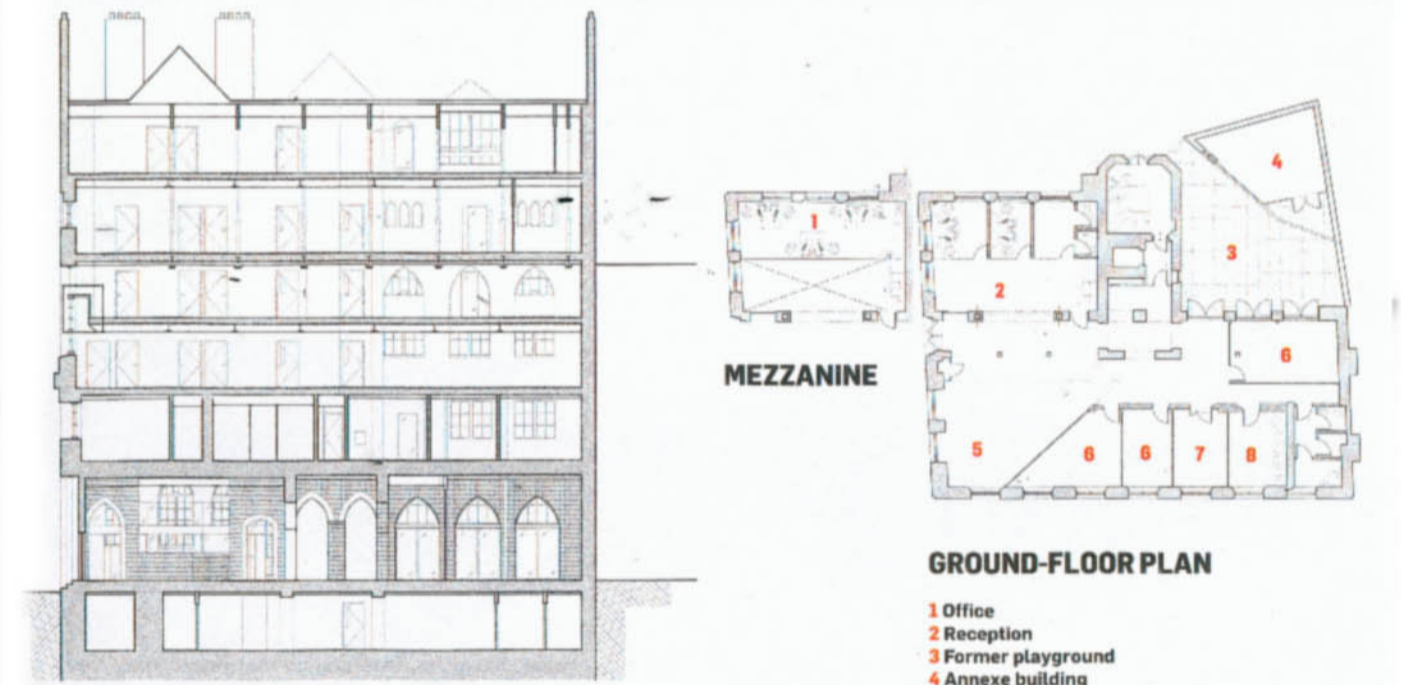


WORKS: PETER BARBER ARCHITECTS

PROJECT TEAM Architect Peter Barber Architects, Client St Mungo's Community Housing Association, Structural engineer Bolton Priestley, M&E consultant Harding McDermott, Contractor Quinn London, Project manager Philip Pank Partnership



The top-floor rooms sit between the old roof structure.



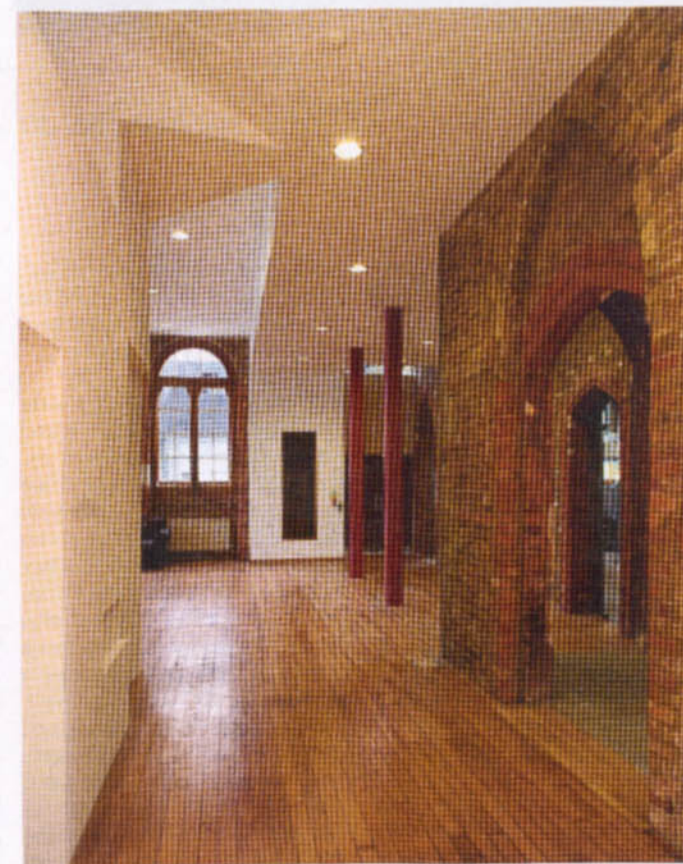
MEZZANINE

GROUND-FLOOR PLAN

- 1 Office
- 2 Reception
- 3 Former playground
- 4 Annex building
- 5 Foyer
- 6 Meeting room
- 7 Community police room
- 8 IT

SECTION LOOKING SOUTH

The reception area maintains a reading of the full volume of the ground floor.



