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# BUILDING STUDY

# SHEPHERDESS WALK

# JACCAUD ZEIN

# ARCHITECTS



## Brief

*Jean-Paul Jaccaud, Jaccaud Zein Architects*

Situated at the corner of Shepherdess Walk and Wenlock Street, the project mediates between the different historical conditions and formal qualities of the site to propose an unapologetically modern project for a terrace of houses and an apartment building with a strong sense of place.

In collaboration with developer Solidspace, a split-level section was developed, and applied to both the houses and the apartments. This configuration allows for the juxtaposition of rooms with different uses around double-height connected spaces, offering a sense of spatial generosity and continuity.

## Data

**Start on site** January 2014  
**Completion** November 2015  
**Gross internal floor area** 1,250m<sup>2</sup>  
**Form of contract or procurement route** JCT contract  
**Construction cost** £4,175,000  
**Construction cost per m<sup>2</sup>** £3,500  
**Architect** Jaccaud Zein Architects  
**Architectural team** Tanya Zein, Jean-Paul Jaccaud, Fanny Noel (project architect), Diogo Fonseca Lopes, Stephan Gratzer, Marco Ferrari  
**Developer** Solidspace  
**Quantity surveyor** Measur  
**Contract administrator** Measur  
**Structural engineer** Conisbee  
**Planning consultants** AZ Urban Studio  
**Main contractor** Roof  
**Landscape designer** Forum Landscape  
**Cad software used** Vectorworks

