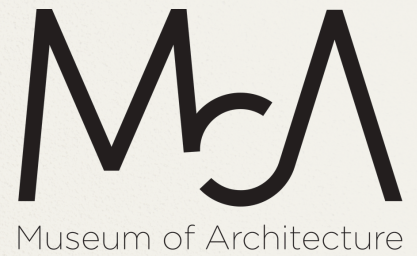


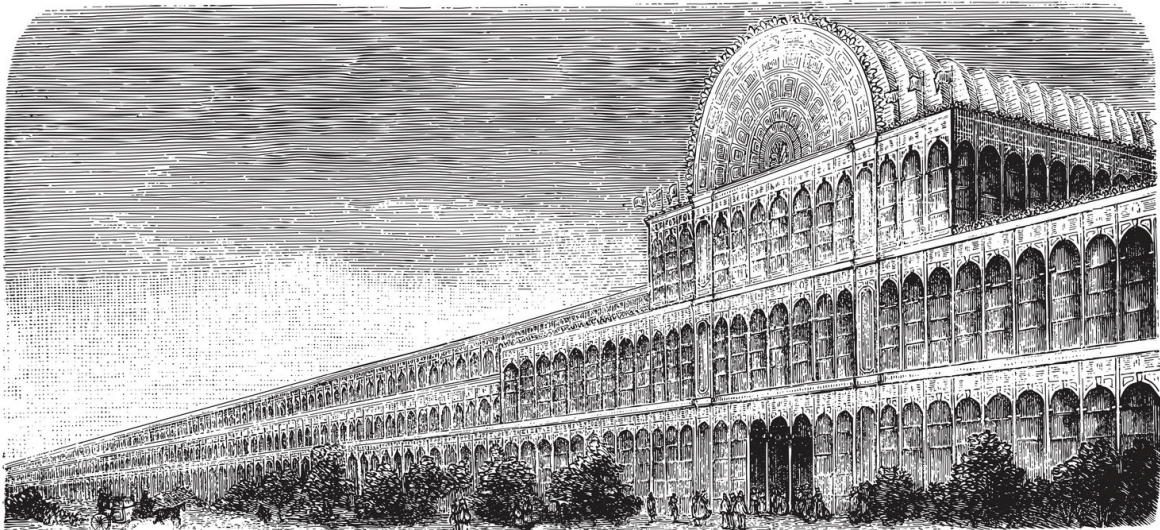
CRYSTAL PALACE OPEN DESIGN IDEAS COMPETITION



Marking 175 Years Since the Great Exhibition

Deadline for expressions of Interest: 1 May 2026

Deadline for entries: 19 May 2026. Open internationally. Free to enter.



The Proposition

The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations (The Great Exhibition) was a massive World Fair that exhibited and boasted global modernisation and industrialisation, particularly that within the British Empire. Yet viewed from today's perspective, it also exposes the imperialist foundations that made such "progress" possible.

It took place inside the Crystal Palace, a building made almost entirely of glass and iron that was erected in just seventeen weeks in Hyde Park, London, from 1 May to 15 October 1851 and was attended by 6 million people. This was equivalent to one third of Britain's population at the time. In 1851, the Great Exhibition exemplified optimism and industrial triumph. Today, it also symbolises something more complicated. It reveals how Victorian Britain understood itself: as modern, advanced, and destined to lead the world.

2026 marks 175 years since the Great Exhibition, and therefore the Museum of Architecture and the Great Exhibition Road Festival have partnered to create a design competition to explore its legacy and ongoing impact in science, the arts, innovation and communities today.

Colonial extraction and competitive nationhood shaped the future in 1851. If we start from the assumption that we now want a different form of economy, one built on equity, care, sustainability and exchange, what physical form would that take? What would you build? And would you build at all?

The Brief

Paxton definitely fulfilled his brief. The Crystal Palace was designed to house the products of all nations under one roof, in a structure that demonstrates Britain's industrial supremacy and it was built incredibly quickly.

This competition invites participants to begin by thinking about the possibilities of what an exhibition, exchange or gathering space should be. An appropriate form for the architecture can then follow.

Ask yourself:

- What do people want to see and how do they want to experience it? We were told how to experience culture in 1851 but how do we now engage with objects, ideas, knowledge through contemporary co-creation, digital access and participatory processes?
- How do we bring people together productively around communities, ideas, hybrid identities, places and networks?
- What would it mean for a structure to house more equitable forms of trade, production and distribution?



Embodied Energy

The original Crystal Palace was structurally unprecedented. Its modular, prefabricated cast iron and plate glass system was designed to be assembled at speed and at scale, with standardised components that could be manufactured off-site and erected quickly. However, it was also immensely carbon hungry and that legacy should inform what we conceive today.

Applicants should consider what materials, construction methods, structural tactics, or environmental systems are at the forefront today? A new Crystal Palace should be as groundbreaking for today's visitors as Paxton's was to Victorian London.

Where do the materials come from? What is the embodied energy (i.e. social, carbon and labour) of what you are proposing? Who makes it and under what conditions? Is it designed for disassembly and reuse? Does it generate energy, sequester carbon, provide habitat or heal the natural environment?

Site & Memory

The Crystal Palace was built in Hyde Park, then moved to Sydenham where it stood for 82 years before burning down.

Think about site in the broadest terms:

- Is your proposal on the Hyde Park footprint or should it be built elsewhere?
- Does it contain a memory of what was there or deliberately start afresh?
- Is it a single location or distributed? Physical, digital, hybrid?
- Could it move, as the original did? If so, where and why?
- Is it temporary or permanent? What do those words mean now?

You are not required to choose a site. If not, please explain why you have come to that decision.

Precedents & Provocations

Think of this as architectural capriccio: fantastical, playful, serious and unbound by the constraints of the possible. In the tradition of Archigram's walking cities, Cedric Price's Fun Palace and the Millennium Dome's ambition, the competition invites proposals that are:

- Fantastical in form but rigorous in thought.
- Ambitious in scope but honest about the potential consequences.
- Visionary with ideas translated into physical space, featuring craft and artistry at its heart.



Format

Submit as a digital single A2 sized PDF, including a written statement of no more than 500 words. It is important to see some form of visual presentation but that can take any form, ranging from renders to hand-drawn sketches, collages or paintings.

A selection will be exhibited on Exhibition Road across the Festival weekend, with 60,000 visitors expected across two days on the 6th and 7th June.

Selection committee includes: Neal Shasore, Rob Fiehn, Melissa Woolford, and Professor Ambrose Taylor

Expression of Interests and submissions to be sent to office@museumofarchitecture.org.

Please put your name in the heading with Crystal Palace competition (ex. Smith Studio - Crystal Palace EOI or competition submission).

To include:

1. A complete A2 designed pdf ready to be printed and displayed
2. A separate duplicate word file of your 500 word text for press purposes
3. Your images as separate 300 dpi files for press and online

Final Note

We are living in a world that is equally complicated and, in many ways, equally pivotal. One full of extraordinary abundance and catastrophic inequality, of technological marvels and deepening crises.

We think there is real value in asking what that world would build if it chose, as the Victorians did, to build something truly epic and to put it on show. We are curious to know what you think that might be.

Expression of Interest deadline: 1 May 2026

Submission deadline 12pm 19 May 2026

