



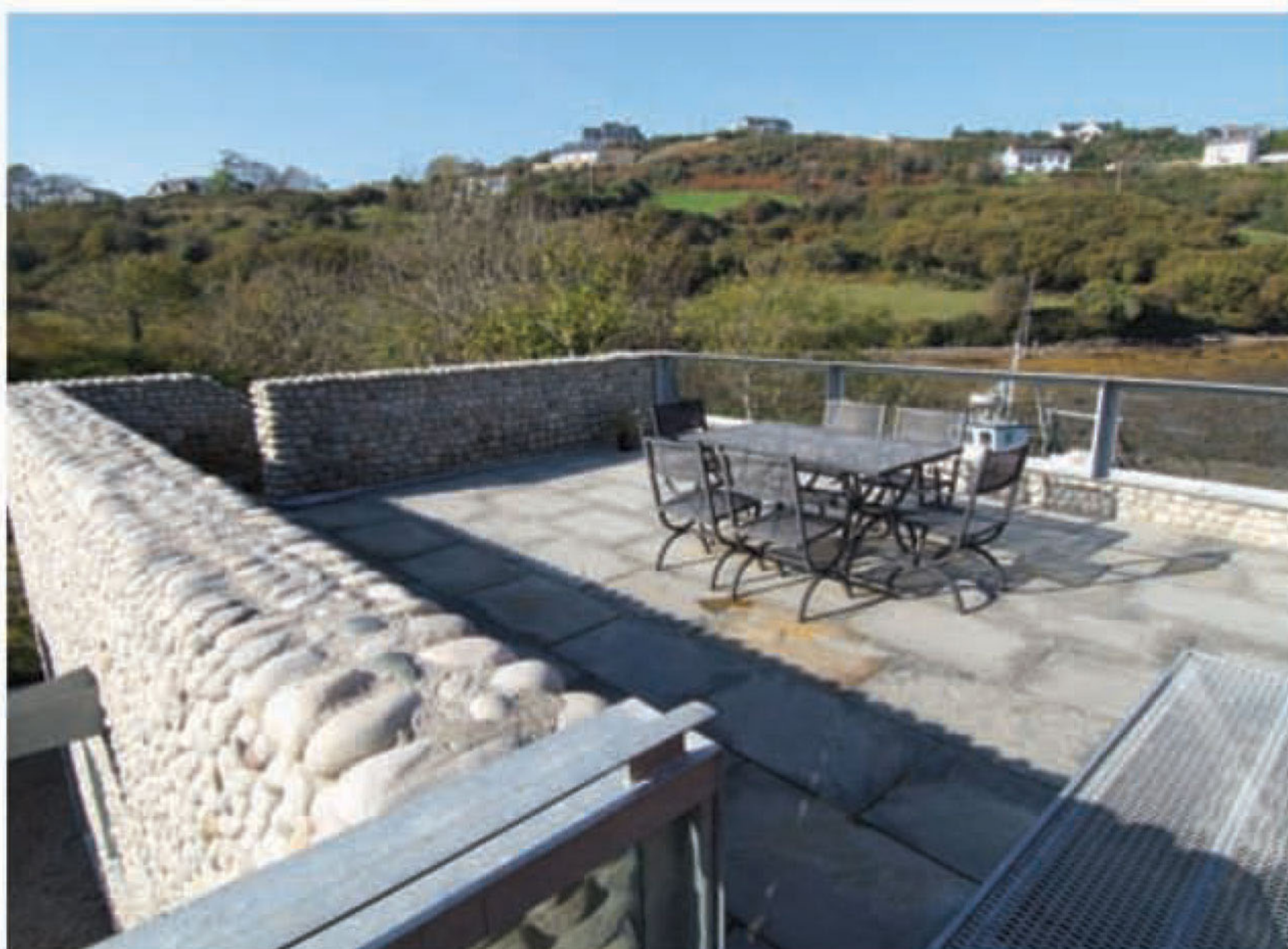
# 'An Sciobál Dearg'

Marianne O'Kane Boal visits Mulroy Bay, Co. Donegal where she discovers a dwelling perfectly in keeping with its seaside location.









