Nick Eldridge and Piers Smerin founded their practice in 1998 after meeting at John McAslan and Partners, where they were both partners. They studied at the Architectural Association and Royal College of Art, respectively, and gained experience early in their careers while working in the offices of exceptional architects like Norman Foster and Zaha Hadid at a time when even the more junior members of staff worked directly with the principals. Today their company employs between eight to ten personnel, a size which they prefer to maintain as it is big enough to allow them to take on substantial projects while still being small enough for them to be able to pick and choose their commissions. They only select individuals or companies they know they will get along with and who will share their vision.

Their first major commission was The Lawns, a family house in the Highgate Conservation Area in London, for Frances and John Sorrell, which won awards from both the RIBA and the Civic Trust, and was short-listed for the Stirling Prize. From the start, their reputation as cutting-edge domestic architects was sealed with a series of commissions for new houses on similarly sensitive sites. However, their first residential scheme remains for them their greatest success as it still encapsulates their attitude to design in many ways: challenging the planning restrictions of building in an historic area, transforming an existing structure into something new, and fusing the design of the interior with the exterior.

Although usually responsible for both the building and interior of a project, they do not like to label what they do, preferring to use the more amorphous term of ‘designer’ or ‘design’. ‘To be honest we are not much concerned with how our work is described or classified. Design is either good or bad, successful or unsuccessful, irrespective of where it originated, what was intended by it, or how it has been classified.’ The duo prides itself on the ability of being able to work on all aspects of a project, from the shell to the furniture.

This overall approach has built the partnership a reputation for producing
intelligent and memorable solutions in response to varied clients’ briefs, often within tightly constrained budgets.

They work across a range of typologies from workspace and retail to educational and residential design, collaborating with landscape architects, fine artists, lighting designers, and graphic and identity designers, which they believe enriches the project while still resulting in a coherent whole. Notable schemes include a number of commercial projects, including the radical new research and development headquarters for BT Cellnet/O2, Ealing Studios, London; the headquarters for E. Oppenheimer and Sons of De Beers, Hatton Garden, London; Prisma’s headquarters at Centre Point, London; an entire floor devoted to youth fashion ‘Spir’ and technology in the Birmingham Selfridges; and the interior and landscape of the Villa Moda department store for Sheikh Majed Al-Sabah, Kuwait. More recent projects include the redesign of the Design Council’s workspace in Bow Street, London; a Performing Arts Centre for a school in north London; and the new Business and Intellectual Property Centre at the British Library.

Eldridge and Smerin do not consider they have a particular design style, preferring the site, client or intended users of a building to dictate the look of the finished project, making each example distinctive and unique. However, what all their work has in common is timelessness being measured, well conceived and constructed. The organization of the spaces is simple and clear, and there is a strong attention to the innovative use of materials as well as detailing. They are sleek and engineered, with strong lines and exude a calmness and restraint which belies their complexity. They could be called minimalist, but it’s an enriched form of paring down.
Eldridge and Smerin agree that the greatest influence on their career has been their association with the Sorrells, not only because the couple took a risk employing unknown architects for the groundbreaking design of their home, but also because they share the architects' desire to promote good design within schools. The Sorrell Foundation, set up in 2001-02, promotes designers in a range of disciplines to undertake projects with schools to prove to the government that design does make a difference.

Eldridge and Smerin's goals for the future are to continue to do more work in the schools' sector and to become involved in mainstream mass housing, an area where most developers still offer unimaginative housing on the exterior and internal spaces which are poorly considered and unresponsive to the needs of contemporary life.