

SPACE

DERWENT
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How two buildings in the same Fitzrovia street are being reinvented by architects DSDHA to bring out the best in each



LATERAL VISION

If you know the architects Deborah Saunt and David Hills, the names behind the initials DSDHA, you know that they are not people for the conventional architectural response. DSDHA is a relatively young outfit with a steadily growing portfolio, ranging from diminutive pavilions such as you find in Potters' Fields Park near Tower Bridge, to a range of public-building projects such as the St Anne's Community Centre in Colchester, secondary schools in Guildford and Gloucester, and new housing at the Athletes' Village in Stratford.

They have now taken a typically lateral-thinking approach to Suffolk House, one of the many existing buildings in Derwent London's Fitzrovia portfolio. It's tucked away at the top of Whitfield Street, close to Warren Street Tube station in the newly designated Fitzrovia conservation area.

What DSDHA is doing, in fact, is sensitively adapting two buildings, both on the same street, to bring out the best in each.

Suffolk House, which is Victorian in origin, is currently used as a small-company workspace. Further south, Asta House is a mid-1950s office building for which there is an existing planning consent for a mixed-use development including some flats. But Asta House is surrounded mainly by offices, while Suffolk House is in a more residential enclave next to a public square. The solution? Rebalance things by swapping the uses: the plan is to shift all the commercial space currently in Suffolk House to Asta House. And all the homes planned for

Asta House will instead be built in the remodelled and refurbished Suffolk House.

To do this, Suffolk House has to be enlarged, in keeping with the building's character.

DSDHA's answer is to build on top — to crown the building, not with a clichéd mansard-roof solution, but a sophisticated crinkle-crankle roofscape that picks up on the valley roofs of the area and reinterprets them in a new geometrical form and skyline.

This will be a green place to live. With an array of solar panels and areas of green roof, a bike store in the basement and absolutely no car-parking spaces (abundant local public transport renders them unnecessary). Suffolk House will reinforce the residential character of this part of northern Fitzrovia.

Derwent London has built its reputation on imaginative office buildings, but residential spaces are increasingly becoming part of the mix, as at Rathbone Place (a conversion by Sergison Bates) or the planned new mixed-use building in Leonard Street, ECI, by AHMM. Multi-purpose spaces such as these point the way to an exciting future.



Opposite page: Suffolk House, Fitzrovia; Animated skyline. Top Right Clockwise: Christ's College, Guildford; Central atrium, John Perry Children's Centre, Dagenham; Public space, Pond Meadow School, Guildford; External play space, John Perry Children's Centre, Dagenham; Interior, Charred Timber pavilion, Potters Fields Park, London.