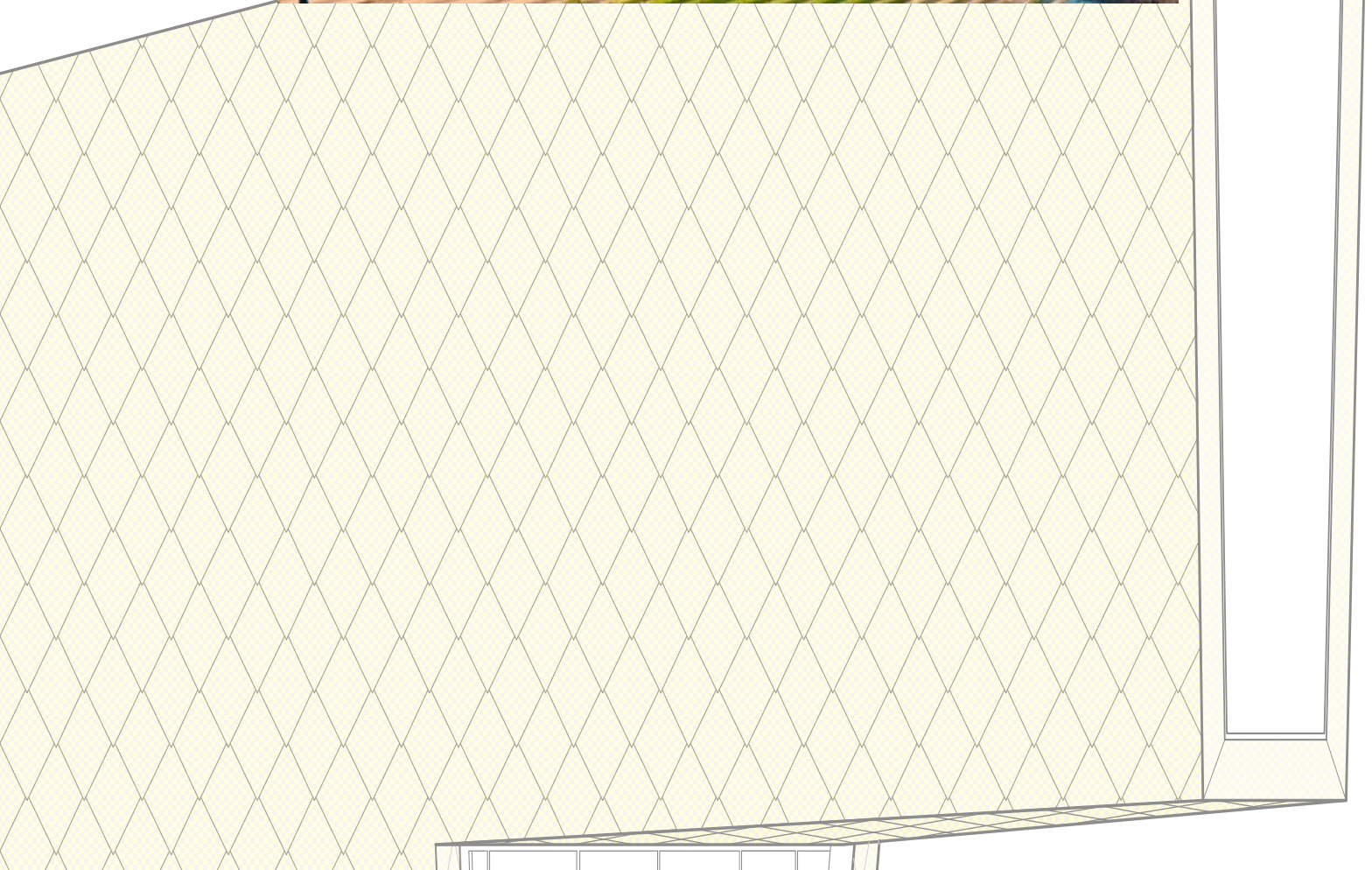
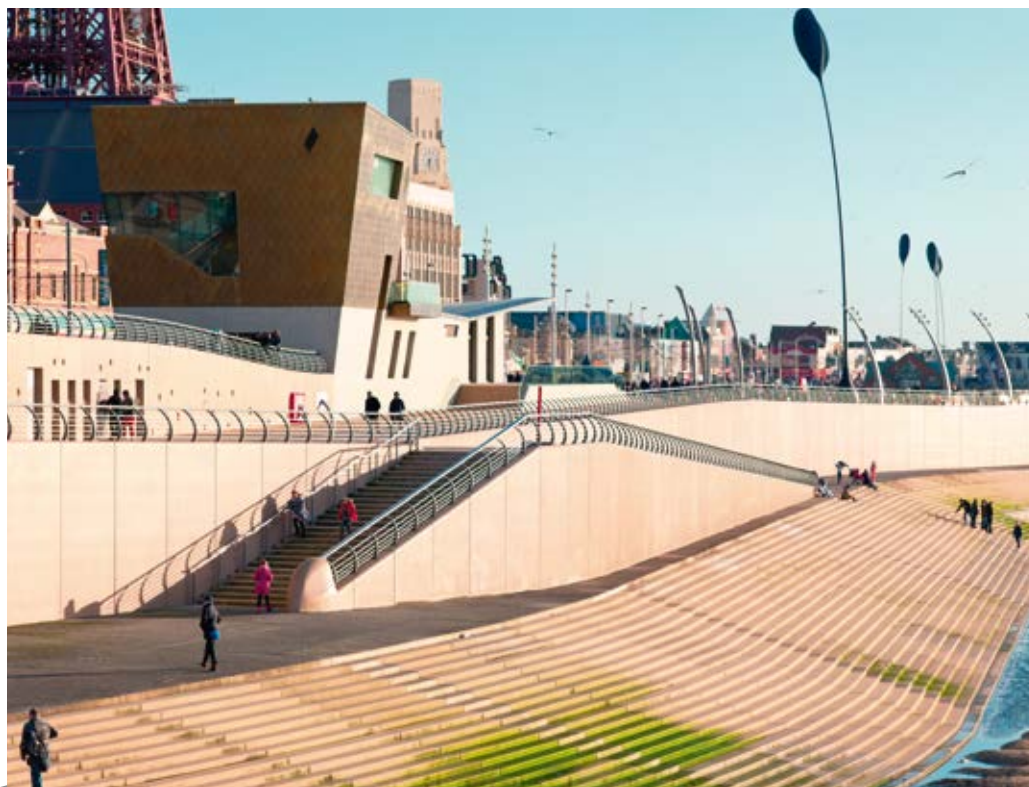


