

MARK MERER  
**LANDHOUSE**

For Lucy Glendinning

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Welham Studios, Charlton Mackrell, Somerset TA11 7AJ  
Telephone 01458 223 341

Mark Merer 07557 772 330  
www.markmerer.com  
markmerer@landhouse.co.uk

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Photographs by Louis Porter except p.16 Lindley Ashline, pp.36-7 Dana Anderson, p.50 Robert Carter  
Studio photography by Mark Merer  
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## Introduction

Time, space and existence have shaped our beliefs and perception of the physical world. Primates and then early man built platforms to sleep on but within the last century science has taken us to previously unimagined realms. My perception of space and the physical world evolved during an arts/science project on quantum theory and the work of theoretical physicist David Bohm. This gave me a sense of the interconnectedness of the physical world.

In trying to understand artistic drive I asked anthropologist Jane Goodall if, during her studies of chimpanzees, she had ever noticed unprompted signs of 'artist engagement'; she replied yes, but only in captivity. These thoughts are the backbone of my work at Welham Studios: 'sense of place' is a primary concern.

I am first and foremost a land artist. I was brought up in an architectural hands-on milieu in the Far East where my father was working as an architect on large building projects and infrastructure. I saw how ideas become reality at first hand, and the complexity of the process of transformation. What primarily obsesses me is how we exist on the earth and, specifically, how we shape it. I am looking for a balanced union between the two, a balance between spirit and matter.

Time and the elements shape our landscape. The shapes of my structures are informed by my observations of this interaction and how best to ground them. I make experiments recreating the effects of, for example, rain or thawing ice. By filming these and using time-lapse photography I create a vocabulary of forms.

Time also shapes our thinking about a specific place; we consider its layers of history, its psychology and its social structures, and must respond to these accordingly.

Two earlier projects, together with this studio work, demonstrate the progression of my thoughts culminating in the Cubis project at Bruton.

Welham Studios resulted from work developing an environmentally sensitive scheme of housing that both respected the tribal traditions of the Swinomish tribal community and responded to the landscape of Fidalgo Island in Washington State. We devised module units based on forms of triangulation; these could be adapted to create houses of differing sizes or community facilities. The studio started the company Landhouse to promulgate this philosophy.

Ferrum House represents work in an urban environment, and is the prototype for the flexible sustainable modular systems used at Cubis.

Cubis in Bruton arose from the community's decision that while new housing was needed, they wanted housing that would respond to the subtle variety of an English medieval town, rather than generic repetitions. The project started with extensive research, meticulously recording the fabric and ecology of the place, so that the finished development of 68 houses would sit lightly on the townscape, and yet have its own identity.

Art should be integral to the existence of a project and part of its process, not something superimposed at a later date. In striving to create the best possible co-existence of place and object, rather than being merely driven by economics and politics, we reach a greater connectivity and understanding of the world around us.

*Mark Merer*



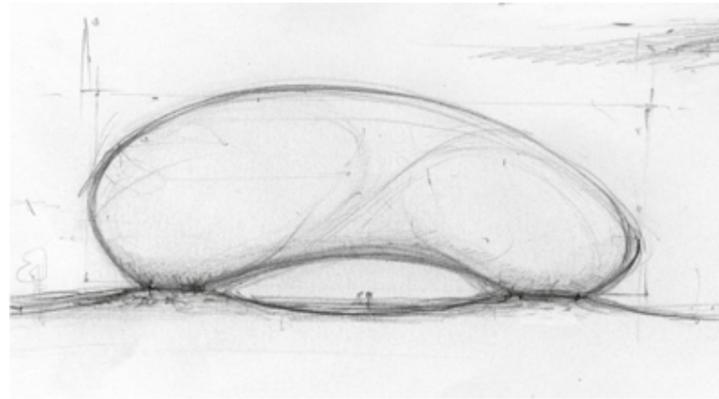
Great builders draw no line between sculpture and architecture. With them sculpture is not 'commissioned' as an afterthought or budgetary dole. Neither is so-called landscaping. The three are inseparable.

Bernard Rudofsky, *Architects without Architecture*, 1964  
Museum of Modern Art, New York

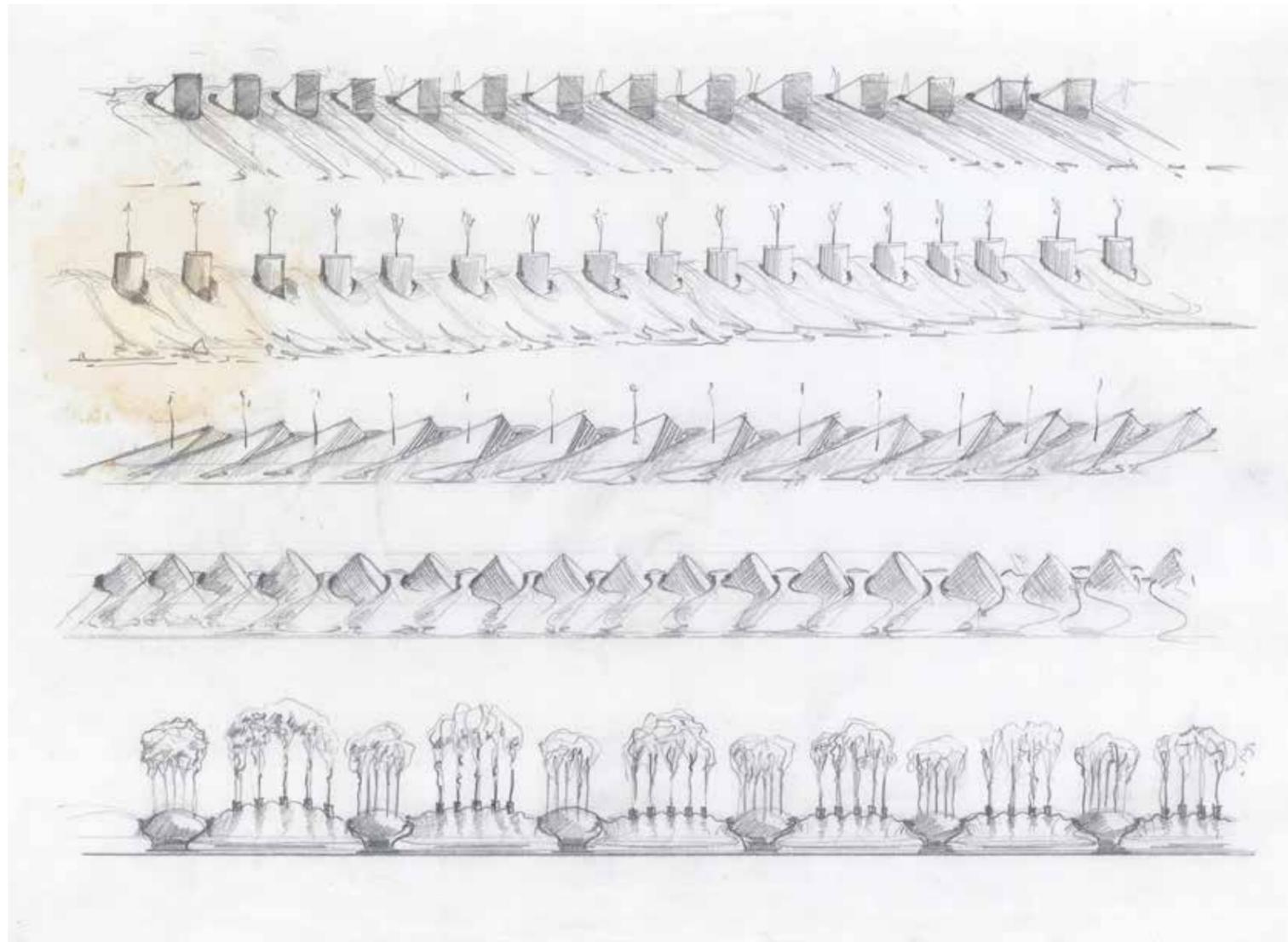
This quotation accompanied the exhibition *Architects without Architecture*, which illustrated ancient prehistoric stone monuments, rock and troglodyte dwellings, nomadic tents and forms such as *trulli*, the conical stone houses in Apulia. Much of my studio work is about making forms in the same spirit as these structures.

I am looking at the influence of weather: how shapes evolve through, for example, the processes of melting, drifting, eroding. Geological strata show physical layers that represent interconnecting past events.

Modular repetition of units is a fundamental aspect to building. It is interesting to explore the range of possible alternative structures and see how the elements would play on each form. Out of this comes the work with 'tensegrity'.



Concept drawings for monumental forms in the landscape, 2002



Earthworks for Sustrans and the Groundwork Trust, Workington, Cumbria, 1994



Everything is sculpture . . . any material, any idea without hindrance, born into space, I consider sculpture.

