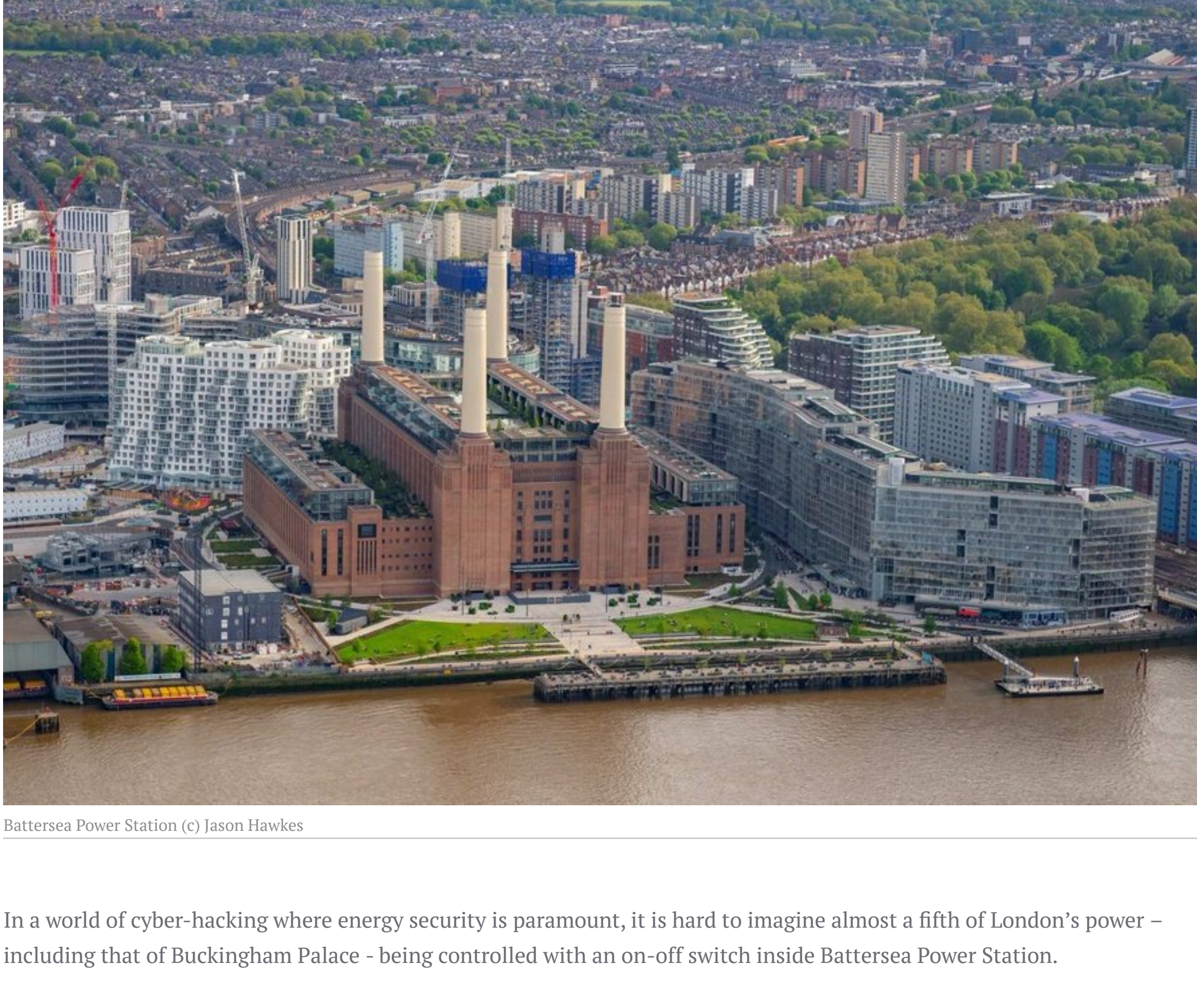


Reimagining London's 'Cathedral of Power'

Written by Tara Loader Wilkinson Created: 04 October 2022



Battersea Power Station opens this month for the first time in nearly 40 years.



