

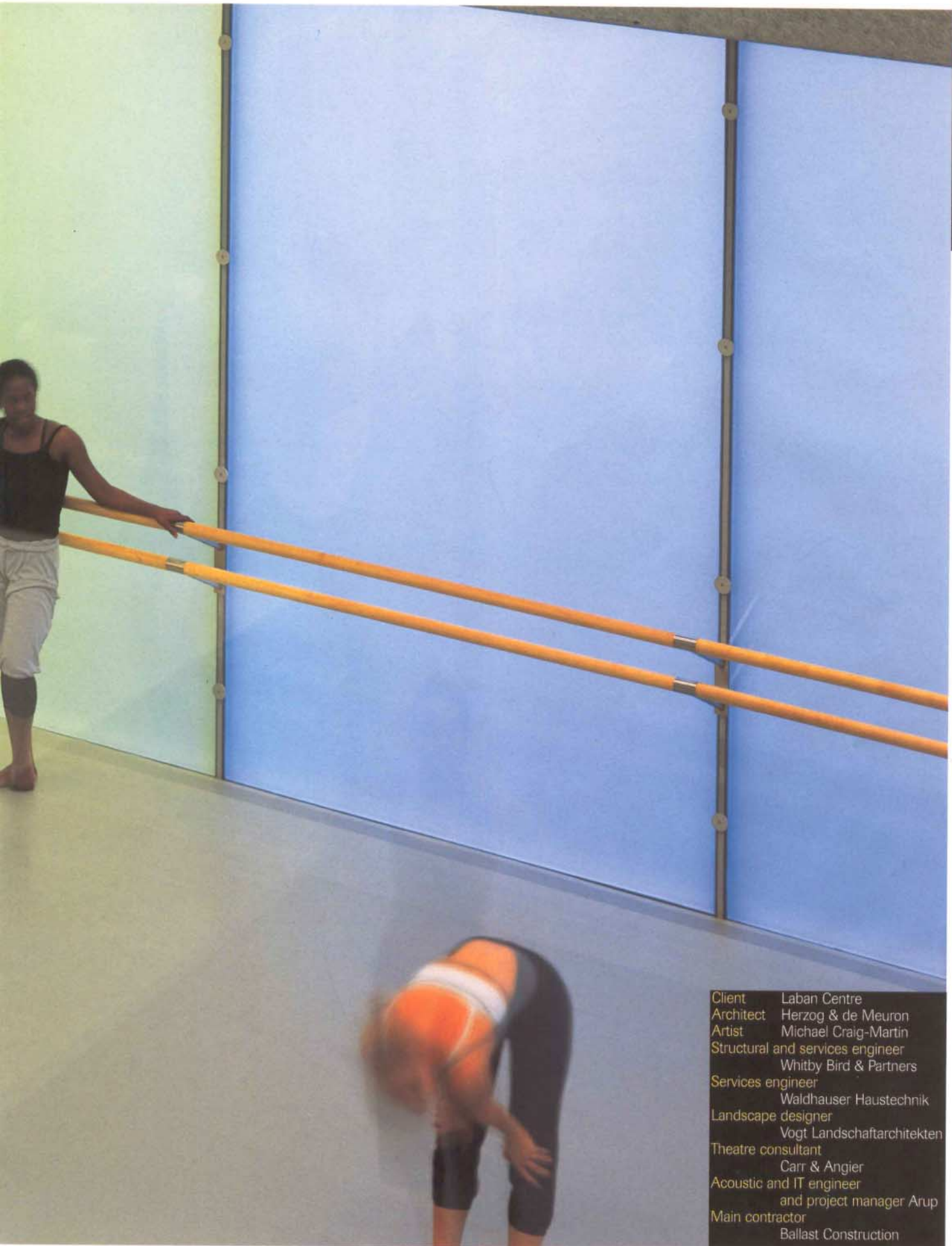
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Dancing feat Herzog & de Meuron's Laban Centre

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Client Laban Centre
Architect Herzog & de Meuron
Artist Michael Craig-Martin
Structural and services engineer
Whitby Bird & Partners
Services engineer
Waldhauser Haustechnik
Landscape designer
Vogt Landschaftsarchitekten
Theatre consultant
Carr & Angier
Acoustic and IT engineer
and project manager Arup
Main contractor
Ballast Construction



The translucent facade incorporates clear glass windows, so that each studio has a view out.



