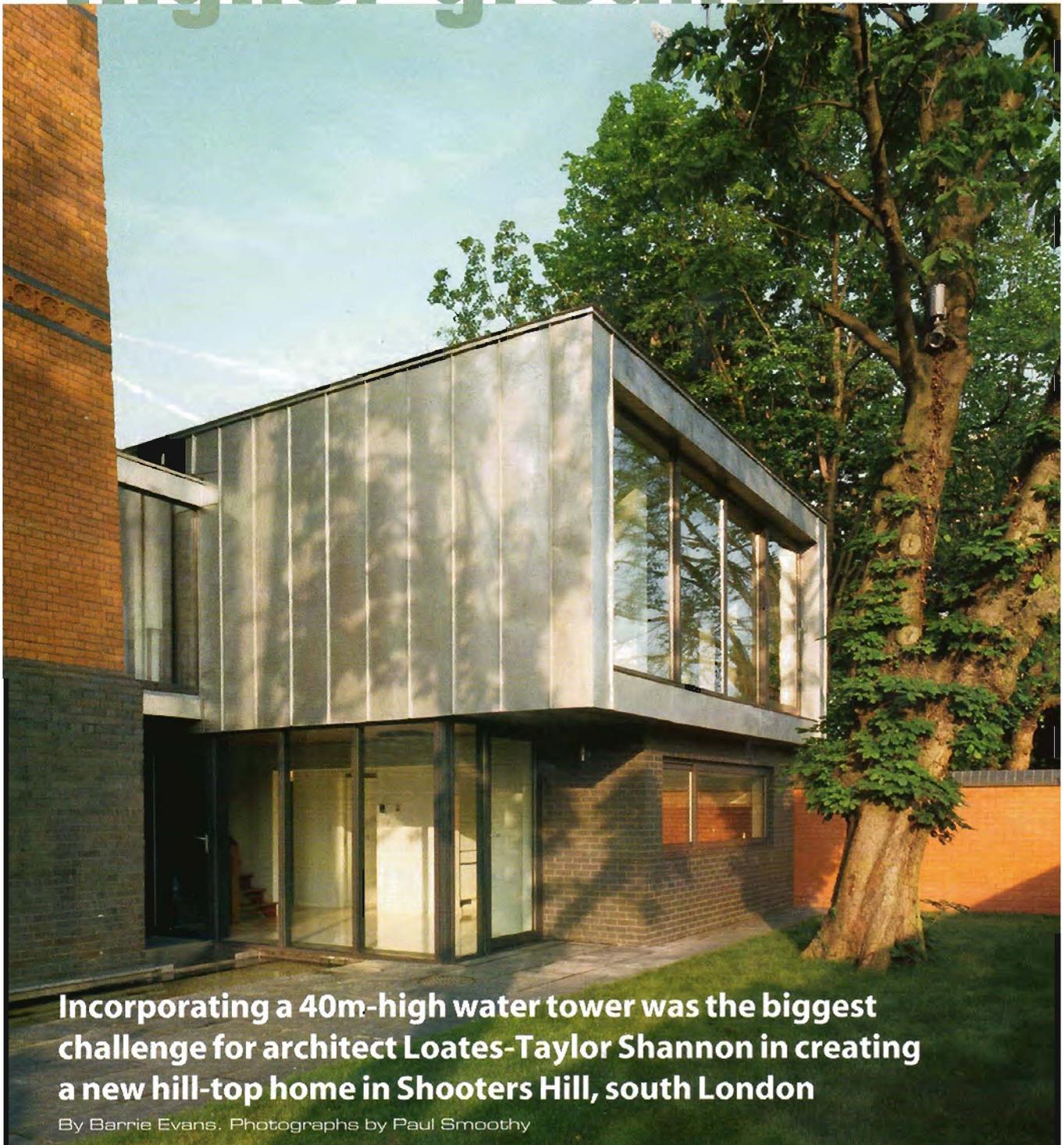


# Higher ground



**Incorporating a 40m-high water tower was the biggest challenge for architect Loates-Taylor Shannon in creating a new hill-top home in Shooters Hill, south London**

