



**ON TOP OF THE TECH**

With the public paying for nightly performances and a roster of event clients teaming with tech and media companies, Kings Place needs to be right on top of its technology game. The on-site sound, lighting and broadcast team numbers 15-20 technicians, who are just as comfortable realising ambitious concepts with client tech teams as guiding organisers who have no in-house technical support (more common in recent years). With a large staff on hand, each event receives the attention of three AV technicians.

The media-savvy client base has also brought social media to the top of the agenda at Kings Place. 'Clients want delegates to be able to engage with the outside world,' says Lucy Wright, director of business development. 'So 400 delegates, each with an iPad, laptop and phone – that's 1,200 devices, each one needing a connection with the outside world.' The venue team scratched its collective head, and installed a 1GB internet line – one of the first venues in London to do so – which can cope with such demands.

Investment is ongoing. Autumn 2012 saw the addition of a single-mode satellite on the venue's roof that links to the BT Tower and eliminates the need for an outside broadcast truck. The message is clear: we're connected.



pride of *place*

*A decade ago, Kings Place was little more than a bright idea and a blueprint. Today, this canalside corner of King's Cross is home to a thoroughly modern venue where culture meets commerce*

WORDS: ANNA KIBBEY

When property developer Peter Millican unrolled the blueprint for Kings Place at the turn of the century, it would certainly have raised a few eyebrows. A £100m construction that would house two concert halls, two art galleries, a handful of event space and five floors of offices on the fringes of King's Cross, when the area was little more than a traffic-clogged intersection, a rundown station (not even a sniff of the Eurostar terminal) and a notorious red light district. Construction started in 2008, just as the recession was starting to bite. Not the best timing.

Fast forward to 2013. As Kings Place approaches its fifth birthday, King's Cross is almost unrecognisable – the station revamped, a shiny new Eurostar terminal at the restored St Pancras, two landmark hotel openings and the likes of Marcus Wareing, Mark Sargeant and Bruno Loubet involved in restaurant launches. *The Times* is calling Millican a 'pioneer' and *The Guardian*

hopes that Kings Place 'sets the tone for a new generation of offices in British cities' and then moves its 1,700 staff in. The vision is becoming a reality.

The building itself, distinguished from the (still unremarkable) surrounding streetscape by its wave-formation façade, has an open-door policy that gives the place a vitality you don't find in private venues. At its heart is a light-flooded atrium, which pulls people from outside and surrounding offices in for coffee and casual meetings. Continue through, and you'll find yourself on the Regent's Canal, where swans glide past the rows of deckchairs, patio tables and ranks of colourful houseboats.

Like the structure itself, the event space on offer has been purpose built. It's also integral to the business model that underpins this pioneering project. Every event held here generates profit that goes straight back into the work of the Kings Place Music Foundation, a charity that aims to increase engagement in music and the arts. >>



**SPACE SELECTOR**

The largest of the event spaces is the Japanese-inspired **Hall One** (pictured, left), an elegant blend of oak (all from a single 500-year-old German tree) and sleek lines. The slick tiered space is the centrepiece

of the concert programme

– audiences rave about its pitch-perfect acoustics, and event bookers about the truly state-of-the-art kit. HD ballcams (no need for a hovering cameraman at the back) and HD/3D projectors are the latest addition. The auditorium seats 420.

With more of a studio feel, the imaginatively named **Hall Two** (pictured, right) is a black box of a space blessed with a grid rig for 360-degree projection and elaborate set design. It's particularly popular

with production companies,

as well as the retail sector, as

brands can mock up an office, showroom or flagship store for showcases.

The blankest of all the canvasses on offer, **The Battlebridge Room's** most notable feature is its canalside terrace (pictured, left) and views over the canal beyond with its rainbow house boats. Presentations with drinks receptions are a popular option, but Google, which has a particular penchant for garden-themed events, recently created a 'Garden Market'

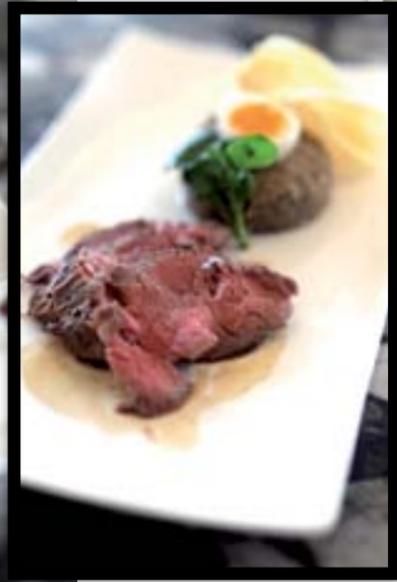
in here: astro turf on the floor, pillars dressed as silver birches, market-style food stalls and deckchairs on the terrace.

