



# Surman Weston

---

**PRESS ENQUIRIES**

Claire Curtice Publicists  
claire@clairecurtice.co.uk  
+ 44 (0) 7775 562 264

PRESS RELEASE

## HACKNEY SCHOOL OF FOOD

10/2020

Surman Weston has completed Hackney School of Food at Mandeville Primary School in Clapton, London. The project is a new initiative to teach children and adults from across London how to grow, prepare and cook delicious, nutritious food, while also providing an inspiring community space and productive gardens for local residents to enjoy.

The school, a dedicated food education centre, is a joint venture between the Learning, Education, Arts and Partnership (LEAP) Federation - a network of three Hackney primary schools - and Chefs in Schools, a charity dedicated to transforming food, food culture and food education in schools through training, guidance and support. The organisations are working together to share and instil a passion for healthy food, and to tackle childhood obesity.

Surman Weston was appointed in 2018 to help the LEAP Federation and Chefs in Schools realise their ambitious vision for a food education hub. The scheme comprises an indoor kitchen and surrounding gardens sited on a prominent corner plot in an underused part of Mandeville Primary School grounds.

Working to a tight budget, the scheme is designed to be robust, unfussy and joyful, adapting the existing buildings to reduce carbon emissions through construction. The heart of the project is the educational kitchen, which is housed in a redundant caretaker's cottage. The red brick house was stripped out and the entire first floor was removed, to create a bright and voluminous double-height, open plan space. Learning through experience is a central ethos of the project; as such, all the building elements have been left exposed - from the structural beams to the insulation and roof rafters - helping everyone using the building to understand how it is put together.

Many of the original finishes and features of the former house have been left in place, including the rough plastered and blockwork walls, and the old bathroom tiles - telling some of the story of the building's former life. The varied palette of materials and textures is unified by paintwork throughout, with the contrasting red cementitious floor lending colour and warmth.

The operational area of the teaching kitchen is designed to be as functional and fun-to-use as possible. The kitchen can accommodate an entire class of 30 students - not an easy task considering the compact footprint of the existing 59m<sup>2</sup> building. Key to the kitchen's success is that it can be used comfortably by five-year-old children, as well as the tallest of adults. To make this possible, Surman Weston designed and developed height-adjustable cooking and washing stations, composed of simple, off-the-shelf components. Professional grade ovens and other cooking facilities also allow the kitchen to cater for large events, including corporate away-days for ethical businesses, ensuring a vital income stream to support the charity and the local community.

On an urban level, the project transforms the streetscape by upgrading the former caretaker's cottage with the insertion of a generous picture window. A mural by renowned illustrator Jean Jullien enlivens the previously blank elevation and gives the project a cheerful presence on the street. Slatted timber gates are introduced between the new ornamental kitchen garden and the street, allowing a visual connection between, and direct access to, the shared kitchen garden.

The kitchen garden is both a productive growing space and a learning and entertaining space capable of holding outdoor lessons, parties and banquets. It features large planters, a sun terrace, a fire pit and wood-fired pizza oven. Designed to allow children and adults of all ages to access the project, the masonry planters are at a range of heights and also double up as seating for outdoor lessons and alfresco eating. The architects worked closely with Louise Nichols, the Executive Headteacher of Mandeville, Gayhurst and Kingsmead Primary Schools, and landscape designer Lidia D'Agostino, to ensure the gardens are accessible and stimulating for all users.

The kitchen will be run by Head Chef Thomas Walker, who was Head Teaching Chef at The Jamie Oliver Cookery School prior to joining Chefs in Schools. Activities will range from cooking over fire, making pizzas in the wood-fired oven, learning basic kitchen skills – such as knife skills, vegetable prep and basic recipes, plus a focus on field to fork produce where students learn to grow the food they will eat. Produce for the school will come from the onsite orchards, additional vegetable patches, soft fruit areas, a greenhouse and two beehives.

Towards the end of the summer, children began using the space as part of a summer club programme. As of this autumn, Hackney School of Food will be available as an amenity to all primary schools across the borough.

The school will have an even wider reach, functioning as an amenity for local people looking to volunteer in the gardens. As a dense inner-city borough of London, private gardens and shared community gardens are scarce in Hackney. The school has been overwhelmed by the community response to its call for volunteers, who have ranged from teenagers to those in their 80s. Even with the challenges presented by physical distancing, gardening is seen as a safe and healthy way of keeping fit and happy during a time of social isolation. Throughout the pandemic, volunteers have reflected on how important the gardens have become to them, providing a space to engage with nature, make a positive contribution to the community and meet their neighbours.

Hackney School of Food launches at a time when the UK government has highlighted the importance of improving the nation's health with initiatives such as the Better Health campaign and publication of the National Food Strategy, authored by Henry Dimbleby, Co-founder of Chefs in Schools.

Spearheaded by Executive Headteacher Louise Nichols and Head Chef Nicole Pisani as a local resource serving a borough-wide community, Hackney School of Food offers a prototype for future national roll-out in primary schools across the UK. Surman Weston's architectural scheme incorporates design details that are easily repeatable; it is a simple, low-cost design solution which has potential for application on further sites.

