



GASHOLDERS LONDON: LIVING IN A GAS CONTAINER

Posted on May 5, 2018 by editorship



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King's Cross is the largest urban redevelopment scheme in Europe, and the rich industrial heritage of the area is integral to its renaissance. Among the most distinctive and beautiful features to be retained is the triplet of Grade II-listed, cast iron gasholder guide frames which were originally constructed in 1867. The triplet was abandoned as heavy industry moved to the outskirts of the city and was dismantled in 2001 to allow for the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

ISSN : 2575-5374

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WilkinsonEyre won a design competition in 2002 with the concept for three residential buildings to be housed within the elegant frames. The concept proposed three drums of accommodation at differing heights to suggest the movement of the original gasholders, which would have risen up or down depending on the pressure of the gas within. A fourth, virtual drum shape located at the centre forms an open courtyard, celebrating the conglomeration of the cast iron structures at their point of intersection.



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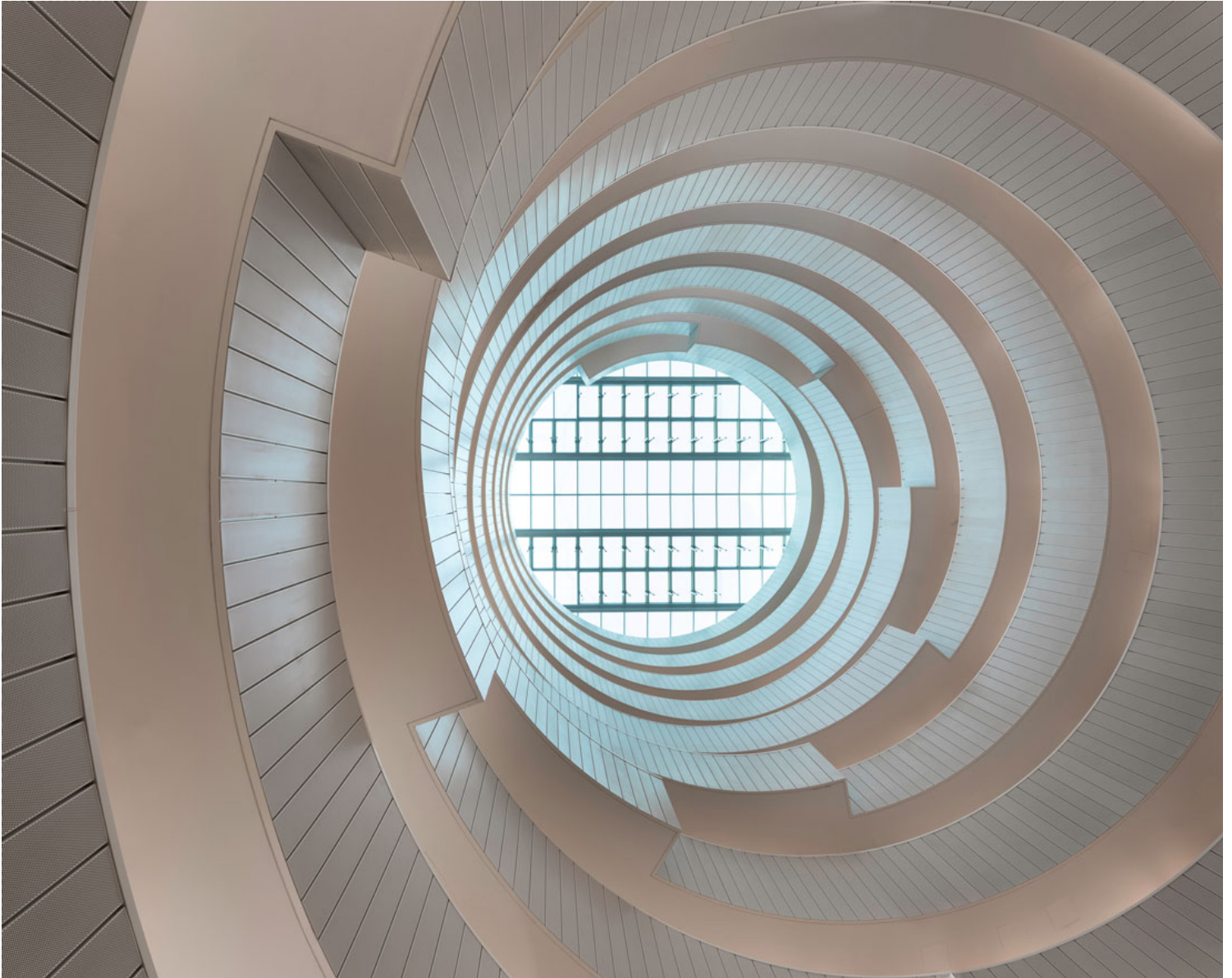
The scheme provides 145 apartments, a private gym and spa, a business lounge and an entertainment suite with screening room, bar, reception area and private dining room. Apartments are accessed through a central courtyard, each drum volume with its own atrium and core. These are linked by a series of circular walkways which surround the courtyard, where light is reflected in a central water feature. In another play of contrasts, the roofs are planted as gardens to bring nature to this re-inhabited urban landscape.

