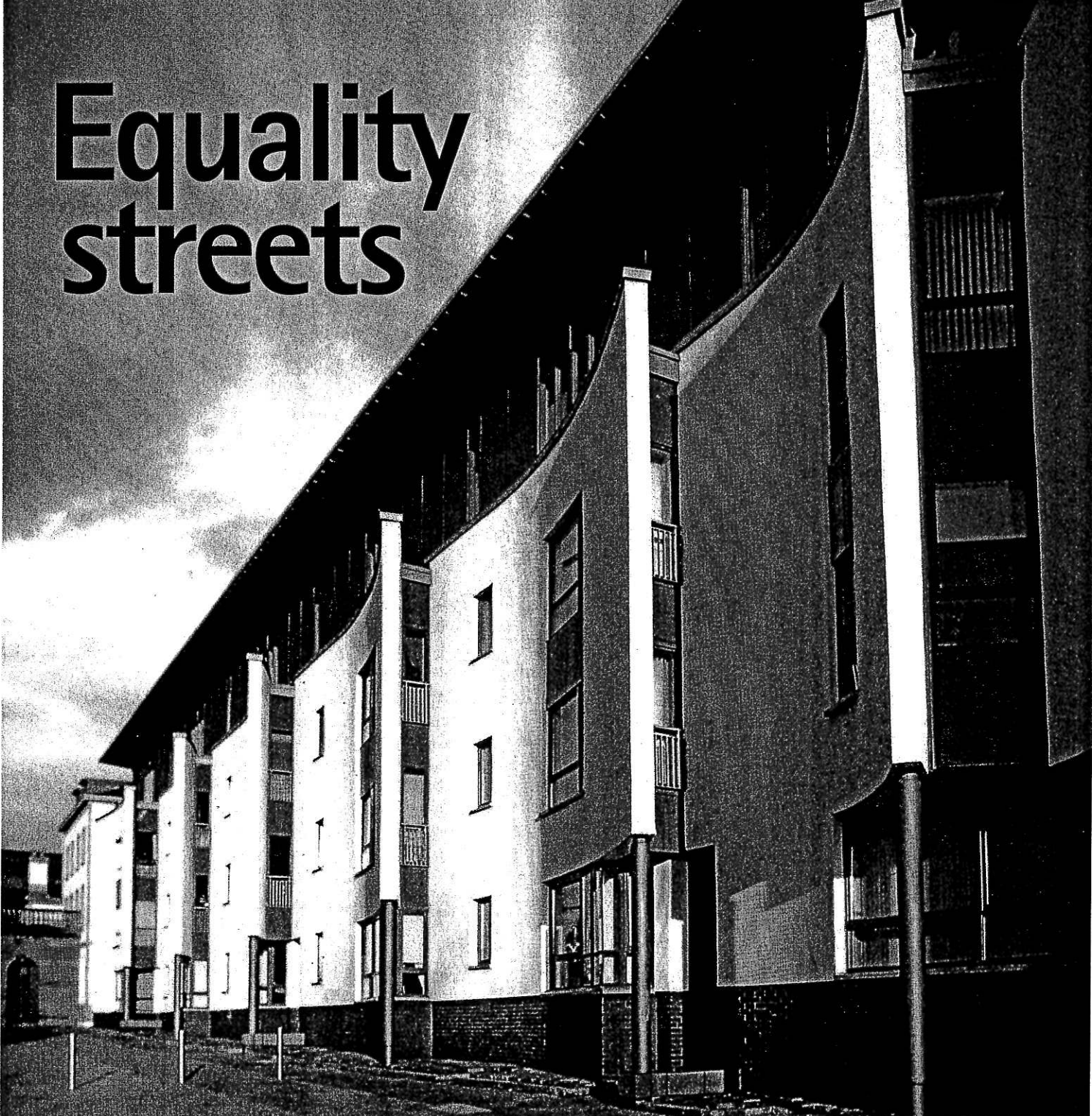


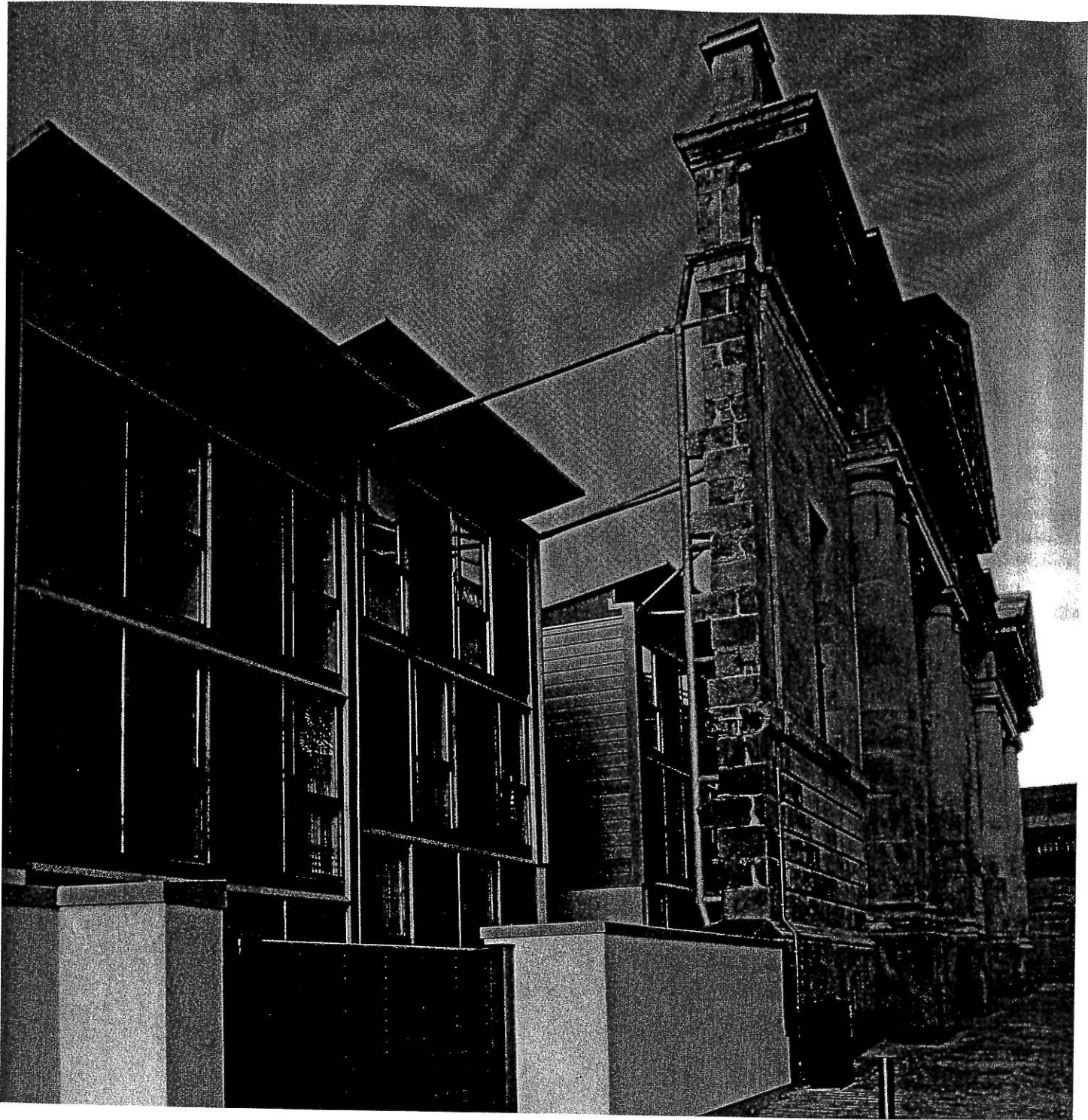
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inside design

Equality streets



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square roots

The Graham Square development in Glasgow's east end mixes the best of old architecture with the best of the new to dramatic effect.

Gavin Curry reports

The murder of a Kurdish asylum seeker in the Sighthill area of Glasgow has reinforced all the most negative perceptions of housing in the city.

Television news has shown us bleak tower blocks standing in what appears to be the middle of nowhere, the residents cut off from the city and increasingly from each other.

Whatever the truth of such a picture, Sighthill, Easterhouse and the like have become archetypes of the worst mistakes of modern planning and architecture.

But there is another side to the new Glasgow, one which emphasises continuity and community, good design and the human scale.

Leading the battle against the practice of uprooting and moving people en masse to huge new estates on the city fringe is Rob Joiner, director of Reidvale and Molendinar Park housing associations. Mr Joiner is a passionate opponent of 'monotonous, ugly, very basic estates'.

'For some reason it has been assumed that because people are poor or sick or disadvantaged in some way they are different from the rest of us,' he says. 'Consequently, we have created for them environments which are brutal and inhuman.'

Reidvale Housing Association was born out of the refusal of residents of the eponymous inner city, east end district to move to a council-owned estate on the edge of Glasgow in 1975.

