Interview

Maria Cheung

Partner, Head of Interiors, Squire & Partners

Image:
Tom Oldham

Maria Cheung describes design as a personal form of expression. She told *Hospitality Interiors* about the journey that's brought her to the top, her inspirations and what's next in the world of design.

For Maria Cheung, the path to interior design began with an education in architecture: "I studied architecture at Magdalene College, Cambridge, and the Architectural Association in London," she shared. "It was a fantastic experience, and I was fortunate enough to learn from several inspiring tutors who taught me not just about design but also about different design processes, ways of thinking, and site-specific approaches."

After graduating, she co-founded Evans Cheung Architecture, where she worked on over 130 residential projects over a six-year period. In 2007, she decided to explore new challenges and joined Squire & Partners where she became a Partner last year. The company is renowned for its creative, thoughtful, and commercially viable design solutions.

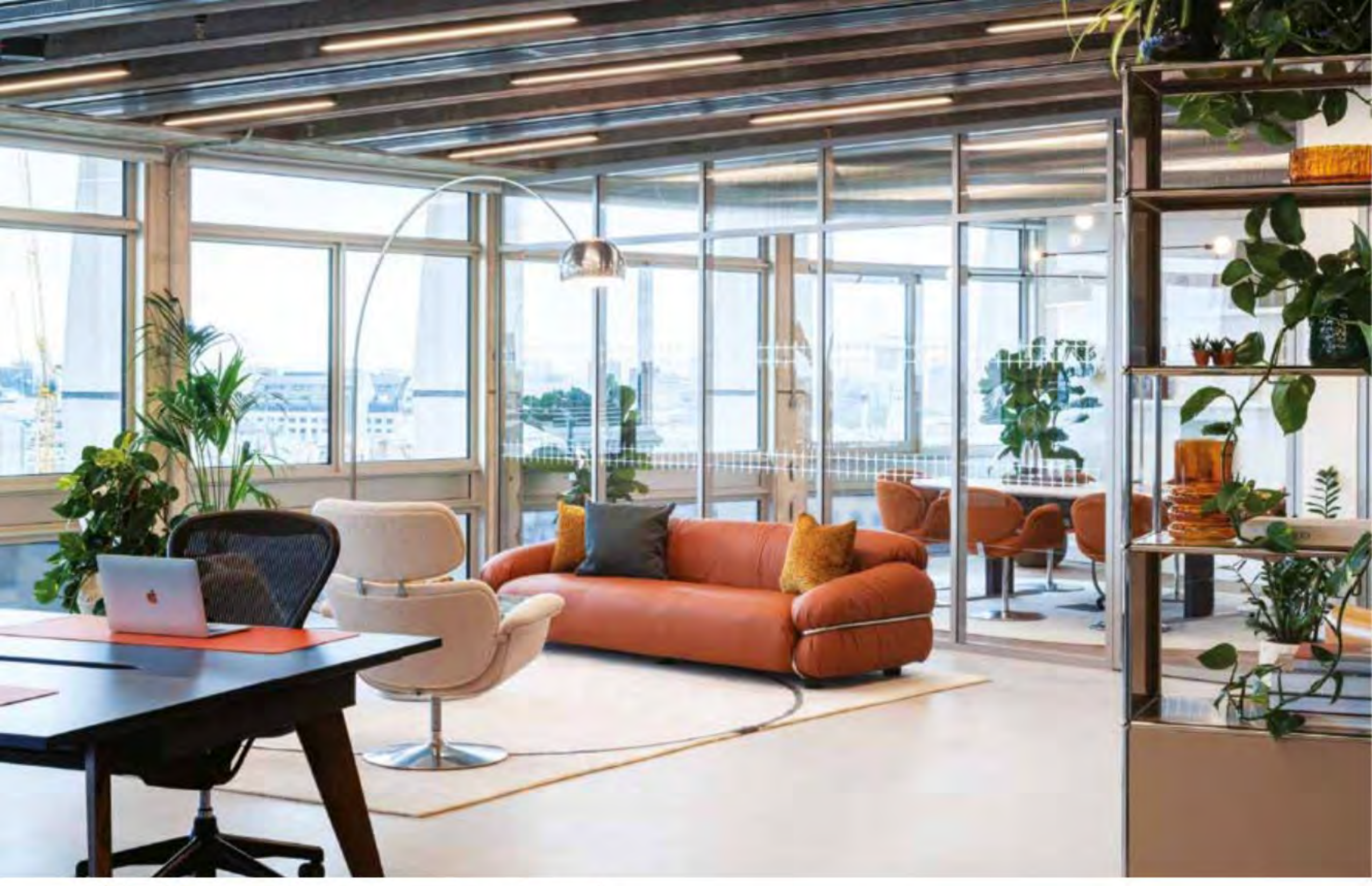
Maria identified two projects as pivotal milestones in her career. The first was the refurbishment of a Grade II-listed Victorian terrace on Stratton Street. "This project was particularly significant because it marked the beginning of our Interior Design Department at Squire & Partners. We drew inspiration from the building's Free Gothic Revival architecture, infusing the design with bespoke timber cabinetry, ironmongery, and intricate detailing that honoured the original structure while bringing it into the modern era."