PRESS REPORT

Festival House, Blackpool (UK)

Editor:
Klaus Sikora Kommunikation

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MN Metallverarbeitung Neustadt (D)



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Chameleon on the promenade

The English seaside resort of Blackpool is not a likely first choice for a sightseeing tour of modern architecture. For over 100 years, the old classic Blackpool Tower has been the prominent landmark of a town so well-known throughout the UK and abroad as a synonym for holiday fun, and the resort's latest sculptural structure is definitely not meant to compete with this symbolism. The new Festival House is, however, an outstanding architectural achievement in its own right. Located on the recently modernized seafront promenade and designed by London-based architects dRMM, the more than attractive project literally leaves a shimmering impression.

1. The project

Blackpool's seemingly endless promenade stretches for all of 11 kilometres along the coastline. In the middle section, to the north of *Pleasure Beach* amusement park, three piers jut out into the sea, attracting visitors with a wide range of entertainment – such as a casino, a giant Ferris wheel, cafés, snack bars, takeaways and souvenir shops – with a fresh breeze from the Irish Sea thrown in for good measure. The *Golden Mile* between the North Pier and the South Pier dazzles with entertainment for young and old alike in many different dimensions and qualities. Right in the middle of all this, the 150-metre high steel frame of the Blackpool Tower rises to present a scaled replica of the Eiffel Tower that has been the popular landmark of the town since it was completed at the end of the 19th century. The building concealing the base of the tower is still home to several crowd drawers, such as a complete circus and the impressive Victorian ballroom, where all-night dance parties and Sunday afternoon tea dance events take place, and which is also regularly the venue of prominent international dance competitions. Blackpool offers many different tourist attractions, many of them dating as far back as the time the tower itself was built and the town needed to develop strategies for regaining the high volumes of visitors that used to come from the early industrial factories, closing at agreed times in summer especially to allow their workers to holiday in Blackpool. This is why for almost 140 years from the end of October the traditional *Illuminations* have been turning the promenade into a sea of light that makes even many big-city Christmas displays seem dull in comparison. Now, the *Illuminations* throw their light on a new and promising scenery: the much needed promenade renovation in time for the 2012 holiday season was an important step towards increasing the town's attraction.

