

Kate Macintosh



Dawson's Heights, 1969.

I first became aware of Kate Macintosh's work through her contribution to the publication *Project: Interrupted*, a series of transcribed lectures by acclaimed British housing architects.¹ Here she talked about two of her own housing schemes of vastly different scales: Dawson's Heights, a superscheme with 300 units which she designed at the age of just 28 and Macintosh Court, a social care home of 44 units.

She set these projects in the context of London in the swinging sixties with its vibrant social housing programme and finished with an activist's plea to address the current state of social housing in the UK. I found this unusual, as architecture lectures often tend to treat built projects as finished business.

I became curious about this woman who had decided to make a career in the public sector. In her book *Breaking*

This article forms a chapter in a series formulated to shed greater light on the practices and innovations of leading women architects. The series is the result of the conversations and collective editorial work of a group of female colleagues and friends who want to highlight the work of women heroes who inspire them.

While discovering more about the *œuvres* and design principles of three female architects – Cini Boeri, Margaret Kropholler and Kate Macintosh – we also came to realise our true motivation behind the project was a shared desire for an increased diversity of role models.

Dawson's Heights, Southwark,
London, designed when Macintosh
was 28.



Ground: Architecture by Women, Dr. Jane Hall talks about how the dominant narrative in architecture, centred on singularity and authorship (the architect genius, working alone, probably sketching on a napkin, whose name alone is stamped on the final building) has been largely responsible for eclipsing women from architectural history.²

Why had Kate Macintosh chosen to practice for over 30 years in a context where her authorship ran the risk of being subsumed into the achievements of an anonymous body, 'the council'? Which other projects had she realised that I didn't know about? Was she able to develop her own formal language and design principles within the multiplicity of financial, bureaucratic and standardisation constraints?

I was fortunate enough to interview Macintosh for this article. Prior to the interview she sent me plans and photographs of other projects that I found otherwise barely documented online and in those archives in which I had searched. These projects included social housing and education design, as well as a number of fire stations. Regardless of scale, all these projects share a spirit of generosity towards their users, embodying "a holistic attitude to architecture... [where] structure and aesthetics are not placed at odds, but as inextricable: flowing and melding, transforming each other."³

In the course of the interview, it became clear that the quality of Macintosh's built work is also indivisible from the other defining aspect of her career: her activism. Her professional commitment to delivering quality in the public sector is a reflection of her belief that architecture at its most basic should provide "shelter, protection and liberation, both physical and psychological".⁴

Her work has influenced the direction of public housing and education design by municipal authorities in the UK, yet she has also campaigned tirelessly for tenants' rights throughout the length of her career.⁵

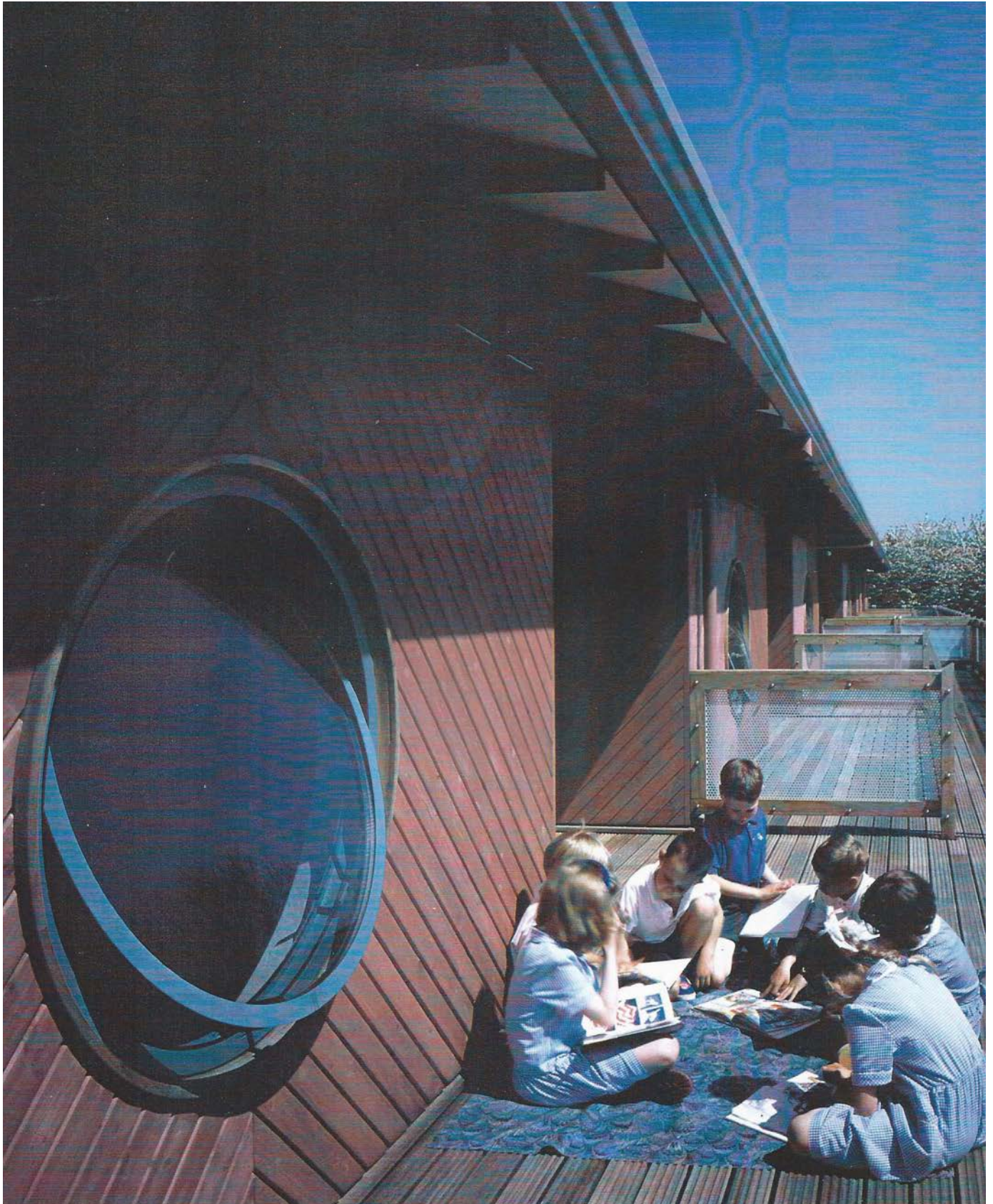
An ardent feminist, Macintosh has worked hard to ensure that her authorship be acknowledged in her own built work.⁶ Moreover, Macintosh has also championed the rights of women in the architecture profession since the 1970s,

The quality of Macintosh's built work is indivisible from the other defining aspect of her career: her activism.



Kate Macintosh in 2018.

Solent Infants School, Portsmouth, 1995. Macintosh's work maximises the special qualities of elevated sites: every classroom has a view of the sea and an external teaching deck.

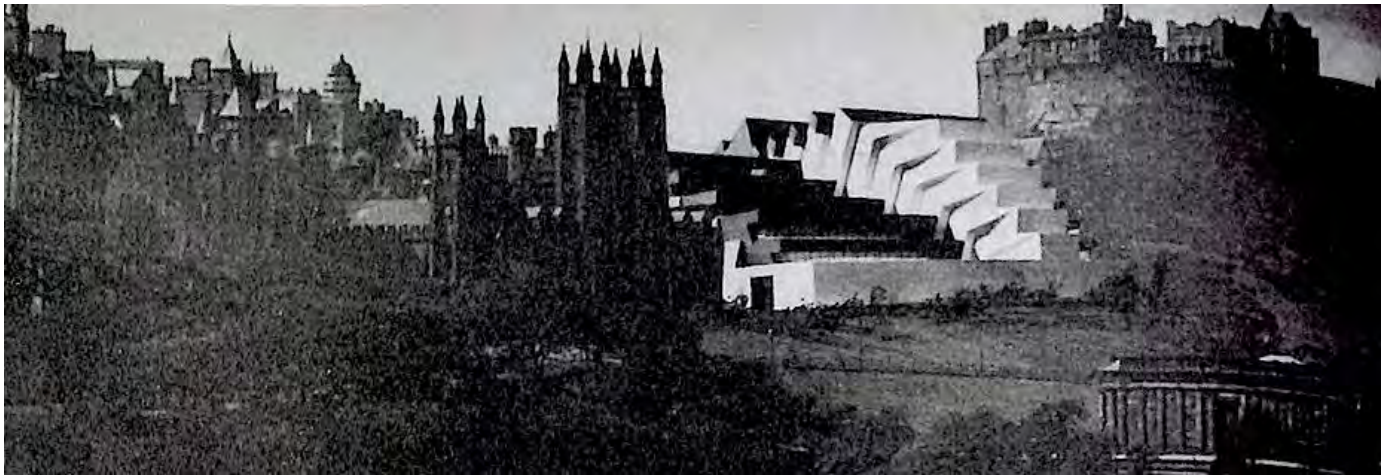


through her teaching work and as an active member of the Council of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

In 2021, Macintosh was awarded the Jane Drew Prize, which acknowledges architectural designers whose work and commitment to design excellence have raised the profile of women in architecture. This in turn has led to new and renewed recognition for the full breadth of her built work. In this spirit, I am proud to be able to present her work in this edition of Local Heroes.

Left: the playground of the Priory School, 1996.
Right: interior corridor of the Battle Langton Primary School, 1986.





