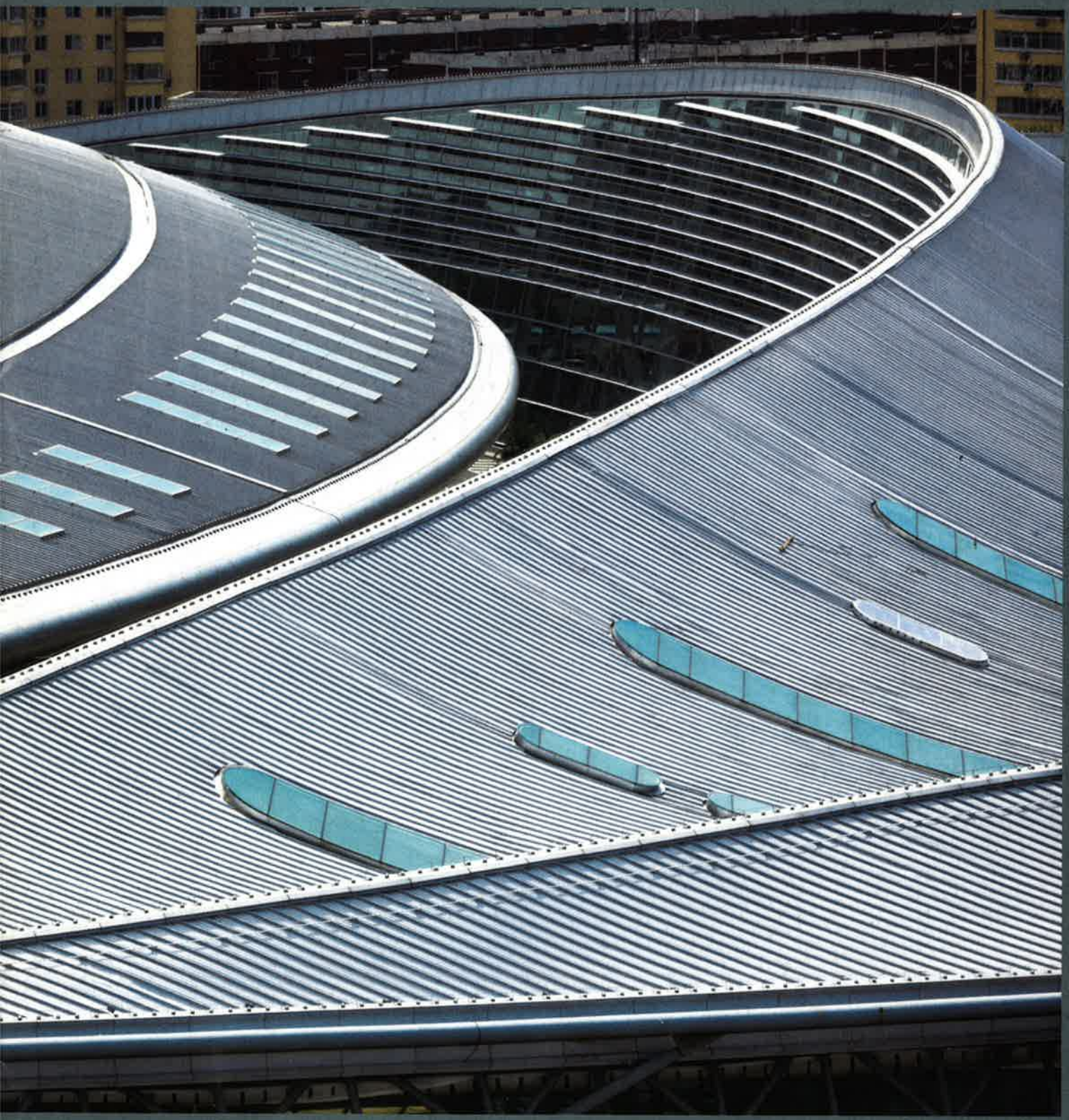




POST-POSTMODERN

Continuity in the work of Farrells: 1981-2011

ARCHITECTURE TODAY

FARRELLS



The legacy of Postmodernism

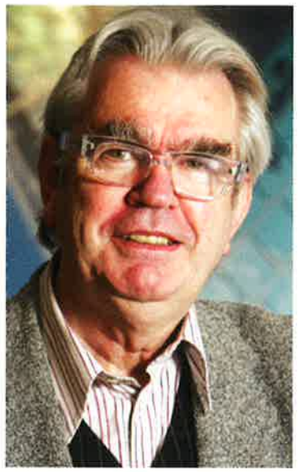
As the Victoria & Albert Museum opens the doors to an exciting new exhibition on Postmodernism, we felt this was a good time to reflect on our own legacy and the work of Farrells over the last few decades.

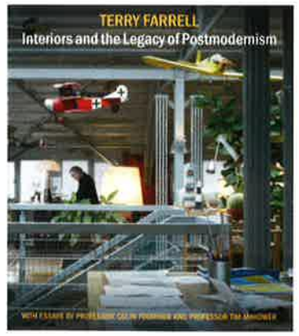
To coincide with the exhibition, Laurence King is publishing a new book, 'Terry Farrell Interiors: The Legacy of Postmodernism'. The book contains an essay by Professor Colin Fournier, an excerpt of which appears here, which truly captures the essence of Postmodernism and its effect on our understanding of space, time and meaning in architecture.

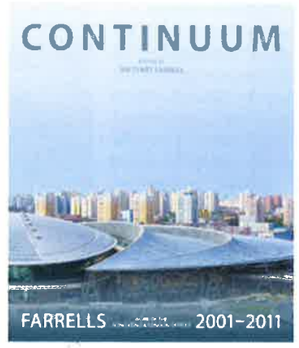
This publication, 'Post-postmodernism', also explores the legacy of that period. In comparing ten important buildings from the 1980s and 90s – Clifton Nurseries at Covent Garden, TV-am, Limehouse Studios, the Henley Regatta headquarters, the regeneration of Comyn Ching, Embankment Place at Charing Cross station, Alban Gate, Edinburgh International Conference Centre and the Peak Tower in Hong Kong – with ten of our recent projects, it shows that the fundamental concerns of Postmodernism remain central to our work.

Towards the end of this year Laurence King will be publishing another book on the work of the practice over the last ten years. Called Continuum, it explores in more depth the cultural lineage of an architecture that is founded on a broad view of urban planning and place-making.

Terry Farrell







Front cover Beijing South Station.
Back cover The Home Office; TV-am.
Left Embankment Place, the air-rights development at London's Charing Cross station, which subsequently led to similar projects on a larger scale at Kowloon Station in Hong Kong and Beijing South Station.

Postmodernism was not a style: it was a period of profound change that affected all aspects of our culture, not just architecture. It was a powerful reaction against the mindset of Modernism, a spectacular return at the beginning of post-industrial society of all that had been repressed for several decades.

