

Fledgling design companies offer unbeatable (and occasionally unprofitable) creative value to clients. Small-scale fit-outs, installations or refurbishments often come more heavily laden with analysis, consideration and conceptual rigour than larger projects by more established firms. In the heart of London's Camden Town, 62 Rochester Place is one such example; a modest mews conversion that while subtly stitching together a narrow domestic plot, successfully and harmoniously combines the clients' professional and domestic needs. While apparently simple in form, the project took two and a half years to complete, demonstrating the focused commitment required on such idiosyncratic projects; a

project that while striving to produce a unified work that is more than the sum of its constituent parts, required sensitive resolution of the complications that arise from working for a client with eccentric, eclectic and highly personal requirements. So, on this project, within the shell of a redundant mews workshop, a simple and coherent solution was sought that would transcend the many and varied realities of a pavilion/summerhouse/studio/gallery/workshop and ... spa! Unsurprising therefore, that when described by co-designer Francesca Hughes, philosophical, poetic and thematic references abound. Wittgenstein, Hitchcock, Grace Kelly, James Stewart, even Alice (the little/big girl from

Wonderland), all have lines in the script, describing a space in which glazed and mirrored surfaces catch visitors' peripheral vision, causing volumes to open up, merge and distort with theatrical trickery. The designers' interest in the ambiguity of reflection and transparency fulfils their aim to create an environment in which to enjoy cerebral and corporeal pleasures. Described as a contemporary reinvention of a traditional gentleman's smoking room/library, five volumes combine multiple functions with the three principal studio spaces providing different environments within which to store, display and contemplate art. From the street, the first space retains the workshop's original industrial nature: walls of painted brick,

- 1 House and studio are connected with view across garden from first-floor balcony.
- 2 Mirrored sauna straddles the studio threshold.

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Transformation of a mews workshop into a place for art, bathing and contemplation.



ARTIST STUDIO, LONDON
ARCHITECT
**HUGHES MEYER STUDIO/
SANEI HOPKINS ARCHITECTS**

exposed electrical conduits, iron radiators and steel windows. Above this, having climbed a neatly inserted steel and glass stair, the mezzanine studio presents a crisper space, carpeted in red, and lit from both sides. With the character of a design studio or office, this trussed loft gives views through the workshop's original window apertures onto the upper level of the double-height garden room – a bright and airy top-lit gallery in which dual aspects exploit the contrast between the expanse of the sky above and intimacy of the garden beyond, compressed and framed beneath a full width mirrored soffit. By extending the pitch of the original workshop roof, the wedge-shaped glazed volume provides strong visual links to the main house beyond so that, with most of the volume

visible from the first floor living room balcony, house and art space connect across the garden, enabling the artist to view his work from near or far.

Despite its simplicity, a surprising and curious theatrical twist lies in wait. Continuing the surreal nature of the space's visual qualities, where reflected views challenge perception and blur reality, where soffit becomes lawn and fascia becomes sky, the function of the space also begins to blur. With two sculptural installations – a mirrored box and a ceramic limpet-like blob – art space becomes spa with self-contained sauna and steam room. Just as shifted perspective and multiple reflections challenged the mews' spatial logic, as focal lengths double and apparently massive surfaces float, so inclusion of the treatment

facilities contradicts the conventional logic of the mews as a place for art. No longer read as a commercial art space, but instead as somewhere that immediately becomes specific to the occupation of its artist. With private bathing added to the mix, boundaries are blurred between public and private rituals, raising questions as to how this space actually functions; a very peculiar, but nonetheless charming wonderland in which to escape.

ROB GREGORY

Architects

Hughes Meyer Studio / Sanei Hopkins Architects

Project team

Abigail Hopkins, Francesca Hughes, Amir Sanei

Structural engineer

Technicker: Matthew Wells, Helen Remordina

Photographs

Sue Barr / VIEW (apart from no 5 which is by H el ene Binet)



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3 Detail: glazed and mirrored roofs.