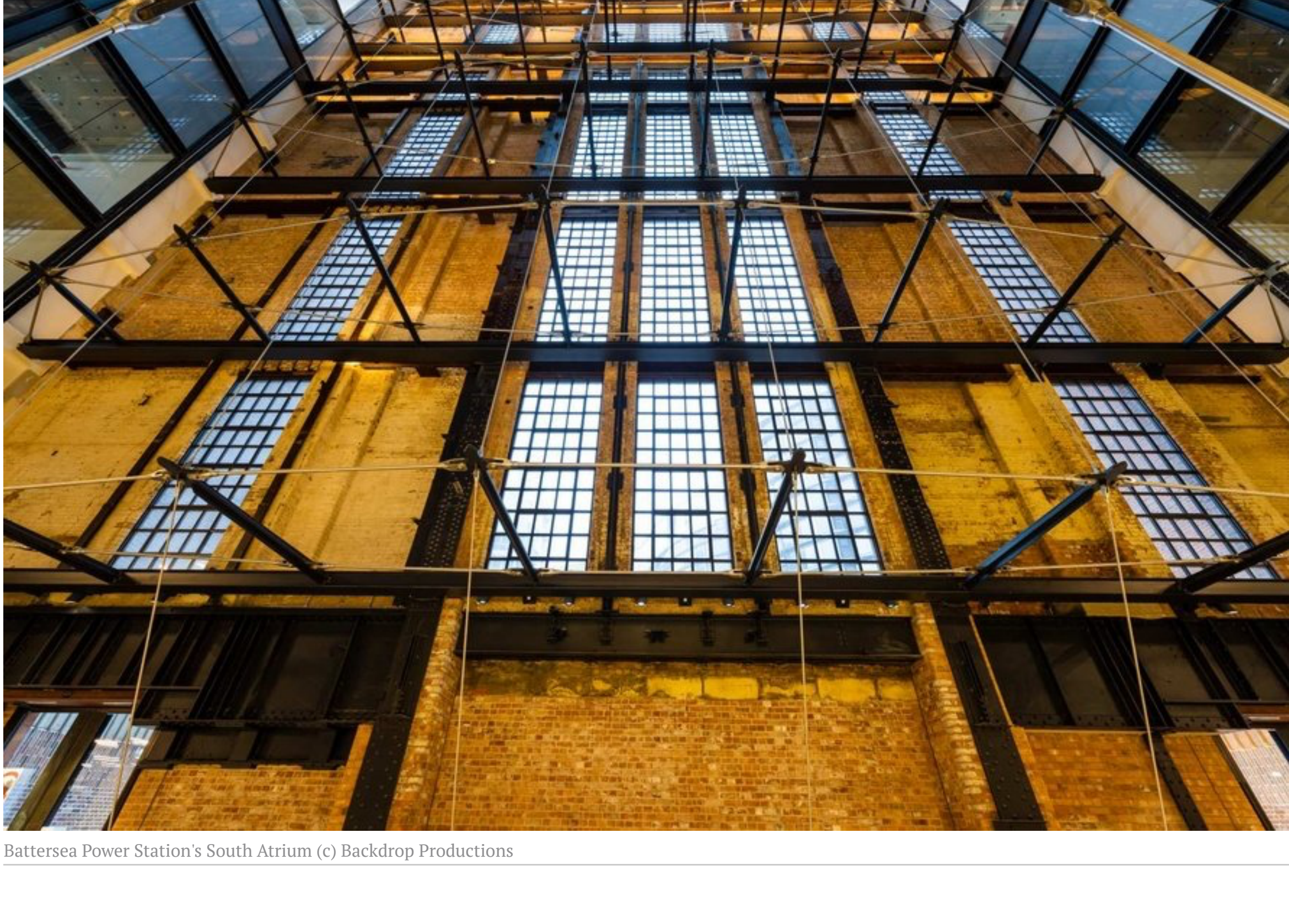
Battersea Power Station (c) Jason Hawkes

In a world of cyber-hacking where energy security is paramount, it is hard to imagine almost a fifth of London's power – including that of Buckingham Palace - being controlled with an on-off switch inside Battersea Power Station.

But back in the 1950's this was the case; although at least the control for Buckingham Palace was code-named 'Carnaby Street 2', to throw off any wrong-doers.

From Friday October 14th, members of the public will be able to sip cocktails, go shopping, and meet for dinner amongst the original dials and switches which once regulated the supply of electricity to some of the capital's most important landmarks, from the Houses of Parliament and Wimbledon, to 'Carnaby Street 2'.

Following its decommissioning as a coal-fired power station in 1983, and after several aborted attempts to redevelop the site, the Grade II* listed Battersea Power Station is finally ready for its close-up.