**A**n Sciobál Dearg is gaelige for 'The Red Barn' or 'The Red Shed.'

Completed in July 2009, the house is situated overlooking Mulroy Bay in Downings. Originally from County Antrim, the client came to the area in the late eighties as a community development worker and has remained there since for the last twenty years. The client inherited an interest in the sea from their father who was a yacht builder in Whitehead.

While conceived on a small scale at c1800 square feet, 'An Sciobál Dearg' does not impart a diminutive impression. Situated on approximately an eighth of an acre, the scale is practically urban, albeit in a rural seaside context. The series of fishing boats moored in front of the house create an attractive vista for the dwelling to overlook.

MacGabhann Architects, a renowned practice based in Letterkenny, designed 'An Sciobál Dearg'. The client's main stipulation in

terms of brief was that the house would be contextually in keeping with its surroundings. The largest neighbouring buildings are the sizeable boat sheds located at the pier and this typology was to be referenced in the design. To this end the architects created a red rectangular box with pitched roof (and integrated solar panels) as the principal feature of their design. This offers a parallel allusion to the adjacent boat sheds. For the architects, "The red corrugated metal cladding was chosen as it is the common material traditionally used on sheds in the countryside. Also its lightweight qualities suit the metaphor of a building about to be launched into the sea, or that of a temporary building or ship container perched on a dockside."

The orientation of the box is designed to maximise views with; "the seaward and cantilevered projecting end of the red box, cut-off at an oblique angle, to offer views of ➤





➤ the larger bay and open sea beyond."

This type of design is perfectly in keeping with MacGabhann's domestic oeuvre where their primary objective is to communicate a vernacular aesthetic in a contemporary vein. They strive to reference the habitual environs of a given dwelling, offering a contextual statement but one firmly seated within the Irish tradition of building. The client, therefore, was resolutely of like mind. The confederacy of architect and client is palpable and this can be seen in the collaborative approach to design. MacGabhann Architects appoint a team of professionals to every commissioned project, regardless of scale or whether it is in the commercial or domestic sector. For 'An Sciobál Dearg' the project architects were Niels Merschbrock and Bjoern Patzwald, project manager Antoin MacGabhann and design led by Tarla MacGabhann and Barry Maguire. Therefore there was a practice team involved for the client to work with. This was further complemented by the

contribution of the client's daughter, who worked with her parent on the interior and the unique range of finishes.

Externally the house is conceived to reference two levels of the earth/road at entrance/ground level and the seashore at lower ground level. The ingredients for materials were lifted from the surrounding buildings and the seashore. The lightweight box extends at a right angle to the road on the same plane and the box's red oxide hue references the earth.

The windows throughout the building are aluminum on the exterior and wood on the interior. There are also a number of coastal or nautical references. The remainder of the building, in contrast, is faced with beach stones, salvaged from the seashore, that have been individually placed by hand in the mortar as a distinctive alternative to stonework. The building is entered via a catwalk bridge composed of galvanised steel mesh underfoot and a galvanised steel handrail. This method of approach suggests a



