

ECCO

HOUSE BOOK



TERENCE CONRAN

ECO BARN

WEEKEND HOUSE | NORMANDY | FRANCE | ARCHITECTS: JEAN-BAPTISTE BARACHE



Above: The gable end of the house faces south to take advantage of passive solar heating in the winter months. The simple form of the building has been inspired by traditional agricultural buildings.

Right: The weekend retreat is not connected to mains electricity. After dark, the house is lit with storm lanterns and candles.

Below right: The exterior of the house is clad in red cedar shingles, which were imported from Canada. The cedar naturally weathers over time to a silvery grey.

Far right: The main living area is a soaring space that rises up to the pitched roof. Supplementary heating is provided by a wood-burning stove made of brick.



A modern version of a traditional agricultural building, this weekend retreat is sited in the middle of a field in Normandy. The tall, pointed structure is built entirely out of wood, except for the minimal concrete piles that anchor it to the ground. The building, which is not connected to the electrical grid, has many eco features.

Chief among these is its orientation. The glazed gable end of the house faces south. During the winter, low sunlight penetrates into the interior and warms it, while in the summer, the sun is too high to cause overheating. Natural stack ventilation is promoted by six trapdoors under the house and openings high up.

Supplementary heating is provided by a wood-burning stove clad in masonry, similar to the traditional 'kachelofen', which is common in northern Europe and in parts of France, such as Alsace. Using the same principle of the brick in the storage heater, these masonry stoves warm up slowly and release heat gradually. To operate most efficiently, it is necessary to place the stove centrally and leave the doors open so that heat can circulate – not a problem here, where there are minimal partitions.

The structure of the house is made of timber. Exterior cladding consists of red cedar shingles imported from Canada. These naturally weather over time to an attractive silvery colour. No applied finishes or treatments were used on the external joinery, which is made of recycled local timber. Instead, the wood was lightly charred to protect it from ultraviolet light and to increase its water-resistance – a time-honoured method of timber protection that was much used in vernacular construction.

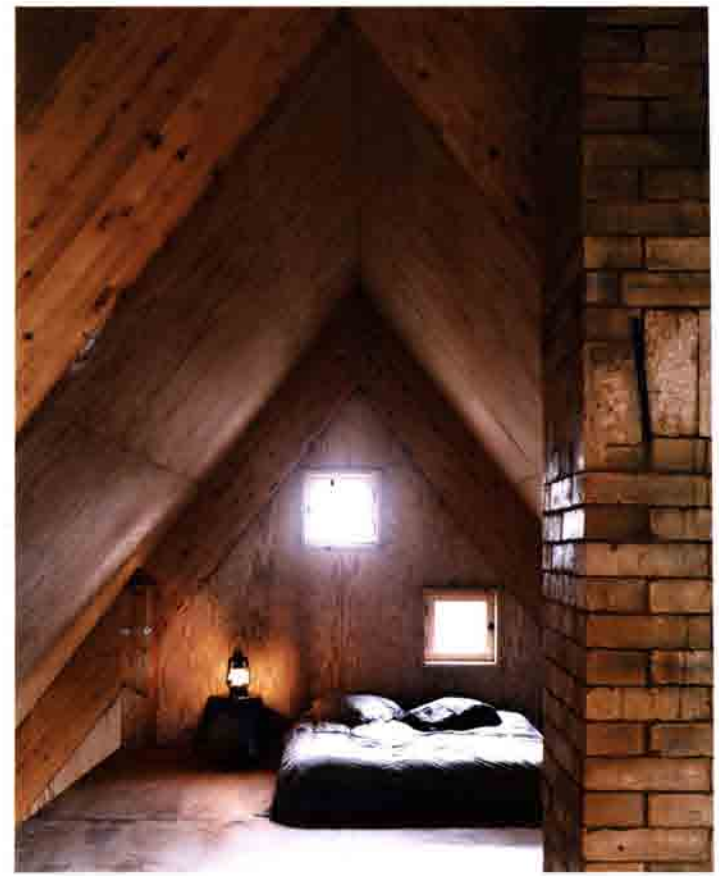






Left: A long horizontal box, reached by a short flight of stairs, provides an enclosed private space for sleeping and bathing.

Below: A mezzanine level above the floating corridor provides room for another sleeping area. It is accessed by a ladder.