Looking across the foyer towards the main entrance.

Closer to home

Peter Barber's redesign of a London homeless hostel is part of a radical reinvention of its culture to prepare residents for independent life, writes **Ellis Woodman**

Pictures by Morley von Sternberg

Today, Endell Street in central London is a parade of upmarket gyms and spas, restaurants and boutique clothes shops. However, when it was laid out in the mid-19th century the street was intended for the use of a very different demographic. At the initiative of the philanthropist James Pennethorne, Endell Street was built as a locus of facilities for London's poor. A workhouse, church, public bath, wash-house and hospital were established along its length and at its north end, EM Barry – son of Charles – built a school in 1860.



The original 1860 building is by EM Barry.

Ranged over four storeys on a tight urban site – there was a playground, but it was only 140sq m – Barry's gothic building was sized to accommodate up to 900 students. The members of the 1860 intake were, in many cases, the first members of their families to receive a formal education. When the school finally closed its doors in the early 1960s, it was taken over by squatters – a period which culminated in the violent "siege" of 1969 when the occupants were evicted by 200 policemen. Happily,

however, the building soon found a new use that enabled it to remain a site of philanthropy when it was converted for use as a hostel by homeless charity St Mungo's Community Housing Association. The building has remained in St Mungo's ownership ever since, but with each passing year the effects of decades of underinvestment were becoming more visible. In the past decade, the hostel also proved an increasing source of antagonism to local residents and businesses, with instances of drug-related crime frequently

being blamed on its presence in the community. Finally, in 2006, St Mungo's was able to address these issues when it secured £3.5 million from the government's Hostel Capital Improvement programme. It has used this money to carry out a comprehensive refurbishment of the building, to designs by Peter Barber Architects, and in doing so has radically reinvented the hostel's culture. "What we have tried to do," explains John Hughes, the facility's director, "is to create an environment where we communicate our high expectations of people and we have the resources to help them move on with their lives in whatever way they want." He describes the shift in policy as a move away from a "maintenance approach", in which residents' primary needs were the sole focus, to a "recovery approach" in which the aim is to enable them to get back on their feet. In order to facilitate this mission, the number of places offered has been reduced dramatically, from 93 to 53. Given that under the previous regime one client had been in residence for 24 years, an

even more significant change has been the introduction of a 12-month cap on the length of any stay. With these restrictions in place, the hostel's efforts have all been redirected towards securing a self-reliant future for the clients that are admitted. The journey from entering the hostel to heading out into the world on one's own is reflected in the allocation of rooms – newcomers are given a bed on the first floor and graduate upwards over the course of the year. Introducing a cellular plan into a building designed to accommodate large classrooms was never going to be straightforward, and the resultant plan is a compromise between the most efficient layout and the free distribution of the often very large windows. The arrangement of the top-floor rooms was further determined by the fact that they sit between the roof joists that previously spanned the school's gymnasium – architectural features that have been carefully preserved. Presenting really magnificent views over the rooftops of Covent Garden and enjoying ensuite bath-

rooms – a luxury that is not afforded lower down – these rooms are the most desirable. They also benefit from opening onto a corridor of a width that can accommodate limited dining facilities. Barber has now designed a whole series of projects for St Mungo's and has always aimed to minimise corridors wherever possible. In the new-build hostel that he is currently building in Hither Green, south-east London, he has eliminated them completely: the individual rooms open directly into a wide social space which tracks around a courtyard. On Endell Street's lower levels, social and educational spaces have been provided, ranging from IT facilities to rooms where Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings can be conducted. The absence of the TV room which usually forms the focus of hostel life sends a clear message about the expectations that are being placed on clients. There is a fully equipped recording studio, which will enable a local radio station to be established. It is hoped that it will also serve a commercial function, managed by the residents. There is also a dining room and associated kitchen where residents will have the opportunity to develop catering skills. In the same spirit, the contractor admirably used the project as a means of offering training and employment to a number of former residents who have now secured jobs in the industry. Barber's hand is felt most strongly on the ground floor, which is completely unrecognisable from its previous incarnation. A dense grid of partition walls has been swept away and a suspended ceiling which cut off the top of the beautiful arched windows has been removed. Now, where partitions have been introduced, they are in glass, enabling the full

extent of the volume to be understood as soon as one enters. Various accretions in the old playground have also been stripped out. This has enabled the reintroduction of generous south lighting and made space for the construction – in brick, reclaimed from the main building – of a single-storey annexe where meetings of a more sensitive nature can be conducted. The combination of exposed brick walls, timber floor and leather furniture give the main reception area an image not far from the lobby of a boutique hotel. Crucially, the security considerations have been handled with the lightest of touches. "The reception desks in many hostels have glass screens or shutters which more often than not will cause conflict and violent incidents," explains Hughes. "It is counterintuitive, but if you take those screens away you find that you reduce violent incidents to zero." For clients who have experience of other hostels, life at Endell Street promises to be a revelation but also a challenge. Barber has created a building which gives them the best possible chance of meeting it.

The reception area has an image not far from the lobby of a boutique hotel