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Land form

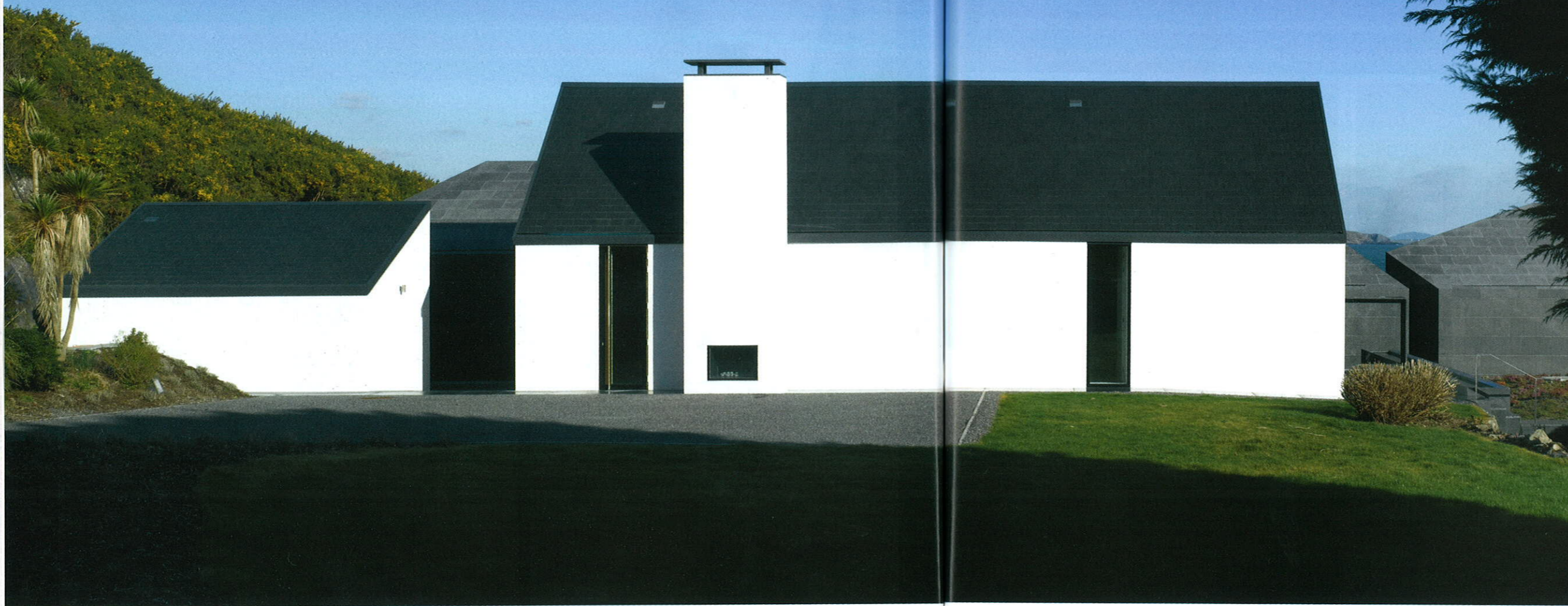
Visiting Spanish Cove, Niall McLaughlin's
celebrated cottage in County Cork
PLUS Sergison Bates' mixed-use retrofit

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The house at Spanish Cove

On a craggy site on the Irish coast, Niall McLaughlin Architects' precisely hewn home challenges our ideas of the familiar and the domestic, writes *Stephen Best*



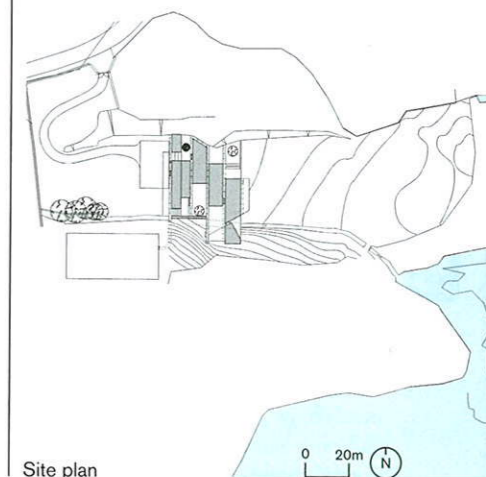
In Cork's most south-westerly parish, on the Mizen Head peninsula overlooking the Fastnet lighthouse, is a rarely found creature. Sitting squat on its craggy site like a hardy black mollusc scowling into the salty breeze, the house at Spanish Cove by Niall McLaughlin Architects is a resilient, romantic, rustic dwelling in an intensely contemporary style.

