arq 23.2 – DESIGN – Platt – Pre-FINAL – 03.05.19

Can a site itself be a gift to an architectural project, and can the same project also return the favour in a reciprocal act celebrating unexpected qualities?

**Vessels and landscapes: A special reciprocity**

*Christopher Platt*

*Here was the house, its heavy walls built of the stone of the mountain, plastered over by groping hands – in feeling and material nothing but an artificial reproduction of one of the many caverns in the mountain-side. I saw that essentially all architecture of the past, whether Egyptian or Roman, was nothing but the work of a sculptor dealing with abstract forms. The architect’s attempt really was-to gather and pile up masses of building material, leaving empty hollows for human use* […]. *The room itself was a by-product.*1

By 1911, Rudolph Schindler had concluded that all architecture in the West leading up to the early twentieth century had been fixated on structure and mass, in stark contrast to the new ‘space architecture’ he championed. His dismissive categorisation of the traditional room as some kind of evolutionary relative of the cave is a reminder of the moment when a strand of Western architecture blossomed from containment into openness; from a predictable past to an exciting and uncertain future – the gift of modern architecture.

Today, we see no conflict in accommodating both containment and openness in architecture. Our gathering place of ideas is wider and our lives more complex. The spaces we inhabit often require distinct, autonomous characteristics as well as blurred thresholds that flow into each other, encouraging multiple purposes and interpretations for living. In the UK at present, the individual house occupies a unique position in the spectrum of architectural evolution, trapped between the extremes of banality and novelty. In the hands of the volume house-builder, the house is an easily-reproducible generic product for the mass market whilst, for the architect, it is the opportunity to create a unique, site-specific stage for a client’s life. The individual house remains one of the few typologies left where there is opportunity for experimentation with architectural and social ideas; one of the main reasons why some large practices still accept such commissions.

**Something special**

*We felt you were making something special and that it was the artist in you that was coming out. The end result far exceeded any sort of imaginings we had to be honest* […]. *It was truly one of the most amazing experiences of our life.*

Dr. Cath Dyer, studioKAP client, 2014*.2*

At its heart, architecture can be a transformative, life-affirming process, as characterised wittly in Charles Moore’s quip about bread being cast into the waters and returning as club sandwiches.3 How can such a transformation occur, given that the starting point is merely building materials and a piece of land? Could the land itself be a gift to an architectural project, and could the same project return the favour to the land with unexpected and welcome qualities? This paper sets out to explore this question, which we are attempting to answer in the current work of our practice, studioKAP. The question comprises a number of dualities:

* Can the individual and collective needs of family life be enriched through the architectural interpretation of a particular site and setting?
* Can the contemporary house be informed by the inherited wisdom and timeless qualities of ideas of the vernacular, as well as remaining an individual site-specific authored statement?
* Can a dwelling’s interior realm intensify the experience of, and relationship to, nature?

These questions address Christian Norberg-Schulz’s account of the three basic ways that human-made places relate to nature, namely ‘visualisation, symbolisation, and gathering’.4 The results – presented here through four case studies of house designs – reveal an alternative design approach to modern architecture’s myth of human versus nature 5. In exploring how the spatial orchestration of four individual house designs have been inspired and informed by their site and place, we identify how each one reciprocates, drawing attention away from the design towards the physical context surrounding it. That which has not been designed is brought into sharper focus through the medium of that which has been designed. The architect’s inspiration is shown to be drawn from everyday spatial observations; gifts freely given by the place and unconditionally received by the authors. The paper also positions these case studies within traditions surrounding the evolution of the Western domestic room, and identifies specific lessons from ideas of the vernacular which inform our work.

For some wealthy individuals, there are few limits to what is architecturally possible. For non-millionaire self-builders, however, reconciling their dreams with a limited budget underpins the reality of commissioning a new home. Our clients typically have construction budgets in the region of £350-£450,000. All four houses discussed here have similar programmes, typically 3-4 bedrooms, and have been designed within the last five years in rural or suburban settings in central Scotland. One house is completed and occupied; two are under construction at the time of writing (unfortunately without our further involvement); and one will remain unbuilt. This paper is an exploration of the intended and imagined impacts of these projects, rather than a detailed reflection on already-completed work.