Nicole Pisani, Co-founder and Executive Chef, Chefs in Schools, said:

*"The School of Food is a wonderful space for children to learn, for the community to come together to cook and for us to train the school kitchen teams of the future. The building and grounds are beautiful and perfect for celebrating food, cooking and produce. We hope many schools and private groups will sign up for our courses and come along to experience what*

*the school has to offer. It truly is a special place to get people - young and old - excited about growing and eating good food."*

Louise Nichols, Executive Headteacher, Mandeville, Gayhurst and Kingsmead Primary Schools, said:

*"Building the School of Food from scratch has been a rewarding collaboration between the educators, the chefs, the gardeners and architects. It's not been without its challenges: from raising funds, sharing the vision and launching a project of this nature at the same time as a world pandemic. The journey has not been easy, but the glorious outcome is incredibly gratifying for all concerned. Visitors, children, school staff, volunteers and funders all light up with smiles when they step into the kitchen and its gardens for the first time. The architects have created a surprisingly light-filled, beautifully functional and well-designed working space from the constantly evolving brief we originally gave them. The gardens were mud heaped, covered in brambles, a dumping ground for old footballs and inhabited by foxes not so long ago, and they have blossomed into a productive oasis."*

Percy Weston, Director, Surman Weston, said:

*"This has been a truly rewarding project to work on. We know that the educational and wellness benefits of Hackney School of Food will be transformative for the community. We have worked carefully to reinvent the site to create a joyful setting that fulfils the ambitions of the project. The architecture is an enabler for a great cause, and it's been a pleasure to contribute our expertise to a project with far-reaching impact."*

**Press enquiries:**

Claire Curtice Publicists  
 mail@clairecurtice.co.uk  
 + 44 (0)7775 562264

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

<b>Address:</b>	Oswald St, London E5 0BT
<b>Construction value:</b>	£309K
<b>Site area:</b>	298m <sup>2</sup>
<b>GIA:</b>	59m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Client:</b>	Joint venture between LEAP Federation and Chefs in Schools
<b>Architect:</b>	Surman Weston
<b>Design team:</b>	Tom Surman, Percy Weston, Hilly Murrell
<b>Project architect:</b>	Percy Weston
<b>Structural engineer:</b>	Structure Workshop
<b>Services engineer:</b>	Peter Deer and Associates
<b>Contractor:</b>	Modern Arc
<b>Illustrator:</b>	Jean Jullien Studio (mural designer)
<b>Artist:</b>	Claire Ward-Thornton (mural and signage painting)
<b>Planting Design:</b>	Lidia D'Agostino
<b>Photography:</b>	© Jim Stephenson

**Instagram handles:**

- @hackneyschooloffood
- @chefsinschools\_uk
- @leapfederation
- @mandeville5
- @tomthefoodchampion
- @surmanweston
- @lidia\_dagostino
- @jean-jullien
- Photo: @clickclickjim



**Surman Weston** is a London-based architecture studio established in 2014 by Tom Surman and Percy Weston.

Eschewing a house style, the practice has developed a portfolio of unique developments that are contextually sensitive, with careful consideration of materiality, construction technique, use and function.

Built works to date include: new-build house Ditton Hill House, Surbiton (2020); new-build garden annexes including Lantern Studio (2016) and Cork Study (2015); and extensive London refurbishments such as Mayow Road (2017), Replica House Studio (2018), and Makepeace Mansions Apartment (2019). In the education sector, Surman Weston created Brunswick Park Cookery Cottage for Brunswick Park Primary School (2017), and a new student cafe for the practice directors' alma mater, the Royal College of Art (2012).

Committed to the process of making, the studio has developed a number of bespoke products, fittings and furniture, including Wedge Table, a minimal chandelier and a contemporary doorknob.

Tom and Percy are regular tutors for the undergraduate course at the University of Cambridge; Percy is visiting critic at University of Nottingham; and both have taught and lectured at institutions including the Royal College of Art and the University of Westminster.

[surmanweston.com](http://surmanweston.com)

**Chefs in Schools** was established in June 2018 with the aim of transforming food, food culture and food education in schools through training, guidance and support. We work predominantly in areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation and aim to reduce child obesity and malnutrition. At Chefs in Schools, we believe all children should have access to high quality, nutritious food at school and be taught to cook it for themselves. We bring about change by training chefs to run school kitchens professionally, equipping them with the know-how and tools to produce freshly made, restaurant standard food in a school setting.

Our target is to transform food and food education in 100 schools by 2023, and to inspire and enable thousands more to make meaningful improvements. We currently support 35 schools and reach over 11,000 children a day.

Chefs in Schools is a campaigning charity - lobbying to end food poverty, to improve free school meals and to improve school meal standards nationwide. Money raised for our charity supports our work transforming school food, funds cookery lessons in schools and supports the Hackney School of Food - our collaboration with the LEAP Federation. The Hackney School of Food is a field to fork cooking school, which trains school chefs and offers food education to children and communities in Hackney.

Chefs in Schools was co-founded by Henry Dimpleby, co-author of the School Food Plan, author of the National Food Strategy and co-founder of Leon Restaurants; Nicole Pisani, former Head Chef at Nopi; and Louise Nichols, Executive Head Teacher of the LEAP Federation of schools. Our charity is backed by some of the country's leading food influencers, including Prue Leith, Thomasina Miers and Yotam Ottolenghi.

[chefsinschools.org.uk](http://chefsinschools.org.uk)



Photo © Jim Stephenson