

Anthony Boulanger

Output 2:
Montpelier Community Nursery, Kentish Town, 2012

Abstract

Montpelier Community Nursery is a small building in Kentish Town, London designed for Camden Community Nurseries. The project has wide reach as a model for participatory design processes in dense urban neighbourhoods. It responds to questions of how the design of a small public building can serve as an instrument of community building and urban regeneration; of how the idea of natural play can be promoted in the design of a nursery; of what responsible environmental strategies can be incorporated into the design of a nursery; of how the short and long term sustainability of a nursery can be assured; and of how the autobiography of a building process can be recorded? Boulanger was involved in all stages of the project, generating community awareness, bringing together different groups and parties to participate in its design, fundraising, designing, supervising the building's construction and recording and disseminating the process. The new building was designed around a flexible play space opening onto a wooded outdoor play area that forms part of a community garden. The park landscape became a central part of the children's indoor/outdoor play space, to promote healthy exercise and natural play. Daylight is brought into the building through strip windows located within the roof that have a north-south orientation, spanning the floor plan diagonally. Deep overhangs allow passive solar heat

gain during times of the year as needed, but block out high summer sun. The superstructure is made of a pre-fabricated solid timber panel system, which facilitated an efficient building sequence. The project was recorded and disseminated through film, photographic documentation and exhibition, a children-focused workshop and a collaborative project of site visits with local primary school children. The building has been widely lauded, receiving a 2013 RIBA London Regional Award, a 2013 RIBA National Award and the prestigious 2013 Steven Lawrence Prize, which rewards the best example of a project with a construction budget of less than £1 million. This output will also be returned by Yeoryia Manolopoulou, co-founder of AY-Architects, for University College London.

Key Words

Community building, participatory design, play, sustainability

Context

AY-Architects was founded by Anthony Boulanger and Yeoryia Manolopoulou in 2005, on the basis of the cross-fertilisation between teaching, practice and research. It is an open form of practice that includes clients, consultants, artists and trades, with an overriding concern for the creation of unique experiences of space, time and meaning. AY-Architects' projects are diverse, ranging from ideas competitions and exhibitions in public space to small public and private buildings. This diversity tests ideas in different contexts through a layered, open-minded attitude to design. Since 2008, AY-Architects has been runner up in the RIBA Competition for the Brockholes Visitor Centre (2008), was awarded winner in the 'Best Use of Concrete' category by New London Architecture, The Building Centre, Time Out and the RIBA (2009) and was one of three winning teams for the 122 Leadenhall Street Site Competition organised by British land and New London Architecture (2009). The work of the practice has been exhibited at the CUBE Gallery in Manchester (2008), the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition (2008), the Staalplaat Store in Berlin (2008), The Building Centre in London (2010), the RIBA (2011) and the Ecole special d'architecture, Paris (2012). They have also published extensively in the architectural and public media including in *Journal of Architecture*, *Architects Journal*, *field*, *the Evening Standard* and *Time Out*.

Montpelier Community Nursery is a 130 m² building in Kentish Town, London designed for Camden Community Nurseries, a Charity and Voluntary Organisation and completed in 2012 (fig.01). It was funded through an Early

Years Capital Grant and undertaken in two stages - a 'Community Engagement and Fund Raising' stage and a 'Building Design and Completion' stage. It received a 2013 RIBA London Regional Award and a 2013 RIBA National Award. It is under consideration for short listing for the Steven Lawrence Prize.

General Description

The Montpelier Community Nursery is located within Montpelier Gardens in Kentish Town, London (fig.26). The nursery provides voluntary sector affordable childcare for 2-5 year olds. In 2009, it had been operating from a temporary pre-fabricated building built in the 1980's, which had become overcrowded and dilapidated beyond repair (fig.02, fig.03, fig.04). From January 2009 AY-Architects worked closely with the nursery to co-ordinate a successful application for an Early Years Capital Grant to replace the existing building with a new facility on the same location. The new building was designed around a flexible play space opening onto a wooded outdoor play area that is part of the community gardens (fig.05, fig.26). The park landscape became a central part of the children's indoor/outdoor play space (fig.15, fig.27, fig.36, fig.37). Support spaces wrap around the play space and form a solid perimeter to the public land (fig.06, fig.13). Daylight is brought into the building through strip windows

located within the roof (fig.08, fig.09). These roof windows have a north-south orientation, spanning the floor plan diagonally (fig.10, fig.29). Deep overhangs allow passive solar heat gain during times of the year as needed, but block out high summer sun (fig.07). The roof windows also provide natural ventilation. The superstructure is made of a pre-fabricated solid timber panel system with a whitewashed internal factory finish (fig.14). The exterior is clad with dark stained FSC timber boarding (fig.06a) and the roof supports a biodiversity sedum blanket (fig.24, fig.35). The building was completed in spring 2012 and the outdoor play area in summer 2012.

Research Questions

The building responds to the following research questions:

- 1) How can the design of a small public building serve as an instrument of community building and urban regeneration?
- 2) How can the idea of natural play be promoted in the design of a nursery?
- 3) What responsible environmental strategies can be incorporated into the design of a nursery?
- 4) How can the short and long-term sustainability of a nursery be assured?
- 5) How can the autobiography of the building be recorded?

Aims and Objectives

1) To use the design of a small public building as an instrument of community building and urban regeneration

The project has wide reach as a model for participatory design processes in dense urban neighbourhoods. It is a small public building whose design and realisation served as an instrument of community building and urban regeneration. One of its objectives was to create respect for public space through a well-designed building that regenerated the adjacent park and transformed it from a neglected space into a community garden (fig.05, fig.26). The architects were involved in all stages of the project, generating community awareness, bringing together different groups and parties to participate in its design, fundraising, designing, supervising the building's construction and recording and disseminating the process. This involved pro-actively bringing different groups together to generate the need for a new public building, advocating for it in various forums and engaging a variety of stakeholders in the process. The nursery management committee served as advisory board for this participatory process. Community consultation was undertaken through a Local Authority web based comments page, where 60 - 70 comments were received; an open day was held on site for residents and a design workshop, 'Build your Own Nursery' was conducted with children (fig.21, fig.22). The architects also orchestrated a fund raising event with Frank Robson MP, and the press present. These processes were recorded and disseminated through a range of media, as detailed in (5) below.

2) To promote the idea of natural play

Natural play is based on the idea that children will play instinctively with the natural elements that are around them; they are natural play experts. To promote this, the nursery was conceptualised as a canopy in a garden (fig.25, fig.27, fig.36). Doors open up right across its garden façade, facilitating easy access between interior and exterior spaces (fig.16, fig.27). At the same time, facades to the outside public space and adjacent child referral unit were closed and protective (fig.06a, fig.06b). This promoted the idea of natural play in a garden setting and encouraged children to engage with their natural surroundings and in healthy physical activity (fig.36).

3) To incorporate environmentally responsible strategies during building construction and for the long term

The building is constructed as a low energy building to meet the needs of community, staff and children. It makes extensive use of passive energy principles, including orientation, solar heating and cross ventilation. Daylight is brought into the building through strip windows located within the roof that also provide natural ventilation (fig.07). These roof windows have a north-south orientation, spanning the floor plan diagonally (fig.10). Deep overhangs allow passive solar heat gain during winter, but block out high summer sun. The roof supports a biodiversity sedum blanket (fig.24, fig.35).