Isamu Noguchi



*Tensegrity Tower*, selected entry for construction tower competition, NEC Birmingham, 1998

Model for holiday lodges in Annaishola, Nilgiri District, Tamil Nadu, Southern India, 2002





Welham Studio

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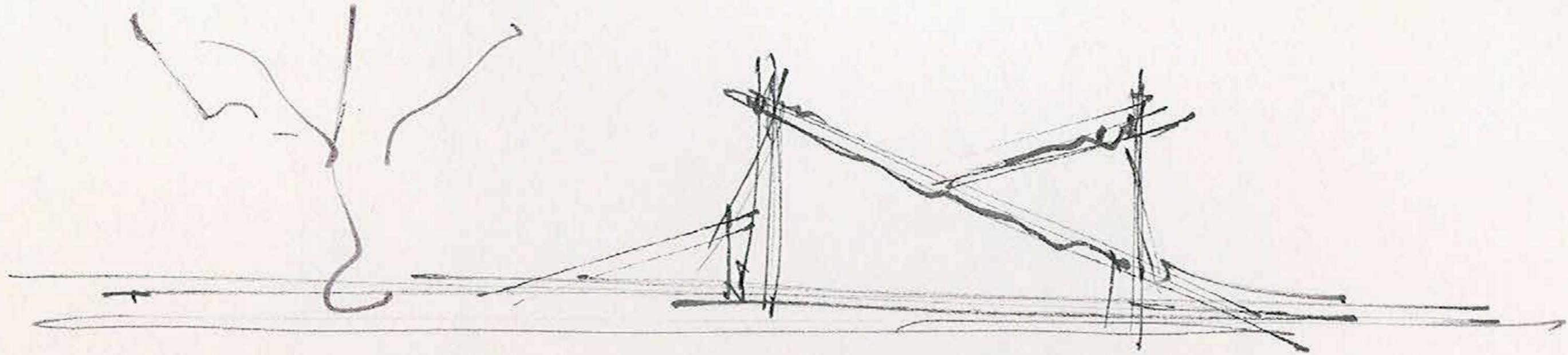
Ferrum House

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Cubis Bruton

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# Welham Studio

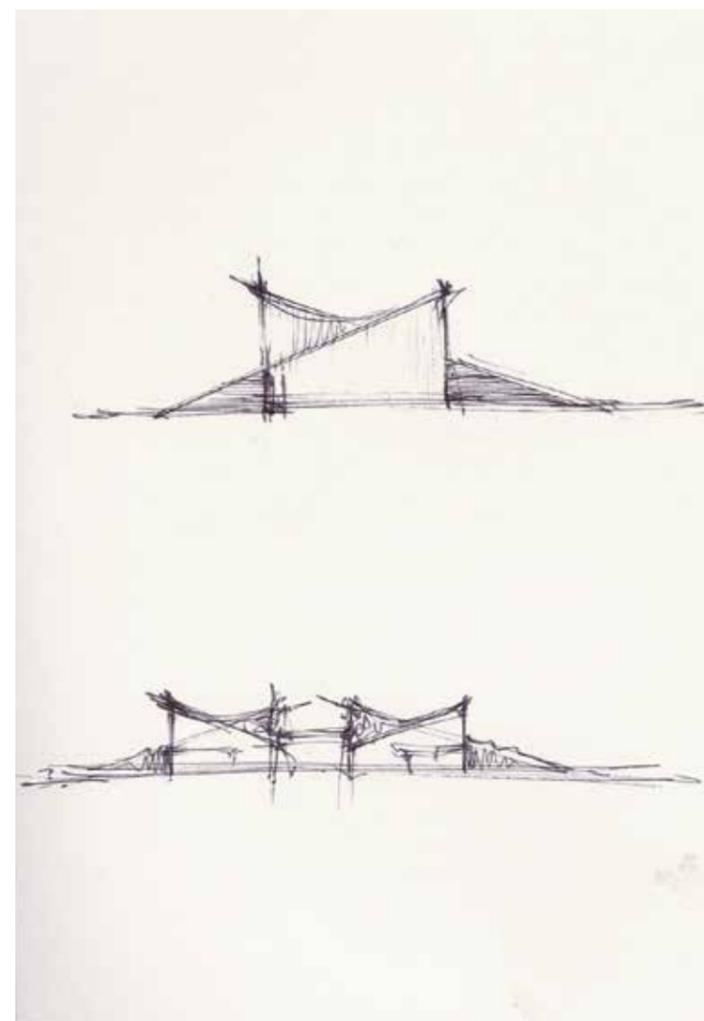




View from Mount Erie, Fidalgo Island, the reserve of the Swinomish tribal community in Washington State



Concept model for Swinomish housing, 2006  
Below Sketch for Somerset, 2007



## Welham Studio

Somerton, Somerset  
2009

The roots and form of Welham Studio lie in earlier work. In 2006 we visited Fidalgo Island in Washington State, the reserve of the Swinomish tribal community. We were introduced to Ray Williams, a Swinomish elder, and the architect Art Petersen, of Cedar Tree Architects in Seattle, who had just collaborated in building a traditional longhouse. Our meeting resulted in the decision to develop an environmentally sensitive scheme of new housing that would respect the tribal traditions, respond to the island's landscape and provide a skill set and opportunities for the younger generation to build to their own specification.

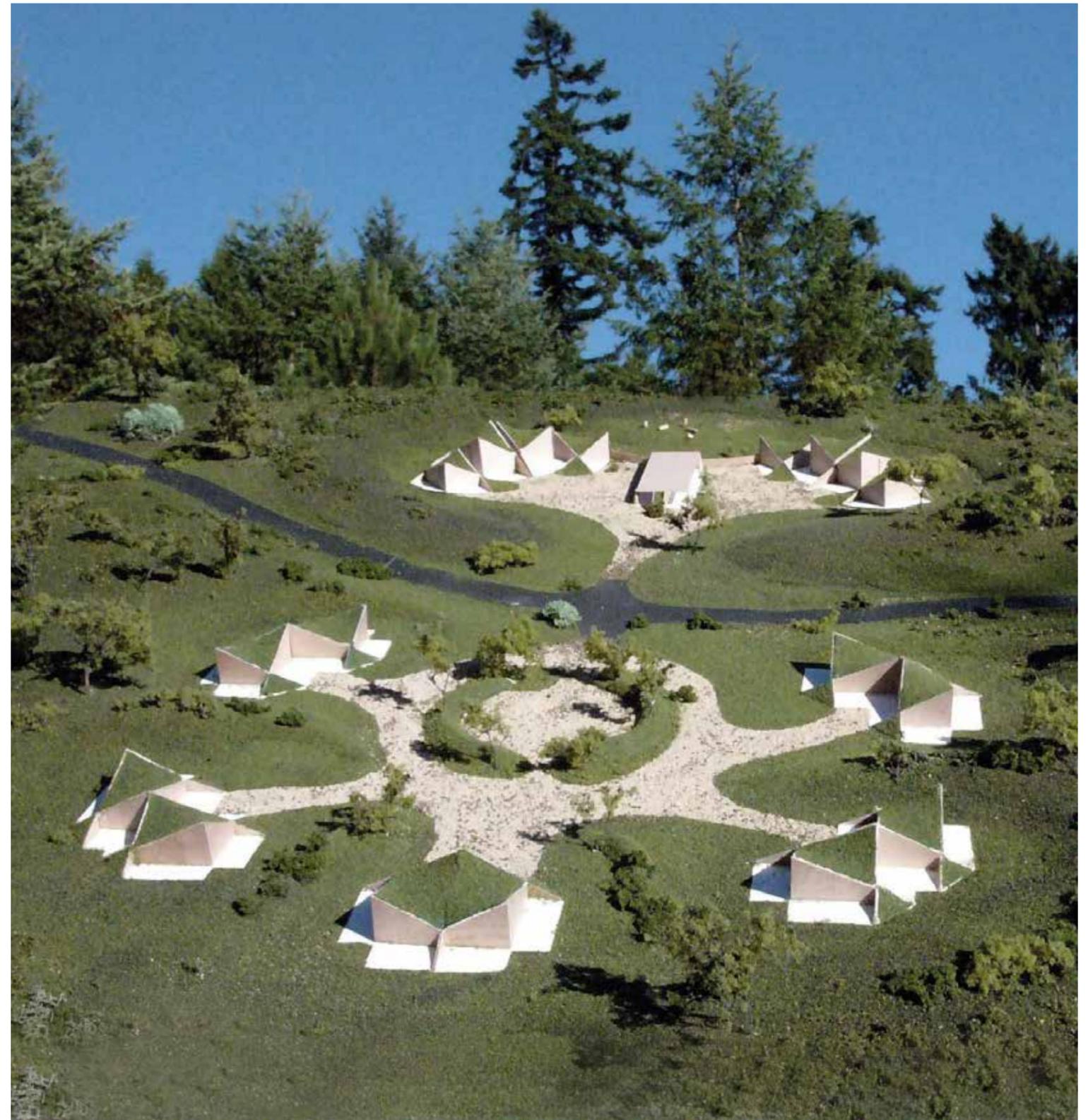
Historically and culturally the Swinomish have no tradition of private space and individual boundaries, but lived communally with a feeling for the ancient spirit paths. We devised module units, based on forms of triangulation, which could be adapted to create varying sizes of house – for elders, students, single families, multi-families, vacation and community facilities. The turf roofs were to unify the buildings with the land.

Welham Studio was built to create a flexible collaborative studio space for Landhouse plus living quarters. We wanted to make full use of the Swinomish work, both as a building method and in conceiving a house as part of the landscape. It is the largest of the three sizes developed. The site is rural, lying on the margin of a flood plain at the edge of the Somerset Levels. The river Cary runs to the south; behind an escarpment rises, a site of Special Scientific Interest. Welham Studio sits within the landscape and appears part of it. The two triangular wings ground the building in a way that is reminiscent of the way in which sand or snow drift up against a vertical. Studio work expands on the way in which shapes naturally evolve.

The mainframe of the building is a modular system constructed in structurally insulated panels (SIPs), manufactured in Seattle by the company involved in the Swinomish project. It is clad in thermoform three-strand ply panels. At the base of the roof is single-ply membrane with an inbuilt root barrier; above that is an irrigation system of 100 mm substrate overlaid with turf.



