

On Broadway (Market)

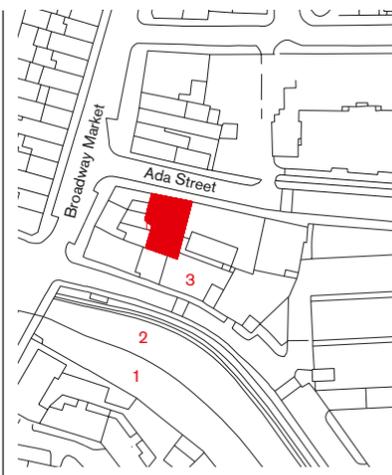
Abstract and asymmetrical, Amin Taha Architects' mixed-use development is a flamboyant addition to its hip East End locale, and a bargain to boot, writes *Felix Mara*.
Photography by *Charles Hosea*

Broadway Market, in the east London borough of Hackney, has everything young professionals could wish for: a bookshop, a delicatessen, a cycle repair shop (with café) that sells second-hand bikes and cycling helmets disguised as trilbies, an old-fashioned toy shop, and now, at its junction with Ada Street, a mixed development with inclined black rendered walls and a random arrangement of large, reflective windows by Amin Taha Architects.

The client, a friend of director Amin Taha, wanted an inexpensive development with a gallery at ground floor level and flats above, and a utilitarian quality that would appeal to thirty-something professionals. The outcome has three two-bedroom flats on one side of a central staircase, and

the same number of three-bedders on the other, with two retail units below. Because there are less than 10 units, the local authority did not stipulate affordable flats. None are designed to Lifetime Homes standards, nor as accommodation for disabled residents, and the client did not want to pay extra for environmentally responsible design beyond the statutory essentials.

The site is in a conservation area and Broadway Market, a parade of ground floor A1-5 units with flats above, is unusual because of the way it is embedded in a predominantly residential district. Hardly any of these units belong to chains, and the parade starts at a hump bridge over the Grand Union Canal¹ at one end and is terminated by London Fields at the other. The architect and >>



