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FOREVER YOUNG

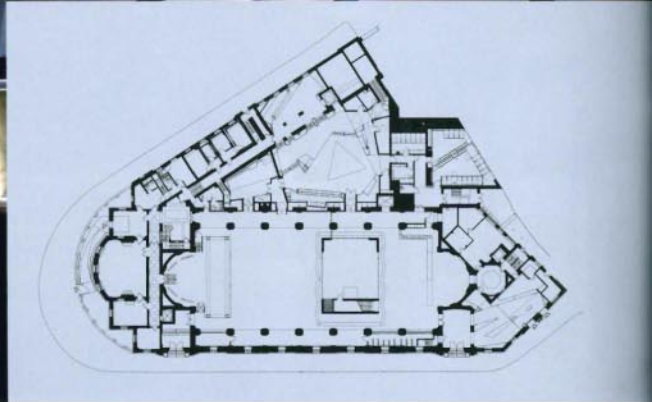
OPEN Youth Venue Hudson Architects

Photography by Edmund Sumner

It's both unconventional and impressive. The combination of a muted 1929 Grade II-listed building exterior with contemporary and vivacious insides is a rare contrast in today's world of disappearing heritage. Costing £6 million, the refurbishment of this former banking hall was part of the OPEN Youth Trust's vision to have a city-based centre with a high-quality infrastructure offering youngsters support and advice within a "stimulating and positive" environment. And opportunities for stimulation there came aplenty as that vision took the form of a structure comprising climbing wall, dance studio, recording studio, cafe, media lab, the country's first nightclub for under-18s and a live-event space with an audience capacity of 1,450. Arguably, the venue surpasses its brief, demonstrating Hudson Architects' ability to design a space that's unique and aesthetically inspiring, particularly against the backdrop of one of England's smaller cities.

To begin with, the architects lined the main hall with an inner structure. As the focal point of the venue, the faceted gold-mesh steel platform sits in the main hall like a gigantic table that snakes its way around the insides of the structure. Made of recyclable materials, the platform is removable. A series of prisms zigzag across the ceiling, providing theatrical lighting for live performances.

The platform also acts as a space organiser. At ground level it is divided into a series of discrete spaces, which can be configured in various ways by using movable acoustic





partitions. The platform provides access to facilities to the south of the hall, such as the cafe and classroom spaces. A double-height atrium emulates a village with glazed white brick walls, tall street lamps and a green linoleum floor. Featuring pink-strip lighting, the under-18s' club has its own street entrance. Although linked to the hall, it has been designed to operate independently.

The most striking attribute of the interiors is its candy colours. Every shade from neon green to orange yellow to electric blue streaks through the venue, conjuring that adolescent bubblegum charm with appropos aplomb. Bright, modern furniture pieces such as red Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec Alcove sofas and purple Wiesner Hager Compod Play reclining chairs further energise the space. Elsewhere, sunshine yellow walls liven up a conference room. All the furniture and fittings were carefully selected in consultation with a local youth group – a wise move, considering how tricky it can be to understand troubled teens!