

Jeremy Melvin



# Young British Architects



Birkhäuser

## Niall McLaughlin London

Niall McLaughlin brings a highly original approach to form-making in his architecture. Coming from sources which are at once pragmatic, intuitive and intellectual, this gives his buildings a freshness and vitality, and the ability to conjure the unexpected effect. Paintings are often a stimulus; he devises built manifestations of the effects they depict, such as borrowing light from unexpected sources. In his re-working of a Carmelite monastery in central London, the sacristy expresses a rigour in the proportional system of the cupboards which contrasts with sunlight modulated through the roof: both the rationality of proportions and the power of light, to a Roman Catholic priest, denote the presence of God. Monastic tradition and the limits of the existing building were both factors which set parameters for the designs.

Two domestic projects, an apartment in a house in London's fashionable Notting Hill district, and a sizeable house in a South Kensington mews, show a similar ability to conjure unexpected spaces within constraints of existing buildings and sites. But they are more than exercises in maximising space; the spaces they make have a delicacy and subtlety which completely defies the given parameters. Careful placing of art works increases the sense of illusion and the

visual intensity. These formal characteristics have a long history; they are not far from the techniques Sir John Soane used to transform his ordinary terraced house into a unique home and museum.

The photographer's shack, overlooking farmland in Northamptonshire, has a much freer form, which also derives from a combination of pragmatism and intuition. Here, however, budget rather than existing fabric provided the pragmatic constraints. Its construction process was almost mediaeval; its starting point was a model, and to save money there were no architectural drawings – the contractor was free to find his own way of building it to the outline of the model. It also fits sensuously between a low ridge between open farmland and a more formal garden. Opening its face to a small pond, it is both a passive element in the composition of the images its owner devises, and an active agent in helping to frame them. It is at the same time a retreat and a space for intense deliberation about nature.

Carmelite Monastery, London

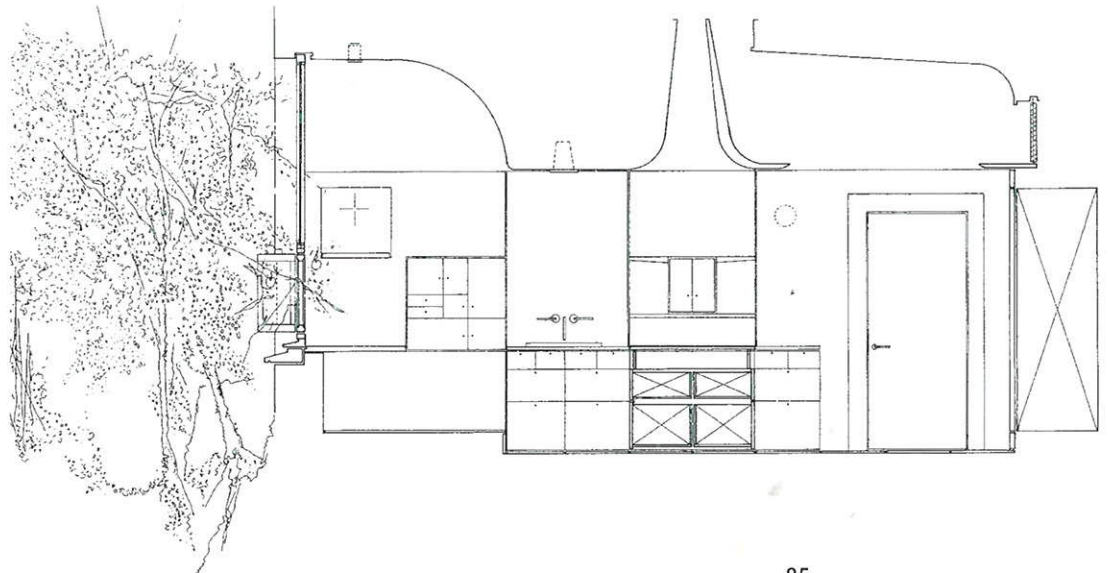
Works to this complex include refurbishment of the sacristy, a private space where priests prepare to celebrate mass in the church, and the creation of a private chapel for the monks. Light and texture are the only available ornaments, and the work shows a fine degree of control of even the smallest details and objects.



Even the cupboards and drawers conform to a grand design.

The private chapel is converted from an existing room: careful treatment of surfaces and placement of furniture make it special.

