

# New Nordic Houses



Thames & Hudson

Dominic Bradbury

Thames & Hudson Ltd  
181A High Holborn  
London WC1V 7QX

T +44 (0)20 7845 5000  
F +44 (0)20 7845 5052  
W [www.thamesandhudson.com](http://www.thamesandhudson.com)

Frankfurt Book Fair 2018  
Hall 6.1, Stand B126

#### Author

Dominic Bradbury is a journalist and writer specializing in architecture and design. He is the author of many books on the subject, including *Mountain Modern*, *New Brazilian House*, *Vertical Living*, *Mid-Century Modern Complete*, *The Iconic Interior*, *Mediterranean Modern*, *New Natural Home* and *The Iconic House*, all published by Thames & Hudson.

#### Specification

- 320 pages
- c. 400 illustrations
- 29 x 23 cm (11 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 9 in.)

All information on this sheet is provisional and may be altered without notice

## New Nordic Houses

Dominic Bradbury

**A collection of the best contemporary houses across Scandinavia's most beautiful and remote locations, designed by both emerging and established architects.**

#### Marketing points

- **Long before the recent *hygge* hype**, the Nordic countries were known for their modern design and their particular relationships with their dramatic landscapes.
- **In keeping with their temperate culture**, the best Scandinavian residential works have been the region's best-kept secrets – until now.
- **These timely and timeless designs** offer a complete overview of the world's most refined contemporary houses, most set in desirable locations off the grid.

#### Description

In a climate that ranges from cold, dark and unforgiving to endless sun and crystalline skies, the homes of the Nordic countries are lifted by ever-changing and dramatic natural light balanced by an intrinsic sense of warmth. Nordic architects today are as much informed by vernacular traditions and natural materials as their forebears, but the most recent generation of practitioners reflects a new appetite for spatial exploration and changing lifestyles.

Divided into four chapters – rural cabins, coastal retreats, town houses and country homes – this survey of over 40 of Scandinavia's finest and most innovative houses features work by a broad spectrum of leading architects, such as Jon Danielsen Aarhus, Thom & Videgård, Snorre Stinessen, Reiulf Ramstad and Todd Saunders. Structured by terrain to reveal the full diversity of the landscape and its architectural challenges, the book is full of fresh thinking about living spaces that are at once universal and distinctively Nordic. From country houses complete with traditional Nordic fireplaces, saunas, window seats and verandas, to remote cabin hideaways and artist's studios, there are details and grand ideas that can be applied to residential design anywhere. A reference section includes an appendix of architectural plans.

Aimed at anyone with a passion for modern design, the arctic landscape or escapism in its purest form, this unique glimpse inside Scandinavia's new generation of 21st-century homes will be an endless resource for designers, architects and homeowners alike.



# New Nordic Houses



# New Nordic Houses

Dominic Bradbury





	6	Introduction	
Rural Cabins	16	Norderhov Cabin	Atelier Oslo
	22	Cabin Ustaoset	Jon Danielsen Aarhus
	28	Gotland Summer House	Enflo Arkitekter & DEVE Architects
	32	Gudbrandslie Cabin	Helen & Hard
	38	Hvassar Summer House	Hille Strandskogen Arkitekter
	44	Villa Buresø	Mette Lange Architects
	50	Österklint 20	Skälsö Arkitekter
	56	Bjellandsbu	Snøhetta
	62	Arctic Treehouse Hotel	Studio Puisto
	68	Archipelago House	Tham & Videgård Arkitekter
	74	Cabin Vindheim	Vardehaugen
	80	Åre Solbringen	Waldemarson Berglund Arkitekter
Coastal Retreats	88	Slävik Summer House	Fahlander Arkitekter
	94	Folded Roof House	Claesson Koivisto Rune Architects
	100	Aluminium Cabin	Jarmund/Vigsnaes Arkitekter
	104	Split House	Jarmund/Vigsnaes Arkitekter
	110	Weekend House	Knut Hjeltnes Sivilarkitekter
	114	Vega Hytte	Kolman Boye Architects
	120	Lille Arøya	Lund Hagem Arkitekter
	126	Stupet	Petra Gipp Arkitektur
	132	Fleinvaer Artists' Retreat	Rintala Eggertsson Architects
	136	Manshausen Island Resort	Stinessen Arkitektur

	142	Summerhouse Lagnö	Tham & Videgård Arkitekter
Town Houses	150	Villa Björnberget	Delin Arkitektkontor
	158	Townhouse	Elding Oscarson
	164	Mölle by the Sea	Elding Oscarson
	170	Villa Weinberg	Friis & Moltke Architects
	176	Villa S	Saunders Architecture
	182	Roof House	Sigurd Larsen
	188	Villa R	Arkitekterna Krook & Tjäder
	194	Villa Kristina	Wingårdh Arkitektkontor
Country Homes	202	Four-Cornered Villa	Avanto Architects
	208	House for a Drummer	Bornstein Lyckefors
	212	Plus House	Claesson Koivisto Rune Architects
	218	Villa G	C. F. Møller
	224	Villa Sunnanö	Murman Arkitekter
	230	Slutterupgaard	Henning Larsen
	236	Store Lauvøya-Bestemorstua	Mikado Arkitektur
	240	House Riihi	OOPEAA
	246	Villa Blåbär	pS Arkitektur
	252	Villa N1	Jonas Lindvall
	258	Split View Mountain Lodge	Reiulf Ramstad Arkitekter
	264	Villa Moelven	Arkitektstudio Widejdal Racki
	272	Plans	
	315	Project credits	

# Introduction

The houses of the Nordic countries are lifted by their intrinsic sense of warmth. Set within a climate that can be cold and challenging, as well as bracing and beautiful, the idea of a warm and welcoming home assumes particular power and resonance. Many different elements combine to create this unique and engaging Scandinavian character, in which the historic hearth is of ongoing and crucial importance. It's rare to find a Nordic home – whether traditional or contemporary – in which the fireplace does not play a pivotal role, creating a focal point for everyday living and placing the idea of warmth at the heart of the house, both literally and metaphorically.



