



## A Mayfair dandy

Like a jazzed-up suit, Eric Parry's Eagle Place redevelopment cuts a showy dash in London's fashionable West End, writes *Jay Merrick*

In a period when facadism has given a great deal of British architecture bogus auras of quality and vivacity, it is daring for an architect to base the meaning of an important building in one of London's most cosmopolitan streets on what are, essentially, uncompromisingly vivacious surface effects.

There is a good deal more than that to the architecture of Eric Parry's redevelopment of five buildings on the Crown Estates site at the eastern end of London's Piccadilly. Yet the decorated facade of the centrepiece building so dominates the ensemble that it has effectively created a new and highly extraverted commercial building type in London.

In pragmatic terms, the £45 million Eagle Place development, on the south side of Piccadilly in territory defined architecturally by Nash and Blomfield, has delivered a skilful 11,500m<sup>2</sup> arrangement of ground floor retail frontages, optimised office floorplates, luxurious apartments, and an overall BREEAM Excellent rating.

This has involved the demolition

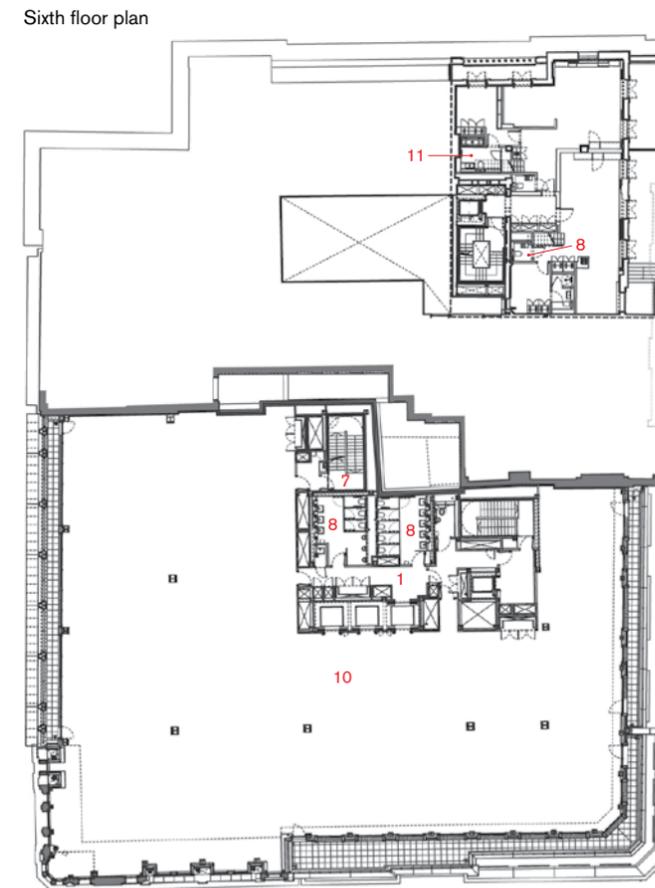
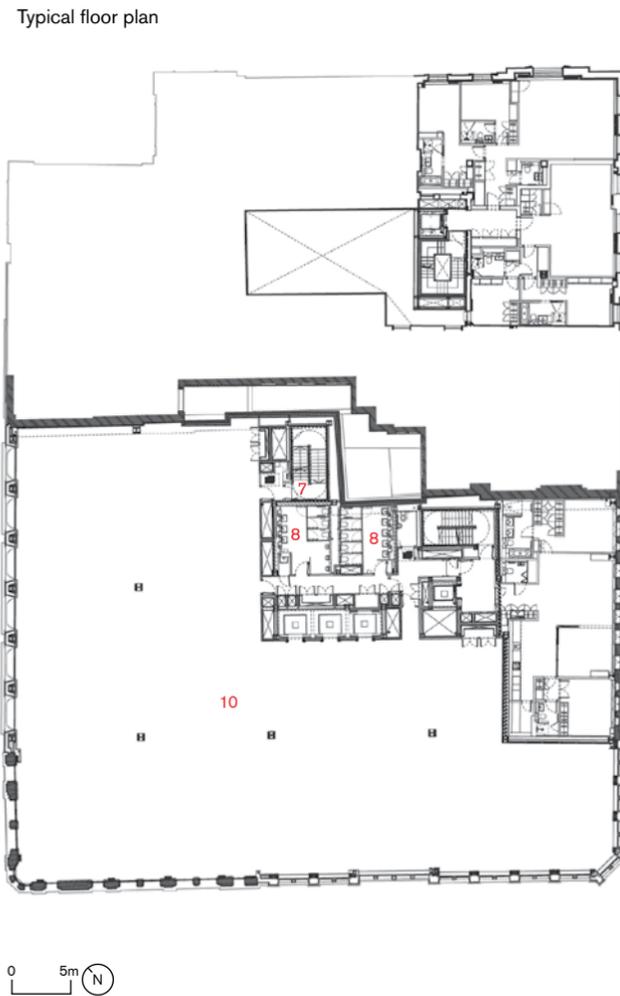
and raising of the building at the corner of Piccadilly and Eagle Place; the demolition and redevelopment of 212-214 Piccadilly, 3-4 Eagle Place, and 18-21 Jermyn Street behind a retained facade; and the retention and internal remodelling of 27 Regent Street, which now contains luxury apartments designed by the practice. The first four elements are in the St James's Conservation Area, the latter in the Regent Street Conservation Area. >>

