

Alumni News

With Flying Colours: Professor Fiona McLachlan and the Old College Refurbishment Project

When the Old College refurbishment project began, we didn't know how many secrets we would uncover underneath paint and behind walls. The original 1789 building has revealed, through the demolition of later architectural additions, examples of centuries-old graffiti and hidden staircases.

A closer look at the building's secrets have also shaped the choices being made in the redevelopment, as the Law School seeks to ensure that the improved Old College is a building for the future that is in keeping with its past.



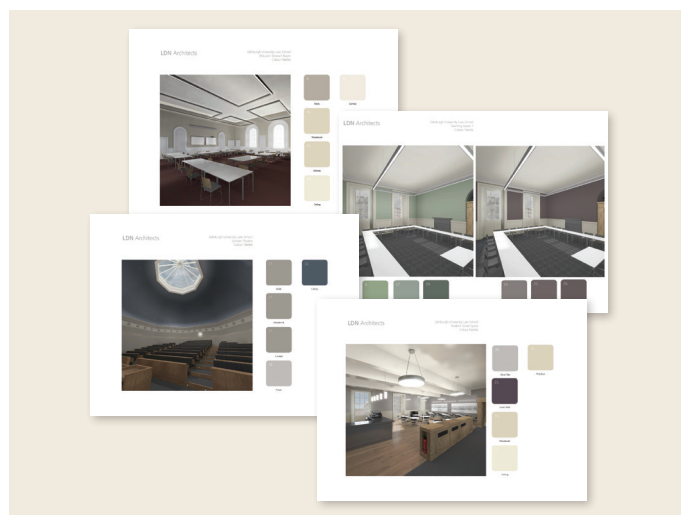
Professor Fiona McLachlan

Professor Fiona McLachlan has been on hand to help us in this task. Professor of Architectural Practice at the Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (ESALA), Fiona is a recognised expert in colour and has been helping us to select colours for the new suites within Old College by identifying the paints used in the past.

Her involvement in this project, she says, was "a happy coincidence". She had been conducting research on colour as part of a different University refurbishment – the updating of modern neo-classical Adam House on Chambers Street, home to ESALA. This project employed the same firm who are working at this moment on Old College, LDN Architects. The keen insight into historical and modern uses of colour she provided to the Adam Smith project made her a perfect fit as an Old College Colour Consultant!

Paint scrapings were taken from the original paintwork and sent for historical analysis. Shades were matched up with Farrow & Ball paint colours and Fiona and LDN together were able to provide historically appropriate palettes which could be used in dynamic, contemporary ways. Lots of soft greens were uncovered, in addition to an Etruscan Red and an Indian Yellow. You can see from some of the mock-ups how more muted shades are going to be used in the new building.

Fiona has also been working with a variety of students on Old College related projects. Over 600 unsorted Playfair drawings were discovered and project groups have been working with the drawings. From this, architecture and design informatics students



have been able to explore the history of Law within Old College. Students made three large models in sections according to Playfair's original drawings and the final building dimensions, showing the significant differences.



These scale models were shown to the public as part of a very successful exhibition.

Fiona's interest in the Law School refurbishment, she has said, is about the identity of the building. How has this identity been formed over the 227 years we have spent in our Law School home, and how can this best be presented in its new incarnation?

Fiona's wonderful work on the building will come to fruition when the doors are reopened later this year. Until then, we will look forward to being reunited with our colourful, characterful home.

To further facilitate interdisciplinary work as we look ahead to our new Old College, what do you think gives the building its identity? How can we communicate this, in words and pictures? Send your stories to law.alumni@ed.ac.uk!