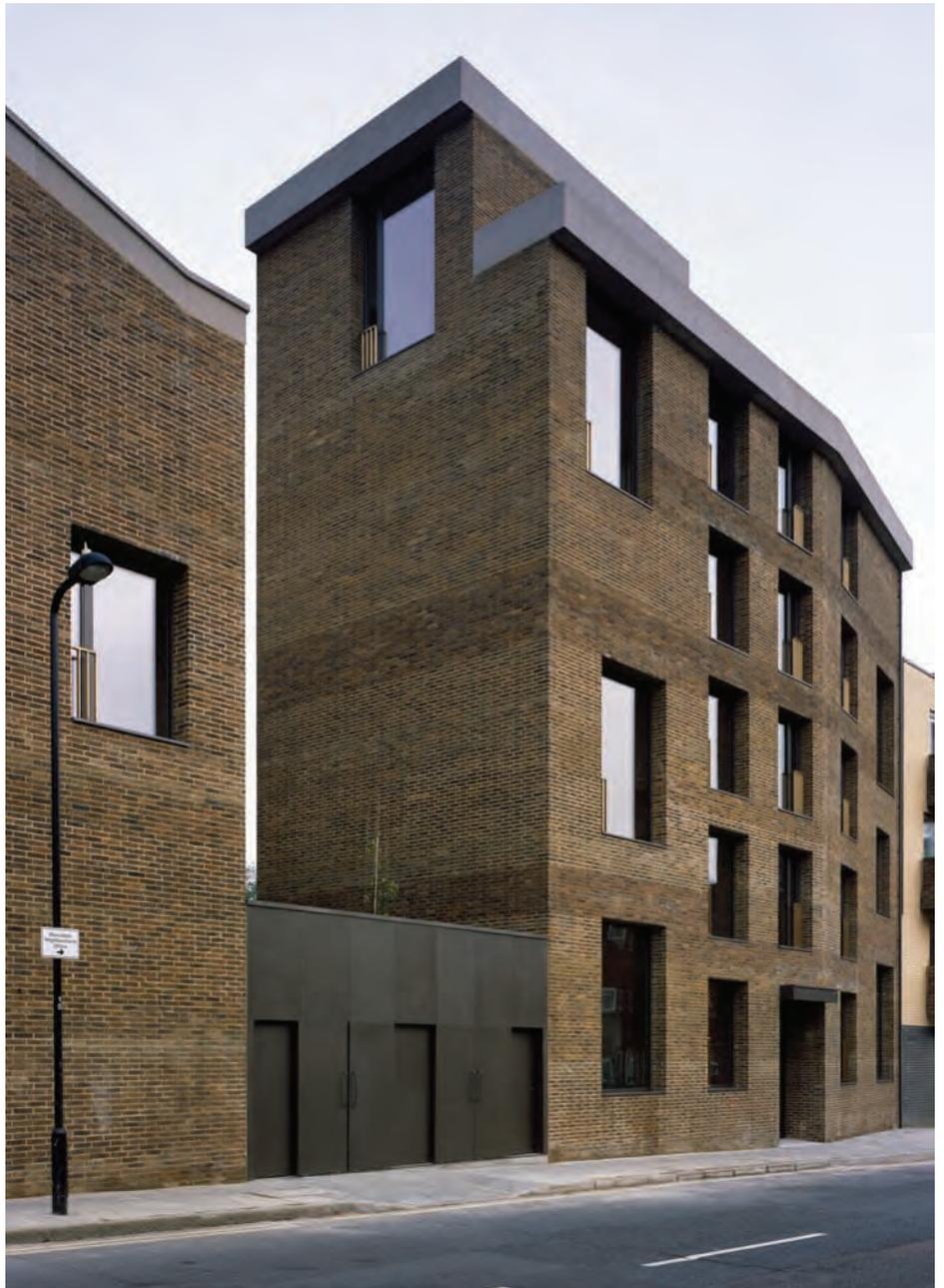
## BUILDING APPRAISAL

By Ellis Woodman  
Photography by H el ene Binet  
& David Grandorge

**A**s its name records, Shepherdess Walk in east London once formed part of the route along which sheep were driven to sale at Smithfield Market. It found built definition in the early 19th century with the establishment of terraces of lower-middle-class housing; a scene that survived until Second World War bombing levelled large sections of it. What remained was only saved from an early 70s slum-clearance programme by spot listing. The wave of gentrification that has swept through east London over the past 20 years has, however, transformed the street's fortunes. The same houses the council was reluctant to repair 40 years ago now sell for upwards of £1.5 million.

The latest addition, comprising a terrace of three houses and an adjoining apartment building, is the first UK new-build project by Swiss husband and wife architects Jean-Paul Jaccaud and Tanya Zein. The couple are long-term UK residents, but Jaccaud is best known for his Geneva-based practice, Jaccaud Spicher. He and Zein established their partnership as a sister company with the aim of acting as architect and developer for projects in the UK. But having identified the Shepherdess Walk site – then occupied by a derelict low-rise health clinic – as ripe for development, they decided they needed a seasoned UK partner, and ultimately agreed terms with Roger and Gus Zogolovitch's company, Solidspace. A significant proviso of the agreement was that the project would employ a split section – a consistent theme of all Solidspace developments.

The project stands at a road junction, with the houses distributed along Shepherdess





Walk and the apartment building facing the adjoining Wenlock Street. This division into two blocks negotiates a significant discrepancy in scale between the streets: the parapet of the terrace aligns with that of an adjacent 19th-century pub, while the apartment building answers the height of the neighbouring social housing blocks.

Both buildings are faced in an unusually long-format brick, produced by Belgian manufacturer Vande Moortel, laid with a one-third, two-third coursing. The resultant horizontal thrust is exacerbated further by the gentle cranking of the principal facades. Forty-millimetre-deep window reveals lend these surfaces a highly substantial character – an impression supported by the absence of movement joints, which in the case of the larger block, was achieved only through stainless-steel reinforcement within the mortar bed of parts of the wall. The architect has chosen to register this device by raking out the joints in the reinforced areas. These horizontal bands are only just perceptible but make a subtle contribution to the textile-like tension of the wall surface.

1. (*opening spread*) Shepherdess Walk with terrace on the left. Its elevation is dominated by the 40mm-deep brick reveals  
2 and 3. (*previous spread*) The elevations of the apartment block on Wenlock Street; the three houses on Shepherdess Walk  
4. (*below*) Model  
5. (*opposite*) The master bedrooms of the houses are sited on the top floor

While the new terrace represents an extension of Shepherdess Walk's dominant typology, it presents a more conflicted relationship to the street than do its 19th-century neighbours – a result of the disabled access regulations' requirement that the houses offer an inhabitable room at street-level. Jaccaud Zein has duly sited the principal living spaces here but, anxious about street-level exposure, has left the facade's lowest two metres unfenestrated. Lacking a street view and highly constrained in plan, these are not living spaces of the kind usually encountered in a residential development pitched at the upper end of the market.