Location plan

1. One Eagle Place, west building
2. 210-211 Piccadilly, rebuilt facades
3. 20 Jermyn Street, retained facade
4. 15 Jermyn Street, listed building

0 10m N





This degree of functional worth has become a given in Parry's commercial work over the past decade. It's more challenging to judge Eagle Place in terms of his overarching interests in the city as an amalgam of history, architectural artefact and artifice, and art in general. Parry brings these conditions together with an outré combination of precision and ambiguity.

The defining centrepiece of the

## Parry, who has introduced a Crayola sheen to Piccadilly, is hard to define

1. Office reception
2. Residential lobby/reception
3. Resident bike store
4. Bin store
5. Retail unit
6. Service corridor
7. Escape stair
8. Toilets
9. Lightwell
10. Offices
11. Bathroom

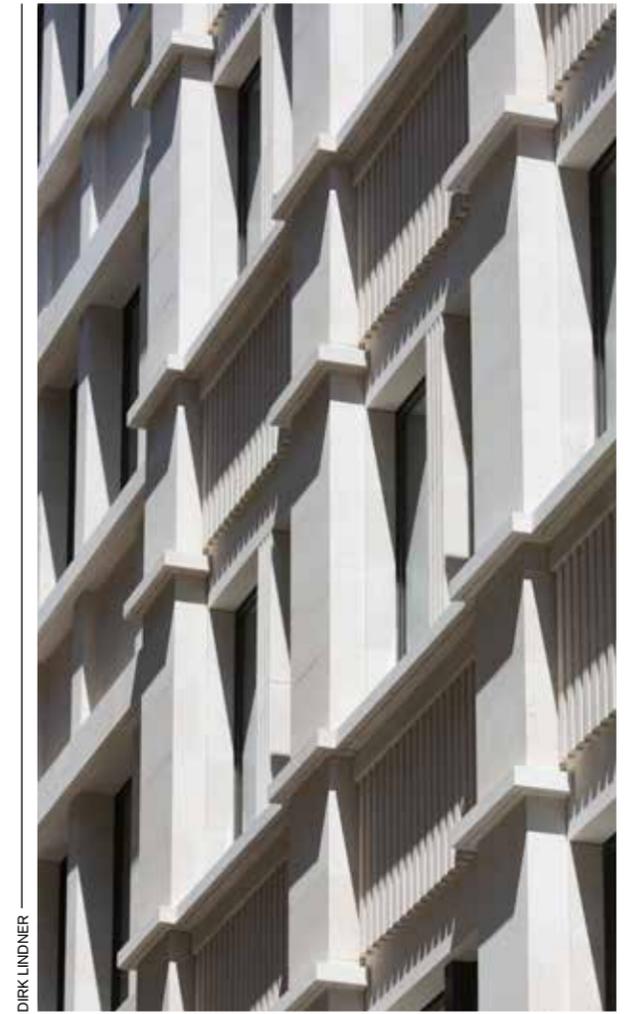
scheme is the main Piccadilly facade, equivalent to a Savile Row suit coat cut and sewn by Anderson & Sheppard, and then jazzed up by Oswald Boateng. The well-known British architect who suggested to me that Parry's ribbed and faïencé extension of Bath's Holburne Museum was 'simply vulgar' will regard the elevation of the 212-214 Piccadilly segment as paroxysmal proof of his opinion.

