

**1993** 10 Fleet Place (Ludgate Hill Development)  
Ludgate Hill; London, United Kingdom

**Skidmore Owings Merrill**

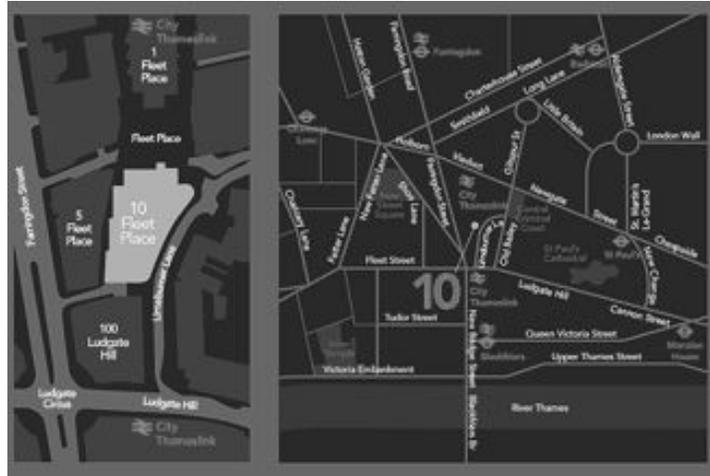
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### *10 Fleet Place: The Impact and International Style*

Skidmore Owing and Merrill's construction of the Ludgate building at 10 Fleet Place in London is a successful and iconic example of an international style building designed with a post-war mentality. The building's inclusion of modern elements along with connections to older site and surrounding reflect a successful balance of structural and design ideals. As Le Corbusier stated: "Space and Light and Order. Those are the things that men need just as they need bread or a place to sleep." And thus the international style was born; encompassing ideals of exoskeleton open floor plan structure, utilization of new technologies and flexibility of function, the International Style set forth to confront all modern day construction obstacles. SOM's 10 Fleet Place building is such a successful example of International Style because it proves to appease all these conditions while simultaneously respecting the historical context in which the structure was erected. Incorporating open floor plans and glass walls--designed with flexibility in mind for office environments--and a semi-public plaza on the North side of the building, the structure of 10 Fleet Place is focused inward but also towards the neighboring 1 Fleet Place development.<sup>1</sup> Due to its introverted nature, the walls and design of the Ludgate development turn their back on the Southern and Eastern streetscapes. As a whole, 10 Fleet Place typifies the recent examples of a "mixed-use" high rise. However, a sense of distinction is derived from the site and from the details and structural elements designed to adjust the building relative to the context of the neighborhood. The SOM building at 10 Fleet Place is an exemplary model of a structure created with technology used to both advance structure and also use such elements to bridge the gap between more modern and historical aesthetic. SOM is making a statement that structure is able to speak with the vernacular of the time in which it was built while also respecting its current context.

Located within the Fleet Street corridor, 10 Fleet Place is the first building to be constructed as part of SOM's larger Ludgate Hill development. The development was initiated in 1990, and ten buildings within the development were completed by 1993.<sup>2</sup> The most recent building was completed in 2005, however, due to the downturn in the global economy, there have been no new commencements to projects since. All of the projects within the development share attributes of modern office facilities. 10 Fleet Place is positioned between the number 1, 3 and 5 Fleet Place buildings in the development. The site for 10 Fleet Place is the most unique in that the building's reaction to each street it borders is not the same. As a result, the building conforms to the shape of the site and in response, includes multi-faceted facades, curved facades, and dramatic site elevation changes.



*Dual-Scale Mapping of the 10 Fleet Place Development.*

In terms of utilization and occupancy, the building is strictly a professional center. The construction using a steel exoskeleton design with widely-spaced columns on the interior allows for each floor to be entirely uninhibited by partition walls, with the exception of elevators and stairwells which are concentrated in two central points on each floor. Although considerations are made for wall structures to be assembled, and indeed are prescribed for various uses by the owners of the building, they are entirely moveable and independent of the structure of the building.