The building's walls are made of a prefabricated, cross-laminated timber panel system (fig.10). These are load bearing and facilitated quick erection on site (fig.11). Interior surfaces are treated with a whitewashed internal factory finish while the exterior is clad with dark stained FSC timber boarding (fig.13, fig.14).

4) To contribute to the short and long term sustainability of the project

The approach the architects took to the design of the building aimed to instigate and sustain the development of the project simultaneously from different perspectives: social (the community), educational (staff and children), financial (fund-raising) and aesthetic (design). They did so through the participatory process described in (1) above and by embracing passive energy principles in the design. These produced a low energy building that would contribute to ensuring to its long-term sustainability over time. At the same time, the increase in the number of children the nursery

Research Methods

The nursery had been operating from a dilapidated and unsafe portakabin with a lifespan of only 15 years, originally built in 1983 (fig.03, fig.04). AY Architects initiated a proposal for its demolition and replacement with a new building in an effort to secure affordable childcare and a sustainable building for the community for the long term. They worked closely with the neighborhood in their multiple roles as local architects, former parents, trustees and voluntary members of the nursery's management team. In January 2009

could accommodate, from 18 to 24, secured affordable childcare in the community for a long time (fig.04, fig.08). In addition, the central covered play space was designed as a to be hired out to other community groups or event, and generate additional income for the nursery.

5) To record the building's autobiography: the transition from demolition to re-building, addressing the significance of this change for the neighbourhood

The project was recorded and disseminated as part of the awareness generating and fund raising process, through 'Montpelier Film' by Caz Stuart (<https://vimeo.com/16920274>) (V01), 'Montpelier Autobiography', a photographic documentation by Guan lee, a children-focused workshop, 'We're Building our Own Nursery', with Wanja Wechselberger (fig.21, fig.22) and 'Montpelier Building Sights', a collaborative project of site visits and workshops with local primary school children.

they coordinated a successful application for a Capital Grant to cover the project's costs and persuaded London Borough Camden to give full support to their initiative.

The brief was for a larger and environmental friendly facility that could provide an increase from 18 to 24 nursery places. The footprint increased from 90 to 130m². Floor areas were carefully calculated to ensure that what was taken from the public gardens was returned elsewhere (fig.05).

The design of the new building took its inspiration from the unique setting within the public gardens. It was planned around a large flexible play space that generously opens out to the external green space distinguished by a concentration of mature trees (fig.37). Indoor-outdoor play was central to the design concept and the garden environment was considered central to the children's learning experience (fig.36). The south wall of the main play space includes a large window and shutter looking directly onto the public gardens, and also offers a slender low bench used by the neighbours (fig.06b, fig.34). In this way the nursery gained a greater level of interaction with the community, contributing to a safer and more enjoyable green space. The exterior of the building is clad with ebony stained fsc Siberian larch decking to give it a robust skin and allow it to sit contently within the park and amongst the trees trunks (fig.06a).

The building's structure was designed to maximise open plan interior space (fig.8, fig.09) and connection between inside and outside (fig.38). It comprises a series of glue laminated timber columns that echo the verticality of the surrounding trees, and cross laminated structural timber panels (fig.10). These allowed for an efficient building sequence and erection time (fig.11 - fig.13). The roof was designed to maximise daylight and allow natural ventilation (fig.17). Three strip windows with north-south orientation span the plan diagonally (fig.18). The orientation of the openings welcomes the sun to enter the building when it is low to take advantage of solar gain in colder months, while large overhangs block out the sun when it is hot to

prevent overheating (fig.07). The larger north facing roof window brings in an abundance of daylight and facilitates cross ventilation. These elements were repeatedly modelled and drawn to optimise sun penetration in summer and winter (fig.07, fig.25). The nursery was designed as an energy efficient building in operation and low carbon in construction. Detailing was designed to ensure air and water tightness (fig.24). A mixed sedum blanket forms the roof finish, contributing to local biodiversity and water retention (fig.35). These realised many of the ideas explored in an earlier project, the Brockholes Wetland and Woodland Nature Reserve Visitor Centre (2008), where the architects explored the use of prefabrication for efficient building sequence and passive energy principles.

Fund raising events and workshops were held to engage children and the community in the design process (fig.21, fig.22). The design process was recorded and archived using a range of media, including photography and video (V.01).

Dissemination / Impact

Montpelier Community Nursery has been widely lauded, receiving a 2013 RIBA London Regional Award, a 2013 RIBA National Award and the prestigious 2013 Stephen Lawrence Prize, which rewards the best example of a project with a construction budget of less than £1 million.

The following is the citation from the RIBA Award Judges:

“The school takes the form of a pavilion opening onto a part-sheltered play area with a park beyond. The selection of materials is a key part of the scheme’s success. The black stained Siberian larch sits inconspicuously in the treescape and contrasts with the white-washed internal woodwork allowing the playful objects to come to life. All the details were well controlled, from exposed conduits to the selection of nursery furniture and material finishes. Simple decisions made for an all-encompassing education experience: thoughtful pram stores and recessed entrances took some of the madness out of drop-off and pick-up times; the door on to the park allowed quiet surveillance; and there was a seamless link to the outer play area and garden.”

It has been favourably reviewed in the architecture media including:

Mark, L. 2013. ‘AY Architects’ Montpelier Nursery bags 2013 Stephen Lawrence Prize.’ Architects Journal, 26 Sept
<<http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/ay-architects-montpelier-nursery-bags-2013-stephen-lawrence-prize/8653628.article>>

Klettner, A. 2013. ‘AY Architects takes 2013 Stephen Lawrence Prize.’ Bdonline.co.uk, 26 Sept
<<http://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/ay-architects-takes-2013-stephen-lawrence-prize/5061215.article>>

2013. Montpelier Community Nursery / AY Architects. ArchDaily, 24 Sept
<<http://www.archdaily.com/430388/montpelier-community-nursery-ay-architects/>>

2013. AY Architects: Montpelier Community Nursery. Domus, 25 July
<http://www.domusweb.it/en/architecture/2013/07/23/ay_architects_montpelier_community_nursery.html>

2013. ‘Montpelier Community Nursery by AY Architects.’ Dezeen, 1 July
<<http://www.dezeen.com/2013/07/01/montpelier-community-nursery-by-ay-architects/>>

Carrier, D. 2013. ‘Architecture going for nursery revamp’, Camden New Journal, 20 June, p. 23.

2013. 'RIBA Awards 2013', The Architects' Journal, 13 June, cover and pp. 80-81.

Olcayto, R. 2013. 'Who's going to be up for the Stirling Prize?: Rory Olcayto draws up the shortlist of shortlist,' The Architects' Journal, 13 June, p. 30.

Hartman, H. 'The RIBA Awards' best green buildings', The Architects' Journal, 13 June 2013, pp. 50-51, p. 53.

