

*Wickham & Associates' Fifth Floor at Harvey Nichols is inspired by the market square. Critique by Ian Latham. Photos: Peter Cook.*

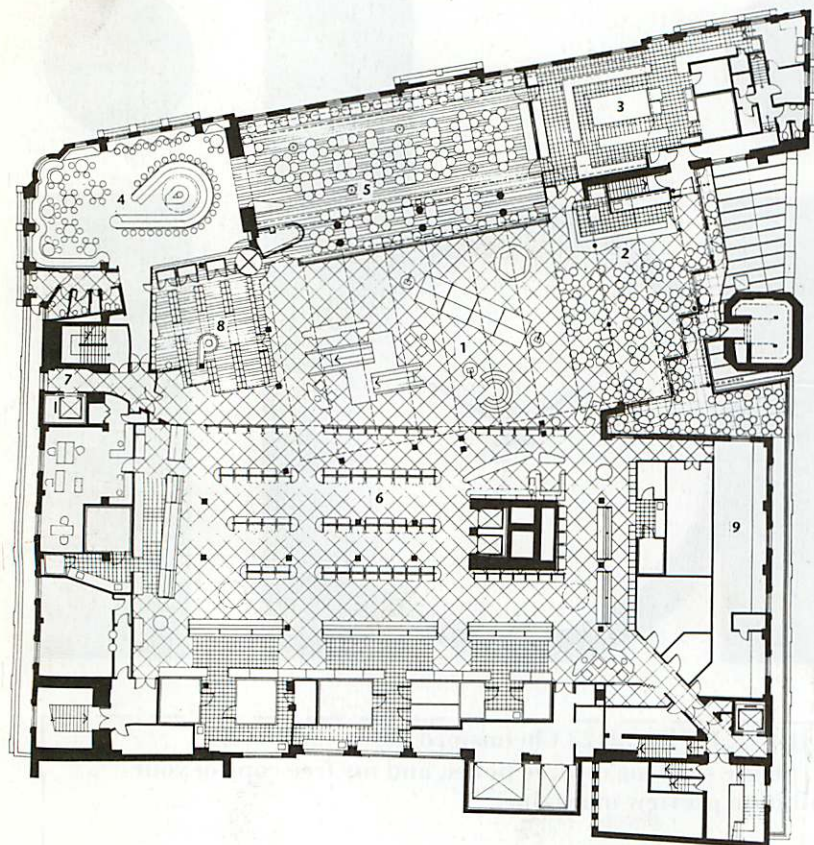
**Fifth Floor plan** 1 market square, 2 cafe, 3 kitchen, 4 bar, 5 restaurant, 6 food market, 7 express lift and lobby, 8 wine store, 9 alterations room.

After a long climb you reach the central square, enlivened by fruit and flower stalls. Bottles beckon from the wine shop. Behind the glass bays of the restaurant waiters prepare tables for the wealthier denizens – it has established a reputation. The morning sun glances across the square flooding the cafe. Tables and chairs are informally scattered, some lining the terrace edge to take in the view of the bustling town streets far below. In the covered market to the south, porters, butchers, fishmongers and bakers are busying themselves in anticipation.

But this is not some Tuscan hill town; it is Knightsbridge. And what makes the

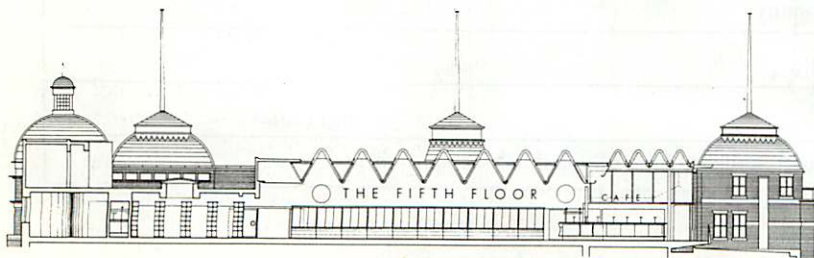
Fifth Floor at Harvey Nichols most intriguing, is that this busy street theatre has been created within a year and by one architectural team – right down to the idiosyncratic lighting and furniture. Such a Gesamtkunstwerk could so easily have fallen victim to fashion or fakery – architectural integrity is a rare commodity in the food sector. But Wickham & Associates have contrived a complex urban ensemble – balanced finely but comfortably between order and chaos – that neither flatters nor deceives the customer.

The project came together with spectacular speed to open well in time for



Christmas 1992. Hong Kong businessman Dickson Poon, who purchased Harvey Nichols' Knightsbridge store the previous year, wanted to set up a new top-floor restaurant and appointed Dominic Ford, then at the Hong Kong Mandarin Oriental, to initiate, develop and run the project. Ford extended the brief to encompass a specialist food market, wine shop, cafe and bar as well as restaurant and brought in a top-class culinary team to run the place. Soon after being appointed Julian Wickham set off with his client on a whistle-stop tour of food halls from Paris and Milan to New York and Hong Kong gathering do's and don'ts.

