

House in Soho, London

ALISON AND PETER SMITHSON

In this statement on their project for a house in Soho, London, Alison and Peter Smithson first invoke New Brutalism by name. Their short definition, stressing the building's lack of finishes and its exposition of structure, will go on to influence the theses that Banham attributes to the movement in his seminal essay two years later. The invocation of the terms shelter and environment is also significant.—A.K.

The attempt was made to build in Central London, and failed because of difficulty with adjoining owners. It seemed that a series of Trusts held the surrounding land (all bombed) but it turned out to be one man who intended to build kitchens to the left, W.C.'s the right and restaurants to the rear—this contract was about to be signed after nine months' work.

On the normal city site costing between 15s. and 25s. per sq. ft. one can apparently do little different from the Georgian, but it was considered that a different internal order must be visualized. The air and sunlight of the attics in the daytime suggests that living quarters should be up top, with the bathroom in the cool dim basement.

It was decided to have no finishes at all internally—the building being a combination of shelter and environment.

Bare concrete, brickwork, and wood. The difficulty of unceiled [sic] rooms was satisfactorily overcome by the disposition of rooms which were also placed high up or low down according to light-sunlight desired.

Brickwork may suggest a blue or double burnt or colored pointing; but the arbitrary use of color and texture was not conformed with, and common bricks with struck joints were intended. The bars and color variation have some sort of natural tension when laid by a good bricklayer.

In fact, had this been built it would have been the first exponent of the "new brutalism" in England, as the preamble to the specification shows: "*It is our intention in this building to have the structure exposed entirely, without internal finishes wherever practicable. The Constructor should aim at a high standard of basic construction as in a small warehouse.*"

—*Architectural Design* (December 1953), p. 342.