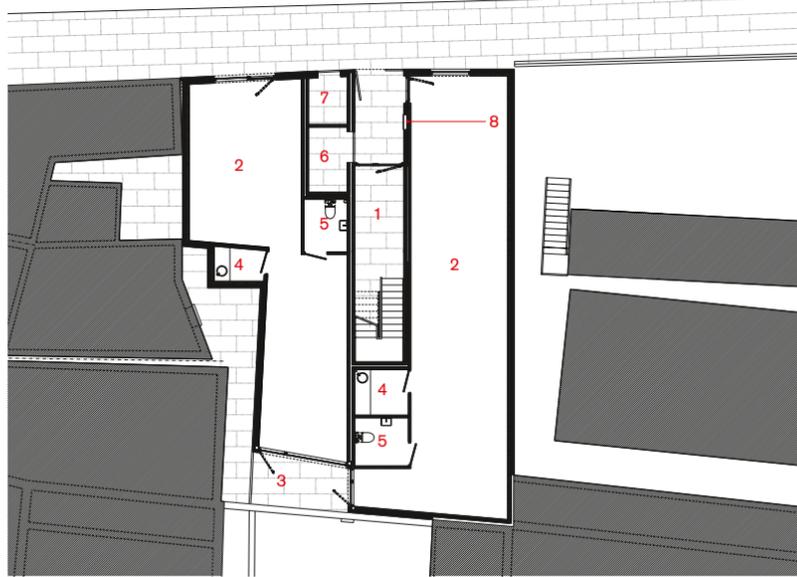
Location plan

1. Grand Union Canal
2. Regent's Canal
3. Works

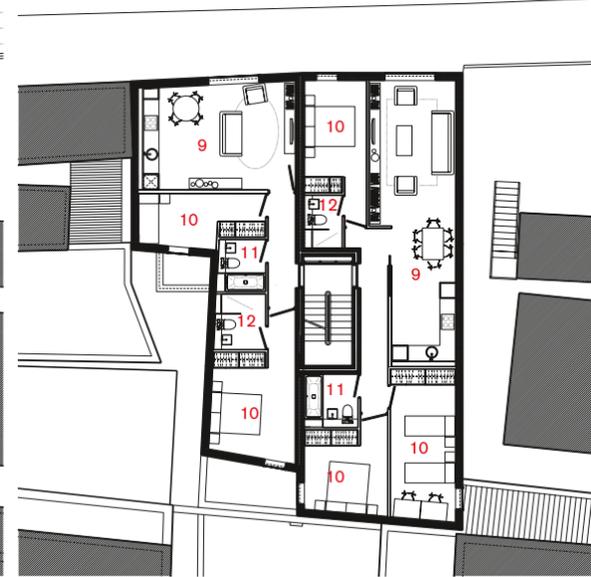
Right Ada Street elevation – a facade in constant motion



Ground floor plan



First floor plan



Second floor plan



Third floor plan



Legend

1. Entrance to flats
2. A1 unit
3. Courtyard
4. Kitchen
5. WC
6. Bin store
7. Cycle store
8. Letter boxes
9. Kitchen/living/dining
10. Bedroom
11. Bathroom
12. Ensuite



planning theoretician Camillo Sitte might have referred to this as an urban corridor and, with its secluded, convivial atmosphere, it resembles a long external room. The planners did not regard Taha's site in Ada Street as high-street development, but there was a height restriction – hence the flat rooftop – and they expected it to be 'ground-floor-plus-one'. They got ground-floor-plus-three.

Embedded between buildings on either side of its Ada Street frontage, and with further development to the south expected, Taha's addition deliberately stands alone and makes no attempt to ape its 19th-century



neighbours in Broadway Market, where there is a pronounced horizontal line between shop fronts below and flats above. 'We didn't want the windows to align with the other buildings as this would have "connected the dots",' says Taha. Although European architects are understandably proud of their traditional urban heritage of streets and squares, perhaps the backlash against the type of Modernist town-planning which endorsed stand-alone buildings went too far.

Taha's building has none of the traditional detail of the brickwork facades of Broadway Market, with no projecting copings or window sill drips, and this gives it an abstract quality similar to, but much more pronounced than, the white-rendered iceberg on its west flank. There's an abstract quality in the distorted clock-face pattern of its windows, like a levelled-out version of Henri Matisse's painting *The Snail*. There's also a timeless, enigmatic quality, like a Giorgio de Chirico painting. It could as well be in outer Tokyo, and the narrow retail units and flats on its east side and meagre courtyard reinforce this impression. Rather than simply

drawing on the genius loci, Taha's addition, with its strong presence and subliminal refinements, actually helps to redefine it.

The Ada Street frontage is gently cranked on plan and, more noticeably, in its section and elevation. 'You can soften the mass by tilting the facade,' says Taha. The vertical windows sink into and contrast with these soft, matt, battered walls, and rather than absorbing most of the light that hits them, they variously reflect the sky and the warm hues of neighbouring brickwork, giving the facade life and a quality of realism that verges on the surreal. Alternating positions of ventilators in the large apertures add further animation. The specified window manufacturer's products are available with black frames, and Taha took the opportunity to match them with the finish to the render, although at one point he dabbled in a colourful 'paint-pour' treatment.

Like the guardings behind the full-height opening windows, the gates at the main entrance to the flats and the adjacent cycle store door are bespoke, with black perforated metal sheet, which also forms the balustrade on the top landing of the staircase

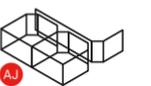
serving the flats. This staircase is treated with loving attention to detail and is meticulously set out. Its flights are precast concrete with fair-faced soffits, and this has made it possible to work to exacting tolerances, with 30mm gaps between these units and the skylight-washed blockwork walls. An offset on plan of only 10mm between flights, leaving clearance for 3mm diameter stainless steel tension cables at 50mm centres which form the staircase guardings, strung like a harp between springy laser-cut frames at ground floor level and a V-beam at roof level with an integral gutter. Stainless steel eyelets, forming guides

for these cables, and brackets for the cantilevered CHS handrails are fixed to the faces of the precast flights. The landings are finished with screed and grout, and they span between the stairwell walls, so there are no awkward downstand beams. Because the budget was tight and procurement was Design and Build, the blockwork is not fair-faced and the riser cupboards in the staircase do not, as intended, read as a simple, continuous black wall – there are too many vertical joints. But at least the key-clamp balustrade proposed by the contractor was rejected.