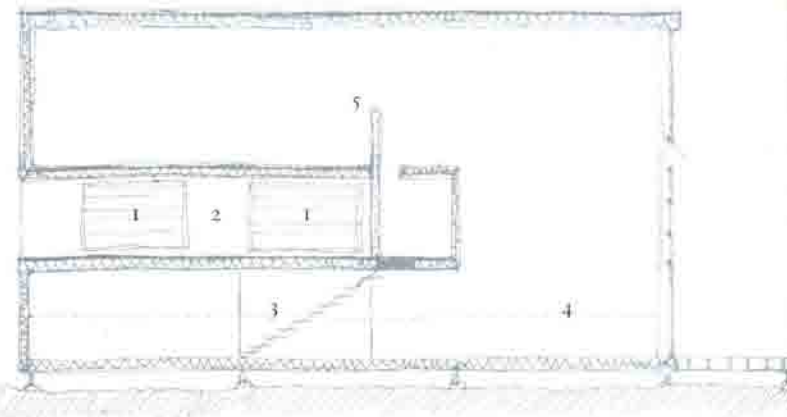
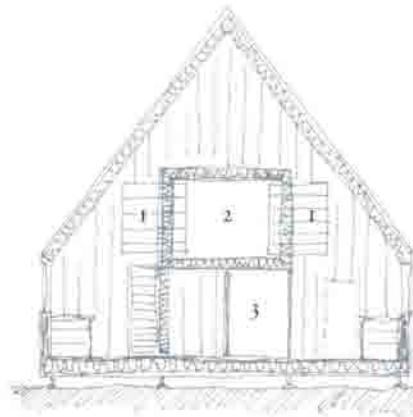


ECO FACTS:

- Siting to take advantage of passive solar strategies.
- Minimal foundations.
- Timber structure, recycled timber joinery, cedar cladding.
- No timber treatment.
- Wood-burning masonry stove.
- No connection to electrical grid.
- Lighting provided by candles and storm lanterns.
- Natural ventilation provided by vents and high-level windows.

SECTION KEY:

- 1 - Bedroom pods
- 2 - Floating corridor
- 3 - Bathroom
- 4 - Living room
- 5 - Ladder

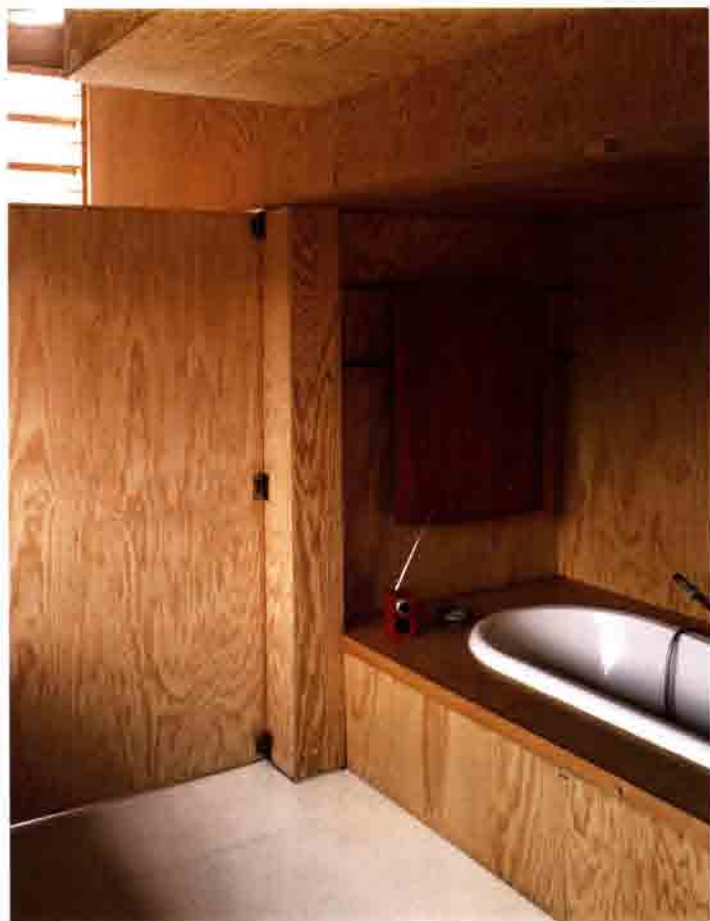


The building rests lightly on the land. Instead of a concrete slab foundation, which would disrupt the site, foundations are provided by 20 mini concrete piles.

Apart from the basic structure, which was erected by a team of carpenters, the architect/owner built this house entirely by himself, a process that took eighteen months. The result offers the opportunity to experience the simple life, attuned to natural rhythms. After dark, candlelight and storm lanterns provide the only illumination.

The internal layout of the house is very simple, with the entire ground floor devoted to living, eating and cooking areas. The insertion of a long horizontal box creates a private area for sleeping and bathing, with two bedroom pods, reached by a flight of stairs, and a bathroom. Above, on a mezzanine level under the eaves, is another sleeping space, which is accessed by a ladder.

In keeping with the back-to-nature approach, the interior finishes are simple and rustic. The walls are clad in unfinished timber panels, which provide physical and psychological warmth.



Above: Unfinished timber cladding is used on the walls. Furnishings echo the back-to-basics approach.

Far left: The bathroom is on the middle level.

Left: A pair of sleeping alcoves or pods are minimally screened with curtains.