

O'Donnell + Tuomey's striking riverside shapes

Architectural education: an uncertain future

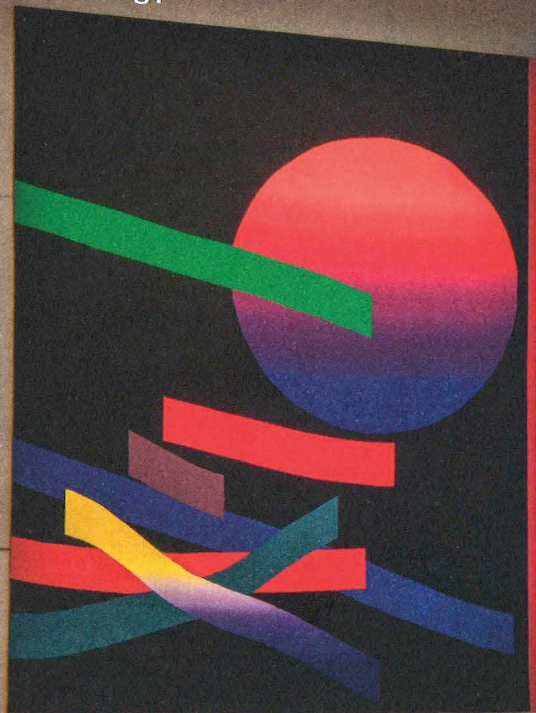
Walworth Town Hall roof rises from the ashes

Future winners: practices showing promise

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Pull shapes

Sadler's Wells East by O'Donnell + Tuomey creates a striking form on London's emerging East Bank

Words: Eleanor Young

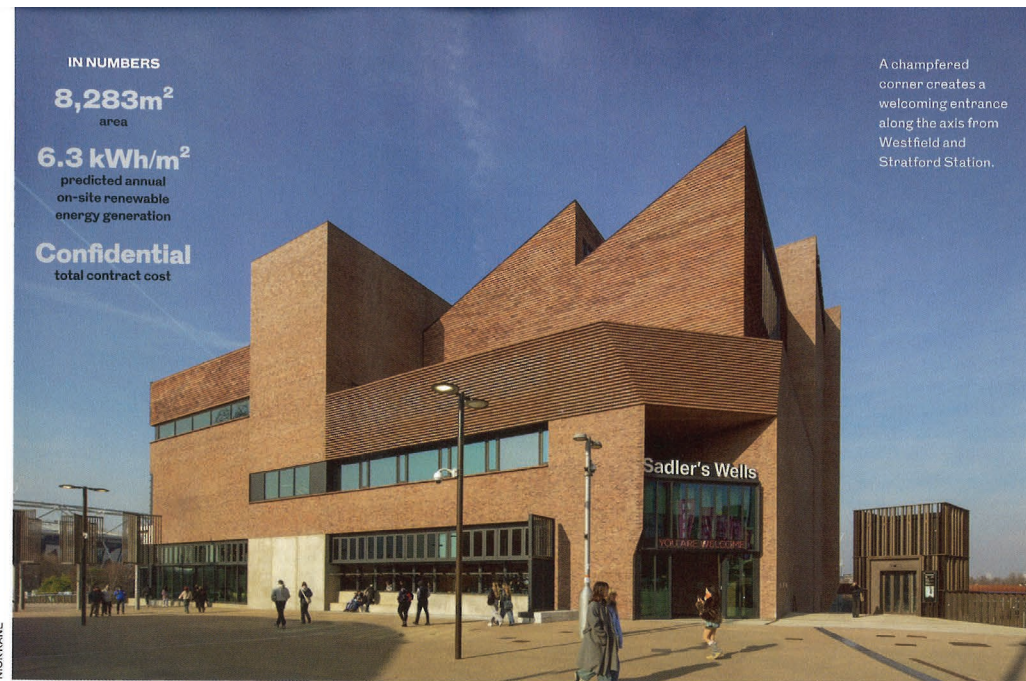
Sadler's Wells East
seen across the River
Lea, with two of the
other East Bank
institutions alongside.

IN NUMBERS

8,283m²
area
6.3 kWh/m²
predicted annual
on-site renewable
energy generation

Confidential
total contract cost

A chamfered corner creates a welcoming entrance along the axis from Westfield and Stratford Station.

