

“LFA2022 Showroom Showcase (Second Edition)” Podcast Transcript – LFA Building Sounds

0:03 Intro

Eliza: Hello and welcome back to Building Sounds, the podcast exploring the stories behind some of the key buildings and projects in our city. Brought to you by the London Festival of Architecture, I’m your host Eliza Grosvenor.

In this episode, we’re exploring another project that forms part of LFA 2022, Showroom Showcase and hearing the conversation behind the design.

Now in its second year, Showroom Showcase is a design competition that sees a series of innovative paper installations by emerging architects and designers displayed in some of London’s leading design showrooms.

We start in Marylebone with Unfurled and Lateral Flow and then head over to Clerkenwell for Choose Love and the Floating Column.

The conversations can be listened to from the comfort of your own home, however for the best experience recommend seeing the installation on site as part of a self-guided walking tour. As you walk between the installations, you’ll be able to pause the episode and restart in the next location.

When you’re ready, Lisa, Sophia and Simon will share the story of their collaboration.

1:12 UNFURLED by HAGENHINDERDAEL @ Gaggenau

Simon: My name is Simon Plumbridge and I’m the category manager for Gaggenau.

Gaggenau is a luxury domestic appliance brand founded in 1683, which actually makes us one of the oldest appliance brands in the world and Gaggenau has actually a place just in the bottom of the Black Forest, right on the outskirts of Baden-Baden.

And right from our brand inception from making nails as an iron foundry, right up today it's always been our confidence to work with the best materials using the best processes to produce the best products.

Speaker 2: We are HAGENHINDERDAEL, that's Lisa Hinderdael and Sophia Hagen. We're originally architects by training and started our studio in 2020, focusing on product design and feature installations, which always have the incentive of a continuous afterlife.

So all the products are made reusing materials-waste, materials repurposing, materials turning them into high-end design and at the same time the installations consist of elements that can then be repurposed and live on.

Speaker 3: The installation is called UNFURLED and we were really driven by looking at the Gaggenau's core principles as a brand and how they really align with what we do and our sustainable narrative.

So the big thing we looked at was we wanted to see if we could take the old catalogues from Gaggenau, recycle them and use them as the feature part of our installation.

As a concept we look a lot at the Bauhaus teachings of 'form following function', so everything is very simplistic and minimal in its aesthetic but very powerful in its design, so the way that we use mirrors reflects and refracts the books and the catalogues and as you walk by you get glimpses of appliances in the folds and you can then see those in the background in the showroom itself.

Speaker 2: All the mirrors we're using are also repurposed from previous installations we've done, so we always look after what we use, so the mirrors, the special lighting effects etc that's all repurposed and hopefully can live on afterwards as well.

Speaker 3: We knew we wanted something where the installation takes a lot of hours to make, it's very beautifully crafted and done by hand, blending craftsmanship and what Gaggenau does in terms of loving attention to detail, so in the process of creating each element we take the catalogue, we meticulously fold each page and we create a kind of thickened spine within the book so it furls out and it becomes this unfurled shape as the name of the installation.

Speaker 2: We had the idea quite early on to use the origami techniques of deconstructing the catalogues, folding them in certain ways, which also works with the mirrors because the way you fold the paper, it shows you different refractions, different sides of the appliances and different side of the design, but at the same time we were quite meticulous in terms of 'okay what fits in?'

We did a proper survey, we actually modelled it all and so we had a blend of 3D modelling, playing around with the composition quite a lot beforehand, so we knew exactly how many catalogues we need to be as efficient as possible. Then the next step was getting hands-on and folding but you know it's also a way of being efficient and not creating anyway.

Simon: I think from a Gaggenau point of view as well and absolutely appropriately you know that narrative of sustainability, about how we can make sure that we're doing everything we can in those areas.

I'd love to sit here and say everything we do is zero waste, we're not there yet, we're on the journey, we're working hard, we're doing everything that we can as we can, and I'm proud to say, you know, we're owned by a bigger group and that bigger group now, you know, we've been carbon neutral for I think the last 16 or 17 months and for an organisation the size of ours with the amount of manufacturing that we do and the markets we sell into, it's a phenomenal achievement, it's a start we're by no means completed it, but we're on that journey doing the right things and for that message to be the narrative of this particular London Festival of Architecture, it's just perfect for us.

If you're outside looking at the installation or you're scanning the QR code, you're listening to this, please feel free come inside, touch, feel and experience it.

