

## PROJECT

### Caruso St John



Overshadowed for years by its younger, trendier relative, now it's Tate Britain's opportunity to turn heads. *Herbert Wright* visits the revamped gallery, after its £45m overhaul and finds that there is much to admire

Physically, the transformation of the Millbank side of **Tate Britain** turns around a spiral staircase. Billed as the 'New Tate Britain', and opened in November, the £45m project restored, enhanced and extended the original building designed by Sydney Smith.

Since opening in 1897 as the **National Gallery of British Art**, what is now Tate Britain has had many extensions. In May 2013, nine new galleries were delivered with reinforced flooring and contemporary climate control. The Tate gave little away of the surprises to follow, and indeed many new additions look as if they could have been part of the original. **Adam Caruso** of practice Caruso St John says 'the distinction between new and old is less interesting than for previous generations', and the new Tate plays on this ambiguity.

The main Millbank riverside entrance, reached by grand stairs, has been restored. New doors are framed in bronze, and on one side of the foyer a tranquil, leaded glasswork by 2009 Turner Prize-winner **Richard Wright** has been installed.

Step through into the rotunda, a central domed atrium space long under-utilised, and we are in the heart of the action. On its upper floor, the space behind Smith's octagonal balcony and columns has now been reclaimed as a lounge bar area for the members room. This space is accessed by two previously existing small spiral stairs, which now act



as satellites of the new staircase, right in the rotunda's centre. It's a swish, curving affair, almost art deco. A scallop pattern derived from Roman thermal baths radiates across the floor and forms an protective stone filigree circle around the new stairwell. Polished black and white terrazzo continues in the staircase itself, with glass inset in a steel balustrade. 'Architects are not trained to work on ornamentation, so it was a terrific effort,' commented Caruso.

The lower levels have also been opened up. A new archive gallery with a central drum space has been created. The Whistler restaurant feels completely re-invigorated by the restoration of its epic classical fantasy mural by **Rex Whistler**. The space for the new **Djanogly Café** has been created

with the removal of columns. Here, 'it's all about the vaulting', says Peter St John. In what is possibly the most subtle architectonic intervention in London this century, artist **Alan Johnston** has exaggerated the shadows of the vaulted space with graphite pencil shading. Finally, the lower floor hosts the only space which feels completely contemporary: the Clore Centre, a learning studio into which school parties enter from below the main entrance.

Directly above the Millbank lobby, a large meeting and event room, the Grand Saloon, has been restored, with the addition of new features.

The 'New' Tate Britain is a very different project from others underway in the Tate's empire — the £215m Tate Modern extension with its 64m-high sculptural tower by **Herzog & de Meuron**, and the clean, white, new galleries in **Tate St Ives'** £12m extension by **Jamie Fobert**. No one has mentioned postmodernism, the style of **James Stirling's** Clore gallery wing (1987), which deliberately made a counterplay against Smith's neo-classical structure. But the new works adjacent use historicist elements too. Rather than challenge the old, Caruso St John freely reinvents classical space. The effect is all the more powerful for its artisanship.

- 1 - The Djanogly Café, with graphite-shaded vaults
- 2 - A new gallery, one of nine opened last May
- 3 - The rotunda, with new stair behind a scalloped stone circle