Postmodernism's radical legacy does not lie in the traces that it has left in terms of the appearance of the architectural object. Rather, it lies in the shift in our perception of the world as we moved from the machine age to the information age. It emancipated our knowledge and our ways of acting, and has had a deep impact on our conception of the fundamental components of architecture and urbanism: space, time and meaning.

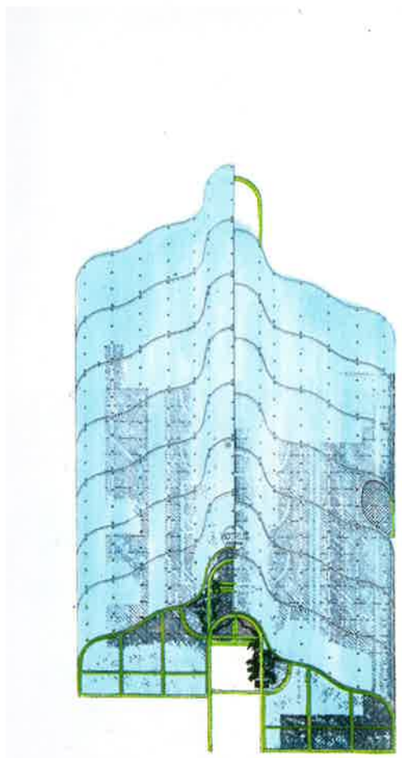
Modernism saw space as the ideal, homogeneous grid of Euclidean geometry, spreading ad infinitum. That was the undifferentiated abstract milieu within which new architecture had to be inserted; it was also the stuff out of which the architectural object had to be formed. Postmodernism reintroduced the notion that there are many different structures of space. It emphasised the uniqueness and significance of 'place'. It rehabilitated the socio-anthropological evidence that different kinds of spaces are constructed by different people for different purposes, and that they can coexist – that space can legitimately be multilayered, pluralist, eclectic, even at times messy, unplanned, monstrous.

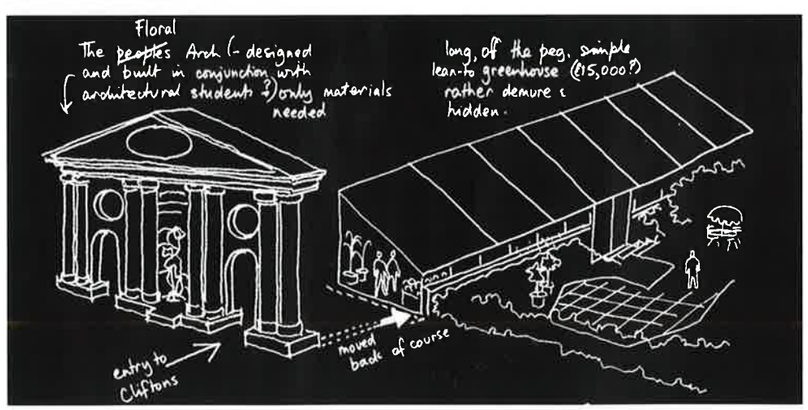
In the same way that it attempted to place itself outside contingent space, Modernism endeavoured to place itself outside time, cut off from the past. Paradoxically, this uncompromising commitment to the 'here and now' leads to being neither here nor now: by not acknowledging that we are living a chronological palimpsest of successive layers, time is deprived of its essence. Postmodernism attempted to put architecture back into the context of time. In doing so, it explored design options that were hitherto considered forbidden territory, often transgressing the limits of 'good taste'. Many projects were indeed nothing but shallow pastiche, the products of commercial opportunism. But the best were playful, witty and irreverent, expanding the repertoire of architecture to include tongue-in-cheek hybrids juxtaposing codes that were hacked, irreverently and inconsistently, from different periods in architectural history, freely combining state-of-the-art engineering with ancient references.

Under Modernism, architecture was expected to be predominantly self-referential. No mixed messages were tolerated, no contradictions, no jokes, no attempts at seduction, no symbolic references, no slang, no local dialects. An extraordinary set of injunctions of quasi-religious integrism that diminished the freedom, pleasure and depth of expression. Postmodernism took the lid off these monastic restrictions. It made us understand that there was something pathological about Modernism's collective hallucination of sainthood, in its ascetic desire to say as little as possible, except the obvious. By reinstating the legitimate autonomy of the architectural object in relation to function, Postmodernism allowed it to take on meaning again.

Professor Colin Fournier









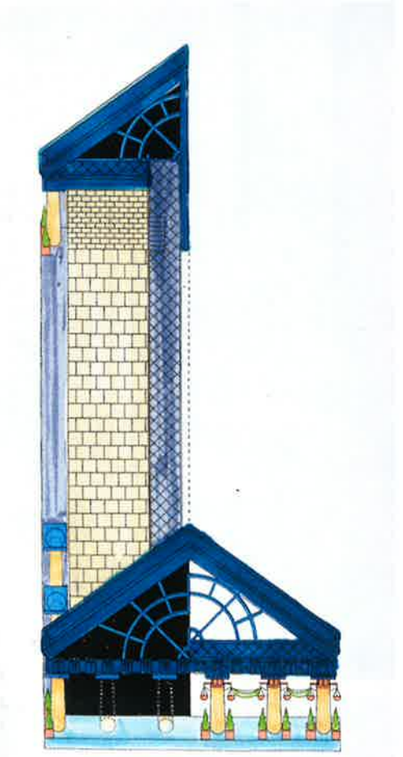


Terry Farrell "Clifton Nurseries at Covent Garden represented a phase in the development of the Royal Opera House. The challenge was to fill the site temporarily with something that would earn some money for the opera house, and also give it added entertainment value. A garden centre seemed historically appropriate for what had been London's flower market.

Our aspiration was to develop an urban set piece in keeping with the piazza, which is full of formal arrangements involving both the arcading and major marker buildings. A source of inspiration was the small church of St Paul's by Inigo Jones, which was criticised by a contemporary who suggested 'It's just like a barn, it is so simple', to which Inigo replied 'Yes, but it's the finest barn in Europe'. The most significant thing about St Paul's is its free interpretation of classicism: because it is on the west side of the piazza and the altar has to be at the east, the portico – the public face – is not the entrance; that's on the opposite side. Nevertheless, the portico was dressed up to look like the entrance with columns and a pediment. This playful disregard for the expression of function appealed to me a lot as a postmodern idea. It's the urban sensibilities that come first.

At the nurseries we arranged a pediment on an axis of one of the main streets, to the north of one of the market buildings. Half the pediment hid an ugly car park so, like Inigo Jones' church, the building was not at all what it seemed to be. And just like the church, the pediment represented a completely new interpretation of classicism. It was made out of lightweight elements of a sort usually found in temporary buildings rather than conservatories or greenhouses. Behind the facade, we worked with engineer Peter Rice to produce a piece of real high-tech – the first Teflon-coated fabric building in Britain.

