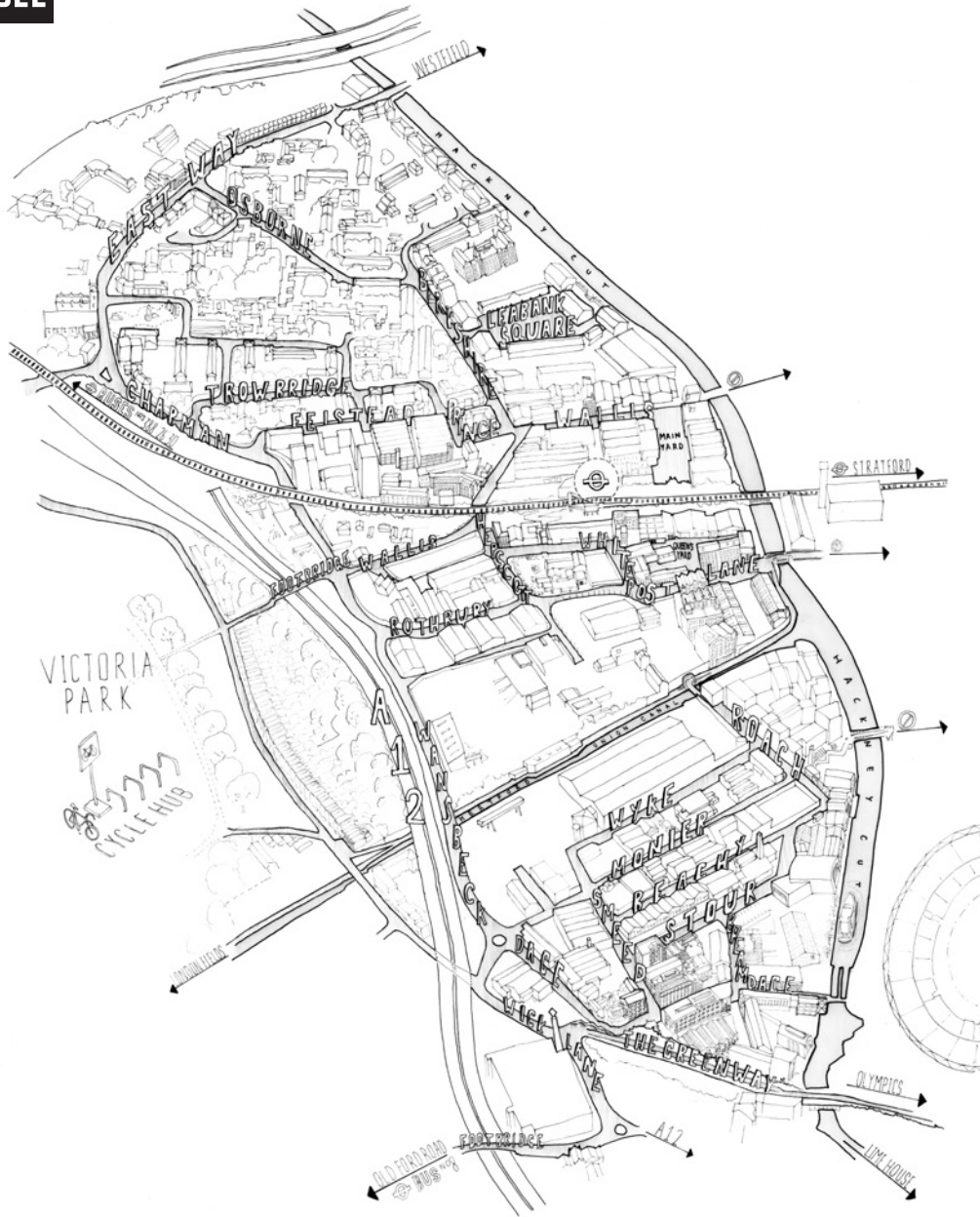


MADE IN HAWAII



THE LIVE-WORK COLLECTIVES BY RICHARD BROWN



This report looks at creative live-work spaces in Hackney Wick and Fish Island (HWFI). The aim is to reveal, in more detail, the people and the places that have influenced the area's prominent creative industry. There are thirteen individual case studies from five different factory complexes in the area. Each study looks at a particular live-work unit and its inhabitants, to consider how the differing creative disciplines, spatial arrangements and economic factors have played a part in the cultural growth of the area. In the context of the likely development of some of these sites due to be released from their light industrial zoning, this research project aims to document the key role of existing live-work arrangements in the area's current cultural foundations, and make a case against their disappearance.



In 2009 muf architecture/art was commissioned by Design for London to map the businesses and activities of HWFI. muf found over 600 studios, which at that time was double the number found in Dalston. The resulting report, Creative Potential, highlighted the potential embedded in nurturing this cluster of creative industries.

The majority of artists and creative practitioners are to be found in “live-work” units, which are let out directly from various private landlords. I am a live-work resident of Hackney Wick and Fish Island, and in the past few years I have witnessed how the area has become increasingly populated. This is partially due to the demand for affordable live-work spaces. During the course of this study I have been very privileged to have the chance to further map this phenomenon.

Over the last decade, many of the light industrial warehouses in private land ownership have been leased surreptitiously through various letting agencies to artists and creative practitioners, many of them

as shared live-work units. This has been an effective way for landlords to generate income from these old buildings. At a rough average of £13 per sq ft and steadily rising, these units are profitable for landlords, but also financially accessible to artists living and working in collectives.

Most of the warehouses in the area have been refurbished for this purpose at very low cost. The units are typically cleared of partitions, then fitted with basic commodities such as a kitchen sink, bathroom, and numerous bedrooms; all constructed from timber stud walls. The spaces are generous and flexible; many of the artists who have moved in to these units have been able to build extra walls or rooms to suit their work practices. The units typically range from as small as 500 sq ft, to over 3,000 sq ft.

Hackney Wick has a diverse range of warehouse typologies, with different shapes and sizes. Consequently each unit has a distinct agenda and attitude. In this report, I have deliberately chosen a range of units from some of the most dense factory complexes, all of which are leased by creative practitioners engaged in production on a daily basis.

The case studies show how these industrial spaces house, affordably, disciplines as diverse as circus and theatre, as well as smaller units for artists. It is the “no frills” environment which means that these spaces are incredibly flexible, allowing artists to manipulate their surroundings to fit their practices. Financially, live-work is easier to manage because, if organised well, artists can share a functioning work space without needing to pay another set of rates. A majority of the units are managed communally, with tenants negotiating the spaces with each other, which in turn has led to many collaborative projects with artists sharing materials and skills within their units. With its high density of artists, these factory complexes work like creative business incubators, where many young people have been able to test ideas and develop their careers as professionals. Within this collective live-work phenomenon, employment, education and

training are passed on in a grassroots fashion.

There are inherent compromises for these live-workers, notably in the quality of the construction. Many of the larger complexes have been cheaply divided into units by breeze block walls; consequently the sound proofing is very poor. There are also some units, not covered in this report, which suffer with dampness due to lack of ventilation.

In the more communal units, it is very apparent that good inter-personal relationships are needed to be able to negotiate the shared space. Most of these live-work households are very cautious about who they choose to live and work with; this is often defined by social criteria or a preference for work disciplines.

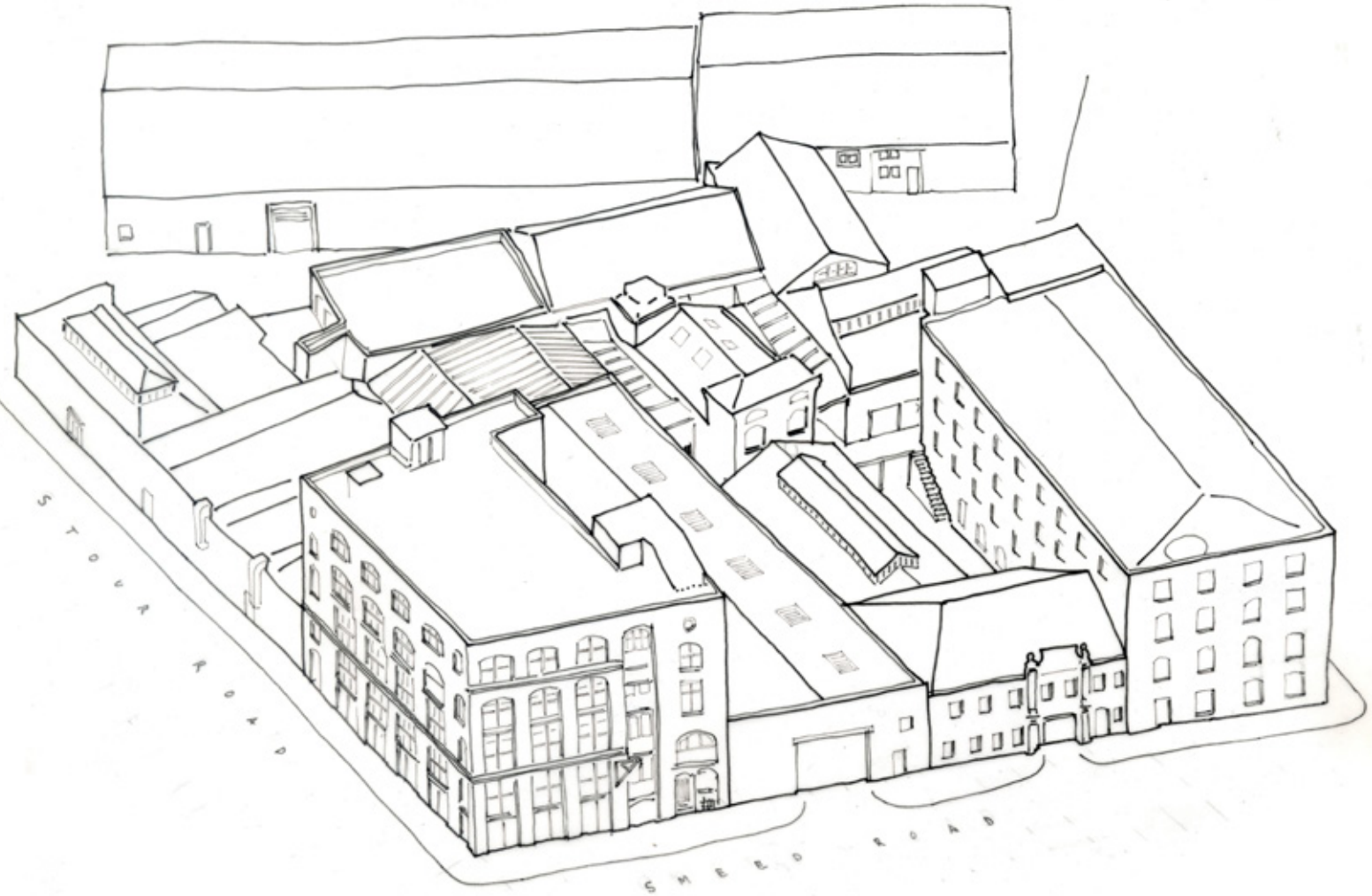
During this study, it has become clear that landowners have used the adjacent Olympic Games development as an excuse to raise rents at a very steep rate. Many artists stress that they are uncertain how long they will be able to afford to stay in the area. For many, the character of the area is under threat by the newer developments on the horizon. There have been a few new “live-work” developments notably in Fish Island, which bear no relationship to those covered in this report, both in terms of spatial arrangement and price. These developments are often approved on the basis of their implied employment space; many of the workspaces provided have since been converted with a change of use to residential.

It is the ambition of this report that the characteristics discussed here may feed into an open dialogue and re-assessment of how HWFI can be developed as part of the Olympic legacy.

CASE STUDIES

OLD FORD WORKS

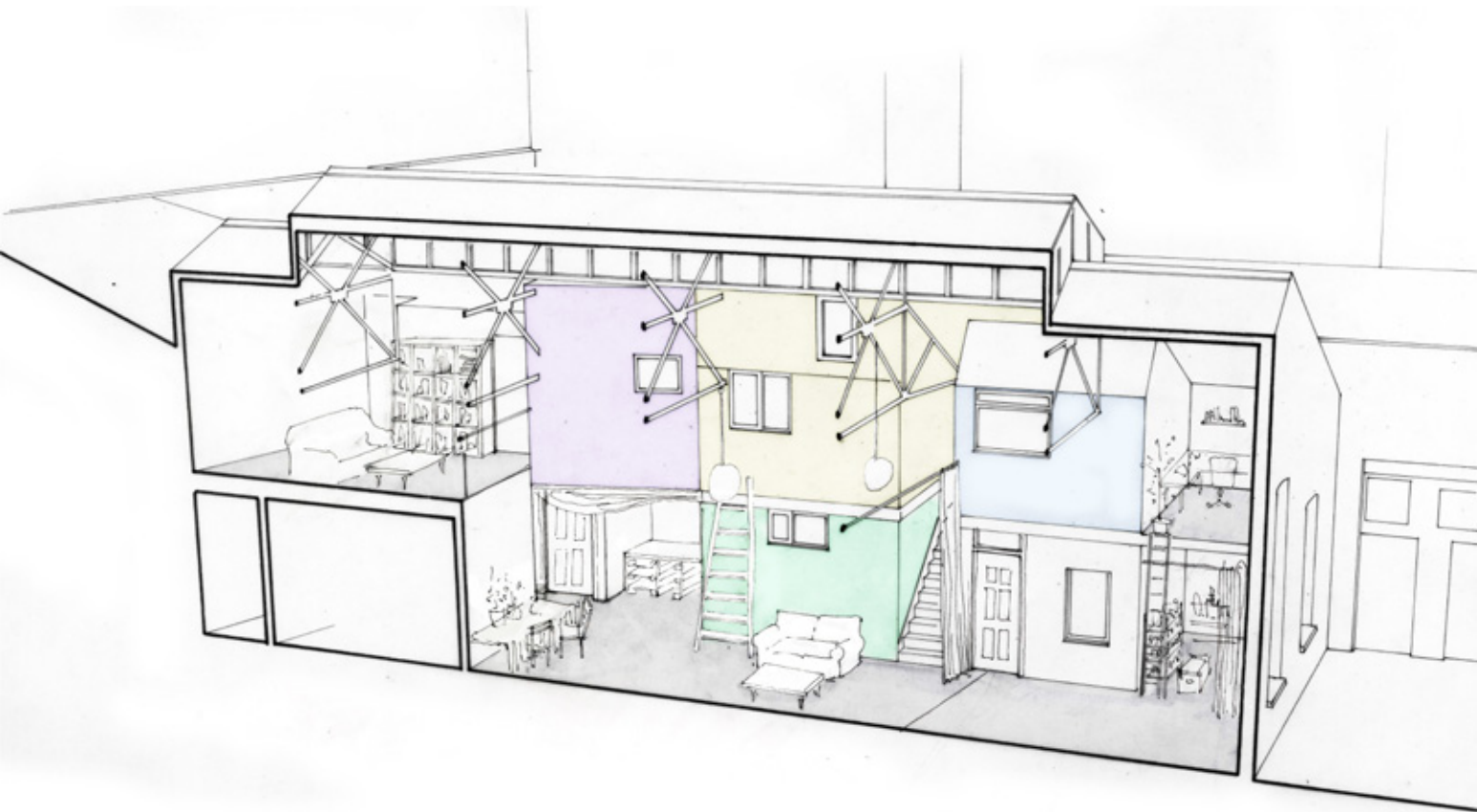
OLD FORD WORKS IS A CLUSTER OF 19TH CENTURY FACTORIES AT THE HEART OF THE FISH ISLAND CONSERVATION AREA, PARTS OF WHICH WERE ORIGINALLY STEAM POWERED RUBBER WORKS AND WATERPROOF CLOTHING WORKS AND NOTABLY A PRINTING WORKS WHICH SPECIALISED IN BANK NOTES AND POSTAGE STAMPS. THIS BLOCK IS NOW KNOWN LOCALLY AS THE "OLD PEANUT FACTORY", BECAUSE OF ITS BRIEF OCCUPATION BY PERCY DALSTON'S PEANUTS CO. IT IS NOW PROMINENTLY MADE UP OF LIVE-WORK AND ARTIST STUDIOS. IN 2009, AROUND 79 STUDIOS WERE MAPPED HERE. ITS DENSITY AND SHARED YARD SPACE HAS MADE THE COMPLEX NOTORIOUS FOR ITS CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY OF CREATIVE PRACTITIONERS.