The SOM Ludgate development sits at the base of the famous "Ludgate Hill" on the eastern most end of Fleet Street. Geographically, the site is positioned one block north of the River Thames, within the city proper of London, above the underground River Fleet. Fleet Street, which is known as Ludgate street on the east end, and eventually becomes the "A4" street to the west outside of the city limits, initially served to link the commercial downtown of London with the government centers at Westminster. Fleet street as a whole serves as a living timeline for the expansion of London, with the westward development in the 14th century to the commercial growth of the present. With parts of the neighborhood dating as far back as the 1200s, this street is one of the most prominent in all of London, and to this day, serves as the symbol for press and journalism for the United Kingdom. Fleet Place is one of the larger side streets linked into the Fleet Corridor. In terms of significance, it carries a certain report in the sense that it serves as a collective snapshot of the history of the city at a smaller, denser scale than the rest of the street. The Fleet neighborhood was spared from World War II destruction in comparison to the damage in the surrounding areas. Due to the limited damage juxtaposed with the tremendous amounts of neighboring destruction surrounding, the architecture of Ludgate serves as a unique representation of the history of London that is unrivaled elsewhere.

Architecturally, Fleet Street--and Fleet Place especially--is a diverse area with existing buildings on site dating from the 18th century to present, with some dating back to the 14th century. The area carries its own vernacular. This is partially due

to building styles remaining somewhat consistent for centuries, and also because of a conscious effort on the part of owners to consider the neighborhood as a composition, and maintain some aspect of those traditions while constructing new buildings. Although significant development to the local built environment has occurred in the 20th century--some of which incorporating the latest building technologies--the roots of neighborhood are still visible. The buildings on the older parts of the streets maintain party walls, and direct access from the sidewalk at the main facade. The dominant style for the neighborhood consists of masonry construction. This is made up of exposed brick and more decorative stone cladding with some incorporation and adaptation of "International Style" introduced during the reconstruction after World War II. All of the buildings pre-dating the 1900s are load bearing wall construction; this means building heights are kept well below 100 feet, and in most cases are only around four or five stories. At street level, the density and weight of these structures are apparent with the massive nature of the walls, and the relatively small apertures.



*Historical Ludgate Hill: And Illustration of the Densely Packed Building Constructed with Heavy Masonry and Small-Style Fenestration.*

Despite the fortified nature of Ludgate Hill, a street culture was and is essential to the area. Local inns and pubs continue to dominate the retail markets on the ground floors. The most notable industry associated with Fleet Place is Journalism. Fleet was the center for the press starting in the early 1500s, soon after the printing press was invented. The presence of copious legal activity as well as the expansion of banking served as a catalyst for printing, and eventually journalism in the 17th century. Although the majority of the major press entities have moved out of the area since the 1980s, the metonym for the industry is still Fleet Street. In the present day, professional services are the primary commerce for the neighborhood,

with many of the United Kingdom's largest companies based along the street. It is the continuous rate of fast-paced inhabitation that has kept Fleet Street thriving for hundreds of years, and the healthy economy of the neighborhood which has permitted such exemplary architecture to be created, and maintained.<sup>3</sup> In the spirit of a neighborhood as place, composition and history, the Ludgate development joins the fabric as the newest project, as well as the anchor, serving as the most prominent and iconic, as it sits at the first address of the Fleet Street corridor. It is due to these attributes that it can thus be classified as an International Style structure.

