

# ROUGH CITY // THINKING LAB

## Innovation in Practice & Process 2026:

Designing for Belonging, Memory and Community

### PROJECT BRIEF

A [New] Space for Us reimagines St Mary's Church, Somers Town, as a site of spatial and civic innovation, transforming a threatened place of worship into a community-anchored asset. Developed through the Rough City // Thinking Lab, the project challenges the dominance of the smooth city, a global condition where privatised public spaces, lifestyle aesthetics, and curated sameness erode identity, displace communities, and suppress cultural difference.

Positioned as an exemplar of Innovation in Practice and Innovation in Process, the project embraces un-common architecture: design that speaks from the margins, resists homogenisation, and foregrounds the lived realities of Somers Town's working-class communities. Through an iterative, community-embedded design process, developed in partnership with A Space for Us / The People's Museum, the proposal draws on cultural narrative to amplify voices at risk of disappearance and to position interior architecture as a tool of advocacy rather than consumption.

By exposing and activating the hidden porosities of the church, those overlooked gaps where new forms of occupation, care, and collective life can emerge, the project proposes an unsmoothed alternative. This reflects an innovative practice methodology: working with imperfection, uncertainty, and the evolving nature of community needs. The resulting materially eclectic, socially responsive, and contextually grounded hybrid environment integrates spaces such as a social living room, a historic and oral archive, and a debating and learning space, redefining what a community museum can be.

The work exemplifies the values of the Innovation in Practice & Process Award through:

**Social relevance** rooted in the real needs of Somers Town

**Cultural awareness** that honours both historic and contemporary narratives

**Responsiveness to site and context** through Rough City research and methodologies

**Ethical intent** that challenges displacement and prioritises community voice

**Meaningful user experience** shaped by inclusivity, care, and co-presence

This is interior architecture as resistance, stewardship, and civic empowerment—an invitation to imagine a city where difference is not smoothed away, but made visible, valued, and shared.

### SITE SURVEY INFORMATION



"ON REDEFINING THE MUSEUM'S EXPERIENCE."



"We want to get away from that idea that it's a museum and you can't touch anything. My ambition is that this space is a space for art, for this community, but also a space to reflect on the pace of change."

- DIANA FOSTER,  
FOUNDER OF PEOPLE'S MUSEUM



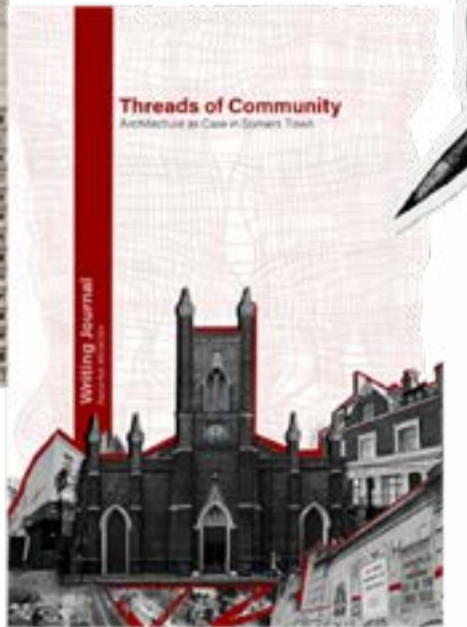
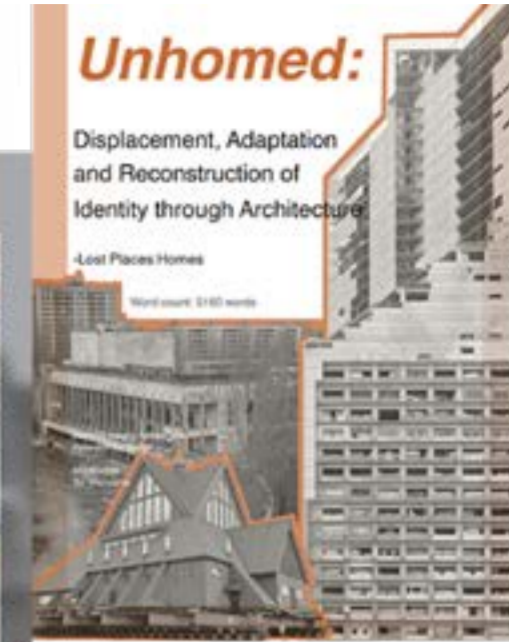
### SITE WRITING

The writing journals capture a collective process of listening, observing and reflecting. Through autoethnographic research, students examined Somers Town from their own perspectives, investigating the social, cultural and spatial realities of the area. By translating lived experience into architectural inquiry, these journals became a foundation for design, ensuring that proposals emerged from genuine engagement with people, place and community.