The circular nature of the buildings results in apartments that are laid out to take advantage of natural daylighting, with the living and bedrooms at the perimeter. The pie-shaped configuration of the grid forms open-plan apartments with expansive views and a variety of orientations.

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The design for Gasholders was developed to create a dynamic counterpoint between new and old. The heavy industrial aesthetic and raw physical materiality of the guide frames contrast with the lightness and intricacy of the interior spaces, which draw inspiration from the delicate refinement of a traditional watch movement.

The cladding is composed of modular vertical panels of steel and glass, textured with a veil of

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shutters which can be opened or closed at the touch of a button, to give shade and privacy to the occupants. Designed for the busy urbanite, the apartments incorporate innovative technologies which will allow residents to adjust, control and environmentally fine-tune their living spaces.

This new vision for the Gasholders balances the functional requirements of modern living, whilst celebrating the character and form of the triplet guide frame. The project responds to the wider industrial heritage, meeting the inherent constraints with imaginative design.



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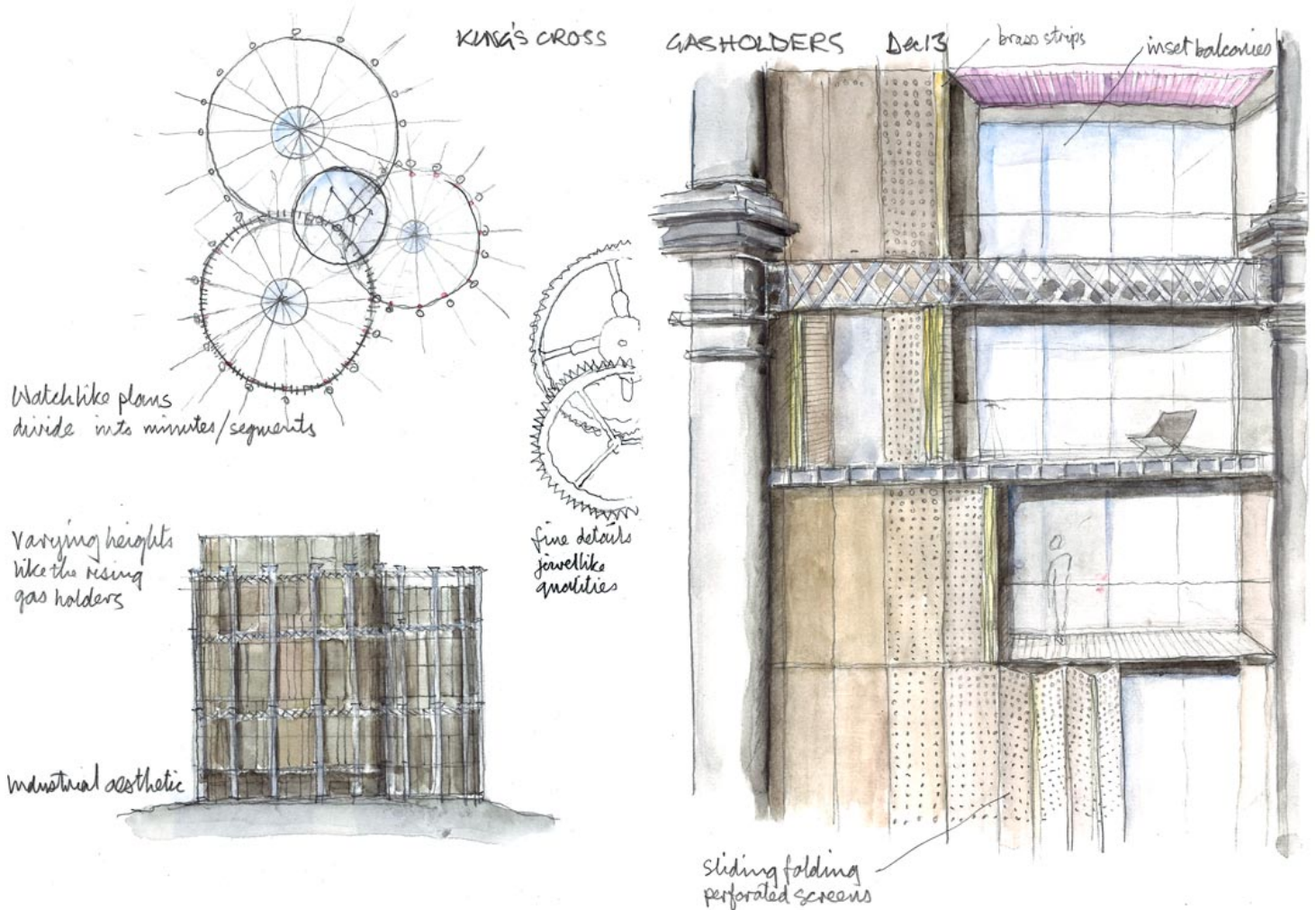
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'Working with circular geometry has resulted in really beautiful ideas. What began as a challenge turned out to be a blessing.'

'The gasholders are historic, industrial structures being redeveloped, but in a more enduring sense, we view it like a watchmaker would see a beautiful timepiece. We wanted to retain the presence of the structure but give it new meaning and use for the future.'

'We're placing new against old, finding ways to create an elegant contrast.'

Chris Wilkinson, OBE, RA DipArch RIBA Hon FAIA, FCSD

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