Biography

Born in Cheshire and raised in Edinburgh from the age of ten, “a city with architectural lessons on every corner”⁷, Scottish architect Kate Macintosh was deeply influenced by the drama of the landscape and its relationship to the built environment.⁸

Macintosh’s Graduation Project, an opera house for Castle Hill in Edinburgh shows early research into volume massing and the celebration of hilltop sites.

Education and Scandinavian inspiration

After graduating from Edinburgh College of Art in 1961, Macintosh worked for three years in Stockholm, Copenhagen and Helsinki, a stark contrast to Britain in the 1960s and an environment that influenced the rest of her career.⁹ Firstly it was formative for her commitment to social justice: “Scandinavia felt like a much more egalitarian society [...there was no argument that] everyone should reach their maximum potential by being given access to quality housing”.¹⁰ Secondly, seeing that women were more advanced in the architecture profession in Scandinavia reinforced Macintosh’s own commitment to making her way as a strong female voice.

Between 1962 and 1964, Macintosh visited a number of projects in Scandinavia that influenced the material language of her later projects: firstly Ralph Erskine’s Villa in Drottingholm, built in prefabricated elements made of lightweight concrete (Siporex) and secondly the buildings of Alvar Aalto, whose office she was invited to visit and by whom she was also interviewed.

Upon returning to the UK Macintosh worked on the National Theatre as part of a team under Denys Lasdun, but promptly started looking for professional opportunities where she could get her boots muddy: “as the most junior member of the team, I could tell it was going to take some time”.¹¹



Villa Erskine by Ralph Erskine, one of the projects that Macintosh visited during her time in Scandinavia. The treatment of exposed concrete block-work inspired her later work.

Local authority construction in post-war Britain

Macintosh initially joined the public sector because she “saw the opportunity for radical innovation”.¹² A national housing offensive was in full swing in the UK, funded by the national government and built and managed by local authorities, also known as councils, a number of which had their own in-house architect department.

For three decades, housing became the centre of architectural discourse in the UK, aligning, for a golden moment, with social idealism and political willingness.¹³ These municipal dreams delivered over a million homes between 1945 and 1979. As a result, fifty per cent of the British population was accommodated in social housing by the mid-1970s.¹⁴

In London, heavily destroyed during the war, the scale of the undertaking – and the schemes that emerged during this period – was even bigger.¹⁵

The London County Council had the biggest architecture department in the world, alive with “dedicated and idealistic architects who were engaged in trying to rethink how society could be organised”.¹⁶ In 1964, the responsibility for social housing provision was reorganised, passing from the LCC to the London boroughs.

For three decades, housing became the centre of architectural discourse in the UK, aligning, for a golden moment, with social idealism and political willingness.

Innovative in-house council architecture departments

In this context, the borough of Southwark, where Macintosh was a fresh recruit, ran internal competitions within their team with a view to achieving excellence and quality in their housing design. It was one of these competitions that landed a young Macintosh her first and largest commission: Dawson's Heights.

After three years at Southwark Council, Macintosh joined the research and development department of Lambeth Council. Here she was able to learn more about "the mysteries of modular construction".¹⁷ There was an ongoing nation-wide effort in Britain to coordinate dimensions of building materials during this period. The idea was to join up manufacturers with designers and builders to increase the standardisation of elements and ease the transition from imperial to metric units.¹⁸ During her time at Lambeth Council, Macintosh designed and built Leigham Court Road, later renamed Macintosh Court in her honour. This was an exemplary elderly care housing scheme based on a social model, which employed a modular facade system.

After a brief stint at Arup, Macintosh joined East Sussex County Council, where she realised another experimental elderly care and residency housing scheme, Thornwood, which expanded upon spatial ideas from Macintosh Court. Here she also built the first in a series of fire stations and her first school, Battle Langton, also on a hilltop site.

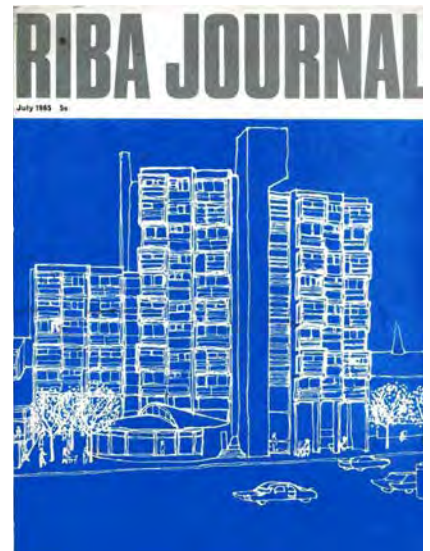
Moving to the inspiring setting of Hampshire County Council in 1986 "where there were a lot of strong personalities", Macintosh "became more ambitious as to stretching the parameters of expression". Her work used increasingly expressive formal language that referenced historical motifs, moving away from the programme of modernism of her earlier career and the idea "that one must start with a blank sheet and try not to emulate the past".¹⁹

Private Practice

After thirty years in the public sector and driven in part by the policies of the Thatcher government that dismantled the public housing programme of the 1960s and 1970s, Macintosh and her life partner George Finch founded their own private practice. For a further twenty years, they worked from a studio that they built in their garden.



Royal National Theatre by Denys Lasdun, on which Macintosh worked between 1964–5.



The cover of *RIBA Journal* from 1968 featuring the Lambeth Towers by Macintosh's future partner, George Finch. The project influenced her initial decision to join Lambeth Council.



Macintosh Court, Lambeth, London, 1972. Renamed in Macintosh's honour, the experimental elderly care housing scheme was based on a social model and employed a modular facade system.

Throughout the length of her career, Macintosh has campaigned against impediments to women's evolution within the architecture profession. Elected to the RIBA Council in 1972, Macintosh was the first chair-person of the Women's Architect Group, which later evolved to lobby against broader discrimination within architecture. She both organised and presented work in the exhibition *Women Architects – Their Work*, during the RIBA Festival of Architecture 1984. Most recently she has campaigned against the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on women's pay and access to child-care.

Timeline of Built Works

- Housing
- Education
- ⬠ Cultural
- ▲ Fire Brigade Buildings

National Theatre ⬠ Denys Ladsun, London

1969

Dawson's Heights ■ Southwark Council, London

1972

Macintosh Court ■ Lambeth Council, London

Chelsea & Kensington Depot
Holiday Development St Raphael ■ Arup Associates, Ahrends
Burton & Koralek, London

1977

Halton Fire Station ▲

1979

Maresfield Fire Brigade
Training Centre ▲

1981

Polegate Elderly Care ■

1983

Thornwood Elderly Care ■

1986

Lewes Fire Communications HQ ▲ East Sussex Council

Battle Langton Primary School ●

1994

Rushmoor Fire Station ▲

1995

Solent Infants School ●

1996

Priory School Sports Hall
& Music Suite ● Hampshire Council
Audley's Close Care Centre ■

1998

Weston Playground ● Private Practice

Design Principles

Avoiding Institutionalism: Conviviality and Diversity

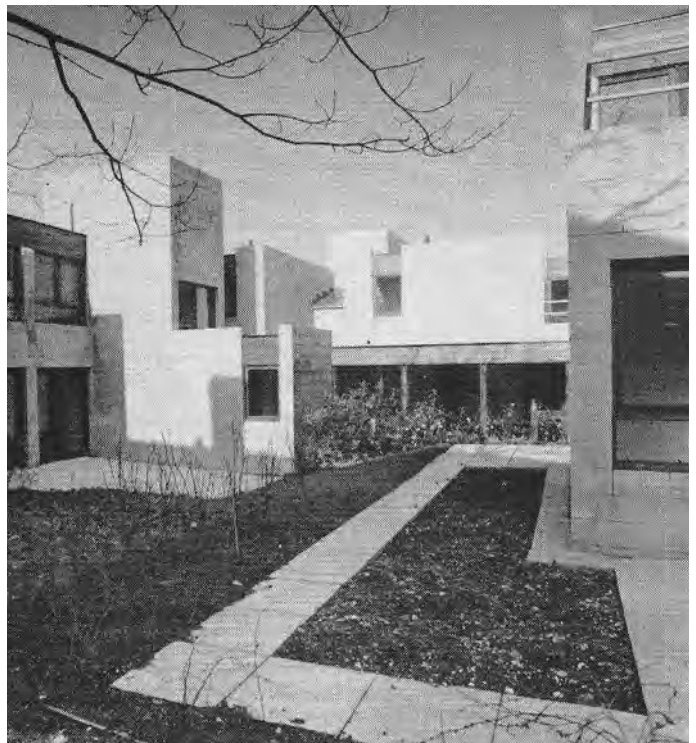
A fundamental quality in Kate Macintosh’s work is a concern for scale. Regardless of the size of the project, the same type of spatial qualities exist between the smallest and largest projects. All are driven by a concern to ensure that the individual person or unit is not subsumed into the whole, whilst still maintaining a sense of unity.

