recently completed
London College of Fashion

Allies and Morrison

London College of Fashion
Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

Allies and Morrison has completed the new home for the London College of Fashion at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Through robust and flexible architecture, it aims to suit the long-term needs and ambitions of one of the UK's most important arts universities. The new college provides over 40,000 sqm of space for 5,000 students over seventeen storeys. It is rich in creativity and production with classrooms, workshops, offices, a lecture theatre, canteen, an archive, digital studios and social spaces.

Previously dispersed across six sites, this is the first time in the college's history that all its departments co-locate under one roof. Catering for courses from journalism to jewellery, fashion illustration to footwear, menswear to marketing, the building has been conceived as a 21st-century factory atelier. Outwardly straightforward, internally it can accommodate multiple strands of production with process-driven internal arrangements that are continuously adaptable to future change. It is the UK's largest centre for fashion excellence in all its diversity.

A 21st century factory for fashion: pragmatic and dramatic

The building operates like a vertical campus bringing together a diverse range of functions and typologies across seventeen floors. Needing to accommodate, and be appropriately scaled, for both individual and group work and fully exploit the benefits of bringing all departments together, the circulation and shared spaces at the heart of the building actively encourage planned and incidental interaction, exploration and a sense of shared identity.

Square in plan, the college's structural stability derives from a simple rectilinear column grid that delineates a central circulation route. At this 'heart' are the fixed elements: vertical circulation; lifts; and WCs. In cross-section, through the layering of different configurations, the heart becomes a singular, yet ever changing, interconnected atrium that links the generous entrance hall and public functions at its lower levels – the auditorium, gallery, cafe and library – to the workshop and teaching floors at its middle and the refectory, drawings studios, roof terraces and support functions at its upper levels.

Through this heart travel the stairs: At the publicly accessible lower levels these are generous, expansive and sculptural, unfurling like orange peel to create a dramatic vertical catwalk to see and be seen. At the upper floors they are simpler, made of steel, but with openings that provide visual and physical connectivity between faculties as well as natural light and ventilation to the centre of the plan. At every level they allow people to understand where they are in the building.

Flexible and adaptable workspaces are located around the perimeter. They vary in depth of plan, and because their partitions are lightweight and non-load bearing, are capable of future reconfiguration without impact to the building's organisational code. Their tall, repeating, factory-warehouse like windows give the building its distinctive and robust character.

The Yardley & Co Soap Factory (1903) on Carpenters Road

Just 3 materials: the rigour of specification

The material palette is simple and muted – concrete, timber, black metal – with a consistency of detailing to all elements that, while complex and rigorous, enables the informal character of students and their activities and creative outputs to take centre stage. As the college's 'forever home', these have been specified with long-term robustness in mind.

Each of the three materials performs a distinct function: concrete is the robust structural skeleton, timber a warm maple, provides the tactile elements of the building – the components that users touch (doors, screens, balustrades, fixed furniture, handrails) and dark metal accommodates services.

High levels of cement replacement (up to 50% GGBS) is used to reduce the building's operational and embodied carbon footprint. The building relies on the self-finished nature of the surfaces used in construction to minimise the need to apply further internal finishes. A significant portion of the aluminium used in the curtain walling and windows have been sourced from recycled sources.

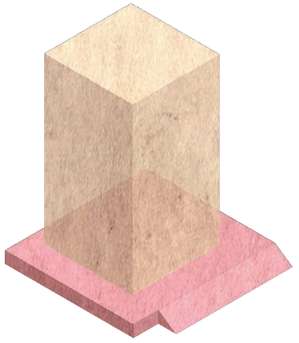
From 6 sites to 1: building a super-sized atelier

The origins of the college lie in the trade schools founded at the beginning of the twentieth century to meet the increasing needs and new technologies of the textile and clothing industries. These include, for one, the internationally renowned Cordwainers College specialising in footwear. Courses representative of the fashion industry today have progressively been added to these craft-based skills, expanding to include fashion journalism, management, and marketing.

