



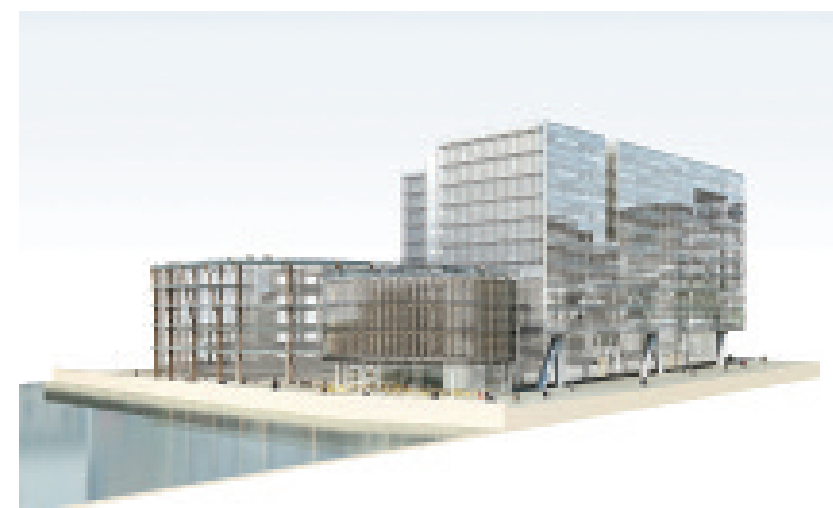
BUILDING ■ Reaction and reflection: Fletcher Priest's Watermark Place

*Shaped by a mixture of ambition and constraint, the latest addition to the Thames bank makes sense both of the site and the property market into which it is launched, says **Richard Saxon**. Photographs: Tim Soar.*

Professor Jeremy Till, in his recent book *Architecture Depends*, attacks the myth that architects can determine form themselves and freeze it for time to come. Other forces drive most of what can happen in any development and changes continue as buildings learn (in Stewart Brand's phrase) to suit their occupants. Till proposes that architects act as interpreters of circumstances, making sense of them and exploiting contingencies. In Watermark Place we have a building which might be a case study of that approach.

