

9. build it up

As the capital city and, for so long, the centre of the British Empire, London has always represented something of a showcase for ambitious architects. Renzo Piano's Shard, the 309-metre elongated pyramid that dominates the South Bank, is just the latest iconic structure to be added to the London skyline. And modern visionaries such as he, Norman Foster – responsible for the Gherkin – and Lloyd's Building architect Richard Rogers continue the forward-thinking attitude to city-shaping displayed by predecessors Christopher Wren, Nicholas Hawksmoor and George Gilbert Scott. London is the beneficiary. Almost every design style of the past 600 years is on show here; and, as a result, the city has become an ever-changing architectural masterpiece.



Start point: Holland Park tube
End point: Canary Wharf DLR
Duration: 6 hours

● Exit **Holland Park tube** and turn right, then take the first left down Holland Park. Walk straight down here onto Abbotsbury Road, then continue alongside the park until you reach the junction with Melbury Road. Turn left here and look out for **The Tower House** at number 29. Built as the home of architect William Burges in 1876, this superb example of Victorian Gothic Revival architecture draws as heavily on fairytale as it does medieval design traditions. Burges was, after all, closely linked with the Pre-Raphaelite artists of the time. He died here in 1881.

● Continue to the bottom of Melbury Road then turn left and catch the eastbound **9** or **10** from the **Kensington High Street/Earls Court Road** stop. Just after the bus passes High Street Kensington tube, it heads along the front of the former **Barkers** and **Derry & Toms** department stores. Built between the 1930s and 1950s, this seven-storey Art Deco complex is now a shopping centre. Look up to see stunning bas-relief friezes of tradesmen at work.

● As the bus goes along Hyde Park, look left for the **Albert Memorial** – another glorious piece of Gothic Revival design, commissioned by Queen Victoria after the death of her husband Prince Albert. The work of George Gilbert Scott, the memorial is surrounded by Neoclassical statues representing the arts and sciences, and the continents of the world.

● Get off the bus at the **Royal Albert Hall** stop and continue down Kensington Gore, passing **Lowther Lodge** on the right. This Queen Anne Style building, home to the Royal Geographic Society since 1912, was designed in the mid-1870s by Richard Norman Shaw. Though its statues of the great British explorers inevitably steal the show, the sunflowers on the chimney stacks are equally worthy of note, and are stylistic motifs that also appear in Arts & Crafts designs of the period.

● Turn right down Exhibition Road, then right again into Prince Consort Road and walk past the back of the High

Victorian **Royal Albert Hall**. As you continue down the road, you will also pass Sir Aston Webb's Neoclassical **Royal School of Mines** (now part of Imperial College) and Sir Arthur Blomfield's Flemish Mannerist **Royal College of Music** on the left.

● Catch the southbound **360** from the **Prince Consort Road** stop. As it starts heading through the district known informally as Albertopolis, look first to the left for Webb's Medieval-cum-Renaissance façade to the **Victoria & Albert Museum** before turning to the right to see Alfred Waterhouse's terracotta-clad **Natural History Museum**. Built in a loose Romanesque style between 1873 and 1880, the building – which features thousands of beautiful and intricate animal, bird and insect carvings – conveys a gothic, almost cathedral-like feel. Just after the bus passes South Kensington tube, it heads down Fulham Road, and passes the **Bibendum** restaurant on the right. Situated in Michelin House (Bibendum is the official name of the Michelin Man), the restaurant is surrounded by some of the finest Art Nouveau architecture in the UK. Designed by Michelin's in-house architect François Espinasse in 1911, the building features stained-glass windows based on the French tyre company's advertisements, as well as exterior tiles decorated with maps and motor-racing scenes. The bus then continues down to the north bank of the Thames, providing you with a wonderful view of Art Deco icon **Battersea Power Station** – the largest brick-built building in Europe.

