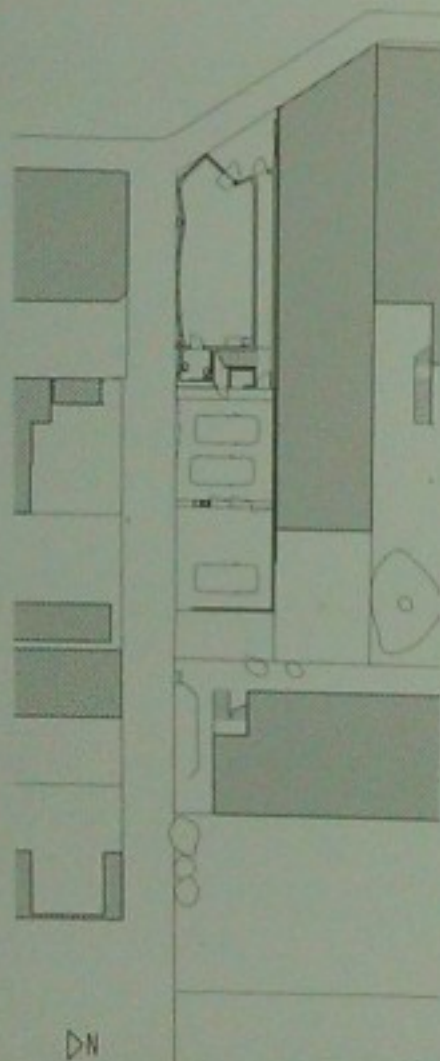
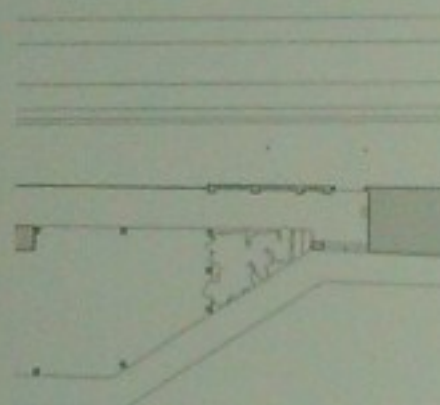




Brick panel detail

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Context Ground Floor Plan

Talking about a job affected by Rescode requires discussion about its influence on the design process. Instead of drawing options or resolving good buildings, the bulk of design time on these jobs is spent engaging with Planning Authorities and discovering and responding to their un-codified requirements. Regardless of the design, the strength of architectural practice in this context boils down to an ability to choreograph consultants and convince them and Planning Authorities of compliance.

The brief for this job was for an office, four car-spaces and separate security entrance at ground floor, two one bedroom units at first floor and a third, three bedroom unit on the second floor. Situated 20m from strip shops and directly opposite an outbound train station, the site is long and narrow orientated east west. The site is bounded by an office on the north, laneway on the south, a carriageway easement to the east and a road to the west. The existing building was a single level solid brick shop covering 85% of the site.

Complying with Rescode was uncomplicated. The Council raised concerns over visual bulk in the laneway and required the proposal to be "sympathetic" with the old train station directly opposite. Site proportions and limited laneway access required a rapid construction system - the solution: precast concrete panel construction.

The Council was not convinced by the drawings and renderings of the benefits and beauty of plain/dumb walls. Responding to the Council's concerns over visual bulk, articulation was provided in the form of a buckling in plan. A relentless string of panels were expressed as squeezed into the site and trimmed at the street frontage. This allowed for maximum floor area while removing the need for gratuitous balconies or decoration.

Balconies were provided to the eastern and western ends of the site. The second floor was required to be setback from the street frontage, responding

to concerns about over visual bulk. Windows were arranged as relentless punctuation reinforcing a sense of continuous fabric shrink wrapping the site, establishing a continuous pattern or field.

In opposition to the precast panelling, a shaped window was provided to the office street frontage. This was to be finished with a wide banded stucco reveal, creating a border and making visual sense of the anomalies in the repetitive external fabric. The panels were cut away at the frontage to mate with the neighbouring parapet and form a castellation in the balustrade to the second floor balcony.

To temper the appearance of the precast concrete and provide a relationship with the old train station directly opposite, the precast was to be finished in a brick tile system. The tile system appears like in-situ brickwork. The Council wanted a Classic Red brick colour in keeping with the train station opposite mixed with a colour to 'lighten' the appearance in the laneway. Tiles were set out vertically, utility size (bigger than conventional brickwork) and cross faded from light at the bottom to dark at the top, similar to the former Crusader Plate Building under the Skipping Girl in Abbotsford. The polychromatic pattern was mirrored from panel to panel creating a book matched affect, stepping down the laneway.