01:

### WRITING JOURNALS

"Memory can be embedded in material traces, allowing architecture to carry forward social and emotional connections."



"EXPLORING THE LAYERS OF THE ROUGH CITY"

### ST MARY'S CHURCH

Located in the heart of Somers Town, St Mary's Church is more than a place of worship; it is a longstanding community landmark that reflects the area's social history, cultural identity and collective memory. Despite serving local residents for nearly two centuries, the church faces significant challenges, including rising maintenance costs and the threat of closure.



INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE YEAR 3 COHORT

# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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## Empowering communities through collaboration, cultural preservation, and design advocacy with The People's Museum and St Mary's Church

ROUGH CITY challenged Year 3 Interior Architecture students to explore how design can support communities, preserve cultural memory, and respond to social change. In partnership with The People's Museum, St Mary's Church, and local stakeholders in Somers Town, students examined the relationship between space, identity, heritage, and belonging.

Through site visits, community walks, archival research, and conversations with residents, students engaged directly with local histories and contemporary concerns. Guided by Diana Foster, they investigated themes of lost voices, skills, homes, and communities, using written and visual research to inform their proposals.

Ideas were developed and tested through reviews, discussions, and public exhibitions, turning student work into a platform for dialogue with community partners and visitors. The exhibition invited feedback and opened new conversations about the future of St Mary's Church as a community asset.

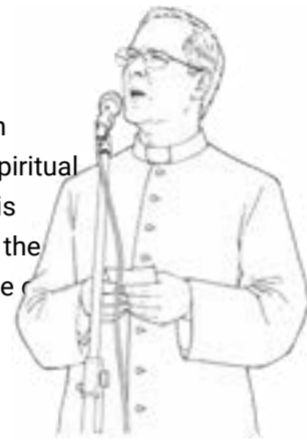
By combining research, collaboration, adaptive reuse, and community participation, the project demonstrated how interior architecture can catalyse cultural preservation, social inclusion, and collective imagination, empowering students to advocate for people and place.

### Key Figures

Diana Foster, Memory Keeper  
Diana is the heart of Somers Town's collective memory. She collects, preserves, and shares stories from the local community, ensuring that the history of the area remains alive for current and future generations.



Father Pascal, Guardian of the Church  
Father Pascal is responsible for the spiritual life and preservation of the church. His guidance has been crucial in shaping the design approach: Quiet spots to pause and reflect.



### Students' Practice Feedback Recordings of the Process

#### Cristina Stoica

Cristina Stoica – A Space for Us

*"I learned that architecture can become a platform for community voices, creating spaces where people feel heard, represented, and connected through shared stories."*

#### Yee Mon Aung

Yee Mon Aung – The Second Life Market

*"This project showed me that architecture can create social value not only by designing new spaces, but by helping communities preserve memories, share resources, and support one another through change."*

#### Sara Dehbouzorgi

Sara Dehbouzorgi – Traces of Us

*"This project showed me that interior architecture can empower young people by creating places where identity, creativity, and belonging can thrive."*

#### Lim Yi Xuan

\* Lim Yi Xuan – Somer's Exchange

*"This experience has reinforced the importance of listening before designing. It taught me that successful design begins with understanding the people who will use and shape a space."*



Scan QR to hear Student recordings!



### 01: People's Museum Visit



### 02: Presentation Review with Diana



### 03: Exhibition Installation



*"The exhibition was really interesting to walk through. Even without a design background, I was impressed by how the projects addressed real social issues and highlighted overlooked communities. It was inspiring to see how interior architecture can create meaningful and inclusive spaces."*

James T., Brother of a Student Exhibitor

### Feedback from Diana Foster Founder, The People's Museum

*"It was a pleasure to see the students' creative ideas for a People's Museum and community uses within St Mary's Church. The proposals thoughtfully explored sustainable development, the local environment, identity, history, and community needs."*

*Standout ideas included the use of ear and musical metaphors, varied levels, and breaking up the space to encourage exploration, engagement, and discovery.*

*The strongest concepts responded directly to the church's existing features, particularly the columns and overall architecture. I would have liked to see more of this approach, drawing on elements such as the stained glass, height, and first-floor level. Opportunities could include using light, sound, projections, and viewing platforms to activate the whole space and encourage community participation, rather than introducing enclosed structures disconnected from the church's character."*

Thank you to all the students!

