

BLUEPRINT 333

ARCHITECTURE | DESIGN | ART

**PAULO
MENDES
DA ROCHA**

in Lisbon with
**RICARDO
BAK GORDON**

LINA BO BARDI | RICHARD HAMILTON | **CARMODY GROARKE** | STEVEN HOLL ARCHITECTS

is deeper and better. It makes the marketing for the place easier, and it means there's no way we're not going to do the right thing on this site." (For the record, Evans has promised not to staff the artisans out of the railway arches when the adjacent Rogers Stick Harbour + Partners-designed flats are completed.)

There are one or two big players also surfacing this evolutionary wave. Argent's efforts in King's Cross, for example, are widely appreciated, not least for the care taken to ensure that a good mixture of interesting practices work on individual buildings, but also for its commitment to investing in high-quality public spaces that will help knit the disparate communities together. Meanwhile, Land Securities – the biggest commercial UK developer of them all – is midway through a 30-year, £2bn project in Victoria that harnesses the talents of Sir David Chipperfield alongside younger, edgier practices like Lush Architects and Henry Holmwood Rortman.

Land Securities' head of London development management, Oliver Gardner, would dispute that an appreciation of design and good architecture is anything new, but he admits that relationships between all in the design team are tighter these days. "When we work with the teams we take the long side very seriously," he says. Undoubtedly, using high-end architects is part of their strategy to draw a significant number of fashion businesses to the regenerated Victoria square, but plans for the area have evolved substantially since 2005, with a large amount of input from its architects and Westminster's own planning department. Architect Patrick Lynch says Land Securities has agreed to almost every proposal he's made in the floor buildings he's designed for them in Victoria. They are happy to listen, he says, as long as he can demonstrate that his interventions improve the building quality, longevity and performance, along with public realm and connectivity.

Ultimately, Lynch feels that it's pointless to single out developers as a different species of client to any other type – there are good and bad among all of them. "The whole history of London is speculative development," he says. "What's happening now is that good planners, developers and architects are working intelligently together, and maybe, he thinks, architects have facilitated this shift by taking a more pragmatic, less protagonistic role – by presenting themselves as problem solvers rather than purveyors of 'self-expression'." Says Lynch: "A lot of architects are stuck in this attitude that they can do what they want – it's a baby-boomer bubble. If you can make a plan work and talk to a planner, you can make it happen."

To the architects involved, good paid jobs for their time and skills? It's impossible to get an honest response. Ultimately, developers get the cash and the kudos, architects get to create some really good buildings, unlikely parts of our cities are looking better – if collaborative spirit is responsible, then we need not put a tickle but an epidemic.

THE QUICK RIFT

We asked Professor Flora Samuels, head of Sheffield University's school of architecture, for an independent opinion on some of the key schemes emerging from developers Derwent, Cathedral and Land Securities. Here is what she thought:

VICTORIA LIBRARY HOUSING AND OFFICE

Patrick Lynch for Land Securities

Project summary: A mix of retail, office space and affordable housing with a new library, the building will connect with the adjacent Victoria Palace Theatre, adding opportunities for use of its food, event and performance facilities. Constructed above the proposed Victoria Station upgrade and the King's Schooler Pond sewer, therefore requiring use of a lightweight, engineered timber structure.

Prof Samuels says: "The play of proportion in the penetration does something to space, opening it up to an oddly asymmetrical yet balanced facade. Spatial games and historical quotations are clearly present in this highly intellectual composition, evidently an immense investment of care on the part of the architect. This gives the building the necessary authority for this angular location. It won't be outdated in a hurry. All this was achieved while working within the alarming constraints of building over a large railway intersection."

KINGSGATE HOUSE, VICTORIA

Patrick Lynch for Land Securities

Project summary: Replacing an existing masonry office building with two new buildings to incorporate retail and office space in one, and retail and housing in the other, thereby breaking down existing massing and allowing new open public spaces to be created between the buildings and their neighbours, improving public realm as well as connections to the streets behind.

Prof Samuels says: "Kingsgate House has a breved facade that fits inaccessibly well into its surroundings, offering colonnaded urban space at base level. I can actually read the layers of architectural history that have gone into its evolution. "Subtle articulations of form create in plan a perceptible sense of arrival, a public space, a bead of experience on the street of Victoria Street. There is a strong engagement between site and building. To walk round or past the building is not a dull matter but a wonder through columns, variable shade and surface evocation of landscape: urban fabric; of its most humane."

1. Illustration: Jaggi - Victoria
2. Photo: Housing and office, by Patrick Lynch for Land Securities

3. Photo by Lynne Architects
4. Land Securities, Wellington House, Victoria



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KINGSGATE HOUSE, VICTORIA

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