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Steeling itself for the big show

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Monstrosity or milestone? Orbit, ArcelorMittal's steel tower at London's Olympic Park.

everyone's taste. "Even my father asked me a couple of weeks ago: is this a joke?" he said at the recent inauguration of the tower. "It divides opinion and it wouldn't be art if it didn't."

Whatever one's view of the Orbit, it has to be said that it is quite the coup for ArcelorMittal, which is putting £17.6 million, including 2,000 tonnes of steel into the project. While it won't own the structure – which is being "gifted" to the Games' legacy development corporation, the tower will bear the company's name in perpetuity, and has also earned it the position of a Tier 2 sponsor of the London Olympic and Paralympic games.

No company logos are allowed within the Olympic Park during the course of the Games, but when the Park is re-opened to the public following a revamp in 2013, the tower will

ArcelorMittal hopes that Orbit, the twisty steel tower it is putting up in London's Olympic Park, will signal it as a bold and progressive company.

Love it or hate it, the ArcelorMittal Orbit, the 114.5-metre-high asymmetric steel tower in London's Olympic Park, designed by India-born sculptor Anish Kapoor and Sri Lanka-born designer Cecil Balmond and sponsored by the world's largest steel group, has certainly become a talking point for Londoners. Is it a randomly twisted lattice of steel and a potential eyesore or a forward-looking emblem that London will be proud of for decades to come?

Ian Loudon, Head of Brand at ArcelorMittal, admits it is not to



bear the ArcelorMittal brand on it. There will be a discreet plaque on the top observation tower and the ground floor marking the firm's contribution. "It won't be brightly coloured or lit ... but more like a foundation stone," he says.

"Being behind this landmark sculpture that is the symbol of London 2012 and a symbol of the regeneration of East London is very, very important to us," says Louden. He argues that the design and choice of materials – 60 per cent of the steel is from scrap, and there is product from all ArcelorMittal operations across the world – is symbolic of the company.

"We hope that it is going to create not just positivity for us but communicate through its design and through its progressive nature something about us as being a company that is moving forward and progressive," he says. "Mr Mittal's original strategy that led to the formation of ArcelorMittal – that it was necessary to be a global steel company that is near to the sources of supply and energy and the customer in as many parts of the world as is possible, as a way of flattening the peaks and troughs of cyclical steel demand – this streak of boldness of having a plan and sticking to the plan runs through us as a company and I'd like people to get a bit of that feeling from the orbit."

Branding matters hugely to ArcelorMittal, he says. "Brand is an important business asset, even for a business-to-business commodity company... What people think of us affects us – our reputation in the minds of stakeholders, journalists, customers, local employees, regulators all affects their interaction with us."

The story of how ArcelorMittal came to be involved in the Olympics is already well-known: London Mayor Boris Johnson bumped into Lakshmi Mittal in the cloakroom at the Davos Summit back in 2009, and persuaded him to do something for the Games in a conversation that lasted less than a minute. After a competition which garnered applications from 40 or so applicants, the choice of the Kapoor-Balmond proposal was made from a short list of three. "We were absolutely delighted with the choice, we like to think it fits with us ... it is bold and it is provocative but it does create debate and that is healthy," says Louden, pointing to the initial reception to buildings such as the Houses of Parliament and the Eiffel Tower (the latter in particular provoked a furious protest from Paris' artistic community). "Both were savagely criticised when they first appeared and look at the value that they bring now."

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