### 04: Exhibition at People's Museum



### Community Response

*"The projects show a lot of thoughtful thinking, especially in the way students reimagined neglected or forgotten spaces as places where underrepresented voices and communities can be seen and heard. Overall, the works and samples reflect a socially conscious approach to interior architecture that feels relevant, meaningful, and capable of making a real impact in Somers Town."*

Hein.K.Z, Visitor to The People's Museum Exhibition

### 05: Extending Learning Beyond the Studio



### 06: Institutional Support



*"Working with a live client, the People's Museum, allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of site, community, and context, and how these inform design decisions. I particularly valued exploring the relationship between the client and the local area."*

Interior Architecture student Yeemon Aung

Student Research Collage: Yee Mon Aung



# STUDENT PANELS

Innovation in Practice & Process 2026:  
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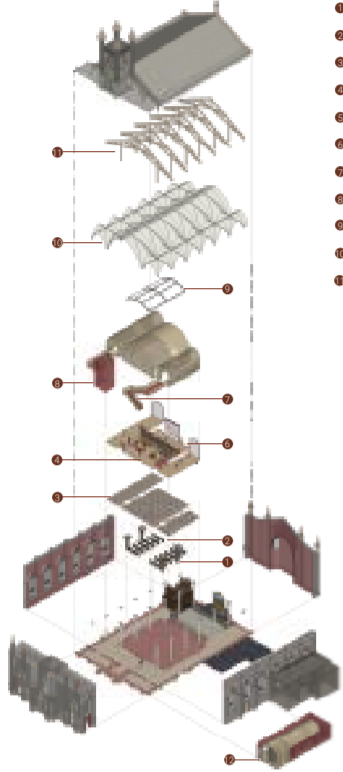
Cristina Stoica

Cultural Memory & Collective Gathering

## A BUILDING WITHIN A BUILDING

A Space for Us is a space for the local COMMUNITY.

### EXPLODED AXO



- New Structural Columns
- Reinforced Ceiling
- Primary Insertion Beam
- Safety Space
- Historic Archive
- Lounge Area
- New Insertion Structure
- Accessible Lift
- Metal Chain Support
- Existing Vaulted Ceiling
- Existing Timber Beam Structure



The project inserts a self-standing structure within the first floor within the historic church, creating a building within a building. The new interior preserves the church's original fabric while offering a sequence of spaces for experimentation.

Visitors enter through historic arches that cut back the beams, creating a sense of movement of light from their previous location to a central meeting room and exhibiting area, the heart of the design.

The inserted structure is independent and fully enclosed, allowing the old church to remain an architectural shell, offering a continuous, balanced journey through its new interior.



### MAGDALEN CENTRE

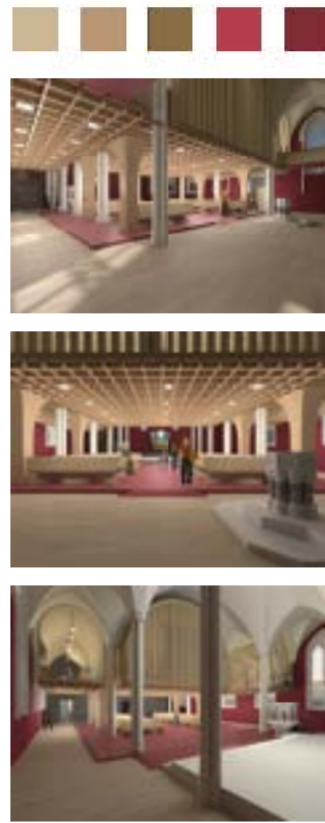
- Public Kitchen
- Men's and Women's Bathrooms
- Storage Area with Tables
- New Roof Structure

1:1 MODEL

### MATERIAL PALLETTE

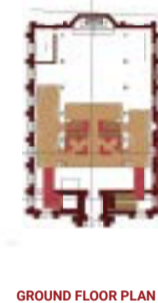


- EXLUM - Clear Laminated Timber
- Light Timber - Natural Birch Timber (Clear Matte Finish)
- Medium Timber - European Oak (Natural Oil Finish)
- Dark Timber - Thermally Modified Ash
- Dark Flooring - Natural Flooring
- Burgundy Flooring - Clear Boraxite Tiles
- Burgundy Brick - Clay Facing Brick (Deep Red/Brown)
- Glass - Low Iron Structural Glazing



This piece will be a key component that's specific to the project, made for the client. A heavy timber structure that's a key component of the design that focuses on a small, selected part of the structure.