Similar ideas are present in a project carried out 25 years later, for the Royal Institution. Its headquarters in a row





01 | Clifton Nurseries – The Royal Institution

"From the beginning this little building with its jumble of elements was touched by a kind of omnivorous untrammelled genius. Everything about it, from its client's original idea, to the architect's wild and ingenious design, to its innovative light structures engineering by the late Peter Rice, to its first tenant's verdant display of energy and enterprise, all of it was pure magic. And when you analyse that magic, most of it consists in making something out of nothing, which was the once and future genius of Terry Farrell."
Martin Pawley on Clifton Nurseries





of terraced houses has several facades, united in one grand colonnade of triumphant Corinthian columns that raise the scale of ordinary houses to one that is quite heroic and says 'this is the home of science'. Behind this classical facade, at the back of the building, we added a new structurally-glazed seven-storey conservatory atrium with a glass lift, so that there was a piece of new technology at the heart of the institution. In both buildings, a certain playfulness is coupled to an order and discipline in the classical formality of arranging internal spaces and the axiality of the plans that we've introduced.

Both buildings are for long-established institutions which continuously adapt and alter their properties in ways both permanent and temporary, a condition reflected in the combination of new construction techniques and historical references – continuity and change – in our work."

Left Temporary building for Clifton Nurseries at Covent Garden, London, 1981, described by critic Martin Pawley as 'the Barcelona Pavilion of postmodernism'. The sketch is annotated: 'Put all the effort into Post-Modern screen/arch. Many variants possible, TF'. The perspective shows the building at Covent Garden and its predecessor at Alexandra Palace, north London.
Right Reorganisation of the Royal Institution of Great Britain on Dover Street, London, 2008. Items from the Institution's collection of scientific instruments were incorporated into the design as decorative elements. Plants were used in a similar way at Clifton Nurseries.













Terry Farrell "If form follows function, then a television studio ought not to look like TV-am and yet the building had such a presence in the world of television entertainment that it is almost more famous than the station itself, and was an incredibly important part of its branding. Millions were spent on a corporate identity, yet the eggcup architectural motif was the image that prevailed (and they only cost £100 each).

The conversion of a derelict garage into a television studio was first and foremost a piece of urban opportunism, which helped catalyse the regeneration of much of Camden Town and Camden Lock. We were deeply involved in the development process, from finding the building and arranging the development process to helping appoint a builder.

We played a similar role in the development of Hatton Street in north London, where our office is now based. Both existing buildings belonged to a common type: low-cost 1920s and 30s sheds with concrete walls and columns and very light steel trusses with a profiled metal roof and rooflights.

Like TV-am, the additions to Hatton Street add playfulness and entertainment to the utilitarian cheapness of the existing structure. At Hatton Street, the aeroworks that formerly occupied the building became part of its identity. In the words of a passing taxi driver, we turbo-charged Wallis Gilbert's main Art Deco facade but there are also back street facades, and just as we introduced the eggcups on the canal side at TV-am, at Hatton Street there are now flying spitfires silhouetted against the sky and leaning out of the elevation. In both buildings the interiors were sometimes left raw and sometimes dressed up in according to circumstance.

Both projects were adventures in urban regeneration and development in a very holistic way, extending from the bigger financial strategies right through to the design of the internal furnishings. It is only by involvement in all of these areas that architects can exercise significant influence in regeneration. Standing apart as a specialist professional and dealing only in new build and standardised procedures just doesn't work in this field. Rather, the architect must be a complex enabler of change in ways that the specialist Modernist world never anticipated. It is part of the whole ethos of our Postmodern times."

02 | TV-am – Hatton Street

"[At TV-am] the old 1950s street front in brick has been repackaged in shiny metal, shot through with coloured stripes that are supposed to symbolise sunrise: Terry Farrell's judicious mixture of camouflage and construction has turned what was a collection of scruffy garages into one of the most exotic looking television studios in the world."
Deyan Sudjic







Left The playful use of iconography at TV-am helps establish the occupier's identity – building as brand-making London, 1983).
Right At Hatton Street, which houses the Farrells studio, the industrial heritage of the building is exuberantly employed to add playfulness and entertainment to the utilitarian structure (project ongoing).

03 | Limehouse Studios – the Thames Gateway

"An adaptation of existing industrial buildings, a regeneration stormtrooper, anticipating what turned out to be a massive revival of the dockland area."
Hugh Pearman on Limehouse Studios

"Farrell's intervention is selective but succinct. It takes its inspiration from the stepped section and strong lines of the warehouse, but by vigorous contrasts of colour, materials and geometry, announces its apartness. Limehouse Studios brings to the present some of the bravado and adventure of dock buildings."
Rowan Moore









Terry Farrell "Limehouse Studios is an example of how we might reinterpret London's post-industrial fabric in a way that deals with the vastness of scale typically found in the areas concerned. The later history of the site epitomises the difficulties the British still seem to have in getting to grips with this scale; unlike the regeneration of parts of inner London like Covent Garden and King's Cross, here we're dealing with a predominantly industrial landscape extending over many square miles.

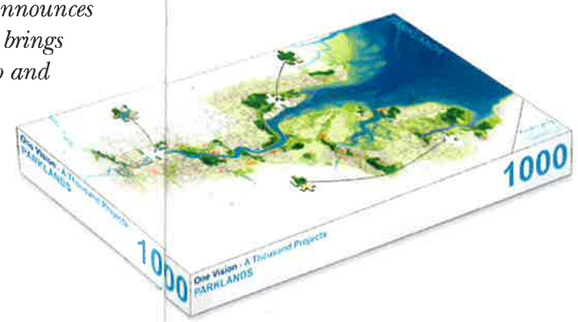
Limehouse Studios was a converted 1930s banana warehouse – a big, tough, reinforced concrete building. Our adaptation was a light touch upon the surface, preserving the robustness and integrity of the building itself, and the dark edge of its setting.

The building was later demolished to make way for Canary Wharf, an alien piece of the Manhattan landscape dropped into London, which has so little connection to place that it might equally have been put anywhere else in the docklands. Canary Wharf has proved a great commercial success, and one has to accept that some urbanity has been achieved within the development itself. But a much more holistic and broader approach by the London Docklands Development Corporation, learning from Limehouse Studios, would have been more successful for the city as a whole.

Nevertheless, the lessons learnt at Limehouse about working with the grain and scale of former industrial areas have been carried through into a lot of our later work on the Isle of Dogs, in the Thames Estuary and on the Thames Gateway project, at the Royal Docks in East London and as masterplanners of the Greenwich Peninsula. In each case the fundamental questions have been: how do you cope with this scale of change, and to what extent do you take into account the geographical features of rivers and their banks and the man-made physical features of docks and other utilitarian structures left over from earlier uses?

