



The Exhibition Road Quarter is a landmark project for the world's greatest museum of art and design. The largest building project undertaken by the V&A in over 100 years, it comprises a new entrance, courtyard, exhibition gallery, conservation and logistics areas.

This project has changed the V&A's relationship with the city, taking the street into the museum and the museum into the street. The new courtyard creates an exceptional place for London – a destination for installations, events and, above all, for appropriation by the public. It attracts and welcomes new audiences, making explicit ideas of accessibility and democracy.

This project relied on significant alterations to the Grade I Listed Western Range and Aston Webb Screen to create a new way in. Conducting in depth research to develop a compelling narrative and support negotiations with English Heritage was essential to argue that the social and cultural imperatives here should override conservation issues.

Many thoughtful details express the duality of history and modernity. The design of the world's first porcelain courtyard builds on the museum's didactic ethos and its unrivalled ceramics collection. The pattern of the tiles is derived from the geometry of the subterranean gallery's ceiling and gives a visceral reading of the structure below making visible the invisible. The innovation of the porcelain tiles references the museum's mission of marrying craftsmanship with industry. Light reflected from the porcelain tiles brightens the historic facades.

New perforated gates reference the removal of the Aston Web Screen stonework and its WWII shrapnel damage, memorialising the past as well as celebrating the future. Cutting through the stone façade to create the new front doors reveals a perspective of the stonework not visible before. New columns and beams, literally supporting the weight of history, are painted international orange, a colour with a special provenance. In the entrance hall the historic mosaic floors are reimagined in a contemporary idiom.

The design and thinking behind this project has helped change the way people think about the museum and the way the institution thinks about itself by the way in which it now engages with contemporary life.

V&A Exhibition Road Quarter
London, UK
Client: Victoria & Albert Museum
Architect: AL_A
Area: 6,360 m²
Completed: 2017