

The Courtauld

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION



COURTAULD CONNECTS

Courtauld Connects is an ambitious transformation programme that will make The Courtauld's world-class artworks, research and teaching accessible to even more people – driving forward our mission to advance how we see and understand the visual arts.

The most significant development in the history of The Courtauld since it moved to the North Wing of Somerset House in 1989, this visionary project – supported by £9.5 million from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and generous donations from foundations, individuals and other supporters - will transform the Gallery and the facilities for teaching, research and students. Future ambitions include providing students and faculty with improved study and teaching facilities and unprecedented access to its collections and exhibitions, whilst giving the public greater insight into its outstanding teaching and research.

Designed by Stirling Prize-winning architects Witherford Watson Mann, the redevelopment revitalises and opens up the magnificent buildings conceived by Sir William Chambers in the 1770s, celebrating their fascinating heritage. Accessibility to the building will be dramatically improved, and new interpretation and display of the artworks will make them more engaging than ever before.

INTRODUCTION

Led by Stirling Prize-winning architects Witherford Watson Mann, the redevelopment revitalises and opens up the magnificent Grade I listed Somerset House buildings conceived by Sir William Chambers in the 1770s, celebrating their fascinating heritage.

Completed in 1780, the North Wing of Somerset House facing the Strand was home to the Royal Academy until 1837, and the Royal Society and Society of Antiquaries until 1867. The General Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths occupied much of the block until 1970, before The Courtauld relocated in 1989.

Behind its grand Neoclassical façade, the building is an idiosyncratic assemblage of disconnected suites originally constructed to house a varied collection of government offices and learned societies. Drawing on French classicism and Italian baroque, on Inigo Jones and Vanbrugh, Chambers' building combines order and variety, grandeur and intimacy. Its tall central volume is flanked by wings that step downwards and outwards, perforated by the vaulted Vestibule which provides the only connection between the Strand and Somerset House's courtyard. Rooms increase in size as the building ascends, culminating in its largest room and London's oldest purpose-built exhibition space, the Great Room.

OVERVIEW

The first phase of Courtauld Connects will be completed in late 2021 with the reopening of The Courtauld Gallery, new spaces for visitors and the extensive rebuilding of the conservation studios.

Highlights of the first phase of the project include:

1. Renovated galleries across the site, giving more space to The Courtauld's world-famous collection

One of the most significant outcomes of the project is the transformation of spaces to present works from The Courtauld's outstanding collection, adapting and refurbishing Sir William Chambers' idiosyncratic complex of rooms to make existing areas work harder.

Dedicated spaces for the display of the collection will include:

- Reinstatement and conservation of the previously subdivided Great Room – one of the largest spaces in Somerset House which once hosted the Royal Academy of Arts' famous summer exhibitions – restored to its original, breathtaking proportions and volume to provide a vast new home for The Courtauld's renowned collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings.
- The beautifully restored Blavatnik Fine Rooms, a suite of six galleries showcasing some of the greatest works in The Courtauld's collection, ranging from the Renaissance to the 18th Century, and from paintings to decorative arts. The Courtauld's celebrated collection of works by Peter Paul Rubens will be one of the highlights of these displays, complemented by bespoke high pigment paint colours.
- New and transformed galleries devoted to the Medieval and Early Renaissance collection, and to 20th Century art.
- A new Bloomsbury Room, located on the top floor, showcasing the work of the Bloomsbury Group artists as part of an immersive domestic experience, again complemented by bespoke wall paint.

2. New spaces for temporary exhibitions

Created by the removal of former attic apartments, two new, full-height elegant galleries located on the top floor of the building will enable The Courtauld to extend its celebrated programme of international loan exhibitions. In addition to these two rooms, the development will include the delightfully eccentric Project Space for smaller temporary projects and changing displays in the dedicated Gilbert and Ildiko Butler Drawings Gallery.

3. Dramatically improved accessibility

Accessibility to the building will be dramatically improved, including:

- A redesigned visitor reception to enable all visitor access to The Courtauld Gallery, with a generous new, solid York stone cantilevered staircase down to the lower ground floor, and an enlarged, bespoke Gallery visitor lift.
- The historic flagstones in the famous Strand entrance to Somerset House will be gently ramped on both sides to enable level access to The Courtauld main entrance and exits for the first time.
- A new layout with greatly improved accessibility, which will give visitors the time and space to enjoy the beautiful art around them, including a series of discreet interventions substantially increasing step-free access throughout the building and level access to all Gallery spaces for the first time.
- All art displays have been designed carefully with accessibility experts, with attention to label font size, non-reflective showcase glass and new bespoke lighting.
- The new Learning Centre in East Wing will also have a fully accessible, ramped entrance.
- The Conservation Studios will have a lift for the first time, allowing safe and accessible transport for people and art.

