

House in Linsiadar, Lewis.

The project is a new house which physically engages with the ruins of an existing dwelling to establish an innovative approach to 'old' and 'new' in rural settings, applicable and relevant in wider settings and contexts.

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Output No. 2



NARRATIVE

Narrative

The focus of all the work in this portfolio can be summarised with the question, 'what is place?' The work explores the thesis that the artistic dimension of architecture is the human experience of what we describe as 'place'. It examines how the quality of the constructed domain can enhance the lives of individuals and communities. The topic is examined through actual built works, reflective writing and analysis of contemporary Swiss architecture and architects exploring similar themes.

4 Linsiadar, Lewis is an everyday contemporary rural building which draws on ancient and contemporary influences to show a fresh approach to dealing with the widespread rural problem of how to design a new house adjacent a ruined former croft or dwelling. The design operates within the traditional architectural language of pitched roofs and punctured openings as well as the limitations of engagement with local contractors whilst displaying contemporary characteristics such as inter-connected, well-lit interior spaces, high environmental standards and a broad 'gathering place' of influences. It has been the subject of academic papers, professional journal critiques, featured in the architects' own writings. It has made an impact beyond academic and professional press with articles in the popular press. It has been awarded GIA, RIAS and RIBA Awards and was shortlisted for the Doolan RIAS best building of the year and longlisted for the Stirling Prize- RIBA best building of the year.

Research Question

How can a contemporary dwelling be designed in a rural setting of historic sensitivity and harsh climatic conditions and make a meaningful physical and cultural connection to it? How is an everyday architectural character generated in the contemporary object to compliment that which exists in the historic object?



The completed project

CONTEXT

Context

In remote rural settings both in the UK and overseas the deterioration of traditional, masonry-built dwellings often result in the erection of new buildings immediately adjacent. Old and new consequently sit awkwardly side by side. The former still able to communicate quietly about the culture, construction and values of the individuals and communities responsible for its erection and useage even in its ruined state, while the latter (often built with no sensitivities to the particular physical or cultural context of the site and wider setting) displaying a brash ignorance towards the notion that the act of erecting a dwelling in the landscape could be a profound and human act.

General Description



The powerful presence of ruins and vertical objects in the landscape:

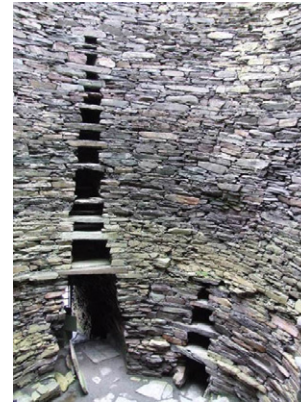
Calanais standing stones, the ruined Tacksman's House, the site in its setting, the remains of a stone croft.

Linsiadar is a tiny settlement on the west coast of the Isle of Lewis, the northernmost island of the Outer Hebrides. The landscape is rocky, sculpted by glaciers and now full of rocky knolls and lochans. From some aspects, one has the impression of a wet desert, a rainy Kazakhstan. However, man-made interventions in the landscape are nevertheless visible; testament to previous communities' tenacity and skill.



Harsh landscape with thin vegetation. Reconstructed 'black houses'. Iron Age settlement at Bostadh, Bearnaray. Salt marsh in Lewis.

The late Neolithic site of Calanais is close by, as is the Iron-Age settlement at Bostadh and the Dun Carloway Broch. Traditional Blackhouses here were occupied well into the twentieth century. Little sense of any traditional building remains in this part of the world which has a good sense of fit its environment. As transport and freedom of movement increased since the 1700s, the Blackhouse was gradually replaced with the 'Whitehouse' tradition – whitewashed stone walls with a slate pitched roof.



Dun Carloway Broch, Lewis: the presence of an ancient monumental in the rural landscape.

Since then, old ways of building have given way to generic timber framed bungalows, often sited immediately adjacent to the already-dead croft. Practical trades and design skills are thin in these parts and a pervading melancholy hangs in the air. The project consists of a new family house located adjacent the ruins of an inherited stone-built Tacksman's House.