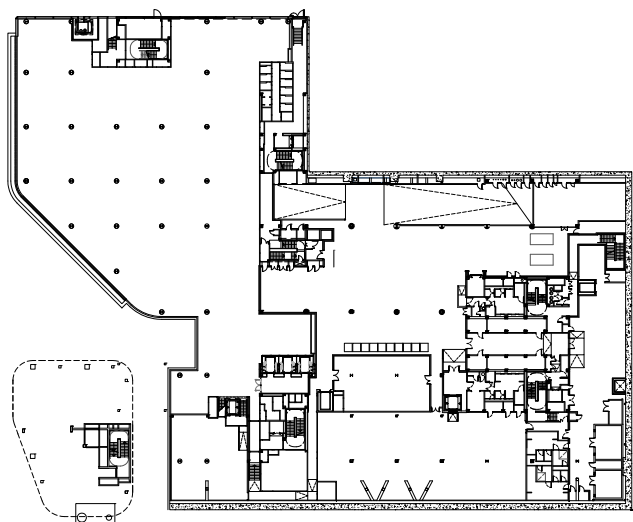
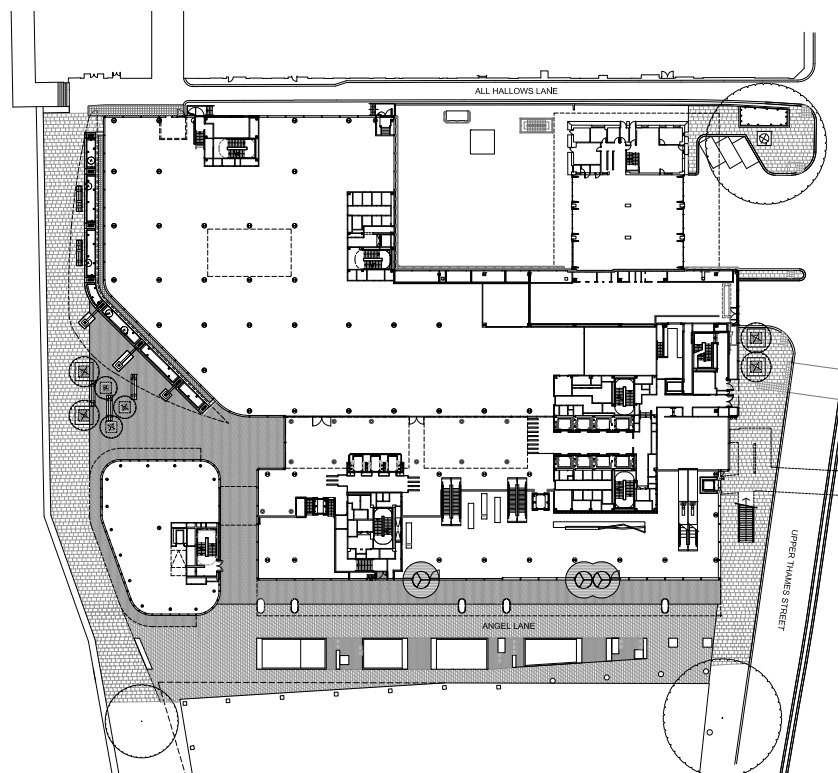
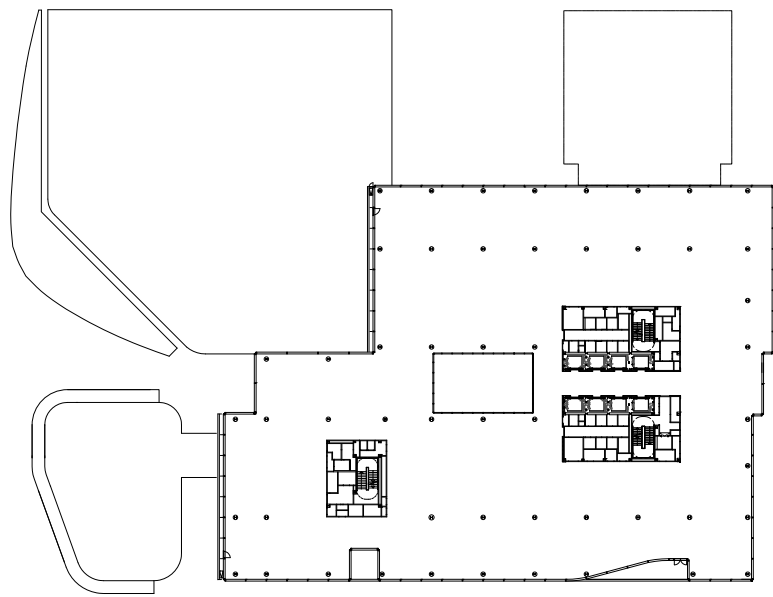
The north bank of the Thames, where the City meets the river, has not been blessed with many fine post-war buildings.

Now the stretch between Cannon Street Station and London Bridge is being redeveloped and the first completed building, Watermark Place, is likely to please many. It appears to be a cluster of buildings, with unusual low pavilions to the riverfront featuring timber, a material not associated with the sleek glass and granite image of the financial centre. The name chosen for the development gives a Freudian hint of wishing to remain invisible and avoid the opprobrium heaped on its predecessor, Mondial House. That futuristic white telephone exchange was dubbed 'a giant word-processor' (whatever that might be) by Prince Charles. The bulk of the half-

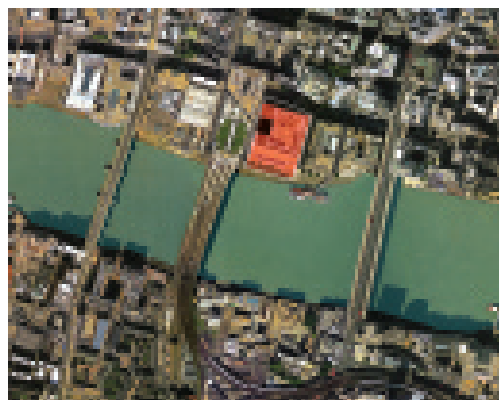


million net square foot building is indeed near invisible. The 11-storey background mass is wrapped in sheer glass planks, animated by a dappled colour palette taken from photographs of light playing on the river. The dot-screened colours provide the shade factor needed and are barely perceived from inside. The eye is however

