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Torquay House falls within the Borough of Westminster's Westbourne Green neighbourhood improvement masterplan. The ground-floor frontage, modelling and elevational colour are intended to enliven the streetscape. Green roofs and accessible roof terraces provide amenity space on the tight site.

Relow

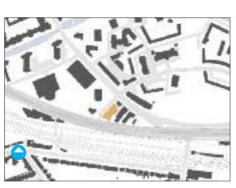
Location plan, section, staircase and view from Westway. The design of the hostel building helps promote communality by placing social spaces and shared facilities, such as the laundry and study areas, in circulation 'hotspots' near lifts and stairs.

It is the conjunction of railways, canals and motorways that defines the fragmented area of west London around LHA Torquay House, a 13-storey hostel designed by MJP. Trains reach their terminus at Paddington, the Grand Union canal weaves its lazy path through through the city, and the elevated Westway looks towards the sunset — as its name implies, it is all about escape from London rather than arrival.

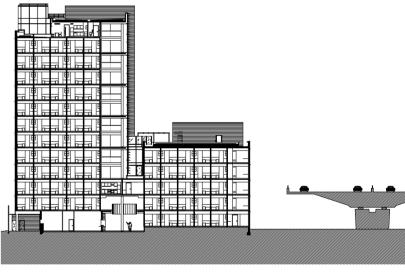
Transportation moulded the modern city and continues to do so. It not only creates places but it carves and severs communities, leaving tracts of land that become secondary and therefore less valuable. These leftover spaces have consequentially been adopted by offbeat and alternative users, but today the commercial value of any land in or near the metropolis is on an upward trajectory, and these places are catching the attention of developers and housing providers.

Founded in 1940 to help those left homeless after the Blitz, LHA London is a charity that today provides short-term accommodation for students and others starting out in this overpriced and increasingly alienating city. Marginal sites are clearly of interest.

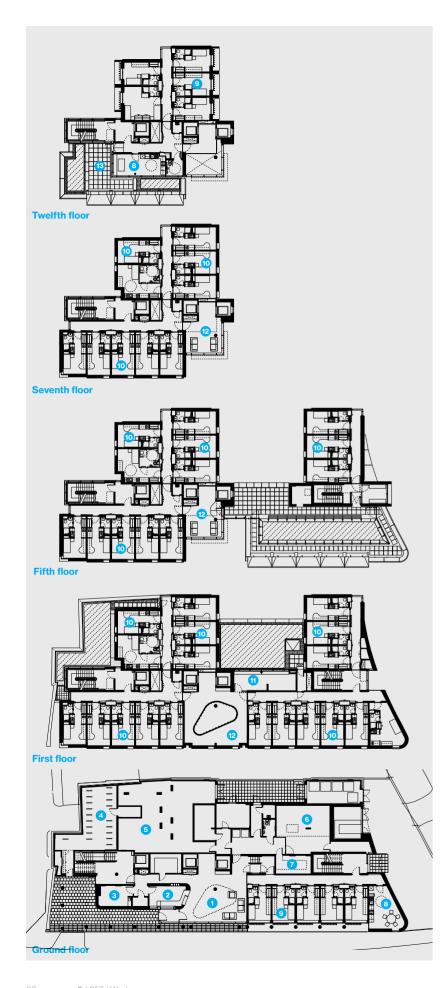
Torquay Street is not much of a street like most of the surrounding area it was redeveloped after the second world war and has a quality reminiscent of places depicted in JG Ballard's books 'High Rise' and 'Concrete Island'. For MJP the challenge was to create a building that provides homes for over 150 people on an island site that offers few contextual clues. Its response was to build a tallish structure that has a clear and individual identity, an architecture that explores formal urbanism and vertical placemaking. The architects have approached the task in a studied, serious and inventive way. The result is a building that enriches the locale and more importantly provides quality living space. In fact MJP has managed to up the game for this building type, where lesser architects may have adopted a lazily formulaic approach.











New tall buildings in the London Borough of Westminster are relatively unusual; the local authority has a preference for the mansion block scale rather than the rampant verticality we are seeing in areas like Old Street and Vauxhall. Torquay Street sits among the 20-storey towers of the Warwick and Brindley Estates, where a young Mick Jones lived with his grandmother in the formative days of The Clash. AHMM's Stirling Prize-nominated Naim Dangoor Academy (2007) is next door. Torquay House muscles in at 13 storeys, slightly lower than the neighbouring tower, but high enough to find clean air above the environmental disaster that is the Westway – traffic pollutants and road noise were key factors that helped to determine the building's design.