To achieve regeneration that benefits the whole region, not just small privileged enclaves, we need a more low-key and modest approach, a light touch, based upon landscape regeneration and a respect for what is already there."

Left Limehouse Studios on the Isle of Dogs, east London (1983).
Right Clockwise from top left: Thames Estuary Parklands vision – 'bottom up regeneration but with a picture on the box'; the masterplan for Greenwich Peninsula – still the largest planning consent in the UK; recent visioning work for the Royal Docks envisages a 'Water Garden City' and, together with the vision for the Isle of Dogs, follows the principles enshrined in the Parklands initiative.



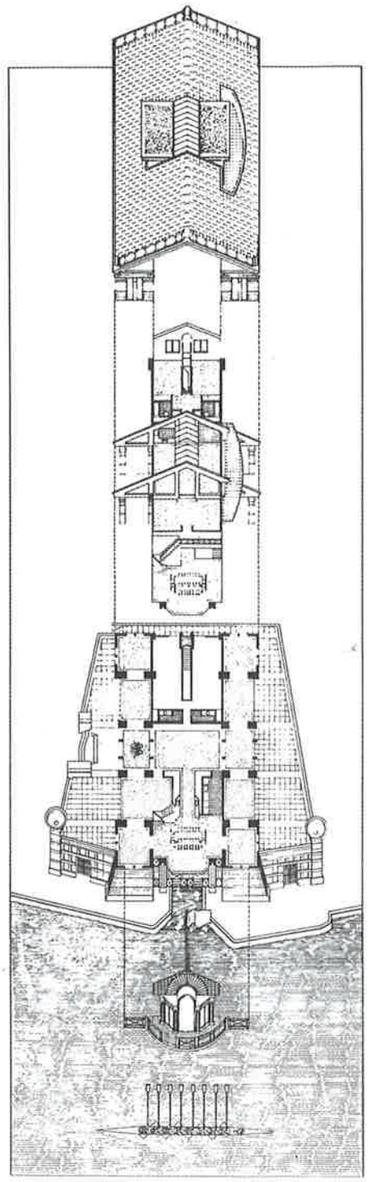












04 | Henley Royal Regatta Headquarters – Petersham Courtyard Housing

"It is a suburban resort where urban proprieties are maintained… Farrell has accordingly married a Villa Suburbana to a marquee, and then introduced some of the gravitas suitable to the only permanent manifestation of the Henley Royal Regatta, and to the Roman ideals of sport. The resulting ambiguity is entirely appropriate, and reflects the building's dramatic change of character when 11 months of quiet planning become a single month of action and festivity."
Rowan Moore

Terry Farrell "Much of the criticism directed at Postmodernism has been about it as a style and although one can readily see that there are aspects of style, its real significance is in the liberation from style. The challenge Postmodernism posed to Modernism wasn't that of one style to another, but that of many perspectives in place of a suffocating single way of seeing. In that way, the headquarters for the Henley Regatta can be seen as one of the most Postmodern of our buildings.

It has many inspirations, particularly the heraldry and sporting club dress of the Henley Regatta itself. There is an association between the Regatta and related institutions – such as public schools – and classicism, so there was strong justification for its continued use in the front facade. But much of the rest of the building is a simple domestic pitched-roof construction, a building of the south-east of England.

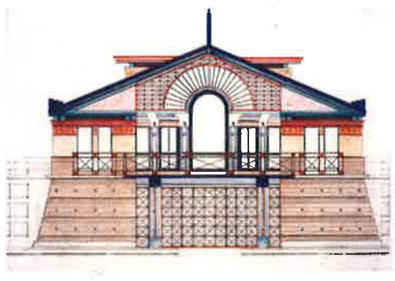
The building also has a complex mix of functional and spatial requirements. It has three entrances: a river entrance for boats, another at road level – a formal entrance for the clubhouse – and another at the rear, leading to to the secretary's flat above. The flat, with its sweeping 'smile' balcony, overlooks gardens and has its own Arts & Crafts character.

Our Petersham housing, also in the Thames Valley, continues this interest in complex spatial organisation on a small scale. The three courtyard houses were designed for a volume housebuilder with its own established tradition of building courtyard houses – one which is space-positive, rather than object-positive. While Henley is a public or institutional building and the Petersham houses are private, they share spatial complexity, the domestic two-storey scale that suits the upper Thames, sensitivity to landscape and particularly the enfilade of their main internal circulation systems.

The Petersham houses also draw on tradition – in this case modernism. We were conscious not just of Leonard Manasseh, who built houses on and near the site, but also of Eric Lyons and Span, accessible housing built by a mass housebuilder, albeit in a fairly expensive upmarket area. So both projects are based on a certain kind of vernacular. Henley is closer to what Lutyens and the Arts & Crafts movement might recognise as vernacular architecture, yet it also plays with aspects of classicism. At Petersham, it's the undemonstrative Modernism of Lyons and Manasseh that is accepted as a vernacular which is available for reinterpretation by Postmodernism."







Left At Henley Royal Regatta headquarters the use of muitiple styles mirrors the building's mix of uses (1985).
Right Courtyard housing in Petersham (2004) treats Modernism itself as an architectural vernacular.



05 | Comyn Ching – Earls Court

"Comyn Ching was ground-breaking – a residential and mixed-use scheme, militating for a balanced development which converted and retained as many existing buildings as possible, supported the existing community activity – and built only as much new development as would make the project commercially viable."
Kester Rattenbury

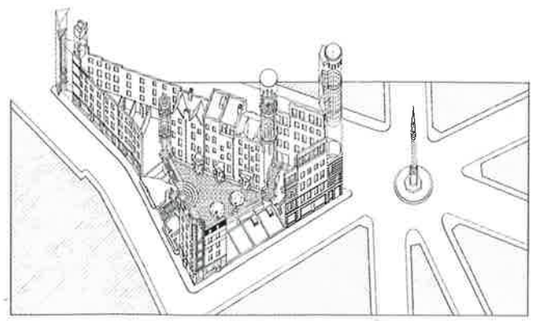




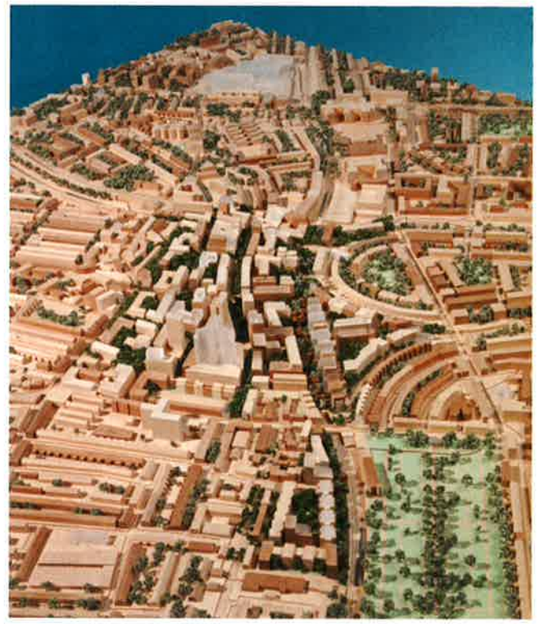












Left Old meets new in the redevelopment of Comyn Ching Triangle in Covent Garden (London, 1985). This pragmatic, incremental approach to regeneration was the antithesis of the prevailing approach which tended towards wholesale redevelopment.
Right Earls Court masterplan. The approach is to begin with placemaking and let the architecture follow. Existing communities around the edges will be grown to create four new urban villages connected by a twenty-first century high street.

