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BUILDING Showcase: three Mayfair galleries by David Kohn Architects

Stephen Friedman Gallery, Thomas Dane Gallery and Sotheby's S/2. Report: Chris Foges. Photos: Ioana Marinescu.

Contemporary art dealers are conservative in their architectural preferences. Most galleries conform to one of two long-established models: the capacious and characterful industrial building, presented as found, or the window-less white cube where, as Brian O'Doherty noted 40 years ago, sequestration from the outside world helps to sanctify the art. In three new galleries in Mayfair, David Kohn Architects has sensitively combined aspects of both types, at a domestic scale, with traces of material richness added to the mix.

Each of the three is an offshoot from an existing institution: a new gallery for Stephen Friedman faces the gallerist's principal space across Old Burlington Street; a ground-floor showroom for Thomas Dane is a few doors along from his first-floor headquarters on Duke Street; and S/2 sits across George Street from Sotheby's, and was established by

the auction house to sell work from private collections in a gallery setting.

Along with a nearby gallery for Stuart Shave (2008, AT191), they form a recognisable family. In part, this is a product of circumstance: all were created from small-ish retail units with offices above, limiting the possibility for occluded, toplit spaces and inviting some relationship to the outside.

DKA has embraced this condition, and each of the galleries is open to the street to an unusual degree – visually, at least. This is especially noticeable in the cases of S/2 and Thomas Dane, whose shopfronts are at back of pavement. At both, DKA was keen to introduce a buffer between street and gallery to

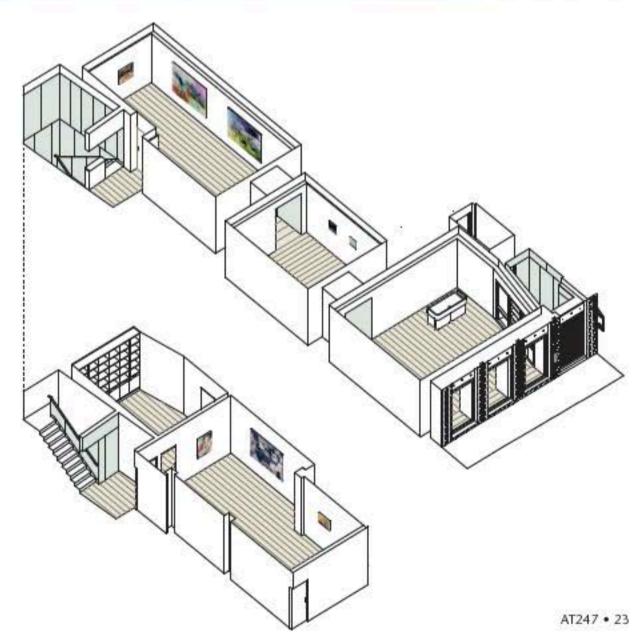
Above Vitrine and reception desk at Sothebys' S/2 gallery, which occupies the ground floor and basement of a 1970s office building. The shot-blasted aluminium windows are a new addition.

