



## 2006 RSUA Design Award - Workshop/Living Space, Oxford Street, Belfast

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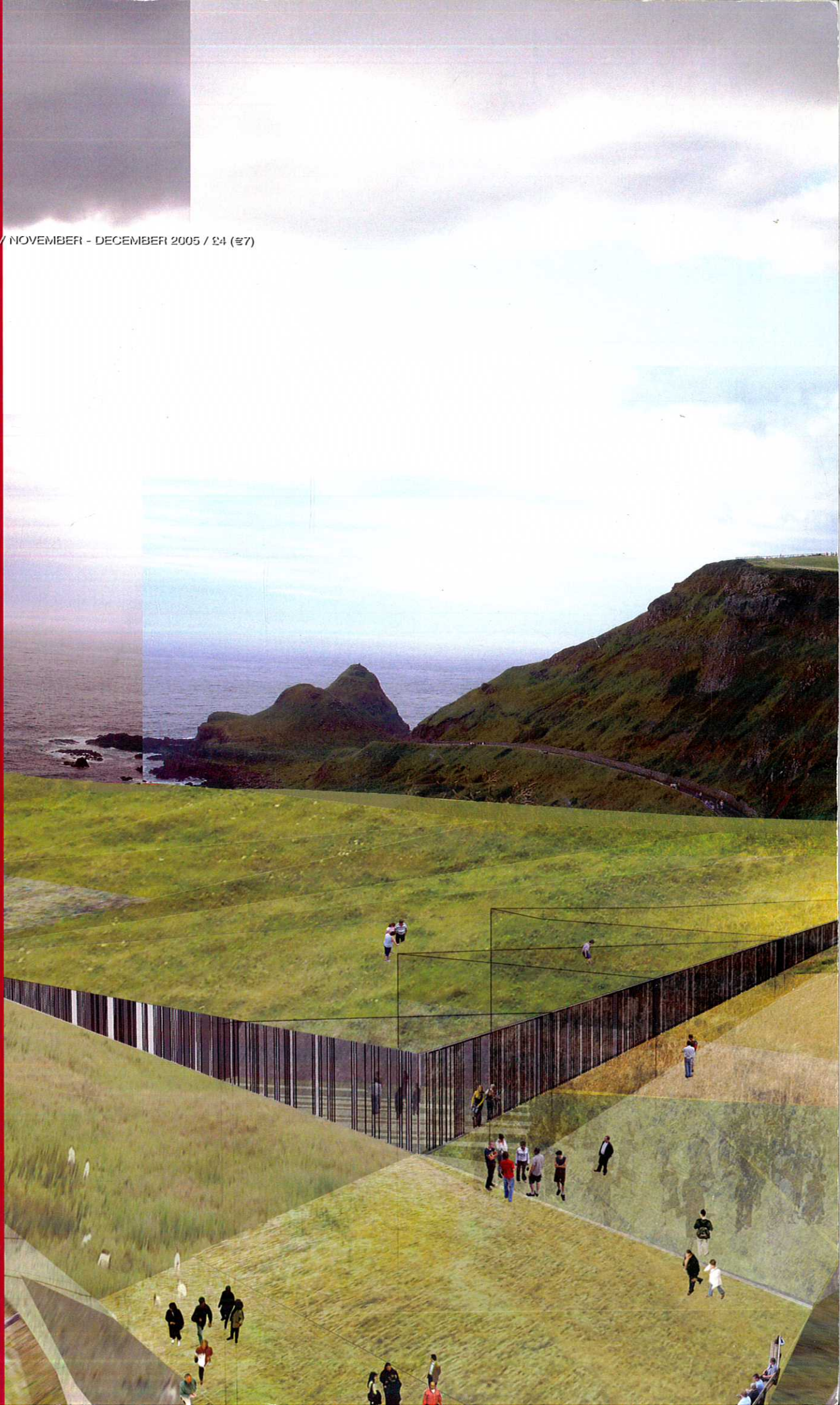
# PERPECTIVE

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GIANTS CAUSEWAY  
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## INDUSTRIAL RESOLUTION

• 50

A showroom for modern furniture is an obvious place to look for the patronage of good semi-industrial architecture, and the new premises for Living Space and Workshop in a newly refurbished building on Belfast's Oxford Street is a fitting illustration of this point.

