

# CREATIVE FACTORIES

## HACKNEY WICK AND FISH ISLAND

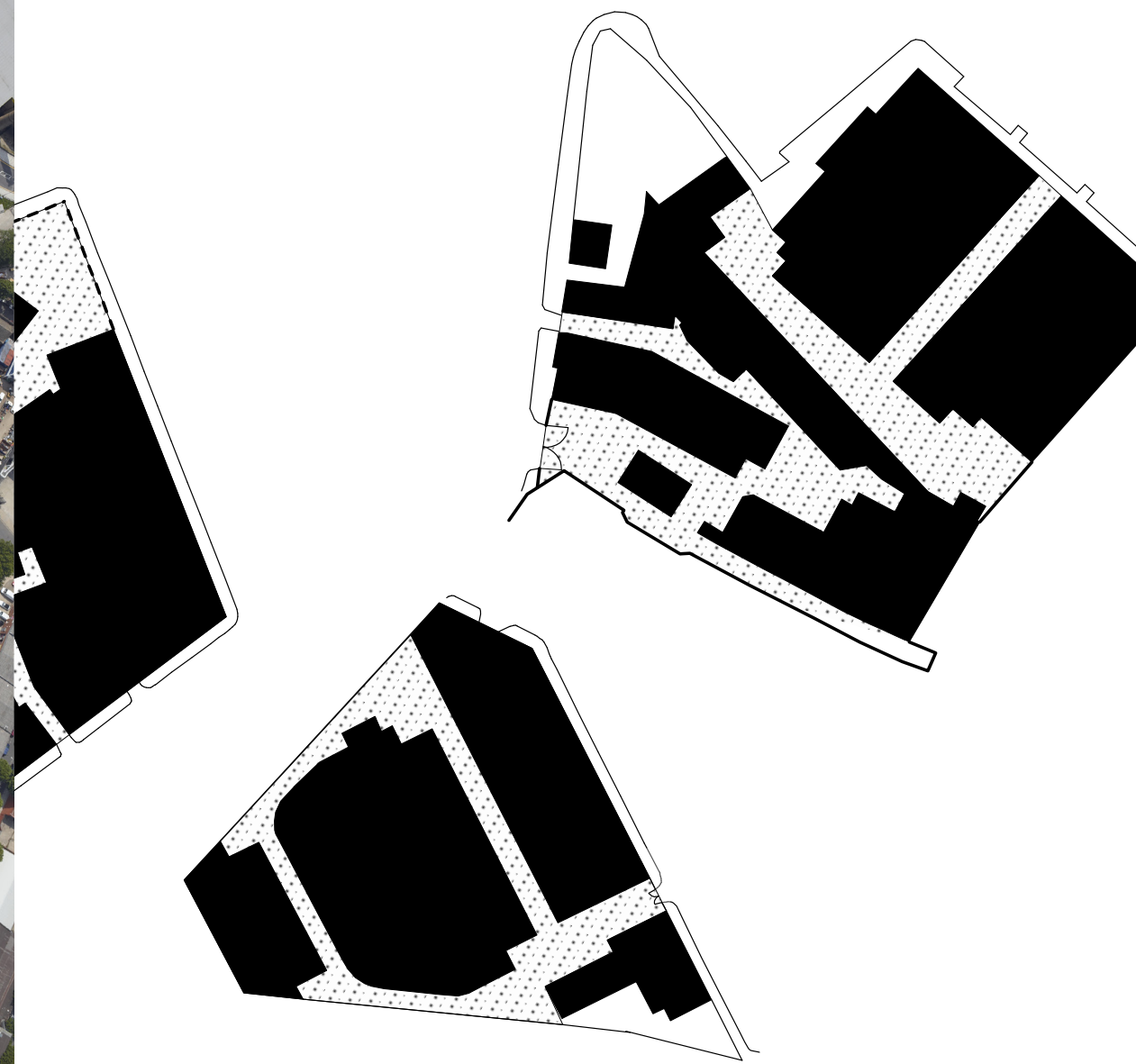
RICHARD BROWN



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**RESEARCH AND TEXT**

Richard Brown

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

Richard Brown  
Daren Ellis  
Ola Kanczura

**COVER**

Giles Price

**EDITING**

Isaac Marrero-Guillamon  
Sara Custer

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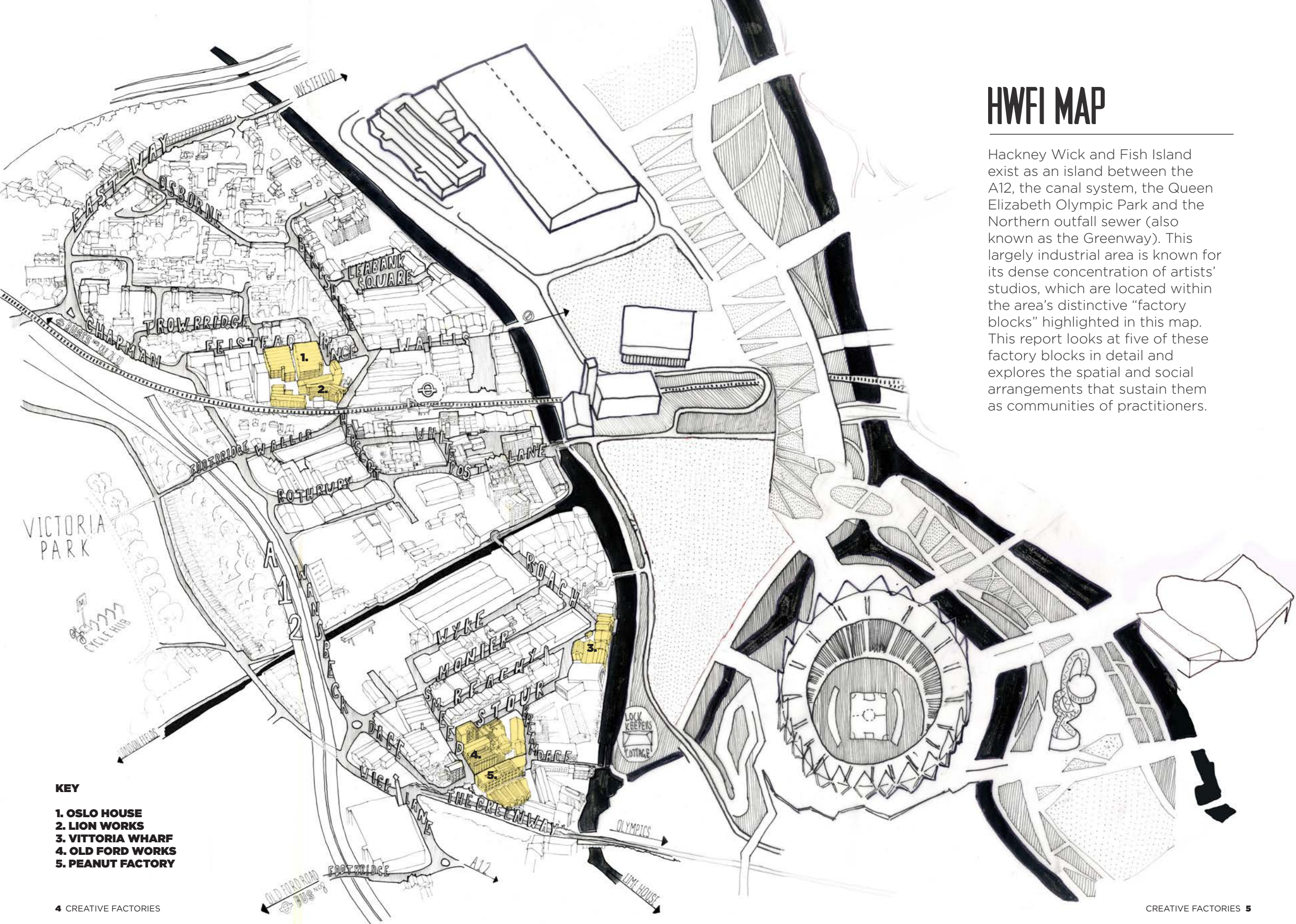
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# HWFI MAP

Hackney Wick and Fish Island exist as an island between the A12, the canal system, the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and the Northern outfall sewer (also known as the Greenway). This largely industrial area is known for its dense concentration of artists' studios, which are located within the area's distinctive "factory blocks" highlighted in this map. This report looks at five of these factory blocks in detail and explores the spatial and social arrangements that sustain them as communities of practitioners.



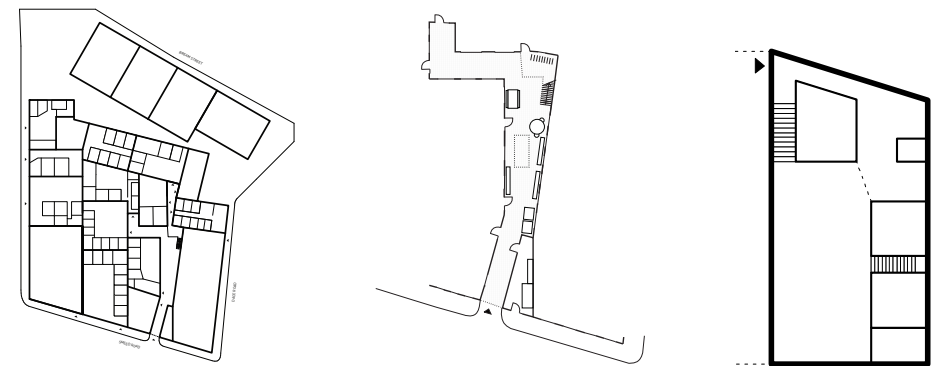
## KEY

- 1. OSLO HOUSE
- 2. LION WORKS
- 3. VITTORIA WHARF
- 4. OLD FORD WORKS
- 5. PEANUT FACTORY



# DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

Generously proportioned affordable workspace is the overriding characteristic of the thriving studio culture in Hackney Wick and Fish Island. Looking closer, Europe's densest concentration of artists' studios relies on a series of specific spatial and social underpinnings. This report distinguishes three scales:



## 1. The Factory Complex

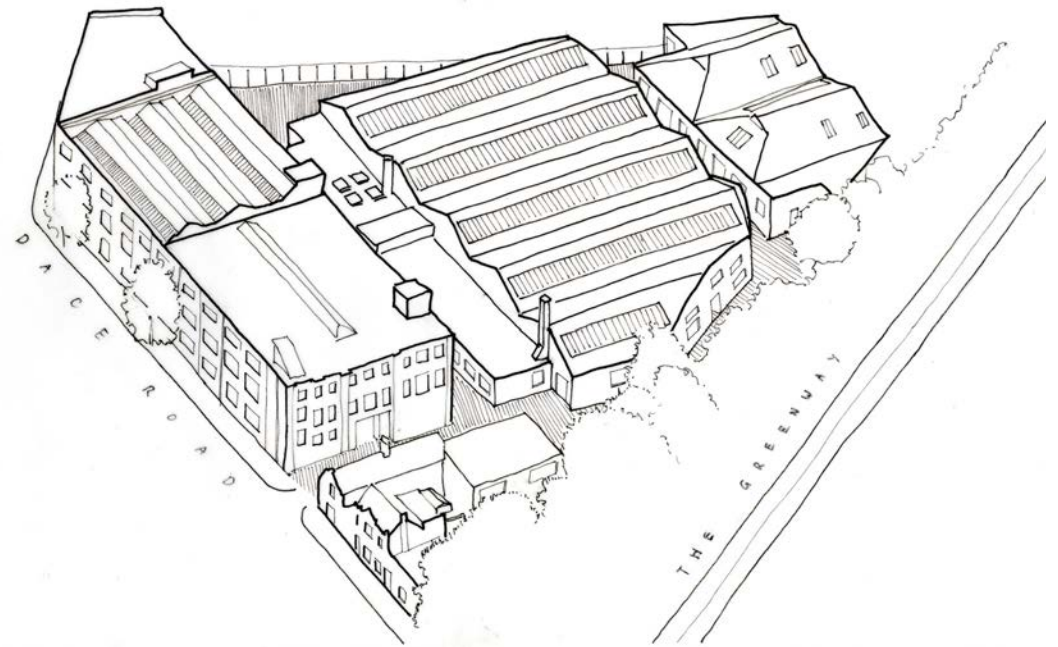
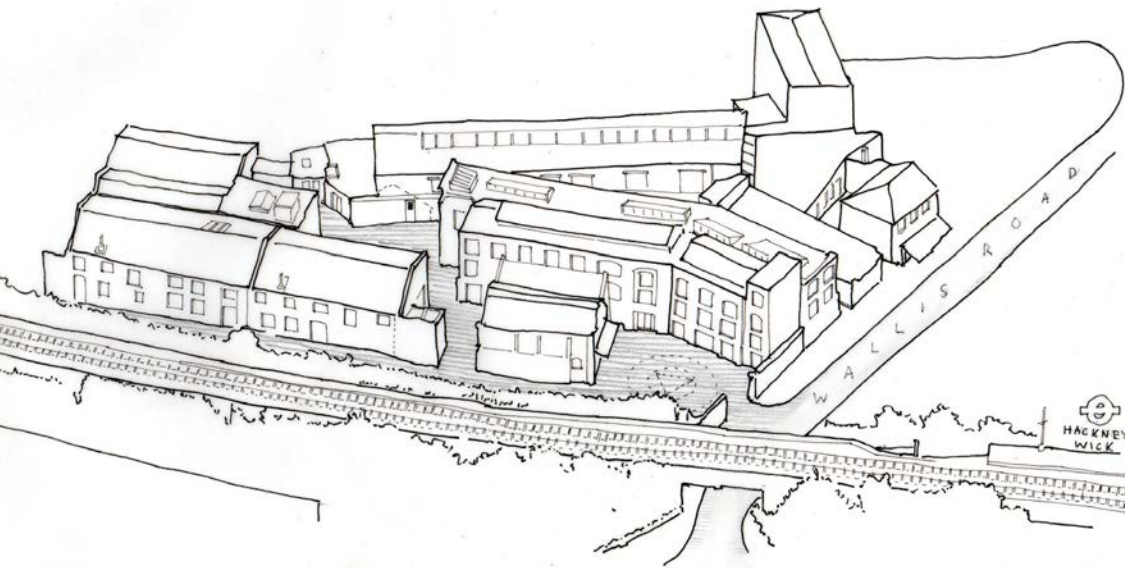
Large blocks containing dense numbers of studio units clustered around intimate courtyards define and encourage tangible creative communities. Industrial, commercial and residential uses are mixed throughout. The block allows for different forms of public and semi-public interaction.

## 2. The Yard System

Yard spaces sit amongst industrial, live-work and commercial units. They are used as points of access, as temporary workspaces and for events. Their intimate human proportions encourage conviviality and allow for ground floor public-private interaction.

## 3. Studio Unit Culture

Large units with very basic provisions are leased collectively, then redesigned, partitioned and arranged by the collectives. This is more affordable, flexible and efficient than traditional studio provision. It is an alternative model that fosters collaboration and self-management.



## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this document is to define the distinctive character of collective workspace in Hackney Wick and Fish Island (HWFI). The area is already notorious as the densest concentration of artists' studios in Europe, but the secret to its affordability and vitality lies within its distinctive factory blocks of collectively organised units. It is therefore crucial to understand the social and spatial factors at play in these creative factories.

This document takes into account the specific arrangements seen in several of the factory blocks and studio units in HWFI,

and derives from them a general set of principles aimed at sustaining and extending this environment of creative production.

These factors set HWFI's creative workspaces apart from the more traditional managed studio complexes, in which studios are self-contained, individually leased and linked only by corridors.

Creative workspace in HWFI has emerged with a very clear tendency for collective occupation, leading to distinctive shared studio typologies that make spaces more affordable, collaborations more frequent and the neighbourhood more active.

The "no frills" warehouse typology typically found in industrial areas in decline has long been the point of departure for young artists and practitioners worldwide looking for vast space and cheap rent. The emergence of a creative neighbourhood such as HWFI has been driven by the same on-going pursuit for affordability, as well as the need for generous and self-regulated workspace. In HWFI this phenomenon has happened at great speed and with a great deal of collective endeavour, to the extent that the transformation of the warehouses into creative factories has also

shaped and redefined the neighbourhood as a whole.

The ecology in which these creative factories have emerged is however rather fragile, based on a precarious relationship between occupants, landlords and local authorities. Much of the workspace is leased without any specific designated use beyond B1 commercial/industrial – which is general enough to cover the range of creative uses and even some ancillary residential use. Security of tenure is rare, with leases subject to frequent and arbitrary rent increases. Collectives are sometimes given an initial rent-free period in order

to carry out building work to meet their needs, often paid for or self-built by the tenants themselves. On other occasions, landlords hire contractors to build partitions according to the tenants' needs.

As a rule of thumb, larger units cost less to fit out and therefore offer cheaper rents for collectives sharing the spaces. This creates a motive for collective occupation, firstly driven by need but ultimately resulting in better work collaborations and more social equity. At the larger scale, 19<sup>th</sup> century factory complexes, with their low-rise densely packed sheds divided by narrow yards,

provide an ideal human-scale environment that links units together around shared yard spaces and encourages activity and commerce at the street front.

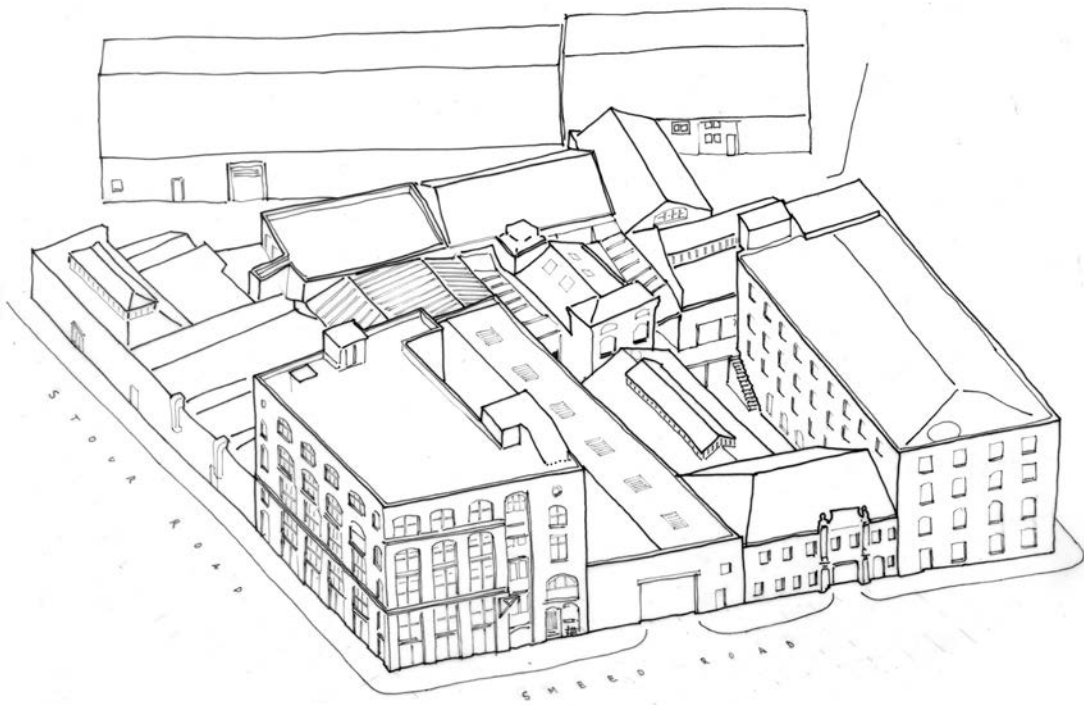
The principles set out in this document are based on the most conclusive examples of creative occupation of industrial spaces, and their wider positive effects on the area. It is crucial that future developments in HWFI learn from them. The evidence here provided makes a strong case for the viability and benefits of the "creative factories" model that has emerged in HWFI.

Former Percy Dalton's peanut factory,  
Fish Island, as seen from Iron Works



## The Factory Complex

The Factory Complex is defined by a dense community of shared studio units in one block. These units host a variety of uses including creative, industrial, live-work and commercial. The factory complexes are successful places because they are multi-faceted. They have public, semi-public and private spaces that create a convivial studio culture lacking in the traditional "off corridor" studio complexes.



