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PROJECT 3

PubLove at The White Ferry, London

MorenoMasey and PubLove have completed their second pub/hostel project, turning an under-appreciated upstairs into a welcoming space

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IT MIGHT FEEL like every inch of space in London must be accounted for, yet it's likely that on a street corner near you there are two or three floors of a historic building lying empty or underused, perhaps even derelict. While a pub downstairs may be bustling, the upstairs is likely not – traditionally occupied by the

publican, these spaces are often left empty, at best looked after by property guardians.

On paper, such spaces have potential: their desirable attributes include high ceilings and period details, and their locations across the whole of the city are in a number of in-demand spots. To translate them into more enterprising

language, they could be pitched as 'standalone mixed-use developments', as Rodrigo Moreno Masey suggests when explaining how PubLove (now working with his architectural firm MorenoMasey on these projects), is seeking to make something of the phenomenon.

PubLove is the organisation that set up in >



KEY SUPPLIERS

Bed enclosures & cubicles – Origine Premier range N26 Noyer Ombre
Polyrey
en.polyrey.com

Bedroom vinyl flooring – Orchestra Glockenspiel
Altro
altro.co.uk

Wet room vinyl flooring – Aquarius Hippo
Altro
altro.co.uk

PROJECT INFO

Client
PubLove
publove.co.uk

Architect
MorenoMasey
morenomasey.com

Previous spread The PubLove look is a contemporary industrial aesthetic

Left and top Triple-tiered bunks provide 78 beds across the space

Below The White Ferry in London's Victoria was the first pub that PubLove and MorenoMasey took on

2007 'against a backdrop of 49 pub closures a week'. Its idea to save London's pubs is to run a hostel in the upstairs space, with the pub downstairs continuing to serve locals as well as providing extra amenities for hostel guests. The revenue generated from the upper floors creates a viable model for continuing to run a pub in these high-value buildings across cities. The set-up is that Ei Group, a leased and tenanted pub business in the UK with a portfolio of over 4,000 pubs, provides PubLove, 'a young enterprising company', as Moreno Masey describes them, with properties to run.

Moreno Masey explains that the traditional layout of a pub makes it difficult to convert the upstairs into normal residential properties – often, the only way up is through a staircase in the middle of the pub, and many properties are also listed, making it tricky to create new entrances. The combination of planning laws, practical concerns and a lack of financial demand leaves these spaces empty – 'so the idea that you would take a disused upper floor and make it actually generate income...' Moreno Masey trails off, but his visible excitement concludes the sentence.

His studio's work ranges from conducting feasibility studies to delivering the interiors for the hostel, and in some cases the pub too, and

at various times the practice has been looking at up to eight different properties for PubLove. The White Ferry, Victoria, was the first pub that PubLove and MorenoMasey took on, but due to its listed status impacting the time on the build, the first to be actually finished was The Crown in Battersea.

Following the PubLove model, The White Ferry design aims to widen the demographic of hostel user to include a new kind of traveller. The quality of finish plus amenities such as higher-spec bathrooms – individual wet rooms with carefully chosen finishes – do a lot of the work, while the pub provides better social spaces than the either absent or disappointing common spaces of the standard hostel.

In the rooms, triple-tiered bunk beds provide the volume of beds necessary for the business model to work – in this case offering 78 beds across the space. The beds that PubLove developed require the ceiling heights afforded by traditional pub buildings, so that is an important factor in determining whether a property can be converted. Moreno Masey has updated the PubLove bunks in terms of finish and amenities, going for a sleek black and timber palette and adding individual power points plus hooks for storage.

Moreno Masey describes the two paths that hostel interiors usually take as either:

'everything is Formica or very sterile'; or overtly themed, as if screaming 'London!' – in case you didn't know where you were, he jokes. The PubLove look is more of a contemporary industrial aesthetic that hopes to appeal to the target demographic, but the company is not attempting to mimic a higher-end hotel. Moreno Masey explains: 'We don't pretend that they are anything other than functional spaces, so that sort of slightly industrial aesthetic helps.'

The listed status places restrictions on how the fabric of the building could be altered, yet both the studio and PubLove could ensure consistency between how the branding concept is manifested here and the other less-restricted locations. Moreno Masey explains: 'We actually applied a skin inside the historic building so that we could keep the brand, of the hostel, intact, within the historic building.' Other non-invasive refurbishment included keeping original features, but using an elevated colour palette for painted surfaces, including painted branding graphics for room numbers.

Having been involved in pubs for 20 years – easily long enough to understand the problem of these upstairs spaces – Moreno Masey finds this a fascinating project. He concludes: 'I've been upstairs in lots and lots of pubs, and most of them are... horrible.' He is clearly pleased to be finally making something of them. **FX**