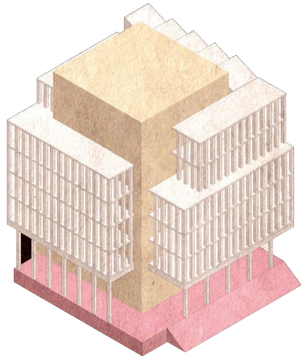
As well as a broadening scope in terms of what it teaches, like other higher education institutions, the college has seen a shifting emphasis in ways of learning and teaching practice. While non-specialised space with flexibility and capacity for change was therefore fundamental to the brief, the college's creative, practice-based making courses require specialist spaces equipped with machinery and tools. Complementing these internal requirements was a need for spaces where the college's disciplines might come together and interact.

Before we embarked on the design, the architecture team visited the various sites across London that were hosting the college: Curtain Road, Golden Lane, Mare Street, John Prince's Street, Lime Grove and High Holborn. Several of the workshop spaces we discovered had a particular impact, each with a distinct atmosphere that arises from spaces where things are made. We were inspired by both the spaces – their functionality, adaptability – as well as the ordered productivity they encouraged. Certain qualities found in these places now find themselves in the architectural detailing of today's college.

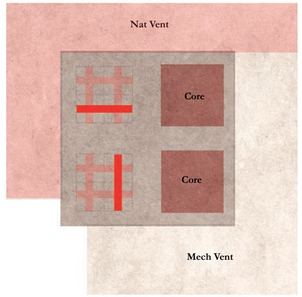
Housing such a variety and diverse character of departments in one place represents a step change in the functional organisation of the college. The new building has also been an opportunity to build a new tangible identity for the college and for its students. So, of equal importance has been the need for a building of character. In response we looked at the 19th century factory and warehouse buildings common to many industrial cities – spaces capable of use and re-use, with long histories of creativity and production. The key attributes of these buildings – lofty, solid, well lit, simple and adaptable spaces –define a large part of the new building. The new London College of Fashion feels at home in this part of east London once characterised by factories and industry.