The Piccadilly facade is ordered like a commercial palazzo: a plinth of ground floor retail; a band of Nash-like mezzanine windows; a Blomfield-inspired layer of double-height windows with inserted, one storey-high oriels; deeply-punched windows suggesting a *piano nobile* under the

cornice; and an attic level recessed behind a loggia. The horizontal ordering is based on a 3.75m grid that produces six bays.

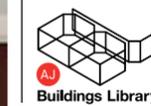
This is the most startling major facade in London since the PoMo-Gothic blancmange off Fenchurch Street known as both Minster, and Munster, Court; and we might also compare its sheer visual voltage to James Stirling's No.1 Poultry.

For an architect so fascinated by the poetic depths of Adolphe Appia's 19th-century stage set designs, the Piccadilly facade comes as a surprise. The tidy surrealities of Parry's faïencé elevations at the Holburne, and in New Bond Street, have been upstaged by a stage-flat. It's the apotheosis of Parry's



**Above** Eagle Place office facade  
**Left** View of entrance lobby

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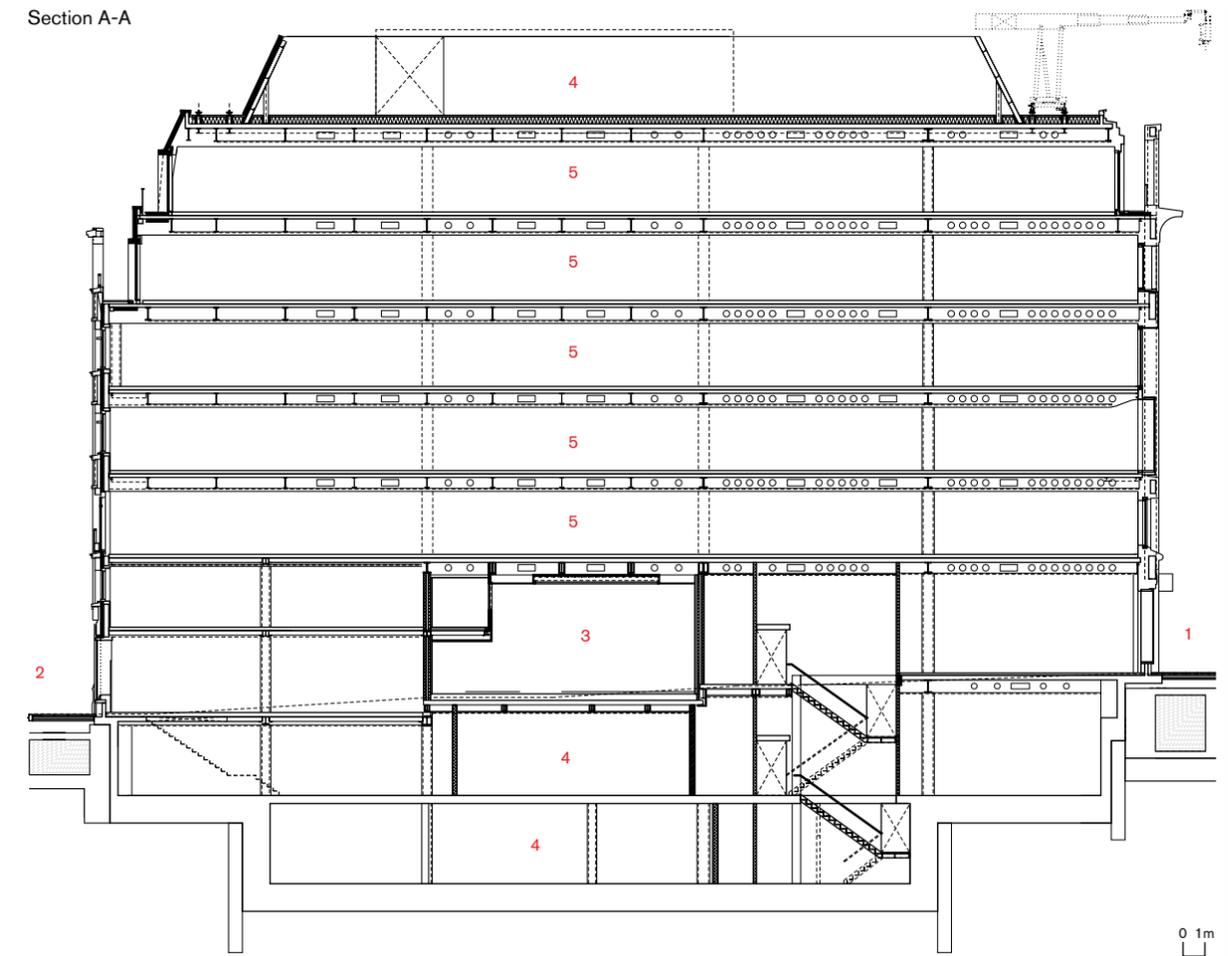
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familiar combinations of refined decorousness, artistic decor and, most significantly, experimental instincts that have already produced inversions of classical and Corbusian orders in the elevations of his Bath and Finsbury Square buildings.

