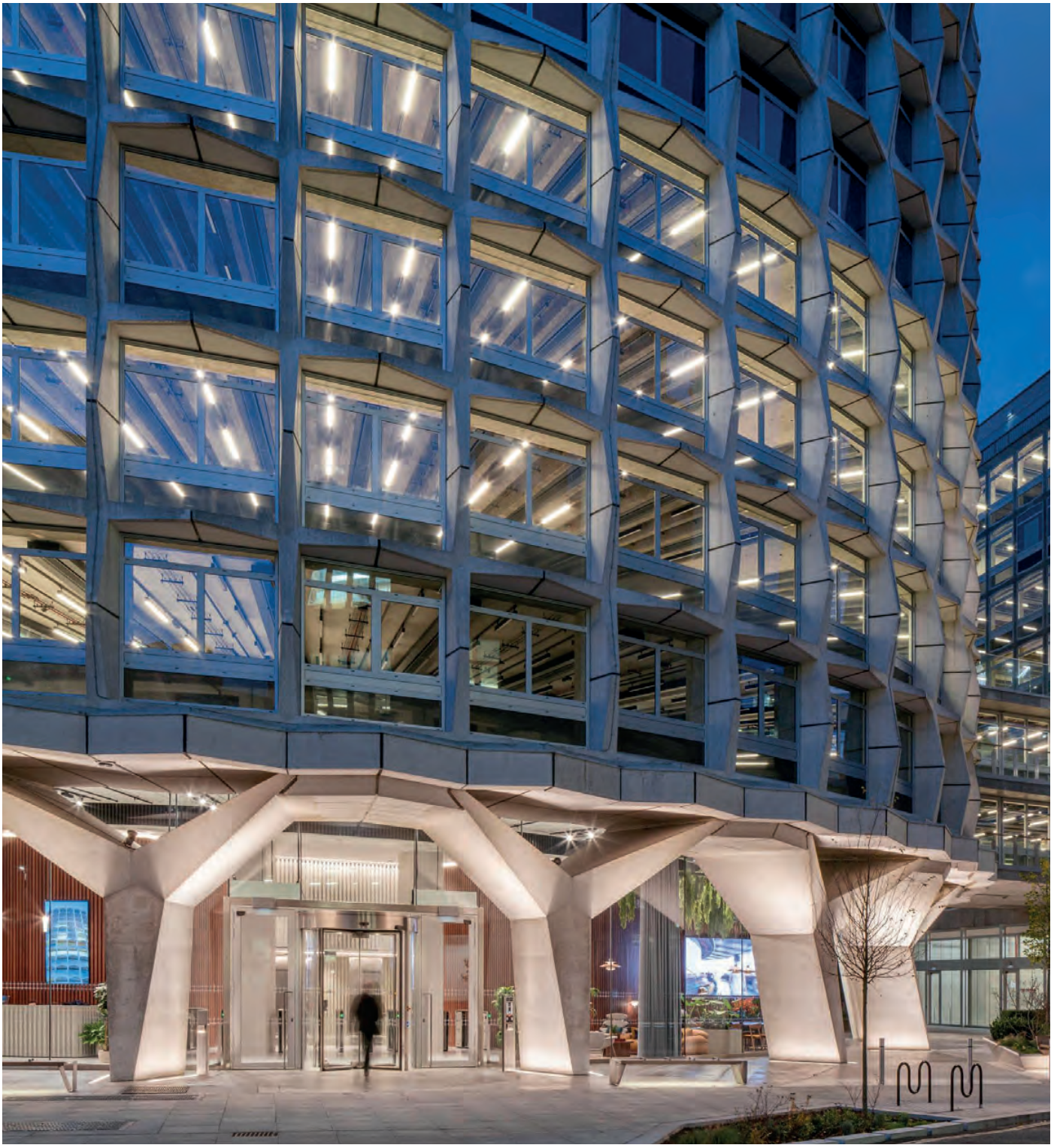
(All photos: Gareth Gardner.)



SPACE HOUSE – THE REIMAGINING OF A BRUTALIST ICON

Main entrance on Kemble Street.

Squire & Partners has sensitively refurbished and extended the iconic Grade II-listed Space House in Covent Garden. The retrofit creates 255,000ft² (23,690m²) of high-quality workspace, contemporary and flexible retail space at ground floor, and an improved public realm. The revitalisation of the landmark has preserved and enhanced the building to allow people to work and socialise in and around its outstanding 20th-Century architecture once more. **Tim Gledstone** reports.

A symbol of the 1960s commercial property boom, Space House was designed by Richard Seifert and Partners, and built in 1968. It is known for its distinctive cylindrical tower with a precast cruciform façade sat on Y-shaped columns, a rectilinear block and connecting bridge, which were designed as a response to the surrounding urban context.

During its long stint until 2019 as home to the Civil Aviation Authority, Space House underwent numerous alterations (in 1996 and 2003): façade modifications, layout changes and lobby revamps, as well as the insertion of mechanical air conditioning, which resulted in dropped ceilings, interrupted windows and rooftop clutter. Therefore, Squire & Partners' challenge was to reinstate the original design intent within the framework of a Grade II heritage listing (awarded in 2015), while optimising and preserving the building to ensure its future.

Enabling and demolition works began in July 2020, with full construction commencing in April 2022. The project was completed two years later, in October 2024.

