



Wildlife retreat

Local memory, painterly reflections of war, and the poetry of an insect's wing over water, inspired the design of a Northamptonshire shack.



- 1 Southerly aspect with wooden deck and sauna.
- 2 South-west face and perforated metal canopies over skylight.
- 3 South-west wall facing over water to family house has architectural solidity.
- 4 Lantern, which appeared in an early collage and remains, diffuses light into the interior.
- 5,6 Rear north-east side set into a fold of land and covered by dark wing.

The winged shack provides a studio and hide for a wildlife photographer, and a family retreat. At the bottom of the garden it hovers over a pond in a fold of Northamptonshire countryside, its form inspired by the client's fragile insect images, and by others drawn from the war-time history of the site.

Surrounding farmland had been used as a US reconnaissance base during the Second World War. Flights of B-24 black carpetbagger bombers flew on clandestine missions, serving the

resistance in Holland, Norway and France. After the war the site was developed as a nuclear missile base but was abandoned in the mid-'60s. The land is littered with the debris of military hardware – a dismantled bomber is buried close to the pond – and Niall McLaughlin's design of the shack is threaded by memory of Anselm Kiefer's stark paintings of war-scorched landscape.

The idea of building a studio over the object of study – insect life on water – occurred to the client after McLaughlin showed

her his own photograph of objects arranged at different depths in a boghole and she began to imagine ways in which water could modulate light, to alter the depth of field. There was a pond between the garden and open farmland, but it was stagnant and lost in a tangle of briar. To bring it back to life, and to attract dragonflies, the briars were cleared and the water filtered, oxygenated with plants, and filled with fish.

In developing the design, client and architect were fired by

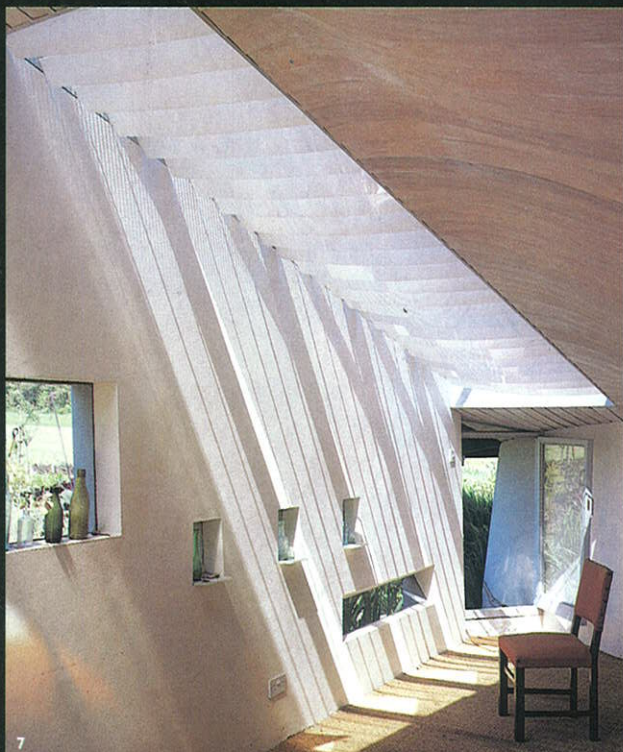
corresponding visions, equally predatory, of a hovering camera lens capturing insect imagery, and of the black B-24s capturing Kieferesque pictures of alien fields.

An early collage made to fix the image of the building is of a dark wing-like form at the edge of the pond. It caught the imagination of the builder, Simon Storey, whose father had been a war-time reconnaissance pilot and who agreed to construct the building on condition there were no working drawings, knowing the arrangement would allow

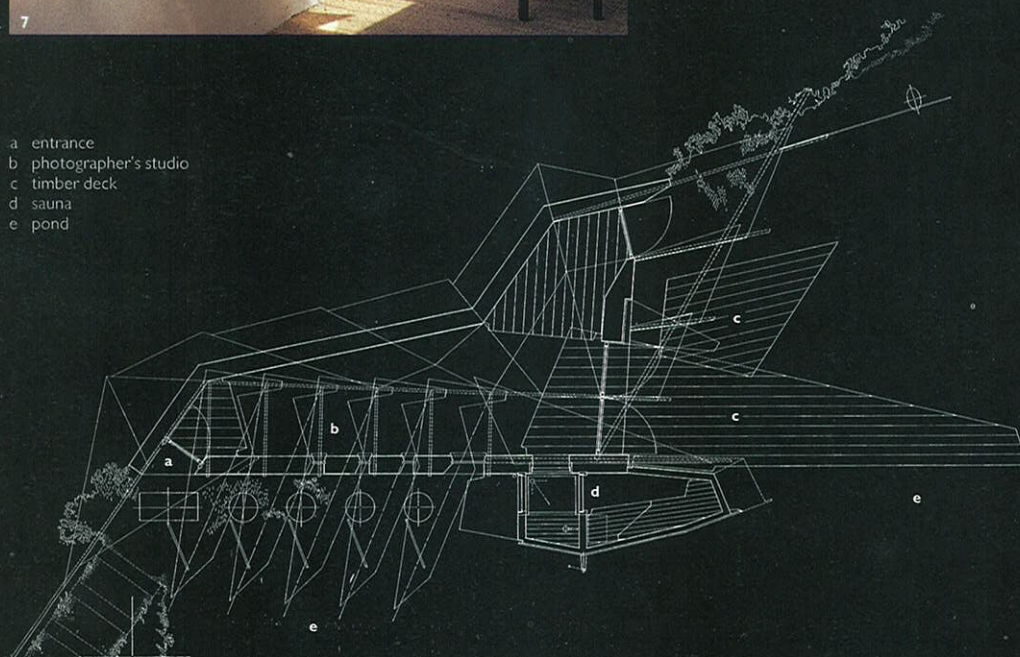
him some latitude. Consequently, rough models and photographs of models were used to design, explain and construct the little building, making development and modification open to all involved. The result is an extraordinary correspondence between the three-dimensional object and its plan.

A complex winged roof, tethered by thin metal angles, fans out and flaps, flexes and deflects in the strong winds which buffet this part of the country. The main elements of





- a entrance
- b photographer's studio
- c timber deck
- d sauna
- e pond



plan (scale approx 1:300)

the structure are the large wing members that sweep down over the rear of the building, and a glazed rooflight over the long axis. Light into the interior is deflected by a delicate lantern, polycarbonate baffles and overarching canopies, curving petals of perforated metal, tied down by slender rods.

Underneath this airy living roof is a solid base, a concrete raft supporting concrete block walls and with wooden decks extending over the water. The rear north-east wall meanders

with the contours, insinuating itself into the landscape; the south-west wall facing over the water towards the house is punctured by small openings and has a solid architectural presence. You enter the building by passing through a small door, like a cave opening tucked under the roof eaves, from stepping stones in the pond. More stepping stones lead off right to the wooden sauna.

The interior, plainly decorated and furnished under the arching roof, is a luminous cavity.

Patterns of light, cast by water through windows, and deflected through skylight and lantern, superimpose themselves across the blind rear wall. Each window made at eye level forms a frame for objects collected and held in the light to be photographed.

Architect,
Niall McLaughlin Architect
Structural engineer
Anthony Hayes
Builder
Simon Storey
Photographs

All photographs by Nicholas Kane, except no 9 which is by Niall McLaughlin.



- 7 Interior striped and patterned with light.
- 8 Bedroom retreat giving onto wooden deck over water.
- 9 Light percolating through skylight and polycarbonate baffles.