## Old Ford Works Case Study

Old Ford Works is a good example of the typical artist-occupied factory block in HWFI. It features a complex arrangement of shared and private spaces with a wide variety of uses. In the following pages, the spatial structure and social arrangements that give shape to the complex are assessed. The aim is to describe how and why these factories have become ideal hubs for

creative practice in HWFI. In 2009, around 79 studios were mapped in Old Ford Works. Its density and shared yard space has made the complex renowned for its close-knit community of creative practitioners. Often referred to as the “Old Peanut Factory”, this cluster of 19<sup>th</sup> century factories makes up a large proportion of the Fish

Island Conservation area. The complex has seen an array of uses over the past century, leading to a palimpsest of building fabric. Parts of the factory were originally occupied by steam powered rubber works and waterproof clothing works and notably a printing works which specialised in bank notes and postage stamps.

Old Ford Works, Fish Island, entrance to central yard



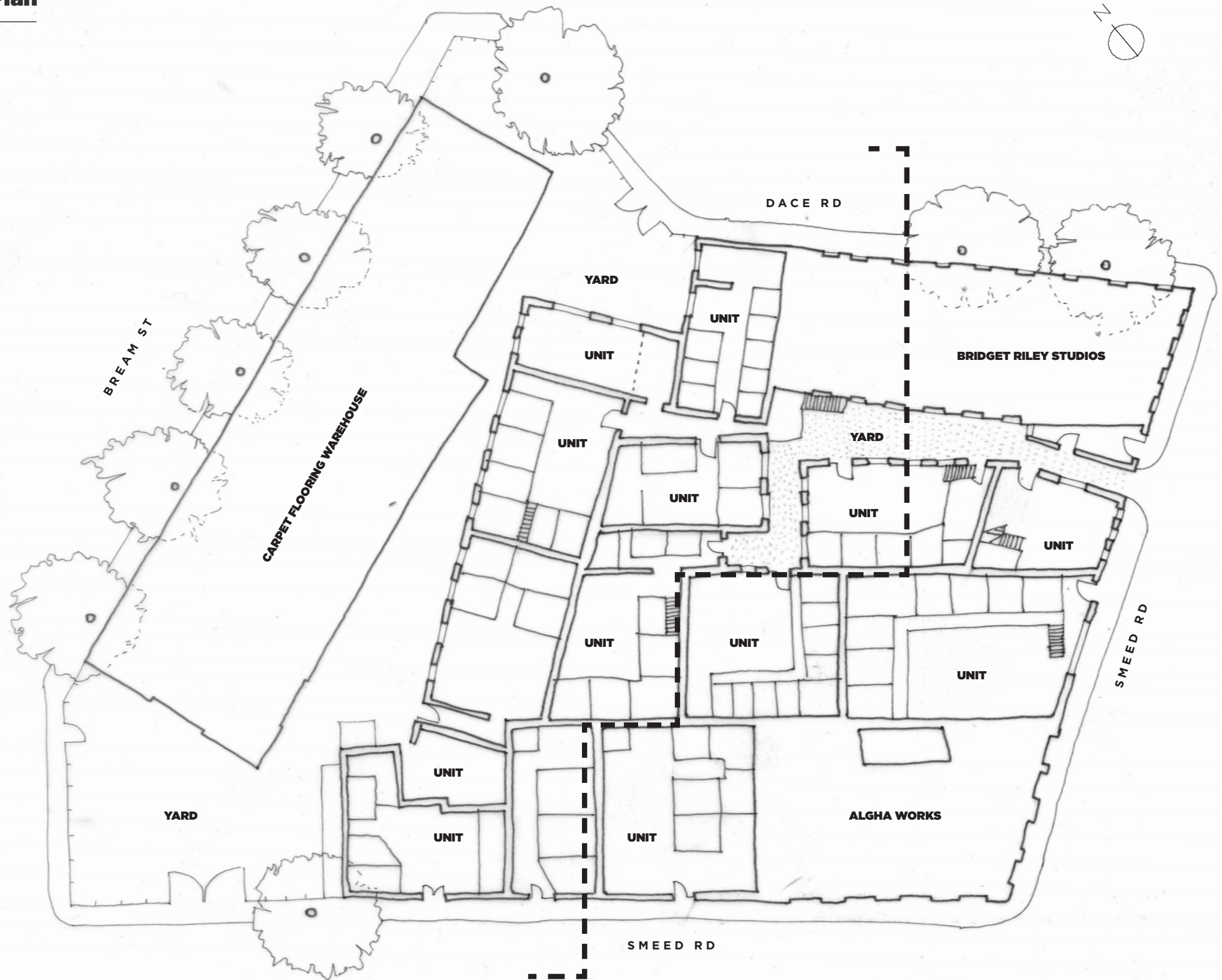


## Old Ford Works In Plan

This factory plan is distinctive for its partitioned collective studio units, which range from 500 sq ft to 3,500 sq ft and from two to 20+ occupants. Each unit has a separate single lease.

Units are separated thermally and acoustically by dividing walls from ground to ceiling. The range of adjacencies in this complex plan means that each unit is distinctive. Their uses range from private activities, such as regular studio space, to hosting public events. In fact, these uses are often interchangeable. The plan facilitates this flexibility of use by ensuring that each unit has access to either a yard or street (or both).

The dense plan is fractured in the centre with a tight and intimate yard entered from a bottleneck. This gives the complex a further sense of unity with the yard playing a crucial role as a shared work, leisure and event space.



## Old Ford Works In Section

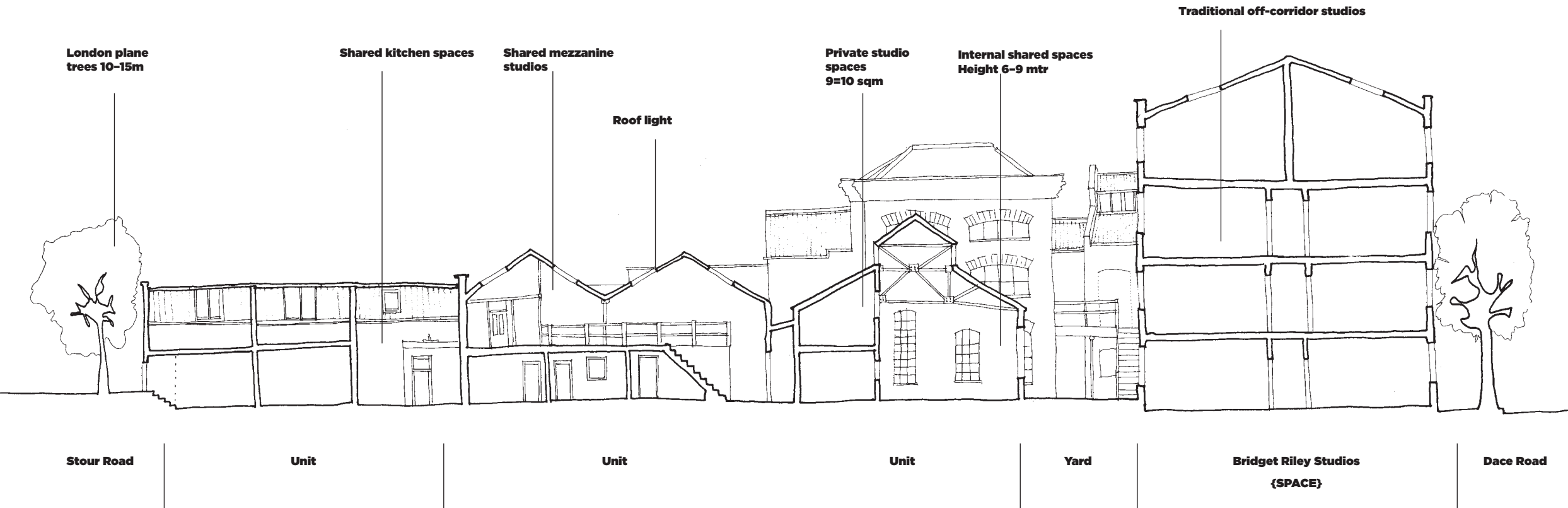
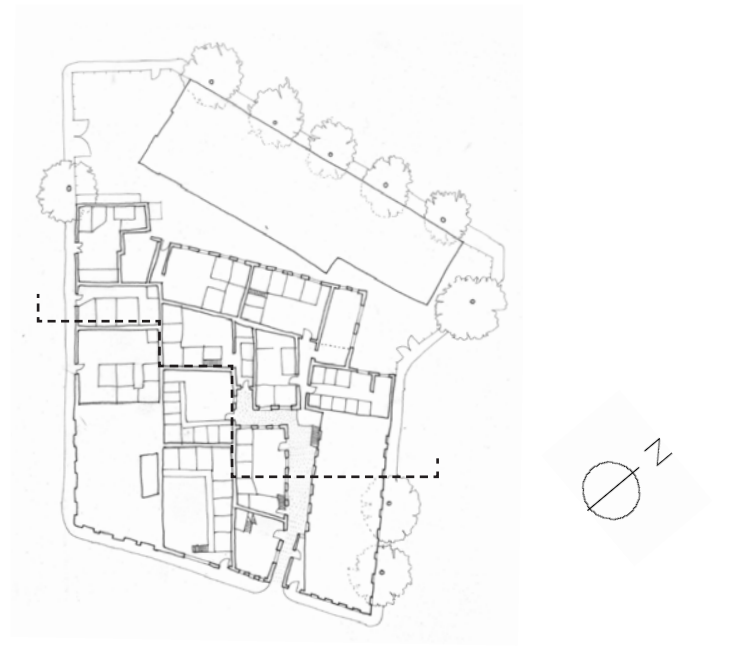
The block retains a human scale where it meets the central yards and surrounding streets, ranging from one to four storeys, lined with openings large enough to allow passage of large works or to hold events, but not too exposing as to compromise privacy or security.

At the ground floor, lofty internal shared studio spaces up to 10 meters in height lay adjacent with the street or yard, allowing for large events and performances to spill out between the public and private spaces.