The many elements that contribute towards the notion of Nordic warmth are essentially the same as those that define the unique character of the region's architecture. Materials, especially, play a crucial part, with contemporary architects continuing a preoccupation with natural, organic building materials that lend texture and personality to a space. To think of Norway, Denmark, Finland and Sweden is to conjure an image, above all, of the wooden cabin or the timber farmhouse; such vernacular reference points continue to inspire today's Nordic architects, who use timber as a 'modern' material, experimenting with form, volume and space. Stone and brick, too, have a very special place in Nordic architecture and design, reinforcing a palette that is rooted in the landscape itself.

The multiple threads of Nordic architecture lead back naturally and inevitably towards this extraordinary landscape. The epic Scandinavian coastline – with its countless fjords, inlets and isles – contrasts vividly with the mountains and lakes of these glacial countries upon the edge of the Arctic circle. Yet this is also a place of forests and woodlands, prairies and pastures, which inform the mythology and narratives of the Nordic countries. Nature itself has always played a profound part in shaping the art and culture of the region.

Scandinavian architects exhibit a vital respect for the natural world. This is expressed in many ways, including the choice of eco-friendly materials and a general emphasis upon sustainability, with the creation of contemporary houses that are super-insulated and often warmed by renewable energy technologies, such as solar panels and ground source (or geothermal) heat pumps. A number of the houses in this book are off the grid, with architects and designers

consciously creating buildings that are self-sufficient. This respect extends to the land itself, with Nordic architects taking particular care to make as light an impact upon their sites and settings as possible. This ambition to touch the earth lightly leads to innovative structural solutions, such as raising homes slightly above ground level on slim supporting pillars to reduce the impact of the building, while landscaping is kept to a minimum. The idea that such houses are temporary guests upon the land and that they should be capable of being replaced, or even removed altogether, with little or no trace of their existence is commonly repeated.

This outlook is linked to the accepted wisdom in the Scandinavian countries that the countryside and the coastline belong to everyone. In Sweden, the right to roam (known as the *Allemansrätten*, or 'Everyman's Right') is written into the constitution, and planning conditions across the region seek to limit the impact of new buildings upon the countryside by restricting height, scale and visibility.

Many architects see such conditions as sensible challenges rather than as limitations upon their own creativity. The particular context of a project is an essential point of inspiration for Nordic architects, and while this may include research into local cultural, historical and vernacular points of reference, the most vital contextual element will always be the landscape itself.

'Our objective is to create distinct and relevant architecture with the starting point resting within the unique context and specific conditions of the project,' says Swedish architect Bolle Tham of Tham & Videgård. 'One factor that makes architectural work constantly interesting and inspiring is context. When looking closely enough at a project's context



# Rural Cabins



The ideal of the country cabin has particular resonance across the Nordic countries. Defined by simplicity and modesty, cabins possess a lightness of touch that sits well within the natural beauty of the Scandinavian landscape. Largely made of timber and usually just one storey, these homes sit low in the land and have an organic quality that ties them to the countryside with subtlety and grace. In recent years, Nordic architects have increasingly embraced and explored the typology of the cabin as a way of creating a new generation of rural homes that possess an innate sensitivity to their natural surroundings. The 21st-century cabin, in itself, serves as a kind of belvedere or viewing platform connected to landscapes that demand reverence and inspire delight.

The modern Scandinavian cabin has its roots in a number of traditional buildings common to the region. They owe much to the simple forms of timber barns and agricultural sheds, including the hillside and mountain huts used by farmers and shepherds. Other kinds of rugged mountain shelters used by hikers and skiers also inform the make up of the contemporary cabin, including the 'gapahuk', as it's known in Norway – a basic roofed hut used to protect oneself from the elements where one side is left open.

At the same time, the intricate coastline of the Nordic countries, with its many archipelagos and islands, offers the example of another kind of cabin. Here, traditional fishermen's huts and boathouses share that sense of organic simplicity. Once again, it's the lightness of the materials and the availability of timber from the forests of Scandinavia that help to make wood a natural choice in every respect, along with the cross-over in craftsmanship between boat-making and house-building.

The strength of the craft tradition in the Nordic countries adds to the desirability of the contemporary cabin. Beautifully detailed exteriors are complemented by crafted interiors that feature much in the way of bespoke and fitted timber furniture, including seating and bunk beds as well as kitchen cabinets and wardrobes. Materials are reduced down to a modest palette of choices and finishes, reinforcing the sense of simplicity and cohesion.

Contemporary Nordic architects possess a particular respect for these traditions and

ways of making. 'What seems to be a common trait of traditional cabins is their simplicity in form, size and comforts,' says Norwegian architect Jon Danielsen Aarhus, who designed Cabin Ustaoset in Hol (see p. 22), among others. 'So when modern cabins become ever larger, built in an ornamented national romantic style, with indoor plumbing and a driveway and garage, they move away from every aspect of the traditional cabin. The style looks misplaced, and the infrastructure destroys the very thing you want to get close to – nature.'

Yet the essential modesty of the cabin – reinforced in many parts of Scandinavia by local planning restrictions on scale and footprint – does not mean that contemporary architects are limited when it comes to an imaginative response to context and setting. As the cabins on the following pages suggest, the contemporary Nordic cabin is rich in variety and depth, with a range of fluid forms, rounded interiors and a vivid sense of connection between inside and out, even within extreme and challenging settings.

Snøhetta's Bjellandsbu Cabin in the mountains of Hordaland, Norway, is little more than a single room encompassed by a sinuous roof, designed to recess into the alpine landscape. Yet the design manages to combine many different themes and ideas within one small shelter with a powerful escapist allure. In Finland, Studio Puisto elevated their modern cabins in the forests around Rovaniemi on stilts, creating a series of original treehouses. Swedish practice Waldemarson Berglund embraced the gradient of the Åre mountains within the design of a triptych of cabins that literally step down the slope itself.

Running through all of these projects is a particular emphasis on establishing a thoughtful relationship between building and landscape and linking interior and exterior space. Whether in a forest, island or mountain setting, terraces, verandahs and decks become an integral part of the architectural design, while apertures and openings become lenses focused on framed vistas and panoramas.

