In January 2018, the US Embassy in London moved across the River Thames from its home in Grosvenor Square to the Nine Elms district. The former Embassy building was designed by Eero Saarinen in 1960. In 2006, the State Department examined several options to renovate the existing Embassy and found that renovation would have required a major rehabilitation and an appropriation of taxpayer dollars. Even after such a significant investment, the chancery would still not meet the most critical security standards. The State Department began exploring alternative solutions and developed a plan to finance a new embassy project entirely from the proceeds of sale of existing US government property in London.

After an extensive site search of more than fifty properties, a 4.9-acre site in the Nine Elms Opportunity Planning Area was identified as the most viable location. This emerging commercial and residential district of London’s Central Activity Zone would anchor the Embassy within a vibrant regeneration area. Almost ten years after planning permission was granted for the new Embassy, new housing and commercial districts have emerged in Nine Elms and a linear park running from Vauxhall Bridge to the renovated Battersea Power Station has become a sustainable, green centerpiece for this revitalized district of London.

The US Department of State sought a building design that would be iconic, safe, timeless, and symbolic of American democracy—giving priority to transparency, openness, and equality, and drawing on the best of American architecture, engineering, technology, art, and culture.
KieranTimberlake was selected in a juried design competition as the architect for the new Embassy by a panel of both American and British leaders in the fields of architecture, academia, and diplomacy.

Conceived in an era of heightened political and environmental threats, the Embassy was to be both welcoming and secure, efficient, and highly sustainable. Subsequently, the design challenge was to resolve the contradictions between what embassies aspire to be and what present realities dictate they must do.

The guiding principles for the project encompassed issues of diplomacy, efficiency, environment, excellence, place, security, welcome, and workplace. To address these complex issues and provide an efficient and flexible building, every design element had to be both performative and purposeful, solving multiple issues at once. The architecture needed to be integrated with Nine Elms while respecting the required security setbacks. Working with OLIN landscape architects, KieranTimberlake addressed the requirements with an open, public park that connects Nine Elms and incorporates a range of sustainable technologies, including a pond that is integral to the site’s stormwater management. Trees and plants are inspired by the shared history of the United States and the United Kingdom, the landscape is reminiscent of both the expansive, rolling American prairies and the site’s early history as a River Thames wetland.
Situated within this public garden, the Embassy is a transparent cube atop a four-sided colonnade that gives form to democratic values of transparency, openness, and equality. An innovative exterior solar shading system creates a distinct identity on London’s skyline. With color and form ever-changing in weather and light conditions, the high-performance envelope is made of an inner layer of laminated glazing and an outer envelope of ethylene tetrafluoroethylene (ETFE), a transparent film shaped to minimize solar gain and glare. Developed with engineers at Arup and Thornton Tomasetti, this design affords generous natural light throughout the interior and access to the site’s striking views.

Inside, the Embassy’s workspaces are flexible to encourage collaboration and meet evolving approaches to diplomacy. Offices and shared workspaces are naturally lit and airy, with tall ceilings and column-free spaces. Open stairways traverse interior gardens that continue the upward spiral geometry established in the site design. These gardens, each inspired by a different United States ecosystem, act as informal gathering spaces and places for quiet reflection.

The US Embassy in London represents a complete fusion of urbanism, building, and landscape. It is both evocative and performative, helping to define a new environment for diplomacy while mapping a passage toward a diplomacy for the environment.

An open yet sheltered four-side colonnade invites visitors and staff into the building.

The spiral geometry of the site design links four parallel channels: the river, Nine Elms Lane, the linear park, and the elevated railway. This geometry weaves the building into the site and draws visitors from multiple paths and directions.

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The Embassy building is a single, compact cube supported by a colonnade. The stability and purity of this geometry gives form to the core democratic values of transparency, openness, and equality.
Detail of the main entry pavilion integrated into the landscape.

The main entry features a public plaza and opens to a promenade along the pond.
The Embassy's distinct layered facade screens excessive solar gain and mitigates glare while optimizing natural light and views.

The Embassy grounds include a lawn for outdoor events.
The building design and surrounding landscape situate the Embassy at the center of a still-developing urban park, honoring the English tradition of city parks and gardens as a context for civic buildings.

