

WELCOME to FX's Focus on surfaces. There are fresh challenges for the built environment in 2021, and with a new 'do not touch' approach to surfaces, designers are exploring different ways to feel and

interact, ensuring both hygiene and mental well-being expectations are met in a much-changed and seemingly impossible world. But there is real innovation emerging, so don't despair! From weaving to pops

of colour to socially distanced graphics that engage, we've sought out some of the most inspiring project, products and people that will help take us forward during these interesting times. Enjoy.



1

Profile Laura Carrara- Cagni



LAURA CARRARA-CAGNI is a founding director at Edward Williams Architects and has significant experience in winning, designing, managing and delivering large, complex international public projects such as hospitals and university buildings. Since the early years of her career she has been researching materials and colours, and showcasing how their use in architecture is not simply a matter of taste but a critical part of the design scheme.

Carrara-Cagni has an enviable portfolio of work and accolades. She was an associate partner at Hopkins Architects between 1998 and 2012 where she delivered key buildings for clients in the UK, US, Europe and the Middle East. Projects included the Brent Civic Centre in London and The Forum in Norwich, ten new college buildings at Rice University in Texas, the Cyprus Cultural Centre in Nicosia, and 20 private villas in Dubai.

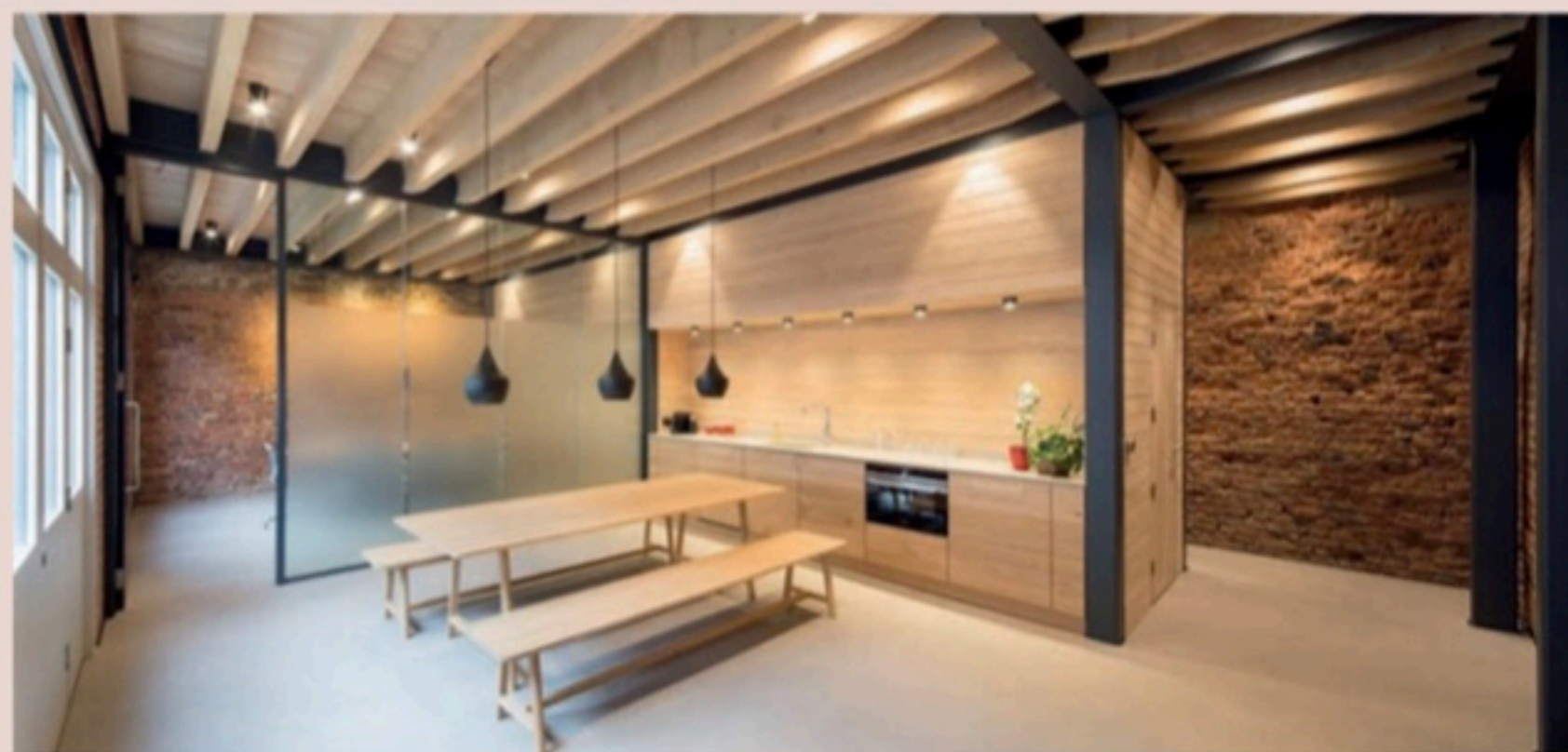
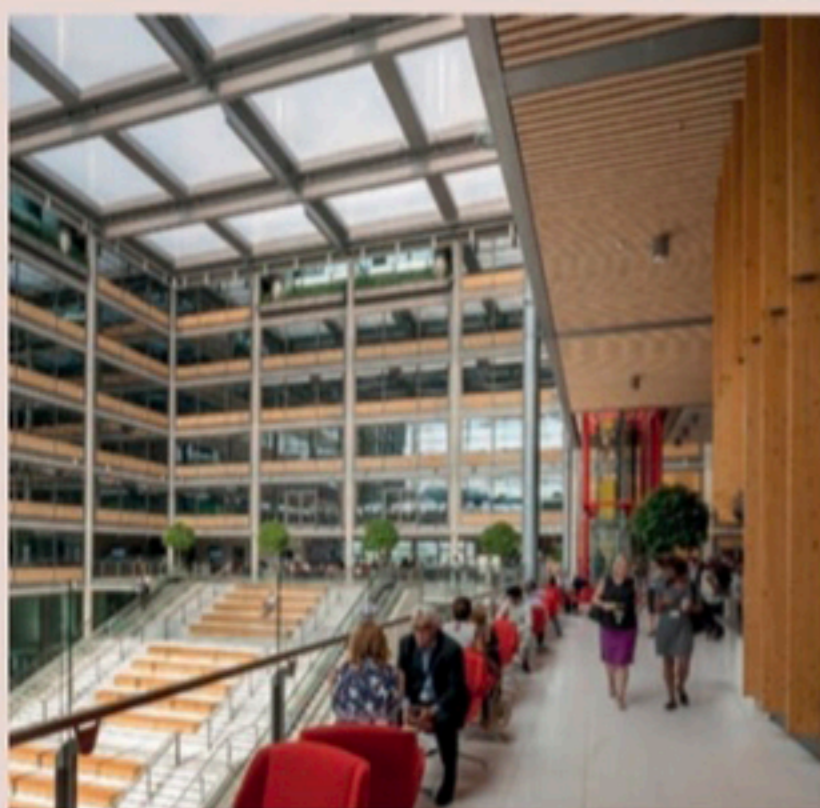
She talks of an enjoyment in understanding natural materials and says that new products are not always better.