Over a 20-year period the housing association has rehabilitated or built around 1,000 flats, with no-one moving more than a few hundred metres from their original home.

Molendinar Park was in turn formed in 1993 by Reidvale committee members to create social housing across Glasgow that was 'aspirational, not an option of last resort'.

Its committee includes members with backgrounds in arts journalism, design education, planning and architecture, who help pursue its philosophy of building homes which are well-designed, durable and energy efficient with an emphasis on public spaces and public art.

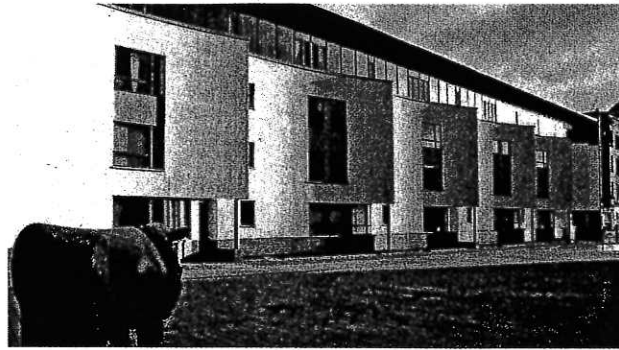
The jewel in its crown is award-winning Graham Square, described by Hunter Reid, Scottish Homes' Glasgow east operations co-ordinator as 'probably the best integrated housing project built in Scotland over the last few years in the public and private sector'.

In just the past few weeks Mr Reid has shown visitors from Ireland, Denmark and Hungary around the east end development, which brought together three architectural practices to build attractive modern homes for sale and rent in a setting which preserved the best of the past.

The derelict street scene presented to the architects included the listed neo-classical façade of the city's old meat market, a redundant Victorian hotel and an Edwardian tenement building.

Following an ideas competition, Page & Park was commissioned to design a four-storey block of 24 flats for shared ownership, Richard Murphy Architects was given the task of converting the hotel into 16 units for rent and McKeown & Alexander handed the challenge of integrating the meat market façade into a block of flats for rent and shared ownership.

Page & Park associate Karen Pickering says: 'Rob Joiner said try and do something dramatic. He's quite an unusual client. It's social housing that he builds but it's always social housing with a difference. It doesn't cost any more to make buildings a bit more interesting.'



Fintastic: Kerry Hunter's sculpture *Calf* over an approving eye over Page & Park award-winning building

The architects call their building the 'matador houses' because the curve of its 'fins', which give it such a distinctive appearance, evoke a bullfighter's cloak. This in turn establishes a connection with Graham Square's meat-trading past.

'By peeling off the fins we opened up the living rooms to south-facing light,' says Ms Pickering. 'The whole development looks quite Mediterranean during the summer. It's not often you get that quality of public space in Glasgow.'

Resident Jaqueline Small says the southern theme continues inside the flats. 'There's a lovely, airy continental feel to it all, yet we have privacy because no-one is looking onto us directly.'

'They have kept the architectural context of the older tenements, high ceilings, lots of light, lots of glass.'

Richard Murphy Architects' plans initially involved demolishing and rebuilding part of the hotel but when the contractors moved in they found it was all beyond repair.

'It ended up being entirely demolished and the north and south blocks were rebuilt as they were,' says architect Stewart Stevenson. 'Our brief was fairly minimal. To a great extent they sat back and let us get on with it.'

Tenant Pauline McClure moved in to her two-bedroom apartment in the Richard Murphy building because her one-bed flat nearby was too small for both her and son Cameron.

'The difference between the flats is the size,' she says. 'This has lovely high ceilings and everything.'

'It's got the wee bonuses like the courtyard and the plants.'

The RIBA Award-winning, environmentally friendly McKeown & Alexander building is probably the most complex of the three, its ultra-modern appearance contrasting strongly with both its neighbours and the linked but free-standing meat market façade.

Mr Reid enthuses about features such as the non-load bearing internal walls which can be repositioned to create new spaces within.

But then he enthuses about everything to do with Graham Square, from the way the project was conceived down to the original cobblestones used to repave the street.

Within the complex of buildings Molendinar Park has strived to create a mixed community, doing a 'little bit of social engineering' to establish a 'social balance' as Rob Joiner puts it.

This mix reflects the way Graham Square was created, bringing together a variety of architects working with artists and the residents to create something unique – or, as Mr Joiner says, 'a monument to the loose collaboration of creative individuality'. Not something even the most charitable of observers could say about the tower blocks of Sighthill.