In this respect, the contemporary Nordic owes much to the example of pioneering Scandinavian modernist architects and designers, as well as traditional crafted buildings. The Danish designer Halldor

Gunnløgsson built a home for himself and his wife on the coast at Rungsted in 1958 that could be described as a modern cabin: a single-storey home facing the ocean, with a semi-open plan layout and indoor-outdoor spaces. Its crafted quality and extensive use of joinery was influenced by Japanese homes, as well as Danish craftsmanship. Similarly, the country house designed by mid-century Swedish designer Bruno Mathsson near Värnamo in 1965 splices modesty and craft with a modern, fluid layout and extensive glazing that draws the bucolic lakeside landscape deep into the heart of the house.

Nordic cabins of the 21st-century draw upon such influences, as well as the craft tradition and the concept of organic architecture, within buildings that forge a deep interaction with their surroundings and embrace fluid floorplans that blur the boundaries between indoors and out. They meet a growing need for solace, escapism and a deeper relationship with nature as an antidote to the growing pressures of the urban, digital world.



# Hvassar Summer House

Hvassar, Norway

Hille Strandskogen Arkitekter

A modestly scaled and sensitively conceived home on the Norwegian coast, this contemporary summer cabin by architect Henrik Hille was designed to make the lightest of impressions upon the landscape. The land itself – around a two-hour drive south of Oslo and overlooking the straits that feed into the capital – had already belonged to client Annelise Thornbjørnsen's family for many years. Her grandparents originally bought their farmstead here in the 1930s, and her parents built a small house on the site in the 1950s. Thornbjørnsen spent part of her childhood here, developing a strong connection with the area, but eventually the family recognized that the old cabin was in poor condition and would have to be replaced.

Thornbjørnsen and her partner, forester Trygve Refsdal, turned to architect Henrik Hille, who also has connections to the region, although his architectural office is based in Oslo. The beauty of the landscape itself implied a certain responsibility to create something that rested gently within the surroundings and this was reinforced by planning restrictions on both the scale of the house and its position in relation to the protected coastline.

Taking inspiration from the barns, farmhouses and agricultural sheds of the region, Hille designed an L-shaped home in two parts with an entrance zone between them and verandahs for each, providing sheltered retreats facing the green-grass 'courtyard' on the windless side of the building. Together, these two elegant timber-clad structures have the look of a modern farmstead. The two-storey master building holds the main living spaces, arranged around a central fireplace, with the master bedroom suite alongside; a study and an additional bedroom are positioned on the upper level. The smaller

'barn' alongside the main house holds two guest bedrooms, creating a degree of privacy and independence for visiting friends.

The choice of organic, natural materials helps tie the house to its rugged, rural setting. Although the house sits upon a concrete base pad, the principal material is timber, with red cedar cladding that will silver over time, along with pine for the framework and a combination of pine and ash for the interior joinery. When the summer house is not in use cedar shutters are used to close down and protect the building, reinforcing the simplicity of the architectural forms.

'The shutters in front of the windows function as a sun shield when they are in an open position and protect against wind and rain when they are closed,' says Hille. 'When they are closed, in particular, the cabin does have these associations with the old barns and boathouses of the area. The sense of simplicity in design and function was our goal from the beginning.'









# Arctic Treehouse Hotel

Rovaniemi, Finland

Studio Puisto

Situated along the Arctic Circle and in the heart of Lapland, the Arctic Treehouse Hotel caters to tourists attracted by the Northern Lights and Santa Claus. The region is also rich in wildlife and ski resorts, while the nearby Lap capital of Rovaniemi hosts three buildings designed by the pioneering Finnish modernist Alvar Aalto. On a forested site not far from the city, architects Studio Puisto were commissioned to design a new kind of hotel with a direct and vivid sense of connection to nature. Perched among the pine trees and located on a gently sloping hillside, Studio Puisto designed a series of floating cabins here, raised on stilts and coated in timber shingles.

'Everything in the design process started from Arctic nature and how the end user will experience it,' says architect Willem van Bolderen of Studio Puisto, who worked on the project with colleagues Emma Johansson and Mikko Jakonen. 'The contrast between this wild landscape and these safe, nest-like spaces has been a guiding element. The wooden shingles are inspired by the surrounding forest but they also make the cabins look a little like the traditional Finnish hand-made toy cows that are made with pine cones....'

There is certainly something of a zoomorphic quality to the stilted cabins, which look frozen in time on a walk through the woods. Green roofs help the structures disappear into the greenery of the trees, while also compensating for any disturbance to the ground beneath the cabins.

The architects and their clients were, in any case, intent on a light touch. They were commissioned to create thirty-two cabins in all, as well as an on-site restaurant. The cabins themselves are placed among the trees, parallel to one another or, in some

cases, as conjoined twins with a linking door that allows larger families to use two cabins as a combined vacation home.

The entrances to the cabins are at ground level on the upper portion of the hill, while supporting pillars keep the structures level as they push outwards over the sloping gradient below. Service spaces, such as the kitchenette, shower room and storage, are arranged around the entrance hallway to the rear, with the cabins opening out to a combined lounge and bedroom. The focal point of this space is the floor-to-ceiling window that frames a view of the surrounding forest and, with its elevated position, gives the impression of a floating treehouse suspended above the hillside.

As part of the focus on sustainability, many elements of the cabins were prefabricated and then lifted into position, minimizing the impact on the environment and limiting the construction period. The buildings sit well within the tradition of warm, organic modernism established by Aalto and others.

'Using wood as the main material when constructing in the forest is particularly Scandinavian,' says van Bolderen. 'We have also kept the detailing quite minimal, but with a sense of character, using these pure materials.'







The elevation of the living spaces of the cabins above the forest floor, combined with the dramatic floor-to-ceiling window, gives the occupant the sensation of being suspended among the trees.





# Folded Roof House

Muskö, Sweden

Claesson Koivisto Rune Architects

The growing interest in prefabricated homes over recent years sits in synergy with the increasing sophistication of the architectural designs of the buildings themselves. Prefabricating component parts in a factory helps reduce the costs of constructing a home while reducing the amount of time and energy spent on site, compared with traditional building methods. In the Nordic countries, where settings can be challenging and extreme, and only offer small seasonal windows for construction, the concept of prefabrication has particular appeal.