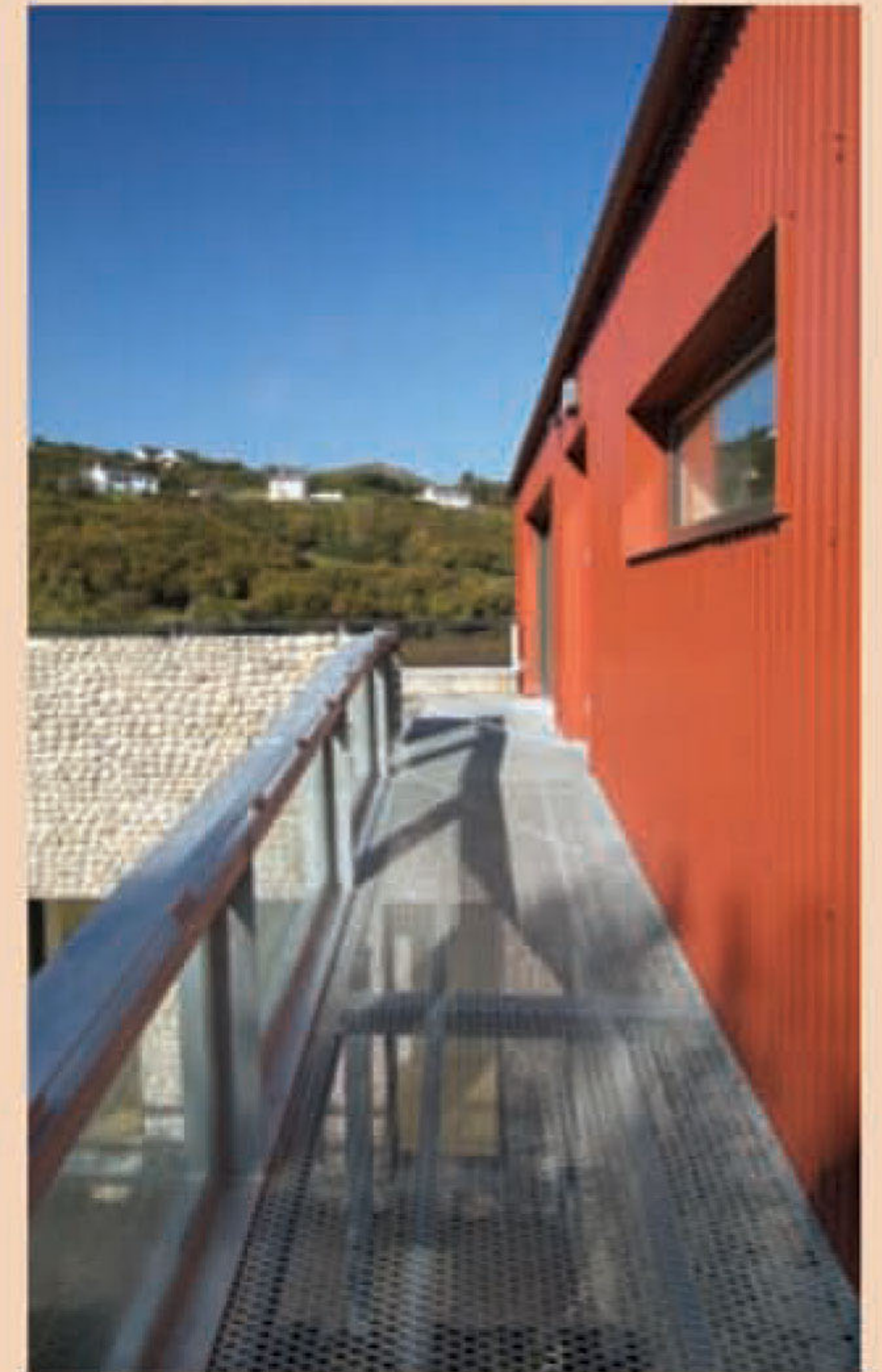
ship's gangplank and the analogy is further emphasised by the west facing flag stoned terrace at the main entrance to the living area, alluding to the ship's deck.

The house is entered via the kitchen/living/dining area. Throughout the house the client

