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NEWLANDS

Mary Arnold-Forster Architects

Words Hugh Strange
Photographs David Barbour



The Lake District is so associated with a particular set of ideas of the English pastoral, notably captured by the Romantic poets, and more recently defined by leisure pursuits, that it is easy to overlook what an internationally connected and hard worked landscape it once was. Newlands Valley, within the National Park and close to Derwent Water, is especially interesting in this respect. Like much of Cumbria, it was settled by the Vikings, with the flat terrain of the valley base later drained and cultivated to form productive farming land that is now largely grazed by the distinctive local Herdwick sheep. Later still, within the steep fells that extend above the valley edges, valuable metals were discovered and mines established. Most famous of these was Goldscope mine, where copper and lead were extracted in great quantities. First worked in the 13th century, it was during the reign of Elizabeth I that the mine thrived. The 'Company of Mines Royal' was established at this time, bringing German expertise and skilled mine workers to carry out the copper mining operations. Lead mining prevailed, and for many centuries the area was a hive of industrial activity, with works finally ending in the early 20th century.

Perhaps it should not be so surprising then to discover amongst the rural farms and hamlets

of the valley floor, a few miles from Goldscope mine, a new house so indebted to High Modernism. And yet it is surprising, nevertheless. Surrounded by the reassuring solidity of the pitched slate roofs and thick stone walls of the local buildings, here we are presented by flat roofs, expanses of glazing and floating volumes. The cause for the house's difference, its otherness, I would suggest lies in part in the persistent interrogation by its architect Mary Arnold-Forster over numerous one-off house projects of the same demanding questions, each time approached in a slightly different manner. How, her houses seem to ask, might one dwell in a spectacular natural landscape? And alongside this inquiry, a similarly expansive yet challenging question: what might the vernacular *really* mean in our contemporary world? Definitive answers are not the objective here, rather the nuanced wisdom that comes from variations in responses over multiple iterations. Yet it is equally telling that one half of the client for this house is a structural engineer who, operating with both hats on for the project, has clearly brought an agenda informed by their profession, a will to examine, and perhaps challenge, the journey of load through a building. Together, architect and client/engineer have produced a dwelling imbued with these preoccupations.







