

GBBN

L O N D O N

DX19

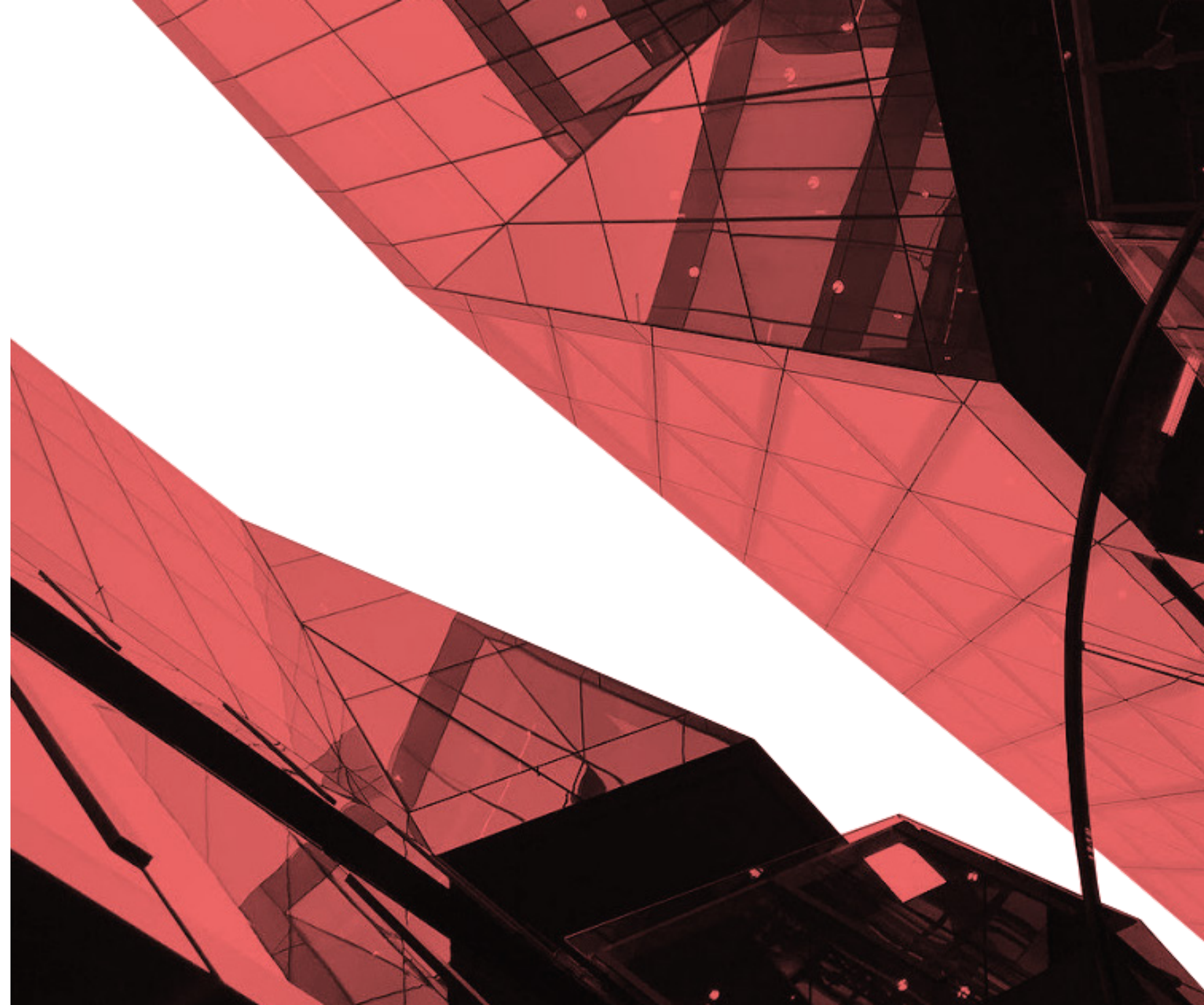




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THE DESIGN EXPEDITION (DX) was developed to engage, explore, and discuss design ideas among a diverse cross-section of GBBN employees. Launched in 2015, our first DX went to Philadelphia, where our tours of architecturally significant buildings helped inform our Guiding Principles and crystallize our vision for the firm.

The same spirit animated subsequent trips to Toronto, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, where we considered how to integrate research, technology, and transformative vision into our design process.

In 2019, we went to London...



“ DX ELECTRIFIES THE URGE TO DESIGN AND PROPELS ARCHITECTURE AND THE FIRM FORWARD. ”

-CHRIS BOWLING



TRANSFORMATIVE SPACES don't come easily. Ushering a bold vision into reality not only takes hard work, it also takes partners. London is a city where impactful projects often come about through uncommon partnerships and strange alliances.

The Maggie's Centres are the perfect embodiment of this: Had Maggie Jencks not studied landscape; had she not married a well-connected architecture critic; had she not had a family fortune; had Maggie not been diagnosed with cancer and been cared for by an unconventional oncology nurse, there would not have been the conspiracy of vision, resources, and collaborators necessary to develop 22+ highly-individualized—beautiful, humanizing—support spaces for anyone affected by cancer.

We went to London looking for partnerships, like those assembled to produce the 14,500 handcrafted tiles of the V&A Courtyard or the alliances forged to overcome the objections of Prince Charles and his supporters to ensure that Jean Nouvel's One New Change was built. And we found those.

But we also found another layer: Partnerships, like Maggie's, are often preceded by messier, less certain connections that develop between seemingly unrelated people and endeavors, which come by sheer juxtaposition in a city as dense and cosmopolitan as London.