Indicative section through the monastery sacristy, showing to the left: a contemplative seat with views over the garden, and the complex forming of the roof to create lighting effects.



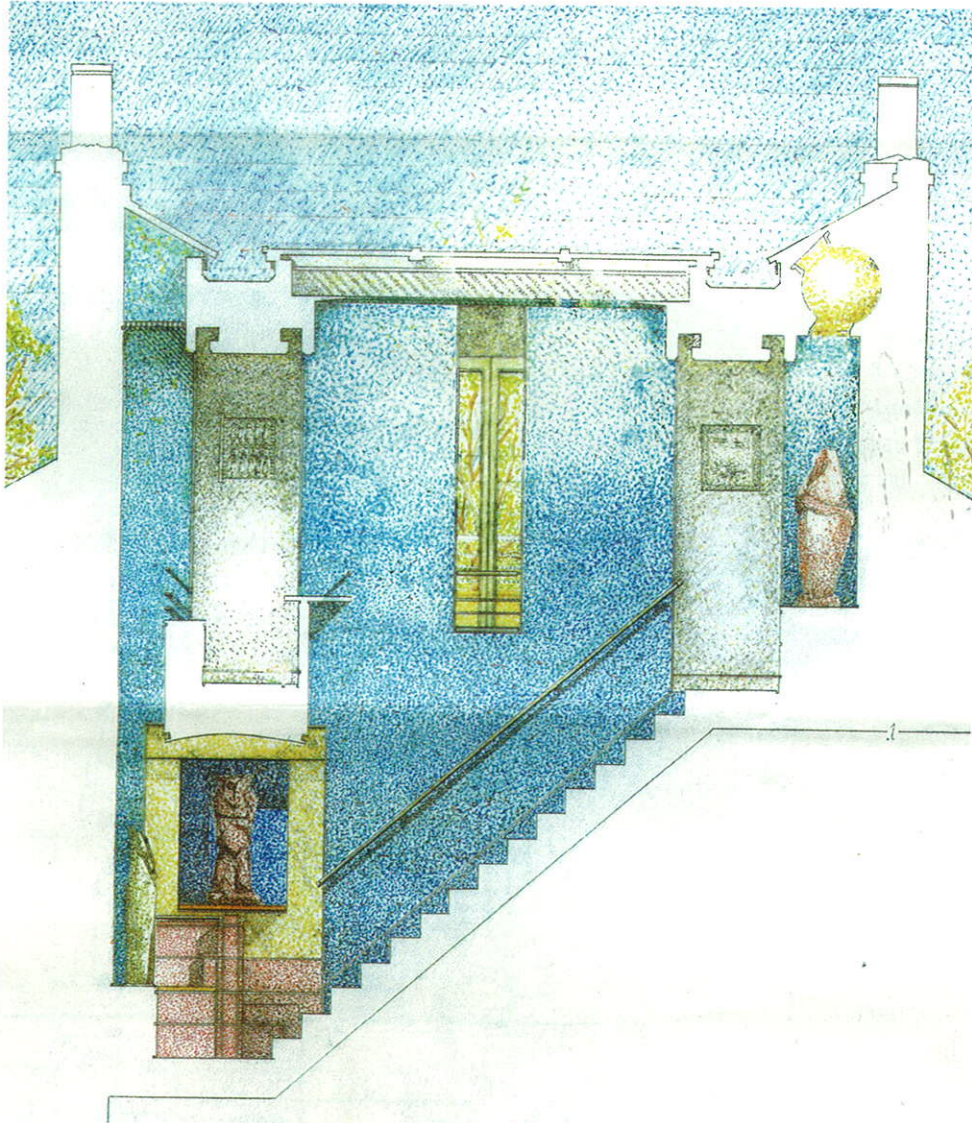
Apartment, Notting Hill,  
London

An early project which sets out  
an agenda of careful working  
of space and surface within  
the constraints of a standard  
London terraced house.

View through the living room  
to the balcony: Erno Goldfin-  
ger's Trellick Tower in the  
distance.