The new promenade, designed in reddish-yellow sandstone, is modern and inviting, almost a little surreal in these surroundings. To the one side, the revitalised tram line and the road, which has now been reduced to two lanes, and the town behind, and to the other side the wide, arching „Spanish Steps“ facing the shoreline beyond. This aesthetically impressive replacement for the former sea wall now allows plenty of access to the section of beach between the piers at low tide. In the northern part, towards the tower and North Pier, the promenade widens towards the *Tower Festival Headland*, an area featuring several conspicuous objects. Like over-dimensional pebbles, organically shaped stone sculptures invite visitors to take a rest, while the *Comedy Carpet*, laid out in finely worked stone surface, decorates the ground like an

enormous newspaper page containing citations from many well-known British comedians, and towering black, tulip-shaped sculptures bend gracefully on flexible “stems” in the wind.

The architectural highlight of this ensemble is located on the north side of the Festival Headland. A one-storey building with an elegant seamed flat roof projecting on all sides that unveils its restaurant interior through a large glass front to the south merges into a „mini tower“ with two additional storeys on the opposite side. The formal play with different angles in different directions creates areas of façade with various trapezoid shapes and a distinctive oriel-like top floor, whose glass front cuts the line of sight with a good view of the Blackpool Tower. London-based architects dRMM, who have not enjoyed a name for this kind of sculptural work up to now, achieved a surprising result with this successful design vocabulary, while simultaneously retaining the high merit they have shown in many other projects with their intuitive use of innovative materials. In this case, the all-round metal sleeve of the „tower structure“ gives the shape its materiality and immediately attracts attention. Even in a snapshot, the pattern of rhombus-shaped shingles exhibits a multi-faceted play with structure and colour. Depending on the light quality, each single shingle has a characteristic basic colour with an individual colour gradient – from emerald green to gold-yellow, from reddish brown to bluish violet. The incidence of light creates the corresponding varied reflections in the different angles of the façade surfaces and the different phases of the changing light conditions create an amazing sequence of many different visual impressions, so that it is actually quite difficult to characterise the façade in terms of specific colours. In extreme circumstances, it appears to be veiled in brass, but then seems cast in gold. The secret of this „chameleon skin“ is the coloured stainless steel with a cleverly designed structure, which, thanks to extremely precise pre-fabrication and project planning, unfolds fully its unrivalled aesthetic effect. At least as appealing are the obvious material benefits, such as high resistance and long life, especially when in autumn the stormy disposition of the Irish Sea whips the seawater over the promenade and even the Blackpool Tower is coated with a salty crust to a height of more than 90 metres.

Function and use of the building become clear on access from the east side facing dry land: *Festival House* can be read in raised letters beside the entrance on the light-coloured stepped concrete base with the luminous glass inserts that surrounds the ground floor. The glazed entrance where the tower segment meets the front building takes visitors directly to the local Tourist Information Centre, and the stairway, well lit through the generously sized windows, leads to the local registrar’s office, which occupies the two upper floors. At the very top, the projecting ‘oriel’ discloses its function as a wedding ceremony room. Like the rest of the building interior, its walls and ceiling are clad with sheets of cross laminated timber (CLT). The glass front at the narrow end of the trapezoid room looks directly over to the Blackpool Tower. Thus, from the marriage registrar’s desk, the bride and bridegroom have a full view of this permanent, silent witness. After the ceremony, the balcony on the middle floor, which is ideal for wedding photos, offers a panoramic view of the sea, the piers, the tower and the promenade. A somewhat restricted view of this can also be enjoyed through the large windows of the restaurant in the one-storey front building. The congenial interior design of the restaurant plays on the structural design of the building, and is a warm and friendly invitation to guests to experience Blackpool’s new beach scenario dry and out of the wind.

2. The metal façade

The unique aesthetic effect of the poly-spectral colours on the metal façade of Festival House is based on the interaction of several factors. The rhombus-shaped planTEC® system shingles from north German company MN Metallverarbeitung Neustadt offer characteristic reflection properties due to their special surface structure. In addition to the many different perforations and embossings that the company has implemented in previous projects - using every conceivable construction metal and alloy for innovative design solutions in architecture which it markets under the brand name planTEC® - in this case an individual positive/negative embossing solution was developed, creating many different refractions and reflections of light and, consequently, countless colour nuances. The base material here is stainless steel sheet reworked using the ColourTex® process of British manufacturer Rimex, which due to its characteristic colour gradients has additional light variations on the Mirror Gold 6WL surface. Additionally, a special characteristic of traditional shingle cladding is that not all rhombus elements are at exactly the same angle to incident light, and thus they reflect the light in slightly different ways.