CASE STUDY 1. OLD FORD WORKS

2,700 SQ FT (APPROX.)
 £13 PER SQ FT (APPROX.)

ONE CLOWN
ONE VIDEO ARTIST
ONE WEB DEVELOPER/CAPOEIRA TEACHER/TRAINING
TO BE A STUNT MAN
ONE MUSICIAN
ONE PSYCHIATRIST
ONE SINGER
AGES 27-36



This unit is a hybrid of performance space and a seven bedroom home that abuts a communal courtyard entrance within the Old Ford Works factory complex. The warehouse was taken on in 2008 by a proactive couple, seeking a space where they could perform and rehearse but also live in an area which had a strong community.

This house has become well known for its cabarets and various performance events, and was highlighted in a recent article in *The Guardian* titled "London 2012: what to do near the main Olympic venues". It is a very collaborative household, where housemates often help one another to put on various events such as film nights, barn dances, political talks and cabarets.

The warehouse had been previously used as a large open gallery, and the couple wanted to keep as much open space as possible, so the bedrooms were squeezed to one side over two storeys. These rooms are each painted a different colour and face the main performance space, with a somewhat cute favela hillside feel to them. All of the rooms here were self-built by a professional clown. There is a mezzanine living room above the kitchen which doubles up as a viewing platform to the performances in the main space, and there is also a mezzanine office space where the video artist works.

When they first moved in they organised many cabaret performances, with the intention of bringing



in local audiences from around the courtyard and Fish Island. “The crowds that we have are generally people that we know and friends of friends. It’s never been the case that things have got broken, we have never had a problem, and they are very respectful people.”

The cabaret events are very cosy. Half of the main space serves as a crammed and intimate seating area. A dividing curtain is hung from the trusses to conceal the performers while the company entertains the audience. There is always a friendly atmosphere and plenty of familiar faces from the neighbourhood. The events have also attracted industry professionals from circus companies and theatres. One housemate commented that, “the events we did here have opened a lot of doors to other (performance) companies which have led to other things.”

“We are careful with what we choose to present, we try to make sure there is a good quality of work, we do put in a lot of energy, it takes a long time to do a cabaret... You need to buy lights, curtains, lino for the floor, paint etc. This all takes money time and energy. So we do have to charge, but its only £5!”

The house takes a rather philanthropic position regarding their events, which are often not-for-profit, with all funds going to charity. They are also very generous with their performance space, which is generally in use every day, if not by them, then other artists and performers who need space.

“We try to help some artists to give them support in their process of creating work. Unfortunately in London it’s impossible in the circus world to find a place to rehearse or compose new material. So if someone wants to show their work, we are happy to give them the space and they can invite friends or test the work with the public. We are all open to those possibilities.”

The unit commands great presence in their courtyard, which is a great point of contact for the

neighbours, and a very active place whenever there are events.

The housemates do not doubt that there is a community in the area. Each of them knows many people, partly because they depend on each other for help and assistance. There is great deal which is shared, especially during the Hackney WickED Arts Festival, where residents open their studios to one another and the public.

“During the festival, everybody opens their doors and you go around and see the quality of work that there is, it’s fantastic, we need more of those kinds of events which inform the attitude of the whole community.”

The housemates spend a lot a lot of time together in the house, so they need to get along well and to be able to share space. This is a mature and sensible house; early to bed, early to rise. The housemates all have busy lives, and take their work seriously. The self-build, ad hoc construction style has meant that they suffer with poor sound proofing, and one housemate mentioned that over the years they have had to filter out any noisy housemates: “We’re probably the squarest house in Hackney Wick, its always been that way because Hugo (professional clown) is a performer and really needs his sleep as you end up living a fairly rigid life as a physical performer.”

When I asked the housemates about their plans for the future, they firstly raised the recurring issue of rent increases. They mentioned, like many others around the courtyard, that rents have been increasing year on year, arbitrarily. Besides that, many of the housemates make the point that it would be very strange to move into an ordinary house after this experience: “I can’t imagine ever living somewhere that’s finished and boring. I want to live in another strange building if I have to live somewhere else”

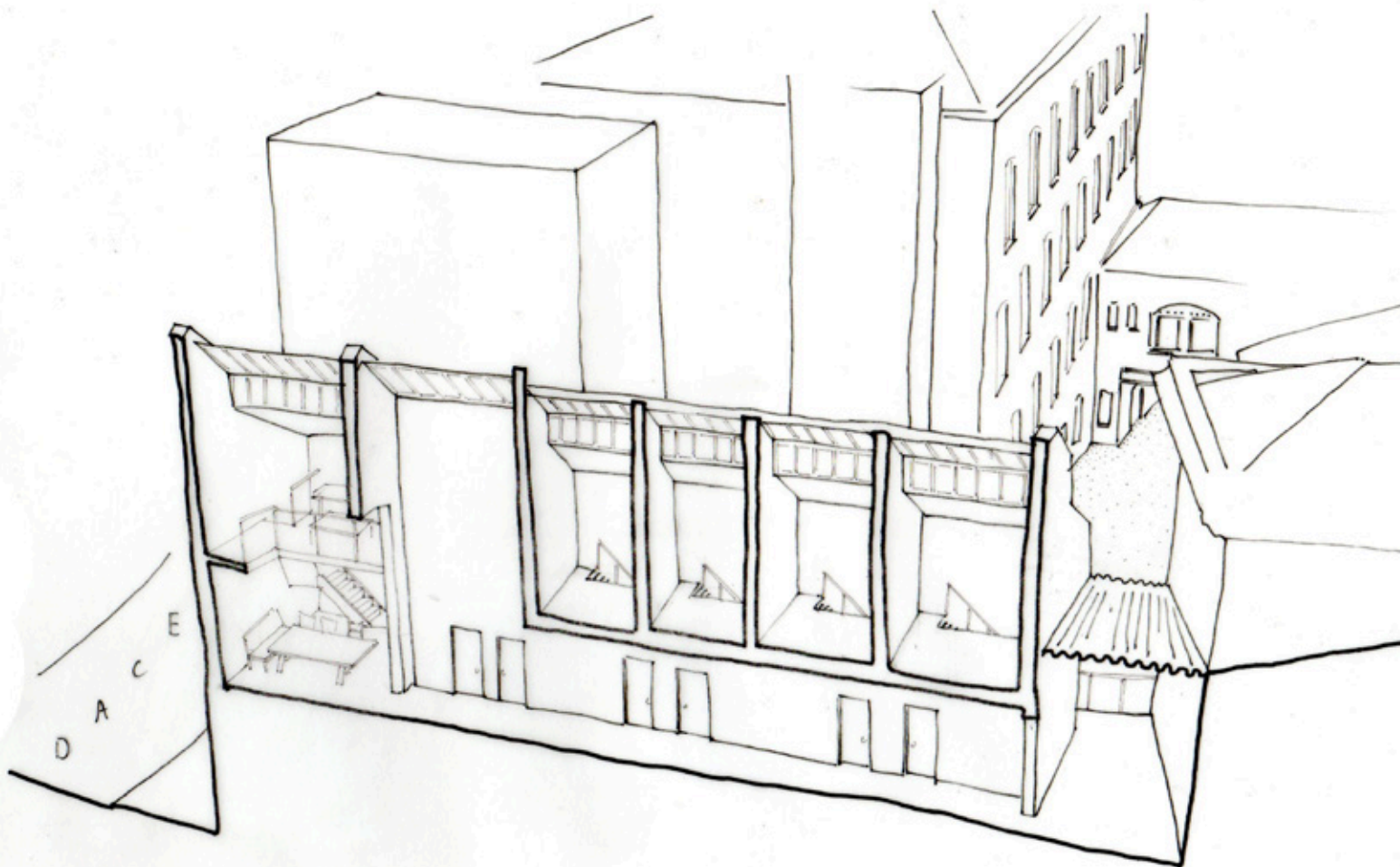


“WE ARE CAREFUL WITH WHAT WE CHOOSE TO PRESENT, WE TRY TO MAKE SURE THERE IS A GOOD QUALITY OF WORK, WE DO PUT IN A LOT OF ENERGY, IT TAKES A LONG TIME TO DO A CABARET . . . YOU NEED TO BUY LIGHTS, CURTAINS, LINO FOR THE FLOOR, PAINT ETC. THIS ALL TAKES MONEY TIME AND ENERGY. SO WE DO HAVE TO CHARGE, BUT ITS ONLY £5!”

CASE STUDY 2. OLD FORD WORKS

1,800 SQ FT (APPROX.)
 £17 PER SQ FT (APPROX.)

TWO CAFÉ PREP MANAGERS
TWO CAFÉ DIRECTORS
ONE CAFÉ MANAGER
ONE FREELANCE DESIGNER
ONE CAFE EVENTS MANAGER
ONE GALLERY CURATOR
ONE TELEVISION PRODUCER
AGES 25-31



This unit is a live-work home, leased to the owners of a local Fish Island café (the Counter Café), who share it with their friends, almost all of whom are involved with, work for or run the café. The space is partitioned by a long corridor of bedrooms with tall mezzanine levels within them, all lit by roof lanterns. There is a very tall lounge space followed by a communal kitchen dining area with a mezzanine level floating above as a work studio for the freelance designer.

The building works as a sort of residential retreat for the café workers (the café is only two streets away). They leased this house in the summer of 2011 –prior to this they lived in a similar space directly adjacent to the café. Tom, Jess and their friends have, since 2009, created a thriving coffee culture in the area; the café itself has become a destination within the Olympic fringes. It has been listed in various magazines and London guides and was notably highlighted in the recent Guardian’s “Top 10 budget restaurants around London’s Olympic stadium.” The café employs numerous local artists and students on a part-time basis, and it has, without doubt, played a part in the convivial nature of the Island, with a community of artists and young professionals regularly visiting the café.

Much of the design work for the café takes place in the house, on the mezzanine above the kitchen



dining area. It's a small dedicated work zone where local interns often come to help out on the various design projects associated with the café, which range from furniture to web design to café fit-out work.

I asked Tom if there are any issues around separating himself or the house from their work: "There's no issue at all, because the whole ethos of the area and the way that we operate is that there shouldn't be somewhere that is defined as work, it's a lifestyle, there's no 9-5 here and I like the fluidity of that. I don't really like rigid work hours, although in reality I end up working a lot, but it is because I want to."

Tom stumbled upon Hackney Wick years ago, when he saw the potential in the area. "I thought this place was like a treasure trove of abandoned and interesting buildings, chimneys, bricked up windows with lots of stuff going on. I'm actually surprised how quickly its developed here."

Tom and his sister Jess set up the café in 2008, which itself was also a live-work unit with separate buildings for the café and the residential house. The café was an idea that they had in their heads for a long time. They had spent a lot of time looking for the ideal place to start a business, although they had always expected that this would happen when/if they returned to their home country, New Zealand. It was the feeling of the 'dead end' which charmed Tom and Jess; the feeling that this was truly an island which is bound by the canals, sewers and motorways which encircle it. For them, Fish Island felt like a natural destination, they describe it as a very quiet place with no through traffic where there was already a "peaceful and unbothered community" of people. It was the atmosphere of this place which prompted them to start the business here.

They invested what money they had into a quick refurbishment of their first warehouse leasehold. The format included a café and a six bedroom house shared with friends. This enabled them to begin the venture which had been 15 years in the making,

with business plans already roughed out.

"About a week or two after we moved in, the landlord could see the dollar signs, or at least our enthusiasm in the fact that we had already cleaned the place up, gutted it and turned it into a six bedroom mansion."

The café and the house were community builds; a group of friends along with an extended community of people helped to build it, as well as lending skills and DIY construction tips. I asked Tom if he thought they could have had such a collaborative experience elsewhere in London, "you could, but you need a critical mass, it's all about rolling your sleeves up and getting involved with what's going on around you. There are people who are up for doing things, no planning, just doing it, ten minutes later there's something done which you can actually enjoy with instant gratification whether it's a basketball hoop in the road or building a deck, there's always a community behind that."

In respect of their future in Hackney Wick, the café has grown and recently opened The Crate micro-brewery and Pizzeria in the White Building at Queens Yard. However, Tom remains uncertain about the effect of the Olympic Games in the area, especially in terms of rent increases: "The idea is to keep renewing our lease and stabilise, hopefully things will die down a little after the Games."



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CASE STUDY 3. OLD FORD WORKS

1,700 SQ FT (APPROX.)
 £14 PER SQ FT (APPROX.)

STUDENT TEACHER
COPY WRITER
ARTIST
MUSICIAN
AGES 27-34



This is a long medium-sized shared live-work unit in the Old Ford Works factory complex. Unlike many other units in this complex, it does not sit onto the central yard; opening instead onto Stour Road. The current dwellers moved in to this unit around 2009 when it was cleaned out and refurbished as a shared live work studio. One artist and sculptor (Ally) moved here because of its affordability and great work space: “It’s the sort of place where you can make big dirty sculptures, which was what attracted me.”

At the ground floor level, you enter from the street into the front studio; this is a space which is used prominently by Ally. A side corridor guides you along the deep and narrow plan past the open living room in the middle of the unit, and then through to the rear of the unit where there is the open plan kitchen dining area with a small bathroom in the corner. There are three bedrooms above, all with separate staircase access points and there is one bedroom below at the ground floor. The pitched roof is punctuated with roof lights, which cast natural light into the bedrooms and the kitchen space.

The musician tends to work in the kitchen space as it’s the best lit communal area in the house, other than the lounge. The kitchen is the most occupied area in this house, a communal space where the housemates spend a lot of time together (for privacy they retire to their individual bedrooms). The lounge is a comfy, artificially lit area in the middle,



often used for watching television in the evenings.

The long plan means that these areas are compartmentalised and separated, which has meant that the issue of separating living and working is slightly easier here as the boundaries are well defined. “It’s easier for us because the studio is at the front of the house, so what the eyes don’t see, the heart can’t grieve on... I do realize what a gift it is, to have somewhere to work from home, but it can be a total nightmare... There is something great about shutting the door and leaving work behind you.”

For Ally, the affordability of the live work unit has enabled her to practice while doing other jobs occasionally to supplement her income, although she mentions that the immersive nature of living in a converted warehouse means that there is a definite compromise on her ideal living conditions.

“It can be quite difficult living in these kinds of spaces, sometimes I think I could just do with a house, with open-able windows and a back yard to sit in. I do sometimes crave that ideal setup of a house, but I know I’d lose the studio! That’s a whole other rent, I wouldn’t be able to afford or justify two rents to enable me to do what I do. So this is the kind of sacrifice you have to make.”

Although some the usual aspects of a domestic dwelling are compromised, this robust space also has its benefits. Last year during the Hackney WickED Festival, Ally and her housemates turned their studio and lounge into an art gallery in which all the housemates exhibited their work. All of the furniture was pushed out to the back of the house into the kitchen, and for one weekend, it ceased to be a home. The space worked comfortably as a gallery, with its white walls and grey painted concrete floors, hundreds of people passed through that space, many of whom left complements on the quality of the curation.

“That’s the nature of the space... It is very adaptable, you can build any kind of configuration that you want in here; we are not bound by the usual

constraints of a domestic dwelling.”

It is this ambiguity between dwelling, work place and even gallery which to some extent gives this factory complex its quirk.

Ally and many others describe Fish Island and Hackney Wick as an alternative set of conditions outside of the rhythms of usual London life. “It’s a weird little place, it’s almost like a 1984 village that we’ve created for ourselves and it’s almost like dystopia, but on the weekend we all emerge like sewer rats and go and have fun with each other. Usually people are behind closed doors trying to get on with their work, trying to make some sort of artistic statement.”