Like McLaughlin's previous award-winning home at Clonakilty in West Cork, Spanish Cove is a sensitively designed extension to a modest white-painted cottage. It is a building that eschews ostentation, asserting instead an altogether different aesthetic, one that seems hewn from the grey folded landscape, which makes this Atlantic coastline so famed. The architecture shares an almost Ruskinian sense of coherence with the landscape.

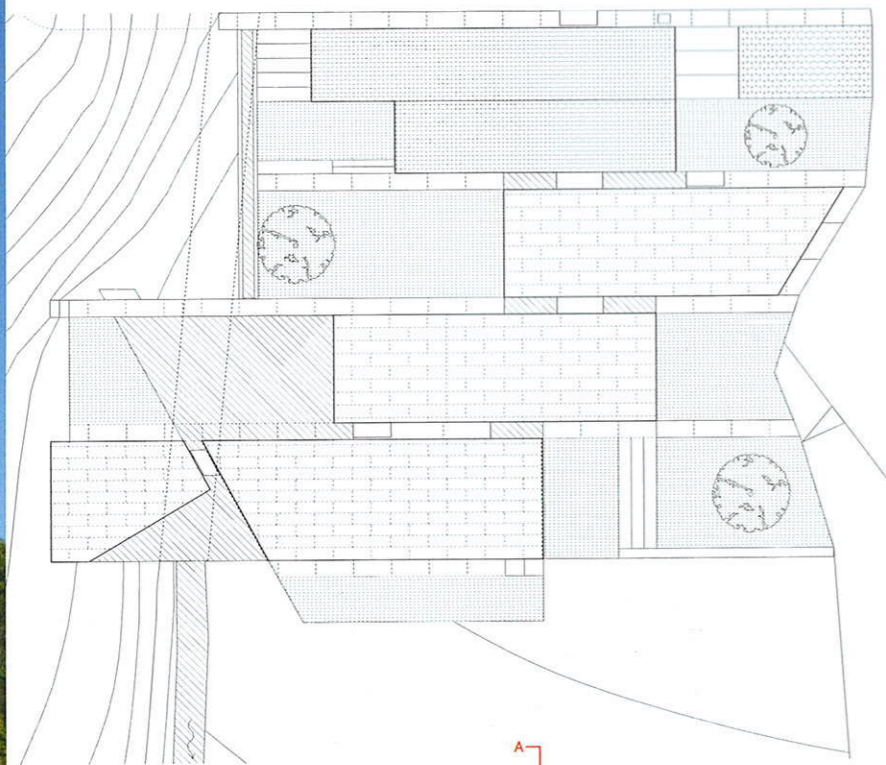
Tuned to the specificities of place, Spanish Cove is approached from above, through a low, unassuming timber gate over which is glimpsed a view of the distant Fastnet Rock. The original building remains, clamped between two sheer, gorse-laden, polished stone ridges. It nestles into a luminous green valley at the bottom of a winding gravel drive beside a gently burbling stream.

McLaughlin has, however, reinvented the cottage and stripped the form back to its constituent parts, blinding white walls and >>

