Goldfinger: Upscaling through mobilisation

No, not the notorious Bond film villain! Goldfinger Factory — part community centre, factory workshop and café — lies at the foot of the Trellick Tower in west London. The factory/centre, which takes its name from the tower’s somewhat notorious Modernist architect Erno Goldfinger, is the brainchild of one Oliver Waddington-Ball.

The young social entrepreneur struck on the idea while working as a management consultant, advising companies on how to become more community friendly.

The centre trains and employs local residents from socially disadvantaged groups to convert old furniture, bric-a-brac and other unwanted goods from charities and secondhand shops into attractive items that are again offered for sale to an up-market clientele, a process known as “upscaling”. Artists and craftspeople with no workspace of their own are given use of Goldfinger’s basement workshop; what they give back is part of the profits from sales to allow the centre to carry on, as well as...
some of their time to others to acquire basic craft skills.

“One man’s muck is another man’s gold,” Waddington-Ball quips in a Domus Nova interview. “Watching the success of the London Reuse Fund he was involved with that allows individuals and businesses to offer products, materials and waste for future use, I realised that you could apply the same model to people, asking those who are able to offer up services, support, teaching and mentoring to those who need to learn and grow their abilities.”

Waddington-Ball’s industry and contagious enthusiasm won him support from the Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council for his start-up fund, facing stiff competition from the British Red Cross, British Heart Foundation and The Prince’s Trust.

In addition to providing workplace skills and chic-and-unique products, Goldfinger Factory has a built-in “lifestyle element”. It’s a place to meet, discuss ideas and ponder the future. Attached to it is the acclaimed and alcohol-free Redemption café, which serves homemade food and Fair Trade coffee. “By being consciously abstemious,” says Waddington-Ball, the café “welcomes all cultures.”

Quoted in Le Cool, Waddington-Ball sums up his enterprise and love for his local community with the following: “It’s about mobilising a poor community through the medium of design and waste reduction. Rather than being isolated from the surrounding community because of the wealth gap, to interact and tell a bit of a Robin Hood story — how, if you give people the right tools, they can change their own circumstances.”