These blocks achieve a high density of studio units at low-rise height. Individual studios within

the units are built to the sides and around the edges of these large shared spaces, and illuminated through roof lights, windows to the street or via the main spaces.

The central yard spaces receive enough light to allow for the planting of fruit and vegetables and other means of greening.



Old Ford Works' yard on a normal day (L), and during Hackney Wicked Festival 2010 (R)



## Yards

As a shared space, the yard plays a crucial role in how the block operates. It is probably the single defining characteristic of studio culture in Hackney Wick and Fish Island. Yards are the main arteries for those coming and going, and provide an intimate point of contact between residents that encourages conviviality. They are collectively negotiated spaces used for work, leisure and events. This section assesses the spatial and social qualities of the yards of Hackney Wick and Fish Island.

## Yard Principles

Many of the qualities of the yards in HWFI are a consequence of Victorian pragmatism, where building mass spreads as wide as possible and access routes are minimised to

allow only the necessary traffic through to each of the units. The yard is entered through a bottlenecked gated entrance from the street, which is managed

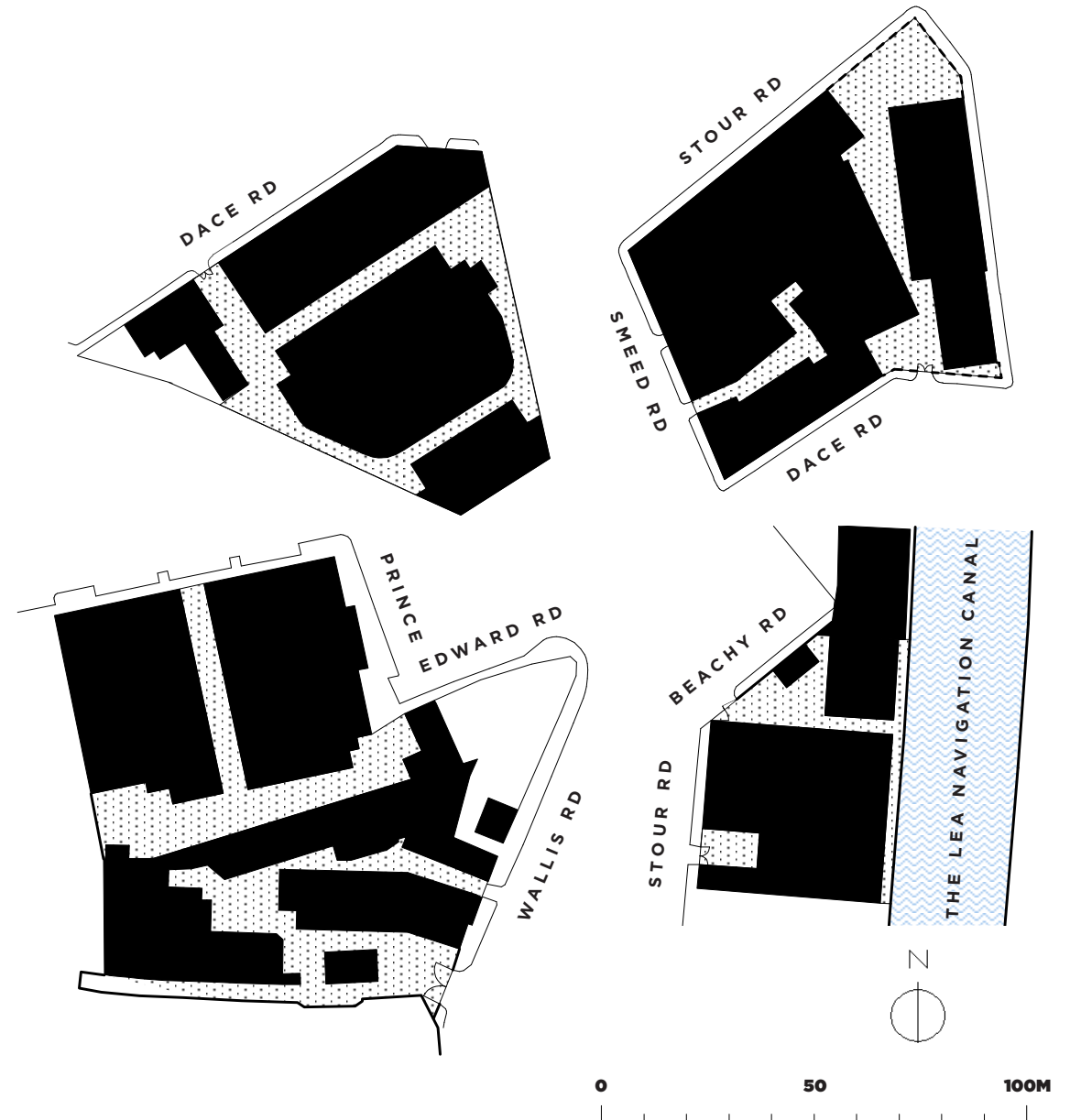
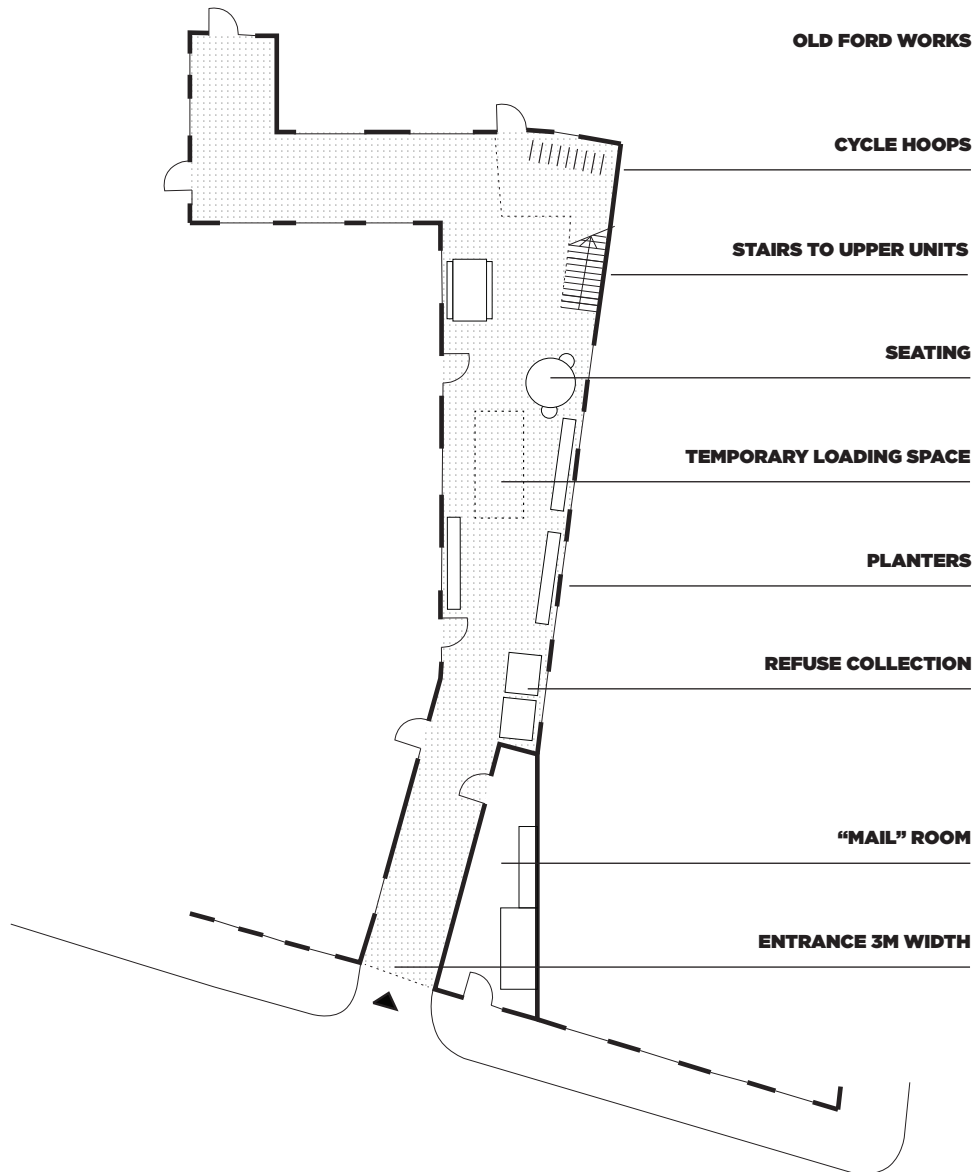
by residents when events are held.

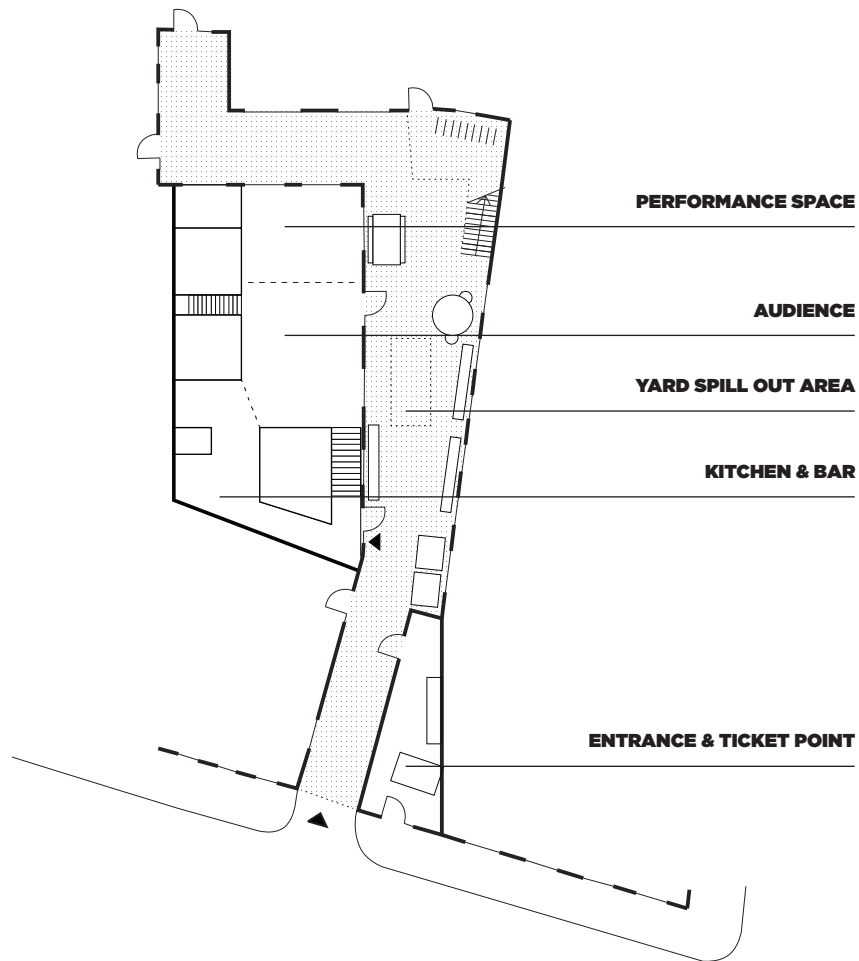
The result is a distinctive labyrinth-like yard system on a very intimate scale (with widths as narrow as 3m). This spatial

