

|||: THE WILL TO ARTFULNESS

We are unavoidably steeped in the art of architecture, and are constantly adding to our knowledge and understanding of buildings and of different ways of doing things. We use a range of tools to analyse the clients needs and wishes and the qualities of the site, and wish to offer the client something extra that they had not thought of, that is beyond and better than their expectations. In listening to a client and thinking about what we might do we have “a will to artfulness”, and are not merely knitting a design to their pattern. In some instances this might be described as formalism, and there is always a danger of settling on preconceptions that may not fit and which we wish to avoid. We have a conscious and unconscious desire to avoid overly dramatic shapes and rhetoric, admiring the Smithson’s concept of “ordinariness”, and wish to arrive at a solution that may appear to be very simple but has an underlying richness.

As architects we are educated to intuitively balance a complex range of different requirements when designing, drawing subconsciously on a wide range of principles and precedents as well as attending to the client’s programme and brief. Listing the principles and methods that we employ runs the risk of overlooking the less measurable and the less conscious moves we might make: there is no guarantee that such a list covers the whole story, as Alvar Aalto said:

“..the large number of different demands and sub problems form an obstacle that is difficult for the architectural concept to break through. In such cases I work - sometimes totally - on instinct”¹

We are searching for something in a design that will somehow transcend the merely utilitarian and touch the senses in a poetic way, although we often may cloak this in a logical rationale when discussing a project with a client.

¹ Alvar Aalto “The Trout and the Mountain Stream”, pub 1947. Quoted by Colin St John Wilson in “Architectural Reflections”, pub. Butterworth 1992.



