

The rebirth of Bradbury Studios



Bradbury Studios is a Grade II listed building situated on Kingsland Road in the Borough of Hackney, to the north of the listed Geffrye Museum. Formerly a tram shed for the North Metropolitan Tramways, today Bradbury Studios is the home to a world class disabled-led theatre company, Graeae.

Graeae's Directors, Judith Kilvington and Jenny Sealey MBE, appointed Artillery Architecture and Interior Design to provide the design for a ground-breaking refurbishment project, resulting in the creation of an award-winning workplace.

Bradbury Studios proudly stands as the physical articulation of Graeae's vision to create an accessible workspace that excludes any reference to the trappings of an institutional environment. The space champions the significance of working together and sharing resources - the foundation to the Greek legend of the three Graeae sisters.

The arched brick façade of Bradbury Studios' is inextricably linked with the rich urban vibe of a creative community. Six arches each house a bold, individually designed letter which collectively spell Graeae's name. These letters were carefully considered to appeal to the senses whilst drawing on elements such as the diversity of the theatre and its members.

The pavement area to the front of Graeae's building was enlarged to provide ample spacing for wide ramps to both entrances. Visual and voice activated entry devices are set at two heights to aid wheelchair users and people of short stature and have Braille and textured lettering for visually impaired people. Automatic double doors permit entry into the foyer area where a welcoming seating area draws visitors in.

On entering Bradbury studios, there is an immediate sense of light and space. The glass and brick façade allows for the interplay of exterior and interior spaces, connecting public with private in a lively exchange. There is no one single solution to creating a fully accessible building. However, as a starting point, Artillery's designers gave careful consideration to the different senses used by individuals as they move through a space.

The building consists predominantly of four main areas: rehearsal space, creative hub, living room and office. The front half of the building looks on to the activities of Kingsland Road and two private spaces are located at the rear of the building. These areas include a quiet office area for administrative staff and a living room which exudes a calm domestic ambience where individuals can relax, read and recuperate from theatrical activities.

The entire interior landscape is designed to be fully accessible for wheelchair users. In order to achieve a fully accessible space for individuals with various impairments, Artillery's designs recognised multiple sensory layers through the careful selection of tactile, visual and acoustic elements.

Colour:

Three dominant colours have been utilized throughout the building. Their purpose is two-fold, as a link to the three Graeae sisters and to provide focal points which aid way-finding. The colours are used as a code on various doors to identify different zones and functions.



Light:

Focus group meetings revealed that a contrast in lighting levels would aid way-finding for visually impaired people. Recessed circular lights in varying sizes and colours act as interesting features which denote junction points and different zones.



Wellbeing:

To enhance the quality of experience within the space, clear sight lines, visual barriers and subtle way-finding devices aid spatial awareness and instill the sense of comfort felt from the familiarity of people and place. A cantilevered way-finding wall was inserted on each side of the glass walled creative hub, providing a guide around the room and a suitable background for sign language at eye level.



Acoustic and tactile design:

Recessed lighting provides a level of absorption for reverberating sound. The acoustic consultant also selected materials to increase sound absorption and for their engaging tactile equalities.

Accommodating new M&E services with a listed building:

A significant challenge to the retrofit of any Grade II listed building is often the lack of an identifiable area and planning restrictions for external plant space. This was overcome by integrating the mechanical services seamlessly within an internal redundant roof lantern.

Accessibility:

Bradbury Studios is Disability Discrimination Act compliant throughout, including a tea-point, sanitary facilities, electronic doors and a lift to the mezzanine level. These components, combined with an integral way-finding system, combine to provide a fully accessible, yet aesthetically pleasing, environment for deaf and disabled users.

As precursors of sustainability in design Artillery and the project's Main Contractor, Paragon Management, reintroduced old materials as new components. Alongside Graeae, they also promoted a proactive attitude towards recycling, energy saving, and sourcing local fittings and furniture for the project. The original brickwork was sandblasted and the concrete ceilings were exposed alongside the steelwork beams which support the roof and a mezzanine floor. Space and light interplay to evoke the imagination and please the senses.

Artillery and Paragon worked collaboratively to surpass Graeae's vision for Bradbury Studios. Their innovative approach to creating Graeae's new home has set an impressive benchmark in accessible design and they celebrated winning the **"Best Project up to 2,000m²"** at the prestigious **British Council for Offices (BCO) National Awards** in 2010. Artillery and Paragon were rewarded for their "wholly responsive and spirited approach to the unique criteria set out by their client, Graeae Theatre Company".



Statement from Artillery Architecture & Interior Design

Artillery Architecture and Interior Design provide architectural and interior design services, both independently or as part of a multi-disciplinary team. A passion for design is what drives us. Our clients are highly valued by us and we adopt a personal approach in order to foreground their priorities and exceed their expectations. Artillery's responsive solutions are inspired by a resolute environmental ethos which supports the creation of sustainable interiors. Our innovative design concepts challenge boundaries and propose appropriate solutions for best practice environments. Artillery have an international presence with offices in Melbourne and the U.A.E. and partnerships worldwide. www.artillery.co.uk.

Statement from Paragon

Paragon Management is a specialist fit-out and refurbishment contractor operating in a number of sectors including retail, leisure, residential, commercial office and light industrial. The Paragon philosophy is based on integrating quickly into the team and ensuring that the process remains enjoyable and non-adversarial. Paragon's simple and straight-forward approach to daily business is proactive, non-confrontational, professional and clearly communicated. Construction is a logical process and by applying simple procedures our skills can be tailored to any kind of project. Paragon's project managers pride themselves on closing our projects in a clean and well-managed way leaving no outstanding issues. This enables us, our clients and our supply chain to continually improve and move forward. www.paragonmanagement.co.uk

What is Graeae

Graeae is a force for change in world-class theatre, breaking down barriers, challenging preconceptions and boldly placing disabled artists centre stage.

Artistically led by Jenny Sealey, Graeae's signature characteristic is the compelling creative integration of sign language and audio description, which engages brilliantly with both disabled and non-disabled audiences. Championing accessibility and providing a platform for new generations of artists, Graeae leads the way in pioneering, trail-blazing theatre.

Not only does Graeae produce outstanding theatre, but the company delivers extensive training programmes and opportunities for aspiring and established actors, directors and writers.

Graeae is a registered charity and our extensive programme of work is only made possible by the kind support of grant-giving organisations, sponsors and donations from the public. If you would like to make a donation visit our web site www.graeae.org and click on the **Support us** link.

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