

# ANDRÉE COOKE

PRESS RELEASE | Dec 2017

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## A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

**North London Schoolchildren Design Their Own Breakout Space**  
*(with a little help from Andrée Cooke and Michael Marriott)*



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Every old school building has its neglected spaces; the corridors that still bear the scuffs of the last generation of students; the classrooms that there's never enough budget to refurbish; the common rooms that no one ever seems to hang out in. With maintenance funding in short supply, these spaces are likely to remain unchanged at many schools, but one institution in Golders Green has taken an inventive approach to refreshing its forgotten corners: get the students involved.

Contemporary art and design specialist and curator **Andrée Cooke** is a parent of a pupil of [King Alfred School](#), an independent, co-educational school for 4–18-year-olds that offers a progressive and individually focused educational environment. Although much of the school's estate is designed and maintained to nurture this engaging, community atmosphere, Cooke noticed that the common room area for Years 7–10 had become a lacklustre, purposeless space; little more than a corridor with a bank of lockers and a smattering of tired furniture.

As an interior-design consultant who has worked on luxury development and social projects internationally (recently including New York event space and fashion photography studio Spring Studios and its neighbouring workspace/members' club Spring Place), Cooke saw an opportunity to both reinvent the space and provide the students with a lifelong learning experience in the process.

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*'I thought how amazing it could be to get the kids to work with a contemporary, work out a way to take back the space and design it so that they felt a sense of ownership, giving it relevance and purpose. My ambition was to offer the kids an experience that inspired them to think about designing or making as a career, and what's involved in thinking about how to create an environment and physically build it from scratch.'*

– Andrée Cooke

With the support of King Alfred's Head of Year 9, Claire Murphy, its on-site architect, Belinda Webb, and Christopher Raymond from its Design Technology department, Cooke was able to enlist the acclaimed furniture designer **Michael Marriott** to lead the project. With his flair for working with recycled and everyday materials, his utilitarian approach to design, and his reputation for honest materiality, Marriott was the ideal person to introduce King Alfred's students to the creative possibilities and everyday realities of a working life in design, as well as to ensure the finished space met the functional needs of the people who would actually use it – the students themselves.

Since the start of the autumn term in September 2017, Marriott has run weekly workshops with 15 children from Years 8 and 9 who have shown a strong interest in and talent for Design Technology. Together, they are cutting, sanding, and joining recycled plastics, wood and pieces of existing furniture to create new pieces and transform the space into an environment where they and their fellow pupils can spend time, relax and socialise – with the buzz of satisfaction that comes from knowing they designed and built it all themselves.

*'I'm hoping they're gaining an insight into a fuller, real-world kind of design project than they might in a classroom situation – where they get to see something being produced, as opposed to just prototyped.'*

– Michael Marriott

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With help from Cooke, Marriott and the King Alfreds team, the students are acquiring practical, real-life design skills, ranging from how to build jigs and handle power tools to understanding the relationship between function, concept and aesthetics.

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***'The physical making, doing and designing of this space is an amazing legacy for King Alfred; the change to this space physically by the children themselves is something that will have massive impact on their day. Social spaces are invaluable to the enjoyment of the school day and inclusion with other children. The project teaches them social responsibility, team-building skills, practical carpentry and design.'***

– Clare Murphy, King Alfred School

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Real-life skills such as these are both increasingly precious and increasingly under-supported in schools. As digitalisation and automation revolutionise the world of work, creative jobs are likely to be among the most resilient. It is Andrée Cook's hope that this opportunity to work with and learn from a leading contemporary designer and interior curator will go some way towards equipping these children for future creative careers, while also giving them the chance to actively shape their own social environment.

Using just minimal budget to redevelop, the space – now named 'Alfred's Room' by the participating students – will be completed in early December, to be enjoyed by King Alfred's students for many years to come.

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## Notes for editors

### About Andrée Cooke

With 20+ years' experience working in contemporary art and design, Andrée Cooke works with clients in the public and private sector to curate interior spaces; commission vintage and contemporary artworks and design; and provide consultancy services for strategic and business development to companies in the arts. As a curator and gallery director for the likes of David Gill and Spring Projects in London and the British Council Window Gallery in Prague, Cooke broke new ground in championing a combination of contemporary art and design curation. More recently, she has produced iconic collections by the likes of designers Tord Boonjte, El Ultimo Grito and Hussein Chalayan and artist commissions from Lawrence Weiner and Mat Collishaw. Her recent interior projects include Spring Studios New York, a 150,000 sq ft events space and fashion photography facility, and Spring Place – a new collaborative workspace and social membership club in the same building.

W: [andreecooke.com](http://andreecooke.com)

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### About Michael Marriott

Michael Marriott has run his London design studio since 1993, where he creates furniture and household objects characterised by material honesty and a pared-back, functional aesthetic, often including thought-provoking juxtapositions of reclaimed or salvaged materials. A graduate – and former senior tutor – of the Royal College of Art, Marriott was awarded the Jerwood Furniture Prize in 1999 and has designed products for a range of clients including Established & Sons, SCP and Very Good & Proper.

[michaelmarriott.com](http://michaelmarriott.com)

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*For more information about Andrée Cooke and the King Alfred School project, please contact Dorothy Bourne at [dorothy@zetteler.co.uk](mailto:dorothy@zetteler.co.uk) or on 07939 200519.*

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