



Sculptor Mark Haywood, who lives and works in Bermondsey, is one of many prospective tenants interested in the Peckham studios (below)

Nineteenth-century artists like Matisse struggled to make a living in dank studios they could ill afford. So I'm sure they would be green (or rather, olive, jade or emerald, depending on your palette) with envy if they heard about The Galleria. In a pioneering planning initiative – the first of its kind in London – 47 artists' studios are to be constructed as part of a mixed-use scheme of private and affordable housing and workspaces. In partnership with housing association Acme Studios, Barratt Homes will construct the artists' spaces as part of this new scheme in Peckham, south-east London.

For years, Peckham was written off as a rather dodgy Del Boy place "on the wrong side of the tracks", to be avoided at all costs. But after winning a major tourism award last year, with 13 of its streets firmly put on the tourist map, things are really starting to look up. Only six years ago, the whole Belenden Road area was little more than decrepit Victorian terraces. But after a rejuvenation campaign involving local artists, the area has become as funky as Hoxton or Whitechapel. If you stroll round the streets now, you will unearth bollards designed by Zandra Rhodes and Antony Gormley, gates by Heather Burrell and street lighting from Tom Phillips. Restaurants, an award-winning library and three art galleries have all moved in.

The new studios, totalling around 16,000 sq ft of affordable work space, are part of The Galleria development, which will also have 79 apartments in a contemporary building just off Summer Road. The development is on the site of a former printing works that has since relocated. The studios will replace 30 existing affordable studios in neighbouring Bermondsey (where the lease is set to expire) and will increase the charitable housing association's overall stock to more than 400 work spaces.

One artist who will benefit hugely from the partnership between Barratt and Acme Studios is sculptor Mark Haywood, 37. He is looking forward to an affordable place to work that is "more suitable and less beaten up" than his current space at Acme's Larnaca Works, a 1930s Bermondsey concrete factory converted to 60 studios.

Goodbye, gloomy garret

A celebrated library and lively street art have transformed Peckham, says CHERYL MARKOSKY. And a new housing scheme is set to attract one desirable denizen in particular – the artist

His existing studio will go when the lease expires in 2006. "These days, as well as having good light, space and access, I need a studio that also has office space so that I can do all the paperwork that is inevitably required," says Haywood. "That's why I have been hoping to get one of these new studios."

Mark says that in order to make a living from his art, it is crucial that he has subsidised studio space through Acme. "It would be incredibly difficult for me to live

and work in London. I certainly would not be able to get studio space at a commercial rent and pay full business rates." He adds that one of the reasons Acme will not be able to renew its lease in Bermondsey is due to escalating property values.

Michelle Moynieux is also keen to move into her purpose-designed space, primarily for the natural light that will stream through the floor-to-ceiling windows, but also for utilitarian modern conveniences like good central heating. "Being an old factory, Larnaca Works is especially prone to dust – which is very bad news for anyone who makes and prints photographic images as I do," she says.

So why would a volume house builder get involved in such an endeavour? Barratt Southern's Clive Fenton says, "There is undoubtedly a desperate need for affordable and properly designed studio space for artists in London, and we are convinced of the cultural, economic and social value of a project like this. The partnership with Acme works in much the same way as a partnership with a housing association. We build and sell the studios at very low cost to Acme, enabling them to let them at subsidised rates to artists who otherwise have little hope of finding good-quality studio space."

Fenton thinks the residential buyers will get a frisson from having a small colony of working artists as their neighbours. "Like the contemporary design of the building and the location, the studios will be seen as one of the development's attractions."

Jonathan Harvey, one of the directors at Acme Studios, agrees that this is a good model: "It's not just a sustainable mixed-use scheme where the artists' workspace may actually add value to the homes on sale, but also an example of how affordable workspace can be provided in London."

Overlooking Burgess Park and just a few minutes' walk from Peckham Rye overland station, The Galleria's apartments will have fully fitted designer kitchens and bathrooms and most will have balconies. Some of the duplex penthouses will have sizeable roof terraces. Prices will start from around £170,000.

And, if new residents fancy a spot of hand-painting or some new art to brighten their minimalist walls, they won't have to go far to find it.

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Michelle Moynieux's work can be viewed on www.artistseye.com