The building design was to present itself as a peripheral distraction to passers by at the strip shops nearby, as a point of interest in an otherwise uneventful laneway and was to be an engaging face to passengers alighting at the train station opposite.

Following a VCAT hearing, the Planning Permit being issued, documentation completed and tenders being sought, the site was sold. The purchaser constructed the building without my involvement. Although the envelope approximates my intent none of the critical precast concrete panel set-out, detail or finishes were retained.

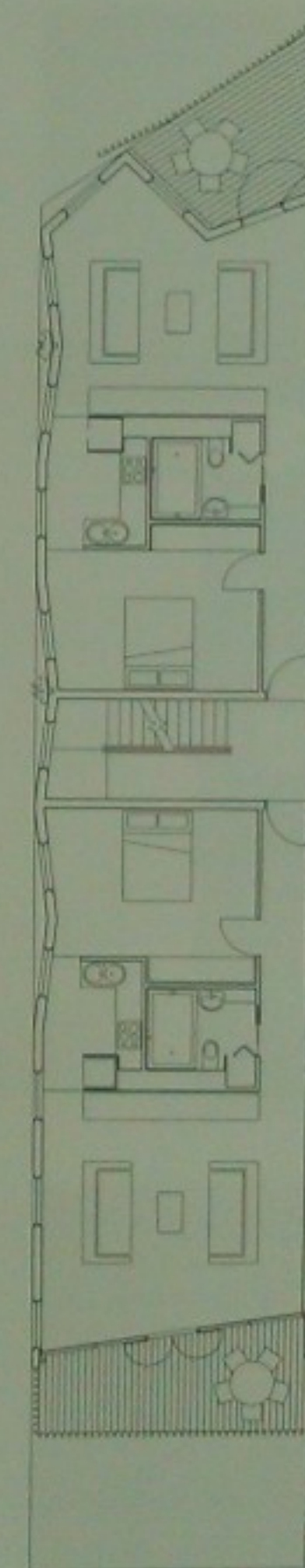


Render looking east

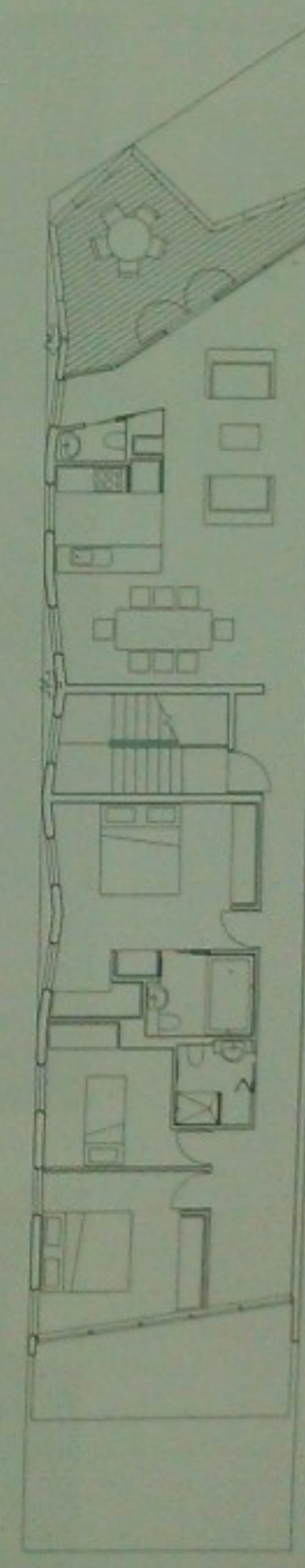
Codes and regulations provide interesting limits. However, our responsible authorities, the Council and VCAT don't vet irrelevant or unjustified objections causing unnecessary frustrations. On this job an objection was considered on the basis of overshadowing and overlooking by an objector who lived many doors to the north of the subject site.

It is difficult to trade off good architectural design against local planning compliance. In planning forums language is restricted to describing tick box compliance. Discussions exclude describing responses to urban issues or architectural intent. Good architecture can comply with Rescode but still may not comply with the local requirements or wish lists.

Despite close scrutiny by Planning Authorities and consultants there are opportunities for innovation and good architecture. By understanding planning matters better architects can stay in command of their work and see and respond to urbanity with added meaning.



First Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan