

This mixed B1 and housing scheme in south London, designed by David Quigley, provides a dilapidated area with a new focus. Ken Powell reports.

Brightening a backwater

DAVID Quigley's recently completed Hopewell Street development in Camberwell, south London, was certain to arouse hostility on the part of the architectural purists. Colourful, evocative, and eclectic, it provides a new focus to an area that bears the scars of the post-war clearance mania.

Its immediate context is provided by blocks of local authority flats, some of them — metal-clad slabs of the 1960s — in a dilapidated state. Close by is a Stirling & Gowan school of 1961/62, looking equally neglected and unloved. The brave hopes of the 1960s lie shattered here as in so many inner-city areas. In contrast, the Quigley scheme appears as a symbol of renewal.

If the development is aesthetically controversial, it is also something of a triumph over the more obvious prejudices of developers and funding institutions.

Camberwell is a lively and attractive part of south London, with distinct artistic leanings, but the immediate surroundings of Hopewell Street are discouraging. Moreover, the project mixes residential use (34 units) and commercial use (13 B1 studios) in a manner uncommon in this country.

For Quigley, the most complimentary adjective that can be used to describe it is European. 'It has that lively, informal mixture of activities which you find, for example, in a typical French town,' he says.

One description at which Quigley visibly winces is post-modernist. It is a 'reinterpretation', he claims, of the buildings — partially retained — which previously occupied the site.

The principal inspiration is Victorian industrial building, known for its qualities of

firmness and simple rationalism, though, admits the architect, there are deco and modern movement references to lighten the mix. The post-modernist label, however, comes easily.

Quigley worked in Terry Farrell's office for a number of years. He took a break to work briefly for Robert Venturi and Norman Foster but returned and was part of the team that worked on Greycoat's Embankment Place. His present practice is four years old.

Farrell was instrumental in getting Quigley the commission to revitalise the Winter Gardens in Blackpool, a neglected group of buildings now

within strict budgets. Hopewell Street cost £2.5m — about £55 per sq ft. His client, Crescent Estates (South East), a firm with experience of working in Docklands, must be well satisfied. All the flats and houses are sold and all the B1 units let at £12 per sq ft. Tom Mulligan Associates was letting agent.

The scheme fits surprisingly easily into the neighbourhood. It has little of the fortified look of many Docklands housing developments.

The paved yard, which is its centrepiece, is not an internal, closely-guarded enclave but a semi-private domain, used by residents, business-

ground and to grass other areas. For some unfathomable reason, Southwark Council refused to permit this and the land remains a litter-strewn waste.

The assimilation of the development has been helped by the sale of a number of housing units to people from the immediate locality — this is not a ghetto of newcomers.

Integrating a couple of moderately sized town houses into the scheme was a gamble, but they have sold. The remainder of the housing consists of flats and maisonettes, some of them occupying upper floors above the commercial units.

On plan, the blocks are pleasingly irregular — reminiscent of the organic form of traditional towns. 'We had to wrestle with the planners to get it all in,' admits Quigley. Window space was at a premium. The flats were not allowed to look out over a neighbouring school-yard and many are lit only from the courtyard.

The solution to poor daylighting was the insertion of a new atrium, open to the sky and providing light to the workshops, formed by cutting out an entire bay.

Quigley should not be dismayed by his more purist critics. Victorian factories, Edwardian mansion blocks and even the housing of the early 20th century Amsterdam School can all be seen as influences on the design of Hopewell Street. But none of these is as alien to Camberwell as the Corbusian housing that has so disfigured the place.

Quigley has built a commercial landmark for the inner city. He has struck his own blow for regeneration and set a new standard for mixed-use urban developments.

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An internal courtyard elevation.

extended and restored to spectacular effect at a cost of £3.5m.

The interiors, freely mixing the old and the new, suggest that Quigley has something of the spirit of the great cinema designers of the 1930s.

Quigley is expert at building

users and visitors. Cars park informally but there is also an underground car park.

