



# Homes

*Projects by Bell Phillips Architects,  
Checa Romero Architects and  
Denizen Works*



£10



*Building study*

# Whitstable wizardry

Denizen Works' Haddo Yard housing at Whitstable on the north Kent coast combines intelligent planning with robust detailing











*Denizen Works became involved with Haddo Yard through informal conversations with Duncan Blackmore of Arrant Land on the developing planning scheme. These conversations led to a small piece of work on the front elevation and eventually, the commission for the detailed design. The practice was tasked with elevating the planning scheme to create a distinct piece of architecture rooted in its place.*

Words Charles Holland  
Photography David Barbour

Duncan Blackmore has a good story behind the naming of Haddo Yard, his new development in Whitstable on the Kent coast. Oliver Haddo is the anti-hero of Somerset Maugham's novel *The Magician*, a shadowy occultist modelled allegedly on Aleister Crowley.

The cover of early imprints of *The Magician* featured an occultist symbol, something between a tepee and the magician's hat often worn by Crowley. It is possible to see a formal relationship between this symbol and Haddo Yard's pointed gables, but the more literal connection is that Maugham lived in Whitstable as a child.

It's hard to think of another developer who might name a project after a man associated with satanic rituals. But Oliver Haddo's oblique connection to the history of Whitstable has the benefit of avoiding

obvious clichés of seaside living or gentrification, cultivating instead a more personal approach to context.

Blackmore is one half of Arrant Land, a company that describes itself simply enough as 'developers of good buildings'. Haddo Yard is part of a subset of Arrant Land schemes called Whitstable Approaches, all of them located in the eponymous seaside town where Blackmore lives. It is the first to be completed, though a second project,



designed by 31/44 Architects, has recently started on site nearby.

Haddo Yard is situated a few streets back from the sea front, overlooking Whitstable train station. It is the product of a collaboration between Blackmore and architect Denizen Works, an east London-based practice run by Murray Kerr. The close working method between Kerr and Blackmore suggests a genuinely productive relationship between architect and developer.

The form of the building has its origins in a planning application for seven new flats, which Blackmore had asked local architect Blink to draw up. This in turn grew out of an earlier scheme for a row of three houses replacing an existing bungalow, a significant piece of planning gain achieved by Arrant Land. Denizen Works was brought on following approval and in doing so revised the plans and refined the elevations.

As well as magicians' hats, the front façade – a row of three gables clad in a mix of coal-black and pale grey bricks – evokes the tar-painted fishermen's huts found on the beach front. This elevation was the subject of intense study by Denizen Works. Although expressed as three gables, the roof is actually a dark zinc-clad mansard, which allows the space between the gables to also be occupied.

The front façade includes a number of blank panels enlivened by bespoke ceramic tiles (made by Darwen Terracotta, which







also supplied the tiles for FAT and Grayson Perry's House For Essex). At Haddo Yard they provide discreet embellishment rather than 'pattern all over' and help to continue the fenestration rhythm where it conflicts with the party wall lines that run between the gables. Their subtle decorative effect is intended to echo the suburban setting of half-timbered houses with their projecting jetties and tiled porches. On the rear elevations, the same panels are finished with bricks laid in a herringbone pattern.

Behind the gabled elevation sit seven apartments, three on the ground floor with a further four on the first and second floors. The ground-floor two-bed flats are long and thin, stretching far back into the plot with rooflights over their single-storey living areas. The upper-floor flats – also two-bed – were flipped around by Denizen Works to improve daylight and reduce circulation space and now have double aspects to the north and south.

The layouts are sensible and distinguished by some nice detailing in the tongue-and-groove wainscoting that runs through most of the spaces. Denizen Works avoided suspended ceilings in the top-floor flats so you really know you are in the roof space. The joists burst through the walls in a couple of places and the ceilings swoop down low.