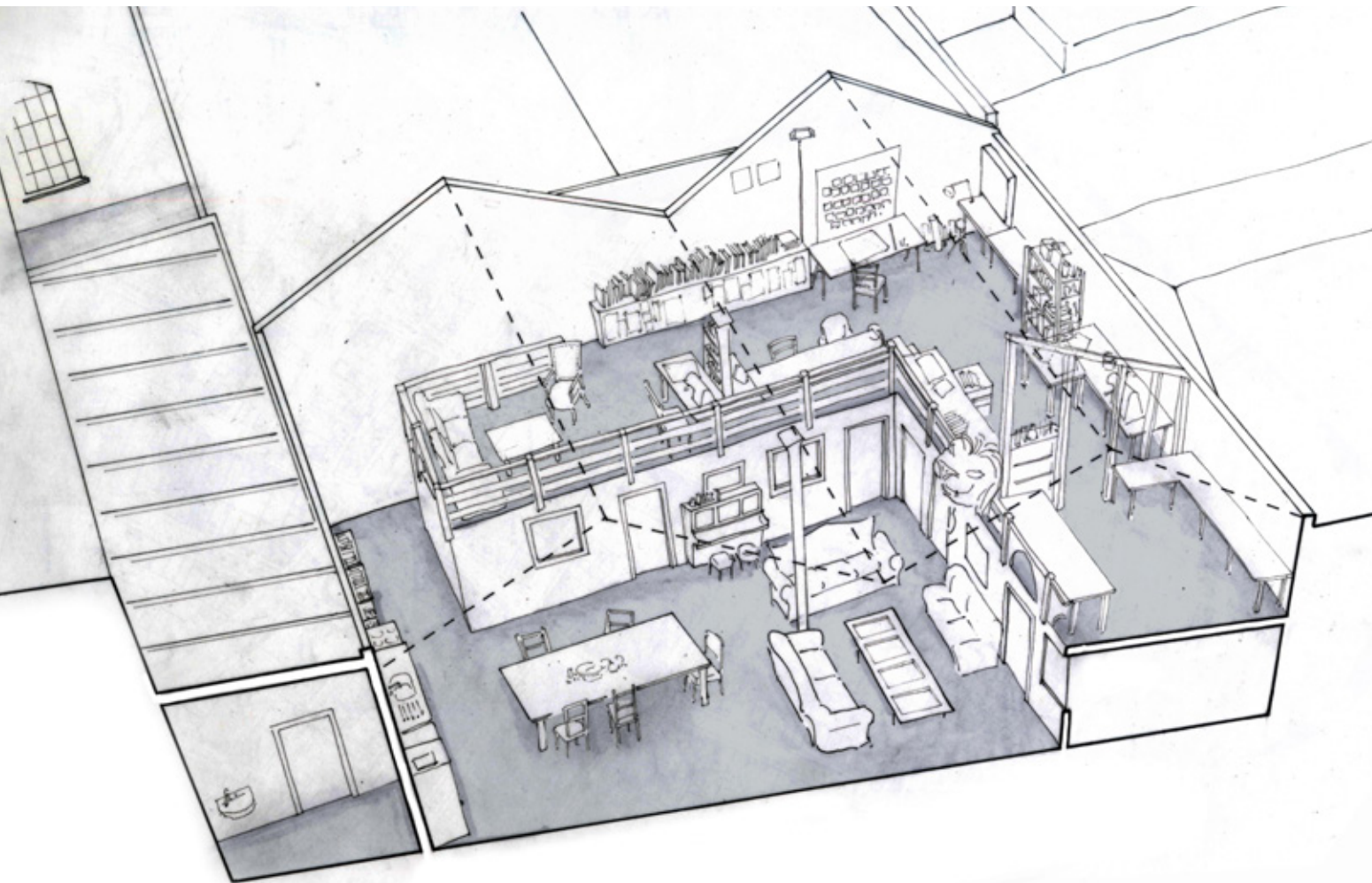
Ally is not sure if she will continue into the next annual lease, but is apprehensive about where she might live next. She mentions the difficulties of finding places to work from home on flat-share websites such as Gumtree: “You go to these interviews and you sit in these small spaces which they call the lounge, and you’re told it will cost you £700 a month, and it’s terrible... I genuinely think I have been turned down for a lot places in the past, because of what I do.”

For Ally and many other artists, affordable studio space is a necessity to continue their creative work. In these kinds of live-work units they can, with some compromises, practice.



“IT CAN BE QUITE DIFFICULT LIVING IN THESE KINDS OF SPACES, SOMETIMES I THINK I COULD JUST DO WITH A HOUSE, WITH OPEN ABLE WINDOWS AND A BACK YARD TO SIT IN. I DO SOMETIMES CRAVE THAT IDEAL SETUP OF A HOUSE, BUT I KNOW I’D LOSE THE STUDIO! THAT’S A WHOLE OTHER RENT, I WOULDN’T BE ABLE TO AFFORD OR JUSTIFY TWO RENTS TO ENABLE ME TO DO WHAT I DO. SO THIS IS THE KIND OF SACRIFICE YOU HAVE TO MAKE.”

CASE STUDY 4. OLD FORD WORKS



2,500 SQ FT (APROX.)
 £13 PER SQ FT (APROX.)

ONE TAILOR
ONE ART DIRECTOR
ONE DESIGNER, FREELANCING
FROM HOME
ONE TRAINEE TEACHER
ONE COMPOSITION STUDENT
ONE RUNNER ILLUSTRATOR
AGES 23-28

This unit is home to a mixture of people working within the creative industries: two tailors, one art director, a designer and three students. Many of them are making their living from the work they do in their shared studio. The space has been used for a large variety of public and private events, such as film showings, album launches, gigs, workshops, music video shoots, short films, fashion shoots, animations, set building and live art shows.

The core group (Sam, Elise, Sasha and Ossian) have been here since 2009. They saw it as an exciting new opportunity for a big change after living in a “very cool, but very normal house in Brixton”. The warehouse is a 2,500 sq ft space, which is split between communal living below, and communal working above.

The house is very comfortable in its everyday balance between living and working. The upstairs mezzanine has a very strong working atmosphere, and is a place where “you can really get into your own zone”, as one housemate put it. “Everyone’s really considerate; generally if someone’s working upstairs you leave them alone.” In the evening people tend to hang out downstairs more, where they might watch a movie together. The housemates said that it is important that nobody has to work in their bedroom.

The studio is a generous L shaped space which is

SEE



geared up for everybody's particular type of work practice. Each housemate has their own bit of studio, containing all the specialist kit they need, such as sewing machines and large desk spaces on which to lay out their patterns. The studio accommodates a lot of activity; one of the desk spaces is rented out to a friend who used to live nearby, while two of the housemates both have business partners who work here with them in the space.

This house is clearly a proactive one – even the parties have involved considerable amounts of work to create extraordinarily themed events such as “the hip hop in space party”, where they turned the whole mezzanine into a space ship with rocket thrusters.

The space has been negotiated in such a way that there is a careful duality of something which is both informal and homely, but also professional. I wondered what their trick was to getting such a fun and productive house, avoiding any interpersonal tensions. One answer might be the way the house has grown. The core group of 4 people have always remained here, but when people have left, and there has been a room to fill, they have been very “fussy” when it comes to finding someone new. Rooms are usually advertised on Gumtree, they have often seen over 20 people visiting the room before they have found someone they are happy with. What people do for work isn't a big issue, as long as they're doing something. The important thing is that everybody “fits in”. One housemate pointed out: “We're lucky, there has never been any tension here, when you live so closely with other people it's very important that everybody gets on. We say no to couples because it reduces internal politics. For example, if a couple were to have an argument, you couldn't really intervene, and this is such a public space.”

The house sits at the end of an intimate yard within the factory complex. This courtyard is the main entrance for over 10 other shared live-work

units. For the housemates, the yard has been a very useful place to meet the neighbours. Other live-work units have events and parties which often spill out into it and in the summer it's a very sociable place to eat dinner. One housemate has made a little garden there.

The yard has its own Facebook group, which is a great platform for lending and borrowing materials and sometimes finding the odd job, although one housemate warned: “I've lost three drills and a jigsaw so far... but it's a good thing and people are very generous, they normally help if they can and share knowledge too. If there's something you can't do, there's probably someone around who can do it. If you need a specific person like a makeup artist or someone like that, they'll probably know someone.”

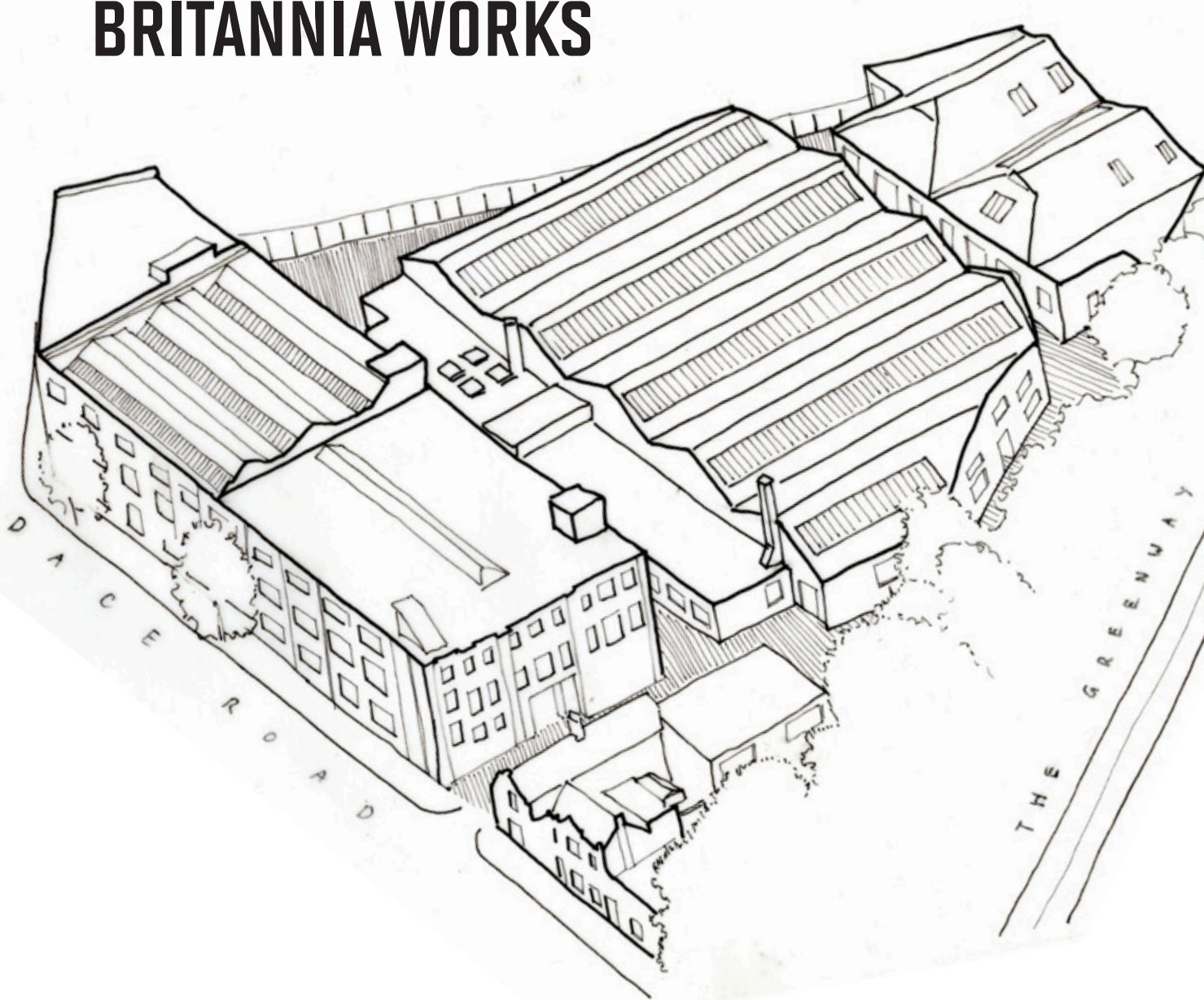
For many of the housemates, Hackney Wick and Fish Island has offered them an opportunity to build their creative businesses in an affordable and very fertile environment. I asked the housemates about their plans for the future here: “I suppose we'll stay until it's not financially possible, it seems like the landlord keeps putting up the rent every time we renew our lease, much more than inflation. If it continues at this rate we'll have to move out, everyone's still early on in their careers so it's kind of a crucial time in terms of having that space now. I can't think of any other reason we would want to leave this place.”



“WE'RE LUCKY, THERE HAS NEVER BEEN ANY TENSION HERE, WHEN YOU LIVE SO CLOSELY WITH OTHER PEOPLE IT'S VERY IMPORTANT THAT EVERYBODY GETS ON. WE SAY NO TO COUPLES BECAUSE IT REDUCES INTERNAL POLITICS. FOR EXAMPLE, IF A COUPLE WERE TO HAVE AN ARGUMENT, YOU COULDN'T REALLY INTERVENE, AND THIS IS SUCH A PUBLIC SPACE.”

SEE

CASE STUDIES BRITANNIA WORKS



BRITANNIA WORKS REFERS TO A DENSE AND VERY WELL OCCUPIED GROUP OF 20TH CENTURY WAREHOUSE BUILDINGS, INCLUDING A FORMER CARD-BOARD BOX PACKING FACTORY AND THE FORMER HOME OF THE PERCY DALTON'S PEANUT COMPANY. THE COMPLEX HAS BEEN INTERNALLY DIVIDED INTO ARTISTS' STUDIOS AND LIVE-WORK SPACES, IT HOSTS SOME 94 STUDIOS TIGHTLY KNITTED TOGETHER BY A SERIES OF COMMUNAL CORRIDORS AND INTIMATE YARDS WHICH ARE SHARED BY THE RESIDENTS. MANY OF THE SPACES IN BETWEEN ARE USED AS WORK AREAS AND COMMUNAL GARDENS.

CASE STUDY 1. BRITANNIA WORKS

ONE SINGLE STUDIO: 240 SQ FT (APPROX.) @ £22 PER SQ FT (APROX.)

ONE LIVE/WORK UNIT: 980 SQ FT (APPROX.) @ £14 PER SQ FT (APROX.)

