



Large rooflights define the Foreshore Gallery. They are split to give flexibility to the layout of temporary exhibitions.

ADDING THAT EXTRA POLISH

Informed instinct lies at the heart of HAT Projects' design for Hastings' **Jerwood Gallery**, the seaside town's shiny new arts regeneration scheme

Words Eleanor Young

THE NEW JERWOOD GALLERY is starting to emerge, shimmering slightly, from its scaffolding cocoon below Hastings' East Cliff. This is no showy butterfly though. The black tiles with their oily iridescence will gleam like a wet pebble with reflections of the shingle beach and old town. Its preciousness attracts unwelcome attention: overnight scrawls appear on the impregnable, yet somehow vulnerable, cladding.

But then this is a high visibility attempt at arts regeneration, not marooned in old industrial docks but set in the heart of a much loved seaside town. Despite its poverty (it is

Britain's second most deprived coastal town, only recently having lost its first place crown) opposition to the development of this bus and coach park along the Stade, as this bit of beach is called, had a history. There were 500 years of wrangling over the beach and in the last decade Ushida Findlay had a high profile curving visitors' centre killed off. Elsewhere in the town

hopes were briefly raised by Foster and Partners' dramatic Pelham Square design for a new open space, offices and a hotel – which has been put on hold indefinitely. But with the gallery the deal was clearer. The council gave the land to the Jerwood Foundation and in return got a £4m gallery to give people another reason to visit and stay in the town. It will be funded and run by the Foundation which will fill the permanent galleries with the collection of British art it has built up over 15 years.

Young practice HAT Projects – Hana and Tom Loftus plus an architectural assistant –

designed the 1300m² gallery. But its principal, Hana, was working with Jerwood at the early stages, finding a site and local authority partner. 'Hastings had it all – deprivation, a lack of this sort of cultural infrastructure – but a nascent cultural sector, and it's two hours from London,' she explains. The practice also masterplanned the site which is shared with a 3500m² square, which opens the tight streets of the old town for visitors and festivals, and a community building, both designed by Tim Ronalds Architects and due to open this month.

Tom Loftus left Tony Fretton Architects on the back of this project: 'It is such an amazing site, when I first went to see it I felt sick.' It sits between the fishing beach and Medieval-cum-Georgian town, alongside picturesque 25m-high black net shops and set against the rugged rocks and funicular of East Hill. 'But you have to believe in your own skills, you can't run away from it; otherwise what was all that training for?' HAT drew on the good and the bad in the Peggy Guggenheim in Venice ('really exploring'), Kettle's Yard ('gentle galleries and a sense of place'), Fretton's ArtSway ('single rooflights')



The black Jerwood Gallery rises on the sea-side. The huge sliding windows of the café on the upper floor open onto the new square.

INSET: Slices of old Hastings seen from the upper floor of collections rooms.

BELOW: The fresh building emerges from the scaffolding.



and Pallant House ('too much in the ceiling').

The couple knuckled down to making the project work, interrogating their own decisions as well as the brief. Lingering uncertainties about the colour of the facade (the black of the net shops or clay blocks suggesting the cliffs' sandiness?) were put to rest by an unprompted endorsement of black from a member of the South East Design Panel. They called on the expertise of foundation staff at London Jerwood Space who understood the installation issues and the technicalities of where sockets should go. And at times they battled for what they thought was right, as with avoiding the totally internalised spaces suggested by the curators who reviewed the designs. 'There's no point if there aren't amazing views out of it,' says Tom.

The massing of the building and the L-shaped section took a lot of work. In its Essex studio, with the help of model maker Thomas Goodey, HAT made model after model trying out the form until it felt right. Being at the foot of two big hills meant the roof was critical. The zinc north lights (light on the first floor, dark on the lower section) ensure there is no single roof slab and these are also visible from the beach

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where they add complexity to the simple form. The gallery picks up the proportions of the Georgian houses above the old town. 'We have a bit of a thing about flank walls,' says Hana.

The gallery's flank walls were important to HAT as robust town walls, which can take a bit of roughness. Where it faces the square the gallery acts in civic sympathy; the hung tiles giving way to a more solid dark 500mm long brick up to shoulder height 'You want to be able to lean against it,' says Tom. Sliding windows on the first floor café open fully to the square, which will surely become the locus of events as well as a place from which to look out.

In fact the location of the café, deep into the gallery in terms of circulation, gives an idea of the project's priorities; putting art at the forefront. 'You have to earn your cup of coffee,' says Tom. The inevitable café is played down, a neighbourly thing to do considering the livelihoods depending on other cafés further along the seafront. So while the fishing beach, black of the tall net shops, and views towards the town and from East Hill above are critical outside, inside the building is essentially about an exploration of art, and particularly the



STRUCTURE AND FACADE

ABOVE: The aluminium carrier rail for the ceramic tiles being sprayed black to avoid silver show-through. HAT Projects spotted the potential of ceramic tiles early on when it visited Rab Bennetts' Brighton Library but the final decision depended on working through the structural solution with consulting engineer Momentum. The timber frame is restrained by the inner brick skin. This was sheathed with cement board and a carrier rail put in place. The tiles are hung in a three lap bond with mitred corners.

ENVIRONMENTAL SECTION

- 1: Office
- 2: Café
- 3: Education space
- 4: Rainwater tank
- 5: Kitchen
- 6: Plant
- 7: Foreshore Gallery
- 8: Ground duct
- 9: Rock-a-Nore Road

collection. It has a soft backdrop of sandy brick. 'The inner skin is light, muddy, warm and you can grow plants up it,' says Hana.

As you might expect from a practice whose partners met at Haworth Tompkins, they are unafraid to give spaces character. The plan is ostensibly simple with a strong north/south axis, but this is subverted by the intrusion of a glass wall courtyard and an abrupt intervention of the sea-side staircase, postponing the sea view in favour of a piece of art. There is an axial route but Tom and Hana explain that they threw in objects to walk around, to allow you to explore and find. The L-shaped section has the Foreshore galleries for temporary exhibitions on the ground floor under large concrete-coffered rooflights lined with timber.

The permanent collection fills seven galleries with a staircase linking them through the two floors, the lower gallery stretching into the upper where the ceiling opens to the depth of the pitched north lights. Jerwood's director-

designate Elizabeth Gilmour describes it as 'grand domestic'. After getting to know the collection and its figurative and semi-figurative character HAT realised the building had to address that. 'It was really important that it wasn't just a white box,' says Hana. This set of rooms was conceived as a series of paired galleries so one pair is handed a side window and strip rooflight. Two others sit either side of a carved out window onto the fishing beach which tiles wrap into – but the galleries are almost closed off to the views and the south light. 'We didn't do massive daylight modelling, it was more instinctive,' says Hana.

That seems to have been how most of the project worked, as is often the case with the best architecture. It was not about science or meeting targets and standards but about informed instinct – something that is often now neglected. And when the Jerwood Gallery opens next year, pictures hung in place, it will be clear whether the instinct has paid off. ■

Seen from East Cliff: the Jerwood Gallery in the foreground awaits its roof. Tim Ronald Architects' new community building is just beyond and the fishing beach is alongside.

