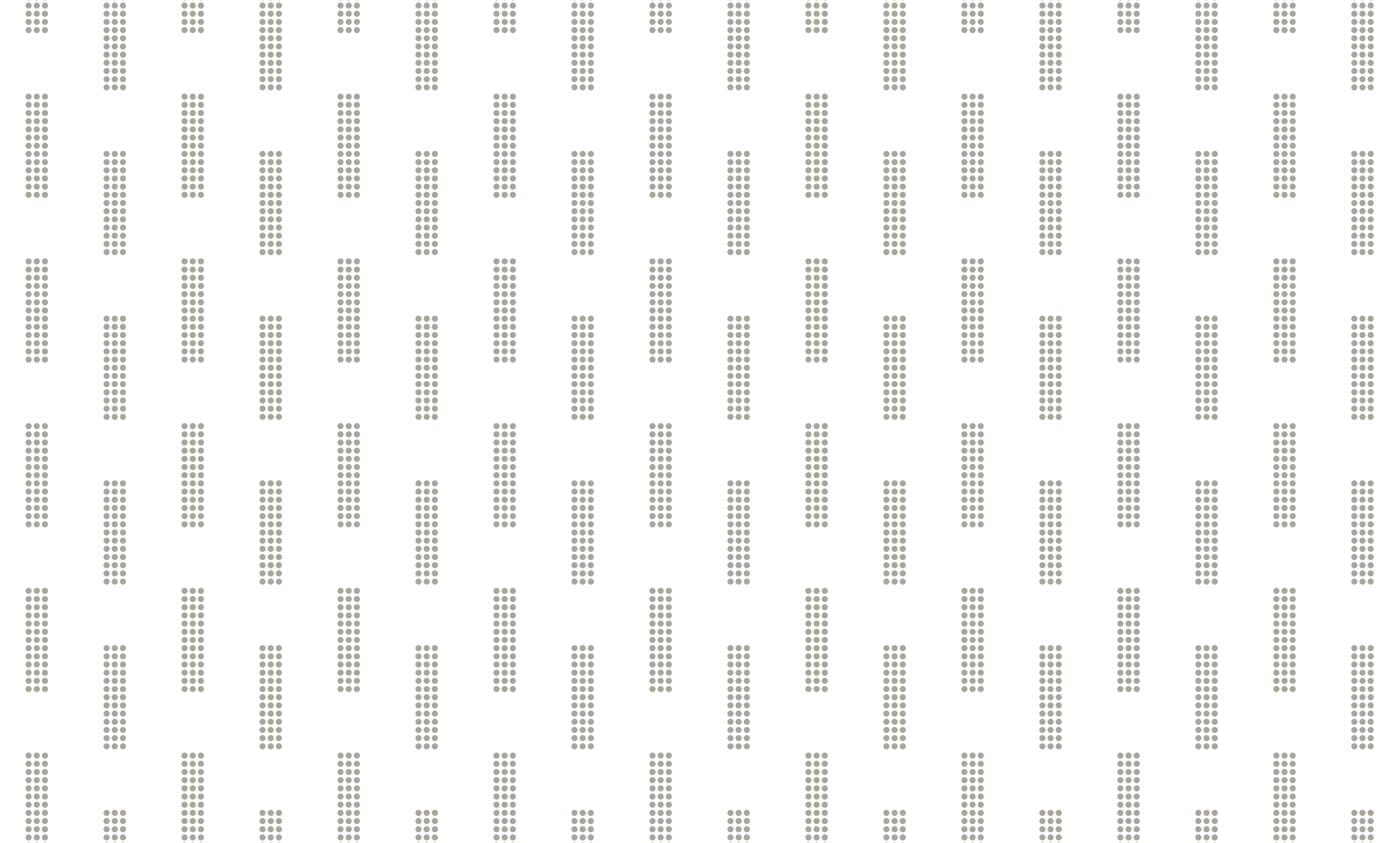


## **WHITE COLLAR FACTORY**



“I didn’t invent an architectural system; I made it. I didn’t invent forms; I made an architectural system that had forms. I made it using bent sheet steel because I had the steel and the presses to bend it with. It’s as simple as that.”