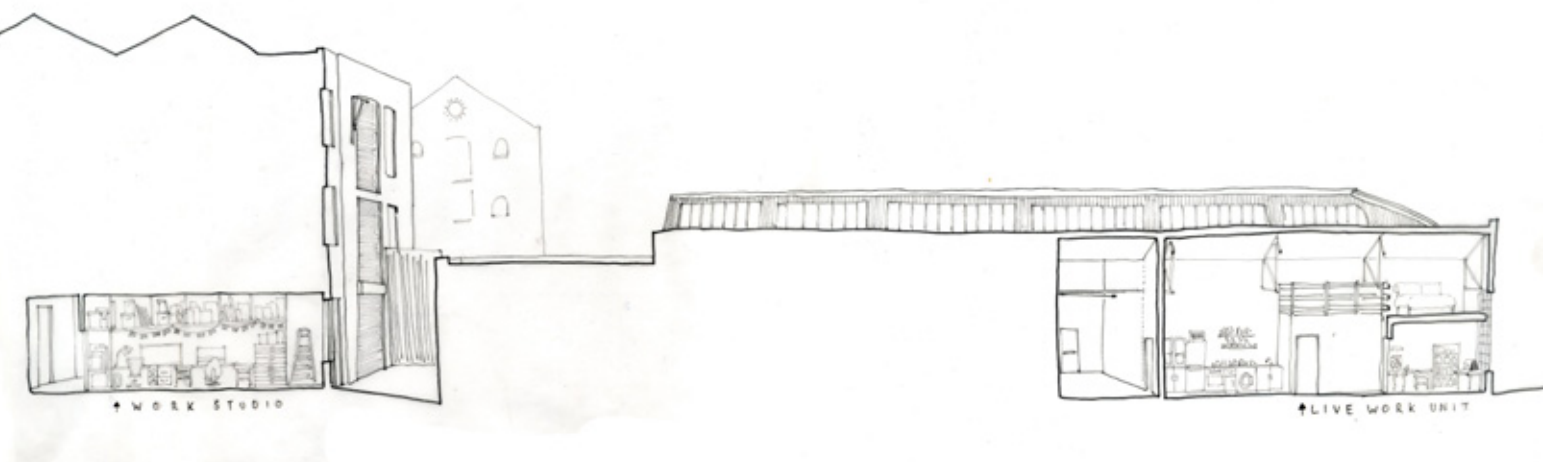
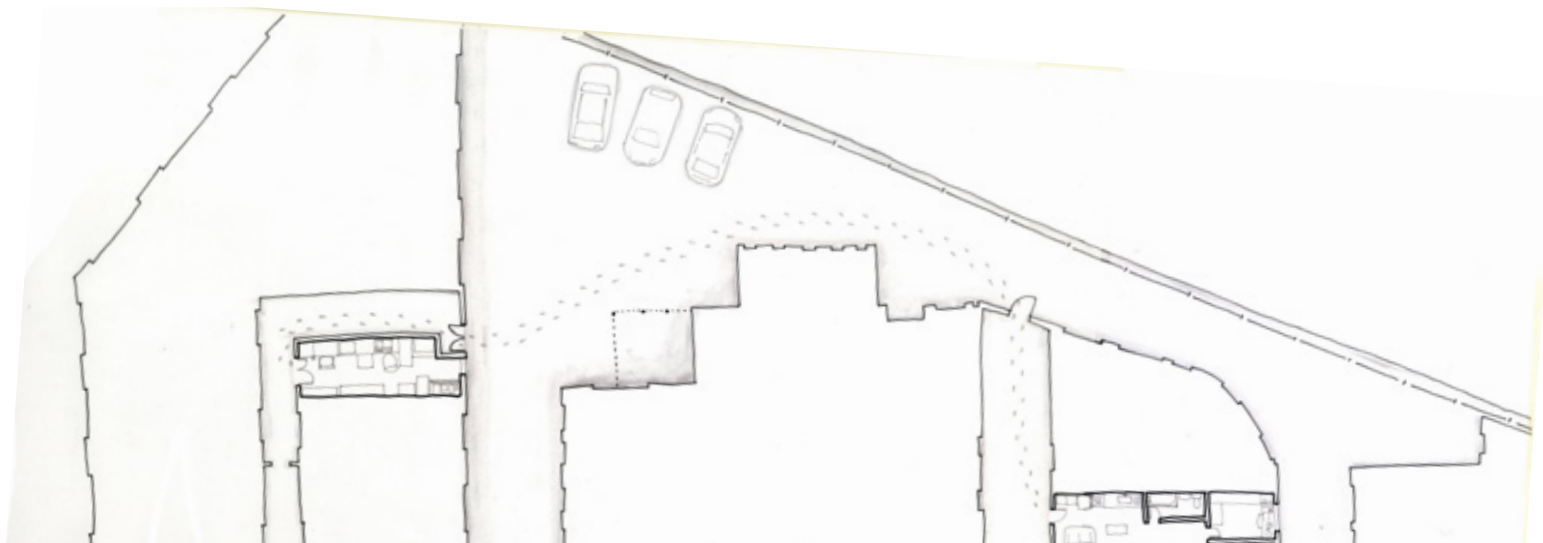
**ONE COMIC BOOK ARTIST
ONE TEXTILE ARTIST
AGES 26-36**

The comic book artist (Rufus) has a live-work unit where he lives with his partner in the Britannia works complex, with an additional separate single work studio only 50 meters walk around the yard. The live-work unit has a spare bedroom, a textile studio and a main bedroom for the couple. The textile artist works in the live-work studio in the evenings after coming home from her day job. Rufus spends much of his time in his single studio where he designs and draws his work.

Rufus has lived in Hackney Wick for the last five years in different units, and although he often sketches a little at home, he has always had a separate studio dedicated to his work. The work studio is a small but very dense unit (240sq ft) filled with comic book merchandise and various collections of paraphernalia related to his 20 years of experience working in the industry. It is a true den of activity; he has several drawing boards for different stages in his work process, there is a desk for sitting and drawing and another one for standing and drawing as he mentions that he cannot sit still for very long otherwise he feels “antsy”.

“This is my little den; we built a mezzanine to give me a bit more space because I’ve got the smallest unit in the building. It has such high ceilings that you can actually double the floor space which is nice because when you’re sitting at your desk it feels as though sitting in a little cocoon.”

For Rufus, the separate studio is an important





investment, and it is fortunate that it's so close to home and it is also small enough to be rates-exempt. This work is his income and his livelihood, and because of that, a professional distraction-free workspace is essential. "When I used to work from an ordinary flat, I would end up working in a bedroom, and it was very depressing. It's like being in a prison when you don't leave the room."

Although his work is carried out solitarily, he stresses the importance of being amongst other artists and designer-makers in the building. He says: "It's inspiring because there are so many people with different disciplines, to me that is one of the important things, that they're all creative people, it keeps me moving." Rufus has made lifelong friends in this neighbourhood, and he knows the area especially well because he volunteered to take responsibility for the post: "I got to know many of the people around here by delivering the post, partly because my post kept going missing, I decided to sign for all the deliveries around my block and make sure people get their post. It was really nice because I got to know people, for a start you know who lives where and you know their name."

Rufus mentions that he has found many people to collaborate with in the area, one neighbour, Sofie, had worked with Rufus on rendering his drawings, and in the back of one of his books, *Tank Girl*, he made a dedication to the local Counter Café staff, as they fed him whilst he held a studio in the same building (Stour Space). He often bases the characters in his books on people he knows from the area.

"That's what I love about living in the peanut factory, it's the fact that you have both the isolation, and the community... One of my favourite things here, is that you can go around to someone's house, have a few drinks and then you can walk across the street, and go straight to bed, it's such a luxury... All of my best friends are around here, and it's wonderful that I have this community around me."

Back in his home studio, his partner works

frantically in the evenings and weekends knitting in her textiles studio and is currently setting up a company. It has proved very handy to have dedicated space at home to put in those crucial hours. Rufus has a spot in the kitchen where he works more informally on his rough sketches during the evenings. The house is a kind of middle ground between relaxing at home and working in the studio; it is a great place where they can chat while they work.

This warehouse complex sits directly adjacent to one of the newer residential developments in the area, Iron Works. For Rufus and many others, these developments have a very negative effect on the culture of the area: "they like to live next to the artists, but they don't like us making noise, they don't like it if we cut things outside, they don't like the art work, but they do like to associate with it, because it's 'cool!'"

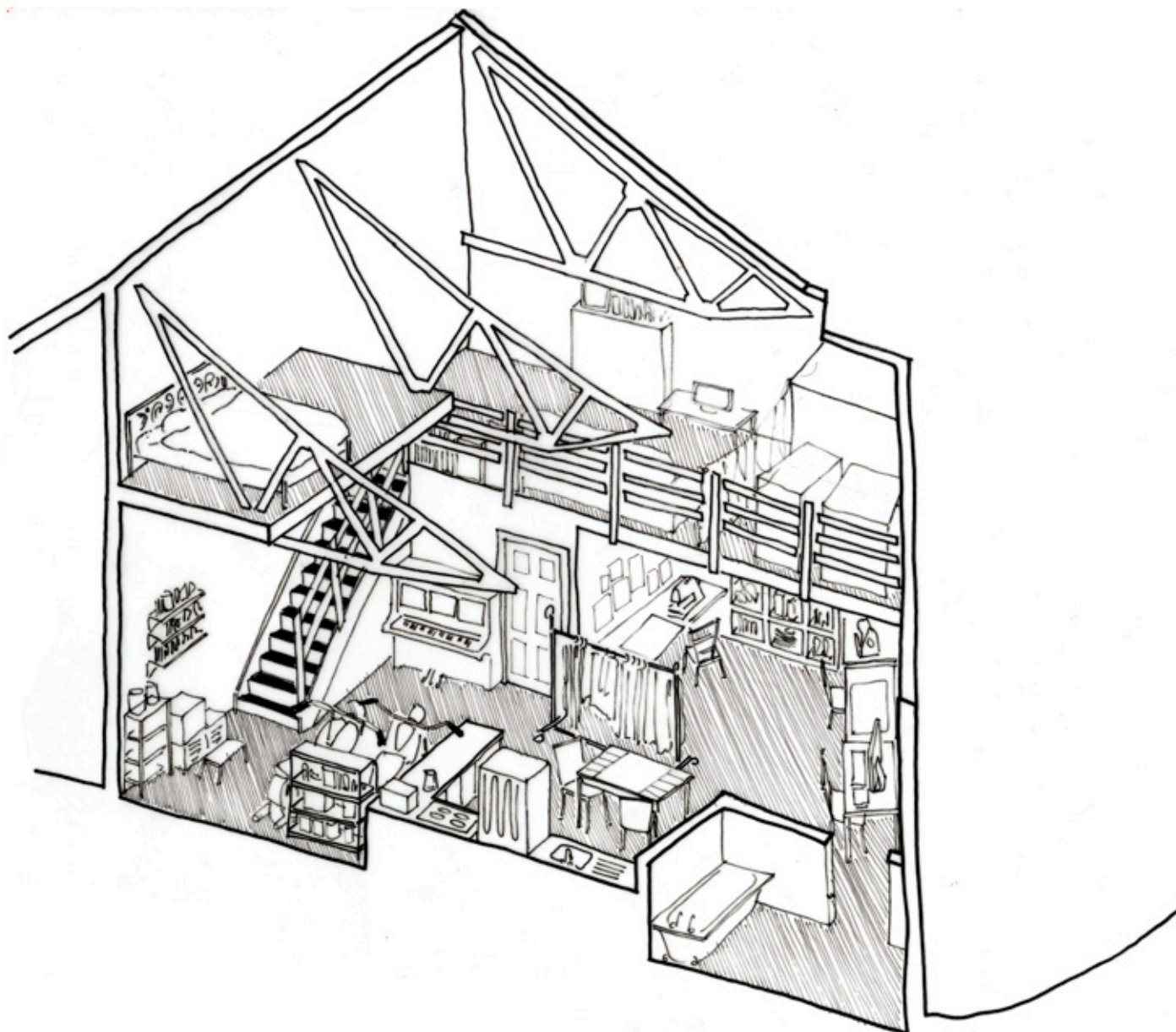
Rufus articulates a point which is at the forefront of conversation in the area now in terms of its future as a creative neighbourhood. There is a strong awareness of the incoming residential developments which have been implied by various documents produced by local authorities (e.g. Fish Island AAP) the effect of which seems so far to be at odds with the current creative cultures which have developed here over the last decade. However change is also being fuelled by the private landlords' ever increasing rents. I asked Rufus how long he will stay in the area, and his opinion on the way the area may be changing:

"I'd like to be here as long as possible, how long it is, is really a financial matter really. Our landlords don't care about us, they're massively unpleasant people, there's a high demand for these spaces... Also many people who have moved in don't create stuff, and don't contribute, often they're just here to have parties"



"I'D LIKE TO BE HERE AS LONG AS POSSIBLE, HOW LONG IT IS, IS REALLY A FINANCIAL MATTER REALLY. OUR LAND LORDS DON'T CARE ABOUT US, THEY'RE MASSIVELY UNPLEASANT PEOPLE, THERE'S A HIGH DEMAND FOR THESE SPACES... ALSO MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE MOVED IN DON'T CREATE STUFF, AND DON'T CONTRIBUTE, OFTEN THEY'RE JUST HERE TO HAVE PARTIES"

CASE STUDY 2. BRITANNIA WORKS



800 SQ FT (APPROX.)
£20 PER SQ FT (APPROX.)

**ONE COSTUME MAKER/ SPECIAL EFFECTS
ONE MOTORBIKE REPAIRMAN**

This is a live work unit home to one couple, one of whom uses it extensively as a base for her costume and prop making business, mixed with her partner's passion for motorbikes. The couple moved into their first warehouse in Clapton some years before moving to Hackney Wick. They quickly became used to the generous spaces that warehouses offer, and "there was no going back." Through the same agent, they moved to another warehouse in Fish Island. In these spaces they had the opportunity to develop their work and define what they wanted to do. "The first warehouse I moved into, we didn't really know exactly what I was doing but having that amount of space meant that we took advantage of it."

Sofie, the costume maker has, over time, developed her business to the point where it accounts for her full income - as she says "just about paying the bills". Her partner, Chris, works as a bar manager and otherwise uses the space to fix and modify motorbikes. The studio sits at the ground floor level in the Britannia Works complex, so Chris has a little area in the studio by the door for the motorbikes, leaving the rest of the space for Sofie and her work. These two spaces are delineated by a strip of black electrical tape on the floor meaning "no motorbikes past this point".

Sofie, and those she works with, make big objects and various props and costumes in the main space. There have in the past been interns helping out with some of the projects. The main area is a blurred mix of kitchen dining meets textile studio. It's a zone of colourful props and costumes, lots of desk space and specialist equipment. I asked Sofie why she feels this space works well:

"It's not been converted far from a car park, you



can make a lot of mess here, which is nice because you can also re-decorate and build, the amount of space is really nice and It's not too expensive yet."

Upstairs is the living room mezzanine level which is kept much tidier and solvent free. There is the main platform bedroom which is situated off that. The space feels very generous and well lit, they have tried various ways of organising it around the work which happens there. Work hours tend to be rigid (optimistically 10am-6pm) but if things are busy, work will go on for as long as it takes.

Separating work time from living time seems flexible here too, however the materials in use mean that the generous size of the unit allows for these separate floating areas.

"What we do is very messy, we used to have a studio upstairs, but it made the live-work balance more tangled and you'd get into bed with faux fur by accident, fluff would get everywhere. It's good to keep it separate so you don't glue your teacup to the table, but then it's still the same giant room. I can go upstairs, I can kind of switch off a little bit and ignore work."

Sofie mentioned that there had been many crossovers and collaborations between herself and her partner. Sofie had done lots of little jobs on motorbikes such as upholstering saddles and relining helmets. She has also worked collaboratively with other artists in the building and in the neighbourhood, leading to lots of cross-disciplinary projects like comic book art and graphic design. "There's definitely a lot of opportunity to collaborate here which is really nice, even on just a really simple level, everyone shares tools and things."

For a crafts person, Hackney Wick is a treasure trove of discarded materials, and with the various bits of industry and yards in the area, there's often a chance of finding something useful. "We find all sorts of things in the bins, people leave lots of wood around, and cardboard, there's an upholstery company around the corner, and as we make lots

of stuff out of foam we tend to rummage through their bins."

Sofie and her partner have both lived in this area for some time and are part of a "little community", although they point out that the area is changing rapidly and it's easy to feel grumpy or "hermitic" about the area becoming busier. I asked whether they have plans to move on: "I'd like to stay for a bit longer, we will be here for the Olympics, so it depends on how that affects the area. It will be a massive hassle to move our things. I'd like to move further east, I might be a bit different because I'm married and I might like a dog and to live in Epping... It just depends on rent going up, and with our work we're not sure what's next... Due to our space requirements, I'd need to find a similar situation - it's just finding the next Hackney Wick... I love the collaborations this place has started, and I feel more settled in our industry now. It's been great starting up here, but now I think it's just getting expensive and trendy.



"WHAT WE DO IS VERY MESSY, WE USED TO HAVE A STUDIO UPSTAIRS, BUT IT MADE THE LIVE-WORK BALANCE MORE TANGLED AND YOU'D GET INTO BED WITH FAUX FUR BY ACCIDENT, FLUFF WOULD GET EVERYWHERE. IT'S GOOD TO KEEP IT SEPARATE SO YOU DON'T GLUE YOUR TEACUP TO THE TABLE, BUT THEN IT'S STILL THE SAME GIANT ROOM. I CAN GO UPSTAIRS, I CAN KIND OF SWITCH OFF A LITTLE BIT AND IGNORE WORK."