NICK GUTTRIDGE

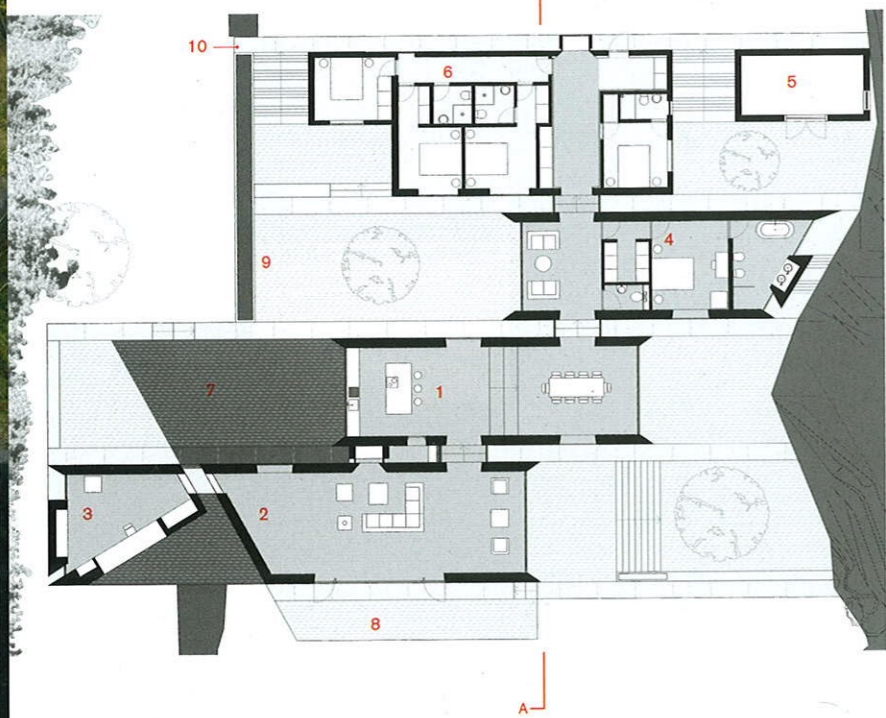


Roof plan



Legend

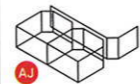
1. Kitchen/dining
2. Living
3. Study
4. Master bedroom
5. Utility
6. Existing cottage
7. Pool
8. East terrace
9. South courtyard
10. Water from hillside stream



Ground floor plan



Previous spread
Part of Spanish Cove is an existing cottage, stripped back and reinvented as a blinding white Modernist form



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blue-grey slate. It has become more essential, more theatrical. The simple disconnection of the traditional chimney breast from the body reinforces the drama, as does the punctured window at its base, through which the flickering welcome of a stately hall fire can be glimpsed. The architecture surprises and challenges our perceptions of the familiar.

Screened by the cottage, facing the ocean, the new house emerges from a cascading limestone terrace. It is a volley of four self-similar monopitch



NICK KANE



forms, separated by a tartan grid of lightwells and level changes that arrest movement between them and provide poetic moments, which instantly draw your view left and right out from the interior to frame the landscape.

Stepping diagonally across the terrace from north to south, the blocks either nuzzle up close against the valley wall or sit back to create generous sheltered courtyards, as they move gently down the sloping site towards the water's edge. Each form is surgically sliced to reveal a soaring,

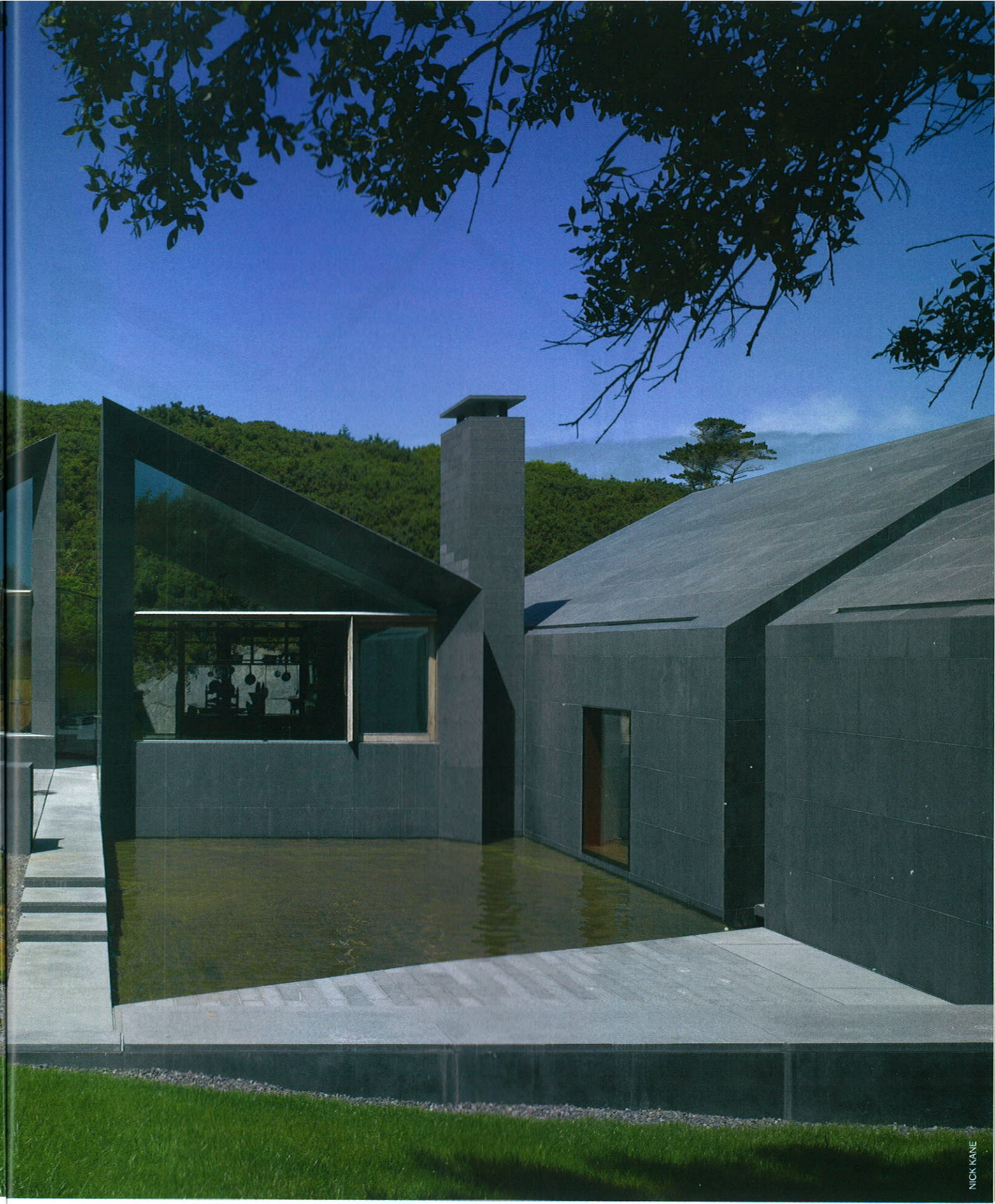
Above Looking east with the Atlantic beyond
Below, from left Living room with east terrace; South courtyard; Central corridor towards dining room; Blue Irish limestone envelope