## Project data

Start on site May 2016  
 Completion June 2017  
 Gross internal floor area 458m<sup>2</sup>  
 Form of contract Bespoke contract  
 Construction cost £ 800,000  
 Construction cost per m<sup>2</sup> £1,750  
 Architect Denizen Works  
 Client Arrant Land with Peech and Pear  
 Structural engineer Morph Structures  
 SAP assessor Blink Architecture  
 Approved building inspector Harwood  
 Main contractor Yellowjack  
 CAD software used AutoCAD



There are ice cream-coloured tiles in the kitchens and bright blue mosaics in the bathrooms. Otherwise it's a simple palette of materials including concrete screed floors throughout the ground level.

Both apartments and circulation areas are tightly planned, but careful detailing helps to offset any sense of feeling cramped. The 'home-made' acoustic ceiling in the ground-floor corridor consists of thin strips of black painted timber suspended below a shallow void. This gives an illusion of depth and avoids the oppressiveness of ceiling tiles or a more consistent surface finish.

The structure is blockwork inner leaf with brick outer, beam and block floors and a largely timber roof construction. The quality of the bricks adds greatly to the overall sense of stylishness. All of this is achieved for an admirably frugal £1,750 per square metre budget. Arrant Land may be motivated to build good architecture but its projects have strict commercial constraints.

The front landscaping is robust and significantly better than most similar scale developments. There are nicely sculptural concrete planters, which have been cast in corrugated metal shuttering, and 'grasscrete' pavers laid in a subtle graphic pattern. The flats keep to the building line of the neighbours, their roofline navigating a level between that of the shopping parade and the adjacent houses.

The garden planning is less convincing. Neither the 'private' terraces nor the communal area of garden seem quite satisfactory. The terraces – separated by low-level planters – are also elevated from ground level to avoid flooding. This gives them a slightly theatrical relationship to the rest of the garden, as if you are standing on a small stage – great for a party but possibly less comfortable when watering the planters in your underpants.

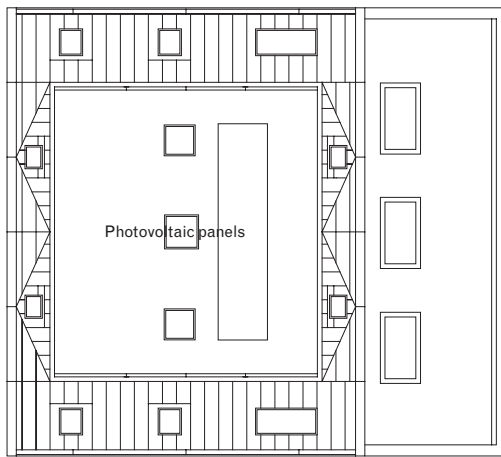
The Whitstable Approaches website contains a detailed explanation of Arrant Land's philosophy. It is a robust defence of terms such as 'local distinctiveness', which Blackmore believes have been devalued by so much planner-friendly pastiche and estate agent jargon. Although much new housing in London has improved immeasurably over the last decade, in small towns like Whitstable it can often still be appallingly cynical and shoddily constructed.

Arrant Land appears to be on a mission to turn this around. Denizen Works' Haddo Yard is a very good start. In its intelligent planning and robust detailing it is way ahead of what one might expect. And in its willingness to embrace decoration and references such as the connection to Somerset Maugham, it suggests a much richer relationship between new buildings and their contexts. There are exciting avenues for how this approach can be developed and I look forward to future projects by both Denizen Works and Arrant Land.

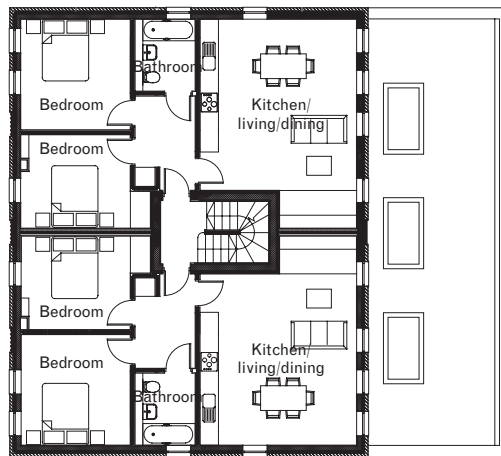
*Charles Holland is principal of Charles Holland Architects and a former director of FAT*



