

The Makers House By David Liddicoat and Sophie Goldhill



The Makers House is a new-build four-bedroom villa in Hackney, a self-initiated project by husband and wife team David Liddicoat and Sophie Goldhill. It is located within a short walk of Victoria Park Village and Well Street Common in Hackney, E9.

Having bought the site in 2012, over the following four years the architects won planning permission, raised finance and built the house by hand. They set their own brief – to explore the ideal texture and atmosphere of domestic architecture. The house is a joyful collage of tactile materials that blend the industrial with the luxurious.

Set within the Victoria Park Conservation area, the irregular site was constrained by neighbours' rights to light, and proximity to listed houses. Scrupulous computer analysis allowed the house's asymmetric form to be tuned to capture key moments

of sunlight while forming apparently regular interior spaces.

The architects' pursuit of craftsmanship and tactility is reflected in the house's rich palette and varied processes of fabrication. The exterior combines roman brickwork with inky pigmented zinc roofing and bleached larch carpentry. Internally, the structural steel and timber work is exposed, and is married to a restrained palette of reclaimed and repurposed industrial materials.

Increasingly lightweight materials are deployed in the upper, sleeping levels, which

are unified by a Rhodesian mahogany floor reclaimed from Hove Bus Station. The attic is conceived as a north-lit studio, while calm bedroom suites are arranged on the first floor.

To the rear an expansive suite combines spaces for sleeping, bathing, dressing and contemplation. A panelled wall slides on cast iron to one side to define or amalgamate the bedroom and bathroom spaces. Expansive, bright circulations are designed to display art and family objects, or for occupants to enjoy moments of pause.

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A Tale of Two Basements By Laurie Elks



In the 1860s the Norris Family sold up their house and estate in South Hackney and retreated to their estates in rural Kent. Their Hackney estate was developed and laid out in streets named after villages close by their Kentish estate. The process of development is documented in *Gentleman in the Building Line*, the work of local historian Isobel Watson.

The houses are ‘bog standard’ mid-Victorian houses of a type seen throughout Hackney. Some streets such as Groombridge Road are built to three storeys with subterranean cellars; others such as Penshurst Road are built to the semi-basement design with exposed basements. The streets are – or were – exceptionally intact but were illogically left out of the original Victoria Park Conservation Area. I pressed Hackney Council to extend the Conservation Area and this finally took place in 2013. Indeed, the Conservation Area Appraisal identified the former Norris Estate as one of the three special ‘Character Areas’ within the extended Conservation Area.

But meanwhile, development pressures have been mounting. This is partly due to rising property prices (ensuring that the value of increased habitable area exceeds the cost of creating it) and partly the result of the fashionable popularity of ‘Victoria Park Village’ as it is now widely known. Bulky rear extensions and roof dormers are becoming prevalent and planning regulations also now allow roof window lights on street elevations. The integrity of street façades is increasingly

threatened, not helped by the fact that a late revision of the new Development Management Local Plan removed the presumption against alterations to street frontages in Conservation Areas. Any such proposed alterations are now – heaven help us – to be treated on their merit depending on the relevant planning officer’s assessment as to whether the change ‘preserves or enhances the conservation area’.

Groombridge Road, as I have mentioned, has underground basements and I was concerned to see a notice in *Hackney Today* that the owner of No. 39 was applying to excavate the front garden to expose the basement, a step I feared could lead to a rash of ‘me too’ applications. As I had some concerns about the planning officer’s engagement with conservation issues, I decided, rather than objecting, to ask his head of team to ensure that the application was carefully looked at. The outcome was that the householder was advised that an exposed basement would not be approved as ‘not characteristic of the street’ and this was withdrawn from the application.

The householder proceeded, however, to create the exposed lightwell albeit concealed behind a high hedge and window tubs. I raised the matter with Planning Enforcement, who failed to respond to my complaint or to several follow up emails. I was finally advised that the householder was seeking retrospective consent and no enforcement action would be taken pro tem.

Meanwhile, No. 41 applied for permission for a similar lightwell. The Design and Access

Statement argued that No. 39 already had one (which was being regularised by retrospective consent) as did No. 43. No. 43’s lightwell was very much smaller and had been approved before the Conservation Area designation. In my objection I asked that this application be considered at a senior level so that a principled position could be taken as to whether and on what basis lightwells could be permitted in the Conservation Area so that policy and practice would not be developed by a series of isolated ad hoc decisions. My appeal fell on deaf ears. The decision of the planning officer was that since No. 43 had an approved lightwell – ‘lightwells are acceptable’ – period. The subtlety that the area had become a Conservation Area in the interim was ignored.

