



The Hyh Courtyards

Chingford Road, London

Completion year : 2019

Hyh House was once a Georgian Country House famous for its walled garden. Certainly, the walled garden would now be very useful: a reserve of biodiversity and an oasis of silence on the busy street, a buffer between the street and the House. Are we going to build a wall, in 2019? Of course not. The new wall is a thick layer of thick planting, which reacts to the context and can become more and more multi-functional playful, or more and more quiet.

The entrance's double curve introduces visitors to a well-defined, geometrical open space. The boundaries are defined by a thicker and a consistent line of planting that runs along the perimeter. Greenhouse buildings and tools sheds have crawled against the original walls and are now used by schools and residents to maintain the gardens. Smaller features are hidden in the thick garden: a bug hotel, bird nests, and stepping stones.

The centre of the garden is occupied by a humid landscape interspersed with patches of more dry landscapes and furniture. Rainwater from the castle is directed towards the central depression (the rain garden) where it slowly filters to the water table, reducing the pressure on the sewer system and the nearby roads. The shifting contours of the rain garden foster biodiversity.

Along the rainwater rills the residents are invited to plant their favourite colour. Each plot is assigned to the GF residents choosing the plots that are closer to their houses and function of privacy. The length of the planting line is dependent on the degrees of desired privacy and its relationship to the entrance pathways.

Along the pathways, you might find a small bridge, a secondary path towards a bench.

Our inspirations:

Two Courtyards, Palazzo Reale, Milan

The courtyard building. Palazzo Reale in Milan is one of the best examples of the double courtyard typology. The courtyard serves as a private open space, but as importantly, also allows to control access and views from the street and towards the private areas of the building. Very long courtyards were often divided in two, to preserve the proportions of the open space, or when more floor space was needed, or to distinguish between a more hard and classic space and a more soft and private garden. Our proposal aims to convert Hyh House in a double courtyard building enclosed by a colourful living wall.

Panca Di Via, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence

The panca di via is a unique public private architectural feature, typical of Florentine Renaissance. It is a simple bench running along the buildings' pediment, symbolising the relationship between the aristocratic families and the city. A gesture of kindness and the reco finto of being part of a larger entity: the city-state. The panca di via has disappeared from the architectural dictionary. We wish that every building had one, so that the streets would become living rooms and theatres.

Hyh House is composed of two linear buildings running parallel to Chingford Road. The buildings were built in times when cars were less pervasive, or maybe in the hope that they would become some day. Today the buildings sit completely exposed on a low green platform. Apart from the mere distance, there is no buffer between the noisy, public street and the private lives of the tenants.

The proposal is the result of a multidisciplinary approach led by Unagru Limited. Unagru has successfully delivered several residential and mixed-use projects in London and Italy. Cath Hassel of Ech20, has delivered tens of SUDS systems in the UK. Emma Griffin Landscape has more than ten years of experience in Landscape Design. In collaboration with Ech20 we have recently completed private rainwater gardens in Bromley. Ech20 have worked on tens of SUDS installations, including in schools and other public premises. Ech20 have worked on several participation and professional development projects. In Partnership with Thames Water, Ech20 has successfully delivered "Be Water Aware" assemblies and workshops to over 22,000 pupils and 1,150 teachers in 85 schools as part of Water Efficiency in Schools Programme (WESP). Emma Griffin and Matthew Stephens are part of Emma Griffin Gardens and have worked on multiple private and public garden designs.

The site has immense potential for improvement both in terms of aesthetics and functionality. We were struck by the feeling of exposure, by the noise and pollution coming from the road. We also noticed how the pavement narrows in front of the garden with no apparent reason, leaving less space for walking. We have designed our proposal with the residents' privacy in mind. The new boundary living wall will defend them from the noise, pollution and views coming from Chingford Road. The residents will draw the curtains of their front windows to the landscape without feeling exposed. We propose to increase the privacy of the ground floor flats by planting medium height hedges to create tiny front gardens. We have set aside a modest budget to improve the lighting and increase the feeling of safety. We hope to save some money to purchase benches and playground equipment for the garden.

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