

Flip It

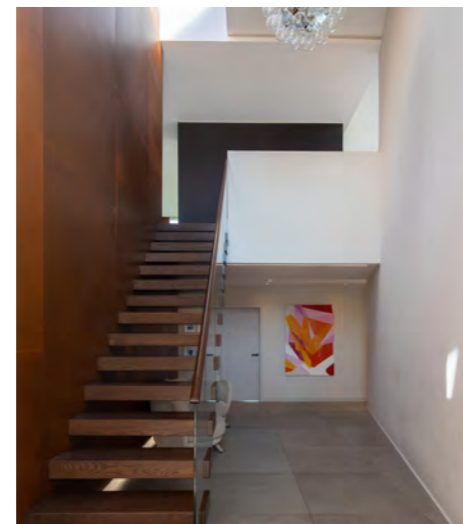
Dr Andrew Molloy explores a dwelling in Bangor by BGA Architects.





The history of Orlock Point – located along the sweeping coast at the south eastern edge of Belfast Lough – has profound links to notions of observation and looking. There are records of a Coastguard Station being present in this area since the 1830s, the glazed observation deck of the twentieth-century incarnation still peaking over the ridgelines of its residential neighbours and out to the choppy expanse of the North Channel beyond. A First World War Signal Station was established here to watch for warships attempting to enter Belfast Lough, informing the commander of Grey Point Fort further along the coast. It is fitting, then, that a startlingly contemporary new addition to the area plays so deftly with notions of the gaze; into, out-from and through.

Located on a steep incline sweeping down from Orlock Hill to the shores of the Lough, this new addition is referred to by its designers, Newtownards-based BGA Architects, as 'Fliphouse' due to its unusual



planform; living/reception rooms upstairs, bedrooms downstairs. The house is a zinc-clad box, open at both ends with vertical banded glazed and timber infills, perched on a black masonry plinth. The heaviness of the plinth at once tethers the box to the ground while from some aspects could be construed as a shadow, conversely making it appear that the upper form is floating.

While the materiality – a lightweight box perched on a heavy masonry plinth – draws inspiration from the coastguard station further up the hill, so too does the essential functionality of the building as a lens drawing focus through the structure and out towards the iconic landscape. One can see this concept echoed through the box dormer additions to the area's more traditional bungalows; haphazard afterthoughts to avail of the view. In the design of Fliphouse, this concept was prioritised, leading to the 'flipping' of the traditional residential planform to ensure the key internal spaces benefitted from this astounding asset.

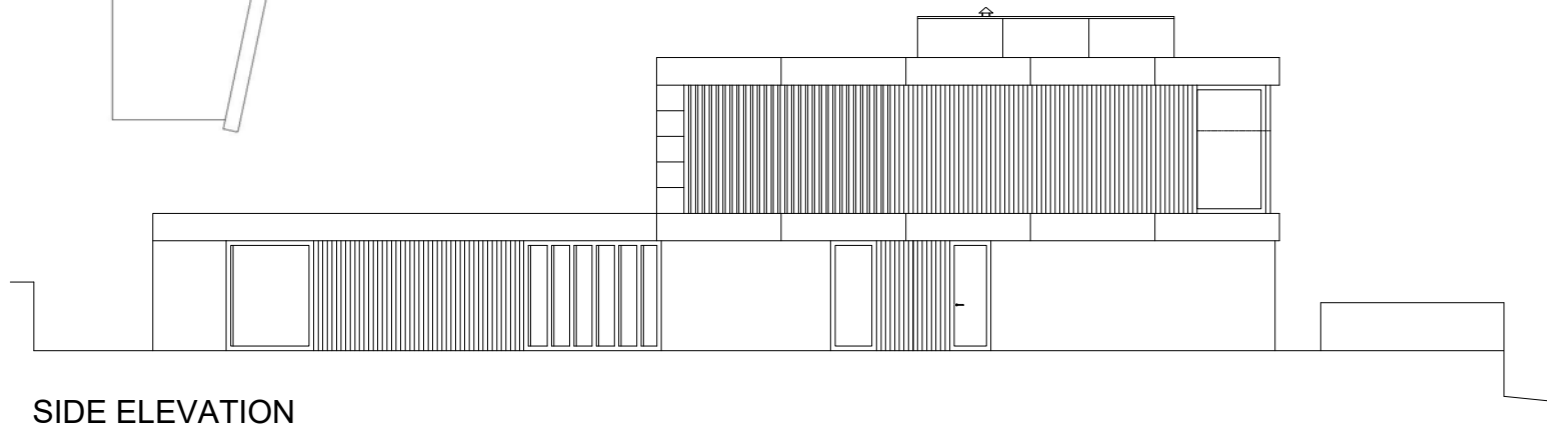
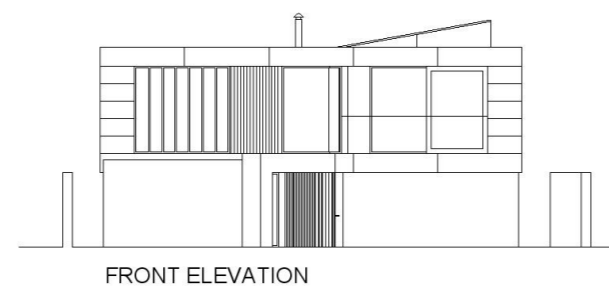
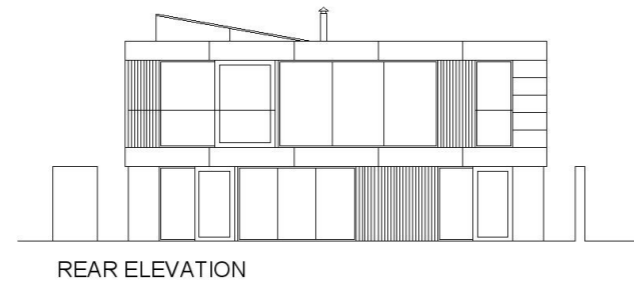
Starting at the top of the driveway, visitors begin higher than the parapet height of the building, offering unobstructed views of the sea with the faint outline of the Galloway coast on the horizon, while a wide rectangular cut in the zinc-clad box facilitates views through the structure to the more immediate rocky cluster of the Copeland Islands in the foreground. The visitor is