The second standout moment came in 2017 with the restoration of an Edwardian department store into a vibrant office space

now inhabited by the firm now known as The Department Store in Brixton. "We purchased the building in 2015 and it was in a very dilapidated state, but we saw its potential," she said. "We celebrated its decayed grandeur, exposing original craftsmanship while layering in contemporary elements to create a dynamic, modern workspace. It's a testament to our approach as designers and place-makers."

Maria has developed a keen understanding of how to blend contemporary design with historical preservation: "One recent highlight is the Nexus Club London, the UK's first private members

Top and above: Squire & Partners design at the Nexus Club London has given the private members' club a family-friendly aesthetic Images: Julian Abrams



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architecture influence each other, symbiotically.

As we look toward 2025, Maria is particularly excited about the industry's growing focus on sustainability. "We're living in a time where the environmental impact of design choices is at the forefront," she added. "In the coming years, interior design will play an essential role in addressing sustainability, from material sourcing to the lifecycle of products." At Squire & Partners, sustainability is a priority: "We focus on the cradle-to-cradle lifecycle of materials, ensuring that what we design today can be reused in the future," she explained.

As for the future, Maria is ready for new challenges: "Every project is an opportunity to grow and push ourselves further. We're looking forward to expanding our team in 2025, building on our existing relationships, and forging new ones. The future looks bright, and we're excited about the opportunity to bring our skills to more diverse markets."

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Above: Offices in the Grade II- listed Space House. Images: Gareth Gardner

> **Films are a constant source of inspiration. Directors like Wes Anderson, Guillermo del Toro, and Christopher Nolan are endlessly inspiring**

Above at right: The refurbishment at Devonshire Square is a highlight. Images: Billy Bolton

