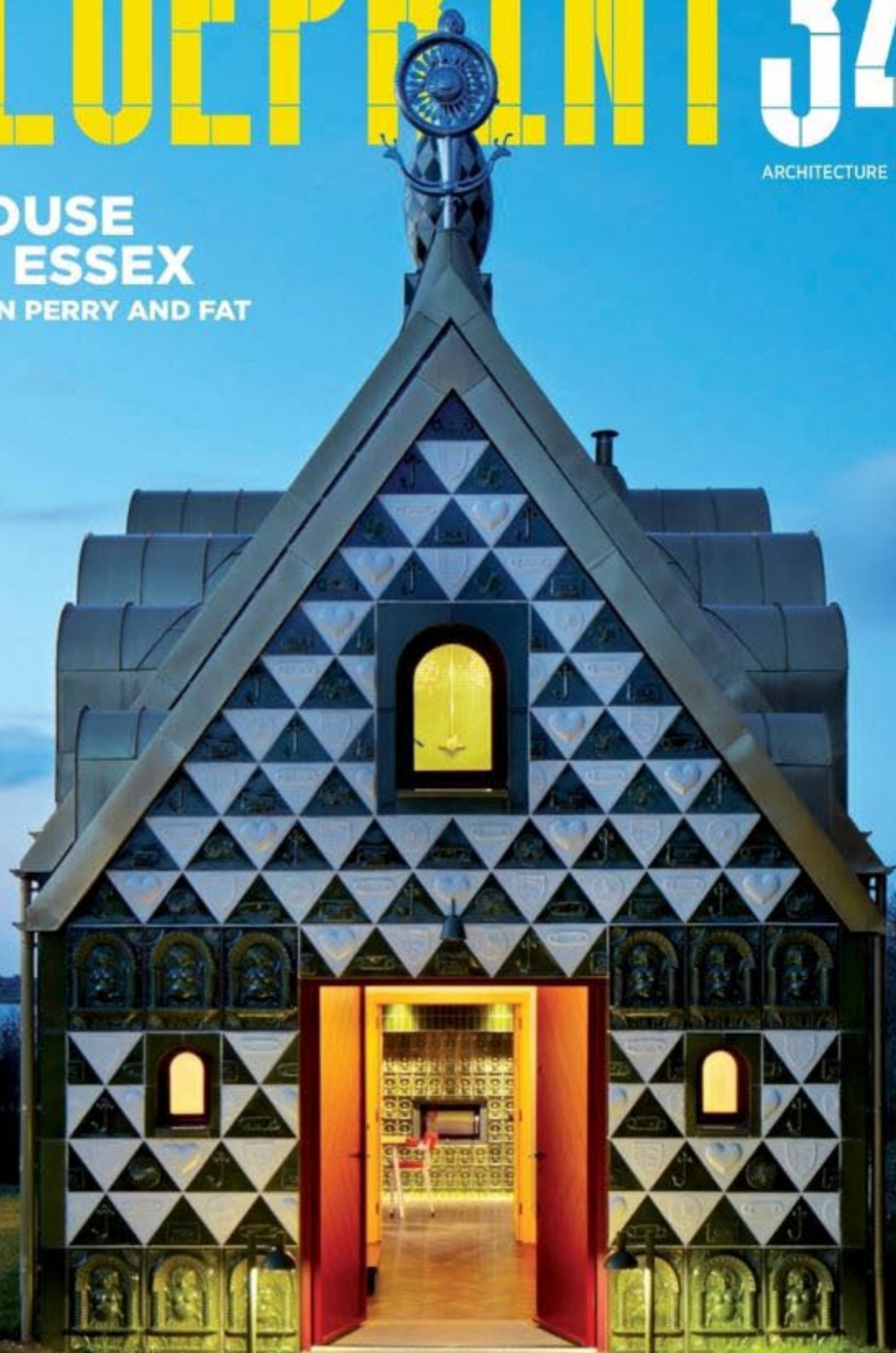


BLUEPRINT 341

ARCHITECTURE | DESIGN | ART

A HOUSE FOR ESSEX

GRAYSON PERRY AND FAT



OMA IN MOSCOW AND MILAN | BARBARA HEPWORTH | INSIDE THE MACK

Feature

EPR Architects has collaborated with ceramicist Kate Malone to create a hand-glazed facade for a seven-storey office and retail building on London's Savile Row

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Project
24 Savile Row
by EPR Architects
and Kate Malone

Words by Cate St Hill

At the end of Savile Row, as the street changes from tailors and men in smart suits to even smarter art galleries, a new seven-storey, mixed-use office and retail building stands proudly like one of London's pearly queens. Clad in 10,000 crystalline hand-glazed ceramic tiles in shades of white and dark blue, it is the work of EPR Architects and London-based ceramicist Kate Malone. On this London street — a place to see and be seen — the corner building holds its own, shimmering and sparkling in the sunshine.

'A lot of the time when you get a collaboration between an architect and an artist, there isn't really a collaboration — the artist will put

something on the building at the end. We worked with Kate right from the start,' says lead architect and EPR associate director Stephen Pey. 'What's interesting about this project, with its uniquely decorated facade, is that it has brought art on to the street. We've noticed people walking along the street stop and take a photo on their phones.'

