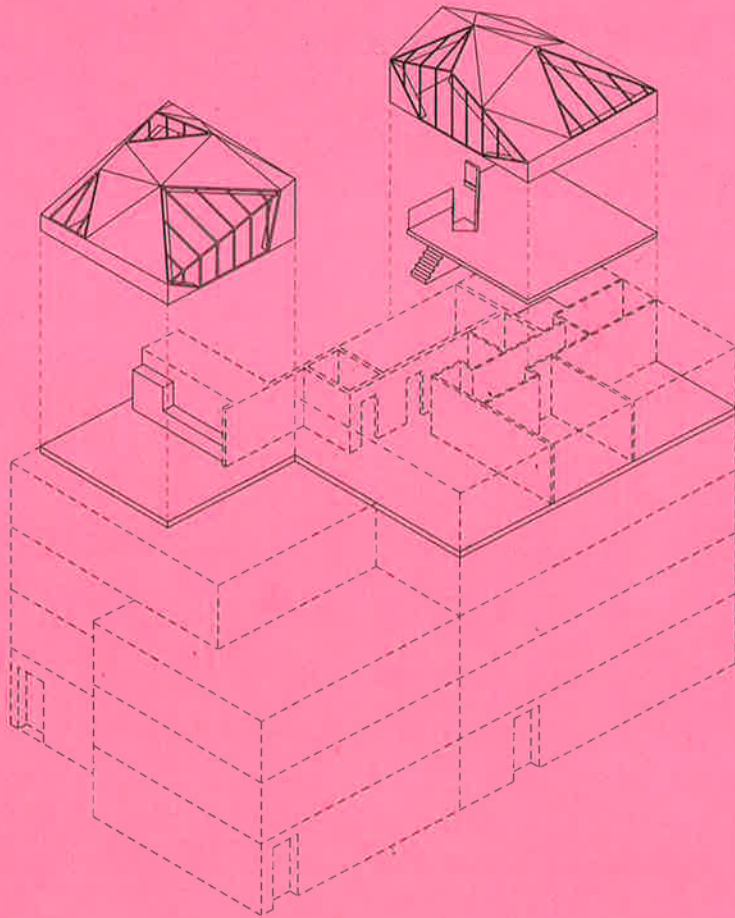




# CORNER HOUSE BY DSDHA



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invigorated by a sense of purpose and autonomy. It now hosts an exercise in clever contextuality, derived from sifting and analysing the runes of Fitzrovia's Georgian past. The template is the traditional Charlotte Street terrace, characterised by a tripartite division of plinth, body and roof, with strong horizontal lines, executed in solid masonry, with punched apertures.

The new building emerges to join the urban conversation in a rich bass-baritone of loadbearing brick, rather than the gimcrack clip-on kind, giving it an undeniably forceful presence (think Bryn Terfel as Wotan) amid Fitzrovia's operatic milieu. 'It's both monumental and delicate,' says DSDHA director Deborah Saunt. 'We were interested in exploring how brick could contribute to the project.'

The calculated game of material nuance adds subtle shifts and timbres to the weighty, brooding facade. It also speaks of a curiosity about and concern for how things are made and put together. Qbvious tenets of architecture, you might think, yet increasingly, architects are retreating from the art of building by relinquishing such responsibilities to product suppliers. The outcome is facades by the yard, dumbly pasted on to lettable floor

area, as exemplified by the redevelopment of the nearby Middlesex Hospital site.

Here, however, the difference in approach is palpable. 'One of the things that occurred to us when we were walking round London looking at residential blocks was their strong sense of materiality,' says Derwent director Simon Silver. Responding to the scale and massing of the previous buildings, the main corner element is connected to a smaller rear block, differentiated by the use of pale blond brick. In a yin-yang of gutsy masonry, light and dark conjoin in Tottenham Street, so the scheme presents a different face to different street conditions: rigorously formal on Charlotte Street and more fragmented round the side and in the mews to the rear.

Windows are set in stepped reveals, the outcome of research and testing to evaluate the potential of brick craftsmanship. 'It's treated with a plasticity to achieve a dramatic effect,' says DSDHA associate

### A yin-yang of gutsy masonry presents a different face to different street conditions

director Tom Greenall. Specially designed lintels span the bays, which relate proportionally one to another, reflecting a modern take on the geometric derivation of Fitzrovia architecture.

'Each floor has a slightly different relationship between the sill and the internal floor levels,' says Greenall. 'It makes the building appear less relentlessly stacked and more subtly differentiated.'