light-filled volume wrapped in a thick, smooth ashlar coat of blue Irish limestone that melts into the scenery. At the entrance, the bright exterior gives way to golden brown Iroko wall panels, a comforting contrast that speaks of home and draws you in towards the flickering fire that forms one end of the main east-west axis. The other is anchored with a framed view of the ocean, a dynamic live picture, which at one moment is like a gentle, calm Hiroshi Sugimoto *Seascape* and at the next a constantly shattering,



incoherent Turner. This subtle duality intensifies and celebrates the perception of security and adventure. It renders the space with a magnetic pull that draws and piques curiosity. Inside, the space flows downwards from block to block and from entrance to landscape as a unified whole, firmly organised yet without boundaries. The architecture seems to take its cue from some of Frank Lloyd Wright's bolder split-level projects, which have freedom of movement while gracefully integrating with their surroundings. >>



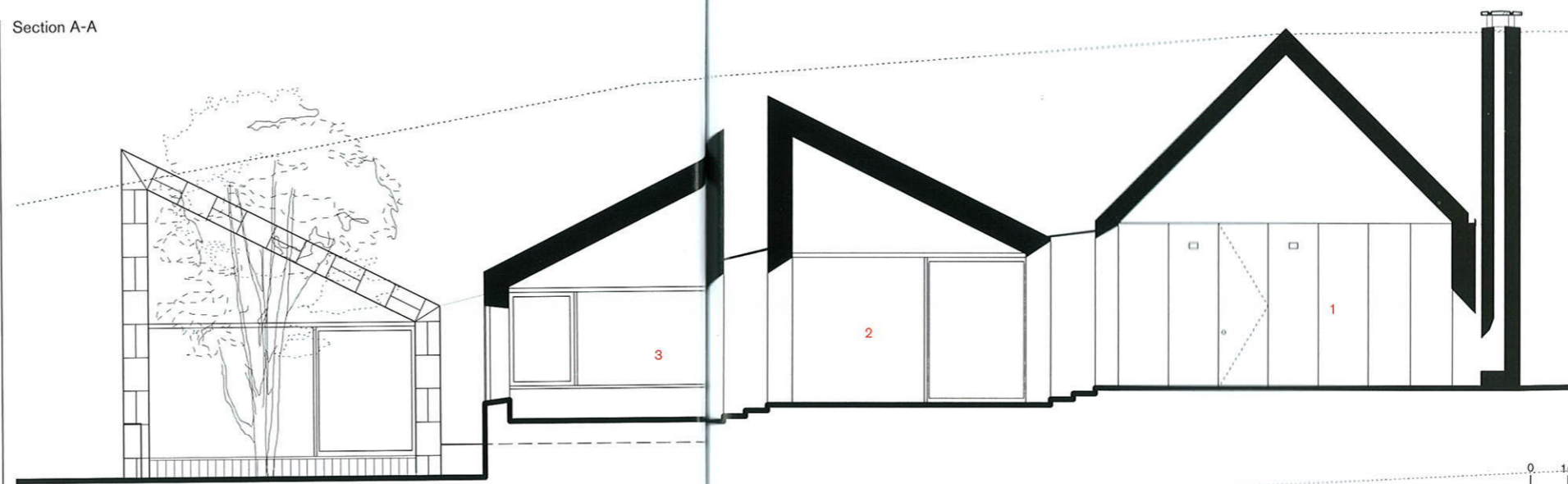
Sandwiched between the building and the valley edge are five sheltered courtyards. To the south, these paved parterres provide a place to sit and entertain. They capture the sun and shelter against the prevailing westerly breeze. The upper level, populated with a solitary sculptural strawberry tree, is edged with an elbow-high stone trough through which the running stream is channelled before it cascades into a shallow reflecting pool on the next level down. While to the north, the courtyards fulfil a more scenic function and are scattered with small limestone chips.

