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The project involves the demolition of an existing shed and its replacement with housing with frontage onto Pearse Square, Macken Street and Hanover Lane. The site is distinguished by the strong Georgian context of the square; the brown brick façades, the tall opes with white plastered reveals, the doorways and entrance steps, and the parapet walls with slate roofs hidden behind.

The plan uses the existing 6m grain of Pearse Square to make an arrangement of interlocking apartments (comprising 6 three-beds, 24 two-beds and 6 one-beds) and semi-private courtyard spaces. These courtyards are raised half a level from the street, but maintain a relationship to the public realm and serve as access to the apartments as well as amenity space. The proposal takes the scale and materiality of Pearse Square and makes a brick screen that completes the west façade for the first time. The opes in this brick screen take their dimensions from the Georgian buildings, but apply a looser more abstract rhythm of solid and void.

There is then a change of scale onto Macken Street to address the new docklands developments. The indentation of this façade allows the apartments to relate to the street while being protected from the heavy traffic. The north and east façades are made as solid as possible to give the building presence in relation to its much larger neighbours, while the south façades are opened up with balconies and glazed screens.

area – 2,905m² / design-completion –2004-2010
photomontages – Bruce Darrell
HOUSING AT PEARSE SQUARE

AAI Awards entry panels
Cross-section and west elevation
ASSESSORS' COMMENTS

HENCHION – This isn't built, but I must say I would be very supportive of this even in its unbuilt condition. I enjoy the floor plans, I enjoy the kind of return on these houses. I'm guessing that this is a private developer who has gone to these architects who have done a good scheme for him, and by supporting it, we might actually help them getting it built.

GERRARD – That is such a nice, charming square. But why do they put those honking things in. It seems a pity to have this overhang in the background.

HENCHION – Well, you're going to have countless overhangs in the background, because on the street behind, you're into six and eight storeys anyway. There's a little pocket of two-storeys left in an area that's gone predominantly six storeys. Behind that tree there, look, it's all overshadowed by a building that's eight storeys. You're competing in a context that's going to be six storeys all around.

ROLFE – I wrote down "a brave attempt". This is one which is trying to do the right thing. It's modest. There's no great architecture about it, but it's controlled and it's dealing with a lot of nitty-gritty issues in an accomplished way.

GERRARD – Do you like the relationship between this project and these houses? Look at it closely. I think it's somehow missing the point. They could do much better with that context. Look at the rooflines. Why don't they carry the roofline around.

ROLFE – Well, the alternative is the planners insist they do a pastiche.
HENCHION – We have completed maybe 80,000 apartments and houses in the last year in a country of four million. This is the only scheme here that represents that enormous industry. And this, in that context, is to be commended.

GERRARD – On what basis is this to be commended? This looks no different from most of the other development I’ve seen.

HENCHION – It’s a far more inventive plan. If this doesn’t get built, the alternative is considerably worse.

DE SMEDT – Let’s have it built then, and then enter it in the awards.

ROLFE – But the model up there is quite telling.

HENCHION – Projects like this should be supported because it has considerable quality. If we don’t support it, if we don’t tell the developer and planners you have something of value here, you are completely ignoring housing ...

RAMBERT – So the idea here is very strategic.

HENCHION – I don’t mind putting a personal take on that – this is where I’m at as well.

RAMBERT – The goal is to have this quality of project.

ROLFE – To get as close to this as we can.

HENCHION – And to tell them we have something of value here – don’t squander it, don’t throw it away. I am personally very strongly for this project.

ROLFE – I agree with you, and I think it’s something which needs to be marked. Even at the very least, the fact that it will be illustrated in the book is a reference point to whatever becomes reality there.
GERRARD – To my mind it would appear to be a highly politicised decision, which is what it is. But I certainly don’t think it’s one of the awards.

HENCHION – It is as politicised as the issue about building in the countryside.

RAMBERT – I understand your point, but the question I put on the table is this: is this project so innovative? It has good proportions, the floor plan is good. It’s good work anyway. Your strategies, Martin, are so protective, but I understand what is at stake.

HENCHION – All I can say is that in the Irish commercial property market, it is innovative. That’s a criticism of the context it’s in.

RAMBERT – Well, we have to put it that way, otherwise people might not understand why. Why this one? So you need to explain the context.

DE SMEDT – I think also it’s a young architect here. I understand the point of supporting this, but to me, architecturally it’s not that innovative. Then I have some issues with the plan which are actually deeply related to the architect’s conceptual decision of making this striped housing.

GERRARD – Why not extend the existing façade in an alternate material – like granite – and hold that sort of unified reference which is already there? I mean, why do we have to have innovation?

HENCHION – The standard approach would be to build a two-storey terrace there and put a four-storey terrace at the back. So the architects used the density argument to try and convince the developer to take a slight risk and do a slightly provocative scheme.

GERRARD – I like this square, I’m familiar with it, and this corner is not of a quality that I would be happy to see in that context.

HENCHION – The difference between that being built well and built badly could be the difference between the architect being supported or not supported.

RAMBERT – It is a commendation on its own merits.