Architects Claesson Koivisto Rune joined forces with prefabrication specialists Arkitekthus, creating a design for a prefabricated timber-framed and -clad home known as the Folded Roof House. The design offers a modern reinterpretation of the Nordic cabin, with a single storey holding bedrooms and bathrooms at either end with an open plan living area at the centre, which features an extensive sequence of glazing and glass doors leading out onto a timber deck. The architects subverted the traditional rectangular format of the cabin by creating a fold, or tuck, in the Rheinzink roof, which also holds hidden guttering and downpipes, simplifying the outline of the building itself.

The architects were commissioned to create the first Folded Roof House on the island of Muskö – one of the larger members of the Stockholm archipelago, situated to the south of the city, and accessed by road bridges and a tunnel. The client was able to tailor the design of the vacation house somewhat, requesting an additional guest house plus a sauna nearby, as well as a jetty, all bespoke designs by Claesson Koivisto Rune. Sitting upon the rocks and bordered by trees, the prefabricated house and its satellite structures manage to feel contextual. The main living spaces

and deck face the vista of the Baltic waters, connecting the cabin with the coastscape.

‘The weathered wood and the grey roof are the exact colours of the bare granite that the house sits on,’ says architect Mårten Claesson. ‘The geometry of the house is also a kind of interpretation of the surrounding rock. The house is “normal with a twist” – a rectangular box with an off-angled, inverted peak mid-roof. It’s a subtle thing but gives a lot of character to the house.’

The building served as a pilot project for the design of the Folded Roof House and has been added to the Arkitekthus catalogue, along with a second, two-storey design known as the Plus House (see p. 212). Other Swedish architects featured in this prefabricated portfolio include Gert Wingårdh, Tham & Videgård and Thomas Sandell.









# Lille Arøya

Larvik, Norway

Lund Hagem Arkitekter

There is an endearing lightness of touch to much contemporary Scandinavian architecture. Within precious coastal and rural landscapes, in particular, there is a desire to create buildings that have an almost temporary quality, as though they are simply guests. There is an ideal that suggests that one day in the future the visiting building could be removed and hardly a trace of it would remain. This very much informed the design and build of a new summer house called Lille Arøya by Lund Hagem Arkitekter.

Commissioned by designer Kaja Klingenberg and her partner Alexander Westberg, the building sits lightly upon the rocky edge of an island to the southwest of Oslo and some distance to the west of the town of Larvik. The isle, which can only be reached by boat, is one of a group of islands jostling for position along the coastline here. The new family retreat replaces an older building close by and was regulated by a tight set of planning limitations on size and scale.

'For us to be allowed to replace the old building, the new one had to be "better" and answer to the situation in a positive way, being less visible than the old cabin,' says architect Kristine Strøm-Gundersen. 'The key requirement from the client was to create a building that connected in a better way with the landscape itself, as well as offering a solution that gave shelter from the prevailing southwest wind.'

Lund Hagem decided to both embrace and protect the rugged, irregular site, creating a platform suspended over the rocks and rock pools below, anchored by a series of slim steel supports drilled directly into the stone; spaces around and below the platform serve as boat moorings and shelters. The timber-framed cabin, made with glulam beams,

sits upon this 'floating' platform, which cantilevers outwards as it pushes towards the water.

The single-storey structure consists of three distinct elements. An accommodation wing holds a sequence of bedrooms and bathrooms, punctuated by walk-throughs and a breezeway. The main living spaces are held in another section of the house that projects outwards from the base rock, cross-braced by triangular tethers that anchor the elevated structure at each end. This part of the house is bordered with glass, forming a belvedere or observatory looking out to the sea lanes and their passing ships. The third element consists of the terraces and decks that sit upon the platform between the two enclosed parts of the cabin, complete with integrated benches.

Given the isolated location of the house, materials were flown in by helicopter, including the concrete used in select parts of the cabin, such as the bathrooms. The cladding and floors are in fir, with flashings and detailing in brass; all of the materials were carefully selected to be able to withstand the extreme coastal conditions. The design of the crafted interiors was a collaboration between the architects and the owner, Kaja Klingenberg.

