



Civic sense

Lynch Architects.
Two Buildings
on Victoria Street

Forum

Timothy Brittain-Catlin,
John McKean on Team 10

Works

BDP, Jaccard Zein Architects,
DSDHA, Sam Jacob Studio,
Käferstein & Meister

Focus

Refurbishment: Panter Hudspith,
Sarah Wigglesworth Architects

Street Symphony

Two buildings on London's Victoria Street embody Lynch Architects' concern for civility, generosity and tectonic integrity, says David Grandorge

Photos
David Grandorge



Below left

The Zig Zag Building viewed from the colonnade of EPR's 1975 Ashdown House; Zig Zag Building and Kings Gate with Westminster City Hall beyond; view from Kings Gate past the Zig Zag Building to Westminster Cathedral.

Below

Zig Zag Building viewed from the east, and the limestone facade of Kings Gate viewed from the south side of Victoria Street. The street was developed in the nineteenth century as speculative housing, mainly mansion blocks, which were largely supplanted by office buildings in the 1950s. Lynch Architects' project replaces a flat-fronted, south-facing glass slab by Burnett, Tait & Partners. The possibility of reuse was explored but dismissed due to its structural complexity and low floor-to-floor heights. Instead, the two-building proposal for an office block and residential tower offered the opportunity to create a more porous public realm.

Lynch Architects' £180 million remaking of a significant stretch of London's Victoria Street, a small piece of city, is as successful in its realisation as its beginnings were unusual and fortuitous. In 2005, the practice won the Young Architect of the Year Award. Its portfolio was small, but characterised by an architectural and intellectual intensity. Steve McGuckin, then working at Land Securities on projects of a very different scale, was simultaneously nominated for the Client of the Year Award. They somehow agreed to work together — not a marriage of convenience, but one of temerity.

Up until that point, the practice had consisted of its founding directors, Patrick and Claudia Lynch, working with mostly young but skilled and tenacious staff. Presciently, they invited an experienced third director, David Evans, to join them in order that he might enhance the practice's mastery of tectonic design and realisation issues and develop a methodology for handling the vast information flows of large-scale projects. They won the competition.



Below

Model of the Zig Zag Building and Kings Gate on Victoria Street; urban design concept drawing.

Below right

Site plan; aerial photograph showing developer Land Securities' projects along Victoria Street. In addition to the Zig Zag Building and Kings Gate half way down the road, there are recent buildings to the east by Pelli Clarke Pelli and to the west by EPR, Nova, a large development currently on site opposite Victoria Station, includes two further buildings by Lynch Architects as well as others by PLP and Benson & Forsyth. The developer also owns Ashdown House, Westminster City Hall and the 29-storey Portland House.

Development of the street is influenced by a Westminster City Council Unitary Development Policy, drafted in 2008, which seeks to undo the problems of 1960s zonal planning, changing the character of Central Business Districts dominated by office use in an attempt to create a more mixed city.

**Key**

- 1** Victoria Street
- 2** The Zig Zag Building
- 3** Kings Gate
- 4** Westminster City Hall



The design development of the buildings that would replace Kingsgate House took place over the next year and a half, incorporating the integration of an electricity substation inside the scheme and a partial change in programme; a new design for apartments in a stand-alone building replaced offices at the east end of the site. Planning permission was granted at the end of 2011, with contractor Lend Lease taking possession of the site in October 2012. Three years of noise and dirt later, it is built.

