

RSA House

Combining respect for history with confidence in its future

With the first phase of refurbishment of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) House completed, Fellows and visitors now enter an environment that makes the most of RSA's 250-year history, blended with its 21st century enlightenment mission.

At the heart of this project has been the refurbishment of the Great Room. The new design means that it can be adapted for a wide range of uses, from lectures, conferences and exhibitions to dinners and weddings.

The room now has a flattened floor, flexible seating and a moveable stage. Its main feature – The Progress of Human Knowledge and Culture, a series of paintings by James Barry – has been

enhanced. Moveable screens can be installed to bring remote audiences into the room and the lighting can be adapted to suit the occasion.

The staircase leading to the Great Room has been uncovered to reveal the original mosaic tile pattern. The house now features two contemporary lighting installations designed by Troika, one of which hangs above the staircase and one of which is located in the Benjamin Franklin Room.

The ground floor has been opened out to create a more welcoming reception area that includes a series of touch screens.

These show information about events, projects, publications and Fellows' networks. The screens display a live video

stream of lectures, along with a live Twitter feed that shows viewers' comments.

A new signage system, designed by Pentagram with support from wayfinding experts, helps visitors to navigate the ground floor spaces. Disabled access has also been improved.

In one of several new meeting rooms, a projected wall screen allows Fellows and other visitors to access information and collaborate on projects or business ventures. These improved technological features allow events to be relayed to and from the Great Room, creating real time links with Fellows and public audiences in the UK and internationally.

It enables more visitors to benefit from the





RSA's free annual events programme, which with more than 150 events a year, is one of the most exciting in the country. Matthew Lloyd Architects led the design of the refurbishment project, supported by a range of specialists including technology consultancy Vanguardia and MHBC, who as Project Managers were tasked with overall responsibility for the successful delivery of the project. The Practice worked hard to restore some of the building's original features while introducing high quality audiovisual technology. Matthew Lloyd Architects won an invited competition in 2010 for the refurbishment and restoration of the building that was designed initially by Robert and John Adam in 1774. Over the ensuing generations the building has been through many iterations, with some of the renovations diminishing its Georgian purity and splendour. RSA's brief was to produce a space with state-of-the-art technical capabilities, but in keeping with the fine 18th century architecture, and accommodating a wide variety of functions. The design from Matthew Lloyd Architects for the outstandingly important Grade I listed building restored its original proportions, form and shape. Ventilation and lighting are concealed within the acoustic ceiling. Subtle, timeless modern elements have been created so that the 21st century functionality is hidden, the room's beautiful simplicity revealed. The previously angled floor is now level as it was originally, stacking seats so that the room can be used for its many events. Ground floor spaces are clearer and more accessible to visitors of all abilities, easily

navigable across the five Georgian houses of which the building is composed. Sustainability was a key concern throughout the project: the architects used materials that have a long lifespan, such as oak and slate. Wherever possible, furniture, fittings and other materials were sourced from British manufacturers. The team of designers, contractors and consultants who carried out the project worked well together to complete it on time and within budget. It is appropriate that this refurbishment was completed in London's Olympics year, given that one of the paintings in the Great Room shows the original Olympians. They can now look down on a significant legacy for the future. Matthew Bates, RSA Venue Director said: "We look forward to welcoming many more Fellows and visitors to the RSA House so that they

can enjoy its elegance and sophisticated technology. More than ever, they will now be aware that the RSA has a distinguished history but is very much an organisation of the 21st century." Some of the first people to see the new spaces were a group of 17 students from the RSA Whitley Academy. The students were given a guided tour of the building, and eagerly road-tested new technology in the shape of the giant multi-touch screen in the reception. The project has ensured that the RSA is strengthened as a platform for ideas, building on its past while positioning it for future growth.

Bristow Johnson & Partners

Chartered Quantity Surveyors
Construction Consultants
CDM Co-ordinators
Dispute Resolution Consultants

*We are pleased to be associated
with the RSA and wish them
continued success for the future*

89 Charlotte Street London W1T 4PU

Telephone: 020 7636 1036
Fax: 020 7436 5347
Email: info@bristowjohnson.co.uk

The Great Room - Audiovisual Systems

The Refurbishment of the RSA House has included integrated audiovisual systems to allow flexible use of the spaces.

The installation has been designed to meet the exacting architectural standards of the historical building and the system overcomes a number of technical challenges such as not connecting to any walls in the main space. The system utilises a flexible under-floor cable infrastructure which distributes, video, audio, data and control signals to removable media columns that can be located into structural floor plate locations. The system receives camera feeds, multimedia video and audio and distributes these to various rooms in the house allowing the Great Room to be used for events such as lectures, film screenings, exhibitions, banquets and weddings etc. The house is enabled with live HD web-streaming so that events can be broadcast live on the internet. The historical house has been equipped for the 21st Century.