What saves the arrangement is its handling in the vertical dimension. More than 4m in height, the ground floor is overlooked first by a kitchen, a half-level higher, and then

## The largest apartment accommodates five bedrooms, across six half-levels

by a second living space, a half-level further up again. While the life of the pavement remains hidden, a monumental, elevated window offers a slice of sky to the lowest floor and a theatrically framed view of the opposing facades to the kitchen. With long, diagonal vistas compensating for the floors' compact dimensions, the overall impression is of a spatially fluid terrain, rich in its potential to support communal life.

The floors above maintain the use of half levels, but the privacy requirements of bedrooms and bathrooms necessitate a more compartmentalised arrangement. A greater openness might surely have been achieved were it not for the UK property owner's fixation on the number of bedrooms. The smallest is scarcely larger than a train cabin and, much as this compartmentation contributes to the sale price, it would more happily have been integrated into the communal space of the stair.

At the very top, the arrangement opens up again, with the final two half-levels given over to an expansive master-bedroom suite. Here, the culmination of our journey is acknowledged through the expression of the house's sloping roof over the lower level – the bedroom proper – and then by the provision of a rooftop terrace.

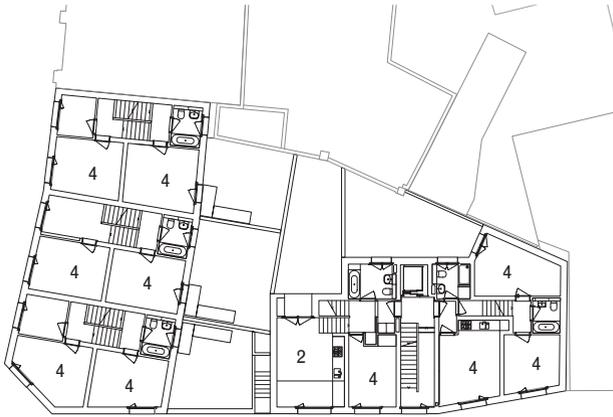
Accomplished as the planning of the houses undoubtedly is, they are essentially a variation on an arrangement that Solidspace has explored over a number of projects. The apartments represent the greater innovation; the radical characteristic being their scale. The largest accommodates five bedrooms, across six half-levels, begging the question: why would any buyer choose such an arrangement when they could have a house?

A compelling answer lies in the greater flexibility. Accessed off a communal stair, the larger units enjoy what are effectively three stacked front doors. The multiple escape routes are crucial to a fire-escape strategy capable of maintaining the openness inherent to the split-section. But equally importantly, the doors allow each apartment to be divided up in response to varying modes of inhabitation. A unit bought to house a large family might therefore be easily split to provide independent accommodation for a teenager, elderly parent or Airbnb tenant. The dominance of the stair may ultimately weigh against the lifetime homes credentials, but these apartments represent a welcome – and all too rare – example of typological innovation in the UK market.

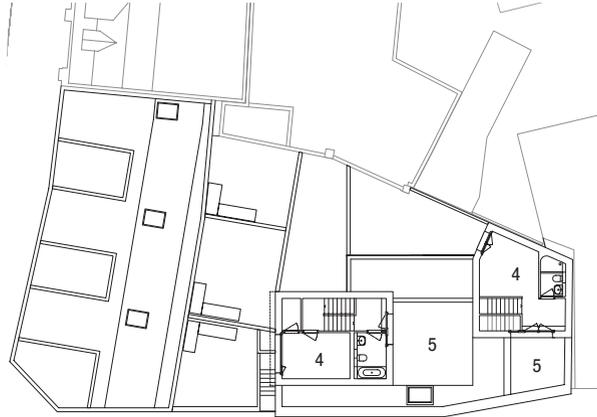
By no stretch of the definition are these affordable homes – the five-bed apartments are on offer for more than £2 million. Yet the project's luxury lies in its spatial complexity rather than the lavishness of its floor area. It leaves one wondering why only the upper end of the London market seems capable of supporting such sophistication today.