Top left Riverside public space. The south-west 'square' links to the pedestrianised Angel Lane and an extended Riverside Walk. **Above** The river frontage of Watermark Place viewed from the replica of the Golden Hind on the opposite bank of the Thames. **Left** The strategic viewing corridor to St Paul's Cathedral informs the height and massing of the new building. Twin rectangular blocks to the north are attached by a full-height atrium, and the fluid forms of the lower pavilions enclose a south-facing public square with a restaurant.



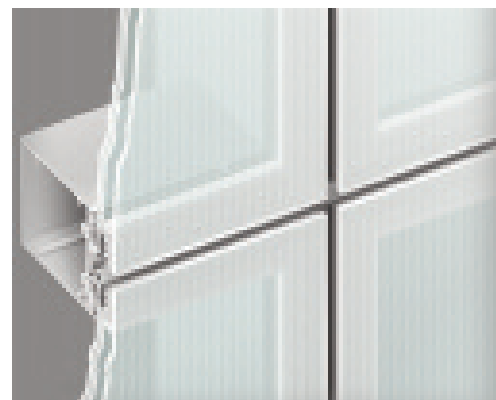
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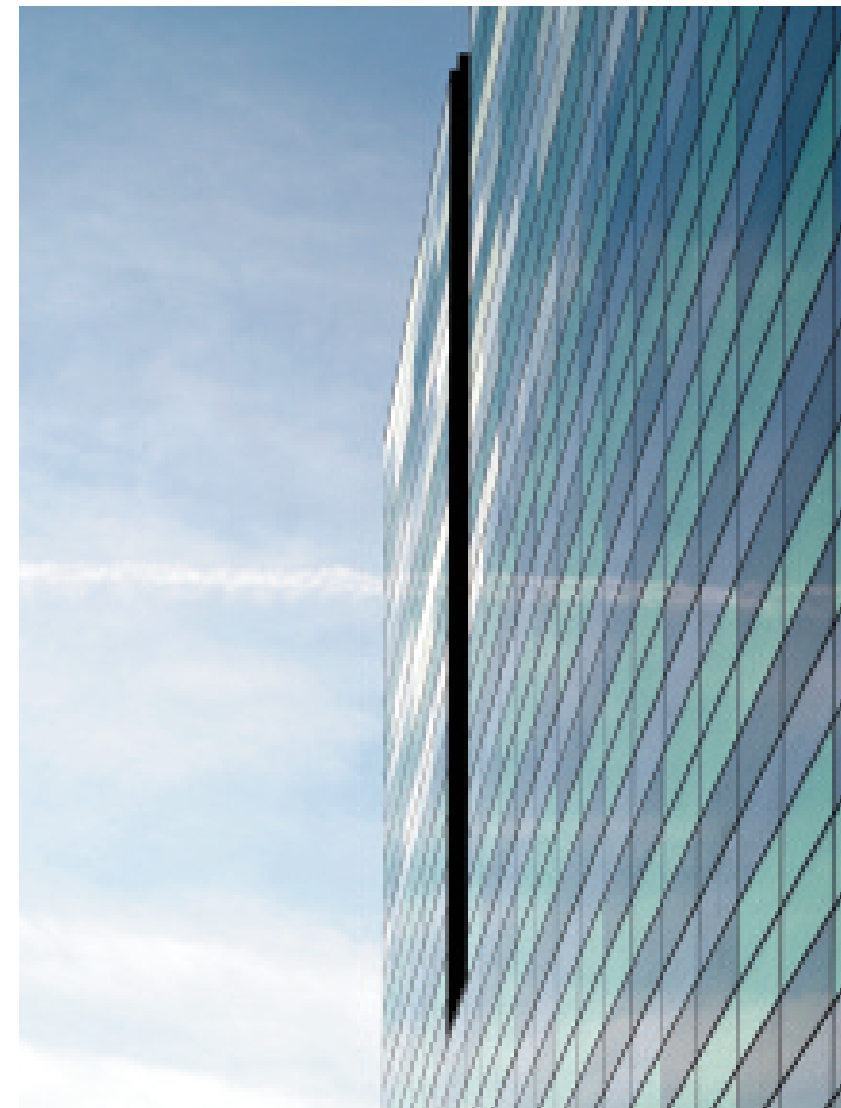
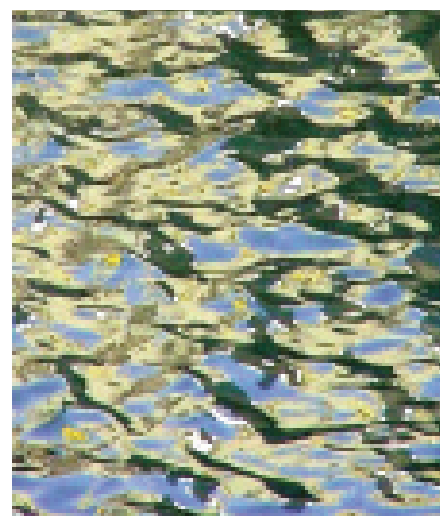
drawn to the two riverside pavilions of four and five storeys with their curved profiles, European oak sunshades and roof gardens. Their forms are determined by the St Paul's Heights regime, which protects views of the cathedral from London Bridge and beyond. They are not in fact separate buildings but are articulated to appear so. The main mass also steps boldly to seem like two blocks, again following the sight angle to St Paul's.



