

# Sneak peek: A tour of O'Donnell & Tuomey's LSE student centre

6 December, 2013 | By [Laura Mark](#)

Last weekend *Laura Mark* joined the Architecture Association of Ireland for a site visit of O'Donnell & Tuomey's new LSE student centre

Next month O'Donnell & Tuomey's LSE student centre is due to complete. It will be the first new building on the LSE campus for nearly forty years.

I joined the AAI on a tour hosted by John Tuomey, Sheila O'Donnell and the rest of the team. More than 200 people met to go on the tour, proving to be one of the AAI's most popular building visits yet. It began with John Tuomey guiding us around the outside of the building, taking us to the various views which have been seen so often on visualisations.

It was a difficult site to work with – tight, and with a myriad of surrounding buildings and streets. But these challenges presented opportunities for O'Donnell & Tuomey, who used the Rights of Light envelope to act as a boundary for the building's form. Many would have stepped back the façade in response to these limits, but instead they used the envelope as a mould to work within, cutting the building back. The folded façade works with the views from the surrounding streets.

The brick façade is similar yet different. Most of the surrounding buildings are made of brick, and as John Tuomey said on our tour: 'London is a city of brick'. Yet here, brick is used differently. It appears to hang in space. Wrapping the walls with a skin which moves between solid and permeable.

The building's façade was originally planned to be built from bricks reclaimed from the demolished 1904 St Philips hospital building which once stood on the site. But these weren't up to the job structurally, so instead handmade bricks were sourced from the Forest of Dean.

Brick is used both externally and internally. One of the internal surprises is a small prayer room on one of the upper floors of the building. The small space is entirely lined with brick creating a dark, but warm and womb-like space.

Spaces are unified through the main staircase which weaves its way through the building. It is this main staircase which holds the building together, providing break out spaces, and diagonal landings, spaces for social interaction throughout the building.

Two more spiral staircases – one leading from the main entrance down to the nightclub, and one up to the building's top floor – seem like an indulgence, but a welcome one. Tuomey admitted he had always wanted to design a spiral staircase and in this building there are two. These concrete staircases are playful and demonstrate the high standards of craftsmanship which have gone into the building.

The student centre is an example of how sustainable architecture should be done. It doesn't shout about being green. There are no eco-add ons like PV's and turbines highly visible from the outside. Yet, the building obtained both BREEAM Outstanding and a DEC A rating. The scheme's form allowed for natural ventilation and daylighting reducing energy use. Architect Willie Carey said 'the building wears its sustainability credentials lightly'.

Could this be another Stirling Prize contender for the practice?

## Project data

**Location** London

**Type of project** Student union building

**Client** LSE

**Architect** O'Donnell & Tuomey

**Project manager** Turner and Townsend

**Structural engineer** Horganlynch

**M&E consultant** BDSP

**Quantity surveyor** Northcroft

**Main contractor** Osborne

**Received planning** October 2010

**Total cost** £21.5 million

**Specific environmental targets** BREEAM Outstanding, DEC A