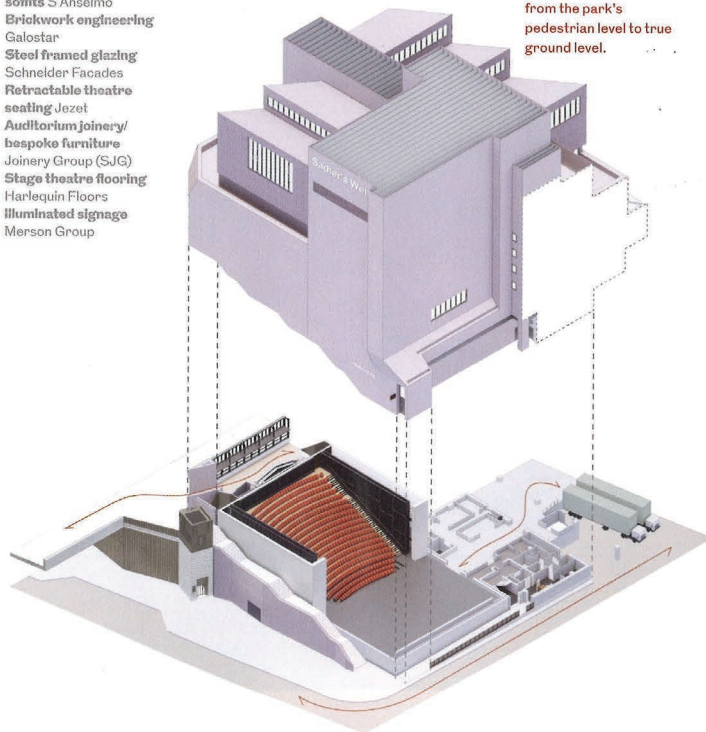


NICK KANE

The gateway to London's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is, for most people, Westfield Stratford City shopping centre. The bright lights and distractions of window displays sit in contrast to the large-scale moves of the buildings beyond, with grand forms that can appear impenetrable – take the looming futurism of Zaha Hadid Architects' Aquatics Centre. But right opposite is the new Sadler's Wells East, a warm entrance cut deep into the brick, angled towards the flow of arrivals. O'Donnell + Tuomey's design has a cutaway corner, welcoming visitors to the dance organisation.

This design is an iceberg; the auditorium is largely below the pedestrian level of Stratford Walk, extending down 8m to the service road below and leaving the 'ground' level free to welcome visitors. The building itself reaches out into the public realm. The heavily framed windows open up to create a canopy for audiences to drink under. Floor-to-ceiling glazing on the corner means more space where you can see the public performance space being brought to life – this is an open foyer of the sort seen at the South Bank Centre. With overlooking terraces and a small performance space stepping down to

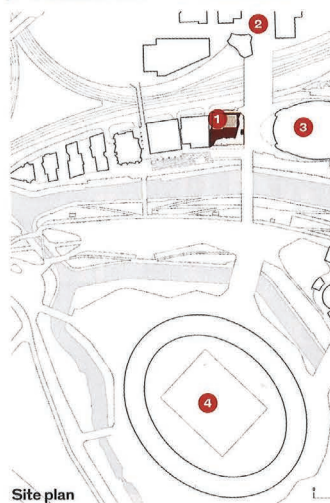
Suppliers
Brick, tiles, clay paving/
soffits S Anselmo
Brickwork engineering
Galostar
Steel framed glazing
Schneider Facades
Retractable theatre
seating Jozet
Auditorium joinery/
bespoke furniture
Joinery Group (SJG)
Stage theatre flooring
Harlequin Floors
Illuminated signage
Merson Group



The auditorium – designed with Charcoal Blue – drops down from the park's pedestrian level to true ground level.

Buildings Cultural

- 1 Sadler's Wells East
- 2 To Westfield Stratford
- 3 London Aquatics Centre
- 4 London Stadium



Site plan

the River Lea, the building pushes out a concrete-framed canopy, studded with pavement lights, which allows the sunshine through.

Perhaps it should be no surprise that the building's massing works in its favour. RIBA Royal Gold Medallist O'Donnell + Tuomey was a key part of the masterplan team for the four cultural buildings of what has been dubbed the East Bank, working with Allies and Morrison and Girona's Arquitecturia Camps Felip. The Dublin-based practice is also delivering the other cultural showpiece of this collection, in the form of V&A East Museum. Sandwiched between it and Sadler's Wells East are two projects by Allies and Morrison: BBC Music Studios, which relocates the broadcaster's Maida Vale studios, and UAL's London College of Fashion, which pushes up – rather bullishly –



The dramatic colours from artist Eva Rothschild's tapestries add piquancy to the muted materials.

