

**WESTMINSTER**

**RAE 2008, RA2 - H 30**

**BARBER, Peter**

**Identifier: 0610830058973**

**Output 1 (Design)**

**DORIS'S PLACE**

## **Barber, Peter (2002)**

### **Doris's Place, Broadway Market, Hackney**

#### **General Description:**

Doris's Place is an ultra-dense, mixed-use urban regeneration project located on a difficult 4.5m wide slot site in a market street, Broadway Market, in Hackney, a run-down borough of London. It was finally completed and occupied in 2002 after several years in design stage and then on site. The scheme comprises two two-bedroom duplexes at first and second floor level, an employment generating live/work unit with double height space at ground floor and basement, and a gallery space behind a fully glazed shopfront, which is intended to add colour and activity to the street. This was a speculative project design by Peter Barber Architects, which needed single regeneration budget support and very high densities to make it viable financially. Doris's Place achieves a density of 650 habitable rooms per hectare, nearly three times the typical local density levels. Despite the high density, all the dwellings have unusually large interior volumes, a high level of privacy and amenity, and a private external space each.

A crucial element is the open courtyard at first floor level which provides a shared space for access into individual dwellings, while allowing daylight into the heart of the building and via pavement lights into the apartment below. This courtyard, which measures only 4.5m x 4.5m, acts as the social heart of the project. It has since been heavily planted and is a central place where residents can congregate in good weather. The rear duplex unit has a tilted parabolic roof, which creates a spacious top-floor living room and has become a popular local landmark. Doris's Place confirmed the ongoing commitment of Peter Barber Architects to high-density development and strategies such as wrapping different occupancies around one another, overlapping sectional arrangements, and the meticulous placing of windows to provide interesting views and maximize daylight.

#### **Research Questions:**

The primary research issues of Doris's Place include:

- (1) How to use the program requirements and site conditions in Broadway Market to create a model of high density mixed-use building for a compact inner-city site - in this sense, the project was treated as a device to reinforce the centrality of the urban street as the generator of social and economic life, the place where we take on what Hannah Arendt described as 'the space of appearance', where our social being is constructed.
- (2) How to utilise an extensive process of physical model-making and sketching in order to test out complex, high-density housing permutations.
- (3) How to investigate and adapt new manufacturing technologies, most notably in the proprietary plastic fabric sheathing the curved parabolic roof vault, to meet the design objectives within an extremely tight budget and construction schedule.

Thus the core of the research work behind the Doris's Place scheme lies in the combination of spatial and technical inventiveness to devise socially beneficial mixed-use prototypes which can in turn help regenerate gritty inner-city areas of cities like London.

## **Aims/Objectives:**

(1) To achieve a high-density model of urban living to increase street activity and socio-economic conditions in a deprived Inner London borough.

In his 1924 essay, 'One Way Street', the Marxist cultural critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin talks of the culture and form of the city of Naples. In the text he captures fleetingly but beautifully the idea of a city and of architecture that is animated and activated by the business and daily activities of its occupants, thus putting forward the idea of urban space as being inert without people and culture. He sketches the human colour and frantic activity made possible by spatially that is 'permeable', which invites occupation. Benjamin gives an intimation of the fragile and complex reciprocal relationship that exists between people and spaces, between culture and architecture. Hence an aim of the Doris's Place project was to test out the notion that space conditions, and is in turn conditioned by, society and culture - and that therefore architecture can create the potential for social action and activity.

(2) To conceive a way of addressing the issue of architectural sustainability in what are essentially urban rather than technological terms.

Back in 1997, the Urban Taskforce Report chaired by Lord Rogers produced a strong set of recommendations, which through the government's subsequent Urban White Paper made a new kind of project possible. The Urban Taskforce recommended a radical rethinking of zoning policy that for generations has given us boring and inconvenient mono-functional neighbourhoods. It recommended the introduction of tax breaks for the development of sites and perhaps most significantly, it recommended the introduction of new planning guidelines to allow housing construction and 'estate renewal' on a scale unseen since the immediate post-war period. Such a programme has the capacity to deliver the construction and refurbishment of hundreds of thousands of urban dwellings, as well as offering opportunities to create whole new city quarters. Schemes such as Doris's Place are seen by Barber as mini-experiments towards achieving that goal.