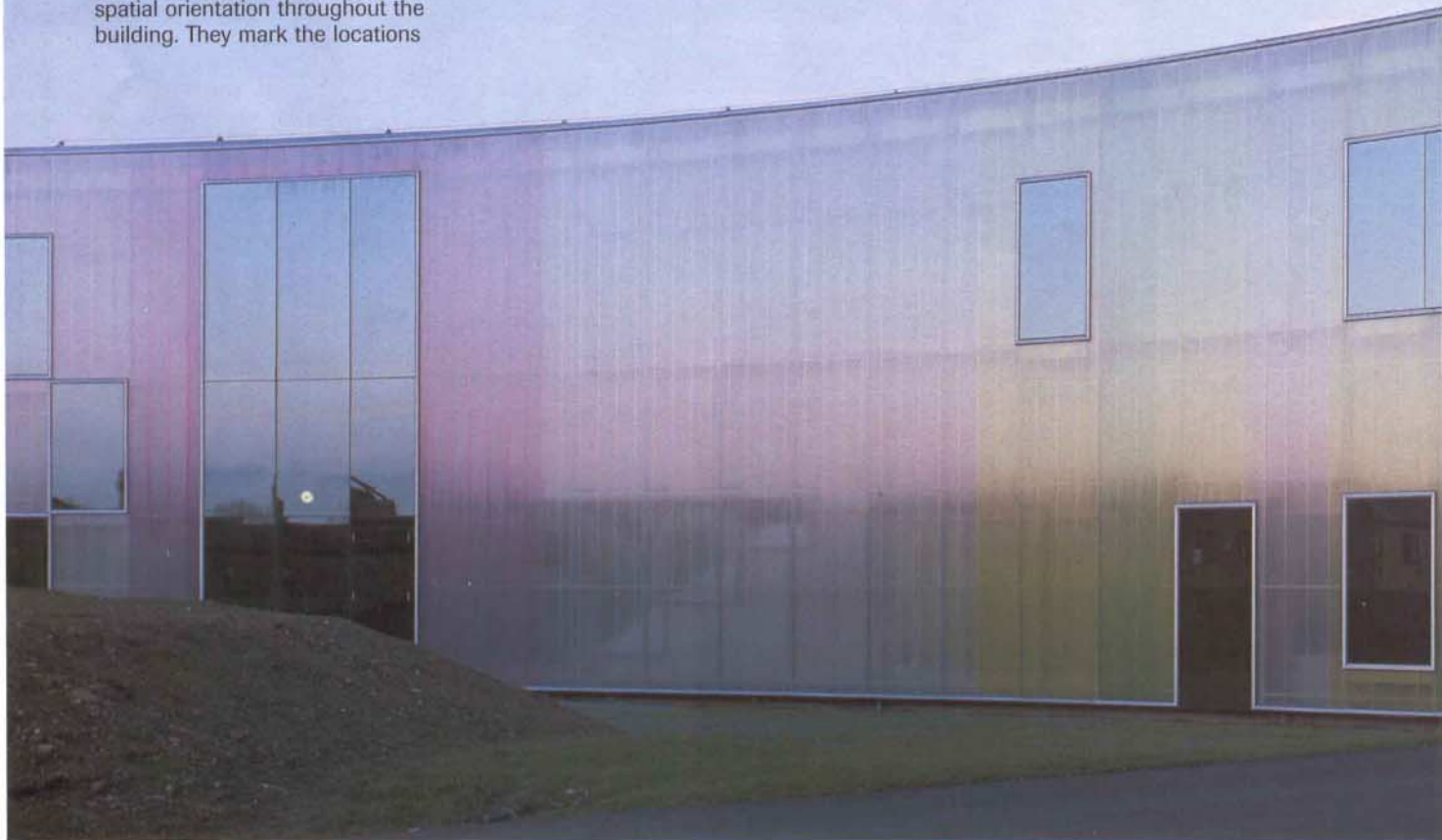
Two interior courtyards bring light – and the weather – into the centre of the building.

**The Laban and colour,
by Herzog & de Meuron**

Deptford's St Paul's Church is an important point of reference for the new complex. The large, embracing gesture of the Laban Centre volume gives the effect of creating a spatial limitation as well as a melting together of Laban Garden and Laban Centre. The topographically shaped structure of the garden finds corresponding qualities in the interior gestalt of the building.

All activities are intermixed and distributed on only two main levels. This promotes communication within the entire building. The large theatre, the heart of the Laban, is located in the centre of the building; the orientation point in the open 'cityscape' of the first floor. The library, cafeteria and also parts of the production facilities and the administration are, through the use of transparent and translucent walls, structured rather than separated. The upper storey houses most of the studios: a dense fabric, like an urban centre. Each studio has a different size, height, form and colour.