To its credit, the developer did its best to break down the contrast between its scheme and the beaten-up housing surrounding it. It offered to plant trees on nearby waste-



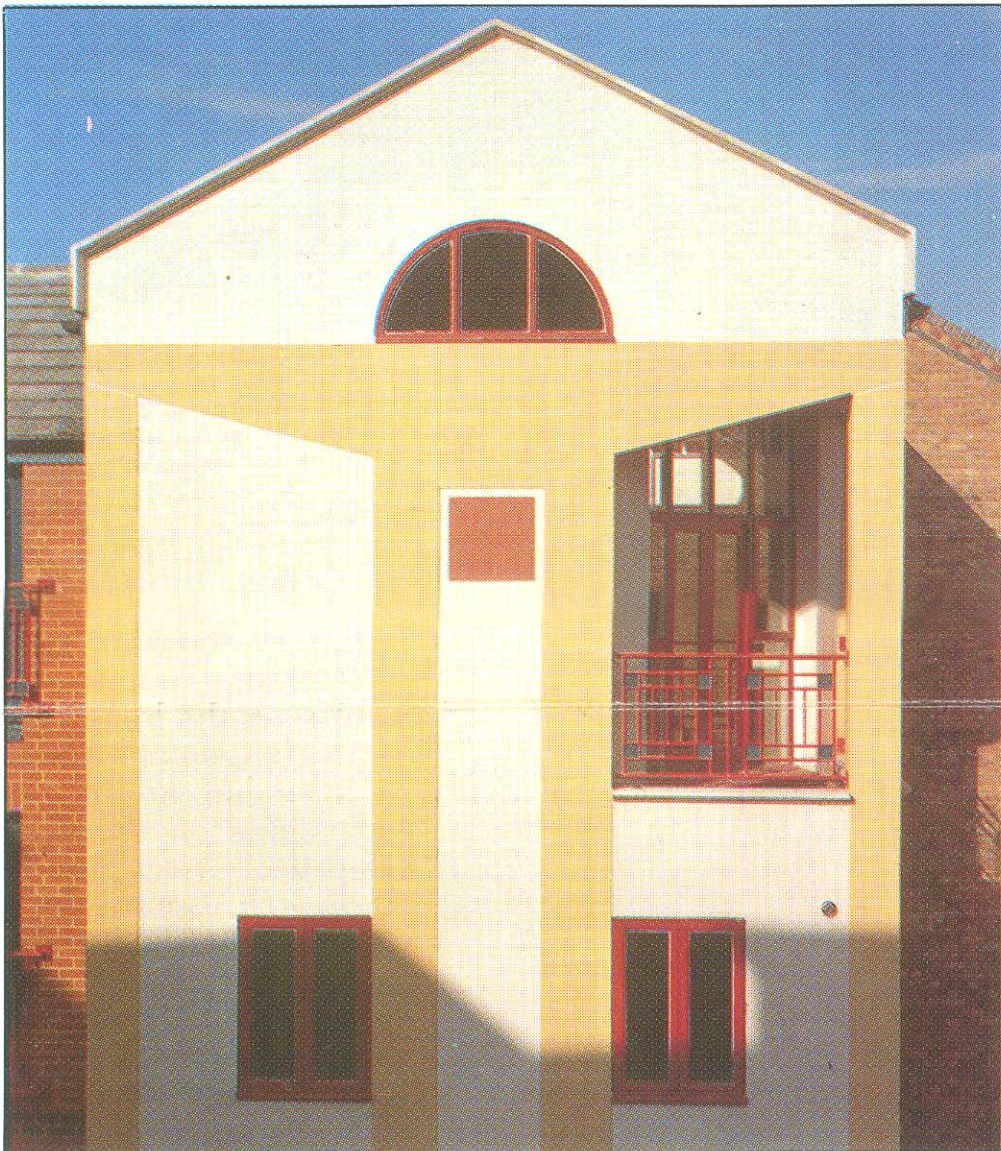
Flank elevation with decorative rendered motifs.



