

## **The Future: Stack A**

Stack A was built in 1820/21 as a tobacco store with vaults beneath to store wine. It was designed by John Rennie, one of the most remarkable engineers of his era. The building which is an architectural gem, was unique in the fact that there was "not one particle of wood or other combustible matter" used in its construction.

Stack A, which is located on Custom House Quay, is perhaps most famously remembered as the venue of the Crimean War Banquet held in 1856. More than 4,000 Irish soldiers, (who were lucky enough to come home), were honoured by Queen Victoria.

The hall extends to a total floor area of approximately 13,000 square metres. Three rows of iron pillars divide the building into four aisles, covered in by a roof supported by an iron framework. For the banquet, the iron framework was painted in brilliant colours of red, cobalt blue and yellow, the pillars were a deep blue and the walls of the building white. The enormous walls were covered in flags from every nation.

Stack A is currently being transformed into a world class retail, restaurant and cultural venue by the Dublin Docklands Development Authority. Work on the £20 million scheme has already commenced and is expected to be completed and the centre open for Christmas 2003. Architects are Michael Collins in association with Fitzroy Robinson as retail specialist architects.

The Docklands Authority has a long standing ambition to attract a top quality museum operation to the scheme and has provided revenue subvention arrangements for this into the IFSC business leases, amounting to a levy of 63 cents per square foot of IFSC office space when the museum opens. The building's saline atmosphere made it unsuitable for the National Museum's decorative arts division which has now moved to Collin's Barracks but in the Master Plan 1997 it was seen as extremely suitable for a gallery of modern art or a science museum.

According to Lar Bradshaw, the Chairman of the DDDA, "The Authority's real objective for Stack A is to create a heart for the area. We want to bring life and vibrancy to the Docklands into the evenings and weekends, to provide Dublin with a major new destination for Dubliners and for visitors and we want it to be exciting and welcoming to all people including families.

This indeed is what the IFSC has been missing, a more human element that will counterbalance the corporate nine-to-five atmosphere and enliven the area throughout the day and night.

Some critics have registered their disappointment at what they see as a slide from the high value of Stack A as an primarily cultural venue (there was no mention in the Master Plan of any retail aspect to the warehouse) to the lower grade uses of retail and restaurants. Yet what must be kept in mind is that although using the space exclusively for a museum would undoubtedly be of greater cultural import, it would nevertheless fail to fulfil the pressing need of the DDDA to make the original IFSC 1 site a more 'people-oriented' place. Museums tend to be nine-to-five enterprises, further compounding the 'ghost-town' atmosphere of that part of the Docklands at night. What is needed is good

planning and a concerted effort to strike the right balance between retail and culture. At the moment the balance in regards to floor space is approximately half and half. Serious thought must also be given to what type of cultural project would be most appropriate and successful in the space.

The ground floor space, with a minimum eaves height of 6 metres, has enormous potential to create modern contemporary space of tremendous character and natural light. The basement, in contrast, is a network of old wine vaults which would be particularly suited to bars, restaurants, or a variety of cultural uses. The elevation has been designed by the renowned structural specialists RFR who also provided the specialist design for I M Pei's glass pyramid and gives fascinating views both in on the structure and out to the Liffey. Given its westerly aspect overlooking George's Dock, Stack A is also an ideal venue for a wide variety of high quality bars and restaurants with potential for al fresco dining to the extent that the weather permits.