Wigglesworth, S. 2013. 'Secluded Wonderland: Montpelier Nursery by AY Architects.' Architects Journal, 21 March
<<http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/buildings/secluded-wonderland-montpelier-nursery-by-ay-architects/8644371.article>>

Evidence

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- Fig. 03 Former nursery building
- Fig. 04 Interior of former nursery building, photograph Guan Lee
- Fig. 05 Site plan, showing area taken from gardens and area given back to gardens by the new nursery building
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- Fig. 06b External wall, door open, photograph Nick Kane
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- Fig. 08 Interior showing sun penetration, photograph Nick Kane
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- Fig. 39 AY Architects in collaboration with Michiko Somi
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Press

- P.01 Steven Lawrence Prize
<<http://www.architecture.com/Awards/RIBASpecialAwards/StephenLawrencePrize/StephenLawrencePrizeShortlist2013.aspx#.UlgG82Sgnx8>>
- P.02 RIBA Awards 2013
<<http://www.architecture.com/Awards/RIBAAwards/Winners2013/London/MontpelierCommunityNursery/MontpelierCommunityNursery1.aspx#.UlgDu2Sgnx8>>
- P.03 Mark, L. 2013. 'AY Architects' Montpelier Nursery bags 2013 Stephen Lawrence Prize.'
Architects Journal, 26 Sept
<<http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/ay-architects-montpelier-nursery-bags-2013-stephen-lawrence-prize/8653628.article>>
- P.04 Klettner, A. 2013. 'AY Architects takes 2013 Stephen Lawrence Prize.' Bdonline.co.uk, 26 Sept
<<http://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/ay-architects-takes-2013-stephen-lawrence-prize/5061215.article>>
- P.05 Wigglesworth, S. 'Secluded Wonderland: Montpelier Nursery by AY Architects.'
Architects Journal, 21 March 2013
<<http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/buildings/secluded-wonderland-montpelier-nursery-by-ay-architects/8644371.article>>
- P.06 Montpelier Nursery Web Site
<http://www.camdencommunitynurseries.org.uk/Camden_Community_Nurseries/Montpelier_nursery.html>

