

May 2005

Street life: housing at the crossroads

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GLASGOW ■ Housing at the crossroads: The Matrix by Davis Duncan

A high-profile mixed-use scheme marks the entry to the historic city centre.
Photos: Keith Hunter.



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The outcome of a design competition organised by Glasgow city council, The Matrix is located on the northern edge of Glasgow's Victorian city centre, close to the Theatre Royal, where the grid-iron layout of the nineteenth-century city starts to fragment. The area does not have a cohesive character but rather is a mix of dereliction and regeneration. Within the immediate vicinity there is housing, commercial and retail space, leisure and recreation areas and open space; one of the strongest influences, perceptual and literal, is the proximity of a number of media and entertainment-based activities. With

this in mind, it was our intention to mediate in, and respond to, a wide variety of physical and perceptual opportunities, both existing and intended.

The planning strategy is to fully utilise the perimeter of the site, introducing a high-density mixed-use development that addresses and responds to the various edges and to the potential of each. The scheme also takes advantage of the drop in the ground from south to north to introduce a number of sectional ideas.

The intersection of Cowcaddens Road and Port Dundas Road is an important junction within the city context, a gateway



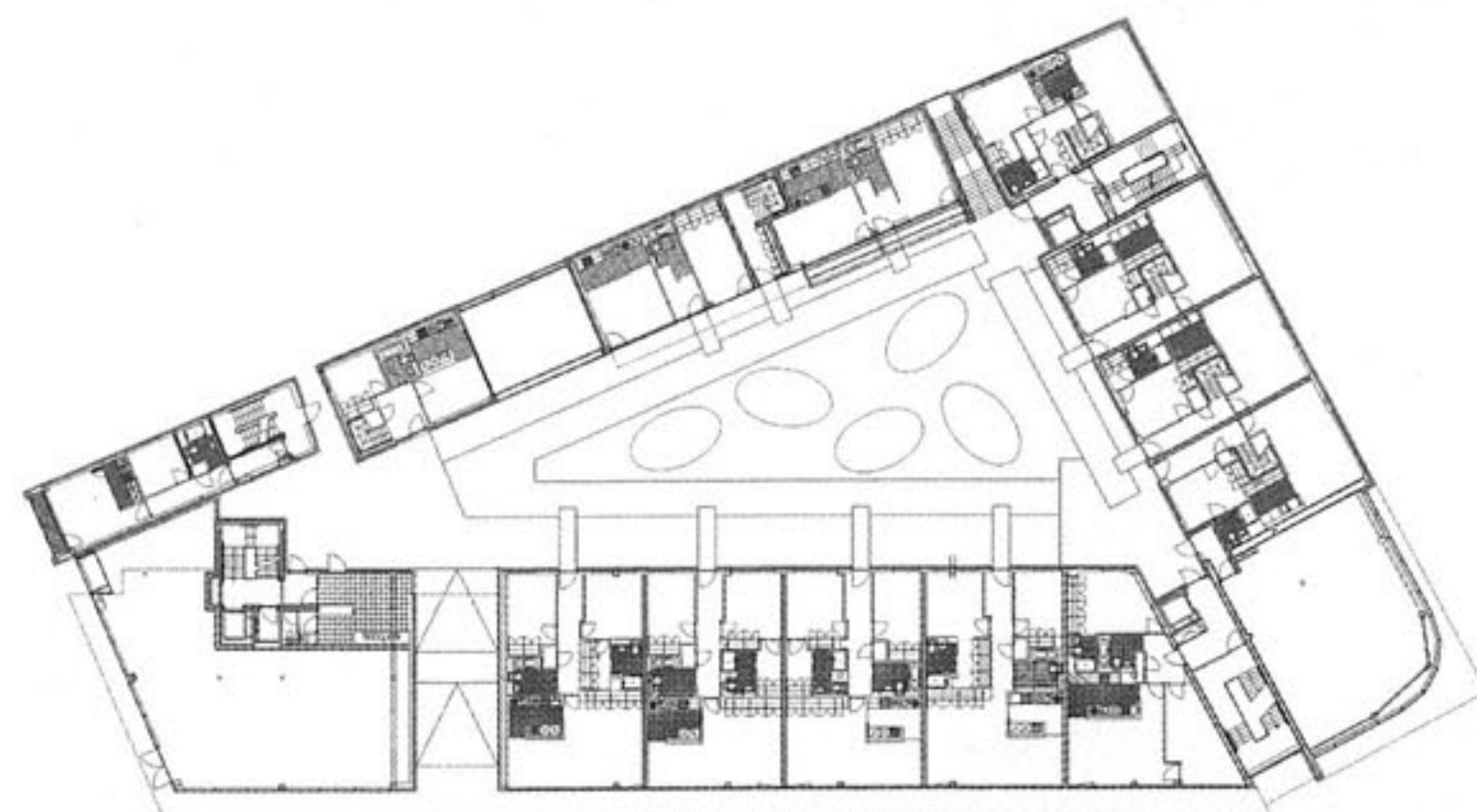
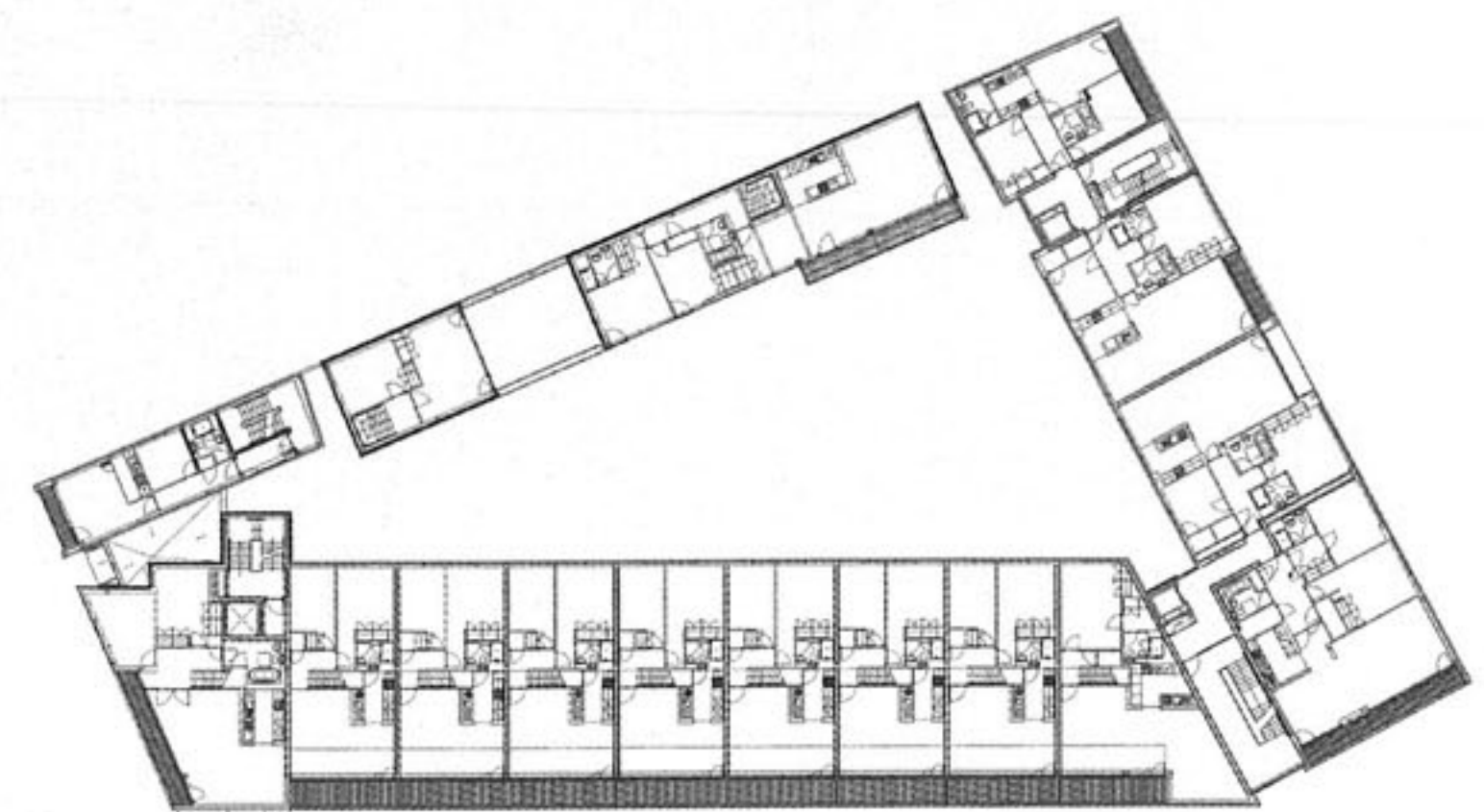
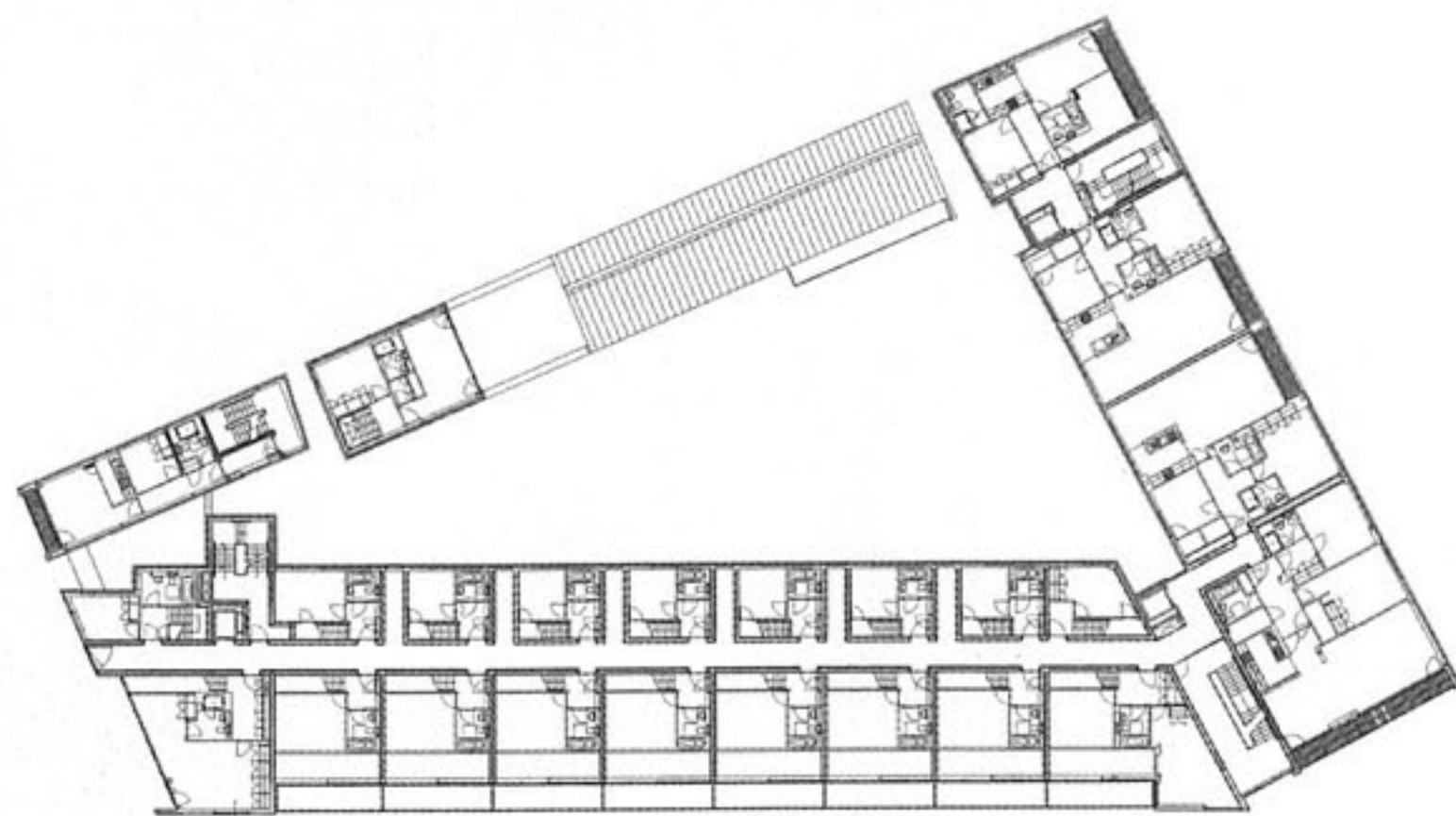
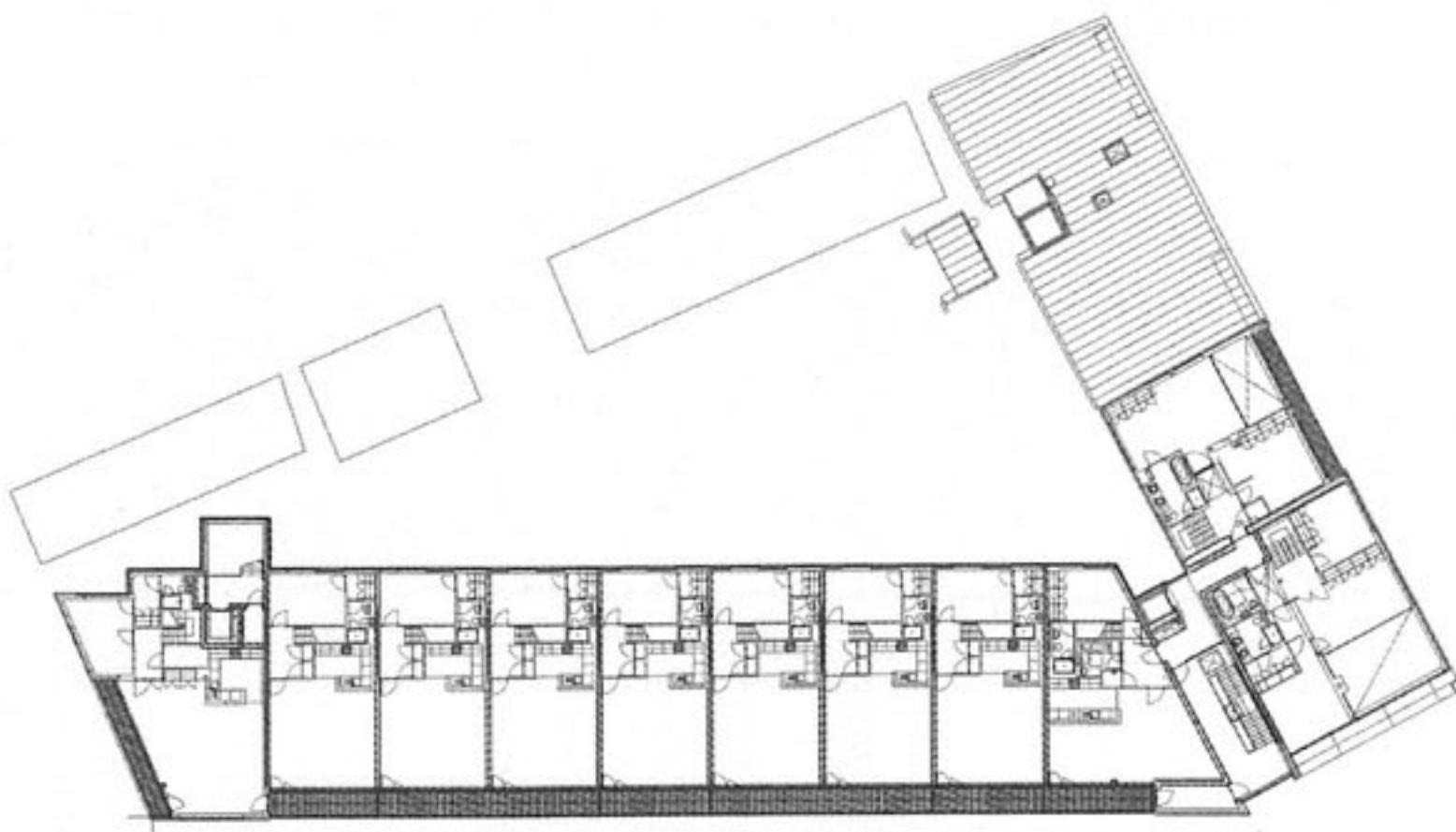
Above The £8.5m scheme provides 73 apartments (11 one-bedroom, 62 two-bedroom), with space for offices and a cafe/bar on the ground floor of the Cowcaddens Road block. **Left** View from the city centre, with Cowcaddens Road block (left) and Port Dundas Road (right).