The timber windows overlooking the courtyards' north and south are set back into the facade. They embrace the external space and blur the threshold between garden and interior, while also celebrating the heavy, sober stone cloak.

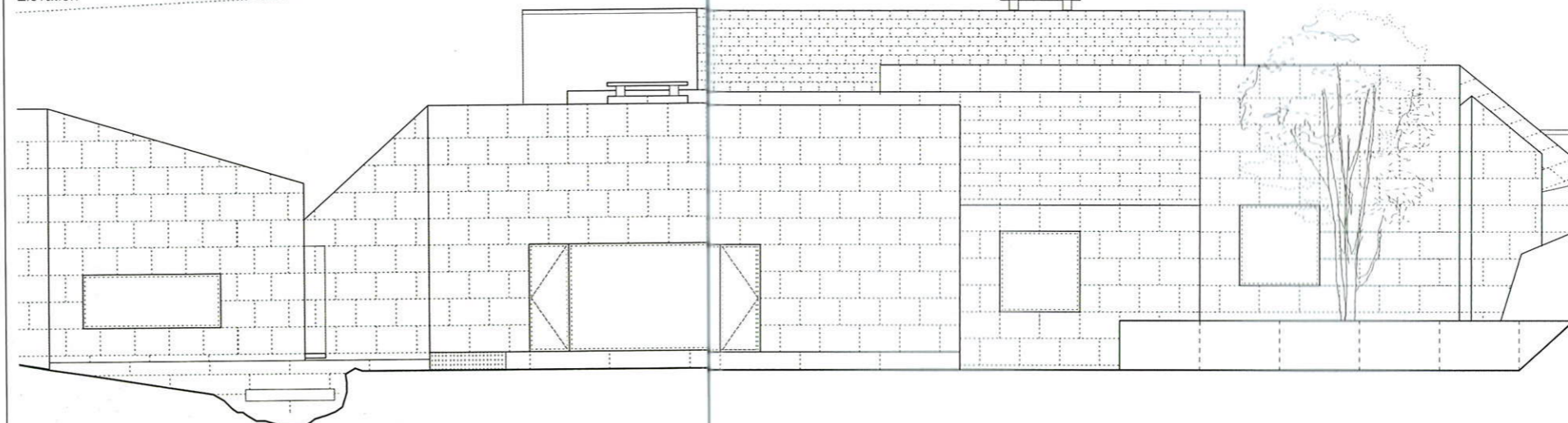
At the edge of the terrace, the last block is splintered into two trapezoidal forms; living room in one, study in the other. They are separated by the line of the fast-flowing stream and kinked at an angle to visually obscure the internal courtyard. Each has a big picture window and is lined entirely in Iroko panelling that radiates humanity, domesticity and fraternity. It endows the space with an unusual sense of serenity and belonging from which to view the universe. It is a feeling that is at its most intense when shimmering light from the reflecting pool shines through the west facing window to

Legend
1. Existing cottage
2. Seating
3. Kitchen/dining

Section A-A



Elevation



Previous page
Looking north towards the coastal limestone terrace
This page, from left Views on to the stream outside; Looking south into the living room; Spanish Cove has a cave-like feel with stunning coastal views

dance overhead, while gazing out across the ocean to Fastnet and beyond.

