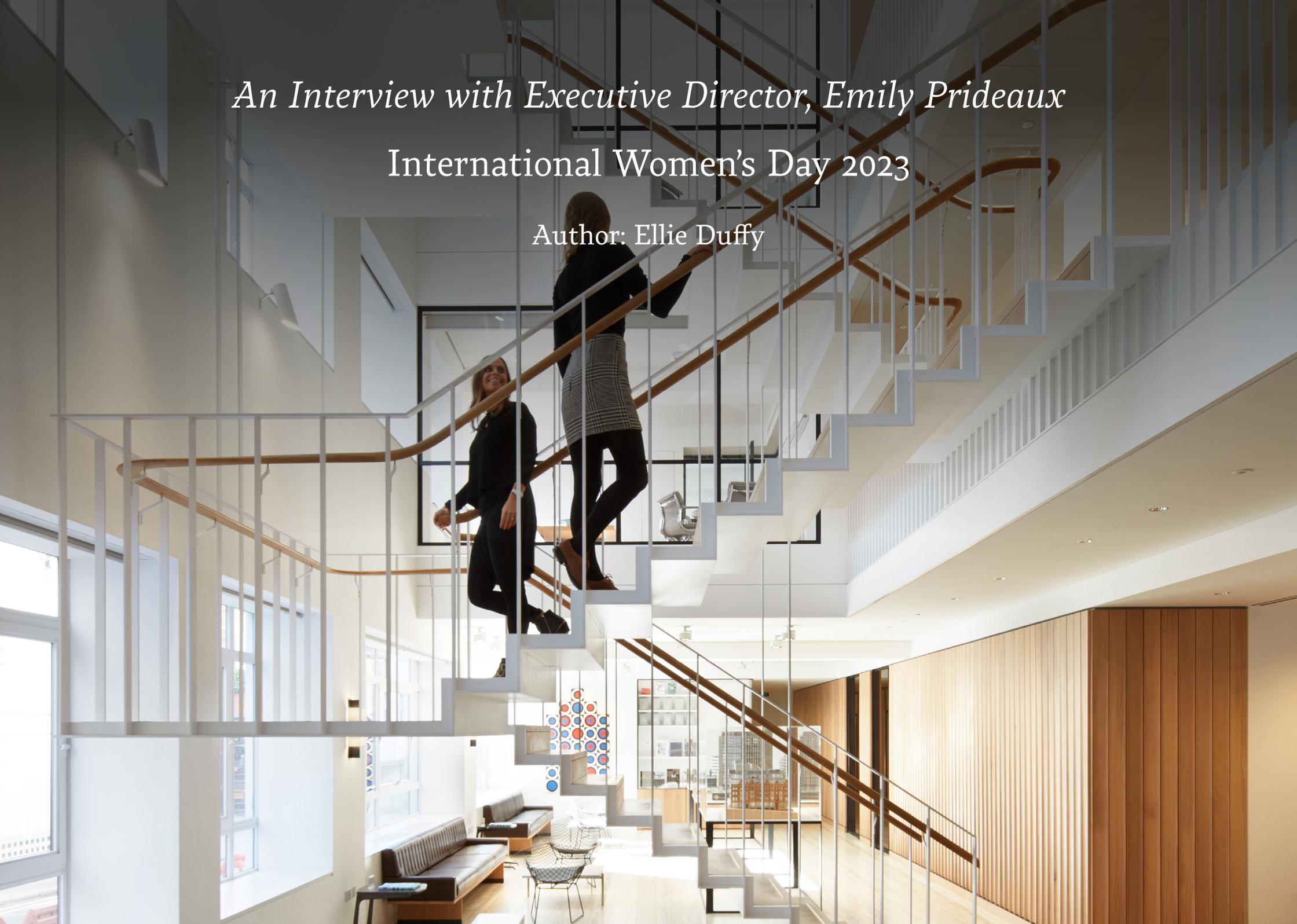


An Interview with Executive Director, Emily Prideaux

International Women's Day 2023

Author: Ellie Duffy



An Interview with Emily Prideaux

On International Women's Day 2023 – with its theme #EmbraceEquity – we talk to Derwent London Executive Director, Emily Prideaux, about how Derwent works with clients to create equitable workspaces.

