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As a long-standing cheerleader for the use of cross-laminated timber, Waugh Thistleton now has its eye firmly on the commercial office sector

WORDS BY Helen Parton

It's the smell that hits you first. In buildings that haven't been fitted out, there's the usual architectural boxfreshness of concrete but at Waugh Thistleton Architects' mixed-use scheme at Curtain Place in Shoreditch, it's a pleasant whiff of wood. Cross-laminated timber (CLT) to be precise.

Practice co-founder Andrew Waugh explains the fascination:



"We've always been curious about new building materials – and ways of reducing our carbon impact. Following the completion of a small project in Exton Street [in Southwark], we researched and experimented with CLT and learned more about what the material would be capable of."

From there the practice used CLT – more often found in houses and extensions for staircases, lift shafts and walls – for the nine-storey tower of the Murray Grove project, a £3.86m scheme for Telford Homes, completed in 2009. The building structure was put up by a team of



four in an impressive 27 days.

Fast forward to late summer 2015 and, on a walk around the Curtain Place scheme, it's clear Waugh Thistleton's love affair with CLT hasn't diminished, with its combination of timber panels and structural steel columns and beams. Located just off Curtain Road and completed for a

local developer, the project has three storeys of office space at its base, above which are nine apartments.

The challenges of CLT mainly involve changing the perception of timber in the minds of the construction industry, says Waugh, adding: "It's a viable replacement for concrete in every project. Curtain Place is on a

very tight site, so having a super-fast, silent construction method certainly helped. We have about a tenth of the deliveries with CLT and a timber building weighs about a fifth of a concrete one, so the foundations are reduced too.

The sandwiched panels provide thick walls, reducing noise transmission between rooms in the apartments. Each of them has access to a shared balcony with envy-inducing views of east London. Plus there is a non-accessible green roof area over the office space. The use of wood here means that a natural surface can be inhabited by local wildlife, enhancing the area's biodiversity.

Waugh Thistleton is set to continue to extol the virtues of CLT in a mass market context. Projects in the pipeline include a 4,645sq m commercial one. "Once it's built and everyone has been to see it, there will be change in how we build offices – and how we think about environmentally responsible construction."

↑ Andrew Waugh of Waugh Thistleton Architects

➤ CLT in use at the practice's Curtain Place project