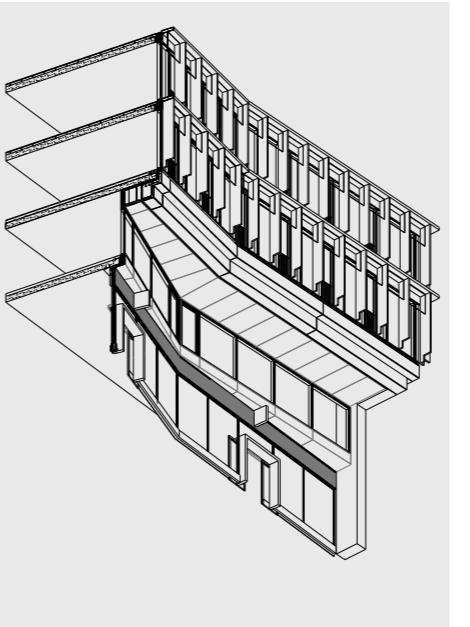
Walking east from Victoria Station, the main body of the office building announces itself as one enters Victoria Street. Continuing towards it, past the generous public space in front of Westminster Cathedral, and under the colonnade of Ashdown House (a 1975 Elsom Pack & Roberts design with Metabolist tendencies), the deftness of its massing and the articulation of its facade become apparent. Like HP Berlage's Holland House – a touchstone for the architects – it has been designed to be viewed obliquely and from the street.

The building is set out on a grid 12 metres wide by nine metres deep. It is divided along its length into three bays, each of which deflects outwards half-way along its length, and cantilevers over the street to enable views from the offices along Victoria Street to Westminster Abbey. For better or worse, this attribute gave rise to the name 'Zig Zag Building', but it's a far more sophisticated sculptural and architectural entity than this brand suggests, especially in its engagement with immediate and distant contexts while keeping a distinct voice of its own.

It is divided vertically between retail at ground- and first-floor levels with office space occupying six floors above at its west end, then up to eight, then eleven floors at its east end, the upper five of which are stepped back and deflected from the building line. This subtle geometric play produces pleasingly ambiguous distortions in the building's profile. The terraces of the seventh and eighth floors, planted with trees and shrubs, will afford future occupants with generous views to the south, east and west.

The articulation of the facade on its southern, eastern and western sides is determined by environmental principles, tectonic rigour and sophisticated compositional ideas. Its primary components – the fins and the delicate laminate screens that span between them – perform specific tasks, shading from the sun and preventing glare.

The fins of bronzed anodised aluminium are purposefully slender – 65mm wide and of variable depth. Their configuration and quantity is based on the formula $n=n+1$, where ' n ' is the number of fins per floor. They therefore increase in number as they rise up the facade, while decreasing in depth. The fins are rebated as they connect with the continuous horizontal components in the same material that mark intermediate floor levels – an elegantly resolved junction.



Above, right
Facade and reception area of the Zig Zag Building.

Top left
Worm's eye view of the Zig Zag Building facade. A planning requirement to guard against future obsolescence by minimising reliance on fossil fuels for cooling resulted in high levels of solar shading to south-facing facades, along with capillary cooling pipes in exposed concrete soffits and operable windows.

The screens are a sandwich construction with a translucent film, printed with an image of a fragment of onyx stone, held between two sheets of glass. High-resolution photographs depicting fragments of large slabs of onyx were flipped horizontally and vertically, resulting in four variants of each image. These varying surfaces were then distributed across the facade according to a set of rules that gives the appearance of complete differentiation between all of the pieces. If a single image had been repeated, the effect would have been Warholian, too dumb for a building with a civic presence. Instead, the screens echo the methods employed by Gerhard Richter in his '128 Photographs of a Painting' (1978), where he reconfigures the surface of an object through the use of multiple images arrayed in a grid.



Behind this elaborate screen is a bronzed anodised aluminium and glass curtain wall with solid opening panels allowing the occupants to naturally ventilate their spaces, though Patrick Lynch wryly observes that they will probably not be used as intended until the widespread adoption of the electric car. Meanwhile, the panels perform the role of manually opening smoke vents.



Left
Floor plans of the Zig Zag Building.

