

FLATSPOTTERS

What a delight your Contemporary Apartment Types issue (AJ 28.02.08) was for all those housing architects out there with transpottng tendencies.

It does, however, highlight a worrying trend. All the recent English schemes using a row or terrace type suffer from the dreadful single-aspect rash that condemns future residents to a solitary view, often with little sun and certainly no cross ventilation.

A further symptom is the internal corridor. This is perhaps OK for the transitory world of hotels but doesn't seem to be a place that encourages 'homecoming' in Aldo Van Eyck's terms – more like the 'buy to leave' highlighted by Anna Minton in her essay, 'The Flat Trap'.

While deck-access schemes work in providing cross ventilation, they are compromised in terms of aspect and privacy unless they are transformed into a virtue by the likes of Sergison Bates in its Wandsworth flats (pictured below). However, this typology

keeps replicating the horizontal circulation and associated social life, which, in my view, should be happening on the street.

The revelation is in the two schemes you published from abroad, Tengbom in Stockholm ('The Flat Trap') and Metropolitan Workshop in Dublin, which have a simple truth – they both embrace double-aspect flats served by stairs that have windows in them. This reveals natural light as soon as you walk out of your front door, while, reciprocally, the users become overseers and 'residents' to the street that they can immediately see below.

In the meantime, you may even make lifelong friends on your staircase, as is often said to be a virtue of the collegiate staircase/courtyard type in Oxford or Cambridge. While there is always the discussion about lifts with this typology, service charges etc., the counter-argument could be to just do four storeys and no lifts.

This might not only help the obesity crisis but could make better streets with a little more dignity. It is not only our

European cousins who have found that this more holistic pattern works, it is also our cities north of the border and the best parts of London – from dRMM's Wansley Street scheme in South London to our own Fairmule House in East London (AJ 06.10.05).

Ken Taylor, director, Quay 2c

POKY HOMES

I found your feature on Contemporary Apartment Types (AJ 28.02.08) excellent – at least as far as the plans went. It is rare to find such a range of schemes presented with such clarity, and the fact that most of the plans were to scale makes this a fantastically useful resource.

However, you seemed to miss the elephant in the room: some of these flats are insanely small. I'm not surprised that plenty of them are empty: who would want to live in a 40m² one-bed or even a 50m² two-bed? (See pages 42–44 for a Technical & Practice feature on mandatory space standards.)

The tendency to squeeze flats down to their smallest possible size is a product of the English habit of defining a flat by how many bedrooms it has, rather than by its floor area. In Europe everyone, including the public, thinks in terms of floor area, but here, developers have taken advantage of buyers' ignorance of this basic measure of value, and have reduced the sizes of flats to the extremes we see today.

In order for apartment living to maintain popularity in the long term, flats need to be seen as a viable long-term investment. For this, they must be flexible to changing needs, as houses have always been. If a block has been designed with this in mind, the

number of bedrooms a flat has when sold is almost irrelevant, as it may be altered any number of times in its lifetime. The important factors instead become floor area, minimising internal structure, a way of fenestrating that accommodates different layouts, and location of services.

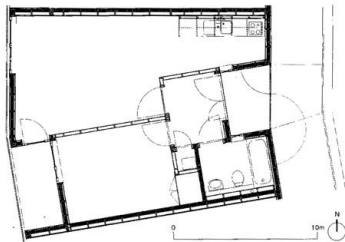
It seems at the moment that developers do not believe buyers are imaginative enough to pay for such an approach. Yet in London, at least, the relatively high price of 'fixer-upper' properties shows that the market does appreciate that value lies in the fundamentals of size and location when applied to traditional housing. Is it really such a leap to apply this long-term approach to apartments?

Mark Wagborn, Wagborn Gwynne Architects

SADLY MISSED

I was sad to hear of Martin Pawley's death (AJ online 10.03.08). I first met Martin in 1972 when he was a visiting professor at Cornell University in the USA, where I was in graduate school. The fifth-year class was working on garbage housing for Chile. As I was going to be in Cologne the following summer, Martin asked if I'd be interested in translating the report to the Chilean Housing Ministry into Spanish. We left it at that.

While I was travelling in the Netherlands, the military coup occurred in Chile. No more project. We stayed in touch over the years, and I invited Martin to lecture at Oklahoma University when I was teaching there. I will miss his wit and criticism (see page 21 for an obituary by Ian Martin). *Gerardo Brown-Marriquet, by email*



Typical flat, Sergison Bates, Wandsworth