(3) To re-establish urban design as the primary driver in housing design.

Seventy percent of the buildings that make up London are houses in some form or another. Housing is thus what creates the very fabric of the city. It surrounds us; it forms the boundaries of public space. So when designing our cities, housing schemes should never be conceived as housing schemes as such, but rather as pieces of urban design. Designs for housing should thus be driven in the first instance by an idea about the city. Streets and public spaces need to be designed first - domestic layouts can then follow.

(4) To consolidate the purpose and importance of urban streets in cities such as London.

Streets clearly work: they are ingenious and effective means of organizing public space and human circulation which have been present since the very earliest settlements. They are hence essential to the social life of cities. To understand this fact, one only has to compare the experience of a stroll along a busy street such as Broadway Market with the experience of walking around a 'typical' London housing estate that is located just a few metres away. Something went very wrong with attitudes to the street in the heyday of British modernism, as if architects had become ashamed or were contemptuous of the street. Today, it is the collective task to re-establish the vital importance of the urban street, as Peter Barber is doing through architectural projects such as Doris's Place.

## **Context:**

Peter Barber is widely acknowledged as one of the most talented British architects who is operating in housing design, linking his research into the nature of street life with the creation of innovative high-density housing models. Doris's Place contributes squarely to contemporary research into higher densities of urban living, as being urged upon the profession by bodies such as the Urban Task Force, and articulated by leading architectural figures like Lord Richard Rogers and Ricky Burdett. Barber has written various essays on the need for a vibrant street life in cities like London and his beloved Brighton - these include an article on the latter in *Architecture Today* (February 2003).

## **Research Methods:**

Several visits were made to the site in order to understand its inherent complexity and potential. Extensive discussions were held with the client, and also the local planning officers, to see how far the dominant local housing density levels could be increased in the scheme. Concurrently a variety of programmatic solutions, different spatial permutations and the three-dimensional complexity of the building and its surroundings were tested through extensive physical model-making and other forms of visualisation, which in turn allowed the refining of the overall configuration of the building in terms of accessibility, light conditions, colouration and its functional viability. These physical models were constructed with the same logic as the real construction operations on site, being regularly and quickly updated throughout the whole process.

## **Dissemination:**

Doris's Place was written up in the *Guardian*, *Independent*, etc., and its planning and innovative roof construction analysed in the architectural press, such as in:

- Merrick, Jay. 'Space, the final frontier', *Independent*, 14 May 2002, p. 26.
- Barber, Peter. 'Solutions: How we cracked it', *Building Design*, 6 May 2005, p. 22.

Peter Barber is frequently invited to give public lectures on his architectural work, now having presented nearly 50 talks across Britain and in countries abroad. As well as the more expected lectures to architectural schools, the RIBA, or the Architectural League of New York, these talks by Barber have also included an invitation to address a symposium on contemporary urbanism in Genoa, Italy (May 2005), or the special session on housing policy at the Labour Party Conference in Manchester (October 2006), or most recently at a multidisciplinary event on urban development for Middle Eastern city mayors held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran, Iran (October 2007).

## **Esteem Indicators:**

The project for Doris's Place was shortlisted for a RIBA London Region Award (2003).

In part due to his design for the Doris's Place project, Peter Barber has recently been awarded with the following prize:

- Winner of Best Affordable Housing Architect, *Building Design* Annual Awards (2007)

## APPENDIX B

### My Kind of Town: Brighton

(Written by Peter Barber for *Architecture Today*, February 2003, p. 64)

Streets thick with people going to and from their homes, pausing for a chat or just passing through. Streets with rows of front doors and bay windows, balconies and roof terraces. Corner shops, pubs and odd factories. A club under the pavement, a mini cinema up a back stair. Old people at the bench under a tree, kids knocking a ball about, shoppers on a mission, scratchies at the cash point.

Brighton is a masterclass in street design, an encyclopaedia of terraced housing variants, a lesson in how streets might be put together to make a city, unfolding like a cinematic screenplay. (Was it Tarkovsky who said that the ancient Greek urbanists were the first great cinematographers?).

Eyes left on the arriving train as the thousand or so worker cottages of Hanover hove into view, a grid of steeply sloping, brightly coloured stucco streets wrap the hill, a tiny pub on each corner, a brilliant festival in June, with every front door open.