Models for Swinomish tribal community housing, 2006

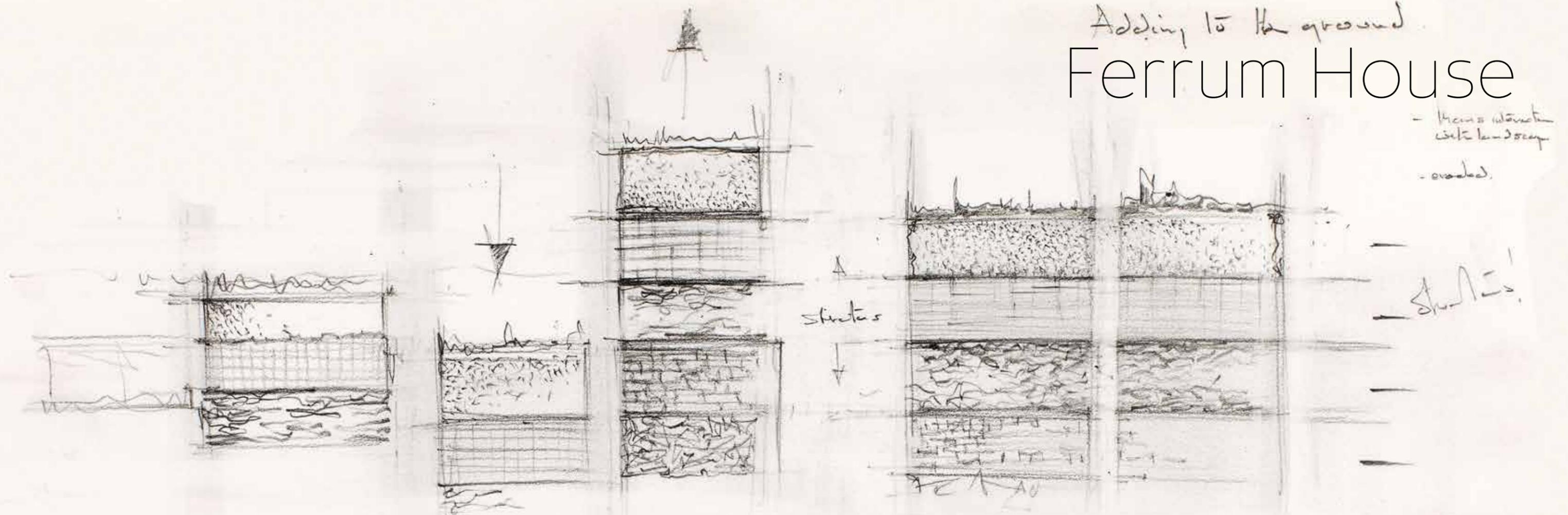








# Adding to the ground. Ferrum House



Exposing to ground.  
Using Structas  
covering layers of Structas with housing.



- ② two layers.
- through out.
- ① with outer traps.



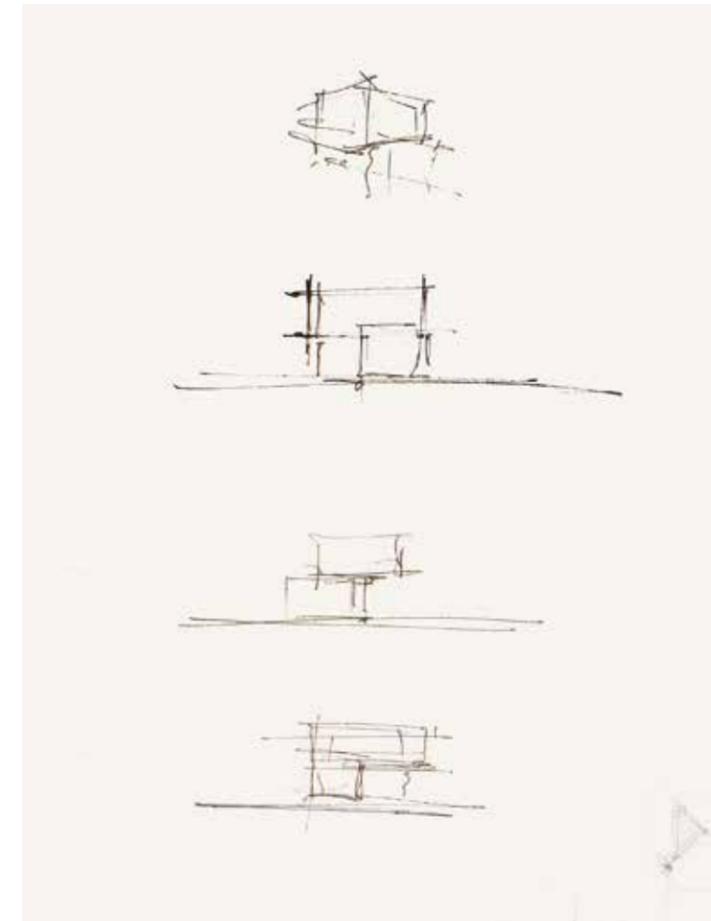
**Ferrum House**  
Bruton, Somerset  
2013

Clients Andrew Pennock & Dana Anderson

This was a private commission for a house in an urban environment. It is in some respects a prototype for Cubis Bruton in that it explored the idea of flexible modular systems that would fit into irregular infill sites.

The house stands in the footprint of a former garage that used to serve Bruton with petrol and repair services. Alongside is an old bacon factory that has been converted into flats. Low-energy and highly insulated, the house won a Somerset Building Award in 2014 with the following citation: 'It is a convincingly modern house that offers no traditional details or signals to declare itself in the context of old Bruton, but sits happily between a series of beautiful old buildings and more recent structures by virtue of its form and scale. As such it has managed to add to the quality and interest of the town.'

Inspired by studies of geological strata, the house, constructed of structurally insulated panels (SIPs), was designed as a series of horizontals. The ground floor extends across the irregular boundary from east to west and is timber-clad. The timber was charred black and made weatherproof with the 18th-century Japanese technique of *shou-sugi-ban*. The first and second floors contain the main living space – elevated to make the best use of light and views – presented as a cube perched on the timber base. These two 'strata' are clad in Corten steel which develops a rust finish. Both the wood and the steel therefore have a natural finish and texture caused by the elements, fire and water, processes allied to my studio work. Corten steel was also chosen to echo the industrial heritage of the site while sitting comfortably with the stone of the old factory wall on the eastern boundary of the site.