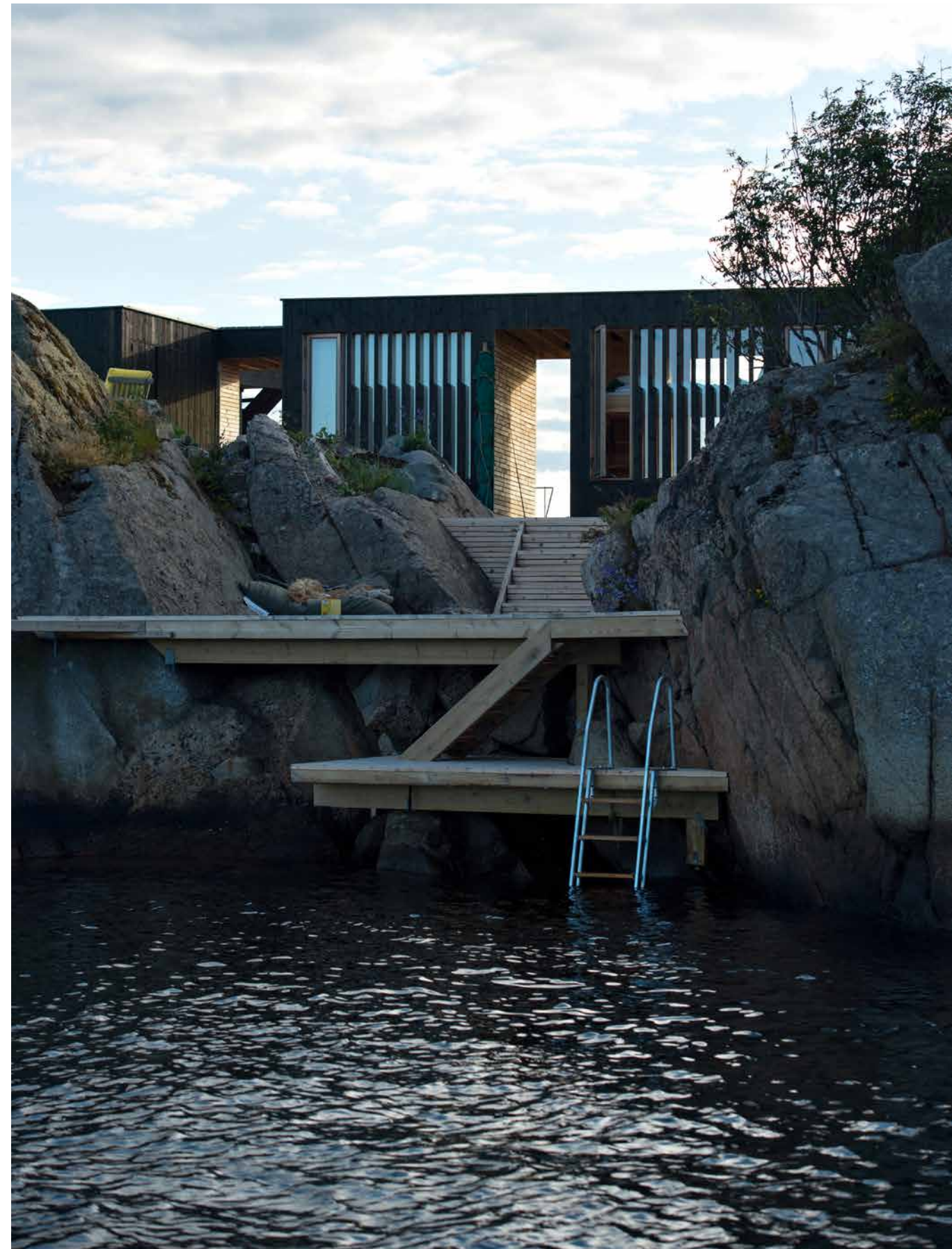
At high tide, especially, the cabin assumes an almost surreal, floating quality, suspended within the folds of the rocks and inlets. 'It could be seen as a vernacular interpretation in the Scandinavian tradition through its use and understanding of the surrounding landscape and materials,' says Strøm-Gundersen. 'But I would also say that the cabin is not so much a building but an exploration of the threshold that separates nature and the man made. It rests between land and water.'







Slim steel supports suspend the cabin above the island's rock pools and the rising tide, so that it harmonizes with its setting, balancing the man made and the natural.





# Villa R

Ljungskile, Sweden

Arkitekterna Krook & Tjäder

Some architects argue that the most sustainable kind of home is a flexible one. Rather than confining its inhabitants to a particular pattern of living, the flexible home accommodates change, adapting with ease to changing family circumstances over time, as well as the arrival of extended family or friends. This is very much the case with Villa R in the Swedish coastal town of Ljungskile, north of Gothenburg. Designed by architects Krook & Tjäder, the house can make claims towards sustainability in a number of respects.

'The area is located where the archipelago meets the forest of the mainland and the site itself is a former boatyard, which was heavily contaminated,' says architect Christian Hammarström, 'so extensive decontamination was required on the land and along the old quayside. For the house itself the clients wanted to live in a "barefoot" house with room for their grown-up children and visiting friends and family. It's tailor-made and calm, with an intimate scale in terms of the details, but also holds the possibility of hosting the most bustling party.'

Krook & Tjäder created a compound home by the water consisting of a number of related elements. Around the site's entrance, there is a low slung pavilion that serves as a spacious but separate four-bedroomed guest house, which can be closed down or opened up according to need. There is also a series of service and storage spaces contained within another pavilion that leads down to a dock at the water's edge.

The main house is oriented towards the views of the sea, opening out onto an extensive terrace facing the open vista of the archipelago. With the exception of an elevated loft or family room on an upper level, the living spaces and the master suite are located

on the ground floor, but designed to include a double-height atrium and a glass-encased indoor garden at the centre of the floor plan. This hidden solarium doubles as a lightwell, yet also introduces a natural and uplifting element at the very heart of the house.

