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Homes

*Three schemes by Proctor & Matthews,
Mole Architects and 31/44 Architects*



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Building study

Ship shape

Mole Architects has created a nautical-themed guest house for Roger Zogolovitch



The Houseboat is a holiday home commissioned by architect and Solidspace creative director Roger Zogolovitch. It is situated at the end of a suburban road in Dorset, overlooking heathland to the rear with views out to Studland Bay. It sits next to Roger's own home, the Boat House, a 1930s Modernist curiosity with a panelled wooden interior salvaged from a 1906 Cunard liner. The brief for the Houseboat was to make a holiday home suitable for visits from the extended Zogolovitch family, which could also be let out as a separate dwelling. It called for an internal arrangement using a split section, successfully explored in various projects by Solidspace.

Words Rob Wilson
Photos Rory Gardiner

After a series of arrow-straight suburban roads lined with cheek-by-jowl pastel bungalows, the black broken-Dutch-barn profile of The Houseboat sticks up starkly against the sky and western reaches of Poole Harbour as you approach.

Closer, the graphic silhouette softens in form, its round-shouldered profile belying and bedding down its scale. In style,

it is reminiscent of something vaguely Scandinavian crossed with an American barn and an old creosoted garage, yet somehow totally in tune with a site that fronts suburbia but backs on to bracken, beach and bay.

This is a house that is visually almost too richly burdened with association and metaphor. Roger Zogolovitch, the architect-turned-developer who commissioned it – and whose firm Solidspace specialises in developing highly tailored schemes on brownfield sites – used the image of an upturned hull on a jetty as a briefing cue in conversation with architect Meredith Bowles of Mole Architects, who designed it. This nautical image certainly has echoes in the house's curved and faceted flanks, but acts most powerfully as a descriptor for its simple materiality – curved black oiled larch above the rough poured concrete base that anchors it to the site. For Bowles too, The Houseboat seems to be a bit of an ur-house in its form and materials, echoing, he says, an early (unbuilt) house project in north London, which had as its generating idea a clear separation between lower and upper elements – the 'distinction between living

on the earth and living in the earth' as he describes it.

The house's plot is adjacent to a much larger one where Zogolovitch has a weekend home, The Boat House. This 1930s villa sits on a small rise at the edge of the sea, surrounded by pines and rhododendrons. Its faintly utilitarian white Modernist exterior holds an extraordinary core: the salvaged second-class ladies' drawing room from the Edwardian liner the *RMS Mauretania* around which the house was built – hence its name. On entering, you find yourself on the balcony of a circular top-lit double-height space, lined with panelled marquetry and mirrors, and full of *Mauretania* memorabilia collected by Zogolovitch. This is a man who clearly relishes richly associative architecture and is not afraid to mix it up in terms of texture and form – traits clear from his days as one of the founders of CZWG and in the projects he has completed with Solidspace, going back to developments such as One Centaur Street with dRMM in 2003.

The Houseboat project, planned as a guest house that would also be rentable for holidays, has taken a long time coming to fruition, with a couple of schemes drawn

up over the years – one indeed by David Adjaye's first practice, Adjaye and Russell, back in the 1990s. Even Mole's involvement has stretched over seven years, starting in 2010.

In many ways, this slow-burn process has been integral to the nature of a project whose progress seems akin to that of a seasonal boatyard, with annual rounds of activity seeing different trades involved at each stage. First the pour of the concrete, which as well as the jetty-like element that wraps around the south and west of the house, also forms an internal monumental orthogonal 'proscenium' arch as a central structural spine for the house. This supports the timber frame, the next element to be constructed, consisting primarily of massive fitch-plated Douglas fir portal beams forming the main roof structure and the distinctive carapace of the house. Subsequently the shop-fitter, Tekne, which Zogolovitch has used on jobs in London, but which has its workshops locally, was brought in to both supply and craft many of the interior finishes. Zogolovitch clearly remained heavily involved throughout the whole process, with at times fundamental design decisions being adjusted on site, in a process that also involved Poole-based architect Rebecca Granger in an executive role, sourcing and managing individual trades on site.

The staged process of the build is most graphically evidenced by the exterior concrete work; its layers of casting using local aggregate left roughly visible. This forms the curving base to the south 'half' of the house, lifting it to three storeys in height, against the adjacent pines; while to the north, the house hunkers down into two storeys of cowed roof, in scale with an adjacent row of houses.