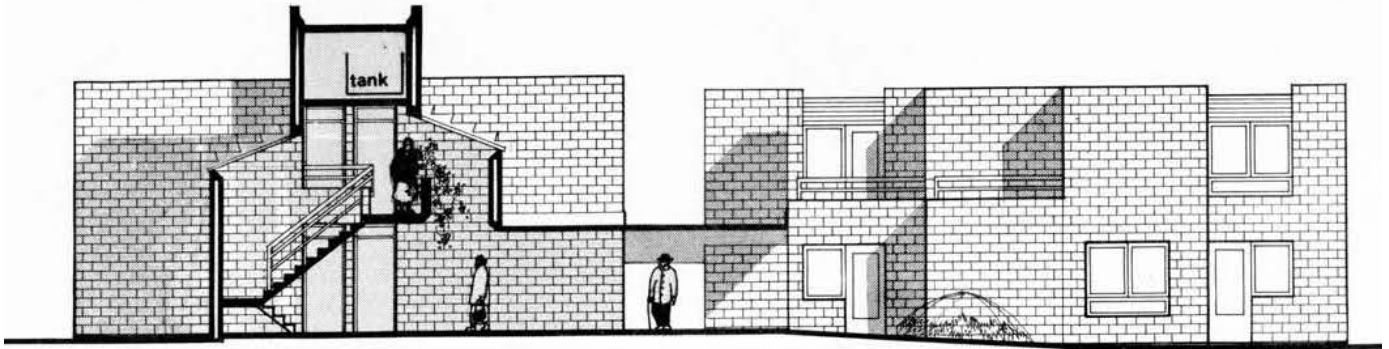
Privacy and conviviality

One of the recurring themes in Macintosh’s bulk housing projects is the entrance sequence. Outdoor, green spaces have a close relation with both the interior circulation spaces and entrance halls. Movement is deliberately created along the route connecting the street beyond the boundaries of the plot to internal routes and the individual unit. It is from these spatial sequences that the particular qualities of Macintosh’s buildings emerge.

“Incidents”, niches or setbacks are carved out into necessary long passageways in public areas. This firstly has the effect that one never experiences their length and avoids a feeling of institutionalism or monotony.

Left: “modern monastery”: Macintosh Court, an elderly sheltered housing project.
Right: enclosed gardens line a covered walkway that connects the housing blocks.





Section showing the entrance sequence and opportunities for interaction between inhabitants in Macintosh Court: from a covered walkway into the staircase.

Secondly, Macintosh employs this spatial sequencing along internal circulation routes in order to balance privacy and conviviality, which she refers to as “the central conundrum for bulk housing”.²⁰ Designing space for inhabitants to pause and interact with one another is intended to encourage neighbourly interchange and mutual support. At the same time, residents are given the option to withdraw and be private, should they so wish.

Thirdly, in internal spaces, the pockets that Macintosh carves out along her entrance route also give people the opportunity for personalisation: “to hang something on the wall or put their shoes in front of the door”.²¹ In this way, the entrance sequence of Macintosh’s social housing projects also repurpose the hall – colloquially associated with a corridor or vestibule – to its historical association, as described by Mark Pimlott: “a room for gathering, celebration, presentation and representation... a room with no fixed purpose... a room for everything”.²²

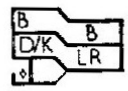
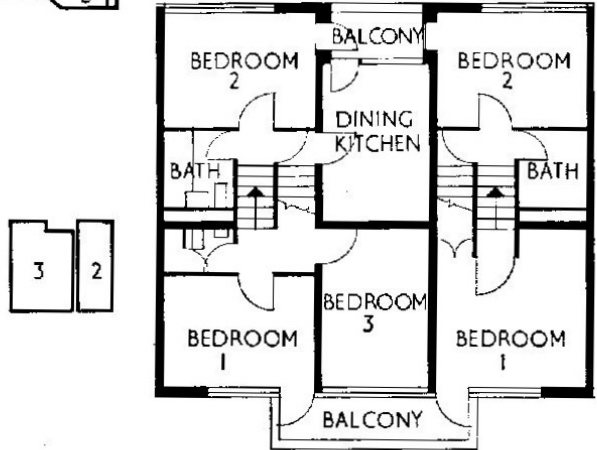
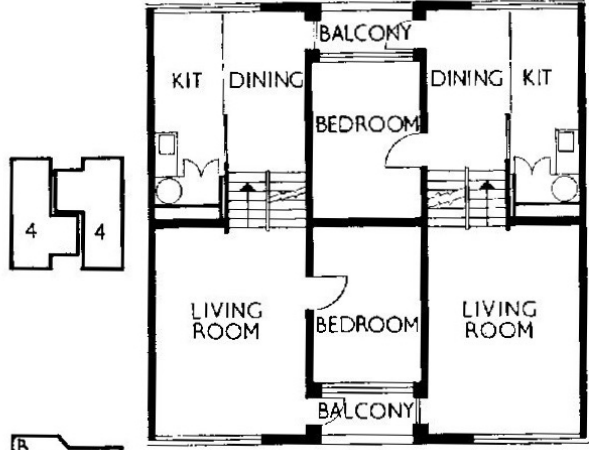
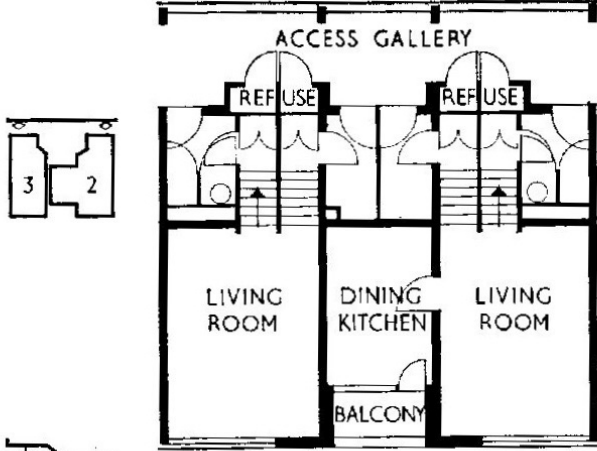
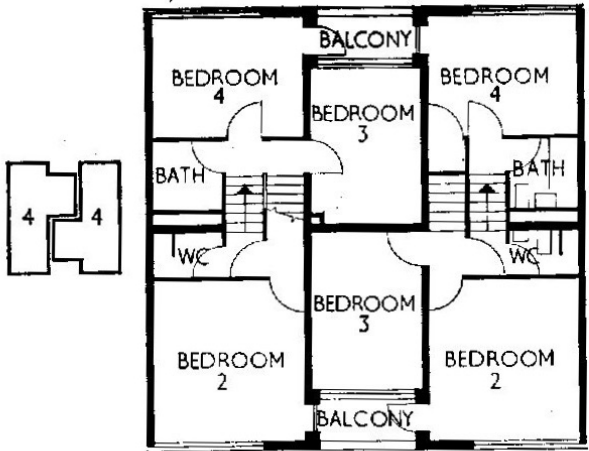
Volume composition and functional diversity

A fundamental element of Macintosh’s design of privacy and conviviality is the composition of volumes to accommodate different types of users and encourage natural social mixing. Particularly in her earlier projects, the external volume reflects a complex internal organisation, where apartment types or programs are stacked together.

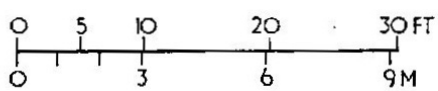
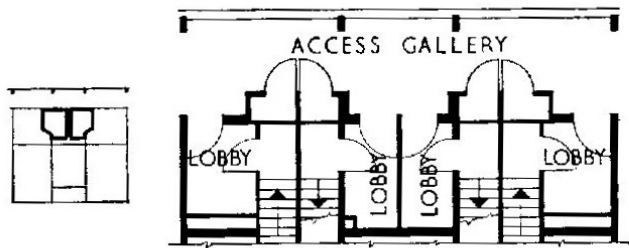
The protrusions and setbacks in the external shell that result from internal stacking often double up as terraces or circulation spaces. The resulting internal voids create niches that encourage social interchange. This stacking logic influences the design of the floor plan and patterns of movement through the building in a particularly dynamic way.



Dawson’s Heights, Southwark, London. Readable in the facade, split-level apartments are accessed from communal circulation balconies that occur every three floors.

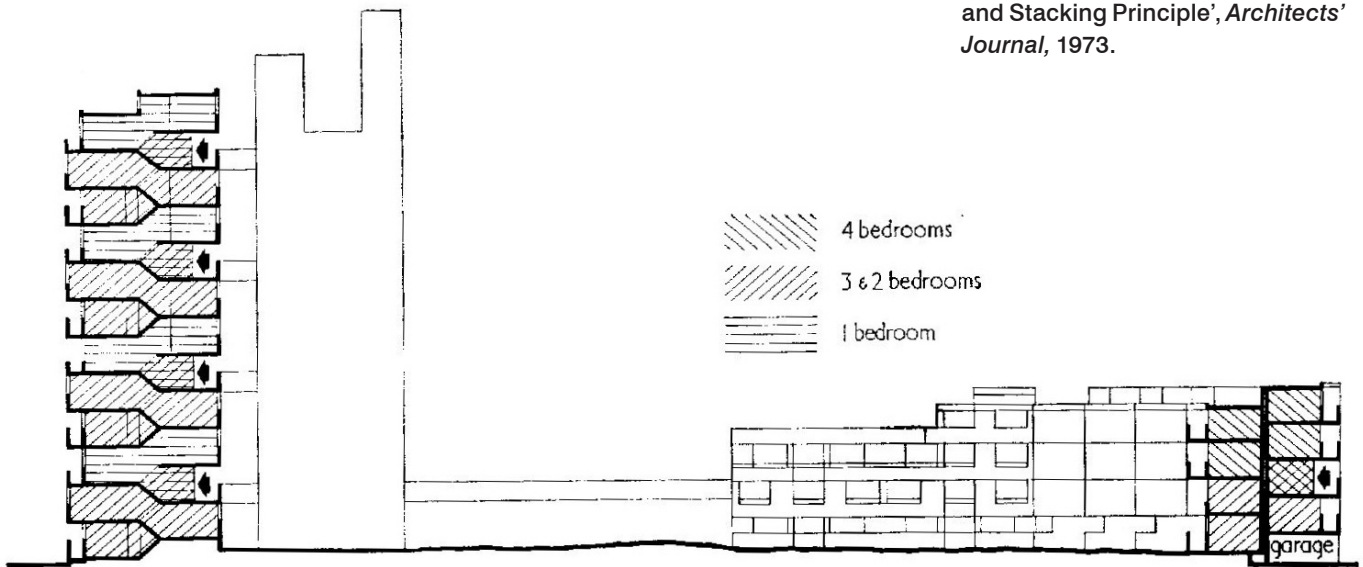


G Plans of two- and three-bedroom dwellings



F Plans of four-bedroom dwellings

'Dawsons Heights: Dwelling Types and Stacking Principle', *Architects' Journal*, 1973.