arrangement encourages chance encounters and shared uses, ultimately bringing residents closer together and facilitating the development of a sense of community. The tight scale

is also better for security; the edges of the yard are lined with doors and windows into studio units therefore enhancing the exposure of the shared yard. It is important that the

yards have a wide range of uses around them. The mix of creative, industrial and residential units means that the space is used throughout the day from dusk till dawn.





## Yard Case Study 1 - The Hive Cabaret

The Hive is a typical collective studio unit featuring a large and open plan shared space shouldering the central yard of the factory block. The unit is used daily as a rehearsal space for performance art.

On cabaret nights, the space is transformed into a venue. The main access

through the yard is closed, and entrance to the space is provided through the “mail room”, which doubles as a ticket point and cloakroom.

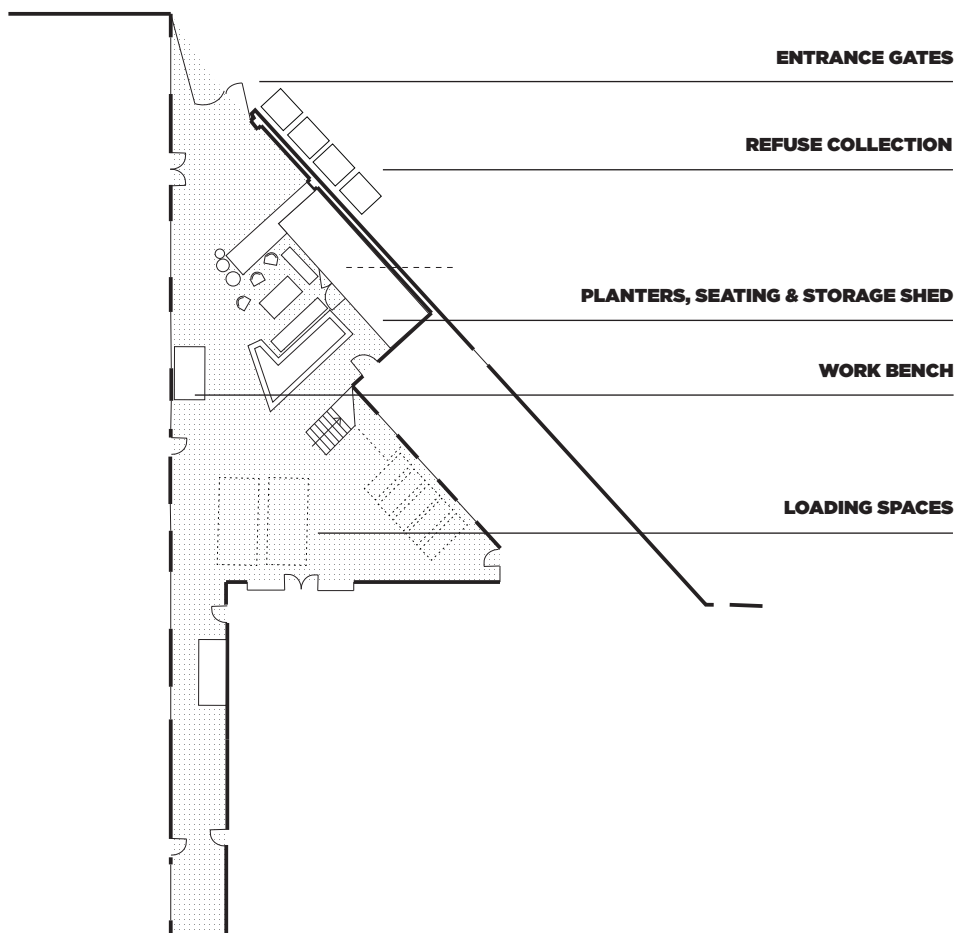
The yard plays a key role in the reconfiguration of the unit, providing an informal space for socialising before and after the performance, as well

as during the intermission. This external yet guarded space is separate from, but also intimately connected to, the performance space.

Inside the unit, the main space is divided into two, with a curtain separating the stage from the audience. The mezzanine is used as the balcony and the kitchen area becomes a bar.

The yard leading to the Hive Cabaret during an event night





## Yard Case Study 2 - Vittoria Wharf

The main yard at Vittoria Wharf is a multi-use space shared between a range of collective studio units.

The space is used as a community amenity space, with a work area, events space, loading space and materials storage.

The occupiers have collectively decided to limit the amount of space given

for car parking in order to encourage the space to be used for a more varying range of activity.

There are work tables which are often moved around and reconfigured to suit the given purpose, while the planters and compost areas are fixed in position, creating a space for residents and guests to

sit together.

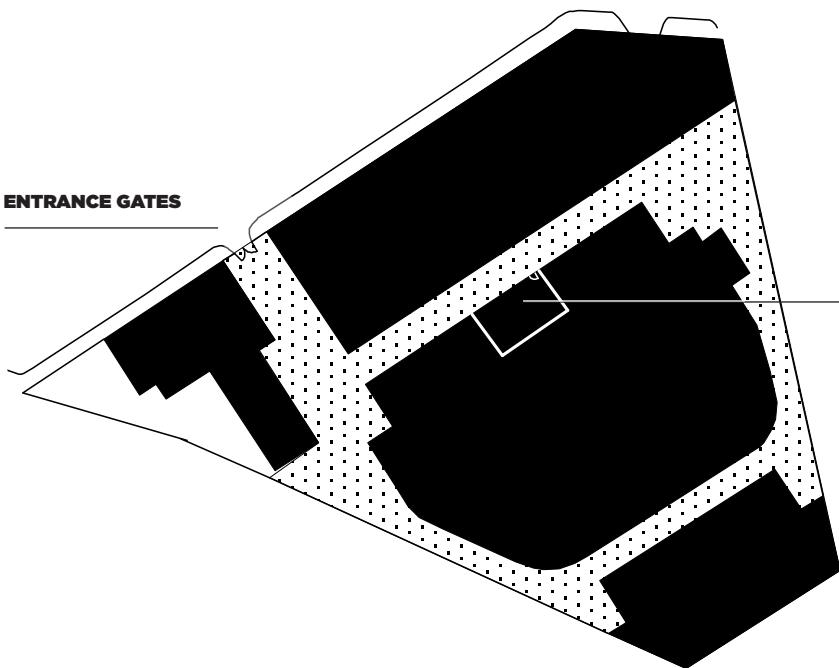
The tin shed is a valuable resource for all units around the yard, as it works as an overflow for large sheets of materials and general storage.

The large gates are managed by all units. They are often open for events, and closed during day-to-day uses for better security.

Vittoria Wharf's yard on a regular day showing a multiplicity of uses



ENTRANCE GATES



ZOE'S KITCHEN

### Case Study 3. Zoe's Ghana Kitchen

Zoe's Ghana Kitchen supper club is a pop-up restaurant which operates from a small studio unit abutting the yard of the Peanut factory in Fish Island. The kitchen actually started out as an informal supper club that thanks to

the visibility that the yard system afforded it became increasing known to locals, and ultimately to the wider public. The porosity between the unit and the yard also allowed Ghana Kitchen to easily spill out onto the semi-public

domain of the yard (when the weather permitted). Ghana Kitchen is representative of the kind of businesses that the "creative factory" incubates, and which depend on its social and spatial infrastructure.



Zoe's Ghana Kitchen: interior space and entrance through the yard





## Factory Units

Factory Units are shells within factory blocks which are leased by collectives for the construction of internal partitions which allow multiple shared uses. Typically, the units are arranged in a horse shoe design featuring separate private studios around the edges of the building shell and a double height central area bringing light deep into the space from the ceiling.

These units are distinctive for the asset of a space negotiated and bartered by all studio holders. They rely on and encourage a collective self-management approach.

Partitions are often self-built by the collectives themselves, often out of timber or steel stud work, during a two to four month rent-free period. Alternatively, landlords may pay for the construction of the studios to the design of the tenants, and later recoup the investment through rent.

The first and foremost issue is affordability; collectives pay less for larger spaces, and then design and build workspaces within them. The addition of dwelling elements such as bedrooms, showers and kitchens are a practical solution for affordability when the price of the lease is too high for work-only studios. The dynamics of live-work adjacencies work best when there is a communal commitment to the workspace elements of the unit, with agreements on use, hours and layout being of high importance.