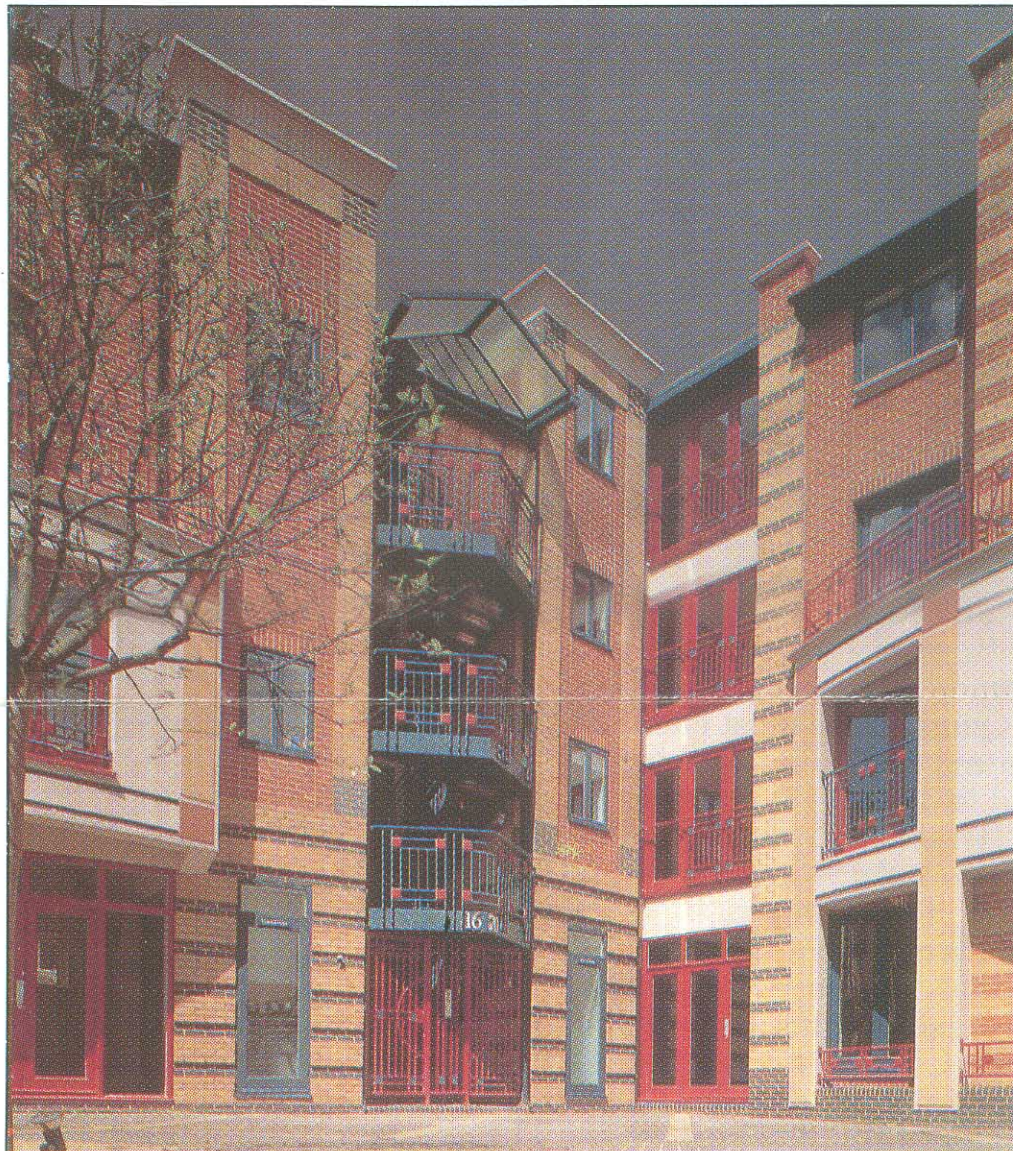
Courtyard view of varying block heights.



Front elevation and main entrance.



Opening in side wall reveals staircase.



Elevations are visually divided vertically.