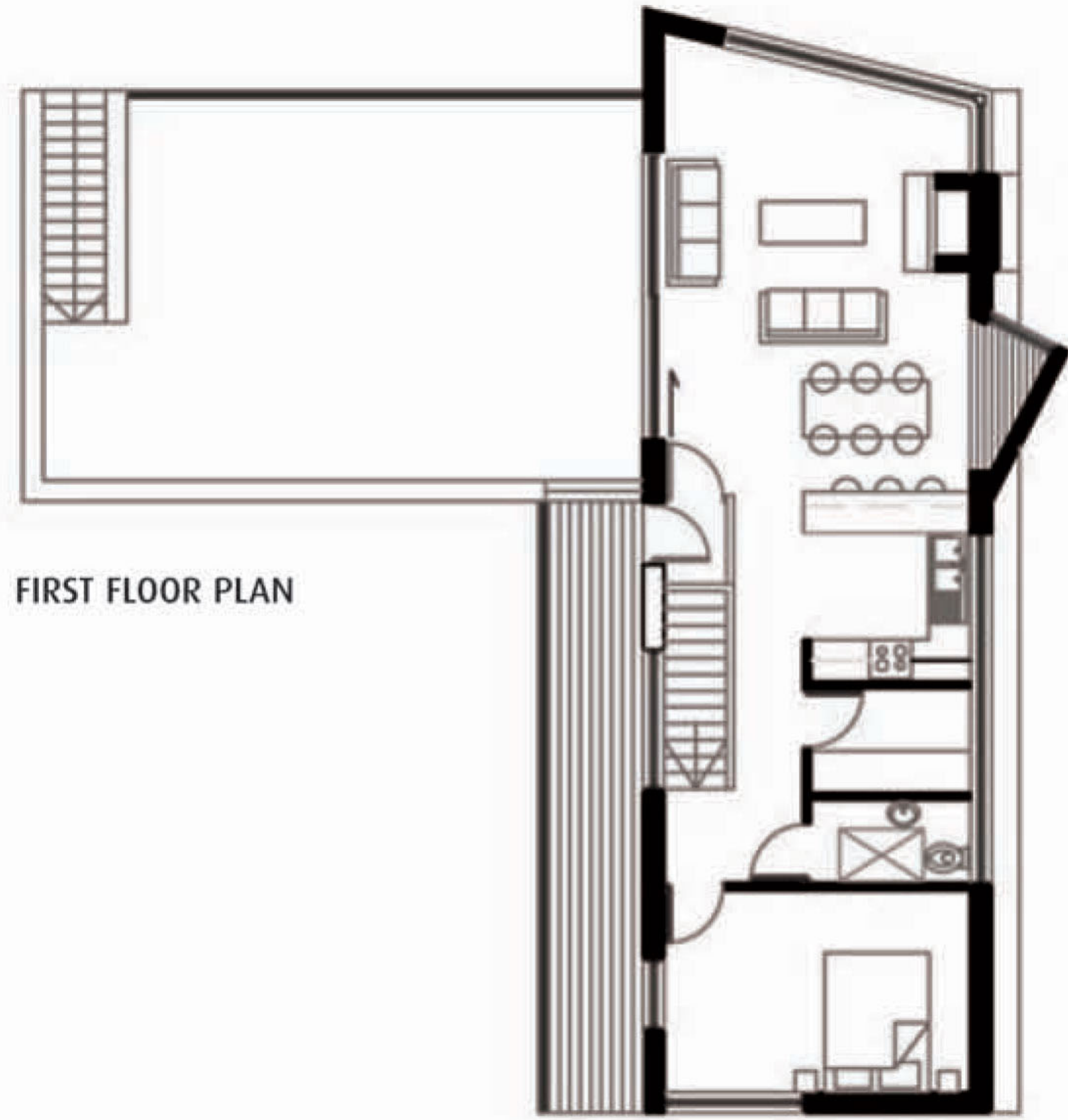


commissioned a one-off floor finish. It is a concrete floor but one infused with a sand cement pigment which perfectly echoes the colour of beach sand. The shade of the concrete, combined with the underfloor heating gives the distinct impression of walking on