This clear orientation of the house to the site is also evident in its two blunt-fronted end façades, to east and west, meaning the house is a truncated egg-shape in plan. The east entrance front is solidly blank as you approach across a lawn edged with a wild-flower meadow – just square openings puncturing its larch-boarded skin. To the west, in contrast, there is a full-height glazed timber-framed wall, thresholded by terraces and taking advantage of the views out to

the harbour. This was fabricated locally, its mullions finely faced with strips of copper, while the St Gobain glass uses thermal insulation coating to mitigate solar gain.

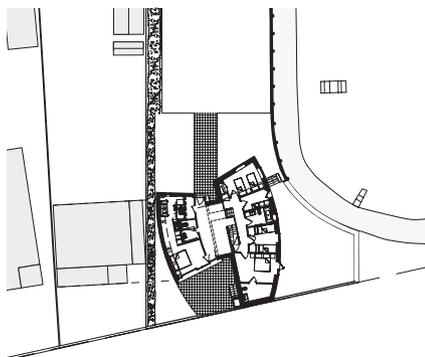
This glazed wall floods the interior spaces, in which the rich materiality and attention to detail of the exterior continues, evident from when you enter the large double-height hall ('halls are very important in houses,' says Zogolovitch, 'and so often left out now'). Here a walnut-boarded floor is surprisingly complemented by a MDF-lined wall, which has been vertically routed and varnished, giving it a slightly 'panelled' Deco feeling, fine-tuned by aluminium door handles, based on an original 1930s specimen found by Zogolovitch.

The whole interior feels richly wrapped in timber and glazing, an echo chamber of The Boat House, but here (as with the name) inverted, both spatially – you enter from the bottom and work up – and functionally. So off the hall, the main bedroom and bath sit behind the curving MDF wall to the right, while a few steps down to the left is a run of three further bedrooms, bathrooms and a utility room that have a very tailored tight feel – the most ship-like element of the house, despite being in the concrete base.

A concrete stair, untreated so as to wear over time, leads up to a kitchen and dining space, with a raised terrace leading off westwards beyond the glazed wall. Then a steel stair leads up to a living room and above to a mezzanine 'eyrie', all raised incrementally at half-levels – Mole's take on Solidspace's trademark 'live, work, eat' model, using open half levels to define but connect different functions.

While some details jar, such as the strange exterior-feeling steel railings at each level, it is already unclear where the architecture ends and the living begins, and the interior spaces are strong enough to take idiosyncratic elements.

This is a house you can imagine long holidays in, leaving sand on the steps or sitting and watching a westerly blow a storm in over the horizon; a house that's highly tuned but which has an easy fit, its strong spaces able to take, indeed inviting, mess and life. It is already becoming encrusted, filled up with pieces that witness Zogolovitch's beachcombing spirit, giving the sense of an ongoing project, which with the big moves now made, is gradually bedding down, filling out with the detail of life.





Architect's view

The Houseboat is upside-down, its main room raised up to take advantage of the view. It is also curved in plan, and split in two, one side raised above the other. It's an odd fish of a house, bringing to mind an upturned boat, or the belly of a whale.

Nestled within pines, and with a long, narrow approach, the site suggests a verticality, a reaching upwards. The house is designed as two hulls, upturned for shelter and seated upon a solid base.

One side sits up higher, following the staggered section, but also negotiating the change of scale from the residential street to the high pine trees to the south. It is sited at the end of a suburban road but connects strongly to wild heathland beyond.

