

## Manalo & White Opening up Towner Eastbourne for centenary year



Towner Eastbourne, home to a significant public art collection and the region's largest art gallery, with 100,000+ visitors a year, has dramatically expanded the reach and scope of their programme.

In close collaboration with Towner Eastbourne director & CEO Joe Hill and the Towner team and overlapping with the Levelling Up programme for the region and redevelopment work for the Devonshire Quarter within which the gallery sits, Manalo & White led an ambitious redesign of the original building designed in 2009 by Rick Mather Architects. The entire ground floor and second-floor restaurant were reconfigured to be lighter and brighter, allowing for a comfortable flow of people, ultimately making the gallery more open and inviting, as per the brief.

Subsequently, Towner has been able to host major exhibitions, craft fairs and now Turner Prize 2023, with additional facilities catering for workshops and community engagement to coincide with their centenary anniversary in 2023. The building now has much more of a convivial feel and a sense of shared space.

*"Over the past 100 years, the role culture has played in our lives has changed dramatically. Our work with Manalo & White to transform Towner*

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*Eastbourne is about looking forward to the future of the gallery – as a home for the arts and a hub for the community.”*

– Joe Hill, director & CEO Towner Eastbourne



## **A generous and fluid foyer**

Manalo & White’s vision was to transform the foyer to be open and fluid, stitching together the variety of rooms around it, allowing visitors to feel the gallery being expanded, even though the overall square footage has not been increased. The design approach was informed by research work (conducted by [Adrian George](#)) which showed that visitors to museums and galleries will stay longer and engage with art further, if the spaces are welcoming and easy to navigate.

The ground floor cafe, which was previously hidden behind two sets of double doors, is now directly connected to the entrance foyer, making it more welcoming and accessible. A discrete retail area has been formed to one side, away from the busier thoroughfare of the foyer. The refurbished second floor restaurant includes a much-improved catering facility and up-to-date kitchen.

Natural light now reaches deeper into the building through a new window, which also reveals the interior to passersby on the street. New lockers, benches, bookcases and cabinets around the foyer have been designed to leave the space clutter-free.

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To enlarge the foyer and create the retail area and much-needed storage, the two existing gallery spaces were reduced in size but improved in scale and proportion, with no loss of display area. They now have uninterrupted exhibition walls and are equipped with concealed sinks for workshops.

*“How to welcome people into a gallery when they feel like art isn’t for them? This is a design challenge that requires a certain kind of risk-taking, and playfulness, too. Our aim was to create a foyer which feels like a courtyard or village square, which stitches all the other spaces together; a convivial shared space where you can pause for a moment.”*

– Brian Greathead, director, Manalo & White

## **Destination restaurant**

Manalo & White has transformed Towner Eastbourne’s second-floor restaurant to be a destination in its own right, offering an elevated atmosphere and expanded food service, and continuing the welcoming openness of the ground floor.

The dining space is welcoming and can be adapted to host a variety of events and performances. The external balcony gives framed views of the South Downs. From the mellow colour palette to the subtle variety of textures of the joinery and materials, such as the oak uprights and deep green worktop of the bar, every detail works to exude generosity and fresh energy.

The central horseshoe bar anchors the flow. The array of globe lights brings warmth and animates the space, which can flexibly accommodate morning coffee or evening dinners. A large felt curtain in a mustard tone wraps around the walls to soften and improve acoustics.



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## Improved acoustics

As Towner Eastbourne has grown its audience, the acoustics of the building weren't suited to bustling crowds or hosting community workshops. Manalo & White integrated acoustic panels within the joinery and below the concrete ceilings, and added a wool felt curtain in the larger gallery space, which can be removed or drawn to dramatically reduce noise levels, if needed.

## Gallery lighting

With services designers Ritchie + Daffin, the original lighting was repurposed to hang on suspended tracks, lower than the existing concrete beams, to improve flexibility and to avoid overshadowing. Reducing electricity consumption was another driver for adopting energy efficient LEDs.



