

Initial thoughts for a New d'Offay gallery

"If its not contrived, if its left ordinary, then it doesn't become fussy in its detailing. Art often looks really great in the studio". (F.O'Gehry)

This is not to say that we would re-create the artist's studio in the gallery. However it is within this theme that we seek to make proposals: how to adjust the fabric and surface of the existing building without erasing its character. We find this not only unique and remarkable in Mayfair, but spatially intriguing.

The location and character of Haunch of Venison Yard, to enter from, seems infinitely more preferable than the transient, opulent consumerism of Bond Street. It may well be spatially similar to the context within which some of the art to be exhibited was originally conceived. If so, consideration must be given to the site for exhibiting this work – the gallery - with thought to the context of its conception.

Idea

What historically was a back would become a front. How to signify this point of entry without erasing the particular character of the yard becomes an interesting and significant question in adjusting these two existing buildings.

The yard side and the ground floor itself offers the possibility to stage openings, appropriated as demand requires particularly in the summer, as an extension of the ground floor space. If not physically then peripatetically - as a site for the located work to be seen in response to, or in dialogue with. A place of contemplation away from the hurly-burly of the street, space of a certain character against which artists work, or with and against which artists work.

At ground floor, in what is now the cellar to the shop - a dark subterranean space - light can be brought down from the light well, at present lighting the shop from the roof terrace. (See model). More contemporary work, such as video installation in a blacked out room – as the recent Bill Viola exhibition - requires less emphasis on the façade being a source of day light, the actual interior surface becoming less present.

The Gallery is to be located in a building whose entrance is from the Yard (originally a back, now a front) but whose offices overlook Bond Street. Domestic in scale and character, we see this functioning within as a big house, top lit through the saw tooth roof - with the hall type space at the back for the display of art. These two buildings being visually connected and surveyed through the oculus overlooking the buying room. (It is interesting to note that some of the structure of the house appears to have been assembled from very old ship masts). The arrangement of the office would be reminiscent in character to the transformation of the Georgian house into a school, as such at The Architectural Association in Bedford Square. It must be a good place to work with spaces appropriate to a small scale, 'family' type organisation, and be the best gallery space of its kind in town.

We like the idea of the provision for some outside space for:

A Staff – & or

B Visitors

C For display of art (a great facility at The DIA in NYC)

This roof terrace - the joint between the two original buildings – presents itself as being the place where an intervention can happen.

This could be;

1 - where new circulation serving both gallery and office is enlarged

2 - a new outdoor space, small as it may be, programmed as either;

A - part of the gallery; or

B - simply part of the office environment, a threshold between the two buildings and a point of entry to the offices - an appropriate beginning to the territory of the work place.

For a visitor or member of staff this contrasting space would be a valuable commodity as a terrace with the potential location to site work. Together with the qualities of light reflecting on the glazed tiling from the light well and adjacent building. We see many possibilities in this newfound space. The light well itself could be extended in width and depth to measure the precise amount of light deemed appropriate for the dark, salvaged space beneath on the ground floor, either as gallery space or for storage.

The negotiation of these two volumes is crucial to a seem-less connection between front and back and will obviously involve compliance with building regulations. It is also where a new lift – if required -

would seem best located, though further clarification is required. Irrespectively provision for handicapped access may require this.

Process

Our photographic inventory of the existing building and its characteristics begins to document and assess the value of the present conditions. By re-presenting these, we have begun to see the potential for both restraint and proposition. Thus establishing an appropriate means to work with the fabric of structure, as;

- 1 - one of transformation and adjustment
- 2 - insertion of new elements with demolition -These two approaches not being mutually exclusive.

Internal arrangements

The present sequence of floors in the hall building is seen as follows: (see photos)

3 similar sized rooms each with different conditions of natural lighting and sequence of approach resp;

Ground floor - from the side and down, across the whole width - entering down.

1st floor - from the side as a pool of light, rather like a bay window - moving up into.

2nd floor - from the top a giant scaled lantern, illuminating uniformly - arriving at the top.

It is interesting to note that the height of the rooms increases toward the top of the hall, whereas it's the inversion in the house (see section)

A vocabulary of interior elements against which the work is seen, these comprise;

- A floor
- A column with a beam sitting on it
- An elegant and gradual stair
- Windows of differing size, height above floor level, character and orientation

The ground floor level is lower than the yard and with the up stand wall- high enough to lean on, or sit on outside - there is a sense of enclosure, so much so that the light appears at a relatively high level to this space. (see yard section)

Offices

We see these as a series of rooms with doors and windows, and views to the street, arranged with loose furniture.

The available space restricting the number persons to be accommodated – approx. 20 no. Employees.

These may comprise within the company organisation of;

- Sales
- Finance
- Exhibitions
- Photo-archive (public access/natural lighting? A large living room-type setting for catalogues and perhaps light boxes for slides).

Structure (See engineer's report for detail)

- Gallery

The 2 no. Columns similarly positioned, but different in type on ground. and 1st. Floor would be retained in location irrespective of:

- 1 - the complete renewal of floors.
- 2 - the propping of existing floors / reinforcement

* The upper floors as existing are probably not sufficient to support large pieces of art. However the ground floor may well be).

- House / office

Similar in scale to that of a residence, spanning could be achieved with relatively little difficulty if the existing dividing walls were removed. Refurbishment would seek to retain this domestic character, exposing where possible the triple pitches to the 4th floor, as a top to the offices with roof lights introduced for views of the sky.

Yard Façade - manoeuvring Art, Loading & Storage.

We would endeavour - where possible - to utilise the existing structural openings, retaining the structural divisions & fabric of the elevation where art works may be brought into the building.

At ground level - looking down into the gallery - an eccentric condition exists which would create a specific context for art to be shown. It poses another question regarding the degree of transparency from the yard into the gallery, which warrants further discussion and investigation as to whether such an eccentric space is appropriate to conditioning or prescribing a context for art.

At 1st floor the existing leaded window would pivot or slide enabling art to be brought in at high level from a crane or hoist in the yard.

At present this SW facing window allows sunlight into the gallery. The choice of retaining this window may be decided by issues of conservation, however we like the pocket of light it frames in the corner of the space.

Options allowing art works in and out at each level by means of;

- A sliding car showroom doors
- B trap doors folding open / out
- C truck with hydraulic or pneumatic lift
- D light-weight, translucent panel

Elevator - see M&E report

Lighting (darkness)

The natural light on all floors of quite different orientation determined by the existing conditions would be maintained, with the facility for complete black out as well. (This has significant elevational consequences on the treatment of external façade to the yard).

Air conditioning (see M&E report).

In order to secure loans of art for display, air conditioning appears to be a prerequisite, so an option must be considered. The integration of these services has significant consequences on the architecture of the interior with regard to the internal envelope as seen at present.

Stripping out

By beginning early, a clear inventory of the actual existing space/ fabric of the building can be documented. This would reveal much and benefit the design process. It would also be influential to the design itself should an approach be taken where the existing fabric contributes significantly to the interior envelope and lining of the spaces.

Entry to offices & gallery

The main entry into the building would be maintained at ground floor but grouped together with the new entrance to the office. Thus a common threshold is formed for both.

10 year lease remaining.

This work could be seen as having a 10-year life span. This would be seen as an option with significant consequences on the design approach and appearance of its architecture, as being less permanent.