I chose this section because it highlights the curve and the geometry of the structure that's unique. The curve is structural and helps show how the form follows function and connects to the overall design. The structure is designed to fit the curved surface of the wall and be used again in future exhibitions.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



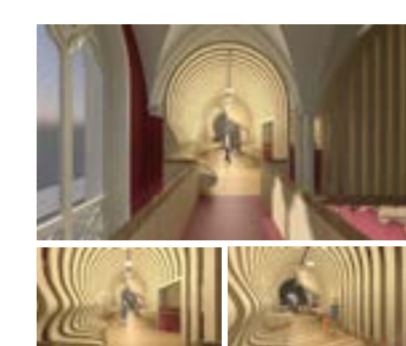
FIRST FLOOR PLAN



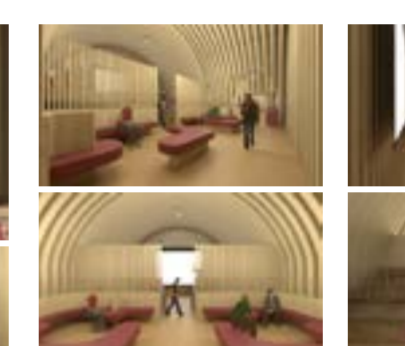
MAGDALEN CENTRE



SECTION DD 1:50



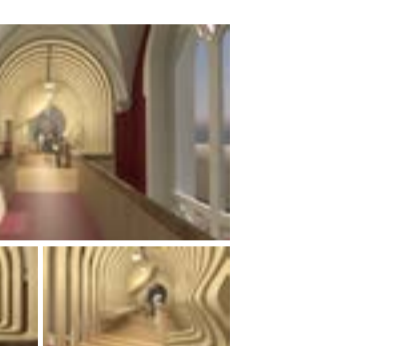
SECTION CC THROUGH TOWERS 1:50



SECTION AA THROUGH TYPICAL BAY OF CHURCH 1:50



SECTION BB 1:50



SECTION CC 1:50



THE LEFT WING



LOUNGE AREA



DEBATING SPACE



THE RIGHT WING

Yee Mon Aung

Circular Economy & Community Enterprise

## THE SECOND LIFE MARKET.

INA 3102: Practices of Reuse  
Yee Mon Aung

Located in Somers Town, London, the Second Life Market transforms St Mary's Church into a community space for exchanging, donating, and reselling unwanted belongings, particularly during periods of relocation and change. Inspired by the People's Museum of Somers Town, the project views everyday objects as carriers of memory rather than waste. Responding to displacement, gentrification, and ongoing urban development in the area, the design promotes community resilience through sharing and reuse. Through adaptive reuse, the intervention preserves the church's existing character while creating new opportunities for social connection.



Political Power



People's Museum Photographs

### Client Analysis

The People's Museum Somers Town is a community-led space preserving and sharing local stories, heritage, and overlooked voices. The design will introduce flexible, inclusive spaces for storytelling, listening, and participation, reinterpreting the museum's community-focused approach.

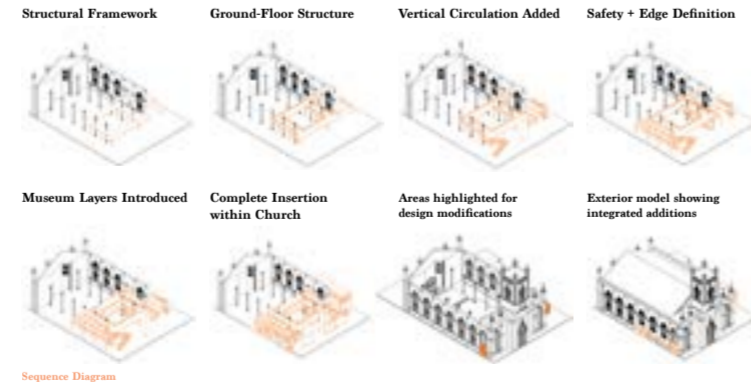
### User Groups

The design serves a diverse range of users, each with distinct needs and ways of engaging with the space. **Museum visitors, artists, and the museum owners** seek spaces for exploration, collaboration, and creative reinterpretation. **Local residents** use it for socialising, sharing, and community activities, valuing comfort and belonging. **Tourists and passersby** engage briefly, drawn by a welcoming and open environment.



