

ACME Artists' studios
HAT Projects

Words Eleanor Young

Photographs Hugo Glendinning

'It's a place where buildings are what they are, not contrived,' says HAT Projects' Hana Loftus. Purfleet is typical Thames Estuary – big sheds, distribution centres and fragments of housing. Designing artists' studios here, as HAT has done, raises eyebrows in some places but space is cheap. It is quite different from the firm's Jerwood Gallery in historic Hastings.

Working on High House Production Park – an Arts Council and public sector initiative that brought the Royal Opera House to this part of Thurrock – and for ACME Studios, HAT drew on ACME's expertise. Research into artists' spaces with Central St Martin's isolated some of the qualities of the old light industrial premises that artists favour – put-

ting the space and art before the building.

ACME was also clear on the mix of unit sizes and the net to gross ratio. It didn't want to force creative interaction, though perhaps it might come to pass in the wash up space and or slightly generous concrete staircase that looks over the Dartford Crossing. Working hard within the £836/m² budget to 'bring out the poetry' with the stair and top lit corridors was coupled with discussions with the QS about which blockwork wall was cheaper.

'People work here for many hours a week,' explains Tom Grieve of HAT. 'We wanted each studio to feel like a good place to be, within our grid system.' Forty-three studios of different sizes, depths, proportions and window configuration create different relations between walls, windows and light for artists to choose. 'There is a place for design as a discipline – not just making beautiful things but also things that work,' says Loftus. ■

IN NUMBERS**£1.8m**

total contract value

2412m²

gross external floor area

2151m²

gross internal floor area

£836/m²cost/m² of GIFA

A string of clerestories gives artists even light while smaller windows open on the Royal Opera House's production workshops opposite. Aluminium and brick give the building a reflective quality.



Light and variety of spaces were all the embellishments needed: the architecture is designed to play second fiddle to the making of art.

