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White City House

LONDON

Soho House has taken design cues from the 1960s heritage of the BBC's former headquarters at White City for its latest opening.

Words: Matt Turner | Photography: © Simon Brown

It opened three years earlier than the speech in which he famously coined the phrase, but the Television Centre at White City is a building that could have been forged in the 'white heat' Harold Wilson hoped would create a new Britain founded on technological innovation and scientific progress.

As the home of the BBC from 1960 onwards, it was from here that Doctor Who adventured through space and time, Blue Peter presenters buried their first time capsule, and Arthur Dent hitchhiked his way around the galaxy. Its iconic structure, designed by architect Graham Dawbarn in the shape of a question mark, housed the latest

broadcasting equipment and was described at the time as 'the largest, best and most carefully planned factory of its kind in the world'.

In its central courtyard, a sculpture of Helios, Greek god of the sun, by T.B Huxley-Jones, was erected to symbolise the radiation of TV around the world.

But ironically it was technology, to some degree, that prompted the BBC to announce the planned closure of the building at White City some fifty years after it first opened. By 2010, TV cameras had shrunk considerably in size and it was considered just too big for the Beeb's needs. Its asbestos-filled architecture was no longer fit for



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Above: Guestrooms feature terrazzo-topped tables, mid-century furnishings and fabrics from original BBC supplier Tibor

purpose. Political pressure to reduce the running costs of the BBC meant selling such a large chunk of London land was an opportunity the broadcaster could ill afford to ignore.

Its purchasers, Stanhope Plc., acquired the site in 2012 for £200m, announcing a mixed-use scheme, masterplanned by AHMM and Morris+Company to provide offices, apartments and studios as part of a wider £8bn regeneration of the White City area. At the heart of their plans was an ambition to attract the media and tech industries with a members club and hotel from anchor tenant [Soho House](#) which opened in April 2018.

Described as “a sensitive interpretation of the historic BBC Television Centre, paying homage to the history of the building and giving it a new life as a space for creatives to eat, drink meet and relax in the various spaces,” White City House includes two floors of club space, a rooftop pool and bar, cinema, screening room, 24,000ft² gym, and 45 bedrooms within the building’s original Grade-II listed central ring.

Design Director Linda Boronkay has taken the era when the Television Centre first opened as her cue, with a brief to “imagine you were designing the BBC back then, but now...”

“We watched lots of 1960s TV and movies, but we didn’t want to be too literal,” says Boronkay. “The influences aren’t immediately obvious but they should feel familiar.”

A mid-century modern aesthetic pervades throughout. Grade II-listed elements have been sensitively integrated with a mix of vintage and bespoke furnishings as well as contemporary finishes and details.

The ground floor is open to the public, housing restaurant, lounge and bar The Allis as well as check-in for the hotel and club facilities above. Originating at [Soho House](#) Chicago this is the first outing for the Allis concept in the UK. Dark polished plaster walls and painted-out exposed services give the space a studio feel. The ‘atomic dots’ – a famous feature of the original façade, have been replicated on the barfront. A reversed glass artwork, created by Archie Proudfoot in homage to the famous BBC ‘Test Card F’ dominates one wall. In the lifts, circular motifs in the wooden panelling hark back to those seen in the Tardis.

Other subtle nods to the building’s former life include timber fluting as seen in the original BBC reception, and a terrazzo styled resin flooring with embedded brass discs that wraps around the entire main ninth floor club level. Fabrics and upholstery include 1950s graphic designs recreated by fabric house Tibor (who originally supplied textiles to the BBC), and 1960s inspired floral patterns on the sun loungers around the rooftop pool.

Throughout the building the design team have worked with the doughnut-shaped layout. On the ninth floor the bar is set in the middle of the room to maximise the dramatic views over West

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Above: Inspired by the Mad Men era and Palm Springs, the rooftop pool brings an air of Californian modernism to West London

London. Bespoke dividing joinery has been kept low and open, allowing light to filter through the spaces. Back of house bar and kitchen areas have been treated with the same level of detail as the member's spaces so that they could be left visible through openings in the timber and glazed panel walls. Members-only spaces include a games room with a large Billiards table, and a rug again inspired by the BBC test card design, adjoining a bar with comfortable seating and more brass-inset terrazzo flooring. A glazed terrace filled with foliage leads out from the main bar, further enhancing the connection between indoors and out.

The large open kitchen serves an 'East-meets-West' menu, with Asian inspired food, healthy plant-based dishes and [Soho House](#) favourites. The space has a small stage for performances which can be curtained off. Artworks honouring TV presenter and artist Tony Hart adorn the walls.

Studio 8 on the eighth floor is a space for member events, featuring a backstage green room, an open kitchen and bar and an outdoor terrace, furnished with Sixties-style lights and furniture, and a patterned resin floor.

The 45 bedrooms, split over the second and third floors of the Grade-II listed Helios building, are accessed via sweeping curved corridors, with signage inspired by the famous italicised capitals of the font that once graced the façade. Each room has George Nelson Bubble lamps, retro-style telephones by Wild & Wolf, mid-century Terrazzo tables and reading lights, fluted timber wardrobes and modernist wooden minibars, with original exposed concrete support beams on the ceilings. The bathrooms have circular patterned tiles inspired by historic BBC designs, and are stocked with the full range of Cowshed products.

The 2,100m² gym, the largest to-date in the [Soho House](#) portfolio, sits in the basement, with fitness equipment, studios and a 17m swimming pool clad in a triangular ceramic tiles, with steam room, sauna and hammam, as well as a juice bar. Despite its subterranean location, large staircase windows feed natural light to the space.

Also located in the basement, Electric Cinema White City has two screens, each with rows of velvet armchairs, footstalls and cashmere blankets. Dark blue 1960s patterned geometric carpets and velvet walls envelop the space.

EXPRESS CHECK-OUT: 45 guestrooms | 2 restaurants | 6 bars | Cinema, games room | Gym, swimming pool | www.whitecityhouse.com
Owner / Operator: [Soho House & Co](#) | Interior Design and Branding: [Soho House](#) Design | Art Consultant: Kate Bryan