Above View from London Bridge; the site between Cannon Street Station and London Bridge; the site in 200AD. The northern boundary of the present site follows the line of the Roman wharf and the river frontage next to Cannon Street was the site of the fifteenth century Hanseatic trading post, the Steelyard.
Plans Levels 0, 1 (ground) and 9.



Fletcher Priest has exploited the site and all its contingencies and associations to provide character and conserve resources. The riverside massing is one aspect, with the massive timber sunshade structure of the western pavilion alluding to the ancient timber pilings of the Roman and Hanseatic docks on this site. On the northern, Upper Thames Street side the architects had to retain the last fire station in the City, part of Mondial

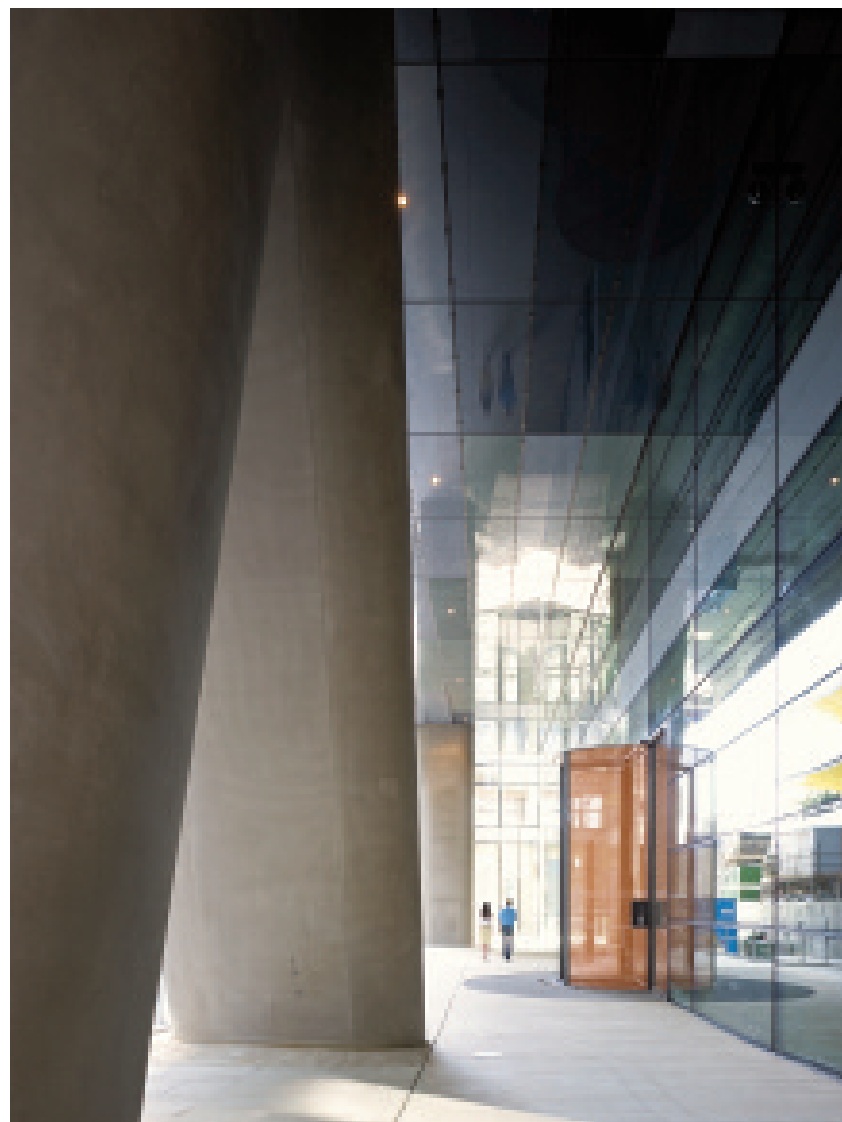


Top left The triple-skin facade allows natural ventilation of the carbon neutral south-east pavilion while sun-tracking timber louvres shade the building and animate the public space below (ph: Richard Davies).

Above, below The east facade is clad in dot matrix high performance glazing, using a palette of colours derived from a pixellated image of the Thames to create a dappled facade. The slot is one of two terraces on the east elevation.

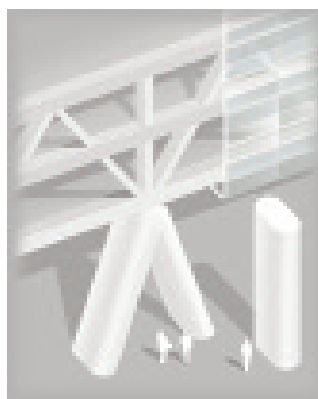
House. They did more than retain the minimum: the north-west segment of the complex is a slice of Mondial House, re-clad above the fire station. Indeed the massive basements of the 'word processor' are all retained and the new metric columns use the huge load potential of the old imperial foundations, jinking at angles to land on them. This is no Alsopian whimsy.

Entrance is compromised by circumstances too. Upper Thames Street is a near



expressway and arrival by taxi or car can only be via Angel Lane, a narrow route to the river which has been paved over for mixed pedestrian and vehicular use. Angel Lane opens out into a small but sunny riverside plaza around the pavilions, the most delightful public feature of the scheme. Most pedestrians will arrive from Cannon Street at the next level up, via an existing bridge across the traffic which has been restyled with timber additions. The resulting split-level reception is inevitably complex. Ground level inside follows the sloping ground outside so that further, barrier-free entrances can be made for future shops or restaurants. Contingency is enlisted as a design tool.

Inside the complex, order is provided by a minimalist, linear atrium pointed at the river with 18-metre-deep spaces on both sides, animated by bridges and glass lifts. The standing-height coffee table drums on the floor turn out to be displacement air inputs. The predominant lobby and atrium materials are dark stones and glasses, with timber accents. The 'granite' on the wall is in fact sandblasted GRC in massive planks, creating (with the timber beam ceiling and sculptural reception desk) a Japanese flavour. That character, coupled with the joys of the roof gardens and riverside views, may have been influential in the successful letting of the whole building to Nomura, which is about to fit out the interiors. The Japanese bank will base 6000