The three storey building has in previous incarnations been a workshop for Bentley and Rolls Royce cars and, more recently, offices for a bank with car parking provision at ground floor, which sadly offered nothing to the street (or to the Lagan waterfront beyond).

It now houses the premises for Living Space (the domestic furniture retail outlet), Workshop (the contract furniture business, and speculative offices). Kennedy FitzGerald have turned this un-promising building into to a cool retail environment, as befits its design-conscious client, and provided a frontage that has successfully raised its profile and embraced the commercial potential of the new location. This shop frontage

"Throughout the entire development there is an obvious enjoyment of architecture as a tactile craft, demonstrating a great balance between intervention and repair. The constraints of the existing fabric have been used as opportunities for spatial experience, and fortuitous coincidences such as the routing of an exposed duct through an existing circular window opening above the main desk, have been used to great effect."

has re-modelled the ground floor façade in a very understated way, visually unifying the entrances to all three functions and providing views in to Living Space itself, and back out to the river.

The project is, however, first and foremost an exercise in the modelling of interior space and exhibits a degree of integrity that is usually missing from the transient approach to design evident in most retail outlets. The project accommodates modern retail's reliance on a rapid turnover of interior display and layout

by providing a neutral but carefully considered framework within which the products can speak for themselves in a variety of ways, without the architecture becoming the centre of attention.

The main retail environment is that of Living Space and on arrival, its scale is such that the eye does not get attracted to too much in one go, a benefit that is reinforced by the skilful utilisation of the section which hints at different spatial episodes without revealing all, thus encouraging exploration.

The key sectional shift in the middle of the plan where the ground floor ▶

Right / living space, view of new stair



Above / living space, new mezzanine with original plate steel beam and roof structure beyond

Left / Oxford Street shopfront and existing offices.



### THE TEAM

Client / workshop / living space

Architect / Kennedy FitzGerald & Associates

Quantity Surveyor / White Young Green

Structural / Doran Consulting

Mech & Elec / White Young Green

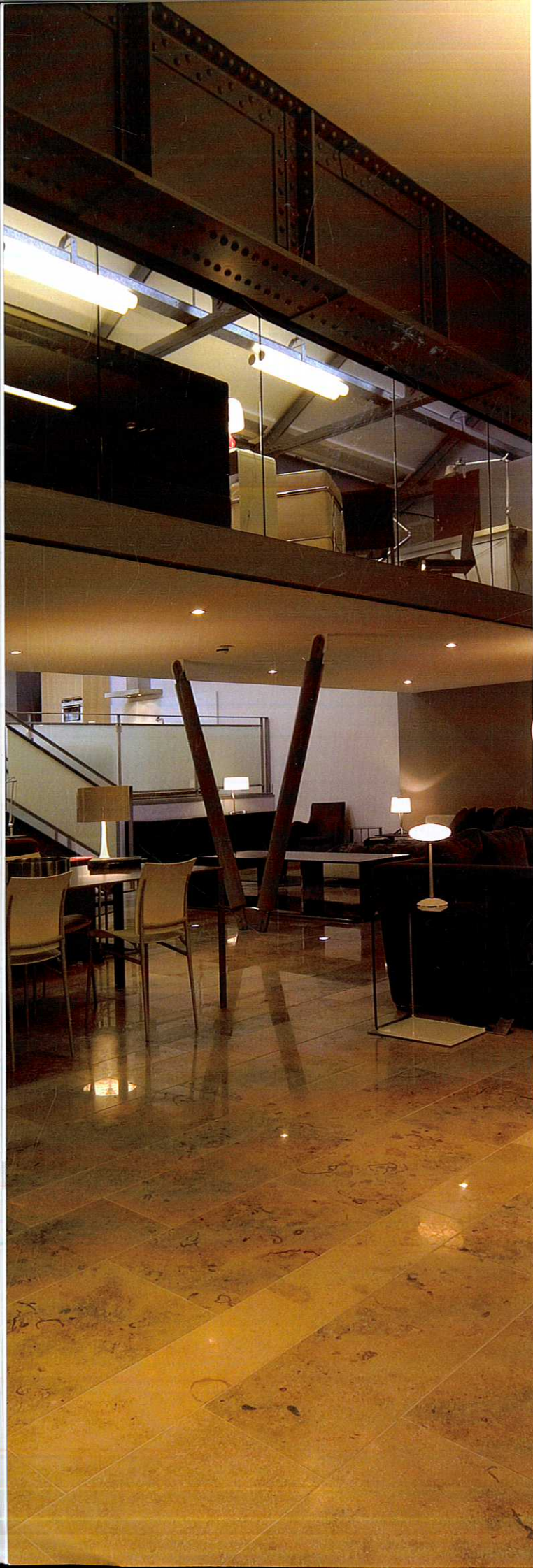
Main Contractor / Martin Shopfitting  
(H&J Martin)

