



## BUILDING ■

DSDHA: studio for Edmund de Waal

*Ros Diamond enjoys a spatial description of the artist's working process created within a generic light industrial building. Photos: Hélène Binet.*

When a work of art is viewed, the place where it was made is rarely considered. Studios are usually private: the means of production are irrelevant to the intended experience of the work, and exposure might reveal the alchemy. For the artist it can be different; the meaning of a work may be dependent on siting, but the process and environment of its making can be equally significant.

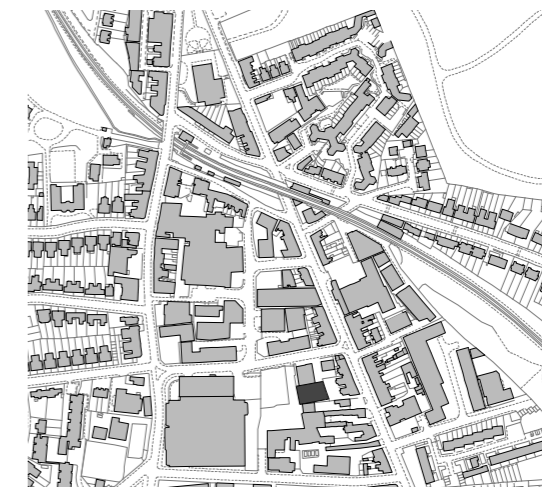
In the work of the ceramic artist Edmund de Waal, making porcelain pots and writing play complementary parts. He has worked for nearly ten years in south London, in purpose-made studios created within generic, light-industrial buildings on indistinct trading

estates of a sort rarely associated with architecture or fine craftsmanship.

The first of his two studios was made in 2005 in a small two-storey factory, which he outgrew as his work developed into 'cargos' of pieces in larger vitrines. Its successor, recently made in a 1960s munitions warehouse, is three times the size, a jump from domestic to semi-industrial-scaled space.

Like its predecessor, the new studio contains workshops, writing space and offices. This time, however, a vast warehouse hall

**Above** Edmund de Waal's studio in West Norwood, south London. **Right** The first studio designed by DSDHA for Edmund de Waal; location plan; detail of existing warehouse building.





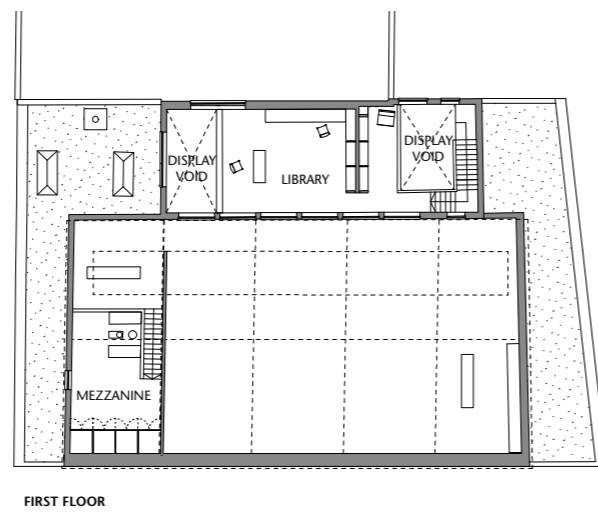
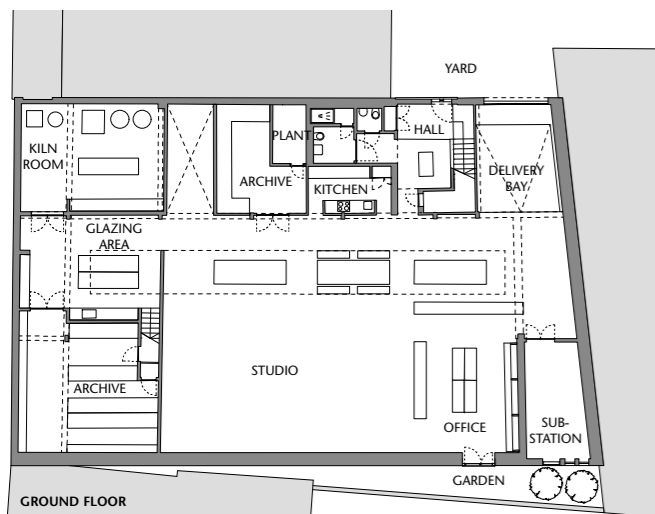
enables de Waal's large works to be installed and reviewed. Storage rooms accommodate his archive. Neither studio was idealised, nor conceived as a gallery. They are residencies within existing fabric, where the nature of the artist's occupancy itself can change.