Planted with species from the US and the UK, the landscape is reminiscent of expansive American prairie and the site’s early history as a River Thames wetland.
The Art in Embassies program commissioned a monumental work by Rachel Whiteread for the Consular Lobby. The work, titled *US Embassy (Flat Pack House)*, is a concrete cast of a typical American suburban home from the 1950s.
The double-height gallery features a glass stair and bridge, bringing daylight to exhibit and event spaces.

The lower level gallery provides intimate spaces for exhibition, display, and events.
Architecture and art are integrated in the Embassy. In the gallery, Mark Bradford’s commissioned artwork, "We The People," is visible from Nine Elms Lane.
Tall windows in the consular space provide sweeping views across the River Thames. The ceiling is pulled back from the windows to increase natural light.
Translucent materials, natural light, and comfortable furnishings create a serene environment in the consular waiting room.

The floor in the consular space is inscribed with a quote by American diplomat Ralph J. Bunche, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950.
The Main Lobby serves as the point of welcome for staff and diplomatic guests.

Following the tradition started at Grosvenor Square, the names of the ambassadors to the Court of St. James are engraved into the Lobby wall beneath the Great Seal of the United States.
Each of the building’s six interior gardens is inspired by a different United States ecosystem. The Pacific Forest Garden, shown here, features a variety of ferns and perforated metal “trees.”
The Embassy’s interior gardens continue the upward spiral established by the exterior landscape.

The gardens open to shared conference rooms and meeting spaces, forming hubs of activity and collaboration, as in the Canyonlands Garden shown here.
The double-height café is the building’s social hub.

The Gulf Coast Garden overlooks the café and features a steel trellis and stair.
One of the Embassy’s primary goals is to demonstrate exceptional environmental leadership. With sustainable initiatives including brownfield redevelopment, natural habitat creation, healthy and responsibly sourced building materials, and energy efficient equipment, the Embassy is on track to receive LEED Platinum, BREEAM Outstanding, and EPC-A+ ratings and is on track to achieve net carbon neutrality as defined by BREEAM, pending construction phase review.

The Embassy takes a two-fold approach to sustainability. First, the building's energy efficient design conserves as much energy and water as possible through strategies such as daylight-responsive lighting and shade controls, passive and active chilled beams, grey water recycling, and efficient mechanical systems. The landscaped pond is part of an integrated water system that aims to retain all rainwater that falls on the site for landscape irrigation and to keep pollution out of local waterways.

Second, the Embassy harnesses renewable resources including solar energy gathered by photovoltaic cells and geothermal energy generated through ground source heat pumps, which use the consistent temperature of the earth to heat and cool the building. The Embassy maximizes efficiency by simultaneously creating heat and electricity by way of combined heat and power (CHP) units. This system generates enough energy to satisfy the Embassy’s power and heating needs while also creating an excess that can be exported to the local community.
Comprised of an inner envelope made of laminated glazing and an outer envelope made of ethylene tetrafluoroethylene (ETFE), the Embassy's high-performing envelope is triple-glazed, blast resistant, and thermally broken.

The Embassy's pond filters and stores stormwater preventing runoff pollution from entering the River Thames.
Offices and shared workspaces emphasize natural daylight and outward views with generous ceiling heights, open floorplans, and a column-free design.

The ETFE layer is shaped for optimal light and view, while reducing energy demand for lighting and air conditioning.

Previous: A double-height break in the façade forms an exterior terrace for the Mid-Atlantic Garden.
The outer envelope’s frame is fabricated from lightweight, extruded aluminum. The frame’s vertical spines are supported at the roof and run continuously to the bottom of the outer envelope.
Through the holistic integration of architecture, landscape, security, environmental performance, and workplace design, the US Embassy in London defines a new environment for diplomacy in the 21st century.
Schedule
Competition launched December 2008
Competition winner announced February 2010
Groundbreaking November 2013
Occupation January 2018
Size 518,050 square feet (48,128 square meters)
Height 12 stories, 65 meters tall
Program Public and work spaces, ceremonial and symbolic spaces, dining, recreation and support spaces within landscaped precinct
Green Certifications LEED Platinum - Pending
BREEAM Outstanding - Pending
Commissioned Art The art collection features works and commissions by contemporary artists from the United States and the United Kingdom to reflect our cross-cultural dialogue. Rachel Whiteread, Jenny Holzer, Mark Bradford, Sean Scully, and Ryan and Hays Holladay are participating artists in the new Embassy building.

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Drawings ©KieranTimberlake