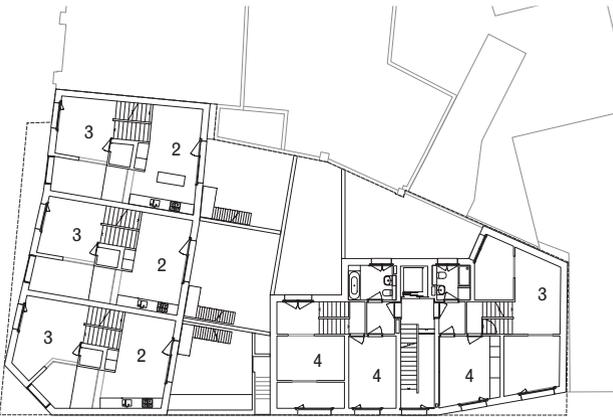


Second floor plan

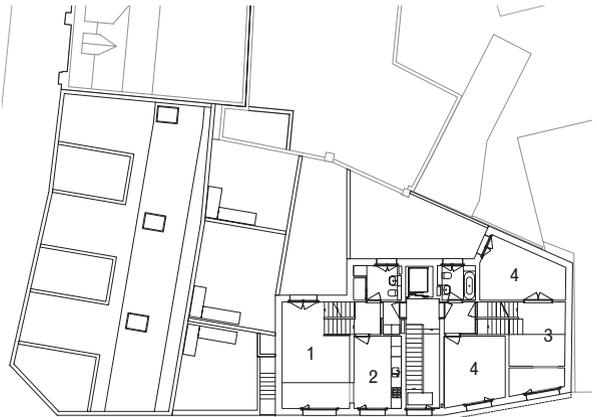


Fifth floor plan

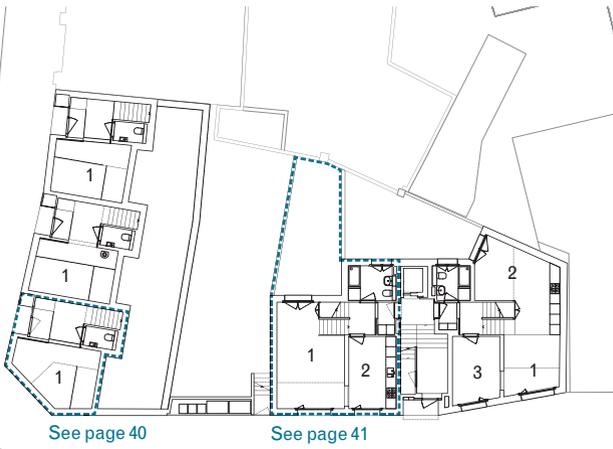
- 1. Living room
- 2. Kitchen
- 3. Office
- 4. Bedroom
- 5. Roof terrace