SEEING 80 WALK-INS a day, Maggie's West London is likely the busiest of the Maggie's Centres. Situated on a congested corner of the sprawling Charing Cross Hospital, that's not too surprising.

Still, as you make your way through the carefully landscaped, spiral path towards the heart of the building, it's easy to forget that the building floats in a sea of concrete, surrounded by speeding cars and hurried pedestrians.

Enclosed by vibrant red walls, which intensify the green of its gardens, visitors are given room to breathe and collect themselves before entering.

Unlike anything else Richard Rodgers has done, the interior of Maggie's West London feels more like a mid-century modern home than a High-Tech or Bowellist specimen. It's airy and simple, with ample natural light from windows and the raised roof bathing the interior in a soft, warm glow. This helps the building feel insular and protected yet connected to the surrounding gardens. The kitchen—especially, its large kitchen table—forms the heart of the building. It's the central hub, where community and support are found. It's where you realize, you're not alone.



“...ARCHITECTURE DOES HAVE A POWER TO INFLUENCE PEOPLE FROM ALL DETAILED ASPECTS.”

—JING LUO



MAGGIE'S WEST LONDON

ONE NEW CHANGE

ACROSS FROM St. Paul's Cathedral, the sleek, contemporary design of Jean Nouvel's One New Change sits in dialogue with its medieval neighbors. However, despite Nouvel's claims about his design's "deferential" relation to its historic neighbors, the project was immediately embroiled in controversy. After Nouvel won an open design competition in 2005, none other than Prince Charles himself intervened. Pressuring the developer to reconsider, the prince offered the services of his Foundation for the Built Environment to help find a "better-suited" (read: traditionalist) architect.

When this became public, architect Richard Rogers—who had his own design torpedoed by Prince Charles—called for a public inquiry into the constitutionality of the prince's action; the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) condemned the prince for exceeding his authority; and *The Guardian* ran an exposé on the prince's history of interventions. Though not unanimous, organized public support for Nouvel's design overcame royal pressure.

“ IT'S ALWAYS BETTER TO STRIVE FOR SOMETHING GREAT AND FAIL RATHER THAN SIMPLY THROWING UP YOUR HANDS... ”

—JAY STUDER

Our group agreed: You don't do justice to St. Paul's by mimicking it. One New Change creates glass-lined cliffs and a series of arcades, which, though ultra-modern, slip into the medieval streetscape and open new views of St. Paul's—elevating the latter by the contrast. However, many in our party thought this design could have been better executed.





THE RESULT of an international competition, you might expect Tate Modern to lack the long, informal pre-history of the Maggie's Centres. It doesn't. Though controversial when built in 1947, after Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's power station was decommissioned in 1981, the building was subject to several fundraising campaigns to preserve it. That's why some described Tate's decision to convert the "grubby old Bankside power station" as preservation "gone mad."

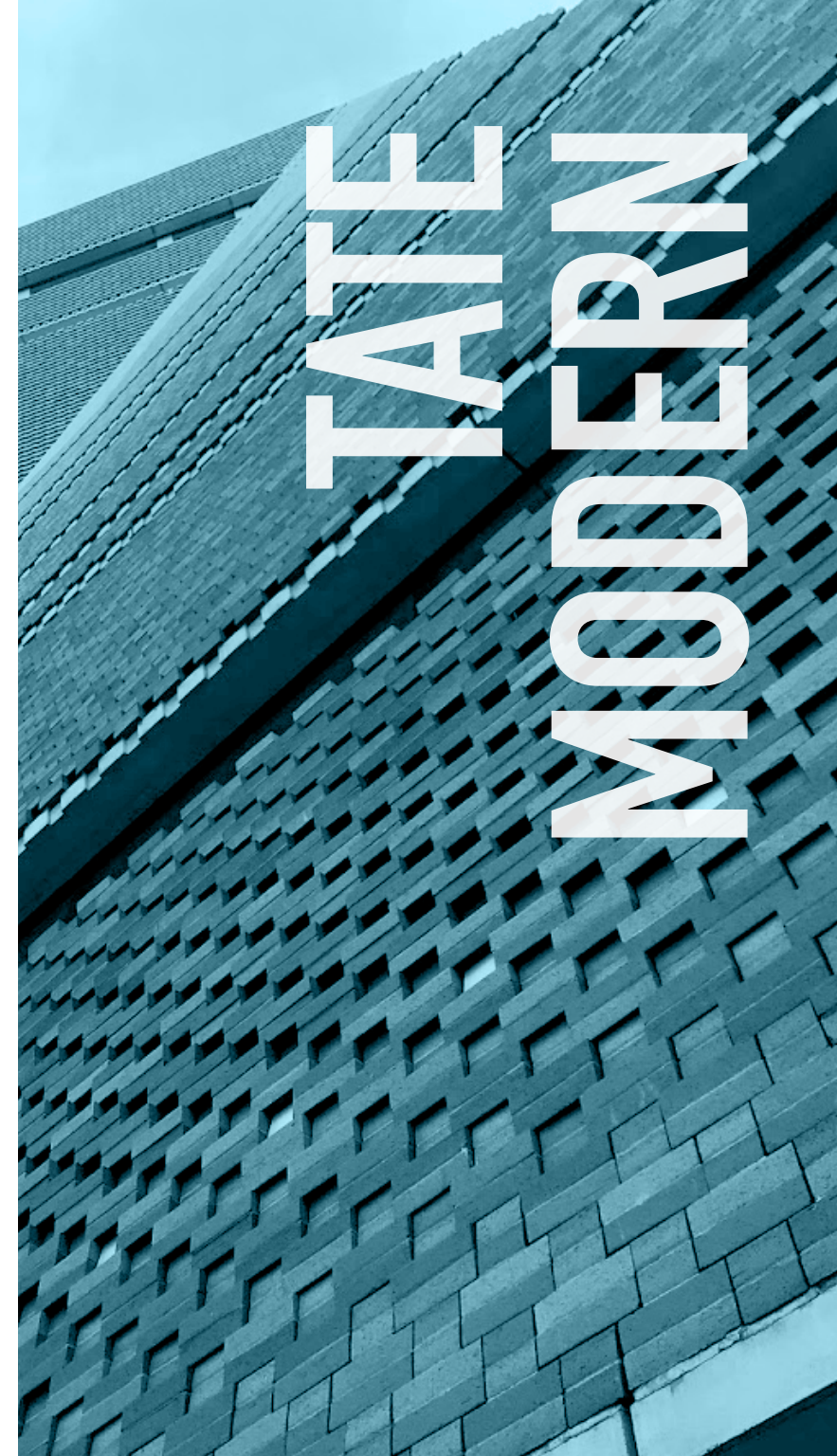
Tate also faced backlash due to the youthful inexperience and "modest" approach of the design firm, Herzog & de Meuron. Beyond the addition to a two-story glass extension over the roof, much of the design consisted of ripping out machinery and introducing surfaces that could welcome the public. Though their approach to the 1947 design is "modest," the effect of this partnership across time is transformative.