Photography / Todd Watson  
Signals Photography









► gives on to a lower ground and mezzanine levels occurs below a series of existing saw tooth patent glazed roof lights and coincides with the main desk/reception. This area in particular, with the original steel trusses exposed, patent glazing and brickwork, illustrates the very successful relationship established between the existing shell and the new interior, a characteristic that is exhibited throughout the shop. This has been fuelled by a very conscious effort to reveal aspects of the building's past, with design decisions sometimes being made on site as parts of the building were revealed. This process has been aptly likened to archaeology by Kennedy FitzGerald rather than architecture.

Detailing throughout is robust, simple and economic, but this rather spare approach is one of the key successes of the scheme. Mechanical ducts and galvanised trunking hang comfortably at high level within the space alongside the much more stylish light fittings. Balustrading to the key feature stair and mezzanine is constructed from steel flats, which are suitably industrial in feel, generally with opaque glass infill panels preventing direct views through the shop, reinforcing the ambition that the shop's spaces are only gradually revealed.



There is, however, precision to the execution, and a richness to the materials where appropriate. The Jura limestone floor with its heavily fossilised pattern and the architects' very controlled layout is beautiful, and provides a sufficiently accented floor plane on which to exhibit the furniture.

Workshop, which deals with the contract furniture side of the business is physically, but not visually, linked internally and has its own shop front - much smaller as there is a separate clientele who usually come by appointment.

