

GENDO 48

Open Market

The 1st Gendo 48 Competition | Old Spitalfields Market – London E1

Presented by Gendo AI | Architecture's Collaborative Design Canvas

48 hours. All hours. One Victorian iron hall. The future of East London.

THE MANIFESTO

Gendo is not an image generator.

Architecture is not about producing a single, glossy, finalized image. It is about testing options, making decisions under constraints, collaborating in real time, and communicating spatial ideas with precision and atmosphere. Gendo is built for this process - the actual work of design.

GENDO 48: Open Market is the first edition of the Gendo 48 - a recurring architectural hackathon built around the speed and intelligence that Gendo makes possible. It is not a beauty contest. We are not looking for the most spectacular render or the most eye-catching palette. We are looking for design intelligence: proposals that are feasible, coherent, and ambitious - and a canvas that shows how you got there.

The site is Old Spitalfields Market, London E1. The iron structure is your constraint and your collaborator. The future of one of London's most layered historic buildings - and one of its most time-sensitive - is your brief.

48 hours on the clock. £5,000 for the best work.

Go.

How Gendo Fits Into This

Gendo handles the technical complexity in the background. Your job is design: generating ideas, comparing options, iterating on atmosphere and material, building the argument for your proposal image by image.

Start from the reference images of the building in the Starter Pack - rendered from the provided 3D model, taken from the building itself, drawn from its plans and sections. Develop your proposal through Gendo's iterative generation tools - adjusting atmosphere, materiality, light, and programme as your thinking evolves. The speed of iteration is the point: in the time it would take to re-render a single frame in traditional software, you can explore a dozen directions on the Gendo canvas.

Use that speed to go further into the design - not to produce more images, but to find better ones.

THE SITE: OLD SPITALFIELDS MARKET

Horner Square, Commercial Street, London E1 6AA *Grade II Listed | Built 1885–1893 | Architect: George Campbell Sherrin Structural renovation 2017: Foster + Partners*

350 Years of Reinvention

There has been a market on this ground since 1682. Few sites in London carry more accumulated human history in their fabric.

The Huguenot silk weavers who fled France after 1685 settled in Spitalfields and built one of London's most remarkable communities - their presence still written into the terraces of Fournier Street and Elder Street, thirty metres from the market hall. When the silk trade declined, waves of Eastern European Jewish immigrants arrived in the late 19th century, transforming the streets into the most densely populated square mile in England. The market became their lifeline. By the mid-20th century, the area had shifted again - Bangladeshi families from Sylhet arrived through the 1970s and 1980s, and Brick Lane became the geographical heartbeat of a new London identity.

Through all of this, the market endured. Each generation changed what was sold, who sold it, and what the building meant to the neighbourhood. The iron hall remained.

In the 1980s, when property developers threatened demolition, a long campaign saved the building. In 1991 the market reopened as a craft and arts venue. In 2017 Foster + Partners renovated the southern bays, extending the building's active life while carefully preserving the Victorian ironwork. Today, Old Spitalfields Market is one of London's most visited markets - home to over 100 stalls, restaurants, and events throughout the week - and its Grade II listed iron hall is one of the finest examples of Victorian market architecture in existence.

This is a building that has always survived by adapting. The question this competition asks is: what does the next adaptation look like?

The Building

The main market hall was designed by **George Campbell Sherrin** and built between 1885 and 1893. It is a structure of considerable architectural and engineering sophistication:

Element	Description
Plan	Approximately 9,500 m ² of covered floor area. Central nave approximately 12 metres wide, running the full depth of the building north to south. Side aisles on the east and west.
Columns	Cast-iron columns on a regular grid, rising from a stone floor to approximately 8 metres. Each column is a slender, elegant profile with simple decorative capitals.
Roof structure	An unusual hybrid truss system: rectangular crescent-type trusses combined with bowstring trusses. Upper chords of paired angle iron. Lower chords of flat bars and horizontal round bars. Warren-type diagonals with X-bracing in the outer bays.
Glazed lantern	A continuous glazed lantern roof along the central nave, flooding the interior with natural light throughout the day. The quality of this light - diffuse, even, changing with the hour and

Element	Description
	the season - is the defining atmospheric condition of the building.
Perimeter	The Horner Square perimeter walls and shopfront elevations facing Commercial Street (east), Brushfield Street (south), and Lamb Street (north).