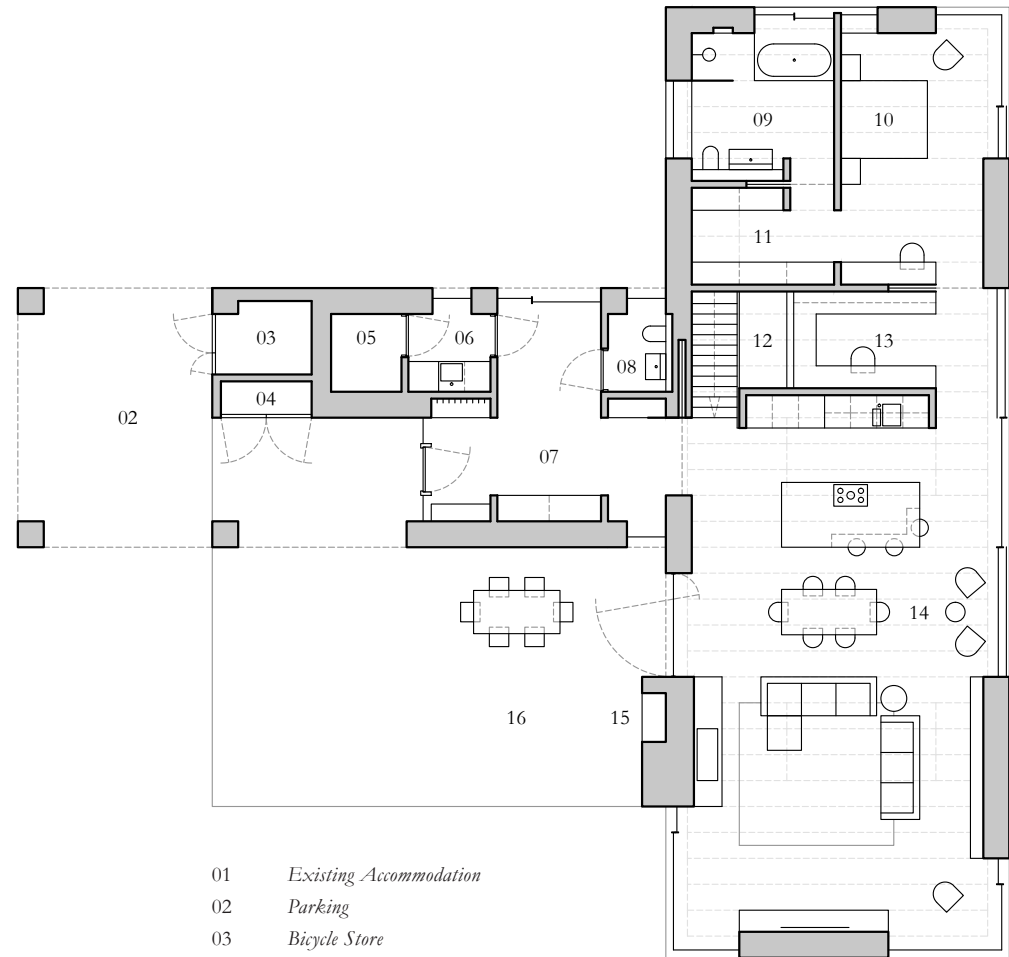
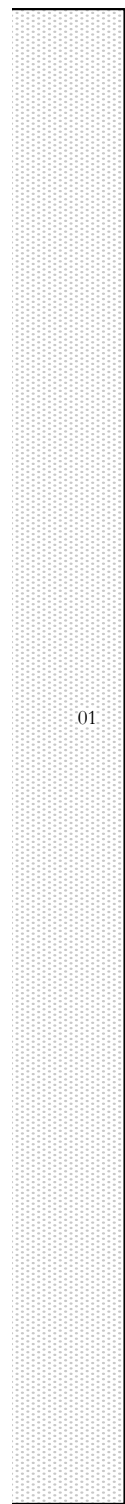
The site of this house is approached along the edge of the valley with lush green fields to one side and the dark tones of heather and bracken ridges to the other. At the point where the road bridges a small ghyll, on its way to joining the primary stream of the valley, a simple converted piggery forms one edge of an entrance court for the new dwelling. A secondary entrance wing forms another and connects perpendicularly to the main volume of the house. Here, a lower floor, built of slate, extends the level of the courtyard outwards towards the view, forming a new constructed ground. Rising from this horizontal plinth, a generously proportioned chimney provides a vertical counterpoint. These planar elements, emphatically solid, appear to lift and hold the main box-like volume of the house, elevated and balanced, to fully address the remarkable landscape beyond.





Entering through the hallway and preliminary spaces of the entrance wing, one arrives at the expansive interior of this primary volume, a light-filled, generously proportioned space, very much oriented towards the view. This upper level is constructed with an engineered timber frame, more specifically BauBuche, a beech laminated veneer lumber that is significantly more efficient than solid timbers and glulam, as well as LVL formed from spruce. The material's use in the upper floor of the house results in a remarkable openness not always associated, or often achievable, with timber construction. This is particularly evident in the span of the main room's roof and in the scale of the large