Video

- V.01 'Montpelier Film' by Caz Stuart
<<https://vimeo.com/16920274>>



Fig. 01 Montpelier Community Nursery, photograph Nick Kane



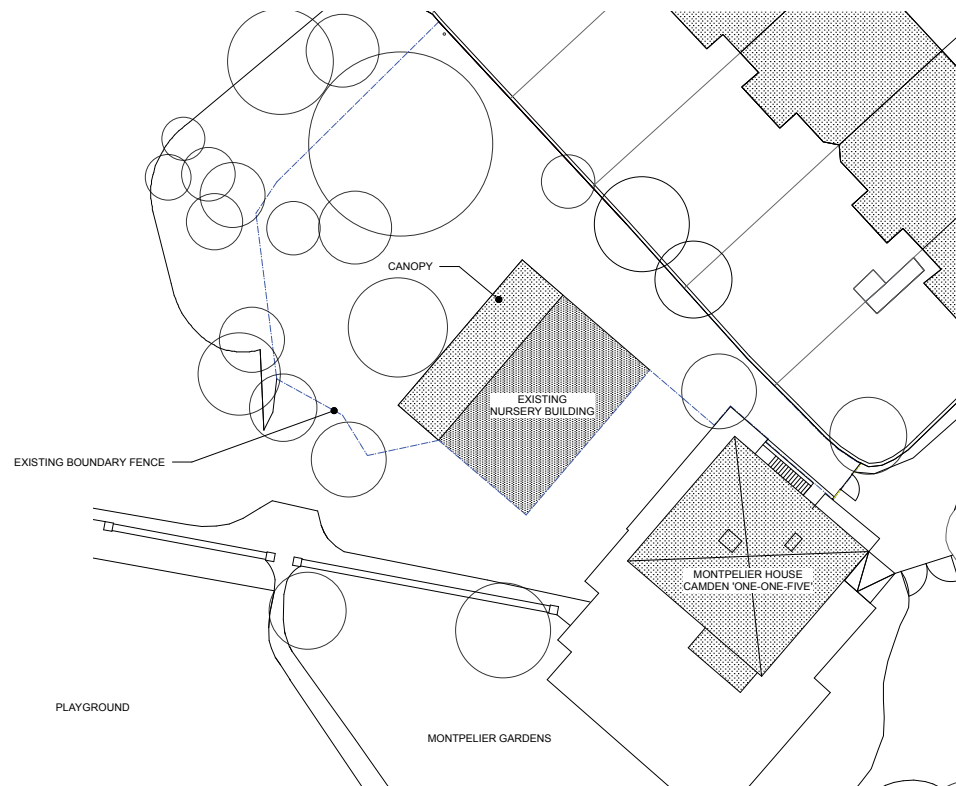
Fig. 02 Former nursery building



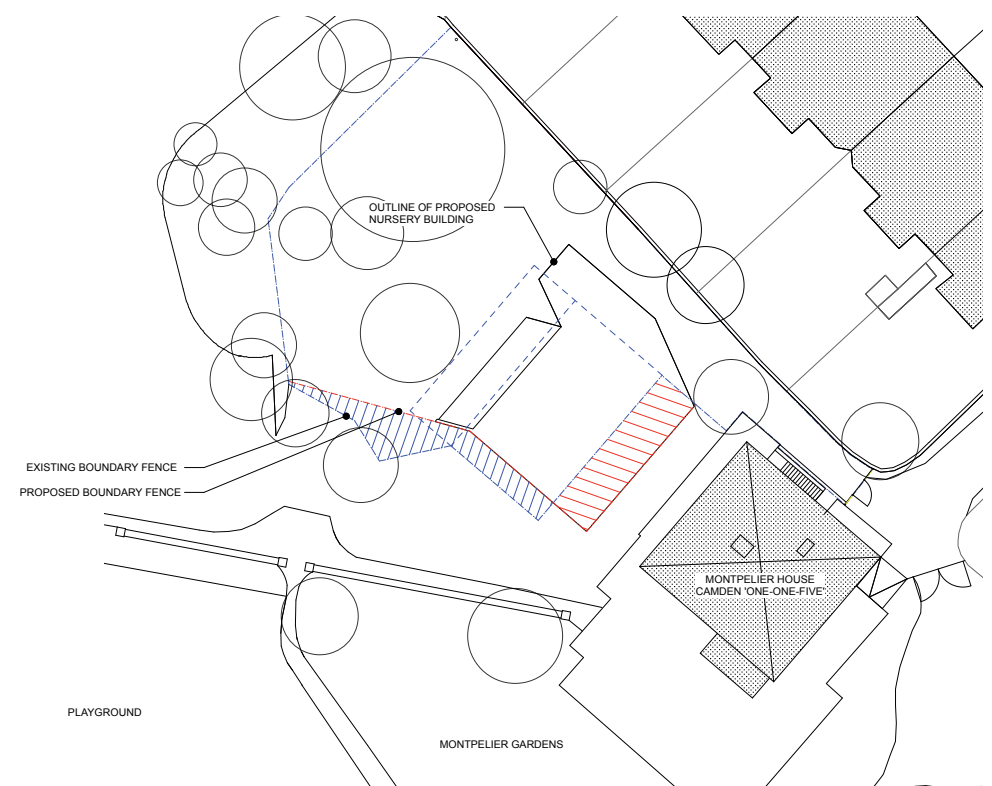
Fig. 03 Former nursery building



Fig. 04 Interior of former nursery building, photograph Guan Lee





SITE PLAN - EXISTING NURSERY BUILDING

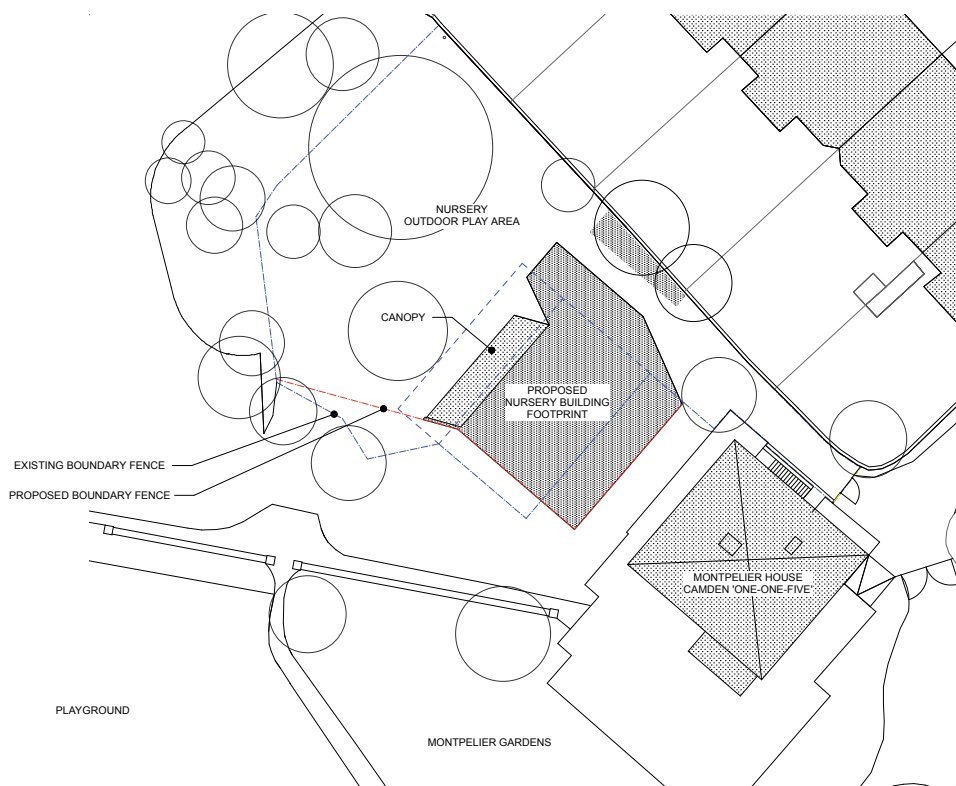


SITE PLAN - AREAS OF LOSS / GAIN

The land currently within the Nursery leasehold boundary, which the proposal would give over to the gardens, is considered to be of much greater value than the land which would be taken away. The land taken from the gardens is hidden, more neglected and perceived as unsafe for children. The space given over to the gardens is more prominent, more visible and would help enhance the activities in the gardens with the new nursery building as a backdrop.

KEY TO REVISED BOUNDARY - LAND SWAP

-  AREA GIVEN TO GARDENS FROM NURSERY = 32M2
-  AREA GIVEN TO NURSERY FROM MONTPELIER GARDENS = 32M2



SITE PLAN - PROPOSED NURSERY BUILDING

Fig. 05 Site plan, showing area taken from gardens and area given back to gardens by the new nursery building