Terry Farrell "From the early 1970s Farrells were involved in the reappraisal of urban regeneration. The battle between so-called Modernist progress and the conservation movement over the fate of Covent Garden was right at the forefront of debate, and the successful redevelopment of the area provided a template for regeneration that has subsequently influenced the approach taken in many districts of London, from Shoreditch to Docklands in the recent past to Nine Elms and Earls Court today.

Central to our work at Covent Garden was a collection of buildings – almost a village within the Covent Garden quarter – known as the Comyn Ching Triangle. Over a period of 15 years we progressively, one step at a time, renewed and regenerated these properties for three separate clients. The first step was to make space by clearing out all the buildings in the middle to create a new public courtyard, which is still one of the great lesser-known delights of Covent Garden. It involved reorganising the uses of the whole block so that upper floors were for the most part only accessible from the inner courtyard. There are a range of residential types, from townhouses to flats, as well as offices and retail units with retained individual shopfronts all around the edges. Integral to it all was the reinstatement and refurbishment of the Comyn Ching ironmonger, which was the original owner of the site, and now has its showroom on Shelton Street.

Working with several different owners and producing new architecture among refurbished buildings is the antithesis of the wholesale approach to regeneration and redevelopment advocated by Modernism, with its belief in a universality of building types and repetitious mass production. Here, new meets old producing difference, particularity – a total urban composition of such variety that it's hard to know at the beginning where one will end the project; pragmatism is a hallmark of such projects.

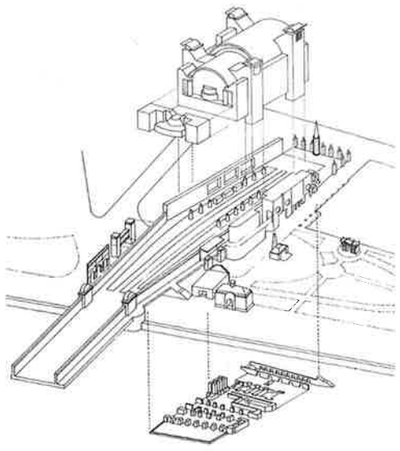
As masterplanners at Earls Court in west London, we are now beginning to create several of these urban villages, all based upon blending old and new, all looking at diversity of uses and all looking at building on the lessons of Covent Garden and Comyn Ching, where placemaking and public realm were the starting point, and architecture follows.

Architectural expression is a subsidiary to these imperatives; it has its place, but it occupies a modest place within the overall urban strategy. There is a variety of expression at Earls Court – we have 11 different architects on board now but there may well be 100 different designers involved by the time it is finished. There is a celebration of difference and celebration of placemaking whose roots can be traced to what happened in Covent Garden in the 1970s, to the conservation movement, the refurbishment and regeneration movement and indeed to the emphasis on variety in architectural expression that was championed by Postmodernism in that same era."



Terry Farrell "Much of our work in London has been concerned with the post-industrial regeneration of the city's urban fabric. Charles Dickens wrote not only about the area in Covent Garden that became the new Comyn Ching, but also about the seedy arches beneath the nearby Charing Cross station, a depressed place that was home only to the homeless even in the late-twentieth century. The pioneering transformation of this area was part of London's coming to terms with its industrial past, making necessary changes to the social and economic base as well as the physical structure of the city. The transformation of the station had a multi-layered complexity, and resulted from a development model in which the landowner (Westminster), the operational transportation body (British Rail) and the financial and procurement expertise of a developer all came together to make a new urban district.

The same model was later repeated at Kowloon where the MTR transportation company had both real estate and train operating arms on land owned by the city state of Hong Kong. Both projects were essentially three-dimensional masterplans of incredible complexity – vertically layered, with some trains deep underground and others high above, public spaces, streets, and a new urban quarter with buildings of all types,



including those essential for making a place, such as shops and houses. The only significant difference apart from the scale was that Kowloon was built on new land created in a new city while Charing Cross brought with it centuries of history.

The 'gateway' iconography is clear on both projects, but to different purposes. At Charing Cross the role of the station is expressed in the large-span arches. However, the suspension structure also unifies both the office floors and the station, supporting the floorplates to keep the tracks below clear. In contrast, the gateway at Kowloon addresses a main square that gives access to large concourses leading to the platforms below. The celebration of gateway, the clarity of its association with railways and entrances, unifies a complete urban district. In a truly Postmodern manner, iconography is separated from function, making a narrative that helps explain a district, lending identity and form. In contrast to the Modernist view that form is generated by function or construction, the urban district and its narrative comes first. One project led to the other, with our experience in dealing with the complexity of railway station, placemaking and development at Charing Cross proving crucial to the commission for the vast project at Kowloon – still the world's largest realised three-dimensional masterplan."







02 | Embankment Place – Kowloon Station

"What Charing Cross shows is that commerce, the private sector, is also capable of producing spectacular, eyecatching landmarks that can have enormous and immediate public appeal… By acting as a beacon to everyone driving or walking along the Embankment, or crossing the river, Terry Farrell's new Charing Cross building brightens the very heart of London."
Marcus Binney







Left The redevelopment of Charing Cross railway station (London, 1990) is a complex, multi-layered masterplan that includes an air-rights development over the train tracks.
Right Farrells' experience at Embankment Place proved invaluable when masterplanning the 'three-dimensional' vertical arrangement of Kowloon Station (Hong Kong, 1998).







Terry Farrell "The MI6 building next to Vauxhall Bridge on the Thames makes an interesting comparison with our later Home Office building not far away, along from Lambeth Bridge. The parallels begin with their locations. The MI6 building was built on a site where planning permission had been refused for the Green Giant, a tall high-rise building; the Home Office replaced tall buildings. Both of our buildings proved that groundscrapers can contain as much floor space as towers on a given site, and be much more efficient and effective in terms of containing a community as well as more economic in energy use.

