

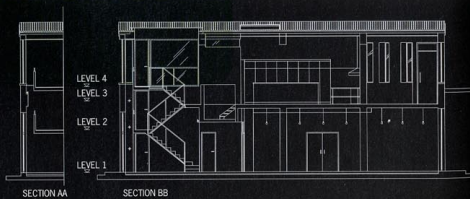
# Post-loft light

by corinna dean, photographs by alan williams and chris gascoigne/VIEW

Stiff and Trevillion's conversion of a 1950s industrial building in Borough into a live/work apartment for client, Keith Wainwright, is an ambitious remodelling of the original property. Back in the late 70s Wainwright, proprietor of Smile hairdressing salon on the King's Road, commissioned Ben Kelly to design the salon, which was then frequented by the great and the good of London's hip scene – Bryan Ferry being one of its regulars. In the early 80s, Wainwright formed a creative live/work community in Charterhouse Square, shared with Piers Gough and Howard Hodgkin, long before the property magnates seized upon the area. Ready for a new challenge, Wainwright jointly purchased 38 Copperfield street, a former post office ancillary building, a stone's throw from the Tate Modern. The building, arranged around a courtyard with a covered loading bay, was divided into several units; Wainwright took half of one side, adjacent to the kinetic sculptor Peter Logan.

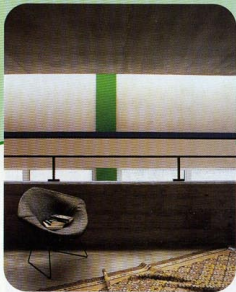
Stiff and Trevillion, whose work ranges from fashionable interiors – it provided the benchmark Bloomsbury branch for the cool minimalism of Wagamama restaurants – to large-scale office developments such as Siemens in Hampshire, was commissioned by Wainwright to convert the warehouse and provide live/work spaces, three bedrooms and three bathrooms. Described as exploring the concept of 'a house within a house', the architects removed 30 per cent of the floor area and inserted a three storey free-standing shuttered-concrete structure which incorporates a staircase.

The two-storey building faces south east and is tightly hemmed in at the rear by a



The insertion at the rear of the building is set back 500mm from the original warehouse wall, allowing shafts of light to penetrate into the lower floor





The owner's bedroom (top) overlooks the stairwell. These cellular rooms at the back of the building also overlook a full height void (centre). The bottom image shows the owner's en suite bathroom and semi-enclosed tiled bath



Slot windows in the open plan kitchen and living space offer views into the staircase tower. Each slot is angled obliquely to construct the view in a highly mannered way

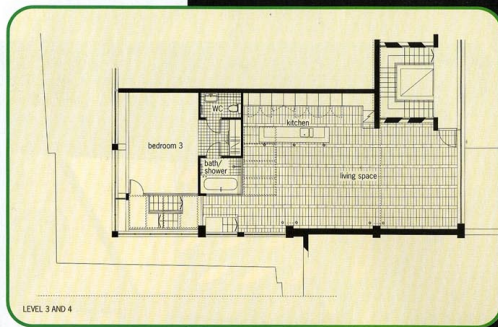
party wall that leaves a narrow channel of approximately 2m. The architect maintained the open plan floors at the front of the building, and placed the insertion to the rear. To bring light into this area of the building, additional windows were introduced into the existing steel frame. The ground floor of the insertion accommodates a bedroom with en suite bathroom, above is a study and on the third floor is the owner's bedroom and another en suite bathroom. The structure is constructed of cast-in-situ floors with low balconies cast as one slab, the balconies acting as a beam. The floors are supported off the party wall and a newly

constructed block concrete wall. The intervention does not touch the original warehouse elevation, but is set back 500mm to allow shafts of light to penetrate into the lower floor. A strip of glazing seals this void at roof level for acoustic purposes.