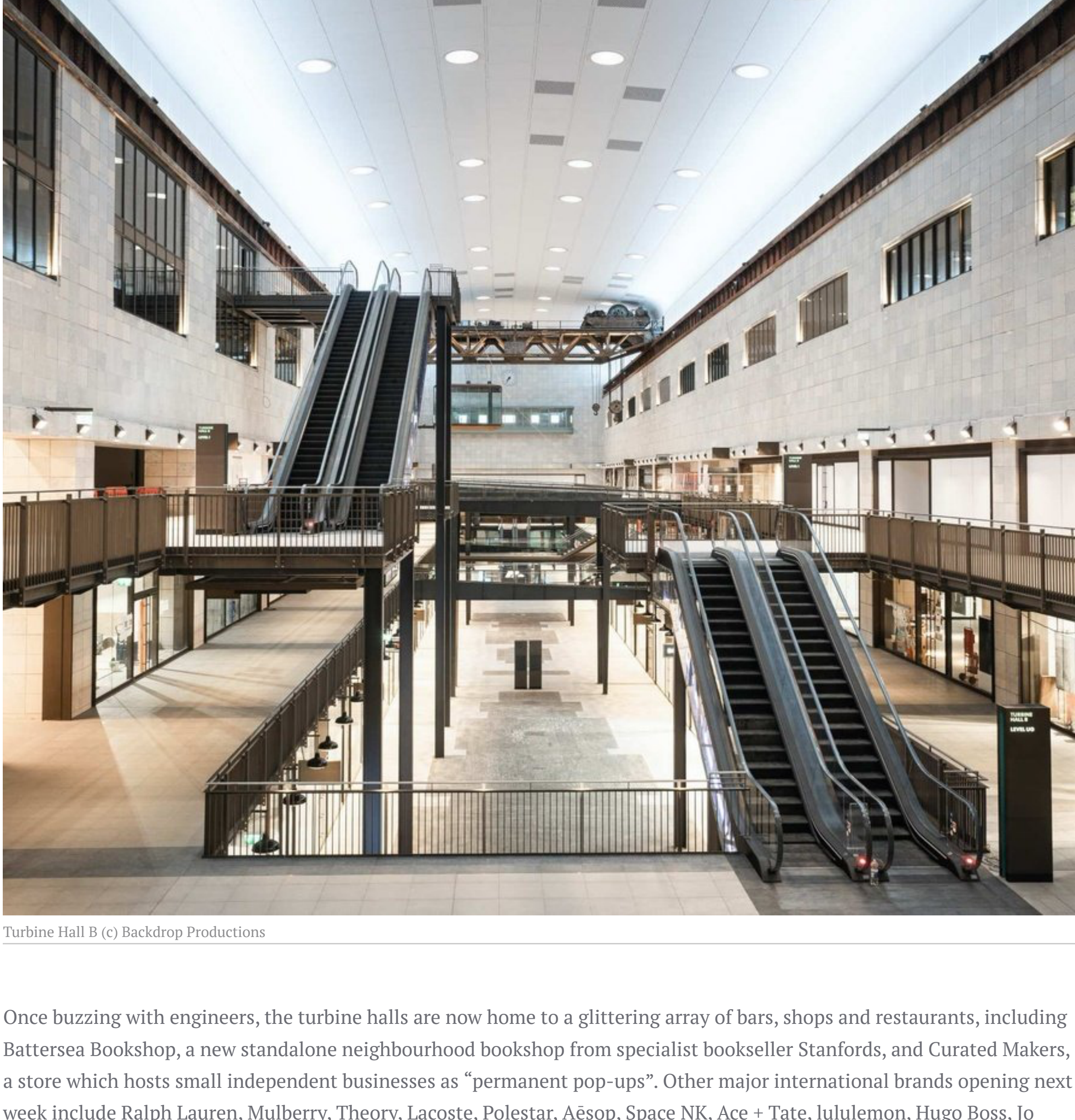


Battersea Power Station's South Atrium (c) Backdrop Productions

Walking in through the iconic doors for the first time will be a huge thrill, hopes Jim Eyre, founding director at WilkinsonEyre, the architects behind the restoration. Since they won the competition to transform the power station in 2013, it has been almost a complete regeneration of a shell with no roof, including demolishing and rebuilding the iconic chimneys. All in all, a £9 billion transformation funded by a consortium of investors from the UK and Malaysia.