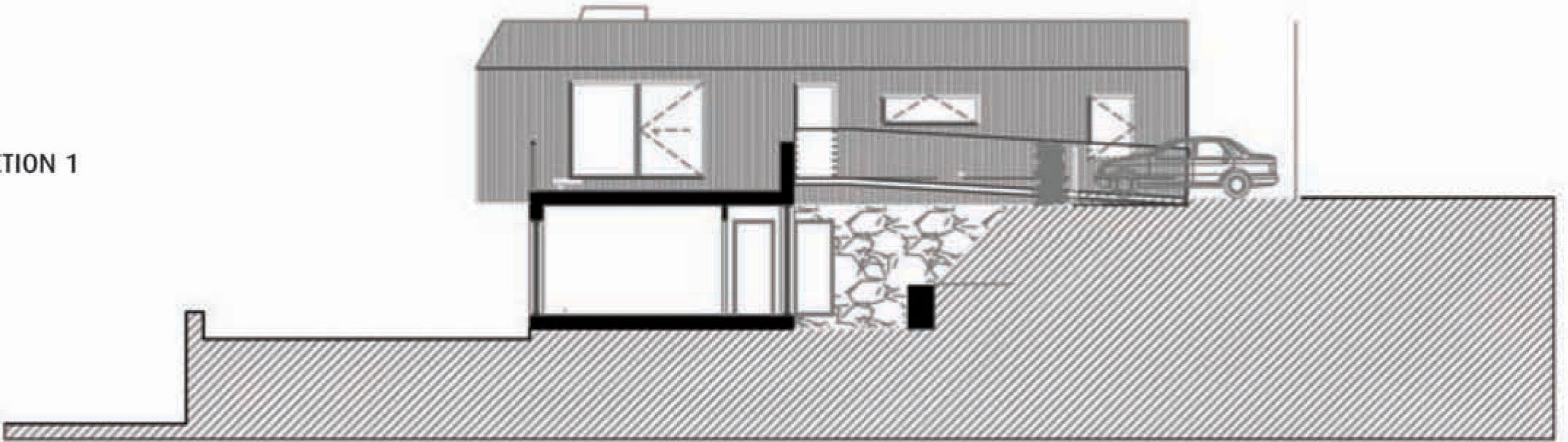
a tropical beach, apt for the seaside location. This floor finish is used in other areas also, as kitchen counter tops and indeed as a seating area and over mantel in the living area. The client achieves a sense of continuity and harmony between inside and outside through their ➤