to and from the city centre from the north and to the west. The rhythm of vehicular and pedestrian movement at this junction is stop-go, which allows people to pause and take in their surroundings.

There are four principal external edges to the development, each engaging with the surroundings in a responsive manner through a range of means, including mass, scale, colour and materiality. If in one instance the intervention is proud of its presence, elsewhere it is deferential and intimate.

The element fronting onto Cowcaddens Road is perhaps the most intriguing of the

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edges. Through our collaboration with artist Richard Wright and the use of colour, texture and architectural layering, this presents a striking elevational composition framed within a black rainscreen surround. In response to the brief for high-quality flatted accommodation, we sought to generate a rich and unusual variety of spaces, drawing inspiration from an icon of twentieth-century modernism – Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles – to introduce internal streets and double-volume living spaces.

Each flat is distributed over two levels, with private internal stairs communicating between the accommodation. The flats are wrapped around the 'skewers' of circulation, which pass through the centre of the section and plan at the various appropriate levels, connected at each end of the block by vertical circulation nodes of lifts and stairs. The metaphor of the skewer announces itself on the plaza elevation, where it pierces the skin as a coloured glass window that glows vibrantly at night.

Although held at the centre of the plan and section, these circulation zones are highly experiential, being lit by shafts of natural daylight penetrating through windows in the highly modulated rear elevation and bathed in light of various colours along their length. The articulation and modelling of the rear facade and section allows for daylighting but also functions for ventilation and smoke venting purposes and provides a sense of place while deep within the plan.