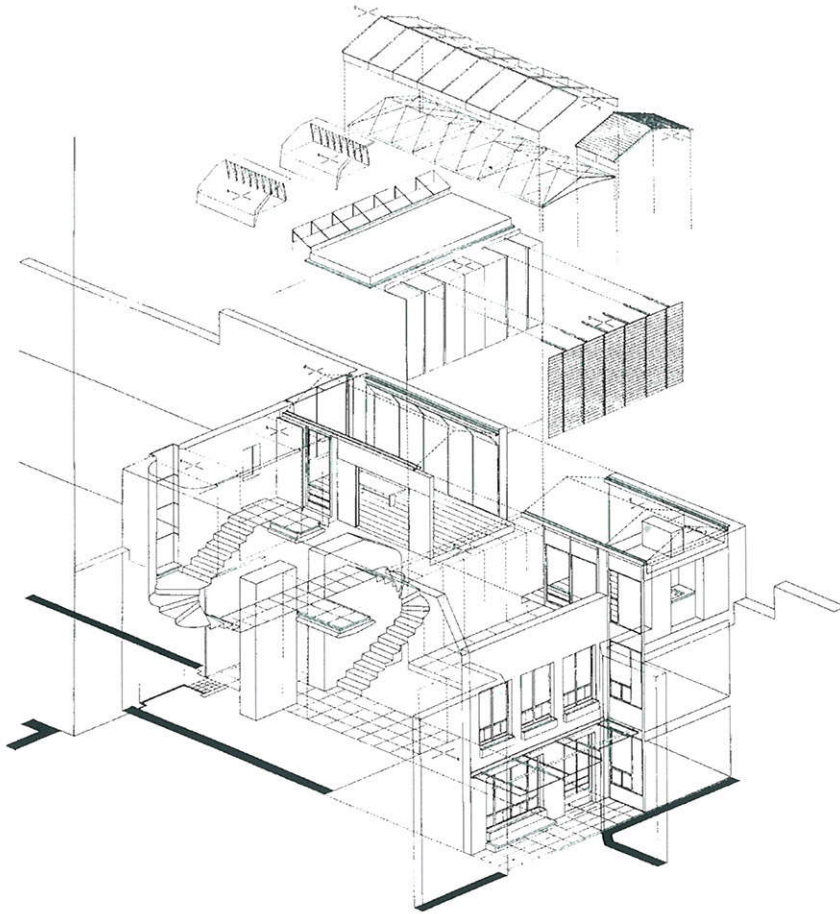
Section through staircase:  
above is a roof-light, and the  
carefully placed objects belie  
physical limits.