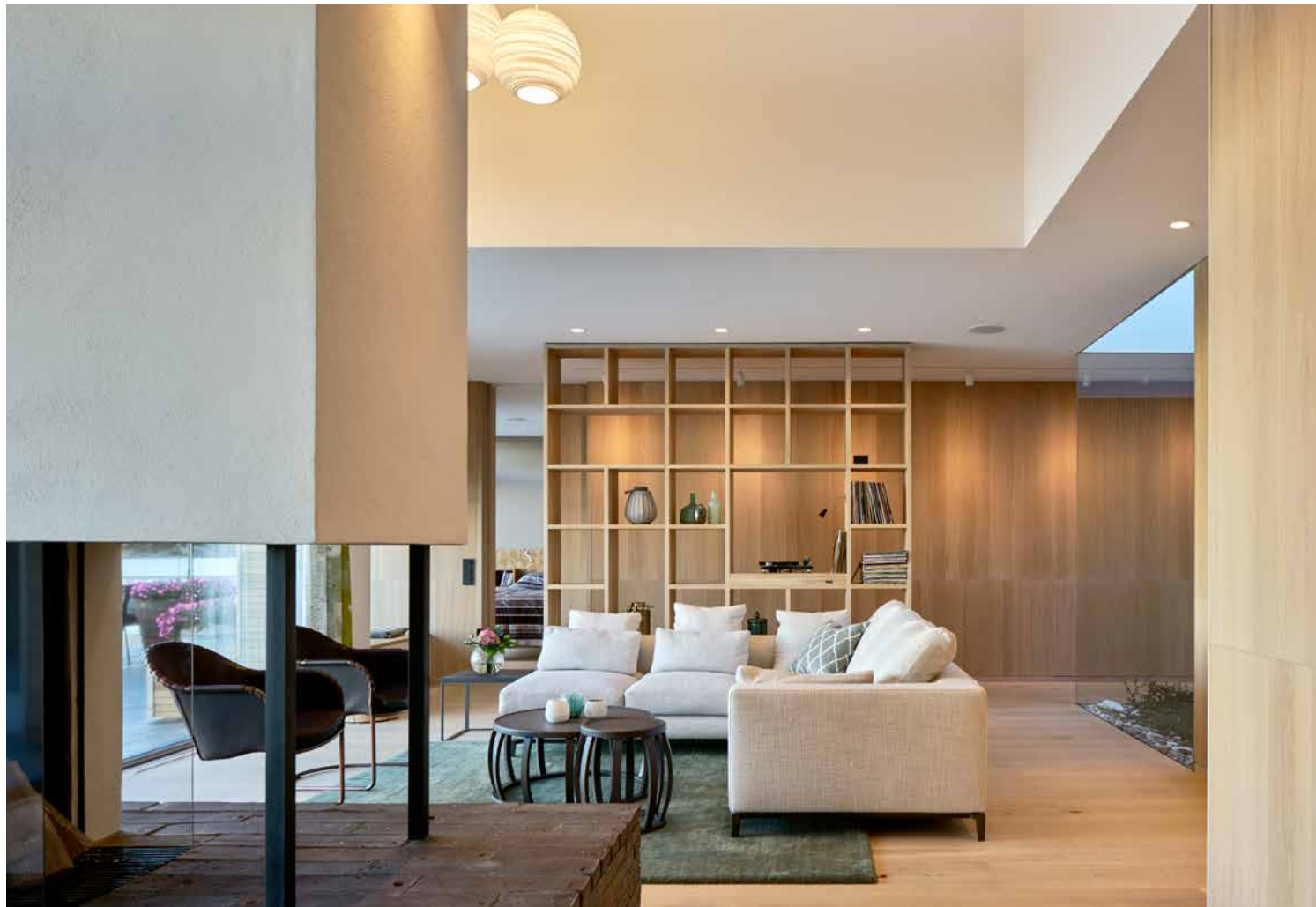
The key living spaces revolve around the atrium and the solarium, as well as connecting with the terrace. The master suite sits within a sequence of spaces to one side of this master building, including a sauna and plunge pool, faced in timber and suggesting Japanese as well as Scandinavian influences.

The entire house, including the pavilions, is faced with slats of cedar that cover a steel framework, while oak has been used for much of the internal joinery. The flat roofs are coated in sedum and the main energy source is geothermal. For much of the time, the owners use only the main house, reducing overall energy consumption.

'The house has a certain air of modesty and control,' says Hammarström. 'But it also adapts to and takes in the natural surroundings.'







Villa R is made up of separate volumes that can be opened up or closed down according to the owner's needs, a flexible design that ensures the house can be adapted to suit the owner's changing long-term needs.





# Four-Cornered Villa

Virrat, Finland

Avanto Architects

One of the great wonders of the Scandinavian countries is the extraordinary natural beauty of its landscapes. The lakes, mountains and forests are an intrinsic part of the character and culture of the region, and serve as an essential habitat for flora, fauna and wildlife of all kinds. Within this context, sustainability has – naturally – become a key concern for Nordic architects and designers, who feel the responsibility of building in the landscape very keenly. In designing the Four-Cornered Villa, architects Ville Hara and Anu Puustinen of the Finnish practice Avanto sought to create a home that was net zero and off the grid, while making as little impact upon its surroundings as possible.

'The basic idea was to provide an example of a sustainable cottage in contrast to normal Finnish cottages that are heated all year round to prevent water pipes from freezing,' says Ville Hara, who was also – with his family – the client for the project. 'The building is well insulated and heated by wood from our own forest, resulting in a carbon-neutral building.'

The house is situated in the municipality of Virrat, a largely rural area around a three-hour drive north of Helsinki. The site sits upon a small horseshoe-shaped island in Lake Vaskivesi, one of the larger lakes that punctuates the countryside here. The site was formerly occupied by a modest hut built in the 1960s to house construction workers building a new road; later the hut was dragged across the frozen lakebed to the island during the winter months.

Ville Hara spent two years studying the site before developing a cruciform, single-storey timber home, with the four spurs of the plan facing different views of the lake and the woods via a series of floor-to-ceiling windows. Two semi-sheltered verandahs, or porches,

are also contained within the overall outline of the building. On the outside, the timber cladding is stained black, while within the timber floors and panelling has been oiled and stained white, creating a vivid contrast between the light, bright interiors and the subtle exterior finish, which blends into the ranks of the nearby tree trunks.

The main living spaces are open plan, with a light sense of separation for the sole bedroom in the house. Two wood-burning stoves provide heating within the super-insulated building, assisted by solar gain, while solar panels provide electricity. A sauna is contained within a separate building nearby, closer to the lake, and here too the heating comes from a wood-burning stove, while water is collected on site.

Built with a modest budget and using sustainably sourced timber, the house is an exemplar of a low-carbon approach to the design and build of rural homes. 'Vegetables and herbs are grown on site and the lake is known as a good place to catch pike and perch,' says Hara. 'The simple and ascetic life in the countryside here differs dramatically from the hectic city life and provides the possibility to live a life with a minimum impact on nature.'



Country Homes

Four-Cornered Villa





‘The basic idea was to provide an example of a sustainable cottage in contrast to normal Finnish cottages that are heated all year round to prevent water pipes from freezing. The building is well insulated and heated by wood from our own forest, resulting in a carbon-neutral building.’

Ville Hara, architect and client



# Plus House

Vendelsö, Sweden

Claesson Koivisto Rune Architects

There are many pluses to the design and build of a prefabricated home, which generally outweigh any minuses. Prefabs tend to be both cheaper and quicker to build than conventional homes, creating more affordable buildings, while the reduced time spent on site during construction, in combination with high standards of insulation, helps reduce the building's impact on the environment. One of the greatest challenges for architects and designers lies in the fact that standardized, prefabricated homes are seldom site-specific. This requires a degree of flexibility and adaptability with the plan of the building, which allows it to sit neatly and responsively within all kinds of contexts. This was very much the approach behind the design of Claesson Koivisto Rune's Plus House.

