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Front cover: Linear housing at Walsh Bay in Sydney
by PTW and HPA architects.
Photo: Chris Johnson.

Back cover: Aerial view of Barcelona showing Ildefons
Cerdà i Suner’s grid defining the mid-rise built form.
Photo: Shutterstock.

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Preface

In many cities around the world, tensions have developed over different desires for future development. Smaller cities have managed growth with low-rise suburban development, but as the city grows, residents often live far from jobs. High-rise towers, however, that are situated closer to jobs have often been rejected by many existing communities due to their scale. But there is another urban typology that sits between the tower and the house – the mid-rise apartment building. This book will focus on the advantages of mid-rise urban apartment buildings as an ideal type for many communities. There are many historic examples of this urban form, particularly in Paris and Barcelona, that are successful. The book will explore these earlier examples as well as look at the positives and negatives of other urban housing forms. Each has its place in a diverse city. From garden suburbs on city edges to high-rise towers around transport nodes, growing cities need a variety of ways to live.

While promoting the solution of mid-rise apartments, I will also be critical of this building type in some areas. Often there is a sameness with endless rows of lookalike, six-storey buildings. We need variety and individual character in our streets, and this may come from more lively architectural expression, from interesting colour schemes or from imaginative landscaping. Examples from many countries will be used to explain this issue. At times, the sameness may need to be varied by examples of greater height, like a church steeple in a medieval village, to add interest. The role of the built form in defining urban spaces and city-making will be explored, along with different balances between private space and public space, as well as relationships between green landscape and built form. Later chapters will look at several recent planning codes intended to encourage and optimise mid-rise developments.

Cities are continually battling the conflicts of being both global and local; of being connected

to the world while also reinforcing the special character that comes from a particular place with its unique topography and climate. This book will include examples, both historic and contemporary, from many cities around the world including London, Paris, Barcelona, Berlin, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Singapore, Sydney, Vancouver, Boston and Melbourne. The aim is to both inform and inspire readers about exciting ways for cities to grow.

The book structure is six chapters that are each divided into themed sub-sections. Chapter 1 summarises the history of urban density in cities, from early slums to the visions of Cerdà in Barcelona, Haussmann in Paris and other cases. Chapter 2 looks at different options for urban housing forms. These range from low-rise to high-rise buildings and from low-density to high-density developments. From this analysis I focus on today’s growing interest in more urban lifestyles, where people live close to work, services, recreation and public transport. Chapter 3 reviews the importance of shaping public spaces that are defined by mid-rise buildings, as well as the value of mixtures of uses. Chapter 4 explores five types of architecture for mid-rise housing – highlighting designs emphasising street edges, sinuous shaping, mixed uses, landscaping and affordability.

Chapter 5 presents international exemplars of mid-rise living – including projects from Asia, Europe, Australia, America and Great Britain. Chapter 6 examines contemporary challenges of mid-rise housing in urban precincts. It highlights the need for design and height variety rather than sameness; the importance of economics to support this building type, preferred locations and some relevant planning codes.

My interest in mid-rise apartment buildings goes back to around 2000 when, as the Government Architect for New South Wales (NSW) in the year of the Sydney Olympics, I designed an early, garden apartment building that I hoped would replicate



(above) Plate 26 Clippership Wharf apartments, developed by Lendlease and designed by TAT, sit on the Boston Inner Harbour with a floating dock and waterfront tracks

(right) Plate 27 The mid-rise six-storey buildings at Clippership Wharf house 284 apartments including 52 affordable apartments





(left, top) Plate 28 TAT's spectacular mixed-use precinct at Battery Wharf on Boston Harbour, with its four pier-like structures, includes apartments and a hotel

(left, bottom) Plate 29 Arlington 360 by TAT has extensive views over the Boston skyline. The complex includes multi-family apartments set in a park-like environment



(below) Plate 30 London architects dRMM, when designing new, affordable housing at Wansey Street, Elephant and Castle, wanted vibrant colour as a contrast to the dull blocks of the nearby estates



AMERICAN AUTHENTICITY BY THE ARCHITECTURAL TEAM (TAT)

The Architectural Team (TAT) is an American design office of around 90 staff including, according to the photographs on their website, a special staff member – the dog, Cash – for the last seven years. The firm has become involved in a number of large condominium projects across America. On their website, TAT predict three big things: adaptive reuse and prefabrication; new residential with mixed uses to transform urban cores; and that smaller cities across the US are poised for resurgence.¹⁶