House in Rutland Mews, South Kensington, London

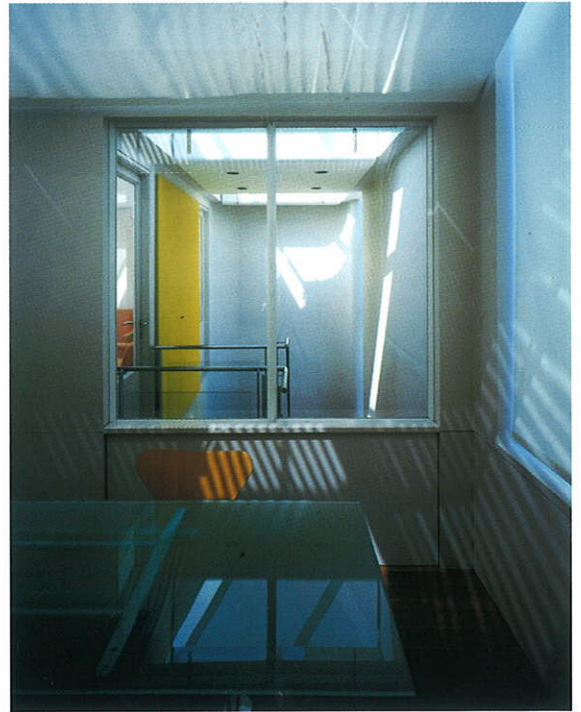
Axonometric

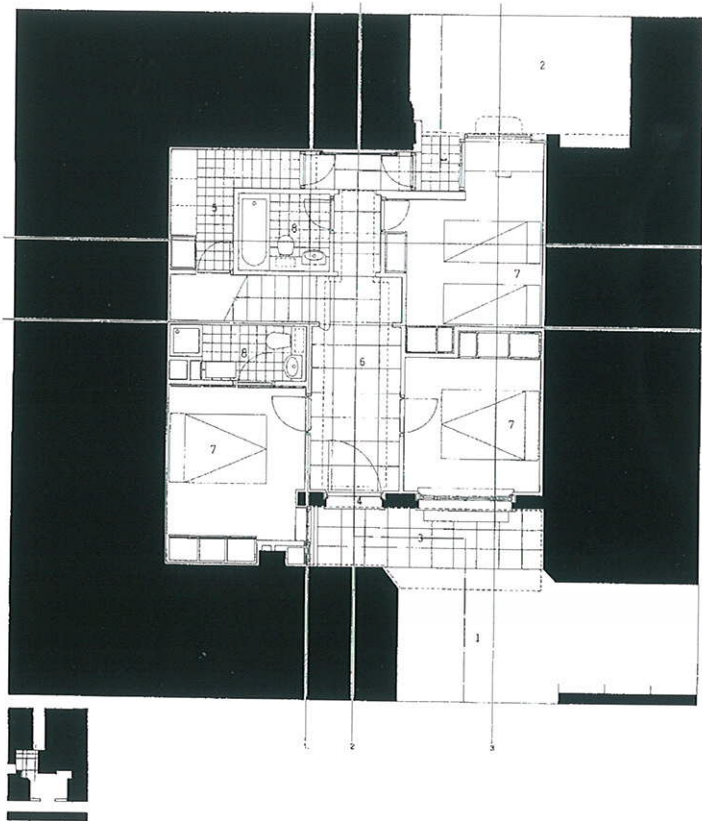
Housing is often highly eccentric and personal, or extremely banal. This house is neither, despite the prosaic constraints of its site. Stepping the entrance facade creates a small forecourt and an outside wall which gives greater flexibility in planning; it also increases the opportunities to create effects. And even in a relatively small house a staircase can become almost processional in its movement from dark inner space to the light and open upper floor.