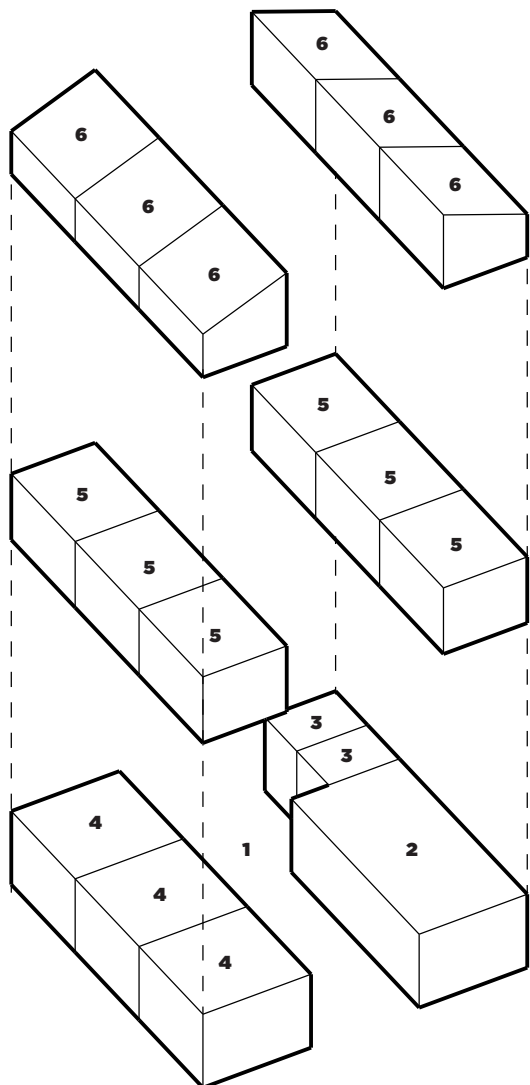


- 1. SHARED PROJECT SPACE
- 2. KITCHEN
- 3. WC / BATHROOM
- 4. GROUND FLOOR STUDIOS
- 5. ENCLOSED STUDIOS
- 6. UPPER STUDIOS

SECOND FLOOR

FIRST FLOOR

GROUND FLOOR



## Unit Principles

Generally, entry at the ground floor leads straight onto a full height central shared space, available for use by all tenants on a temporary basis for a multitude of uses. Adjacent to it are large studio spaces used for disciplines involving larger objects and heavy materials. Their

adjacency with the large central space is crucial as full-length materials need the space for manoeuvring. At this level there is also the kitchen, which works as a communal meeting space for studio holders and guests. On some units, this level also features public spaces such as cafés.

Typical first floor plans have studios with acoustic and thermal separation from the unheated main space. These rooms may also be used as bedrooms.

At the upper floor, studio spaces benefit from roof lights and are used for painting and hot-desking.

Shared workspace at JP Studios, Vittoria Wharf



## Unit Sizes, Economics and Management

The collective units mapped in this study range in size from a two-person 500 sq ft space to an 11-person 3,000 sq ft space. The size of a unit is defined both socially and economically. Self-management tends to work best with smaller, tighter collectives. However, larger units taken on by larger collectives may enable more partitions and cheaper rents.

In many of these unofficial live-work Studios, the total price of the lease and business rates or council tax is divided by the number of bedrooms. Each “live-in” member of the collective

will have a bedroom plus an appropriate workspace sized to their needs, as well as use of the shared spaces. Any extra work-only studios will be rented out and charged at the current price per sq ft of the shared unit. Any revenue generated from them will be used to either subsidise the rents of the collective or to create a communal fund.

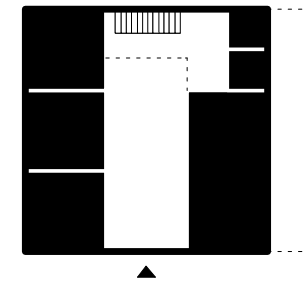
The lease agreement is held between the landlord and either one or several individuals from the collective in annual periods for a set rate, usually decided on per sq ft basis. Prior to occupation, the collective may negotiate or

request the construction of elements such as mezzanine structures or staircases. On other occasions, the collective may occupy the building for a rent-free period of up to four months and self-build their own arrangements.

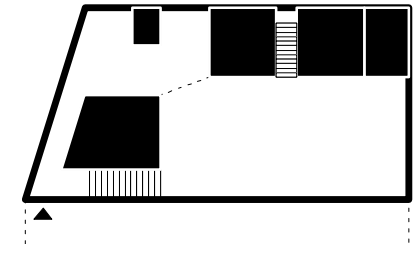
Successful units tend to rely on fully collective responsibility, with regular meetings held to make any decisions which affect the unit as a whole. Collectives with a commitment to keeping the focus on workspace and creative production require all prospective live-workers to prove that they indeed need a work studio.

CASE STUDY	SQFT	Annual Price	Price per sqft	No. of people	Density (ft per person)
<b>1. JP Studios (VITTORIA WHARF)</b>	<b>3,100</b>	<b>£45,600</b>	<b>£15</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>281.8</b>
<b>2. The Hive (OLD FORD WORKS)</b>	<b>2,700</b>	<b>£35,000</b>	<b>£13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>385.7</b>
<b>3. Wood Work Studios (LION WORKS)</b>	<b>1,700</b>	<b>£17,600</b>	<b>£10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>340.0</b>
<b>4. Graffiti Artists' unit (PEANUT FACTORY)</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>£17,280</b>	<b>£14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>300.0</b>
<b>5. Film Producers' (OSLO HOUSE)</b>	<b>1,090</b>	<b>£15,260</b>	<b>£14</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>363.3</b>
<b>6. Costume makers' Unit (PEANUT FACTORY)</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>£16,800</b>	<b>£17</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>500.0</b>
<b>7. Graphic Design / Salon (PEANUT FACTORY)</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>£15,000</b>	<b>£22</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>335.0</b>

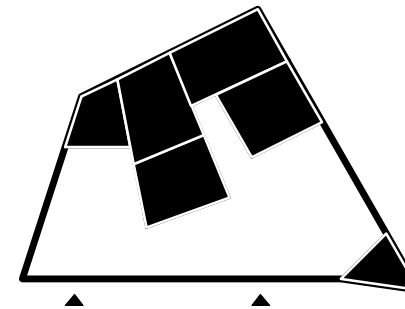
**1. JP Studios (VITTORIA WHARF)**



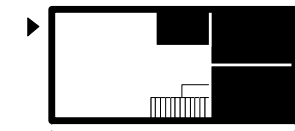
**2. The Hive (OLD FORD WORKS)**



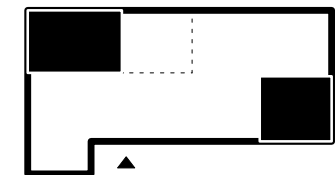
**3. Wood Work Studios (LION WORKS)**



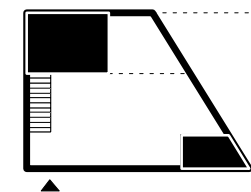
**4. Graffiti Artists' unit (PEANUT FACTORY)**



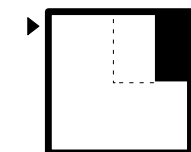
**5. Film Producers' (OSLO HOUSE)**



**6. Costume makers' Unit (PEANUT FACTORY)**



**7. Graphic Design / Salon (PEANUT FACTORY)**



□ Shared Space  
■ Private Space

0 ..... 10m  
|-----|

Ground floor shared workshop space at JP Studios, Vittoria Wharf



**Case Study 1: JP Studios (VITTORIA WHARF)**  
**3,100 sq ft (aprox.)**  
**£15 per sq ft (aprox.)**

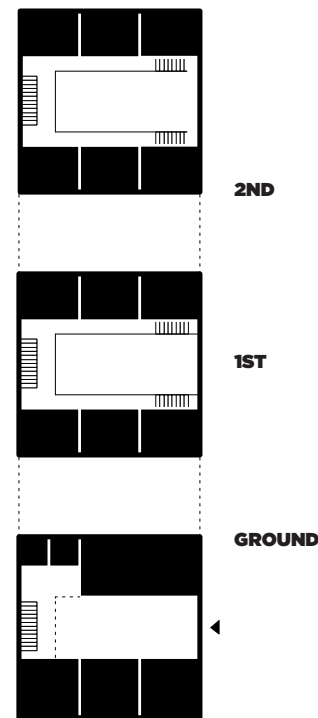
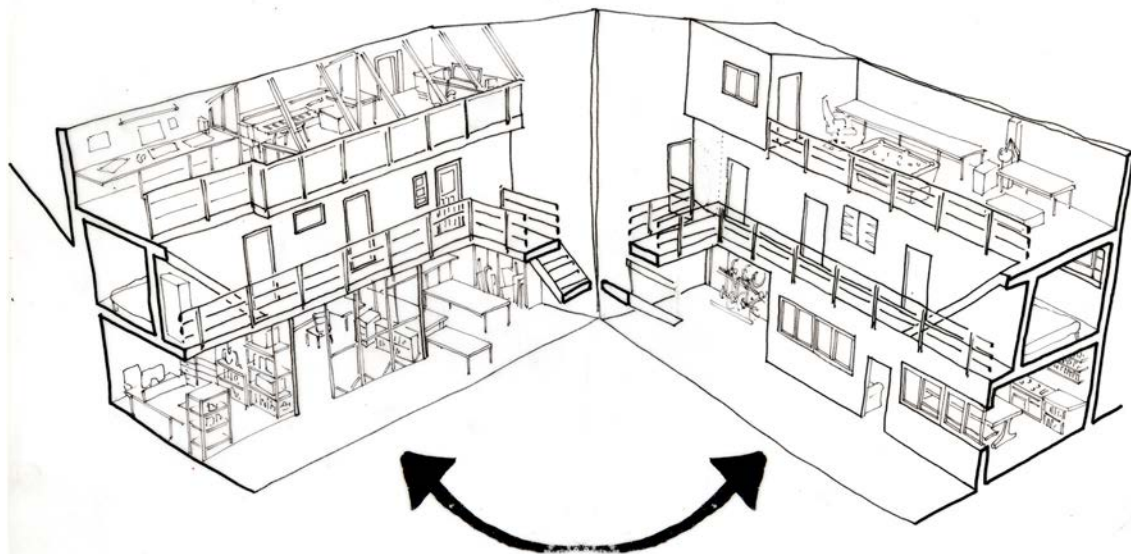
**A Puppeteer, Homeware Designer, Sound Engineer, Animator, Composer, Sculptor, Film Producer, Photographer and an Illustrator. Ages 25-37**

This unit is a large communal live-work space with a strong emphasis on creative production. The unit is laid out in a typical horseshoe arrangement: dirtier workshop spaces are at the ground floor level with a separate communal living and kitchen space; all the private living quarters are on the middle floor; and digital work spaces are located 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 is a generous and affordable model with many of the housemates making their full income from the work they do within the unit.