● Get off the 360 at the **Pimlico Station** stop and continue walking along Bessborough Street and Drummond Gate before crossing Vauxhall Bridge Road, turning right and following signs to Millbank – the road that runs parallel to the river. Turn left onto Millbank and take the northbound **87** from the **Vauxhall Bridge Road** stop. As the bus makes its way up to Parliament Square, it passes the odd couple of the **Tate Britain** and **Millbank Tower** – Neoclassical and Brutalist neighbours that provide one of London's most striking contrasts.

● Though the **Houses of Parliament** – designed by Charles Barry in 1834 after fire destroyed most of the 11th-century Palace of Westminster – are mock-Gothic, **Westminster**

Abbey, on the other side of the road as you enter Parliament Square, is the real deal. Work was begun on the current building in 1245, when King Henry II selected the church that originally stood here as his burial site. It has served as the place in which British monarchs are crowned and interred ever since.

- Get off the bus at the **Parliament Square** stop on Whitehall, and catch the northbound **12** from the same place. This immediately takes you past the Italianate **Foreign & Commonwealth Office** on your left, before heading up Whitehall to pass Inigo Jones' Palladian **Banqueting House** – the first Neoclassical building to be constructed in England – on the right. The bus then heads up the elegant curve of **Regent Street** – the work of King George IV's favourite architect John Nash – before terminating at the **Margaret Street/Oxford Circus** stop.

- Walk back down Regent Street, turn left into Great Castle Street and then right down Great Portland Street. Cross Oxford Street, bear right and walk down Argyll Street to the **Liberty** department store. Built in a striking Tudorbethan style by Edwin T Hall in 1924, this famous building was constructed using timbers from two British battleships.

- Retrace your steps to Oxford Street, then turn right and catch the eastbound **25** from the **Great Titchfield Street** stop. As the bus makes its way along the road, look to the right for Robert Lutyens' Art Deco **Pantheon** (now occupied by Marks & Spencer). The far end of Oxford Street is dominated by the Brutalist **Centre Point**, which towers above Tottenham Court Road tube. Loved and loathed in equal measure by Londoners, this 34-storey building was constructed between 1963 and 1966, and is now Grade II-listed.

- When the bus turns up Bloomsbury Way, look left for the Neoclassical **St George's Bloomsbury** church. Built in the early Georgian period by master architect Nicholas Hawksmoor, who based his design on Middle Eastern temples, it takes the classical theme and runs with it – there's even a statue of George I in Roman dress on top of its pyramid steeple. William Hogarth saw fit to include this brilliantly over-the-top creation in the background of his infamous 'Gin Lane' print of 1751.

- Get off the bus at the **Chancery Lane Station** stop – looking out for the original Elizabethan shop fronts on the opposite side of the road, which form the façade of **Staple Inn** (the oldest of the surviving Inns of Court) – then walk back up High Holborn and turn left down Chancery Lane. Pass James Pennethorne's Gothic Revival **Maughan Library** before emerging onto Fleet Street, opposite the **Inner Temple Gateway** – a 17th-century reproduction of the gate that stood there from the 1100s onwards. Turn left down Fleet Street and walk past Sir Christopher Wren's **St Bride's Church** (the steeple of which is the inspiration for the tiered wedding cake) on the right and, on the left at number 120, Sir Owen Williams' black-and-chrome Art Deco **Daily Express Building**.

- Take the westbound **11**, **15** or **23** from the **Shoe Lane** stop on the St Bride's Church side of Fleet Street. All buses pass the Art Deco **Savoy Hotel** on the left as they make their way along the Strand to the **Bedford Street** stop, where you need to disembark. From here, continue walking along the Strand and turn right up Bedford Street. Turn right into Henrietta Street and emerge into **Covent Garden** piazza, home to Inigo Jones' Italianate porticoed square and Renaissance-style St Paul's church.

