

St. Martin-in-the-Fields London

St. Martin-in-the-Fields is famous for its beautiful Baroque architecture, religious broadcasting, rich music programme, friendly café and its crucial work for those in need physically and spiritually.

by Robert Kennett, Director, Eric Parry Architects

A diverse group of users were occupying James Gibbs' 18th century church, its crypt and burial vaults and three buildings in the north range and the site was serving some 700,000 people every year. By 2001 it was clear to the Vicar and the Parochial Church Council that the poor state of the buildings on the site was inhibiting their work for the parish and the homeless in Central London. Doing nothing was not an option and the renewal project set out to conserve and refurbish one of London's most significant groups of buildings.

The architectural brief was to develop a master plan to unify the whole site, resolve spatial difficulties and create a series of uplifting spaces that are flexible enough to house a range of uses now and in the future. The nature of the site posed a series of enormous design and construction challenges, from working on a site on which all of the buildings are either Grade I or Grade II* listed and creating a large proportion of the



new space underground through to allowing continued occupation by certain parts of the client body throughout the construction work.

Eric Parry Architects has delivered a robust master plan that has met the challenges of programme and budget and achieved the delicate balance between conservation and change.

New public space lies at the heart of the renewal project: a widened Church Path is home to a sparkling glazed entrance pavilion providing access to a new foyer and the reconfigured restaurant in the crypt. Constructed of a crafted glass wall, the pavilion responds sensitively to its immediate architectural context and echoes the



church
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Images 2 & 3
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shimmering quality of the renewed church windows. The form of the pavilion is inverted at the eastern end of Church Path forming a lightwell which brings daylight deep into the new below-ground spaces. The churchyard has also been reconfigured to provide the public with a place for contemplation and reflection in the heart of London's West End.

The buildings that make up the North Range, designed by John Nash in 1830, have been refurbished to provide modern and purpose-built accommodation for the users. The Connection – one of the UK's largest organisations working with the homeless – now has dynamic and flexible spaces in which to undertake its work, described by Chief Executive, Colin Glover as "a building which matches our objectives rather than undermines them... [and] which will enable us to respond to the inevitable changes and challenges of the future..." A new north glazed façade allows good daylighting and cross ventilation to the existing traditional rooms which house the clergy offices and site management team.

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In the new spaces below ground, new community meeting rooms and places for assembly support the work of St. Martin's. These, plus a new chapel for worship and personal prayer and the Chinese Community Centre are grouped around the glazed lightwell creating a series of light and airy interiors.

The conservation works to the church have removed later Victorian additions and returned the interior to its 18th-century glory. Clear hand-made glass has replaced the translucent glazing, allowing natural light once again to flood into the interior space. A new East window, designed by Shirazeh Houshiary with Pip Horne, has replaced the window installed following World War II bomb damage. The church's glorious decorative plasterwork has been restored; in addition, the pulpit has been relocated close to its original position, improving the sightlines for congregation and audiences; and the chancel reordered to allow greater flexibility for worship and concerts. The exterior has been completely restored and cleaned as befits the landmark church on London's greatest square.

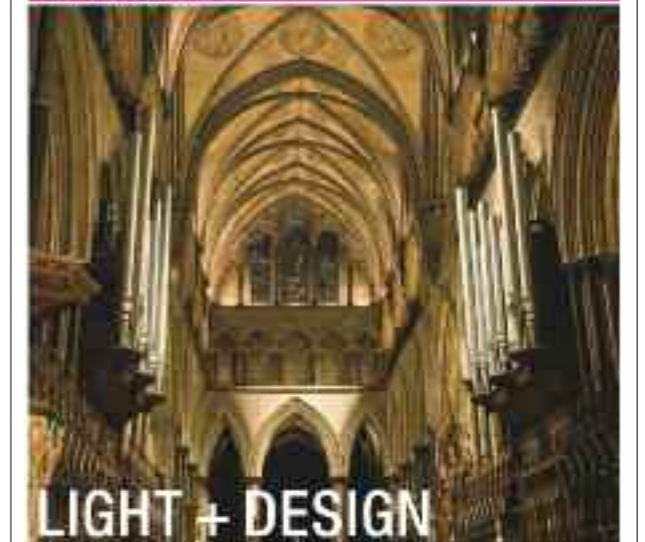
The Vicar of St. Martin's, the Revd Nicolas Holtam sums up the success of the project:

"Light and access are the keys to Eric Parry's renewal of St. Martin-in-the-Fields. For the first time St. Martin's buildings support its work and reputation. These are buildings that lift the spirits." ■

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Design Awards have been gained for schemes at The Kings Library, British Museum, St Bartholomew The Great, St Mary's RC Church Clapham. Recent commissions include St Martin in The Fields London, St George's RC Cathedral Southwark, The Chapel Royal, St James's Palace, Salisbury Cathedral, Worcester Cathedral and Ripon Cathedral.

Salisbury Cathedral



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