



Chipperfield's Turner Contemporary wins funding for £6 million extension

2 November, 2017 By Colin Marrs

Arts Council England (ACE) has granted £3 million towards a reconfiguration and expansion of David Chipperfield's Turner Contemporary in Margate, Kent

The gallery, in association with Kent County Council (KCC), is developing the £6 million project because it has outgrown its existing space. A gallery spokesperson told the AJ that no architect had been appointed to the scheme as yet.

The project will aim to generate more income, provide extra space for staff and extend artistic and learning programmes.

Turner Contemporary director Victoria Pomery said: 'The next phase of Turner Contemporary will be designed to ensure that the organisation is sustainable into the future.'

'After six years of operation and 2.5 million visits, the gallery has been widely acknowledged as the model of arts-led regeneration. Building on the gallery's success will further contribute to making Margate an exciting place to live, work and visit.'

The council and ACE both hope the project will allow them to cut their ongoing revenue subsidy to the gallery.

They are looking to bring forward new-build and refurbishment options which could also explore opportunities on adjacent land.

The gallery and council are collaborating on a stage two application to ACE to find more money to fund the project.

Council documents describing the proposal said: 'Turner Contemporary has outgrown the space in its current building, and over the last five years of operations, staff have been able to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the current facility which is based in Margate facing the North Sea.'

'The outcome will be to cut running costs on the facility and increase income-generating capacity for the trust in order to allow ACE and KCC to cut current subsidy levels to more manageable levels.'

The £17.5 million Turner Contemporary opened in 2011 and has hosted exhibitions from major artists including Tracey Emin, who grew up in Margate.



Source: Richard Bryant/arcaid

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With Margate's Turner Contemporary, David Chipperfield proves he is as much a master of light as the gallery's namesake, says *Christine Murray*

I am standing in David Chipperfield Architects' Turner Contemporary in Margate on what is a rather miserable day at the seaside. Windy, damp and overcast, I was blown from the train station down the boardwalk to this newly adopted totem of Margate, which stalwart, stands alone, like a great glass ship marooned between the town and the sea.

'I saw it very much as a pavilion, nearly industrial, a type of shed,' says David Chipperfield, standing in the centre of the media circus invited for the architectural preview. But if the monopitch form of the Turner is decidedly industrial, up close the detailing of the facade is self-consciously fine, almost filigree. Inside, the spartan entrance hall draws visitors in, away from the town, to an enormous and uncompromising view of the sea, in which there is something of the sublime.

Upstairs, in the gallery spaces, the rooms are remarkably bright for such a dreary day, evenly bathed in pure white, ethereal light. 'Look around,' says Chipperfield, standing under the rooflights in one of the three upstairs galleries. 'As you know it is a very grey day, but not a single artificial light is turned on. And along the walls, and in the corners, not a single shadow.'

Light is the great triumph of Chipperfield's Turner Contemporary: the way it washes in through the clerestory windows and rooflights, and the tricks it plays on the building's glass rainscreen facade, which, depending on the weather, either breaks down the massing with hard shadows on its six volumes, or blurs them into a single hulk-like mirage.

It's an apt focal point for a project linked to JMW Turner, the painter whose abstract treatment of light influenced the Impressionists. Turner came to Margate as a child, and returned there later to paint the sea, staying at a guesthouse run by Mrs Booth, who would later become his lover. Booth's house was originally located on the gallery site, and the Turner connection was the genesis of Kent County Council's plan to build a gallery for Margate to lure visitors back to the declining seaside resort.

Turner Contemporary has existed since 2001, using buildings such as the nearby Droit House to exhibit in. Snøhetta were the original winners of the competition to design a new gallery, but their scheme was abandoned in 2006 when technical problems and escalating costs made it untenable. Later that year David Chipperfield Architects was appointed, and this Turner Contemporary has been delivered on budget at £17.4 million, and on time too.

'I think the light was part of Turner's fascination with Margate,' says Chipperfield. 'We're convinced that the light here is different from the light anywhere else. We can't scientifically prove that, but you can sense it. That was our inspiration, and it connects back to Turner, the light, and the site's unusual orientation, that you are facing due north onto the sea.' Chipperfield describes the north-facing site as a unique condition too good to miss. 'Our best view of the sea happens to be in a direction where we can enjoy light that is least damaging to the museum environment,' he says.

To capitalise on this 'physically strange condition', non-gallery spaces, such as the entrance and seminar and education rooms, have expansive views of the sea, fettered only by the thin steel profiles of the glazing mullions. In the first-floor galleries, single monopitch roofs bring in the north light - a common requirement of Victorian industrial buildings and contemporary art spaces.