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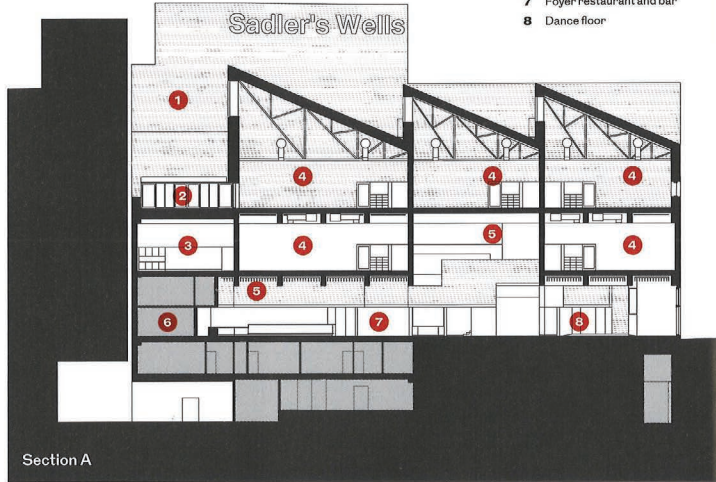


PETER MOLLOY

The L-shaped foyer gives a corner dance floor centre stage.



PETER MOLLOY



- 1 Flytower
- 2 Terrace
- 3 Office
- 4 Studio
- 5 Collaboration space
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Foyer restaurant and bar
- 8 Dance floor

'It is a building wearing its costume – bare naked compared to other buildings'

Top left A canopy creates a sheltered space to look out over public space and river.

Below The bricks continue inside, here disguising vents from the auditorium.



PETER MOLLOY

to 17 storeys, enlivened inside by its dramatic snaking staircases. There will also be 600 new homes on this narrow strip of land, drawn together by some of the same cues from the masterplan of a common ground and a sense that the buildings have been created by casting.

So far the object buildings do indeed share a sense of solidity. The V&A and London College of Fashion work hard to touch the ground lightly. Sadler's Wells, with its history of ballet, does not attempt to pirouette by the Lea; instead, its tectonic message is one of a place of making, with 'north' lights setting up a sawtooth roofline. The artistic director, Alistair Spalding, has set the ambition, launching a hip-hop academy (Academy Breakin' Convention) on the upper floors and a choreography doctorate as well as other dance classes and engagement. 'It is a straightforward building for working and playing,' says O'Donnell + Tuomey founding director Sheila O'Donnell.

Just how 'straightforward' is a moot point. But it certainly can be explained like that with forcefully rectilinear studios gathered around the fly tower and the series of rooms each visible – to the trained observer – in the brick shapes of the building. 'It is a building of big rooms,' says O'Donnell. 'And that shows outside.'

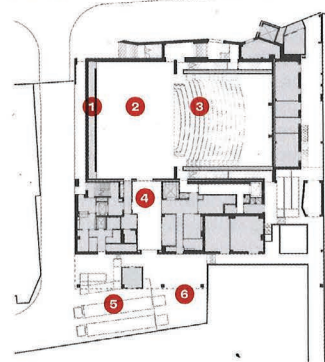
Ribbon windows around the studios seem equally to point to simplicity. John Tuomey echoes his partner's sentiment. 'It is a building wearing its costume,' he says, 'bare naked compared to other buildings.'

As you might expect from O'Donnell + Tuomey, the brick itself plays an important role, from the idea of casting or carving from a solid driving brick, to other bricks accompanied by some large-format tiles from the same clay, provided by manufacturer S Anselmo. There are elbow bricks, pointed bricks, sharp bricks and specials; there are cills in the clay; there were 71 moulds. Rows of bricks, held by dowels, are lined up as horizontal louvres to shade and control views into the studios, hung clay tiles encase the studios. On the rehearsal studio, the tiles stop short of the ground to leave glazing and a bed of planting right up to the window, so softening the high roof terrace. If you should go down to the service road, Carpenter Road, at the base of the building, you will see the brick-encased external stair climbing slowly up to the 'ground' floor entrance, oversized clay tiles building a solid banister, drawing a line on this otherwise blank auditorium facade. It is from the base you can appreciate Tuomey's ambition for 'brand new



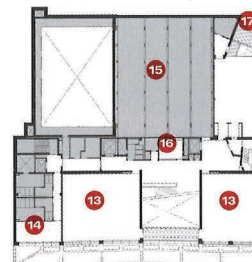
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Level -2

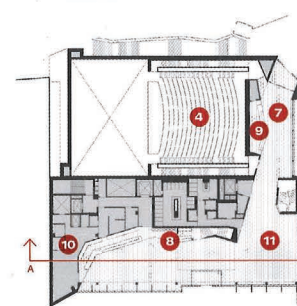


- | | | |
|--------------|---------------------|------------------|
| 1 Run-around | 5 Loading bay | 9 Restaurant/bar |
| 2 Stage | 6 Get-in | 10 Kitchen |
| 3 Auditorium | 7 Foyer | 11 Dance floor |
| 4 Scene dock | 8 Welcome desk/shop | 12 Fly gallery |