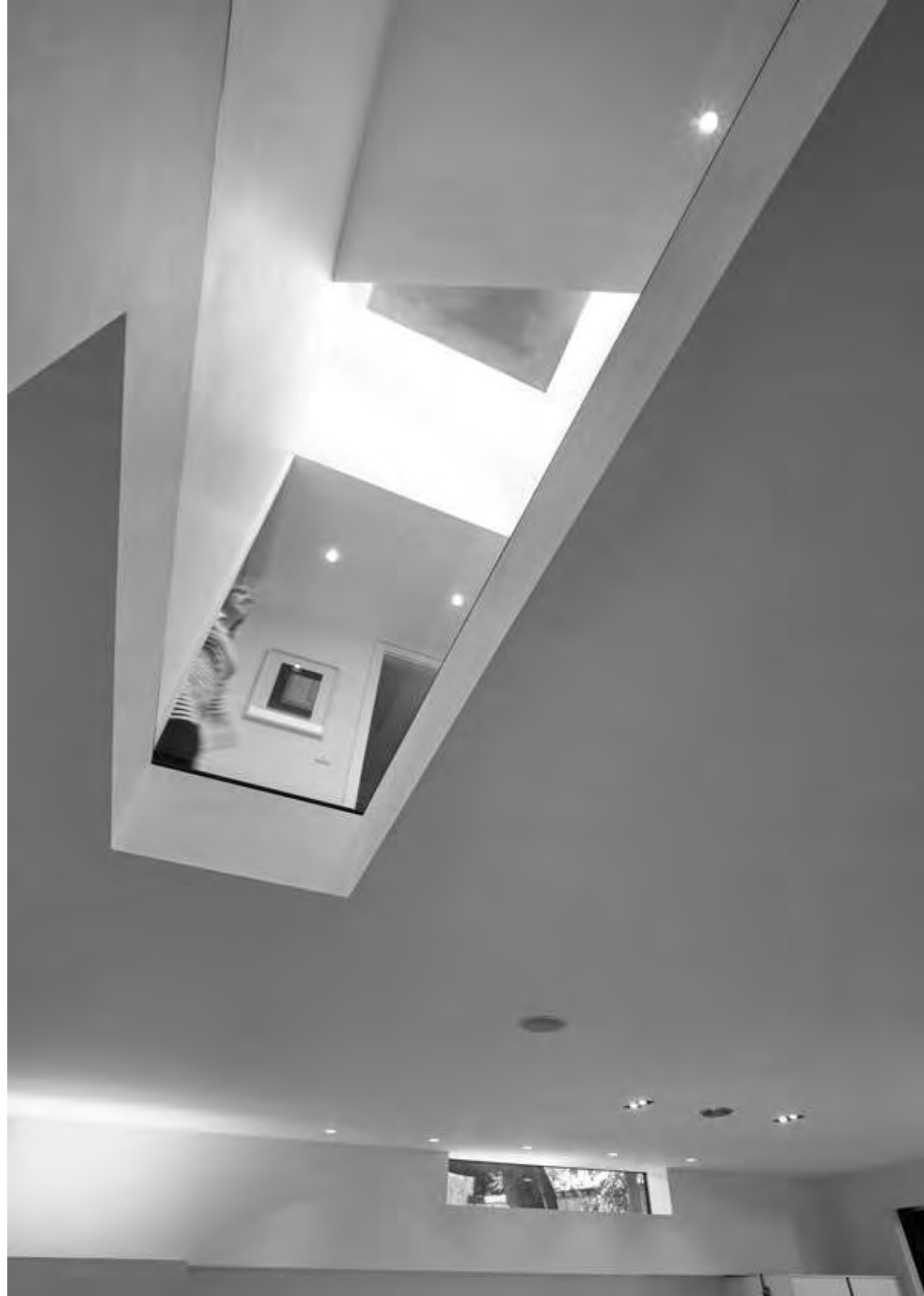
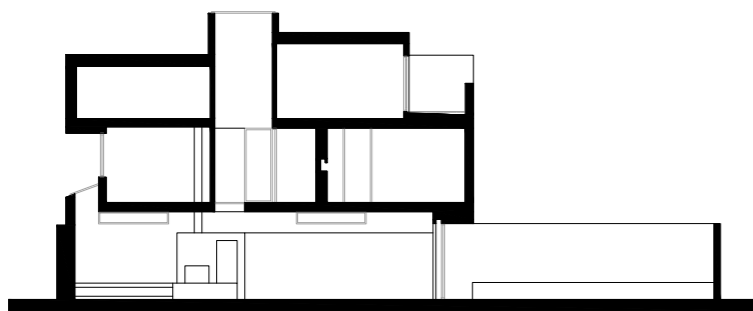
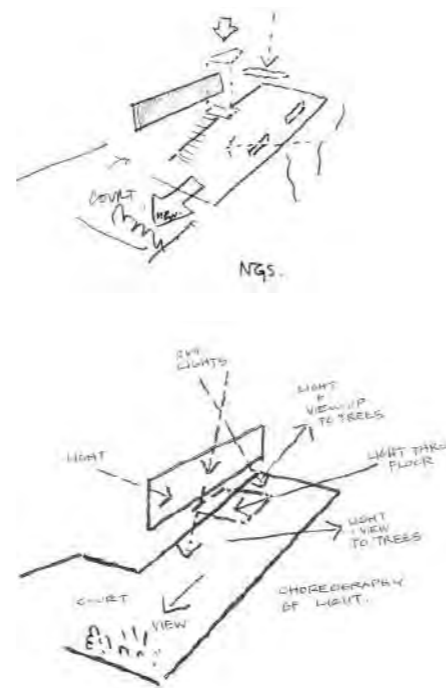
Generally when designing in Scotland we may wish to use our artifice to create the opportunity for different lifestyles in our buildings. These may defer to the Scottish climate in some respects, but also create additional and more unexpected results. These can be achieved by thinking imaginatively about how the spaces feel, for example in considering how the soft Scottish daylight is introduced internally, and how sunlight can be modulated:

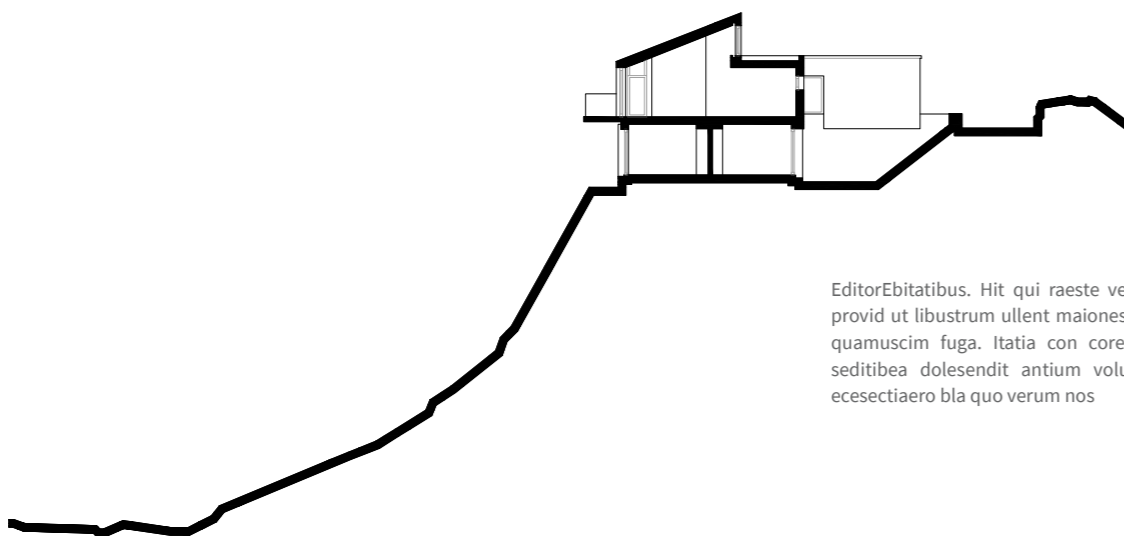
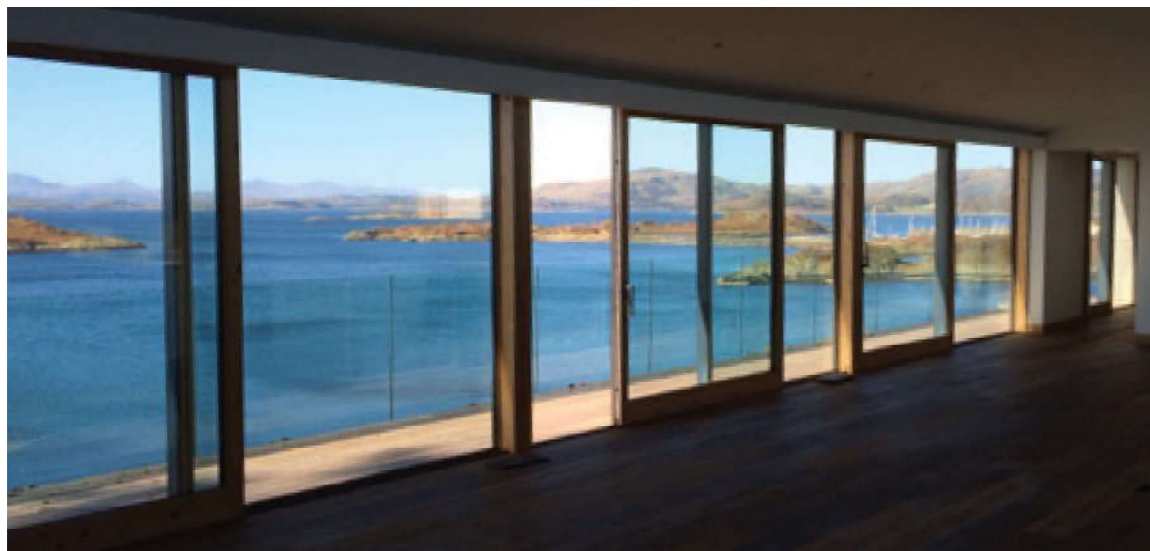
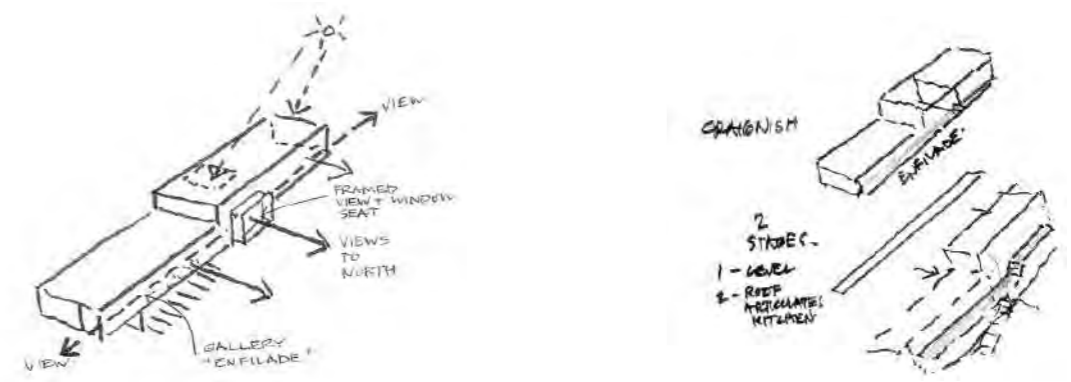
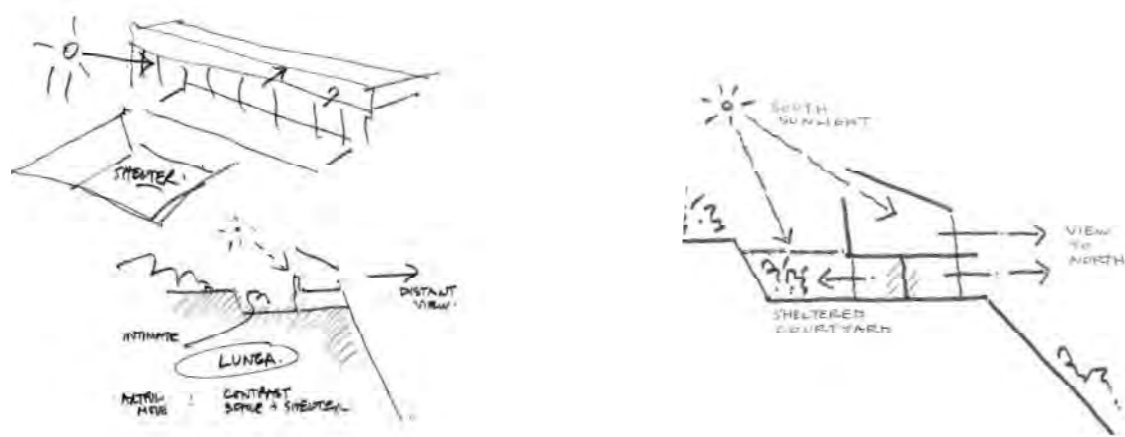
for example in the high level glazing in our inner city backlands project at *North Gardiner Street*, where privacy and overlooking were added constraints.