There is something temporally tense about the Holburne's deliberately hyper-distinct juxtaposition of 18th- and 21st-century architecture. In Piccadilly, the tension is greater, despite a facade that very logically imposes a grander 19th-century classical-urban scale on what had been a huddled set of four compressed, unremarkable frontages with dropped cornices that broke the longer streetscape perspectives. >>



Section A-A



- 1. Piccadilly
- 2. Jermyn Street
- 3. Reception
- 4. Plant
- 5. Office



OPPOSITE: DAVID BUTLER

Parry's raised cornice reinstates the perspective, jutting out like a thick cicatrice from a flesh of the mug-white faience, producing a building as singular as Joseph Emberton's 1936 Grade I-listed Simpsons building (now Waterstones) a bit further west along Piccadilly.

Emberton was a Modernist. Parry, who has introduced a Crayola sheen to Piccadilly, is harder to define, though we can be certain of his refined appreciation for architectural craft and his daring selection of collaborating artists. The chunky, asymmetrical modillion-cum-dentils of the Piccadilly cornice feature riotously blotched decal glazes by Richard Deacon; and a 6.5-tonne granite face

DIRK LINDNER

by Stephen Cox gazes gnominically out across St James's from the fourth floor of the new corner facade of Jermyn Street and Eagle Place. The sculpture has the same Vedantic otherness as his *Lingam of a Thousand Lingams* at the Cass Sculpture Foundation.

Parry himself has contributed artwork – the rather bloody speckling of the double-height window casings. These are extremely adventurous admixtures of public art and they deserve better than the bland bread-and-circuses justification by James Cooksey of the Crown Estate, who talks of 'creating an exciting retail and business destination based around a vibrant local community. Public art, like this piece by Richard Deacon, >>

**Opposite** View of office reception space  
**Left** Typical master bathroom in Jermyn Street apartment  
**Following spread** Eagle Place separates Parry's redevelopment from Lutyens' Midland Bank Building (*right*)

can inspire community connections.'

But, to return to tenser matters, what about temporal connections? Deacon's and Parry's decorative glazing decals could be seen as no more lavishly convivial than the ornate stone urns on the facade of Norman Shaw's last work, the 1908 Piccadilly Hotel (now Le Meridien); or the carved Portland stone pendants of fruits, flowers and festoons on the rather squashed attic storey of Lutyens' 1925 Midland Bank building at 196 Piccadilly, now inhabited by Hauser & Wirth.

But the classical and the colourist qualities of Parry's Piccadilly facade are not incidental. The beautifully crafted oriel window bays, the gleaming softness of Shaw's of Darwin's faience, the fineness of the lime mortar joints and the inwardly radiused double-height window casings create the sense of a perfectly cast foreground object in a street of grand, but not overwhelming architectural backgrounds. The formal civility of Parry's building remains beneath the decals, an architectural make-up baked on at 1,200°C.