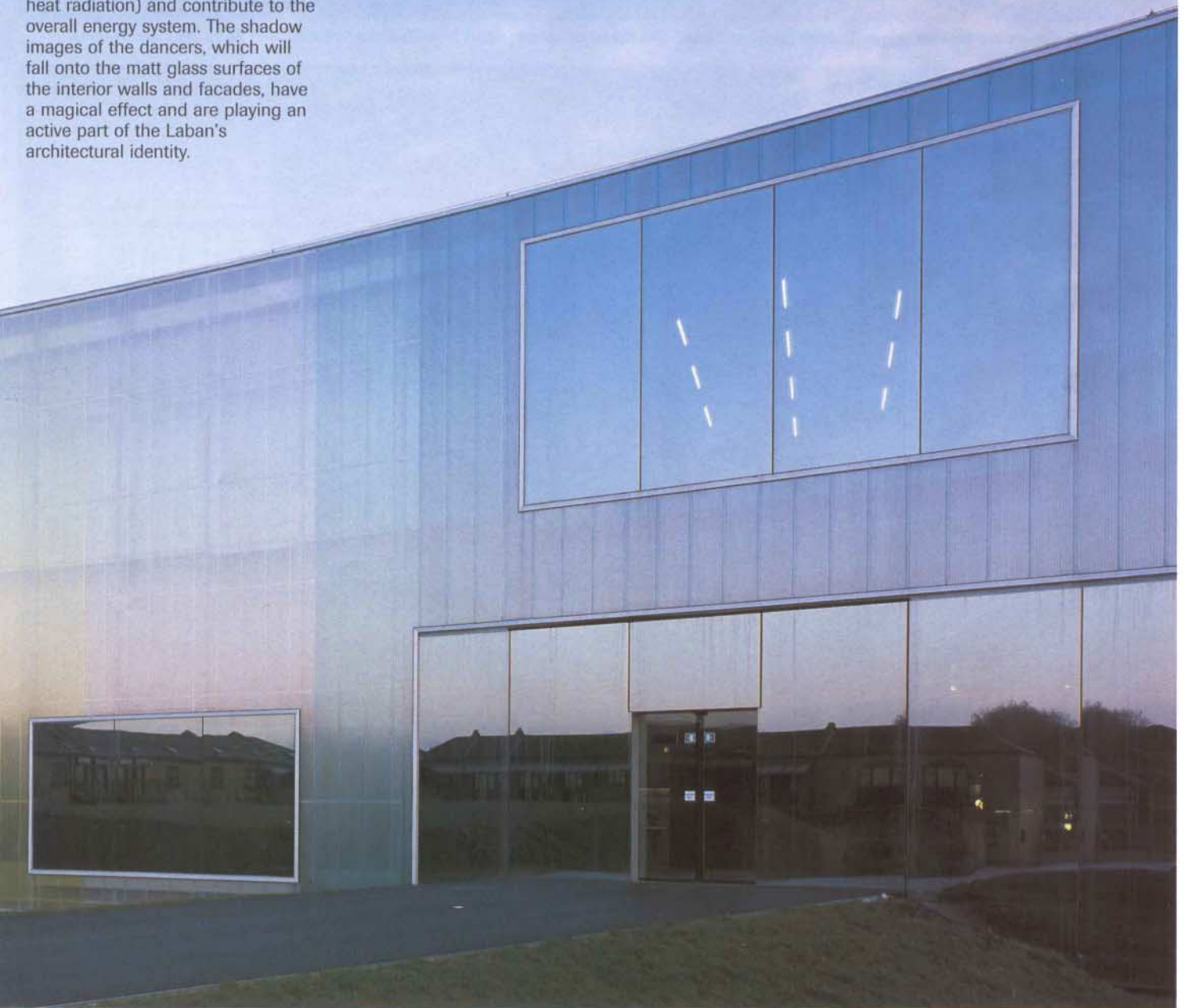
The two spiral-shaped connecting stairways are laid out generously enough to become places for encounters. Three planted yards are cut in at different depths; they provide daylight to the interior and enable visual connections and spatial orientation throughout the building. They mark the locations