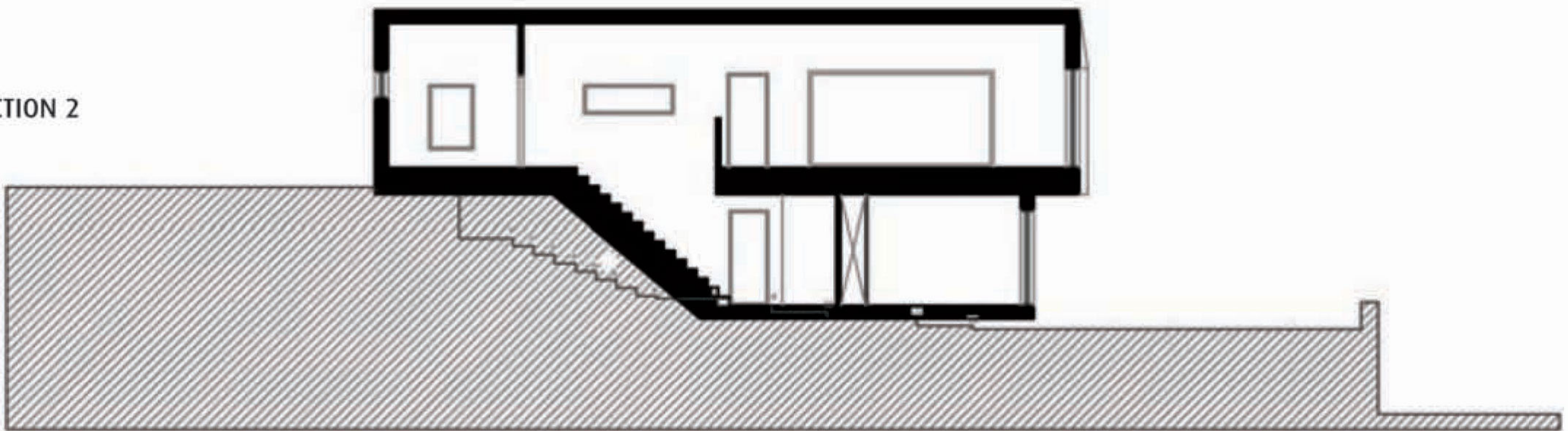




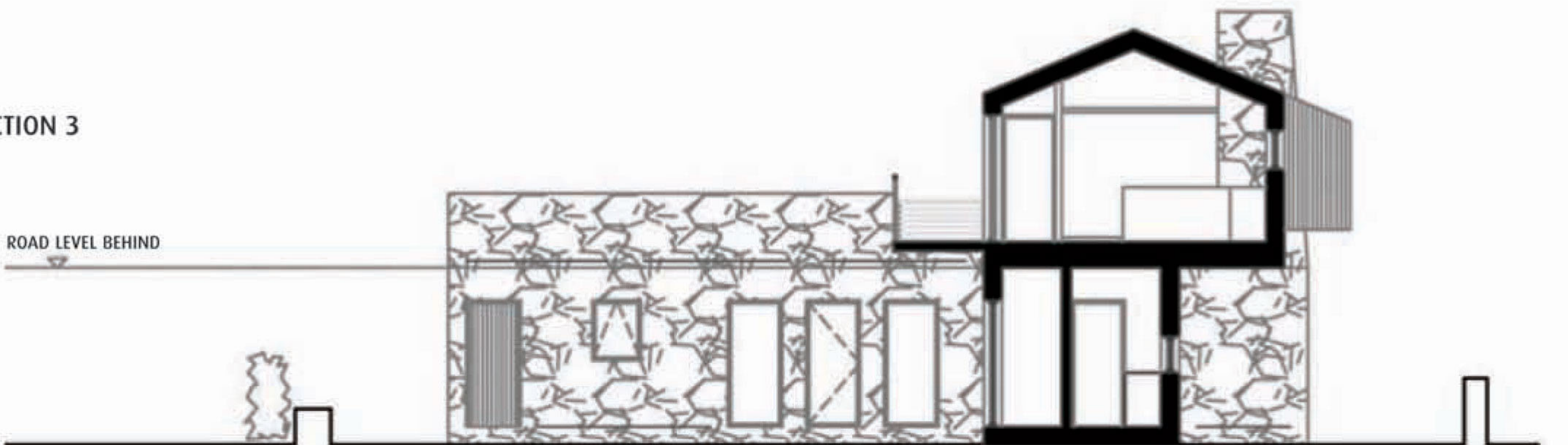
SECTION 1



SECTION 2



SECTION 3





➤ extensive employment of the colour green in the living area; sofas and dining chairs. This directly links to the lush forested area across the bay outside the living room window. Also on this level is the client's bedroom and ensuite. The lower ground level is set out parallel to the waters edge. The nine narrow window and door openings in the beach stone are framed on the reveals and cills with a metal surround, which also function as the lintel. These openings are of varying widths and provide the series of rooms within (two bedrooms, a study and bathroom) with either two or three windows each. Each bedroom and the study have one window that also functions as a door so there is access to the waterside from these shorefront rooms at lower ground level. The

bathroom is distinctive and tranquil. Its vertical window offers a seaview and this is perfectly complemented by the horizontal strip window above the bath. The theme of beach stones on the exterior is adapted here with a beach pebble effect on the principal wall of the bathroom, to great success. Services, utility and boiler are also housed on this level and extend at a right angle to the shorefront rooms.