This is not the case with the rebuilt building that wraps around the corner of Piccadilly and Eagle Place, whose raised brick structure is now linked to the steel frame of the *pièce de résistance*. The new facade in Jermyn Street and the asymmetrically modelled facade facing Eagle Place show Parry's skill as an architectural collagist, and they add something very fresh and historically alert to what was an unremarkable alley and to the oddly muted eastern end of Jermyn Street. The Eagle Place elevation is particularly engrossing; if only more secondary spaces in our cities were graced with this degree of design originality.

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Where does Eric Parry go from here? One must hope that the commercial success of the Eagle Place ensemble does not trigger a demand for copycat buildings from him – or, indeed, from lesser architects, which would be a truly hideous prospect. The tensions of Parry's arrangements of craft, detail and subversions of type that give his work its teasing fusions of virtuosity and strangeness surely preclude obvious repetitions.

What would Lutyens have made of Parry's Piccadilly palazzo? Perhaps Stephen Cox's meditative Vedic sculpture might know the answer: it overlooks a point midway between Lutyens' bank building and the mews studio in Apple Tree Yard, between Jermyn Street and St James's Square, where he designed his New Delhi projects. There is nothing in the Vedanta about Mannerism, but it must charge the Floris-scented air here, playfully and provocatively. ■

*Jay Merrick is architecture critic at The Independent*

#### Project data

START ON SITE August 2010  
COMPLETION June 2013  
GROSS EXTERNAL AREA 12,960m<sup>2</sup>  
FORM OF CONTRACT Construction management  
TOTAL CONTRACT COST £45 million  
COST PER m<sup>2</sup> £3,500  
CLIENT The Crown Estate in partnership with Health Care of Ontario Pension Plan  
ARCHITECT Eric Parry Architects  
MAIN CONTRACTOR Lend Lease  
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER Waterman  
PROJECT MANAGER Gardiner & Theobald  
M&E CONSULTANT Mecserve  
CDM CO-ORDINATOR PFB Construction Management  
PLANNING CONSULTANT CBRE  
COST CONSULTANT Gardiner & Theobald  
ACOUSTIC CONSULTANT Alan Saunders  
LIGHTING CONSULTANT DPA Lighting  
PUBLIC REALM CONSULTANT Atkins  
DEVELOPMENT MANAGER Stanhope  
CAD SOFTWARE USED MicroStation  
ESTIMATED AVERAGE ANNUAL CO<sub>2</sub> EMISSIONS 25.8kgCO<sub>2</sub>/m<sup>2</sup>  
FAIENCE Szerelmey and Shaw's of Darwin

DIRK LINDNER



# Working detail

## Eagle Place, Piccadilly, London W1

Eric Parry Architects

### Window

The relative depth of the elevation – 900mm – allowed the exploitation of the sculptural quality of faience as a cast material. The units incorporate complex stooing, reveals and running moulds that repeat over the six sections of the facade. The faience has a wall depth of 40mm and is coursed and sized to accommodate the tolerances of a fired material.

In order to bed the units in a lime mortar to create a continuous sealed surface, as opposed to an open joined rain screen, the structural substrate has to be stiff and a movement structure was designed to achieve this. A closely analysed support system to allow for the movement of the primary structure, the thermal expansion of the faience and the plasticity of lime mortar lies between the two systems.