The stainless steel sheet colour is produced by enriching the oxide layer, which also optimises the material's corrosion resistance. Very important considering the exposed location of Festival House is that the metal is resistant to weathering and UV and is absolutely colour fast to 200°C. Ageing effects as well as cracks or flaking can be ruled out, as can material changes caused by light or weather. The material is also very easy to work with: processes such as laser cutting, edging, bending or deep drawing are all possible with the coloured surfaces, since the oxide layer is bonded to the base material and thus has a very high degree of elasticity.

However, the positive/negative embossing of the metal does cause problems in relation to traditional processing techniques, since the thickness that has to be taken into consideration from a technical point of view is 2 to 3 mm and not between 0.5 and 0.8 mm as is usual with stainless steel sheet. In combination with the high design demands of the project and the highly individualized system requirements, an exceptionally high level of expertise in pre-fabrication and project planning was required – probably unique for what is actually a traditional roof and façade system. As a Specialist for Technical Elegance MN was the perfect partner for the project and was able to deliver the entire metal cladding ready for assembly; MN also acted as the interface for all the trades involved in the construction work. The company's extensive experience with creative metalwork according to individual customer requirements, coupled with the unrivalled possibilities of a modern sheet metal machining centre enabled the tasks to be bundled in a highly concentrated manner: pre-assembly of the complete metal skin, development of special tools for the individual systems, internal processing of the laser cuts, implementation of the complete construction system, including ventilation elements, coping, internal gutters. The specific challenges were not limited to the most spectacular aspects of the building's cladding; the cleverly designed seamed roof of the restaurant is based on a traditional standing seam cladding with multiple angles that demanded special solutions for the cuts because of the longitudinal and transverse expansion of the material. This made the chameleon skin a hybrid project in more ways than one: traditional stainless steel plate with high-tech finish, traditional assembly technique with today's industrial expertise.