Jean Prouvé

# WHITE COLLAR FACTORY

A DERWENT  
LONDON  
BUILDING

From our very early days, over thirty years ago, Derwent has had an affinity with industrial buildings that could be converted into generous, characterful office space. The principle was simple: it was all about “Volume and Light”. As a result we purchased light industrial buildings like Tea, Buckley, Oliver’s Yard and Greencoat and Gordon House, and redeveloped each into great work spaces that are some of the most popular in our portfolio.

This got us thinking – wouldn’t it be great to build a modern office space, but on a generous, industrial scale? In 2008 we put together a think tank that comprised architects AHMM, engineers Arup and AKT II, and project managers Jackson Coles, together with London’s most creative agent, David Rosen of Pilcher Hershman.

The result was the promotion of a new building type, and crucially, one that entailed chilled water pipework within the concrete soffit to replace the sophisticated, high energy-use air conditioning systems that are normally encased in a sealed building. However, it soon became apparent that our solution needed 3.5m floor to ceiling heights: more than 0.5m taller than industry standards. This would mean constructing 15 storeys instead of 17. After much research, we decided the sacrifice was worth making, and these large volumes

that included openable windows would be worth more than a standard office. It was a brave decision, but we figured this was what the market wanted, especially in this location. It also enhanced the building’s sustainability, lowering energy costs by 20-25%.

Our creative journey with AHMM has seen us develop many successful buildings together, such as Burberry’s headquarters in Victoria, Angel Building in Islington and Tea Building in Shoreditch. We’ve learned so much along the way since we first met Simon Allford and his partners in the early 90s, and on each occasion we vowed to do it even better the next time.

So here we are, ten years post our think tank, and the result is a Prouvé inspired, factory-scale office building the likes of which has never been built before. Simon Allford tells me on good authority that it is the most progressive central London office ever built.

The Old Street Yard six-building campus, with its new public space, restaurants, café, rooftop bar and running track, is home to over 2,500 people. It has already proved an instant hit, and its name, dreamt up by Simon Allford and David Rosen, is one of our strongest.

Simon Silver  
Director, Derwent London

Overlooking Old Street roundabout,  
White Collar Factory is the creation  
of a new community





Old Street Yard is a new piece of  
city and a new postal address for the  
London A-Z





The entrance is marked by a red oxide totem, and framed in concrete, metal and cast glass

Previous page: The courtyard provides space for campus users and residents to rest and play





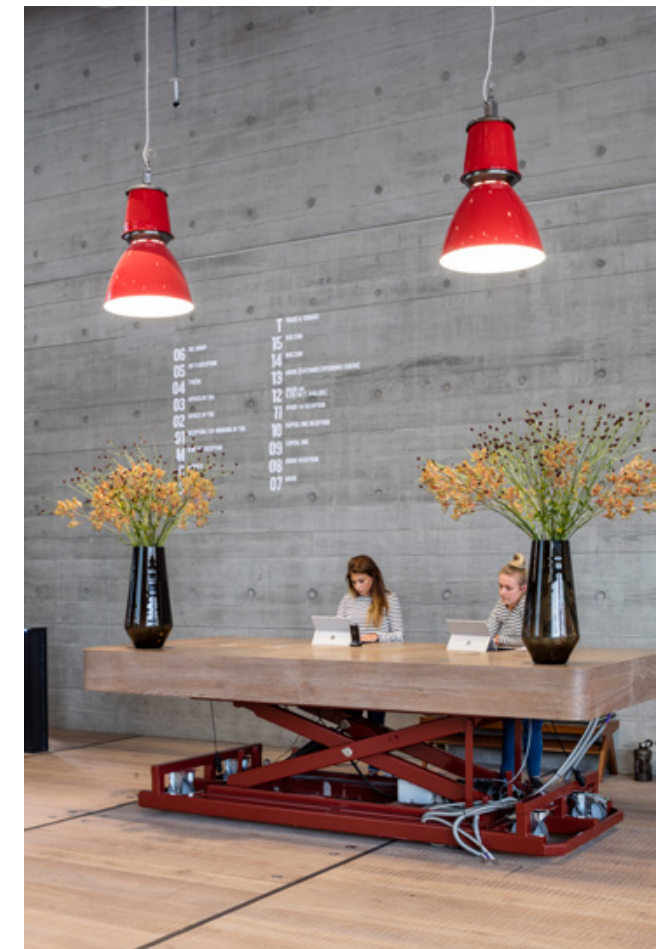
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WORKSHOP  
COFFEE  
AT WHITE COLLAR FACTORY



One of the bespoke mobile work-benches designed by AHMM

Image overleaf: Artworks include 'sun-shutters' - original fragments of Jean Prouvé's buildings







White Collar Factory  
Essential architecture: nothing need be  
added, nothing can be taken away

‘Gentlemen we have no money, we have to think.’