funnelled down the driveway by a single-storey wing set at an acute angle to the main massing of the house, cutting along the true east-west axis. At the place where these forms meet, the masonry plinth steps back to form the entrance door, the mass of the house hovering directly above; a moment of being squeezed before being released into a double height entrance hall, daylight pouring in through a frameless skylight.

Facing the main entrance is a lacquered Corten steel wall, a shock of rich saffron orange in a space otherwise defined by sparse whiteness. A flight of robust, gravity-defying timber steps, cantilevered off this anchor-wall, draws the visitor up into a small vestibule. The sleek black obelisk of the chimney breast creates a sense of anticipation – a moment of delayed gratification – before entering the main space, the open-plan kitchen lounge with its sweeping and majestic ocean views.

Two open terraces are located to the south side of the building; the narrow east-facing ‘morning terrace’ sheltered by a small canopy, while the generous west-facing ‘evening terrace’ is framed by



a zinc clad corner column and parapet-level beams, design touches which mean that the parapet course remains uninterrupted and the massing of the box is maintained. A section of the flat roof is ramped up over the living room – something the architect playfully describes as “peeling open the can” – filtering in south-light to avoid the need for windows overlooking the neighbours.

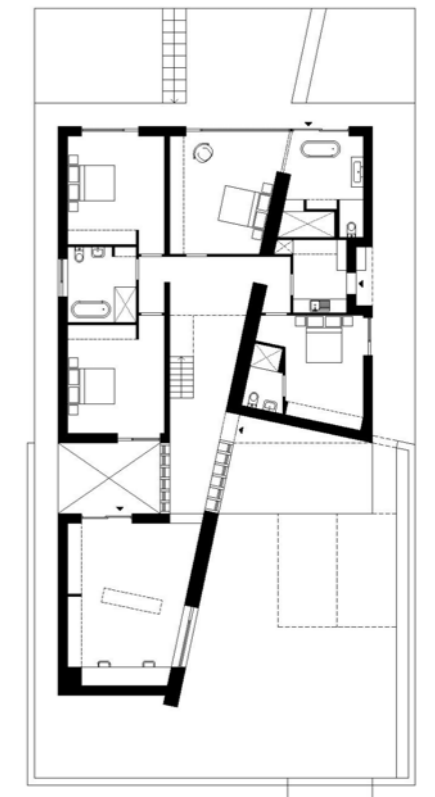
Inside there is a real feeling of mid-century California Modernism; reflections of Ellwood in the glazing, echoes of Neutra in the spacious interiors. The boldness of that stylistic movement is reflected in the attitude of architect John Lavery who, when reflecting on his approach to design, suggests that he would “rather have a negative reaction than no reaction at all.”

At the same time, the approach here is good-tempered and well-mannered. Despite being unapologetic in its contemporary form and choice of materials, the approach is a contextual one, setting Fliphouse

apart from the abstracted experimentation of its American design inspirations. The parapet height matches the ridgelines of its neighbours providing a less intrusive outline than the aforementioned box dormers, and the materials subtly reflect aspects of the site; the grey-blue zinc cladding speaking to the ocean soaked sky of the Ards peninsula, warm timber panels reference the rose-red roof tiles of its neighbours.

Devoid of the sense of manifest destiny and insensitive opulence which came to define Mid-Century Modernism, Fliphouse manages to successfully blend bold design aspirations and a deep respect for the site, something the architect refers to as ‘Contextual Modernism.’ The form is eye-catching yet undistracting, the interiors open yet intimate, the structure lightweight yet grounded; a harmonious collection of enjoyable contradictions all in celebration of that transcendent view. ■

Dr. Andrew Molloy



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



THE PROJECT

Architects
BGA Architects

Structural Engineer
Design ID

Main Contractor
O’Prey Developments Ltd

Cladding Supplier
Cranwood Industries

Kitchen Supplier
Interior 360

Flat Roof and Zinc Cladding
Rowan Roofing Company Ltd

Floor/Wall Tile Supplier
CECO Ltd

Paving
A&G

Stairs
Macspec

Gate
Timbergate

Stove
Mourne Fires

Ventilation System
Homecare Systems