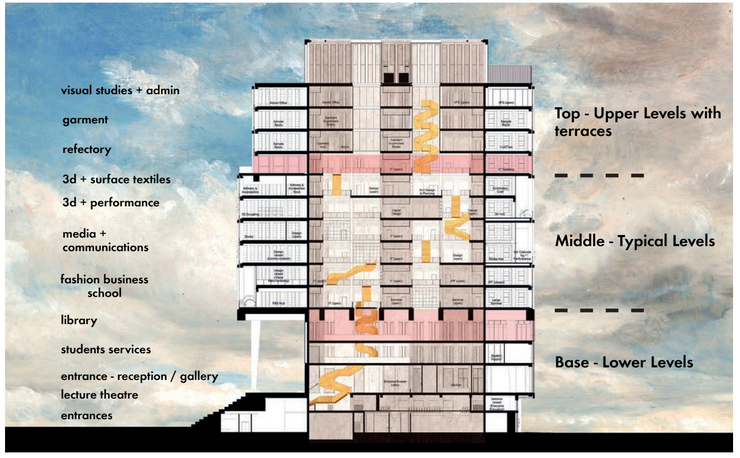
the heart



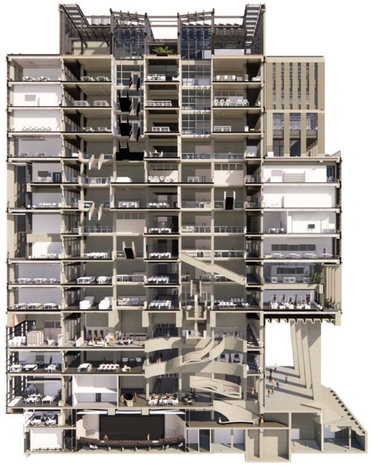
the workshops



typical floor plan



section



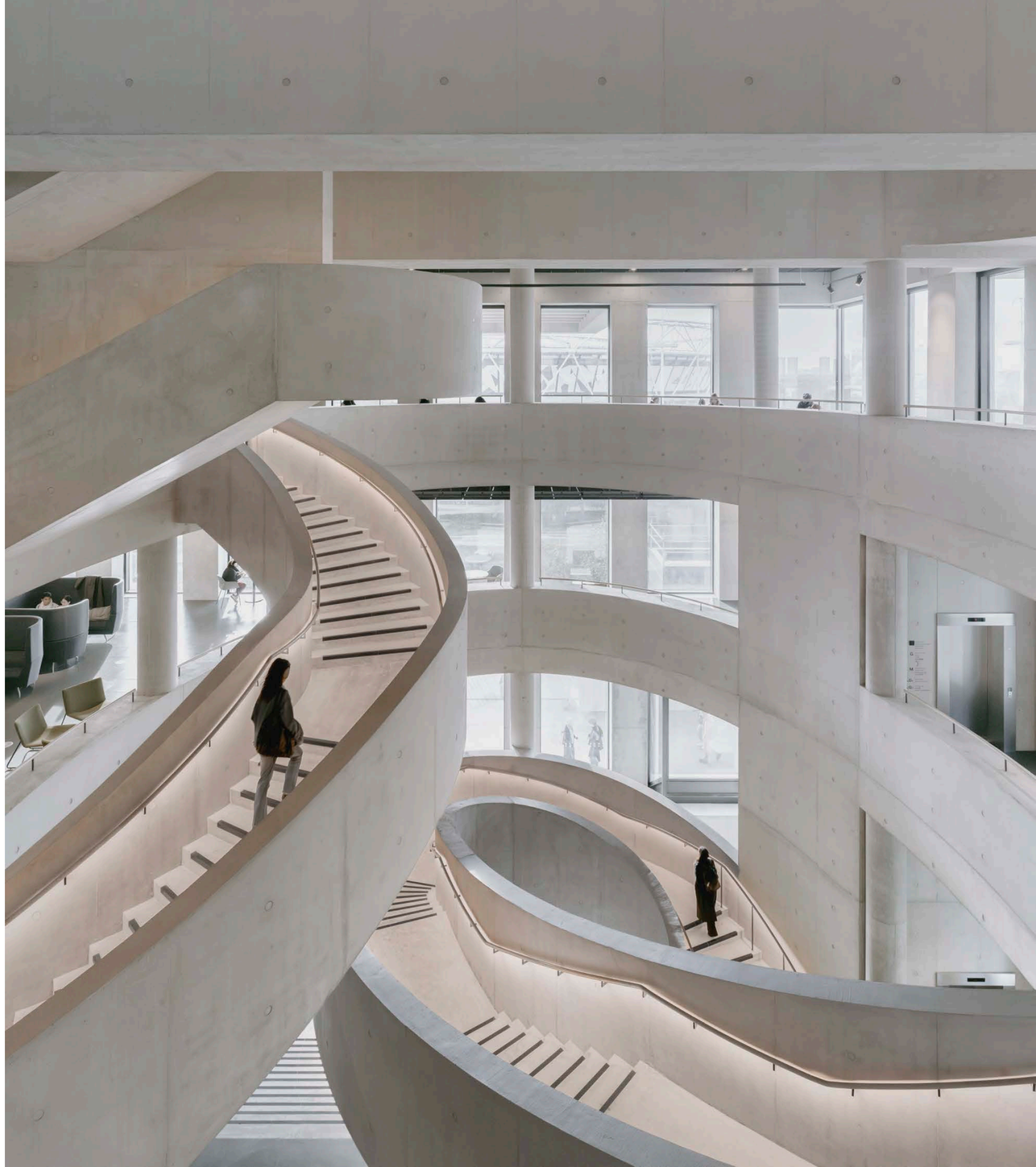
The context: a cultural and educational neighbourhood

London College of Fashion is the largest of the four cultural and education buildings that, along with six hundred homes and over a hectare of new public realm, make up Stratford Waterfront, a central component of London Legacy Development Corporation's (LLDC) Eastbank project. The overall vision is to create a place that is welcoming and usable by all; that is comfortable, safe, accessible and fun; that is able to accommodate large numbers of people throughout the day and evening; and that is free of social hierarchies and boundaries.