**The Vernacular: Message in an Object**

Rural vernacular buildings can be imagined as vessels on landscapes, or constructed artefacts located in geographic places *[*1*]*. Their physical characteristics are usually described in terms of addressing fundamental needs to shelter people and livestock, and by their relation to the characteristics of the surrounding land which provided food, fuel and building materials. Ideas of the vernacular remain the most direct and eloquent story-telling medium about humanity’s interface with the natural and the built environment. As Robert Maguire pointed out, vernacular structures are so close to the lives they were made for, they became images of the lives they served 6. Whilst remaining anonymous, imagined as free from artistic authorship, they nevertheless exude a compelling and moving architectural presence. They bear the imprint of human life and feeling and it is this enduring quality which particularly fascinates us. As Lao Tzu reflected:

*Moulding clay into a vessel, we find the utility in its hollowness;*

*Cutting doors and windows for a house, we find the utility in its empty space;*

*Therefore the being of things is profitable, the non-being of things is serviceable.* 7

The contemporary architectural commission is informed by a more complex set of requirements than those which impacted on vernacular worlds of the past. A wider gathering place of issues influences how and why we build now. Whilst vernacular buildings were intrinsically retreats, sheltering inhabitants from the harshness of climate, the contemporary house in contrast is the lens through which the more benevolent qualities of the land and weather can be enjoyed and appreciated. As Bachelard observed: ‘Storm makes sense of shelter, and if shelter is sound, the shelter makes the surrounding storm good, enjoyable, recreational.’8 Throughout history, unselfconscious architectural statements have evolved into more self-conscious gestures, as buildings are assimilated into the realm of educated, well-travelled authors and clients who wish to give face to their aspirations, opinions, personalities and status; narratives communicated to both themselves and to the wider world. Their external composition produces the opportunity for articulating built form which transcends utility to exploit architectural expression. But what is being expressed and to whom? And where does that urge to express come from?

Whilst the fundamental role of buildings as objects of containment – of people, physical things and activities – is explicitly revealed through their three dimensional form, their fundamental purpose remains to create an inside, to provide the stage for life to be acted out. Architecture’s intrinsically disruptive nature can either be an enhancement or a burden on a place, and is arguably dependent on how much each influences the other. There is therefore a special kind of reciprocity that exists between a site and a site-specific performance such as architecture, drawing together the site’s known qualities with the yet-to-be-defined qualities of the emerging design.

**The Genesis of the Domestic Room**

Modest rural dwellings in the more northerly parts of Britain were often, historically, single space enclosures where people and animals existed in unhygienic proximity *[*2,3*]*. The hearth as the main source of heating and cooking dominated such living arrangements, as did the resulting smoke, which – for example – gifted the name ‘Black House’ to traditional dwellings on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides whose sooty interiors were still occupied by crofters as recently as 1964. Whilst Black Houses remained in occupation, modern developments in multi-occupancy dwellings in pre-World War 2 Europe resulted in domestic layouts without the presence of a traditional fireplace *[*4*]*. Without this distinctive environmental and symbolic focus, a new spatial dynamic developed within the modern domestic home, and this consequently impacted on the spatial arrangement of many early modern projects, such as Hans Scharoun’s 1930 apartment block in Siemensstadt, Berlin. Such exemplars show the emergence of a clear distinction between cellular spaces with privacy needs, such as bedrooms and bathrooms, and more open, free-flowing family spaces, such as the living, dining and kitchen spaces. Technical advances in centralised heating sources, cooking and ventilation systems created the circumstances whereby such spatial arrangements were both possible and desirable. Whilst some contemporary dwellings in the twenty-first century are still built as a sequence of exclusively cellular rooms, (an intriguing development is the recent work of Sergison Bates for example), the combination of closed and open spaces within a home marks a steady evolution over the last century – a spatial arrangement which could be interpreted as private ‘vessels’ and communal ‘landscapes’. In this paper, this duality will be used to describe aspects of both internal spatial character as well as external form.

**Dwelling in a secret garden**

*In Carli in India there are a number of cave temples. They were actually created, as I have described above, by eliminating material - that is by forming cavities. Here the cavity is what we perceive while the solid rock surrounding it is the neutral background which was left unshaped.* 9

In our practice, we begin most of our projects with what might be described as a sensory site walk with a client, experiencing its physicality together and exploring where it feels pleasant to settle; to enjoy what the site has to offer *[*5*]*. In other words, we try to imagine how and where to dwell (as the philosopher Martin Heidegger would have had it). This is the beginning of our design process, using our whole bodies and the 1:1 experience of the site itself; bringing everyone into our thought process at the very beginning in an inclusive way, and marking a key moment in the forthcoming journey of client and architect. Thus, the blue touch paper of the creative process is lit.