Originally more machine than building, the enlarged turbine hall has become a dramatic entrance into a shared public space.



“THE TATE IS LIKE A POEM, THE EMPTY SPACE—WHAT WAS THERE IS GONE AND REPLACED WITH A NARRATIVE OF YOUR CHOICE.”

—MATTHEW SCHOTTELKOTTE



MAGGIE'S ST. BART'S

SITTING BETWEEN cherished 12th century structures—St. Bartholomew Hospital and St. Bartholomew the Great Church—Maggie's St. Bart's occupies a historically-charged, highly-determined site. Steven Holl's initial design for the site was rejected by the city of London (its opponents objecting to its "bulky," "ultra-modern" style). Its second iteration was only narrowly approved, by a 11-10 vote.

Site constraints distinguish Holl's building from any other Maggie's Centres. While most are horizontal in orientation, Maggie's St. Bart's is vertical. The three-story, concrete structure is wrapped with horizontal bands of matte white glass that is punctuated by fragments of colored glass.

The geometric pattern not only recalls the medieval "neume" notation, which would have been used when St. Bart's was new. It also softens the look of the exterior, matches the scale of the surrounding stone structures, and bathes the inside of the building in soft, colorful light.

The upward, winding motion of the façade is reproduced in the open, bamboo-lined concrete stair, which carves out spaces as it ascends toward the rooftop garden. More somber than other Maggie's Centres, the building's palette welcomes its visitors into a soft, meditative ambiance. Thoughtful and beautifully designed, our visit was moving.

“AN INTEGRATED
DESIGN WEAVES THE
CONCEPT AND STORY
INTO A SINGLE,
WHOLE PROJECT.”

—GREG PINTER





SITTING ON THREE ACRES of park in Kensington, the building that now houses London's Design Museum is a Grade II-designated, modernist landmark that was originally built for the Commonwealth Institute. Designed by architectural firm Robert Matthew Johnson-Marshall and Partners in 1960, the structure is distinguished by its hyperbolic paraboloid, copper roof.

However, by the 1980s, as the Commonwealth Institute dissolved and structural upgrades became necessary, it was increasingly difficult to find money or stewards for the building.

Following years of uncertainty (and legal wrangling), its future was secured in 2009 when OMA put forward a proposal for the site that would restore the shell of the building while John Pawson, Ltd. oversaw the reconfiguration of the interior to meet the needs of a 21st century gallery.

The proposal also created three upscale residential towers on the site, which are deftly hidden—or, perhaps, guarded—by dramatic grade changes and landscaping. After years of struggling to find a caretaker for the building, this partnership finally provided the resources to sustain it.

The Design Museum was the sleeper hit of the trip. Exterior shots, showing the Design Museum in its context are not that compelling. But the building houses something special inside. The interior of the Design Museum is enough to make anyone a lover of geometry. There is nothing but joy to be found in the geometric play of the hyperbolic paraboloid roof's radiating lines.

“ HOW DO WE IMPACT CULTURE? BY ENVELOPING PEOPLE IN LANGUAGE THAT COMMUNICATES. ”

—ANNE CHEN

DESIGN MUSEUM

V&A COURTYARD

WHEN DESIGNING the new courtyard for the V&A, AL_A became enthralled with the museum's ceramics collection. So, they decided to add to it. Porcelain was selected for the courtyard floor for its fine texture, its bright white color, and its inherent strength.

But this was no easy feat. "We had to understand technically and aesthetically what was wanted and what was possible," says AL_A Associate, Matt Wilkinson. Working with Koninlijke Tichelaar Makkum, a manufacturer of hand-crafted ceramics, AL_A experimented with different pigments, firing techniques, etc. to understand color variation and shrinkage.

It took two years to finalize the tile design, and another two years to pass the required British Standards. But their patient collaboration resulted in 14,500 handmade tiles, whose patterned, matte, and glazed white surface offers a compelling contrast to the red brick and terracotta of the surrounding buildings.

