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The Architecture of London 2012

VISION > DESIGN > LEGACY

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The Royal Artillery Barracks, South-East London

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Woolwich was the centre of the arms industry that fuelled Britain's imperial expansion, just downriver from the nation's traditional naval centre at Greenwich. The perfect spot, then, for the Olympic and Paralympic Shooting events. Arms manufacturing has long since disappeared, and Woolwich itself has struggled to find post-industrial purpose and prosperity, but it is blessed with an incredible and little-known architectural heritage from these golden years, such as the Royal Artillery Barracks. The barracks were built between 1776 and 1802 by James Wyatt, the most successful architect of his day who was responsible for designing Kew Palace for George III as well as numerous houses for the aristocracy. A grand building, its long façade is made up of six barracks joined together to form two symmetrical wings either side of a central triumphal archway. It's an eye-popping mix of white stucco teamed with Flemish brick, Tuscan colonnades and myriad coats of arms. It used to sit among three riding schools, stables and a theatre, though only the military accommodation remains. It is still a designated military training area.

GAMES CAPACITY

7,000

SPORTS/EVENTS

Shooting, Paralympic Shooting,
Paralympic Archery

► The Royal Artillery Barracks were built in the late eighteenth century and were occupied in part by the Royal Artillery until 2007. The Royal Arsenal was also sited here, and for more than 200 years was the Government's principal armament manufacturing facility.



For the Games, three temporary indoor rifle ranges designed by Berlin-based Magma Architecture have been built to the south of the splendidly named Ha-Ha Road – the main entrance for spectators – which bisects the site from east to west, with the three shotgun ranges to the north. The largest rifle range sits closest to the road and holds the 10m and 50m ranges, with the 25m one tucked just behind – both are semi-enclosed. As the finals range is the only one where filming will take place, it is fully enclosed, and since, as a consequence, the designers didn't need to take account of the sun, there was greater freedom about where to place it. 'We wanted to create a hub at the road,' says Keas, responsible for the masterplan of the site, 'which is why we've seated this arena and the shotgun ranges back to back.'

Typically ranges are lined up in a row, with a formal layout. But the designers 'wanted to create a park-like experience,' explains Eddie Taylor. 'A very formal layout fought against the rest of the site, and we wanted to create a sense of enclosure. If we weren't careful, people were going to rattle around,' he says of the site's grand size. The informal feel also derived from technical reasons, to do with fitting the ranges on the site and accommodating the fallout from the shotgun pellets, requiring shotgun ranges 12 degrees off north rather than the due north required by international rules.

Magma Architecture's design of the range buildings is dramatic.



They are large – the site itself is the size of the Olympic and Paralympic Village – and these buildings, says Richard Arnold, Project Sponsor at the ODA, ‘are two or three times the size of some of the buildings in the Olympic Park.’ Instead of being constructed from scaffolding, like so many other temporary Games buildings, these huge structures are made from a steel frame over which fabric is stretched. They look rather like wedges of Swiss cheese, their skins perforated with giant holes – which allow air through – to reveal bright orange, pink or blue beneath.

▲ The temporary rifle ranges look like blocks of Swiss cheese, each with a different bright colour showing through the holes, which allow air in and out of the building.