### Design Development Sequences

This sequence shows how the new insertion is gradually built up within St Mary's Church.



Sequence Diagram

### Main Spaces Narrative

This proposal reimagines St Mary's Church as a community space centred on reuse, exchange, and storytelling.



Ground Floor Plan



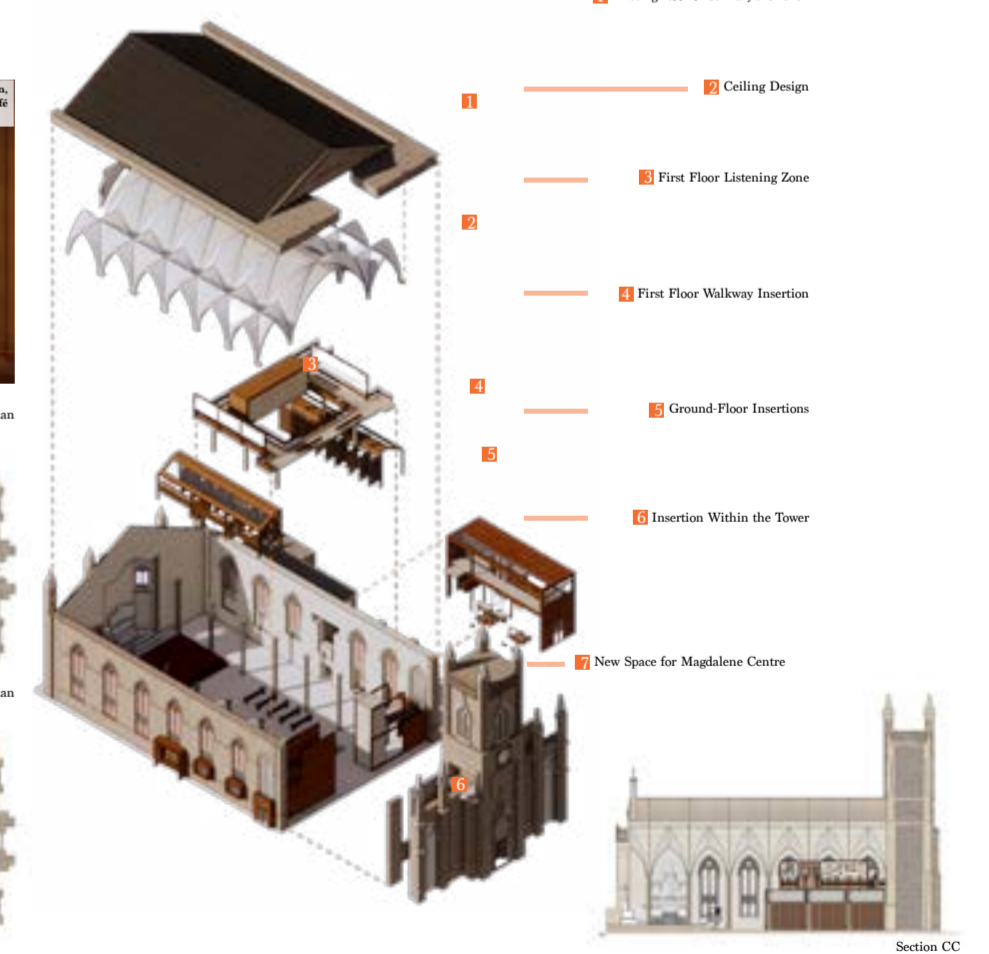
First Floor Plan



The market space and repair corner create a place where everyday objects are given new life. Here, people can browse, exchange, or fix belongings in a setting that feels open, practical, and welcoming.

On the first floor, a listening area lets visitors hear recorded voices from the neighbourhood, while exhibition panels give treasured objects from the original museum space to be displayed with clarity and care.