Allies and Morrison led the multidisciplinary team that won the commission for Stratford Waterfront in an international design competition in 2015. The team secured planning consent for the masterplan of Stratford Waterfront in 2018 and subsequently developed the detailed designs for the cultural and education buildings. Having opened in late 2023, the college is the first to complete. The remaining venues will become operational through 2024-25: these are the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A East), Sadler's Wells East and BBC Music. Allies and Morrison is also the design architect of BBC Music; O'Donnell & Toumey is the design architect of the V&A and Sadler's Wells buildings.

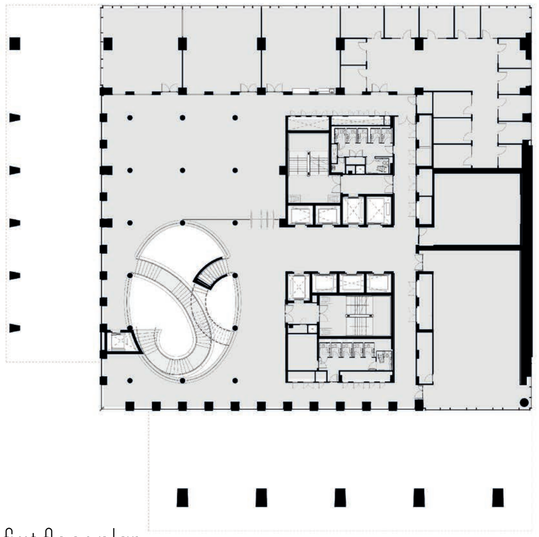
Alex Wraight, Partner at Allies and Morrison notes, "London College of Fashion is the result of committed collaboration. Architecture and engineering are fused, each element performing multiple tasks: structural column and window reveal, stair balustrade and beam, interconnecting void and ventilation chimney.

"This is a unique project in that it is a building with three clients, and the architecture addresses each of their respective priorities. The generous, covered colonnades and permeable, welcoming relationship to the public realm and Queen Elizabeth Park beyond reflect the London Legacy Development Corporation's wider stewardship role; the robust materiality, simple and distinctive form, and flexible and adaptable configuration of the perimeter workshops respond to University of Arts London's desire, as landlord, for an asset for the long-term; and the intimate scale of the spaces within the heart, and the glimpsed diagonal views and slower pace of circulation it affords, were conceived through extensive conversations with the faculty, staff and students of the College itself, as occupier, with the experience of the individual in mind."

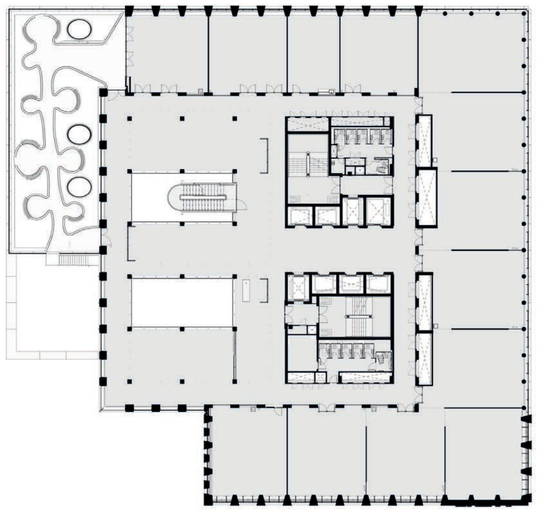


James Purnell, President and Vice Chancellor of UAL says, "Our new campus is allowing us to teach, create and collaborate in ways we could never have before – bringing together students and staff from across London and opening new opportunities to work with partners and our local community.