This particular house is set within a discreet part of a Victorian garden within a protected nineteenth century Glasgow suburb which is ‘discovered’ beyond the formal lawns at the front and rear of an existing plot. The combination of overgrown landscape and weathered brick garden walls separating the site from the neighbouring rear gardens created a memorable atmosphere which suggested a natural affinity between the two; redolent of walled gardens in grander country estates. Our new design sits adjacent to the existing sandstone Victorian mansion, and is defined by four brick cuboids housing cellular accommodation; identifying the extremities of a plan and almost acting as giant inhabited columns which support the roof and shelter the open space in between. Combining transparency and translucency, this central space is conceived as part of the external landscape flowing from a lush garden of flowers, shrubs and trees on one side to a secluded walled and paved south-facing courtyard on the other *[*6-8*]*.

Rudolph Schindler would surely recognise the cuboids as distant relatives of those mountain side caverns he wrote about. They are rooms in the traditional sense; autonomous spaces for private activities - retreats from the hustle and bustle of family life which, in contrast, is played out in the open stage between *[*9, 10*]*. They are conceived in textured brick with large, flush pointed joints, relishing their hand made ‘wet trade’ quality, like the existing garden walls, and the astonishing tactility of Lewerenz’s St Mark’s Church in Stockholm. The contrasting spatial configurations of closed and open space, of chamber and platform, represents the traditional characteristics of Western and Eastern architecture respectively. One concerns itself with ‘me’, the other with ‘we’ – a combination with powerful resonances with the private and public characteristics of domestic life. The design is an attempt therefore to enhance the experience of living together in this secluded place, and to intensify a relationship with the nature that is in immediate proximity. At times, the house almost shuts out the outside while at others it draws it in seamlessly. It takes the neighbouring Victorian arrangement of stone vessel and walled garden and interprets them in a fresh way using different materials and spatial configurations *[*11*]*. The new external brick walls are, as a result, imagined as extensions to the family of garden walls, joining their older Victorian cousins to dwell intimately with the plants and flowers. The design reconciles the contrasting family demands of privacy and togetherness (of ‘me’ and ‘we’) with corresponding spatial arrangements internally and surprising revelations of the landscape externally.

**Dwelling in the countryside**

*In finally arriving in the primary interior space, there is a sense that no goal or destination is worth attaining without effort, and the desirability of the destination increases with each new barrier to reaching it* […].10

The spatial arrangement of this house choreographs a journey from the immediate and intimate landscape to the far away hill-scape and horizon, thus exploring the experience of proximity and distance *[*12-14*]*. Like all promenades, the journey begins on *terra firma*, continuing through two levels and culminating in an upper living room and external terrace. It can be understood as beginning with a cave and ending with a bird’s nest; two of our favourite spatial metaphors *[*15-17*]*. At first glance, the simple ‘head and tail’ composition of the plan suggests the building is nothing more than one significant upper space (the ‘head’) preceded by a meandering circulation route on the lower level (the ‘tail’). In reality, the ‘tail’ is generous enough to accommodate more than just circulation and is organised around a south-facing sheltered courtyard. As a result, it becomes both route and destination. Its free-flowing arrangement of both communal and private spaces is designed to build up momentum leading to the spatial climax of the upper floor living space, the *raison d’être* of the entire project; the ‘settling place’ that we and the client imagined on our first walk round together. This space exploits both the experience of living under the tree canopy as well as the gaze towards the distant mountains.

The project’s plan and its formal three dimensional geometry owes something to the configuration of traditional steadings, although its load bearing discipline is interrupted with glazed timber screens. Externally, it employs that most utilitarian of external finishes, unpainted harling, and combines it with a metal roof and chunky timber detailing to create a character which revels in its intrinsic plainness, or ‘a high standard of ordinariness’ 11 as Robert Maguire has put it *[*18, 19*]*. Its immediate neighbour, a modest, finely-built stone gatehouse, rescued from demolition by our client. will we suspect always be the better dressed of the two buildings and will retain an appropriately dignified presence in the landscape after its younger neighbour is unveiled.

When viewed from the road below, the new house’s one and two storey massing conceals the courtyard tucked behind the more prominent two storey element *[*20, 21*]*. The climb from the road rises a full storey to the house entrance, and then from that entrance a further storey to the upper room. From here, the immediate and the distant are invited into the experience of the dwelling, bringing together the human-made and natural worlds in rich and surprising ways. This results in a series of ‘charged’ internal spaces which capture qualities of the outside landscape and re-interpret those characteristics of this memorable setting in the interior realm.