First floor plan



Fourth floor plan



Ground floor plan

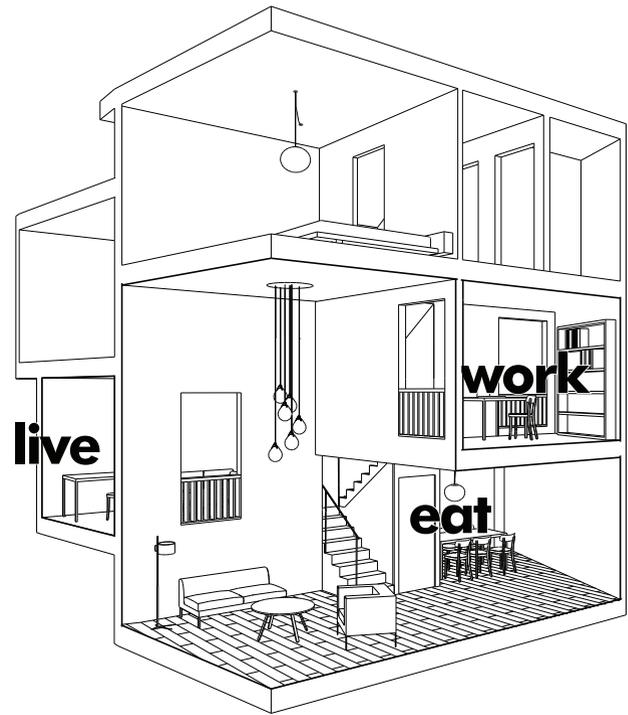
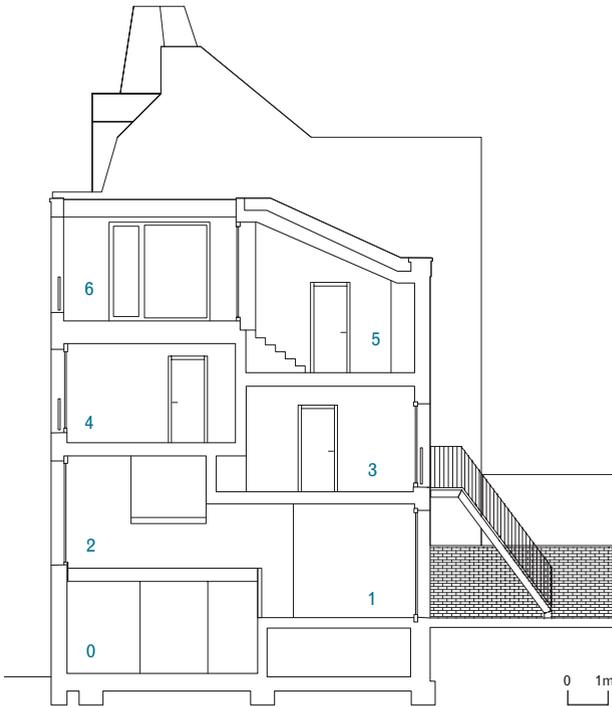


Third floor plan

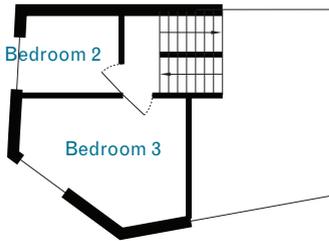
- 6. (above left) The interiors are finished in waxed but unpainted plaster with rough-sawn oak floors
- 7. (above right) The upper level apartments feature rooftop terraces
- 8. (right) Intersecting living spaces in one of the five-bedroom apartments
- 9. (far right) Stair in one of the five-bedroom apartments detailed with walnut handrail



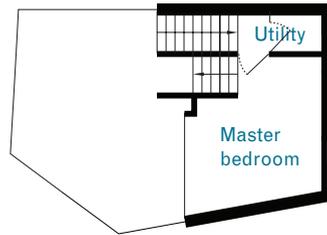




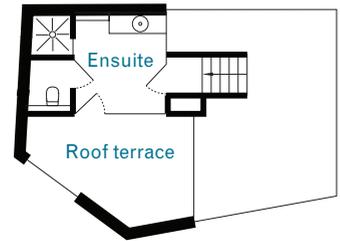
96-100 Shepherdess Walk section (terraced houses)



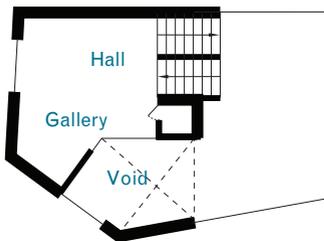
Upper second floor (4)



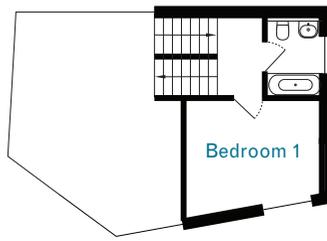
Lower third floor (5)



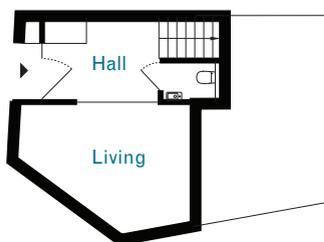
Upper third floor (6)