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view_east_001_0972



view_north_003_0926_b



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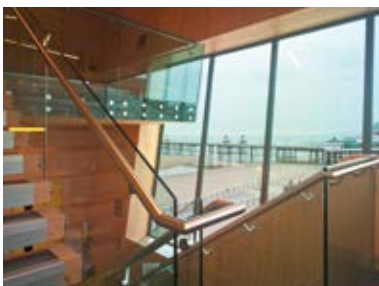
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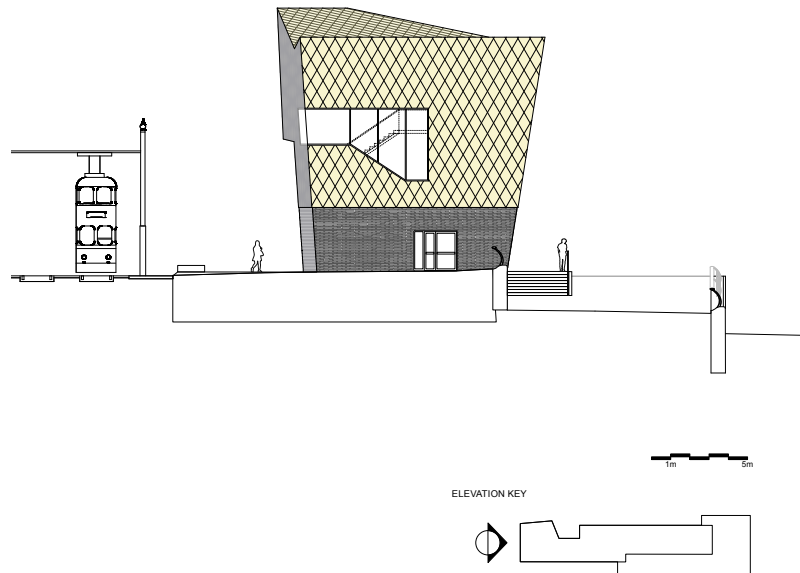
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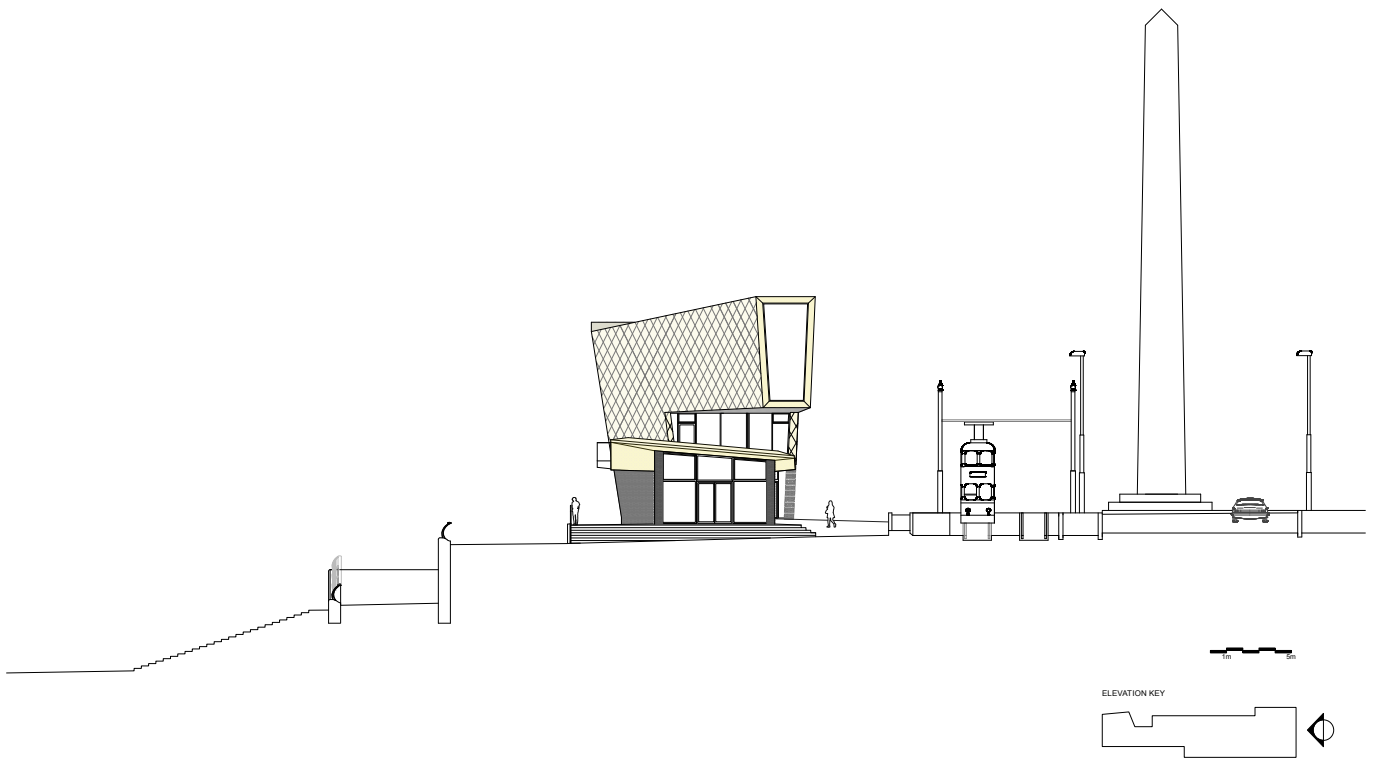