CASE STUDY 3. BRITANNIA WORKS

550 SQ FT (APPROX.)
 £27 PER SQ FT (APPROX.)

ONE SIGN PAINTER AND ONE HAIR STYLIST
 AGES 28-30



This is a small live-work unit which is used as a graphic design studio meets hair salon. The sign painter (Nico) and hair stylist (Steph) have been in the area for 4 years - previously in other live-work units separately, sharing with others. The unit is an open space with an enclosed bathroom. Steph has a well-equipped hair dressing area to one side, and directly adjacent, Nico has a design studio space. He also has a “messier” building and making space elsewhere in Fish Island. Day to day, the space is a very calm relaxed environment where local clients visit Steph to have their hair styled, while simultaneously small design meetings are often held with clients around the table. The couple have very deliberately arranged the space so that these different disciplines complement each other. Nico describes their approach to the shared space:

“We didn’t want to have it sectioned off, what I do is very visual, so Steph’s clients come in and enjoy what I do. I’m very solitary when I work so I like to be able to chat and discuss it with Steph’s clients as well, for me it’s great to have interaction with other people, who come in every hour.”

They both consider their professions to be age-old trades, but putting them together in one space is very contemporary and would seem to reflect the spirit of this area, both in terms of creativity and entrepreneurship.

They have learnt to work with each other in partnership over time, and have found that there are benefits in making this domestic/professional relationship work. It has meant for instance that they can enjoy a space which has no walls between their private bedroom space (suspended above) and



the ground floor working space.

“We don’t have a solid divide, that’s because we’re lovers as well as business partners. I think we know where the testing point is through frowning, but it has been a learning curve to live and work as a couple. We have a lot of friends who live and work together, but they aren’t able to have a space that’s as open as ours.”

Another benefit of live-working as a couple may be that it is easier to define rules in the work space; less internal politics compared to some of the larger shared work spaces featured in this report. Both partners had lived and worked within larger shared communal live-work spaces around the area before moving to this smaller unit. They both reflected on the difficulties of sharing space with many different agendas:

“When I lived with friends before, there was a lot of holding your tongue. I had troubles because I was becoming more professional than they were... It is difficult to speak against friends because you’re worried you might offend them, whereas Steph and I work very well, because we both have the same ambition to be professional, and we can then discuss our problems without any internal conflict.”

Although they say that they work more productively in this blurred live work environment, they do both actively seek down time from work. This is especially so for Steph, whose work is contained in the space for the entire day, 6 days a week and any chance to get out for lunch or a stroll is of the utmost importance. They both confess to being workaholics - if they aren’t cutting hair or making something they will be sending emails or doing speculative work to get more business. When they want to switch off, they have their suspended mezzanine bedroom. From the mezzanine, the work space is hidden by the edge of the platform which seems to levitate amongst the roof trusses.

They are strict about their work times, within reason. Steph’s appointments begin around 10

o’clock to leave some personal time in the morning to prepare the space and make sure the dishes are clean. In the evening she may work quite late, but often the last client is a friend who will usually hang out for a while.

From Nico and Steph’s perspective, Hackney Wick has a village atmosphere which is very homely and intimate with neighbours, they don’t have to go very far to socialise with friends. The down side, they admit, is that you can forget about the city out there and become a Hackney Wick hermit. However, like many others they are “proud wick hermits”.

For this couple and many others I have spoken to during this report, Hackney Wick is seen as a quiet spot to settle down and indulge in their passion. In a sense, the area works as a very organic creative business incubator, allowing artists and designer/makers to mature to a point where, like Steph and Nico, one’s living can be made entirely from their studio work. As Nico articulates:

“We think the area should be more professional, and more driven towards establishing a name for yourself, then building yourself up to a point where you can jack in the side line job, to focus on your own personal work, which is what I think everyone should be aspiring to.”

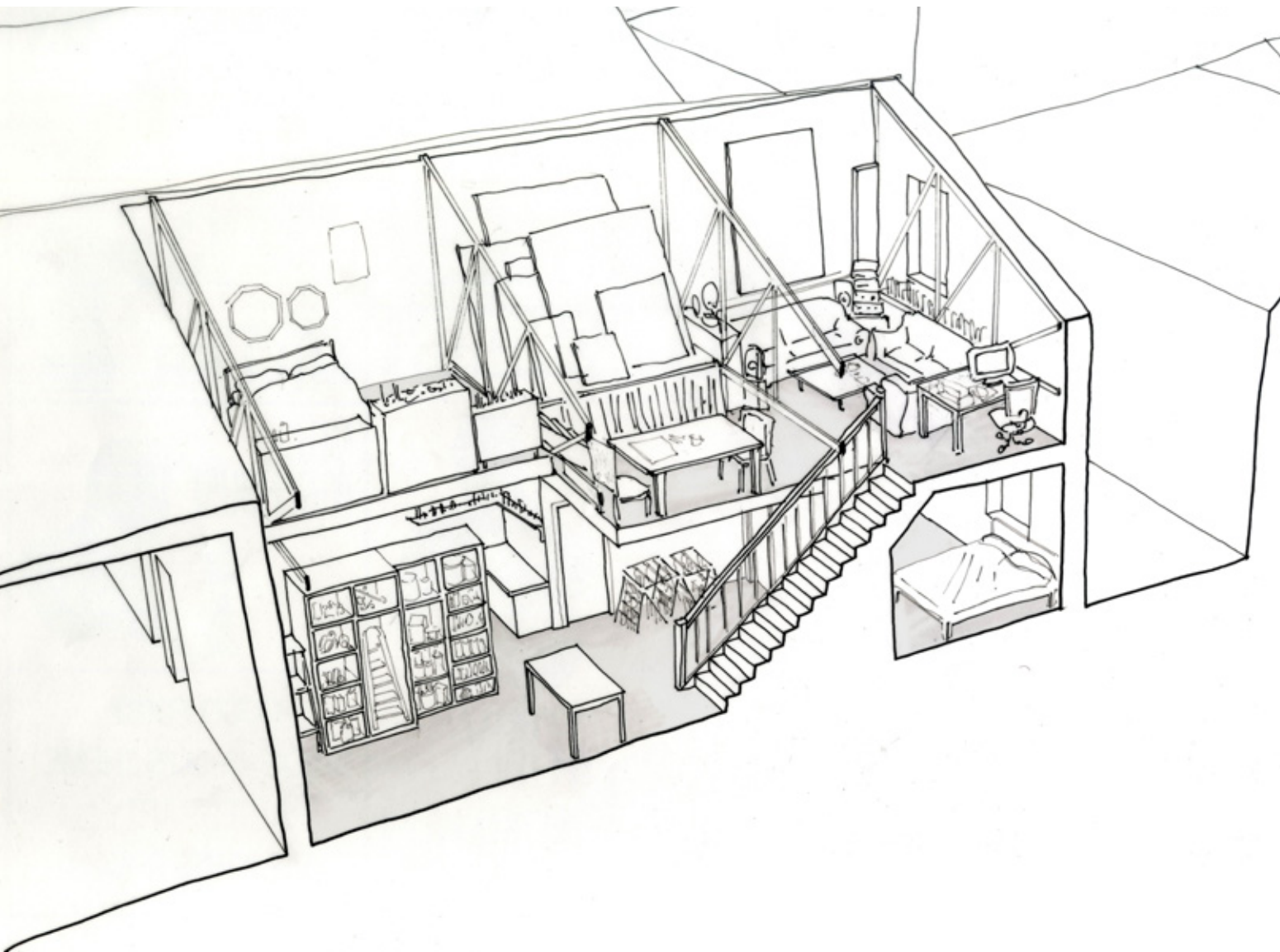
They pointed out that their sense of community is strong as a direct consequence of the intimate shared yards and spaces in around their studio. It is easier to get to know people when you can see them working out in the yards and it’s simpler to identify with one another. They, like many of their neighbours, put in the extra time and effort to keep the yards clean and presentable for visitors.

I asked the couple about their future in the area, whether they saw this arrangement working on a more long-term basis. Nico responded: “I would like to stay here for the indefinite future as a studio, [even if] it would be a scenario where we did have a flat elsewhere.”



“WE THINK THE AREA SHOULD BE MORE PROFESSIONAL, AND MORE DRIVEN TOWARDS ESTABLISHING A NAME FOR YOURSELF, THEN BUILDING YOURSELF UP TO A POINT WHERE YOU CAN JACK IN THE SIDE LINE JOB, TO FOCUS ON YOUR OWN PERSONAL WORK, WHICH IS WHAT I THINK EVERYONE SHOULD BE ASPIRING TO.”

CASE STUDY 4. BRITANNIA WORKS



1080 SQ FT (APPROX.)
£13 PER SQ FT (APPROX.)

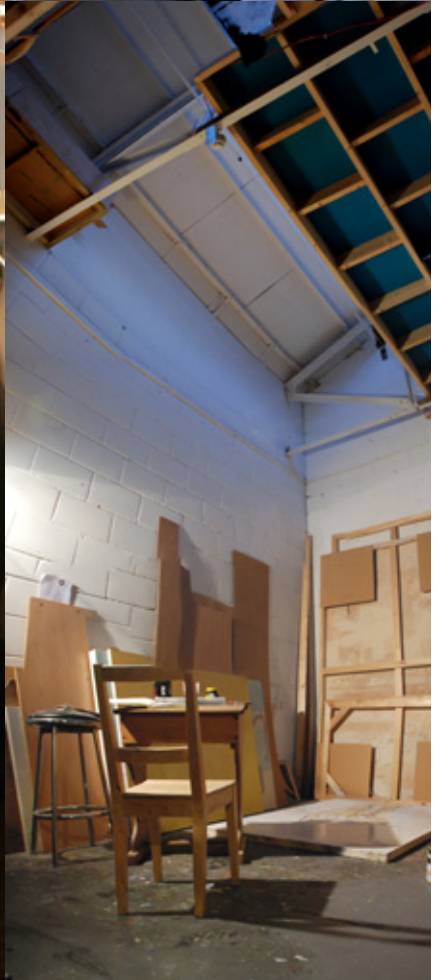
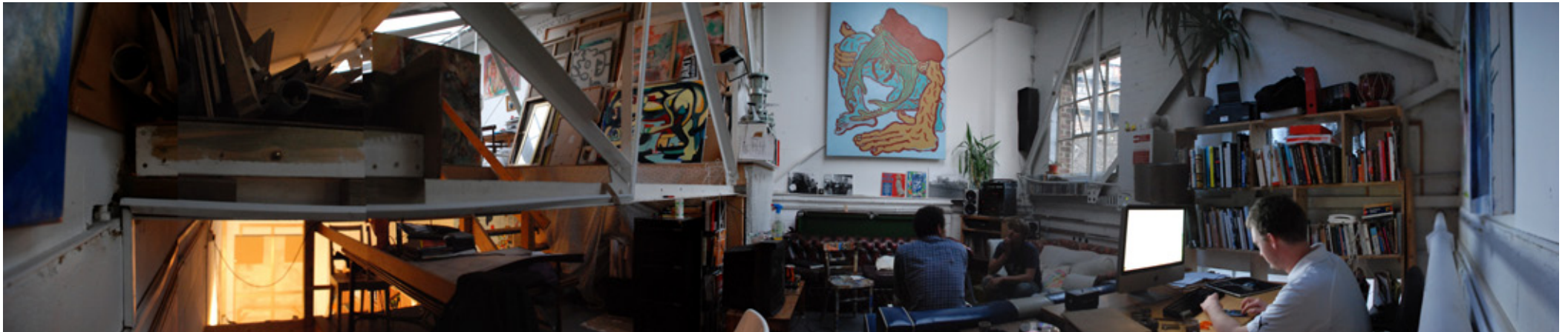
TWO ARTISTS
ONE ART TEACHER
ONE ARCHITECT
AGES 25-28

This is a shared live-work unit, arranged as a painting/design and build project space/design studio and home. There are three bedrooms; one for the painter (Nick), one for his brother (also his project manager) and his girlfriend (artist), and one for a friend (architect).

Nick is a 'Hackney-born' artist, who was attracted to this area around three years ago by its tranquillity and industrial nature. When he first arrived, the streets seemed much less populated, fewer people had moved in and rents were much cheaper than they are now. He had lived in one other live-work unit before the one in this case study.

The unit shares a long internal corridor with the other units in the factory. At ground floor level is the kitchen and work space, which is most often used by Nick to make his large 8ft high paintings. It also serves as a design/build project space as Nick and his architecturally -trained brother also work as contractors, doing building jobs for various clients in London. It's a tall robust space where you can find any tool for the job, although it is only occasionally used as a workshop space, as it can be disruptive.

Upstairs, the environment becomes much more homely amongst the roof trusses. It's a living room meets office space where the two brothers can work on their digital CAD work. There is a desk space for the architect, who although works full time at the office, occasionally uses this desk to work in the evenings. This mezzanine area also serves as a very efficient storage zone for large paintings and bits of frame wood. There is a bedroom which leads on



from this as a separate platform, and the other two bedrooms are found on the ground floor tucked to the rear with large windows into the yard. All bedrooms are lit either by roof lights or windows.

Nick mentions that being able to live and work in this scenario with his brother is important for their collaborative work, and that sharing with other artists has also been very useful: “It’s nice to work when other people are around you doing other things. It’s a bit more fun, it’s not necessarily collaborative, but when everyone’s working on something, it gives a better working atmosphere”

They have modified the space during their occupancy, making better use of it both logistically and financially. For instance, adding an extra extension to the mezzanine floor meant that there could be an extra room, therefore lowering the overall rent.

According to Nick, the neighbourhood has “so much going for it”. It has a strong industrial character with some of the best waterways for walking and cycling. The numerous galleries and cafes popping up over the last few years have provided many an opportunity to collaborate, exhibit and share work. The house opened their studio during the Hackney WickED Festival, which Nick says was useful because “during the festival other people get to see your work who wouldn’t normally, as it’s a fairly insular neighbourhood, usually.”

Nick pointed out that for what he does for a living, the area is incredibly convenient due to the remaining industry. You can find a whole range of places to buy materials, to print, and all within trolley-pushing distance. “Buildbase is really good because I can go and buy loads of plywood and simply wheel it home, there’s no travel or delivery costs involved.”

I asked Nick about how long he planned to stay in the area. He said that rent increases are often arbitrary, and of course a cause of concern. He

also points out that the ecology of a place like this changes very quickly the more it becomes occupied, and that already many artists are beginning to leave due to the rents that have followed demands for warehouse loft living space: “If it suddenly became like another Shoreditch and lost that charm it has, I might move. There are a few new developments which are heading in a direction which I wouldn’t want it to, there’s a nightclub being built, and also I’m uncertain about what the effect of the Olympics might be.”