Ruined everyday structures displaying their sculptural and enigmatic qualities.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology

This project attempts to overcome this widespread orthodoxy by actively engaging the ruins of a former traditional dwelling on the Isle of Lewis in north west Scotland with a completely new building. In doing so, the building critiques the dearth of local traditions in construction and makes connections with the ancient (and still standing) structures which still exude meaning and mystery in the landscape and suggests a new way of addressing this issue. The project resists the temptation to propose easy and shallow answers by using 'contrast' as the answer and instead explores the architectural potential of extending an existing and familiar language to create a bridge between old and new in ways that are relevant in every country and culture. The project uses observations on tradition and history to innovate new architecture without resorting to pastiche.

Both the Linsiadar and the Dyer House in Falkirk (a separate output in the repository) contain almost identical programmes yet radically different settings. Using similar technology and construction (timber frame assisted by steelwork and clad in timber externally), each project displays contrasting means of expression. Both projects explore the question of how to use the physical and cultural context to generate architectural ideas within a tightly constrained technology. Linsiader acknowledges typology and makes a 'quiet' architectural statement within a strong physical setting while Falkirk breaks with typology and speaks 'louder' within its (arguably weaker and less coherent physical) context.

Context and Research Methods

The physical and historical context of Lewis was studied using a variety of tools. Apart from the existing house which was measured and drawn, studioKAP found little fruitful material in Lewis's recent architectural heritage history and looked instead much further back in time to its iron age past and the ancient objects prevalent in the Hebridean landscape. Clues were sought to help establish design criteria and help us to design in an unfamiliar place. Distance and proximity were

both important, not least because we were geographically (and also, culturally) distant from the place where we were building. The physicality of the place and structures had a significant impact on the subsequent design process. The isolated characteristic of the site with its proximity to a solitary tree, shoreline and sea was important and the sculptural qualities of the ruined house and outbuildings in the landscape resonated with the Calanais standing stones in our minds. The site was re-read through our eyes.

Our approach to working with older buildings and contexts is informed by pioneering international figures in this field such as Carlo Scarpa in Italy, Karljosef Schattner, Dietzinger and Kramer, Karl-Heinz Schmitz in Germany, Richard Murphy in the UK. These architects are less interested in conservation as a concept and more interested in making clear the layers of history in a building project. This often results in projects where there is careful restoration in parts juxtaposed with contemporary interventions. These interventions display an almost obsessive interest in detail and tectonic quality and are often the result of close involvement with builders and craftsmen. In their work, the pursuit of quality (where people come face to face with the architecture) informs the design rationale. Contemporary quality meets with historic quality and history is seen as a continuous process. We pursue similar interests generally in our own work, also believing that the design process continues throughout the entire realisation process of a project and that the architect's close involvement throughout (and with those who are physically building) is important to delivering that quality mentioned earlier. This is not the norm in the UK at present where architectural practice is polarised into the two extremes of small scale work (where the architect has a traditional engagement with client and builder) and public work where the procurement and delivery processes involve many different professionals and where those direct relationships are rare.

Aims and Objectives

In such a wide and exposed landscape, one is struck by the powerful presence of anything vertical. The Calanais stone circle, made up of tall, flat menhirs, the old House in its ruinous state and its gables and chimneys displaying a distinctive verticality all made a big impression on us. Ruins have a particular presence because of their ability to be experienced as a series of abstract forms, dislocated from their former life as familiar buildings. Our architectural response was more influenced by these ruined elements than by any observed or received building 'tradition' in this part of the world. We looked consciously to the distant past in Lewis and to the power of those stone structures which remain in the landscape, rather than to any recent building tradition. So the motley crew which made up the players in this new architectural narrative comprised a living tree, a dead house, two dilapidated outbuildings and a powerful and windswept topography. What could an incoming architect bring to the issue of fashioning an appropriate and humane dwelling here, we asked?