Clippership Wharf on Boston Harbour

The spectacular Clippership Wharf development sits on the Boston Inner Harbour near the Maverick MBTA Blue Line station. The project was developed by Lendlease who pride themselves on environmental sustainability. Clippership Wharf achieved the LEED Neighbourhood Development Silver Certification for its environmental planning, particularly in relation to flood management. The project restructured the waterfront edge to minimise the potential for flooding. A new living shoreline with a series of salt marsh terraces will result in a diverse new wetland community for flora and fauna. A floating dock will allow the launching of kayaks and a harbour walk that delivers the waterfront back to the community. The six-storey buildings will house 284 apartments. with an affordable component of 22 apartments and 30 condos. Residents will have access to 10,000 square feet of dining and retail space, including a destination restaurant, commuter cafe, fitness centre, boating and recreational facilities¹⁷ (Plates 26, 27).

Battery Wharf is also on Boston Harbour

TAT have also designed another mid-rise apartment building on Boston Harbour as part of a large mixed-use development in the form

of four pier-like buildings. Battery Wharf is a 480,000-square-foot development that includes the 150-room Battery Wharf Hotel, bars, bistros and 104 luxury apartments. The development also includes a Maritime Museum, a large health spa, 30,000 square feet of retail space and a waterfront promenade. The buildings, including the six-storey apartment wing, reflect the character and scale of the adjoining precinct of mainly brick mid-rise buildings, many of them old warehouses (Plate 28).

Arlington 360 has views overlooking the Boston skyline

Arlington 360 is situated on an 18-acre hilltop in Arlington, Massachusetts on the site of the former Symmes Hospital. TAT master-planned and designed a new, mixed-income multi-family community close to the downtown area. The 199 units include townhouses for sale and rental apartments located in the mid-rise buildings. They include open studios, one-bed, two-bed and three-bed apartments. Residents have park-like surroundings with landscaped courtyards and gardens with sweeping views overlooking the Boston skyline. Resident amenities include a fitness centre, media room, recreational sport court, playground and an outdoor swimming pool¹⁸ (Plate 29).

BRITAIN'S JOYFUL BUILDINGS BY dRMM

London architects deRijke Marsh Morgan aim to provide joyful buildings with spirit. In a video on dRMM's website, director Sadie Morgan described her background in belonging to a communal family and how their practice sought to produce joyful buildings. Sadie has been the youngest President of the Architectural Association and her interest in influencing policy comes through in the firm's architectural projects. Many of these relate to housing, both as social housing and as market housing, and many of the buildings are mid-rise apartment buildings.¹⁹

Wansey Street apartments celebrate colour

Wansey Street is a £4.2 million pilot project for the Elephant and Castle regeneration area. As a pilot scheme, it set out to demonstrate to local residents living in outmoded accommodation what social housing could be. The building was to be vibrant and colourful – unlike the nearby estates characterised by monolithic slab blocks. The site sits between Victorian terraces and Walworth Town Hall. The four- to six-storey buildings are 61 per cent social housing units and 39 per cent private sale units. The design minimises corridors and provides full-length windows to maximise natural light, but the most striking feature is the colourful red and orange facade of standard fibre cement boards. The warm colours connect to the brickwork colour of the terraces and the adjacent town hall. The building is certainly a joyful one and has a spirit that is enjoyed by both residents and passers-by (Plate 30).

More colour at Harper Square

Following the success of the Wansey Street project, dRMM were commissioned to design a larger social housing project at Harper Square. The apartment buildings range from three to seven storeys and are located around a communal green space that gives a sense of neighbourliness. The buildings are clad in vibrant green, glazed terracotta tiles to reflect the landscape heart of the precinct. The individual units are through units that connect both to the street and to the gardens, providing excellent cross-ventilation (Plate 31).

Trafalgar Place builds a new community

The developer for Elephant Place and Trafalgar Place, Lendlease, engaged dRMM to design a large housing campus at Trafalgar Place as part of the regeneration of Elephant and Castle. The project comprises 235 high-quality homes, with 25 per cent designated affordable housing, set in a mature landscape (Figure 38). The four- to



38 Lendlease engaged dRMM to design 235 homes, 25 per cent affordable, at Trafalgar Place in London