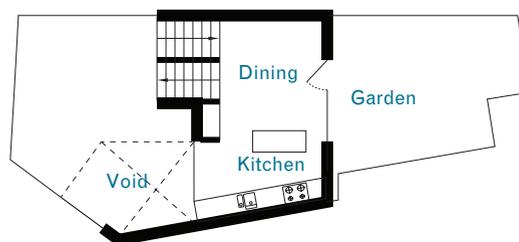
Upper first floor (2)



Lower second floor (3)



Ground floor (0)



Lower first floor (1)



# CLIENT'S VIEW

*Roger Zogolovitch, creative director, Solidspace*

The Shepherdess Walk development explores the Solidspace volumetric architectural form. This responds to this typical small gap, formerly a two-storey NHS clinic located on a corner site fronting Wenlock Street and Shepherdess Walk.

As a developer, we use our split-level homes with their generous internal volumes to respond to these types of sites. This is the key element of our architectural brief and the basis of our customer-led brand. The architects have engaged positively with the site constraints and the challenges of working with this discipline.

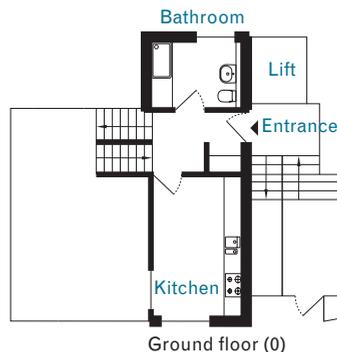
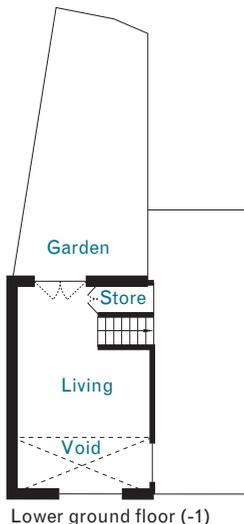
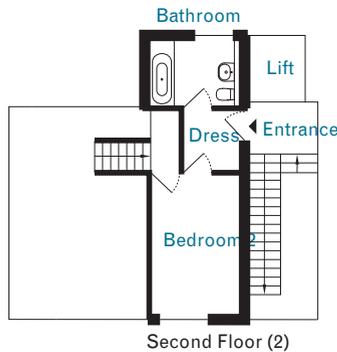
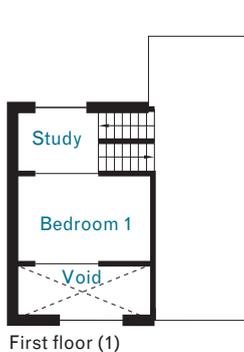
The project benefited from a supportive planning approach from Hackney Borough Council and the intelligent input of the wider design team. The completion of the project with the input of Roof, the contractor, demonstrates how wider dedication and passion in the delivery of the project pays dividends.

The architecture elegantly expresses the form of the homes within the envelope created around the volume and split-level plan. The clear and precise palette of materials sharpens our focus on the space created.

While quality housing development is much debated and desired in our overcrowded city centres, it is rare for it to be delivered so expertly and executed with such care.

The 'gap site' development of eight units on this small 400m<sup>2</sup> site is the equivalent of developing at 200 units per ha. What is remarkable is that this high density is delivered on what appears as such a modest development. This approach contributes to meeting the demand for new homes on scarce and difficult land parcels. It is a model that needs to be repeated.

This project demonstrates a consistent approach of using 'gap sites' as demanding and creative prompts to the imagination of both developer and architect, making positive additions to our city. They are the quality of development that we believe will form our future heritage.



# WORKING DETAIL

Jean-Paul Jaccaud,  
Jaccaud Zein Architects

The intensely urban setting called for a certain depth to the facades to ensure a clear threshold between the street and the interior realm of the dwellings. This depth conveys a sense of weight and presence to the buildings, which we felt was in keeping with their situation and character.