From its inception, the 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," explained one of the occupants. "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."

At the ground floor, the open project space may be used by all housemates when needed, although it is more often used by those working with heavier materials.



Performance area / shared living space at The Hive



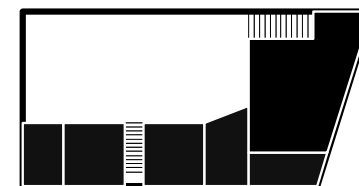
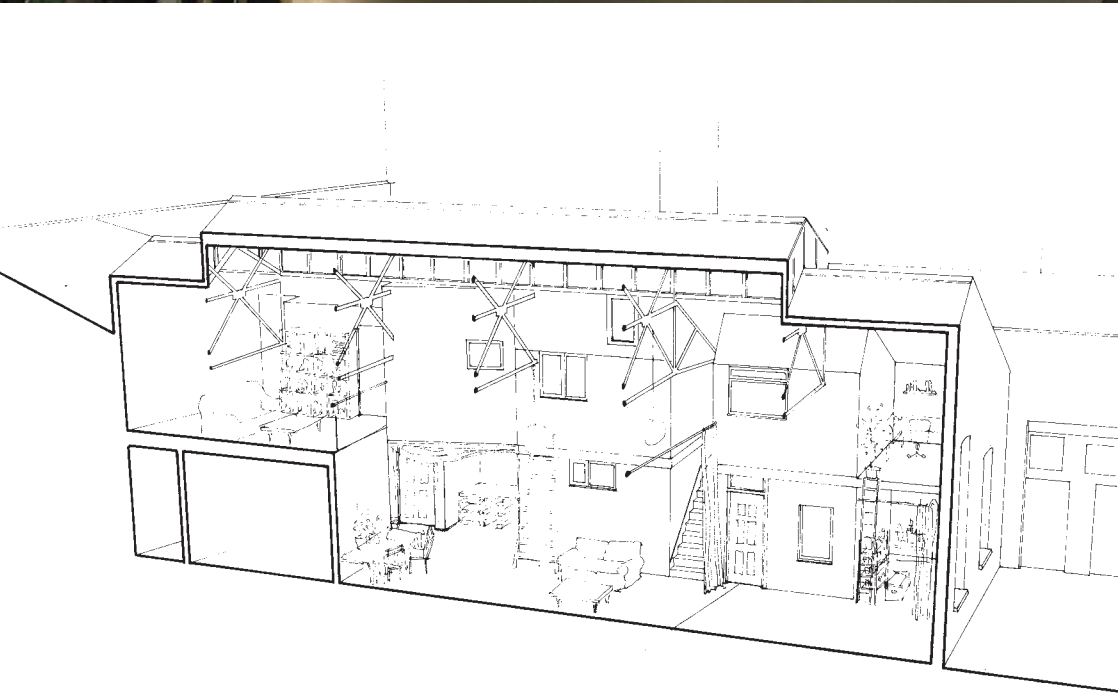
**Case Study 2: The Hive  
(OLD FORD WORKS)  
2,700 sq ft (approx.)  
£13 per sq ft (approx.)**

**A Clown, Video artist, web Developer, Musician, Psychiatrist and Singer. Ages 27–36**

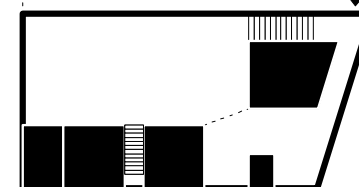
This unit is a hybrid of performance space and a seven bedroom home that abuts a communal courtyard entrance within the Old Ford Works factory complex. The warehouse was taken on in 2008 by a proactive couple, seeking a space where they could perform and rehearse, as well as live in an area with a strong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

This unit has become well known for its cabarets and various performance events. It is a very collaborative household, where housemates often help one another to put on 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.



1ST



GROUND



**Case Study 3: Wood Work Studios (LION WORKS)**  
**1,700 sq ft (approx.)**  
**£10 per sq ft (approx.)**

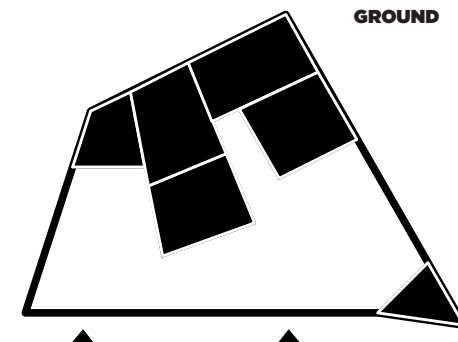
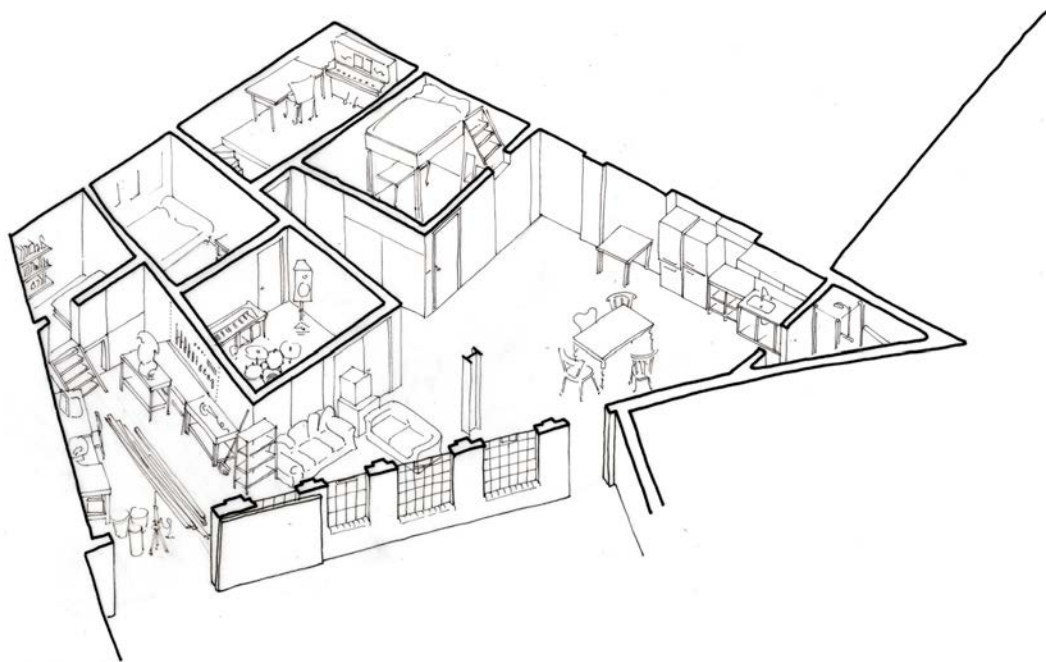
**A Sculptor, Film Maker, Musician and Advertiser. Ages 24–29**

This unit is a peculiar triangular space that is thought to have once been a yard to the adjacent building. It had been filled in to be a woodwork carpentry workshop. It has four bedrooms and an insulated rehearsal space which all cluster to the rear of the building, leaving space at the front for the kitchen, living spaces and a workshop area that has floor to ceiling shutters opening out onto the front yard.

The residents came here in 2009. As one of the occupant explained: “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. We were also able to make the modifications we needed, which was important. It is a very flexible arrangement.”

The sculptor makes his living from a combination of selling his work, doing fabrication work for others, and teaching mould making – all of which happens within the workshop space.

The unit is “softly” divided, with sculptural work often spilling onto the yard, that also provides a socialising area where neighbours often meet each other.



Top floor studio, Peanut Factory



**Case Study 4: Graffiti Artists' unit (PEANUT FACTORY)**  
**1,200 sq ft (approx.)**  
**£14 per sq ft (approx.)**

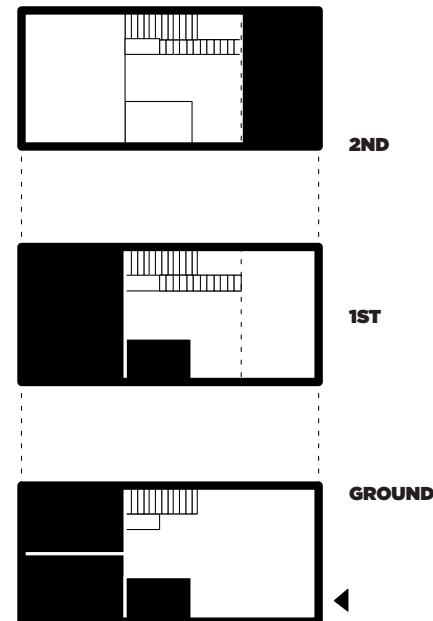
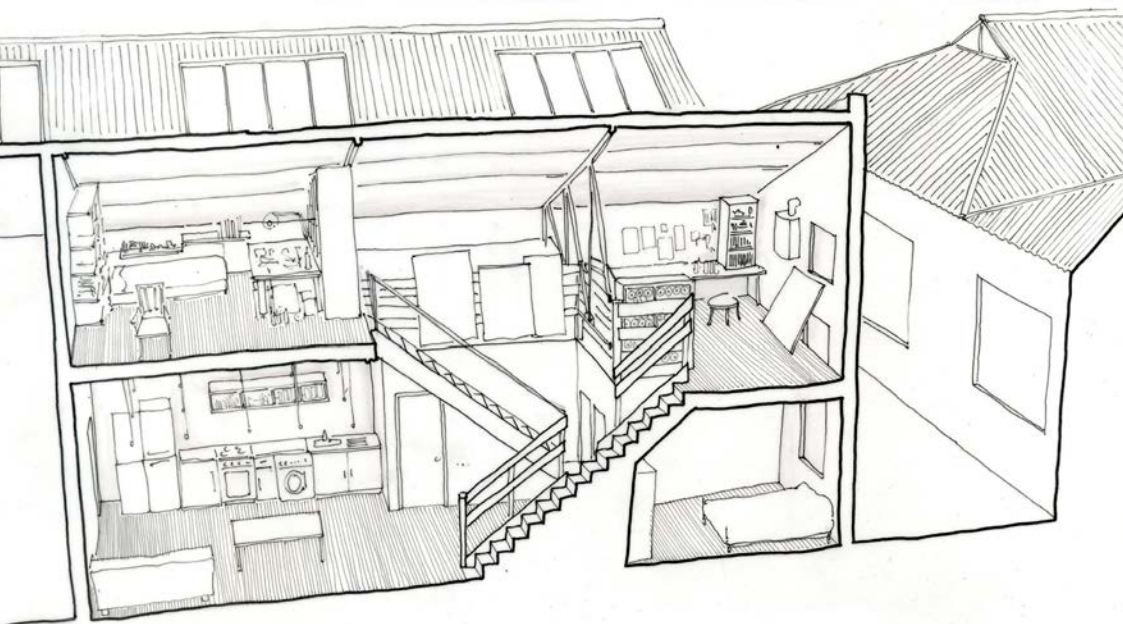
**A Street Artist, Illustration Student, Architecture Graduate and Photographer. Ages 23-35**

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.