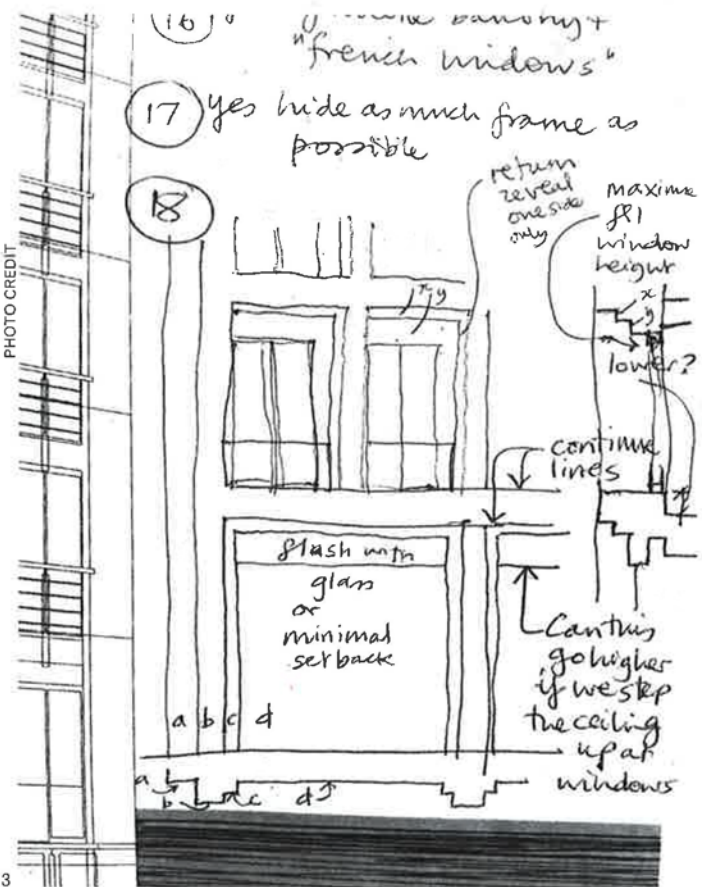
When you reach the top floor, the hitherto orthogonal geometry gives way to a more fluid, fractured composition of shifting planes, generated by slightly angled windows. And above this, shaped initially by rights-of-light constraints but then radically extemporised, is a secret roovescape of pavilions, sculpted and folded like pieces of urban origami.

Visible only to pigeons and drones, it's a fascinating fifth elevation, but as Saunt points out, satellite mapping and Google Earth mean we're now much more used to seeing buildings from above, and reading the urban terrain in a different way. 'It's an alternative dimension from which to visualise things,' she says. Like abstract, warped versions of the traditional French mansard, the glass and zinc pavilions of the Corner House add to an expanding repertoire of covert rooftop structures.

The pavilions form an armature for the stratospheric perks of penthouse living, which, apart from the usual panoptic views, also extend to a lift disgorging you directly into your living room. But were you to take the stairs, forged from wafer-thin steel sheet with sinuously curved flat handrails, you'd find another example of DSDHA's concern for the art and craft of making.

Aside from the duplex penthouse, there are 10 'normal' apartments. Nine are for sale (prices start at £1.75 million) with the two flats on the ground floor set aside for social housing. These are discreetly sequestered away from the main part of the building, each with its own entrance. It might be tempting to see this as a reiteration of the obnoxious 'poor door' policy, which preserves a *cordon sanitaire* for affluent occupants in socially mixed developments, but here it was partly necessitated by the social landlord being unable to take on the maintenance costs of a shared core. The alternative would have been to omit the social component altogether.

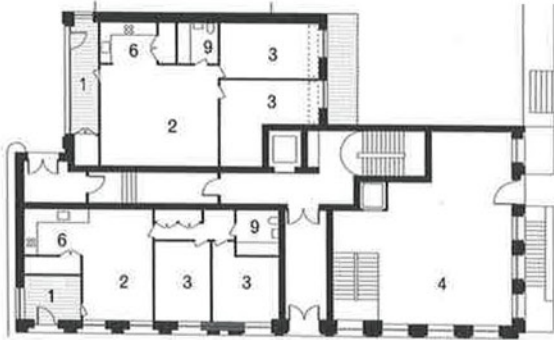
Individual entrances also help to activate the street frontages and deter deviant behaviour, and though the apartments are effectively separated, the level of interior specification is the same throughout. High ceilings and the wall-to-window ratio give all flats a sense of Scandinavian lightness, amplified by bleached wood floors and white walls. Plus everyone gets a ringside seat for the intrigues and goings on of Fitzrovia, now rather less of a mongrel cousin with such a thoughtful, refined project in its midst.



