

Introducing: Yorkton Workshops

Leading design office Pearson Lloyd unveils beautiful purpose-built, future-proof studio and event space in East London designed in collaboration with Cassion Castle Architects



After over a year of restoration and refitting, Yorkton Workshops is finished and in full operation.

Thanks to the vision of Pearson Lloyd and Cassion Castle Architects, what was a dilapidated Victorian block is now a dynamic modern studio, giving Pearson Lloyd a new permanent home in the heart of Hackney for their industry-leading design office.

Spread over two storeys and two wings – a historic workshop building and a more recent warehouse structure – Yorkton Workshops encompasses a variety of spaces, including versatile studios, workshops for making and prototyping, meeting rooms and a dedicated area for exhibitions and events.



Pearson Lloyd's new design office unites and repurposes two existing buildings, both with a history of making.

The new studio has enabled Pearson Lloyd to consolidate its office, workshop and design archive onto a single site for the first time in five years. Because the studio's projects range from North America to Europe and beyond, London is in a key strategic position for Pearson Lloyd to serve its international client base. This opening represents the studio's continuing commitment to the city that has been its home for over 20 years, creating new opportunities to engage with the industry and local community, as well as giving the studio the space and flexibility to operate in a Covid-safe manner.

"After our two decades in East London, opening Yorkton Workshops is a pivotal moment for Pearson Lloyd. Not only did the restoration give us an opportunity to exercise our design approach both at scale and at a granular level of detail, it has resulted in a truly versatile studio space that will allow us to bring everything under one roof, and which gives us the space and flexibility to conduct experiments and explore bold new ideas in workplace strategy."

– Luke Pearson, co-founder, Pearson Lloyd



The scale of the new building and the variety of spaces it offers allow Pearson Lloyd's design team to choose environments that suit their present mode of work.

Design in collaboration

Having worked with Cassion Castle Architects on several projects over the past 12 years, Pearson Lloyd co-founders Luke Pearson and Tom Lloyd knew that it would be the ideal practice to collaborate with to develop their initial design concept, with the experience and creativity necessary to deliver such a complex project, ensuring continuity of design and the refined quality of the final product.

Cassion Castle Architects has a long history of working with individual designers and studios, and the fact that the practice can perform the role of both architect and contractor simultaneously was critical to the restoration. When architects are involved only in the design phase, there can often be a gulf between vision and delivery as the contractor cuts corners, takes easier routes, or is obliged to adapt plans to negotiate unforeseen obstacles. Having Cassion Castle Architects actively responsible for both aspects of the project ensured the design was realistic without any loss of creativity, and that the build remained true to Pearson Lloyd's initial

concept. The attention to detail at Yorkton Workshops is evident in the finished space.



Details throughout the building reflect Pearson Lloyd's eye and Cassion Castle Architects' material understanding and precision.

Restoring a structure like this – which has been modified, damaged, repaired, added to, and reimagined in countless ways over the last century – demanded a highly adaptive approach. A sequential, linear method of planning and construction would have allowed no room for the unpredictable and exacerbated the challenges encountered, ultimately leading to suboptimal outcomes and greater costs.

Because design and construction could happen in parallel, the restoration of the Workshops became a continuous, iterative act of collaborative making. Together, Pearson Lloyd and Cassion Castle Architects responded to the structure as they took it apart, trialling different approaches and evolving their ideas as construction progressed. This approach has been employed since the dawn of civilisation: by modifying, adapting and extending buildings, sites (and ultimately cities) become richly layered palimpsests of old and new.

“Working on design-led projects with an active and invested client is deeply engaging and rewarding from a design perspective. We were blessed with a site that had a lot of existing charm and wonder hidden under the surface, and good enough bones to allow a retrofit rather than a demolition and new-build.

Being the architect and main contractor was another luxury, letting us fully probe the potential of the building as we went, reacting and adapting to the complex site as it developed through construction. In the end it was the