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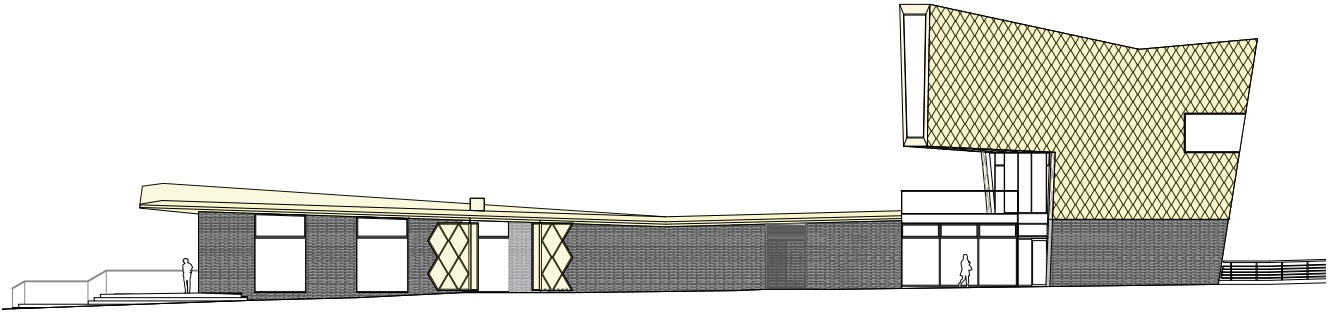
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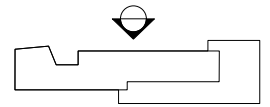
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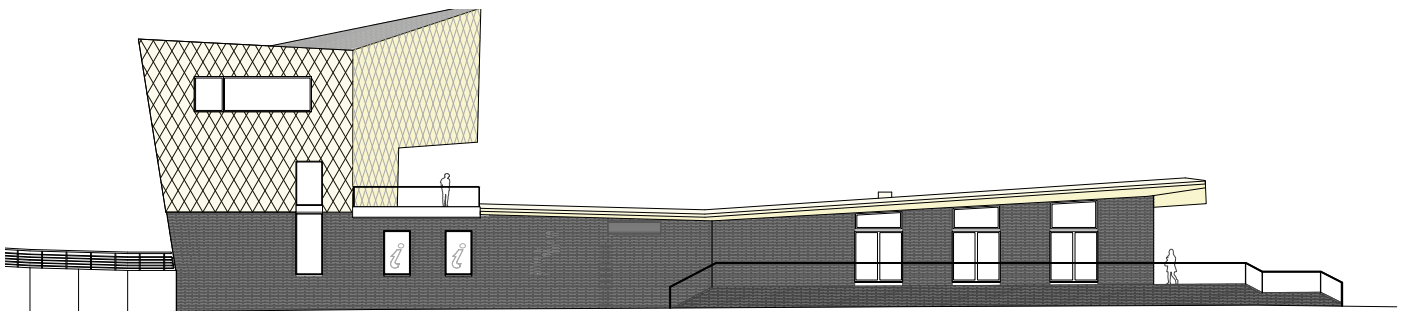
Elevation South *Fassadenansicht Süd*