Below left
West-east and North-south sections through the Zig Zag Building

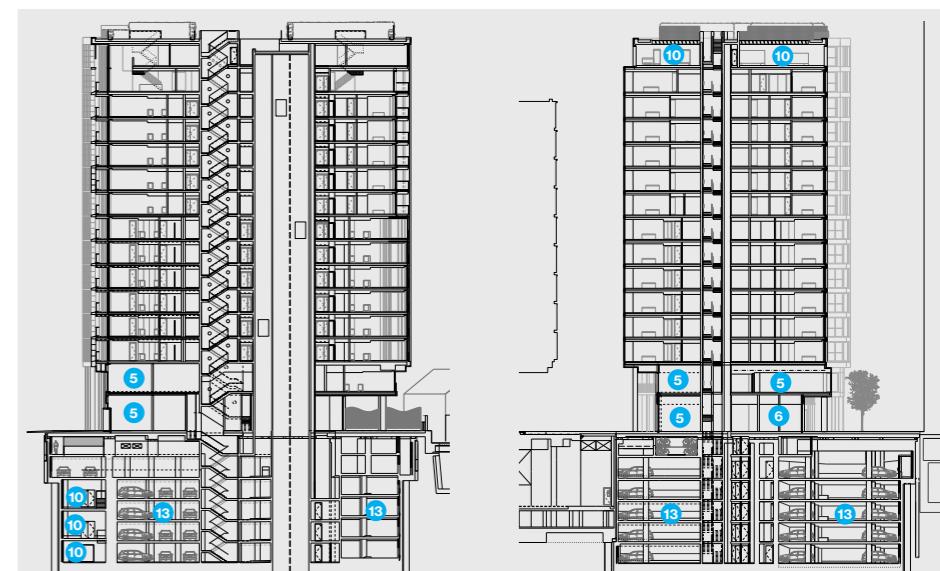
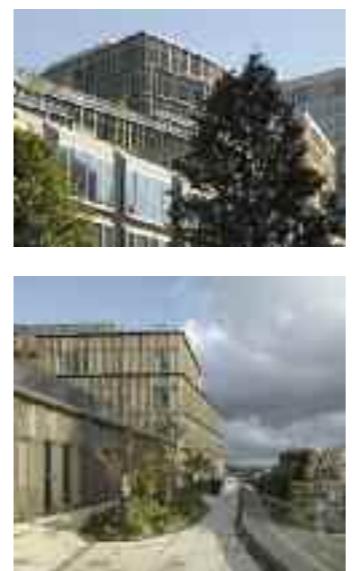
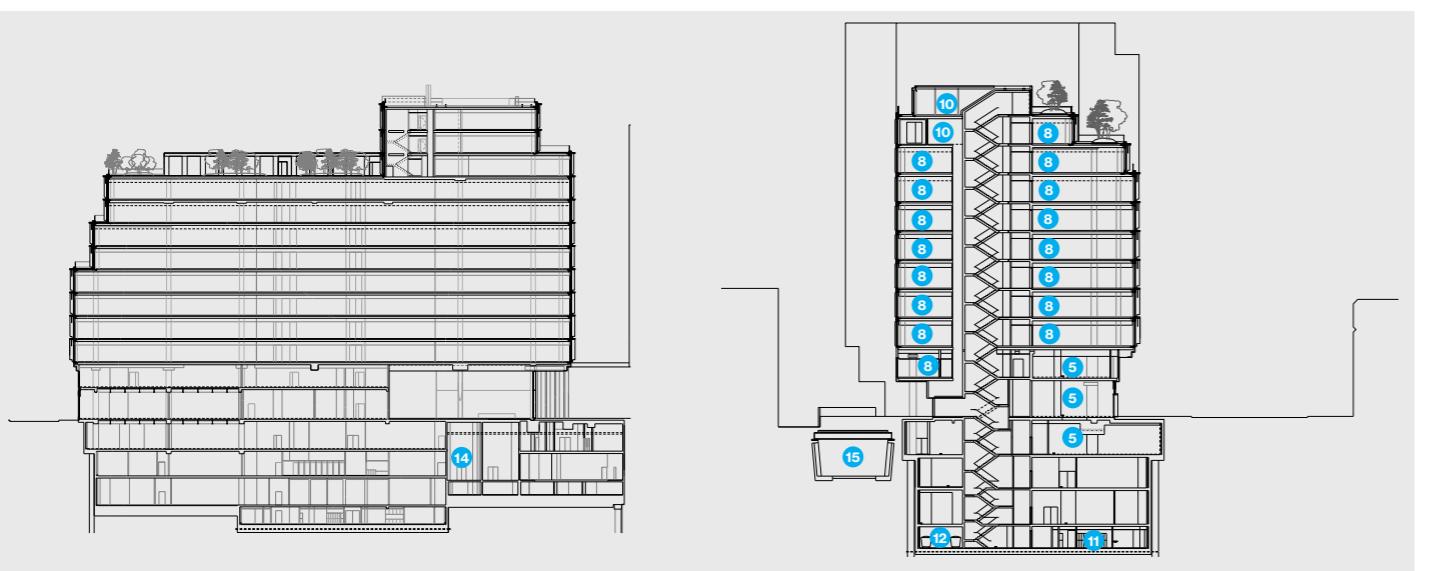
Right
Plans of King's Gate.