**Dwelling between Village and Countryside**

*The idea of the tent is a statement about the relationship between human beings and nature, and it is expressed through the notion of lightness.*12

It is the section of this contemporary barn of a house, rather than its plan, which reveals its spatial concept. Situated between Scotland’s first conservation village, Eaglesham, on one side and open countryside on the other *[*22-24*]*, it is in a distinctive location. We successfully argued to the planning authorities that the site owed its principle characteristics to its proximity to open countryside, rather than to the protected urban crust of buildings which defined the village’s protected status. This permitted us the creative elbow room to study how different rural structures sat in the landscape. In walking the site, and exploring different siting positions, we took inspiration from the relaxed ‘tent-like’ geometries of some anonymous timber and metal-clad barns.

A single, mono-pitched zinc roof forms the key sheltering element for this three generational home, both physically and symbolically *[*25-28*]*. Rather than make a clear distinction between cellular private spaces and free flowing family spaces, the entire house is conceived as an informal multi-level interior landscape of decks and platforms, each of which has degrees of privacy, ranging from doors which can close, to galleries which open-up unexpected views inside *[*29-31*]*. This arrangement provides diagonal glimpses across the plan and section increasing a sense of ‘bigness’ in what is in reality a modestly-sized dwelling. Like the previous two examples, the spatial variety and character of this project is related to an attitude about dwelling in a particular landscape and the subsequent enjoyment of its qualities from inside, particularly the light, surrounding trees, nearby reservoir and open countryside beyond. The section orchestrates spaces for a busy family of four over three levels sweeping down to door height to enclose a completely separate granny flat *[*32*]*. It also forms a unified entrance under a single, generous, cantilevered canopy defining a welcoming threshold between nature and nest.

The architecture facilitates a balance of closeness and privacy as well as detachment and sociability across the three generations *[*33-35*]*. Its presence in the landscape reinforces the site’s rural credentials and distinguishes it from the nearby inhabited wall of the street of the conservation village. In doing so, it brings the bigness of the open countryside right into the heart of the dwelling experience within, enriching it with the qualities which drew the client to the site in the first place.

**Dwelling near a Pond**

*Power is the ability to move reality. Alone, an idea cannot do this. It can and does become power when it is integrated into the concrete life of a man, when it becomes one with his development, instincts, emotions, with the tensions of his interior life, his tensions, his work and its requirements.*13

It was the particular combination of gently-sloping marshy ground with a (poorly-maintained) pond, surrounded by an old mill house and a diverse group of recently-built houses with views to beautiful, rolling landscape and distant hills, that persuaded our clients to consider building a purpose-designed house for the first time [36, 37]. Our ‘sensory walk’ together took place after we had already viewed site photographs and sketched ideas on a plan but, on arrival, the experience of the site immediately prompted us to rethink what we had previously considered – a blunt reminder of how important it is to personally visit a site before ideas are allowed to emerge. The tree-lined pond was revealed to have a more significant presence than when initially viewed through the medium of photography, and subsequently became our key creative stimulus. An idea about locating the family spaces in one distinct structure developed, taking advantage of light, views and aspect on three sides *[*38-41*]*. A parti – of two narrow fingers of accommodation enclosing an open, private external courtyard facing the pond – quickly established the project’s architectural DNA.

While the project’s two wings superficially appear similar, in reality one wing contains an open vaulted volume, where cooking, eating and relaxing can take place, whilst the other is highly cellular in character, dense like a car battery, housing private and supporting spaces. Externally, the only differences between the two wings are subtle contrasts in the configuration of openings. From inside, the external world is revealed through glimpses in a variety of directions; from above, from the side and from straight ahead *[*42, 43, 44, 45*]*. Physically, the overall structure can be seen as two connected vessels: one wing containing a free-flowing internal landscape, with the other a collection of enclosed caverns. Internally, the spaces combine both vessel and landscape characteristics in their configuration while, externally, the building itself remains a simple vessel on a modest landscape, taking a lesson form the neighbouring mill house in transmitting what we hope is a tranquil and enigmatic quality *[*46-49*]*.

On this site, overlooked by surrounding houses, the new design needed to strike a delicate balance. On one hand, it needed to appear content in its setting – a setting which also belongs to the everyday experience of the neighbours who look on to it and pass it by daily. On the other hand, it is the setting for a new private life to be lived by our client. The architectural strategy and the resulting design is, in a quiet way, generous in how it defers the new structure to a refashioned landscape which both occupier and the neighbours can enjoy.