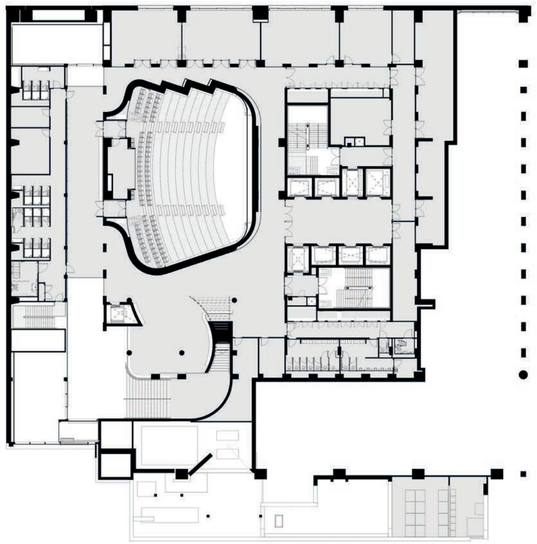
"East Bank was a major undertaking and represents our commitment to our students and equipping them with the skills demanded by the rapidly evolving fashion industry. For 120 years, London College of Fashion has been a part of east London, fostering generations of creative talent. With the opening of East Bank, we now have a state-of-the-art facility to nurture the next wave of industry leaders."