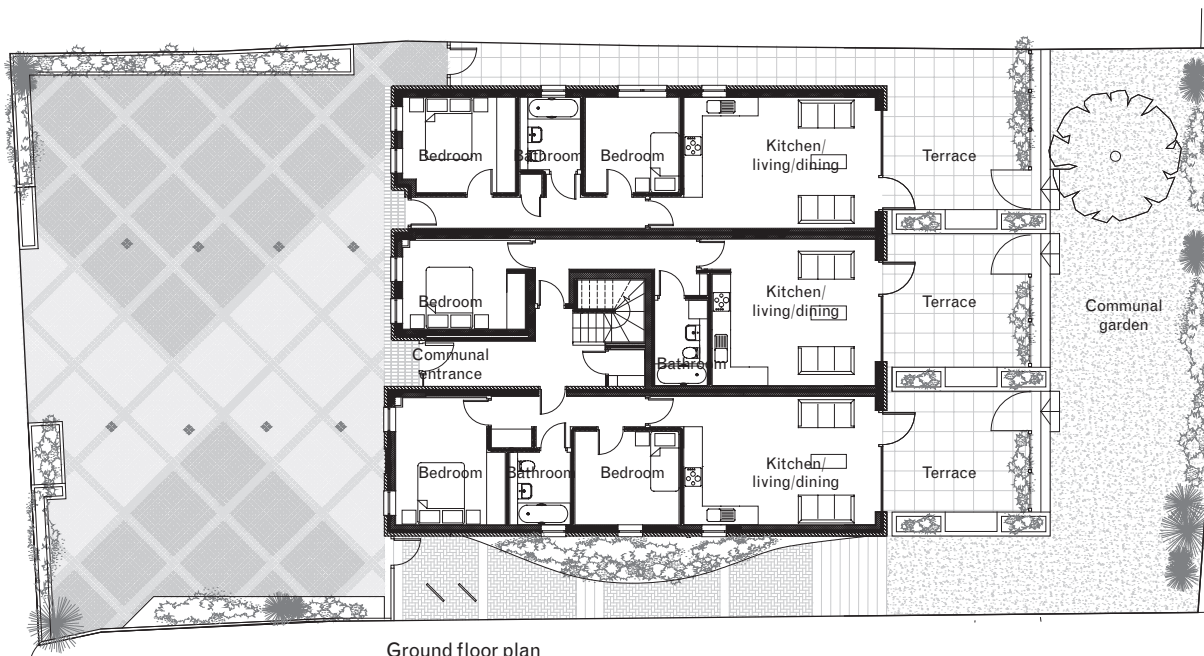




Roof plan



Second floor plan



Ground floor plan

0 1m

## Engineer's view

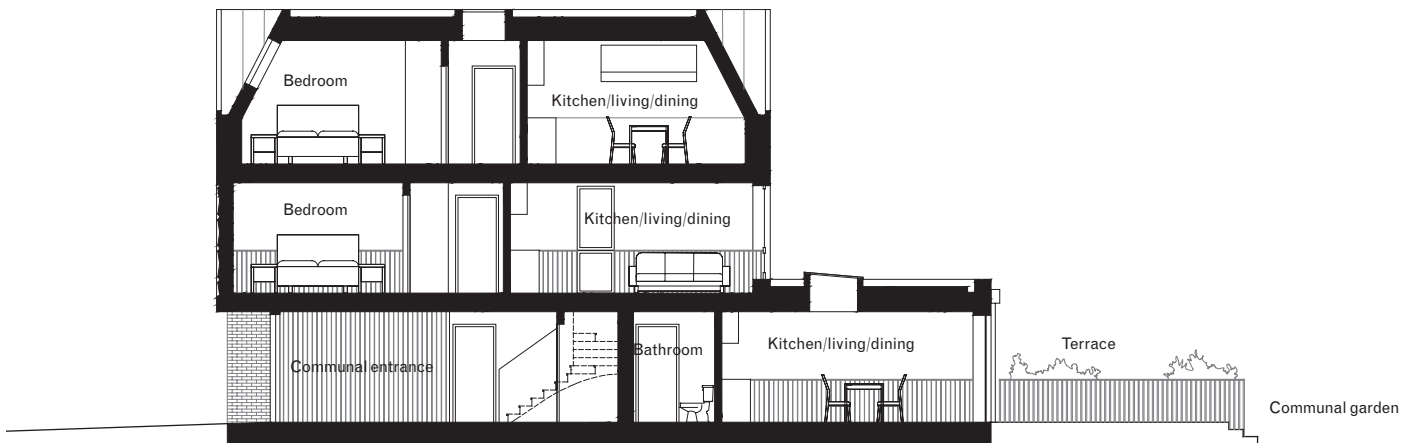
A close working relationship with the architect and contractor proved invaluable in resolving several interesting and bespoke details on this project in a way that suited both the architectural intent and the contractor's preferred methods of working.