Fig. 06a External wall, door closed, photograph Nick Kane



Fig. 06b External wall, door open, photograph Nick Kane

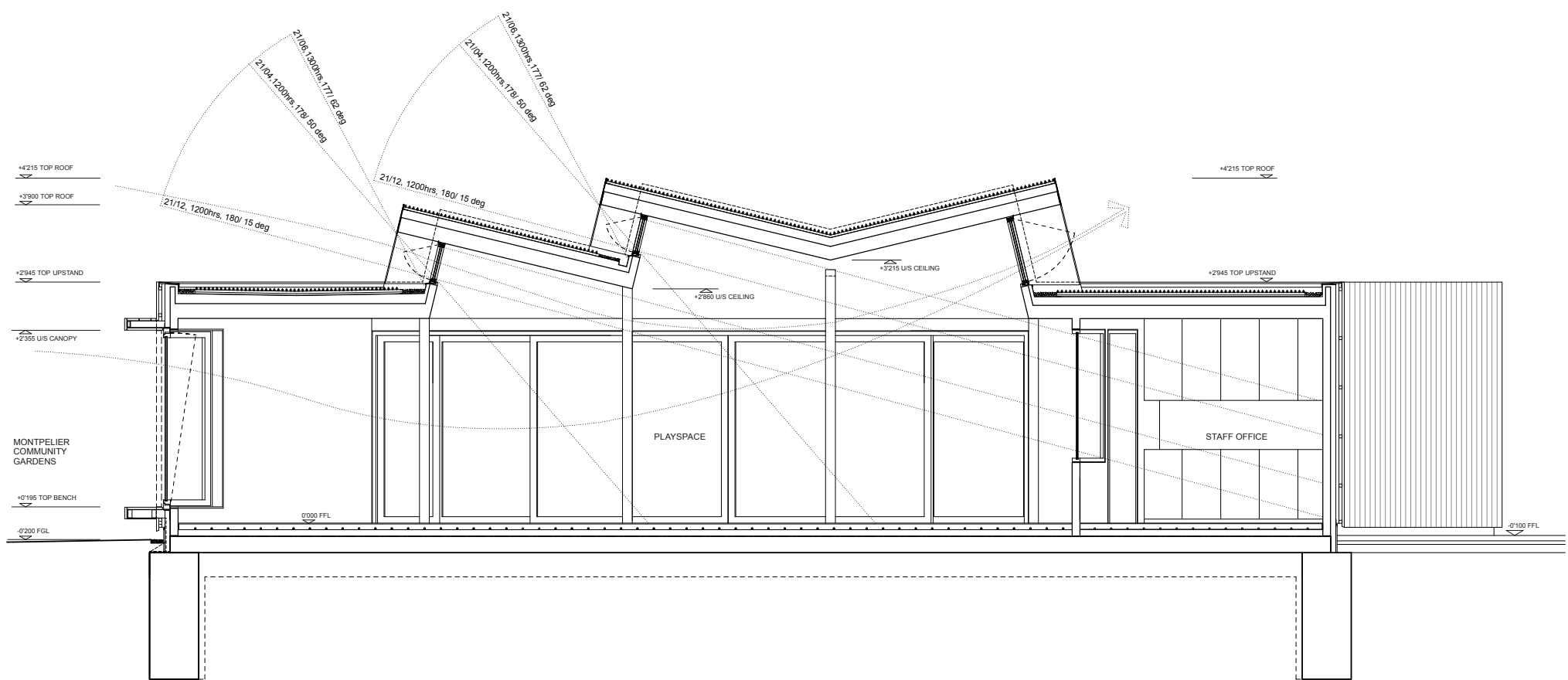


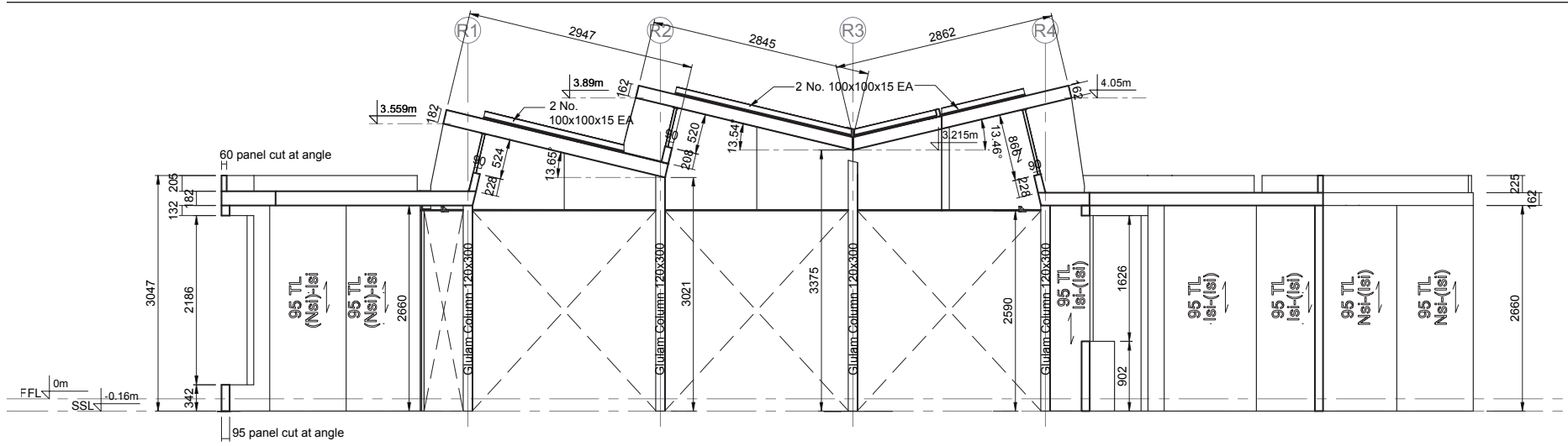
Fig. 07 Diagrammatic section showing sun penetration and ventilation



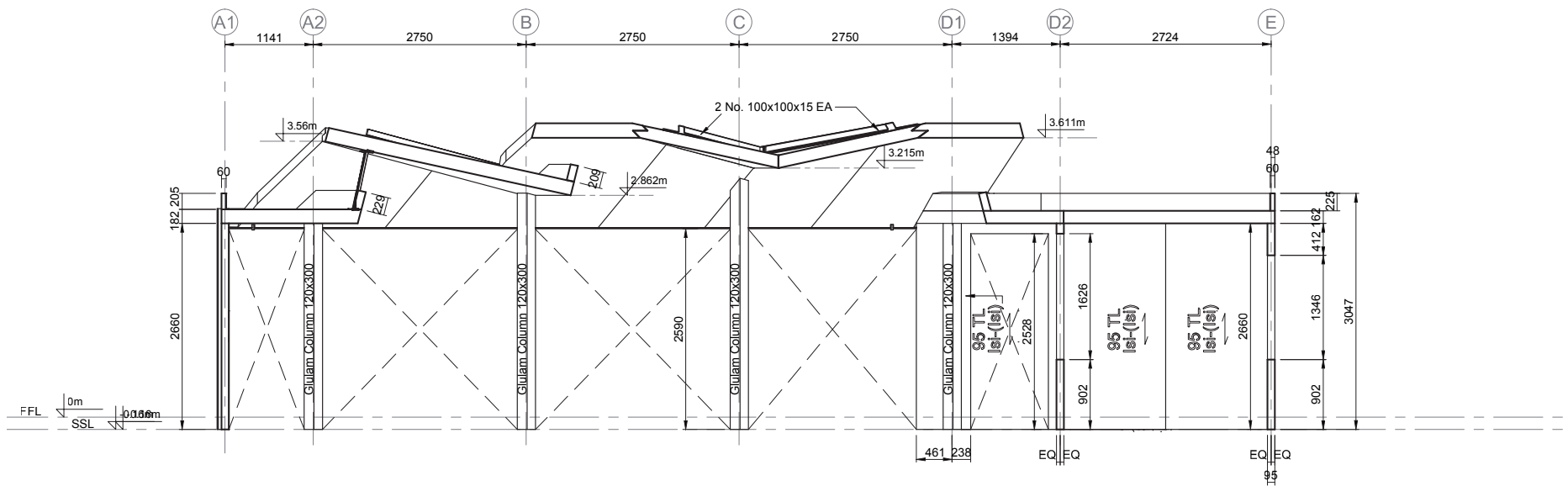
Fig. 08 Interior showing sun penetration, photograph Nick Kane



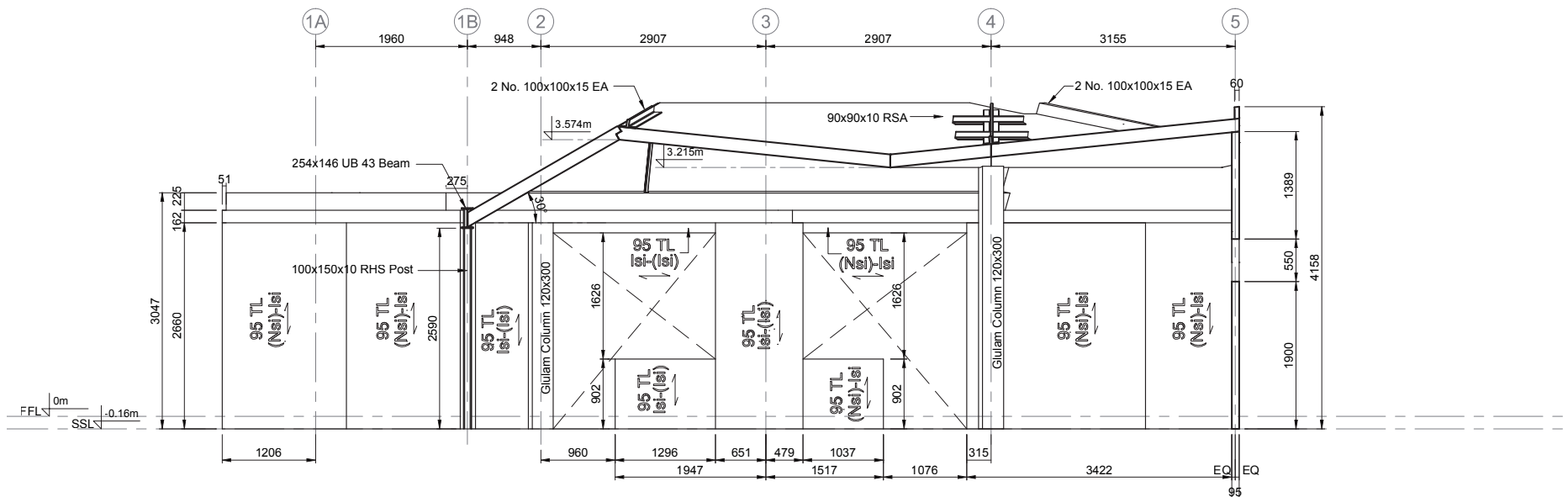
Fig. 09 Interior showing sun penetration, photograph Nick Kane