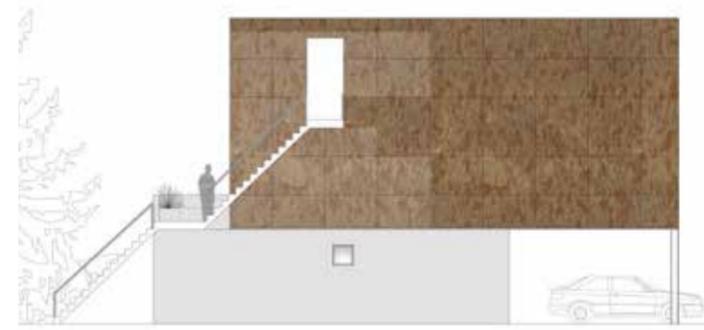




North elevation



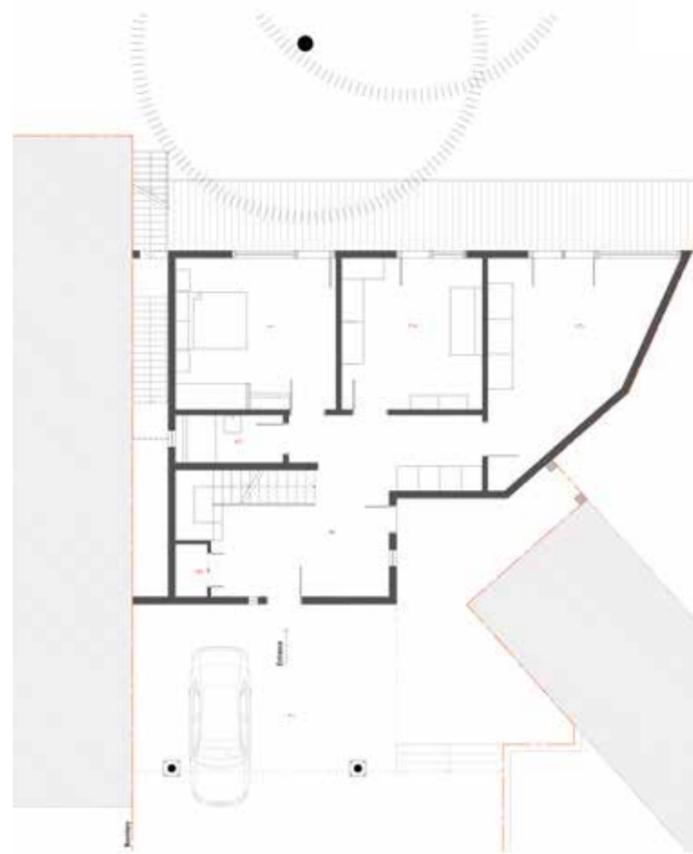
South elevation



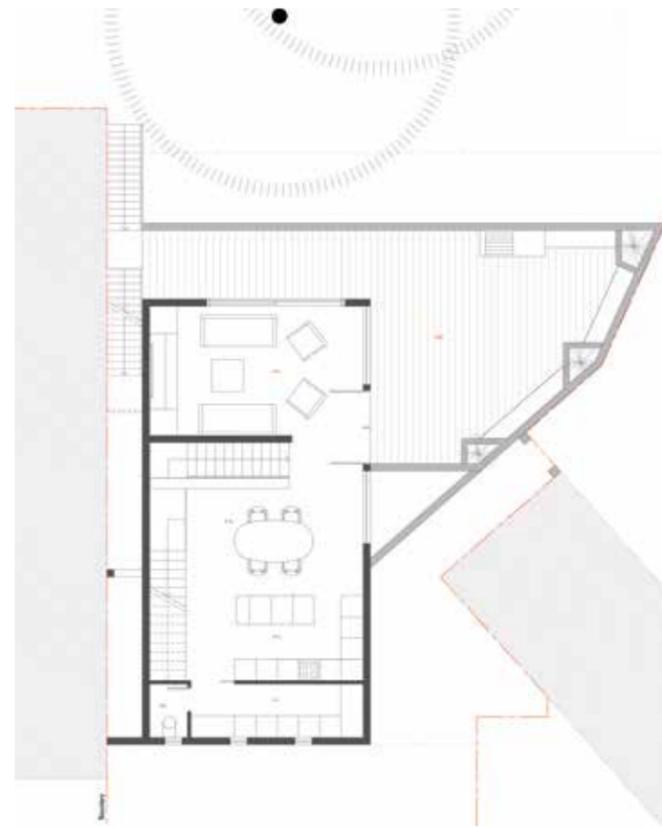
East elevation



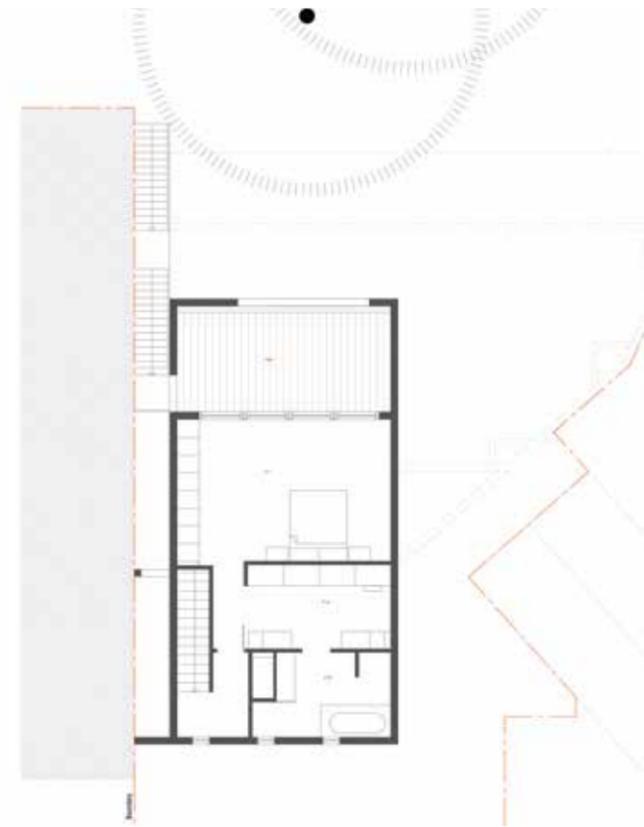
West elevation



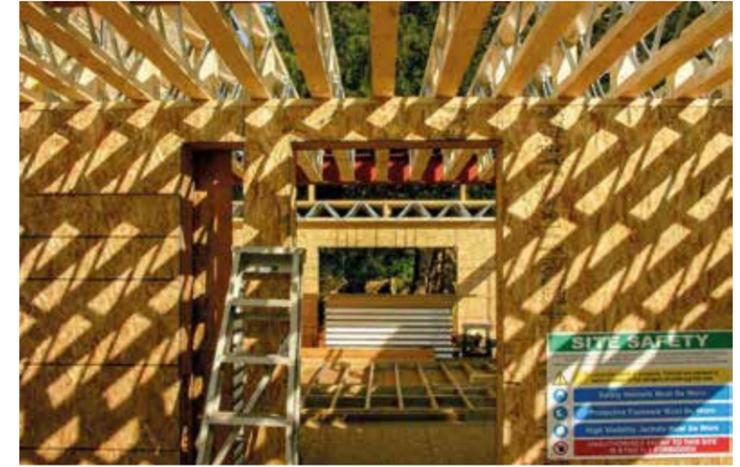
Ground floor

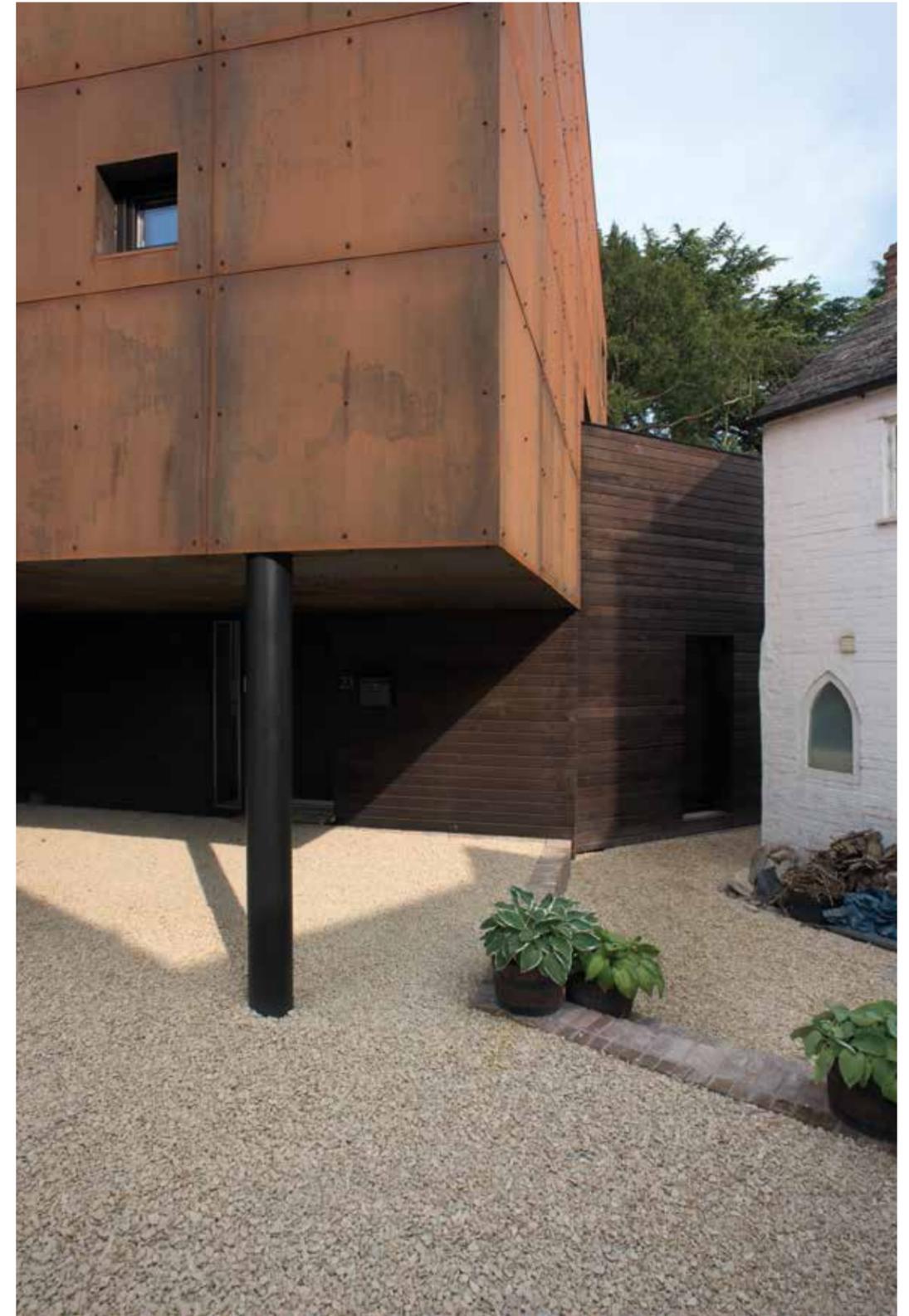


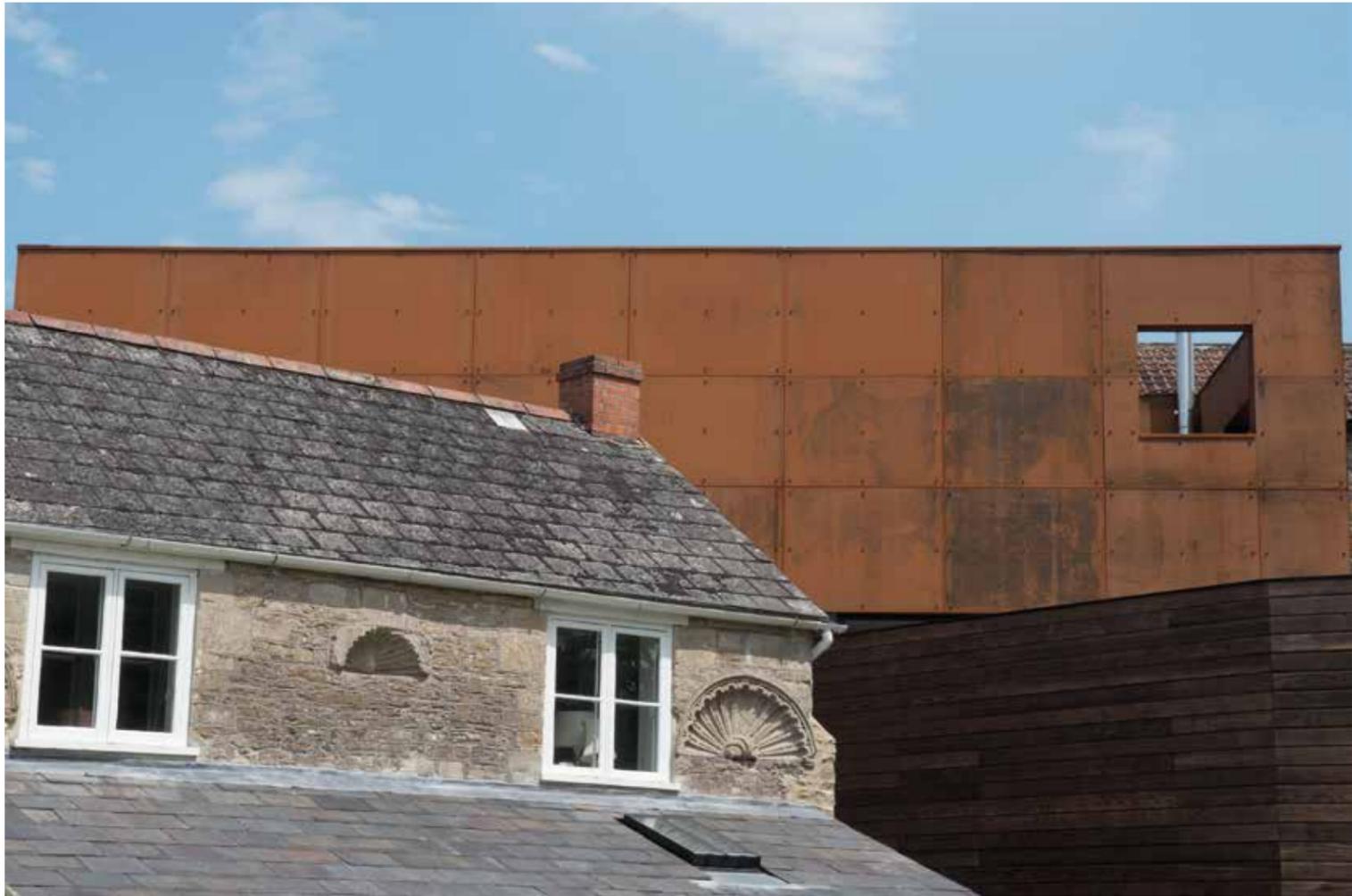
First floor

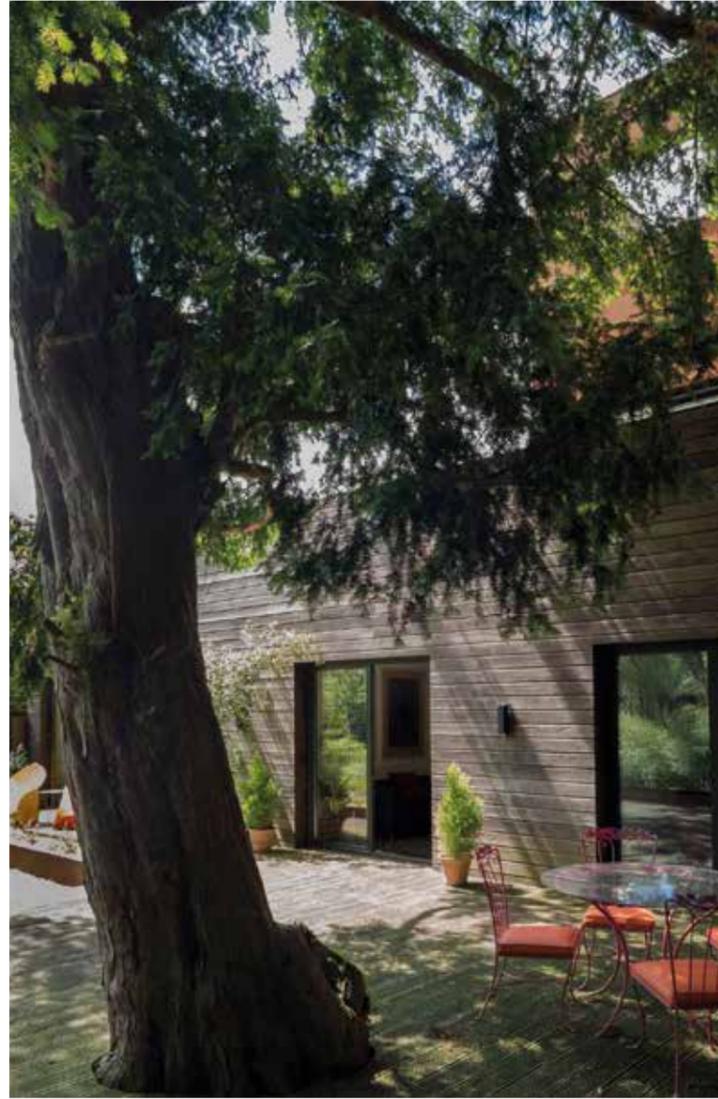


Second floor

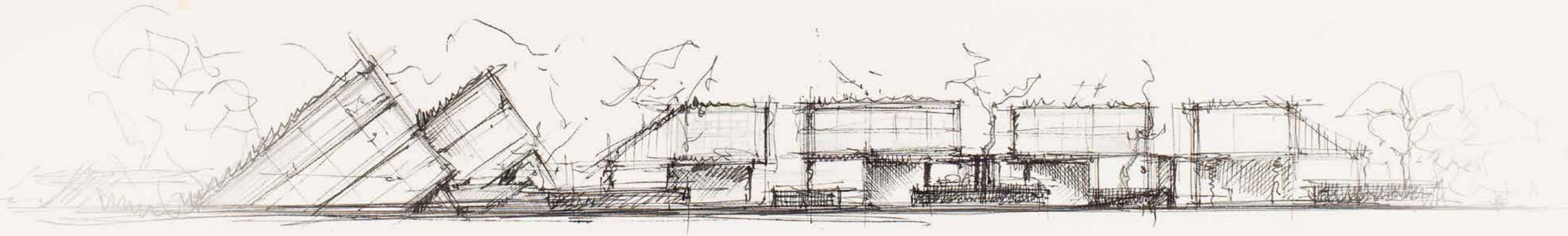








# Cubis Bruton





**Cubis Bruton**

Somerset  
2018

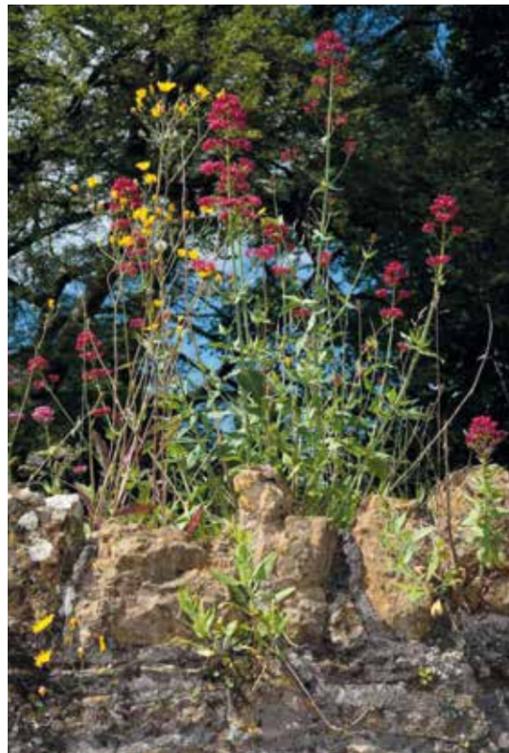
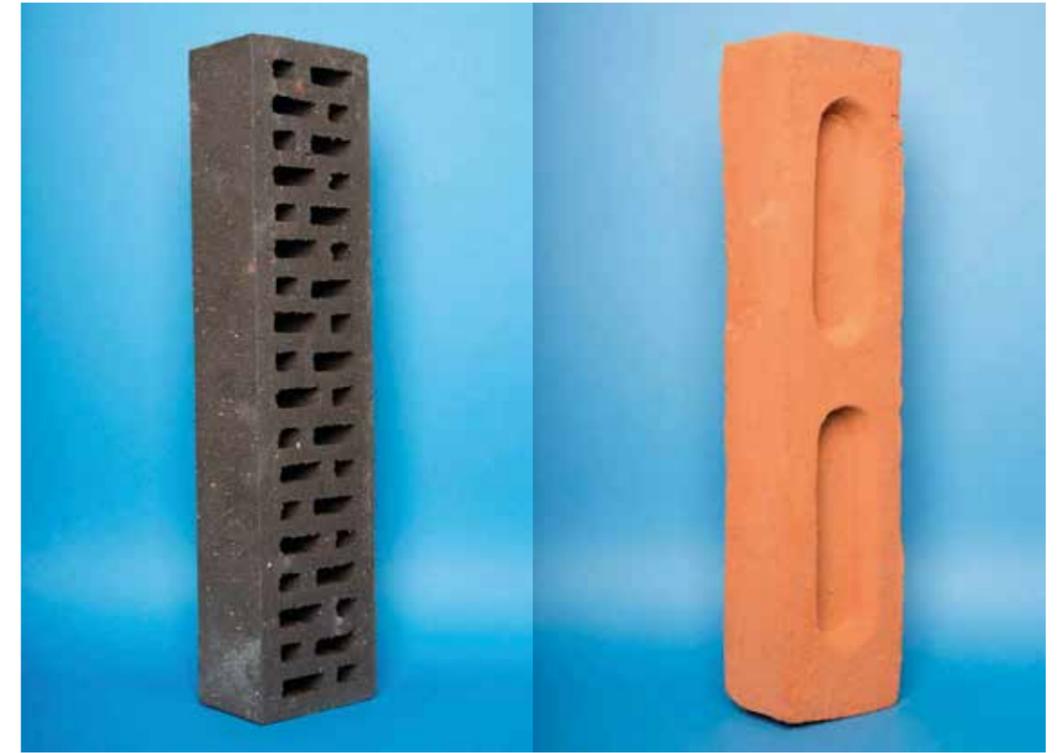
Cubis Bruton is an unusual response to the national need for new housing in that the impetus for this development came from the community itself. Aware that Somerset County Council was required to build 100 houses in the area, the Bruton Trust, whose aim is to encourage a high standard of architecture as well as maintaining or improving local features of historic interest, approached me for a design. The criteria for the plan were that it should be creative; that it should be specifically designed for the site; and that it should be based on modular forms to be manufactured off-site and therefore quick to build. The houses were to be green and sustainable with low running costs. It was also important that the 68 new homes should be a mixture, suitable for housing both families and old people.

The thought processes for the development began with the creation of the network diagram (right). Using that as a key the fabric, ecology, geology, history and landform were meticulously recorded. *Bruton Atlas*, compiled by photographer Louis Porter, provided a visual vocabulary of the town covering all its external aspects from walls to door-knockers, signs to roofs.

It was important that the development should not be an extension of the town, but part of the organic whole. It was viewed initially not just as a housing development but also as an artistic multi-disciplinary endeavour that would involve artists, photographers, historians and social scientists documenting the site in all its aspects – physical and social.