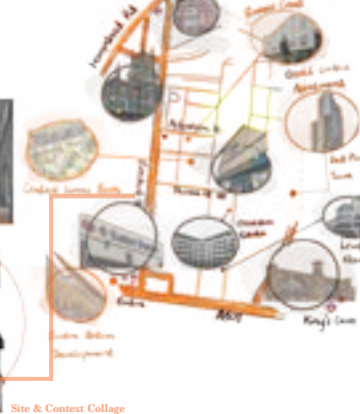
### Exploded Axonometric



Section CC



Site & Context Collage



User Groups & Local Area Illustration



Elevation Views

# STUDENT PANELS

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Sara Dehbouzorgi

Identity, Belonging & Cultural Memory

## TRACES OF US

Where young people gather, create, connect, and leave traces

As youth centres continue to disappear due to funding cuts and urban redevelopment, many young people are left without dedicated spaces to gather, create, and express themselves. In response, communities have increasingly appropriated neglected and underused spaces, transforming them into environments for connection, creativity, and collective identity. These informal acts of occupation reveal a need for spaces that support youth culture while fostering a sense of belonging and ownership.

This project reimagines St Mary's Church in Somers Town as a contemporary youth hub that celebrates expression through art, music, podcasting, and debate. Rather than altering the historic fabric of the church, the proposal introduces a secondary architectural layer devoted within the existing volume. A series of interconnected hubs, bridges, and inhabitable stoops create opportunities for gathering, participation, and social interaction while maintaining a visual dialogue with the architecture below.

Inspired by self-organized youth spaces and local street culture, the intervention encourages young people to leave traces of their presence through conversation, creativity, and artistic expression. The project explores how architecture can provide a platform for voices that are often overlooked, creating a shared environment where community, identity, and belonging can continue to evolve over time.

**SDG 3 - Good Health and Well-being**  
Promotes youth wellbeing through safe social spaces.

**SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities**  
Promotes opportunities for youth expression and participation.

**SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities**  
Promotes inclusive community spaces for young people.

**Long Section Cut** **Front Elevation** **Visuals**

**Exploded Axonometric** **Spatial Elements**

- Welcome Space**  
A welcoming hub introducing activities, workshops, and events while creating a sense of belonging, orientation, and participation.
- Art & Music Space**  
A creative environment where young people express identities, experiences, and emotions through art, music, collaboration, and performance.
- Podcast & Debate Space**  
A platform for discussion, storytelling, and debate, empowering young people to share opinions and amplify their voices.
- Social Stoop**  
An informal gathering space encouraging relation, social interaction, and ownership through creativity and engagement.
- Dialogue Stoop**  
A stepped seating intervention promoting conversation, exchange, and connection between users and communities.
- Threshold Stoop**  
A transitional space combining movement and occupation, allowing users to pause, observe, connect and experience belonging.

**Hero Section**

Rachel Koh Rui Qi

Identity, Belonging & Cultural Memory

## TRACES OF US

Where young people gather, create, connect, and leave traces

**Visuals**

**Entrance from Magdalen** **Main Visual 01** **People's Museum**

**Children & Mutter Zone** **Private Seating Zone**

**Entrance from Aldersham Street** **Communal Dining Space**

**Material Selection**

- Black Vinyl Tiles
- White Acoustic Panels
- Wooden Seating and Benches
- Wooden Slats

**Schematic Plan**

- Children and Mutter Zone
- Communal Dining Space
- Transferring Market Stalls
- Podcast & Debate Space
- Art & Music Space
- People's Museum
- Private Seating
- Black Vinyl Tiles
- White Acoustic Panels
- Wooden Slats

From the heritage of the building, users gain a comprehensive view of the building's architectural details, including the vaulted ceiling, the stained glass windows, and the intricate stonework. The design also incorporates modern amenities, such as the communal dining space, the podcast and debate space, and the art and music space, ensuring that the building remains a vibrant and functional community hub.

Lim Yi Xuan

Food & Social Infrastructure

## SOMER'S EXCHANGE

### THE MARKET OF POROSITY AND COMMUNITY

**PROJECT OVERVIEW**

This project proposes a new market arcade for Somers Town that retains the disappearing culture of the local street market through an architecture of porosity and collective memory. Once a vibrant social and economic lifeline for the neighbourhood, the market has been gradually eroded by redevelopment, rising commercial pressures, and the smothering effects of urban gentrification. In response, the design reimagines the market not only as a place to revive the trade of Chatter St. Market, but as a democratic space where community voice, storytelling, and public discourse are embedded into the fabric of the building.

By day, Somer's Exchange operates as a market hall, supporting local traders, informal economies, social encounters, and cultural exchange. Wide thresholds, open partitions, and visual transparency allow the boundary between street and interior to dissolve, creating a fluid continuity between outdoor life and the new site interior.