SECTION A-A



SECTION B-B



SECTION C-C

Fig. 10 Section showing construction panels



Fig. 11a 11b Building under construction



Fig. 12 Roof after rain shower



Fig. 13 Building under construction



Fig. 14 Garden canopy, photograph Nick Kane



Fig. 15 Garden from nursery window, photograph Nick Kane



Fig. 16 View from interior to garden, photograph Nick Kane



Fig. 17 Roof lights and ceiling, photograph Nick Kane

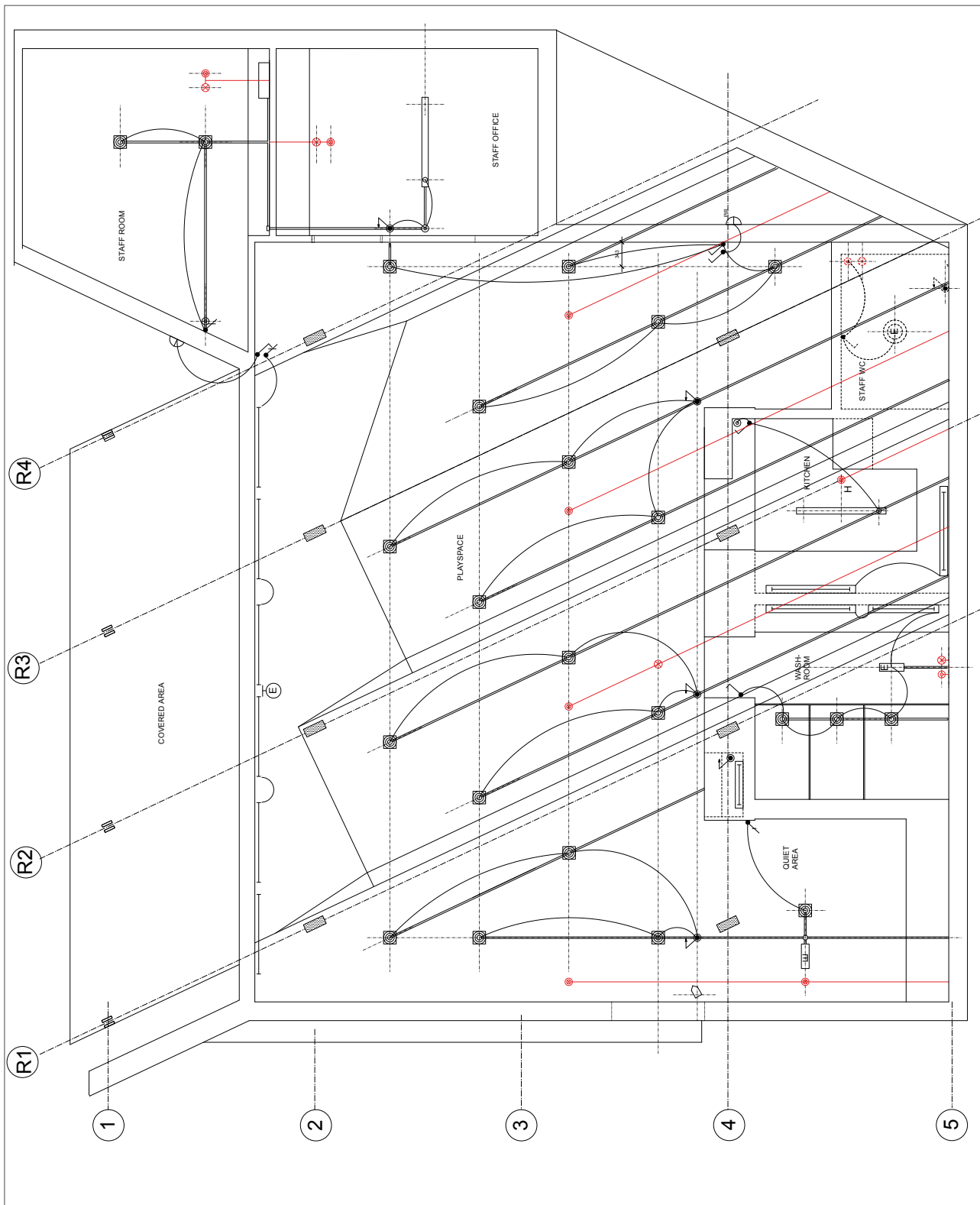


Fig. 18 Ceiling Plan



Fig. 19 Ceiling 1



Fig. 20 Ceiling 2