Elsewhere, the experience is less expansive, more intense and personal. The master bathroom, for example, is pushed close to the cliff edge, creating an intimate cave-like space that focuses attention on the small details; plants and cracks in the rock face take on a sense of hyper-reality.

The use of major building materials is restricted to just three; blue Irish limestone, which can be highly polished to draw out natural silvery

white fossilised flecks, honed ashlar, chipped gravel or flamed paving; Iroko, which can be wall panels, window frames or flooring; and white paint, which McLaughlin sees as ground. This narrow palette provides the building with a powerful expression that undoubtedly would have been weakened if any other material had been added to the composition.

McLaughlin is a keen observer, as all the best architects are. He takes care to notice things that matter. It is a skill that echoes the work of the late

Liam McCormick and provides the humility required to surgically stitch architecture into the site, to maximise opportunities and celebrate the specific.

Gaston Bachelard, author of *Poetics of Space*, described two of the chief benefits of a house as being a shelter against the storm and a place to dream in peace. The magic of the everyday, making the familiar strange and the strange familiar, defines this poetic, dreamy home. ■

Stephen Best is architecture critic of The Sunday Times in Ireland

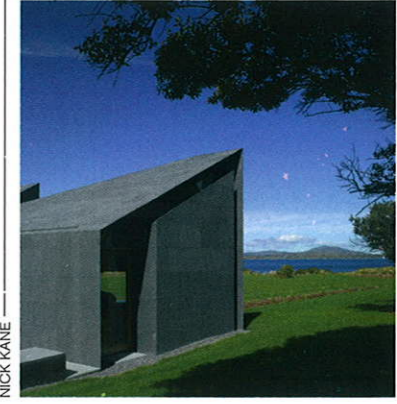
Project data	
START ON SITE	June 2007
COMPLETION	First phase completed November 2007, second phase completed July 2009
NET INTERNAL FLOOR AREA	300m ²
FORM OF CONTRACT	RIA
TOTAL COST	Undisclosed
COST PER SQUARE METRE	Undisclosed
ARCHITECT	Niall McLaughlin Architects
CLIENT	Private
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER	Price & Myers
M&E CONSULTANT	EDC Engineering Design Consultants
QUANTITY SURVEYOR	AKC Chartered Surveyors
STONE CONSULTANT	Harrison Goldman
TIMBER CONSULTANT	TRADA
LIGHTING CONSULTANT	Gary Campbell
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT	Desmond Fitzgerald Architects
MAIN CONTRACTOR	CHOM Construction
CAD SOFTWARE USED	Vectorworks
ESTIMATED ANNUAL CO ₂ EMISSIONS	34.7kg/m ²



