

Me and my project

A fine art

Ken Crouch MCIQB, site manager at 39 Brook Street, tells us about demolition and decoration in a Grade II-listed building



Left: Ken Crouch is director of Nuway Construction

Below: 39 Brook Street's city-centre location made site access a challenge

It is not every day you get to manage a project as delicate, complex and historically significant as the refurbishment of 39 Brook Street in Mayfair. The building has been described as having “perhaps the best known and most influential interior in the history of English interior decoration”.

Originally built in 1720, the building had been headquarters for the interior design firm Colefax & Fowler from 1944 right up until 2016, when the lease was returned to the estate owner. The building undoubtedly enjoyed a fascinating history but needed a major refurbishment to warrant its deserved status as one of the most exquisite retail properties in Mayfair.

Before work commenced, we were engaged by the main contractor, Gaysha, for project and site management services, helping to identify the risks, create the works programme, coordinate all stakeholders and, ultimately, manage the site on a daily basis.

The key risks derived from the building's location, the nature of the

work, the historical significance of the building itself and the close proximity of other important stakeholders.

The site's location on a busy street in an affluent part of central London made access a challenge. Added to this, the 300-year-old, four-storey building needed a huge amount of structural support work, including basement excavations, while an underground river (the River Fleet) was found to be flowing very near by – so we had to closely monitor for any movement.

The most challenging aspect centred around the basement excavation. To level the complex warren of tunnels in the basement, we first needed to carefully remove 500

“We needed to carefully remove 500 tonnes of material from the basement without disturbing the neighbours or dropping any material on the pavements or on site”

tonnes of material from the basement without disturbing the neighbours (Claridge's Hotel), dropping any material on the pavements or on site, all while remaining sympathetic to the protected building interiors.

We achieved this by using a complex of eight travelators running from the basement, through the building, upstairs, out of a first-floor window, over the pavement and into the back of a truck.

Through careful management, accurately planned and timed truck changeovers and a strong team working tirelessly by hand in the basement, the whole process went without a hitch. It was a proud moment to stand opposite the site, watching this complex operation come together so silently and seamlessly.

Work to the rear courtyard involved taking up York stone slabs, relaying to new levels, and the construction of both a well-hidden HVAC system and lift shaft. The most delicate operation involved the removal and replacement of a rare 40ft Indian bean tree complete with tree preservation order from Westminster Council.

We completed our work in October 2019, handing over to the new tenant for the interior fit out. We are hugely proud of our contribution to this flagship project and look forward to seeing the end result when it opens to the public in 2021. ●

Ken Crouch is company director with Nuway Construction.

