

The Swiss Re Building: Case Study



Project

The Swiss Re Building, 30 St Mary Axe

Client

SCX Ltd

Architect

Foster and Partners

Main Contractor

Skanska Construction UK

Requirements

This was quite possibly one of the more obscure and high profile projects that Envirodoor has been involved in. The 180m high building endearingly known as the "Gherkin" was commissioned by Swiss insurance company Swiss Re and was completed in 2004, costing £134.4m. One major obstacle with a building towering 180m above the ground and constructed with 24,000m² of glass is the issue of how to go about cleaning the glass, especially when the sides of the building are curved. The first 35 levels could be cleaned in the same way as any other skyscraper, by using window-cleaning cradles. The architects then had to find a way to clean the glass from floors 35 upward, in the area where the building starts to taper at the top.



Solution

The solution was to use a cherry picker: this would manoeuvre around the circumference of the building on a track, enabling full access to the exterior of the building. This is the point where Envirodoor got involved. We teamed up with materials handling experts SCX Ltd who required our expertise to design a door for the garage in which the cherry picker would be housed. This was not as simple as it may sound. The door had to fit in with the unique aesthetics of the building, as well as being large enough for the cherry picker to fit through. Added to this the door would be in the unusual position of being 36 stories up. The Envirodoor design team came up with the solution of a specially designed sectional overhead door. The door was designed to fit in with the curvature of the building so that when it's closed it virtually blends into the glass.