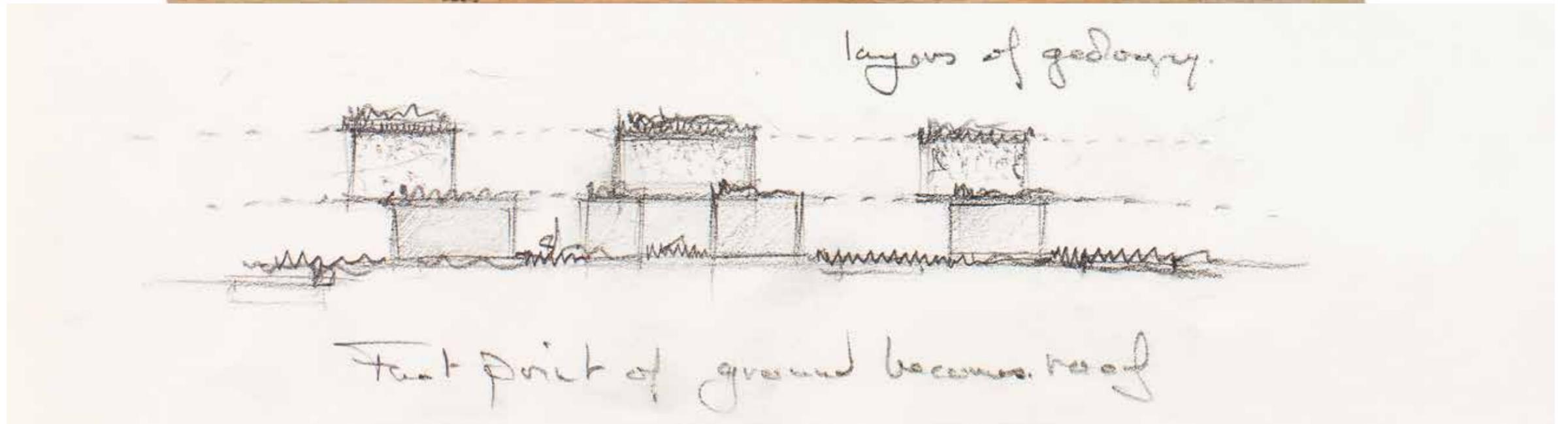
This initial phase involved establishing a series of images, materials and ideas that form points of connection across the town; these would inform aspects of the design. Similarly, a study of the site resulted in a colour palette that would harmonise and unify the development. The site lies on the northern edge of Bruton within a short walking distance of the town and so will become a link to the surrounding countryside through common green spaces and footpaths: ecological corridors provide for wildlife. The houses sit lightly on the townscape and because the land slopes to the south the varied roofscape will appear as a landscape element within the area. Green and gravel roofs blend the roofscape into the landform like the geological outcrops that inspired them.

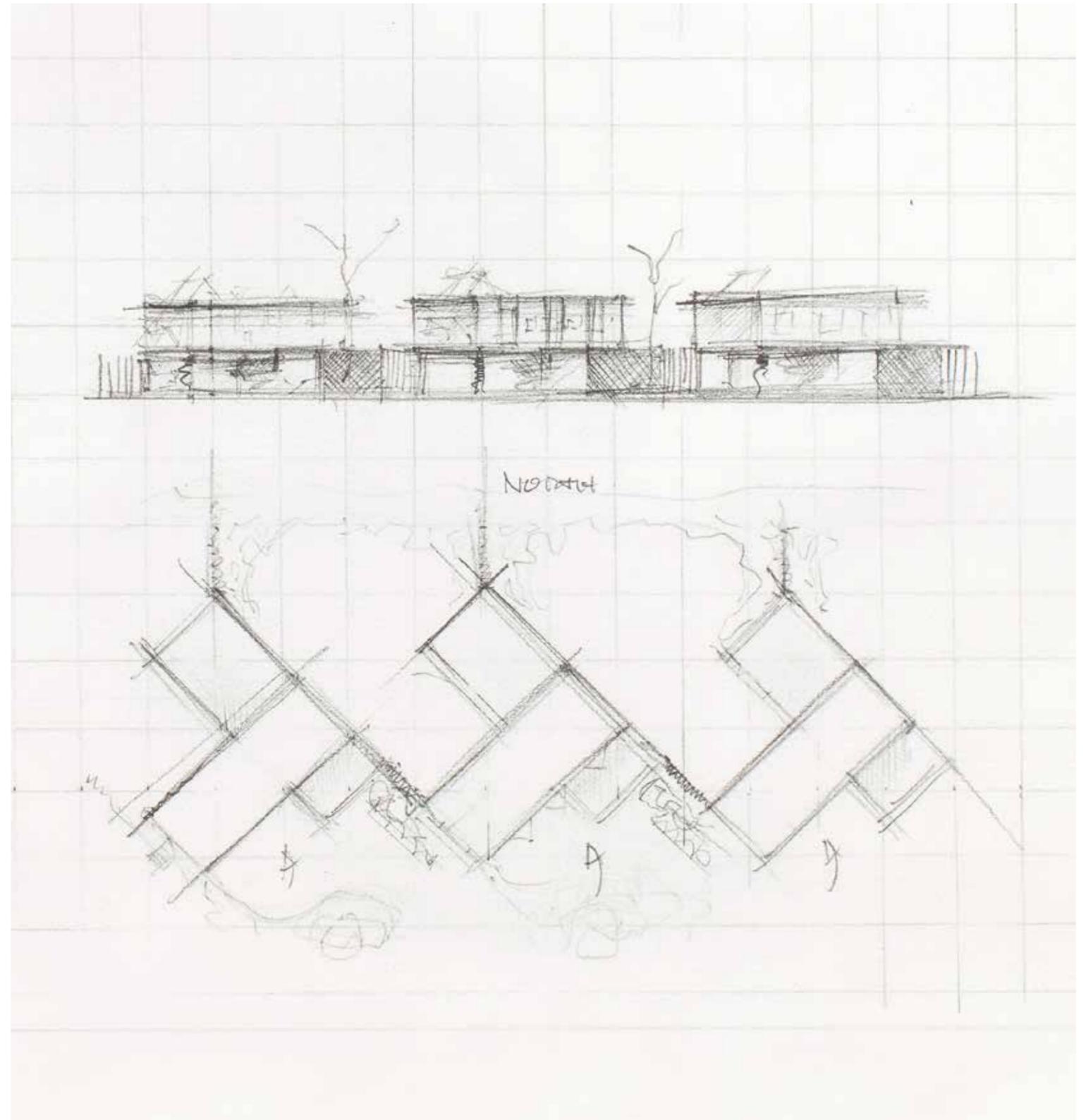
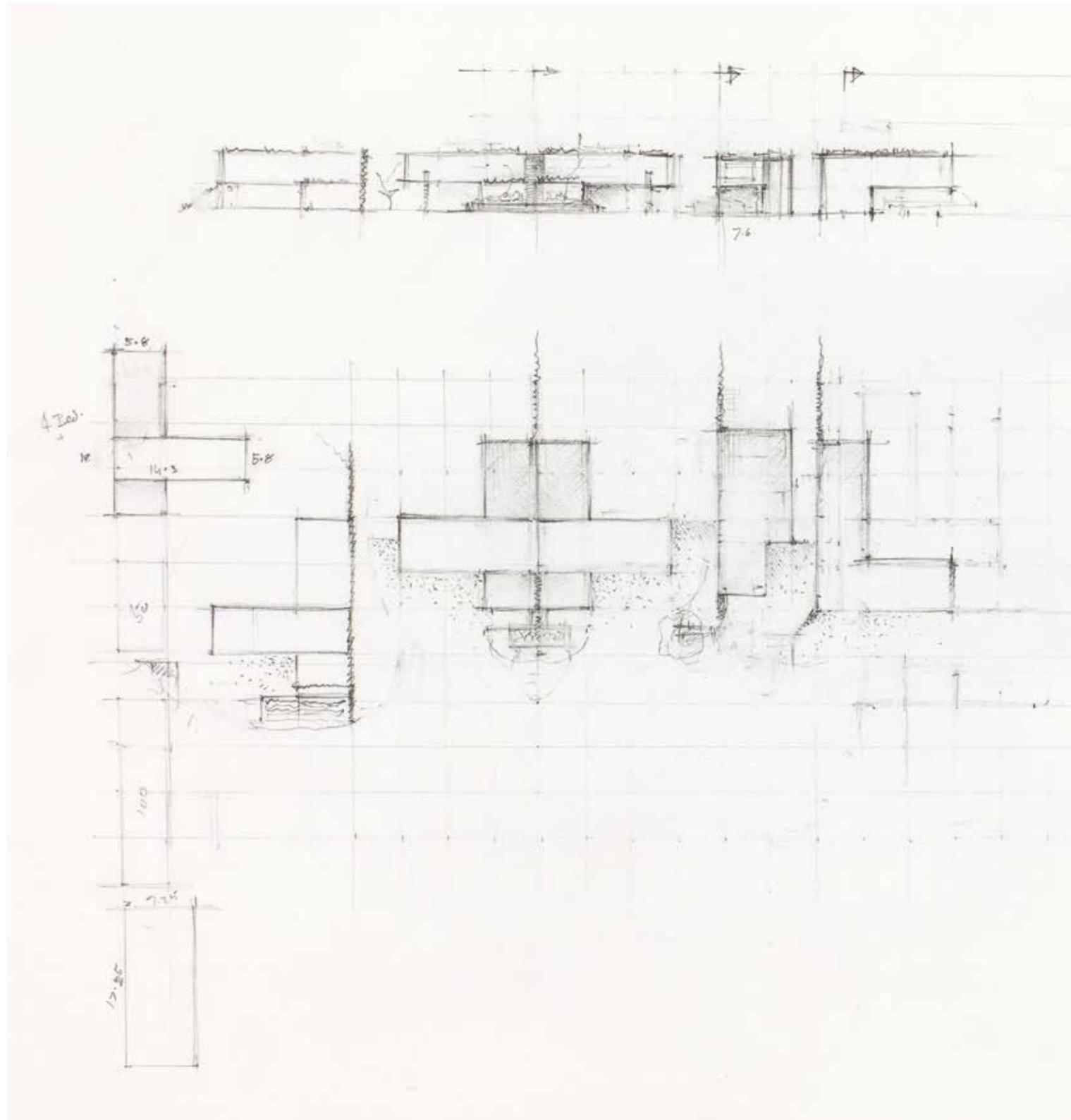