The interiors of the deep-plan flats do not shy away from this hardcore >>



From far left Henri Matisse's *The Snail*; Render to north-facing walls absorbs light while windows reflect colour; 'Before' photo with typical Broadway Market facades (right)



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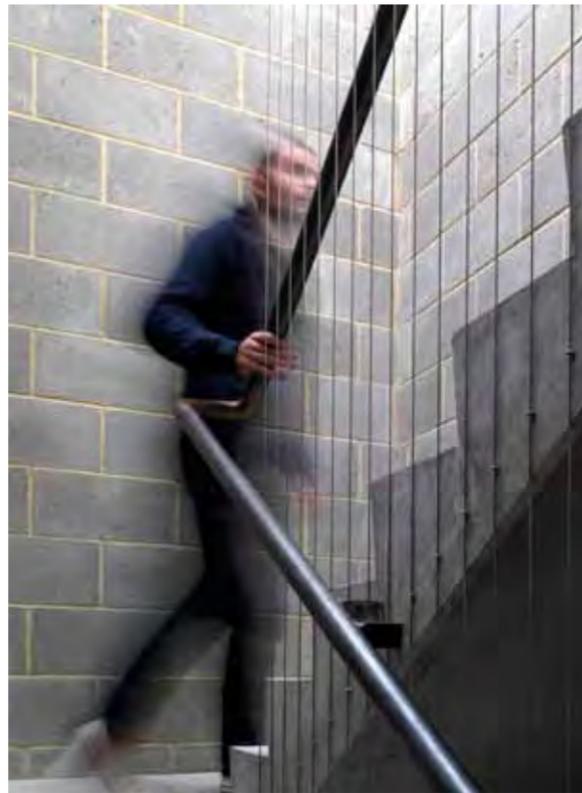


minimalism, eschewing skirtings, false ceilings and radiators. Ceilings are precast fair-faced hollowcore planks, carefully installed with canvas straps rather than chains to prevent damage. It will probably be boded conduit for residents who opt for downlighters. Floor surfaces are polished, power-floated concrete with embedded underfloor heating pipes, which provide thermostatic control in each room, but the client insisted on a varnished finish which is inconsistent with the soffit treatment. Gypsum board wall linings have 10mm shadow gaps where they meet the floor and ceiling, and Taha also designed cabin-like kitchen units and fitted cupboards with concealed lighting in the recesses at their junctions with the ceilings. 'We didn't have much control

Guardings are strung like a harp between the staircase flights

over detail,' says director Richard Cheesman (who, interestingly, worked as the contractor's novated architect while Taha remained 'client side'), but although sanitary fittings are very basic, the interiors are nothing to be embarrassed about, and are enhanced by the way their windows frame external views.

The project was on site for just nine months and although the contractor chose a share of the overall profits from the development in lieu of payment for preliminaries, overheads and profit, the cost of £850 per square metre is still remarkable. Taha's commitment to the project helped to make this possible. 'We had to draw everything up, if only to give us something to argue with, even if we ended up painfully losing time and money,' he says, but you sense that he prefers this to the embarrassing alternative of bastardised conceptual design completed by others. Some astute decisions also helped. Apart



from inclined timber framing to the battered walls, there are no columns: most of the vertical structure is load-bearing blockwork, and this expedited construction. Its insulated render has an additional layer of reinforcement at ground level and, although some would prefer the resonance of three-part render, no one could deny that it sounds and feels like what it is.

'For us, it's just sensible building – you have to spend £3,500 per square metre to get architecture with a capital "A",' says Taha, perhaps thinking of other projects in his office or Zaha Hadid's MAXXI in Rome (AJ 19.11.09 and 30.09.10), which he worked on. But on the levels of design and technology, which are always at one in the best architecture, Ada Street succeeds precisely because of its extraordinary economy of means. ■

FOOTNOTES

¹ The south side of this waterway is actually part of the Regent's Canal

Above CHS
handrails cantilever from fixing points on load-bearing blockwork, and this expedited construction. Its insulated render has an additional layer of reinforcement at ground level and, although some would prefer the resonance of three-part render, no one could deny that it sounds and feels like what it is.

