

HAMISH & LYONS

Stepping Stone House

The site was heavily constrained: conservation area, green belt, flood zone and surrounded by listed buildings. Five planning applications over the course of three years were required before permission was obtained.

We were asked to propose how 3 disconnected and under used out-buildings could be re-developed to form additional living space for the existing house. Specific attention was given to the children - 5 boys (ages 8-15) who all suffer, in varying degrees, with ADHD. The design therefore seeks to engage the occupants with the calming effects of nature. This is done through the abundant use of daylight, an organic structure and natural materials.

The smaller of the two new buildings is a self contained guest house and contains a kitchen, living, utility corridor, bathroom and bed deck. The larger building is a multifunctional space with a bathroom and bed deck and will primarily be used by the children as a play room. It is connected to the existing house via a structural glass bridge. Both buildings can be "opened" up to each other as all of the glass at ground floor level is designed as sliding, opening, door panels. At night time, the spaces can be "closed" and "screened" from each other with blinds. The stilts elevate the buildings above the lake, lifting them clear of the flood waters and allowing flush access to the existing house. They also make it possible to swim under the buildings.

The landscape design is integral to the concept of engaging the children with their surroundings and included the swimming lake as well as creating a continuous route around the buildings. This is done via a path that connects to the stepping stones, at night time jets of water form an archway of illuminated light over them. The path then snakes through a sheltered garden of large, primordial, tree ferns 2-3 m high. It ends at a second set of steps leading up to the bridge connecting the two buildings which also forms an elevated tree fern walkway. The architecture and landscape merge with each other to create a playful and engaging place that is at same time calming and spiritual.

Much of the building was pre fabricated which allowed for a brief construction period on site and minimised waste. In this respect the architects hope to use the buildings as prototypes for other versions that could be built on sites where water is prevalent such as lakes, coastal land and flood plains.