

Design Rationale

The School of Lost Skills is designed to follow the principles of cohousing¹, enabling residents to retain a level of privacy whilst benefiting from living as part of a group. This also helps satisfy the psychological needs of people as they age, keeping them productive, involved and active as part of a community². The architecture expresses the distinct relationship between older residents and students and is designed to encourage neighbourliness, something which critics argue is lacking in the UK³.

A productive garden with raised planters provides an opportunity for the teaching of growing food - a skill lost among many young people and a means to reduce the carbon footprint of each resident⁴. Produce is harvested and cooked in a common kitchen, utilising the care and preparation associated with food as a platform for further social interaction.

A common house provides a central hub for the School, accommodating social areas, a common kitchen and the brewing and baking facilities. Brewing and baking, both lost industries in East London, are processes dependent on time and experience. The scheme aims to exchange, utilise and re-establish the associated skills and regenerate a community-based local industry. The common house acts as a public threshold providing a cafe and access to some facilities available to the surrounding neighbourhood at various times of day.

At the end of each teaching term, the inner courtyard transforms from a productive food growing space, into a new community food festival for East London. The transforming architecture changes the thresholds between private and public and provides another platform for younger and older generations to interact.

The current institutionalised view towards older generations is outdated. *The School of Lost Skills* demonstrates that cohousing can be integrated into a wider community and combined with productive typologies, creating an exciting alternative way of living at different stages of life. While the project is site specific, the core principles could be adapted to different locations and cultures.

¹ A revolutionary housing typology with communal elements started in the Europe, and later trialled in the USA following its introduction by McCamant & Durrett Architects

² Brenton, M (2001) *Older People's Co-Housing Communities in Inclusive Housing in Peace, S and Holland C. An Ageing Society: Innovative Approaches* pp. 169-188, Bristol: The Policy Press

³ Kelly, A (2006) *Report reveals loss of community spirit* in *The Guardian* 16 August 2006 [online <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2006/aug/16/communities.guardiansocietysupplement>]

⁴ Steel, C (2008) *Hungry City: How Food Shapes Our Lives* London: Random House