In the case of Dawson's Heights, mixed dwelling sizes are accessed via a circulation gallery every three floors, in order to generate a natural social mix. "My theory was that [...] if large blocks were to be accepted and loved as a new way of living, they must try to replicate the best characteristics of the terraced street; that families of different sizes and age groups should intermingle, as their needs and strengths would be diverse and complementary".²³

Eight ziggurat apartment variants are interlocked in three dimensions resulting in a "rugged composition [...] that] preserves human scale"²⁴, in which each residential unit as well as the access gallery is easily identifiable.²⁵ All apartments are split-level and dual-aspect. Macintosh made balconies in each apartment indispensable by designing them to double up as fire escape routes.²⁶

The relationship between the internal stacking logic of floor plans and the building envelope is also clearly demonstrated in Macintosh's Thornwood project, a small elderly care home based on an experimental hybrid model.

Three different programs are accommodated into three volumes around an internal courtyard, each with their own volumetric composition.

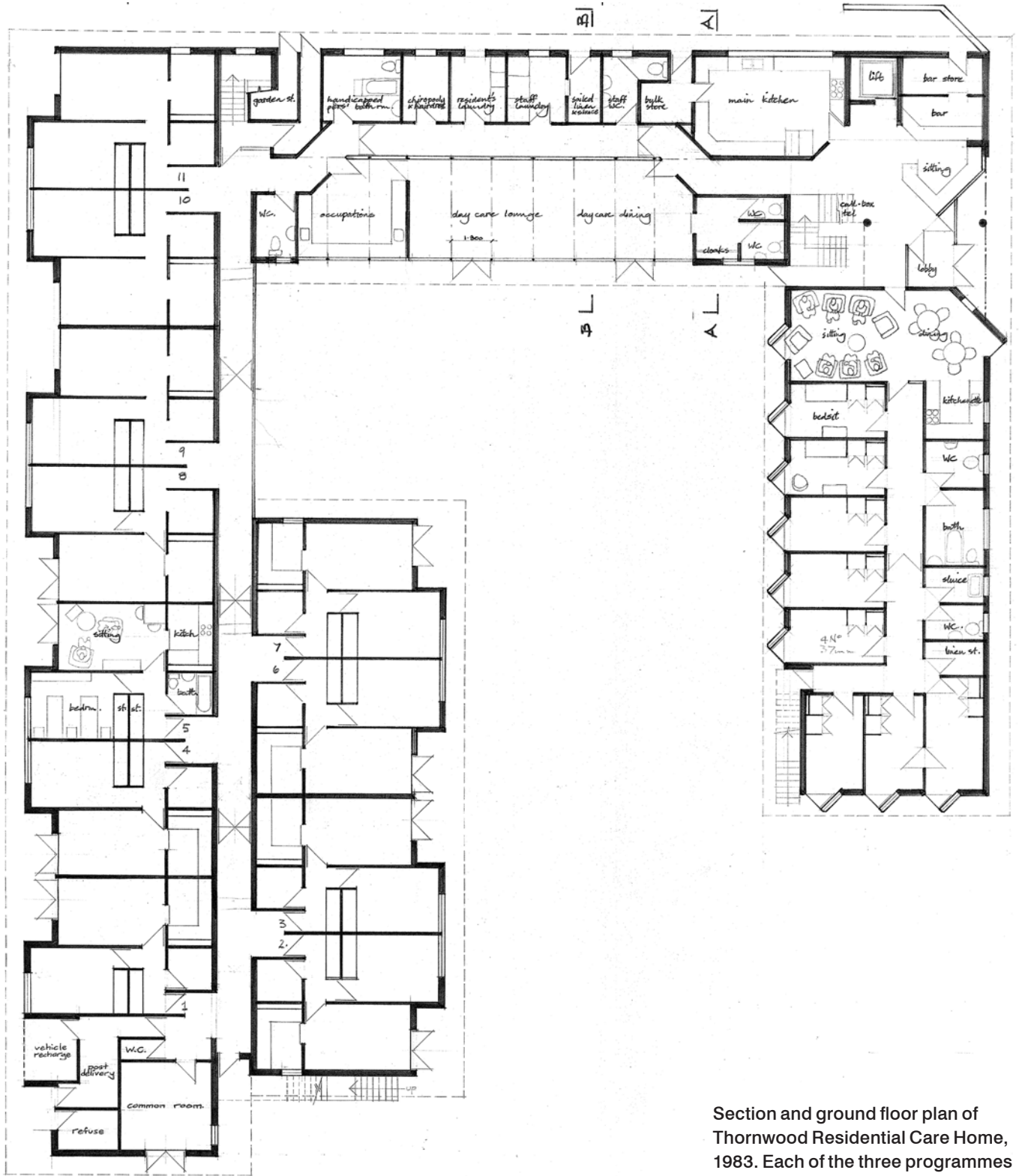
Sheltered two-bed apartments for long term residents in the west wing follow a similar floor plan logic to Macintosh Court, where two apartments share a common entrance

"My theory was that [...] if large blocks were to be accepted and loved as a new way of living, they must try to replicate the best characteristics of the terraced street."

© Kate Macintosh



East Elevation of Sheltered Housing



Section and ground floor plan of Thornwood Residential Care Home, 1983. Each of the three programmes within the care home has different massing and facades.

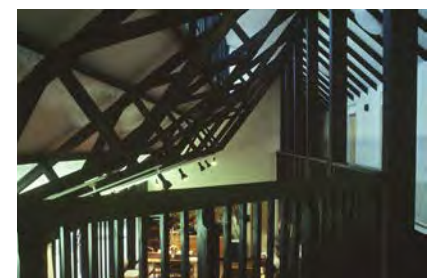
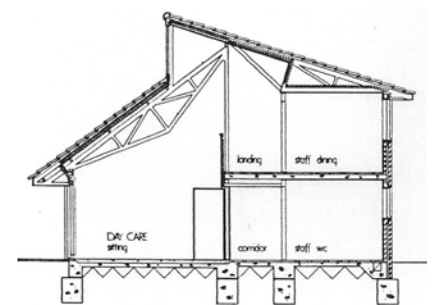


hall (for conviviality), set back from an internal corridor. The rooms behind are pushed outwards, adding protrusions to the central master volume, forming bay windows that also serve to increase the privacy of the ground floor terraces.

The east wing houses short-stay rehabilitation rooms with bay windows staggered at a right angle to the internal courtyard. Each bay window has both a French balcony and a window, allowing residents to temper their relationship to this communal garden space.

A linear volume connecting the two housing types accommodates shared facilities and a day-care centre; where residents are encouraged to cook in a communal kitchen, mingle over drinks at a bar located in the lobby and visitors from outside are invited to come in. The envelope has a glazed facade that maximises the incidence of light, and encourages life to spill out onto the courtyard via terrace doors.

Thornwood Elderly Care Home, a hybrid care facility combining short stay rehabilitation to the east and sheltered flats to the west. Bay window of short stay rehabilitation looks across the communal courtyard onto the sheltered flats.



Section through daycare and shared facilities.

Landmarks and Backyards: Vistas and Enclosures

A second fundamental quality of Macintosh's work is the celebration, and creation, of elevation. Two related themes recur throughout the years: firstly the use of striking massing that evokes a feeling of robust security and simultaneously create a sense of enclosure. Secondly Macintosh's projects make extensive use of internal vis-a-vis.

Use of site to create landmarks

If the envelope of Macintosh's earlier projects is the product of an internal stacking logic in order to favour diversity of apartment types in which the individual units are readable within the whole, Macintosh's works also demonstrate a deep understanding of the power of the housing typology on an urban scale.

In the case of Dawson's Heights, "the idea of the acropolis"²⁷, "ancient cities and Italian hill towns"²⁸ is particularly dominant.

The thrill Macintosh feels for dramatic landscapes, even on a dreary winter's day is reflected in the evocative massing of the meandering superblock: amplifying the drama of the hilltop site. As a child growing up in Edinburgh, Macintosh describes being "elated" walking down the steep streets with vast panoramas across Arthur's Seat and the Firth of Forth.²⁹

As someone only too well acquainted with the depressing power of bleak British weather, I find it an unassuming but compelling motif that a housing project endeavours to enhance, rather than to subdue the landscape. Dawsons Heights seeks to create a landmark for a "mat of suburbia which stretches endlessly across South London".³⁰

Enclosure

The robust sense of security that emerges from the massing and materials in Macintosh's Dawson's Heights and Macintosh Court projects also fosters a unique sense of protection for internal spaces.

The idea of the acropolis, ancient cities and Italian hill towns, is particularly dominant.



