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PROJECT TEAM **Architect** DSDHA, **Client** London Borough of Lambeth, **Structural engineer** Structure Workshop, **Lighting designer & contractor** Enigma Systems, **Concrete contractor** White Rock Engineering, **Landscape contractor** Blakedown Landscapes

Project

Vauxhall Spring Gardens

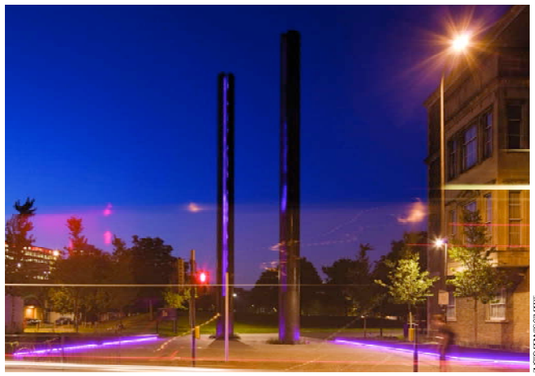
By Oliver Wainwright

"I thought I was in the Elysian fields, with a thousand glass lamps turning night into day," wrote Leopold Mozart on a visit to Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens in 1764, accompanying his infant maestro, Amadeus.

He was not the only one to be wowed. Cutting-edge lighting had always played a major role in the development of this riotous amusement park throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. It hosted some of the first attempts at gas lighting in the country, with special coloured lamps introduced for the Vauxhall Jubilee in 1786

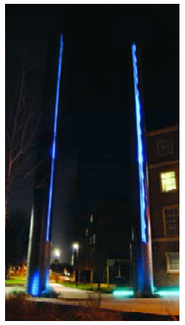
How fitting, then, that DSDHA has just completed a new glowing entrance way to this green space — which has, over the years, declined from pleasure gardens to slum housing, to neglected urban park — to herald a new era in its fortunes

Towering 18m above the entrance from Kennington Lane, the two concrete columns, pigmented a deep "raven" grey, are the latest phase of the architect's larger Urban Framework Plan for the future development of the gardens.



Lighting at ground level complements that of the 18m columns at the park entrance.

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NAME



LED lighting glows from a fissure in the grey columns.

Commissioned by the London Borough of Lambeth in 2005, the plan has so far seen the completion of a new tree-lined square and sports pitch, as well as improvements to paths and surrounding underpasses.

Drawing on a tradition of ornate columns — which were used in the original gateway building and as a visual device to distort perspective in the landscape — DSDHA's black totems are each articulated by a deep faceted fissure, from which programmable coloured LED lighting emanates.

Lambeth is intending to launch a competition to find an artist to design sculptures to grace their summits, transforming them into monumental plinths. Cast in-situ, the columns sit in a new area of granite paving, framed on either side by new trees and planting, with complementary lighting recessed beneath the concrete edging of the planting beds.

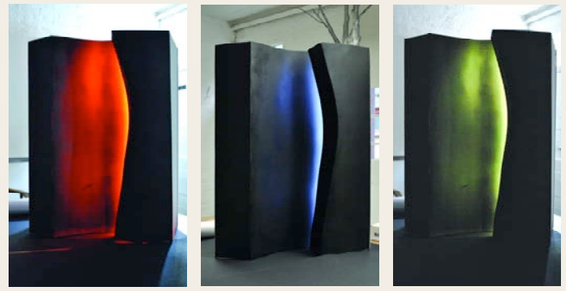
Elevation looking north from Kennington Lane

HIDDEN LIGHTING CHANGES COLOUR

Designed in collaboration with consultant Enigma Systems, and developed through a series of 1:1 prototype sections, the lighting consists of a continuous ribbon of LEDs fixed to an aluminium angle, hidden behind the undulating concrete nib.

A similar system is employed beneath the precast concrete kerbstones, which use a solid Perspex diffuser to soften the light.

The LEDs are programmed to gradually change colour throughout the evening with alternative sequences available for special occasions.



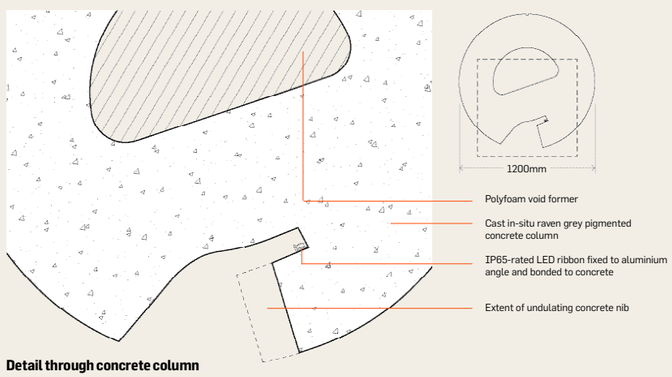
Colour sequences are programmed to change gradually during the evening.

CASTING THE CONCRETE COLUMNS

At 1.2m diameter, one of the main challenges was how to cast such a thick mass of concrete without the change in temperature between core and skin causing cracking on the surface as it cured — particularly given that the pour took place during a period of snow and frost.

This was overcome by placing a polyfoam core in the centre of each column and wrapping the formwork in reflective insulating jackets, with thermal sensors used to monitor the changing temperature.

To save on cost, each column was cast in three sections, reusing the same formwork after a week's curing time between pours.



Detail through concrete column

PHOTOGRAPHER'S NAME

The pair of columns mark the entrance to the south London park.