For a shift in scale nip across town to one of Europe's great urban set pieces. Adelaide Crescent is a hundred or so late baroque mansions formed into a gigantic serpentine terrace around a two and a half acre public garden. Big skies and big views out to sea.

In between, an uninterrupted two-and-a-half-mile ladder of streets run down to the promenade each following the rules, but each quite distinct in scale, detail and culture. One hundred ways to make a balcony, a window, an entrance. Dozens of ideas for handling the joints and junctions at a street corner - a wrap, a notch, a collision.

And each street a handy stroll down to the seafront. Start at Brunswick Lawns where freshly painted neo classical facades and the easy sweep of the horizon are mis-en-scene for promenaders. Skaters make shapes, cyclists, wheel chairs, push chairs and the refuse truck, strung out clubbers, tai chi and lollies, basketball and smell of beach bar-b-q. Drums and bells a way off, chatter up close. Walk past the listing (+ listed) West Pier poised to collapse (+ and with it the Councils outrageous plans to build a shopping arcade astride the adjacent promenade). On past the Grand Hotel rebuilt after the Irish republican bomb. Walk on by Wells Coates' 'go faster' Embassy Court, now almost beyond repair, a kind of back to front Lawn Road Flats and much better seen from it's rear courtyard.

As night falls and the wind rises head for the shelter of the lanes where the Classical grid gives way to winding passageways and shadowy alleys, once the ancient fishing village of Brighthelmston, from which Brighton grew. Peer into Jewellers' windows. Shuffle sideways along crowded passages.

Emerge into trafficky North Street, cross over into Gloucester Street and enter Brighton's urban oddity ... the North Laines, a strange perhaps unique hit and miss grid of streets that don't line up. All at right angles but quite un-navigable.

Our stroll ends at Nash's Brighton Pavilion. George IV's fun palace - The London Court bored him. Not a 'stand alone' Palace but in true Brighton style, grafted with a flourish, onto the end of a humdrum terrace of shops.

Most people have a story to tell about a visit to Brighton - a sunny day on the promenade, or a hen night in the lanes.

My own earliest memory of Brighton is attending a 'Sea gulls' game as a child in the late 60's. My next visit was when as an adolescent, I sped down the A23 for a Friday night with some mates and was arrested with a newly made acquaintance on the derelict West Pier. In 2000 at the height of the property boom, despairing of ever managing to afford somewhere in London we shifted down there. I am now one of 10,000 people who daily wiz up and down to work.

Brighton has been a lovely place to live. It has also been an inspiration for my street based housing and urban design projects and a vital precedent to refer to.

People say that public space is dead, that gated communities are an inevitability, that valuable residential real estates and housing for the poor need to be segregated and separated, that small local shops can't survive, that housing needs defensible space, that overlooking is problematic and that the mark of a good street is it's bin stores.'

And I say get a life ... and a day return to Brighton.