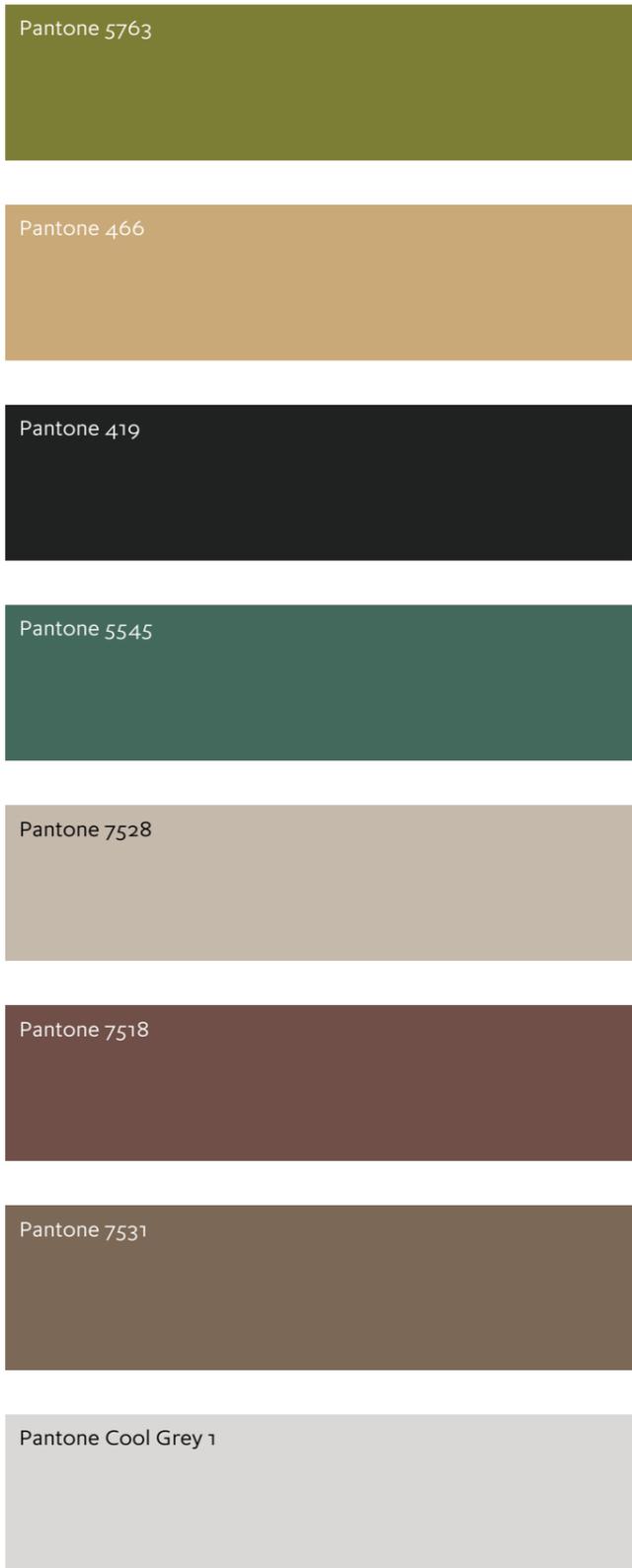


From Louis Porter's *Bruton Atlas*









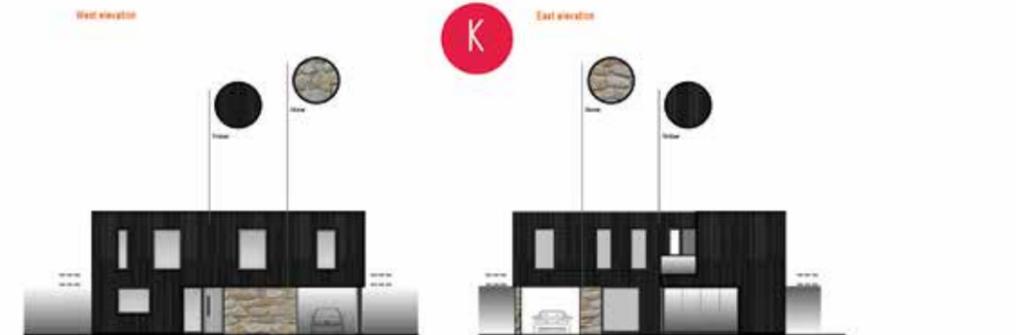
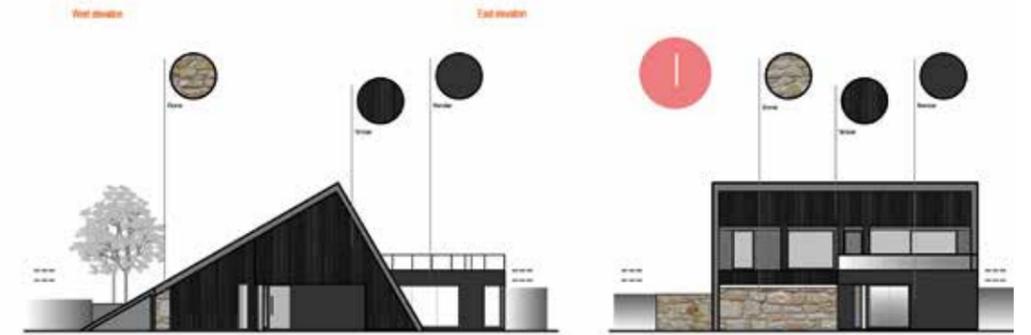
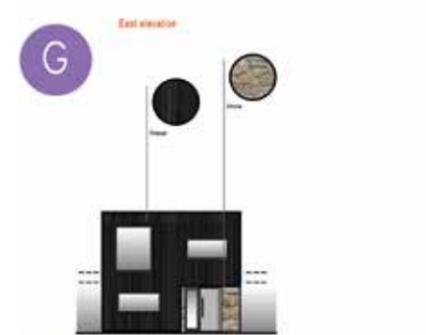
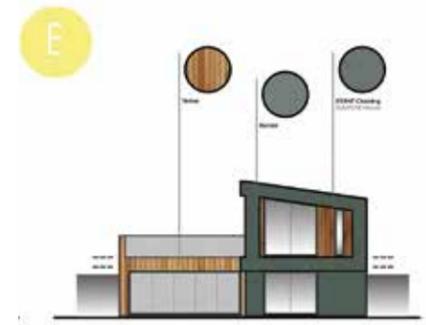
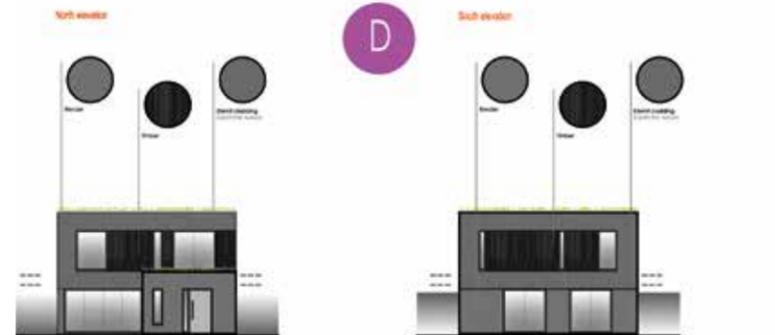
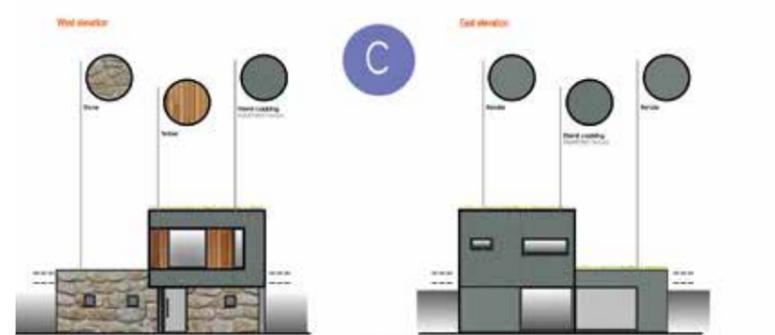
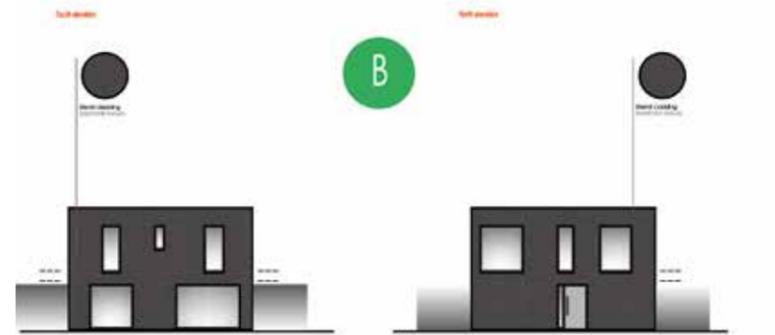
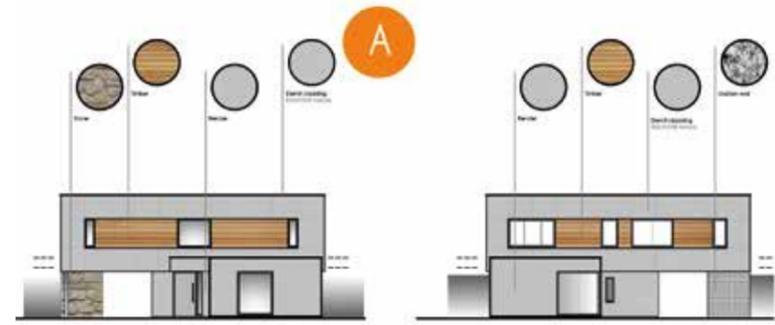
Before we can build well in any scale we shall, it seems to me, have to develop an art of regional planning, an art which will relate city and countryside in a new pattern from that which was the blind creation of the industrial and territorial pioneer.