'Our generation is one that transitions between growing up with adults excited about the new invention of several synthetic materials and widespread application of plastic products, and a growing awareness of sustainability for our planet,' she says. 'Since my university days I have

been fascinated by ageing as a measure of the worth of materials. Plastic clearly showed over time that it does not age gracefully, while we have numerous examples of natural materials getting more and more interesting as time goes by - to the point that nowadays some manufacturers produce artificially aged stone and timber, but I have not seen an artificially aged plastic material yet on sale.'

As well as a passion for materials, Carrara-Cagni also has a passion for colour. For many years she has researched colours to demonstrate that their use in architecture is not a matter of taste, but that scientific knowledge is critical to making the right selection. She says: 'I witnessed architects selecting colour purely as a matter of taste and started asking myself "why can't we have objective criteria to select colours for the built environment?" And I started researching, and that research started to intersect with the embodied colour of natural materials.'

Selecting colours for a project, says Carrara-Cagni, is done by using informed choices. And there are several approaches to doing this - for example, like knowing how to use and measure complementary colours, and that grey should be used 'to make colours shine'.



'This is my own elaboration of the several colour theories, from Goethe to Itten and from psychological colour studies to actual paint production and evolutionary history,' she adds.

Applying the right colour will enhance and complement particular architectural elements. Carrara-Cagni explains: 'In the first instance we work with the architecture – architectural form highlights what element is to stand out – then we carry out colour selection, and finally we select its properties, surface, texture, reflectivity and so on.'

A project undertaken by Edward Williams Architects is the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital. It features a neutral grey terracotta facade alongside a strong orange colour. This highlight makes a vast building legible and easy to navigate from both the outside and the inside, as well as being a fresh, bright and contemporary colour.

'In hospital entrances and foyers and non-medical areas we can use natural materials, timber and concrete,

so we do, whereas in the medical areas we play with applied colours, using vinyl and paints,' says Carrara-Cagni of a pallet of natural materials and colours that create an attractive juxtaposition. 'I am always attracted towards compositions that include some natural materials, especially in large public buildings and even in hospitals.'

This attraction is obvious in the Brent Civic Centre, a project undertaken while at Hopkins Architects. Timber louvres and the facade panels in the foyer and soffits soften the urban surroundings.

Carrara-Cagni believes that a deeper knowledge of materials and colour leads to better built environment:

'Understanding and constantly researching materials allows us to make better choices and work in tune with each material,' she says. 'We are able to detail it better and emphasise the intrinsic characteristics of each material. Knowing how it will age allows us to design buildings that improve over time, and this is one of the characteristics of our buildings that we are proud of.'

Previous page Carrara-Cagni won the project for a new hospital in La Spezia, Italy, while at Hopkins Architects

Clockwise from top Midland Metropolitan University Hospital; Edward Williams Architects says these offices in Paddington 'derive their character from the restored brickwork, extensive use of oak, and grey-painted steel structure'; the Brent Civic Centre located in London

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318

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