

acmestudios

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WEDNESDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 2009 EVENING STANDARD

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HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

Artists' communities are an important part of our city's life. As we celebrate the London Design Festival, **David Spittles** looks at the creative ways used to find artists homes and keep them living in town

'Homerton launched a clever plan that could be a brilliant blueprint'

From £185,000: flats at Matchmakers Wharf in Homerton are due for completion in 2012. Register with Telford Homes at www.telfordhomes.plc.uk

THROUGHOUT history impoverished artists move to run-down areas in search of cheap studio space. The romantic bohemian air of the area eventually attracts the fashionistas. As it becomes smart and fashionable, property values soar. The impoverished artists, unable to find affordable workspace, move on to another run-down area. And the cycle has repeated itself.

Chelsea was such an area, as were the hilly lanes of Hampstead. More recently our young creatives have headed for Shoreditch and Bermondsey.

Gritty Peckham and Deptford are still in transition. But in the east, Homerton has launched a clever plan that could be a brilliant blueprint for other boroughs.

Under way at a canalside site, formerly a factory where Matchbox Toys were made, is a scheme of 49 permanent purpose-built artists studios, 209

new flats and 13,300sq ft of new commercial space. The waterfront is being opened up to the public for the first time and moorings created, while the apartment buildings include a 14-storey tower that will maximise the views along the waterway (which leads to the nearby Olympic Park) and over Hackney Marshes.

The idea comes from an alliance between developer Telford Homes and Acme Studios, which is a charity that provides workspace for artists.

Hackney council, which in the past has had disputes with developers over so-called "live-work" homes that were never or rarely used for genuine home businesses, has energetically backed this scheme.

Described by the government planning inspector, no less, as having been built, "with care and flair", the commercial space is likely to end up as loft offices for creative businesses and galleries feeding off the new artists' studios, thereby generating local employment. Called **Matchmakers Wharf**, the development's 209 new homes (from studios to four-bedroom apartments) are a mix of 138 private-sale flats, shared ownership and rented accommodation.

Homerton already attracts struggling artists but most of them have had to live in short-lease spaces, says Acme, the charity that is funded by the Arts Council and already has a network of 400 studios across the capital and several developments in the pipeline (see box below).

The private flats are a good, early opportunity to buy into an up-and-coming area, says Telford. While artists' studios may well add value to the private homes, the location is part of a wider regeneration zone spreading out from the Olympic Park – only 200 metres from the International Broad-



Artist Rebecca Stevenson (above) in her studio at the Galleria, Peckham, SE15 (below right). This scheme was a collaboration between Acme and Barratt Homes, which produced 50 studios for rent. None are presently available but for information, call 020 8981 6811

cast Centre, where the world's media will be based during the games.

Completion is due in spring 2012, though homes will be released off-plan early next year. Prices are expected to start at £185,000. Shared ownership homes will be sold through London & Quadrant housing association. To register, visit www.telfordhomes.plc.uk. Matchmakers Wharf flanks the Lea

Navigation, a rejuvenated waterway with an upgraded towpath that has become a busy cycle and pedestrian route into Docklands. The canal skirts past Hackney Marshes before reaching the nature reserves and giant reservoirs of Tottenham Hale.

Along the route, derelict factories, mills and warehouses are being redeveloped and integrated with swathes



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of green spaces to form a regional "country park".

Paradise Park is one such scheme – 132 flats built around a dock with listed buildings dating from the 1830s. Contemporary design blocks have balconies and decked terraces projecting over the dock and with views through the trees to the River Lea.

"Most buyers don't know the area and are surprised at what they find – the greenery, the river and local amenities," says Giles Underhill of developer Vision Homes. Prices start at £175,000. Call 0845 838 2088, or visit www.visionhomes.co.uk.

The Lea Bridge (above) and its barges reflect the historic uses of the River Lea. Close by is Paradise Park (right), where flats start at £175,000. Call 0845 838 2088



'IT'S CHANGED THE WAY I THINK ABOUT MY WORK'

JAN Hendrickse, 42, is a trained classical musician who switched career to become a "sound artist and composer". He works at a 300sq ft studio in Tower Hamlets, provided by Acme as part of a two-year rent-free residency. "It's an amazing opportunity for me to develop my work," he says.

His ground-floor studio has large doors allowing him to make and transport installations. "Before, I had

to make do with a small room in the house in Lewisham where I live, which wasn't satisfactory.

"Having a purpose-built studio has been quite liberating. It's changed the way I think about my work," he adds.

Above the 21 purpose-built studios are 60 affordable flats provided by Swan Housing Association.

For more information about Jan's work, visit www.janhendrickse.com.



Jan Hendrickse in his Acme studio

LEADING THE WAY IN HELPING ARTISTS



ACME Studios was founded in 1972 and has helped more than 5,000 artists find affordable space. In the early days, it negotiated short leases on empty buildings and licensed the space to artists prior to redevelopment.

Later, it bought its own buildings, then pioneered new models of mixed-use development. It also provides rent-free "in-residence" studios plus bursaries of £10,000 a year. Priority goes to "non-commercial" artists.

The typical rent for a 300sq ft workspace is £215 a month, about the third of the cost of a commercial rent for a studio. Buildings are mainly in east and south London, including Peckham, Poplar and Hackney.

Coming soon is a scheme of 123 flats and 12 studios at Manor Point on Harrow Road.

Another 15 studios will be part of a mega scheme of 655 homes and a 153-bedroom hotel on Stratford High Street.

For more on all schemes, visit www.acme.org.uk, or call 020 8981 6811.

Artist Lisa Cheung in one of Acme's dozen live/work homes at the Fire Station, E14. Call 020 8981 6811



Atelier Court in E14 offers 21 Acme studios, called Leven Road, which are built into the development's ground floor. For more details, call Acme on 020 8981 6811

For more information please contact:

Jack Fortescue, Communications Officer

Acme Studios, 44 Copperfield Road, London, E3 4RR

T 020 8981 6811 E mail@acme.org.uk W www.acme.org.uk