Meanwhile, what of 39? I was practically certain that my objection would end badly but was unsure on what basis. I was soon to find out. The application was approved under delegated authority. The planning officer’s report noted that since there were much larger lightwells in Penshurst Road which ‘altered the character of the street’ the smaller lightwell in Groombridge Road was permissible. The Planning Officer failed to appreciate that Penshurst Road had been built to a different design and that exposed basements had formed the character of that street since it was built in 1864! A howler by any standards.

I have been advised at a senior level that no policy position has been taken on the acceptability of lightwells and future applications will be treated on their merits. However, I think it is certain that this ludicrous decision will be flashed around architects’ practices locally and that lightwells will become prevalent.

I am not arguing that lightwells are unacceptable in every case. All I sought was that the decision should be made by planning officers, versed in the character of the Conservation Area, or properly advised or supervised by colleagues who were. This has proved too much and – unless the planning department mends its ways – further outrages are sure to follow.

Spaces invited Hackney Council to respond to the above article. A spokesperson for the Council provided the following statement:

‘In terms of the decision-making process, the determination of all planning applications follows the Council’s scheme of delegation and the terms of reference set out by Planning sub-committee, with the majority of decisions (especially householder applications) determined by Officers under delegated powers. Exceptions are made where a significant number of objections are received, at which time the Head of Planning would determine whether the application would be required to be considered by Members of the Planning sub-committee due to the level of public interest received. The assessment of decisions and recommendations to sub-committee are carried out consistently throughout the borough, whereby team leaders and managers assess and sign off all decisions and ensure that all applications are appropriately assessed by case officers.’

When is Reproduction Good Conservation?



In Spaces 49, architect Lisa Shell reflected on the repeated misfortune of Nos 1-5 Amhurst Road. With the buildings raised once again, she considers whether historic reproduction can be an appropriate conservation approach, and identifies some of its challenges.

In 2014 I dedicated considerable time to arguing that the wholesale demolition and reproduction in (to quote a Hackney councillor) 'good heritage likeness' of the Georgian Dalston Lane Terrace was misguided, contrary to policy and wrong: morally, socially and aesthetically. But at a judicial review of the planning decision to demolish, the courts were unable to uphold this position and the terrace has since been lost.

Shortly after the fate of the terrace was sealed, I was invited to provide service to reconstruct 1-5 Amhurst Road, E9, the stump of a C19 terrace that once housed the Gibbons Department Store. Undermined by neighbouring construction work in late 2013, much of the terrace was subsequently dismantled in a controlled demolition. My firm had recently completed a restoration of the buildings, following the 2003 fire that razed Nos 7-17. With a full set of working drawings we were architects of choice. And if 'jamais deux sans trois' presented a cause for concern, the fact that the buildings had suffered their first collapse in 1862, provided some solace.

There was to be no discussion of the suitability of reproduction since the insurers would only fund a reconstruction. The appeal of the project for us was the challenge to achieve good reproduction



without access to a late C19 construction industry and the trade skills that had built most of Hackney.

When the Council maintained that the reconstruction of the façades on Dalston Lane was 'repair', I argued that this was the outcome of a greedy proposal which should never have been approved as a 'conservation led' redevelopment, and was avoidable.

But at Amhurst Road total reconstruction was unavoidable; the feasibility of adjacent excavation had gone unchallenged. Façade-retention schemes 'fail' on a regular basis within Hackney, but such is the rarity of destruction of buildings by neighbouring construction, that the collapse of Amhurst Road briefly topped the 'most read' category of the BBC online news. The loss of the façade of the iconic Hoxton Cinema last year attracted a few lines in the *Hackney Gazette*.

And the façades of Nos 1 and 3 Amhurst Road existed as a benchmark for reinstatement work in No. 5, which would remain secondary in significance to the original.

The previous contractor could not contemplate a year-long *deja-vu* so the owner of Nos 1-5 handed the job of the reconstruction to LPC Living, the Manchester-based team that had completed the adjacent Travelodge.



As the only local member, Lisa Shell Architects had potentially conflicting interests: to serve LPC Living (and get paid); to serve the owner, in accurately recreating their buildings; and to serve the borough in the quality of the reinstatement. We trod a careful path between irritant and enabler within the team, most of whom wanted to get done and get home!

It was beneficial that a specialist firm was subcontracted to reproduce the façade mouldings, taking one dedicated craftsman three months to complete; but the contractor did not monitor the detail, and we had to demand many amendments. Then a labourer sloshed the brick tint across the rear elevation, which left me to patronise the foreman with a tutorial in correct application. And the shop front suffered the same fate as those on Dalston Lane Terrace: mass produced to standard detail with 'high quality' spray finish by a national firm, whilst the bespoke talents of Kings Cross Joinery were overlooked. (If the tenant installs those cloned brass shop-sign light fittings I will personally remove them.) Our mistake in failing to measure the brickwork as it rose, means that the ever-so-slightly boss-eyed-look of No. 5 serves as a reminder that the rather good reproduction is precisely that.

