

**RIAI**

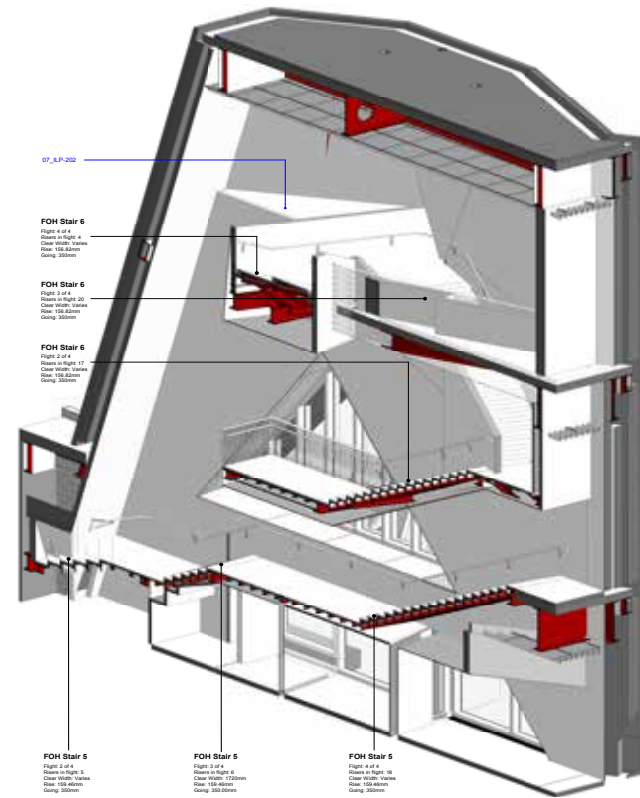
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The **RIAI** Journal



# Detail V&A East, London

O'Donnell + Tuomey



V&A East is a new museum under construction on the Stratford Waterfront in London. The building will house exhibitions, events, and activities, spaces for community-led projects, installations, and collaborations – with a café, shop, and views over the park from a public roof terrace. The five-storey museum has two public entrances, from podium level and from the waterfront square. Designed around a central core, the galleries lead one to another in sequence, inviting visitors to explore the entire building, with a large space on the third floor for temporary exhibitions.

We saw the Balenciaga exhibition at the V&A, a memorable display that drew attention to the Spanish couturier's use of the Japanese concept of *Ma* or 'the space in between'. His sculptural garments provide a sense of space between the body and the enclosing fabric, framing rather than restricting the figure. We made sketches of similar sleeve spaces in Vermeer's *Woman Writing a Letter* in Dublin's National Gallery. These studies were useful reference points in our development of the architectural idea.

The skin of the building is a folded form, giving identity to the museum and providing a protective coat for the environmentally controlled conditions within. The faceted facade is built in precast concrete, and is now being assembled on site by Techcrete. Prefabricated in 464 individually tailored and interlocking pieces, stacked in two-metre bandwidths and fixed to a steel structural frame. Each panel is different, with overlapping lines of low relief to provide variation in shadow and light. Mural stairs and viewing windows occupy the thickness of the outer crust.

The external form is complex, a complicated geometry to model, tricky to draw in three dimensions, difficult to resolve all the junctions in detail design and

