



## Alchemi creative director: ‘I’ll bookmark firms I like’

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Laura Marino, creative director at Alchemi Group, on collaboration, weathering the recession and office-to-residential conversions

### What schemes are you working on at present?

We have three schemes on the go, with a few more in the pipeline. **We are working on two office-to-residential conversions in London at 55 Victoria Street and on Westbourne Grove, both with Stiff + Trevillion as architect.** The third project was an abandoned hotel, which was about to go on an ‘endangered buildings’ list. It comprises a Grade II-listed row of six stuccoed terraced homes in W2. The residential conversion is

being designed by architect Tate Hindle.

**How have the past few years been for your business and how do you see the future?**

The past three years have been intense and sometimes scary – but, overall, the most amazing of our careers. Fortunately, we have not only been able to find funding to back our projects, but we have also been able to grow our business fourfold and we are currently looking to hire more people.

**How has the recession affected you?**

That's a big question for us. It has affected us in ways we couldn't imagine. It has affected us in ways we could never have imagined. It has challenged us immensely by pushing us to figure out how to survive and work hard on a different level.

**What do you look for in your architects and how do you find them?**

Firstly, I look for a willingness to collaborate with the client. The second thing I look for is completely aesthetic. I want the architect to have good taste. I find architects sometimes through word of mouth, but mainly through research. I'm constantly on the hunt and I'll bookmark firms I like and follow their work for a while to see if it is in alignment with my tastes.

**Will proposed changes to permitted development rights boost conversions of offices to residential use?**

In London, yes, I believe it should do, because we are constantly hearing how there is a massive housing shortage, which looks set to continue for the next few years. Development is a competitive world already and I would imagine such proposed changes would encourage more people to jump on the conversion bandwagon.

**Which of your projects is your favourite, and why?**

**That's like asking which child is your favourite! I suppose it is the one I have been working on for the longest so far, our scheme at 55 Victoria Street. Not only is it a very exciting project, but the working relationship with Stiff + Trevillion has been excellent. It has been just the right balance of collaboration and trust. Exactly how a great scheme should be developed.**