Chipperfield credits Arup's Andy Sedgwick as the project's 'daylight guru'. The objective in the galleries was uniform light, and this was achieved by a set-back clerestory introducing ambient light from above without shadow, while the rooflights, covered by a Barrisol stretch ceiling to diffuse the light, illuminate the floor and walls below the clerestory, which would otherwise appear too dark. The Barrisol also conceals fluorescent bulbs to light the gallery on dark winter afternoons.

In plan, Turner Contemporary is compact and efficient, with generous spaces in front-of-house areas and decent, but not palatial, back-of-house provision. For example, there is just one lift to service both visitors and freight; a fine, but not expansive, main staircase and minimum-standard service stair; and a generous 7.5-metre ceiling height in the galleries versus the 2.3-metre ceiling height in the offices, which are squeezed between the plant room above and loading bay below (although they do have nice views of both the sea and the town).

The aesthetic palette consists of white walls, glass and concrete (see 'Visual Concrete' in AJ 02.09.10), with an injection of vibrant colour provided by the Hans Coray café chairs, which will spill across the entrance pavilion in the summertime as a welcome mat for visitors (Chipperfield jokes that the chair selection was the practice's 'most discussed design decision').

Services are ingeniously and imperceptibly concealed. According to Arup associate Nigel Tonks, there is natural ventilation in all spaces except the galleries, which have art conservation requirements. Thick internal walls conceal services and data provision, and with the ceiling, act as plenums. Linear diffusers are 'hidden' in shadow gaps and slots in the ceiling. The three plant rooms are located directly under the roofs, two at the ends of the building (over the offices) and one above the balcony. As a result of its use of natural ventilation and natural light, Turner Contemporary is the first gallery in Britain to get a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating in a bespoke assessment by the BRE.

The detailing of the project is sophisticated and deceptively simple. The facade uses standard Schüco aluminium curtain wall components to hold both the glass rainscreen panels and the glazing in place. The decorative T-shaped anodised aluminium capping profiles run the height of the building, past the doors and windows, to visually integrate all elements of the facade. The copings are as thin as possible, with the glazing brought up to a 20mm thick aluminium profile flush with the facade. The result is sleek and uncluttered. Every line aligns.

According to project architect Holger Mattes, Turner Contemporary's harsh marine environment will see waves and spray hit the building. A laminated 2 x 8mm low-iron glass pane was chosen by the designing facade subcontractor MBM to resist the impact force of the sea water. 'Each individual panel of the rainscreen is also replaceable, and rests on black anodised gravity supports with rubber underlays which are offset and set back, so they are hardly visible,' says Mattes. At the corners, there is a glass-to-glass connection, and Mattes adds: 'Only here is structural silicone used in combination with gravity supports to hold the panels in place.' Low-iron glass was also specified for the glazing 'to achieve the required colour rendering in the galleries'.

The glass of the rainscreen appears to be sandblasted, but is in fact acid-etched. 'The advantage of acid etching over sandblasting is that the surface is not damaged and remains easy to clean,' says Mattes. Testament to Margate's tough reputation, the lower panels are treated with a PSS 20 clear anti-graffiti coating, a sign, perhaps, that the building itself is not expected to combat the town's social problems (unemployment in the poorest parts of Margate stands at 38 per cent).

If there is little question regarding the excellence of Turner Contemporary as a space for art, there is debate about what it will do for the town. Chipperfield says the 'Bilbao Effect' has confused the public, and that buildings such as this should not be procured on the basis of regeneration. 'It's about building an institution which is important for the town,' not the 'cultural elite' from London, he says. The enigmatic exterior of the building, an icon masquerading as a common shed, speaks of his resistance to the 'regeneration' part of the brief. And yet perhaps this marks a new approach to Bilbao, where a building's fitness for purpose, rather than its exterior form, is the driver of regeneration. I can see how the light in the Turner's spaces might attract top-drawer curators and artists to the town, which suggests a more sustainable view of regeneration, not founded on novelty or fashion.

Turner Contemporary is an icon - I can imagine the gallery's signature monopitch roofs being used as a graphic logo on memorabilia and letterheads. But the gallery is also, as Chipperfield says, 'a public space, a public building', fit for showing the great art to come, and in the meantime, for yoga class, as it was used the night before my visit. Its opening day attracted 8,000 people, and as for visitors from London, I will certainly make the 90-minute journey from St Pancras again, having checked the weather forecast first.

Credits

Start on site December 2008

Completion April 2011

Gross internal floor area 3,100m²

Form of procurement Competition won in 2006

Total cost £17.4 million

Cost per m² £5,613

Client Kent County Council/Turner Contemporary

Architect David Chipperfield Architects

Landscape architect Gross Max

Structural engineer Adams Kara Taylor

Services engineer Arup

Facade consultant Arup

Acoustic consultant Arup

Fire consultant Arup

Lighting consultant Arup

Access consultant Arup

Quantity surveyor Gardiner & Theobald

General contractor R Durtnell & Sons

Estimated annual building emission rate 25kgCO₂/m²