“IT’S NICE TO WORK WHEN OTHER PEOPLE ARE AROUND YOU DOING OTHER THINGS. IT’S A BIT MORE FUN, IT’S NOT NECESSARILY COLLABORATIVE, BUT WHEN EVERYONE’S WORKING ON SOMETHING, IT GIVES A BETTER WORKING ATMOSPHERE”

CASE STUDY 5. BRITANNIA WORKS

1080 SQ FT (APROX.)
 £16 PER SQ FT (APROX.)

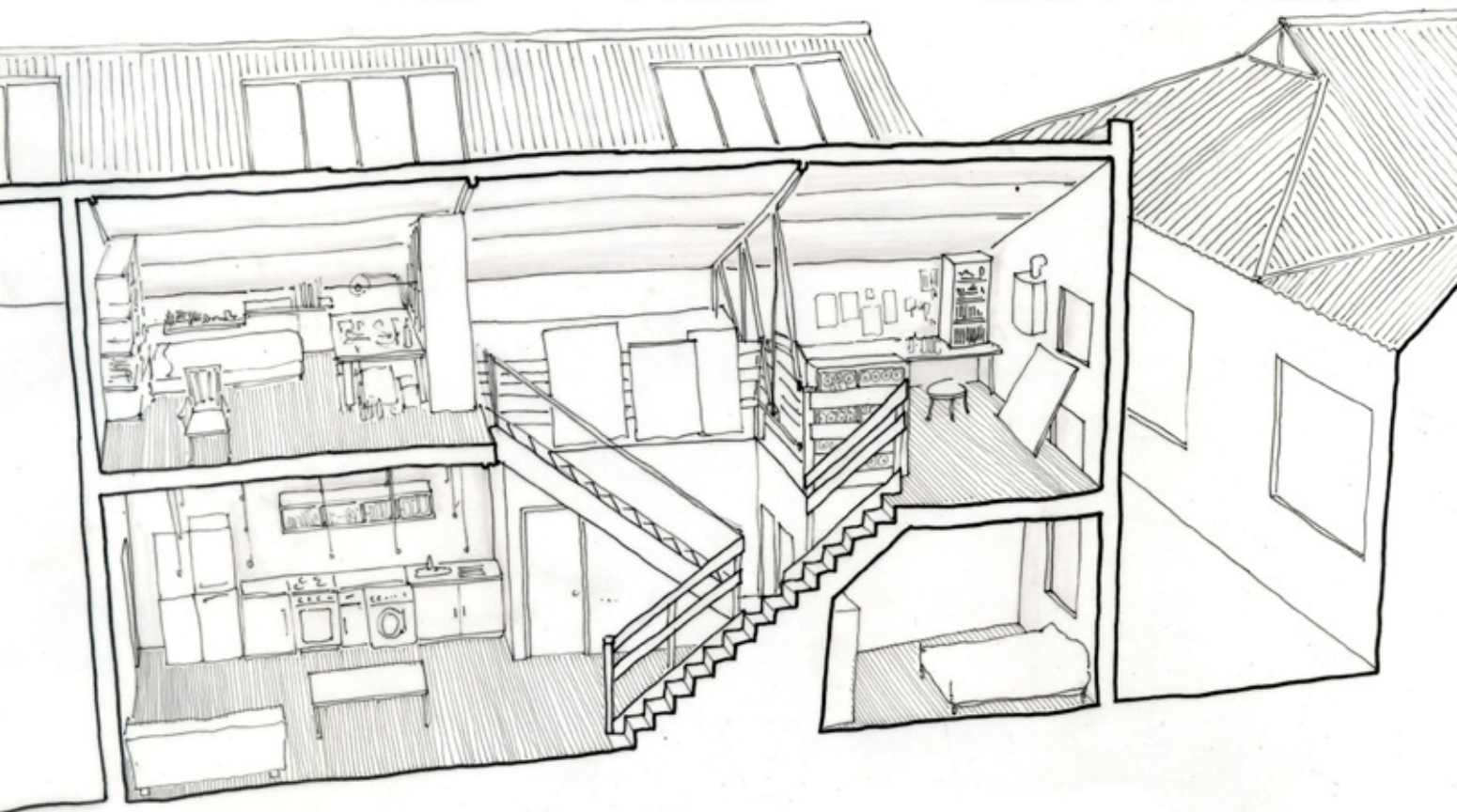
AGES 23-35
ONE STREET ARTIST,
ONE ILLUSTRATION STUDENT,
ONE ARCHITECTURE GRADUATE,
ONE PHOTOGRAPHER

This is a shared live-work unit, home to a group of young artists and students. It sits on the main internal corridor of a large warehouse in Britannia Works.

Ben (street artist), came to this unit over a year ago through a friend. He absolutely loved it because it was ideal for what he needed, and jumped at the chance to move in to a space which was so affordable.

Everybody living here uses the space for their work. Caz (photographer) has set up his own dark room in his bedroom; Emo (illustrator) paints in his room; Joe (Architecture student) works at the table in living room on the ground floor; Ben has an open area up the stairs on the mezzanine small half-sized room. His space is a messier place where he paints his studio based artworks. It has open-able windows to the yard which come in handy when he occasionally uses a spray paint.

The focus of Ben's work is usually out and about on the streets of east London where he makes large murals. The home studio space is an area where he makes his gallery-based work on canvas. Before coming to this unit, he had been living as a property guardian looking after various vacant properties in London. He spent around three years in various properties, sometimes as large as factories and sometimes just ordinary Victorian terraced houses. All this time he has been moving his belongings around with him, many of which are large paintings and other artworks he produced in some of those larger spaces. I wondered if Ben longed for a





separate studio away from home:

“As much as I love having the studio here, I think maybe I would like to have a separate studio space, but that’s not possible because of costs. When I’m out and about working in the street, it’s great because I’m there to paint, whereas when I’m here it’s easier to get distracted.”

Although working from home can be distracting, he also asserts that working as an artist can be very sporadic, and it is sometimes necessary to be close to one’s work. “Because of the nature of what I do, it’s always work. It’s not like I work 9-5 - it’s a continuous cycle.”

Sharing a studio with other friends of similar disciplines has meant that the dwellers have developed trusting relationships with each other in regards to their work. They actively seek one another’s support and advice. “We’re all on a similar wavelength here, we definitely buzz of each other a lot; it’s impossible not to be inspired or influenced by each other.”

Ben mentioned that he hadn’t heard of Hackney Wick before he came here to visit a friend. He describes it as an alternative undiscovered environment away from the more hectic parts of east London he had been working in before. He mentions that the waterways offer great spots to sit out and relax to get away from work. Also the local cafés are nice places to spend time when they can afford it. “I love this area, I love the relaxed nature of it, and even if you don’t know each other, it is its own little bubble almost, it’s so different to anywhere else.”

Although the house did not open its doors for the Hackney WickED Festival, the residents hope to do so in the following years as they produce more work to put on show. The house benefits, like many others, by being bang in the middle of Britannia Works, with creative neighbours either side. On approaching the unit via the communal corridor, it’s like a treasure trove of discarded materials which

they like to take advantage of: “It’s ridiculous what people sometimes throw out in terms of artwork. I’ve found proper solid wooden frames... and a massive light box. If something nice is left in the yard or the communal corridor, you give it a few days, check that there’s no sign, and it’s yours.”

I asked Ben if he planned to stay in the area for much longer: “I have no plans to run away soon, it all depends on how my career pans out. I love it here, not sure I could live here forever, but it depends on the prices too. If the leases were longer you might be able to do something much more special with the space.”

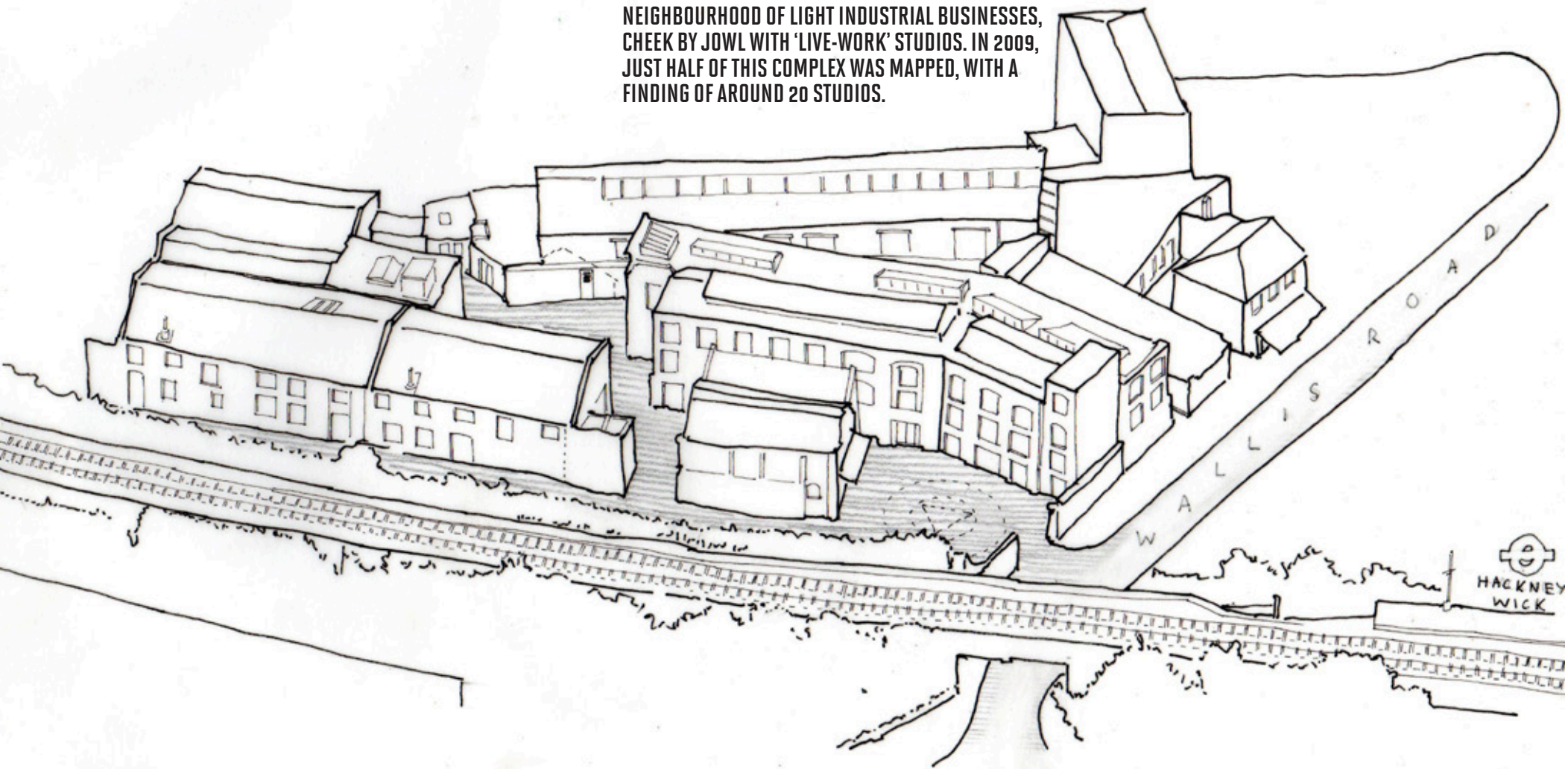


“I HAVE NO PLANS TO RUN AWAY SOON, IT ALL DEPENDS ON HOW MY CAREER PANS OUT. I LOVE IT HERE, NOT SURE I COULD LIVE HERE FOREVER, BUT IT DEPENDS ON THE PRICES TOO. IF THE LEASES WERE LONGER YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO DO SOMETHING MUCH MORE SPECIAL WITH THE SPACE.”

SEE

CASE STUDIES LION WORKS

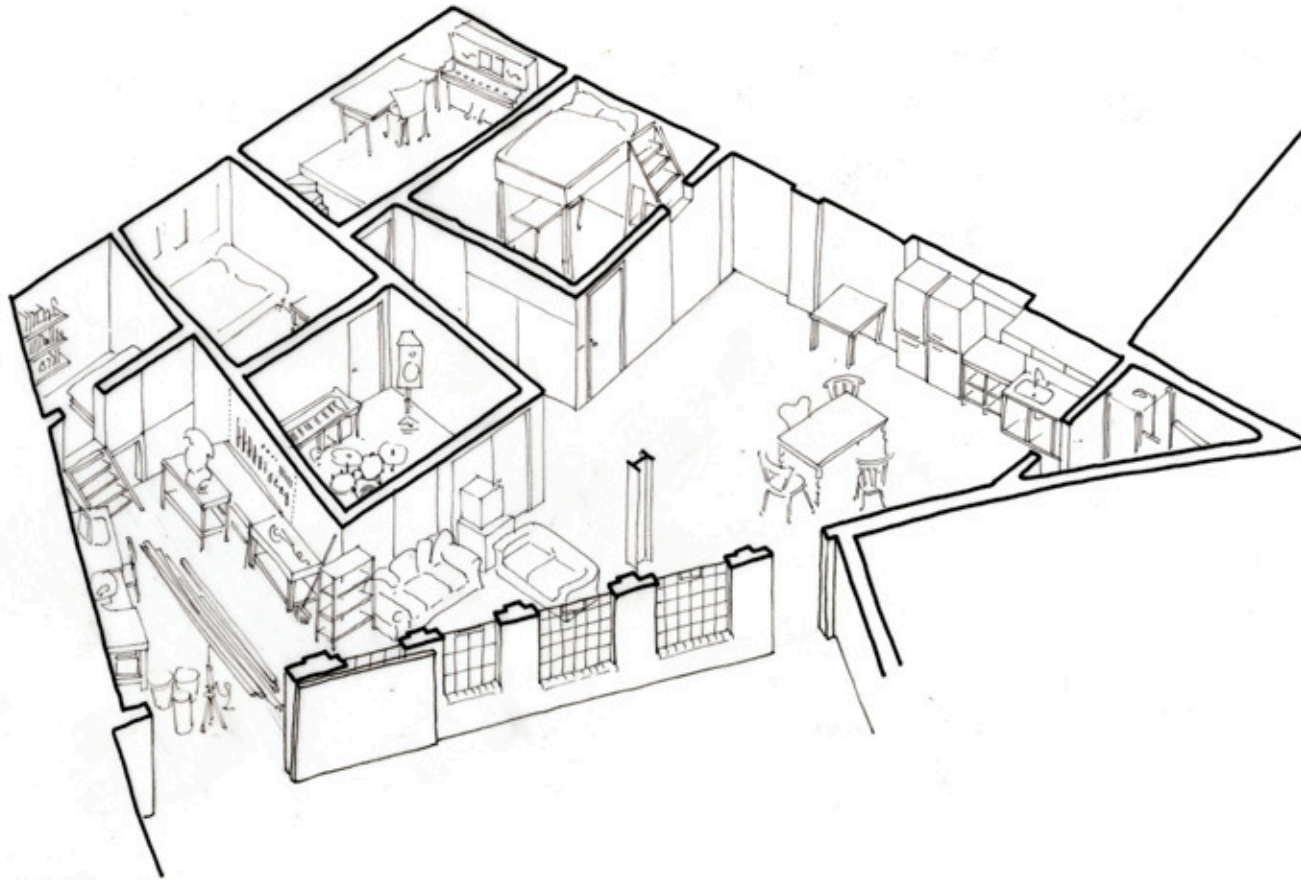
THIS CLUSTER OF FACTORIES FALL WITHIN AN AREA WHICH AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY, WAS A HOT BED OF INNOVATION, JUST METERS AWAY FROM WHERE THE FIRST SYNTHETIC PLASTICS WERE INVENTED, AS WELL AS THE AREA WHERE THE TERM 'DRY CLEANING' WAS BEING COINED. THESE BUILDINGS WERE PART OF THAT INNOVATIVE DRY CLEANING AND CONTRACT LAUNDERING INDUSTRY. TODAY, THIS MELANGE OF YARDS & BUILDINGS IS A MIXED-USE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF LIGHT INDUSTRIAL BUSINESSES, CHEEK BY JOWL WITH 'LIVE-WORK' STUDIOS. IN 2009, JUST HALF OF THIS COMPLEX WAS MAPPED, WITH A FINDING OF AROUND 20 STUDIOS.



CASE STUDY 1. LION WORKS

1,600 SQ FT (APROX.)
 £11 PER SQ FT (APROX.)

ONE SCULPTOR
 ONE FILM MAKER
 ONE MUSICIAN
 ONE ADVERTISER
 AGES 24-29



The residents came here two and a half years ago. “We were interested in getting a building like this because I needed a sculpture studio, and another person is in a band so they needed somewhere to rehearse. We liked the size and the rent was good, and we were also able to make the modifications we needed. It is a very flexible arrangement.”

The sculptor (Luke) had a personal interest in the area because of some of its historical and industrial characteristics: “Down the road, there is the place where the first synthetic plastics were made, which really excited me, because I get very nerdy about plastics.”

Luke makes his living from a combination of selling sculptures, doing fabrication work for others, as well as private teaching of the technical aspects of mould making. Luke uses the workshop space, where he has over time collected a rich selection of tools and equipment. The band play in the rehearsal room, which is insulated enough to not disturb neighbours in the adjoining buildings, although it can be heard within the unit. However, as Luke points out: “In general it doesn’t pose much of an issue. It’s not that bothersome, and they’re not all that loud in there.”