Key to Emily's role is collaborating at strategic level with CEOs and decision makers on current and future workspace needs. So how does she define an equitable workplace? "For me, equitable space is about enabling full participation in the workplace," says Emily. "It's the kind of space that welcomes everyone equally, encourages individuals, promotes wellbeing, is integrated into community and facilitates great team working." From Emily's viewpoint, good buildings are far more than bricks and mortar. "I've never believed that the hardware



of physical buildings can be separated from the software of people and how they use space – either in or around our buildings,” she says. “Increasingly, what we’re seeing is HR and talent managers being involved in ambitious conversations about workspaces – precisely because they’re coming from that people-centred perspective. With long-term, cross-sector clients we’re very used to collaborating to integrate wellbeing, social impact and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion into physical space.”



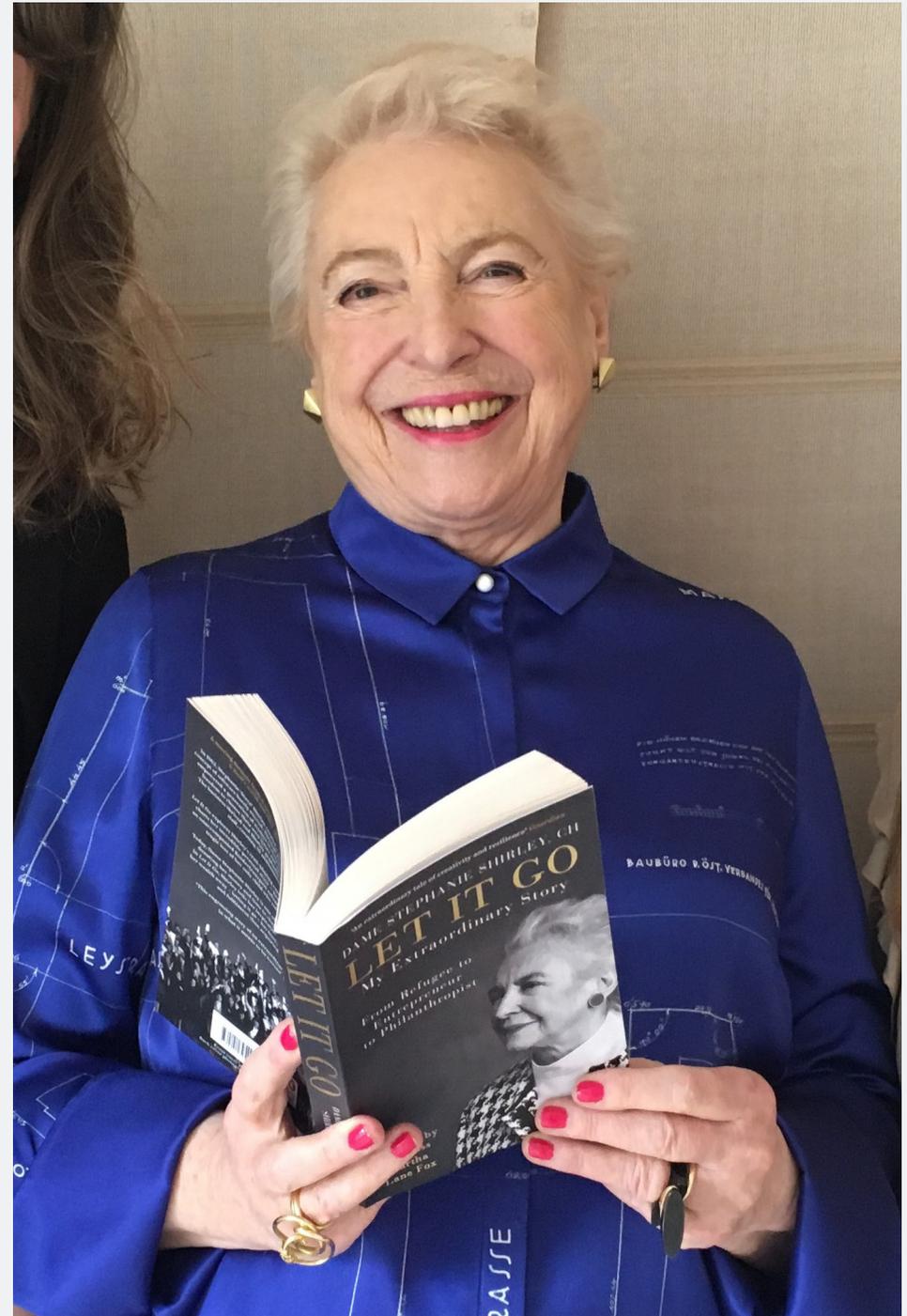
Rooftop yoga at Brunel Building W2

Emily arrived at Derwent London in 2010, after working on the agency side of the industry and studying Modern Languages followed by European Property. In 2021 she was appointed to Derwent’s Board with responsibility for Leasing and Asset Management teams as well as marketing and digital innovation. Reflecting on her first 20 years in property, Emily says she’s seen a lot of positive change. “Just one example is equitable parental leave policies, which I’m proud to have been an advocate for here at Derwent. It’s a way of creating a more equal field for all parents – men as well as women.”

When thinking about equity, Emily says that it’s important to remember that workspace is about people of all ages continually learning from each other. “All diversity – including gender balance – promotes better learning for everyone. I’ve felt supported by a lot of positive role models in my career – male and female – but the fact that Derwent’s non-exec board is more than 50% female does feel empowering.”

Asked about the figureheads who've inspired her, Emily says there have been many – both women and men of different ages and experiences – but she singles out Dame Stephanie Shirley – founder of an all-woman software company and pioneer of flexible working. “I read her incredible life story, *Let it Go*. Dame Shirley came to the UK as a *Kindertransport* refugee in 1939. She was talented at maths and in the 1950s found herself writing code for early Post Office computers. But when she set up her own technology company, she found it necessary to adopt the pseudonym ‘Steve’ so that her business approaches would be taken seriously.”