Next door is the **Rotunda**, the canalside bar-restaurant where Kings Place's commitment to British produce comes to the fore. There's a PDR for up to 35, but we like the idea of a summer party (currently in production) for 230 with a Miami Vice theme that involves balloon palm trees, inflatable crocs in the canal, staff in Don Johnson get-up and cocktails and beers from the resident beach hut. The terrace (pictured, right) is a beauty.

Of the four clean-cut breakout

spaces, the largest is the 100-capacity

**St Pancras Room**, which has built-in presentation, projection and PA systems. For enlightened breakouts, the **Enclosed Art Gallery**, home to some of the venue's more avant-garde exhibitions, is open for public viewing, but also available for receptions of 100, or sit-down dining for 80.



Luckily, the events business is thriving, particularly in the technology and media sector. The likes of Adobe, Google, Sony and ITV have all cottoned on to the rolling programme of technology upgrades here (see box on previous spread). Banks and law firms, previously nervous about holding events in King's Cross, are now pricking up their ears as well.

**TASTE THE DIFFERENCE**

It's not just technology and culture that mark Kings Place out. Catering has been a priority since the venue's launch in 2008, which is no surprise when you learn that CEO John Nugent formerly headed up catering giant Searcys and Corrigan's Restaurants. His company, Green & Fortune, runs all three strands of the venue's food operation: the grab-and-go Green & Fortune Café in the foyer, the impressive Rotunda Restaurant with its private dining space (seating 24), and all the catering for Kings Place Events.



A lot of caterers talk about sourcing and seasonality, but Green & Fortune has gone a stage further – the company has its own farm in Northumberland (it's half a mile from the home of owner Peter Millican), so the kitchen team knows the origins, name and inside-leg measurement of every cow and lamb they serve (see 'Behind the Scenes' below). Like a lot of the philosophies at Kings Place, it's not something they just talk about; it's what they do. **VGE**

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**BEHIND THE SCENES**

We talk asparagus, mackerel and Michelin with executive head chef **Ian Green**, who leads the busy banqueting kitchen.

**How did you get involved with Green & Fortune?**

I've worked in large and small hotels, and in fine dining, but I fell out of love with the Michelin thing. When this job came up and I heard the whole ethos of what John [Nugent] wanted to do here, I jumped at it. People overcomplicate food – when spring lamb is in season and you've got the new Jersey Royals and a 2kg bag of fresh peas from a farm in Kent, that we buy whole and shell here, there's no better flavour.

**What does the 'ethos' involve?**

Well, on our farm in Northumberland, all the animals are born there, hand-reared and allowed to grow at their own pace. This means that our spring lambs aren't available until June, or, because of the weather this year, maybe as late as the end of June or July. Nature takes its course, which comes with its own challenges, but the flavour of the meat is worth it.

**How do you reconcile this approach with the demands of large events?**

Once we know what events we've got, even if we haven't confirmed menus yet, we can let [the farmers] Ian and Lynne know and they keep an eye out for the animals with the best fat covering and meat quality. We also buy our chickens, turkeys and ducks direct from another farm, and our pigs too, so we don't use wholesale butchers – sourcing is a massive part of the job.



**Seasonal sourcing for events sounds like a nightmare...**

It brings challenges and we have to be flexible. This year for example, there's a massive problem with asparagus – the crops were decimated last year so regrowth has been really difficult and it's really really expensive. We use good suppliers so we knew at the tail-end of last year that this was going to be a problem, but we'd never put Peruvian asparagus on the menu instead – our ingredients are always UK grown.

**How does it go down with event bookers?**

Most people who book love the concept – if they want to know what kind of fish we're using in the fishcakes, I can tell them. There are a lot who come here because they want sustainable and free-range produce on their menus.

**Is the job of the chef very different these days?**

Definitely. Chefs have had to change their way of thinking – we have to keep abreast of, for example, what's on the endangered species list, so recently mackerel from the Faroe Islands and Iceland has become unsustainable. We have to be very adaptable, which is why we're not just about menu A, B and C here. We're lucky: because we produce our breads, pastries, stocks, sauces, desserts and meat in house, we can be very flexible.