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# SHOW AND TELL

*Zaha Hadid Architects creates  
the Roca London Gallery*



**DESIGN FOR  
YOUTH**

**LONDON  
HOTELS 2012**

**TECH SPEC:  
SEATING  
LIGHTING  
MATERIALS**



# YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

The need to engage and motivate teenagers has never been more pressing, especially in post-riot UK. Against a depressing backdrop of decimated youth services, a handful of enlightened institutions, charities and individuals are doing their best to make a difference, through inventive concepts and inspirational design.

**Veronica Simpson** reports

The Norwich OPEN youth venue, designed by Hudson Architects, combines exceptional facilities for youngsters with a high-quality space for commercial leasing and events

**P**hysical settings communicate, both practically and symbolically, the intentions and values of the people who design them. In the modern urban landscape, adults clearly have all their emotional, economic and social requirements met: there's a cornucopia of possible venues for work, rest and play. But the buildings and spaces that are overtly designed for children (schools, playgrounds, youth centres) primarily communicate a desire to control or constrain them.

Up to the age of 11, being safely contained within parks, playgrounds and bike tracks may be sufficient to make a child feel that the world has accommodated them within its plan. For those over 11, however, are street corners or bus shelters all we have to offer? If public hostility to youths 'loitering' in these places was prevalent before, imagine how this summer's riots have intensified that public antipathy.

So what's left – shopping centres? If the only leisure spaces left to the nation's teens are malls, how surprised can we be when cash and opportunity-strapped young people express the desire to have a piece of the action either through petty shoplifting or the kind of wanton destruction and looting that occurred this summer in major cities in the UK.

Whatever their trigger, the riots threw a spotlight on the lives of young Britons, and the picture isn't pretty. Youth centres are closing as councils focus their diminished funds on 'core services' (there is no statutory provision for youth services). The Youth Opportunities Fund has been ditched, as has the Connexions services which helped youngsters with counselling and careers guidance. Could it be any clearer that the nation's youth are not prioritised?

But there are a handful of inspiring initiatives that are making a difference to young people's lives and prospects. And thoughtful design – either physical or social – is playing a key part.

OPEN in Norwich is a Grade II listed 18th-century banking hall that was regional headquarters for Barclays until 2002. Now it is a state-of-the-art youth and community centre, with climbing wall, under-18s nightclub, music and dance studios, media suite, cafe and counselling services. Says its architect, Anthony Hudson: 'The problem with a lot of youth centres is that they provide just the basics in terms of space. Most of them are cold and miserable. One of the young trustees was very keen to have top-notch quality. He felt kids deserve quality just as much as adults

do. 'They wanted us to make this space a destination that anyone would like to go to.'

That commitment to quality has paid off in spades. By the time the venue opened in July 2009, funding for the centre's health suite (providing free counselling and health advice) had collapsed. But thanks to the quality of the environment, the same space has been let out to key health charities as office space; they are offering health and drugs counselling as bona fide tenants of the building. The social spaces also attract corporate clients at specified times – some 10 per cent of the venue's usage comes from the corporate sector, bringing in vital revenue. Another revenue stream comes from the conversion of vaults in the basement to safe storage units. The rest of the time the centre is a hub for the region's eight to 25-year-olds. During the summer, around 5,000 young people a week were passing through its doors.

Sarah Mintey, who runs the centre, admits she was quite critical of the initial focus on design. 'The bottom line is we want to deliver youth services. In order to do that we don't need to build the Sistine Chapel,' she says. 'But now Norfolk Youth in the Community services have gone altogether, we have to be financially self-sustaining. So what seemed like an unsustainable emphasis on design has become vital to securing our future.'

The quality of the building and its facilities also helped to secure vital MyPlace funding. A late legacy from the Labour government, the MyPlace programme launched with the promise of massive investment in high-quality youth facilities. Funded by lottery money (already secured before the UK election), by January 2011 12 new centres had been built, and a further 57 are slowly coming to fruition. These include a hugely impressive facility for the long-established Salmon Centre in Bermondsey, south London. The new building features climbing wall, sports court, teaching kitchen, careers advice and counselling facilities, music and arts programmes, and serves 1,700 young people a week. It has also been cited as one of the reasons for Bermondsey's relatively low rate of youth crime.

Another new scheme with MyPlace funding has used thoughtful design to improve the lives of a very different youth population. New Horizon Youth Centre is a drop-in centre for Islington's young homeless. Adam Khan Architects won the commission to redesign and extend this well-worn, 20-year-old facility a few years back. Adam Khan says: 'What really interested me was that it was quite a tough institution. You couldn't have wall lamps because people



## OPEN YOUTH VENUE, NORWICH

Hudson Architects was chosen by a youth panel for the task of renovating an 18th-century Grade II listed banking hall and offices and transforming it into a state of the art youth venue intended to combine exceptional facilities for young people with high-quality space for commercial leasing and events.

Extensive consultations with more than 100 young stakeholders helped to identify activities that would meet both needs and aspirations, including a media lab and quiet study area (for homework), a health centre, a cafe with training kitchen, dance studios, recording studio, climbing wall and an under-18s nightclub. The young people were also involved in selecting colours and materials from the architects' swatches for each area.

Given the listing restrictions, the architects opted to preserve the shell of the building and insert the different spaces in a supremely flexible format that centres around the cafe and climbing wall. Says architect Anthony Hudson: 'You can see clearly what's original and what is inserted. We used trapezoid, angular shapes to contrast with the arches and vaulting of the banking hall.' Gold mesh was used on screens to echo the gilded

capitals atop the bank's original columns; it appears again on huge triangular acoustic baffles that weave through the hall. High-quality and durable materials were used wherever possible: galvanised-steel panels on the nightclub walls, a crushed marble in resin for the bar. Vinyl flooring with a monochrome chevron pattern is both striking with its optical effects and hints at classic tiled floors.

The high quality has ensured that, where youth services funding has collapsed, key spaces have attracted private tenants to supply essential advice (teen-health charities, for example, offer services from their offices in the building) and preserve the vital work of this project, now under the Government's MyPlace banner.

**Client:** OPEN Youth Trust/  
The Lind Trust

**Architects/designers:**  
Hudson Architects

**Cost:** £6m

**Area:** 5,400 sq m (gross internal area)

**Opened:** Completed July 2009

**Climbing wall:** Entre-Prises (UK)

**Granite desks and benches:**

Granite Transformations

**Blinds:** KayDee Blinds

**Flooring:** Forbo-Nairn