One such detail was the exposed brick soffit over the doors, which the team wanted to form without brickslips or other specialist brickwork. This was achieved by simply offsetting the cavity walls between ground and first, so that the loadbearing inner leaf of the upper floors sat directly on the outer leaf of the ground floor below (which is not normally used to support

vertical loads). A course of structural insulating blockwork was provided at the junction between the two to prevent thermal bridging.

The overhanging outer leaf of the upper floors was supported by a custom-made lintel, with flanges hidden in brick courses and a concealed hanger underneath to support a course of bricks. This lintel was in turn supported by cantilevering floor beams.

This provided an efficient structural solution, which maximised internal space and proved easy and quick to build on site.  
*Dave Heeley, Morph Structures*



Section A-A

0 1m

## Architect's view

Haddo Yard represents two firsts for the practice: our first realised housing scheme and the first building completed with Arrant Land. In both respects we hope this will be the first of many.

As an emerging practice, opportunities to design housing can be difficult to come by, but through establishing a strong working relationship with Arrant Land on the design of a new-build house in London, we were able to demonstrate the skills necessary for delivering a high-quality housing scheme. The construction of the building has been an

enjoyable process thanks to the skill and commitment to quality demonstrated by everyone involved.

Working with Arrant Land's Duncan Blackmore has been a significant factor in this enjoyment; he possesses a genuine interest in what is good and has been intrinsic to our process. On Haddo Yard, we discussed ideas in the pub, during late-night conversations on Instagram and – on one particularly hot afternoon – in the sea.

We are a collaborative studio and hold the belief that fostering an atmosphere

that encourages all stakeholders to share their ideas results in projects that are personal and richer in meaning. Clients, builders, planners and consultants enjoy working with us because of the open dialogue we promote, resulting in a diverse portfolio of work shaped by the collective thoughts of each unique team. We believe Haddo Yard is a wonderful testament to this ethos and hope that it will convince new clients to get in touch and help us define our next projects.  
*Andrew Ingham, project architect, Denizen Works*









## Client's view

The miserable beige bungalow opposite the station was a sorry sight for people arriving in or travelling through Whitstable. When it came up for sale, we recognised the opportunity the site offered for density, but also for engagement with ideas about the place's identity. It was cheap, on a large plot and quickly bought. So began an exploration into what a new building in such a prominent position could say about a town – this town.

Disappointingly indifferent planners okayed incrementally more ambitious proposals and we were supported by partners and collaborators committed to realising a project that left no stone unturned. Every part of the process was investigated as an opportunity to improve, enrich or economise. We knew we wanted a building that spoke eloquently of

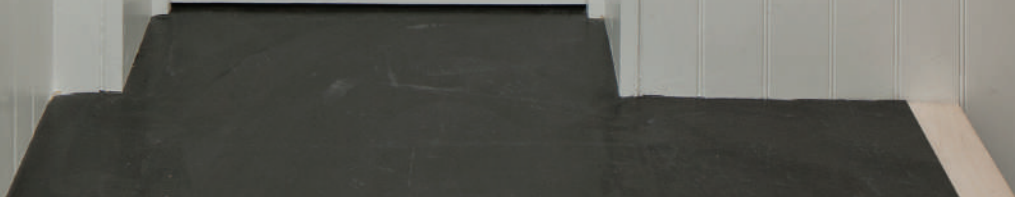
Whitstable, but it was choosing a name for the project that brought it to life. Oliver Haddo's libertine influence was in healthy tension with the well-mannered built context of the town and created a 'safe space' for some unusual ideas. Conversations about the materiality of the town's sea defences touched on the occult. Door handles became ceremonial maces.