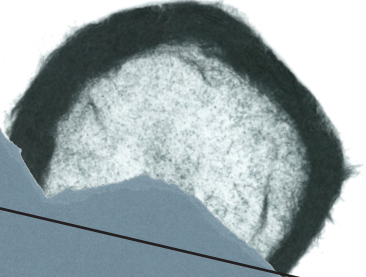
“LONDON IS A CITY WHERE EVERY BUILDING WITH A FANCY FOUNTAIN SEEMS TO HAVE AT LEAST ONE KID IN WET UNDERPANTS RUNNING THROUGH IT.”

—MARY JO MINERICH

The care lavished on the courtyard captivated our imaginations prior to visiting. But the question of the design's execution was hotly debated. Many read the imperfections of hand-crafted tile as sloppy installation, an effect intensified by the machinic design of the tile. We also noticed that visitors tended not to linger or notice the tile, raising the question of whether the effort was wasted.



PEOPLE



- | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| Sean Cottengim | Melanie Pliskin |
| Jay Studer | Chris Bowling |
| Michael Lied | Scott Vidourek |
| Aaron Anderson | Angela Mazzi |
| Mary Jo Minerich | Matthew Schottelkotte |
| Greg Pinter | Brooke Behnfeldt |
| Matthew Plecity | Amanda Markovic |
| Melissa Dulisse | Adam Fosnaugh |
| Jing Luo | Shower Liu |
| Anne Chen | |



5: BE FUTURE-

ORIENTED

SERPENTINE PAVILION



5: OUR WORK MUST BE FUTURE ORIENTED—NOT ONLY FOLLOWING AND LEADING TRENDS, BUT UNDERSTANDING THAT WHAT WE DO IMPACTS PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES FOR DECADES AND THAT IT CAN BE USED TO PROMOTE NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND SYSTEMS. OUR DECISIONS MUST BE WELL-FOUNDED.



“ We must be rigorous—ask the right questions to develop a comprehensive program. Forming a clear concept. Taking well-founded risks. Explore materials. Buildings are not neutral, they do impact people, our decisions must consider not only the micro community it serves but also the larger community.

—AMANDA MARKOVIC

SITUATED ALONGSIDE two art galleries in the idyllic Kensington Gardens, the Serpentine Pavilion is an annual architectural commission that creates the opportunity for architects to experiment with different design strategies, construction techniques, materials, and technologies.

Though they're open a bit longer than the garden's summer blossoms, the ephemeral nature of the pavilions prevented us from visiting any of them in person—Frida Escobedo's commission had come down months before and Junya Ishigami's would not open for another two months.

But freed for a moment from the immediate needs that architecture typically serves, these short-lived experiments—in color, transparency, construction, and technology—anticipate a future in which their technical and strategic interventions might return. Though the Serpentine Pavilions are programmatically excluded from lasting, their legacy contributes towards the future.

4: BE COMPREHENSIVE

THE BARBICAN makes a bid for comprehensiveness that both impressed and horrified. Built between the 1960s and 1970s, the concrete Brutalist ziggurat by Chamberlin, Powell and Bon was part of “a utopian vision to transform an area of London left devastated by bombing during the Second World War.”

Repeating the same form for blocks on end, the Barbican’s thirteen terraced blocks rise seven floors high along their peripheries, enclosing public parks, courtyards—even

lakes—within their centers. The development’s population is also bolstered by three tower blocks, which include some of the largest buildings in London. Incorporating museums, galleries, a public library, performance halls, and shopping, the Barbican’s flexible form is pressed into the service of all its inhabitants’ needs.

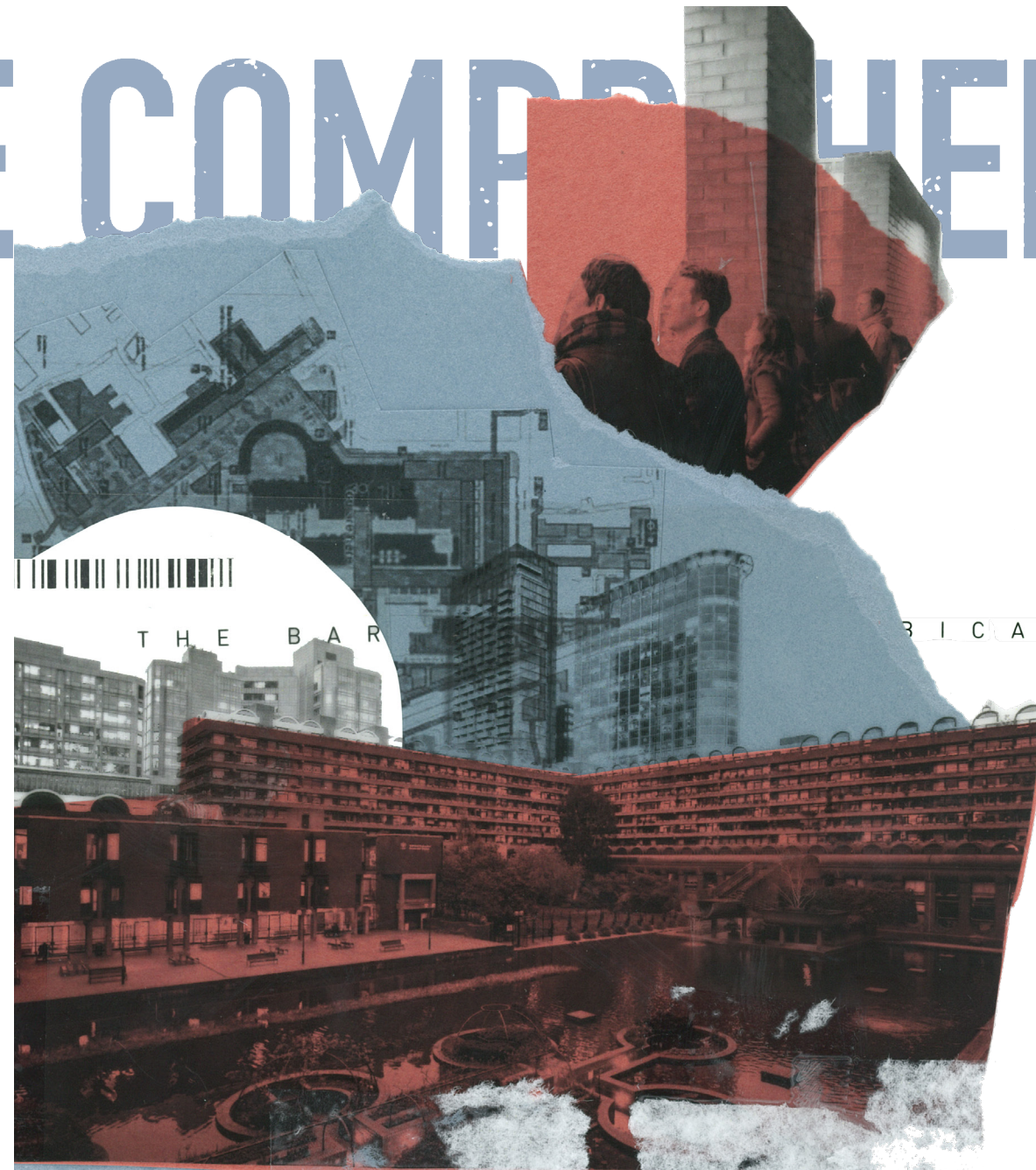
If nothing else, the Barbican is comprehensive. It’s a walled city that carries the fascination and horror of the infinite. This is probably not the kind of comprehensiveness we’ll strive for.