Below right
North-south and West-east sections through Kings Gate

Below
View of the two buildings over Ashdown House from the precincts of Westminster Cathedral; roof terrace at the Zig Zag Building overlooking Victoria Street.

Key

- 1 Angela Hooper Place
- 2 King's Gate Walk
- 3 Artwork wall
- 4 Office reception
- 5 Retail
- 6 Residential foyer
- 7 Void
- 8 Office
- 9 Terrace/roof garden
- 10 Plant
- 11 Changing rooms
- 12 Waste store
- 13 Parking
- 14 Substation
- 15 London Underground line



The entrance to the office space is at the east end of the building, closest to City Hall. The reception is double-height and partially characterised by a triangular coffered suspended ceiling of fibre-reinforced gypsum that gives way to plain surfaces elsewhere. This laconic treatment is given accents in the bronze wall behind the reception desk, the folded felt that wraps the lift shaft and a single column punctuating the space that mutates from a circle at its bottom to a square at its top. Looking outwards from the reception, the life of the street is held in the mirrored polished stainless steel finish to the soffits that cantilever over the pavement.

It is the street that most profits from Lynch's designs, and the streetscape is extended significantly from the inherited condition. This is most marked in two new public spaces either side of the new residential tower, which connect Victoria Street with the shared surface of the service road at the rear of the site. Angela Hooper Place, between the residential tower and the office building, is the more public of the two, with a restaurant fronting onto it and seats designed by Vogt. The second, Kings Gate Walk, is between the tower and City Hall. It is from here that the apartments are accessed, and the decorated cruciform column that marks the entrance is one of several collaborations on this project between the architect, artists and artisans.

The side wall of City Hall facing Kings Gate Walk has been adorned with a commissioned work by the artist Rut Blees Luxemburg. Entitled 'Silver Forest', it consists of an array of large concrete panels screenprinted with her photographs of birch groves. Derived from Paolo Uccello's 'Hunt in the Forest', it has a brooding quality, yet enobles this edge of City Hall in a quite unexpected way.

In terms of programme, the residential tower is an anomaly within the street, yet it has a civic presence that many nearby office buildings lack. It is set further back from the street, allowing an unimpeded view of City Hall in the approach from Victoria Station. At its base is a colonnade rhyming with that of City Hall, behind which sits a restaurant.



Above
Kings Gate Walk, with new integral artworks by Timorous Beasties and Rut Blees Luxemburg.

Left
Bench seating is provided on the newly-formed Angela Hooper Place.

The deep facade above it is a tectonic tour de force. Constructed of deep, slender Jura limestone piers and precast concrete lintels that support the apartment balconies, it is set out on the reverse principal of the office building; here the number of piers per floor decreases by one at every level. And though it is similarly intended to both ameliorate and celebrate the effects of direct sun, it reads more as a stacked colonnade than as a screen.

The building programmes discussed here — commercial offices, high-end retail and residential space — are not usually vehicles for discussing the architectural virtues of civics, generosity, tectonic authenticity and decorum, but they are all here in abundance. That they have been achieved by such a young practice is testimony not only to good fortune and hard work, but also to the architectural imagination. **A**