Wickham's brief for the £6m project was clear, with enough direction to initiate a productive relationship. Almost the entire 3,000 square metre top floor – formerly general offices, stores and residual retail space – was at his disposal. This meant coming to terms with the disparate floor and ceiling levels and conditions across the series of connected buildings that make up the store, which had been



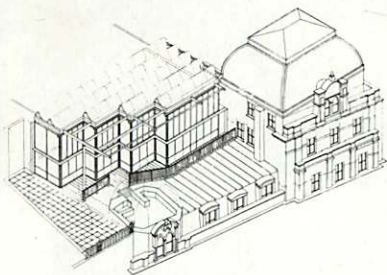




built in four distinct phases between 1860 and 1970. In the 70s intervention a dramatically over-structured series of triangular steel lattice beams was installed to roof over a lightwell which provided the principal escalator circulation.

Wickham's key decision was to remove the roof and ceiling over this area and weave a polycarbonate zigzag between the trusses, bringing daylight back to the heart of the fifth floor. And where, on the east side, the new floor breaks out, the zigzag follows and forms the only new external elevation. These moves define the central market square and the disposition of the other functions – restaurant, wine shop, food hall etc – at its perimeter follows logically. In opening up the interior to both the sky and the city Wickham has gone against food hall convention, but in doing so, and in stark contrast to the lower floors, he has anchored the Fifth Floor to its context. With the lengthy access via escalators or express lifts, the experience of arrival takes on a surreal quality which should be lost on no one.

Wickham has been bold in dealing with the given parameters and objets trouvés of such a refurbishment. To achieve a coherent masterplan, large areas of floor and ceiling have been both



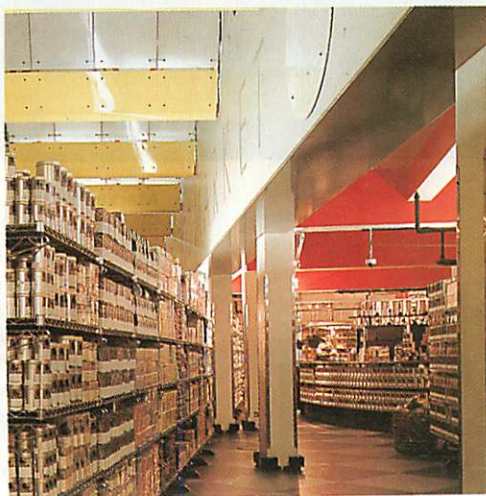
**Cafe** Located on the east side of the market square where a new floor slab, glazed elevation and an extension of the new zig-zag roof have been constructed, the cafe includes a bar next to the kitchen and areas with purpose-designed tables and chairs. The staggered elevation consists of glass doors which can open fully for access to the external terraces; in the summer canopies will provide shade. The glazed cafe bay is the only part of the project to be visible from the street (left).



**Wine Shop** Located near the escalator and main lift, the glass pavilion of the wine shop comprises purpose-designed parallel stacks, a small tasting counter and a fine wine section with conditioned cabinets. As in the restaurant, a recycled woodblock floor has been installed.



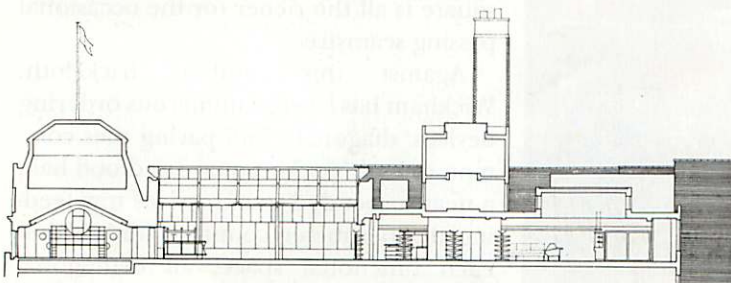
**Food Market** Occupying the south half of the Fifth Floor, the food market consists of specialist preparation and service areas for meat and poultry, fish, charcuterie, pastry/bakery/sandwiches/chocolates, cheese and dairy, preserves and dry goods, coffee/tea etc. The open edge of the market is defined by the glazed backs of shelving. The intended suspended ceiling was abandoned when the project was under way; the disorder of suspended services is countered by bright colours on all downstands. These are coded by direction, so at most two colours are viewed at once.



removed and added. Significantly, however, useful or vestigial features and functions such as old rooflights, penetrating rainwater pipes and a clothing alterations room, have been retained in situ, making virtue out of compromise. The market square is all the richer for the occasional passing seamstress.

Against this random backcloth, Wickham has layered numerous ordering devices: diagonally laid paving tiles common to both market square and food hall; a neat suspended steel services tray feeding the perimeter counters; and, within each functional space, an orthogonal





**Market Square** The heart of the Fifth Floor, the market square features a wavy daylit roof and glazed east end. As in an urban situation, the square is a place of chance encounter, a pedestrian crossroads and a coffee stop. The restaurant, wine shop and food market define the edges with 'external' elevations, their functions proclaimed in Harvey Nichols' corporate typeface writ large. Chequered vinyl floor tiles – also oversized – reinforce the urban scale. Wickham's Royal Mail-approved post box completes the scene.