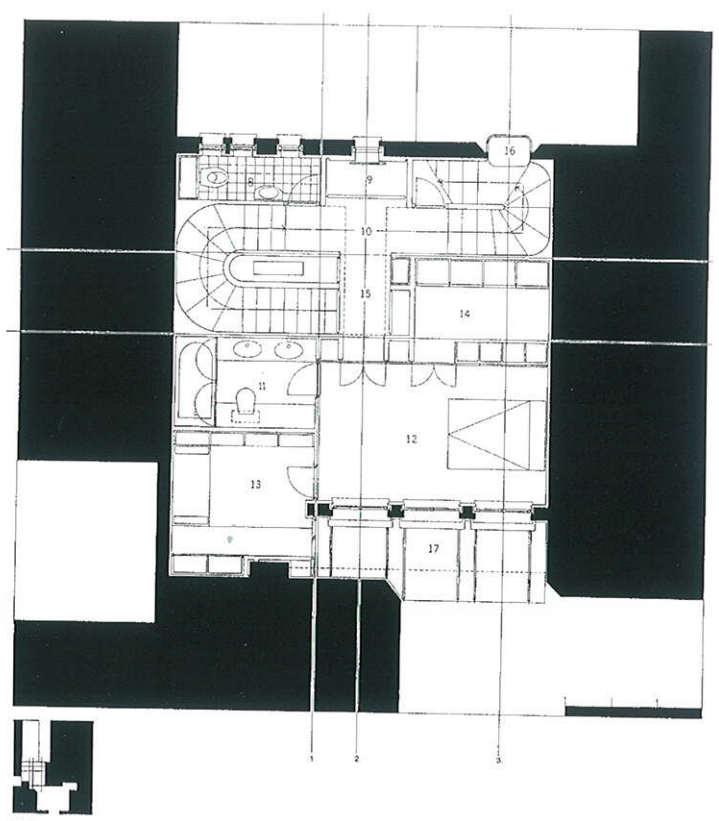
South (entrance) elevation

View from dining room towards staircase



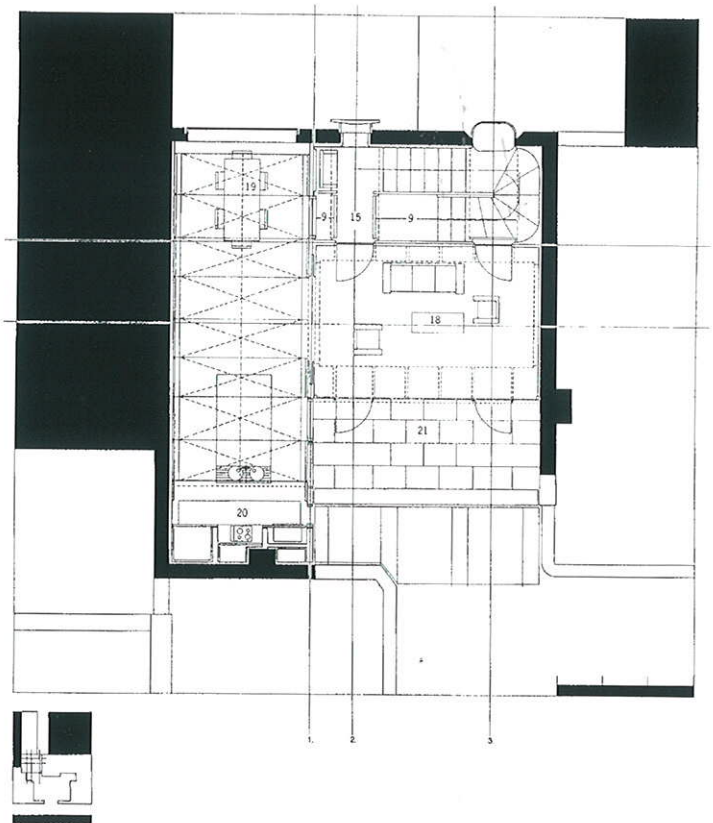


Ground floor plan



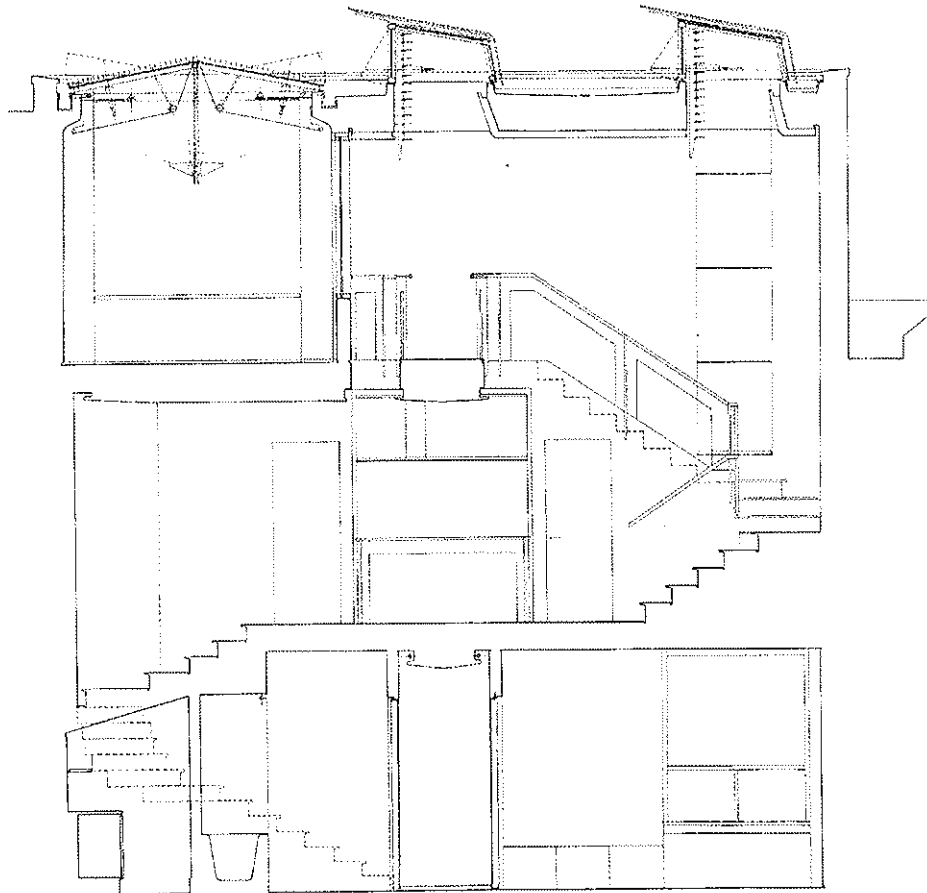
First floor plan

Second floor plan



- 1 Court yard
- 2 Garage lane
- 3 Glazed porch
- 4 Entry
- 5 Utility
- 6 Hallway
- 7 Bedroom
- 8 Bathroom/WC
- 9 Void
- 10 Landing
- 11 Master bathroom
- 12 Master bedroom
- 13 Master study
- 14 Master dressing room
- 15 Bridge
- 16 Tall window
- 17 Glass canopy
- 18 Living room
- 19 Dining room
- 20 Kitchen
- 21 Terrace

