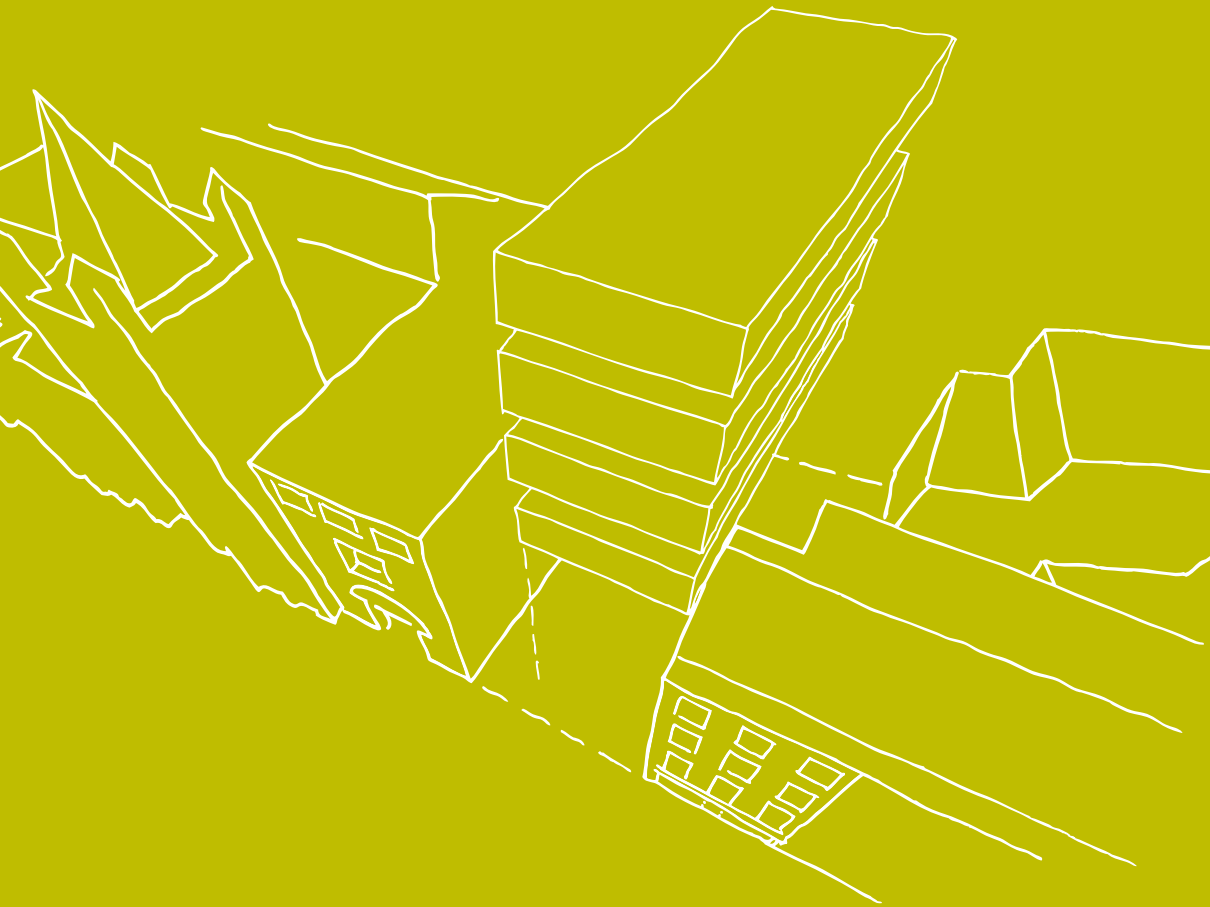


# London Calling



**Berman Guedes Stretton**  
Architects + Designers

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# Client confidence grows for Berman Guedes Stretton in London

Having established the Oxford Office almost twenty years ago, winning a framework contract for Imperial College in London was the first step in shaping Berman Guedes Stretton's ambitions: to grow from its roots in Oxford into a practice with a national profile. The success of this client relationship caused a steady stream of projects to flow through the practice and the directors quickly realised the potential of a permanent London presence. The decision was made to structure the project office more formally, recruiting London staff and providing administration support.

