

# Lasting impression: Chloë Phelps

## Mid-century Croydon - A town that just went with it



Croydon, where Common Ground is based, is famous for its mid-century commercial architecture. It's such a part of the area's character – that era of architects trying to do something new and not necessarily following the norms. At their best, the buildings have an unabashed confidence. The designers just picked a particular form and ran with it.

Perhaps the most famous example is the "50p building" by Richard Seifert, immediately outside East Croydon station, but Seifert also built a less well-known office building just down the road. In contrast to the 50p, Corinthian House (1) (1964-65) is just a beautifully refined, purpose-built office building, with a really elegant chevron composition in plan. The first thing you notice is this amazing wafer-thin canopy that projects out onto the street, then you see how it floats above these triangulated pilotis. Then you look up, and it has this wonderful undulating soffit. It's not shouty, it's just a very nice setpiece building that has thankfully been kept and restored.

20 Katharine Street (2) (GR Toogood, 1975-81) hasn't been so lucky. It was sadly demolished recently, but was a great example of how you can achieve a lot with not very much – in this case a single faceted spandrel panel that repeats over a tall, square composed facade. There was very little in terms of material variation, but it was highly sculptural, with real depth and character to the facade.

The expressed base was quite an amazing thing: an arched colonnade on the ground floor with huge rhomboid column heads that spanned the whole of the floor above. As a practice, we really loved the way it presided over part of Queen's Gardens, one of the main squares in Croydon, and it became the main inspiration for our own Fairfield Homes residential scheme – we've transposed the faceted base to become balconies.

My final choice is the building that I call home – the Hallfield estate (3) (Berthold Lubetkin with Tecton, 1951-58) in Bayswater, west London. It's one of those buildings that gives a little bit more every time you walk around it. It's incredibly well-resolved in that it manages to clothe the homes in very intricate geometric cladding without compromising the internal arrangement at all.

The estate is surrounded by these grand stucco-fronted terraces, but it works surprisingly well as a backdrop. It's a really interesting balance of something that's incredibly bold and really contextual at the same time.

**Chloë Phelps is head of design at Common Ground Architecture**



Photos 1 McKay Securities; 2 James Evans, archoptical.uk; Chloë Phelps