Section through staircase



Photographer's Shack,  
Northamptonshire

A extraordinary building: its extravagant form belies its tiny size. Yet its plan is beautifully worked to construct as many views as possible, to provide a sauna and space for relaxation and retreat. Its relationship to its natural surroundings is intimate and close, yet it is also different: just as photography differentiates between an object and its image.



Detail of roof over pond

Site plan



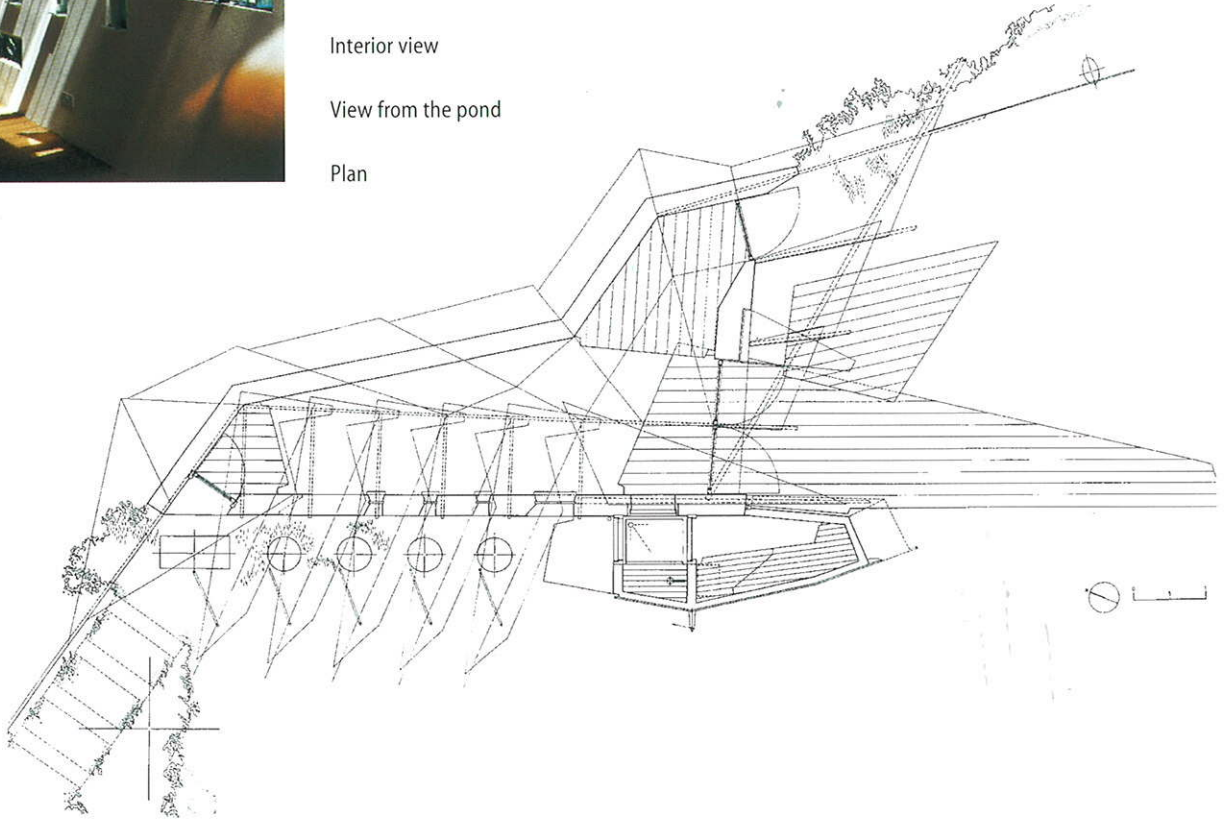




Interior view

View from the pond

Plan



Elevation from west: barely visible from the farmland, it opens to the pond.