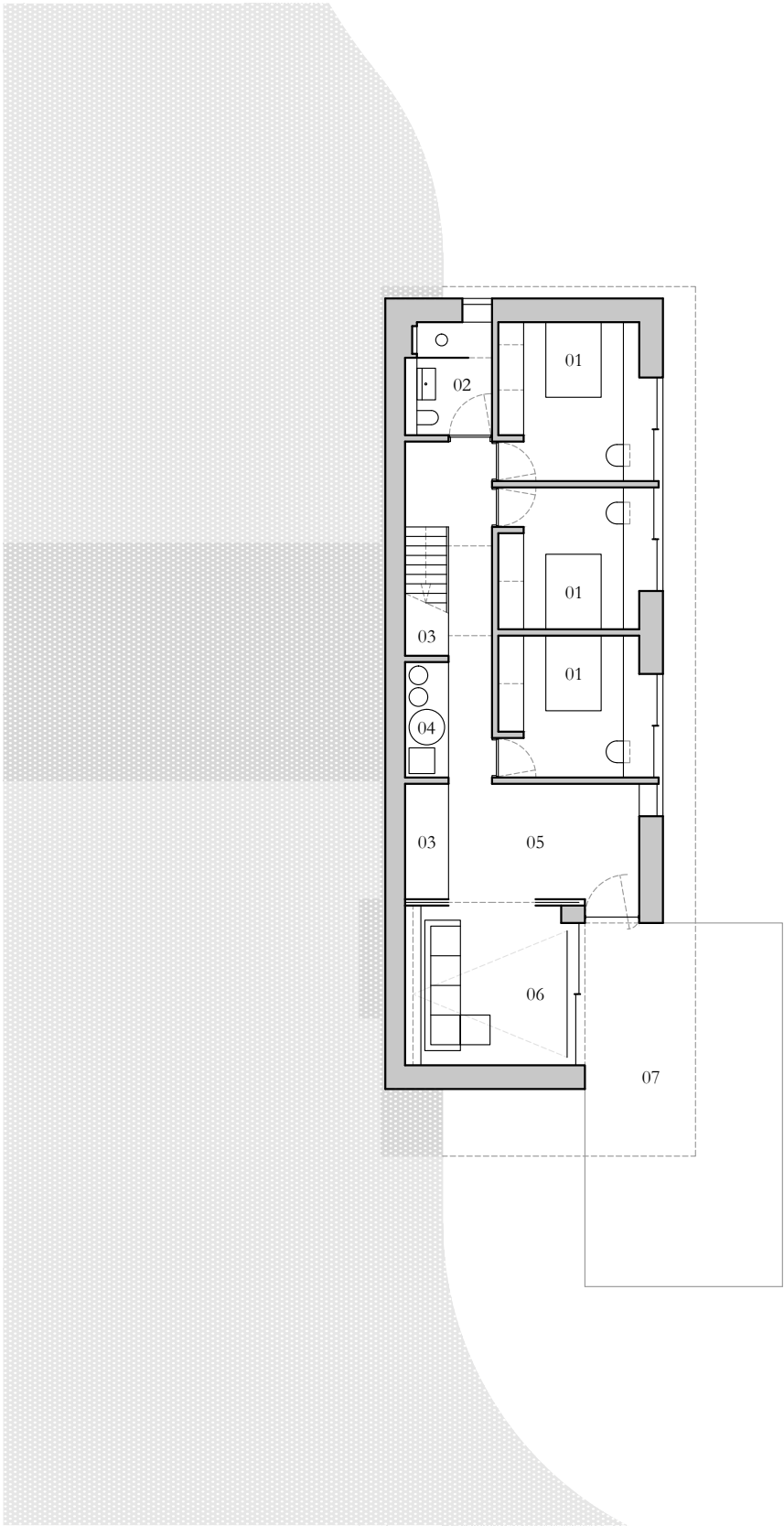
window central to the long wall that addresses the view. Accordingly, this level tends towards the open plan, with the kitchen, dining and living areas forming a single primary space, with a study area screened off, and to the far north end a similarly light-filled master suite of adjacent bedroom, bathroom and dressing area. A stair, with rooflight and void over, leads down to the lower level, housed within the masonry plinth. Here, the children's accommodation is arranged in a cellular layout of corridor and a series of rooms, opening to a snug at the southern end of the plan. **These lower bedrooms are sunk into the ground so that the garden beyond the windows is at desk level.**



- 01 Existing Accommodation
- 02 Parking
- 03 Bicycle Store
- 04 Bin Store
- 05 Drying Room
- 06 Utility
- 07 Hall
- 08 WC
- 09 Bathroom
- 10 Bedroom
- 11 Dressing
- 12 Stair Void
- 13 Study
- 14 Kitchen/Dining/Living
- 15 Barbecue
- 16 Terrace

0 5
m





- 01 Bedroom
- 02 Shower Room
- 03 Storage
- 04 Services
- 05 Hall
- 06 Snug
- 07 Terrace