Left: the double ziggurats on Dawson's Hill, surrounded by a "mat of suburbia".
Below: the enclosed inner courtyard of Dawson's Heights, similar in size to Bloomsbury Square.



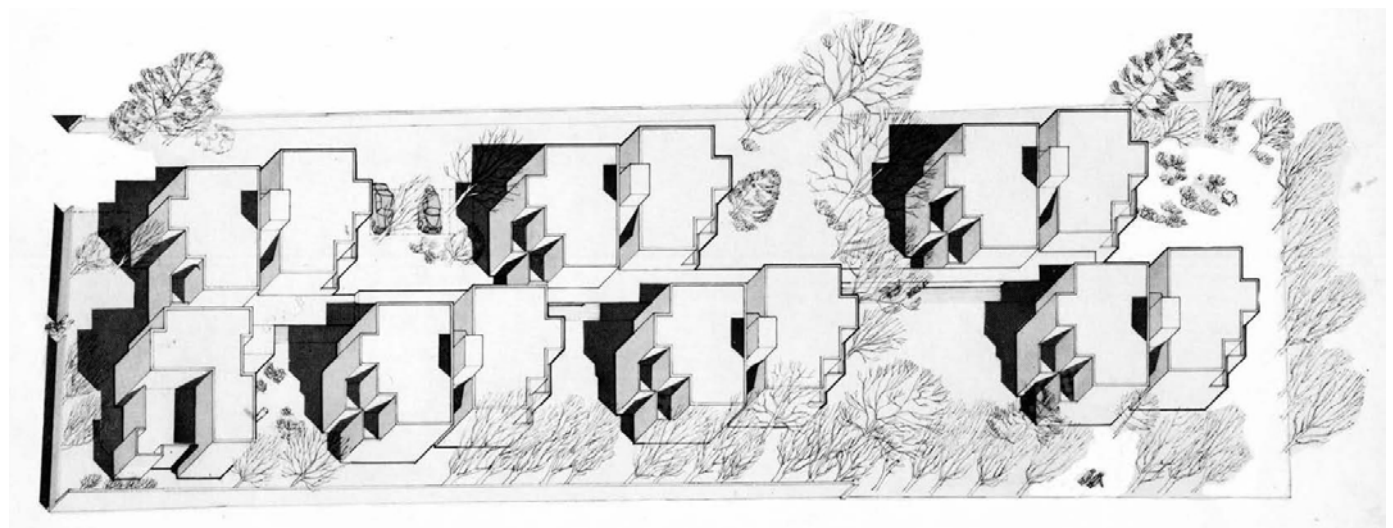
In Dawsons Heights, the tail of the two higher blocks flips around 90 degrees to enclose a central place, similar in size to Bloomsbury Square. In this courtyard children can play safely and neighbours can chat. This courtyard is the central idea of the project, allowing residents who live in high-rise apartment with expansive views across London to still feel a sense of enclosure and protection.³¹

In Macintosh Court, a similar ambiguity between formality and informality exists. Rugged massing and rationalist construction is set in contrast against the backdrop of green, leafy spaces³² on the scale of a back garden.

Communal rooms and a shop are located within a closed narrow street frontage: the “eyes on the street” as described by Jane Jacobs.³³ Behind this, a deep plot opens up, in which “clusters of blocks [are] arranged in a loose chequerboard either side of a central covered walkway”.³⁴ These clusters emerge from the stacking of one-person units on top two-person apartments, stepping back to form terraces and private patios.

The facades of these blocks are planned on a 400 x 200 mm raw concrete masonry block. This large format module makes the massing even more rugged in relation to the small scale of the blocks. The choice of modularity is key to the quality of the relationship between form and space. The raw concrete blocks increase the sense of permanence of the buildings, whilst the garden enhances the feeling of enclosure.

Site Plan for Macintosh Court Elderly Care Housing. A closed street frontage and rugged massing increases the sense of protection within the deep plot.

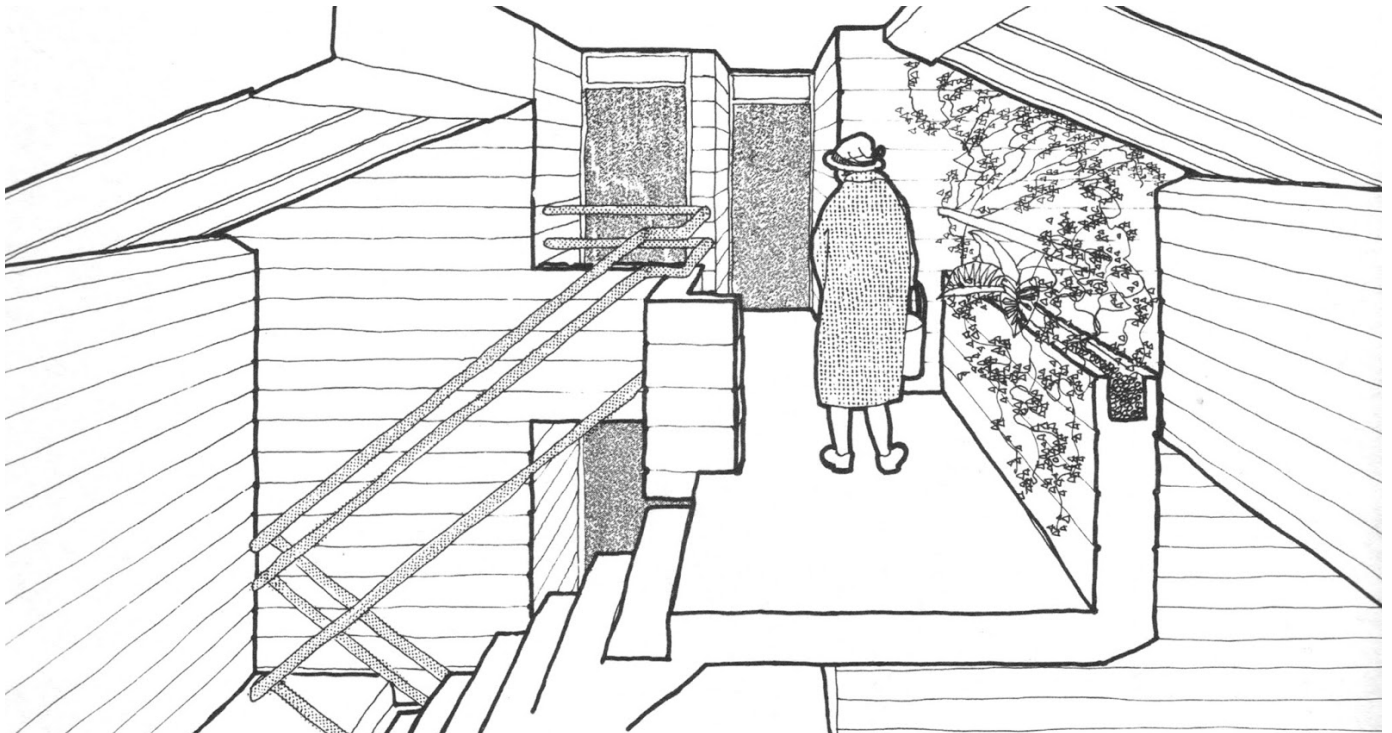




The scale of the central courtyard in Dawson's Heights instills a sense of enclosure and protection for residents, who, from their apartments have a view ten miles across London.



Macintosh Court: large format bricks make the massing more rugged in relation to the small scale of the blocks.



“Sculpted, top-lit” entrance stairwell in Macintosh Court with stepped back entrance niches.

The result is a “modern monastery [...] quiet cloisters dotted with mature trees [...] with] views carefully framed between the walkway’s colonnade”.³⁵

Vis-à-vis

Many of Macintosh’s hilltop projects enhance the sense of inner protection both on an urban scale and inside the buildings by incorporating vis-a-vis into circulation spaces. Those not on a hilltop create similar spatial dynamics in the internal plan.

In Macintosh Court, “sculpted top-lit entranceways”³⁶ in which communal landings lead off from concrete staircases use voids in order to enable communication between neighbours as they come and go.

In Solent Infants School (1995), Macintosh maximises the special qualities of the elevated site. The single-storey building is perched on the edge of a south-facing plateau. Each classroom has panoramic views of the sea in the distance with an external teaching terrace where pupils can spill out for messy play. At the same time, Macintosh maximises the sense of protection for children in the internal spaces. Each classroom has an intimate “class base” space with a circular window, where the day starts with story-telling.³⁷

Children's entrance to Solent Infants' School, directly overlooked by the headteacher's office.