**Peter Barber**  
**February 2003**

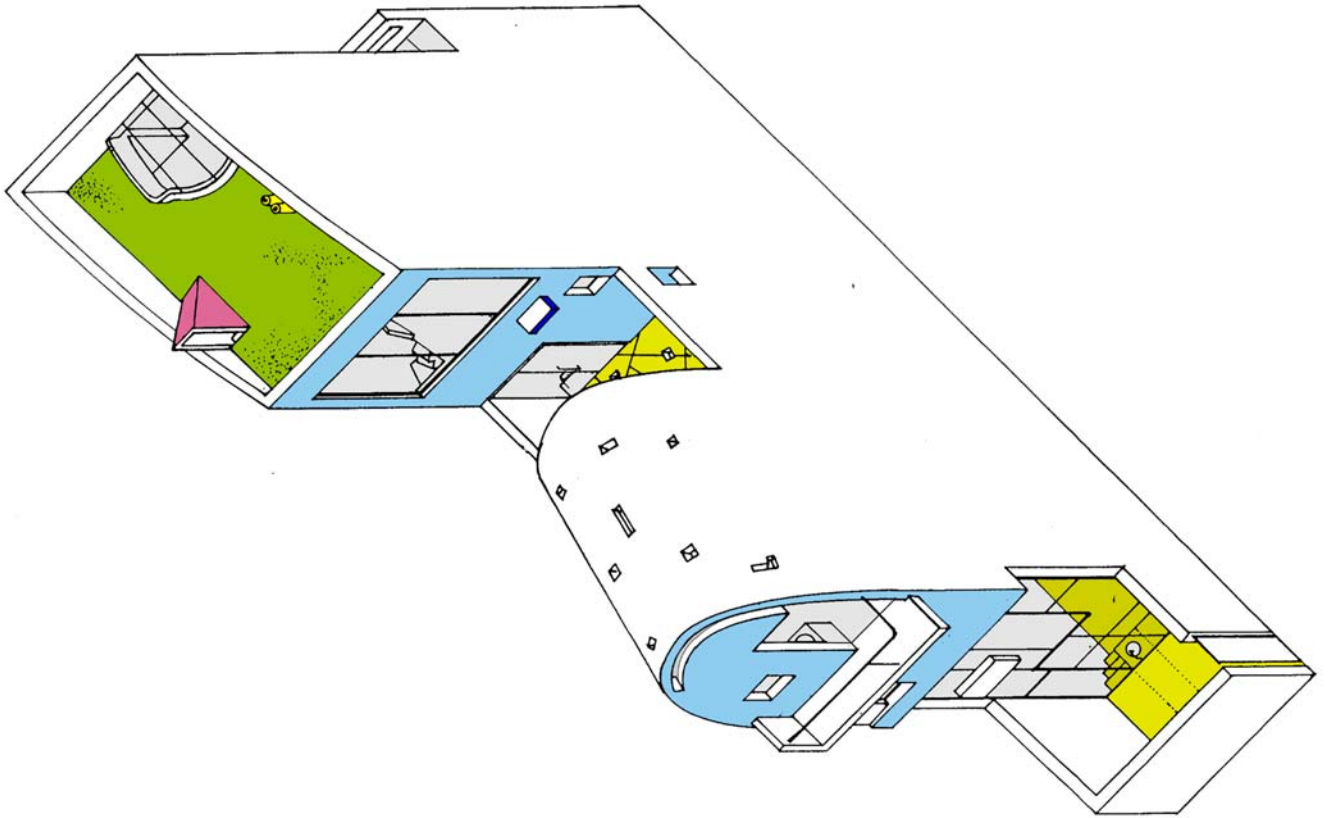


Image 1: Axonometric of Doris's Place, showing the disposition of the 3 housing units and the various courtyards / roof gardens