## Notes for Editors

### Project Data

**Start on site** October 2021(ground floor) and December 2022 (second floor)

**Completion** April 2022 (ground floor) and April 2023 (second floor)

**Gross internal floor area** 600m<sup>2</sup> (ground floor) and 140m<sup>2</sup> (second floor)

**Construction cost** £800,000 (ground floor) and £370,000 (second floor)

**Construction cost per m<sup>2</sup>** £1,333 (ground floor) and £2,643 (second floor)

**Architect** Manalo & White Architects

**Client** Towner Gallery

**Structural engineer** Corbett & Tasker

**M&E** Ritchie + Daffin

**QS** V12

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**Project manager** V12

**Approved Inspector** East Sussex Building Control Partnership

**Main contractors** Vulcan Ellis (ground floor) and Hawes Construction (second floor)

**Fire engineer** Thomson Fire

**Access consultant** JAW Inclusive Design

**CAD software used** Vectorworks

## **Manalo & White**

Founded by Brian Greathead in 1999, Manalo & White is an architecture and interiors studio which weaves together pragmatism with playfulness. With an emphasis on user needs over spectacle and showmanship, the studio is known for its cross-sector versatility. It has developed an especially strong portfolio in the arts and culture sectors. The practice recently completed the new Matt's Gallery in Nine Elms, with its rough finishes reflecting the gallery's original anti-establishment feel. Other notable projects include the design of the East End Women's Museum; a new classroom building for Heathlands School for Deaf Children; a soon-to-complete community hub called Nyth (which means 'nest' in Welsh) for the Welsh-language youth theatre, Fran Wen, in Bangor, North Wales; and reinventing a Fitzrovia office building into the now-beloved boutique hotel The Mandrake. The practice has also become one of the most experienced designers of student housing and amenities in the UK. [manaloandwhite.co.uk](https://manaloandwhite.co.uk) / @manaloandwhite

## **Towner Eastbourne**

Collecting and exhibiting contemporary art for 100 years, Towner Eastbourne sits where the coast and the South Downs meet. Towner presents exhibitions of national and international importance for audiences in Eastbourne, the UK and beyond, showcasing the most exciting and creative developments in modern and contemporary art. Towner develops and supports artistic practice and collaborates with individuals, communities and organisations to deliver an inclusive, connected and accessible public programme of live events, film and learning. Towner's collection of almost 5000 works is best known for its modern British art – including the largest and most significant body of work by Eric Ravilious (1903-1942) – and a growing collection of international contemporary art. Towner Eastbourne was Museum, of the Year 2020 and is the host of Turner Prize 2023. <https://townereastbourne.org.uk> / @townergallery

**Turner Prize Exhibition** is open until 14 April 2024 - Free Admission

**Opening Hours** 10am – 5pm Tuesday to Sunday (Closed on Monday)

## **Eastbourne ALIVE**

This is an ambitious creative wraparound project which celebrates the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that Turner Prize 2023 coming to Eastbourne offers. The partnership programme aims to be the catalyst for lasting change in Eastbourne. Working with young people, local cultural organisations, East Sussex Public Health, businesses, and the community, Eastbourne ALIVE will be delivering a wide range of projects such as public art installations, exclusive schools visits to Towner gallery,

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animating disused shop fronts, teachers training workshops, wellbeing research, a wide-reaching work experience programme and so much more.

[eastbournealive.co.uk](https://eastbournealive.co.uk) / @eastbournealive

## **Light**

Light offers a whole new style of dining and socialising for Eastbourne, with a Scandinavian-inspired restaurant, horseshoe bar and roof terrace with stunning views — great for coffee, cocktails and everything in between.

## **Opening hours**

Tuesday to Sunday 10:00am to 4.30pm

Thursday to Saturday 5.30pm to 10.30pm

Monday closed

<https://lighttowner.com> / @lighttowner