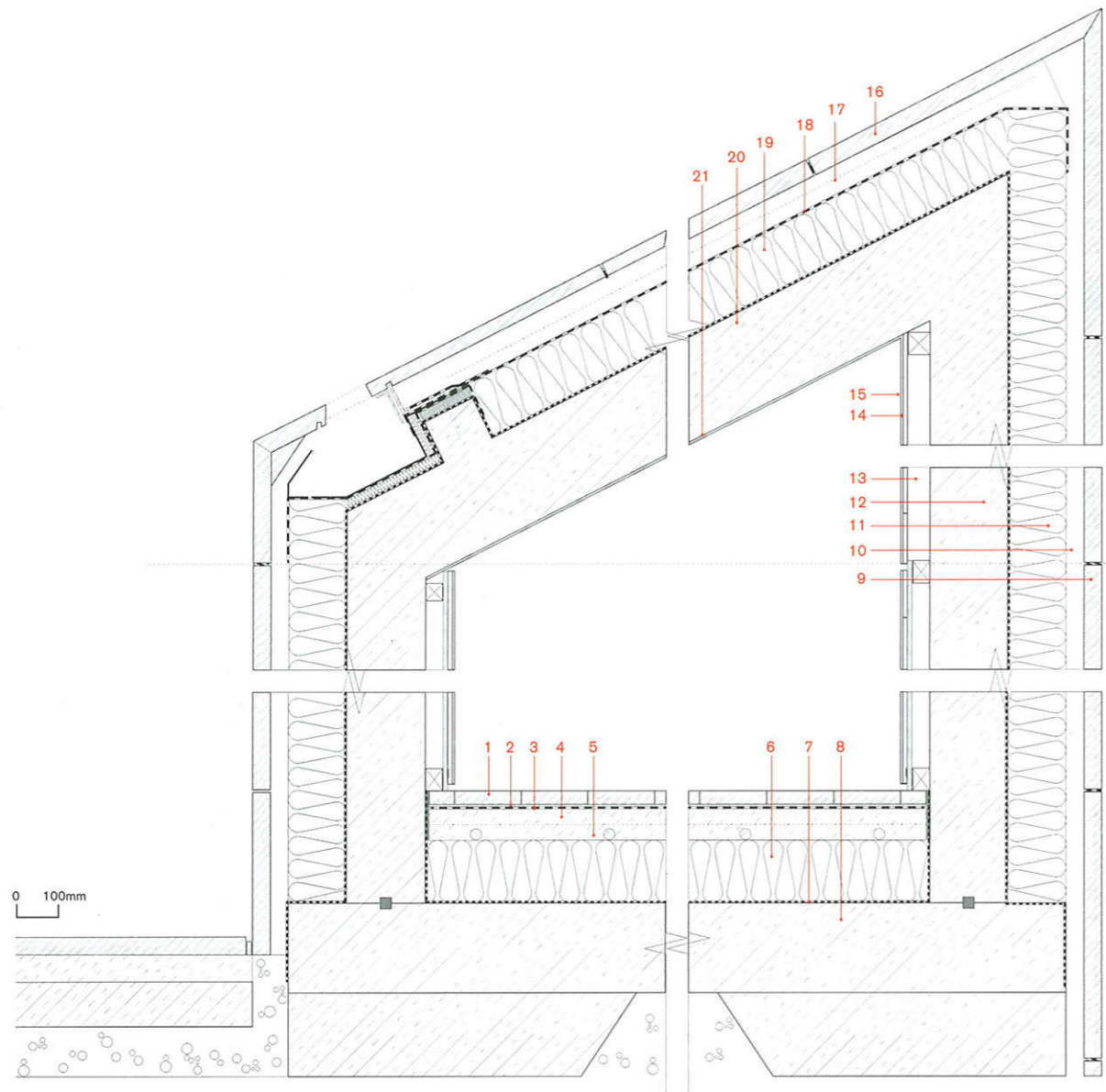
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Legend

1. 30mm stone flooring
2. 5mm adhesive
3. 3mm DITRA mat on 2mm adhesive
4. 70mm reinforced screed
5. Underfloor heating
6. 140mm insulation
7. DPM
8. 200mm RC slab
9. 40mm Creggstone honed and flamed Irish blue limestone, with varying fossil content
10. 40mm void
11. 130mm insulation
12. 175mm RC wall
13. 50mm void
14. 11mm OSB
15. 12.5mm gypsum board
16. 30mm Creggstone honed and flamed Irish blue limestone, with varying fossil content
17. 75mm reinforced screed
18. Waterproofing membrane
19. 130mm insulation
20. 210mm RC slab
21. 3mm Sto synthetic render with painted cladding board

NICK GUTTRIDGE

House at Spanish Cove, Goleen, County Cork

Niall McLaughlin Architects

External envelope

The detail shows a typical cross-section through one of the four stone buildings.

A concrete slab spans between pad foundations poured down to bedrock. Due to the open gables and the absence of walls to cross-brace, steel reinforcement was used to brace

the frame at the wall's base, ridge and eaves.

Rigid insulation is mechanically fixed to the frame and the cavity is drained to a layer of loose hardcore at the edge of the slab.

The visual principles of the project dictate that the honed limestone cladding does not reveal the true depth of the material. Openings in walls, gables, eaves and ridges are mitred to conceal this, giving the appearance of being constructed from monolithic blocks.

The slabs to the roof are bed down upon a reinforced screed, prevented

from slipping by a continuous angle fixed to brackets at the base. The stainless steel gutter and brackets are then lapped over to create a waterproof membrane below the stone, should the silicone joints fail.

Internal walls are plaster boarded or timber panelled and the underside of the concrete soffit is coated with a 3mm synthetic render, allowing the thermal mass of the concrete to remain exposed in order to regulate room temperatures.

*Niall McLaughlin, director,
Niall McLaughlin Architects*