“**BARBICAN**

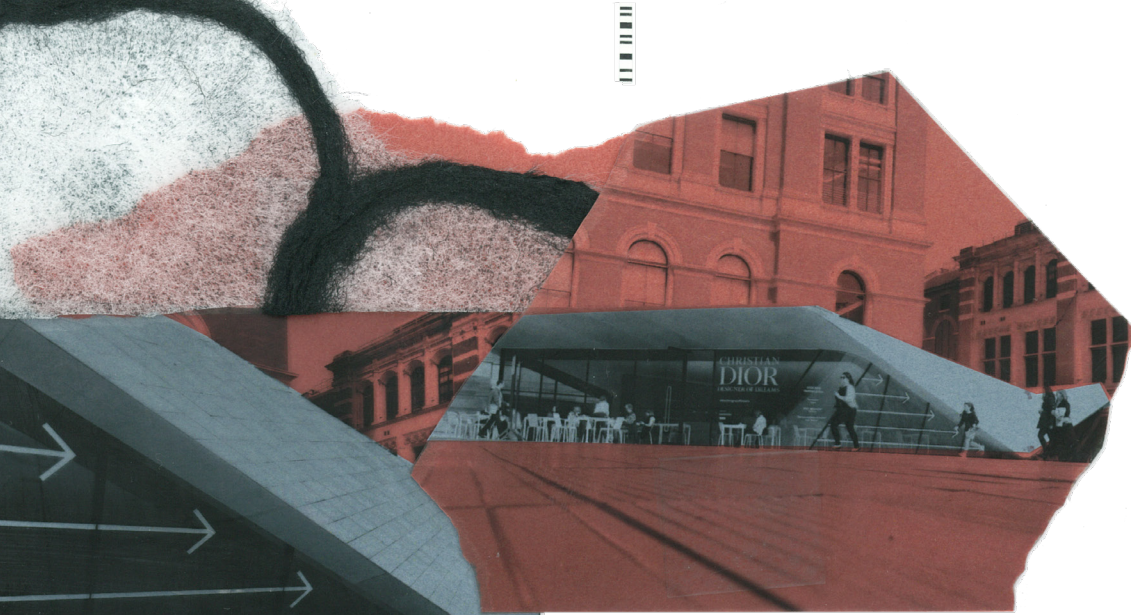
People were probably like why be excited by this? But then it just kept going. It was like a treehouse I would design as a kid, but it was for a whole city block in London.

—JAY STUDER

THE



4: BE COMPREHENSIVE. FOR THE CULTURE TO BE SUCCESSFUL IT MUST PERMEATE EVERY ASPECT OF A PROJECT, OUR PROCESS AND OUR FIRM. DESIGN SHOULD EXPRESS ITSELF FROM ACCOUNTING TO GUEST HOSPITALITY.



V&A COURTYARD



3: WE ARE MORE FOCUSED ON THE EXPERIENTIAL SEQUENCE OF TIME, MOVEMENT, AND SPACE, THAN ABOUT STYLE. BUT WE MUST ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT THE PHYSICAL LANGUAGE OF BUILDING ASSEMBLY COMMUNICATES AS WELL AND THAT WE SHOULD OPTIMIZE IT TO PROMOTE THE PROJECT OBJECTIVES.

3: TELL A STORY

WE DISCUSSED “the story” of the V&A Courtyard in more than one way. On the one hand, there’s the story of its production: AL_A’s love affair with V&A’s ceramics collection, and the patient, painstaking collaboration that it took to develop these finely-detailed, handcrafted tiles so the collection could be brought out to V&A’s new entry. It was easy to get swept up in this story.