Both projects were designed by DSDHA, in an exceptional collaboration. The ceramicist first encountered the architects when a



household accident with falling bookshelves led partner David Hills to contact de Waal to replace a broken coffee set. Shared concerns and interests – in the relationship between individual focus and social engagement and its spatial translation, and in the

**Top left** Double-height entrance hall with sunken vitrine.  
**Above** Display void overlooked by the library above; kitchen.  
**Left** Entrance to double-height display void from studio.



humanity and imperfection of handmade objects – led to several collaborations including the proposed Silver Building in Soho, in which clay's tactile properties as a cladding were to be explored, and an unrealised installation, '5 Ways of Standing'.

In both of de Waal's studios, precise, light-controlled volumes were instated within existing utilitarian shells. Behind a nondescript facade, the latest studio strikingly juxtaposes the new with vestiges of the existing warehouse. Its elaborated spatial structure effectively describes the artist's working methods. A meticulously ordered world is realised from a brief to create connected spaces,

**Above, right** A new partition separates the glazing area and mezzanine from the main body of the studio.



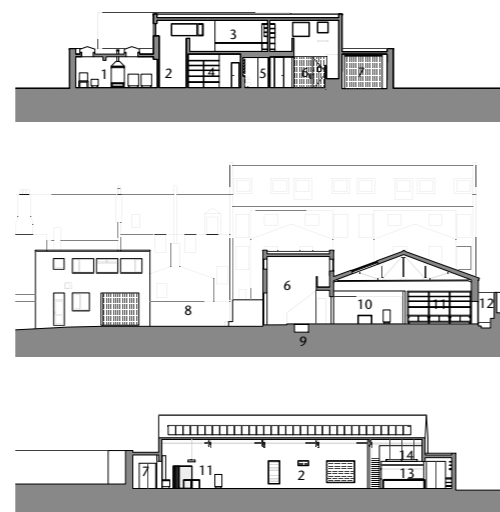
The generic form of a double-height warehouse with adjacent two-storey offices has been recomposed as a continuum in which the voluminous hall is edged and intercut by smaller volumes, disturbing its functional order. Two tall volumes have been sliced through the old office building beside the hall. The first, a double-height entrance hall, acts as an 'airlock' before the studio. A vitrine of de Waal's partly broken pots, sunken in the floor, references his preoccupation with lost hoards. The second double-height space, a 'gallery void', connects the library and writing space above with the warehouse. The studio is a place of connections between different states of mind, sensible to de Waal's inhabitation and the work displayed.

On the studio's opposite corner, behind a new partition wall, the architects have created a mezzanine on which de Waal works at his low wheel, with natural light behind and his back to the room. Even the language of 'centring' clay on the wheel connotes undisturbed individual focus.

In the main hall, meanwhile, the ordinary life of the studio continues: wall-hung or plinth vitrines are displayed and packaged to be shipped to exhibitions; the kitchen is unhidden in an alcove off the hall; office space is loosely enclosed by fixed furniture, detailed so that it appears to float on the monolithic poured concrete floor.

The whole is enveloped in an aura of contemplation and calm interiority, generated by controlled white light that illuminates the subtle differentiations of white glaze on porcelain objects. The external world is occluded. Daylight is filtered through ribbed polycarbonate in the long existing rooflight, while obscured glazing in all of the windows reflects de Waal's vitrines, whose contents are visible as unfocussed objects.

**Above, left** Glazing area with bespoke light above; kiln room.  
**Sections** 1 Kiln room, 2 display, 3 library, 4 archive, 5 bathroom, 6 entrance hall, 7 delivery bay, 8 yard, 9 sunken vitrine, 10 studio, 11 office, 12 garden, 13 glazing area, 14 mezzanine.



sustaining de Waal's reciprocal process of writing and making, and allowing both isolated working space and natural engagement between the artist and other members of the studio.



In an essay on Signs and Wonders, de Waal's permanent exhibit at the V&A, he recalls the 'after-image' left by boyhood visits to the old warehouse-like ceramics galleries at the museum. A similar quality exists in the reinhabitation of his own old warehouse and its unemphatic details. It exists in the entrance hall's boarded lining and front door, and in the fluorescent lights suspended from the white-painted fine steel trusses that sustain a sense of the old space and its purpose, where the existing construction is as light-handed as the new architecture.

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**Above, right** Mezzanine with potter's wheel overlooking the glazing area; first-floor library and writing space.

**Project team**  
 Architect: DSDHA; design team: David Hills, Deborah Saunt, Martin Pearson, Edward Simpson, Natalie Barton; contractor: BRAC; structural engineer: Price & Myers; services: Skelly & Couch; qs: Stockdale.

**Selected suppliers and subcontractors** PermaFloor: Q Flooring Systems; aluminium windows: Schueco; bespoke joinery: Big Egg Designs; bespoke lighting: Aether Lighting; insulation: Celotex.