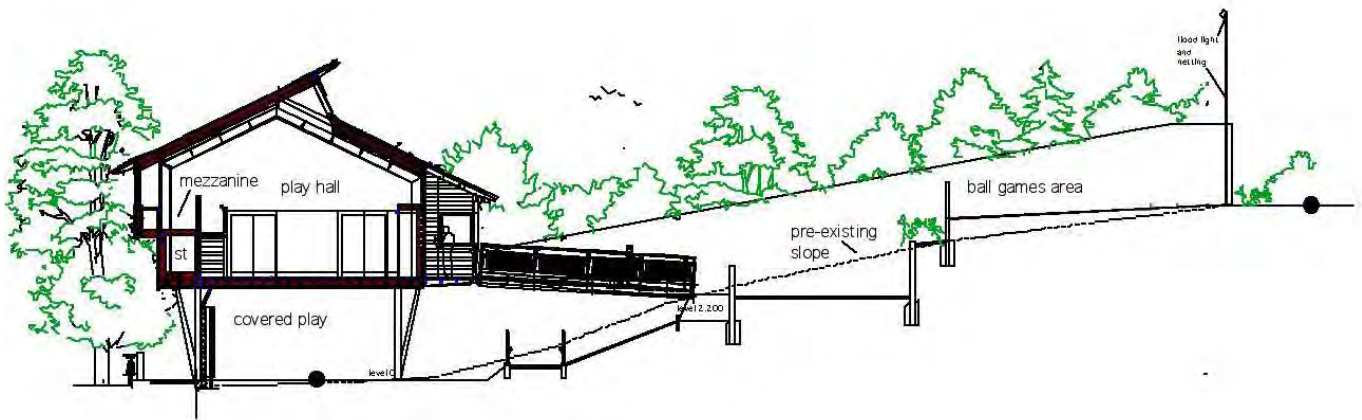
From the timber teaching decks in front of the classrooms, children can also look down upon a separate entrance for pupils, located below. The head teacher's office is located directly above this entrance, enabling her to monitor the coming and going of children directly from her desk.³⁸

In Macintosh's last built work, Weston Playground, designed together with George Finch, the street facade forms a secure wall at the bottom of a steep slope, elevated above an enclosed play area. The building itself is split over a series of levels. This has two effects: firstly, it means that children can play under supervision and avoid feeling isolated, but still have the option to retreat and play more quietly or do their homework. Secondly, it creates a variety of routes both inside and outside the building, so that the whole complex becomes an object of play.³⁹

Weston Playground, 1998. The use of heights inside and out makes the entire complex an object of play.



Weston Playground, 1998. The street facade forms a secure wall at the bottom of a steep slope, whilst the building itself is split over a series of levels.



If the hilltop Scottish castle analogy is a deep memory for Macintosh, the special qualities of her work stem from the understanding that “a castle can be both imposing from the outside and protective from the inside”.⁴⁰ The relationship between the external envelope and internal communal and circulation spaces reflects the idea that “architecture should provide [...] both physical and psychological [...] protection and release”.⁴¹

The special qualities of Macintosh’s work stem from the understanding that “a castle can be both imposing from the outside and protective from the inside”.

Evolving Architectural Language: New Brutalism to The Other Tradition of Modernism

Parallel to the programme of local authority construction in the 1960s and 1970s in the UK was a national drive to encourage the standardisation of building products. Efforts to improve the efficiency and speed of construction and to reduce building costs led to experimentation with modular building, especially in the field of social housing. Modular materialisation in the form of bare concrete, concrete blocks and brick, coupled with the creative will for sculptural expression and to express the individual dwelling gave birth to so-called brick brutalism, or New Brutalism in Britain.⁴²

Macintosh's earlier projects possess highly sculptural qualities, using industrial raw materials with minimal applied decoration to express structural and programmatic relationships and create a "memorable image", key elements of the language of New Brutalism.⁴³ The ambiguity in Macintosh's earlier works between sharp massing that conveys a sense of protection and informal, garden spaces that celebrate the vagaries of nature is likewise characteristic of the British adaptation of inter-war Modernism. Other examples of the period include Alison & Peter Smithsons' Upper Lawn Pavilion.⁴⁴

Macintosh describes herself as belonging to what Colin St John Wilson calls "The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture". This tradition of "humane organic architecture", exemplified by Alvar Aalto, Hans Scharoun, Hugo Häring and Frank Lloyd Wright, "worked within context, negotiation and use".⁴⁵ Buildings of this tradition were based "on the lives of their occupants rather than the styles of their forms".⁴⁶

Many of Macintosh's later projects show the influence of her early career spent in Scandinavia and include a number of direct references to buildings by architects of this "Other Tradition". The colour and material palette of her projects as well as the formal language of her designs becomes increasingly expressive and multi-faceted.

Macintosh's work consistently strove to recreate the qualities of the terraced street: its diversity, scale, chaos and possibility for personalisation.



Moreover, throughout the length of her career, Macintosh's work demonstrates a persistent desire to recreate the qualities of the terraced street: its diversity, scale, chaos and possibility for personalisation. As a result,

Top: street facades of the extension to the Priory School. Bottom: playground facades of same building.

her buildings avoid slipping into binary expressions of social patterns and relations. The style of their form is instead guided by the lives of their occupants.

From tabula rasa to borrowing from the past

In projects later in her career, Macintosh's earlier formalism slips away. "I moderated that view [...that everything must be invented afresh] to think that there is nothing wrong with borrowing from the past, provided only that you have fully digested your source and you are not slavishly trying to copy".⁴⁷

Some of these works respond to site specifics, incorporating motifs from the existing buildings "without ever directly quoting".⁴⁸ The sports and music hall extension to the Priory School in Portsmouth (1996) is a good example of this.

The pre-existing school, built in 1903 and Grade II listed, is an ensemble of buildings: the main entrance had an Edwardian baroque facade in red brick with Portland stone dressings. Next to this stood a former orphanage in red brick with a long triple lancet window.

Macintosh's intervention draws the heterogeneous street frontage together. The facades integrate motifs from the existing buildings with minimal decoration and maximal sculptural effect. Sweeping side buttresses with render tympanums are topped with ball-shaped finials, referring to the Edwardian baroque adornments of the main entrance building.

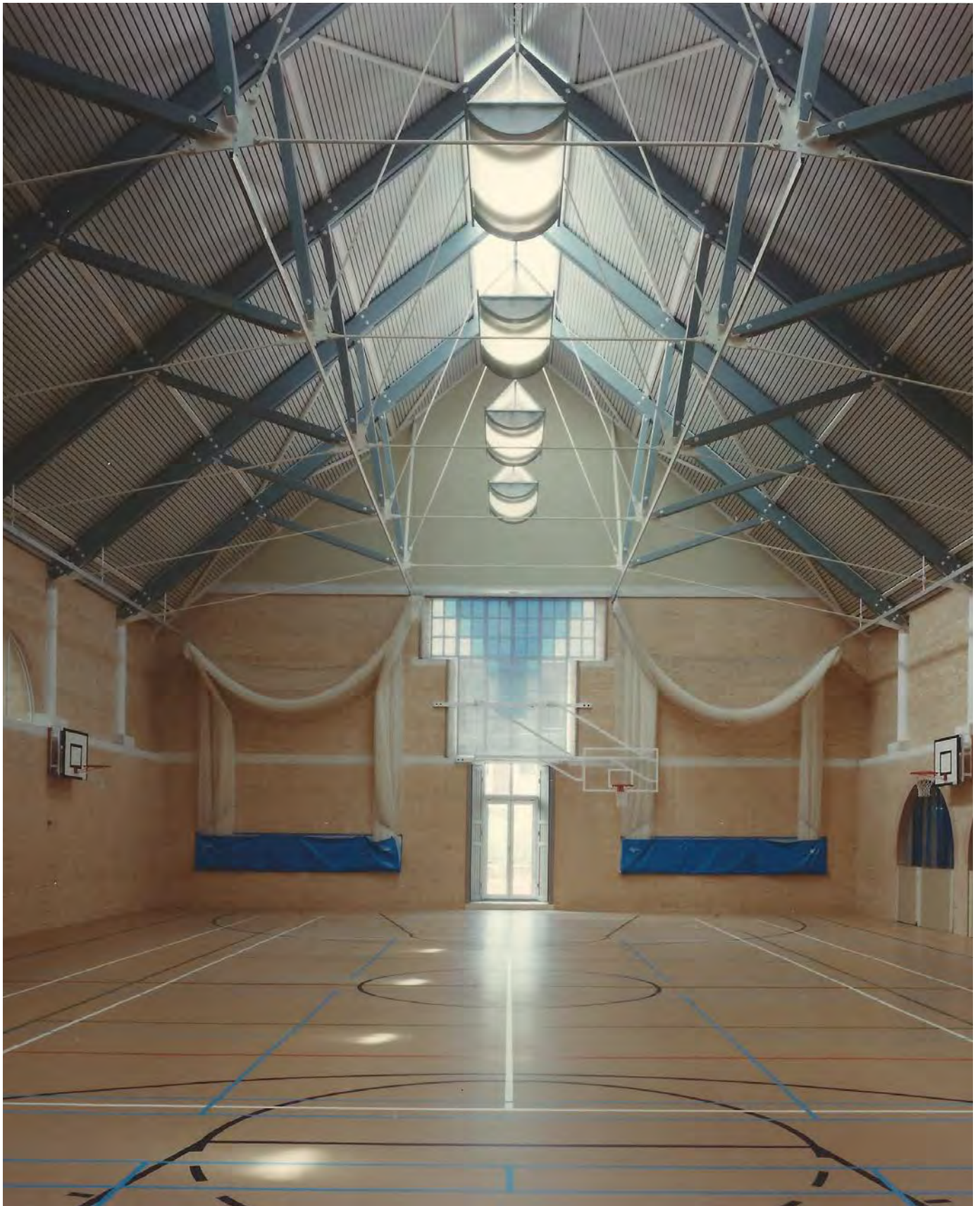
A tiered window, centrally-positioned in the gable and stained blue towards the top to soften the lightfall into the sports hall, echoes the motif of the lancet window. Wooden shutters, hidden in the deep reveals of the diaphragm wall, can be closed to protect the glass when ball games are in progress.

The project is rich in detail and driven by a concern for the human scale of school pupils. Inside the sports hall, semi-engaged columns which support the exposed trusses of laminated timber and steel-tie tension members scale down the size of the large hall for young pupils.⁴⁹

Later projects increasingly incorporate motifs from the built surroundings "without ever directly quoting".