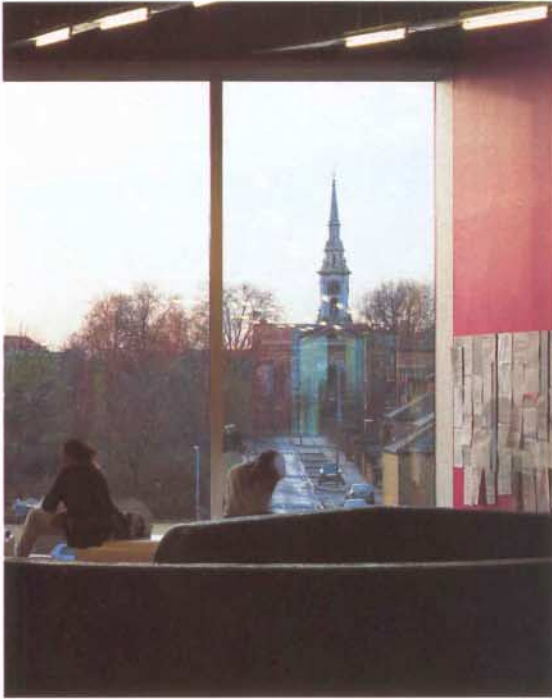
where the stairways access the main storeys and the planted roof area.

Colours determine the rhythm and orientation both inside and outside the building. Because we wanted to give colour such importance, we decided to collaborate with an artist. For the Laban Centre, we contacted Michael Craig-Martin, whose work we got to know and admire over the last few years, also because his approach to colour seemed so different from our previous experience.

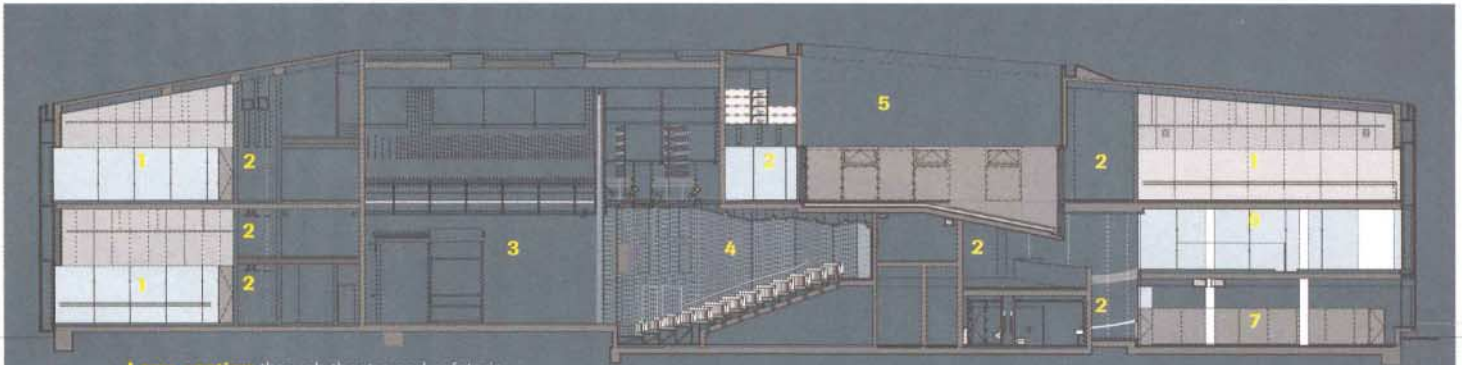
The exterior facades consist of transparent or translucent glass panels, depending on whether the space behind them requires a view. Coloured, transparent polycarbonate panels are mounted in front of the glass panels and serve as a protective shield (against sun, glare, heat radiation) and contribute to the overall energy system. The shadow images of the dancers, which will fall onto the matt glass surfaces of the interior walls and facades, have a magical effect and are playing an active part of the Laban's architectural identity.



The great concave sweep of the main facade looks even more surreal against the backdrop of Deptford Creek.