The buildings' outer facades are constructed as cavity walls with a brick outer layer. The openings set the windows flush with the interior face of the cavity wall, allowing for a reveal depth of 400mm to the outside. This depth echoes the windows of the warehouses in the area and, seen from the side, gives an abstract rhythm to the street. The brick is, however, clearly shown as non-load-bearing in expression, with stretcher courses running throughout and no lintels expressed over the windows.

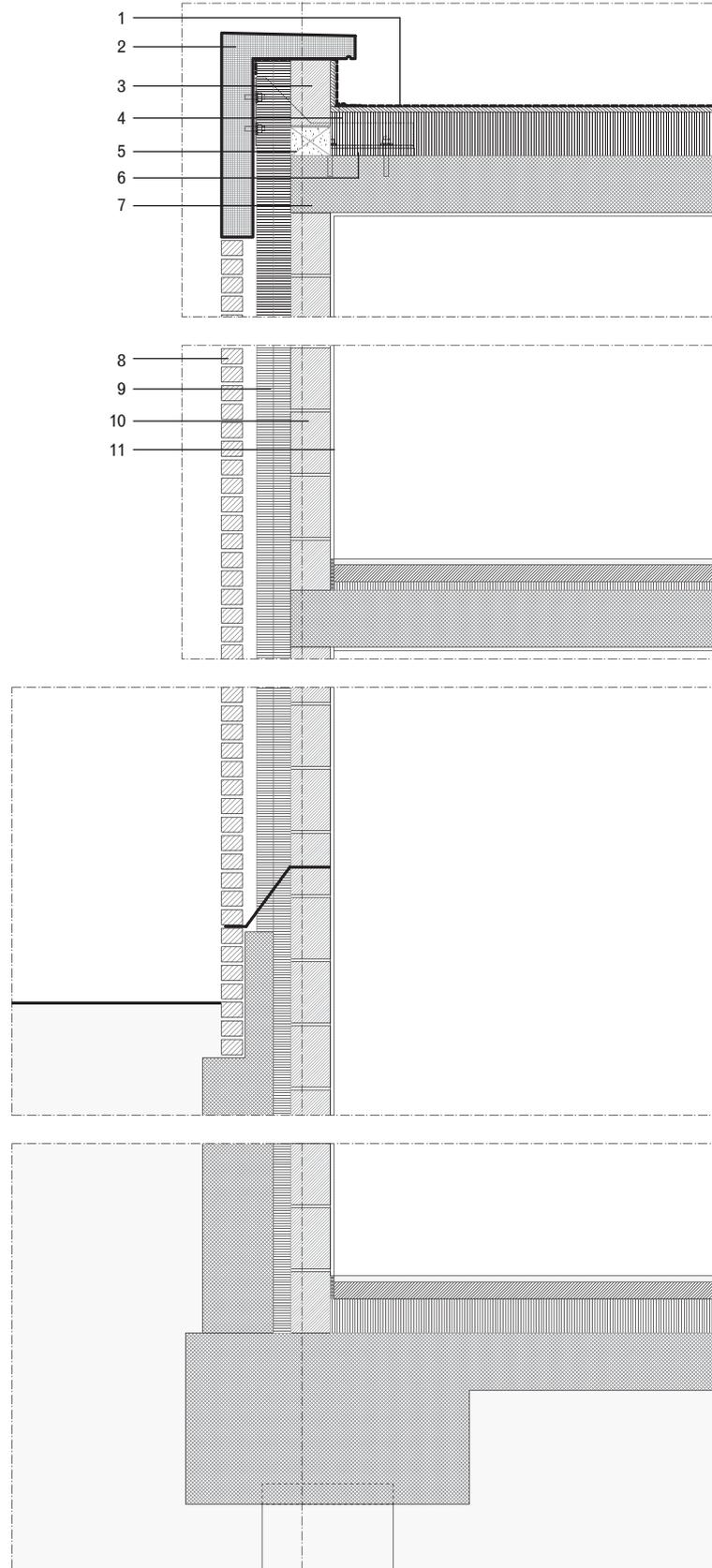
The return of the brickwork is consistent on the sides of the openings and simply follows the coursing of the walls. The lintel, however, is manufactured as a precast metal base with brick slips, and the bricks are set perpendicular to the street on the lintels to express something of the singular nature of this piece.

