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## Design District success continues with launch of new creative workspaces

### Mole Architects' iridescent building adds more colour to increasingly dynamic creative ecosystem



New Design District building D2 is home to tenants across the creative sector and presents a unique community for post-Covid working. Right: founders of bike bag makers Wizard Works.

On Greenwich Peninsula, Design District's evolution continues with the opening of Mole Architects' second building, a striking and sustainable 580m<sup>2</sup> rhomboid structure that seems to change colour as you move around it.

Designated D2, the new building's five workspaces are all now occupied, home to a brilliantly eclectic collection of creative businesses, spanning fashion, photography, cycling accessories and more – a reflection of the extraordinary disciplinary variety of Design District as a whole.

Following the official launch in September 2021, Design District is now well on the way to fulfilling its aim to serve as London's permanent home for the creative industries, and to support around 1,800 of the capital's creative-sector workers, at every stage in their careers.

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Comprising 16 buildings by eight pioneering architects, the district provides affordable spaces, comprehensive facilities and flexible leases. As of the end of Q1 2022, over 92% of its available space has been let to creative businesses – a testament to the district’s success in offering a compelling proposition to companies and individuals returning to the workplace in the wake of the pandemic. Today, just 8% of Design District’s plots remain available, comprising whole-building lets – smaller enterprises and individuals wishing to join the community can still do so via Bureau, the members’ club and co-working space.

Since its launch, the district has become a thriving and dynamic creative hub, supporting everyone from students (of Ravensbourne University’s Institute for Creativity and Technology) to freelancers based in Bureau through to larger businesses occupying versatile workspaces in the District’s eclectic, architecturally progressive buildings. Its evolving creative ecosystem, encompassing a gloriously eclectic array of creative disciplines, from ceramic artists and fashion designers to dance companies and VR studios.

Now with the official launch of the new building, the most ambitious creative development in London meets another milestone, its thriving community receives a fresh injection of energy.

## **A colour-changing statement in sustainability**

With D2, Mole Architects has taken the principles of sustainable timber architecture and created a head-turning statement building. Housing five workspaces over three storeys, D2 may be the smallest building of the 16 in the Design District masterplan but, with its iridescent metal exterior, it is impossible to overlook.



Design District's new D2 building by Mole Architects features a dichroic façade, which shows different colours when viewed from different directions.

Mole Architects' first building for Design District, C2, is a striking square ziggurat clad in weathered CorTen steel that opens onto the central courtyard. Its newly complete counterpart, D2, is smaller, rhombus-shaped and positioned at the entrance point to the south-eastern corner of the district. Together, the two buildings pay subtle visual tribute to Greenwich Peninsula's history as the home of what was once Europe's largest gasworks. With its rusty metallic exterior, C2 evokes the gasometers that once stood here. In contrast, the shimmering, colour-changing cladding of D2 conjures the shifting shades of a gas flame, seizing the attention whenever you glimpse its shimmer between the surrounding buildings.



The latest building to open at Design District is a timber construction, offering a sector-leading sustainability position and natural interior environment.

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D2 is built from one of Mole Architects' signature materials – cross-laminated timber (CLT). As well as being practical and robust, CLT buildings demand approximately half the energy of concrete structures to build, and also act as carbon stores, locking CO2 into the fabric of the building. The structural timbers are left exposed on interior walls and stairs, which not only gives the space character, it also eliminates the need for additional finishing materials, and enables a quicker build programme.

Energy-efficiency has been a key consideration. The building is naturally ventilated, with external blinds on the windows to minimise solar gain, and a butterfly roof with triangular rooflights to maximise natural light let in at the apex. Internally, walls are lined with phase-change material (PCM), which absorbs heat when the temperature rises, keeping the interiors cool.



Mole Architects founder Meredith Bowles is a passionate advocate of timber construction.

