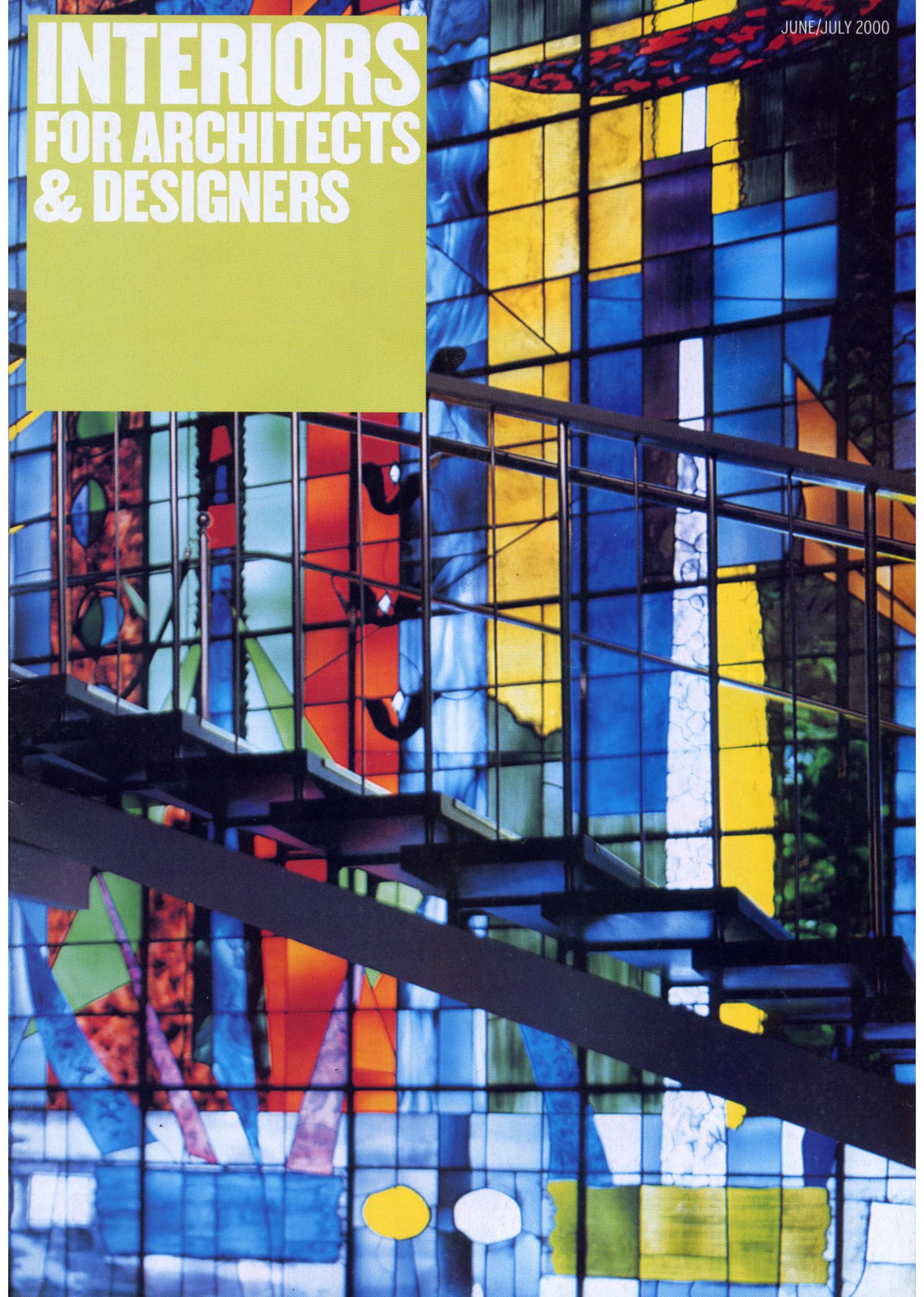


INTERIORS FOR ARCHITECTS & DESIGNERS



Faith Liversedge finds out how architect Waugh Thistleton helped new bar/restaurant The Light live up to its name. Photos by Morley von Sternberg

Seven years ago there was only one pub in Shoreditch, and that closed at weekends. Now the area is awash with funky drinking establishments, of which The Light, newly refurbished by architect Waugh Thistleton, is the most recent.

On Shoreditch High Street, almost within spitting distance of Liverpool Street Station, The Light is a former Victorian power station, which had been unused for 20 years and was utterly derelict before its transformation began.

When a close friend of practice partners Andrew Waugh and Anthony Thistleton bought the building several years ago, the architects were brought in to advise on how to tackle the refurbishment, from redesigning the spaces down to the furniture and even the cutlery.