Entrance foyer with mezzanine social

Key			
1	Entrance	8	Shared kitchen/diner
2	Reception	9	Ensuite room
3	Workshop	10	Studio room
4	Bicycles	11	Laundry
5	Plant	12	Common social area
6	Gym	13	Roof garden
7	Store		









Plan and views of a typical studio flat. LHA London (formerly the London Hostels Association) is a charity that provides accommodation at reasonable cost for students and others, mostly aged 18-30. Demand is high for rooms that are a step up from most student accommodation, so 80 per cent of the rooms have been designed as microflats with kitchenettes and shower rooms. The remaining 20 per cent share kitchens.

Prefabrication can be the enemy of craft, but I have always believed that the best on tight sites with repetitive spaces and strict architecture comes from constrained rather cost limits it can be used creatively, and here MJP has managed to work the budget to create a building of distinction and quality. The elevations are made from latex-moulded precast concrete panels with terracotta detailing. Fenestration is curiously minimal, though this is a deliberate response to the aforementioned environmental challenges.

than an open-ended budgets, and we see this here. The rooms are small but well equipped, and planned in a way that suggests 'home', with a bathroom, kitchen and a living space in which the architects' clever use of mirror appears to double the window area. There is a monastic quality in buildings of this nature, and the shared social spaces encourage engagement. The corridors sacrifice width for quality — they all end with a window and a view, something whose value should never be underestimated.

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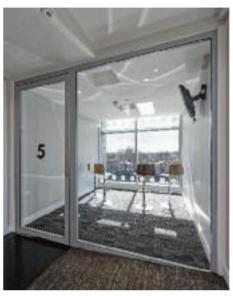
The building is designed to engage with the street. Off-site fabrication was employed where possible to speed up construction. The external walls were pre-assembled off site, with all vertical elements of the structural frame made from precast concrete. Shower rooms, kitchenettes, stairs and furniture were all factory-built.

The building, which achieved a Breeam Excellent rating, takes advantage of views across London while mitigating high levels of road noise and pollution from the adjacent M40 Westway.

The overall result is a building that stamps its impression on the disjointed urbanism that is its context. There is a complexity to the elevation that belies the simplicity of the internal brief, and while it might be overly flattering to compare it to Le Corbusier's Sainte-Marie de La Tourette convent (1959), the themes are similar and the forms reminiscent. Is this a new typology or is it the modern monastery? We live in an increasingly insular and self-centred world, and this building seems to concretise that.











Communal spaces punctuate key parts of the building, adding a social dimension to the programme, and taking advantage of panoramic views across London.

There is no question that MJP's deft handling Project team of scale and proportion has resulted in a positive addition to the west London skyline. This is a place where the planners should and fortunately did — allow bolder, bigger architecture. LHA and MJP have shown that tall buildings such as this can be successful, creating 157 new dwellings that are truly affordable. If London is to thrive as a place as well as an investment vehicle, it is developments like Torquay House that will help ensure its future. The home-owning democracy envisaged in the 1980s by Margaret Thatcher remains a distant dream for many Londoners. As a result we are seeing a shift to the European model of rented accommodation, but that needs to be affordable too. If working people are denied places to live, the city will become an empty shell, a tourist destination rather than a place.

The occupants of Torquay House are fortunate to have found a home here. It may overlook a motorway, but it is one that forms the gateway to a city that is still one of the most exciting places to live on our increasingly overcrowded planet. /

Architect, project manager MJP Architects Design team Russell Clayton, Jeremy Estop, Simon Horner, Arta Muharremi, Eva Pospechova, Michael Ritchie, David Rose, Matteo Sarno, Reza Schuster

Structural engineer Price & Myers Services engineer Michael Popper Associates QS, project manager

Lambert Hart, Artelia Fire consultant Listen Consult Design Acoustics Sandy Brown Associates Client LHA London Main contractor Galliford Try

Selected suppliers & subcontractors

Zinc roofing Rheinzink, All Metal Precast concrete Decomo Windows Deepdale, Kawneer Brise soleil Levolux Lifts Shower pods Sterchele Ironmongery Green roofs **Partitions** British Gypsum Paving Steel doors Fendor Flooring **Curtain walling** Revnaers Metal ceilings

Timber doors

Soundcraft Sanitaryware Twyfords

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