- Walk right through Covent Garden market to emerge at the Royal Opera House end of the piazza. Continue straight ahead down Russell Street. Turn right down Catherine Street and catch the southbound **RV1** from the **Covent Garden/Catherine Street** stop. This bus first takes you past Sir William Chambers' Neoclassical **Somerset House** before driving alongside the iconic **London Eye**, built as part of the city's

Millennium celebrations. Next up are the Brutalist South Bank buildings – the **Royal Festival Hall**, the **Queen Elizabeth Hall**, the **Hayward Gallery** and the **National Theatre** – which were constructed in the early 1950s to create a new entertainment sector on the neglected south side of the Thames. The bus continues around the back of Bankside, providing excellent views of the Art Deco **Oxo Tower**, whose architects got around advertising restrictions by incorporating the stock-cube company's name into its window designs, and the **Tate Modern** gallery – which occupies the former Bankside Power Station, designed by Giles Gilbert Scott in 1947.

- When the RV1 starts to cross the Gothic Revival **Tower Bridge**, look to the left for a great view of Sir Norman Foster's headlamp-like **City Hall** and Renzo Piano's **The Shard**, which is the UK's tallest occupied building (only Yorkshire's Emley Moor transmitting station is higher). The bridge also affords a wonderful sight of the London skyline, and Foster's sustainable **30 St Mary Axe** (known affectionately as 'the Gherkin'), **Tower 42** – the Postmodern skyscraper better known by its old name The Natwest Tower – and Wren's 17th-century masterpiece, **St Paul's Cathedral**, are all clearly visible. Get off the bus at the **Tower of London** stop.

- As you walk up Tower Bridge Road and turn left onto Tower Hill, you will see the **Tower of London** to your left. A riot of architectural design, the complex was begun with the Norman **White Tower** in 1078 and was expanded in the 12th and 13th centuries in a range of medieval styles. Catch the westbound **15** from **The Tower of London** stop, which takes you past Wren's **Monument** – a 60m Doric column that commemorates the Great Fire of London in 1666 – and the Neoclassical grandeur of his **St Paul's Cathedral**.

- Get off the bus at the **City Thameslink/Ludgate Circus** stop, walk back towards St Paul's and turn left up Old Bailey. Cross over Newgate Street and continue up Giltspur Street until you emerge in Smithfield – home to the **Tudor gatehouse of St Bartholomew the Great** (straight ahead from Giltspur Street) and Sir Horace Jones' stunning cast-iron **Smithfield Market** building. Walk through the market and turn right onto Charterhouse Street. At the end of this road lies Charterhouse Square, the north side of which is occupied by the **London Charterhouse**, a former priory that is now a complex of medieval residences, some of which date back to the 14th century. The Charterhouse is private property, but viewings can be arranged at www.thecharterhouse.org. At the southeast of the square, the Brutalist towerblocks of the **Barbican Estate** – built in the 1960s and 1970s to rejuvenate the bomb-shattered Cripplegate district – can be seen towering over this peaceful enclave on the edge of the City.

- Return to Smithfield, turn right into the alleyway between the gatehouse of St Bartholomew the Great and St Bartholomew's Hospital, and walk along Little Britain. When you reach the junction, turn left onto Montague Street and catch the eastbound **100** from the **Little Britain** stop. As this heads along London Wall, look out for the Neoclassical **All Hallows on the Wall** church, designed by George Dance the Younger in 1767, on the left. Get off the bus at the **Houndsditch** stop.

- Catch the eastbound **135** from the same stop all the way out to **Canary Wharf Station**. **One Canada Square**, the Postmodern pyramid-topped tower that dominates this futuristic huddle of buildings was designed by Cesar Pelli in 1988, and was the first marker to be put down in this mini Manhattan out in London's Docklands. A brash symbol of 1980s affluence that broke tradition by setting up shop away from the City, it is something of an extended middle finger to London's traditional financial centre upriver. This upstart, though, has now become iconic and its futuristic design now seems almost quaint. Glitzy and gleaming it may be, but like all the other buildings in this journey, it's now merely part of the fabric of the city.