Having previously worked together on a ceramic art wall at the purpose-built development in Brighton for American Express, EPR and Malone were inspired by Savile Row's tailoring heritage and artisanal history. 'The word bespoke was invented on Savile Row, where suits were "to be spoken for" by a specific client,' says Pey. 'So, we knew we had to create a bespoke building, featuring material and design of the sort of quality to match and echo that tradition. It was the perfect collaboration in a way; we wanted to bring a level of the handmade to the project.'

Together they devised a hand-

glazed elevation that sensitively pays homage to the neutral tones of the surrounding Mayfair Conservation Area. The longer Savile Row elevation is clad in three shades of white ceramic square tiles, with black projecting windows while, round the corner, the Conduit Street elevation is treated in a dark navy blue, 'to maintain the urban grain of the street's Georgian terraces'.

The glistening crystalline effect on the tiles is made by carefully climbing the temperature of the kiln to 1,260°C (most ceramics reach about 900 degrees). The 'crystals' form as the tile is cooling, creating fragile iridescent patterns like shattered ice or frost on a car window. The unique process is a delicate balance, and also means that no two tiles are the same. 'We approached a lot of the major manufacturers in Europe and the UK to come up with a system and product that could take Kate's glazes, and initially all the samples melted. In the end, we sourced a proprietary extruded bisc

clay tile. The trouble was that Kate could only fire about 10 at a time — we needed 10,000! I think it worked out that it would probably have taken her six years to fire them all,' says Pey.

EPR called in the help of small Surrey-based artisan workshop Froyle, which could handle both the high temperature and the amount of tiles. Each tile was hand-painted with the glaze, cleaned, weighed and hand levelled before going into the kiln — 'If it wasn't dead flat, all the glazes would run off the edge and destroy everything,' says Pey. Froyle could fire 100 tiles at a time, taking five days to slowly raise the temperature and two for the tiles to cool down once out of the kiln. A bespoke crate system was designed to ensure they arrived safely on to the site.

Once there, the tiles were gravity hung on to a rainscreen system, made up of a Kingspan integrated panel, aluminium rails and 'helping hand' brackets. Says Pey: 'This hadn't really been done before and in a way we

were trailblazing. We went to Ceram in Stoke, which is the European expert in testing ceramics, and we carried out every test known to man, and a few more. Because the tiles go up to 1260°C, the glaze becomes fully bonded to the tile — it passed all the tests with flying colours.'

Pey calls the facade an 'ever-evolving canvas. The crystals reflect and refract daylight, capturing different moods and subtly changing the appearance and tone of the building depending on the weather and time of day. The photographs don't do it justice; you have to see it in the light; it has its own glow,' he says. And he's right — the tiles are best appreciated right up close, where their pearly patina shines the brightest.

1 - The facade of 24 Savile Row is made up of 10,000 hand-glazed tiles in blue and white
 2 - The shiny crystalline effect is made by heating the kiln to 1,260°C
 3 - Part of the Conduit Street elevation is dark blue, to tie it in with the Georgian terraces
 4 - Box windows jut out of the pearly white Savile Row elevation

Ceramist Kate Malone

'I specialise in hand making decorative arts and large-scale public works. For 30 years my glaze research has centred around discovering new colours and surfaces, the past 20 years specifically around high-temperature stoneware crystalline glazes. After a climbing in temperature to 1,260°C these glazes form crystals while cooling; these seed and grow creating surfaces that refract and reflect light — more responsive than normal glazes and more complicated to use than most glazes.'

'My initial response to Stephen Pey's request to develop black and white glazes for a facade project was to encourage him toward a more lively set of colours. Initial trials threw up amazing greens, golds, blues, greys but the 'Pey vision' for this building became clear, with good reason.'

'We tested hundreds of new glazes in my small glaze lab. With workshop manager Helen Evans, and under the watchful eye of Pey and

his ever-increasing demand for purer surfaces, we worked for 18 months. At these high temperatures, clay and glaze intermingle — making pure white glazes especially challenging to produce.'

'The facade Pey needed was 1000 sq m with 11,000 tiles — too many for my London kilns. I searched for someone to take on these notoriously difficult fluid and variable crystal glazes. I found Rich Miller of Froyle, a small artisan workshop producing handmade tiles at high-glaze temperatures. Tests in his kilns rendered positive responses. Rich was prepared to take this on. I was to be glaze supplier, with Froyle to apply glaze and fire tiles.'

'At my Balls Pond Studios we hand-mixed 1,500ltr of my glazes, a daunting task — hand-weighed (to 0.1g), hand-sieved (through a fine mesh), and kiln tested. The supply was mixed in 6ltr batches, with staggered delivery to Froyle for freshness. Froyle fired back-to-back, five-day kiln firings

of 100 tiles in rotation. Firings rendered every tile covered in a thick matrix of extraordinary crystal glaze. Each hand-glazed tile had hand-sponged edges, each set made perfectly level by hand. Some 20km of masking tape was applied and peeled away. 200,000 holes poked with a stick to check for blockages. Each tile was handled nine times through the glazing, QA and sorting, before being stored ready for hanging on the facade.'

'It is a testimony to craft skill, attention to detail and the hand. The vision of Stephen Pey and EPR, the climax of 30 years of my own research, the willingness of the teams to take pleasure in the craft of making, and the confidence from planners, developers and architects, made this a most extraordinary project.'

'The result is a sharp, modern and intensely crafted work of art that stands on the streets of London to glisten and delight the public... a public work of craft.'



1-4 JIM STEPHENSON 2-3 EPR