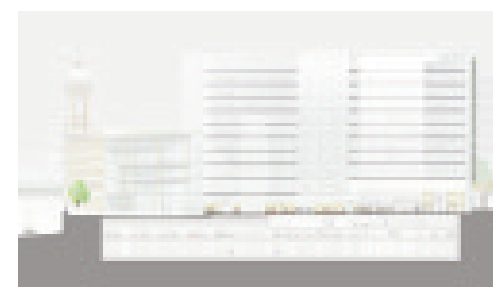
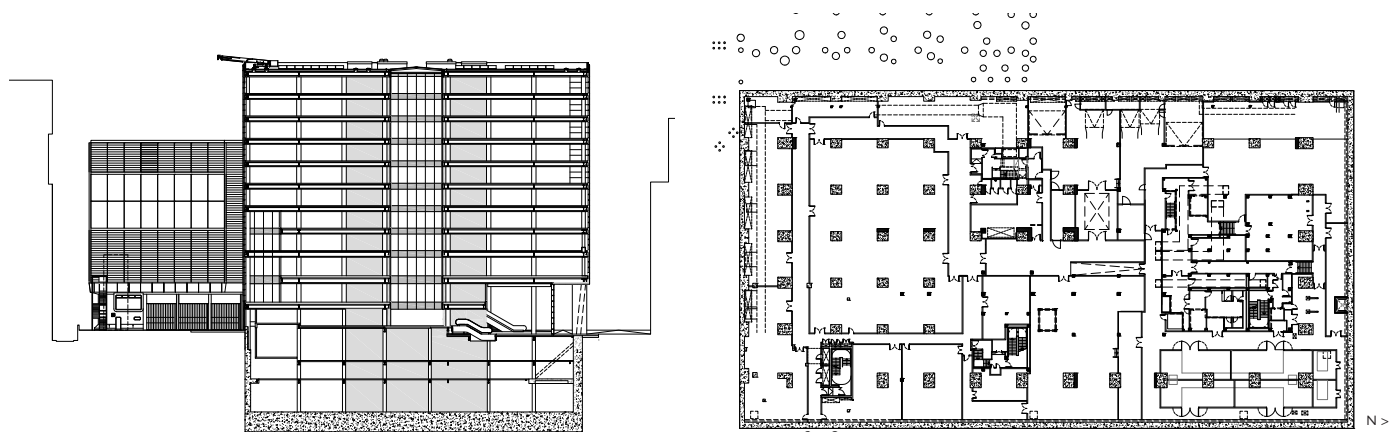


Top Massive inclined columns distribute structural loads to existing hard spots in the original basement. The pedestrianised Angel Lane extends below the buildings to create a covered link to the riverside bar and restaurant. Orange glass marks the doors to the reception.

Far left Intrinsic to this development is the re-use of a third of the existing buildings, using the below ground imperial structure to support the new metric column grid above. This resulted in less demolition and significant savings in time, energy and materials – 98 per cent of demolition spoil was recycled.

Left Angel Lane is widened by supporting the building on a transfer truss bearing onto three sets of columns, each two storeys high. The truss itself is 75 metres long and two storeys high, and was delivered in eight prefabricated elements.

Below Cross section and B2 (lower basement) plan.



people there, modifying the building in small and large ways, unleashing a round of further contingent events which will determine the state of the artefact at any given moment in time.

The signature of Fletcher Priest is perhaps that it has an attitude rather than a house style. The emphasis on conservation of resources and re-use is common to many recent projects. Energy awareness is central too. Within the limits of City practice Watermark Place uses less energy than most and provides a slice of 'carbon-neutral' space in the south-east riverside pavilion. It has mixed-mode ventilation through a double glass wall with rotating timber sunscreens in the cavity. Daylight levels are high. Photovoltaic cells on the main building roof deliver the renewables

Top With shared materials and levels which fall with Angel Lane, the reception is a visual extension of the pedestrianised space outside. The same palette of materials is extended to all internal common spaces.

Above Long section showing stepped ground floor.

Right A common palette of York stone, concrete and timber extends to lift cores and atria.