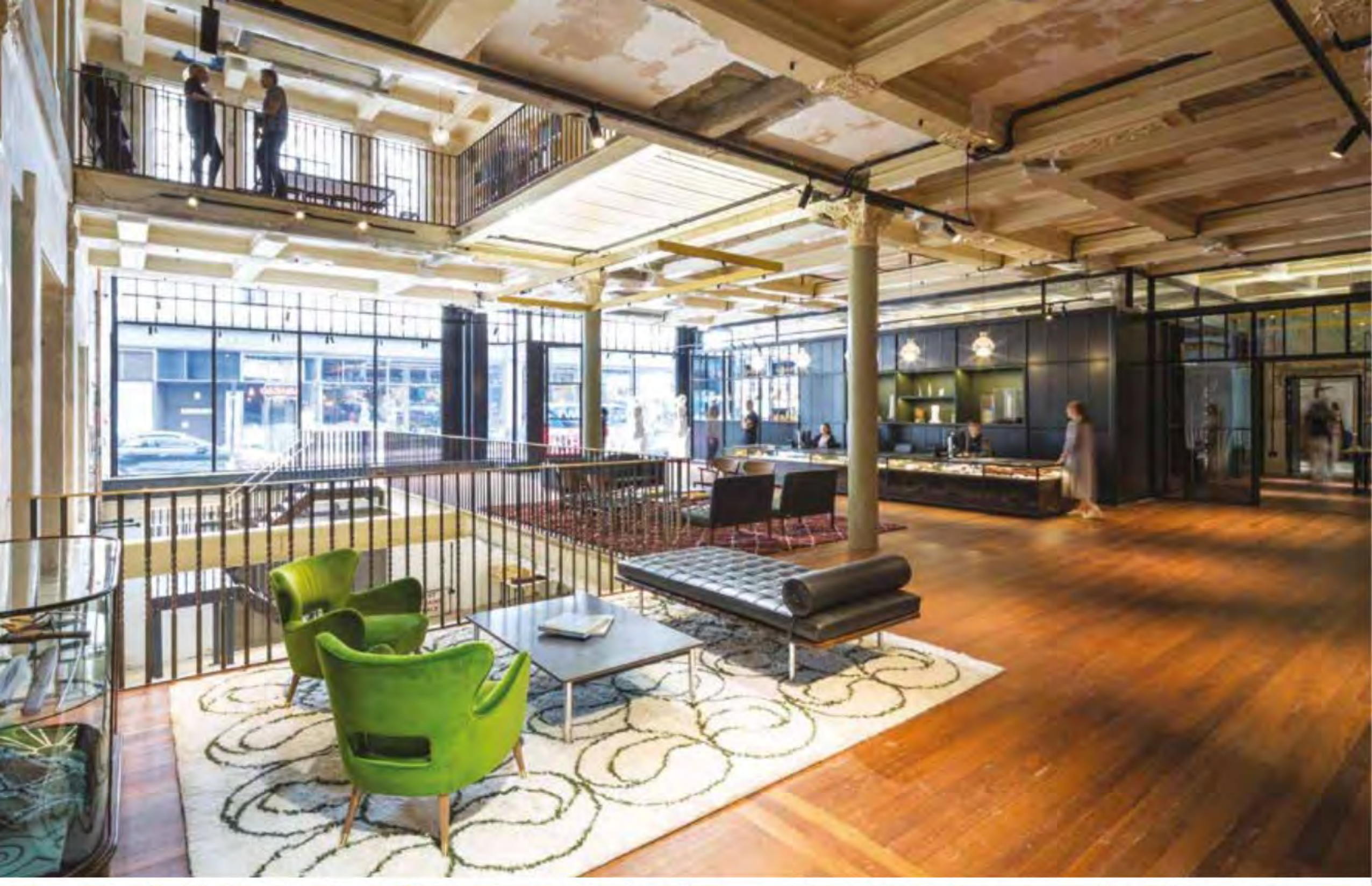
club by Nexus Luxury Collection, in South Kensington. We remodelled the existing members club venue, and added additional amenities, such as a children's play area, a golf simulator, a gaming zone for all ages, a gym studio, a members' café / lounge, restaurant and private dining room, as well as a terrace, to transform the nature of the club for a more family-orientated clientele. In the remodelling process we took care to preserve and reuse, wherever possible, the building's historic heritage and enhanced it by incorporating the Nexus Club brand DNA throughout.

"Our other highlights include the Grade II-listed office building, in Space House, and the recently refurbished office campus on Devonshire Square."

Maria explained that inhabiting and reimagining historic buildings such as these, "preserves the value of our heritage while enabling us to design spaces that genuinely respond to the needs and experiences of their contemporary users."

For Maria, inspiration can strike from various sources with many of them outside the traditional realm of design. "Films are a constant source of inspiration," she explained. "Directors like Wes Anderson, Guillermo del Toro, and Christopher Nolan are endlessly inspiring. Their meticulous attention to detail – from landscapes and architecture to interiors, costumes, and props – creates immersive worlds that captivate audiences."

Closer to home, she finds inspiration in the sample library at Squire & Partners, which is continuously updated with new materials. "Choosing materials helps me form a clear vision for a project. We focus on sustainability, keeping our eyes open for



innovative, eco-friendly products from a broad range of suppliers," she said. "The materials speak to us: they tell us how to design, how to interact with a space."

Above: Vibrant office space at the Edwardian-era Department Store. Images: James Jones

For Maria, the joy of interior design lies in its ability to transform experiences. "Interior design is both a universal language and a deeply personal form of expression," she said. "When done well, interior design evokes an immediate connection. Entering a space can be inspiring, relaxing, or energising." Elaborating on the ways designers engage the senses, Maria added: "The variety of materials – colours, textures, soundscapes, and lighting – allow us to create rich, dynamic environments." She also sees the potential to push boundaries in design: "Interior design has no limits. It's all about what you choose to make of it."

Looking ahead, Maria believes the industry needs to evolve beyond seeing interior design as a separate discipline from architecture. "Interiors should be intrinsic to the building – part of the architecture, landscape, art, furniture, fittings, and culture of the space," she explained. "Design should flow fluidly between all these elements as we experience and move through different spaces." Her view is that current design practices often separate interior design from the broader architectural process, but Maria believes the future lies in a more integrated approach where interiors and