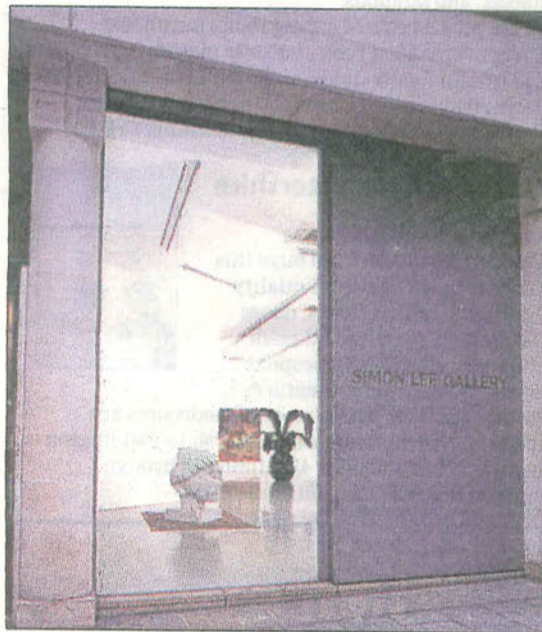




The first-class male



The exterior of Howick Place retains its business-like look



The Simon Lee Gallery is incorporated into Howick Place

A top Italian designer has transformed a Victorian Royal Mail depot into a stunning homes-and-arts complex. By **David Spittles**

WHEN the man who created Milan's Zona Tortona — the world's leading Italian design district — cherry picks an unlikely pocket of central London to be a new creative quarter with art galleries, design studios and boutique apartments, you know the neighbourhood will quickly be reinvented. For his first project outside Italy Alessan-

'It injects glamour into what was a dull enclave of MPs living in mansion blocks'

dro Cajrati Crivelli bought, three years ago, the handsome red-brick Victorian former Royal Mail sorting office in the civil service heartland of SW1. It originally had planning permission for 122 boxy flats. It would have been a "wasted opportunity", says the modest but inspirational Crivelli, who has transformed the depot behind windswept Victoria Street into a stunning 120,000sq ft arts complex with commercial space and spectacular loft apartments.

Noted furniture designer Marc Newson has set up a studio and home there, while contemporary art auction house Phillips de Pury has opened a 40,000sq ft showroom. Already the centre has become a venue for top fashion shows and photography exhibitions by the likes of Mario Testino and Annie Leibovitz.

Called Howick Place, the development injects glamour into an area beginning to jettison its image as a dull enclave for mansion-block-living MPs.

Burberry has chosen nearby Horseferry Road for its new headquarters, joining Channel Four, whose media execs and office workers have helped trigger new bar and restaurant openings. Even luxury developer Candy & Candy has moved from Knightsbridge to discreet new offices in the area.



The huge open-plan rooms of Howick Place capture Alessandro Crivelli's adage that, in a city like London, space is the ultimate luxury. Crivelli (top left), plans many other schemes in the capital

Shoreditch or perhaps Deptford would have been a more obvious address for the project given Crivelli's track record in Italy. Eight years ago Zona Tortona in Milan was an abandoned industrial district on the fringe of the city. Today it is a vibrant 3.25 million sq ft fashion neighbourhood where global brands such as Armani, Tod's and Ermenegildo Zegna have premises alongside television studios, advertising agencies and canalside cafés. Last week, during Milan's annual furniture fair, the district hosted 90 events, alone worth about

'London has a dynamic creative sector which can lead it out of the financial crisis'

£180 million to the local economy. Property values have risen dramatically since 2000.

Crivelli's vision enabled him to see the potential value of derelict buildings he could acquire for relatively little money.

"They were beautiful but affordable," he says. The first building to be converted was a Milan factory where gas meters were once made. He reinstated the original 82-ft ceiling heights and let the space to creative-

sector companies. Property, he says, is a way of indulging his passion for art and his entrepreneurial gift for making money. But he never lets the profit motive compromise his quest for good design. He has an obsession with volumetric space — "the ultimate luxury".

Crivelli, 45, commissioned architect Squire & Partners for Howick Place, and the firm has done a sensational job, retaining the industrial fabric of the building and overlaying it with clean-cut contemporary finishes such as copper and slate, polished concrete and machined oak. Huge open-plan spaces have cast-iron columns and girders and are lined by windows.

Originally, nine large loft apartments were planned but this number was reduced to five after Crivelli received requests for much bigger spaces. Only a giant 6,000sq ft shell remains for sale, ready for an art collector to do a bespoke fit-out. The price is £6 million. Call Estate4 on 020 7584 6383.

"Previously, the residential part of our developments was marginal but now it is my new interest," says Crivelli.

Finding another project — the right building in the right place — is Crivelli's new mission. He bid for the listed Commonwealth Institute in Kensington but lost

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Boutique apartments only 50 metres from Selfridges

BOUTIQUE flats are for sale alongside smart shops and fine art galleries in the vibrant heart of the capital. There is a strong link between luxury fashion and luxury property. SW7, which covers prime Knightsbridge, between Harrods and Harvey Nichols, is London's most expensive postcode. Next in the league table is the Mayfair pocket of W1 (Bond Street) followed by SW3 (King's Road) and W8 (around High Street Kensington).

For Selfridges fans, Picton Place could not be more convenient. This is a niche development of 14 apartments tucked away almost anonymously only 50 metres from the famous shop. It also has the cachet of being a Candy & Candy creation. Prices from £1.08 million. Call



Designed by Candy & Candy, Picton Place consists of 14 apartments hidden away only 50 metres from Selfridges on Oxford Street

Knight Frank for details on 020 7483 8349. Fitzrovia Apartments in Bolsover Street is close to the shops of Marylebone. There are 66 apartments plus four penthouses with large terraces. Prices from £650,000 to £4.25 million. Call Hamptons International on 020 7758 8479.