Although the "Modernist" and international styles refer predominantly to the decade immediately following World War II, the 1950's and 1960's, the terms continue to describe the architectural styles of skyscrapers and large office complexes through the 1990s. The goals that motivated the original swing to the "international style" have largely changed over the decades, however the materiality and basic design concepts have remained consistent. Notable changes come as a result of advancements in technology. These advancements have served to expand material possibilities and allow for larger scale structure as well as more flexible construction. The present day version of International Style incorporates entirely steel framed structure with two typical formats. The first of these two is an exoskeleton structure which support a building purely via exterior walls in the form of columns. This structure is simple and provides clear spans over an interior to allow for one enclosed and uninterrupted space. Due to this version of a structured exoskeleton's reliance on clear spans consisting of no internal support, this technique is limited to relatively small projects. However, upon the development of more modern advancements in both materials and design capabilities, projects like 10 Fleet Place have developed abilities to be larger and more elaborate than anything previously conceived at the genesis of the International Style. The second form of steel frame construction allows for usually larger structure than other exoskeletal techniques. Rather than relying on clear spans over the entire width of the building, an array of columns are incorporated to create a consistent and module type space. Due to this existence of a greater number of supports, each module is allowed to be smaller, thus creating more space around the structure.

While loosely meeting the definition of "skyscraper," compared to similar buildings of its time, 10 Fleet Place serves as a testament to the versatility of the International Style high-rise both in terms of appearance and in use of technology. At the structural level, the building is the purest example of the International Style of the 1950s: steel frame, supported entirely by columns, with a freestanding curtain wall enclosure. In understanding the increased complexities of buildings between the 1950s and 1990s, one can appreciate the elegance of the system presented in 10 Fleet, despite its simple appearance. The standard all-glass curtain wall, which is the single most recognizable aspect of the international style, was taken into special consideration for this project. In place of opaque, mirrored panels that are typically used where the curtain wall encloses the structural ceiling space, 10 Fleet embraces opacity and the heritage of the neighborhood by using a steel cladding, which doubles as a support system to connect the mullions over the

height of the building.<sup>4</sup> In effect, the streamlined surface of the building is maintained--as the mullions over the windows and the steel panels exist in unity--and the lack of an unimpeded sheet of glass goes unmissed. Keeping with the practice of modifying the tenets of international style to create a modern variation, ornamentation at 10 Fleet is derived from of the forms created by structure while also being fully distinguished as non-structural. The granite slabs are similar in size, surface and color. The exposed steel structure holding up the building also carry these similarities and also have the appropriate sturdiness necessary to appear structural.<sup>5</sup> However, they are offset and attached only by small anchor points proving to not be structural at all. The subtlety is unnoticed from afar, yet upon further scrutiny it is readily apparent where structure and ornamentation differ. This is a clever balance between the purely structural ornamentation of the international style, and the vernacular methods employed throughout most of the neighborhood. 10 Fleet Place typifies the new projects of modernism: while incorporating the basic attributes of the international style, regional and adjacent influences are exposed in the finished design.



*Exterior Exoskeleton and Interior Office Space of 10 Fleet Place.*

At its most basic level, the construction methods for 10 Fleet are typical of a 1990s office tower. Aside from the loosely ornamented aspects of the exterior, the building's steel skeleton and wrapped glass enclosure is telling of the International Style movement. Designed to have a transparent appearance, this ability to view the interior of the building is meant to serve as the modern version for direct street access.<sup>5</sup> 10 Fleet Place is part of a grander edifice who's large plaza which serves multiple buildings in the development complex. Due to it's focus on a large plaza for a threshold, the layout of Fleet Place dictates a large area of transition from street to structure and further separation from the interior due to the physical distance between pure public space and semi-private enclosure. The presence of walls and doors as tangible boundaries become of little relevance to the feeling the built environment creates for someone entering the building from a public perspective. In effect, 10 Fleet Place becomes focused not on a street atmosphere with interaction being between people, but on the interaction that the buildings that enclose the formal plaza. In effect, this is how 10 Fleet Place can stand to represent an International Style structure because it is erected in attempts to compare

previously built structure and appease them all. Unlike other International Style buildings by SOM, like their Inland Steel building structure in Chicago erected in 1998, it is both the exclusive structure of Ludgate and how it reacts with it's surroundings that creates a successful and aware international style. Though the Inland Steel building is an interesting example of the International Style in it's own right, its inability to blend so clearly into the urban fabric of Chicago is something that in comparison, continues to strengthen the successes of 10 Fleet Place.



