



# The Willis Building, London

Photography courtesy of  
Hufton and Crow

WITH THE GHERKIN AND THE 'INSIDE-OUT' LLOYDS OF LONDON SKYSCRAPER AS NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOURS, THE WILLIS BUILDING NEEDED TO BE A BREATHTAKING YET PRACTICAL DESIGN AS WELL AS A WORKPLACE OFFERING STATE OF THE ART RESTAURANT FACILITIES.  
CLARE RILEY REPORTS

In 2005, after a recommendation by their fit-out architects Swanke Hayden Connell International, Humble Arnold Associates were tasked with designing the foodservice facilities for one of the world's biggest insurance brokers, Willis Group Holdings.

Willis moved from two buildings - Ten Trinity Square and Camomile Street - into 51 Lime Street, London. The new award winning 28-storey skyscraper next to Lloyds of London was designed by none other than Sir Norman Foster of Foster + Partners.

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Willis Group, Joe Plumeri, describes the stunning architecture as a monument to the company's past. "It represents our commitment to stand tall as the change agent in the global insurance industry, challenging the status quo and modernising the way we all do business while

finding new and innovative solutions for our clients."

Hospitality plays a crucial role within the building, especially as the Willis Group put so much pride into "welcoming clients to their new home - a state of the art greenscraper which is a testament to energy efficient sustainable architecture".

Two main restaurants cater for both clients and co-workers. The impressive Client Advocate restaurant on the 23rd floor hosts private dining facilities, whilst the One Flag Café on the 15th floor provides rest, relaxation and replenishment for associates and colleagues.

The associates' restaurant is designed to cope with footfall of over 800 people. Customers move through an array of individual servery counters including hot main meals, hot and cold delis for 'made to order' sandwiches, two theatre cooking stations with

Above  
Willis moved into 51 Lime Street, a new award winning skyscraper designed by Sir Norman Foster of Foster + Partners



interchangeable cooking equipment providing flexible hot offers, island salad bar, 'grab and go', desserts and beverages.

Complementing the restaurant is a standalone coffee bar, offering gourmet coffees with pastries, and a juice bar.

Andrew Humble FCSI explained how the project was approached. "With rentals in the city around £50 per square foot, it was beholden on Humble Arnold Associates to minimise the footprint of the catering facilities within the tower but without compromising the menu variety, service or quality demanded by Willis' clients and staff.

We paid particular attention to speed of service, carrying out a queuing analysis. The building format being circular with angled external fenestration certainly proved challenging when it came to equipment layout design, but we still managed to create logical food storage, preparation and production routes with a strong emphasis on hygiene."

Wherever possible, low grade basement space was utilised for sundry storage and staff changing. Two particular aspects of the project presented Humble Arnold Associates with challenges. The plant room on level 25 being 10 floors away from the cold stores meant that utilising a traditional refrigerant solution would not be feasible and so a Glycol System was specified.

In addition to this, air movement in the servery initially caused smoke from the chargrill to spill from the extract canopy. With support from the manufacturer, Halton, it took a series of rebalancing and canopy cheek enhancements to overcome the issue.

Some special features that Humble Arnold Associates implemented with its design included large glazed windows

between servery and kitchen so that customers can see fresh produce batch cooked in pristine conditions; multi-decks with inbuilt security shutters ensuring produce does not need decanting at night; camcording of equipment demonstrations for catering staff to assist with future inductions; and interchangeable servery cooking appliances to achieve menu flexibility either daily, weekly or seasonally.

The building opened in Spring 2008 and Andrew Eastwood, Client Services Manager for Willis, describes how the restaurant areas have been extremely well received. "Humble Arnold Associates reviewed the previous Willis Buildings catering facilities and developed our ability to provide a more extensive menu offer in an increased restaurant space. The response from Willis associates has been one of absolute positivity. With 1800 associates now under one roof and the design of the servery units we were in a position to provide theatre cookery, serving daily stir fry dishes, pizza & pasta menus and a choice of hot sandwiches and grilled items.

"Customer flows at the counters and tills are permanently fluid, thanks to the design and extended offer. The newly installed (VMC) cashless payment system has worked better than we could have hoped and only requires one operator to process two queues. The new restaurant facility on level 15 not only has the wow factor due to the design and stunning views of London, but it really works."

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Customers move through individual servery counters for hot main meals, delis for made to order sandwiches, desserts and beverages