5:53 Lateral Flow by WallaceLiu @ Siemens Home London

Paul: Hi, I'm Paul, I'm the showroom manager for the Siemens London Showroom. We do consultancy work for retailers, so all of the kitchen retailers and nationally we work with.

I've been with the company about 18 months, so not too long, so I've been on the journey from the beginning and I was brought on board to help establish Siemens London as a showroom on Wigmore Street which is really a hub for kitchen retailers and kitchen designers.

Jee: So this is Jee Liu, from WallaceLiu. We are a Camden-based architecture firm.

Jamie: Hi my name is Jamie Wallace and I am also a director at WallaceLiu and our project is called Lateral Flow.

Jamie: So yeah, the project is called Lateral Flow, and it uses this kind of scientific paper that changes its colour when a substance is applied to it.

The most famous type of this paper is the Litmus Test Paper, and it's used in industry and medicine to measure the pH of a substance.

But of course, over the last years, the words 'lateral flow' have become synonymous with the tests that we've all had to undertake and are based on the same fundamental principles.

So the proposition we made was to explore this type of paper through the making of this installation. It's aesthetic and tectonic qualities, the way a liquid moves through it, how it reveals invisible properties through the way it changes colour and texture.

And I guess, fundamentally, it is about the shared experience and memory we have of these tests and how this kind of paper impacted on all of our lives during the pandemic.

Jee: Jamie's done a wonderful introduction in terms of where the idea came from and the definition of lateral flow and how much it has influenced our lives during Covid.

I was quite interested in how, artistically, we can provide an edge to it. So in that research process, it reminds me, the process of how paper reacted to the chemical substance with a particular pH and how quickly that was absorbed and evaporated as well as soaked on the paper and reminds me of Chinese ink reacts with paper and somehow that's one of the most beautiful functions I think paper provides to art.

So that then led me to think of some references, for example, this Korean artist called Kwon Young-Woo and the so-called Dansaekhwa movement that happened during the 1980s where these were the pioneers who tested how paper reacted to traditional ink.

The start of the idea, we tested, but somehow, what was always missing, was this motion - this kind of calmness and motion of watching the colour develop on the paper and the natural result, it would appear without too much of our manipulation in terms of just watching the process going.

And we came up with an idea of using some sort of pendulum device which carries a tube of wet surface and that would touch the paper, and as it touched the paper, the reaction would happen and as the device moves away from the paper, it would temporarily allow it to just slowly descend into this image.

And the motion of watching this device touching the paper and letting go is almost as if applying ink onto the paper.

So there is a level of control and precision going on, but on the other hand when it touches the paper and exactly how the colour would generate and how it would grow within the paper carries a lot of unknown factors and that's exactly what is exciting.

Jamie: Yeah, I think I completely agree with what you just said in this idea of it being a kind of resolution of engineering and aesthetics, to kind of bring those two things together - the technology or the engineering behind it with what it

actually looks like, is fundamentally what architecture is and it's absolutely what Siemens are about as well.

Paul: I've been in retail a very long time and I've been working with luxury furniture manufacturers and all sorts of different things from beautiful design to fantastic engineering companies, and the one thing I've learnt over time is to actually get people to stop and look and think and just to stop people because everybody these days is in a rush and they're always running around frantically.

And I always find just getting people to stop, whether it's to stop and look at something or to stop and have a coffee or just to stop and think for a minute, it's a really healthy thing to do, and to have a reason to stop is the whole point.

So to give people a reason to stop to see this installation is really interesting to me because what's more interesting is that we're going to have some of the same people walking past this window every single day, in the morning and in the evening, and there's a really good chance this is going to be different every single time so there's more reasons to stop every single day just to stop and take it in. And to collaborate with these guys with the engineering aspect, as well as the design and aspect, is for me a really incredible collaboration.

And bringing attention to our showroom is only going to bring attention to our brand, so for me it's a win-win. It gives me this fantastic point of interest that I'm going to enjoy everyday, but hopefully everyone else will as well, and you know, behind the door, is Siemens.

Jamie: I don't think there's much more to add from what Paul said. Siemens have given us just the entire freedom to do what we wanted with their window which has been a great pleasure and is very unusual.

So it's been very enjoyable and I hope it makes people curious and I hope that people find that it's beautiful and intriguing.

12:23 Choose Love, by It's a local collective with Tom Tse @ Billi

Jay: So I'm Jay McLeod, I'm the commercial team manager at Billi, and at Billi what we supply is commercial boiling and chilled office taps.