The spatial rhythm of the column grid - regular, generous, full of light - is the building's primary architectural character and the constraint around which all proposals must be designed.

The Speculative Brief

East London is changing faster than at any point since the post-war era. The area around Spitalfields - Shoreditch to the north, Aldgate to the south, Brick Lane to the east - is now one of the most dynamic mixed-use quarters in Europe. Tech companies, creative studios, independent traders, and long-established Bengali-owned businesses share the same streets in a density that is genuinely rare.

The market continues to trade. But its future is not fixed.

For the purposes of this competition, the following scenario applies:

In 2030, the Spitalfields Market Trust has issued an open brief. The current market programme has relocated to a new purpose-built facility nearby. The Victorian iron hall is freed. The building is empty of tenants, free of furniture, and full of four centuries of possibility.

The Trust has one overarching requirement: whatever happens next must be worthy of everything that came before it - including the building's most fundamental quality. This building has never stood still. It has always been different depending on the hour, the day, the season, the community. Any proposal for its future must honour that.

THE CHALLENGE

Propose a new civic institution for East London within the iron envelope of Old Spitalfields Market.

This is not a hotel. Not a luxury residential development. Not a corporate headquarters. Not a museum dedicated to the market's own history. The brief calls for something that serves the public - all of the public, across many hours of the day and many rhythms of the city - in a way that is commensurate with the building's four centuries of civic function.

The building type does not yet exist. That is the point of this competition.

Your proposal must meet five tests:

1. **Civic** - publicly accessible. Not primarily commercial. Serves the whole borough, not a demographic.
2. **Temporal** - this is the heart of the brief. See below.
3. **Structural** - the iron structure is the protagonist, not the backdrop. The columns, the trusses, the glazed lantern. These are not obstacles to work around. They are the reason this building is extraordinary.
4. **Historical** - coherent with what the building has been. The design must be legible as the next chapter, not a demolition of everything that came before.
5. **Feasible** - buildable, fundable, and governable by real people in a real city. Ambitious is good. Speculative is good. Architecturally impossible is not.

The Second Test: Time

The market has never been a single-state building. It has always been a building that changes - and that change has never been only about the clock.

The daily cycle. In the morning, traders arrived before dawn. The hall filled with movement and noise. At midday it quietened. In the evening, a different crowd. Late at night, the streets around it were alive with a different East London entirely - the restaurants, the music, the night city. The glazed lantern transmits all of it: the angle of morning light is entirely unlike the artificial warmth of midnight.

The weekly cycle. On Sundays the market is packed; on Wednesdays it breathes. Different communities occupy different rhythms within the same week. The building has always known the difference between a market day and a quiet Tuesday.

The seasonal cycle. In December, the building transforms - the Christmas market, the cold air, a different quality of crowd. The Ramadan period brings its own rhythms to Brick Lane and the surrounding streets, its own hours, its own gathering patterns. The summer solstice floods the glazed lantern with a warmth entirely unlike January's cool grey. Spitalfields Music Festival fills the surrounding streets in June. The building has always known the difference between seasons, and between the communities that bring different seasons to life within it.

The historical cycle. Each era of Spitalfields has had its own relationship to this building. The Huguenot weavers, the Jewish traders, the Bangladeshi families, the creative economy workers - each community brought its own hours, its own rhythms, its own claim on the space. The building absorbed them all, because it was large enough and open enough to hold more than one answer at a time.

And then there are the other kinds of time - the ones that do not follow a calendar.

The time of a pandemic, when a large covered civic space becomes something urgent and essential: a distribution point, a gathering place for those who have nowhere else to go, a refuge that is neither public nor private but simply open. The time of political upheaval, when a building at the centre of a neighbourhood becomes a place of assembly, of collective expression, of shelter from whatever is happening outside. The time of economic hardship, when the building has historically been what the surrounding community needs most - not what is planned, but what is possible. The time of collective grief. The time of collective celebration. The time when the city needs something different from what it normally provides, and the building either rises to meet that need or does not.