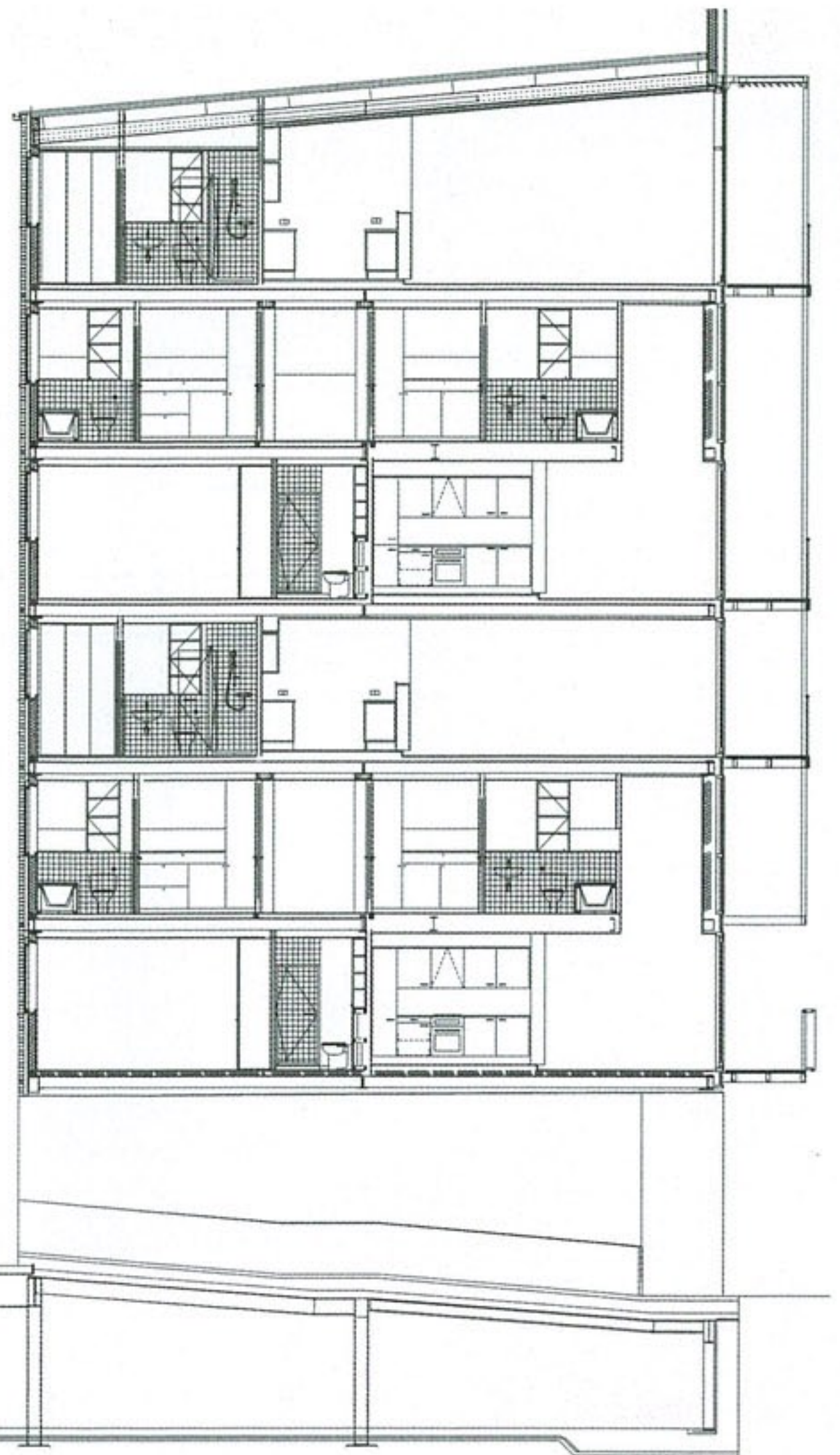
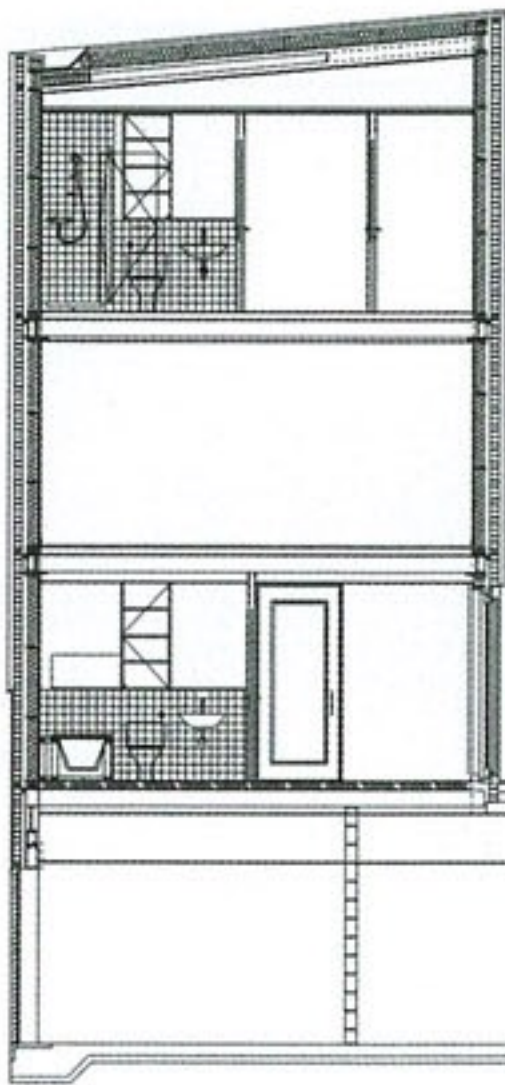
The opportunity of a south-facing facade has been utilised to its fullest advantage. While bedrooms are generally placed on the north side, the living spaces, often double-height, are orientated south and are entirely glazed. Destination balconies terminate the living spaces with glazed balustrades to maintain the visual connection with the city.