The Light consists of a ground-floor bar and restaurant, and a members' bar on the first floor, with washrooms on the mezzanine level. The train track runs directly under the ground floor, so services had to be installed above floor level.

When work began the first floor was partially flooded, which meant access could only be gained through the first-floor window. Part of the wooden roof had already caved in, and, with the rest of it on the verge of collapse, the first priority was to make the building watertight. Heavy rainfall interrupted the re-roofing work, but this turned out to be no bad thing – the pitch from the roof, along with the grime, slid down and streaked the beams, producing a rather attractive look. To maximise the effect, the re-slating was delayed for another 10 days.

The inside of the building retains many of the original features. From the outset, the architects have tried to ensure that any changes made were sympathetic to the building. "It had a self-determined form, so we made strong interventions but without

being disrespectful of the building," says Thistleton. It is in this context that the only major alteration – which involved taking out half of the first floor space – became what Waugh says was one of the boldest decisions he has made in his career. It also demanded a degree of persuasion to convince the client that introducing a triple-height space would create an effect that outweighed the loss of floor space. The triple height ensures a distance of 9m from the ground to the roof which adds a grand theatrical feel in keeping with the overall scale.

This also marks a fluidity between the ground and first floors – an abid-

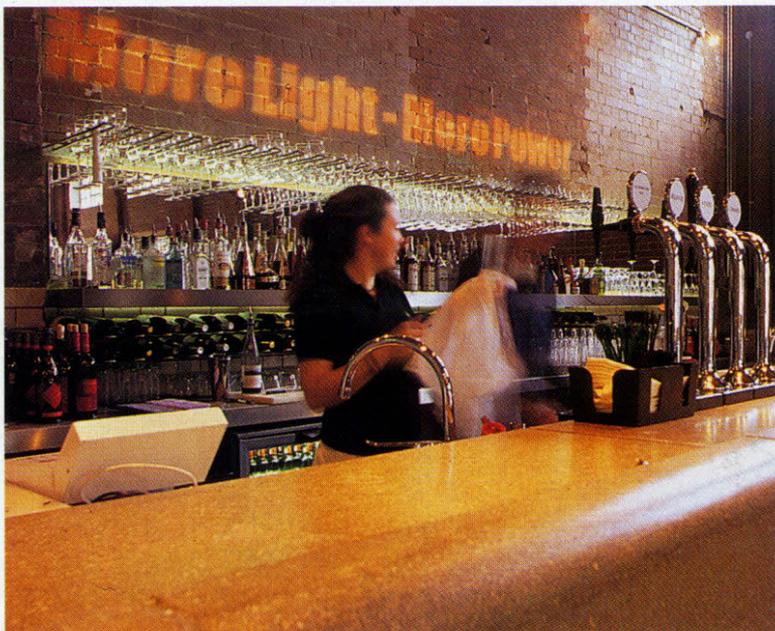
Above: The gap left by removing part of the first floor is supported by a series of galvanised steel tubes. It allows a continuity of spaces between the public bar on the ground floor to the members' bar above.

ing concern for the architects. "The whole concept was to produce continuity in the sequence of three rooms and leave no space as a single individual unit," Thistleton says.

The space left by the floor – now replaced with a series of galvanised steel tubes – also exposes the two staircases at either end of the ground floor. This was a deliberate move in keeping with the theme, which enabled the architect to make a feature of each of the stairtowers. Having clearly expressed stairs at each end of the room indicates access to the other floors and also means that an entire circuit of the pub can be achieved in one go – which ▶

Blinding Light





makes searching the pub for friends a far less self-conscious experience.

According to Thistleton, “clarity for the public and ease of orientation”, were paramount. To accord with the simplicity of the alterations, the stairtowers are clad in a modern version of asbestos, an off-the-shelf unfinished material used as fire-board in factories with a grain-like surface, which sparkles slightly in the light.

From every area of The Light, there is a clear vantage point to another: outside the toilets upstairs, a glass panel looks on to the restaurant, and the gap left by the removal of the first floor allows views to the bar below.

Upstairs, in the private members bar, a kind of updated gentlemen’s club meets loft space, a collaboration between Waugh Thistleton and furniture designer Rock Galpin has produced wonderful cubed leather sofas and chairs in brown and cream, and the same leather tops the balcony.

Much of the lighting and furniture was designed by the practice’s in-house project team, which helped eke out the budget. The ground-floor furniture is made from massive oak. “It was important to scale the furniture up, to highlight the magnitude of the interior,” says Thistleton. The chairs are covered in Bute fabric at the bargain cost of £12 per m. “The secret has been to use lots of cheap materials, and the expensive ones very sparsely,” Waugh says.