There will be a need for a range of different spaces, some that allow for a comfortable feeling of shelter and a cosy intimacy: perhaps *"seeking beauty in darkness"*.

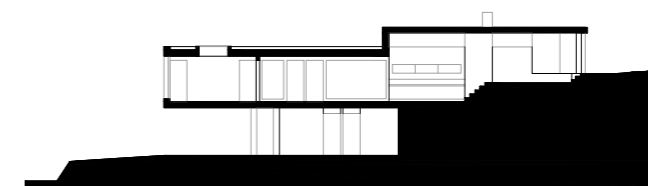
For the 2 spectacular site at Lunga we have tried to contrast the sunny glazed living area with darker spaces leading into it and at the edges. The other larger and more open space here has a different physiological impact, invoking a more relaxed Mediterranean lifestyle, as well as being sufficient perhaps to dance *"Strip the Willow"* in a suitably energetic fashion.

2 Tanazaki "In Praise of Shadows"
pub Vintage 2001

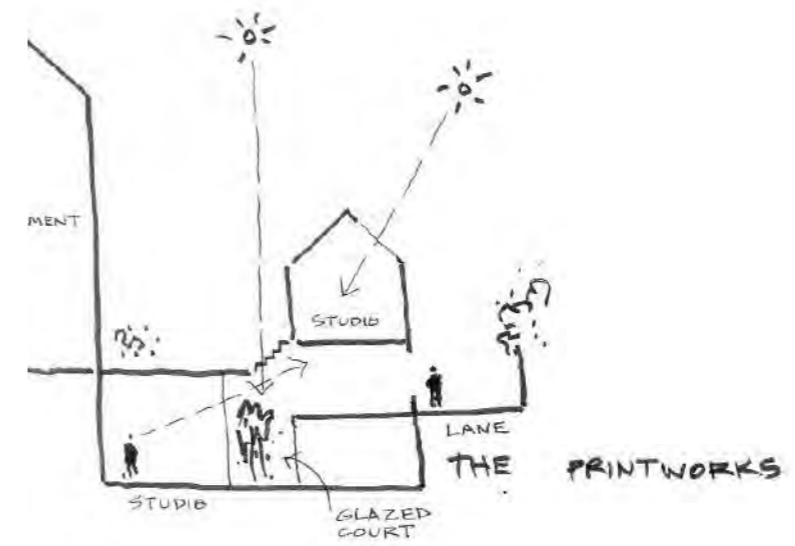




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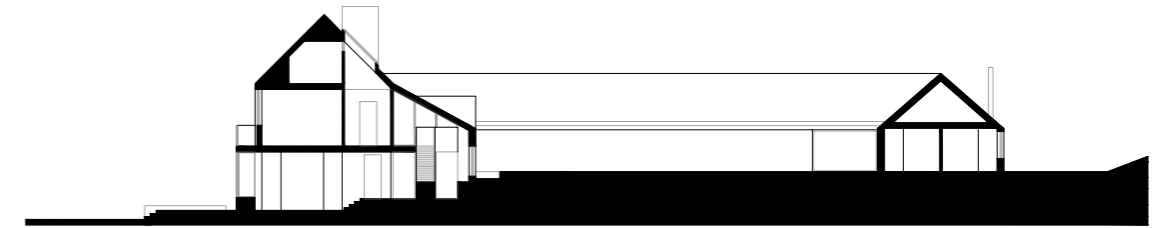


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Externally we also wish to create comfortable and sheltered microclimates in our northern latitude, by designing with the landscape to create courtyards and sheltered gardens, such as at *Lunga* again, while also controlling and orchestrating the impact of existing views from within, as at *Craignish* where a framed view from the kitchen also acts as a window seat.



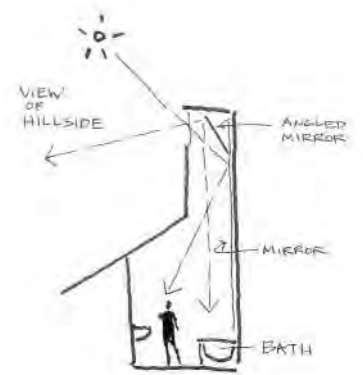


The tools that we as architects use to develop the design are the drawing of plans and sections, diagrammatic at the start, and using precedents that we know or find out about that relate to the problem or to our initial ideas: as Peter Zumthor has said, "*Practicing architecture is asking oneself questions*"³ We may draw the site in a number of different ways, trying to fully understand it, and imagine how people will move around the design, considering arrival sequences and practical and aesthetic controls of views and movement, with lobbies and degagements, as in the entrance to the coastal house at *Cove*. We will also employ *beaux art* devices such as enfilades, which in the house at *Craignish* link all the main rooms at the upper level to a long gallery that enjoys the best views. Quick models are also useful to help imagine spaces, and to clarify how light may be best introduced into them: which we have done in a rather dramatic way for the bathrooms at *Tarvie*, giving them light and a view that they would not perhaps expect to have.

3 Peter Zumthor
"Thinking Architecture"
 pub 1999 Birkhauser.

4 Quoted by Colin St John Wilson in
"The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture"
 pub: Academy Editions 1995

We will also employ a range of devices that link the spaces and manipulate the section, which is the key to the design at our office building at the Printworks. Employing an intuitive shorthand of scribbles and thoughts understood by us all allows very quick reactions and sparks further ideas. We may invert the normal in a playful manner, by for example trying to make an opening rather than to "*insert an object*", and trial different typologies that are well understood to us in different contexts. This is an intense and iterative process, some designs may come more easily and even appear to have an inevitability about them, others may only emerge after many different attempts and are the result of considerable struggle.



To quote Alvar Aalto again "*It is not what a building looks like on the day that it is opened but what it is like thirty years later that matters*"⁴

All of our projects have been tailored to meet the needs of particular clients who may eventually move on, and we hope that the buildings will serve others equally well: architectural ideas are bigger and last longer than individual whims.

BATHROOM AT TARVIE