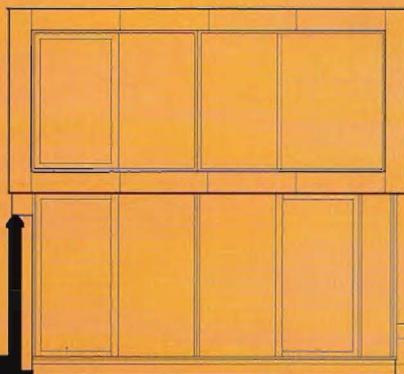
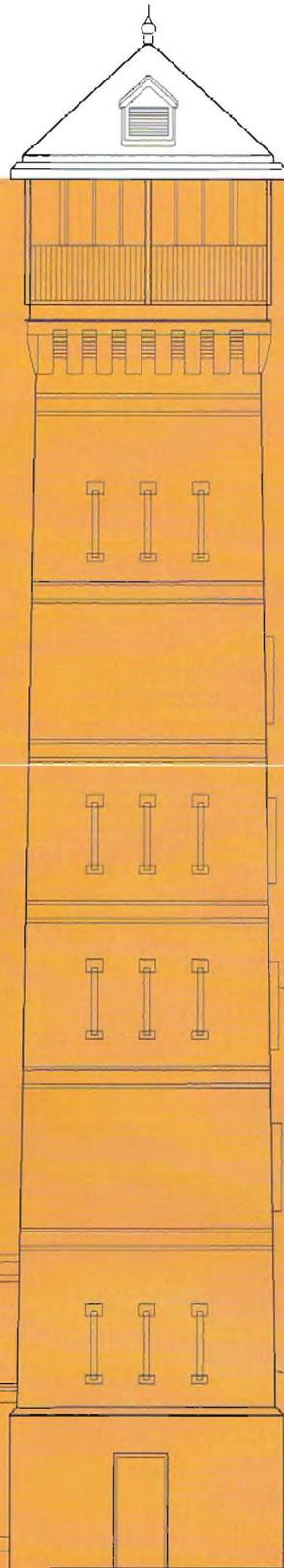
By Barrie Evans. Photographs by Paul Smoothy



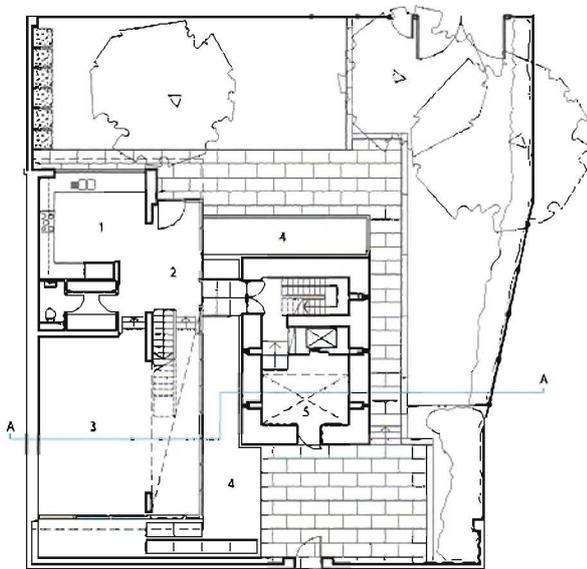
A house eight floors high does not immediately strike you as a model of convenience, though it does bring to mind one of Bryan Avery's stranger ideas for high-density urban housing – where each dwelling was stacked one room per floor for half a dozen or more floors, connected by a linear-motor lift. For this house on Shooters Hill, near Greenwich, south London, there is a combination of the strange (converted) and more conventionally planned new space.

At the base of the tower is a new two-storey pavilion with entrance hall, kitchen and living/dining space on the ground floor, two en suite bedrooms and a utility room above, with a covered bridge into the 120-year-old tower. Located close to the brow of Shooters Hill, the tower has amazing panoramic views across London – it is nine miles east of central London yet you can just make out the Wembley arch.

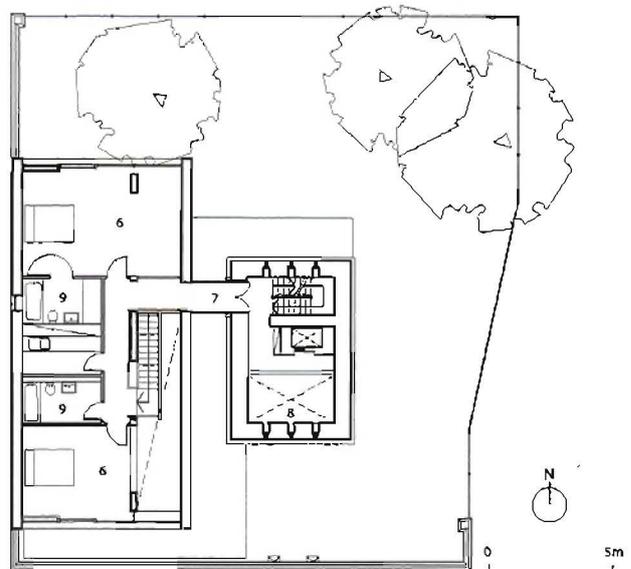
Originally it held 80 tonnes of water for a former hospital nearby. Consequently, the solid masonry walls are a metre thick, win-