"The sheer scale of the space coupled with the dramatic effect of the restoration is bound to evoke an emotional response on first entering these extraordinary spaces," he says. "We hope that people will share that sense of pride and awe that comes from seeing inside an iconic landmark that so many people are aware of but have never before been able to visit, now brought back to life with new uses."

He points to the difference in architectural style between the two Turbine Halls, one built before the Second World War, Art Deco and glamorous in style, and the other constructed Post War. Contrastingly brutalist, austere, with a definite sense of the Orwellian, it is characterised by faience tiling and stainless steel control panels arranged in an arc. "The difference in Turbine Hall A and Turbine Hall B should give an element of surprise and excitement as visitors discover all that is within," says Eyre.



Turbine Hall B (c) Backdrop Productions

Once buzzing with engineers, the turbine halls are now home to a glittering array of bars, shops and restaurants, including Battersea Bookshop, a new standalone neighbourhood bookshop from specialist bookseller Stanfords, and Curated Makers, a store which hosts small independent businesses as "permanent pop-ups". Other major international brands opening next week include Ralph Lauren, Mulberry, Theory, Lacoste, Polestar, Aesop, Space NK, Ace + Tate, lululemon, Hugo Boss, Jo Malone London and Uniqlo and Korean food and culture hub, Oseyo.

"The luxury brands tend to prefer the glamorous 1930's-style Turbine Hall A, whereas the more youthful brands have located themselves in the more Brutalist Turbine Hall B," says a representative of Battersea Power Station during a hard hat tour.

One of the most exciting elements for visitors, says Eyre, will be Control Room B bar. Back in its heyday Control Room directors had views over Turbine Halls so they could survey the work of the engineers. Experiential bar company Inception Group, known for Mr Fogg's and Cahoots, has taken over the Dr Who-inspired Control Room B; staff dressed in white utilitarian boiler will serve cocktails in mid-century glassware from a stunning centrepiece bar, a turbine-inspired radial sculpture. "Control Room B will be a fun place to relax amongst the shiny dials and switches of the controls, overlooking Turbine Hall B," says Eyre. Control Room A will be available for private event hire.



Control Room B (c) John Sturrock

Eyre adds that much of the restoration was done as a homage to the original architect of Battersea Power Station, Giles Gilbert Scott, one of the great 20th Century architects. "Working so closely, effectively in collaboration with Giles Gilbert Scott, we developed an appreciation of how he organised the various components of a building; particularly the geometric arrangement and ordering of fenestration and his quite sparing use of ornamental elements," says Eyre. It helped that WilkinsonEyre had already restored another project of his, the Bodleian Library in Oxford. "Our prior work on the New Bodleian (now the Weston Library) had already made us empathetic to Scott's design approach, which in the case of Battersea Power Station is monumental and heroic," says Eyre.

All in all, the restoration took nearly a decade. Pored over by dozens of architects; at one point as many as 35 were working all on different elements. Because the construction of the building originally took place over two decades, there were so many different types of bricks and materials used. A reported four Eiffel Tower's worth of steel went into the construction. Meanwhile, in the vicinity of the power station a number of luxury residential projects were built simultaneously, including cascading residences by Frank Gehry and contemporary apartments by Foster + Partners.

"This project is effectively a few projects in one," says Eyre. "A major office development, a major residential scheme, a major retail scheme, an event space as well as a massive piece of infrastructure for the full masterplan," says Eyre. "So we had to have separate teams working on each of these aspects with separate project architects, we also had a site-wide team dealing with the cladding, the restoration components which cut across all areas. Wilkinson Eyre have produced a vast number of contract drawings for the project and have reviewed many times more again of suppliers drawings, each with subsequent revisions. This is why the architect man-hours ran into hundreds of thousands."

For epic views, visitors can take a lift 109 metres up one of the building's four famous chimneys, which famously graced the album cover of Pink Floyd's 1977 album *Animals*. From up there, you may catch a glimpse of one of the resident family of peregrine falcons, of which WilkinsonEyre is particularly proud. The falcons had begun nesting at the power station in the 2000's, some 17 years before the first humans moved in. The architects were desperate not to disturb them, so, under the eagle eye of David Morrison, the in-house peregrine falcon expert, at a cost of more than £45,000, a tower of the same kind used to support large cranes was erected with a nest box for the peregrines installed at the top. Since the project began in 2013, the falcons have raised 22 chicks. They are now referred to as VIBs - Very Important Birds.

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