'The Plus House is a typical, traditional Swedish house at first glance and from a distance,' says architect Märten Claesson, 'and the proportions were taken from the generic Swedish barn. However, up close it is quite extreme, with either complete glazing or completely closed walls and a total reduction of detail. To make this balancing act just right was more difficult than first appears. The house was not specifically designed for this site but the setting could not have suited it better.'

The house is situated around a twenty-minute drive from Stockholm, close to a small, rural village and a nature reserve. The clients were living in an apartment in the city, but wanted more space for themselves and their two children. Having found the perfect location, they approached the prefabrication specialists Arkitekthus and selected one of two designs developed for the company by Claesson Koivisto Rune (see also *Folded Roof House*, p. 94).

The design takes its name from the key sight lines that pass through the upper and lower levels of the house, one from front to back (ground floor) and the other from side to side (upper floor); on a diagram combining the two levels, these indicators fuse into a plus sign. These sight lines, and the extensive use of banks of triple glazing, allow a significant degree of connectivity with the landscape, with the Plus House neatly adapting to this rural setting, bordered by pine trees and rocky outcrops.

The ground floor is semi-open plan, with the walls of glass opening out onto a long timber deck. Within, a seating area sits to one side of the staircase while the kitchen and dining area sits to the other; a separate service and utility zone sits behind the kitchen at the far end of the house. Upstairs, the bedrooms sit to either side of the staircase and a central bathroom, with space enough for a fitted desk within one of the two long landings that run from side to side, extending all the way to the integrated balconies at either end; fitted storage cupboards are also hosted by these landings.

Constructed with factory-made component panels and parts, the house of spruce, steel and glass was assembled on site in twenty days.

'All three materials represent local Swedish products available at a reasonable cost,' says Claesson. 'The Plus House has many virtues and, apart from being a fantastic living machine for a family, it is also rather humble and proof of the possibility of creating good architecture within a low budget.'



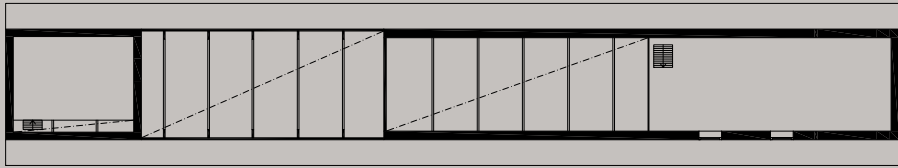
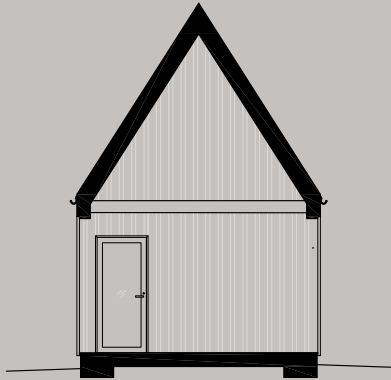
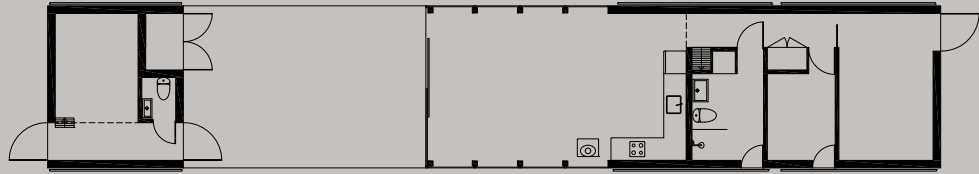


The prefabricated Plus House was specially designed to seamlessly integrate with any environment, in keeping with the Nordic tradition of treading lightly on the land.



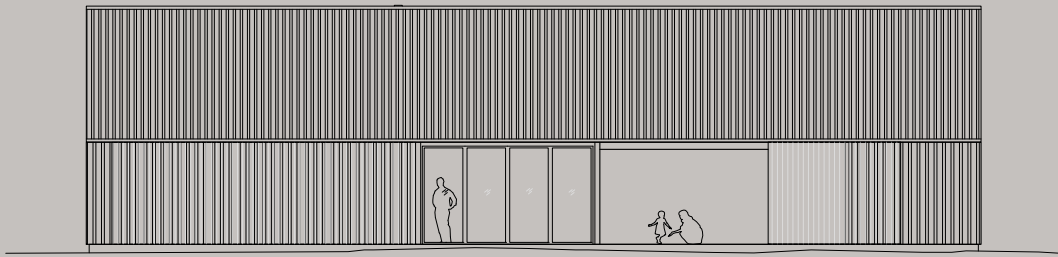
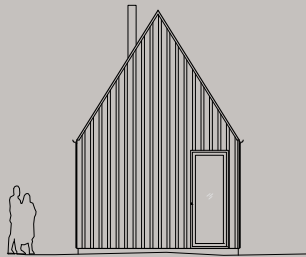