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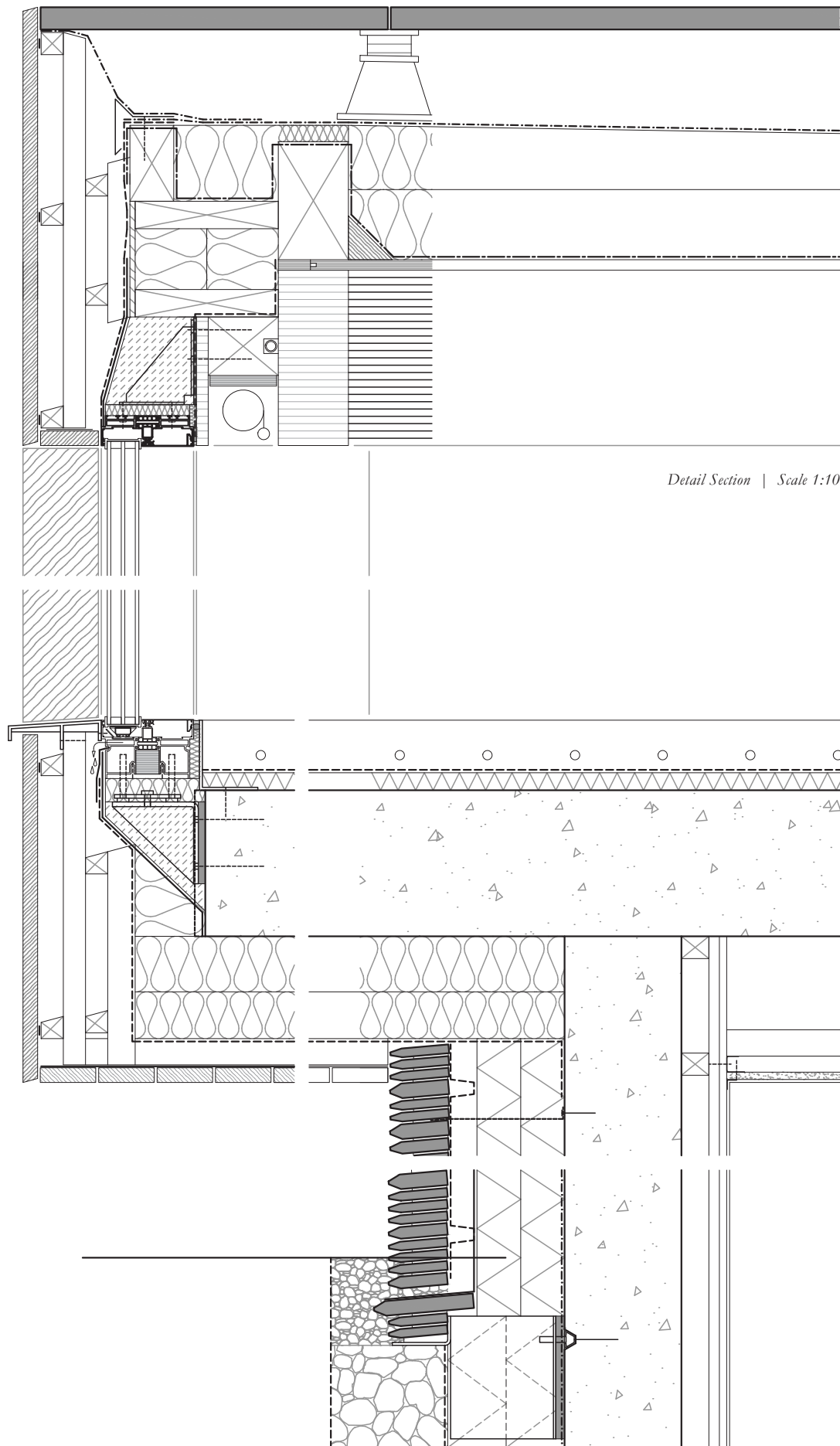