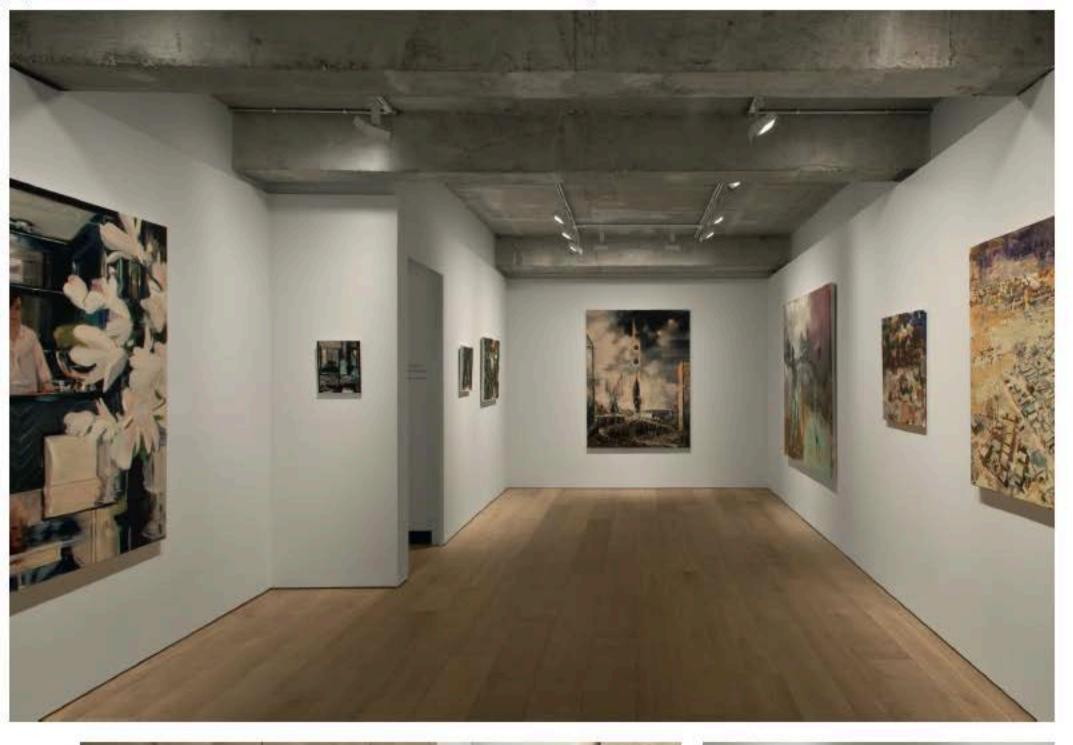
Right Shutters to street door at S/2; axonometric projection.

















encourage a change of pace before entering, and 'to make the galleries feel less like shops and more like showrooms – part of something larger,' says David Kohn. From the street, doors open onto vestibules, separated from the galleries by glass and timber screens comprising an inner door and a vitrine.

The material of the screens is picked up in furniture also designed by DKA. At Thomas Dane, the reception desk takes the form of a fold-up table on the back of the dark-stained

Above, left Ground-floor galleries, sycamore-lined stairs to basement and basement office at Sotheby's S/2.

oak display case. The combined piece is large enough to ground the workspace within the open plan of the gallery. At S/2, a compact, Beidermeier-inspired desk facing the shop window is veneered in Italian sycamore taken from thin trees whose buffeting by the wind has produced a strong figuration. The silky silver-grey wood reappears later as panelling to the stairwell leading to the basement gallery and office, and lines the notably deep door reveals that also appear in the Freidman and Shave galleries.

The reveals draw attention to the thickness of the partitions, which neatly conceal existing columns but also underline the distinction between rooms, so that at Stephen Friedman's gallery there is a convincing independence to the three well-proportioned spaces carved from one small shop. At S/2, openings between the three rooms on the ground floor are offset from one another in



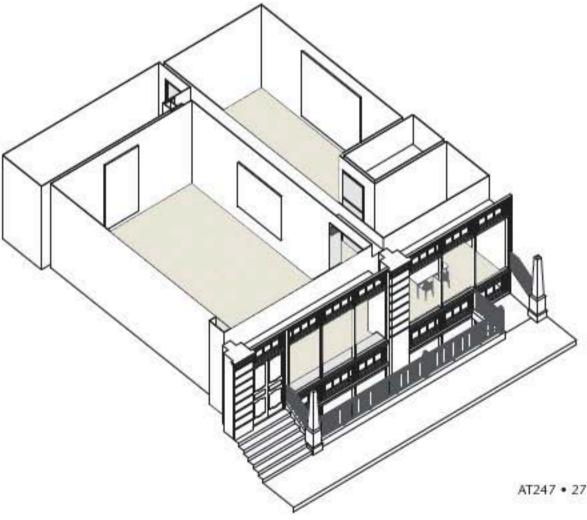




plan, allowing visitors quickly to forget the street as they move further into the interior.