On the other hand, we talked about the courtyard’s “story” as the sequence that you pass through on your way into the museum. Ultimately, this was a bit underwhelming. The courtyard creates a quiet entrance, between the traffic of Exhibition Road and the V&A’s busy interior. It does extend the ceramics collection out to the street. But it didn’t seem to have much effect. The courtyard barely slowed the pace of those passing through it. And, many of us who had been taken by the story of the tile, were disappointed in its presence.

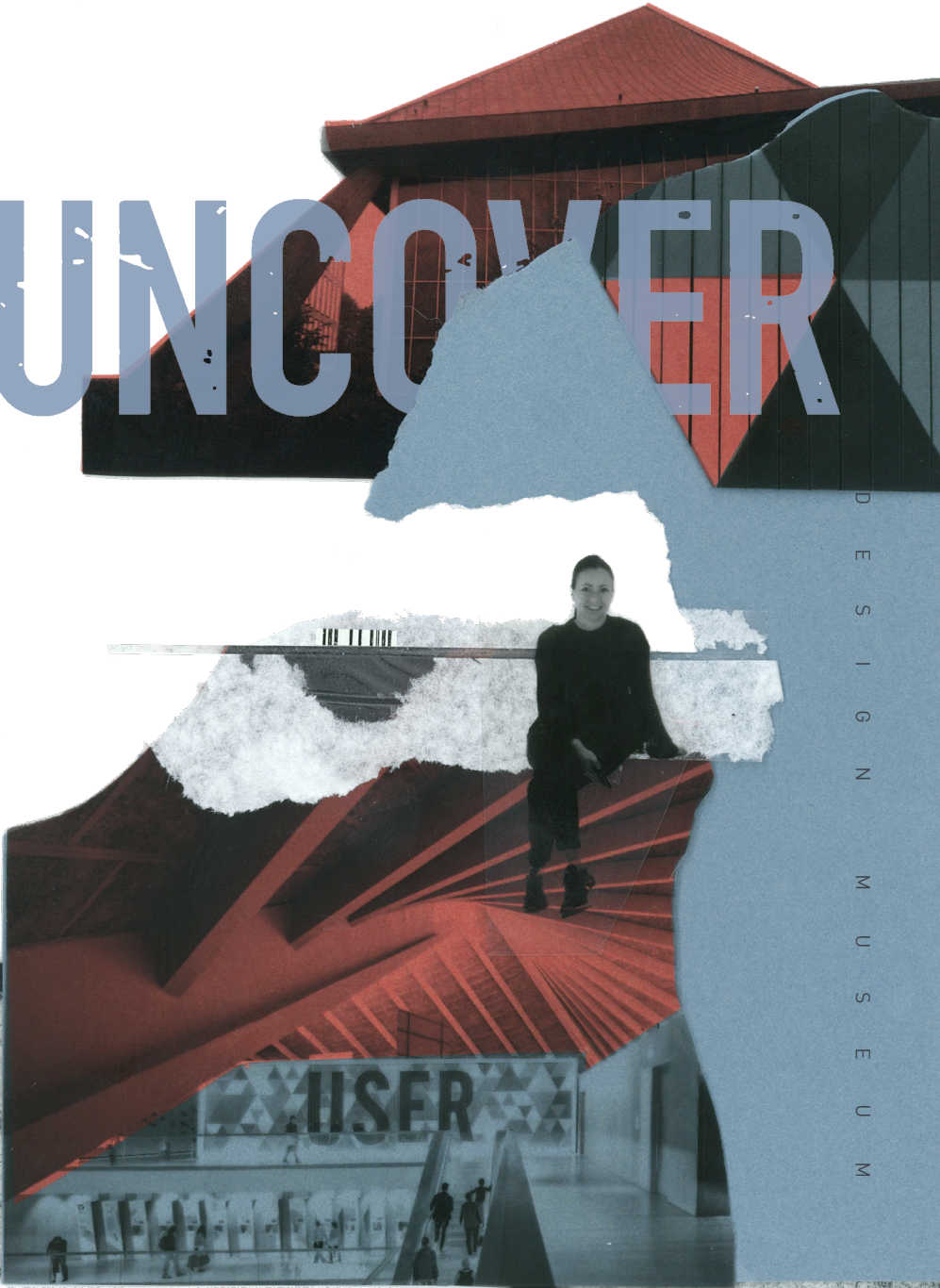


“The V&A Courtyard was really interesting—both contextual and contemporary (even though the material itself was a little disappointing). It created a fifth façade with the ground that really allowed the historic façade to stand out...

—GREG PINTER

2: UNCOVER

2: TO TRULY KNOW WHO WE ARE DESIGNING FOR— WE NEED TO GO BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL ‘WHAT’ A CLIENT WANTS AND UNCOVER ‘WHY’ THEY WANT IT. WE MUST BRING EMPATHY TO THE FIRM, AFTER WE DEFINE THE ‘WHY’ WE MUST REPRESENT THE ‘WHO’ WE ARE DESIGNING FOR. DO WE UNDERSTAND WHAT WE ARE CREATING AND HOW IT WILL AFFECT OTHERS?



AS BEAUTIFUL as it is—and you really do have to see it in person to fully appreciate it—London’s Design Museum offers a sort of anti-example of Design Tenet #2. Its long, complicated history—the tortuous path towards its preservation—has muddled the questions of “what” exactly is wanted of the building, “why” it’s wanted, and “who” it’s designed for.

Was the renovation of the building and the parceling out of the park it sits on done for the community? The Design Museum? Historical conservationists? The developer of the upscale, residential towers that were built in this space?

To some extent, the renovation was done for all of them, which clouds the building’s purpose, making it a little hard to understand (perhaps this is always the case when historic buildings are repurposed?).

The beauty of the design still shines through, but its rationale or purpose isn’t exactly coherent.

THE ‘WHY’

DESIGN

“

I think the clarity of a well-formed “brief” and a concept might be where the solution lies. So as they say on the tube, a good reminder to Mind the Gap.

—BROOKE BEHNFELDT

MUSEUM

1: BUILD A BETTER WORLD

MAGGIE'S

I was impressed by the empathy and impact... [it] show[s] clarity of idea and effect on the individual.

—ADAM FOSNAUGH

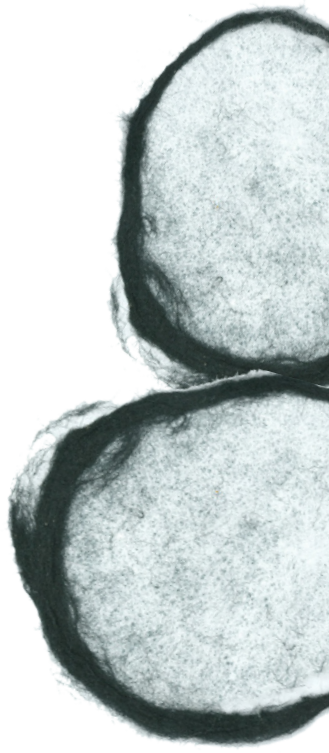
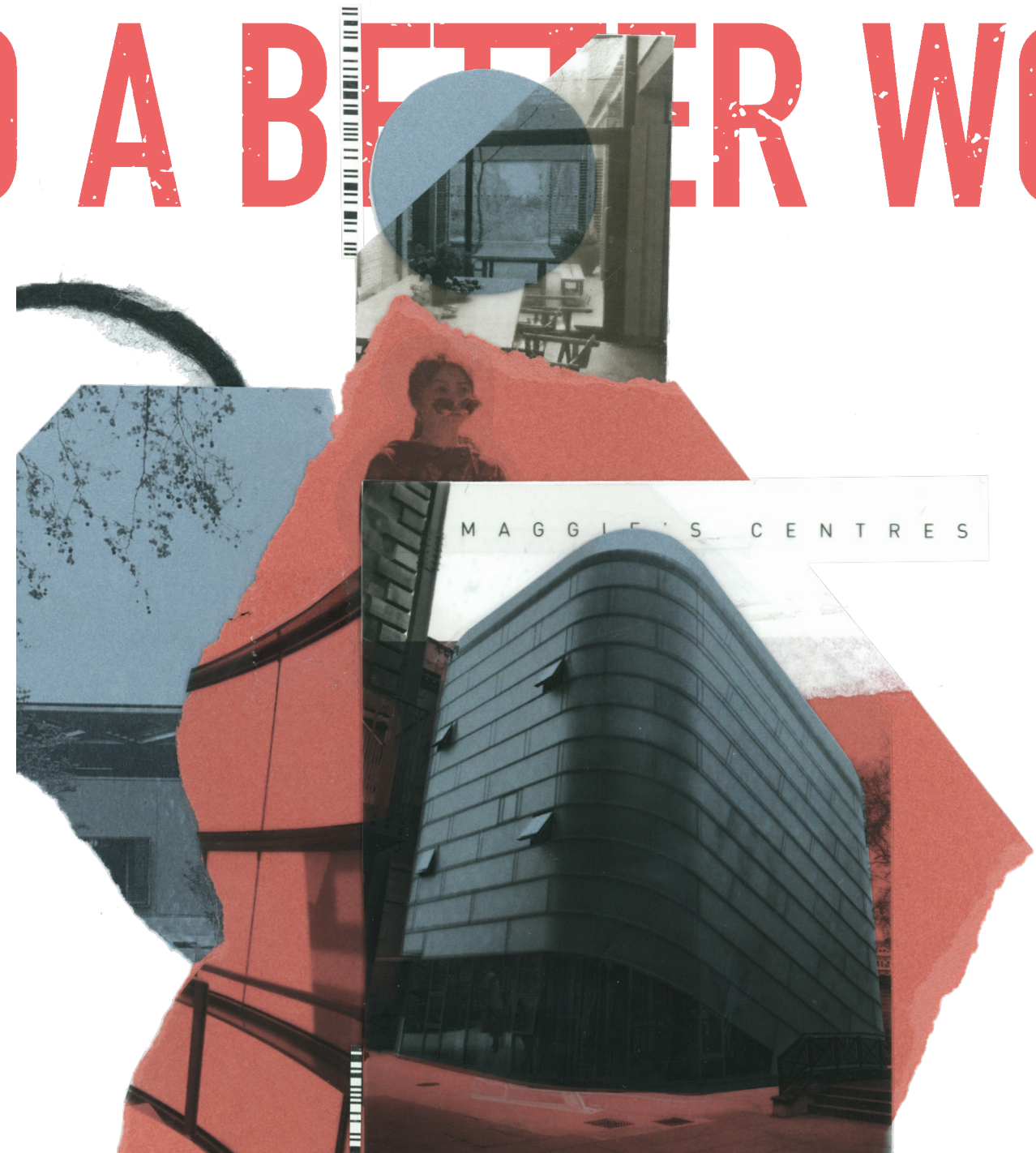
CENTRES

WHEN SHE was diagnosed with cancer, Maggie Jencks was given 2-3 months to live; then she and her husband were ushered into a windowless hallway—not even a waiting room—to sit with other patients.

