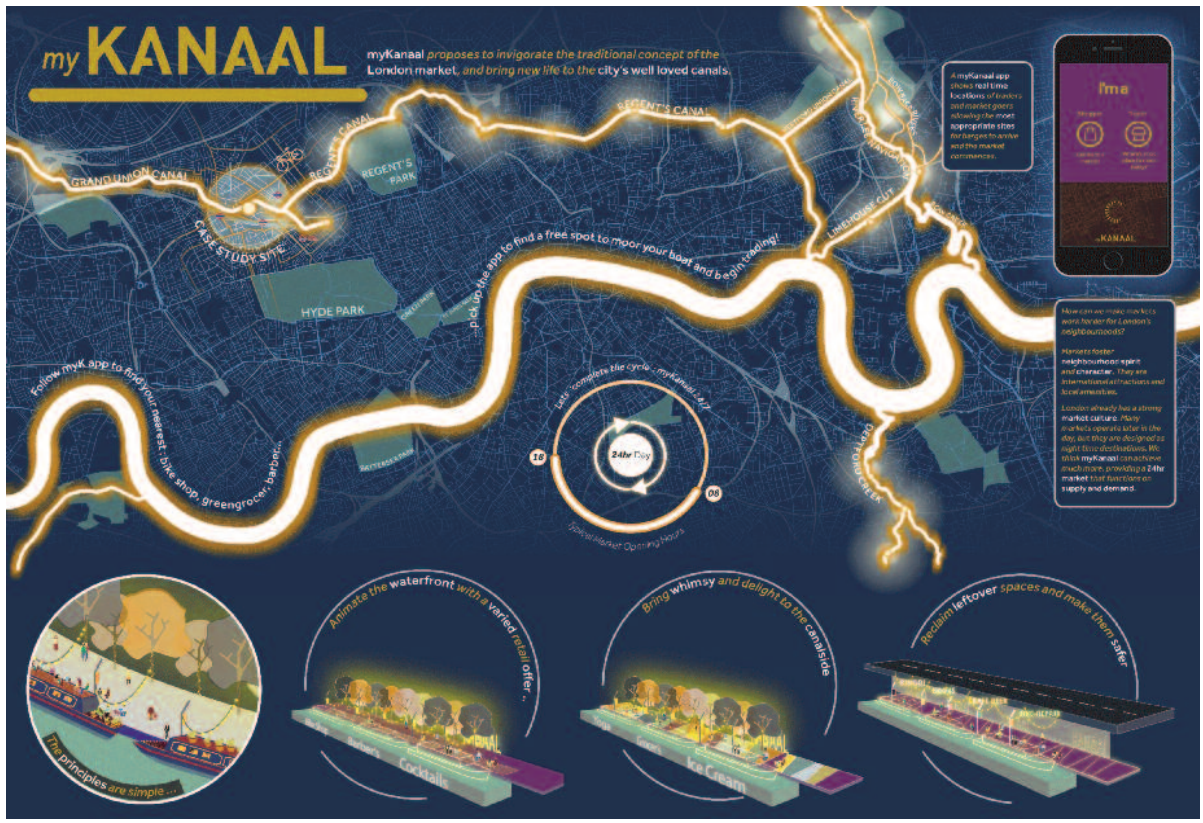
Making cities work as 24-hour places to live

Maysa Phares of Farrells gives us the thinking behind their competition winning idea



RIGHT: Competition entry

What if we imagined a flexible, moving market, where stalls might sell croissants in the morning and mojitos at night? This was the initial premise of the entry Farrells submitted, just over two months ago, in response to the Built Environment Trust's call for ideas to make cities work as 24-hour places to live.

It turned out that what we imagined would be a fun opportunity to engage in out-of-the-box thinking was much more successful than we had anticipated. In fact, when we learned that our project had been selected as the winning entry, the team's screams of joy could be heard from one end of Hatton Street Studios to the other and, arguably, all the way to Paddington.

The decision to take part in an ideas competition was the result of a practice-wide momentum to rethink the way we design. Earlier this year, a Design Development (DD) Group was set up at Farrells as a platform to invite staff to think about ways to build on Terry's legacy while shaping a forward-looking design culture that reflects the wealth of energy, enthusiasm, and experience we have in the practice today.

Resolutely 'bottom-up', the DD Group, conceived and overseen by design partner Effie Kuan, kicked off with a brainstorming session. Open to all, the event brought together staff of all levels to reflect on the identity, quality, and process of design at Farrells.

It became clear then that people at Farrells have, and always have had, an appetite for bold and big-picture thinking. Encouraging staff to take part in open competitions emerged as one of many ideas to foster creativity in the office. It materialised into a simple deal: teams should be free to prepare competition entries outside work hours, and Farrells would provide facilities and peer reviews to guide them through the process.

The Night Time is the Right Time ideas competition seemed a fantastic place to begin the experiment. Designing for the night time is inherently captivating, and the brief meant there was scope to conceive proposals at just about any scale.

An interdisciplinary team of urban designers and architectural assistants came together, including Ellen Peirson, Giulia Robba, Ben Simpson, Oleg Sevelkov, and myself. Effie Kuan, Carlos Muriel, and James Webb took part as design advisors and provided insights throughout the project.

Markets immediately captured our interest. With one in eight British employees working the night shift, we felt that 24-hour markets could make a tremendous impact on the quality and security of night time environments in London. But the question was: how? We first considered transforming our local Church Street Market into a 24-hour destination, but logistics posed a real challenge. How could a street market seamlessly transition from daytime to night time uses? Could there be a way for >>>



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>>> traders to load and unload merchandise without disrupting the flow of activity?

These were tricky issues, but we had a resource to draw upon. The DD Group came up with the idea of holding open charrettes on an ad hoc basis, and this was the perfect opportunity to pilot the idea.

Charrette participants, from partners to more junior members of staff, were invited to think about what a 24-hour market might look like, what it would sell, and where it should be. A few participants came up with the idea of using canals as the network of a series of floating markets. Others suggested a travelling market, led by a giant elephant, making its way across town and stationing in whichever location was voted best by app users.

Collaboration paid off, and our team took two key ideas on board: floating markets as a strategy to bring waterways to life at night, and a smartphone application that connects traders, moorings, and customers. Despite its popularity, the giant elephant was sadly set aside.

This became myKanaal, an app-driven proposal to transform London's waterways into a network of floating markets that operate around the clock. At the heart of the idea, the myKanaal app is envisioned as a digital platform that directs boat traders to available mooring spots and alerts Londoners to shops and services near them.

As place-makers, we felt there could be real benefits in activating our waterways, and especially towpaths that are popular commuting routes during the day, but can be intimidating at night. Even a small cluster of boat shops could bring life to an otherwise uninviting public space.

Although it is easy to imagine these markets as trendy destinations, the main ambition of myKanaal is to bring amenities closer to Londoners who live on boats or work unconventional hours, and who would benefit from the added convenience, safety, and delight of a 24-hour floating corner store, yoga studio, or bike shop.

myKanaal seduced the jury, alongside many other exciting proposals. Importantly, it highlighted the positive outcomes of enabling design professionals to take on initiatives outside project work.

A few new competitions are now underway at Farrells, with further success in the National Park City competition with our 'Living Network Entry' and many more successes yet to come.' - more information can be found here.

For the exhibition info go to: http://www.buildingcentre.co.uk/exhibitions/night-time-is-the-right-time

BELOW: Competition entry