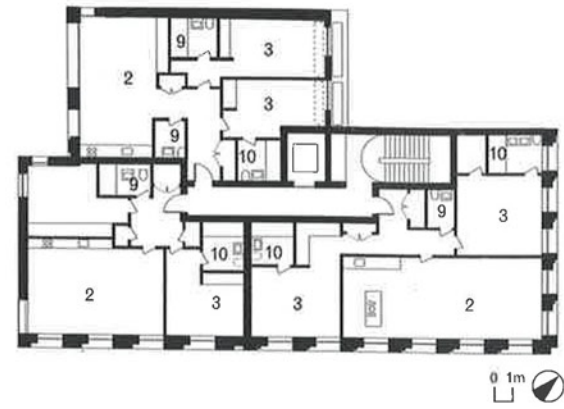
1. (pages 36-37) The six-storey block appears solid and geological  
 2. (previous page) Penthouse terraces create a secret roovescape  
 3. (left) Development sketch  
 4. (opposite) View out from penthouse



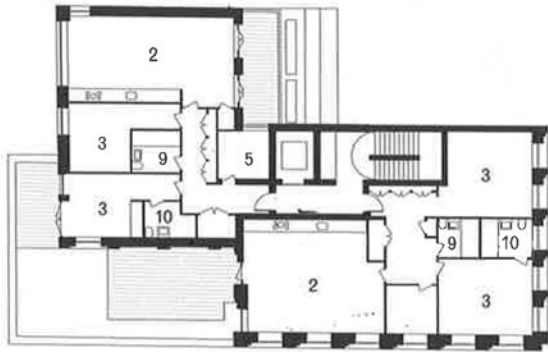
Ground floor plan



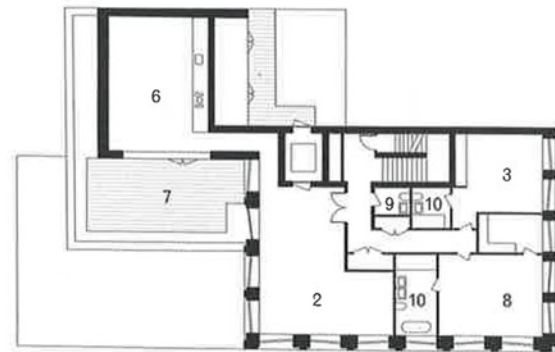
First floor plan



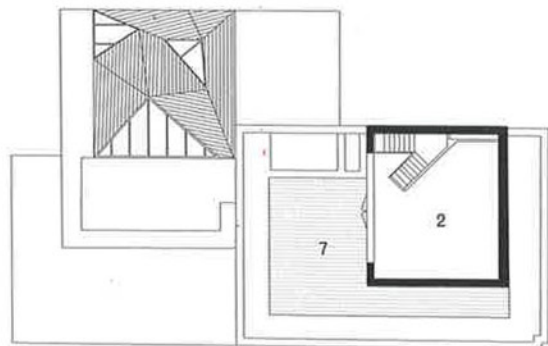
Third floor plan



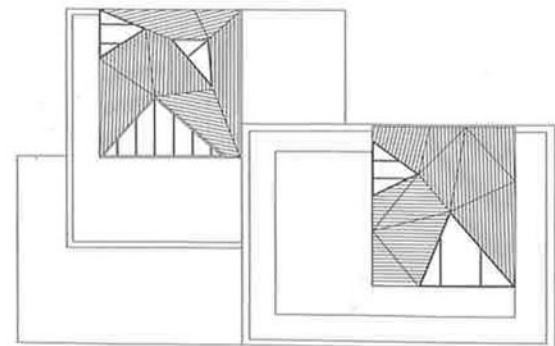
Fourth floor penthouse plan



Fifth floor plan



Roof plan



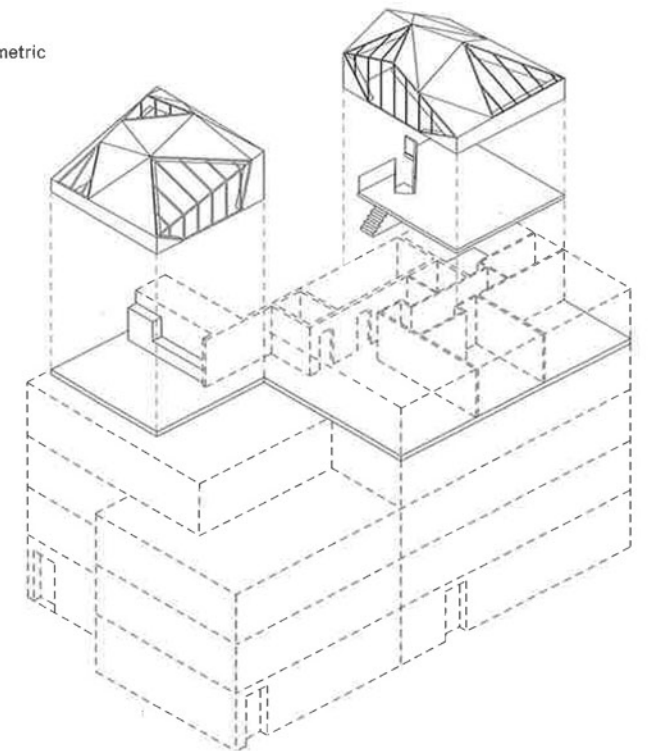
Tottenham Street elevation



- |                      |                   |                       |
|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Winter garden     | 5. Single bedroom | 9. Bathroom           |
| 2. Living and dining | 6. Kitchen        | 10. En-suite bathroom |
| 3. Bedroom           | 7. Terrace        |                       |
| 4. Commercial unit   | 8. Master bedroom |                       |