south elevation



ground floor plan



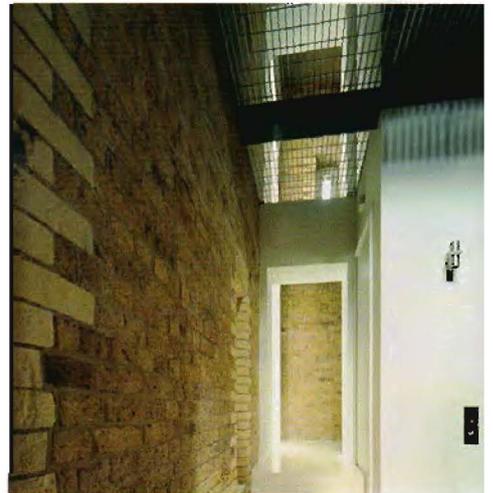
first floor plan

dows are few and floors small in area when considered as potential habitable space. After a tight five-person (lockable) hydraulic lift has been squeezed in alongside the existing stair, the remaining internal floor area is about 2.75 x 3.50m (floors vary). The excellent quality of the original brickwork includes a 2° batter to the walls above the plinth. Floor-to-floor heights are largely defined by the existing stair, with occasional adjustments of a step or two into a room. Much of the brickwork is left exposed and lancet window openings have been retained. There are windows on the east accessible to fire ladders and the tower is sprinklered.

Architect Loates-Taylor Shannon (LTS) has responded to this stimulating set of constraints with a room-stacking that works off

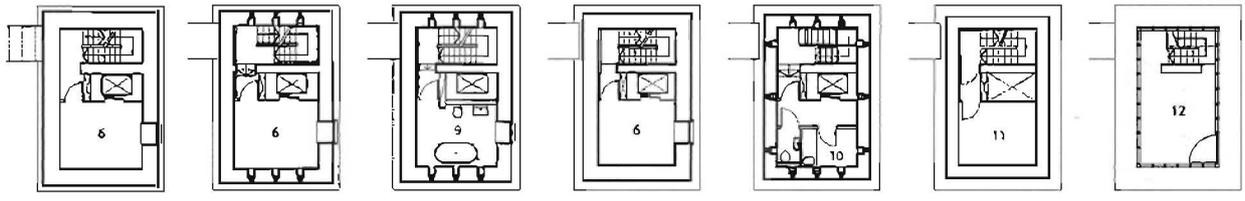
its industrial past. The original cantilevered stone stair, which has been sandblasted and sealed, is extended at the top with a new galvanised stair that has open-grid treads and landings that add to the sense of spiralling height. The vertical sense is also reinforced by making the entrance hall two storeys, with a mesh balcony to access the lift. Above these two floors, the other seven floors are planned as bedroom three, bedroom four, bathroom, bedroom five, WC and kitchenette, plant, then observatory. The lift stops at level seven to allow the maximum panorama from the observatory, which follows the original roof profile. This observatory is fully glazed, though shaded by an oversailing roof that also shelters a perimeter balcony.

The overall composition consists



Left; new stairs approaching the tower-top observatory. Above: the view north in the two-storey tower entrance. Opposite page: the tower-top observatory, the balustrading following the original perimeter of the water tank

- KEY**
- 1 kitchen
  - 2 reception hall
  - 3 living room
  - 4 pool
  - 5 entrance (tower)
  - 6 bedroom
  - 7 bridge
  - 8 void
  - 9 bathroom
  - 10 kitchenette
  - 11 plant
  - 12 observatory



second floor    third floor    fourth floor    fifth floor    sixth floor    seventh floor    eighth floor





Left: the tower 'front door'. The most-used connection between tower and pavilion is the first floor glazed bridge. Above and below: the split circulation route between the entrance lobby and living area. Opposite upper: the bathroom on the tower's fourth floor (with fire escape window). Opposite lower: the different feel of the austere kitchen

essentially of two objects – the tower and the pavilion – in a fenced garden enclave. The surrounding streets are mostly undistinguished suburbia, except for some of the Victorian hospital buildings nearby. It feels surprising to find this dwelling here.