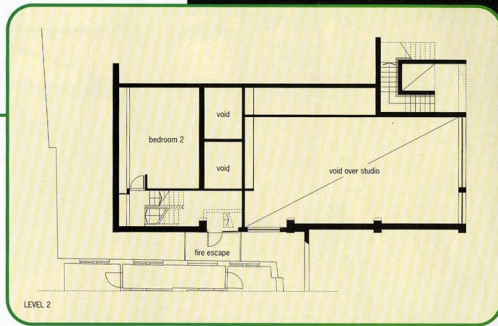
This separation of the insertion from the existing building is again expressed in the design of the staircase which sits as a free-standing object to the rear of the interior. A concrete wall to the height of the handrail has been cast in-situ with exposed-grain shuttering, reminiscent of the Hayward Gallery staircases. The treads of the stairs are covered in 12mm thick blue grey natural

river slate. As the building has three points of external escape the architect was not required to enclose the staircase. The means of escape on the third floor links up with the external fire escape stair of the adjacent building, which sits cheek-by-jowl with the building's west elevation.

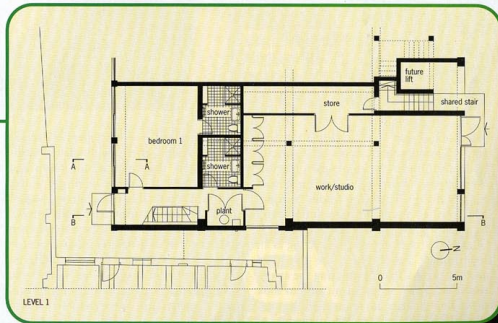
The building can be entered through the ground floor living space from the main courtyard. This is perhaps the most disappointing aspect of the conversion. The complexity of the scheme is not communicated as one enters a space which – at least on a winter's day – is rather dark. The building line has been brought forward to



LEVEL 3 AND 4



LEVEL 2



LEVEL 1



#### CREDITS

##### ARCHITECT

Stiff and Trevillion  
**STRUCTURAL ENGINEER**  
 Techniker

##### MAIN CONTRACTOR

Coleman Building  
 Contractors

##### SUBCONTRACTORS AND SUPPLIERS

*kitchen joinery* Gary Wild  
*Hand Built Furniture;*  
*metalwork* McFarlane  
 Telfer; *sanitaryware* CP  
 Hart; *ironmongery*  
 Higrade Hardware; *slate*  
 Winclate; *tiles* World End  
 Tiles; *light fittings* SKK

Conceived as a freestanding object, the semi-open staircase is robustly detailed. The concrete wall was cast in-situ with exposed-grain shuttering reminiscent of the Hayward Gallery staircases

incorporate what was the formal loading bay. A second, more ceremonial, entrance leads up through the communal intersection between Wainwright's apartment and his neighbour's. This is a generous staircase, which wraps around a lift space and leads up to a balcony overlooking the courtyard. It resembles a tenement stairwell, acting as an intermediate area between the courtyard and the private flat. On entering the apartment, tall arrow slots permit one to look down into the staircase tower from the interior. The slots are angled obliquely to construct the spectator's view in a highly mannered way.

The open space on the upper floor acts as a multi-functional area with kitchen facilities running the length of the south east wall, set behind a plane of maple veneer walls which unfold to reveal the working of the kitchen or fold into a flush wall. Vitrolite panels line the splash area above the kitchen sink. The lines of geometry subtly articulated in the finishes, such as the tramlines in the slate floor, are played off against the strong geometry in the drawing out of structural elements such as the sandblasted roof purlins. The precast concrete portal frames have been sandblasted to expose the aggregate. Throughout the warehouse the

original Crittal windows have been reglazed and roof lights inserted to bring daylight into the deepest part of the plan.

The layout of the apartment successfully balances the domestic scale of the cellular spaces with the principal open plan areas, without compromising the loftiness of industrial living.

At the time of my visit, work on the neighbouring building was well under way, and a large-scale lift was being constructed to hoist up Logan's sculpture. The work should make for a rich mix of small scale urban development, which avoids the clichés of fast-track loft developments.