SAINSBURY WING,
NATIONAL GALLERY

Architects: Venturi, Scott Brown and
Associates, Inc. in association with Sheppard
Robson Architects

Location: London, England

Client: National Gallery

Area: 120,000 sf

Cost: $47,930,000

Completion: 1991

Built on the last open space on Trafalgar
Square, the Sainsbury Wing houses one of the
world’s greatest and most visited collections
of early Italian and Northern Renaissance
paintings. Stylistically, the Wing is designed
to connect to and reflect William Wilkins’ 1838 National Gallery building
while maintaining its own identity as a work of contemporary architecture.

It’s constructed of the same Portland limestone and observes the cornice
height of the original. Elements from the Wilkins facade are replicated on
the new building, but used in innovative and unexpected ways alongside
contrasting elements -- for example, large square-cut openings and small
metal columns -- to create new rhythms and harmonies.

The Sainsbury Wing contains a new and more generous entry that provides
grade access to the entire National Gallery. This ground-level entrance is
not only accessible to all people but, in contrast to the original structure,
appears accessible -- an important consideration as museums reach out
to ever more diverse audiences. Inside, visitors have convenient passage
to flexible temporary exhibition galleries, conference rooms, a restaurant,
a 350-seat lecture theater, an enlarged museum shop, and an interactive
information center. Beyond a large glass wall overlooking the Wilkins
building and Trafalgar Square, a grand processional stair leads from the
lobby to the third-floor permanent galleries where the Early Renaissance
collection is exhibited. Galleries are arranged in a gentle hierarchy of
small, medium, and large rooms, each lit by a delicately balanced and
automatically controlled combination of natural and artificial light
sources. Galleries are grouped and linked, providing a variety of pathways
to accommodate the Museum’s four million annual visitors.

VSBA placed first in an international invited competition for design of the
Sainsbury Wing after a previous design was abandoned at the urging of the
Prince of Wales. As prime architect, VSBA provided architectural design,
programming, interior design, and construction documents in metric.
The Sainsbury Wing and original building (top) and view of the gallery during an anti-war protest.
Awards:

The Benjamin Franklin Medal Award, 1993.
Arts Access Award, First Winner, 1992.
The Queen’s Award for Export Achievement, 1991.
The Design Award for Natural Stone, 1991.

Site plan
View of museum on Trafalgar Square
Gallery level plan

View of skylight lighting system

Views of galleries