**Conclusion**

*A natural character is for instance translated into a building whose properties somehow make the character manifest. 14*

Space envelops us all the time. It captivates and inspires artists, film makers and writers, from the likes of Gaston Bachelard and Steen Eiler Rasmussen, from Casper David Friedrich, to Paul Theroux. It provides psychological relief when we reach the seaside on holiday, but can generate psychiatric crisis if we cannot cope with its vast, open expanses. We are often more comfortable when our sense of territory and place is palpable. It is only when space is captured, defined by surfaces and charged by physical form and mass, that it becomes really useful and meaningful. For most of our lives, we need its contained state even more than our longing for the great outdoors. Each is inextricably linked to the other. That sense of containment can either be a soul-sapping burden (if it is against our will, as in places of incarceration) or it can be life-enhancing and benevolent. We see and feel its surfaces, we experience and delight in how light illuminates it. Our senses are awakened and we accept its invitation to inhabit and to dwell. As a result, we are more aware of where we and who we are. Place may be the marriage of space and time, but it also the human experience of the art of architecture.

*[*50*]* All four designs explored in this paper are research projects for contemporary living. Each design exudes a particular culture rather than a style that demands uniformity. We hope that this culture evidences an openness to many influences and a freedom of enquiry which allows variety and vitality. Each design’s ‘figure’ and ‘ground’ is transformed by each other. Each is an active participant in a creative exchange, with ourselves as architects acting as mediators. Both, it could be said, are party to an arranged marriage. What can be deduced therefore about reciprocity, inspiration and how the duality between anonymity and authorship is reconciled in these examples? Is each project as eloquent a story-teller as its vernacular neighbour? Each design is the result of a creative process which brings both conscious and unconscious factors to bear on the end result. The physical characteristics and qualities of each landscape are direct influences but so are our own individual cultural hinterlands as architects. Each design is responsive to some aspect of the surrounding vernacular; be it barns and steadings; Victorian masonry and glass or the tranquility of a modest mill cottage. All four dwellings reject the two fore-mentioned extremes of banality and novelty and engage with the reciprocity described in the paper’s key questions. Do they provide convincing answers to those questions? Perhaps, if there is a special reciprocity, it is more a spatial and a sensuous reciprocity? Perhaps we make a mistake when we concentrate our view on the building designs as published here? Perhaps we need to reverse our view and judge the buildings as vantage points from which to view the landscape?

Paradoxically, the media of communication in this paper – photography, drawings and text – suggest that each design is the focus of each site, and each has an assertive manner. It is difficult not to conclude that each design might be an imposition more than a contribution: the exact opposite of our main aim. After all, a written and illustrated paper cannot recreate the full sensory, three dimensional experience of being on a site, witnessing the setting through our bodily senses. It is impossible to recreate the immediacy and the immensity of the information that our senses take in. Rather, as we read this, we view images and use our imagination which can get us close, but not close enough to determine how the claims made here play out on site.

The answers to the questions posed in this paper cannot therefore be revealed by the representation of, and reflections upon, the designs alone. The dwellings require to be occupied by lives waiting to be lived, through the interaction of the animate and the inanimate, before we could know the answers. Ultimately, this is architecture’s key weakness as a medium for a research analysis of this type. Architecture needs to be inhabited to reveal its significance. It needs time to tell and actual life-experiences to fully comprehend its meaning and significance. In other words, it will require subjective answers from individual life experiences to answer the objective nature of the questions which this research paper raises. No words or images can ever be sufficient.

**Notes**

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**Author’s biography**

Christopher Platt is Chair of Architecture at the Mackintosh School of Architecture, Glasgow, at the Glasgow School of Art and co-founding director of studioKAP architects. He spent 20 years in full time practice in Glasgow, London, Oxford, Ethiopia and Berlin designing and realizing contemporary public architecture often in sensitive and historic environments. This was followed by 20 years combining academia with independent, reflective practice and practice-based research examining creative reciprocity between Concept/Detail; Old/New; Figure/Ground. He was previously a member of the Architektenkammer in Berlin. The book, ‘Dwelling with Architecture’ written with Rod Kemsley was published by Routledge in March 2012.