Lewis Mumford

Masterplan under development



Modelling the house types



Section 2.0  
Assessment

### Ecological corridors

#### Hedgerow/woodland planting Mix

Species	Size (height)	Spec	Form	Grouping
Acer campestre (5%)	100-125cm	BR 2x	feathered	2-3
Corylus avellana (30%)	40-60cm BR	BR 2x	branched 2brks	5-10
Crataegus monogyna (20%)	100-125cm	BR 2x	feathered	5-10
Euroymus europaeus (5%)	40-60cm BR 1+1		branched 3brks	3-5
Ilex aquifolium (10%)	40-60	3Lt	leader with laterals	1-3
Ligustrum vulgare (10%)	60-80cm BR 1+1		branched 3brks	3-5
Prunus spinosa (10%)	40-60cm BR 1+1		branched 2brks	5-10
Viburnum opulus (10%)	40-60cm BR 1+1		branched 2brks	3-5

Design & Access Statement - Bruton 11

Pages from the Design & Access Statement

Section 2.0  
Assessment

### Planting Hierarchy

A diverse palette of street and park trees has been selected, designed to hark that of an arboretum, with the intention of providing a wide variety of interesting and unusual trees of note for their flowering, seasonal colour or fruiting value. These trees in time provide an attractive arboretum character to the site.

Additional structure would be provided by espaliered fruit trees, used to frame spaces and define thresholds, their edible fruit providing additional interest and promoting local food production.

Design & Access Statement - Bruton 5

Section 2.0  
Assessment

### Public Spaces

A network of public spaces provides connectivity and circulation through the site. The vehicular routes have been sub-divided with shared space courtyards, nodes and junctions. Hard surfaced shared spaces would be elevated closer to pedestrian footpaths, finished with regular paving. These spaces would be softened with street trees and shrub planting to aid traffic calming and provide a pedestrian priority feel.

The central green open space reflects the angular geometry expressed in the built form within its embankments. Specimen trees of notable and seasonal interest would define the space.

Design & Access Statement - Bruton 7

Section 2.0  
Assessment

### Sculptural Landform: Corten Structures

The sculptural essence of the development is translated from the built form and extended into the surrounding landscape. This would be expressed with Corten steel retaining structures, features and planters. The aerial perspective image below reveals the proposed sculptural elements from the entrance to the development, through to the central open space in the distance.

Refer to architect section for further details

Design & Access Statement - Bruton 9



Landhouse



Cubis Bruton







Breaking ground, February 2018

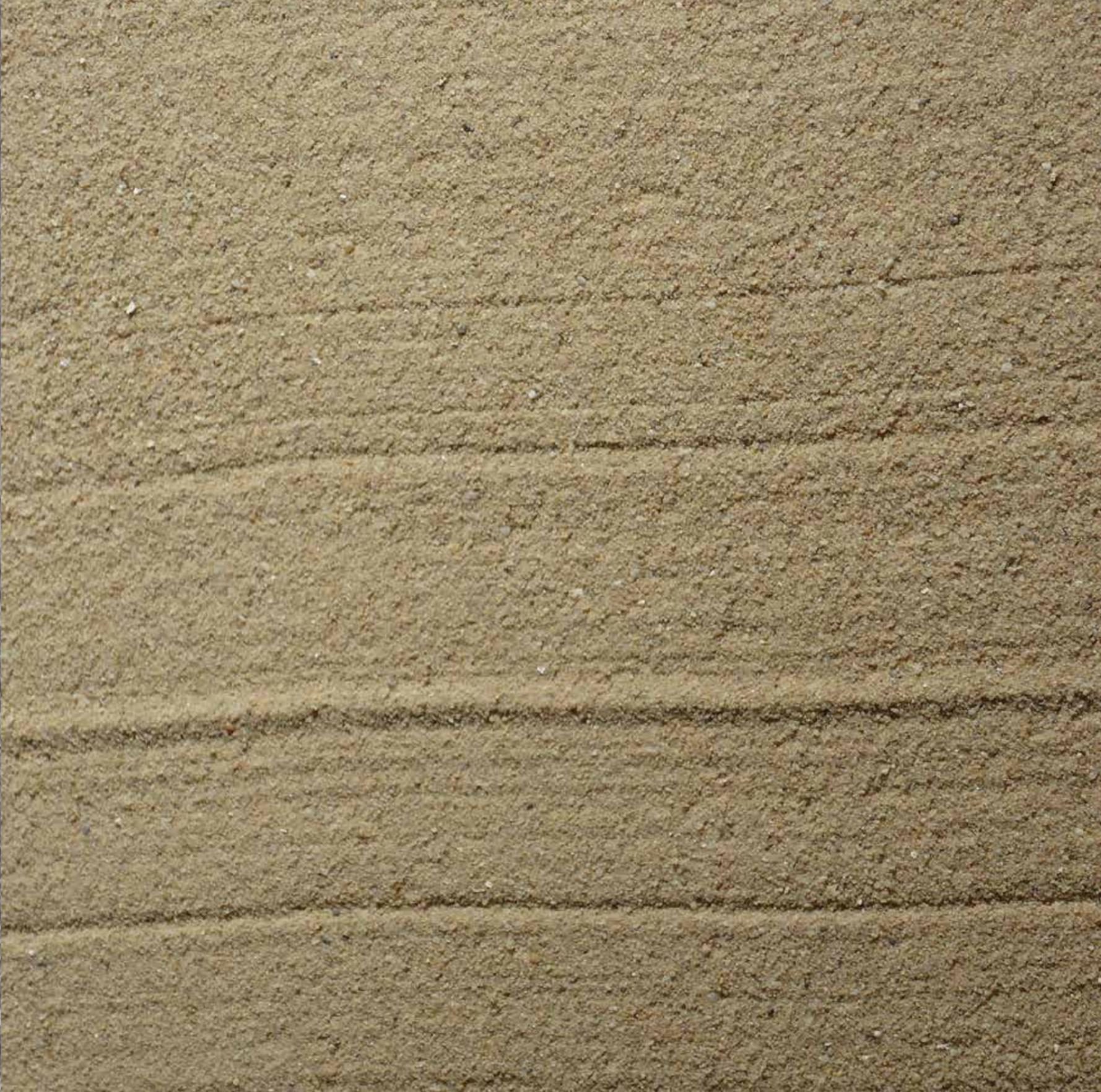


Masterplan, 2015



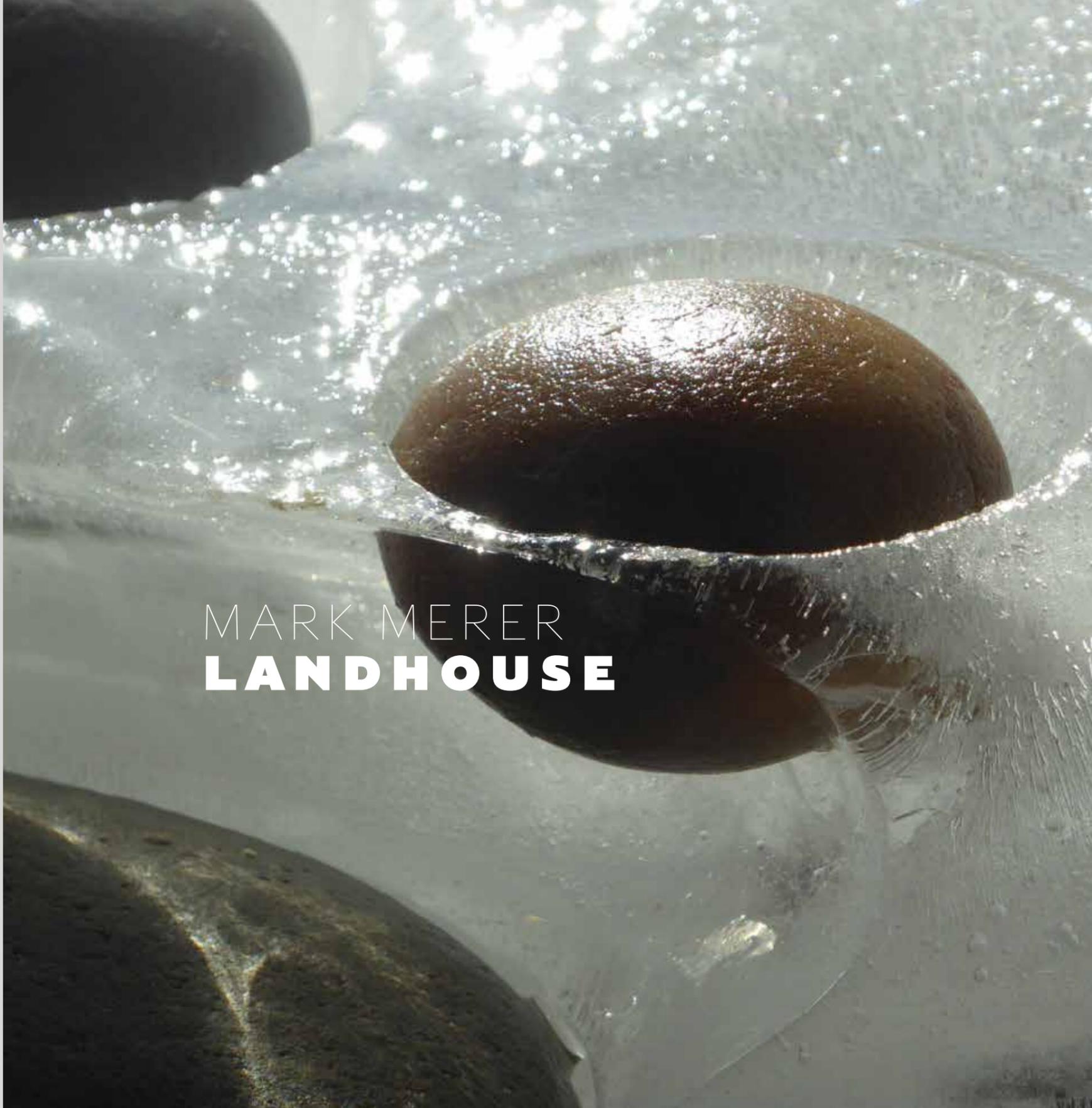


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