It's an Australian company that came over to the UK, probably 8 years ago now and it's been growing ever since.

One of our key things that we like to focus on is sustainability and we have a really super energy efficient product.

Lisa: I am Lisa, I am an interdisciplinary designer, curator and educator.

In 2020 I founded 'It's a local collective'. It's an art and architectural collective about creating objects and spaces that bring people together. Our projects are about building resilient social relationships and sustainable constructions.

Tom: I'm Tom, I'm an architectural assistant at BDP, I'm a paper-cut artist and practicing printmaker.

Lisa: The name of our installation is Choose Love.

Lisa: So, Choose Love celebrates the power of paper and words and the relationship of human and river, it tells the mythical tale of life underwater, praising the beauty and importance of the river's ecosystem.

It is a value we share deeply with Billi. Inspired by a tradition in both of our East Asian cultures, Fai Chun calligraphy written on decorative paper as blessings to carry into the new year, Choose Love is also a meticulously carved blessing.

With everything going on in the past two years, with Choose Love we want to create a beautiful interactive reminder that love is a choice, it is an action.

Tom: For this piece, we use a combination of laser cutting and hand cut paper techniques.

I specialise in paper art and a lot of people question about like how delicate is paper and I think people have the misconception of how strong paper can be, so I did something for a Chinese New Year and we made these Chinese scroll texts called Fai Chun.

I asked a lot of people I know to hold up a piece of Fai Chun to celebrate the change of year, making people understand the materiality and also trying to bring people in and having to interact with the paper and the finished pieces, and I thought that was quite an interesting interaction between paper and community.

Lisa: When we visited Billi's showroom we were wonderfully guided through the tour of their products and the projects that they're working on and a lot of the projects had a great focus on public access to water and the concept of sustainability to reduce the use of one-time plastic bottles, so listening to all these shared value on sustainability and public access drinking water near the Thames, we decided to also create a narrative in our installation that puts emphasis on Rivertown's ecosystem or more generally a river's ecosystem and how we could be more sustainable in our co-living with nature.

So in our installation we created a story of life underwater, you could see children swimming with the fish, mushrooms growing below the water, these are all life that are important to the river's ecosystem.

Fish, shrimps, mushrooms, plants and they very heavily depend on our actions and how we choose to treat our river, therefore with this installation we want to celebrate the life and also to draw attention to the importance of nurturing the growth of the reverse ecosystem, which draws to our overall concept as well that is choose love, to remind everyone that love is a choice, it is our action.

Jay: And just following on from that so I suppose the reason why Billi got involved in this project and why we selected Tom and Lisa, because touching on what they've already said we definitely have a shared interest in reducing single-use plastic and sustainability, so I guess the impact we want to have on our showroom, but also on the local communities we want something that's a bit different, that people can take a look at and get a story from but that also equally ties into those messages that we're trying to promote as well.

Billi as a brand is very design-led and we want to show that we're more than just taps and we're more than just water, we can be designed in all kinds of interesting ways.

Jay: I guess one of the things from my side that I'd like to say is obviously it's a visual thing that people are going to see as they walk past, but please feel free to come in and I'll be happy to discuss it from my perspective but also put them in touch with Tom and Lisa and do that networking thing.

17:14 The Floating Column by SpaceA @ Vitra

Nicola: Hi my name is Nicola Friel, I'm the showroom manager for Vitra London.

Vitra is a Turkish manufacturer of bathroom ceramics, furniture, brassware and tiles, we've been in the UK for 30 years this year, and we are celebrating our first year in London as well after opening our design hub here in Clerkenwell.

Amelia: Hello my name is Amelia Hunter and I am the co-founder of Studio Space A. Together with Anna Drakes we founded our design studio in 2018, we have named our installation The Floating Column and we're based in Vitra showroom near Farringdon.

Amelia: So I guess our starting point was the fact that Vitra's showroom ceilings are so beautifully tall, at five meters height. We really wanted to design an installation that had impact and accentuated that beautiful asset, that's the spatial asset.

So we were looking at an elongated piece, something that could fill the vertical space and for that reason we were drawn to a column shape, we also enjoyed the fact that its reference is such an important and integral architectural aspect, the column, which has many manifestations back to classical times.

We also wanted to weave in, and excuse the pun there, a way of talking about colour and how it might start to connect back to emotions in space, so we were starting with this column, we were starting with colour and weaving and talking about complexity, and after playing with different bits of paper we came across toilet rolls.