The street artist took on the lease for the whole unit in 2011 through a friend. He was attracted to the large available space and its affordability, as well as to the neighbourhood's quiet and relaxed atmosphere. He mentions the waterways and the local cafes as great places to spend time in.

All occupants work in the unit. The street artist has a working space on the second floor, an open area with windows to the yard. The photographer has set up a dark room in his bedroom; the illustrator paints in his room; and the architecture student has a desk in the living room on the ground floor.

Sharing the unit with people from similar disciplines has meant that the dwellers have developed working relationships. They actively seek one another's support and advice. "We're all on a similar wavelength here, we definitely buzz off each other a lot; it's impossible not to be inspired or influenced by each other," said the street artist.



Living room / Green screen room,  
Oslo House



**Case Study 5: Film Producers' unit (OSLO HOUSE)**  
**1,090 sq ft (aprox.)**  
**£14 per sq ft (aprox.)**

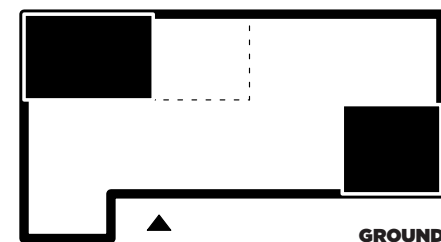
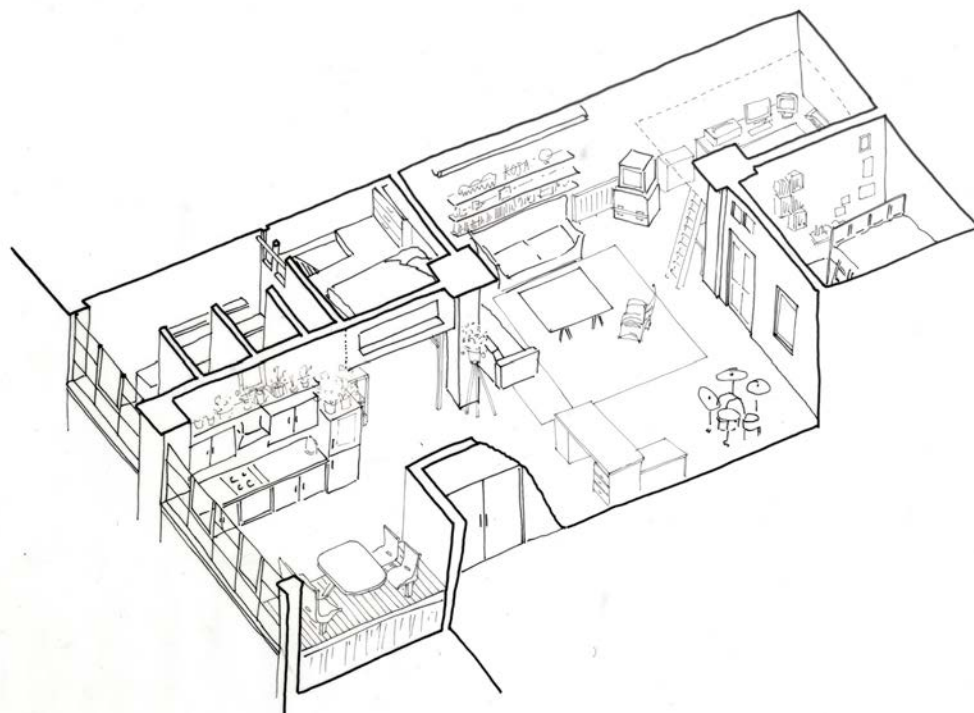
**Two Film Directors, a Cameraman, Director of Photography. Ages 34-42**

This is a production studio meets shared home; it is home to two film directors, a photographer and a director of photography. They moved to this unit in 2005, seeking work space. It is based in Oslo House, a mid-20th century warehouse; a building of townscape merit within the conservation area.

The unit is used as a home but when work demands it, the space is transformed into a media production facility where films, advertisements and animations are directed and shot.

The unit is a 1,000 sq ft open plan space with windows lining its shortest edge. The bathroom doubles as a darkroom, complete with an 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 as needed.

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 the director of photography 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.



Ground floor motorcycle workshop and costume making studio, Peanut Factory



**Case Study 6: Costume makers' Unit (PEANUT FACTORY)**  
**1,000 sq ft (approx.)**  
**£17 per sq ft (approx.)**

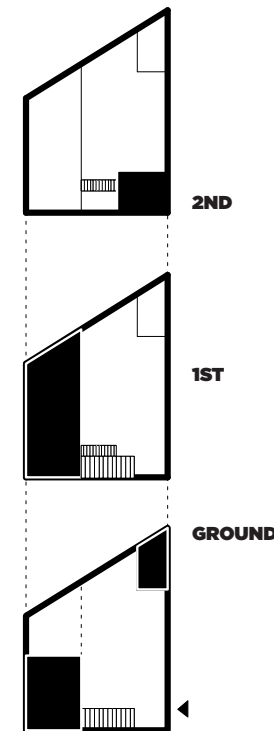
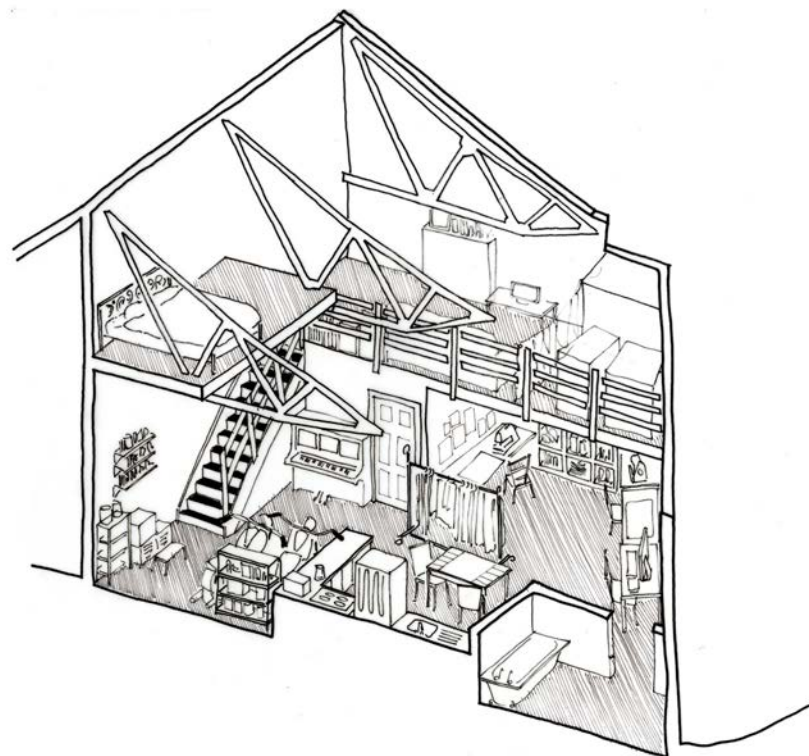
**A Costume Maker/ Special Effects and Motorbike Repairman**

This is a live-work unit home to one couple. One of them uses it extensively as a base for a costume and prop making business; the other as a motorbike workshop. The couple previously lived in another warehouse in Clapton, and through the same agent found this space in Fish Island.

Both of them have relied on the generous spaces and affordability that warehouses offer for developing their practice. The costume maker has, over time, developed her business to the point where it now accounts for her full income. Her partner 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 he has a little area in the studio by the door for the motorbikes, leaving the rest of the space for his partner's work. These two spaces are delineated by a strip of black electrical tape on the floor meaning "no motorbikes past this point".

The costume maker, 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 and textile studio. It's a zone of colourful props and costumes, lots of desk space and specialist equipment.







**Case Study 7: Design & Hair Salon (PEANUT FACTORY)**  
**670 sq ft (approx.)**  
**£22 per sq ft (approx.)**

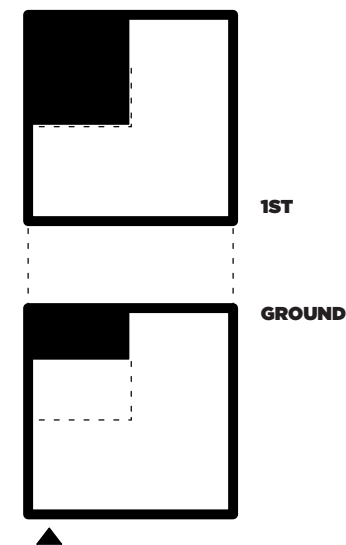
**A Graphic Designer and a Hair Stylist. Ages 28-30**

This is a small live-work unit which is used as a graphic design studio and a hair salon. The designer and the hair stylist have been in the area for four years – previously in other live-work units separately, sharing with others.

The unit features an open floor plan with an enclosed bathroom. The hair stylist has a well-equipped hair dressing area to one side, and directly adjacent, the designer has his 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 the stylist. Design meetings with clients are often held simultaneously, around the table. The couple have very deliberately arranged the space so that these different disciplines complement each other. “We didn’t want to have it sectioned off, what I do is very visual, so her clients come in and enjoy what I do,” explained the graphic designer. “I’m very solitary when I work so I like to be able to chat and discuss it with them as well. It’s great to have interaction with other people.”

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



**THANKS TO**  
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