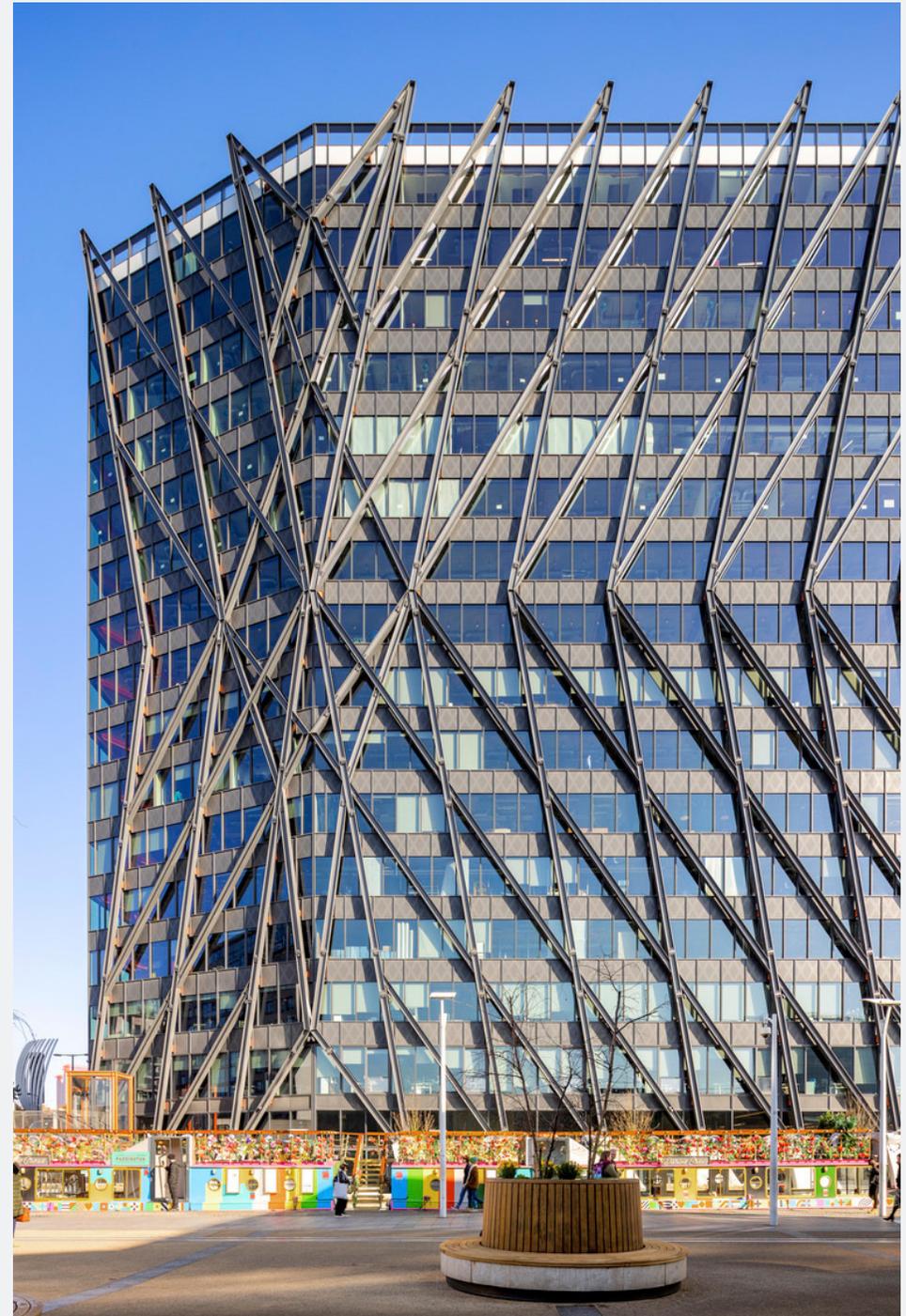
Today, with flexible and hybrid working mainstream, Derwent’s approach to equitable workspace is essentially collaborative. “It’s about innovative, best-in-class sustainable design; thinking long-term and getting those fundamentals right by listening to our customers and making informed decisions with architects and design teams at early design stages. Increasingly clients perceive high-quality space as much more than bricks and mortar – it’s about creating environments where staff feel inspired and empowered to be productive and collaborative. That’s likely to mean a range of work settings that suit different needs and preferences – and which may be very specific to organisational culture.”



A good example of businesses getting the most out of space to enhance their operations and culture, says Emily, is the Brunel Building in Paddington, which completed in 2019 and was pre-let to eight occupiers from diverse sectors. She explains that each company has now put its own stamp on their space within the Fletcher Priest-designed building, reflecting different working modes and priorities. Sony, for example, has incorporated two screening rooms and significant entertainment space while a private equity house has prioritised gym space staffed by a full-time personal trainer for its hardworking employees.

Tech innovator Dojo, meanwhile, has fitted out its floors to reflect its operational style, with team configurations continually evolving on a fast-moving project basis. “All the tenants who’ve taken more than one floor at Brunel have been able to create the kind of generous vertical circulation space that promotes social interaction, learning and incidental collaboration – the kind of connectivity that dynamic business thrives on,” observes Emily.

Opposite: Brunel Building W2



It's through her role as director of non-profit organisation The Paddington Partnership that Emily works to build relationships between Brunel's occupiers and the community. "The Partnership is a grouping of Paddington stakeholders, including developers and social enterprises. It's partly about placemaking, streetscape and maintenance of public realm but it's also about bringing community together through initiatives like mentoring in local schools and community events for all demographics. A really important aspect of equity from my perspective is that workplaces are engaged with the communities they're part of."

And what advice would Emily give to young women at the start of their careers today? "Actually, I tend to give the same advice to everybody – and that's to be yourself at work and let people see the authentic you," she says. "I'd also say that to achieve equity in the workplace, we all need to be trying try our hardest to account for everyone around us, to expand our perspectives – because true equity is a collective endeavour."



Derwent London staff and occupier volunteering

Derwent London works with Smart Works – a UK charity supporting women in the workplace. To find out more about their work click [here](#).

For International Women's Day 2023, campaign group Part W has produced a map that shines a light on female contributions to London's built environment. To find out more click [here](#).