Priory School Extension, 1996. Rich in detail, the facade incorporates motifs from the existing Edwardian baroque-style school buildings.



Interior of the Priory School Sports Hall. Macintosh incorporates classical motifs alongside the visible structure to scale down the size of the large hall for young pupils.

Externally, the entrance sequence along the street facade follows a low, curved brick wall, topped with an undulating wrought-iron fence.

The massing of the building also picks up on the morphology of the existing school as an ensemble: the facades of the sports hall are the frontage for not only the hall itself but also side aisles which house storage and fitness rooms. A second gable front for the music suite mediates the building height to relate to two-storey terraced houses along the side road.⁵⁰

Vernacular structures and evolving material palette

Two further school projects show Macintosh's increasing exploration of vernacular structures and expressive evolution of Macintosh's material and colour palette in her later career. Both projects are built on south facing slopes with expansive views.

Battle Langton (1986) uses pitched roofs over a brick and timber facade. The brickwork is enriched by the use of dark grey bands at the height of the windowsills, whilst texture is added to the large roof surface through the use of tiles with different profiles. The interior uses large scale concrete blocks, akin to the Macintosh Court project, alongside blue painted steelwork.

The massing is a composite of classrooms, each with their own external teaching space. The building nestles into and steps down the slope, reminiscent of Charles Moore's Sea Ranch.⁵¹

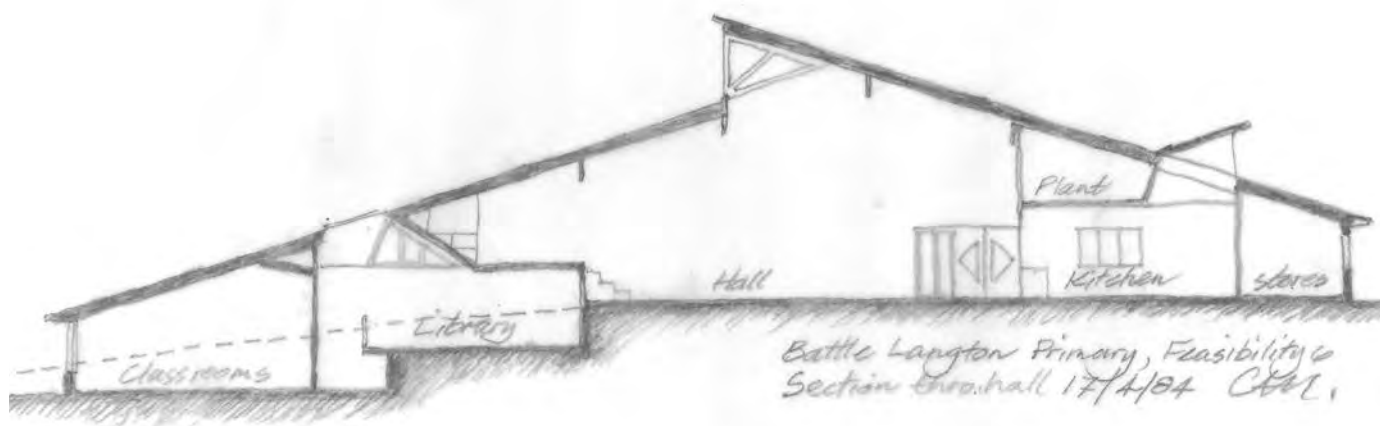
In the second project, Solent Infant School (1995), Macintosh clad the facade of the single-storey building which houses the classrooms in stained timber, a material with which it was important that children could come in close physical contact. Circular windows inside the classrooms, intended to have nautical connotations, allow pupils a panoramic view of the sea.

The remainder of the external walls are in brick, with detailing strongly influenced by Alvar Alto.⁵² The facade of the assembly hall, which sweeps round to enclose the playground, is mainly imperforate to avoid overlooking



Battle Langton Primary School, 1986.

Top: interior with bare concrete bricks and painted blue steelwork. Bottom: timber and brick facade showing Macintosh's increasingly expressive use of materials and colour.



Battle Langton Primary School, 1986. A composite of classrooms clustered together across and down the hillside: section and elevation.

the neighbouring garden. The expansive brick surface is enlivened by abstract relief modelling. Heavy vertical timber mullions filter lightfall from the south into the assembly hall, whilst timber structural elements in the roof and interior are exposed and stained in blue tones.



Assembly hall of Solent Infants School, 1995.



Solent Infants School, 1995. Stained timber and colourful brick encourages pupils to come into close contact with the facade.

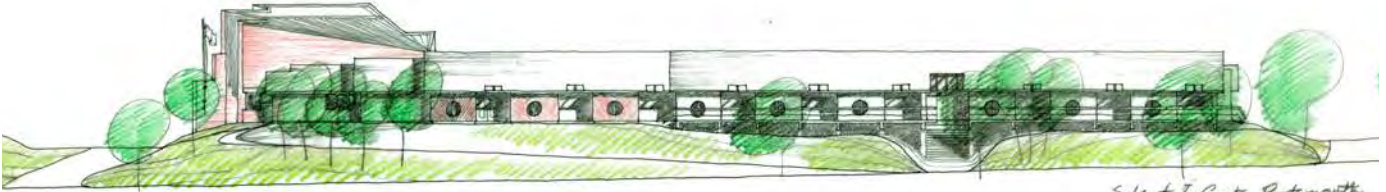


Muuratsalo, Experimental House
by Aalto, 1952–1954.



Solent Infants School: staff entrance
with assembly hall on the left.
The brick modelling and timber
mullions were strongly influenced
by Aalto.

South elevation and ground floor plan of Solent Infants School.
Drawings by Kate Macintosh.



*Solent Infants, Portsmouth,
South Elevation. 1993. 2009*



*Solent Infants
Portsmouth*

Romantic Pragmatism

Macintosh's increasingly evocative colour and material palettes also lend a striking sense of personality, and thus a sense of place, to her later works. Two buildings for the fire-fighting services are notable examples.

The Fire Communication Headquarters (1986) was built on the banks of the river Ouse in Lewes, Sussex, notorious for flooding. The design brief required computer hardware – at the time bulky and expensive – to be located below a communication suite located on the first floor.

Macintosh raised the ground floor 600 mm above the highest recorded flood level, pushing the operational rooms higher and presenting workers with a better view across the river to a wooded hill rising to the West. In turn, this presented Macintosh the opportunity to enhance their view: introducing ribbon windows across the length of the facade.⁵³ The industrial cladding brings a bright dash of colour to the otherwise drab surroundings of the building. Situated on an industrial estate, the building also improves the view from the public path across the river.

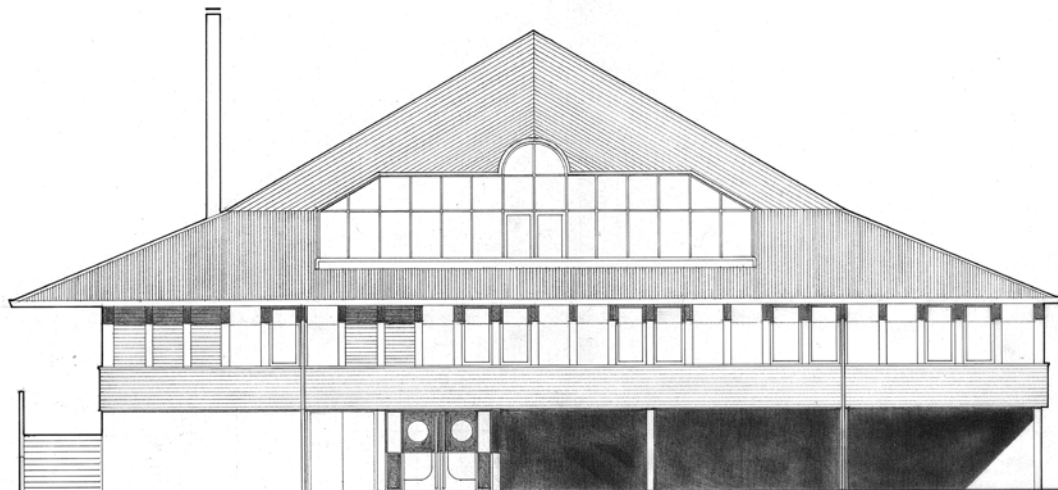
Macintosh's fire station buildings demonstrate her persistent concern for scale in all building types. Macintosh uses the material language of the facade to mediate between the scale of the single-storey, semi-industrial appliance bays where vehicles were stored and the two-storey administrative building housing showers, the mess room and dormitories.

Evocative colour and material palettes also lend a striking sense of personality, and thus a sense of place, to her later works.

Left: Halton Fire Station, 1977. Right: Rushmoor Fire Station, 1994. Macintosh uses the material language of the facade to mediate between the two scales of the building volumes.