The space has also worked well as an area for providing tuition: “I also use the space for teaching. I’ve had a lot of very different people come in here who are interested in mould-making... which is something you don’t seem to get at BA level in Education... People leave those programmes



wanting to physically make something... but that physical aspect of actually resolving the job is something they are lacking, so I enjoy talking people through that technical process.”

For those in the house who are working mainly on laptops, there are less space concerns; they predominantly work from their bedrooms or in the open living space. The spaces are “softly divided” as Luke puts it. He often spends most of the day in the workshop with the shutter door opened: “It’s really pleasant because sometimes people would stop by, you could finish work and put on the barbecue in the yard, which is one of the great things about the neighbourhood, there’s so many people that you know here.”

The yard is a handy place to do some of the occasional spraying, and the more noxious plastics like polyester resins and fiberglass are handled there.

In terms of live-work separation, Luke argues that it is sometimes important for an artist to “obsessively” stay engaged with work as long as possible: “I like being in the work atmosphere all the time. Even when I have finished something for the day, I like to be around it, so that you can keep thinking and going back and making changes.”

There is a strong work atmosphere in this house, but Luke admits that there is a need to occasionally break free of work and spend time with one another. I asked whether the house really have any “down time”: “You get that when someone says they’re going to make dinner for everyone tonight, or you have a few beers or sit down and play a game of cards. I enjoy that. Although I obsessively want to always be around the work, you do need to get away from that at times and it’s good for the work too.”

There have been no notable collaborations in the house on a direct level, although the residents do talk about their work and have informal conversations. Luke mentions that for a graduate, it is important to be able to continue that critical discussion with others about the progress of your work.

Sharing and swapping of equipment and tools is a very valuable asset to this live-work arrangement. In this case, tools for making are swapped for video capture tools for documenting: “That’s really handy because for example, if you make a sculpture that moves, you need to document and video it, and I don’t know anything about video”

I asked Luke if they had a particular set of criteria when looking to fill a free room when one becomes available. He stressed that there are many people looking to move into Hackney Wick with its lower rents, not for creative production but for its reputation for warehouse parties: “We want people who are engaged to the same level as everyone here. We don’t want people who think that it’s just a ‘cool’ neighbourhood, who think it’s just a good place to have parties.”

Luke has plans to start a new sculpture- dedicated live-work studio with another friend elsewhere in London. This studio will be re arranged to better suite music and video production thereafter.



“WE WERE INTERESTED IN GETTING A BUILDING LIKE THIS BECAUSE I NEEDED A SCULPTURE STUDIO, AND ANOTHER PERSON IS IN A BAND SO THEY NEEDED SOMEWHERE TO REHEARSE. WE LIKED THE SIZE AND THE RENT WAS GOOD, AND WE WERE ALSO ABLE TO MAKE THE MODIFICATIONS WE NEEDED. IT IS A VERY FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENT.”

CASE STUDY 2. LION WORKS

1800 SQ FT (APROX.)
 £13 PER SQ FT (APROX.)

**ONE PHOTOGRAPHER
 ONE FINE ARTIST
 ONE CARPET DESIGNER
 ONE FILM EDITOR
 ONE FASHION BOUTIQUE CREATIVE DIRECTOR
 & ONE CAT
 AGES 21-25**

This is a live-work unit based within the Lion Works building complex adjacent to the Overground railway tracks approaching Hackney Wick Station. These buildings were originally built for the prevalent dry cleaning industry in Hackney Wick in the early 20th century.

The unit is tucked away at the end of a courtyard shared with other various studios and businesses. It is an open plan space with five bedrooms arranged to one side with a mezzanine studio above. The main space is a kitchen/dining/living room, but during the day the furniture is moved aside, and used as a photography studio.

The housemates have been here since 2009, and it has since seen many changes in its live-work use; originally divided into studios for painting and sculpture, then used as a large textile studio, and an editing suite. Luke (Artist) and Sarah (photographer), are in the process of re-arranging the space to fit their evolving work rituals. The studios which were here when the previous housemates moved in were either too big or too small; too small for a photography studio, and too big to just have a desk space. It was arranged in a way which was more inclined towards a work environment rather than a home.

Gradually, the partitions were removed and smaller bedrooms were built to one side, it is a continuous project, where the house has become more populated and homely. Now, the space is used



prominently in the day time by Sarah and Yun as a photography studio, Luke takes over the space every now and then, filling the whole warehouse with costumes, and 'general mess' as he put it. "I do the smaller things in my room, but when I do the bigger stuff, like when I have a party and I've got to make 13 costumes in a week, I bring in a huge kit to set up in the main space, and I just get on with it"

He is in the process of organising the mezzanine studio, arranging it so that all housemates can have a desk space. Much of Luke's work involves arranging events for a popular live music venue in Hackney (Passing Clouds), which has influenced his ambition with this home live-work space. He and the house intend to hold small events, such as film screenings and performances; taking advantage of their far reaching network of proactive friends. The whole house is supportive about bring together their work connections to do projects collaboratively, particularly for events."These spaces are great opportunities to test ideas, and we have this big group of people who will help us. We want to get more people involved and for it to be more of a social working space."

The house is certainly a very sociable one, I first visited the unit one evening when most of the housemates were around, sitting at the kitchen table chatting, surrounded by a melange of ad-hoc furniture mixed with a collection of curious props and paraphernalia. Above this space, a web of 100 warm glowing fairy lights is hung from the roof trusses. Luke described this house as a homely 'bubble' because it sits between mainly business units and workshops. It makes this unit feel unexpected and secretive. There are advantages and draw backs to 'invading' an industrial complex like this. "Directly around us we have lots of businesses and work only artists' studios; apart from a nearby alley way of other live work units, this unit is the only live work unit here. It affects us that the mirror makers are next door, because we can't use that

courtyard in any residential manner... I'd love to have some plants and maybe a few chairs there at the bottom of the stairs... I once left my barbeque outside our front door and it was just thrown away...I get the feeling that they're not happy about the way the area is changing, they don't understand why we live here, they probably think we're squatters.

On the up side, there are many useful free materials to be found in the yard because of these industrial neighbours, the furniture makers next door have provided for good off cuts of timber and the odd bit of furniture in the house.

There is a tension and uncertainty in this group of buildings, there are signs of more commercial units being converted to make way for smaller parcelled up residential units which are often leased at higher rates. It is expected that this pocket of buildings will change quickly over the coming years; that the present businesses will gradually move on, but it is unknown who will take their place.

The residents in this particular unit fortunately have a secure 3 year fixed lease and are confident that they will stay here until that runs out, Luke is particularly attached to the area as well of the house: "For as long as I'm in London I'd want to be around here, because it's so creative, I'd love to be here until I bought something... I can't see myself moving back into a normal house"

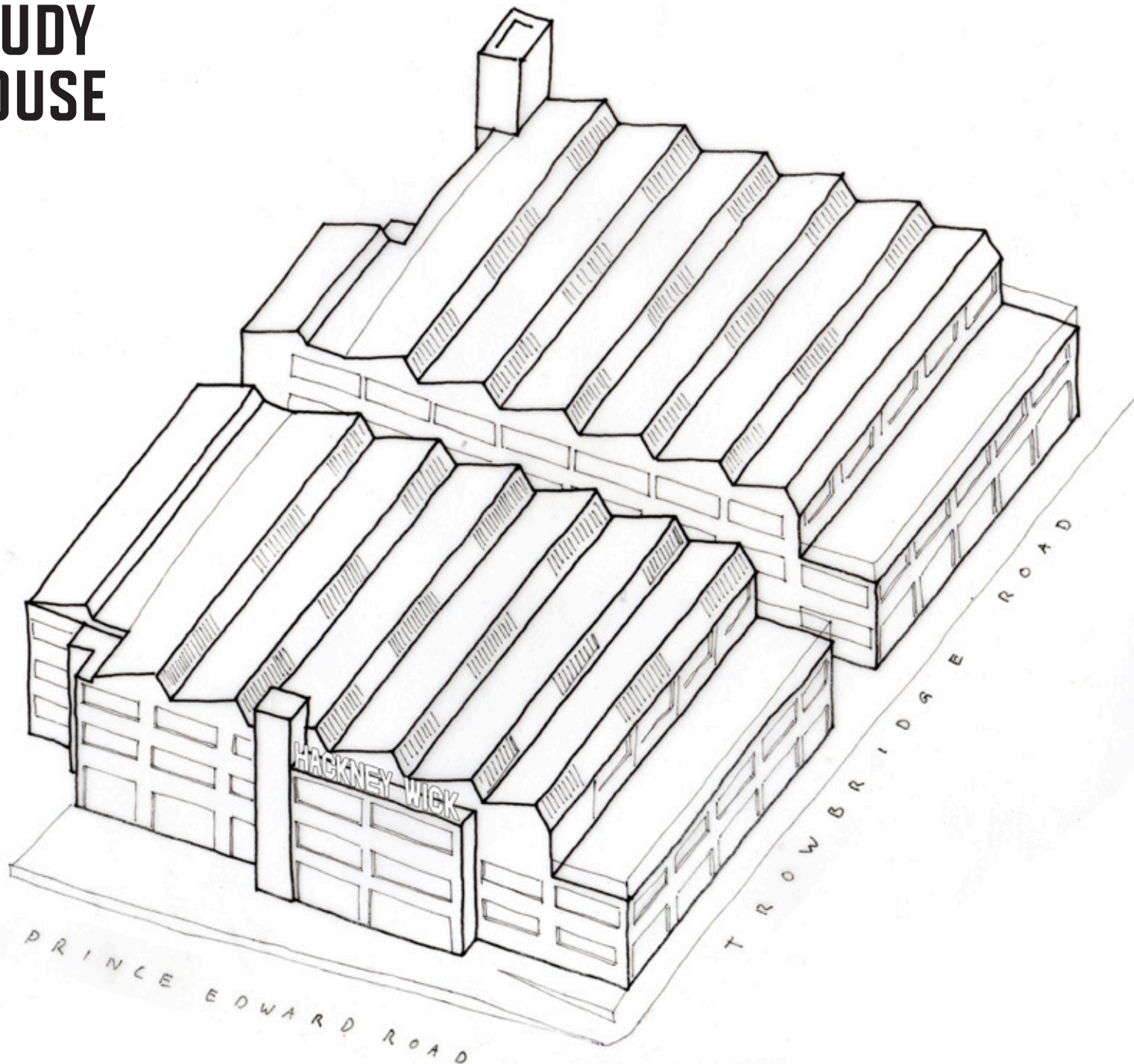


"THESE SPACES ARE GREAT OPPORTUNITIES TO TEST IDEAS, AND WE HAVE THIS BIG GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO WILL HELP US. WE WANT TO GET MORE PEOPLE INVOLVED AND FOR IT TO BE MORE OF A SOCIAL WORKING SPACE."

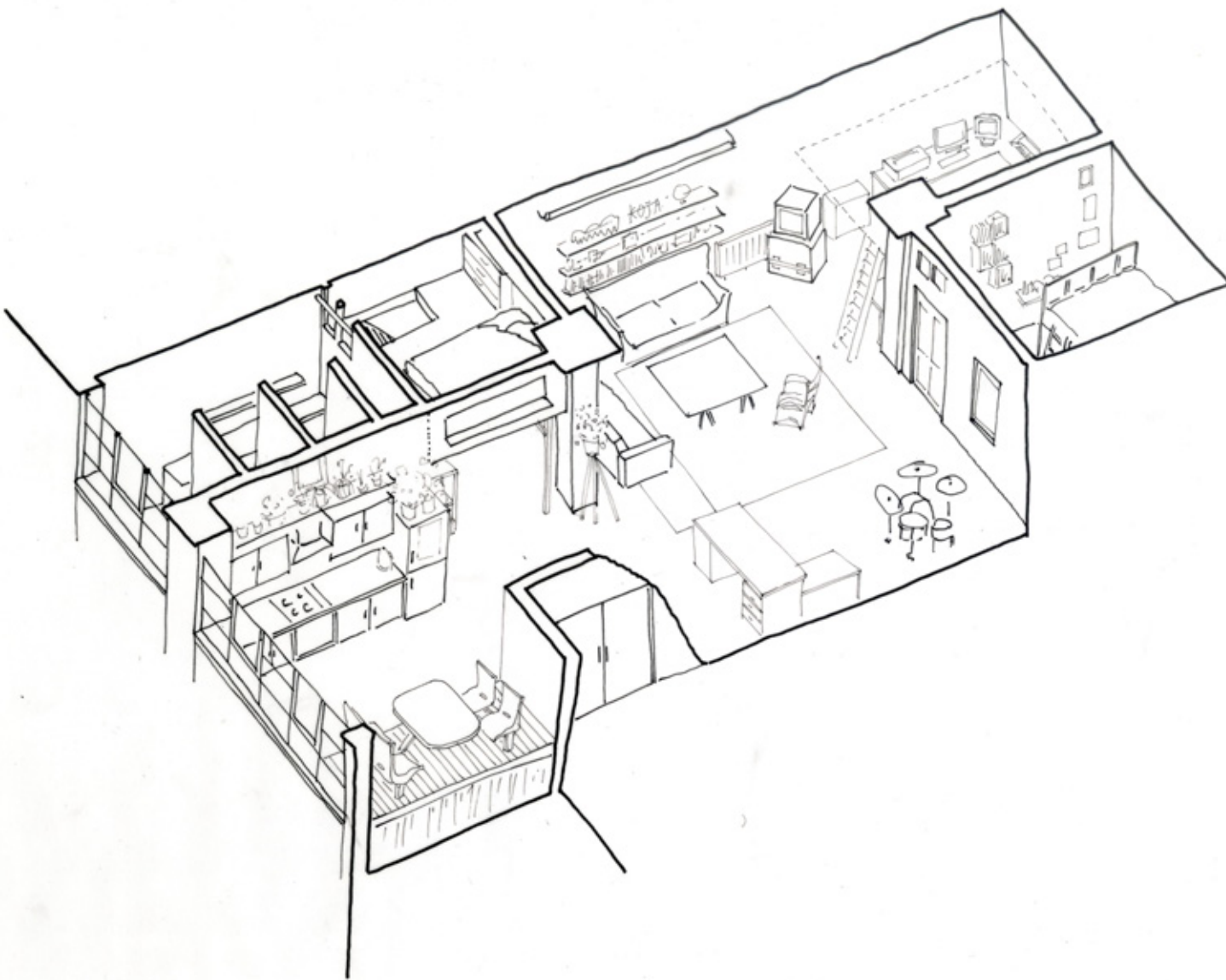
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CASE STUDY OSLO HOUSE

OSLO HOUSE SITS AT THE HEART OF THE HACKNEY WICK CONSERVATION AREA AS A BUILDING OF 'TOWNSCAPE MERIT' THE FACTORY IS MADE UP OF TWO WINGS (EAST & WEST), WHICH WERE ORIGINALLY BUILT IN THE MID-FIFTIES, AS WHAT IS THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN A DETAILED PRINTING WORKS FOR WALLPAPER OR OTHER VARIOUS TEXTILES. IT IS NOW FULLY OCCUPIED WITH LIVE-WORK STUDIOS AND A MIXTURE OF SHOPS, CAFÉS AND GALLERIES LINING THE GROUND FLOOR FRONTAGES. IN 2009, AROUND ONE HUNDRED 'LIVE-WORK' STUDIOS WERE MAPPED.



CASE STUDY 1. OSLO HOUSE



1090 SQ FT (APROX.)
 €14 PER SQ FT (APROX.)

**TWO FILM DIRECTORS,
 ONE CAMERAMAN
 ONE DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
 AGES 34-42**

This is a production studio meets shared home; it is shared by two film directors, a photographer and a director of photography. They moved to this unit around seven years ago, seeking work space. It is based in Oslo House, a mid-20th century warehouse; a building of townscape merit within the conservation area. It is thought to have been originally built for the production of wallpaper and textiles.

On a normal day, it seems like a very ordinary shared flat. The unit is used as a home but when work demands it, the space is used as a media production facility where films, advertisements and animations are directed and shot.