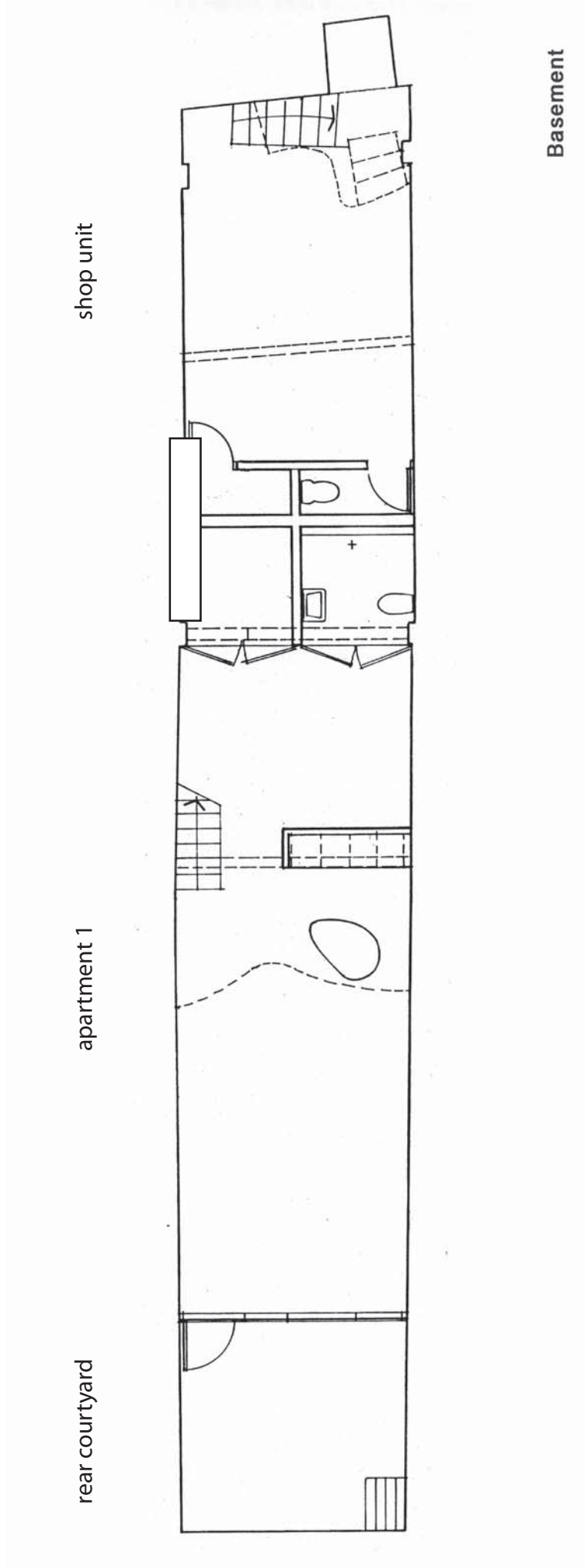
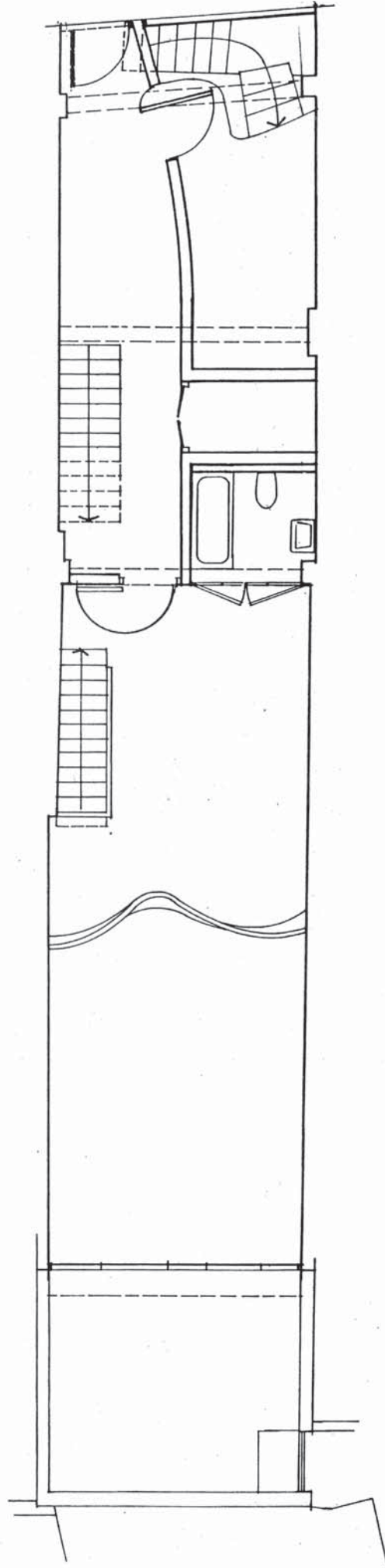


Image 2: Basement plan of Doris's Place, with Broadway Market to the right-hand side