They also assist in disguising services, a task whose difficulty is always in inverse proportion to the apparent simplicity of the architecture. In the handling of both ventilation and lighting, the galleries are variations on a theme: at Stephen Friedman the air intake is concealed within a new bulkhead installed behind existing shopfront grilles, and track lighting is fixed directly to white plaster ceilings. At S/2, where the lighting track sits on the exposed concrete soffit, wall linings are recessed at high level to make a datum just below the downstand beams and a hidden ledge for ventilation slots. At Thomas Dane, stripping out the remnants of earlier refurbs

Above Facade, view through main gallery space to reception desk, and smaller gallery at the Stephen Friedman Gallery. Painted mdf lines the door reveals, while coated plywood is used as flooring. Right Axonometric projection of the Stephen Friedman Gallery.

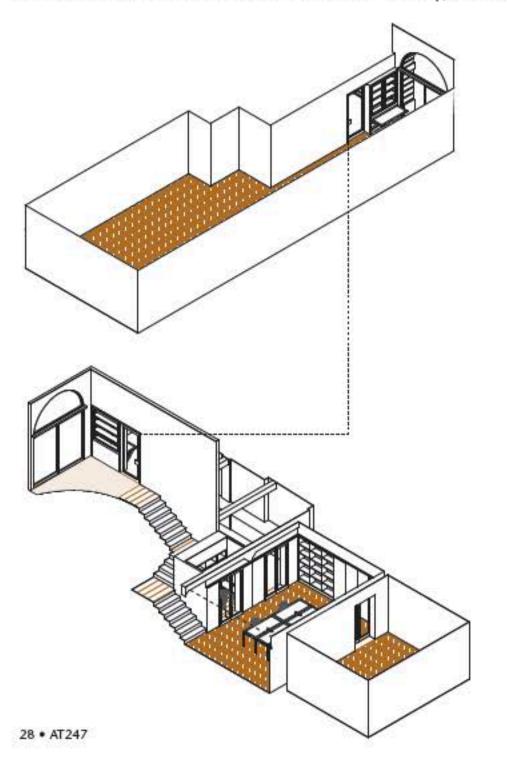




revealed even rougher concrete soffits, replete with neighbours' waste pipes. Here, the wall lining stops some distance short of the ceiling, and lighting is suspended at the