The great civic buildings of history are not the ones that function best on a comfortable Tuesday at noon. They are the ones that are still there - still useful, still open, still meaningful - when something unexpected happens in the world. That is the standard this building has already met, for three and a half centuries. Your proposal must meet it too.

Your proposal must be designed across time, not just for a single moment. The temporal dimension is not a presentation requirement - it is a design requirement. At minimum, your final boards must show the building in different hours. But the richer the proposal, the more dimensions of time it will engage.

Some questions to work through - not all of which need to be answered on the canvas, but all of which are worth asking:

- How does the building's programme change between morning, afternoon, and night?
- What does it become in December? In the heat of a July evening?
- Are there elements of the proposal that only activate at certain hours, or for certain communities, or at certain points in the year?

- How does the glazed lantern - which transmits every shift in the quality of London's light - become a design instrument across the seasons, not just a structural feature?
- What does this building become in a crisis? In a pandemic? In a moment of collective grief or collective joy?
- What does it offer when the city needs something it did not plan for?
- What is the relationship between the building's rhythms and the rhythms of the surrounding neighbourhood - its particular communities, their particular calendars, their particular hours?

Leave some of these questions unanswered on the canvas. Not every dimension needs to be resolved. But the brief asks you to show that you have sat with them.

The brief does not prescribe a programme. It prescribes a quality: **the quality of being genuinely alive across time.**

RULES OF THE GAME: DESIGN ADHERENCE

Old Spitalfields Market is Grade II listed. The Victorian iron structure is protected. This is not a constraint to resent - it is the reason the competition exists.

Fixed: What the Competition Protects

The following elements are part of the listing and must appear clearly in your design. They cannot be altered, obscured, or removed:

- The **cast-iron column grid** - columns, capitals, and base plates in their existing positions and proportions
- The **hybrid roof truss system** - including the bowstring trusses and the continuous glazed lantern above the nave
- The **external envelope** - the Horner Square perimeter walls and shopfront elevations facing the surrounding streets
- The **existing floor level** - the stone floor plane is the datum. Insertions can sit on it, rise from it, or be suspended above it. They cannot remove it.

Open: Your Design Domain

Everything else is yours:

- All **insertions between, below, and above** the column grid - new floor levels, mezzanines, platforms, structures inserted into and around the columns

- All **interior programme and fit-out** - what happens in the space, at what time, and for whom
- **Light** - how the existing glazed lantern is supplemented, modulated, dramatised, or contrasted by artificial and seasonal light
- **Connections** - how the building opens to Commercial Street, Horner Square, Brushfield Street, the surrounding city
- **The roof surface** - it can be activated, walked on, planted, opened to the sky. It cannot be removed.

Design Adherence in Practice

The Starter Pack provides a 3D model from which you can add your designs and extract your key views.

There will also be a contextual information pack including links to plans, sections, axonometric drawings, and photographs of the building. Use these to understand the space and establish the iron structure as the foundation of your proposal.

The iron must remain legible in your final boards. If your images show a space that could be any space - if the columns have disappeared, if the glazed lantern has been replaced by something else - you have lost the thread. The architectural intelligence of this proposal lies in what you do *with* the iron, not *instead* of it.

Design adherence is not a technicality. It is the premise of the competition.

HOW TO WORK: THE GENDO CANVAS

The board is the submission. Not a PDF. Not a presentation deck. Not a rendered portfolio exported from somewhere else. The Gendo canvas you build over the course of the competition - the decisions, the iterations, the pivots, the annotations - is the work.

Everything begins from the provided reference images of the building. Load them into your canvas on day one. Start from the iron.

The canvas has two areas. Both matter.

Check the submission criteria for more details

The Working Area

This is where design happens. Think of it as your sketchbook, your wall, your pin-up board - all at once, shared in real time with your team.

Bring in your designs, hand sketches or views of changes to the provided 3d model. Generate ideas. Try things that don't work. Explore a material and abandon it. Discover something unexpected in a prompt you didn't intend. The working area should feel alive: directions taken and abandoned, images that opened up something new, notes that explain a decision.

