

HOUSE, BATH, ENGLAND
ARCHITECTS
PIERS TAYLOR

Moonshine

With crystal clear views, and a particularly potent flavour, this West Country homebrew deserves to be savoured.

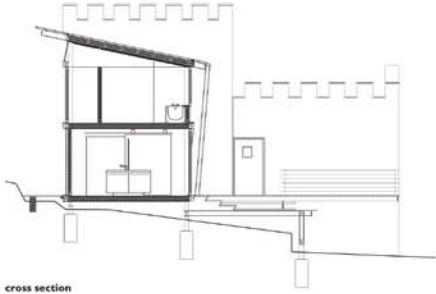
house

When architects have to consider the nuance of a place, it is often as hard adequately to describe essential qualities as it is to know immediately what to build. Rushing to impose hard and fast solutions is misguided, and if time permits, imposing a change of pace to the design process can reap long term rewards that have a more harmonious relationship with their locale. And this was the case with this remote dwelling in St Catherine's Valley, less than five miles outside Bath, with results that are suitably provisional in their manner.

While confidently asserted, controlled and deliberate in terms of tectonic presence, the lightness of touch achieved is much more than a functionalist attitude to materials and building, or indeed a direct homage to the architect's mentor, Glenn Murcutt. Resting gently above the ground on 10 precast pad foundations, imposing little or no change to the water table or to the site's beautifully rich habitat, the more time spent considering the nature of this place reveals that the architect's principal moment of genius was when he first chose his site, long before a single element was put in place.

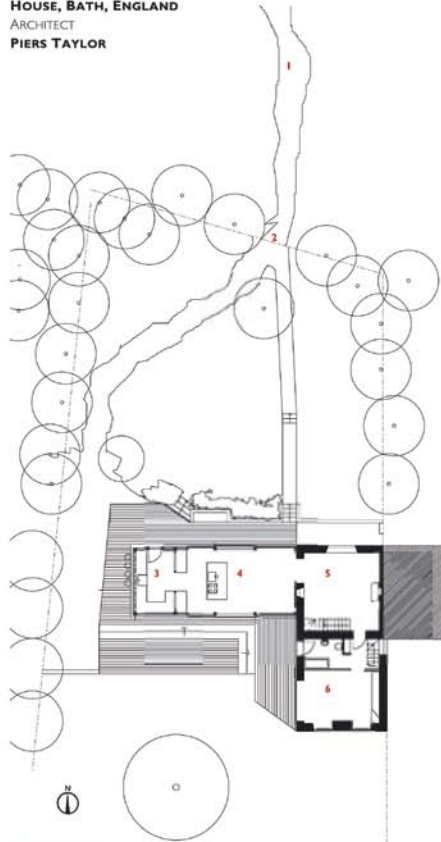
Having discovered the former Moonshine School House (1786) at the end of an unmade path that winds through the 150 acre East Rocks Wood, Piers Taylor's heart and mind were immediately settled. Despite having no vehicular access, no detailed structural survey, and no development assurance from planners, he instinctively knew that this was the place where he wanted his young family to live. Having spent formative postgraduate years in Australia, where he met and was taught by both Glenn Murcott and Richard Lepastrier, Taylor wanted to create his own place of prospect and refuge; a place that would establish an imposed change of pace to his potentially hectic life, teaching and co-running a growing practice in Bath.

¹ In place of a 1980s mock Georgian extension, this new addition restores the dignity of the original schoolhouse.



cross section

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78 | 7 site/ground plan



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- 2 From the north-east the ground floor of Moonshine frames extensive views towards St Catherine's Valley.
- 3 The west end gable describes the tectonic order of the new structure.
- 4 Raw/unfinished materials sit well with the original stone.
- 5 Conceived as an internal terrace, the principal living space sits between and filters two distinct landscape scenarios.
- 6 Details reveal a rich yet modest palette of materials.



first floor plan (scale approx 1:300)

- 1 woodland path
- 2 garden gate
- 3 entrance/utility
- 4 internal terrace/living
- 5 living
- 6 (Client's) guestroom
- 7 bedroom
- 8 bath
- 9 shower
- 10 dressing room
- 11 neighbouring property



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Having spent two years living on site prior to constructing this modest 80sqm extension, many hours were invested in coming to terms with the lie of the land, and while sharing the place with his writer wife, Taylor was also keen to develop a strong narrative for the site; a never-ending story, that begins as you leave your car to walk the wooded path, and that continues via gate, enclosure and terrace, to infinity beyond.

Having visited the site during perfect seasonal conditions, to discuss mechanics of construction seems somewhat unnecessary, especially as the architect himself made surprisingly apologetic references to his overt expression of structure sinew and skin. Certain elements, however, do deserve mention, adding as they

do to the home's rich narrative. The green oak frame is the first of these, simply prefabricated and carried by hand to site, before being set out on a four-bay 2600 x 4150mm grid. Articulated internally with 150mm square posts, and externally with 200mm square edge beams, the spaces on the lower level conform to a rational order, with a three bay internal terrace and a single bay utility/entrance room at the westernmost end. On the upper level, however, spaces no longer conform to grid. Instead, with a layout that provides provisional accommodation for a family that will no doubt need more privacy with time, a series of free-standing plywood partitions enclose a shower, bathroom and two sleeping areas. Free from

constraints of orthogonal geometry, these screens extend diagonally across plan to link new with old, leading through to a reconfigured stair, dressing room and third bedroom, set within the upper level of the two-storey castellated tower. Within the ground level of the tower is a more cosy living room, where the family can (reluctantly) retreat from contact with the outside world, and a guest room, temporarily crowned with billowing metallic insulation and fittingly named Glenn's Room, following a recent visit by the Pritzker Prize winning architect.

Putting all this solid architectural competence to one side, however, it is across the extensive south-westerly horizon that the lead character of this

delightful domestic narrative is finally introduced. Playing a number of lead roles as approaching weather fronts – storms and shine – are seen hours in advance, this is a weather watcher's paradise. Sun paths too can also be closely observed, and in true Crocodile Dundee style, a simple glance heavenwards is all it takes for Taylor to tell you what time it is. Moonshine is intoxicating; the perfect place for refuge, prospect and for an extremely well imposed change of pace. **ROB GREGORY**

Architect
 Mitchell Taylor Workshop:
 Piers Taylor, Bath
 Structural engineer
 Structures One
 Photographs
 Peter Cook/VIEW



8



9



10

7 Within Glenn's guestroom, foil insulation creates a unique interior.
 8, 9 Views are spectacular when cooking and bathing.
 10 The upper level partitions stand free from the soffit, expressing the provisional flexible nature of the space.

81 | 7