

Designing London

Cities are not created by individual designers. Some have been shaped by an individual's vision: Haussmann's interventions in Paris dissecting the topography of the existing city. Others, such as Corbusier's new city of Chandigarh, or Niemeyer's city at Brasilia, have started life as the concept of an individual. All, however, frustrate and surpass the expectations of their designers. **Cities are collective projects which thrive on the diversity of those who work and live in them.** They exist physically, but also in the collective memory and experience of their inhabitants.

London, perhaps more than most cities, has resisted the vision of individual designers. It is a city defined by difference: the diverse communities, places, personal and communal narratives that form its fabric. To be successful, designs for London will be specific

Evolution & Transformation

Adaptation, transformation, intervention are the processes by which cities grow. **Vibrant cities are always in a state of flux, welcoming change and renewal but retaining in their urban landscape the traces of earlier incarnations.** Designing within London is analogous to the process of working on an ancient building or structure: a process of continuous repair, intervention and reinvention; conservation, incision, change. This is a process based on the analysis and interrogation of existing fabric, as well as an intuitive understanding of the essential qualities of a building or place: an understanding of the extent to which an existing place is capable of being transformed without losing its unique character and value.

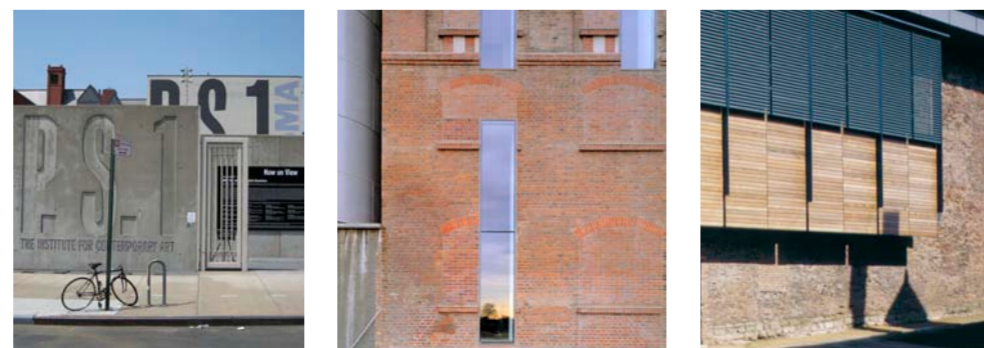
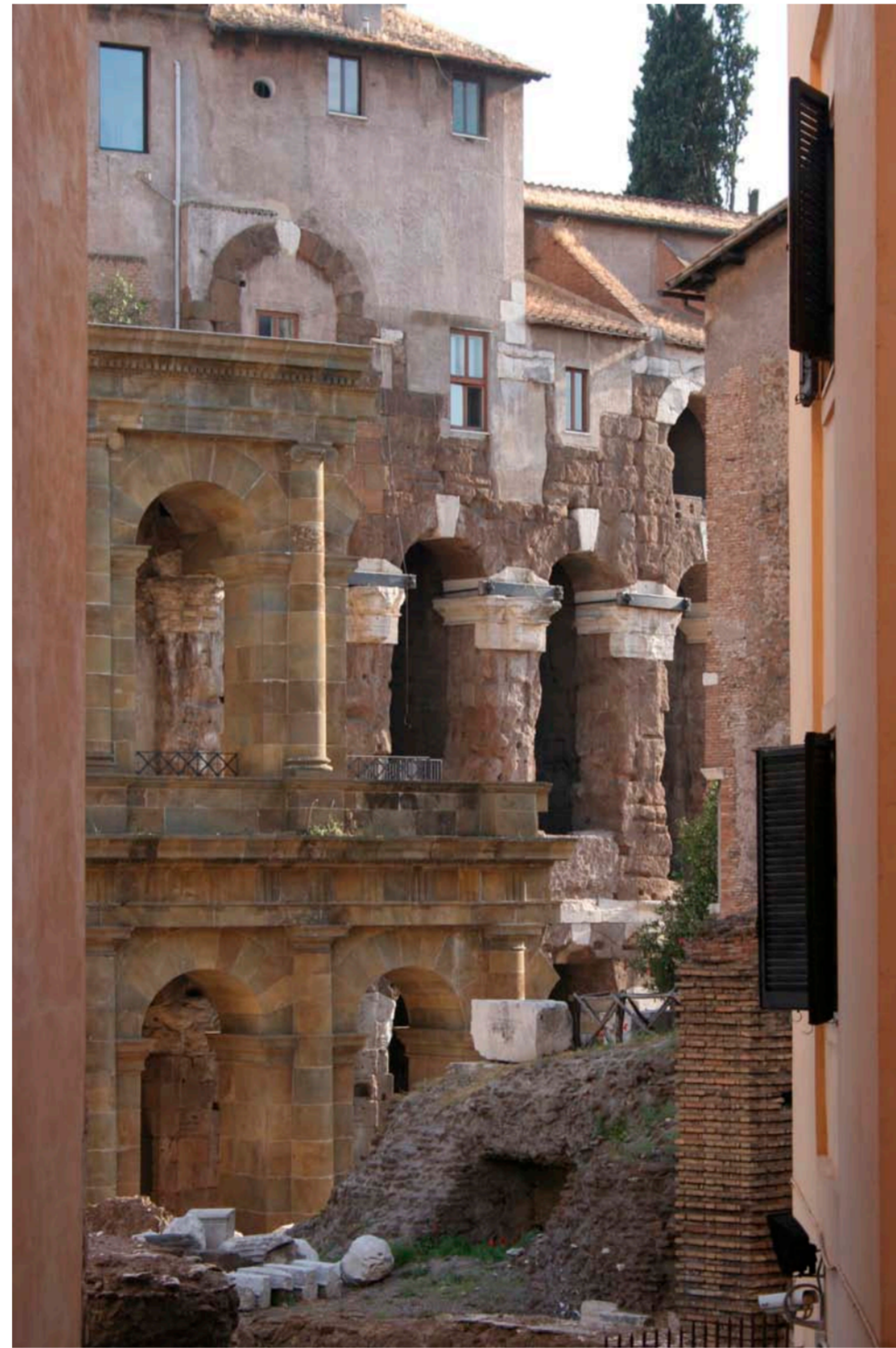
Historic cities provides a model for sustainability: creative re-use of primary building structure, retaining **a legacy of historic structures which remain in use having have outlived their original purposes many times.** Adaptability of existing buildings, and future adaptability of new buildings should be the focus for design: the creation of lasting structures suited to their users needs.