Both buildings rely on atriums. The plan form of MI6 is not immediately apparent but was inspired by a visit I had made to Trondheim University a year or two earlier. I looked at the MI6 building as an opportunity to make a deep-plan office building with many different atriums – six in total – so that despite very large floorplates and quite sizeable communities of office workers, occupants always had light and views. At the Home Office, we placed three linked buildings around atriums with bridges across pedestrian routes.

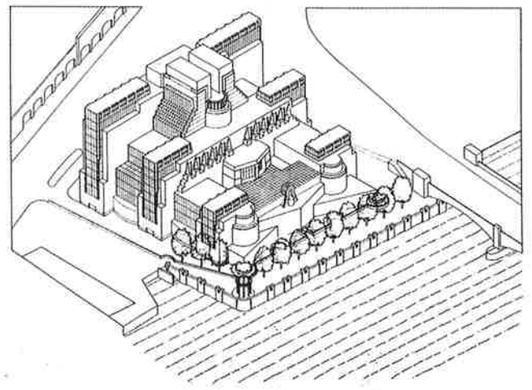
Both are government buildings and so security and access control were significant considerations, but both aim to make a contribution to the public realm, with gardens and a new river walk at MI6 and housing, shops, a crèche, gardens and pedestrian routes through the building integrated into the Home Office.

Moreover, while the two buildings respond in different ways to very different physical and urban contexts, both aim for a level of presence and playfulness – particularly in the use of ornament – appropriate to a public building in its given setting.

MI6 is a substantial riverside palazzo with a strong individual presence, like the whole run of buildings on the south bank of the Thames, which range from Giles Gilbert Scott's great Art Deco icons at Battersea and Bankside to County Hall and Lambeth Palace. The characterful silhouette of MI6 is deliberately designed to make the building a landmark object in its own right.

The Home Office, meanwhile, is in a dense urban situation, and we felt strongly that its triple-tower precedessor had been everything but a good neighbour. We spent a lot of time making the new building respond to its context, primarily in the urban design approach but also in the treatment of the exterior, which derives its presence from an assemblage or collage of artists' work produced under the direction of Liam Gillick and myself. These interventions are at the scale of the building and include canopies and printed glass, water features and signage. At MI6 the ornament comprises an assembly of components that are themselves miniature parts of buildings – including a miniature of the whole building itself."

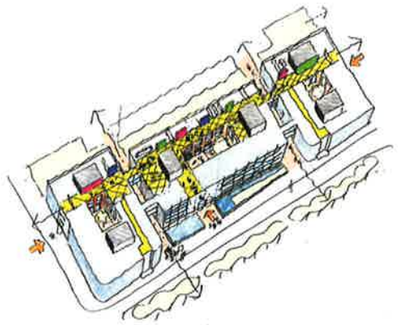




Left The headquarters of the Secret Intelligence Service – MI6 – at Vauxhall Cross on the south bank of the Thames (1993). The building responds to the run of landmark buildings along the river that includes County Hall and Battersea power station.
Right The Home Office at Marsham Street, London (2005), replaced a trio of towers known as the 'ugly sisters'.

07 | Vauxhall Cross – the Home Office

"Masterly in its understanding of the grandeur and formality that can be achieved by the massing of classically-based pavilions on the river… Like Wren's city churches, [Vauxhall Cross] depended upon a range of variations of the classical theme and an understanding of the London scale."
Colin Amery





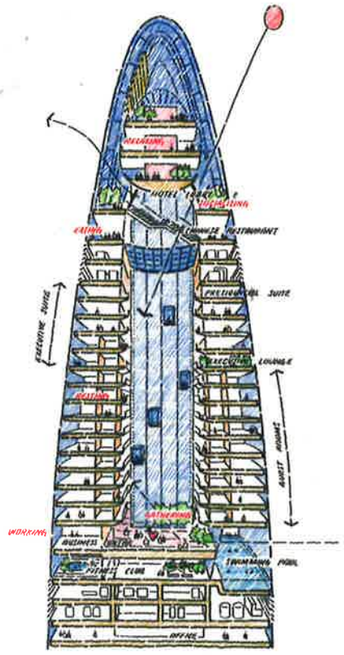






08 | Alban Gate – KK100

"[The buildings] bring new life to London's centre by working with, and not against, the grain of the city. But they also have a spectacular architectural presence of their own, offering a dramatic new element in the city that is operatic in its power and range."
Piers Gough on Alban Gate



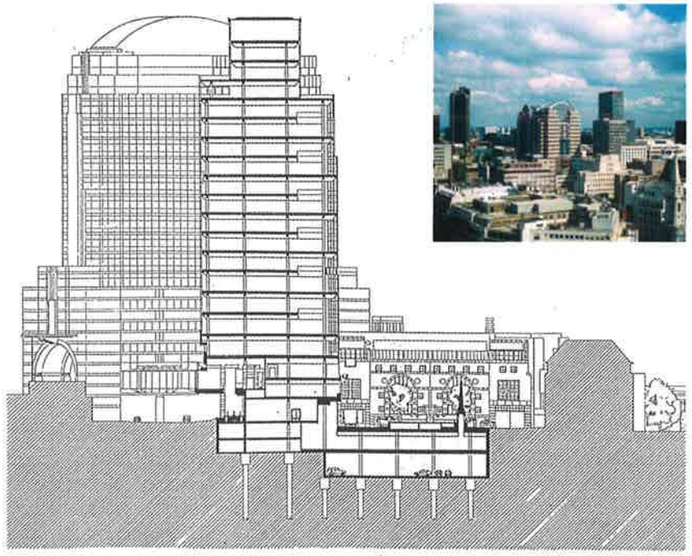
Terry Farrell "Alban Gate was an opportunity to build what was then seen as high-rise for London, although fairly modest by international standards. I had always been interested in precedents such as New York's Rockefeller Center, where the tower forms part of an urban complex with 'foothills'. In this sense, Alban Gate is definitely a tower with a context – at the rear of the development is a new residential square and to the west is a garden within the remains of the city's Roman wall. Around the base are new retail premises, and new pedestrian routes connect to the City's split-level pedestrian domain across London Wall.

Similarly, at the KK100 complex in Shenzhen, the tower is a recognisable element, raising its head on the skyline, but its foothills include a large residential and retail complex – connection to the street is more important than the iconic quality of the building itself. Structurally, Alban Gate was extraordinarily challenging, with cross-bracing that rises through the whole building to support it in the air above the busy road. KK100, too, is notable for its technical innovation. It is the eighth tallest building in the world, and by far the thinnest super-high-rise. Moreover, it is asymmetrical, so Arup faced severe challenges of wind loading and eccentric forces.