*10 Fleet Place Fitting Seamlessly into London's Urban Fabric & The Streetscape of Fleet Place Plaza.*

When SOM was commissioned to build an addition to the Ludgate Complex at 10 Fleet Place, their main initiative was to use their modern technologies and modern style in combination with more historical and classical aesthetics of the region in order to create a successfully International Style edifice. Though Skidmore Owings and Merrill were more commonly followers of Mies's design principles, their consideration of historical context and local vernacular can be seen apparently in combination with more traditional ideals.

The majority of SOM buildings are reflective of their post-war emergence into the field of architecture. Not merely an architecture firm, SOM uses their vast knowledge of engineering to help further a long the more intricate and structural components of many of their designs. With the availability of a multitude of structural building options at their fingertips, SOM used engineering to create a language of structure rather than structure dictating the visual appearance and language of the building.<sup>5</sup> As reference to not merely the structural aspects of the Ludgate building, but the context in which the building sits as well, this is a great example of the large-scale corporate style architecture that SOM represented. Not only is 10 Fleet Place a high-end enterprise building, it is a part of a larger complex, not just a singular structure. While using both the context of the historical Ludgate area and the aspects of modern international glass-box style, SOM's 10 Fleet Place at Ludgate can be viewed as the genesis to critically regional International Style.



*10 Fleet Place: Steel Frame Glass Curtain Wall & Critical Corner.*

An "International Style" skyscraper is traditionally a steel framed structure with a glass curtain wall. The idea behind international style is that it is a universally applicable aesthetic; an idea that all locations can use the same stylized forms to meet function. This concept emerged as new technologies became widely spread; allowing for the knowledge of structure and material to dictate design, not the location and context of the design itself. The concept of standardized and uniform materials and technology emerged symbiotically with the sharing of building knowledge. After WWII, most every country involved needed to rebuild both their sociopolitical theory and physical landscape. Due to this rebuilding in unison, countries were fabricating new techniques simultaneously, and spreading their ideas, sharing their ideas to better rebuild infrastructure. All the factories that had been utilized during the war for war products were now being able to transform to solely focus of physical structural rebuilding. The new technologies that were discovered in the war due to necessity of weapon production and other methods of warfare production were then being applied to building; hence the emergence of an international approach to rebuilding; the International Style.

SOM is known not only for their role in the implementation of International Style, but even more specifically their use in terms of tall glass-box skyscrapers. Simplicity, verticality, glass and steel; all main components of common SOM design. In the case of 10 Fleet Place, Skidmore Owings and Merrill slightly adapted their ideals to better suite the surrounding neighborhood. Although SOM is known to have designed some of the tallest buildings in the world, with their focus on verticality, in the case of Ludgate, they adapted their vertical aesthetic to a more horizontally focused structure. Spreading 347,000 ft<sup>2</sup>, and only ten stories tall, SOM utilized the maximum area on the site in an efficient and flexible way while simultaneously not overwhelming the area with a too intrusive and obtrusively tall physique. The building's uniform steel exoskeleton and wide column spacing creates a clear floor language with flexibility of office space on the interior. This idea suites the function of the building, yet also adheres to traditional SOM style.

The main floor of the 10 Fleet Place Ludgate works towards creating a dialogue between the interior and exterior spaces of structure and surrounding. Also, the juxtaposition of the vertically oriented steel beams and the horizontal *wrapping* of the building around the site correctly articulates the efforts of SOM to react to the surroundings and for the international style to react to the local vernacular and historical context of a traditionally lower-leveled building area.<sup>1</sup>



"Wrapping" of 10 Fleet Place.

In literal connection to the technical definitions of International Style, the 10 Fleet Place Ludgate structure relates to the three main principals in unique yet effective ways. The first main principle of international style is the "expression of volume rather than mass". Ludgate is a prime example of this principle as it attempts to define space using architectural detail and a continuous and repetitive style frame to create a volume in on the site rather than a mere mass of space.

