

RUSSIAN FOR FISH

Inside the Architects' Studio

Russian for Fish builds bespoke new HQ



Russian for Fish studio. Photo by Peter Landers.

When you spend all your time making other people's homes better, improving your own can easily end up being an afterthought, but for the award-winning architects of **Russian for Fish** – experts in creating beautiful, functional spaces – the prospect of designing their own everyday environment has always been on the firm's to-do list. Now, it's in the 'completed projects' column.

In mid-January this year, company directors **Pereen d'Avoine** and **Nilesh Shah** put the final touches to a new, self-designed studio space – three times the size of their previous one, and specifically laid out to nurture the collaborative atmosphere in which the practice thrives.

For the last nine years, **Russian for Fish** has been based in Bethnal Green's **Durham Yard** complex – a fin de siècle industrial building that once housed the workshops of cabinet makers, at the heart of the Old Bethnal Green Road Conservation Area. The **Russian for Fish** team loved the complex but for a growing firm, the small space – furnished in a hodgepodge, ad hoc manner over the years – was proving increasingly impractical.

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Russian for Fish studio. Photo by Peter Landers.

Then Unit 16 became available, bringing with it the opportunity to create an environment that was tailor-made to the needs of the practice and the tastes of the individuals within it. For the first time in their 12-year history, **Russian for Fish** were free to work without the constraints of a client brief. The 70 sq m dual-aspect, high-ceilinged space offered the freedom to create a workspace that was both an effective and engaging perfect place to work and a visual showcase of the values and abilities of Russian for Fish as a practice.

'Architecture studios are busy places – we have samples everywhere, cladding tests, models, drawings, prints etc – so the underlying space needed to be calm. It was important that the studio was functional on a daily basis but could also be a showroom. Now, we can invite clients to the office; they can see our door handles in use; they can understand our attention to detail and the level of finish we aspire to; and they can appreciate the holistic vision we bring to a space and the talent of the designers we collaborate with.'

– Pereen d'Avoine, founder, Russian for Fish

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Russian for Fish studio. Photo by Peter Landers.

Brilliant white walls and mid-grey floors lend a bright neutral backdrop to the bespoke fixtures and furniture, which Russian for Fish created with designer **Gavin Coyle** – a long-standing collaborator. Together, they've developed a simple but material palette of lightly steamed beech and oiled **Valchromat fibreboard** – which Russian for Fish chose both because of the diverse aesthetic effects it can enable, and as a means of testing the material's response to everyday use before they specify it for use in their residential projects.

Used for cupboard fronts, bookshelves, desktops and display shelves, the midnight blue Valchromat creates a visual thread that draws the eye through the space, while the solid beech of Coyle's tapered table legs provide a tonal contrast.

The beech's subtle pale pink undertones also complement the brass of the **Tala LED pendant lights** that illuminate the space, and the gold of Russian for Fish's signature ironmongery designs, which feature on the cupboard doors.

One wall is lined with a full-width bookshelf and a series of low-level units used for storing office essentials, and topped with a display shelf for the practice's architectural models. In the central area are three desk spaces and a large meeting table with a speckled white tabletop created by **Smile Plastics** from the lids and labels of recycled yoghurt pots (a nod to Russian for Fish's emphasis on material sustainability). A second display unit beside the table serves as a privacy screen for client meetings.

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Foremost in the design is its suitability for collaboration – Russian for Fish are joined in the studio by Pereen’s father’s firm Pierre d’Avoine Architects, and four smaller practices, so it was essential that the space was tailored to the open exchange of ideas and the shared exploration of creative possibilities.



Russian for Fish studio (left). Nilesch Shah and Pereen d’Avoine of Russian for Fish (right). Photo by Peter Landers.

‘The spirit of the space reflects our approach: it is calm, robust and practical, as well as being warm and tactile. It’s a place that we’ll enjoy spending time in. It also reflects our integrity. We don’t like to specify products without testing them and so the studio’s interior gives us an opportunity to test certain materials. It’s not just a space for us, but a space for our co-workers, it provides space for conversation, for the sharing ideas, for impromptu design reviews, for the odd moan... it reflects the very nature of collaboration.’

– Pereen d’Avoine, founder, Russian for Fish

For more images or information about **Russian for Fish’s** new studio and other projects, please contact **Jodi Moss** at jodi@zetteler.co.uk or on +44 (0)7910 705147.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

Unit 16, Durham Yard

Architect Russian for Fish

Furniture design [Gavin Coyle](#)

Surfaces [Valchromat](#)

Tabletop [Smile Plastics](#)

Photographer [Peter Landers](#)

About Russian for Fish

Russian for Fish is an award-winning London-based architectural and design practice founded by RIBA-chartered architect Pereen d'Avoine in 2006. Now run by Pereen and co-director Nilesch Shah, the company works on extension and new-build projects for both residential and commercial clients, and is especially adept at transforming compact spaces. Their work is characterised by simplified material palettes, contemporary and minimalist detailing, and a cohesive, sympathetic approach to surroundings.

The Russian word for fish is pronounced 'RIBA'.

russianforfish.com