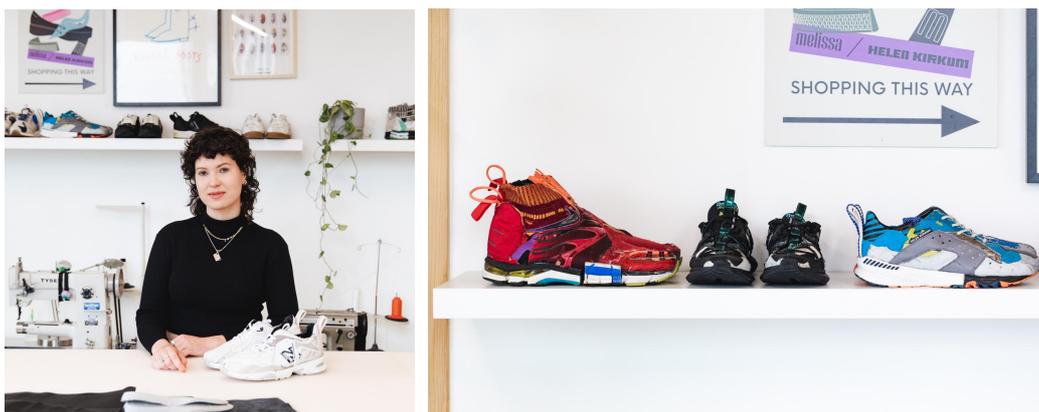
The use of timber also has a wellbeing advantage for the building's users – there is an inherent comfort to be found in natural materials such as wood, that improves quality of life for the building's occupants, and contributes to the building being an inspiring place to work – as does the colourful play of light created by specially glazed fins by the windows that reflect light in different wavelengths.

*"Making timber buildings is a gift to those that live or work in them; it seems that humans have a natural affinity with timber and the warmth that it conveys. We've left quite a lot of timber exposed, as well as each space having fantastic large openings to the best views. The reflected light from the dichroic fins into the interiors was actually an unintended surprise, but we love it."*  
– Meredith Bowles, Mole Architects

## The most inspiring neighbours in London

The workplace needs of creative people vary enormously from discipline to discipline. Photographers need expansive and versatile studios; graphic designers and agencies need desk space and adequate tech infrastructure; makers need spacious workshops where they can make noise and get messy. Like Design District as a whole, D2 is designed to act as a blank canvas for creative workers of all kinds.

In its ground-floor workshop, Wizard Works makes eye-catching, cult-following bike bags for cyclists. Upstairs three units are split between sustainable fashion pioneer Helen Kirkum, creative agency Fford, and Storytellers London, the commercial arm of the Photography Foundation, which helps disadvantaged young people access careers in photography and occupies D2's top-floor studio space.



Design District tenant Helen Kirkum designs and makes bespoke footwear from recycled materials.

The building's newly installed residents thus represent a microcosm of Design District's wider creative ecosystem – an exciting, eclectic community that reflects the extraordinary breadth of contemporary creative enterprise, and a testament to the success of Mole Architects' discipline-agnostic design vision.

*"I LOVE our building, the materials and colours are gorgeous and I love that it was built with sustainability in mind. The green exterior is beautiful – I fell in love as soon as I saw it. It looks like a cutting mat, so it's a perfect home for the HELEN KIRKUM team. Our old studio in Hackney Wick wasn't very customer facing and wasn't well connected. I was excited at the prospect of being part of the community here. We love the impressiveness and connectivity of*

*Design District – it's perfect to build our client base. It is great to be surrounded by like-minded entrepreneurs who are working towards putting more good into the world."*

– Helen Kirkum, D2 tenant

## A winning formula for post-Covid working

While the workplace sector at large has entered a period of post-Covid decline, with the call to return to the office proving less than compelling for many workers, Design District is bucking the trend. By investing in versatile fit-for-purpose workspaces – like D2 – in an architecturally inspiring environment, and consciously setting out to build a mixed creative community with its blended rent model, Design District has created a compelling proposition for creative businesses, with clear advantages over both conventional office space and work-from-home set-ups.