Modern "Charterhouse thesq" in Clerkenwell is surrounded by stylish furniture showrooms — useful for buyers of its 129 new apartments

Charterhouse thesq, in Clerkenwell, has become a design hub, with new furniture showrooms joining other local creative companies such as Bulthaup, Alexander McQueen and Boss Design. Flats (129 in total) start at £385,000. Call Currell Residential on 020 7253 2533.

who delivers



Hairdresser Adee Phelan says: "If you live in London, you have to live in the centre." That's why he pays £4,000 a month to rent an apartment with a roof terrace in Seven Dials, near his Covent Garden celebrity salon. "It is worth every penny," he adds. "I save on travelling costs and have more spare time." The main local freeholder is property company Shaftesbury, which has interests in Carnaby Street and Soho, and has a policy of encouraging independent retailers rather than chains

out to developer Chelsfield, which recently unveiled plans for a £150 million revamp to include 63 apartments and a new Design Museum.

Because of the banking collapse, London is at a crossroads, believes Crivelli, who has a home in Chelsea as well as his native Milan: "If London continues to rely on financial services, it is lost," he says.

No longer is London a workshop for the world but it has a dynamic creative sector, which can lead the city out of the crisis, he believes.

However, as in Milan, where small design businesses get special treatment from the authorities, he says London needs strategic support from its planners and politicians.

Certainly there are lessons for London.

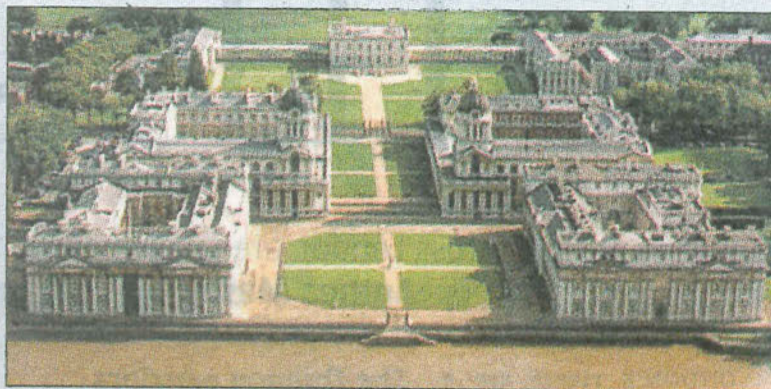
Milan is synonymous with design flair and quality products and has remained Italy's business capital in spite of the death of heavy industry. Large tracts of land have been freed up for redevelopment and the city is undergoing an architectural renaissance.

"When you think of Italy's mafia-and-spaghetti image in the 1960s and see the turnaround that has taken place, it makes me feel so proud. London is a creative design capital, it has become a winner over the last two decades and I'm relishing the challenge in London."

For more property news visit homesandproperty.co.uk

SMART MOVES

Meantime, in Greenwich...



Magnificent Greenwich Park offers some of the most spectacular views in the capital

SWEEPING views of the River Thames and Canary Wharf from the heights of majestic Greenwich Park are among the best in London — and can now be enjoyed from the private and communal terraces of a new apartment complex nestling in a wooded plot right alongside the park.

Called Seren Park, the development of 174 flats is a welcome modern addition to the gracious old naval town, a Unesco World Heritage Site. Built on elevated yet secluded land, the flats are in connected blocks forming a horseshoe shape, with a raised piazza-style courtyard below which is a car park.

The architecture — timber-cladding and crisp white render — harmonises well with the surroundings. The leafy setting borders allotments running alongside the platform of Maze Hill train station (less than 10 minutes

to London Bridge) to which there is direct access.

Aware that these are value-for-money times, Urban Solutions, the developer, has come up with a smart, above-average design package.

Bright and tasteful, the open-plan interiors have solid oak floors and Poggenpohl kitchens with Miele appliances. Prices start at £215,000 and rise to £625,000 for three-bedroom penthouses. And there is a 24-hour concierge. Call 0800 085 1577.

Several other developments are under way in Greenwich town centre, which, to the irritation of many locals, caters mainly for tourists flocking to the Cutty Sark, Maritime Museum and Royal Observatory.

Rubicon, a redevelopment of a former council estate right next to Greenwich train station, offers cheaper homes, from £190,000 to £328,400. Call King Sturge on 020 7715 9723.

Greenwich Creekside is the first residential phase of a new "creative quarter" being built on derelict land around the Laban Dance Centre. Eventually there will be 800 homes.

Plans include a jazz venue, galleries and canalside bars and restaurants. Telford Homes has launched Adagio



From £215,000: flats with Canary Wharf views from private or communal terraces at Seren Park, Greenwich. Call 0800 085 1577

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[†] Monthly payment is based on a 30% share purchase of £39,750 (£3,975 minimum deposit required) on a 1 bedroom apartment at Park 25 valued at £132,500. Balance of monthly payment includes estimated monthly mortgage payments, monthly rent of £154.58 payable on the unpurchased share (at 2% pa) and estimated monthly service charges. Prices and availability are correct at time of printing. Mortgage financing is subject to qualifying, availability at time of completion and individual circumstances. APR may differ according to the size of the mortgage. For advice on mortgage financing, availability, terms and conditions please refer to an Independent Financial Advisor.

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