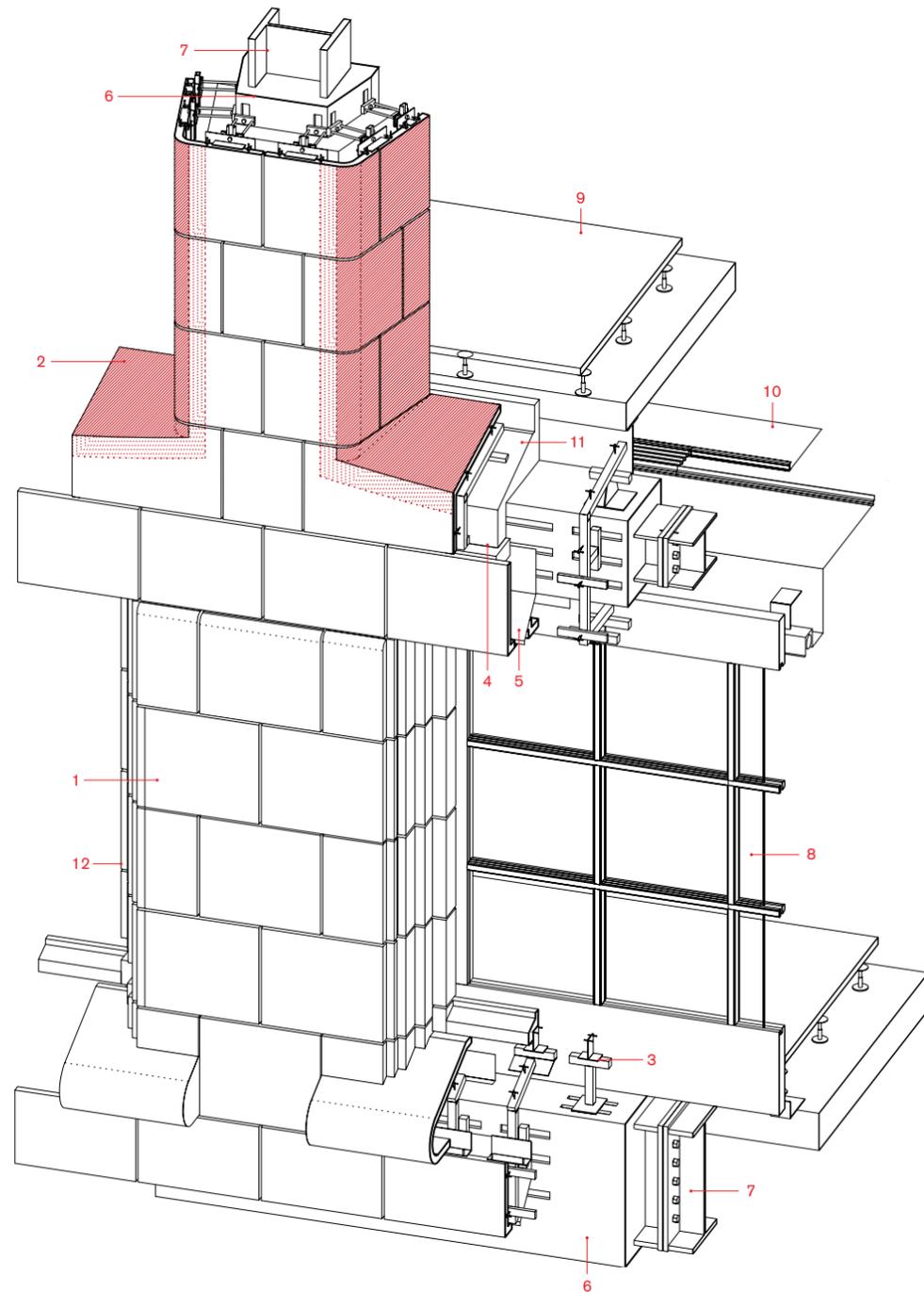
The faience units all have a grey-white glaze and were fired at approximately 1,200°C to achieve frost resistance. The glazed polychromy was achieved subsequently by a transfer technique, fused through a second lower-temperature firing at approximately 850°C. The 39 cornice units, generally made up of two or three subsections, weighed up to 200kg. Extensive dry lays were required to check control of tolerances, colour and glaze. The intention was that this north-facing elevation would reflect the vivid life of Piccadilly, both in spirit and materiality.

Eric Parry, principle,  
Eric Parry Architects

### Opposite

Piccadilly facade, with Richard Deacon cornice above double-height windows

and jambs ornamented by Eric Parry Architects



OPPOSITE: DIRK LINDNER

1. 40mm faience tiles, once fired hand-applied glaze  
2. 40mm faience tiles, twice fired and transfer glazed  
3. Halfen stainless steel subframe

assembly  
4. Continuous horizontal cavity barrier  
5. Continuous horizontal cavity tray at storey level

6. Precast concrete encasement with cast-in stainless steel Halfen channels  
7. Steel moment frame with aluminium splice collars

8. Composite DGU  
9. Raised access floor on composite structural floor slab  
10. Suspended ceiling with integrated blindbox and

supply grille  
11. Rigid insulation to achieve 0.18 W/m<sup>2</sup>K U-value  
12. Lime mortar jointed with weep holes at soffit