Both buildings embrace a complex internal urbanism. The hotel that occupies the top 30 storeys of KK100 has a central atrium with a reception capsule set within a multi-storey conservatory with panoramic views across the city. At Alban Gate, a tall south-facing atrium rises up the full height of the building, giving similarly spectacular views. Both schemes incorporate structural gymnastics and complex vertical spatial components in their atriums and both have foothills – both are essentially urban towers that create density and liveability at the same time. They respect the city and its grain, and both make and contribute to the sense of place."







Left Alban Gate in the City is relatively tall for London; 'foothills' of building around the base form the urban context (1992). **Right** The 100-storey KK100 tower – the tallest building realised by a British architect – is the most visible element of a much larger masterplan with 'foothills' containing housing, retail and transport connections (Shenzhen, 2011).





09 | Edinburgh International Conference Centre – Regent's Place, London





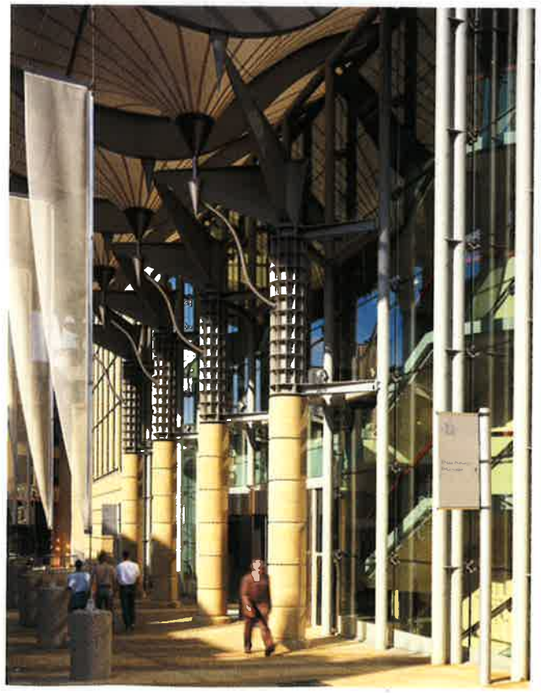
Terry Farrell "Both Edinburgh Conference Centre and our buildings at Regent's Place, north of London's Euston Road, arose from our role as masterplanner, taking backland and disjointed pieces of city and reconnecting them with routes and buildings to create new urban districts. We find that the problems of contemporary urbanism tend to recur, not least where 1960s motorway-like thoroughfares are present, such as at Euston Road and the West Approach Road, which cuts through our Edinburgh masterplan.

Both of these schemes address neighbourhood revitalisation, so the Conference Centre looks outwards onto Morrison Street, creating a frontage and street elements that brought in adjacent ownership. Likewise Regent's Place embraces streets to the west and north, forming street frontages and entrances to reintroduce continuity to the urban fabric.

Another intriguing parallel is that both projects are concerned with bridging a busy road. At Regent's Place we are forming pedestrian bridges across the traffic underpass in a project called Euston Circus, and in Edinburgh a new bridge links with the town to the north. We were concerned with creating disaggregated forms, so the conference centre has pavilions which carefully follow the street line, while the central drum provides a unifying element. In Edinburgh we also designed and took to planning an adjacent building that continued this flow of building elements within the masterplan. Both the Edinburgh and London projects are constructed in precast concrete, have street-edge buildings and deal with new pedestrian ways through the site. Urban continuity and urban connectedness are central to the way they are designed."









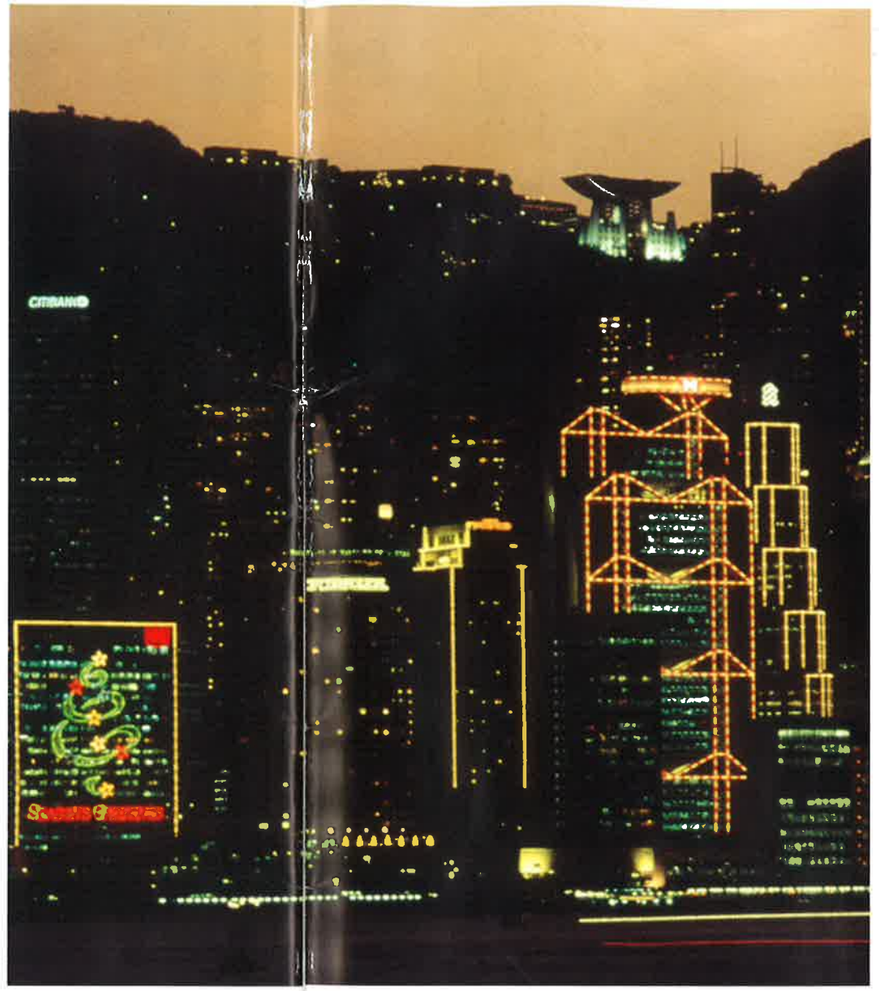




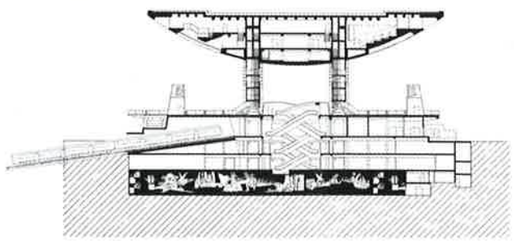


Left The Edinburgh International Conference Centre (1995) is part of Farrells' masterplan for the Exchange District of Edinburgh which has now been built out.
Right Regent's Place, London, was awarded the RTPI award for Sustainable Communities in 2010.