In addition, led by exhibition designers Nissen Richards Studio, working with the curation team and interpretation by Narrative Threads and Ralph Appelbaum Associates, The Courtauld's collection will be completely redisplayed and newly interpreted – making it more stunning and engaging than ever before, for a wide range of audiences. A further strand of interpretation will focus on the building itself, drawing out aspects of its architecture and rich history.

4. Newly constructed spaces for conservation, learning and research

To support collection care, teaching and learning, the Conservation and Technology Studios have been extensively rebuilt, and a new Object Study Room created for students to work closely with The Courtauld's collection. A new Learning Centre will provide improved facilities for school groups, families, young people, community groups and adult learners.

5. Improved visitor facilities

The redevelopment includes a newly constructed shop and café for visitors to enjoy.

6. Form

The transformation of the building is marked by subtle progressions of materials and volumes, from robust brick construction in the lower ground vaults to delicate plaster in the upper storeys. Chambers' rooms have a distinctive sense of weight, volume, and light, with vaulted forms throughout. The interventions throughout the building led by Witherford Watson Mann follow a similar progression, from substantial concrete below to crisp fibrous plaster above, from segmental barrel-and-cross vaults in the lower ground reception space to quadrant vaults in the new temporary exhibition galleries on the top floor. Concrete, stone, wood and plaster have been sensitively used throughout the new and refurbished galleries, using contemporary techniques to make rooms that are robust, warm and luminous.

When completed, the transformation will provide students and faculty with improved study and teaching facilities and unprecedented access to its collections and exhibitions, whilst giving the public greater insight into its outstanding teaching and research.

WITHERFORD WATSON MANN ARCHITECTS

Stephen Witherford, Co-Director, Witherford Watson Mann Architects:

“This ambitious transformation project re-imagines Sir William Chambers’ masterpiece to make it a public building fit for the 21st Century. Through a careful balance of studious conservation and bold intervention we wanted to reveal the layers of the building’s evolution. Opening up spaces and transforming the layout of the building will provide a more versatile infrastructure for exhibition and exchange in a way that resonates with the distinctive characteristics of Chambers’ original design.”

About Witherford Watson Mann Architects

Witherford Watson Mann Architects was established in 2002 by Co-Directors Stephen Witherford, Christopher Watson, and William Mann. Known for projects that reinforce and complement the characteristics of existing spaces with focused and crafted additions, the practice's best-known building, Astley Castle for the Landmark Trust, won the 2013 RIBA Stirling Prize for its distinctive entwining of past and present. The new theatre for Nevill Holt Opera, built within the courtyard of an historic stable block, was shortlisted for the 2019 Stirling Prize. Both projects won the ‘Stirling Prize People's Vote’.

WWM have transformed existing buildings for organisations including Amnesty International UK, Whitechapel Gallery, Arts Council England and Albany Deptford. Strategic projects at the city scale include the Walthamstow Wetlands, Bankside Urban Forest, and Olympic Park Legacy Plan. A generation of substantial building projects were initiated in 2014, and the first to be completed is Brickfields business centre in Hoxton for the Workspace Group (2019). The transformed Courtauld Gallery at Somerset House will open in late 2021, while the New Almshouse in Bermondsey for United St Saviours and the extension of Old Court for Clare College, Cambridge have both started construction, and are due for completion in 2021 and 2022.

PROJECT DATA

Site area (approx.):

Phase 1 – gross internal floor area = 56,585 sq. ft. / 5,257 sq. m

The Courtauld Gallery

- The Great Room: 206m²
- The Blavatnik Fine Rooms: 494m²
- The Ante-Chamber: 49m²
- Medieval and Early Renaissance Gallery: 81m²
- 20th Century Gallery: 92m²
- Bloomsbury Room: 24m²
- Temporary exhibition spaces: 134m²
- Project Space: 33m²
- Object Study Room: 18m²
- Welcome Reception and Ticket Hall: 125m²
- Art Café: 91m²
- The Vaults/retail: 238m²

- Prints and Drawings Study Room, Technical Examination Room and Art Store: 137m2
- Learning Centre: 86m2

BUILDING CREDITS

Lead Architect: Witherford Watson Mann Architects

Project Managers: Gardiner & Theobald

Structural Engineers: Price & Myers

Mechanical, Electrical, Acoustics and Lighting Design: Max Fordham

Construction Managers: Sir Robert McAlpine Special Projects

Gallery Design: Nissen Richards Studio

Lighting Design: Studio ZNA and Arup Lighting

Access Consultants: David Bonnett Associates (build) and Jane Samuels (fit out and interpretation)

Historic Building Assessments: Alan Baxter Ltd

Planning Consultants: The Planning Lab

Security Consultants: Ian Johnson Associates

Fire Consultants: BB7 Fire Ltd

QS: AECOM

Showcase Design: florea d.sign

Setworks Design: Factory Settings

Interpretation: Ralph Appelbaum Associates and Narrative Threads

Bespoke Paint Colours: Little Greene and Bauwerk

Approved Inspector: Approved Inspector Services Ltd