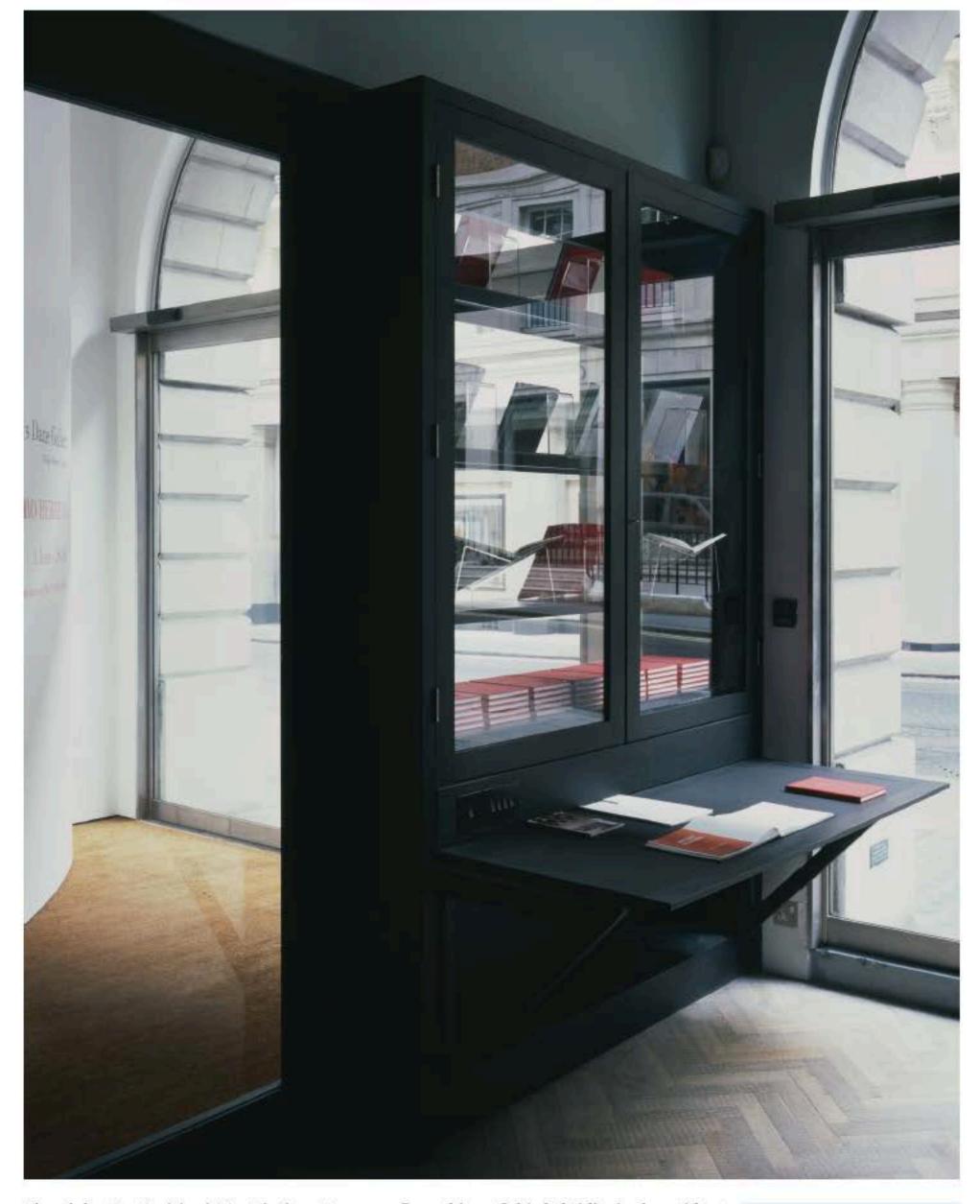
Above, below Ground-floor display space, facade and basement office at Thomas Dane Gallery; axonometric showing ground floor gallery and basement workshop, office and viewing room.

same height, presenting the simultaneous impression of the room 'as found' and, within it, the more refined features of the well-appointed display space.









Above, below Reception desk and vitrine at the Thomas Dane Gallery, Duke Street.



Something of this hybridity is also evident at S/2, where the scarred concrete is counterpointed both by sleek details – an electronic key sensor buried behind plaster, identified only by a discrete square incision on the surface – and by the warmth introduced by crafted or tactile elements, such as the heavy milled aluminium shutters or the roughened engineered oak floor over whose surface a saw blade has bounced against the grain. The success of all three projects stems from a fluent handling of type and place, and the ability to make something that belongs to both, without fully conforming to either.

Thomas Dane Gallery
Architect: DKA; design team: David Kohn,
Tom McGlynn; main contractor: WORK;
m&e: Mendick Waring; qs. Jackson Coles;
Joinery: London Bespoke Joinery; oak floor:
Solid Floor; gallery lighting: Erco, tzé.

Stephen Friedman Gallery Architect: DKA; design team: David Kohn, Tom McGlynn; main contractor: REM Projects; m&e: Mendick Waring; gallery lighting: Erco; sign: Bellenden Signs.

Sotheby's S/2
Architect: DKA; design team: David Kohn,
Tom McGlynn, Joslane Imhof; main contractor: Parke Morrison Construction; mice:
Jared Engineering; qs: Rider Hunt; Joinery:
Gregory Joinery Projects; oak floor: Solid
Floor; lighting: Erco; front cloor, windows:
Advanced Glass Facades; veneer: Mundy
Veneer; sign: DMA Signs.