Use sticky notes liberally to show your workings. Not captions - thinking. Why did you go in this direction? What did the previous attempt teach you? What changed? The working area should tell the story of how the proposal was found, not just what it became.

There are no rules about how the working area looks. It is yours.

The Final Boards

An identifiable section of the canvas - clearly separated from the working area - where your final proposal is laid out as you want it to be seen.

The final boards are your submission. They will be what judges assess, what gets shared on social, what becomes the record of your proposal. They should be composed with the same care you would bring to a studio crit or a client presentation.

The final boards must contain the following:

- 1. The Building as Found** At least one image establishing the iron structure - the columns, the glazed lantern, the spatial depth of the hall - in its existing state. This is the before. It sets the terms. This can be your sketch, screenshot of the model, photograph - whatever your starting point is.
- 2. The Design Proposal** Your intervention in the iron hall. At minimum, one image that shows the full spatial proposal - the iron and the new together, at a scale that communicates the relationship between the existing structure and what you have placed within it. Additional views are at your discretion. Choose the angles and moments that best argue for your proposal.
- 3. The Temporal Narrative** The most important requirement of the final boards. Your design across time.

Show the building in at least **two distinct temporal states**. The choice of which states you depict is itself a design decision - the moments you select reveal what you believe the building is actually for.

A day/night pair is the minimum. But the most powerful temporal narratives will go further. Some possibilities - none prescribed:

- A sequence across the hours of a single day: dawn, noon, dusk, midnight
- A pair across seasons: the building in a January morning versus a June evening
- An ordinary moment and an extraordinary one: the regular programme alongside what the building becomes at Christmas, during a street festival, or in a moment of collective need
- A depiction of the building in a condition of crisis or transition - what it offers when the neighbourhood needs something it did not expect to need
- Multiple communities at multiple hours: the building shown through the lens of different users at different points in their day or year

There is no prescribed format. The temporal narrative can be a pair of images or a sequence of six. It can span hours, seasons, or historical eras. What matters is that each state feels genuinely different - not a lighting filter applied to the same image, but a different condition of occupation, atmosphere, use, and meaning. And that the choice of states reveals something true about the proposal.

4. The Design Thinking Sticky notes on the final boards - brief, in your own words - explaining the core decisions. Not descriptions of what we can see in the images. Explanations of *why*: why this programme, why this material, why this relationship between the new and the iron, why the temporal sequence works the way it does.

JUDGING

Submissions are evaluated by the Gendo jury on four criteria. All four are assessed together - a proposal cannot win on imagery alone, and cannot win on process alone. The best work will be coherent across all of them.

Criterion	Description	Weight
The Idea	The design concept is original. The programme is convincing and genuinely civic. The brief is answered - not as a checklist, but as a proposition for how a building and a city can work together.	35%
Design Adherence	The iron structure is legible and made more powerful by the design. The columns, the trusses, and the glazed lantern are present and deliberate in the final boards - not incidental, not erased.	25%
The Temporal Narrative	The proposal is genuinely designed across time. The final boards show the building in different states - different hours, different seasons, different world conditions - in a way that is specific to this building, this programme, and this city. The choice of which temporal states are depicted reveals architectural intelligence. The best entries will show the building not only in its ordinary rhythms but in at least one extraordinary	25%

Criterion	Description	Weight
	condition: a crisis, a season of particular significance, a moment of collective need or collective celebration.	
The Process	The working area of the canvas tells a design story. The thinking is visible. The pivots are shown. The sticky notes explain the decisions. This is a pin-up, not a portfolio.	15%

PRIZES

First Prize – £5,000

Awarded to the team that demonstrates the clearest design intelligence, the most convincing architectural proposition, and the strongest understanding of time as a design material.

Shortlist – 4 entries

Each shortlisted team receives:

- A full feature profile on the Gendo platform, blog, and press distribution network
- 12 months Gendo Studio subscription for all team members
- The board published permanently in Gendo's competition archive

People's Choice

The most-shared board on social media, tracked via board link reach throughout the competition period. The People's Choice team receives:

- £500 cash prize
- A featured post across all Gendo social channels at the winner announcement

Honourable Mentions – up to 5 entries

Permanent inclusion in Gendo's competition gallery. For many practitioners, this will be the beginning of a public portfolio.