Axonometric



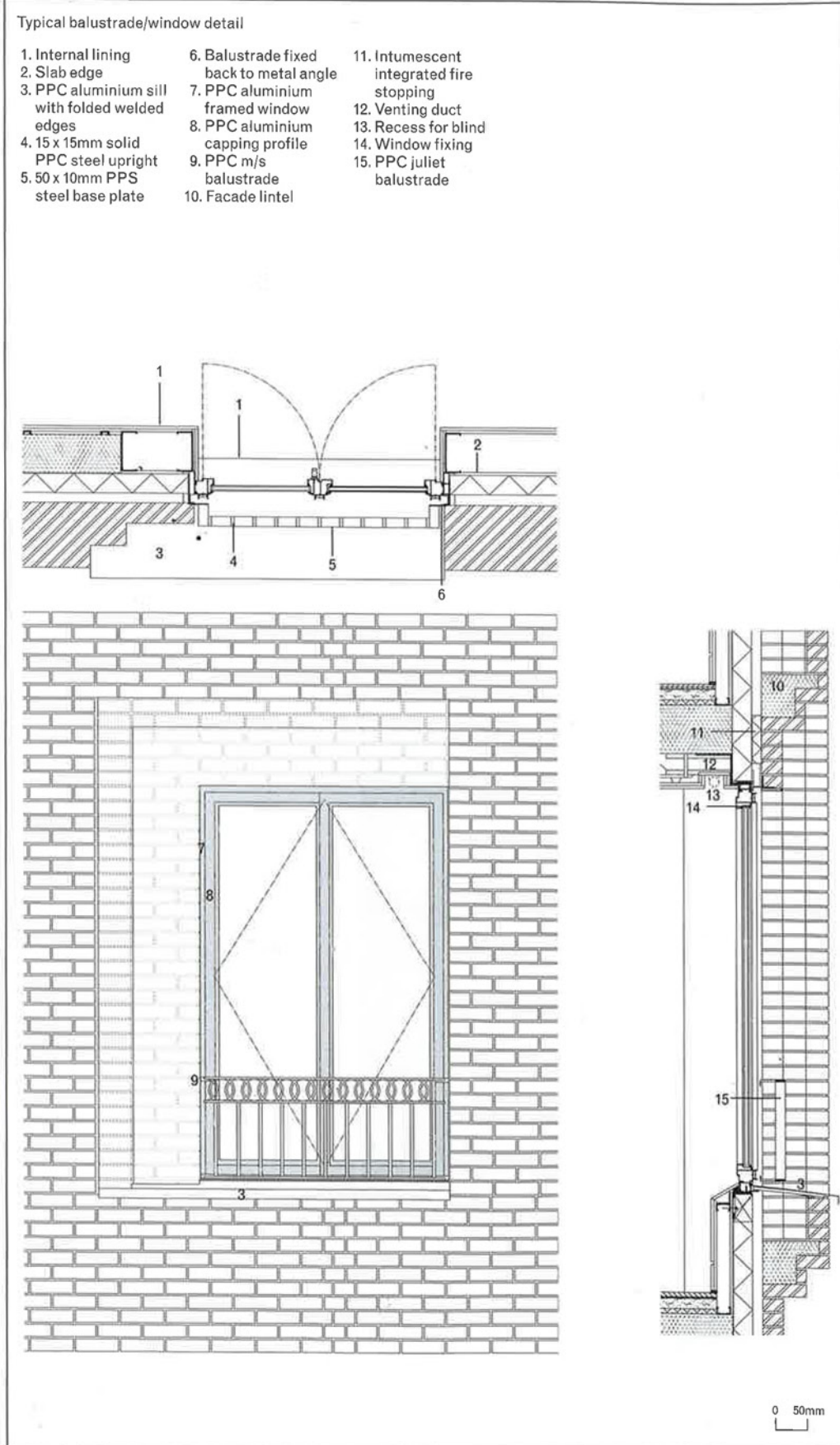
# WORKING DETAIL

Tom Greenall, associate director,  
 DSDHA

DSDHA's analysis of Charlotte Street's conservation area ensured a contextual response that restores some key local features of typical Fitzrovia terraces, such as an emphasis on verticality where strong horizon lines mark a tripartite division of plinth-body-roof, masonry construction with punched apertures and a high ratio of wall to window.

The stepped reveals to the facades were the result of extended research and testing to capture the craftsmanship of masonry construction. Bespoke lintels help span the bays, which relate proportionally one to another, reflecting the geometric derivations of most of Fitzrovia's architecture. As a result each floor has a slightly different relationship between the sill and the internal floor levels, making the building appear less relentlessly stacked and subtly differentiated.

Unlike most new projects that use brickwork as a non-structural cladding, the brickwork for the main body of the building is self-supporting, bearing its own substantial weight, thereby relieving loading on the superstructure, and minimising the use of concrete and the energy embodied in its production. What could have become a monolithic facade is refined by the use of lime mortar to eliminate expansion joints, and embellished by bespoke metal work balustrades.



# ARCHITECT'S VIEW

Deborah Saunt, director, DSDHA

Corner House strives to introduce a new type of beauty; one that is less ostentatious yet captivating, able to build on the qualities of its location, very sustainable and embodying high-quality design and craftsmanship.

While at an urban level it celebrates the ordinary street corner, Corner House inverts this typology, typically presenting a more articulated treatment of the facade at the ground level, and places two jewel-like crystalline pavilions on the rooftop, opening up a series of unexpected views on to London's roofscape.

The roof pavilions offer a hidden terrain to the project that only becomes apparent upon enquiry, occupying as they do the rights-of-light envelope established by neighbouring buildings. Corner House does not disrupt the consistent morphology of the solid brick facades that characterises the neighbourhood, but the shifting planes of its slightly angled windows on the uppermost floor suggest something unexpected.

