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Inner self

Faced with a 'non view' beyond the windows, designer, Derek Frost, looked for drama within this Covent Garden apartment, described by Catherine Haig. Photographs by George Solomonides



THE ADJOINING buildings crowd in on this prime site in Covent Garden, some of them butting up as close as three feet from the windows. 'Even worse than having a bad view is having simply no view at all,' says designer, Derek Frost. Thus, the starting point for his team at Derek Frost Associates was to turn the apartment in on itself, creating the drama within the space, independent of site and setting.

The apartment, such as it was, consisted of the top two levels of a newly-developed building, incorporating shops and offices below. 'The space was completely derelict, raw, non-domestic,' recalls Derek Frost: 'there was nothing there.' He began by devising the system of Japanese-style screens which retain maximum light from the windows, while veiling the 'non view'. Made

from spinnaker fabric stretched onto metal-laminate sliding screens, they cut out conventional points of reference beyond the windows, giving the apartment a sense of timelessness and a feeling of detachment from the world. To compensate, the central pitched roof (one of three) was extensively glazed.

Echoing the vaguely triangular shape of the apartment, a large triangular well was cut in the upper floor. This allows the natural light to penetrate through to the lower level and succeeds in linking the two levels, creating the feeling of one continuous space. Designed for a bachelor, the apartment is almost entirely open plan, the only enclosed areas being bathrooms and storage. The lower floor comprises two seating-areas, kitchen, dining-area and cloakroom; the upper



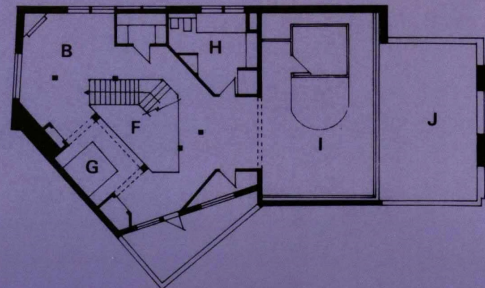
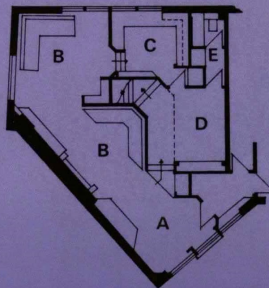
floor, the bed, main bathroom and a seating-area, plus a conservatory and roof terrace.

Derek Frost made no attempt to hide the structure of the building, emphasizing rather than concealing supporting beams and columns. Vertical elements – in particular, the four supporting columns around the stairwell – are clad in copper sheeting, burnt with a blowtorch into rich and elaborate patterns that recall exotic wood veneers. Horizontal beams become sculptural forms, wrapped in aluminium, a highly reflective material that creates a lively play on light and shadow, even in the darkest recesses of the apartment.

The ceilings are finished in tones of silver, the lower one lined in aluminium sheeting, the upper one in a combination of metallized insulation

1 Mirror and aluminium sheeting play tricks with light and space on the lower level. The shelf above the main fireplace echoes the stair rail (see 2) in milled stainless steel, while the shelving unit at left echoes the stair construction with steel shelves above an oak counter. **2** The stairway curves around the intensely-coloured seating-area. Beyond, in more sober grey, is a secondary seating-area.

Key to plan A Entrance B Sitting C Kitchen D Dining E WC F Stairwell G Bed H Main bath I Conservatory J Roof terrace.







cladding and grey paint flecked with white. 'We wanted to expose the underside of the roof pitches,' explains Derek Frost, 'and this proved both practical and decorative.'

The handrail up the stairs and round the balcony enclosure is a sleek, metallic, snake-like construction in one continuous, apparently seamless piece of milled stainless steel. Robin Hunt of Rare Unit was responsible for this and all the metalwork in the apartment.

Linking these strong, almost brutalist elements, the shell of the apartment is restrained. Walls are white; the floor is lined with blue non-slip sheet rubber which rises a few inches up the walls in place of skirting-boards; the stairs are oak. Three principle mirrors enhance the play on light and space: one above the main fireplace on the lower floor, one in the dining-area and one behind the bed. The bed itself dominates the whole space, from its vantage point on the balcony. The juxtaposition of two of the copper-clad vertical columns and the low, aluminium-lined ceiling combine to create the effect of a four-poster, a curiously cosy, intimate retreat in this metallized, modern environment.

Within the near-monochrome shell, splashes of brilliant primary colour define the seating and eating areas, with geometric-patterned rugs specially designed for the apartment in association with Roger Oates □

1 Mirror in the dining-area bounces light into this internal space. Table and chairs are from The Conran Shop. **2** The exposed beams of the pitched roofs are incorporated into the metallic decorative theme. **3** Like its counterparts downstairs, the upper seating-area focuses on the warmth and life of a fire. **4** Copper-cased beams, richly patterned with a blowtorch, and the low aluminium ceiling create the effect of a four-poster around the bed, a soft, crumpled retreat in a starkly linear setting.