London's housing crisis is usually expressed in terms of quantity: numbers of new units to be created. The real challenge is in quality of housing, rather than quantity: **the creation of architecture which celebrates the everyday**, a simple modest and consistent backdrop which matches the dignified and effective urbanism of London's traditional terraced housing. This is the challenge of **giving dignity, and self respect to all Londoners** by creating good public housing stock, and good quality affordable housing, which is not visibly differentiated in terms of quality or location from higher value accommodation.

Transformation of housing quality requires adaptation of the existing housing stock to reflect changing family and social structures, the aspirations of residents and the environmental challenges of climate change. In the past, London's housing has proved highly adaptable to the shifting patterns of multi-occupancy living. In our vision for London projects will embrace retention and adaptation of housing, coupled with selective densification and insertion, within London's existing "medium rise" urban fabric.

interventions which recognise, respect and enhance the value of this existing diversity.

Diversity is also refelected in fragmentation: growing division between communities and between rich and poor in terms of quality of life as well as cultural and spatial segregation, urban scars, both physical and cultural. **Architectural projects have the capacity to integrate, reconnect, bridge across divides.** To achieve this projects require a broad collective vision which breaks down divisions and which is built on an understanding of the experiences that unite London's communities and define the unique identity of London as a whole: the continuing evolution of our urban fabric, the common experience of our public space and the unifying structures of the natural landscape and topography which underlie London's urban development.



Creative re-use of structure:
Theatre of Marcellus Rome, PS1 New York, Kuppersmuhle Museum Germany, Whitby Abbey Yorkshire

Sharing Space

Our public spaces are places are where we experience the diversity of the city and where we most readily learn to appreciate that diversity and understand our place within it. They are places shared with others and, at their simplest, **public spaces are spaces defined by people and activities themselves.** The challenge for designers is to provide a setting which allows this public life to flourish, rather than to design a framework which constrains.

Increasingly, the concept of shared public space has been eroded, principally as vehicular traffic has come to dominate streets and urban spaces. Redressing the balance between pedestrians and vehicles is essential to creating a real and vibrant public realm.