The second principle of international style is the ideal of *balance* rather than *symmetry*. Often times balance and symmetry are considered one in the same, but this is not always true. Balance can be expressed through a natural equilibrium of both physical and aesthetic structure that is not necessarily manifested through identical forms or mimicked shapes. Ludgate achieves balance as it appeases the individual architecture around each side of the structure.<sup>6</sup> With a coherent design articulated through consistent structural technique, Ludgate's form oscillates around each corner of the block which the building wraps around. Each side of the edifice confronts a different adjacent building. Each building yearns for a slightly different reaction from each side of Ludgate, thus SOM achieved a balanced structure through conscious design formed with consistently technique and styled structure. The highlighted circular steel frame corner provides a statement to the main street running along the backside of the building. The straight and flat continuous planes on the two larger left and right sides of the building react to the side streets and non-entranced aspects of the building. And lastly, the slight stepped sides and angles on the courtyard facing side react to the open-air entrance of the building and the multitude of buildings near that side of the design.



*"Volume" of the Structure & the Stepped, Open-Air Entrance.*

The final of the three main concepts of international style is the idea of expulsion of all exterior ornamentation. This is an expansion on the notion that new technology and structure speaks for itself; thus the structure of an International Style building is in fact also the building's ornamentation. 10 Fleet Place is the epitome of a structurally-ornamented building of the International Style. The structure's exposed steel frame and faceted glass façade allow both the structural and organizational aspects of the building claim priority. The structure not only eradicates the need for other ornamentation, but trumps all other focus. The attention one's eye pays to the steel frame structure proves to allow one to better understand the idea of the structure as a whole; as both a reactionary and functional built form. Ludgate also has an interesting interpretation because in addition to using the steel frame as a bare minimum form of ornamentation, it includes a styling of the steel frame along both the curved corner and towards the top of the structure to compliment the historical style of flying buttresses in the area that is so well known for its old churches.



*Structure as "Ornamentation".*

With the goal of international style being to integrate traditional styles with more modern technologies and social demands culminating in a style that can be widely understood and appreciated while still catering to the specific needs of a structurally sound building, 10 Fleet Place, Ludgate by SOM is the epitome of these ideas. The building is a prime example of built form using modern technology to address new needs for a multi-use flexible space while also respecting the neighboring architecture. This is an exciting notion because it is an instance in design where modern technology is not used to replace the old. Instead, historical context is fully considered and modern technology is used to both present new ideas while continuing to implications of the old. SOM used new technologies to create new design inspired by old, not new technologies to create new design and erase the old. To quote Le Corbusier, he worried that as the international style arose their would exist a "conflict between the old and the new". Yet 10 Fleet Place avoids such conflict by allowing old to inform the new and new to be inspired by the old. This symbiotic relationship of old a new is a truly successful use of international style. It reflects the maturing technologies and new ideals of post-war society in new techniques and a unified aesthetic, yet it does not leave behind the style from which all other ideas were derived.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> 10fleetplace.com

<sup>2</sup> 10fleetplace.com

<sup>3</sup> Arcidi, Philip. *Progressive Architecture*; Aug93, Vol. 74 Issue 8, p88, 1p, 1 Color Photograph, 1 Black and White Photograph, 1 Diagram

<sup>4</sup> Smith, Adrian (2007). *The Architecture of Adrian Smith, SOM: Toward a Sustainable Future*. Images Publishing Group Pty Ltd. ISBN 1-86470-169-2.

<sup>5</sup> SOM.com [http://www.som.com/content.cfm/ludgate\\_10\\_fleet\\_place](http://www.som.com/content.cfm/ludgate_10_fleet_place)

<sup>6</sup> Schumacher, Thomas L. *Architectural Record*; Jul2007, Vol. 195 Issue 7, p62-62, 1/2p, 1 Black and White Photograph