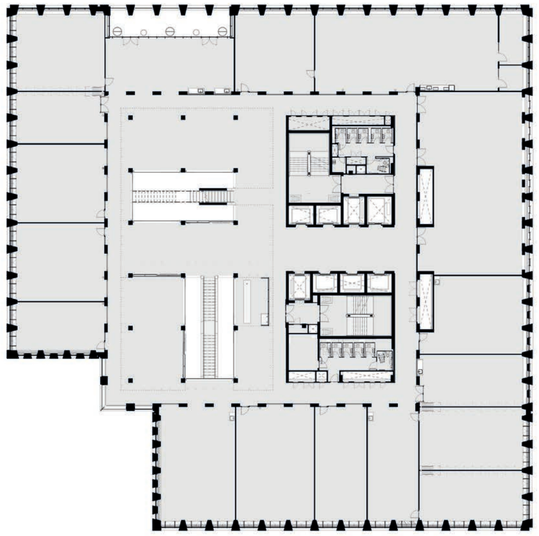
first floor plan



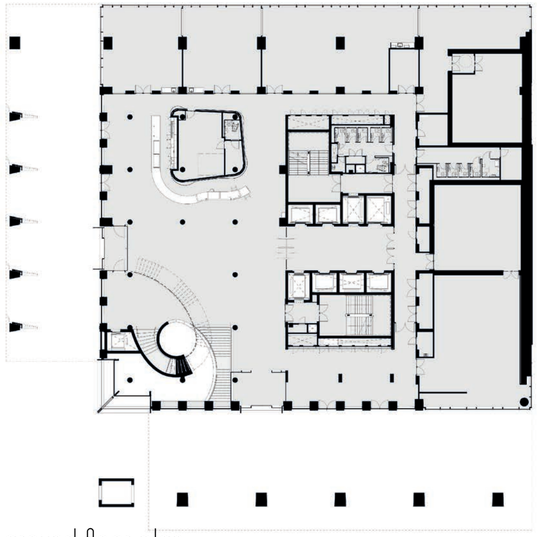
twelveth floor plan



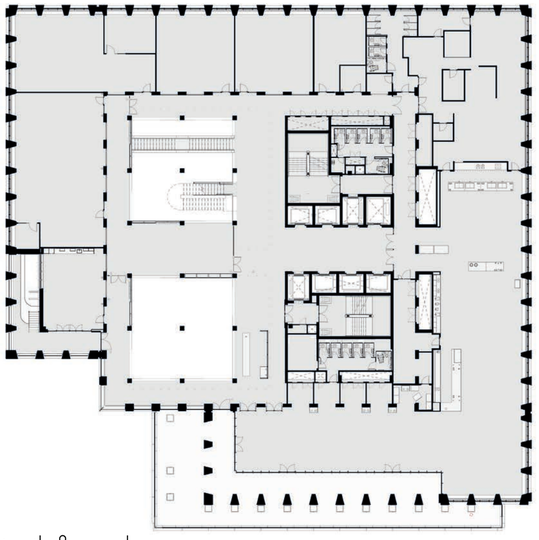
mezzanine level



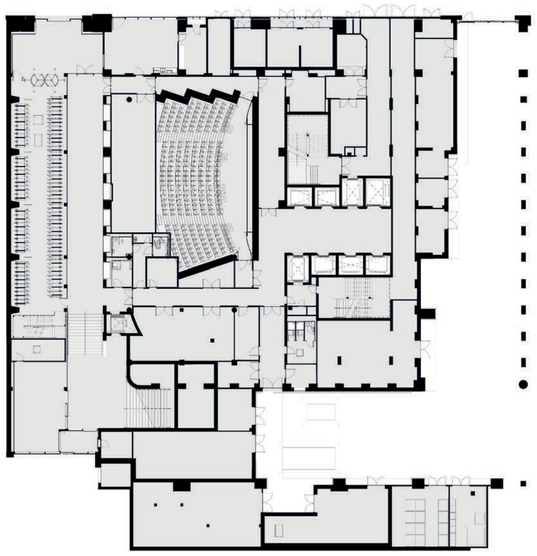
sixth floor plan



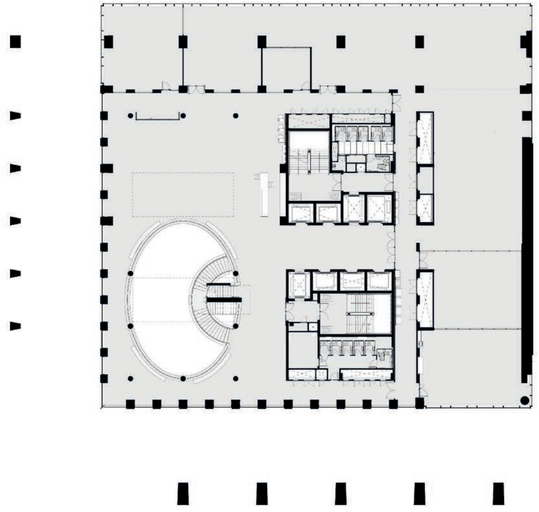
ground floor plan



tenth floor plan



lower floor plan



second floor plan

Location
London E20

Uses
Education

Client
University of the Arts London, London Legacy Development Corporation

Size
41,200 sqm

Expertise
Architecture

BREEAM
Outstanding BREEAM NC 2014 – design score 91.6% (target 85%)

Team
Structure: BuroHappold
Services: BuroHappold
Facade: BuroHappold
Landscape: LDA Design
Acoustics: BuroHappold
Cost: Gardiner & Theobald
Lighting: BuroHappold
Management: Mace