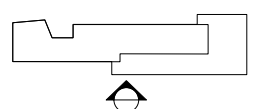
ELEVATION KEY



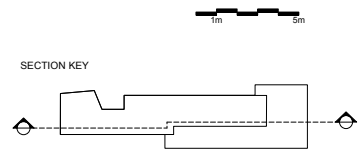
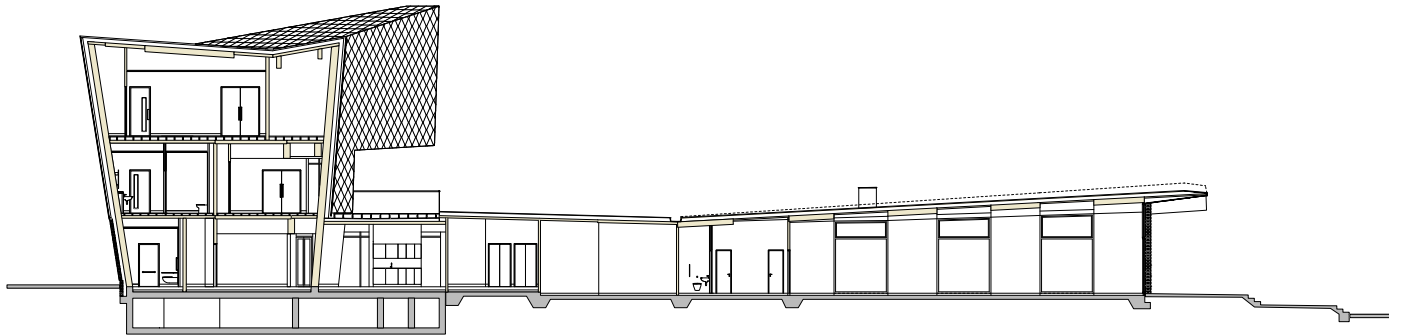
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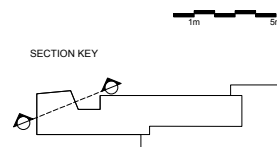
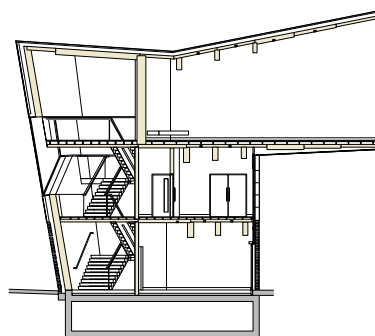
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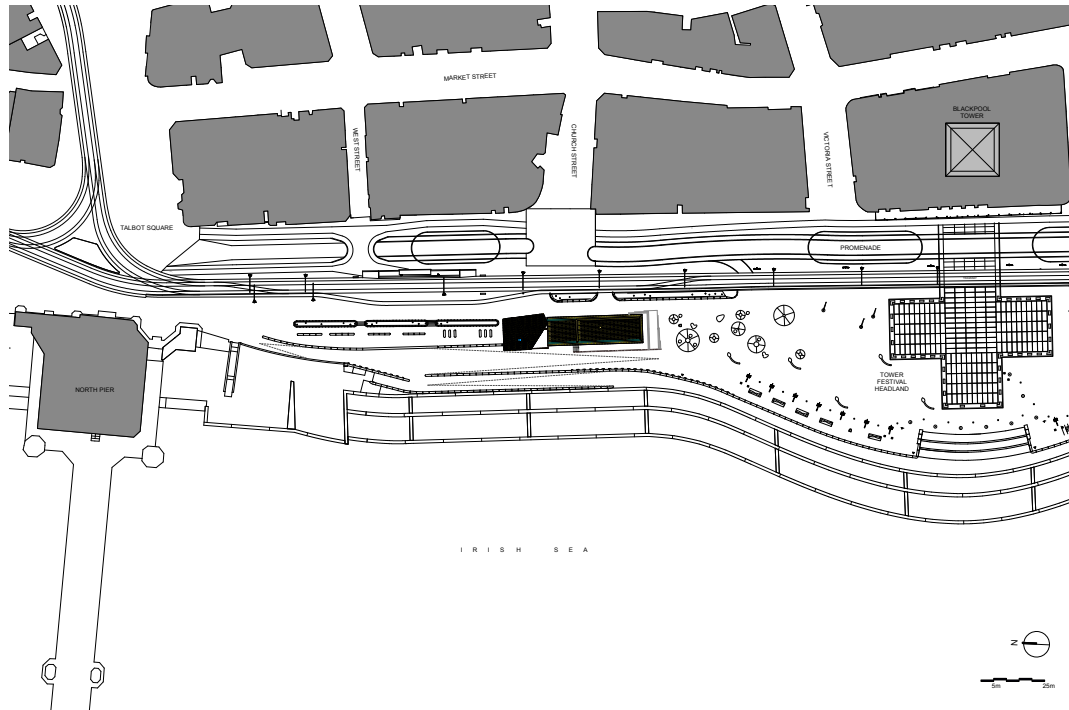
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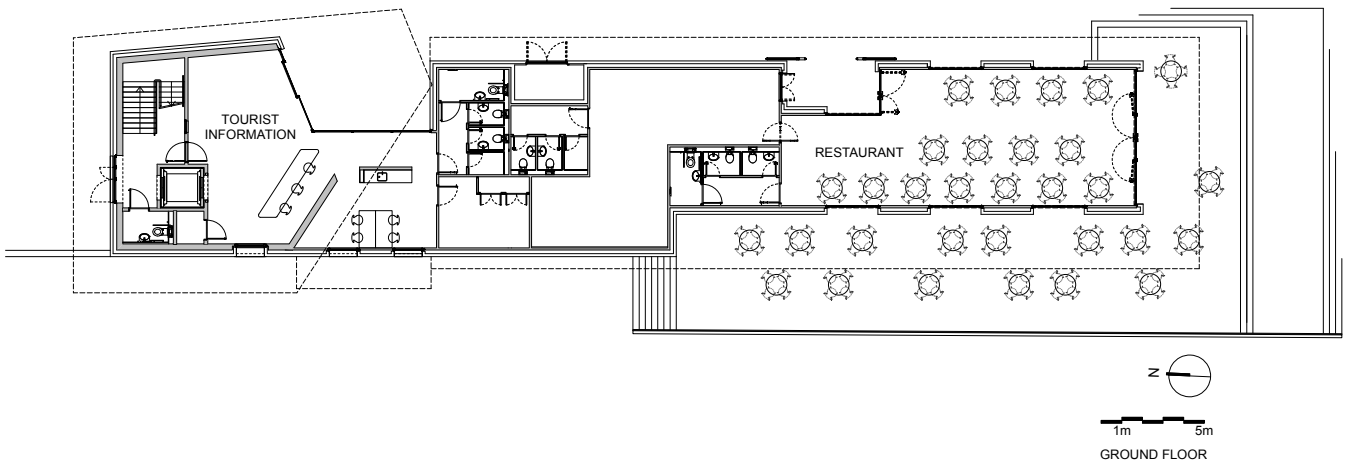
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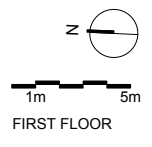
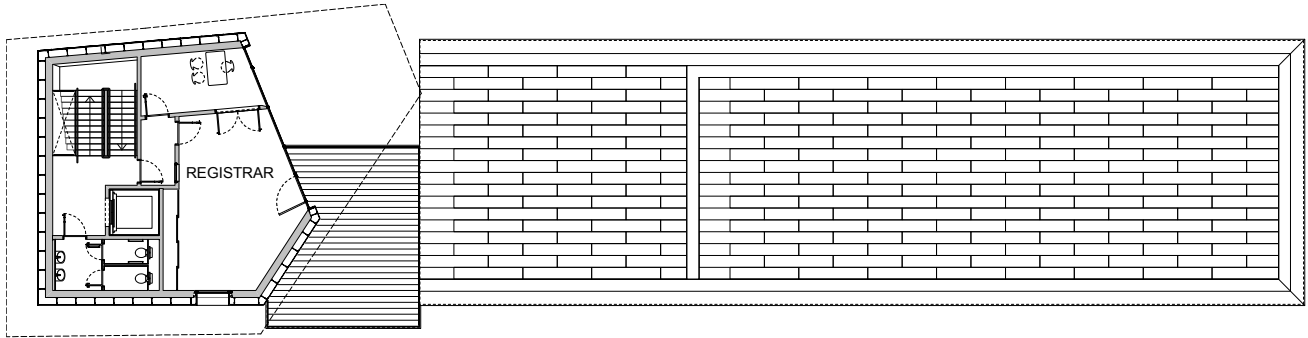
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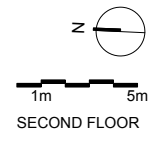
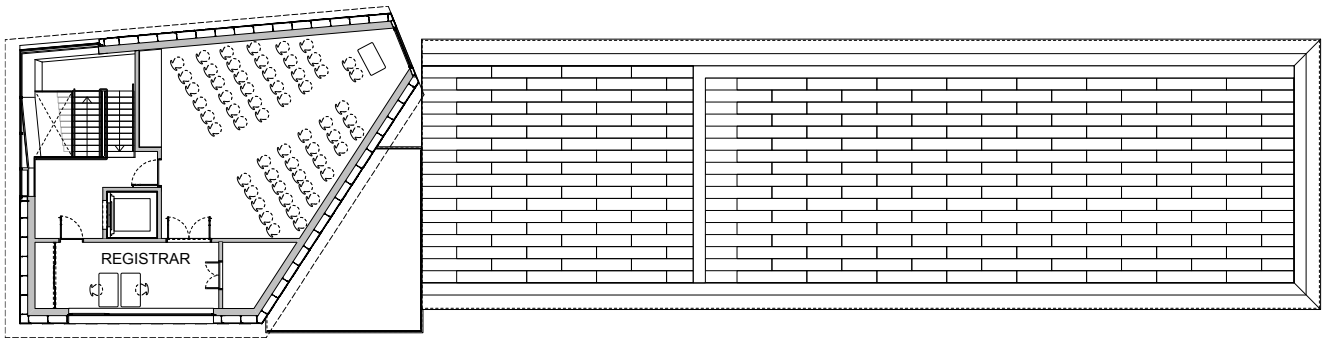
Site Plan Lageplan



Ground Floor Plan Grundriss Erdgeschoss



First Floor Plan *Grundriss 1. Etage*



Second Floor Plan *Grundriss 2. Etage*

Project data: Festival House, Blackpool (UK)
Editorial team: Klaus Sikora Kommunikation
Photos: Klaus Sikora

Project partners:

Client: Blackpool Council
Architects: dRMM, London
User: Blackpool registrar's office; Tourist Information Centre; Restaurant
Builder: Parkinson Building Contractors
Building supervisor: dRMM, London
Project management: LDA Design
Landscape design: LDA Design
Supporting structure: Michael Hadi Associates
Building services: Michael Popper Associates

Metal cladding:

Façade system: planTEC® system shingles
Development, pre-fabrication, project planning: MN Metallwerke Neustadt
Contractor: Richardson Roofing, London
Metal material: Mirror Gold 6WL
Manufacturer: RimexMetals (UK)

Building data:

Building costs: £2.85 million (approx. €3.4 million)
Completion: January 2012

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