Fig. 21 Children's Workshop 1



Fig. 22 Children's Workshop 2

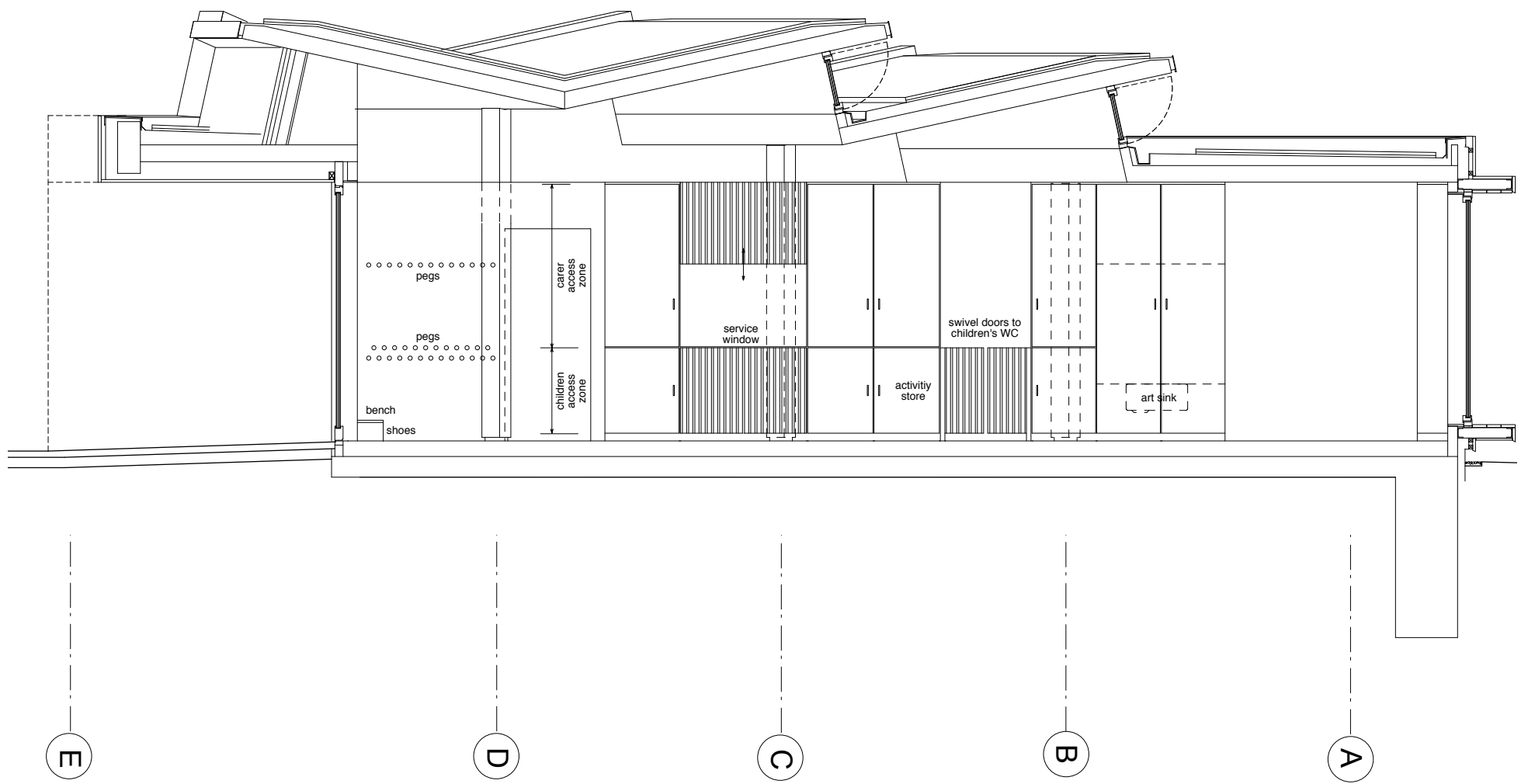


Fig. 23 Section showing fittings under roof canopy

FOR M+E DESIGN REFER TO M+E DRAWINGS / SPEC
 FOR STRUCTURAL DESIGN REFER TO SE DRAWINGS
 DO NOT SCALE - VERIFY ALL DIMENSIONS ON SITE
 REFER TO DRAWING 9001 FOR SETTING OUT
 SETTING OUT OF EXTERNAL CLADDING TO BE
 AGREED WITH ARCHITECT

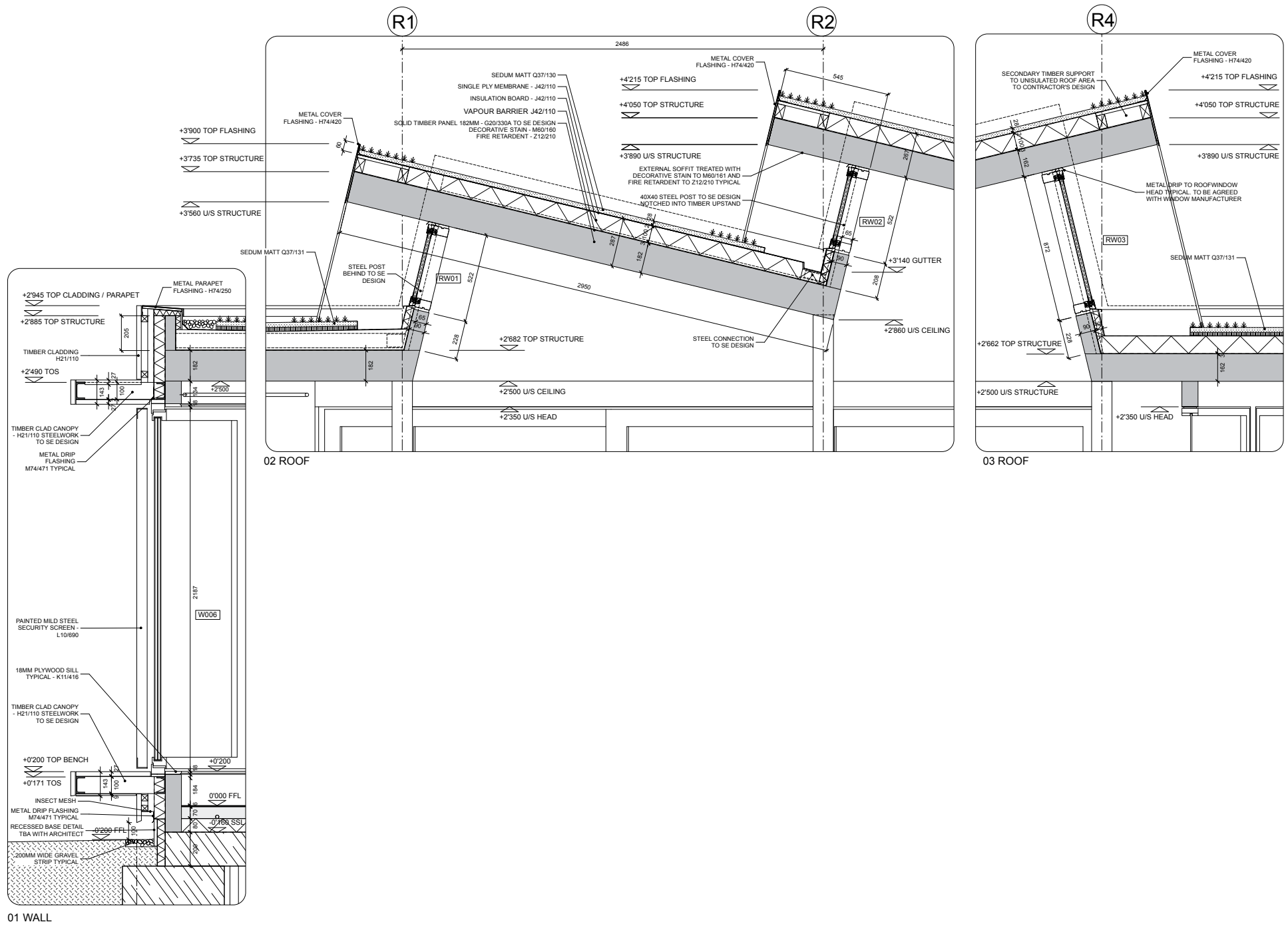


Fig. 24 Detail Roof Section, showing opening window sections and roof construction