TEAM RULES

Recommended 2-4 people. Maximum 5.

This competition is designed for the way architecture is actually practised - in collaboration. The multiplayer canvas is not a feature; it is the premise. Use it.

All team members must have active Gendo accounts

One submission per team. The board URL submitted via the competition form is the submission. The board is locked at the deadline. Work visible on the board after 23:59 GMT Sunday 26 April will not be assessed.

The final boards must demonstrate the iron structure. The columns and glazed lantern of Old Spitalfields Market must be legible in your final images. Submissions where the iron structure has been entirely replaced or obscured will be disqualified.

Entries are free. There is no entry fee.

People's Choice: A link to a social media post with the hashtag #Gendo48 where the winner will be selected by the amount of interaction - more information below

TIMELINE

Date	Time (GMT)	Event
23rd April, Thursday	11:59 AM	Brief drops. All registered teams receive the full brief and Starter Pack by email. The 3D model, drawings, image packs, and structural notes are live.
24–26 April		Gendo unlocked and unlimited for 48 hours
23rd–26 April	-	Open competition period. Research the site, develop your concept, and build your canvas. The board is live and collaborative from day one.
26 April, Sunday	23:59	Submission deadline. Board URLs submitted via the competition form on the Gendo platform. No extensions.
27 April – 1 May	-	Internal shortlist review by the Gendo team.
1 May, Friday	-	Shortlist sent to the judging panel.
6 May, Wednesday	-	Winners announced across Gendo's platform, social channels, and press contacts.

THE STARTER PACK

All registered teams receive the following assets on 23 April:

Asset	Description
Interior 3D model	A clean, competition-ready 3D model of the market hall interior - the cast-iron column grid, hybrid roof trusses, and glazed lantern. Use this to understand the building's spatial geometry, generate rendered views from your chosen angles, and bring those images into your Gendo canvas as the foundation of your proposal.
Floor plan	Architectural floor plan of the market hall at ground level, showing the column grid, perimeter walls, nave, and key spatial relationships.
Sections	Longitudinal and cross-sections through the hall, establishing the vertical geometry: column heights, roof profile, truss configuration, and glazed lantern.
Historical image pack	Archival photographs and drawings of the market across its history - different eras, different communities, different uses. The building across time, as a reference for the temporal brief.
Current image pack	Contemporary photographs of the iron structure - columns, trusses, the glazed lantern at different times of day, Horner Square, and the surrounding streets and neighbourhood.

SHARING YOUR WORK

The Gendo board is both your submission and your social asset. When your board is ready - and even before it is - share the board link.

Post it on Instagram and LinkedIn with **#Gendo48** and **@gendo_ai**.

The People's Choice award is tracked by board link reach over the competition period. The more you share, the more you are in contention. And the more the field can see what is possible in a shared canvas over the course of a week.

Gendo will repost, amplify, and feature work in progress on Instagram and LinkedIn throughout the competition. The whole thing happens in public. Your board is your argument.

Tag **#Gendo48OpenMarket** to enter the conversation specifically about this edition.

Gendo is fully open during the 48-hour competition.

There are no usage restrictions. Participants can generate, iterate, and explore as much as needed throughout the weekend.

The focus is on designing freely and developing strong ideas.

REGISTER

gendo.ai/gendo-48

The brief drops 24th April to all registered teams.

Entry is free. All team members must register on the Gendo platform before the brief drops. Gendo Studio is not required - all features needed for the competition are available on the standard plan.

LINKS

Competition Files: [Download here](#)

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1yj8xPLAfyQnwjuxJrwuwyCmYNabNpYMn?usp=sharing>

- 00_3D_Models
- 01_Planning_Drawings
- 02_Google_Earth

Market Website: <https://www.spitalfields.co.uk>

Location: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/8Drda1t5pcGAu38EA>

Historical Photography: <https://oldspitalfieldsmarket.com/journal/capturing-spitalfields-91>

Market Instagram Page: <https://www.instagram.com/oldspitalfieldsmarket/>

Submission link: <https://forms.gle/bUTh8V552GVZKV659>

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