The design strategy regenerates or consolidates the best of the site's existing characteristics. The proposed new house is seen as the first step in the redevelopment of the site, its robust sculptural form taking the line of the first 'finger', allowing it to better define a garden to the west. The second finger, to be repaired as garage and workshop, serves to contain the garden and differentiate this from the small-holding beyond, to be developed within the network of old walls connecting to the third, most westerly finger. The new building engages physically with the ruined shell of the Tacksman's House, re-inhabiting and preserving its footprint with a raised, sheltered garden, greenhouse and tower for study and reflection on the wider landscape. They react against the more recent tradition of leaving an existing ruin alone and building a 'start-from-scratch' bungalow adjacent. The new building takes the existing ruin and, by integrating a new intervention within it and making a physical link, redefines

it as a wing in the new composition. Our strategy emphasises the two contrasting worlds of the natural and the man-made and our attempt as architects was to design something which reconciles and brings meaning to both.

Perhaps in acknowledgement of this most overlooked and vital issue, both the RIAS Doolan and RIBA Stirling prize winners in 2013 involved projects which addressed and engaged existing ruins or buildings.

Conclusion

4 Linsiadar, Lewis is a modestly-scaled building which makes the everyday special. It is an exemplar of how to 'read' a physical and cultural context to draw out issues and qualities which inform the making of the contemporary rural object. Its 'gathering place' of ideas and influences stretches from local vernacular structures, Neolithic standing stones, anonymous ruins to contemporary architectural and environmental design across mainland Europe. It manages to synthesise this disparate spread of influences to display a fresh approach to dealing with the widespread rural blight of how to build a new dwelling adjacent an older ruined house.

DISSEMINATION

Dissemination

Peer-reviewed Journals:

- “Coastal Conditions”, Christopher Platt, Gordon Murray and Alan Pert, in *arq Architectural Research Quarterly*, (Cambridge University Press volume 15 no. 04, 2012 pp 312-326).
This paper draws out the research content of the work by linking it with two other similarly-scaled rural domestic projects by fellow architect/academic colleagues. The paper focuses on respective methodologies and makes a claim for the work as string examples of practice-based research.

Professional Journals:

- “Figures in the Landscape: studioKAP in the Outer Hebrides”, Alan Dickson, in *Architecture Today*, (issue 22, September 2011, pp 84-93).
This paper is an architectural critique by an architect colleague engaged in similar work and preoccupations (Rural Design architects, in Skye) and draws on his extensive experience of designing contemporary dwellings in an equally remote and rural setting.
- “Black Beauty”, Catherine Coyle, in *Homes & Interiors Scotland*, (issue 82, April 2012, pp87-90).
This paper is a straight ‘lifestyle’ piece of journalism aimed for a broad audience.

Books:

- “Dwelling with Architecture”, Christopher Platt and Roderick Kemsley, (2012 Routledge, pp190-205).
This chapter written by the authors locates the project within a wider body of work and ideas within the practice of studioKAP.
- “Context & Change in Scottish Architecture”, Penny Lewis in, *Architecture/*

Design/Fashion Papers, (British Council, Architecture Paper no. 2, November 2011, pp4-5).

This paper uses the project as a general introduction to the practice and their architectural preoccupations to position them within a contemporary Scottish cultural landscape.

Public Lectures:

- UCD Dublin, April 2012 (*Youtube, March 21 2012 by ucdarchitecture*).
- Sint Lucas School of Architecture, Ghent, 2011.
- Faculty of Architecture, “Federico 11”, Naples 2011.
- Aberdeen University, Dept. of Architecture, 2011.

Public Exhibition:

- Public exhibition designed by studioKAP : ‘Snap Shot’.
‘*studioKAP exhibition celebrates a decade’s work*’, reviewed by Urban Realm in www.urbanrealm.com, March 29th 2012.

Impact

Esteem Indicators

- 2013 RIBA National Award and longlist for the Stirling Prize Best Building of the Year.
- 2013 RIAS Award and shortlist for the RIAS Andrew Doolan Best Building of the Year Award.
- 2012 RIAS Inverness Chapter Award.
- 2012 Saltire Housing Award.
- 2011 Glasgow Institute of Architects Design Commendation

References 1



Timber clad farmhouse in rural Switzerland



Typological links between new and old in Fleisch, Switzerland.
Architects: Bearth & Deplazes.



Uncovering the layers of history and defining and clarifying historic and contemporary quality.
Architect: Karljoseph Schattner, Eichstätt, Germany.