These were not the exact words Simon Silver and Paul Williams used in autumn 2008, as a REIT they knew their well let property portfolio, despite FTSE panic, was built on solid footings. But the general direction was clear and we were all excited by the idea that innovation flourishes in a crisis.

Today, in a world where there is a desperate desire to be different, much is made of the word innovation. However, in reality innovation only occurs when we are faced with real challenges. Indeed Charles Eames noted, ‘without problems there is no design!’ So in theory, White Collar Factory is about problems! Problems that challenged us to think harder and forced us to innovate. Not for the sake of being different and new, but because of a desire to avoid the pitfalls of pursuing the natural tendency of the property market. Indeed any mature market, where comfort with the familiar and widely accepted norm means the lowest common denominator becomes the benchmark standard.



Building section

The premise of White Collar Factory is about smarter working and therefore learning from the past to make a better future. Indeed our thinking relies on basic principles of building physics. Principles which were once assumed in all construction, but in a recent post-war world of monotonously air conditioned office space, these principles had somehow been forgotten. We started working on White Collar Factory at the same

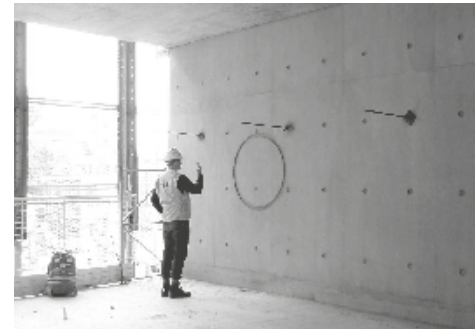
time Angel Building was under construction; the fifth in a series of major projects from Morelands to Johnson Building, to Horseferry House, and Tea Building running alongside as a constant testbed. Through these projects and architectural study tours of New York, Chicago, the mid-West and West Coast (as well as almost all of London) we had all long since committed to the delights of exposed concrete as the underlying engine that drove our architectural adventure in space, light and volume.



Plan of the White Collar Factory campus

But this time we were agreed that our research had to go to the next level of detail. A base case of the idealised office was created: five stories with a central core, good floor to ceiling heights, façade glazing adjusted in response to solar load, a masonry façade and natural ventilation assisted by an emerging idea of cold water pipes embedded in the concrete frame finish. We agreed that in order for this new form of ‘air conditioning’ to be acceptable to the market, it needed a name and an acronym! And Arup suggested ‘Concrete Core Cooling:’ CCC – so we now had both. This was not a building that any of us intended to build but it was the ultimate test of the minimal building. Corresponding with our interests in the theory of convergence, nothing could be taken away, nothing need be added and everything was working hard and doing more than one thing.

The name White Collar Factory was not coined until December 2010 in a conversation at my wedding,



Committing to concrete presented a series of design and construction challenges

between Paul Finch, David Rosen and I: architecture and life are endlessly intertwined! It was about then that this generic idea also moved to a particular place – a site in Old Street.

The next crucial element in design was to build the idea. Having worked with Derwent London for many years, we had collectively come to place great import on mock-ups as the means by which we tested both the visual and technical ideas that drive our architecture. So with the research complete Derwent took the remarkable step of agreeing to build a whole section of the building. Not just any mock-up, but a complete working prototype; exploring the façade, the concrete slabs and their cooling and the implicit and inherent finishes, as well as the ducts, pipes, lighting and sprinkler pipes. Located in the existing cluster of buildings and twelve metres in the air, this prototype became a research facility where we tested building performance, appearance and, through a host of events, market response.

Fortunately all three exceeded expectations and this very brave and near unique idea of large scale prototype gave all the confidence that a White Collar Factory was an idea worthy of becoming a building. And so I am very pleased it has!

Located on Old Street roundabout, this urban block, as we had anticipated, enriched the White Collar Factory story by the very particular challenge of a rich history of place. This history allied to the history we shared with Derwent is reflected in the retention of two buildings. One as incubator offices and the other as three loft

apartments both over generous ground floor units. Why get rid of a good structure? The vestiges of the base case study can be seen in the two studio buildings that are anchored to a super core that opportunistically travels through the salvaged steel frame of the incubator. A new residential building reflects our shared interest in the cultural, social and financial benefits of a mixed-use urban building.

To the north the project took on its most extreme development. A revised consent for a tower, that came with the acquisition of the site, was won on appeal and set a new precedent. The five floors became fifteen and we suggested the great French metalworker and builder Jean Prouvé as a reference for how we might make a more solid yet lightweight façade. A system which, like any good system, is endlessly adapted; at ground, to the four points of the compass and halfway up where the lifts drop away.

White Collar Factory forms part of six unique buildings that define the Old Street Yard campus, which in turn define the Old Street area. It is also the culmination of numerous conversations between Derwent and ourselves about how we might simultaneously reference and reinvent the best qualities of the best buildings we have discovered on our architectural travels and in particular those of Prouvé.



Screens punched with Prouvé-inspired portholes reduce solar load and protect from wind

Prouvé's visionary enquiry into the potential of folded sheet metal to solve all the world's constructional challenges, with easily manufactured, assembled and adapted components to make anything from furniture to all manner of buildings, became a very powerful reference point throughout our discussions. We all enjoyed his concision and understatement: 'I didn't invent an architectural system; I made it. I didn't invent forms; I made an architectural system that had forms. I made it using bent sheet steel because I had the steel and the presses to bend it with. It's as simple as that.'

We enjoyed the fact that he was not trained as an architect but as a metalworker: but also that he was a maker and a visionary inspired to ally art to industry. We were captivated by his endless capacity to change scales. He collaborated on furniture designs with Charlotte Perriand and Pierre Jeanneret and later with Jeanneret's cousin Le Corbusier. He designed and manufactured furniture for schools and hospitals and buildings for that furniture to live in. His endlessly adaptable Maison du Peuple and Maisons Tropicales were appropriate touchstones as they would be innovative if produced today! Throughout we consoled ourselves with the exchange reported to have taken place between Oscar Wilde and his friend James McNeill Whistler. On hearing his friend's witticism, Wilde remarked, 'How I wish I had said that,' to which Whistler replied, 'you will, Oscar, you will'.

When we stood in the concrete atrium on the completion of Angel Building, Simon Silver remarked that we might never top that building. As an architect, and ever the optimist, I remarked that we had better do so and on Old Street. History will be the judge. But at White Collar Factory we have built an idea and remained true to the ambitions we set ourselves. By learning from the buildings, we have recycled and reinvented, we have set a new paradigm for how you build, finish and let an office (no dilapidations even!). We have also built a new place in the city. Of course now, as we move onto our collaboration at Soho Place we retain similar ambitions - but we are also building on the seven years of research and construction that is White Collar Factory.

Simon Allford  
Co-founder and Director, AHMM



Porthole-shaped openable windows naturally ventilate office floors





AHMM's interior fit-out for  
The Office Group

Previous page: Board-marked and  
polished concrete finishes are used  
throughout the building







Simple passive façades with openable windows are a key principle of the White Collar Factory model

Image overleaf: Generous volume allows more to happen: height is just as important as area



The rooftop café 'canopy' is supported by green-yellow Y-shaped steel columns









## Team

### Client

Derwent London

### Architect

Allford Hall Monaghan Morris

### Engineer

Arup

### Structural & Civil Engineer

AKT II

### Main Contractor

Multiplex

### Project Manager / CDM Co-ordinator

Jackson Coles

### Quantity Surveyor

AECOM

### Building Control

BRCS

### Rights of Light

Gordon Ingram Associates

### Planning Consultant

Tibbalds

### Security Consultant

QCIC Group

### BIM Coordination

BIM Technologies

### Party Wall Surveyor

Botley Byrne

### Archaeology

Molas

### Construction Legals

Speechly Bircham

### Property Legals

Macfarlanes

### Tunnel Monitoring

Survey Associates

### Artisans

### Building Identity

Studio Myerscough and  
Cartlidge Levene

### Wayfinding and Signage

Cartlidge Levene

### Photography

Tim Soar  
Matt Chisnall  
Tomasz Preficz

Portholes give runners special views across the city

Previous page: Aerial view showing the running track, rooftop café and terrace

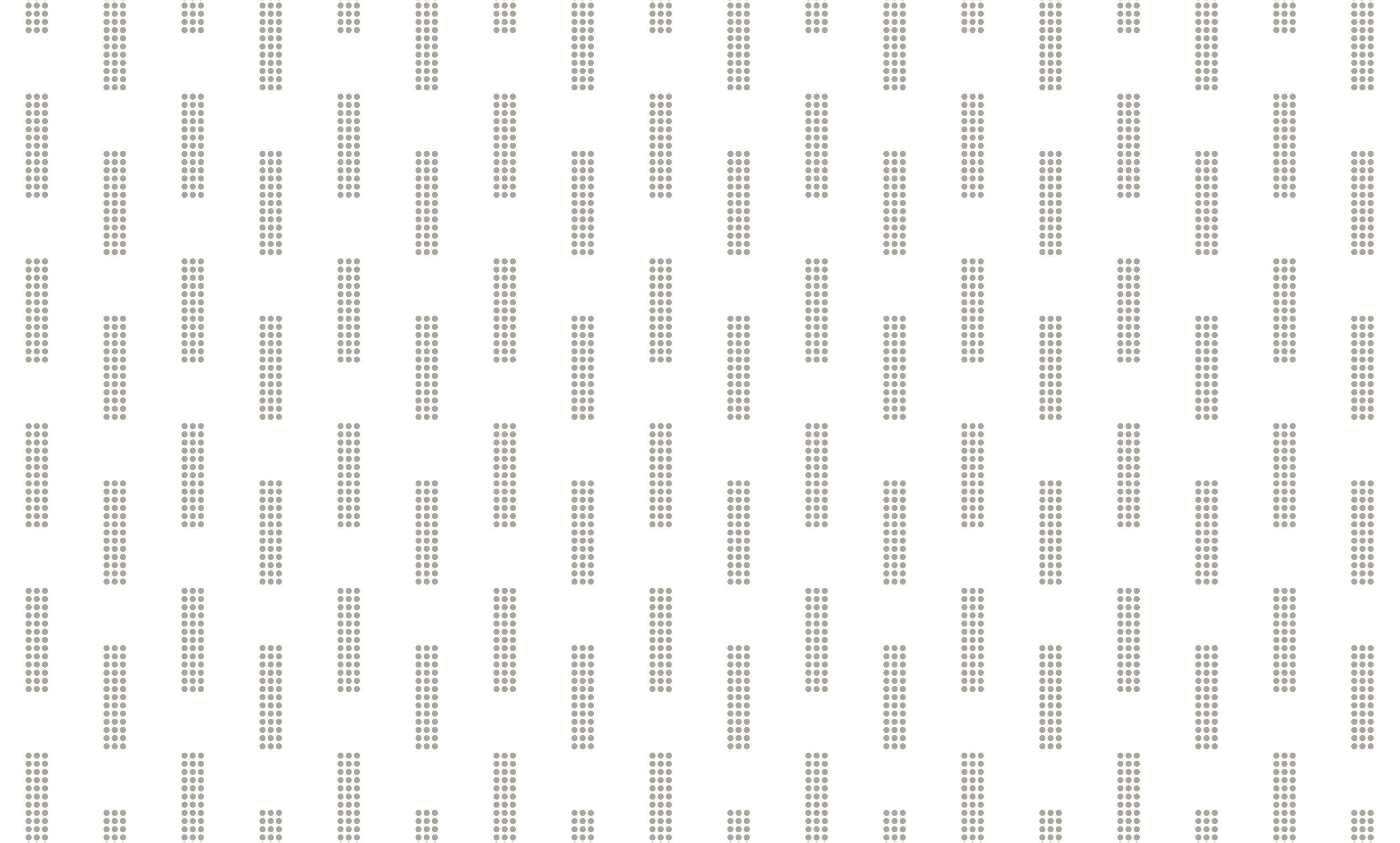


“We want to create the purely organic building,  
boldly emanating its inner laws, free of untruths  
or ornamentation.”

Walter Gropius



Fagus Factory, Walter Gropius  
Carsten Janssen / cc-by-sa-2.0-de







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