The upper, timber-structured level sits on the cantilevered concrete construction of the lower level overhanging the whole of the lower front façade, emphasising from the outside the sense of a lightweight box perched above the falling terrain that surrounds it. At the southern end of the plan the walls of the snug are set back further still, providing a covered outdoor space, and requiring a greater structural projection. While the timber volume projects beyond the envelope of the masonry volume below, three of the corners of this timber volume are themselves also formed with structural daring, the timber edge beams cantilevering to form open corners defined by delicate frameless glazing rather than solid posts. While externally these structural moves differentiate the house from the characteristic containment of the traditional Lakeland farmhouses, internally the dissolved corners suggest a specifically modernist sensibility. This approach is reinforced more broadly through the internal finishes. The windows used have very slim profiles, and polished concrete floors are used throughout, with the cuts of induced movement joints minimised wherever possible. Internal walls are finished with a lime plaster, and the various

timber elements – the BauBuche structure, birch plywood ceiling and Douglas fir joinery – are all coated with a white stain that recesses the grain and evens the different species to a more uniform appearance. Together these finishes suggest a gentle, perhaps softer, modernist palette.

Externally the materials used are altogether tougher. The upper level is clad in vertical timber boards, with a black pigmented ore finish applied. While almost the tonal reverse of the light limed finishes of the nearby stone farmhouses, the dark warmth of the application nevertheless resonates with the browns and deep purples of the brackens and heathers of the fells above. The interplay between the striking horizontality of this timber form and the vertical slate chimney element also echoes one of the few modern precedents of note in the area, Lodore House, designed by John Gill and constructed in 1968. The client of Arnold-Forster's design had regularly stayed in this earlier house, which had clearly made an impact, both for the specific compositional relationship of chimney to building volume, and for the wider inspiration for what modernism might offer as template for rural living.



Detail Section | Scale 1:10



- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>01 Paving slab, supported by adjustable pedestals
Single ply membrane
Tapered PIR insulation
Vapour barrier
18 mm whitened tongue + groove birch plywood
300 x 50 mm whitened BauBuche beam, at 600 mm centres</p> | <p>04 Aluminium triple glazed window, supported by:
Stainless steel support angles, with thermal break
PIR support angle insulation, with EPDM flashing</p> |
| <p>02 95 x 25 mm vertical thermally treated Scots pine cladding
75 x 50 mm tapered horizontal timber batten
75 x 50 mm vertical timber batten
(Matt black stain to cladding + battens)
Breather membrane
120 mm wood-fibre insulation
250 mm in-situ reinforced cantilevered concrete slab</p> | <p>05 95 x 25 mm vertical thermally treated Scots pine cladding
75 x 50 mm tapered horizontal timber batten
75 x 50 mm vertical timber batten
(Matt black stain to cladding + battens)
Breather membrane
120 mm wood-fibre insulation
250 mm in-situ reinforced cantilevered concrete slab</p> |
| <p>03 90 mm polished concrete screed, incorporating under-floor heating pipes
Polythene separating layer
30 mm PIR insulation
250 mm in-situ reinforced cantilevered concrete slab
160 mm wood-fibre insulation
Breather membrane
45 x 38 mm horizontal timber batten
95 x 25 mm horizontal thermally treated Scots pine cladding
(Matt black stain to cladding + batten)</p> | <p>06 12 - 25 x 100 mm knapped Honister slate, watershot coursing
50 mm recycled polypropylene cavity wall spacer
Stainless steel wall tie, with insulation retaining clip
DPC cavity tray
150 mm PIR cavity insulation
Self-adhesive waterproofing tanking membrane
200 mm in-situ reinforced concrete retaining wall
45 mm service void
18 mm plywood
12.5 mm plasterboard, lime plaster skim</p> |
| | <p>07 12 - 25 x 100 mm knapped Honister slate, supported by:
Stainless steel masonry support system, with thermal break
Drainage + geotextile membrane
200 mm XPS insulation</p> |



This chimney, and the constructed ground that doubles as lower-level accommodation, are built with in-situ concrete and clad in local slate. Like the nearby Goldscope mine, the sites of the Lake District's rich productive history - the mills, mines and quarries that once dotted the landscape - are now largely closed or abandoned. Honister, sited high up the passes, stands as exception, England's last working slate mine. Client and architect visited together, selecting the lower grade of material that was both randomly sized and cheaper. This was then laid in thin courses, with the mortar set back and slates laid at a slight fall, giving the walls a stacked appearance. These masonry elements provide a literal and visual grounding to the light timber volume above, a supportive armature. But they also ground the modernism of the house in the local history and materiality of the Lakes, resulting in an architecture both otherly, and familiar. ♦