- 01 Original plans
- 02 Section
- 03 Façade



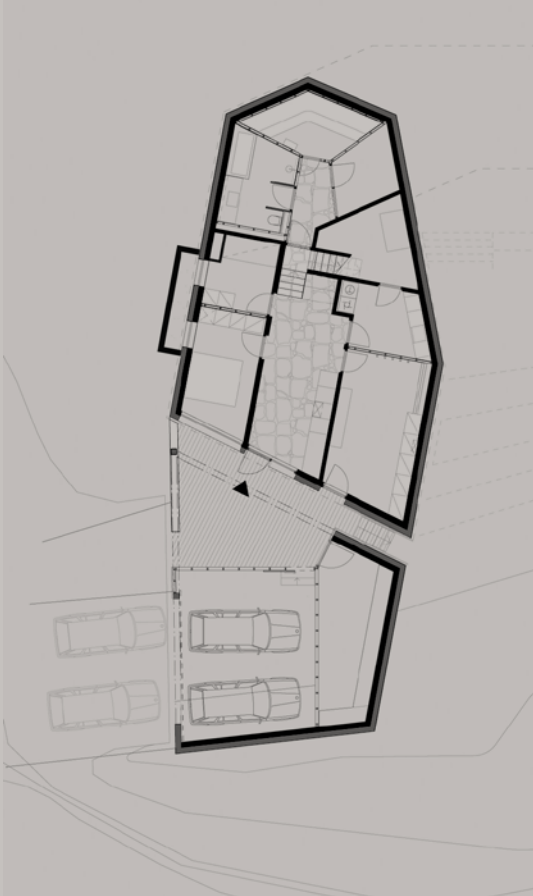
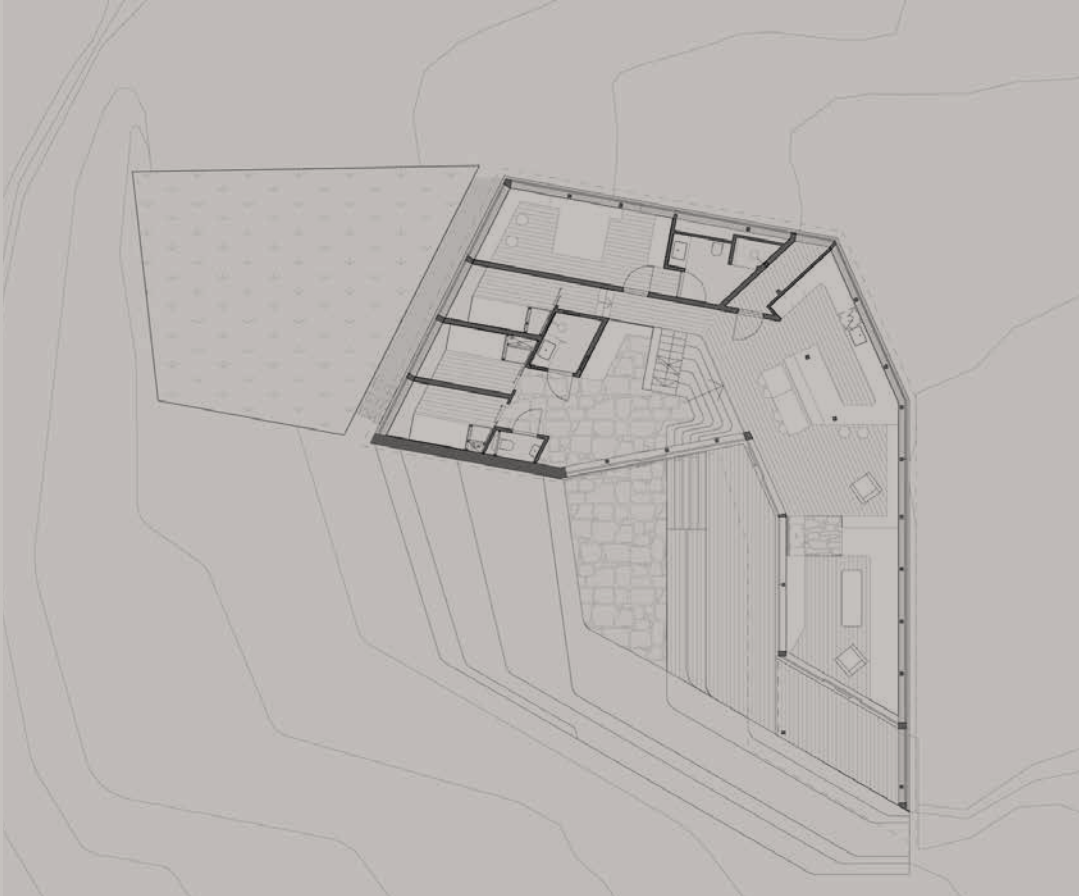
01

02



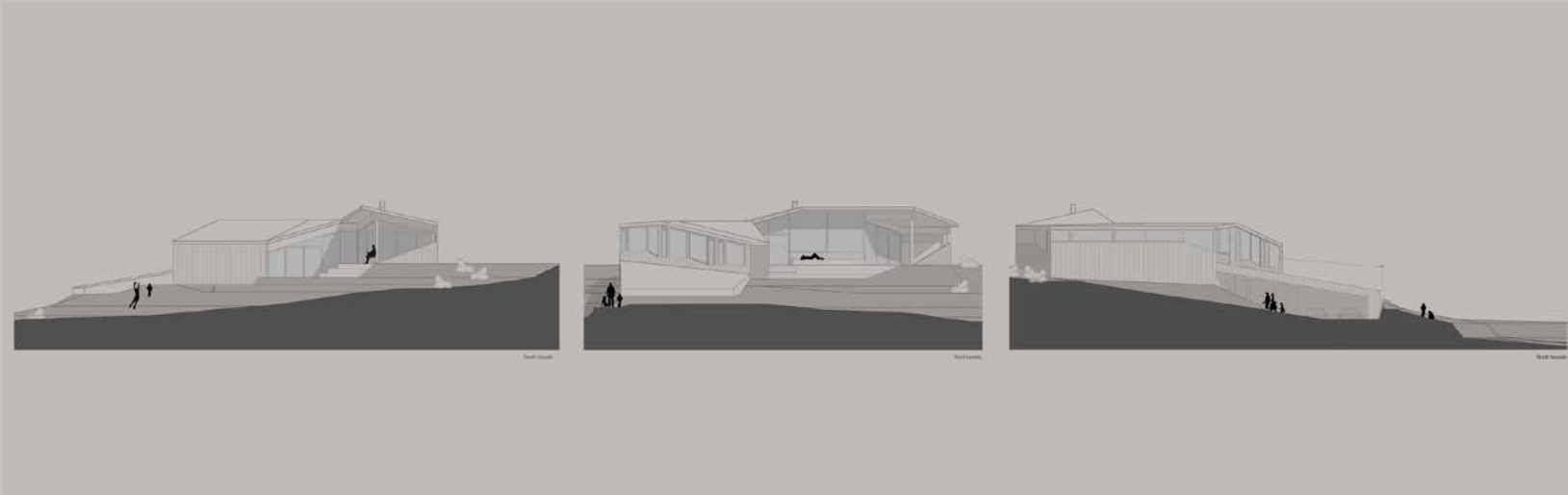
03

- 01 First floor
- 02 Basement
- 03 Façades



01

02



03