In order to avoid any expansion joints in the buildings, bed joint reinforcement was used on the apartment building. The presence of the reinforcement is shown by the recessing of the pointing by 10mm, which introduces horizontal banding to the facades as a subtle hint of the nature of the construction.



DAVID GRANDORGE

External envelope detail



1. Built-up felt roofing system
2. Precast concrete coping to specialist design, length and jointing
3. Masonry block 140mm
4. Proprietary roof insulation
5. Foamglass insulation 140x100mm
6. Roof steelwork
7. In-situ concrete slab
8. Facing brickwork
9. Thermal insulation
10. Masonry block
11. Projection plaster coat finish

0 100mm

## ARCHITECT'S VIEW

*Jean-Paul Jaccaud,  
Jaccaud Zein Architects*

Shepherdess Walk has a rich heritage of terraced housing, and the project draws on this historical fabric to reinstate three terraced houses on the street in a modern-day reinterpretation of the housing type.

Gentle variations in the facades enable a subtle closure of the street towards the adjacent park, giving both orientation to the open space from within the building and clarification of the streetscape's boundaries.

Facing on to Wenlock Street, the first house folds again more sharply, asserting its presence towards the south of Shepherdess Walk and opening the angle of the site towards a second apartment building.

The apartment building rises in scale beyond the houses to stitch the development into the context of larger-scale post-war housing blocks, which extend beyond. A slight folding of the facade alignment signifies an ending to Wenlock Street and allows for a clear articulation between the different scales. Towards the rear, the apartment building steps to allow for light and air in the courtyard and to ensure diagonal views from within. A cornice caps the building with a strong horizontal emphasis that is carried upwards on two setback volumes.

In collaboration with Solidspace, we developed a split-level section and applied it to both the houses and the apartments. This configuration allows for the juxtaposition of rooms with different uses around double-height connected spaces. The complexity of the section is not immediately apparent from the exterior where the large-scale windows only hint at the presence of double-height spaces.

The split-level arrangement introduces a strong potential for flexibility within the apartments, allowing for possible subdivisions within each unit with multiple access to the stairwell. This flexibility allows for a possible fragmentation of scale and an evolution of use through time to meet the demands of multiple occupancy, of children growing up, of partial rental of the unit, of working from home or just varying use of the different rooms.

10. (left) View through window  
11. (this image) View towards Shepherdess Walk down Wenlock Street 12 & 13. (overleaf) Entrance lobby of the apartment building; Living area in one of the apartments

## ENGINEER'S VIEW

*Allan Dunsmore, director, Conisbee*

Conisbee was invited to tender for Shepherdess Walk after a chance architect/engineer reunion in the depths of the Eurotunnel in 2011. Having successfully worked together on the design of the award-winning Laban Centre 10 years previously, this project provided an opportunity for fresh collaboration; this time in the residential domain.

The scale of the scheme, which comprises a terrace of three houses and five flats, is unique for central London. Various structural options were explored with the team during the early stages of design to form the split-level floorplates, including cross-laminated timber, timber frame, precast concrete, steel framing and in-situ concrete.

After consideration of the pros and cons, an in-situ concrete frame was chosen for the flats in order to satisfy the various detailing requirements and to meet the disproportionate collapse regulations; it simplified a potentially complex structure. The chosen solution for the terraced houses is a hybrid solution of traditional load-bearing masonry, steel framing up the spine, and timber-joisted floors throughout.

Because of the site's historic uses, there was up to 4m of made ground as well as various obstructions from Victorian basements and more-recent deep concrete foundations to overcome. In order to avoid mass excavation down to the natural gravels, a piled solution was chosen for both the houses and flats which proved successful as well as flexible enough to overcome some of the obstructions found during pile probing.

The outer skin is formed using 75mm-thick Belgian bricks, and omits movement joints to present a clean uniform facade on all sides. Careful detailing was also required throughout for the precast copings, brass balustrades and the deep reveals, which are highly visible and an important external feature.

The project has come together very well and is something the entire team can be proud of.





RIGHT & OPPOSITE: DAVID GRANDORGE

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