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THE PIG HOUSE

ARCHITECTS
MacGabhann Architects

CLIENT - Private

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS - Carr & Co

MAIN CONTRACTOR - Barney Coyle & Sons

PHOTOGRAPHY - Seiler Fotografie, Declan Doherty

Project size - 270m²

Duration - 15 months

Location - Co Donegal

MAN-MADE MONOLITH OF MODERNITY

Review by Marianne O'Kane Béal

Situated in Downings, County Donegal on a site with sweeping south-west views over Sheephaven Bay and the Derryveagh Mountains, the Pig House takes its name from the spectacular views of Muckish Mountain. Deriving from the Irish 'An Mhucais,' it means 'pig's back' or 'the ridge of the pig,' and refers to the mountain's distinctive flat-topped shape. The house form was inspired by Liam McCormick's St Michael's Church in Creeslough (1971) – a structure which, in turn, is modelled on Muckish. For MacGabhann Architects this has offered a variation in theme: "Whereas the McCormick's church form is based on the frontal and squatting view of the mountain, the outline of the Pig House was inspired by the classical table mountain view."

In form and materials, the Pig House demonstrates an interesting maturity from the earlier 'Tuath na Mara' (RIAI Award Winner) with whom it shares a distinctive form and a pre-weathered natural zinc envelope. Zinc was chosen because it allows the building's roof and walls (vertical and inclined) to be covered in the same material, thus accentuating the monolithic form. The square pattern gives a scale-like finish and allows for a "non-platonic or non-orthogonal diamond patterned arrangement", which makes an association with the landscape and sea beyond. A characteristic feature of the majority of MacGabhann's houses is that there are no gutters. At the Pig House, water is drained via a single feature gargoyle at the entrance like at McCormick's Creeslough church – a reference originally derived from Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp, and Maisons Jaoul.

The dynamic and interesting external form makes for an equally dramatic interior space. Ceiling and side walls are lined in Douglas fir tongue and grooved boards, again a correlation with McCormick as this was the timber specified for the churches he designed. The remainder of the palette of materials is composed of natural tones, the slate of the stone floor, the black zinc externally, all complementing the timber. The internal

arrangement of rooms is divided more or less equally between the double-height open plan living/dining/kitchen, while the remainder of accommodation is organised over two storeys. This distribution automatically demarcates the public and private zones of the dwelling in an informal manner.

The fully glazed façade allows for maximum penetration of south-west light and thus optimises passive solar gain, heating the house. There is a double concrete block wall, acting as a spine, located at the rear of the dwelling housing all services/ utilities and from this cantilevers the roof span towards the front. This double wall also acts as a heat bank, which stores the heat from the daytime and releases it at night.

Adjacent to the large open plan area is a smaller living room with long vertical window strips. Located off this space are three bedrooms, two of which are diminutive yet well proportioned and somewhat reminiscent of monastic cells. Such an analogy is apt considering the remote and exposed location of the house. It is in the arrangement of the bedrooms and living room of this more traditionally laid out area of the dwelling that the house belies its nature as a holiday retreat for the clients. The master bedroom is located on the first floor where the walls, floor and ceiling are again lined with matching Douglas Fir. According to the architects; "The timber lining was selected to provide a warm respite from the harsh external environment and its metaphorical connection to the ships and the sea."

'The Pig House,' has been designed to create an emphatic statement on its elevated site. Defined by its innovative form, it is predominantly sculptural, a contemporary man-made monolith. The ultra modernity of the material employed on the structure's exterior means that it is in stark contrast to any surrounding dwellings. It remains, however, a stand-alone house, and as such can be forceful, breaking new ground in architectural design.

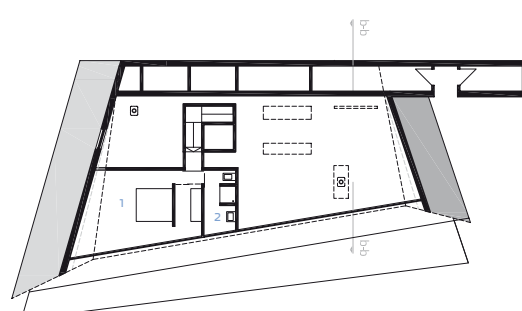
Ground floor plan

- 1 Living
- 2 Dining
- 3 Kitchen
- 4 Sitting
- 5 Store
- 6 Bedroom

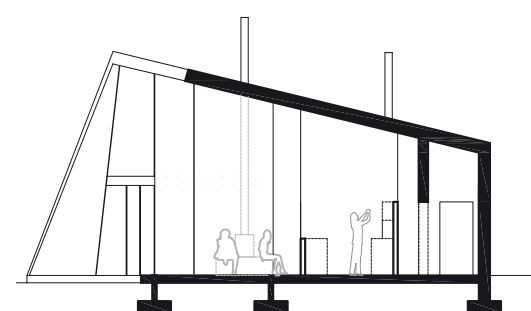


First floor plan

- 1 Bedroom
- 2 En-suite



1. The form enforces the connection to the natural environment surrounding that it seeks to reflect.
- 2/3. The dramatic double-height interior of the living space contrasts with the bedroom accommodation over two storeys. The fully glazed south-west facade allows for passive solar gain



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