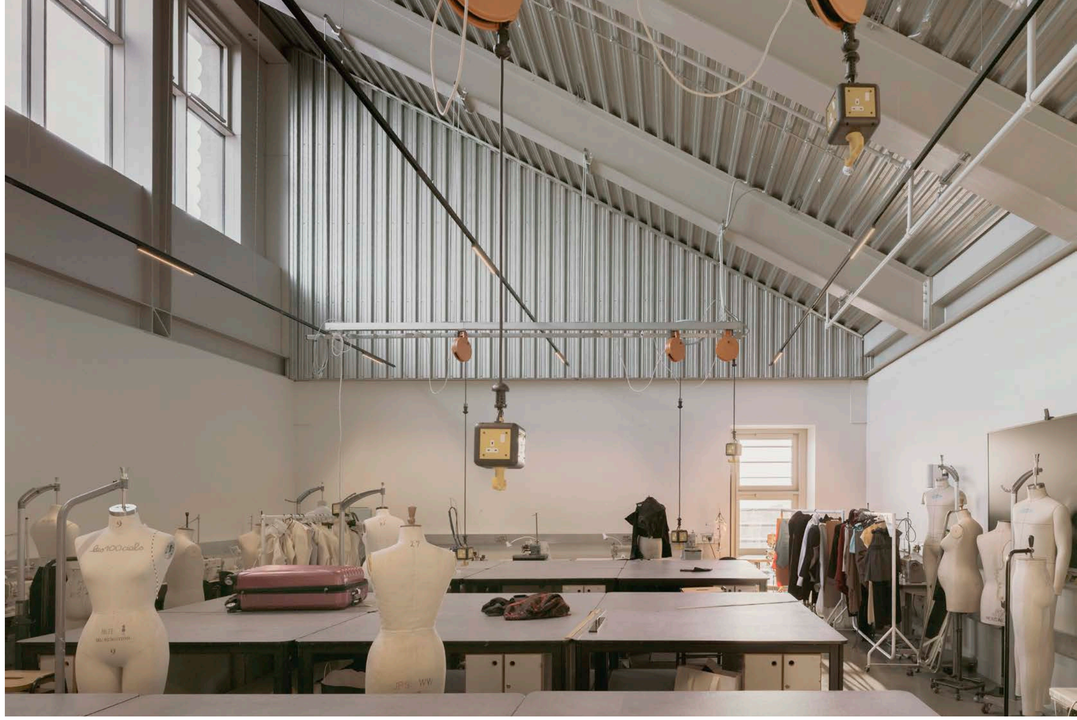
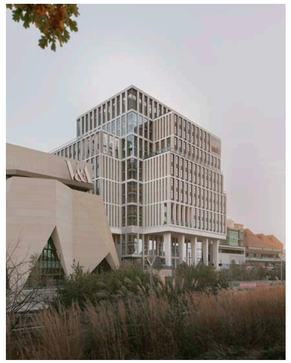
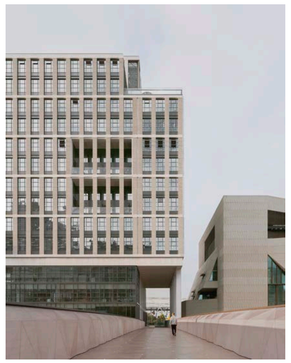
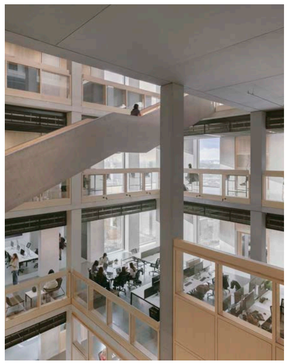
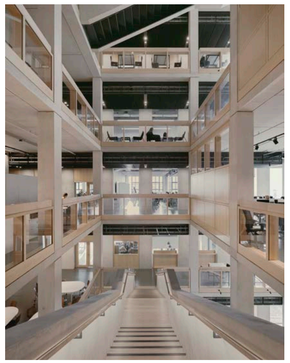
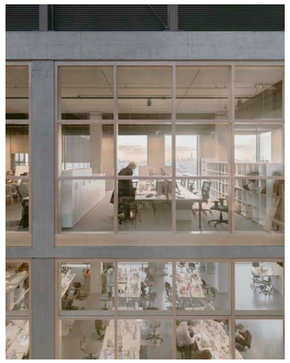
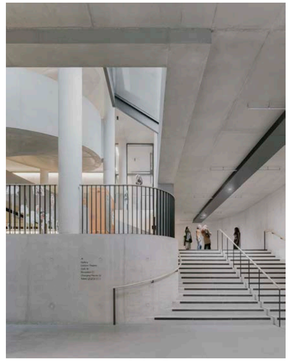
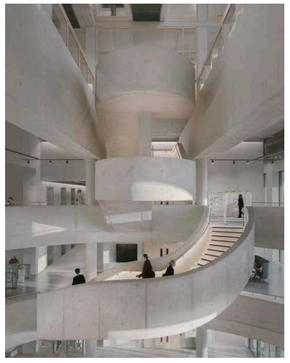
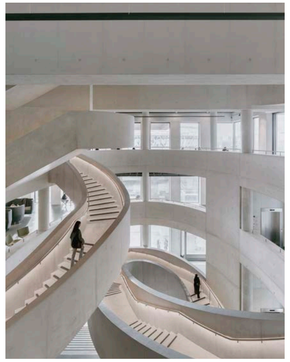
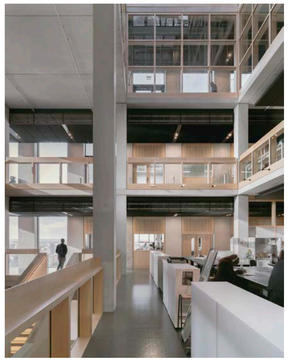
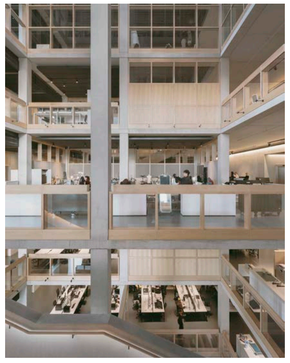
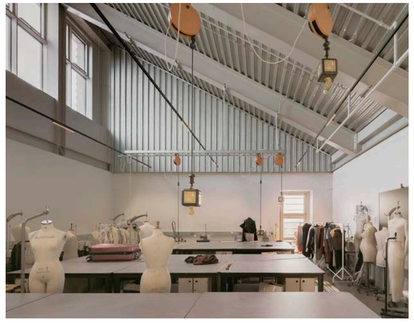
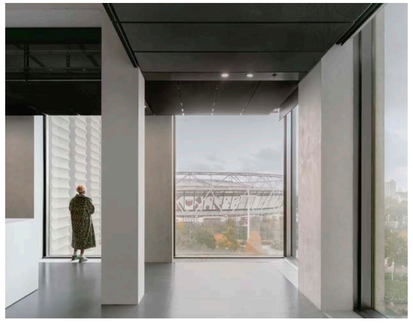
photography
Simon Menges

About London College of Fashion

The origin of University of the Arts London's (UAL) London College of Fashion (LCF) lies in the trade schools founded at the beginning of the twentieth century to meet the increasing needs and new technologies of the textile and clothing industries. Today, LCF is a world leader for fashion design, media and business education and is the only college in Britain to specialise in fashion education, research and consultancy. It currently has over 5,000 students enrolled across the Fashion Business School, the School of Media & Communication and the School of Design & Technology. Relocating to Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP) provides a unique opportunity for all of the College's diverse activities to be co-located for the first time in its 116-year history.

About Allies and Morrison

Allies and Morrison is a practice of architects and urbanists based in London and Cambridge. We design beautiful buildings that have long life and can adapt over the generations. We also shape enduring places whether new pieces of city or settlements at any scale. All our projects are concerned with the crafting of every detail and the appreciation for the uniqueness of each context. The London College of Fashion is our second of three colleges we have designed for University of the Arts London. The first, the Chelsea College of Art opened in the early 2000s, the third, will be the new London College of Communication, currently onsite in its Elephant & Castle home.



photography
Simon Menges