REIMAGINED

The existing buildings have been reimagined, with two floors of office accommodation added to the tower and a single-storey extension to

Space House London

Client
HB Reavis and QuadReal

Architect/interior design
Squire & Partners

Main contractor
BAM Construction

Enabling/demolition works
Erith

Restoration contractor
Paye Stonework & Restoration

Structural engineer
Pell Frischmann

Quantity surveyor
Gardiner & Theobald

Heritage consultant
Donald Insall Associates

Development/project manager
Avison Young

MEP and sustainability
Atelier Ten

Planning consultant
Gerald Eve

Approved building inspector
Sweco

INSET:
View from Lincoln's Inn Fields of the completed exterior.

the block. The extension of the now 17-storey tower tidies up the existing rooftop plant, reinstating the original design intent for a clean set-back top floor, while creating a 3600ft² (335m²) roof terrace. The new eighth floor of the block provides meeting rooms and a Club House, comprising a bar and 5000ft² (465m²) terrace accessible to all tenants.

Upon entering the tower, occupants are welcomed by a spacious double-height lobby and reception. The 10,000ft² (929m²) circular, column-free floorplates are flooded with natural light, with the top ten floors offering unobstructed 360° views of the city. In the block, an intimate lobby leads to eight levels of 8000ft² (743m²) workspace floors. The sky bridge creates contiguous workspace on the first and second floors, and a garden terrace on the third.

The egalitarian workspaces feature long sightlines, offering high levels of visual connectivity to support collaborative working. Designed in a loft style, offices feature polished concrete floors, while new terrazzo flooring has been installed throughout the common areas, with

> "Space House is the largest Grade-II listed building in the UK to achieve a BREEAM rating of 'Outstanding'."

original mosaic tiling in the stair cores retained. The southern stair in the Kingsway block is the original and the new northern stair has been matched to an original, which was demolished during the building's lifetime.

Originally built in an era advanced by the popularity of the automobile, designs reinvent the car-centric elements of the building for the

FAR LEFT:
Workspace area with concrete soffits.

LEFT:
Y-shaped columns.

BELOW:
Lobby area with original mosaic tiling on the stairs.

future. One of three ramps to the basement has been retained to create dedicated cycle access to end-of-journey facilities. The existing car park now provides expansive cycle storage for 600 bikes alongside showers, lockers, drying rooms and changing facilities. Elsewhere, the two-storey basement is punctured with a void to deliver 16,500ft^2 (1533m^2) of flexible double-height event space.

CONCRETE

As an early adopter of hybrid in-situ concrete construction, Seifert's original design used precast cruciform concrete blocks laid out in a grid pattern, which enabled fast and low-cost construction. This forward-thinking method allowed additional floors to be added with relative ease and limited the impact on the façade's overall look by having the ability to insert a new layer of replica cruciform blocks.

A crisp roofline silhouette was intended in the original build, so to honour this and create a taller, better proportioned top to the building, a new rooftop extension to the tower was created – adding 12% of lettable office space and a 3600ft^2 (335m^2) roof terrace. The extension also conceals a new services installation that uses air source heat pumps, replacing cluttered AC units that had amassed on the roof level by previous occupants.

This involved a painstaking process of unstitching the precast T-form structures that crowned the building for vital restoration and renovation, before reinstating them above a new section of cruciform structures that carefully match the concrete composition of the original 1960s units. A technical challenge, but the result is a much crisper silhouette, more akin to Seifert's original intention.

It was fundamental that Space House not only met but exceeded current office environmental standards. Achieving such ambitious accreditation required a comprehensive strategy, made possible by the work of environmental engineer Atelier Ten in tandem with the huge effort of the full design team.

ABOVE:
Y-shaped columns.

ABOVE:
Completed exterior looking west.

Adding external insulation was impossible without altering the building's historic character, so efforts focused on replacing windows with high-performance glazing and designing a high-performing extension. As each window varied in size, 3D scanning was required to perfectly fit the upgraded units, which deliver floor-to-ceiling glazing around the curved façade.

Stripping back ceiling tiles on the workspace floors revealed distinctive radial ribbed concrete soffits. Fitting seamlessly within each soffit, the team designed alternating services, including micro-chilled beams to provide heating and cooling. Running between the closely spaced concrete downstands, they use water instead of forced air to deliver cooling. This required a bespoke and extremely precise approach, ensuring the technology integrated perfectly into the existing building fabric.

Approximately 95% of the floor area is within the existing building, preserving the majority of the original structure. Apart from the addition of new double glazing, the entire building fabric has been retained. Exposed floors and ceilings were used to minimise the use of virgin materials for interior fit-outs. New concrete details include fluted, cast concrete cladding to the lift lobbies and lift interiors, adding a new layer of concrete craft to the building.

Combined with the use of responsibly sourced, low-embodied-carbon materials for the extension and new interventions, these efforts enabled the project to achieve an upfront embodied carbon of 348kgCO_2/m² GIA, meeting the LETI Band B standard. Over its life cycle, the project achieves a total embodied carbon of 714kgCO_2/m² GIA, successfully meeting the RIBA 2030 target.

BREEAM

Space House is the largest Grade-II listed building in the UK to achieve a BREEAM rating of 'Outstanding'. The deep articulation of the existing façade provides passive shading measures and dilapidated parts of the envelope have been replaced to meet modern standards. The revitalised building provides a highly connected and diverse digital platform for its occupiers, with Fitwel 2-star and Wired Score Platinum certification.

The existing poor-quality public realm, previously used as a private car park, has been enhanced to provide links between the ground-floor retail uses in the two buildings. An existing on-site petrol station canopy at the base of the tower has been enclosed to become The Filling Station café, activating the street level and opening it up to public use.

The building's purposeful massing and strongly articulated façade have stood the test of time and have been sustainably restored to respect its brutalist character, while setting the standard for the future of the workplace. The needs of tomorrow's occupier have inspired the creation of bright, generous and democratic space, which will prolong the life of the building for many years to come C