'An Sciobál Dearg' succeeds through complementing rather than challenging its context. The shared view of architect and client coupled with a concerted approach of application has determined a coherent language of design that is successfully fused both externally and internally. This fusion of ideas and materials has enabled a compelling outcome. ■



## THE PROJECT

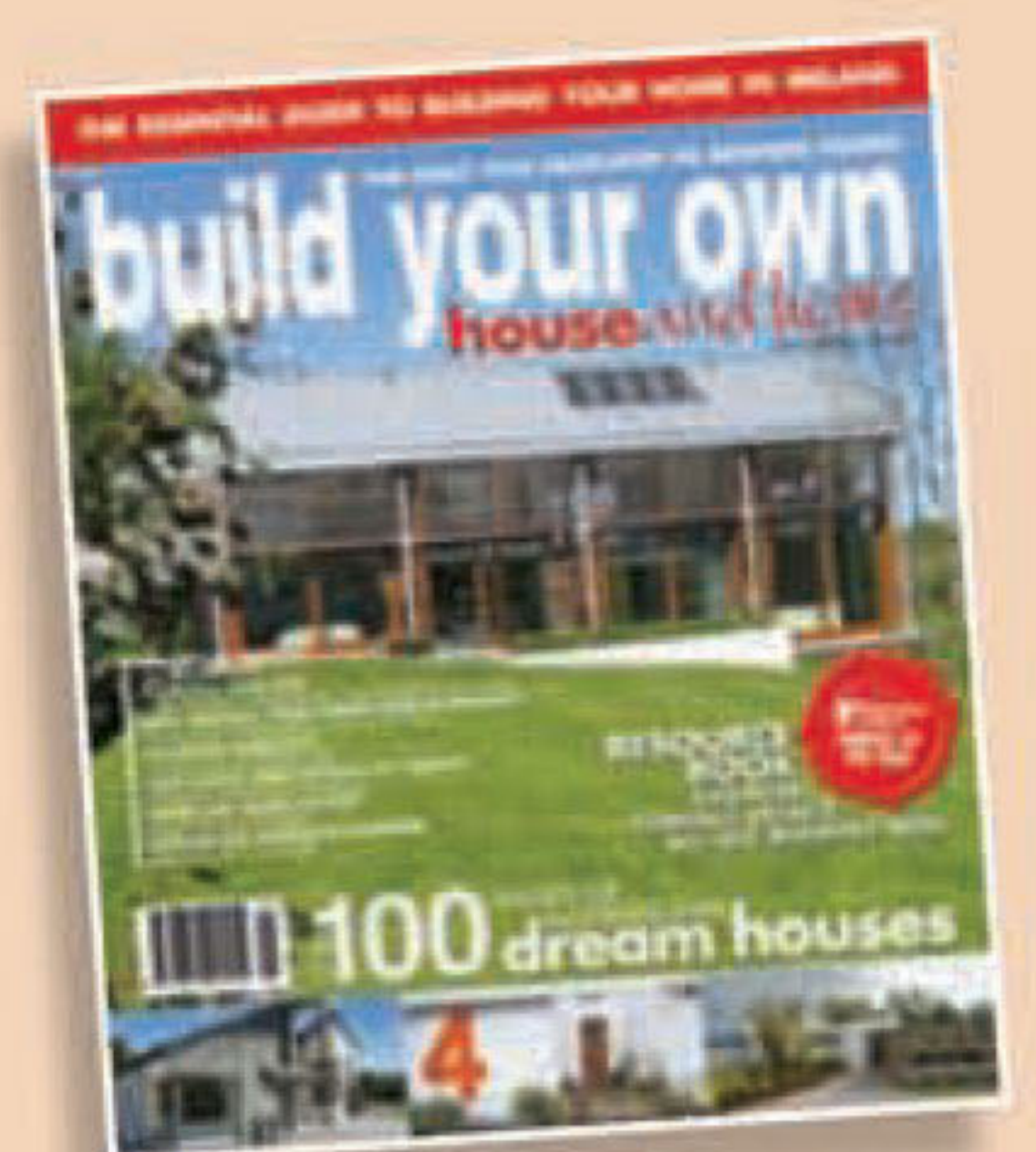
Client  
**Private**

Architect  
**MacGabhann Architects**

Structural Engineer  
**Carr & Co.**

Main Contractor  
**Barney Coyle & Sons**

Photographer  
**John Hogan Photography**



This project was first featured in Build Your Own House and Home 2010, published by Dyflin Publications.