The lights are a variation on the lightbulb dangling from cable theme: the result is elegant and minimal. Some are arranged in clusters

as a modern take on the chandelier. In keeping with the scale of the furniture, the bar is tall at 1.2m. Made of a special aggregate, it has a curved top which is echoed in the bar upstairs, and in the serving top of the catering area. The bar blends in with the original terrazzo floor on the ground level. “When it was recently checked to see how much it had shifted since being laid there in the thirties, it was found to have moved just 1.5mm,” says Thistleton.

From conception to completion, the reinvention of The Light took five years and cost £750,000. It is Waugh Thistleton’s sixth bar – others include Cantaloupe and Bluenote. Most of the practice’s work is within the Shoreditch area: forthcoming projects include the new headquarters for Yo Sushi and a 100-bed apartment hotel. Over a century ago when The Light was a working power station, its motto was “more light, more power” (the same words are projected on the wall behind the bar). With the successful rescue of The Light, and a plethora of exciting new projects on the go, the same could also be said for the area today. ■

PROJECT TEAM

Client Oliver Williamson.

Architect & designer Waugh Thistleton.

Project manager Bob Kempton.

Engineer Greig Ling.

Electrician Syntec.

Joinery David Hall.

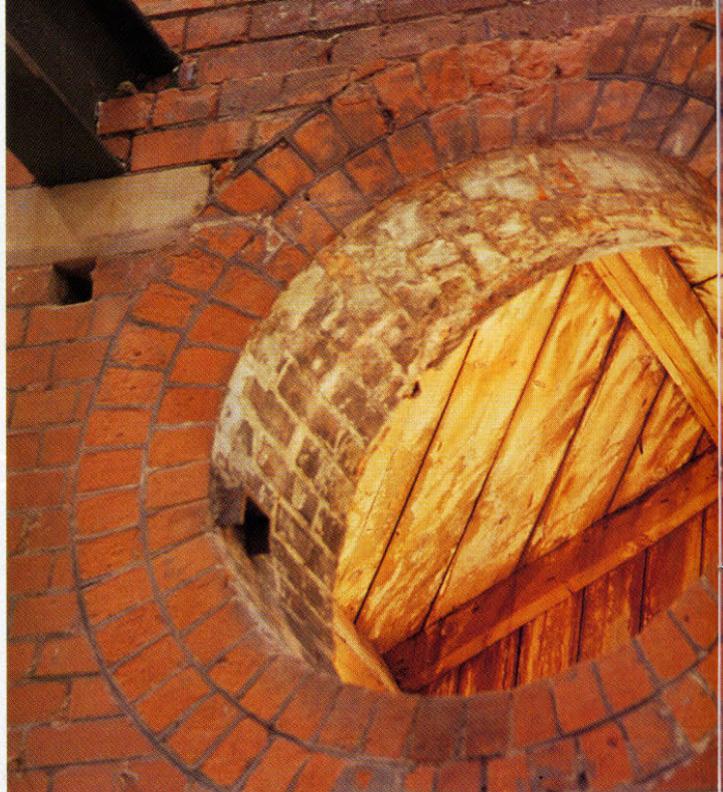
Flooring Floortec.

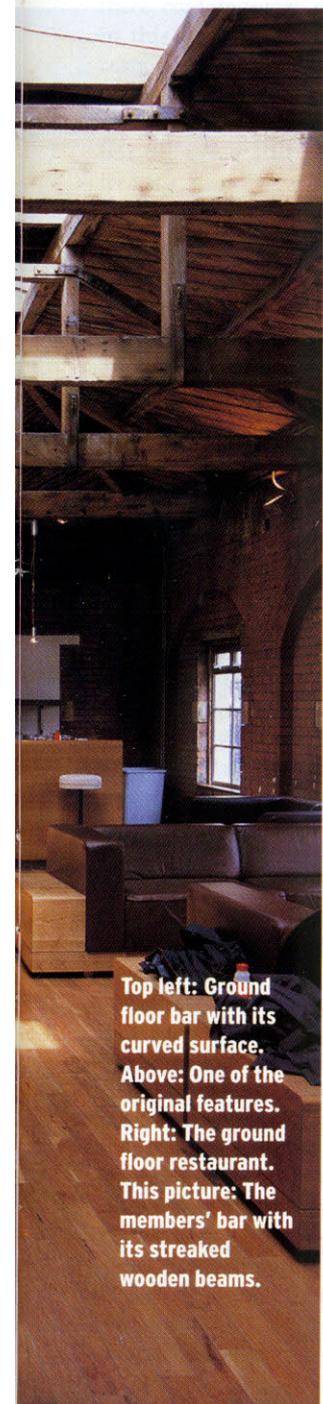
Rubber Dalsouple.

Furniture production Rock Galpin.

Dining chairs SCP.

Lighting Babylon Design.





Top left: Ground floor bar with its curved surface. Above: One of the original features. Right: The ground floor restaurant. This picture: The members' bar with its streaked wooden beams.