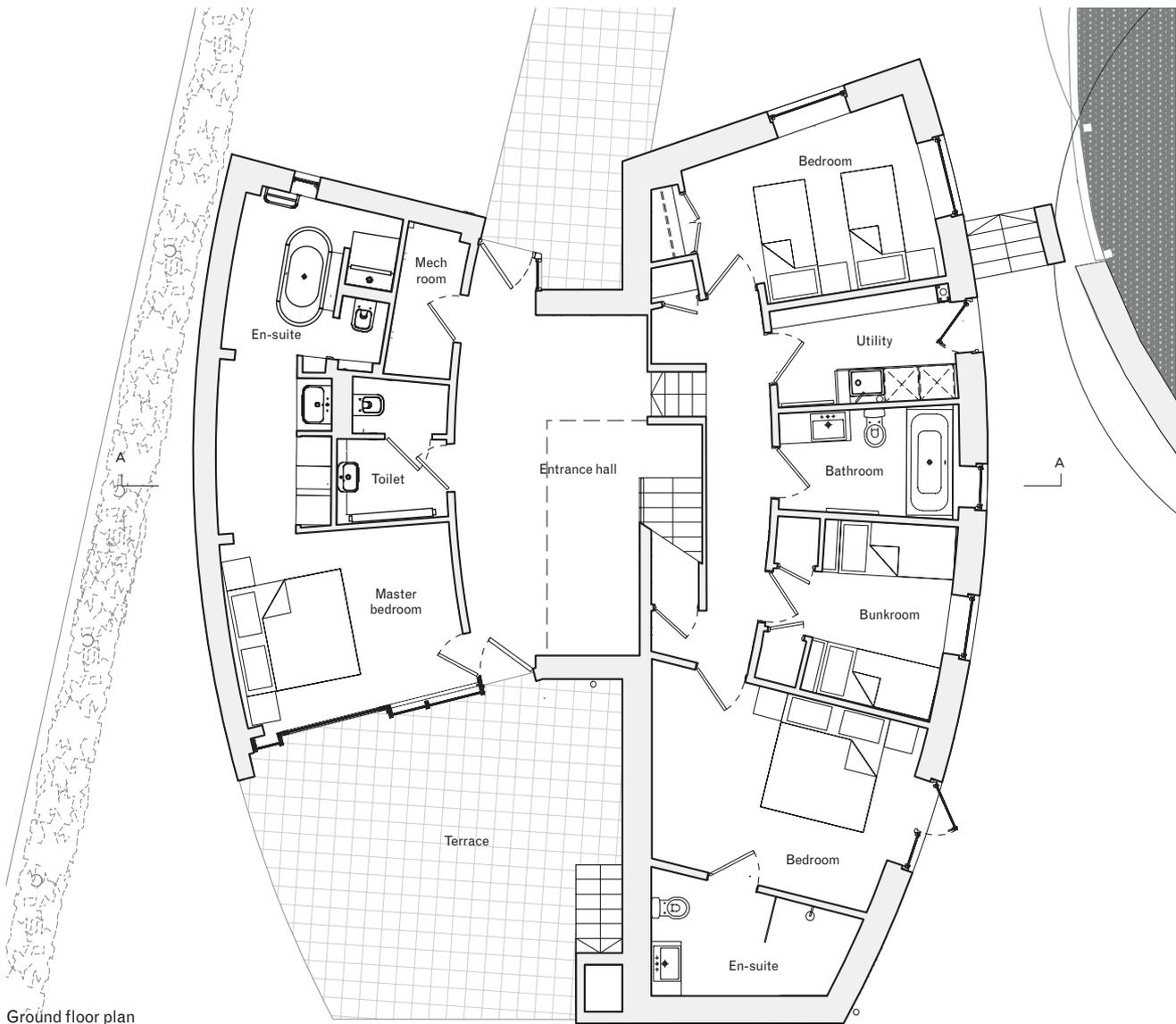
The Houseboat is tar-black, sitting on a weathered sea wall. The solid base is made

from rough-cast concrete and contains the bedrooms, tightly packed, as in the hold of a ship. The master bedroom sits at entrance level, with other rooms a half-level down. The hallway looks up to the light and to the three-storey concrete arch that holds up the house.