4 Visual play: reflections of steam room interior, garden and mews.

5 New against old: exposed brickwork and mirrored soffit.

6 Clinging to the flank wall: the ceramic steam room.

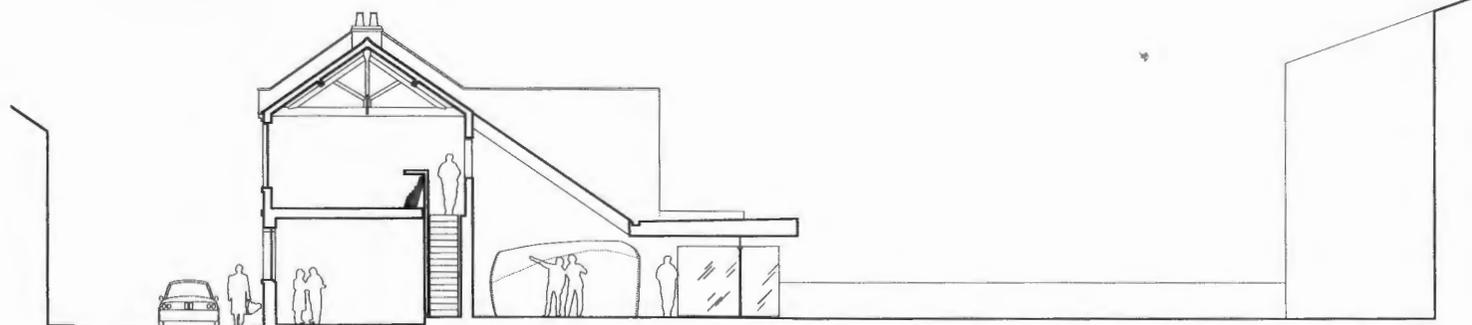
7 North light: casual setting for art exhibitions.

ARTIST STUDIO, LONDON

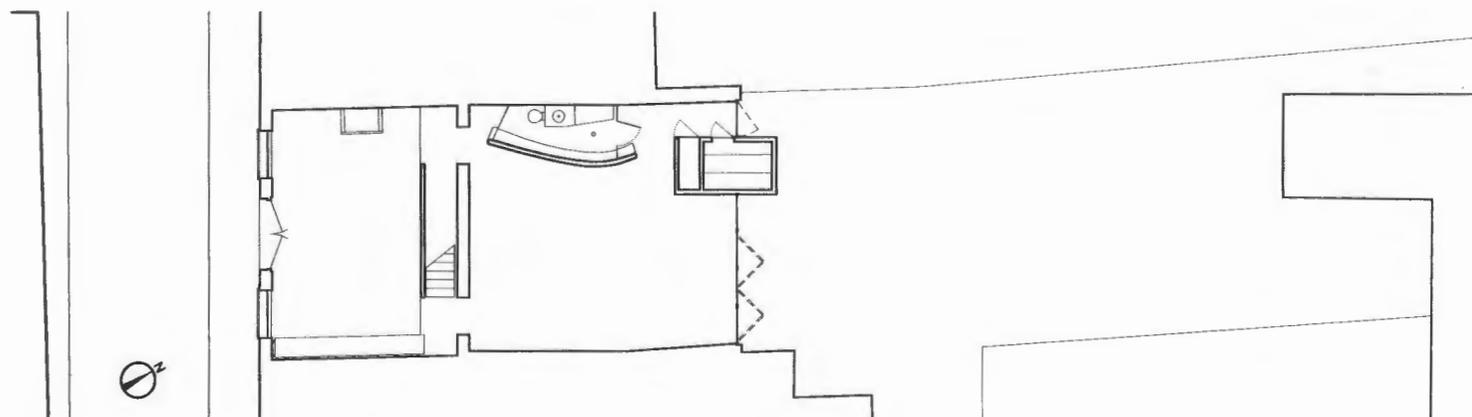
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long section





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