

the Design Museum





Client

the Design Museum

Creative Partners

John Pawson
Cartlidge Levene
Ferango Gutiérrez

Contractor

Willmott Dixon

The art of designing a museum is one filled with expectation and promise. A rare and unique challenge for designers; none more so than when that museum is the new incarnation of the Design Museum, the epitomes home of design in the UK, originally founded in 1989 by Sir Terence Conran.

Cobal partnered with Cartlidge Levene and John Pawson architects to create wayfinding, placemaking and signage that enriches the character and personality of museums' new home in South Kensington.





Following a £23 million transformation, the Design Museum moved to the formerly derelict, 10,000 sq m, Royal Commonwealth Institute building in Kensington. To rejuvenate the building, the space was redesigned by architect John Pawson, and also took on a new identity created by Fernando Gutiérrez, with a wayfinding scheme developed by Cartlidge Levene.

Our brief was to create wayfinding, placemaking and signage that would create a harmony between all aspects of the visitor journey and the building, while also delivering on the museums' aim to be a hub for "contemporary design and architecture and an international showcase of design skills."





The identity for the Design Museum is crisp and clean with the signage and wayfinding utilising the schulbuch typeface and the seminal pictograms, designed by Otl Aicher in the 1970s.

With the scale and importance of the building in mind, developing the designs for this prestigious project was undoubtedly one of the most demanding projects we have encountered in our 38-year history. Highlights included the Otl Aicher icons, which were made to provide both information and also appear as an exhibit. This was achieved by making them from acrylic panels and placing them in folded metal holders, creating the feeling that the pictograms are framed objects on display.

Further design elements in the scheme included the external signage, flag poles, a series of engraved Corian panels, English oak lettering, manifestations and interactive touch screen displays that could be updated with each new exhibition. At every stage of development and refinement, we produced prototypes with modifications and subtle refinements made along the way to ensure faithfulness to the original design intent, focussing on craft techniques that would complement the overall vision.





By paying homage to the character of the new building and the design heritage of the museum as an institution, the scheme delivers a narrative that segues into a portfolio of beautifully crafted signs that effortlessly creates a visually engaging and informative guide around the museum.

“The signs are the jewels of the building.”

Deyan Sudjic OBE

Director, the Design Museum