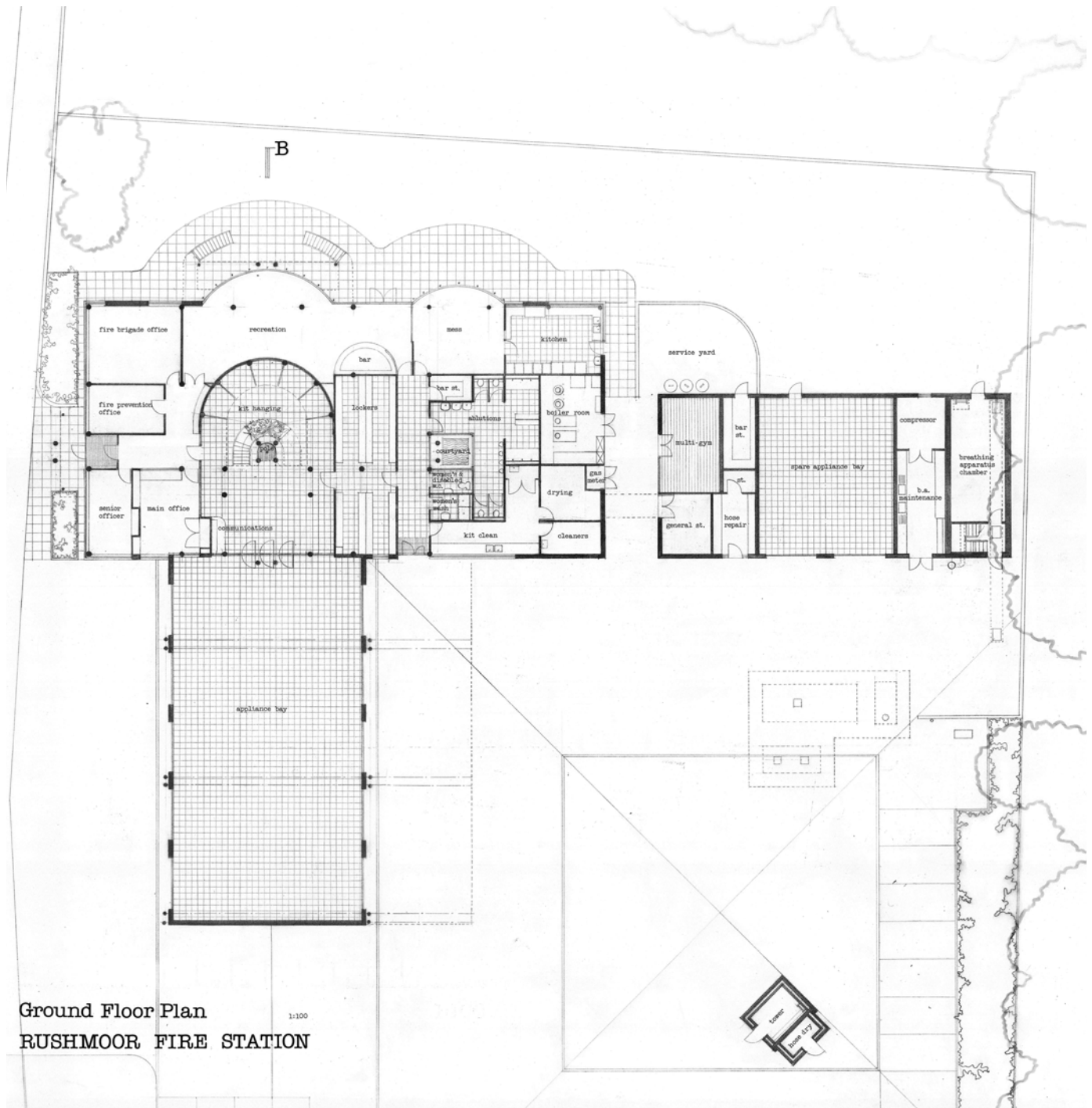


Fire Communication Headquarters, Lewes, 1986. The building lends a dash of colour to the otherwise drab surroundings of an industrial estate.

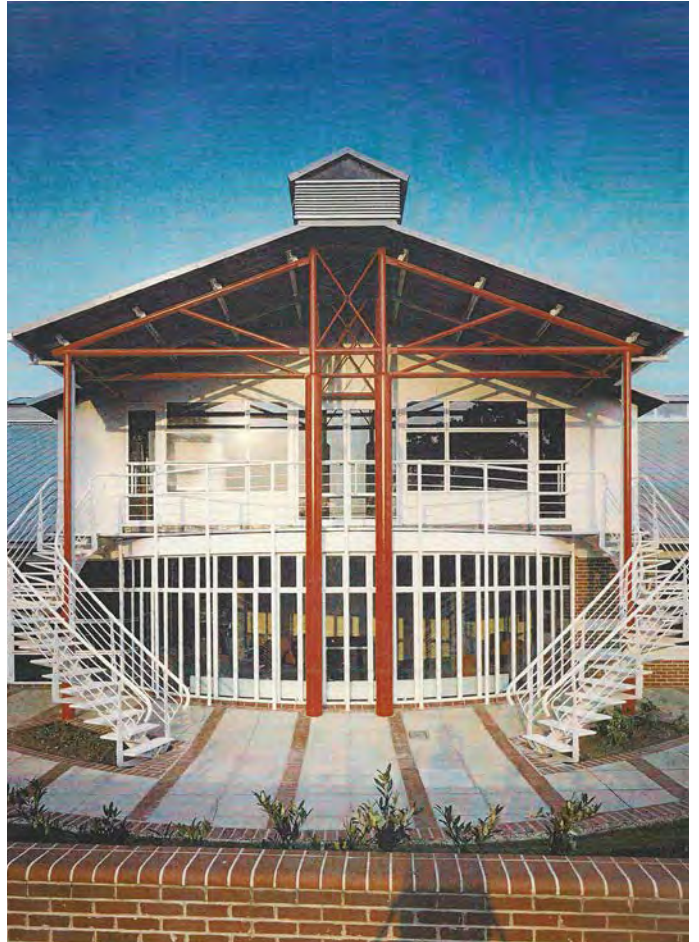


In Halton Fire Station (1977), Macintosh clads the roof, the upperpart of the appliance bays and the first floor of the two-storey building with the standing seam zinc cladding.

In Rushmoor Fire Station (1994), a further unifying element is the exposed bright red steel structure, reflecting the colour typically used for fire appliances in UK.⁵⁴



Rushmoor Fire Station, 1994.
Ground Floor Plan.



Featured projects

Click [here](#) for an interactive map



[Dawson's Heights](#)
177 Dunstons Road
Southwark, London
SE22 0HB

[Macintosh Court](#)
269 Leigham Court Road
Norwood, London
SW16 2SB

[Rushmoor Fire Station](#)
8 Lynchford Road
Aldershot, Farnborough
GU14 6BF

[Weston Adventure Playground](#)
Weston, Southampton
SO19 9JT

[Halton Fire Station](#)
50 The Ridge, Hastings
TN34 2AA

[Priory School](#)
Fawcett Road
Southsea, Portsmouth
PO4 0DL

[Maresfield Fire Training Centre](#)
Batts Bridge Road
Maresfield, Uckfield
TN22 2HN

[Battle & Langton School](#)
Market Road, Battle
TN33 0HQ

[Thornwood Elderly Care](#)
Turkey Road
Bexhill-on-Sea
TN39 5HZ

Conclusion

Kate Macintosh was privileged to belong to a generation of architects who professionally matured in a context where society, politics and architecture uniquely aligned in their longing for renewal. Kate Macintosh was one of a group of talented British planners and architects whose works were realised as “projects for a new society, sponsored by the state”.⁵⁵

Her decision to work for public authorities for 30 years is a reflection of the fact that during this period, council buildings, and especially housing, were at the centre of architectural discourse in the UK. Within the context of public funding, modular construction and an adaptation of inter-war modernism a uniquely British architectural language emerged, particularly in the field of social housing. This was empowered by an ideology that architecture should “not only fit an existing environment but [...] recreate it with a new kind of life”.⁵⁶

Macintosh was able to develop a style that was both informed and encouraged by the inspirational context in which she worked: in a national and international sense but also on the level of the different local authorities for which she worked.

Her projects were driven by a dedication to avoid institutionalism and provide quality buildings in which inhabitants feel safe and empowered to live their lives to the full. The development of her formal language traces a path from modernist tabula rasa to more historically embedded architecture, all with a heavy dose of the “Other Tradition of Modern Architecture”.

The architectural language of Macintosh’s Other Tradition is characterised on one hand by spatial intersections that create places that can be personalised: fleetingly, temporarily or permanently. On the other, it is characterised by the celebration and enhancement of the special qualities of those sites on which her projects are built.

After decades of architectural discourse centred on cultural buildings, housing is once again breaking ground. Regulatory changes are permitting councils to take up their role as housebuilders again to meet the need for new homes

Previous page: Rushmoor Fire Station, 1994. Visible bright red steel structures are painted the typical colour of fire appliances in the UK.

Macintosh’s architectural language is characterised by spatial intersections that can be personalised, and the celebration of the special qualities of sites.

that the private sector has been unable to fill.⁵⁷ Alternative, communal funding structures are creating opportunities for creative housing typologies in the UK and beyond.

Moreover, the renewed interest in Brutalism has led to reappraisal of many post-war housing projects, as well as a number of campaigns to save them from demolition (not all of them successfully, as in the case of the Smithsons' Robin Hood Gardens).⁵⁸

Macintosh consistently ensured that her name was not eclipsed but that credit was dually given to her work. Her drive to advocate the use of buildings as a tool for social justice⁵⁹ has continued through Macintosh's lecturing and activism. The award of the Jane Drew Prize in 2021 furthermore recognises a lifetime of pioneering work in the public sector.

In this context, the lessons to be learned from Macintosh's work are all the more exciting and relevant.

After decades of architectural discourse centred on cultural buildings, housing is once again breaking ground.

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Disclaimer

This publication is made for educational purposes. We tried to get in touch with the different sources of the materials. Reach out if we missed you.

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