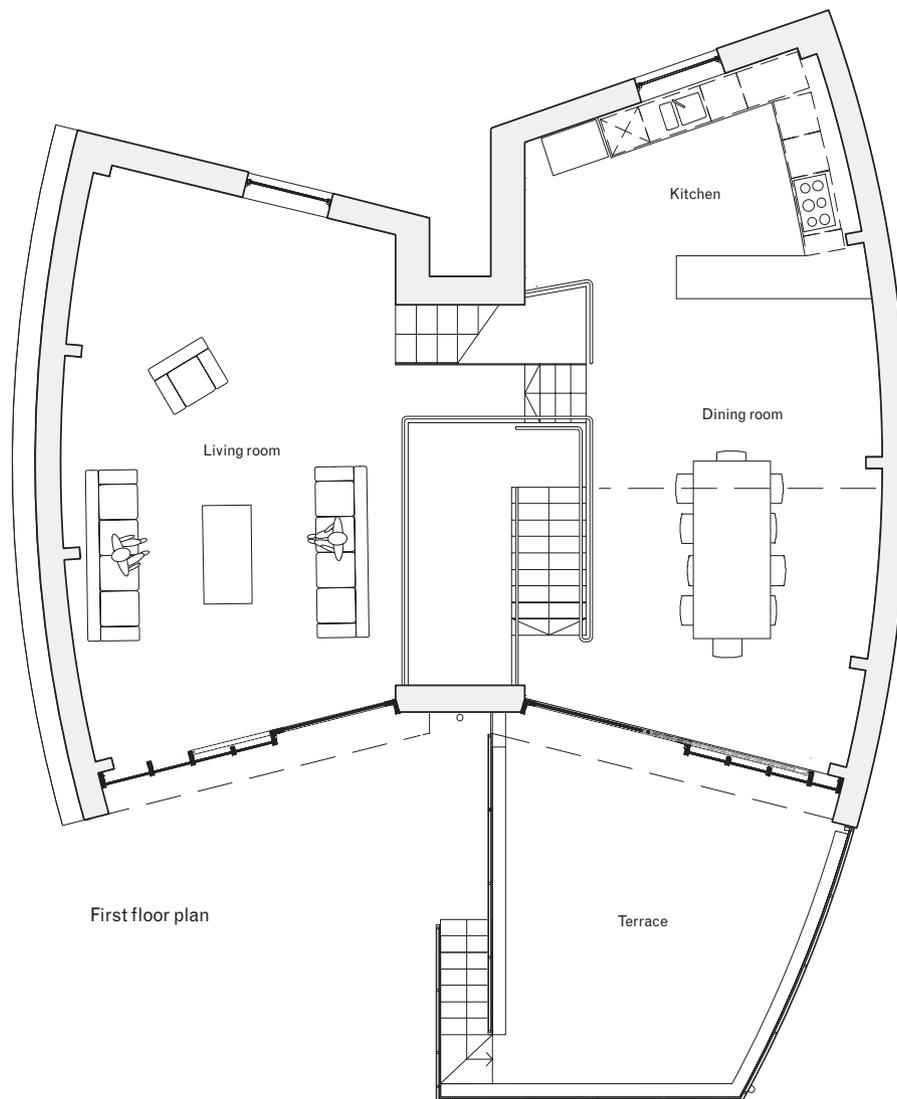
Ascending from below, the living and dining areas are lofty and open, with a feeling of being 'on deck'. Portal frames in Douglas fir support curved walls, so that the rooms widen as they rise up, and then narrow in to the western view.

Inside, it's all taut curves and timber joinery, a mixture of rawness and finish. The truncated ends of the hulls form tall elevations, closed at the front and open in a dramatic screen to the rear, with the weather for the fourth wall.

Meredith Bowles, director, Mole Architects



Ground floor plan



First floor plan



Client's view

This project was a challenge to create a new house on the same site as our 1930s listed Boat House, which was built around the rescued interior of the second-class ladies saloon from transatlantic liner *RMS Mauretania*. The brief demanded incorporation of the Solidspace split level living arrangement.

The design developed from an idea of upturned boat hulls sitting on a sea wall to a curved butterfly plan. The complex shape in plan and section demanded careful detailing of every element. The challenge of bespoke items, such as the west screen window, made demands of the team with respect to structure, environmental protection, use of glass, and 1:1 scale detailing. This occurred throughout the project.

The project had three architects: myself as client, Mole Architects' team and Rebecca Granger as executive architect on the site. It was a collaboration of our three imaginations, skills and drive to deliver. The project was richer by the sum of its parts. We gave the collaborators time to decide collectively on its direction as it grew from idea to reality. While this is not the normal quest for efficiency and certainty beloved of a standard build, it generated a craft and complexity of character that now makes itself evident in the finished home. The authorship of this endeavour belongs to the tenacity and the excellent working relationship between all of these architects. *Roger Zogolovitch, creative director, Solidspace*





Section A-A

0 1m

Executive architect's view

It's not often one gets to work with two greats of the architectural community, so I consider myself fortunate to have been passed the helm in navigating the safe passage and delivery of this architecturally significant work in my home town.

