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## **FARNHAM ROAD HOSPITAL, GUILDFORD**

PM Devereux harnesses its expertise in a hospital transformation that breaks the stigma of mental illness

## **CLYDEBANK LEISURE CENTRE, GLASGOW**

A striking triangular statement reflects the Clyde's past

# ASK THE ARCHITECT

EPR director Tiffany Neller tells Norman Hayden what motivates her – including inspiration from set design

## WHY DID YOU BECOME AN ARCHITECT?

I didn't set out to do so. I studied architecture at university because it suited my maths and physics A-levels and my passion for art. I was originally planning to branch out into set design, which is, in many respects, a precursor for architectural design in terms of both feasibility and fashion. This is always an inspiration, and I went on to discover an interest in hotel design, and so everything came together. Now, I wouldn't do anything else.

## WHAT DO YOU LIKE SO MUCH ABOUT HOTEL DESIGN?

It is one big stage set. I enjoy working with all the personalities and love the fantasies that we create for guests. Hotel design has evolved so much over the past 20 years. A few decades ago there were very few hotels you would choose as a destination, but now they are often the place to go and be seen. I also enjoy the logistical challenge of hotels – bringing all the different functions together to form one efficient, operational building. There are elements of residential, retail, office, leisure and conference all with their own functional and operational requirements, but all still needing to work in unison.

## WHAT INSPIRES YOU MOST ABOUT HOTELS?

Answering the client's brief, and even surpassing it, is always the aim. We are fortunate to work with some very creative clients who are willing to take a certain degree of risk and push the boundaries to create something new. Alex Calderwood, the late founder of Ace Hotels, was a huge inspiration in this respect. In the design of Ace Hotel in Shoreditch, we along with Universal Design Studios 'tore up the rule book.' The

bar and restaurant do not have any street presence and the design was allowed to evolve even while on site. Creating a hotel is not just about fostering aesthetics using materials and finishes, but also about creating an environment with soul and spirit. Above all, the guest needs to have a good night's sleep – even so, hotels are also buildings for entertainment, work and leisure.

## WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON CURRENTLY?

We have a hotel team of over 50 architects, designers and technicians with a broad range of knowledge and experience in the sector. Thanks to this, we always have a diverse mix of hotel projects – including new builds, refurbishments and conversions. Our current projects include a conversion of the Edwin Lutyens-designed former Midland Bank building in Manchester and, in London, the old War Office in Whitehall and the Russell Hotel, Bloomsbury. My particular focus at the moment is the extensive refurbishment of the Russell Hotel – a Grade II listed German Renaissance-style building designed by Charles Fitzroy Doll, the designer of the Titanic. It was one of the



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Tiffany Neller, EPR

first hotels in London with en suite bathrooms but has undergone many refurbishments over the years and lost a lot of its original historic grandeur. We are working with Tara Bernerd & Partners and Russell Sage Studio to combine the building's rich heritage with a contemporary scheme that incorporates its history.



Ace Hotel, Shoreditch  
Photo: Andrew Meredith





Russell Hotel, central London

**Creating a hotel is not just about fostering aesthetics using materials and finishes, but also about an environment with soul and spirit**

### **HOW IS HOTEL ARCHITECTURE CHANGING?**

Hotel exteriors are not always given as much consideration as their interiors, but we are hopefully starting to see a change in that. Hotels are part of the community and more than ever they need to respond to their location and attract custom – and not just from their guests. They are becoming more multi-functional and appealing to a much wider audience using the hotel. At the same time however, guests are becoming increasingly discerning and operators now have to respond to an increasingly diverse demand. With an ageing population and travel available to more and more people, this development is happening in all sectors from hostels to boutique and lifestyle through to high-end luxury.

### **WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS?**

With so many refurbishment projects, I get to work with a lot of materials we may not otherwise consider. Currently, we are working with terracotta in refurbishing the Russell Hotel, in Russell Square. It is always interesting to use traditional materials in a more contemporary way. At Ace Hotel, we incorporated a variety of brick bonds and

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mortar joints with a very contemporary outcome. The layering of modern and traditional materials creates a richness of texture and warmth that can be very expressive.

### **WHAT INNOVATIONS IN MATERIALS MOST EXCITE YOU?**

We are lucky at EPR to work alongside the Materials Council, which allows us to stay informed about the innovations which are occurring in building materials. We have recently been looking at Rockwool as a cost-effective, efficient cladding material on budget new builds and we are keen to try out some of the bricks which are made from recycled waste. It is good that there are so many developments now underway which are attempting to make construction more sustainable and affordable.

### **ARE THERE LIMITS TO THE PART TECHNOLOGY CAN PLAY?**

Technology is a very important factor within hotel design: used in the right way it allows far more flexibility in design. Most guests generally don't want an over-complicated system, but there can be a place for high technology too. The whole check-in process has progressed enormously – while remote check-in may suit one guest, a personal one-to-one service might be favoured by another. There is now a hotel to suit most tastes and needs and so design and the level of technology ultimately have to respond to the individual brief for that particular hotel and location.

### **HOW DO YOU FIND BEING A WOMAN IN ARCHITECTURE?**

It is not easy to be a working mother in any profession. However, things have massively improved for female architects, but there is still a long way to go in all areas of the construction industry. EPR supports the Architectural Review's Women in Architecture programme, which aims to get more women into the industry. And, more importantly, we must ensure that they stay there – and progress. ■