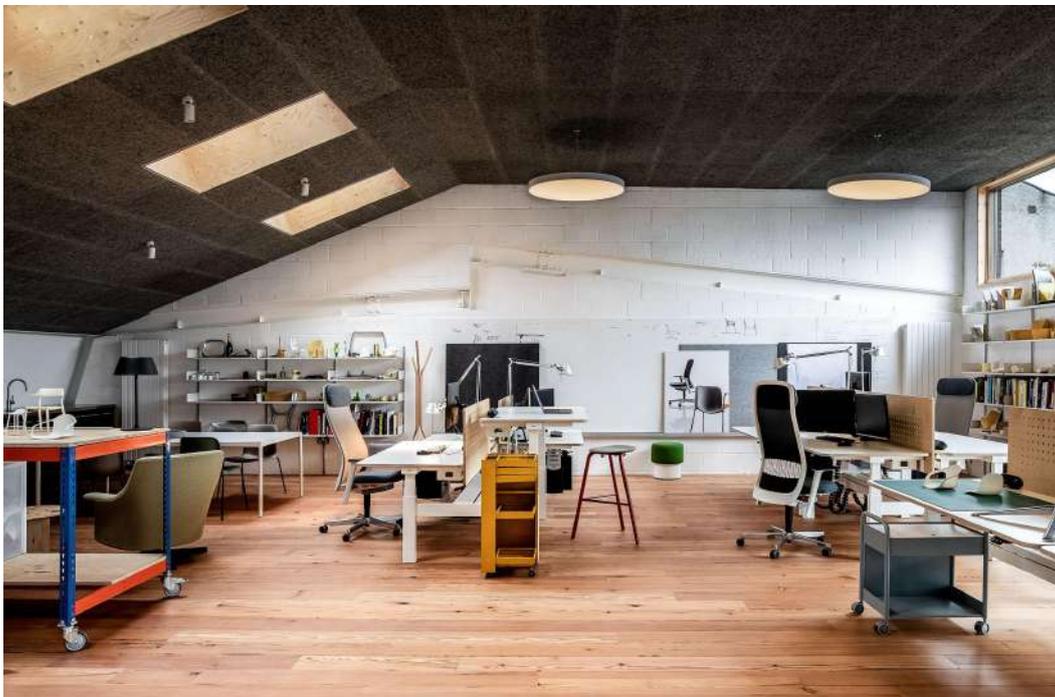
constraints and complexity of the existing site that made the design fly – adding our own chapter to the history of the building rather than rewriting the story from scratch.”

– Cassion Castle, founder, Cassion Castle Architects

The responsiveness of this approach meant that architect and designer could work together to reconcile the fabric of the building to Pearson Lloyd’s needs, ensuring the finished workspace was tailor-made for the practice. This has proven especially valuable in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, as layouts could be easily adapted to accommodate social distancing and more widely distributed working areas for the Pearson Lloyd design team.

A strategic-workplace laboratory

For Luke Pearson and Tom Lloyd, Yorkton Workshops has presented the perfect opportunity to demonstrate Pearson Lloyd’s design philosophy in action – by applying it to their own workspace.



The studio space at Yorkton Workshops allows Pearson Lloyd to test future workspace typologies.

Over the last 20+ years, the studio has dedicated itself to 'Making Design Work' – identifying and building functional, beautiful and efficient products, environments and systems that respond to the challenges of the day and enhance our experience of the world.

Yorkton Workshops reaffirms this commitment. Although the space is tailor-made to meet the needs of a modern-day design studio, Luke and Tom have ensured it is not locked into that role. For them, the restoration of Yorkton Workshops represents not only an investment in Pearson Lloyd's future as a design practice, but in the creative fabric of London as a whole. Yorkton Workshops is effectively future-proof: it can accommodate single or multiple tenants, internal spaces can be modified to open-plan or enclosed as needs change, and it is readily adaptable to manifold workplace typologies – as the ease with which Pearson Lloyd have made it Covid-secure demonstrates.

This flexibility, coupled with the sheer size of the building, have proved hugely beneficial in the creation of an effective socially distanced workplace. Pearson Lloyd's team of 12–16 people are now spread throughout a building with scope for up to 30. They have developed new desking solutions in-house that make working and collaborating at a distance easier, and, like many organisations emerging from lockdown, Pearson Lloyd has incorporated its learnings into the studio's modus operandi, with home working and remote meetings now a permanent part of its everyday operations.

Flexibility is also key to one of the workshops' primary functions. As one of the leading studios in the design of workplace furniture and systems, Pearson Lloyd wanted a space at a scale where they could road-test new design concepts, prototypes and workspace solutions at scale – a real-world lab for their ideas. Featuring a number of their own furniture designs, Yorkton Workshops is in effect the realisation of Pearson Lloyd's own thinking about 'People, Place and Product' – designed workplace strategy in action.

Retrofitted, reclaimed, recycled

Spanning five former stables-turned-workshops on Yorkton Street, Yorkton Workshops is set in an area with a long association with making and manufacture. Today, most of the premises once occupied by furniture makers, musical-instrument artisans, wood turners and other craftspeople have been replaced with residential

units. The restoration of Yorkton Workshops is thus an act of preservation, reinvigorating the area's design heritage, and linking Pearson Lloyd to a lineage of making that dates back over a century.



Evidence of the building's history has been retained, while updating it as a modern design office. Outside space has been created at the top of the stairway to offer an additional meeting and socialising space in warmer seasons.

When Pearson Lloyd acquired the building in 2017, it was a mess; a haphazard collision of old and new, with a mishmash of overlaid alterations and adaptations that had been made over the decades. Part of the Victorian building had been replaced with a modern utilitarian structure some time in the 1990s, likely in response to a fire, leaving 6,000 sq ft of usable – but uninspiring – space. As a former workshop block that had housed an assortment of makers and craftspeople for centuries, it had a heritage that Luke Pearson and Tom Lloyd identified with and wished to continue, but it was ill-suited to the needs of a multi-faceted 21st-century design studio operating internationally.