Above Six- and twelve-storey atria bring light deep into the building and give views across the new south-west-facing riverside public space; public spaces flow between and under the buildings linking the Riverside Walk to the pedestrianised Angel Lane. The new public square is characterised by the six-storey timber shading structure, and will be animated by the bar and restaurant which will spill into the space.

Top right, right Private roof gardens of 2,500 square metres on two levels overlook the river. On the higher terrace, sitting areas are integrated into the roofscape to create small private spaces, while a rill links the landscape to the river below.

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component and feed it largely to this pavilion area. The green roofs and green oak sunbreakers of the whole complex raise the BREEAM rating and support visible biodiversity. The pity is that Nomura's plug load – the power it will use for its work – dwarfs the building's usage. The bank is also likely to junk the category A fitout provided, a wasteful practice that still continues in the City where bare shell space is not seen to be appealing or comprehensible to agents or tenants.

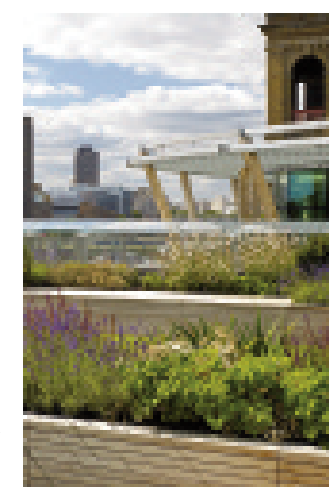
The architecture isn't all rationality however – signs of mannerism can be found. The sunbreaker timber and steelwork is

comically exaggerated and curved into expressive points at the ends. Where the neutral glass screen is sliced back for any reason it turns amber, like the timber. The supposedly massive GRC 'stone' interior is subverted in the dramatic elevator cars by inseting the lift controls and lighting in ways which show the thinness of the material. The reception desk front and lobby floor undulate sculpturally.

People who never set foot inside Watermark Place are also going to enjoy it. The riverside walkway is added to, with fine views, a sunny sitting out space and potentially a better site for the riverboat

pier than at tatty Swan Lane just down the block. The narrow canyon between Cannon Street Station and Watermark Place is intriguing, with its sudden release at the river where the Victorian turrets contrast with Watermark Place's giant sunshade. The new Angel Lane will offer a civilised slot between mirror-faced behemoths. Fletcher Priest has made admirable sense both of the circumstances it found and the market into which the building is launched.

Richard Saxon is chairman of the City Architecture Forum, a former chair of BDP, vice president of RIBA and president of the British Council for Offices.



Project team

Architect: Fletcher Priest Architects; design team: Ed Williams, Sam Craig, Graham Boyce, Martin Gruenanger, Neille Hepworth, Stavros Nissiotis, Mareike Langkitsch, Daniel Nation, William Tang, Michael Fletcher, Keith Priest, John Robins, Ray Holden, Phyllis Wong, Gerry Whale; structural consultant: Waterman Structures; services consultant: Waterman Building Services; project manager: CORE; property agent: CB Richard Ellis, Knight Frank; qs: WT Partnership; contractor: Sir Robert McAlpine, WT Partnership; lighting consultant: Speirs & Major Associates, Waterman Partnership; landscape consultant: Townshend Landscape Architects; facade consultant: NET Project Management & Consultancy Services; rights of light consultant: Gordon Ingram Associates; planning consultant: DP9; archaeological consultant: Mills Whipp; townscape/environment consultant: Robert Tavernor Consultancy; client: Oxford Properties, UBS South East Recovery Partnership.

Selected suppliers and subcontractors

Excavation, drainage and concrete: Byrne Brothers; structural steel frame: Severfield Reeve; external cladding: Joseph Gartner; Sto render: MPG Contractors; revolving doors: Bauporte Door Solutions; timber shading structure: Littlehampton Welding; roof finishes: Rock Asphalt; insulation: WRR, Dow Roofmate, Kingspan Kooltherm K3; Yorkstone floors: Marmi; joinery, reception desk: Ruddy Joinery; GRC panels: Simplicity Mouldings; external works: Gabriel Contracts; ironmongery: Allgood; doors: European Door Sets; paint: Leigh Paints.