

'The London Cut'  
by Caroline Roux

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Thomas Croft didn't always want to be an architect. A child of the 1960s and 70s, advertising and film were at the forefront of the creative world when he was growing up, and names like Nicolas Roeg and David Bailey were the inspiration for a generation. But for Croft, the offspring of the 300-year-old port wine family that has commissioned many fine houses down the years, it was probably better to look elsewhere for that compelling combination of narrative, craft and intensity of detail that so seduced him in celluloid. He found it in architecture, where cultural weight, history and longevity are the other forces at play. While Croft declares with gentle English understatement, that 'I found I was quite good at it', his clients and admirers are more likely to say that the accumulation of his talents means he produces work that is remarkable for its clarity, originality and visual delight.

Englishness is a convenient starting point when considering Croft's work. His is not a sterile modernism or an extravagantly complex solution to the business of living, or working, or showing art (he has a series of successful galleries in his portfolio). Much of it has been executed within existing, older buildings, which he deftly brings up to date without any loss of their inherent charm and personality, or disregard for context. Just like London itself, from where he runs his practice, he shows that the historic and the contemporary can enhance each other's values when knitted together.

'New work should be appropriate without being literal. Something too self-effacing might be subtle, but not exciting. Unusual is good in architecture, and I enjoy creating surprises,' says Croft. Whether dealing with an august private institution like the Royal Yacht Squadron or an energetic younger art collector, such as the S&YP Contemporary Art Collection, his mission is to tailor his design to the clients' needs, but then exceed their expectations.

In fact, tailoring isn't such a bad comparison to draw. Just as having a suit made in Savile Row is about a fabulously discreet distillation of history, low-key glamour and extraordinary skill, Croft's work puts the systems of architecture at his clients' disposal. And after he has listened at length to their desires, he applies them, artfully.

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