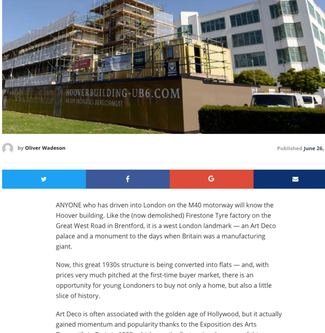
An Art Deco landmark is for the taking in west London



by Oliver Wadeson

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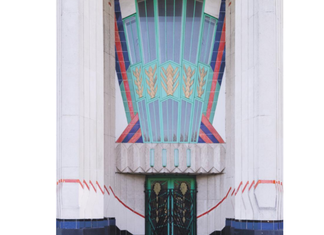
ANYONE who has driven into London on the M40 motorway will know the Hoover building. Like the (now demolished) Firestone Tyre factory on the Great West Road in Brentford, it is a west London landmark — an Art Deco palace and a monument to the days when Britain was a manufacturing giant.

Now, this great 1930s structure is being converted into flats — and, with prices very much pitched at the first-time buyer market, there is an opportunity for young Londoners to buy not only a home, but also a little slice of history.

Art Deco is often associated with the golden age of Hollywood, but it actually gained momentum and popularity thanks to the Exposition des Arts Decoratifs in Paris in 1925, which was the first major showcase of this modernist style.

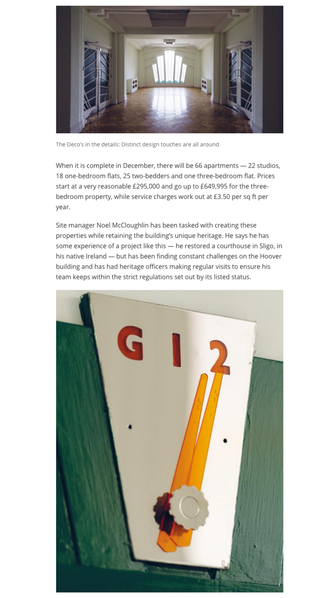


Iconic site: The Hoover Building

Everything about the Art Deco look — the sleek lines, curves and geometric shapes and symmetry — smacked of opulence, glamour and extravagance. No wonder, then, that successful factory owners adopted it for the architecture of their buildings.

Among them was the American Hoover Company, which soon began to dominate the electric vacuum cleaner business after the appliance's invention in 1908, and which chose Britain as a major manufacturing base in the 1930s.

In 1931, Hoover commissioned Wallis, Gilbert and Partners, a British architectural practice that also designed other Art Deco buildings such as the Old Vinyl Factory in Hayes, to build a factory in Perivale as the base for the company's British wing.

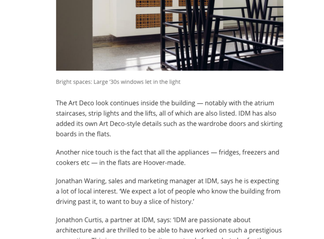


Enter in style: The building's front door

The result is the grand building which stands there today — a structure boasting an imposing, palatial façade of huge columns and recessed bay windows and a dramatic geometric central entrance with its distinctive sunburst pattern. The factory opened in 1933, employing more than 600 staff.

In 1980, the building was given Grade II-listed status, but Hoover switched its production to a site in Scotland soon after, and the premises began to fall into disrepair. Fortunately, the supermarket giant Tesco acquired the site in 1990, rescuing the building and opening a supermarket within it.

In 2013, developer IDM acquired the front of the building and after a prolonged period of planning, began work on converting the front into flats in June last year. Tesco has retained the back for its store but sold its offices, which were located in the front side, to IDM.



The Deco's in the details: Distinct design touches are all around

When it is complete in December, there will be 66 apartments — 22 studios, 18 one-bedroom flats, 25 two-bedders and one three-bedroom flat. Prices start at a very reasonable £295,000 and go up to £649,995 for the three-bedroom property, while service charges work out at £3.50 per sq ft per year.

Site manager Noel McCloughlin has been tasked with creating these properties while retaining the building's unique heritage. He says he has some experience of a project like this — he restored a courthouse in Sligo, in his native Ireland — but has been finding constant challenges on the Hoover building and has had heritage officers making regular visits to ensure his team keeps within the strict regulations set out by its listed status.

Going up: Unique details have been restored

Restoring the façade to its former glory is obviously chief among these challenges. This has involved replacing tiles, bringing in specialists to repair the original Crittal windows and sourcing the exact colour of green paint used on the window casings, walls and tiles when the building was constructed in the early 1930s, which required the hiring of 'archaelogical paint investigators'.

He has also had the headache of carrying out a major construction project cheek by jowl with a very busy supermarket that takes £1million a week. He says the fact that the ground floor of the three-storey building is smaller than the average width of the entire structure has also proved a challenge for construction, as has the fact that he had to rearrange the servicing pipes.

All of the properties have a secondary glazing added to ensure the din of the M40 doesn't prove to be an unwelcome fact of life for residents — and this means that none of the windows in the flats open, though there are doors to access outdoor balconies. There is also a roof terrace available to all residents.

Bright spaces: Large '30s windows let in the light

The Art Deco look continues inside the building — notably with the atrium staircases, strip lights and the lifts, all of which are also listed. IDM has also added its own Art Deco-style details such as the wardrobe doors and skirting boards in the flats.

Another nice touch is the fact that all the appliances — fridges, freezers and cookers etc — in the flats are Hoover-made.

Jonathan Waring, sales and marketing manager at IDM, says he is expecting a lot of local interest. 'We expect a lot of people who know the building from driving past it, to want to buy a slice of history.'

Jonathon Curtis, a partner at IDM, says: 'IDM are passionate about architecture and are thrilled to be able to have worked on such a prestigious renovation. This is a rare opportunity — not only for us, but also for the future Hoover Building residents — to be part of something special.'

Hoover Building,

Western Avenue, Perivale UB6 8DW

66 apartments: 22 studios,

18 one-beds, 25 two-beds and one three-bed, £295,000 to £649,995

Completion date: December 2017

Commuting time: 28 minutes to Oxford Circus

Annual travelcard: £1,842

- **hooverbuilding-ub6.com**