The unit is a deep 1000sq ft plan space with windows lining its shortest edge. For the most part it is a deep, cavernous space with the available light being used in a very well planned kitchen and living space; the bathroom serves as darkroom, complete with enlarger and shelves full of photographic chemicals. Bedrooms have been built as small mezzanine tree house style private spaces tucked to the edges of the main space. The central area is a mixture of work desks and various other furniture, which can be moved around. There is a green screen which can be pulled down, and, as I was informed, on one occasion 8,000 watts of light were brought into the main space for filming.

The photographer tends to use the darkroom in the evening to make prints and he also uses the small office under the mezzanine for digital work. The film directors and DOP will often use the central



area as an open project space, where they can build walls, set up props, lighting and effects. The space is often used by friends in need of space to shoot projects too. The film makers are often working on pitches, which means that the space is often an environment where ideas are prototyped and tested, with tools, props and models all taken from the drawers. The house is littered with paraphernalia related to the various types of work carried out here over the years.

The space is hard and robust, punctuated by concrete columns which flare out to the ceiling which, at a height of 3.5m, leave a generous space for working. Being on the first floor, the deep plan building means that natural light is scarce – which for these group of filmmakers and photographers, is a plus. Photographer Antonio said: “We don’t have too much light, but for me it’s much better, you can manage photography better in terms of controlling the lights, it’s very easy to cover the windows. The layout is perfect for shooting most things, it is just wide enough, we have everything we need, we usually don’t need to go anywhere else to work, we can build everything in here.”

It’s clear that it takes good personal relationships to creatively share this kind of space. When new people are needed to move in, which often happens temporarily as the film directors occasionally work abroad, they put out ads much like in any other normal house. The selection criteria are that they must love music, photography and movies - as well as being animal lovers (they have pet rats).

“We are friends who respect each other; we talk about everything, so we respect what we have to do in our life. The quality of life here is very high, I never expected such an experience in London. If I ever have to leave this place, there will be a massive problem.”

The unit is a deliberate blur of home and work, with not too much concern for separating living and working. Antonio asserts that separating from work

is not a problem: “It’s who we are. In the end there’s no difference, sometimes if we are watching a movie, we might suddenly stop because the movie is giving us an idea, it might be the lighting or the camera movements. Maybe people coming here to stay from outside find this way of life odd. But people who come here know what happens in Hackney Wick and they do expect that.”

Housemates do have their favourite parts of the house in terms of quality of living space, notably the kitchen and bathroom spaces which all have big windows: “The kitchen and the toilet are the best parts, it’s like going to another world, that’s probably the line that separates the two parts (living and working). If you want to get distracted you can go over there and spend some time with the rats. You cook, you eat, then straight to the toilet, you don’t have to pass through the working space.”

The unit shares a wide corridor with the neighbours on the same floor. Here they have a ping-pong table which Antonio tells me has been a great way of meeting other people. Antonio says that it’s an extended community which spans much further than Oslo House. There are connections spanning over to Fish Island, where the housemates often go to private movie nights on Thursdays, and there are also events which are arranged on the Hackney Marshes.

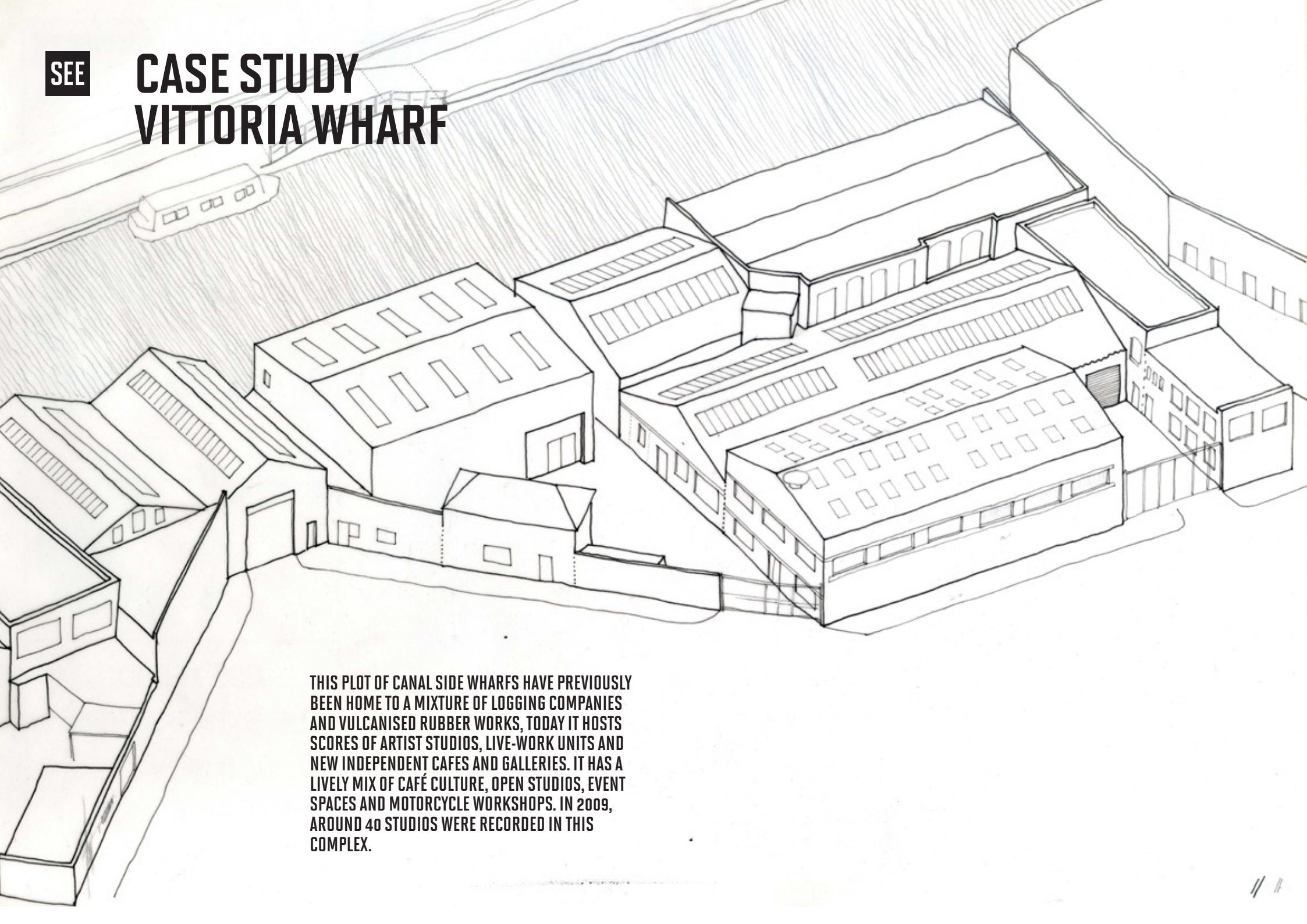
The housemates say that their work will most likely dictate what will happen in the future. Antonio stresses that they are very attached to the area, and would not wish to leave in the foreseeable future.



“WE ARE FRIENDS WHO RESPECT EACH OTHER; WE TALK ABOUT EVERYTHING, SO WE RESPECT WHAT WE HAVE TO DO IN OUR LIFE. THE QUALITY OF LIFE HERE IS VERY HIGH, I NEVER EXPECTED SUCH AN EXPERIENCE IN LONDON. IF I EVER HAVE TO LEAVE THIS PLACE, THERE WILL BE A MASSIVE PROBLEM.”

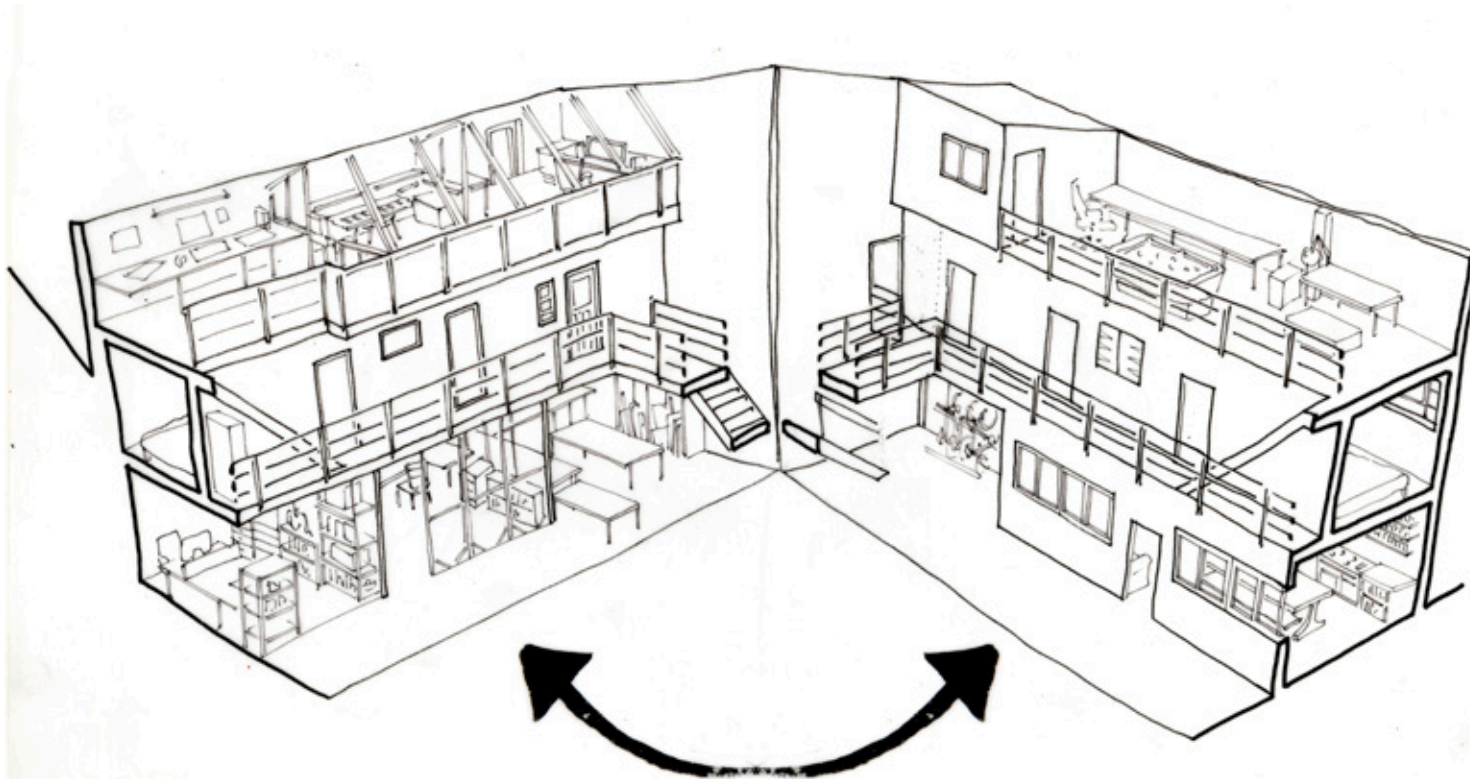
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CASE STUDY VITTORIA WHARF



THIS PLOT OF CANAL SIDE WHARFS HAVE PREVIOUSLY BEEN HOME TO A MIXTURE OF LOGGING COMPANIES AND VULCANISED RUBBER WORKS, TODAY IT HOSTS SCORES OF ARTIST STUDIOS, LIVE-WORK UNITS AND NEW INDEPENDENT CAFES AND GALLERIES. IT HAS A LIVELY MIX OF CAFÉ CULTURE, OPEN STUDIOS, EVENT SPACES AND MOTORCYCLE WORKSHOPS. IN 2009, AROUND 40 STUDIOS WERE RECORDED IN THIS COMPLEX.

CASE STUDY 1. VITTORIA WHARF



2,691 SQ FT (APROX.)
 €15 PER SQ FT (APROX.)

ONE PUPPETEER
 ONE HOMEWARE DESIGNER
 ONE SOUND ENGINEER
 ONE ANIMATOR
 ONE COMPOSER
 ONE SCULPTOR
 ONE FILM PRODUCER
 ONE PHOTOGRAPHER
 ONE ILLUSTRATOR
 AGES 25-37

his live-work unit is arranged much like a sandwich: all the private living quarters are on the middle floor, the dirtier workshop spaces are on the ground floor level with a divided communal living and kitchen space, and the more digital work spaces are on the top level.

The house is unique in that everybody is allocated a clearly defined studio space, as well as access to the shared project space. It's a generous model with many of the housemates making their full income from the work they do within the unit. Work is certainly the main agenda here. During the day the space is calm but very active with the occasional sound of grinding metal and light music.

Within this work environment, many of the housemates have taken their first steps to starting independent businesses. The designer (Haidée) runs her homeware business from her studio on the ground floor. She informed me that from its conception, this communal live work unit had a strong agenda around enabling creative practice at a professional level.

"It was set up so people could afford to have a studio, and be able to do whatever creative



endeavour they wanted to do. When we advertise a room, we do specify that people absolutely have to need a studio space; we won't consider people who don't need a studio."

On the ground floor, the open project space may be used by any housemate when needed, although it is often dominated by those working with heavier materials such as ceramics, who need quick access to the front doors and the sink.

The unit as a whole feels very professional; many housemates have interns and clients coming in and out, as well as those here for the desk spaces, which are charged at a rate much lower than the bedrooms. It's also a very interdisciplinary house. There have been some collaborations, and as Haidée points out, having people actively working in the space makes it an inspiring environment, with many skill shares going on.

Domestically, the house is run like a tight ship. Every dinner time a housemate is elected to cook for the entire house. There is a sign up list for each day, where each housemate can write what they will cook on which day. They all make an effort to eat together, with rules against watching television at dinnertime. This is all funded by a weekly "kitty" of money paid by each housemate for food and various utilities. Haidée stresses the importance of being involved in the warehouse community, and the willingness to cook for each other is an important criterion for someone to join the unit. "You don't have to be an amazing cook, just willing to do it once a week. There is even a little healthy competition... Of course I am the best!"

On the down side for the housemates, once every seven weeks there is what they call the "shit week" where one person has the duty of cleaning both bathrooms and taking care of the weekly food order.

The allocated studio space system means that living and working is efficiently separated, and for the housemates this is crucial. Like many others, Haidée mentioned she had lived before in other

houses in London where one is often left to work in a bedroom. This, she said, can have a negative effect on your health and the work you produce. "I do work really hard, but if you don't give yourself a break, you're just not as productive. You need to be able to escape your work a little bit, so in my bedroom I have no work at all, not even design books. It's my little haven."

Vittoria Wharf is a neighbourly factory complex, where often neighbours from the yard are invited to come and eat together. Occasionally, they may also even bring their sofas next door for movie nights. There is a Facebook group in the yard which gets used to quickly share information, and also to discuss issues which affect those living and working in the immediate vicinity.

The downside to this sort of warehouse space include the common issues in these old industrial buildings, mainly bad heating and poor soundproofing. Some of the neighbours in the adjoining buildings can often be quite loud because of the types of work they do, which include big events with loud music.

I asked Haidée what she thought about the future of Hackney Wick and how long they imagined being here: "What we've got here potentially is going to be some of the best years of our lives. We're having an amazing time, we're so lucky to be here and have this space. Most of us would like to be here for a long time."



"I DO WORK REALLY HARD, BUT IF YOU DON'T GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK, YOU'RE JUST NOT AS PRODUCTIVE. YOU NEED TO BE ABLE TO ESCAPE YOUR WORK A LITTLE BIT, SO IN MY BEDROOM I HAVE NO WORK AT ALL, NOT EVEN DESIGN BOOKS. IT'S MY LITTLE HAVEN."



TEXT AND DRAWINGS
RICHARD BROWN

PHOTOGRAPHY
OLA KANZCURA

DESIGN & PUBLISHER
SEE STUDIO
13 PRINCE EDWARD ROAD
HACKNEY WICK, LONDON, E9 5LX

WWW.SEESTUDIO.COM

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