

# Meet The Influencer: Rupert Wheeler

Architect Rupert Wheeler set up Mackenzie Wheeler Architects + Designers with Duncan Mackenzie in 1986. The practice is based in Shoreditch and employs 15 staff. Projects range from hotels such as The Landmark in London and At The Chapel in Bruton to primary schools and theatres as well as countless private homes. He lives in Spitalfields with his family.

## How long have you lived and worked in East London?

I moved to Spitalfields 20 years ago. My wife and I had done up an old building in Deptford and wanted another big project. We had decided to bring up a family in London rather than moving out to the countryside. Spitalfields had the most affordable Georgian houses at the time, and I knew the area well as I had worked on a number of projects in the area, including the redevelopment of St.Hilda's East Community Centre on the Boundary Estate in the early 1990s. Spitalfields has such a strange and unique history, and the area and the people who live in it have been a great source of inspiration and ideas over the years.



The Landmark Hotel London

## What do you love most about your work?

One of my favourite things about working on public buildings, whether bars, hotels or schools, is that you get an innocent, instant reaction to them as soon as people start to use the space, and it's often a surprising one. People use buildings in unexpected ways and can sometimes take a space created by architects and designers in an unforeseen direction.

**That's interesting. Are there also surprises in the early stages of a project with clients? Do their ideas surprise you?**

In any architectural project, listening is the most important skill, especially at the outset. It's crucial to really listen to what a client is saying about their needs, whether they're a business or a private individual. The key is to pinpoint what they really need rather than just what they think they might like. This is sometimes tricky and clients aren't always sure themselves.

When you're dealing with someone's home, an architect needs to understand fairly intimate details about the way they live. It's also important to think about the way furniture enhances or impinges on movement and use of the space as well as more general factors, such as light.



At The Chapel in Bruton

**You've been involved with the local campaign More Light More Power, objecting to proposals for the development of Bishopsgate goodsyd.**

That's right. The proposal by developer Hammerston & Ballymore is to create huge towers of luxury flats on Bishopsgate goodsyd. The scheme is totally out of keeping with the architecture of the area, would block huge amounts of light in surrounding streets, and is badly designed. It doesn't relate to anything in the surrounding area. Thanks to a powerful local lobby, local councils have objected to the proposal, and the GLA's technical advisors recommended refusal. Sadiq Khan is yet to review the plans, but we are

hoping he will be more measured and thoughtful than Boris, who supported the scheme.



Because the goodsyard is in public ownership it offers a great opportunity to create social housing for the people who make the city tick: key workers. I firmly believe that we can't just have wealthy people in the middle of the city. It takes every strata of people to make a city work. But the whole focus of development in London in recent years has been designed to attract foreign investment.

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