By night, the market transforms into a debate space and living archive museum, offering the community a platform to gather, speak, and record their histories. A dedicated recording booth invites residents to share memories of Somers Town's past, forming an evolving audio archive. Alongside this, interactive displays, projected imagery, and community-curated exhibits reveal the history of the neighbourhood's market culture, foregrounding voices often overlooked in the redevelopment process.

**TARGET USERS**

**SOMER'S TOWN LOCAL RESIDENTS**

- Long-term established residents
- Artists, activists, and community organizers
- Black and other ethnic minority communities
- LBGTQ+ community members
- People experiencing housing insecurity
- Students and young adults

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

- 8
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 15
- 17

**SITE CONTEXT** **SITE ANALYSIS**

**Building Uses**  
Residential  
Commercial  
Services

**Road Connections**  
Eversholt Street  
Canton Road  
Chatter Street  
Aldersham Street  
Porosus Road  
Polygon Road

**Figure Ground**  
Main Buildings

VISUALS

**ACCESS POINT 1** **ACCESS POINT 2** **COFFEE STATION** **MARKET STALLS** **MARKET STALLS** **MARKET STALLS**

**STALLS OF MEMORY: PEOPLE'S MUSEUM** **STALLS OF MEMORY: PEOPLE'S MUSEUM** **AUDIO ARCHIVE** **AUDIO ARCHIVE**

**STALL OF DEBATE AND FILM** **CHURCH Pews** **VIEW FROM CHURCH ALTAR**

# DESIGN THROUGH MAKING

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This 1:1 acoustic panel combines sound absorption with timber detailing inspired by St Mary's Church, balancing contemporary function with historic character.



This 1:1 model showcases the curved parametric structure that defines the inset tion and can be reused in future exhibitions.



1:1 joinery prototype testing concealed dowel connections and material finishes to achieve a seamless yellow-metal aesthetic.



Inspired by Somers Town's street art culture, this 1:1 stool fosters youth expression, ownership, and a stronger sense of belonging within the community.



A full-scale prototype exploring adaptable display architecture through material reuse and circular design.



In my 1:1 sample model, cork was used as it is flexible enough to respond to the space while keeping a consistent material language.



A manually cranked, semi-transparent curtain lets users adapt visibility and ambiance, creating a soft, backlit backdrop revealing subtle silhouettes.

## Conclusion: Interior Architecture as Innovation in Practice & Process

A [New] Space for Us demonstrates how interior architecture can operate as a form of innovation in practice and process, positioning design not simply as the production of space, but as a catalyst for dialogue, belonging, and collective memory.

Working collaboratively through the Rough City // Thinking Lab, the Year 3 Interior Architecture cohort engaged with the lived realities of Somers Town and the future of St Mary's Church. Through partnerships with The People's Museum, local stakeholders, and community members, students developed proposals grounded in listening, observation, and meaningful public engagement. The project challenged students to move beyond conventional design outcomes and instead consider how architecture can respond to displacement, cultural loss, social inequality, and changing urban conditions.

Across the cohort, a diverse range of proposals emerged, yet all shared a common ambition: to transform St Mary's Church into an inclusive civic resource that amplifies community voices and supports new forms of participation. Whether through storytelling, debate, youth engagement, circular economies, social gathering, repair culture, or living archives, the projects explored how existing buildings can be reimagined as spaces of care, exchange, learning, and cultural continuity.

Central to the work was the belief that heritage is not only preserved through buildings, but through the memories, experiences, and relationships they contain. By embracing adaptive reuse and working with the existing character of the church, students demonstrated how design interventions can reveal overlooked histories while creating opportunities for future community life.

The project's impact extended beyond the studio. Through exhibitions, public presentations, and direct engagement with community partners, the work became a platform for discussion about the future of St Mary's Church and the wider Somers Town community. Feedback from residents, visitors, and The People's Museum confirmed the value of design as a tool for advocacy, cultural preservation, and social connection.

Collectively, the project illustrates how interior architecture can contribute to more equitable, inclusive, and resilient communities. It exemplifies the values of the Social & Cultural Agency Award by foregrounding participation, cultural awareness, ethical responsibility, and meaningful engagement with place. Most importantly, it demonstrates the power of design education to empower future designers to work with communities, preserve cultural memory, and imagine new innovative possibilities for shared civic life.

## FULL-SCALE MATERIAL EXPLORATIONS

