invigorated by a sense of purpose and autonomy. It now hosts an exercise in clever contextuality, derived from sifting and analysing the runes of Fitzrovia’s Georgian past. The site is the traditional Charlotte Street terrace, characterised by a tripartite division of plinth, body and roof, with strong horizontal lines, executed in solid masonry, with punched apertures.

The new building emerges to join the urban conversation in a rich base-barline of loadbearing brick, rather than the gimmerick clip-on kind, giving it an undeniably forceful presence (think Bryn Terfel as Wotan) amid Fitzrovia’s operatic milieu. ‘It’s both monumental and delicate,’ says DSDHA director Deborah Saunt. ‘We were interested in exploring how brick could contribute to the project.’

The calculated game of material mise en abuse shifts and timbers to the weighty, brooding facade. It also speaks of a curiosity about and concern for how things are made and put together. Quidvibus tentacul architecture, you might think, yet increasingly, architects are realising from the art of building by relinquishing such responsibilities to product suppliers. The outcome is facades by the yard, dunly pasted on to lettable floor area, as exemplified by the redevelopment of the nearby Middlesbrough Hospital site.

Here, however, the difference in approach is palpable. ‘One of the things that occurred to us when we were walking round London looking at residential blocks was their strong sense of materiality,’ says Dewantz director Simon Silver. ‘Responding to the scale and massing of the previous buildings, the main corner element is connected to a smaller rear block, differentiated by the use of pale blond brick. In a yin-yang of gutsy masonry, light and dark coalesce in Tottenham Street, so the scheme presents a different face to different street conditions: rigorously formal on Charlotte Street and more fragmentary round the side and in the mews to the rear. Windows are set in stepped reveals, the outcome of research and testing to evaluate the potential of brick craftsmanship. It’s treated with a plasticity to achieve a dramatic effect,’ says DSDHA associate director Tom Greenall. Specially designed linkings span the bays, which relate proportionally one to another, reflecting a modern take on the geometric derivation of Fitzrovian architecture.

‘Each floor has a slightly different relationship between the sill and the internal floor levels,’ says Greenall. ‘It makes the building appear less relentlessly stacked and more subtly different.’

When you reach the top floor, the hit-and-miss orthogonal geometry gives way to a more fluid, fractured composition of shifting forms, generated by slightly angled windows. And above this, shaped initially by rights-of-light constraints but then radicalised, is a secret roofscape of pavilions, sculpted and folded like pieces of urban origami. Visible only to pigeons and drones, it’s a fascinating fifth elevation, but as Saunt points out, satellite mapping and Google Earth mean we’re now much more used to seeing buildings from above, and reading the urban terrain in a different way. ‘It’s an alternative dimension from which to visualise things,’ she says. Line abstract, warped versions of the traditional French mansard, the glass and zinc pavilions of the Corner House add to an expanding repertoire of covert rooftop structures.

The pavilions form an armature for the stratospheric perches of penthouse living, which, apart from the usual panoramic views, also extend to a lift disgorging you directly into your living room. But were you to take the stairs, forged from weathered steel sheet with sinuously curved flat handrails, you’d find another example of DSDHA’s concern for the art and craft of making.

Aside from the duplex penthouse, there are 14 ‘normal’ apartments. Nine are for sale (prices start at £1.15 million) with the two flats on the ground floor set aside for social housing. These are discreetly sequenced away from the main part of the building, each with its own entrance. It might be tempting to see this as a reflection of the infamous ‘poor door’ policy, which preserves a certain sanctity for affluent occupants in socially mixed developments, but here it was partly necessitated by the social landlord being unable to take on the maintenance costs of a shared core. The alternative would have been to insist on the social component together. Individual entrances also help to activate the street frontages and deter deviant behaviour, and though the apartments are effectively separated, the level of interior specification is the same throughout. High ceilings and the wall-to-window ratio give all flats a sense of Scandinavian lightness, amplified by bleached wood floors and white walls. Plus everyone gets a ruler-deck seat for the intrigues and goings on of Fitzrovia, now rather less of a mongrel cousin with such a thoughtful, refined project in its midst.
Typical balustrade/window detail

1. Internal lining
2. Steel angle
3. PPC aluminium sill with fixed welded edges
4. 14 x 3mm solid PPC steel upright
5. 6 x 3mm PPC steel base plate
6. Balustrade fixed back to metal angle
7. PPC aluminium framed window
8. PPC aluminium capping profile
9. PPC masonry tachoma
10. Facade Intertel
11. Intumescent integrated fire stopping
12. Vertilite duct
13. Recess for blind
14. Window Bracing
15. PPC Juliet balcony
Simon Silver, director, DSDHA

The Corner House offered us the opportunity to put back an original but distinctly modern building into the historic streets of Pimlico. The corner site enabled us to provide windows on two sides for most of the apartments, with some on the upper levels having three. The result is stunning - spacious rooms with great views out, giving a real connection to the area.

We were keen to use a material finish that reflected the fabric of the area, and had been working with the Danish brick company Petersen Tegl on a number of our other projects. Here we chose a dark and textured handmade brick, reminiscent of the originally yellow stock brick elevations which were devised by London's past planners. DSDHA has used this beautiful material with real elegance and originality; the double-rotated brick window reveals create depth and modeling, which adds a sense of layering and texture.

Inside, other details include fine ledged glass doors in Crittal frames and smooth and robust Drensen timber flooring. The twist was saved for the upper floors, where the roof- form angles and pivots in response to local sight lines, which makes for fun and dynamic spaces. The resulting building provides enduring quality and in a great architectural legacy.

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