Facing Port Dundas Road is the second element, which interfaces with the Cowcaddens Road block through the shared vertical circulation tower that acts as a knuckle to the cranked plan. As the building turns fully onto Port Dundas Road, the materiality and proportion of solid to void changes to acknowledge the existing streetscape and the adjacent (and somewhat unusual) flat-roofed tenements. The building steps down in deference to the tenement block while the red facing brick with toning mortar echoes its red sandstone facade.

In contrast to the major arteries of Cowcaddens Road and Port Dundas



Section McPhater Street, courtyard and Cowcaddens Road.
Below Double-height living room overlooking courtyard.



Road, the street forming the third edge of the project, McPhater Street, is little more than an access road. Given the narrowness of the street and the scale and the proximity of properties on the other side, our response to this edge was to create a mews scale proposal. We also had to deal, however, with the proximity of our own Cowcaddens Road block.

The solution was to make three mews-type flat units, with two one-bedroom units at the courtyard level and a larger unit running the entire length under the sensual curvilinear roof, with all having an inward-looking view over the courtyard garden. Next in the sequence is a three-storey unit, the Tower House. Wrapped in zinc, it turns its view onto the gable of the mews flats and confines a private garden between the two, with views both inward to the courtyard garden and out onto McPhater Street. Terminating the sequence is a slender five-storey residential tower, the Companion Block, which responds to the scale of the Cowcaddens Road block, with the main rooms of the flats looking over the small plaza created at the western prow of the scheme. A nar-





Above *The generous courtyard at the heart of the scheme; the facade to McPhater Street facade is treated as a mews.*

row slot between these two elements allows dramatic shafts of daylight and evening sunlight to pierce into the courtyard. The plaza elevation of the Cowcaddens Road describes how the accommodation wraps around the internal streets and displays the volumes and spaces of the flats in a legible fashion.

The scheme presents a hard perimeter of built form which deals with and responds to the movement, rhythm and noise of its urban context. By contrast at the heart of the scheme, literally and metaphorically, is the courtyard garden. The result of a close collaboration with landscape architects City Design Co-operative, this attempts to create a delightful, surprising and animated space. Entered through a transitional space with a gently rising ramp, the garden provides an oasis of calmness and serenity far from the bustle of the city.

Project team

Architect: Davis Duncan Architects; design team: Grant Robertson, Stewart Glendinning, Radek Sladeczek, Tony Byrne, Ray Davis; landscape architect: City Design Co-op (Rolf Roscher); artist: Richard Wright; structural engineer: Beattie Watkinson; qs: CRGP; m&e engineer: Henderson Warnock; contractor: Morrison Construction; client: AWG Residential.

Selected subcontractors and suppliers

Louvres: Levulux; curtain wall: Saint-Gobain Solaglas; rainscreen cladding: CGL Cometec; bricks: Ibstock, Chelwood; roofing: Kingspan, VM Zinc; timber windows: Nordan; m&e: NG Bailey; ironmongery: JO Miller; tiling: Porcelanosa; kitchens: Tradestyle; bathroom fittings: Scope.