1. Entrance to flats
2. Ada Street
3. Andrews Road
4. A1 unit
5. Kitchen
6. WC
7. Bedroom
8. Ensuite
9. Bathroom
10. Rooflight
11. Fitted cupboard

0 X_m

Section A-A





Top Typical living/ kitchen/dining room with concrete floor and soffit, no skirtings and full-height opening window with perforated metal guarding **Left** The third-floor kitchen snugles up against the battered external wall **Above** xxxxxxxx

Project data



| | |
|---|--|
| START ON SITE | April 2010 |
| COMPLETION | January 2011 |
| GROSS INTERNAL FLOOR AREA | 635m ² |
| TYPE OF PROCUREMENT | Design and Build |
| TOTAL COST | £540,000 (excluding OHPP taken as part of a financial agreement with client) |
| COST PER SQUARE METRE | £850 |
| ARCHITECT | Amin Taha Architects |
| CLIENT | Jack Burns |
| STRUCTURAL ENGINEER | Webb Yates |
| M&E CONSULTANT | Syntegra Consulting |
| QUANTITY SURVEYOR | Cedarmill |
| ACOUSTICS CONSULTANT | RBA Acoustics |
| CONTRACTOR, PROJECT MANAGER AND CDM COORDINATOR | Cedarmill |
| APPROVED BUILDING INSPECTOR | PG Surveyors |
| CAD SOFTWARE USED | Various |
| ESTIMATED ANNUAL CO ₂ EMISSIONS | 52kg/m ² |

Ada Street mixed development, London

Amin Taha Architects

Wall-window-roof-floor detail

Our client expressed an ambition for utility and unadorned domesticity. The practice's general strategy is to find a binding aesthetic form with a reduced material palette. The detail illustrates the extension of this logic through the use of fewer, yet standard products to reduce construction junction types, associated specialist trades, their time on site and associated costs.

Externally, the Dryvit insulated render system, certified to 24 degrees from the horizontal, is used to perform a number of roles, avoiding the need for copings, sills, external gutters and drains. First, it was used to weather external walls and the upper pitched roof, and around window openings to form reveals, returning to an integral sloping sill. At roof level the system alone forms the parapet and coping, terminating against the roof coverings. Finally, the integral DPC at the base avoids an overlap of trades when sealing the building. Together with Velfac's glazing and Guaranteed Asphalt's inverted flat roof, the external envelope is reduced to three products and trades, contributing to the coherence of the form.

This reduction is followed through internally, where precast concrete planks are left as exposed soffits, and floors are power-floated concrete. This standard floor build-up was engineered to meet acoustic performance requirements without the need for suspended plasterboard ceilings or raised floors. The resultant savings permit the use of underfloor heating and 5 amp lighting circuits throughout, allowing better room layout flexibility, without radiators or pendants determining furniture arrangements.
Richard Cheesman, director,
Amin Taha Architects

Legend

1. Underfloor heating
2. Isorubber Base acoustic resilient layer
3. Hollowcore RC plank with fair faced soffit
4. Concrete topping
5. Rigid insulation
6. Power-floated screed
7. Sealant on closed cell backer rod
8. Polyurethane expanding foam insulation
9. Galvanised fixing lug
10. Shadow gap bead
11. Moisture resistant MDF sill with eggshell finish
12. Dryvit Outsulation insulated render
13. Breather membrane
14. EPS insulation
15. Dryvit Outsulation rail system
16. Rendered sloping sill with Dryvit Dryflex base coat
17. Reinforcing mesh
18. PPC pressed metal flashing to match window frame
19. Velfac 200 window. PPC finish to outer frame. Factory applied paint finish to timber inner frame
20. Raking timber stud
21. Insulated render
22. Roller blind reveal
23. Metal bead
24. Skimmed plasterboard
25. Regulating asphalt
26. Two-coat mastic asphalt
27. Polyester fleece isolating membrane
28. Filter membrane
29. Stone gravel ballast
30. Pressed metal flashing
31. Two-coat asphalt skirting
32. Parapet render on shaped EPS insulation
33. Dryvit Outsulation rail system T spline
34. Dense blockwork
35. OSB