The tower retains its original feel, its brickwork sandblasted and chemically cleaned, damaged terracotta mouldings remade to match and pieced in, and finials restored. In contrast, the new pavilion has extensive metal-framed glazing, with brick to the ground floor matching the tower plinth, then a terne-coated stainless-steel-clad first floor. The new-build emphasis is horizontal.

This new pavilion is glazed at either end and has no structural crosswalls, requiring some ingenuity from engineer Haskins Robinson Waters. Standing above 3.5m of desiccated clay, the house is founded on mini-piles, linked by a ring beam. Concrete walls are cantilevered off this ring beam, – single-storey below the clerestory window to the west and two-storey, incorporating large openings, along the spine. These con-





crete walls support a light steel frame, itself cantilevering out to support timber floors, hanging-walls and the roof to the east.

As well as its glazing facing north and south, the ground floor has a long glazed area facing the tower, so that when you experience the house, it feels less like a building in two separate parts. Also helping link the two, and evoke the tower's past, is a stepped pool between them with running water.

Internally, the new work is to a high specification, including extensive solid walnut, Starck sanitaryware plus Jazz and Odissi baths, and an austere kitchen by Nicholas Anthony, somewhat coldly out of keeping with the warmth elsewhere, such as from the timber and the pink metal stair. This stair's positioning is logical on the first floor but does interrupt the flow of space front-to-back on the ground floor.

More in keeping than the kitchen is the lighting by Kevan Shaw, a long-time LTS collaborator, which was brought in very much as part of the design team. Custom-made fittings hang in the double-height stairwell and there is a lot of attention to the exterior night



effect, particularly bottom-lighting of the water, and to lighting of the tower's entrance and stairs.

As well as being the architect, LTS has been part of the development team, along with Chickenfeed. It is a role Greg Shannon and Michael Loates-Taylor feel every architect should experience at least once, to empathise better with clients, although LTS is not planning a future as a developer. This one-off building is, though, an advertisement for the sort of vision that only architects bring to projects.

## CREDITS

**START ON SITE DATE**  
November 2002

**CONTRACT DURATION**  
16 months

**GROSS INTERNAL AREA**  
288m<sup>2</sup>

**FORM OF CONTRACT**  
Construction management

**DEVELOPER**  
Chickenfeed with Loates-Taylor Shannon

**ARCHITECT**  
Loates-Taylor Shannon; Greg Shannon, Caroline Byram, Ana Matic, William Haggard, Jamie Wakeford, Stephen Papps, Louise Greenwood

**CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT**  
Sidney Smith Project Management

**SITE MANAGEMENT**  
Lyndon Cartwright

**STRUCTURAL ENGINEER**  
Haskins Robinson Waters

**SERVICES ENGINEER**  
Brinson Staniland Partnership

**LIGHTING DESIGN**  
Kevan Shaw Lighting Design

**BUILDING CONTROL**  
HCD Building Control

**SUBCONTRACTORS AND SUPPLIERS**  
*Sprinkler system* Atlas Fire Engineering; *brickwork to external walls* Assured Brickwork; *perimeter fencing* Buffalo Fence; *pond liner* Butyl Products; *sanitaryware supply* CP Hart Distribution; *glazing system* Clapton Glass; *ironmongery* Dorplan Contracts; *passenger lift* Elevation Lift Services; *vehicle gate automation* 1st Choice Automation; *kitchen splashbacks* Glass Express; *substructure and superstructure, underground services* Gretbrook; *external brick repairs, sandblasting* J&W Renovation; *joinery to bathrooms, slit windows* K&D Joinery; *electrical and plumbing* MWF Security; *walnut for house* The Natural Wood Floor Company; *kitchen and appliances supply* Nicholas Anthony; *terne-coated stainless-steel cladding* Roles; *lightning conductor* Southern Lightning Engineers; *pebbles to pond* Trilcot; *structural steel, staircases, mesh flooring* Tresher Fabrications; *piling* R Withers

## WEBLINKS

Loates-Taylor Shannon  
[www.lts-architects.co.uk](http://www.lts-architects.co.uk)  
Brinson Staniland Partnership  
[www.bspce.com](http://www.bspce.com)  
Kevan Shaw Lighting Design  
[www.kevan-shaw.com](http://www.kevan-shaw.com)  
HCD Building Control  
[www.hcdgroup.co.uk](http://www.hcdgroup.co.uk)