The London office is now celebrating five years working in London. Today it employs nine full time architectural staff with two associate directors and Roger Stretton taking the helm as director. The client base has grown to include projects for the Natural History Museum, Paradigm Housing Association and Queen Mary, University of London.

In 2008, the London office entered and won a national RIBA competition to design a new art gallery extension to Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum – a coup for the London team. When the project got planning consent earlier this year Jane Lillystone, Museum and Arts Manager was delighted and said:

"Planning permission has been a big milestone so we're delighted it's been granted and we can now progress on to the next stage. We knew we wanted a transformative design that would reflect innovative 21st Century architecture but we didn't know how visually stunning the final design by Berman Guedes Stretton would be!"



*Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum, Cheltenham*



The Queen's Hotel - Queen's Street, Brighton

The practice is becoming recognised for the clarity of its design solutions and its clean contemporary architecture – an evolving design ethos that increasingly recognises design opportunity but also understands where restraint is appropriate.

This approach has served particularly well when dealing with historic buildings – and none more important than London's Natural History Museum, a Grade 1 listed building.

Talking about this ethos Gary Collins, associate director said:

"With effort, we find that often the most complex requirements can be reduced to the simplest of diagrams; supporting our belief that rigorous design can bring genuine value to a project.

Each project is assessed with sensitivity. As with all architects, the requirements of our clients, stakeholders and indeed, the site are all faithfully gathered. But in our mind, we ask what can be added to give coherence and value? What can be taken away to achieve the same? In our experience, this line of questioning can often be overlooked."



Central Hall Toilets - Natural History Museum, London



*From the left: Nick, Alicja, Gary, Joel, Chris, Stephen, Ethan and Clara*

The combination of a commitment to their clients and an overriding belief in the purpose of contemporary design to support clients' ambitions is what gives Berman Guedes Stretton its strength.

Chris Hale, associate director said: "There is a great deal of change in the requirements of our clients. As a profession, there is also an expectation that we will be able to respond to ever changing issues of environmental performance, disabled access and ever more pressing economic factors. Requirements become increasingly stringent and we must be nimble enough to accommodate them."

The practice is structured to respond to these changes. There are five project teams led by each of the practice associate directors, two of these teams being in London. This is the delivery mechanism and is not uncommon in the profession. However, separate from the teams are active practice workshops made up from members of each team. The workshops contribute to the practice's internal procedures, working drawings, financial management and environmental awareness and provide a forum to report back through internal CPD events to each team. Information is shared across the practice through a company Intranet. This helps Berman Guedes Stretton to adopt a research-led design approach while enabling designers from different office locations to exchange ideas – ensuring 'one practice' design philosophy.



*The Queen's Tower Room - Imperial College, London*

Education is vital to the maturity of a practice. In recent years, Berman Guedes Stretton has developed a relationship with Oxford Brookes University where three staff have assisted individual units in the architecture school with technology. This is an opportunity to give something back by sharing real practice experience whilst engaging imaginative design.

As the practice's design confidence grows, it is increasingly engaging with others to test its ideas.

Chris Hale, associate director concluded by saying:

"We actively encourage BREEAM assessment of our project designs to test our approach and to give clients a clear measure of energy targets and a demonstration of how they are achieved. We are encouraging CABE reviews of our designs to allow our peers in the profession to critique our design work. Measures such as these encourage intellectual engagement with every aspect of our design work at an early stage. Involvement with other outside review sources is encouraged."



*The herbology and entomology collection - Natural History Museum, London*



*Accessible Beach Huts - Boscombe Beach, Bournemouth*