*"The extraordinary variety of skills and sectors in D2 is the perfect reflection of the diverse and dynamic ecosystem of Design District as a whole. The sense of being at the heart of a thriving community of ideas – a vibrant network of hugely different enterprises and individuals that collaborate and learn from each other – is one of the biggest incentives for business owners to make their home here. The fact that so many – and so different – businesses are already here tells us that the approach is working."*

– Helen Arvanitakis, Director, Design District



Left to right: D2's Escher-esque wooden staircase, fabulously detailed metal facade and situation among an architectural who's who on Greenwich Peninsula.

## Get started at brand-new coworking club Bureau



Bureau is Design District's brand new coworking members' club for London's creative industries.

For individuals and small businesses looking to join the Design District community, Bureau is the entry point. Spread across two buildings, the workspace and members' club supports an ever-shifting army of freelancers and self-employed creatives, taking advantage of an enticing combination of affordable membership (starting at £80 a month, less than the cost of a daily coffee), top-flight facilities, innovative architecture, and – of course – the multi-faceted creative universe on the doorstep.

### An action-packed LDF programme

To mark Design District's one-year anniversary, Bureau will be at the centre of a District-wide event celebrating its burgeoning creative community during London Design Festival on 19–25 September. Alongside open studio events, creative workshops and one-of-kind-experiences offered by Design District tenants, a programme of Bureau Talks will bring together creative-industry thought leaders to explore topics including sustainability and inclusivity.

The atmosphere of celebration and festivity will be enhanced with special food, drink and music activations – including, of course, a birthday party. More information will be available at [designdistrict.co.uk/events](https://designdistrict.co.uk/events) in the coming months.

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## Notes to editors

For more information about D2, the Design District creative community, and the development as a whole, please contact [designdistrict@zetteler.co.uk](mailto:designdistrict@zetteler.co.uk).

### Design District

At the heart of Greenwich Peninsula, Design District is London's first permanent, purpose-built hub for the creative industries. Conceived and developed by Knight Dragon, and designed by eight leading architects, Design District will ultimately house 16 unique buildings. Built to provide a space for creatives to work together, Design District currently supports an ecosystem of 1,800 creatives, encompassing individual makers, ambitious start-ups, ground-breaking enterprises and industry leaders. The closest Tube station is North Greenwich (30 metres), where the Jubilee Line will take you to London Bridge in 8 minutes and Waterloo in 11. With affordable spaces, comprehensive facilities and flexible leases, everything is designed to help creative Londoners thrive.

[designdistrict.co.uk](http://designdistrict.co.uk)

### Bureau

Bureau is a workspace and members' club for creatives occupying two purpose-designed buildings within Greenwich Peninsula's Design District. Offering an affordable and dynamic space to collaborate, exchange ideas, socialise, and engage with the surrounding creative ecosystem of Design District, Bureau's membership model is designed to nurture and connect the community, leading to a stronger future for creativity in London and the UK.

[bureau.club](http://bureau.club)

### Mole Architects

Mole Architects is an award-winning architectural practice based in Cambridge, founded by Meredith Bowles in 1997. From The Black House in the Cambridgeshire Fens (featured in the V&A architecture gallery) to the Living Architecture collaboration on the Balancing Barn, the practice has been marked out by its distinctiveness, originality and personality. Mole buildings express a commitment to cutting-edge sustainability alongside a passion for colour, form and material quality. Mole's ethos combines innovation and common sense, and celebrates individuality.

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[molearchitects.co.uk](http://molearchitects.co.uk)

**Greenwich Peninsula**

Greenwich Peninsula is fast becoming the capital's most boldly modern landscape. With 15,000 new homes, 13,000 new jobs and 48 acres of open public space emerging over the coming years. Here a community of thousands of pioneers live in new riverside homes, work in a cutting-edge Design District and enjoy The Tide, the neighbourhood's elevated, riverside walkway and public art trail that celebrates art, design and wellbeing - all wrapped by the River Thames. This is new London: a destination for modern urban living.