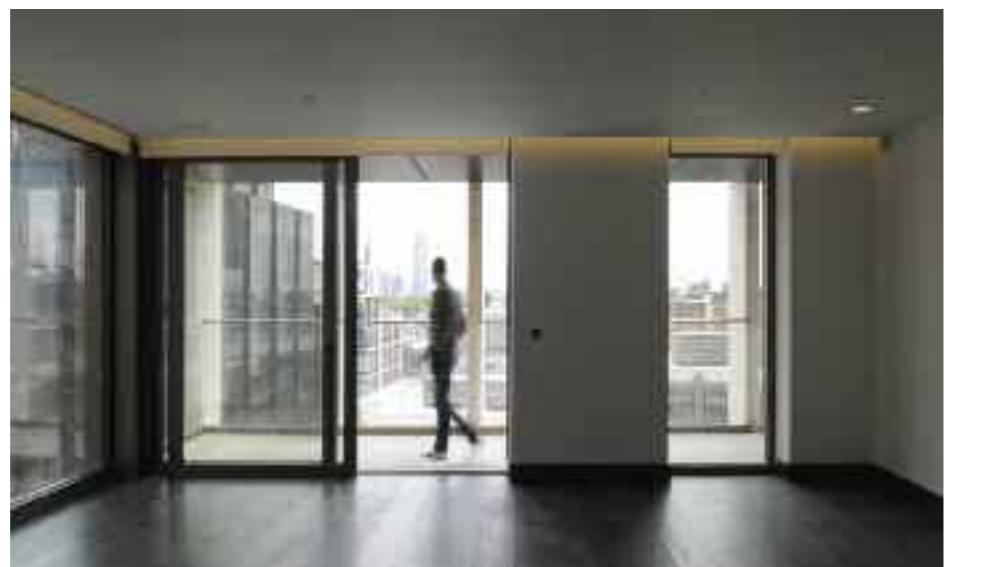
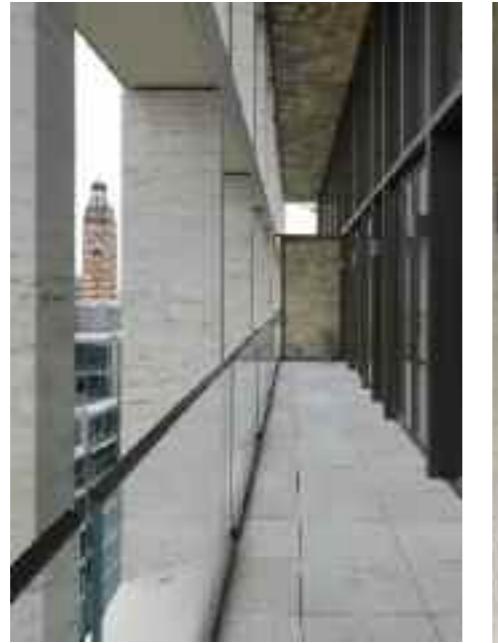


Above

The main elevation of the residential tower, Kings Gate, comprises Jura limestone piers 600mm deep and 160mm wide.

Right

Kings Gate apartment interior.



Project team

Architect
Lynch Architects
Project team
Patrick Lynch, Claudia Lynch, David Evans (directors), Rachel Elliot (associate director)
Cost consultant
David Langdon, Arcadis
Main contractor
Lend Lease
Structural engineer
Pell Frischmann
Services engineer
Gronmjøl
Lighting consultant
Firefly Lighting Design
Landscape architect
Vogt Landscape, BDP
Access consultant
David Bonnett Associates

Selected suppliers (Zig Zag Building)

Acoustics consultant
Applied Acoustic Design, Sandy Brown Assocs
External maintenance consultant
Reef
EAI Consultant
Waterman
EMF shielding
ERA Technology
Planning consultant
Gerald Eve
Townscape advisor
Francis Golding
Façade consultant
Thornton Tomasetti
Artists
Rut Blees Luxemburg, Timorous Beasties
Client
Land Securities

Selected suppliers (Kings Gate)

C31 anodised aluminium facade
Szerelmey
C33 sliding doors, curtain walling
Dane/Schueco
Limestone flooring
Burlington Slate
Joinery
Brown & Carroll
Fabric covered wall panels
Beacon Hill
Escape stair linoleum floor
Forbo
Engineered timber floor
Silvan
Sanitaryware
Bette, Köhler, Flaminia