The Solidspace mantra dictates the exploitation of volume and light and my passage plan (as executive architect/construction manager) began by letting the in-situ concrete trade contract to the aptly named Solent Civil Engineering. This nine-month-long haul occurred in Somme-like conditions, with gale force winds. One gust wrote off PERI's £1 million formwork truck, pinned to the deck by an enormous felled maritime pine.

The light at the end of the tunnel was the reveal of the exquisitely beautiful concrete structure, struck fresh from the equally exquisite hand-made formwork (right). We heaved a sigh of relief that the gel retardant

had worked its magic by removing the fines of the specially mixed and locally supplied concrete.

With a change of tack the follow-on trade contractors entered the arena under stable conditions. We had collectively planned the finer detail of The Timber Frame Company's package for years prior to their arrival on site, and it showed.

The streamlined precision of their off-site manufacture was a breath of fresh air and we raised the Douglas fir structure without a hitch.

Poole has a range of fine craftsmen (Task, Tekne, Fineline Fabrications, Haroys) all ready to engage with the unknown in order to meet our difficult and quirky demands. Like all good skippers, Roger Zogolovitch attributes the success of the project to the collaboration of his crew.

*Rebecca Granger, principal,
Rebecca Granger Architects*





Project data

Start on site July 2013

Completion July 2016

Gross internal floor area 221 m²

Construction cost £ 745,000

Construction cost per m² £ 3,370

Architect Mole Architects

Executive architect Rebecca Granger

Client Roger Zogolovitch

Structural engineer Sinclair Johnston
and Partners

Cost consultant Orbell Associates

Landscape designer Coe Design

West screen joinery Haroys

Architectural metalwork Finline

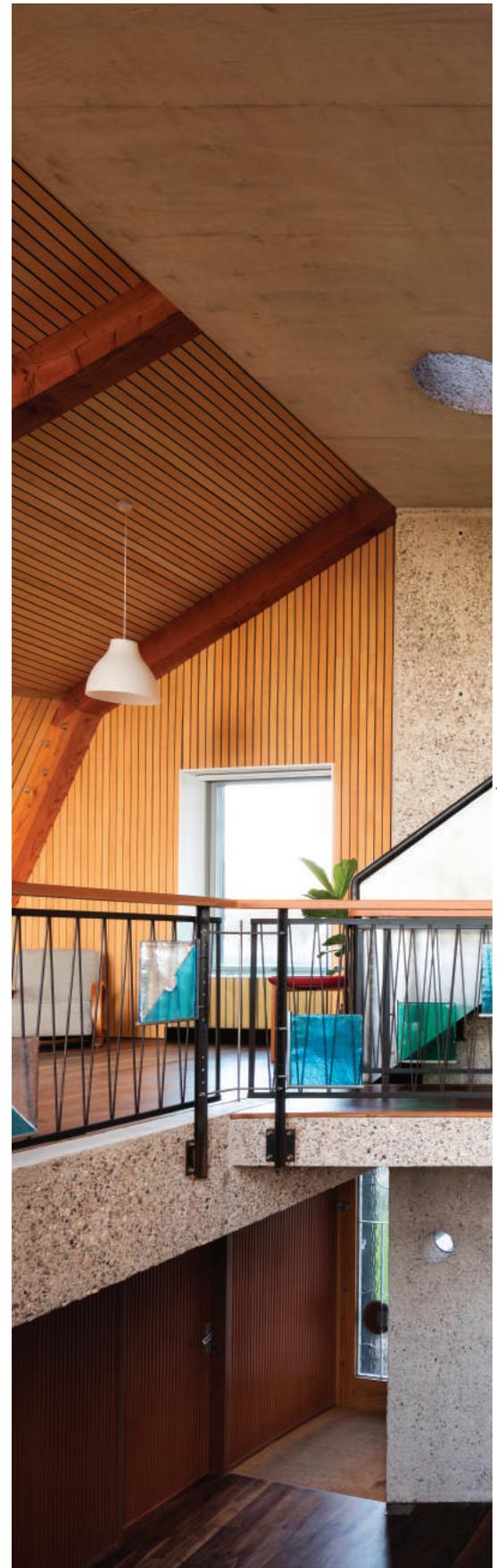
Fabrications Mike Jupe and Andy Bailey

Building contractors

Task Artisan Builders (shell); Tekne (fit out);