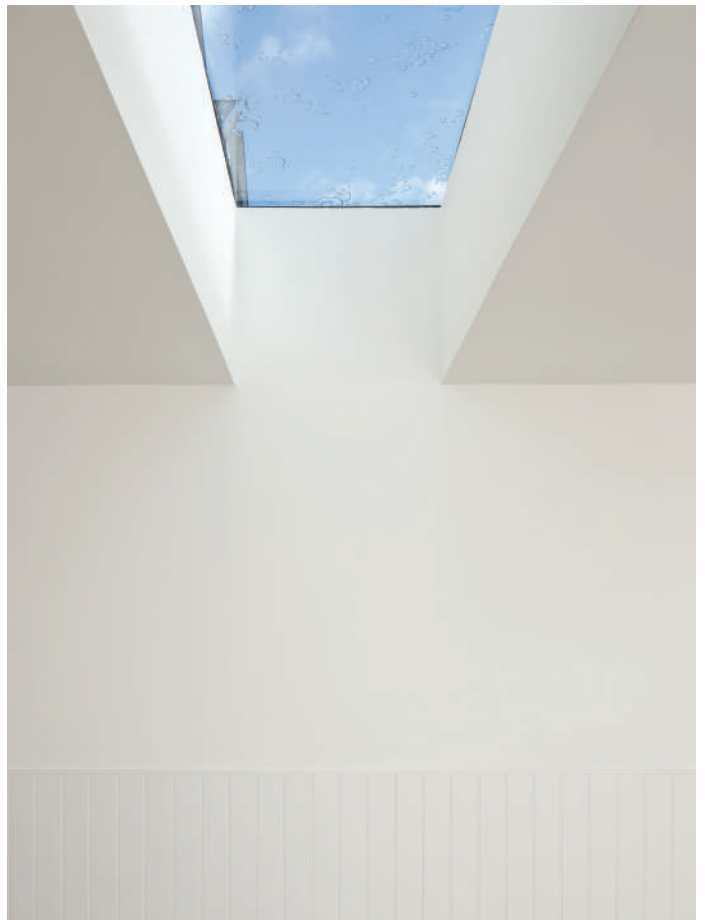
Denizen Works led the mission with skill and patience as the project adapted to accommodate available skills, materials and budget. Opportunities for creative economy were approached with rigour and imagination. Every last spare brick was used for paving, and fencing was designed to make use of remaining timber. The whole project has been complex but immensely satisfying.  
*Duncan Blackmore, Arrant Land*





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## Working detail

A distinctive feature of the local vernacular that we documented on our initial research trip was the decorative faience tiles found on many of Whitstable's older houses. We took this detail and subverted the scale so that the tiles became a significant cladding element and compositional device within the principal elevation.

The form of the tiles, developed through 1:1 scale card models, reference the distinctive gables of the main building, mirroring the 42-degree pitch of the main roof. They were designed to a module that would work with both the opening windows on the first floor and the fixed, frameless glazing of the second floor. Two specials were made, conceived as an ornate skirting, for the one location where the tiles meet the ground.

Each tile has four vertical point connections formed by metal dowels, which are drilled into the top and base. Ancon fixings hook around the dowels and are resin-anchored back into the blockwork leaf to provide restraint. The gaps between the tiles are filled using the same mortar as the dark brickwork and the perimeter of each panel is sealed with silicone.

Different faces of the angled tiles catch the light throughout the day, animating the façade and contributing to the building's distinct visual identity. Where economy is often the focus of commercial development, the tiles stand as a bold symbol of the project team's commitment to quality and desire to make buildings that delight.

*Andrew Ingham, project architect,  
Denizen Works*