The easiest approach would have been to knock it down and start from scratch, but Cassion Castle Architects and Pearson Lloyd agreed that restoring and retrofitting the building – although much more challenging and architecturally complex – would

be a far more sustainable, low-carbon approach, as it would preserve the embodied carbon in the existing structure. On average, between a third and a half of a structure's carbon emissions are concentrated in the construction phase, so the reuse of a building has significantly less impact than a new-build.

This determination to minimise environmental impact influenced the design approach from the outset; Pearson Lloyd and Cassion Castle Architects worked hard to minimise the demolition needed, the potential landfill generated and the new materials introduced. They ensured existing materials were retained or reused wherever possible, repurposing bricks, steelwork and timber joists from the demolition phase, supplemented by materials sourced from reclamation yards wherever necessary. The floorboards, for example, were reclaimed from a Victorian factory site in Mile End.



On the ground floor, the new workshop provides rapid prototyping capabilities in house and an exhibition space displays past projects and opportunities to host events for the community.

The retrofit approach was not only environmentally the right choice, but it also created the opportunity for a much richer interior. The interplay of existing fabric and new material lead to hundreds of bespoke details for the design team to tackle and celebrate. Original brickwork seamlessly intersects with contemporary concrete and smooth sheets of birch plywood – a balanced and harmonious meeting of old and new at macro and micro scales.

“From a material perspective, we were keen to approach the building in an analogous way to our furniture and product design. We wanted the materials to have a quality and directness that was intrinsically integrated to their function. Key choices include the wood-fibre acoustic ceiling, the steel stair, the workshop floor (made from the same material as stage floors and haulage trucks) and the reclaimed and refinished pitch pine floor.”

– Luke Pearson, co-founder, Pearson Lloyd

“Our approach was to try to strip it all back to a few essential characteristics and to include as many existing features as possible. Aside from preserving the embodied energy, this means the interiors of this scheme will be much richer because the project is a refurbishment rather than a new build. The history of the building will be ever-present.”

– Cassion Castle, founder, Cassion Castle Architects

Another priority was to achieve optimal user comfort as passively as possible. To ensure optimal insulation, all retained elements of the external envelope, including the concrete ground-bearing floor slabs, were upgraded to modern standards and new roofs were added throughout. Natural cross-ventilation prevents overheating, whereas north-facing window openings and east- and south-facing roof lights with integral blinds reduce solar gain. The need for air-conditioning has been overcome by the inclusion of naturally cooling exposed-masonry walls. Low-energy lighting has been installed throughout – powered with renewable energy supplied by a photovoltaic array on the roof.



The Victorian wing is more intimate in nature.

The finished building imaginatively matches form to function. The domestic-scale Victorian part has been adapted to house more intimate studio activities such as meetings and events, whereas the larger and more open 20th-century factory wing holds the Pearson Lloyd workshops and primary studio space. A central entrance lobby holds a bespoke industrial steel staircase painted bold red, which grabs the eye from the moment of entry. This leads up to the first floor studio space and meeting areas – generously spacious thanks to raised ceilings – and to an outdoor garden and roof terrace that act as a bridge between the building’s functions and eras, allowing the two wings to be read as distinct but connected.

There was a compelling creative benefit to the retrofit approach, too. Preserving the original industrial character of the buildings has given the workshops a clear contextual connection to the surrounding structures, and emphasised their relationship with the architectural heritage of the local area. By carefully combining Victorian and modern elements, they have created a balanced, engaging space that meets the studio’s modern-day needs without sacrificing its historic character – the latest iteration of a structure that has been evolving for over a century.

“Having made the decision to work with the existing fabric of the building, the ambition was to express the old and new in as honest a fashion as possible. The interior is quite expressive in its materiality. We have left as much of the original fabric exposed as we can. We wanted to maintain the sense that we are working in workshops, as this was the original function of the buildings.”

– Tom Lloyd, co-founder of Pearson Lloyd



Notes to editors

For more information, images, drawings, site visits and interviews with Luke Pearson, Tom Lloyd or Cassion Castle, please contact Rupert Evans-Harding at rupert@zetteler.co.uk or on +44 (0)20 3735 5855.

Pearson Lloyd

Founded in East London in 1997 by Luke Pearson and Tom Lloyd, the design office Pearson Lloyd works with manufacturers, brands and public bodies to identify and build products, spaces and services that respond to the challenges of the day and enhance our experience of the world. Their philosophy of 'Making Design Work'

emphasises the studio's passion for the act of making functional, beautiful and efficient solutions that serve equally the needs of their clients, their users and society.

pearsonlloyd.com

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Cassion Castle Architects

Cassion Castle Architects is an award-winning architecture practice based in London. Founded in 2006 and led by Cassion Castle, it is dedicated to the creation of well-crafted, quality designs for residential and commercial clients. Unusually for an architecture firm, Cassion Castle frequently provides a 'design and build' service where it both provides traditional architectural services and acts as main contractor for the project.

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