The Timber Frame Company (frame)

CAD software used Vectorworks







Working detail

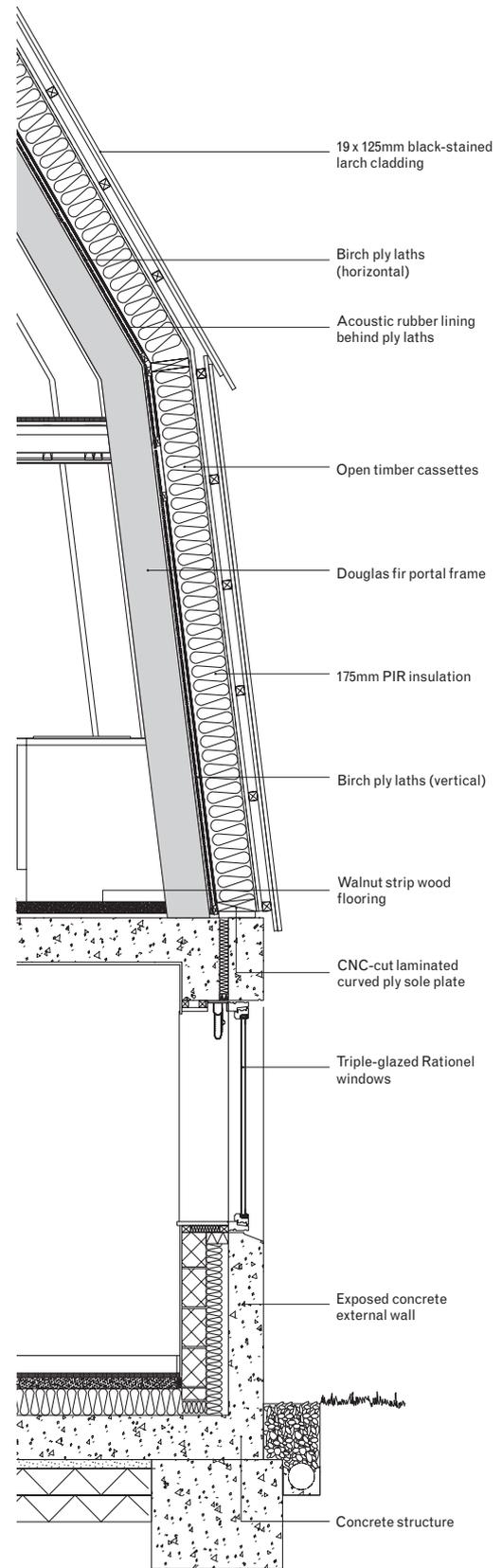
The section of the building demonstrates the progression from the solidity of the lower floor to the frame structure of the upper floors. A loadbearing, reinforced concrete slab is cast with a kicker and waterstop to take external 200mm external concrete walls. The external walls were cast with 70 per cent GGBS cement replacement, using a phenolic formwork with gel retardant applied to the internal face. When struck, the concrete was power-washed to expose the aggregate. This specification was also adopted for the internal exposed concrete; lines are evident in the external walls reflecting the subtly different effects of each pour and making the curved plan more evident to the eye.

RIW Cementseal was applied internally and the internal block walls built to create insulated cavity walls. These lower bunk rooms are lined in pale timber with built-in beds.

The upper floor is constructed from prefabricated curved and leaning timber studwork panels, built off a CNC-cut curved plate fixed down to the concrete. The panels span between 200 x 250mm Douglas fir portals, which sit on the concrete lower floor, and lean against the concrete arch that splits the building in two. The timber wall and roof panels are lined with acoustic rubber underneath birch plywood battens, with walnut woodblocks on the living room floors, adhered to a sand/cement screed laid on an acoustic mat. Externally the larch cladding is laid board-on-board, and finished with a black stain and Non-Com fire retardant treatment.

Fine finishes contrast with the rough concrete, and enclosed rooms with an open living space.

Meredith Bowles, director, Mole Architects



Detail section

0 2.5m