apartment 1

communal staircase / shop unit

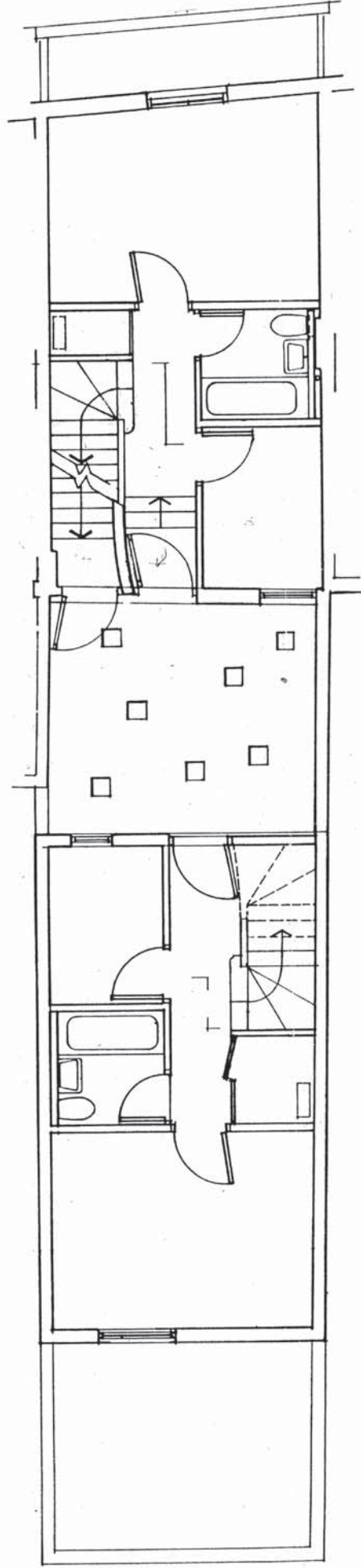


Ground Floor

Image 3: Ground Floor plan of Doris's Place, with Broadway Market to the right-hand side

apartment 2

apartment 3

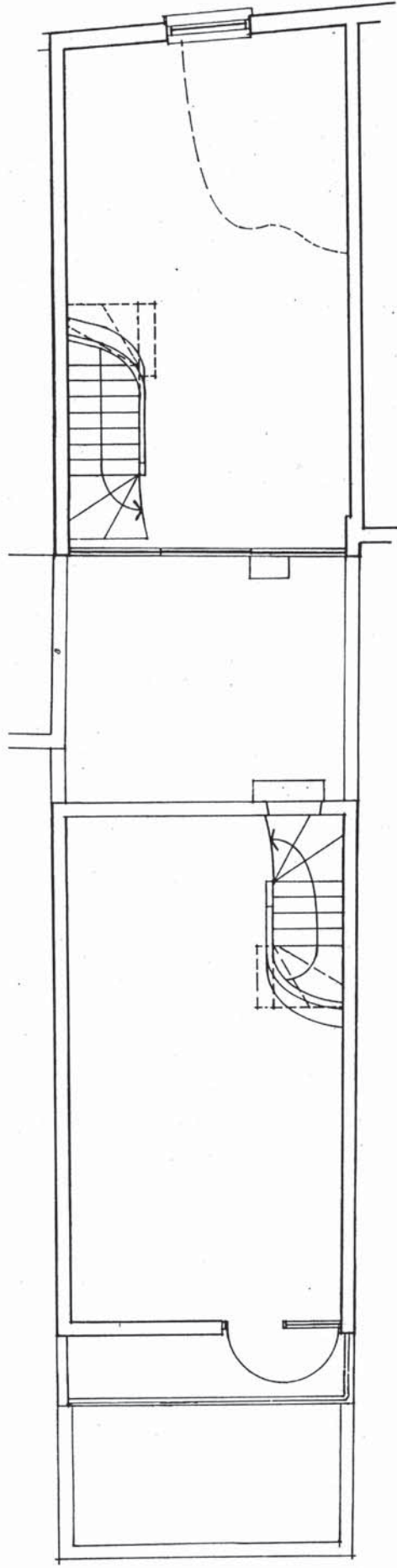


First Floor

Image 4: First Floor plan of Doris's Place, with ingenious open-air courtyard in the centre