10 | The Peak Tower – Beijing South Station

Terry Farrell "The Peak was probably the last in a series of our buildings with the recognisable stylistic characteristics of Postmodernism. The building form refers to the large ceremonial arches and gateways found in China. It was also intended to provide a distinctive silhouette on the famous mountain top and to mark the arrival point of a little funicular train. To my mind the shape reflects the upturned eaves of the big solid roofs that are characteristic of Chinese architecture, and this raises the issue of whether we should reference Chinese architectural traditions in new buildings. There is much debate about this issue in China, of course, where the norm seems to be to import non-specific architectural ideas that don't relate to China or indeed anywhere. With The Peak, my sensibilities took me in the other direction – as they invariably do in the context of China. The intention is to be contemporary while also reflecting and building upon the past.

In the same way, the design of Beijing South Station has a very strong formal component. Stations by their nature tend to have an axial arrangement, with pedestrian routes that intersect the railway line axis. As in an airport or a cathedral, there is a particular formality of pedestrian movement and the spatial organisation of the building inevitably acquires this formality. As our starting point we looked to references such as the Temple of Heaven, which has a similar circular shape in plan. In both The Peak and Beijing South Station, the roof became the predominant form and both seem to have a strong continuity with Chinese traditions.

"Here is an architect, who has refused to deliver repetitious signature buildings. Commission him and you'll get a distinctive building. What you won't get is a brand marked 'Farrell'... Terry Farrell remains – charmingly, obdurately – a genuine explorer whose architecture materialises like islands rising from an archipelago of dreams – the no-brand man."
Jay Merrick

In our entry for the Beijing Opera House competition, our solution related organisationally to the orthogonal plan of the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square, and this provoked a discussion among local architects and politicians about whether they wanted continuity or discontinuity. Eventually the jury chose a rival scheme, a more free-form international project that, as built, seems to express little about the rich cultural context it occupies.

In this way, the building forms of both The Peak and Beijing South Station bring together modern conditions and the continuity of tradition in recognisable iconic forms. Clearly we are appealing to a certain populism here, but this is part of the essence of a Postmodern interpretation of architecture and it is this point that is being re-examined in 2011. Have the Chinese gone too far in abandoning their connections with Chinese traditions, history and identity? As architects working across global boundaries, we must look beyond the physical environment to examine and cultivate the cultural contexts in which we are working."

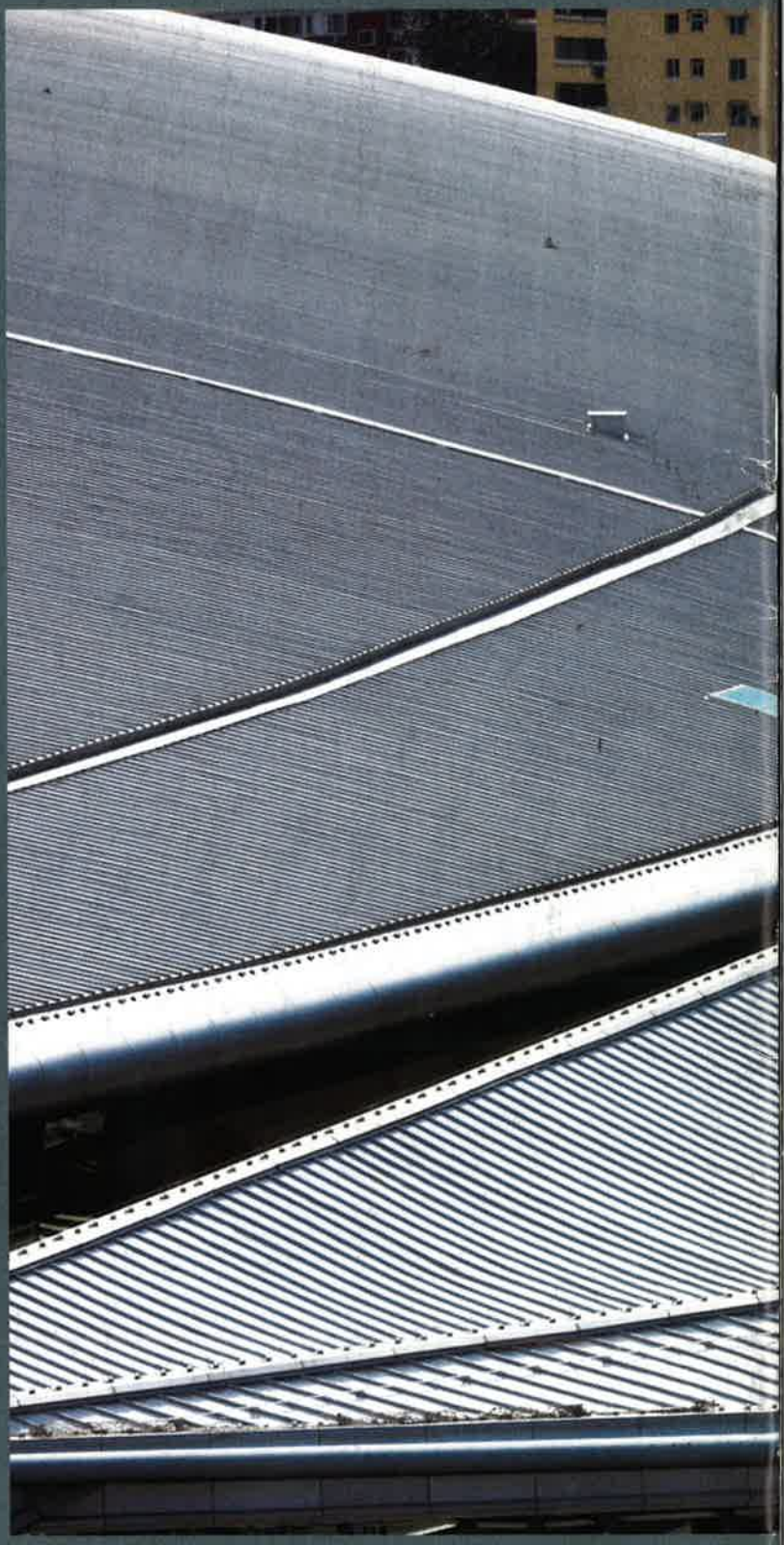






Left The Peak Tower, Hong Kong, (1995) and Beijing Opera House competition entry (1998) – elements of traditional Chinese architecture incorporated into technically advanced modern buildings.
Right Beijing South Station, 2008.







'We are all postmodernists now'

Terry Farrell, 2011, from the catalogue of the Victoria & Albert Museum exhibition Postmodernism: Style & Subversion 1970-1990