

Professional

Architecture: Hans Place by Squire and Partners

Henry Squire, architect and practice partner, explains how Squire & Partners developed bespoke brickwork for a residential project in Knightsbridge



Kingwood is a new residential development by Finchatton for which we were asked to redevelop a series of four townhouses on the corner of Hans Place and Herbert Crescent, a Knightsbridge garden square defined by handsome red brick Dutch revival buildings. Our designs sought to sensitively repair or replace the existing buildings, but we were also interested in the opportunity to introduce an element of contemporary craft that responded to the context of richly detailed brick and featured intricate carvings inspired by nature.

The original decorative motifs were created using a soft moulded brick that was manipulated by artisans who carved and rubbed the brick by hand to create intricate shapes and patterns. It quickly became clear that hand-carving large areas of brick would be prohibitively expensive and time-consuming, and there was a distinct lack of craftspeople available.

We therefore decided to develop a 3D-pattern based on the natural form of a cocoa bean, first introduced to the UK from Jamaica by Hans Sloane after whom the square was named. This was abstracted to create a geometric configuration which could be made with a limited number of brick types for practicality and cost, but when laid gave a varied pattern across the facade. Having created a brick design, we contacted a series of specialist manufacturers to explore production methods and the limited number of brick types that were practical and cost-effective.

Precision and the ability to mass-produce were imperative and so we tried fusing the accuracy of digital fabrication with highly skilled bricklaying. Two basic patterned bricks were produced in batches of 40-50 per session. Following the CNC process, the bricks were hand-rubbed to achieve a smooth finish. These bespoke bricks were then passed on to a team of specialist bricklayers. Each brick was saturated with water before applying lime putty and being laid with a high degree of precision. The process was slow and took great dedication from the team, who were only able to lay a maximum of one metre per day.

The collaborative process of design and craft between ourselves and the various craftsmen has created a building that marries contemporary methods of brick fabrication with the character and heritage of the surrounding neighbourhood.

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