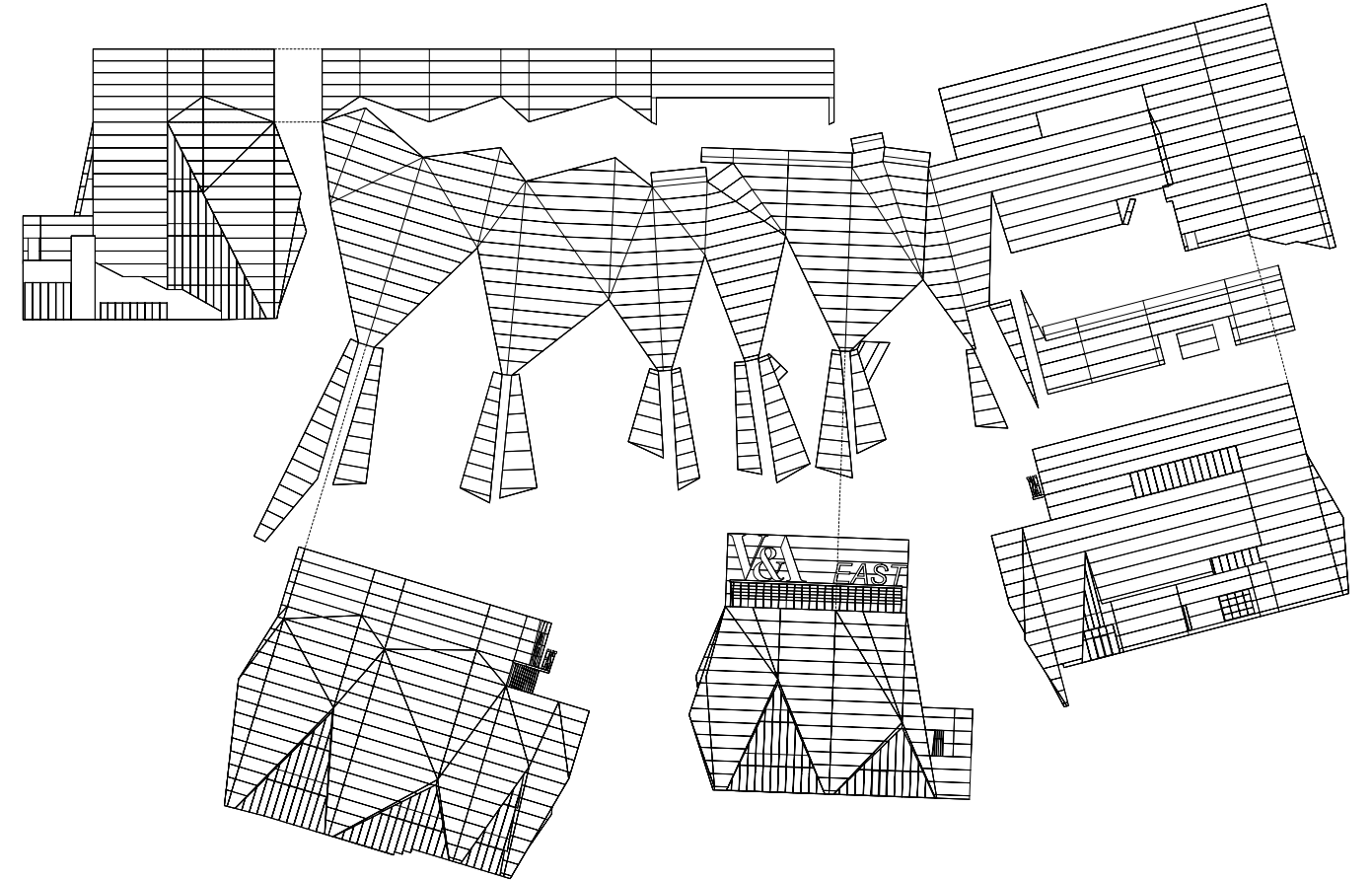
manufacture. Our project team is led by our director Mark Grehan, with two senior project architects Brian Barber and Kevin O'Brien sharing responsibility for bones and skin respectively. For two years, during the detail design stage, they were assisted by a young Scotsman, Ross Ledsham, who worked with us this past four and half years. Ross made the drawings and models published here.

We were all shocked and saddened by Ross Ledsham's sudden death in January 2022. He was a brilliant architect and a fine young man, a gifted and dedicated member of our studio family. He will be fondly remembered by all his friends and colleagues at O'Donnell + Tuomey.

— John Tuomey FRIAI

From the day Ross joined the V&A team, he dedicated himself to the work and craft of architecture within the office, producing wonderful drawings and models in the development of the design. Ross understood that the complexities and intricacies of a building design can be solved through dedication, methodical thinking and, most importantly, drawing. This was epitomised when Ross was asked to undertake a study of the complex, folding form of the V&A facade. The drawings and work which Ross produced demonstrated what a skilled architect he was, exemplified by his unique ability to illustrate the true bespoke tailoring of the V&A's facade in a single drawing. Ross's drawings mesmerised the V&A and the office; he showed us how complex forms and ideas could be distilled and made clear. Ross was a truly gifted and skilled architect. He will be sadly missed by myself, the V&A team, and those of us lucky enough to have worked alongside him.

— Kevin O'Brien MRlAI



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