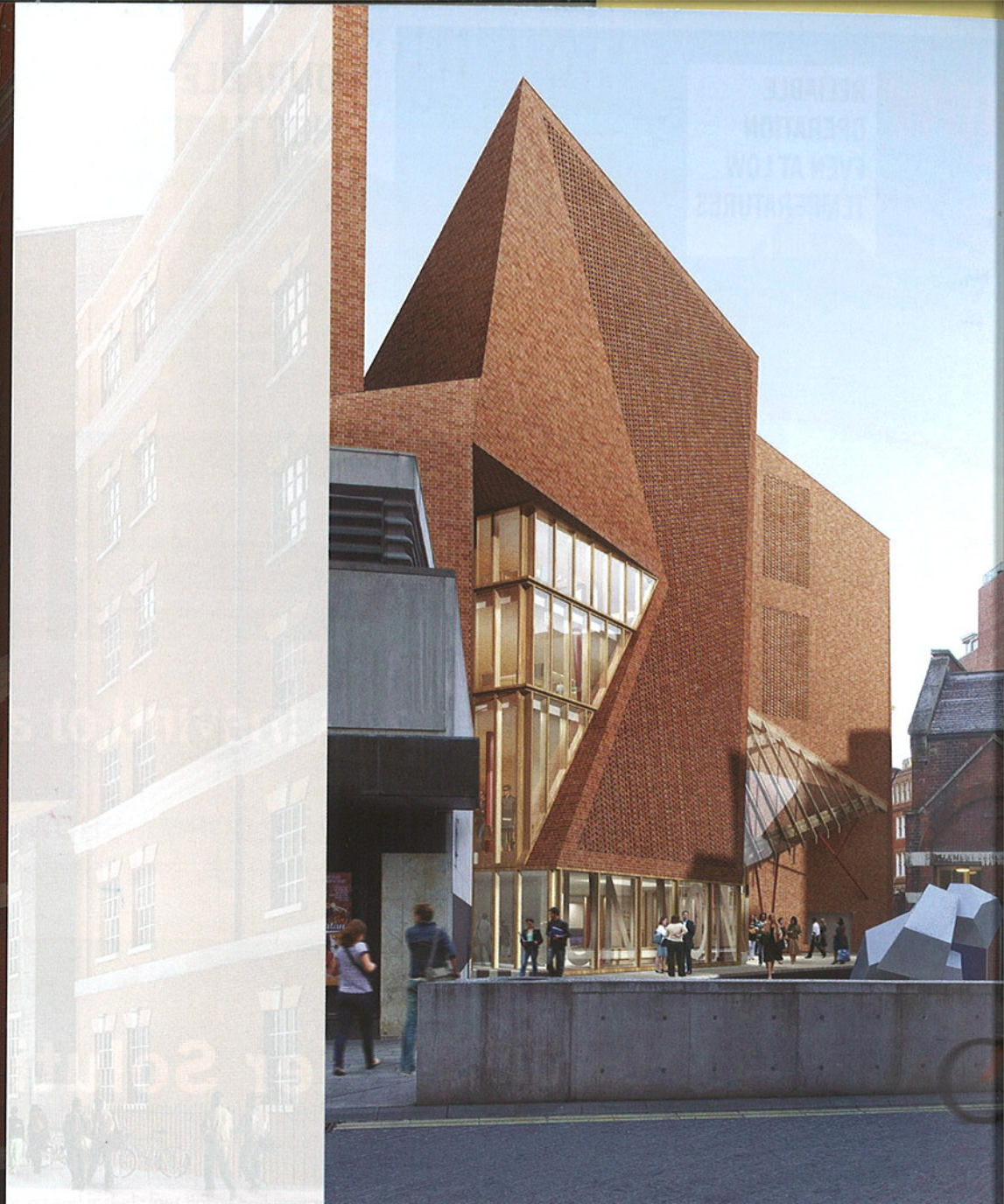


Useful Beauty!



O'Donnell + Tuomey has won an international design competition for a new £21.5 million Students' Centre at the London School of Economics. The new facilities on LSE's Aldwych campus will include a student union reception, bars, entertainment venues, media facilities and offices.

O'Donnell + Tuomey describe the project: "The architectural intention for the design of the building is to create an active Student Union, the appearance and contemporary character of which should be inviting, welcoming and even provoking to its users. Our aspiration is for a democratic, everyday, unusual architecture of useful beauty. The site is located at the knuckle-point convergence of the network of narrow streets that characterise the LSE city centre campus. We are creating a public space at the threshold of the Student Union on axis with St Clement's Lane, pulling pedestrian street life into and up the building. Inside the building open stairways spiral around the central lift shaft that forms a skewering pivot-point at the centre of gravity of the plan. These wide stairs with slow steps make a flowing continuous ribbon of movement from street to roof garden, a vertical building working as a single organism. Space flows freely in horizontal plan and vertical section creating a variety of diagonal break-out spaces

at landings and crossings throughout the building.

The exterior walls are clad in bricks recycled from the old St Philips hospital buildings, in places each brick offset from the next in an open work pattern. The glazing is held in timber frames. The folded, chamfered, canted and faceted façade is tailored in response to specific lines of sight along approaching vistas and from street corner perspectives. Like a Japanese puzzle, the design is carefully assembled to make one coherent volume from a complex set of interdependent component parts.

The key principle of truly sustainable design is to opt for robust solutions which focus investment on building elements with the longest life cycle. A particular advantage of the cut-away (non-centralised atrium) configuration of the scheme is that every space enjoys natural light and ventilation. This approach has practical advantages for the low-cost and energy efficiency of the building services systems. It is better to design a fundamentally efficient building and this strategy serves to simplify building servicing strategies, reducing costs and allowing expensive targets such as carbon neutrality to be achieved.

