

## Space Mission

A low-cost, high-impact renovation by Sarah Wigglesworth Architects secures a block of artists' studios

### Photos

Mark Hadden, Chris Dorley-Brown

It is the eternal curse of artists that having sought out low-cost workshops and studios in neglected or unfashionable parts of town, their own revivifying presence draws in the professional classes who compete for space and push up prices. In London — where an increasingly relaxed attitude to changes of use within the planning system also threatens studio space — a small bulwark is provided by the arts charity SPACE, which runs 18 buildings across seven boroughs, providing work space for over 700 artists.

Deborah House in Hackney, east London, is one in a series of recently completed projects by Sarah Wigglesworth Architects for SPACE. The former light-industrial building had been used as artists' studios since the 1980s, but was in poor condition. SWA's low-cost, high-impact renovation has now secured its future, thereby "preserving some of the rich character and identity of East London in the face of creeping gentrification and bland new development", says the architect.

The project provides 2,300 square metres of affordable work space to artists, and also aims to improve the building's impact on the surrounding neighbourhood, and to contribute to the economic sustainability of SPACE itself.

Expenditure had to be kept low in order to keep rents affordable, and the construction cost of £838,000 represents an economical £363 per square metre.

SWA's design takes "inspiration from, rather than replicating, the existing building and its post-war surroundings", says the architect. The most immediately apparent change is a new facade of metal profile cladding, "inspired by the building's geometric grid and industrial heritage". As well as improving thermal performance with a new layer of external insulation to the existing walls, the overcladding protects decayed brickwork from further damage — though cut-outs in the metal skin reveal patches of the existing brick, acknowledging the building's original identity.

### Left, right

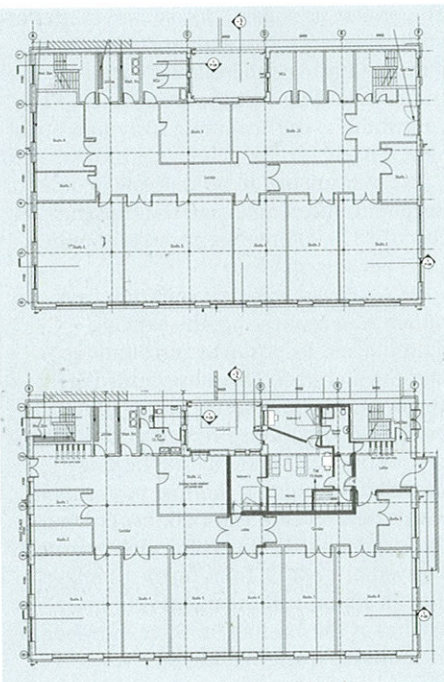
The building has been externally insulated and overclad in 0.5mm-thick full prime galvanised embossed steel panels with a sinusoidal profile (phs: MH).

### Below

The existing building was in a poor state of repair. Originally built for light-industrial use, it was converted to studios in the 1980s (phs: MH).







The corrugated galvanised steel skin is pierced by new large-pane windows whose galvanised steel surrounds project forward of the facade. Their size and form reflects the existing building's simple geometry and fills the studios with plentiful natural light.

Additional studio space has been created in third-floor extension — in place of an existing sawtooth roof — that is set back from the main elevation and clad in fibre cement panels. Above, a new 400-square-metre living roof will act to reduce storm water run-off and provide a biodiverse wildlife habitat. **▲**

## Project team

### Architect

Sarah Wigglesworth

### Architects

Osborne Edwards, Derek

### Lofty & Assoc's

Cost consultant

Brooke Vincent &

Partners

Main contractor

BRAC Contracts

Client

SPACE

## Selected suppliers & subcontractors

### Metal cladding

Hadley Ultrasheet

### Fibre cement cladding

Cembrit Cembonit

### Steel window

surrounds, copings

JA Phillips Associates

### GRP windows

Yprado Pultec FO60

Galvanised steel

rainwater goods

Lindab

### Sedum living roof

Sky Garden Sedum

Blanket system

### Rooflights

NRC Thermadome



**Top**  
Ground- and first-floor plans.

**Above**  
Interior prior to renovation (ph: MH).

**Right**  
Studio within the renovated building  
(phs: CDB):

