

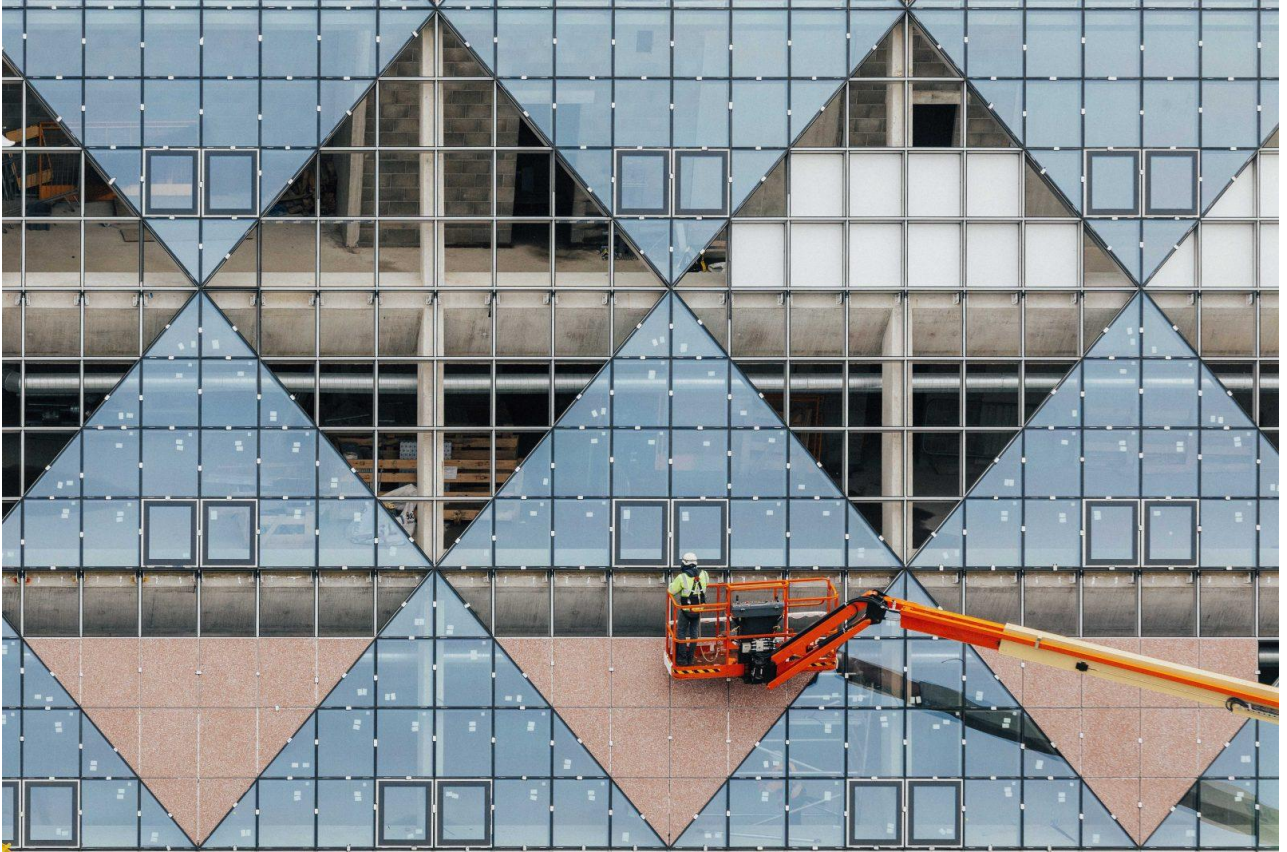


## 6a's 'twin' Greenwich Design District buildings complete

8 FEBRUARY 2023 \*BY FRAN WILLIAMS AJ. PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT CLAYTON AND TARAN WILKHU



6a Architects' A2 and B2 buildings are nearly identical, both being wrapped in a diamond pattern of glass and terrazzo stone cladding and having one steeply sloping side



A2 under construction

The Greenwich Design District is a purpose-built quarter of designers' and makers' studios with protected rents, at the centre of a new residential and commercial development along the river on Greenwich Peninsula.