References 2



Tectonic connections between new and old.
StudioKAP, Dumgoyne, Glasgow.



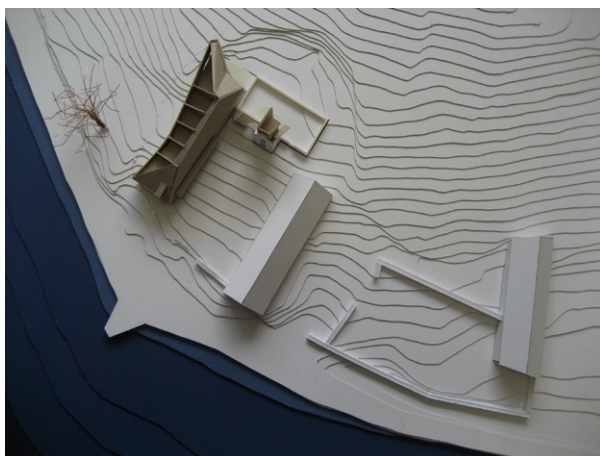
Defining layers of history:
Galfetti in Bellinzona, Switzerland.



Complimentary contrasts between old and new:
StudioKAP in Auchoish.

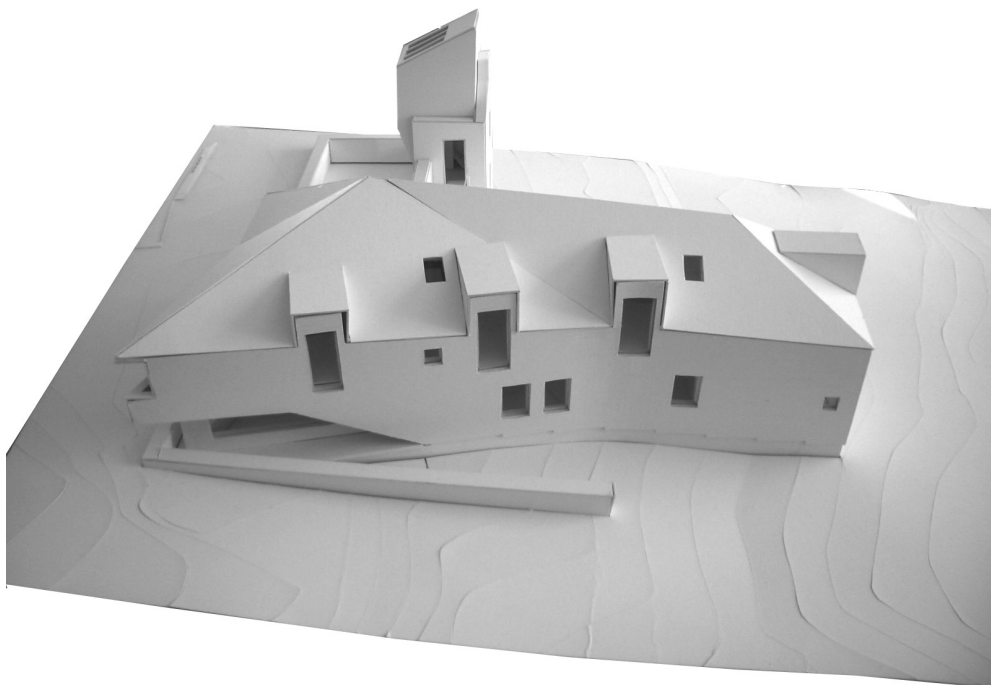
Development Work and Photographs on Completion