Level 2

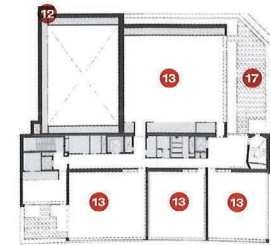


Level 0



- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 13 Studio | 16 Classroom |
| 14 Green room | 17 Terrace |
| 15 Acoustic isolation zone and plant room | |

Level 3



Level 03 Plan

ancient' as the ventilation shaft projects out above the stage door.

When arriving for an evening performance, very little of this matters. It is all about getting in, the bar contained under the red steel beam and the nooks where you can take your interval drink. O'Donnell + Tuomey does in plan here what it does in section in other, typically vertical, buildings – creating nooks and crannies, as Tuomey notes. The auditorium itself continues the sense of warmth and solidity from the front of house spaces, by means of a cork floor, ply seats and amber seat cushions.

Tuomey points out that sightlines are demanding in dance as you have to be able to see the performers' feet. At its opening show, Vicki Igbokwe-Ozoagu's *Our Mighty Groove*, the 550 seats were stowed away during the interval. For the second half, the audience funnelled down the staircases in the double-skinned walls, on either side of where the bleachers had been, to vogue and waack alongside the performers in an almighty sweaty club night. While the double-skinned wall enables the seating and stage format to be flexible, it also allows quick access to hang lights and helps deliver on acoustic separation. For the Sadler's Wells team and the many



NICK KANE

visiting dance companies there is also a run-around along the back of the stage giving performers a way to cross, out of sight of the audience. The six entrances for performers also give more flexibility than the four it would typically have. The loading bays extend under the outdoor terrace with access shared with the other East Bank institutions. What is oddly not shared is a party wall. For acoustic separation, the two walls of Sadler's Wells and the BBC studios sit shyly side by side just centimetres apart. Acoustic separation also accounts for a huge hidden space within the volume of the building between the auditorium and the rehearsal studio, allowing both to operate at full pelt at the same time.

Credits
Architect O'Donnell + Tuomey
Client London Legacy Development Corporation
Structural and M&E engineer Buro Happold
Quantity surveyor Gardiner & Theobald
Project manager Mace
Theatre consultant Charcoal Blue
Acoustic consultant Charcoal Blue
Landscape consultant LDA
Lighting consultant Buro Happold
Feature lighting consultant Aideen Malone

Top left Strips of ply create internal divisions that allow glimpses of movement behind them.

Above A line of windows gives views out for dancers above a lofty studio.

Bottom right Rusty red steels accent openings.

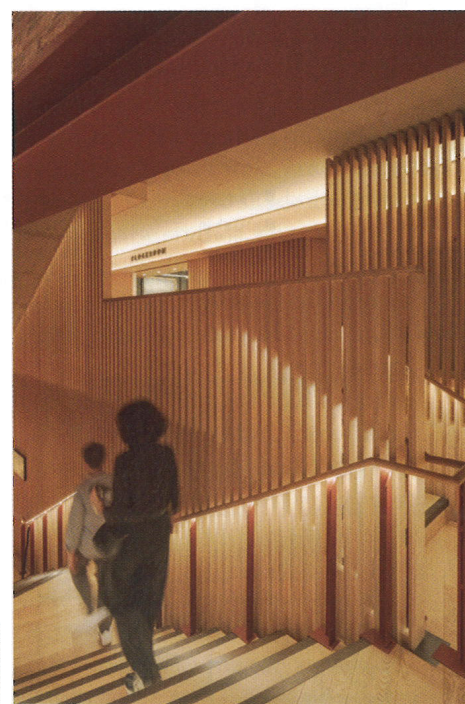
Below Bleacher seating and staircases beyond the wall either side of the seats this a very flexible performance space.

Inside there are ply highlights and a rusty red steel delineating spaces alongside the planes of brick and concrete – the concrete to be draped with brilliant tapestries – while outside the concrete panels are due to receive a commissioned graffiti design. Inside and out, the building is designed for 'civic participation' – the sort of legacy the building's client, the London Legacy Development Corporation, is charged with delivering. I can imagine it peopled with users coming for the space and ambience, the welcome and the Wi-Fi, like the British Library. Then perhaps on the dot of 6pm they will rise up in a balletic flash mob of silent disco and truly bring Sadler's Wells East alive. ●

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