What was funny really is that our initial link to toilet paper was not because Vitra was a bathroom showroom, it was actually because I was in our studio and I was just sort of picking up stuff and I happened to just pick up some toilet rolls.

And I thought actually it flows in quite a beautiful way, in fact toilet paper is something that is as close to fabric as you can get in paper, and therefore it has quite a fluid way of how it gathers together and how it forms folds, which spatially and form-wise was really interesting to Anna and myself.

So it wouldn't really appear it but the sort of very natural link between a bathroom showroom and toilet paper was not the first connection we had in mind, it was more the colour, the rounded forms, the height and something that could, I guess, stick out in the showroom as much as possible and be something that catches people's eye really, that was the starting point for all of us and something we wanted to bring to this year's Showroom Showcase.

Where Vitra showroom is placed is on that route down to Farringdon so a lot of people will be taking a walk and just in their day-to-day lives, for us it would be great if people could spend a bit longer than usual just stopping, looking in, it's an opportunity to put a pause in your day-to-day life and to think along the lines of something that you wouldn't think usually, so I guess it's something that's a little bit extraordinary, it's got the sort of slight wacky appeal where someone will be like 'oh actually there's a toilet roll chandelier', which was another name we were thinking of calling it but we thought that was a bit obvious.

So yeah essentially by referring back to something that's seen as quite grand but then using toilet paper, suddenly you're starting to have this interesting juxtaposition between what material means and its value, because often we just throw it away and don't think about it at all.

How can we celebrate this thing which actually can create such beautiful fold and by arraying it it's something quite extraordinary and I certainly won't see toilet paper in the same way again.

Nicola: For Vitra, what we are hoping is for people to walk past it and catch their eye and just take that minute to look at it and be intrigued by it and then to come in and have a conversation and discuss it. I think what's going to be really nice about it is that we are on a very busy thoroughfare through Farringdon, it's

very easy when people are rushing to pass by so if it does capture someone's attention just for a minute, for them to take a look and really explore it and it isn't a product, it's something to start a conversation and build upon.

We did take part last year it was just really inspiring to see what could be done from paper and seeing what was done across the other showrooms.

It was so varied that we were just really keen to do it again this year and see what else we could achieve, so yeah we've been really excited to be in the programme again and working with Amelia and Anna. And we're just really interested to see how people respond over the course of the time that the installation is in.

Amelia: One last thing, what we'd really like to do is because one of the parts of the brief was to be able to recycle this piece, we've got to be very good at rolling the piece back up again but it would be great if the toilet paper could actually be used either by the future staff in their showroom or they say studio will just have coloured toilet paper for a while, but part of the joy of the piece is it can be recycled truly without going into a recycle bin, so that is something we would like to see when we take it down, that we try and reuse every piece or even if it's just used for cleaning or something, that's something really important to us.

Nicola: Working in a bathroom showroom, we do have some very awkwardly British conversations about shower toilets and bidet functions and things like that but it is a place where you can have that, you can have it with humour and it does need to be approached so people do tend to then suddenly, once you get past that initial tittering and have more honest conversations about what they use and what they don't. You know things like the shower toilets, they are because of the the cleaning function the fans within them they do reduce the use of toilet paper so if we can then properly reuse and recycle the materials that are being used, it just ties into that whole story.

Amelia: I listened to a very good podcast a while ago and there's a lot, a lot a lot of reasons that toilet paper should not be used because of hygiene and because of the planet and although we have this bamboo stuff now arguably like a lot of hygiene issues could be solved if we didn't use toilet paper and it seems like a win-win.

Obviously during the Covid lockdown toilet paper played a very important role because there was a mass panic buying spree of the material and by using a coloured material which we found supplied in Portugal, we wanted to create a slightly different angle and allow people to see it in a different way whilst also creating an aesthetic visual effect and as we like to call a joyful beacon with which to just start a new debate and conversation about the role that toilet paper plays both environmentally but also in its necessity and future in moving forward in our daily lives.

Nicola: We decided you could all come down to see the installation in place in the showroom and chat about it.

We are open Monday to Friday, so you're welcome to come in at any point to come and have a chat with the team and see the installation.

22:46 Outro

Eliza: You've been listening to Building Sounds. To learn more about the installations head to [LFA.london/ss](https://lfa.london/ss).

It's festival month so we'll be back with a new episode next week kicking off our Key Actors series exploring the key people and projects shaping the Royal Docks.

Until then if you've enjoyed this episode and would like to listen to more of our conversations, search for Building Sounds on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you find your favourite podcasts.