Reference

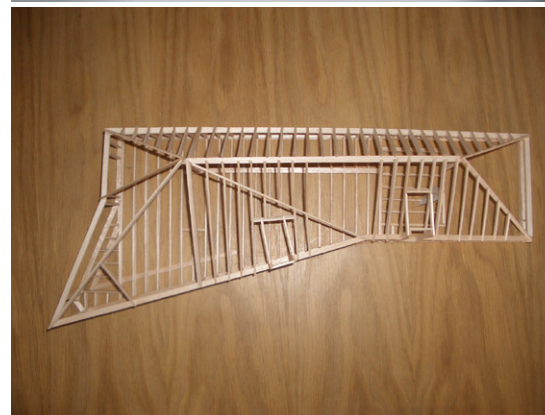
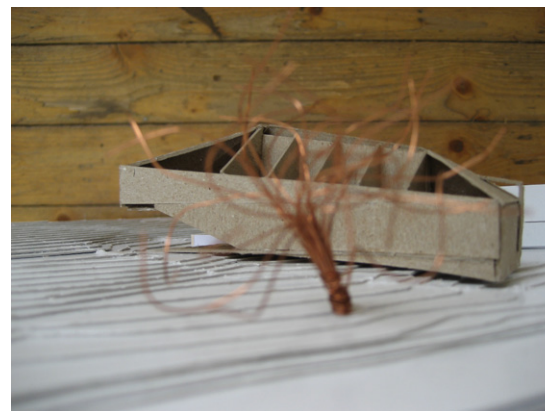


Use of site model at 1:500 to explore 'finger' strategy, relationship of house to ruin and existing tree.

Physical Modelling



1:50 model used to explore interior spaces and exterior massing and openings. Made shortly before tender period when most details are established to allow client (and later contractor) clearer understanding of detail and help boost morale after long design gestation period.

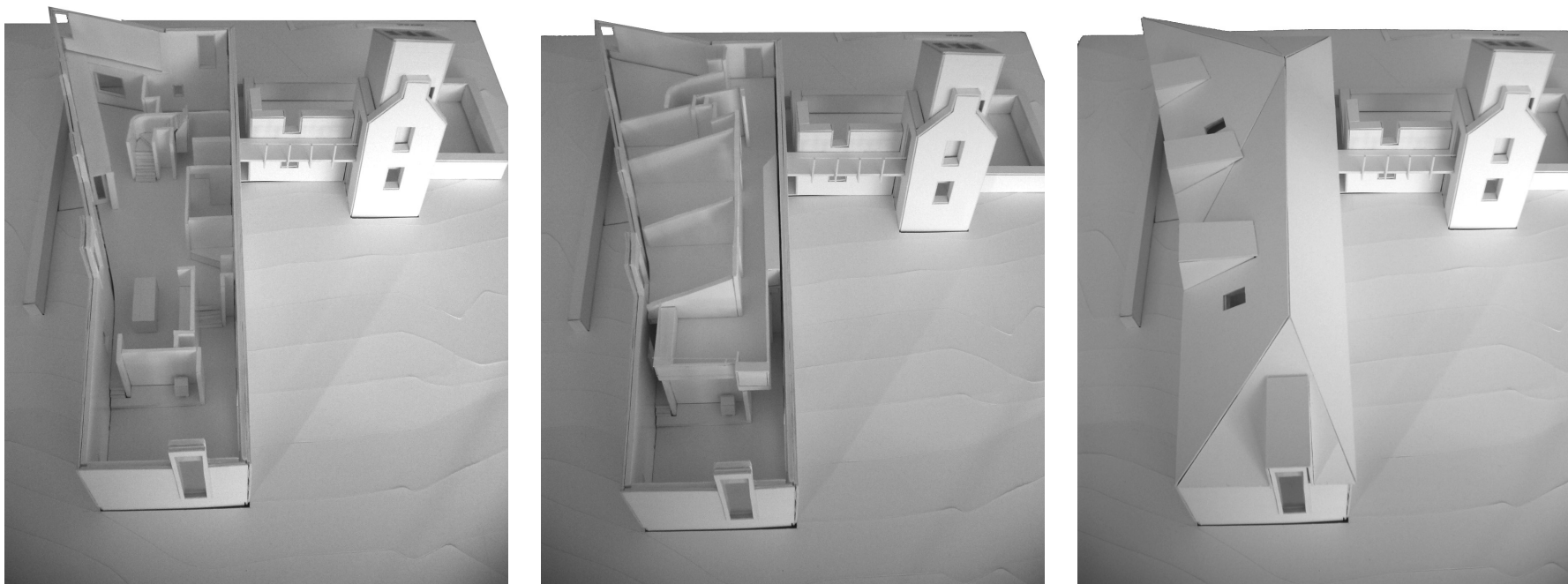


1:500 and 1:100 models examining external form and roof structure to establish whether geometry is achievable with exclusively timber structural system (it wasn't- some steel columns and beams were necessary).