It was designed as a medieval-style street plan of narrow lanes between buildings and a central market hall. Eight architects were commissioned to design two buildings each, based on the plan and developer requirements, with no contact between the different architects.

6a's two buildings are described as 'a pair of non-identical twins'. Their facades use a commercial vernacular of thin, bonded components, and are inspired by the graphic sculpture of [Richard Artschwager](#).



By tilting their façades, daylight and sky views are brought inside, while the space around the market hall is opened up. Drains, ducts and grills are amplified to become porticos and punctuation in the new public realm.

As the buildings taper, the depth of interior space on each floor varies, creating very different spaces: the top floor is super narrow and 7m tall, while the first floor is wider and lower.

The Design District's first building, [A1 by Barozzi Veiga](#), completed in 2021. The AJ published a [themed issue](#) in August 2021 covering Design District buildings by Roz Barr and HNNA, David Kohn Architects and Architecture 00.

## Architect's view

Working on A2 and B2 was a very unusual but enjoyable process. There was no existing context to respond to, it was replaced entirely by potential. We were given a masterplan showing a very tight grain of narrow lanes around open space. We knew the building footprints and maximum heights and had a brief to deliver workspaces for creative industries – a very broad category that can range from digital technologies to studio space to industrial production. We also knew who the other architects would be, which produced an exciting set of possibilities without ever really knowing how it would come together.

The brief did not demand the maximum floor space possible on the plot, allowing for the social or environmental amenities seen in the roof terraces and basketball courts of other buildings. In our case, we used the brief as an algorithm to cut away the building volume obliquely until we reached the exact area required. The cut, which gives the two buildings their form, brought more daylight and wide sky views from the lanes and public space. As the buildings taper, the depth of interior space on each floor varies, creating very different spaces. The top floor is super narrow and 7m tall while the first floor is wider and lower.

We were also very happy to do the same building twice. The eight architects designing the design district would provide plenty of variety within the district. And we enjoyed the old architectural tradition of building pairs – notably in Wren's nearby Royal Naval Hospital.

The work of the American artist Richard Artschwager was with us throughout the project. His sculptural works, playfully dressed in extremely thin surfaces of Formica, were helpful in articulating the thinness of contemporary construction.

*Tom Emerson, director, 6a Architects*

## Client's view

6a's extraordinary sibling buildings are instantly recognisable within the Design District landscape thanks to their distinctive oblique façades, which, in turn, bring variety and character to the spaces inside. Juxtaposed with those huge sloping windows, the exposed concrete and blockwork make perfect sense, evoking the forms and dimensions of atelier-style architecture without slipping into overt pastiche.

Inside, changing ceiling heights and different floor depths throughout mean that each level of the building has a different feel. This ensures the buildings hold appeal to a wide variety of potential occupants, offering not only varying square meterages

but entirely different types of spaces – from grand muscular units at ground level, to lofty, light spaces at the top, via dynamic studios in the middle. That has helped make both these exceptional buildings hugely popular among creative tenants. We currently have only two spaces left available – one in each building – and we expect these to go quickly.

*Helen Arvanitakis, director, Design District*

## Project data

**Start on site** 2019

**Completion date** 2022

**Gross internal floor area** 1,250m<sup>2</sup> (each building)

**Gross (internal + external) floor area** 1,608m<sup>2</sup>

**Form of contract or procurement route** Design and build

**Construction cost** Undisclosed

**Construction cost per m<sup>2</sup>** Undisclosed

**Architect** 6a architects

**Client** Knight Dragon

**Structural engineer** Whitby Wood

**M&E consultant** [Skelly & Couch](#), Swiftline Engineering

**Quantity surveyor** Artelia

**Terrazzo** Inopera Group

**Landscape consultant** Schulze + Grassov

**Acoustic consultant** Pace Consult

**Principal designer** 6a architects

**CDM co-ordinator** Stace Consultants

**Approved building inspector** Royal Borough of Greenwich

**Main contractor** Ardmore

**CAD software used** MicroStation