# 15 Clerkenwell Close signals a new era for low-carbon stone architecture



In an era defined by the urgent need to address the climate crisis, the construction industry faces increasing pressure to embrace sustainable materials for building. Stone, often overlooked in modern architecture, emerges as a compelling solution due to its remarkable sustainability credentials. Notably, the embodied carbon of stone can be reduced by up to 90% compared to conventional steel or concrete frames, making it a low-carbon alternative that aligns with the goals of environmental responsibility.

A striking example of this sustainable approach can be seen in 15 Clerkenwell Close, a recently completed London building that has been heralded as a "love letter to structural stone." The project features a distinctive limestone exoskeleton, whose façade boasts fossilised coral, ammonite shells, quartz pockets, and natural stone seams, reflecting a deep connection to the material's geological heritage. The building’s architectural language boldly integrates stone not just as cladding, but as a primary structural element, reviving a tradition of stone construction through innovative engineering and design.

Pierre Bidaud has highlighted 15 Clerkenwell Close as a landmark that bridges historical architectural achievements with contemporary practice. Over the last century, stone architecture has evolved, but this building pushes boundaries by pairing the material's inherent beauty and practicality with modern engineering techniques. The design harnesses both low-tech methods and cutting-edge advances, offering a vision for healthier architecture rooted in sustainability and timeless materiality.

Structural engineers Webb Yates have detailed how the stone exoskeleton of 15 Clerkenwell Close was designed to meet rigorous performance requirements while addressing the challenges of working with limestone in a contemporary urban context. Their work ensured that the building stands as a testament to the durability and structural capability of stone, further solidifying its role as a viable alternative to carbon-intensive materials.

The architectural approach by Groupwork, the project's architects, seamlessly blends historical reverence with contextual sensitivity. The building's aesthetic and structural choices engage with the surrounding urban fabric, reinterpreting classical motifs and promoting stone’s versatility. This connection to history is seen in elements such as fallen Ionic columns, which add symbolic depth while celebrating craftsmanship.

Despite some controversy during its planning stages, 15 Clerkenwell Close has received significant acclaim within the architectural community, culminating in its shortlisting for the prestigious Stirling Prize. This recognition underscores a growing appetite for innovation in material selection and sustainable building design. Industry observers have noted how the building marks a new chapter in stone architecture, pointing toward a future where environmental considerations and architectural ambition coexist.

The project also gained acclaim in broader architectural circles, such as its inclusion in the EU Mies Award heritage entries, indicating its influence on contemporary design discourses. The building exemplifies how limestone, when thoughtfully employed, can contribute to a resilient, elegant, and environmentally sound urban landscape.

As the building sector grapples with its environmental footprint, 15 Clerkenwell Close stands as a pioneering model demonstrating that stone is not merely a material of the past but a vital, sustainable resource for the future of architecture. By marrying traditional aesthetics with modern engineering, it offers an inspiring blueprint for a greener built environment.

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* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.ice.org.uk/events/previous-events/structural-stone), [[2]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/buildings/heralding-the-new-stone-age-amin-tahas-15-clerkenwell-close/10040004.article)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.ice.org.uk/events/previous-events/structural-stone), [[3]](https://www.ribaj.com/products/15-clerkenwell-close-london-amin-taha-facades), [[5]](https://www.arkitok.com/architects/groupwork/projects/clerkenwell-close), [[7]](https://eumiesawards.com/heritageobject/15-clerkenwell-close/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.ice.org.uk/events/previous-events/structural-stone), [[5]](https://www.arkitok.com/architects/groupwork/projects/clerkenwell-close), [[7]](https://eumiesawards.com/heritageobject/15-clerkenwell-close/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.webbyates.com/projects/15-clerkenwell-close)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.arkitok.com/architects/groupwork/projects/clerkenwell-close)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.stonespecialist.com/news/market-intelligence/15-clerkenwell-close-shortlisted-stirling-prize)
* Paragraph 7 – [[7]](https://eumiesawards.com/heritageobject/15-clerkenwell-close/), [[6]](https://www.stonespecialist.com/news/market-intelligence/15-clerkenwell-close-shortlisted-stirling-prize)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.ice.org.uk/events/previous-events/structural-stone), [[2]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/buildings/heralding-the-new-stone-age-amin-tahas-15-clerkenwell-close/10040004.article), [[4]](https://www.webbyates.com/projects/15-clerkenwell-close), [[7]](https://eumiesawards.com/heritageobject/15-clerkenwell-close/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ice.org.uk/events/previous-events/structural-stone> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/buildings/heralding-the-new-stone-age-amin-tahas-15-clerkenwell-close/10040004.article> - This article discusses the innovative use of stone in the construction of 15 Clerkenwell Close, highlighting how the building's stone exoskeleton reduces carbon footprint by 90% compared to steel or concrete frames. It also explores the architectural and structural aspects of the building, emphasizing the integration of stone as both a structural and aesthetic element.
3. <https://www.ribaj.com/products/15-clerkenwell-close-london-amin-taha-facades> - This piece provides an in-depth look at 15 Clerkenwell Close, focusing on its limestone façade and the architectural decisions that led to its unique appearance. It details the building's design process, material selection, and the challenges faced during construction, offering insights into the integration of stone in modern architecture.
4. <https://www.webbyates.com/projects/15-clerkenwell-close> - This project overview by Webb Yates Engineers details the structural engineering behind 15 Clerkenwell Close. It discusses the design and implementation of the stone exoskeleton, the challenges overcome during construction, and the building's performance in terms of sustainability and structural integrity.
5. <https://www.arkitok.com/architects/groupwork/projects/clerkenwell-close> - This article examines the architectural approach of Groupwork in designing 15 Clerkenwell Close. It highlights the use of stone as a primary structural element, the building's aesthetic qualities, and its contextual relationship with the surrounding area, emphasizing the blend of historical reference and modern design.
6. <https://www.stonespecialist.com/news/market-intelligence/15-clerkenwell-close-shortlisted-stirling-prize> - This news piece reports on 15 Clerkenwell Close being shortlisted for the Stirling Prize. It provides background on the building's design, the controversy surrounding its planning permissions, and its reception within the architectural community, highlighting its innovative use of stone.
7. <https://eumiesawards.com/heritageobject/15-clerkenwell-close/> - This entry in the EUmies Awards showcases 15 Clerkenwell Close, detailing its design philosophy, material choices, and architectural significance. It discusses the building's historical context, the use of limestone as a structural element, and its contribution to contemporary architecture.