Noticeboard

Geffrye Museum

A £12.3m National Lottery grant to support the expansion plans of the Geffrye Museum has been confirmed. The museum has already raised £4.3m and now needs £1.5m for the £18.1m project. New spaces within the existing buildings, including a gallery and library, alongside newly built learning and event spaces will increase capacity so the museum will be able to welcome up to 50% more people each year, bring many more collections out of storage and explore the theme of home more broadly.

Fairchild's Garden

Hackney Road Recreation Ground has been renamed Fairchild's Garden in honour of the Hackney horticulturist Thomas Fairchild (1666-1729). Fairchild's grave is in this space, which is the old burial ground of St Leonard's Church.

Castle Cinema

In *Spaces 52* we reported on the crowdfunding campaign to revive the Castle Cinema in Chatsworth Road. The cinema reopened in early March.

The Acorn

The Acorn pub in Haggerston has been awarded Asset of Community Value (ACV) status, which will give the building planning protection. See *Spaces 52* for an account of ACVs and other Hackney pubs.

Hackney Society Events

A Victorian Walk through Dalston

Thursday 13 July 2017, 6.30pm

Walk with Sarah Freeman and Laurie Elks

Sarah Freeman and Laurie Elks reprise a walk, originally led for the Victorian Society, looking at Victorian buildings in Dalston. The walk will end at St Augustine's Tower, which will then be open for cool summer drinks.

Meet at 6.30pm, Dalston Kingsland Station, Kingsland High Street, E8 2JS.

Booking essential. Book online at <https://billetto.co.uk/e/walk-a-victorian-walk-through-dalston-tickets-191407>

FREE for Hackney Society members, £5 for non-members.

Publications

Dalston in the 80s by Andrew Holligan provides black and white photographs of street life in the area around Ridley Road. Hoxton Mini Press, £14.95.

Own De Beauvoir! by Jonathan Hoskins is an account of how local people prevented the demolition of houses in De Beauvoir in the 1960s. Available



from <http://www.jonathan.hoskins.com/own-de-beauvoir>, £15.

Faces of Shoreditch by Barbara Asboth contains photographs of the people of Shoreditch. Amberley Publishing, £14.99.



My Favourite London

Devils by Hackney writer Iain Sinclair is a series of vignettes of writers that have had an impact on the author: Peter Ackroyd, J.G. Ballard, Alexander Baron, Roland Camberton, Angela Carter, B. Catling, Joseph Conrad, Arthur Conan Doyle, Patrick Hamilton, John Healy, Thomas Homes, Jack Kerouac, Arthur Machen, Michael Moorcock and Robert Westerby. Illustrations are by Dave McKean. Tangerine Press, £10.



Britain's Toy Car Wars: Dinky vs Corgi vs Matchbox

by Giles Chapman describes the battle to dominate Britain's toy car industry. Lesney Products, which made Matchbox toys, was once the biggest employer in Hackney. History Press, £20.



A Long-Awaited Champion for Hackney's Heritage

Lisa Shell, chair of the Hackney Society, welcomes Brownswood Councillor, Clare Potter, to the role of the borough's new Heritage Champion.



With the encouragement of the Hackney Society, the local authority has appointed councillor Clare Potter, as the borough's Heritage Champion, after years with none.

Historic England, the government body that identifies and protects the nation's heritage assets, encourages all Local Authorities to appoint a Heritage Champion and sees their role to promote the historic environment, raising awareness of its importance, and ensuring that 'commitment to the proper care of the historic environment is embedded in all relevant activities and plans of the local authority'. HE also offers support and training to ensure that Heritage Champions can maximise their potentially great influence in the borough.

Clare Potter, councillor for Brownswood Ward since 2014, appears to be embracing her new role. She has attended a Hackney Society Planning Group meeting, was present at the Conservation Areas Review Study meeting, and has plans to join each of the borough's six Conservation Area Advisory

Committees (CAACs) at a monthly meeting to understand how the groups engage with the council, and see how she can contribute to the fulfilment of their goals.

Clare has been living in the ward that she represents for 15 years and has a work/study background in Carpentry, Training and Sustainable Construction. Within the council she sits on the Health in Hackney Scrutiny, Corporate and Standards Committees as well as championing Fairtrade; and represents the council on the Agudus Israel Housing Association and Finsbury Park Trust boards. She hopes to generate enthusiasm for the importance of the historic environment amongst the wider community, and provide a valuable link between the council, and the Hackney Society (and local CAACs) in meeting their shared heritage objectives.

The Hackney Society, the borough's CAACs and others with shared enthusiasm for heritage warmly welcome Clare, and look forward to using their new voice within the council to the benefit of the historic environment.

Clare can be contacted at clare.potter@hackney.gov.uk

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Design and Print

Spaces is published by the Hackney Society. Views expressed in the articles are not necessarily those of the Society.

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