apartment 2

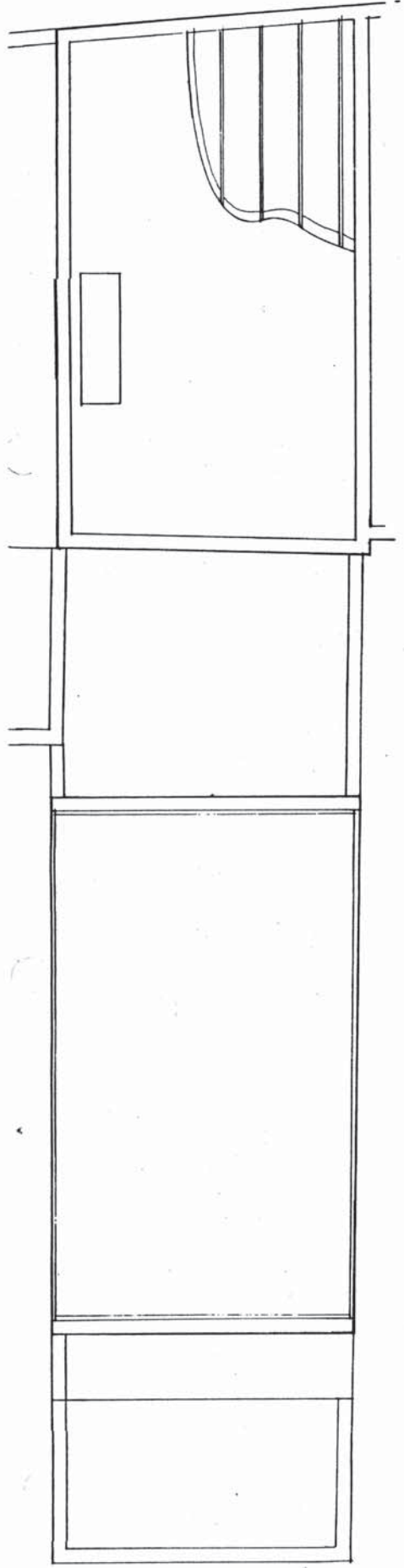
apartment 3



Second Floor

Image 5: Second Floor plan of Doris's Place, with balcony to rear apartment

apartment 3



Roof

Image 6: Roof plan of Doris's Place, with parabolic vault to the left and roof garden to the right

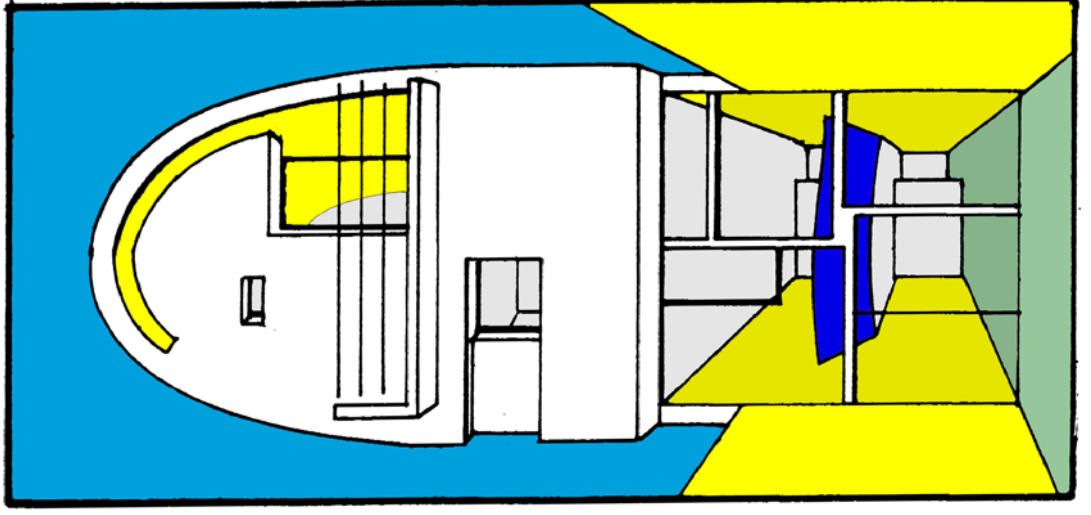


Image 7: Rear elevation of Doris's Place, shown from basement-level courtyard in apartment 1



Image 8: Photo of rear at night



Image 9: Photo of rear at night



Image 10: Photo of balcony to apartment 2  
from basement-level courtyard





Image 11: Photo of external courtyard at first-floor level, looking at apartment 2 facade



Image 12: Interior photo of vaulted ceiling in apartment 3



Image 13: Front elevation of Doris's Place onto Broadway Market



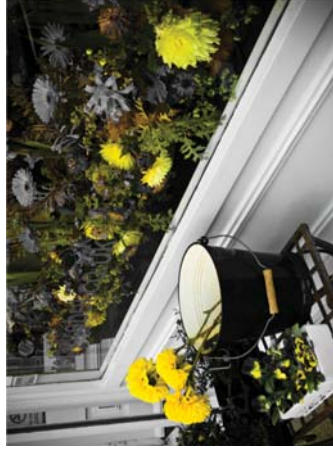


Image 14: Broadway Market street details



Image 15: Construction of hooped steelwork to create rear parabolic vault roof (see also Appendix A)