The articulated geometry of Corner House's facade and pavilions multiplies focal points and dissolves traditional linear perspective, thereby suggesting an alternative dimension from which to appreciate the building and its surrounding views. Technically challenging yet appearing disarmingly simple, they are in an effortless dialogue with other roof structures scattered on the horizon nearby. This careful consideration of the fifth elevation – giving a building's roof the same importance as the ground-level entrance – is something we had already started to experiment with while working on an earlier conversion for Derwent London, Suffolk House on the nearby Whitfield Street, and it has become a recurring theme in a lot of our urban projects.

6. (opposite page) Large windows maximise daylight  
 7. (left) The brick resembles London's yellow stock brick elevations once darkened by smog



11. CHRISTOPHEER RUDOUJST. 12. HÉLÈNE BINET

## CLIENT'S VIEW

*Simon Silver, director, Derwent London*

The Corner House offered us the opportunity to put back an original but distinctly modern building into the historic streets of Fitzrovia. The corner site enabled us to provide windows on two sides for most of the apartments, with some on the upper levels having three. The results are stunning – spacious rooms with great views out, giving a real connection to the area.

We were keen to use a material finish that reflected the fabric of the area, and had been working with the Danish brick company Petersen Tegl on a number of our other projects. Here we chose a dark and textured handmade brick, reminiscent of the originally yellow stock brick elevations which were darkened by London's past pea-soupers. DSDHA has used this beautiful material with real elegance and originality; the double-rebated brick window reveals create depth and modelling, which adds a sense of layering and texture.

Inside, other details include fine reeded glass doors in Crittal frames and smooth and robust Dinesen timber flooring. The twist was saved for the upper floors, where the roof-form angles and pivots in response to local sight lines, which makes for fun and dynamic spaces. The resulting building provides enduring quality and a great architectural legacy.

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