A similar emphasis on spatial drama is exhibited as one enters from the ►

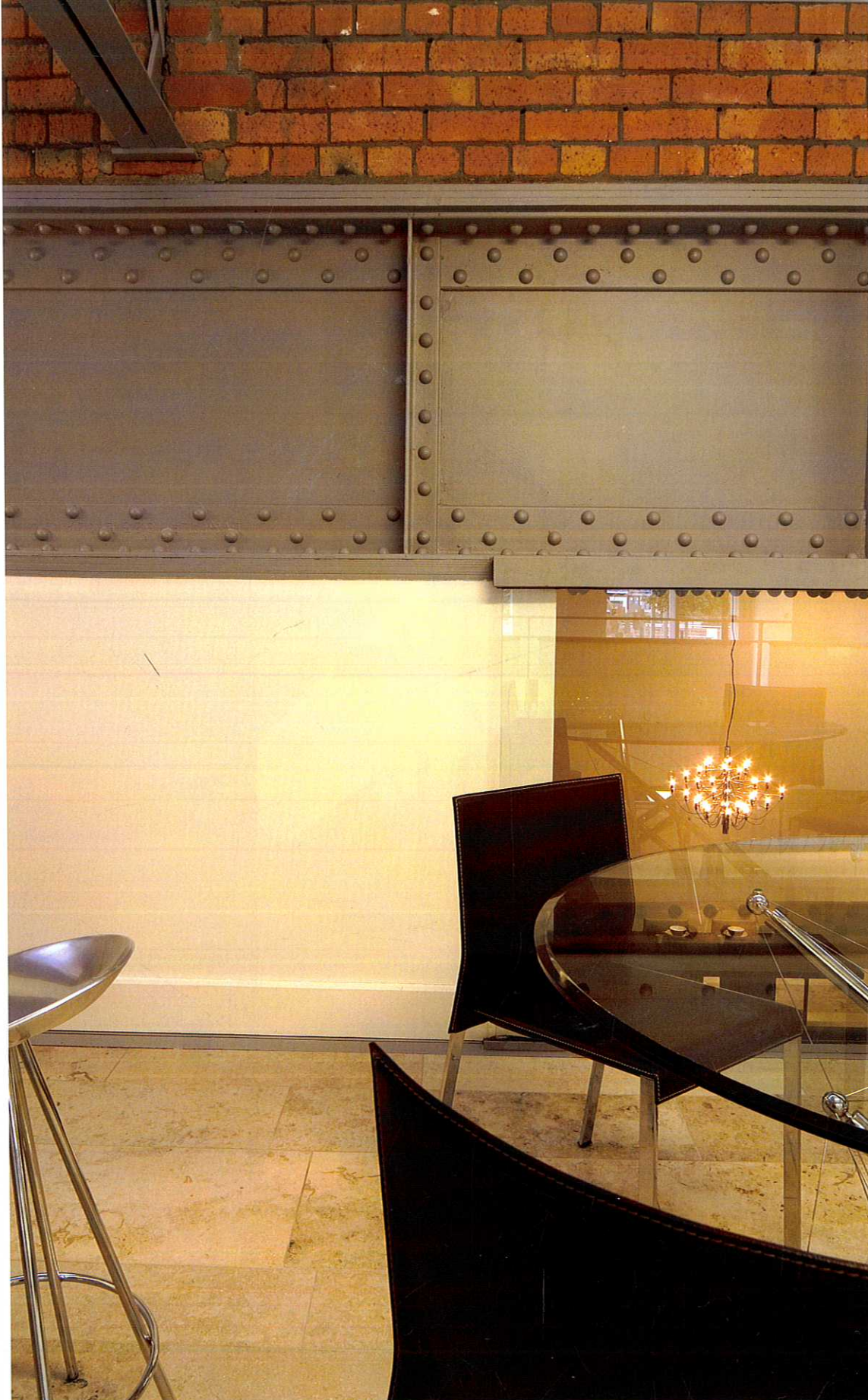


Left / living space, views framed by new mezzanine and existing structure

Above / living space, layering of showroom spaces from shopfront

Top / living space, view under mezzanine





Left / living space, mezzanine

Below / living space, coordination of structure, services and display

Below left / workshop, detail view of display niche



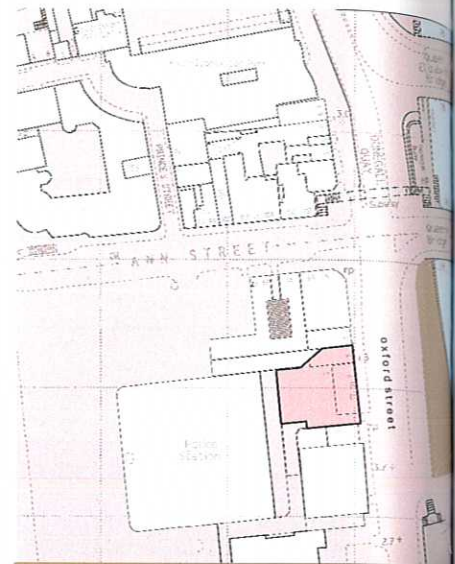
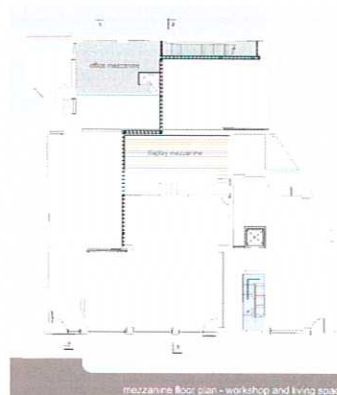
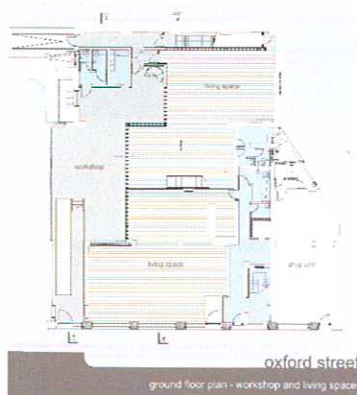
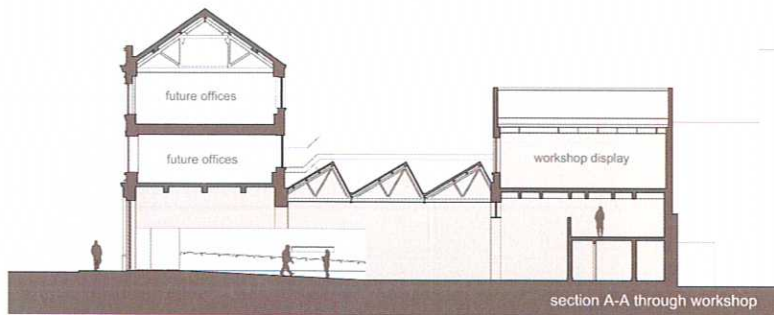
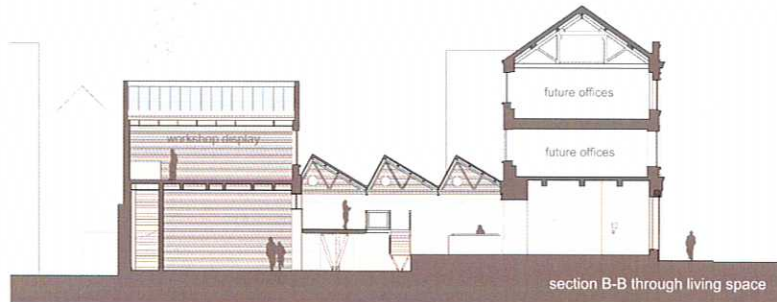
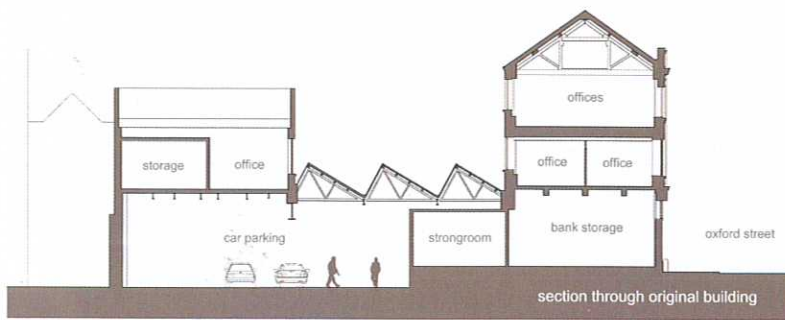
► street down a ramp (where the old vehicular access used to be) alongside a narrow display area. This area is articulated by the subtle shifting planes of studwork walls and a display area enlivened by some beautiful graphics, before expanding into a larger office

area at the rear overlooked by another office at mezzanine level, accessed by a suitably robust galvanised steel stair.

A display area for Workshop runs the full width of the premises at the rear; with a larger scale saw ►



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► tooth rooflight and existing large windows creating a wonderful daylight studio space.

Throughout the entire development there is an obvious enjoyment of architecture as a tactile craft, demonstrating a great balance between intervention and repair. The constraints of the existing fabric have been used as opportunities for spatial experience, and fortuitous coincidences such as the routing of an exposed duct through an existing circular window

opening above the main desk, have been used to great effect. A simple palette of materials, with subtle colours and lighting provides an ambience entirely appropriate for the task of displaying a variety of furniture.

This is not a design that subjects you to its own selfish intentions, rather it acts as a simple backdrop that turns a visit into an experience that is much more special. ●

**Stephen Gallagher**



Left above and below / workshop, Original and transformed entrance ramp views.

Below / living space, view of new mezzanine with existing steel beams and rooftrusses