Construction Photographs

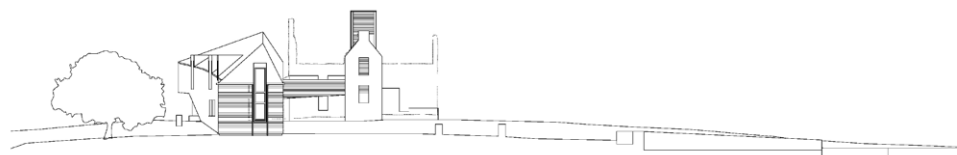
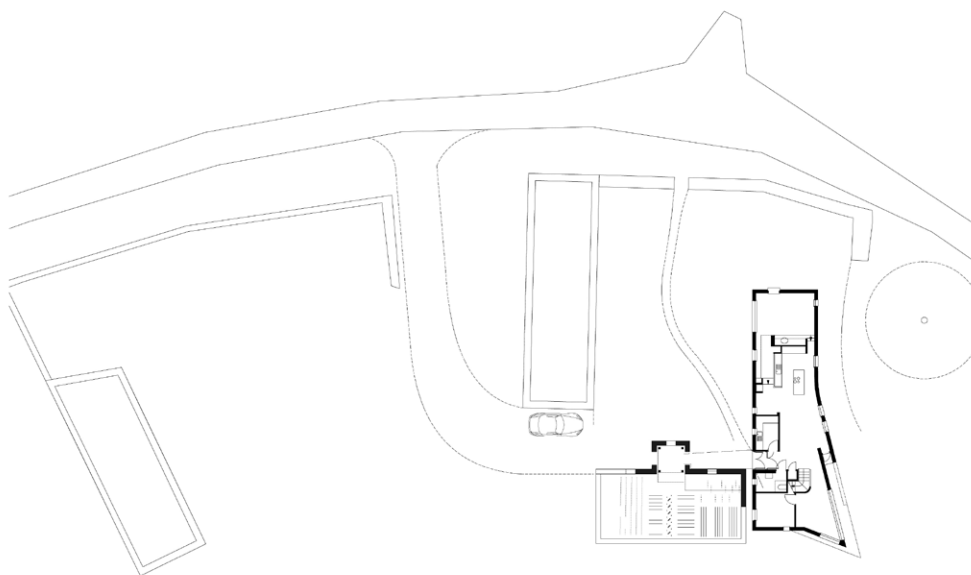


Steel & timber frame contrasting with existing ruined load-bearing construction.



1:50 scale is adequate to show client a good degree of detail. Has positive 'doll's house' characteristics which engages everyone involved in a shared understanding. Allows architects to see design with fresh eyes as white uniformity retains a certain abstract realism.

Drawings and Details



Completed Photography (Keith Hunter Photography)



Approaching from the south east: old and new together



Approaching from south west: 'visual stubbornness' of ruined house helps bed in the cranked geometry of the new house.



Approaching from the east: close relationship to tree, sloping topography and sea.



Cranked geometry of massing opens up building to southerly aspect and creates sheltered external space.



New and old texture from external surfaces.



Physical engagement of new building with old creating new composition.



Completed ensemble using ruined structures still in their ruined state.





Interior radically different from traditional cramped, dark spaces.
Light, spatially-fluid, contemporary interior exploring a sequence
Of open and closed spaces. Black exterior, white interior.



Dark interior of the traditional black house.



Dark interior of the traditional black house.



Modest palette of materials and colour maximises internal daylight experience. Dark exterior, white exterior.



Robust exterior contrasts with bright, contemporary interior. Floor is key element in internal composition. Interior is characterised by a sense of containment as well as a sense of openness to surrounding landscape. Floor visually heavy, walls and ceiling light.



Simple, neutral interior where solid stone floor element allows lighter walls and ceiling to animate a series of interior landscapes.



Robust, almost agricultural character externally.