



THE DEVON GUILD OF CRAFTSMEN REGENERATION OF THE RIVERSIDE MILL BOVEY TRACEY

Softroom have recently completed the £0.5M refurbishment of the Riverside Mill in Bovey Tracey creating a flagship visitor destination for the Devon Guild of Craftsmen. The innovative remodelling and extension of the 19th century mill has created the largest exhibition, education and sales space dedicated to crafts in the South West. Softroom won the commission in September 2002 as the result of a limited competition. The project includes the new Jubilee Gallery, an extended crafts shop and The Terrace Café with rooftop seating.

The Development Strategy

The starting point for the redevelopment was the strategic replanning of complex, rationalising the overall layout. The project is focused around a new gallery structure placed within the existing courtyard space and the refurbishment of existing spaces within the mill. The key decision was to place the main gallery at the heart of the building, moving it from the first to the ground floor and thereby making it more visible and accessible than before. Creating a larger, more flexible space than any previously available in the building has enabled the Guild to attract and mount a higher calibre of exhibitions.

The Jubilee Gallery

The design of the new courtyard gallery is inspired by temporary structures around the world, where fabric is slung between walls to provide shelter. Here the roof is a slender steel structure that curves gently upward toward the outer wall, allowing north light into the gallery space below. Simply finished, with a concrete floor and white walls, the gallery has a relaxed atmosphere—a result of its informal planning and the character of the historic stone-walled courtyard within which it sits.

Full height glazing and oak-framed sliding doors link the gallery directly with the entrance court, which provides additional outdoor display space. The windows between the shop and the courtyard have also been reinstated as doors to allow a greater freedom of movement throughout the ground floor of the building.

The Terrace Café

Inevitably, to increase the useful volume of the building, some of the existing courtyard space has been given over to the new gallery. However, the area on the roof of the gallery has been regained and serves as both garden and roof terrace for the first floor café. Relocated upstairs, the café benefits from south facing windows overlooking the river as well as direct access to the new roof terrace. From here, you can enjoy views to the town and hills beyond, over the low maintenance sedum that surrounds the timber deck.

To make the most efficient use of a very tight site, one of the existing external staircases has been reconfigured, reusing the old solid granite treads, to provide the main circulation between the two floors. This has liberated space to expand the shop on the ground floor and provide a greatly enhanced kitchen upstairs.

The project has also provided improved office facilities, level access throughout the ground floor and a new lift between the two floors.

Artistic Collaboration with Martin Richman

Artist Martin Richman collaborated with the design team on the overall development and during the process the opportunity developed to introduce some small elements of his own work into the site.

The artist comments:

“The windows and doors were chosen as arenas for intervention which linked to my interest in transitional spaces. I wanted to introduce a sense of the inner addressing the outer and vice versa with both a day and night legibility. It was necessary to find an element, or grain, with which to address these windows, a kind of motif that might be applied in a range of differing situations. I didn’t want to have one form for the graphic manifestation (which have the function of making clear glass apparent so people don’t walk into it) and another for the more aesthetic interventions. Eventually we settled on a range of circular discs that would fit into the small glazed panels of the pre-existing windows and the large sheets of newly installed glass doors and windows. The discs had associations with the making of pots, the circular potters wheel etc., but also their fleeting colour looked exuberant and fun having qualities a little like bubbles floating on the glass which I felt suggested something of the energy of the place.”

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