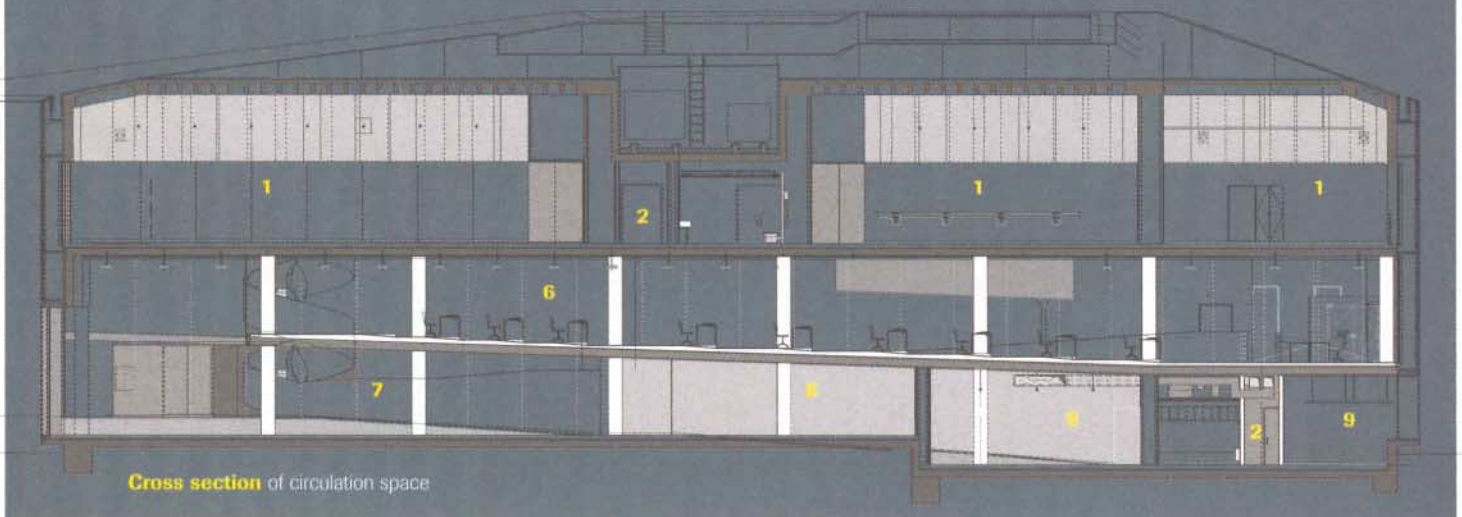
Three interior streets are painted magenta, lime green and pink. The magenta street (right) is deliberately aligned with St Paul's Church (left).



Long section through theatre and cafeteria

Sections

- 1 Dance studio
- 2 Circulation
- 3 Stage
- 4 Auditorium
- 5 Courtyard
- 6 Library
- 7 Cafeteria
- 8 Meeting room
- 9 Therapy area



Cross section of circulation space



Inside, the dance centre is like a little city – with a variety of spaces ranging from the intimate to the more formal.

- Floor plans**
- | | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| 1 Dance studio | 8 Office |
| 2 Circulation | 9 Workshop |
| 3 Stage | 10 Lecture theatre |
| 4 Auditorium | 11 Therapy area |
| 5 Courtyard | 12 Tutor rooms |
| 6 Library | 13 Bar |
| 7 Cafeteria | 14 Studio theatre |
| | 15 Staff area |

That a world-renowned school of contemporary dance should sit in unfashionable Deptford is the first in a series of paradoxes that characterise Herzog & de Meuron's Laban Centre. In truth, it is eminently sensible that dancers, like other artists, inhabit relatively affordable areas of our expensive capital, just as it is entirely natural that they swap urban anonymity (a mazy old building in adjacent New Cross) for the strange glamour of their new Deptford landmark.

Lewisham council has seen value in promoting the school to a flagship arts-led regeneration scheme. The presence of artists leads to the sort of gentrification that prices them out – a conundrum that is not confined to Deptford. Less palatable is what 'regeneration' means here, for the ugly brick diddy boxes that follow do not have the economic justification of those at Salford Quays. The area that the Laban sits in, around Deptford Creek (picturesquely Dickensian – *Oliver!* was filmed here) is far from derelict. It contains those semi-industrial edge functions essential to a working city, and their creeping replacement by investment vehicles for bankers increases rateable value at the expense of the integrity and vitality of the city.

Herzog & de Meuron's sympathies lie with the simple grain of sheds and warehouses. At the Laban, their plain vernacular is raised to architecture by the application of great subtlety and sophistication. At night, the shed glows: not as a lighthouse does but with a low, strange, opalescent intensity. By day it recedes, accepting and colouring the daylight that enters its veiled interior, a daily cycle of inversion set in opposition to the corresponding changing openness to inscrutability of the carefully placed windows.

The central paradox of this enriched simple shed is that it contains a labyrinth. The richness and variety required to create such a thing out of an orthogonal brief and an apparent shed-like box is delivered, with a simplicity that is breathtaking, by a few rational moves.

First, the rectangular box is caved in on the entrance facade to make place and gather us in. This curve creates an urban axis between the Laban and Thomas Archer's St Paul's Church that, particularly when combined with Lewisham's plans for street planting and a small park, makes a radical and positive addition to the urban pattern of Deptford. The axis leads to a front door and through it to an ▶