In the London we imagine, **urban spaces are recognised as social spaces**, places where the design balances needs of the different activities and users. Shared surfaces characterise principal public spaces: spaces where the speed of vehicular movement is appropriate to the complexity of a renewed public life. A speed limit of 20mph throughout Inner London allows traffic to flow more steadily, with greater safety for pedestrians: at these speeds natural stone provides a safe and high quality road surface. Part closures of roads in areas of intense pedestrian activity create the opportunity to link existing public spaces, making connections which transform the mental map of central London: imagine Charing Cross Road closed between the new piazza at St Giles Circus and Trafalgar Square, linking the vibrant activity of Covent Garden and Soho.

Selective demolition will create new public spaces, transforming areas where there is sufficient density to support public life, but minimal provision of public space: this is where Barcelona's widely acclaimed public space programme was most successful, creating new local squares through demolition of urban blocks, adding value, density and activity around the perimeter of the new spaces. This is regeneration through specific interventions which reveal potential in existing situations: a strategy for creating a new framework of public space, and urbanised density, within residential districts.

Landscape

London lies in the alluvial flood plain of the Thames, with the earliest settlements made on low gravel hills. This is the landscape London, from the City itself through to villages such as Rainham in the east. It is **a landscape shaped by water**, the Thames, but also the brooks and streams which feed into it: Westbourne, Tyburn, Fleet, Walbrook, Counters Creek, Stanford Brook, Beckinger, Effra, Falcon in central London alone.

The transformation of stream to sewer was a gradual process, principally an achievement of London's eighteenth and nineteenth century expansion. Although veiled by development, the routes of these water courses remain visible in the contours of valleys and the alignments of the streetscape above. London's major green spaces are anchored to these streams: the Westbourne in Hyde Park, Tyburn in Regents Park and Fleet at Hampstead Heath.

We envisage a London where, through paring away the layers and accretions of development, **a process of topographical archaeology**, these valleys could be rediscovered as features of the urban landscape. Necklaces of local green spaces would be created, the focus of an extended "green grid". These valleys form natural routes, linking London's suburbs with the centre and the Thames: an opportunity for safe pedestrian paths and cycleways linking the great parks and the Thames Path. Perhaps even St Pancras Way could be rediscovered as the bucolic "wash" of the Fleet. Along the Thames itself twenty years of "domestication" - the landscape of balconied dwellings extending out towards Woolwich - would be reversed, new developments responding to the epic and sublime scale of the estuary landscape. This would be to recover **London as it could have been: development sensitive to its unique ecology and topography.**



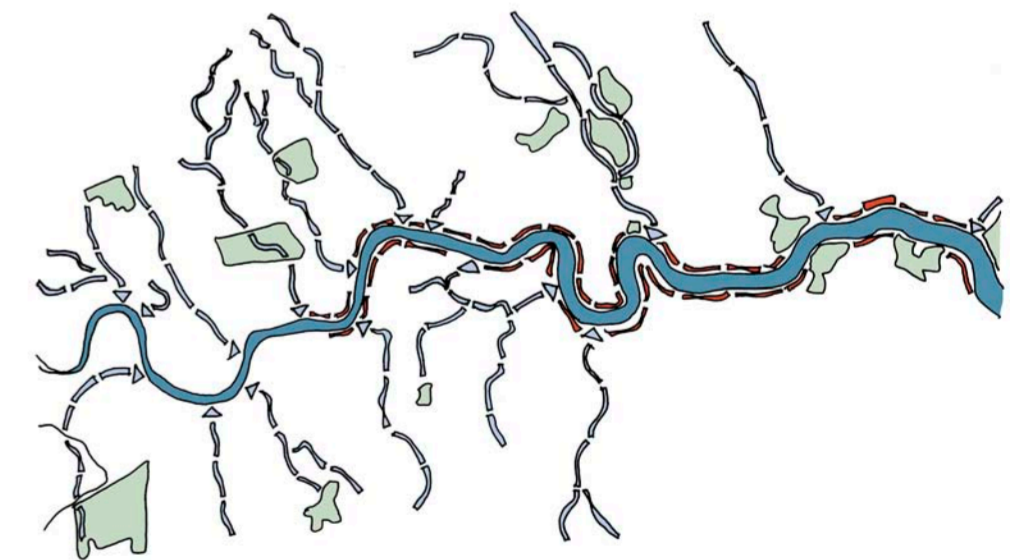
Creating a setting for public life: Tower Hill, London



Space defined by people and activity



Creating spaces for people: Road closure, Charing Cross Rd



Rediscovering the Landscape:
London's rivers as natural routes, Bathing at St Pancras, St Pancras Road today