In her own words, “patients... were left to wilt under the desiccating glare of fluorescent lights.” She understood the effect of ugly, institutional hospital environments on people who were receiving the worst news and set out to give them someplace beautiful—a welcoming, intimate, domestic space—in which to regain their composure and face the future.

As one patient observed, “Maggie’s is like an oasis. It gives you the tools to take your future forward, to take control of your life.”

With her design brief, connections, and supporters, Maggie has indeed built a more nurturing, supportive world.

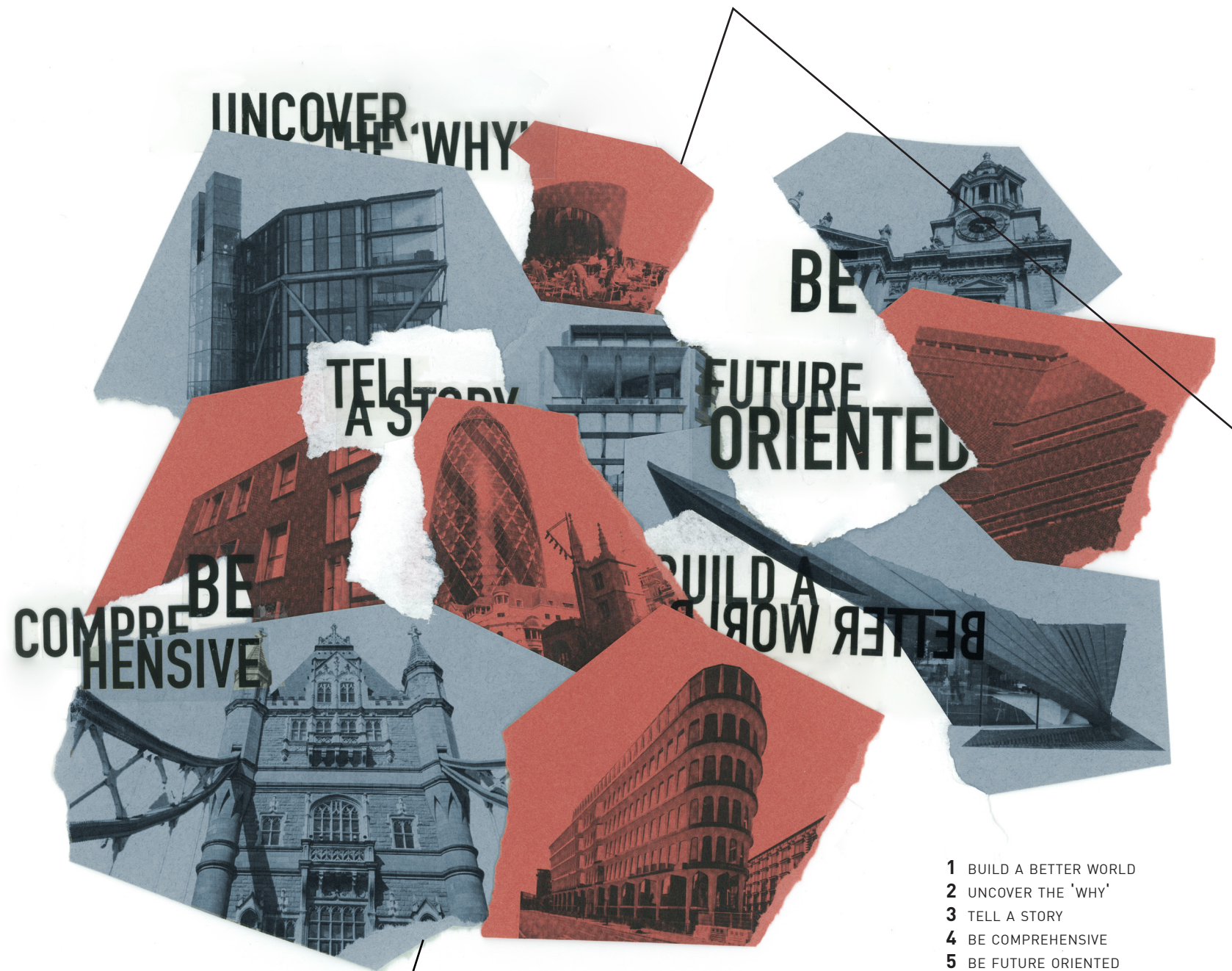


1: WE RECOGNIZE OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS. WE UNDERSTAND THAT DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE SHAPE BEHAVIOR AND EXPECTATIONS.

WE WENT TO LONDON looking for partnerships, like those assembled to produce the 14,500 handcrafted tiles of the V&A Courtyard or the alliances forged to overcome the objections of Prince Charles and his supporters to ensure that Jean Nouvel's One New Change was built. And we found those. But we also found another layer: Partnerships, like Maggie's, are often preceded by messier, less certain connections that develop between seemingly unrelated people and endeavors, which come by sheer juxtaposition in a city as dense and cosmopolitan as London.

We used our time together to discuss the firm's newly articulated Design Tenets—basic principles that we conscientiously strive to integrate into our daily design practice.

The trip's destinations were a mirror in which to reflect as we asked whether we could see our tenets embodied in them. We expect our understanding of these tenets to evolve as they become more deeply ingrained in our habits, but they prompted lively discussion.



- 1 BUILD A BETTER WORLD
- 2 UNCOVER THE 'WHY'
- 3 TELL A STORY
- 4 BE COMPREHENSIVE
- 5 BE FUTURE ORIENTED

C O N TENTS

03	DESIGN TENETS
05	BUILD A BETTER WORLD
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