**Author’s address**

Christopher Platt

[c.platt@gsa.ac.uk](mailto:c.platt@gsa.ac.uk)

WEB ABSTRACT

*“..We felt you were making something special and that it was the artist in you that was coming out. The end result far exceeded any sort of imaginings we had to be honest…. It was truly one of the most amazing experiences of our life.”*

*(Dr Cath Dyer, 20014, studioKAP client).*

Architectural design at its heart can be a transformative, life-affirming process. A physical site can be a gift to an architectural project and the same project can return the favour to the site. This paper explores how the spatial orchestration in four recent individual house designs by studioKAP which have been inspired by site and place, reciprocate that gift with an enriched composition of internal and external landscapes. It examines how the architects’ inspiration is drawn from everyday spatial observations -gifts freely given and unconditionally received. It explores three specific questions. Can the individual and collective needs of family life be enriched through the architectural interpretation of a particular site and setting? Can the contemporary house be informed by the inherited wisdom and timeless qualities of the vernacular as well as remaining an individual site-specific authored statement? Can a dwelling’s interior realm intensify the experience and relationship to nature? The paper concludes that the answers cannot be revealed by the representation of and reflections on the designs alone. Rather it requires the buildings to be inhabited by human lives to reveal their significance, meaning and relevance, highlighting architecture’s key weakness as a medium for a research analysis of this type.

CAPTIONS

Fig 1

A vernacular building in the countryside- an image of the life it serves.

Fig 2,3

The cavernous and sooty single space interior of a reconstructed Black House on the Isle of Lewis.

Fig 4

The beginnings of a flowing sociable space for living, eating and cooking in contrast to the cellular configuration of the bedooms and bathroom in the early work of Hans Scharoun in Berlin.

Fig 5

The first sensory walk with the client experiencing the site together using a ‘walk and talk’ methodology.

Figs 6-8

The emergence of an internal configuration of contained and open spaces revealing a cubic composition of one and two storey masses.

Figs 9-10

A series of textured brick cuboids provide variety in the range of internal and external spaces.

Fig 11

Complimentary masonry and glass compositions face each other across a new garden wall; the new villa deferring in scale and location to the exiting Victorian mansion.

Figs 12-14

The neighbouring gate house, the site orientation and the distant views inform a courtyard strategy sheltering a south-facing space on one side and opening out to long landscape vistas on another.

Figs 15-17

The ‘head and tail’ plan reconciles the family’s desire for private outdoor space as well as a ‘ship’s prow’ upper living space amongst the trees and the external terrace.

Figs 18-19

A prismatic geometry and deliberately plain harled wall surfaces are enlivened by chunky timber detailing, navigating an architectural territory between the anonymous character of vernacular buildings and the authored site-specific artistic statement.

Figs 20-21

The new dwelling is carefully sited in relation to the road, gate house and tree cluster in order that only the two storey ‘head’ is visible from below the site, giving an element of surprise to the entry sequence as well as limiting the overall bulk visible from the road.

Figs 22-24

The abrupt contrasting conditions of linear village edge and flowing countryside which inform the core idea of the house’s design.

Figs 25-28

Inspired by the relaxed tent-like geometry of barns, a single monopitch design emerges from a series of sketches which have concentrated on the sectional arrangement as the design’s key generator.

Figs 29-31

Located on the site to maximise the south-facing open space, the sectional form grows from a modest one storey facing the existing house to a full two and a half storeys facing the open fields beyond the site.

Fig 32

The main dwelling and the granny flat are back to back, each facing their own external space and able to connected internally together at some point in the future if desired.

Figs 33-35

A contemporary barn within the protected status of a conservation village avoids deferring to the existing historical architecture and chooses the countryside as its source of inspiration.

Figs 36, 37

The intimate and the distant provide two complimentary landscape qualities which informed the initial design development; reconciling privacy and openness on a highly-overlooked site.

Figs 38-41

The evolution of two distinct wings of accomodaation began with one long and one stubby element and developed into two externally-similar arms which contained very different spatial conditions inside.

Figs 42, 43

A seemingly casually-arranged pair of wings attempt to both frame meaningful external spaces and support the informal and everyday character of the site prior to occupation.

Figs 44, 45

The wings are configured as low-slung rendered walls with stone bases within an informal landscaping arrangement, attempting to avoid any sense of front and back garden in the suburban sense.

Figs 46-49

Stone forms the surrounding drystone dyke as well as the wall bases and the terrace flooring, helping bed the building to the land. Landscape is encouraged to flourish with minimal planning in order to reinstate the building site into a piece of the countryside once more. In contrast to the surrounding contemporary developer’s houses; the new is on the one hand searching for privacy whilst on the other, accepting its own modest landmark role.

Fig 50

The out-of-context floor plan of each case study hint at how each site has impacted on their formal configuration.