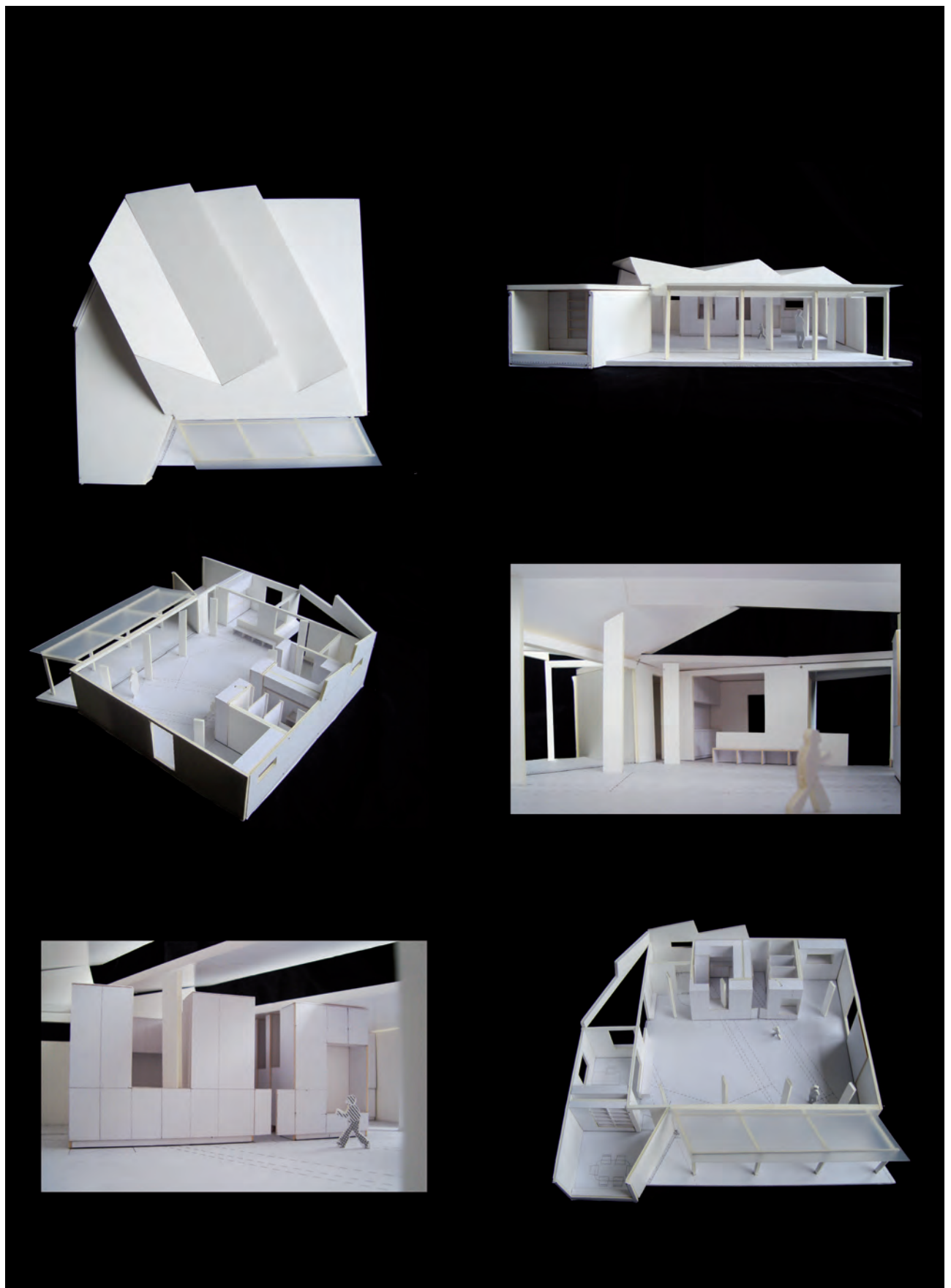


Fig. 25 Models



Fig. 26 Site Plan

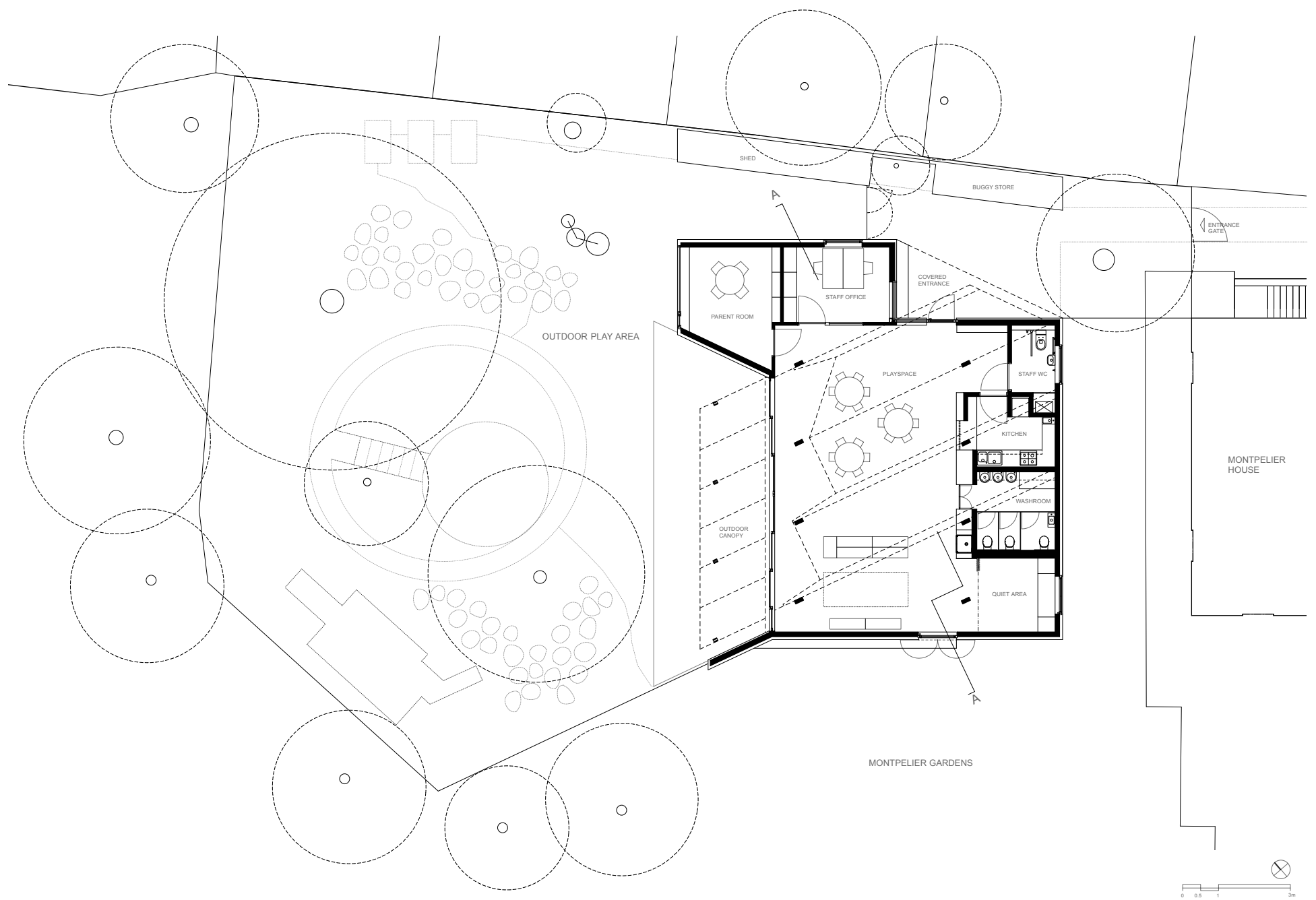


Fig. 27 Site and Ground Floor Plan

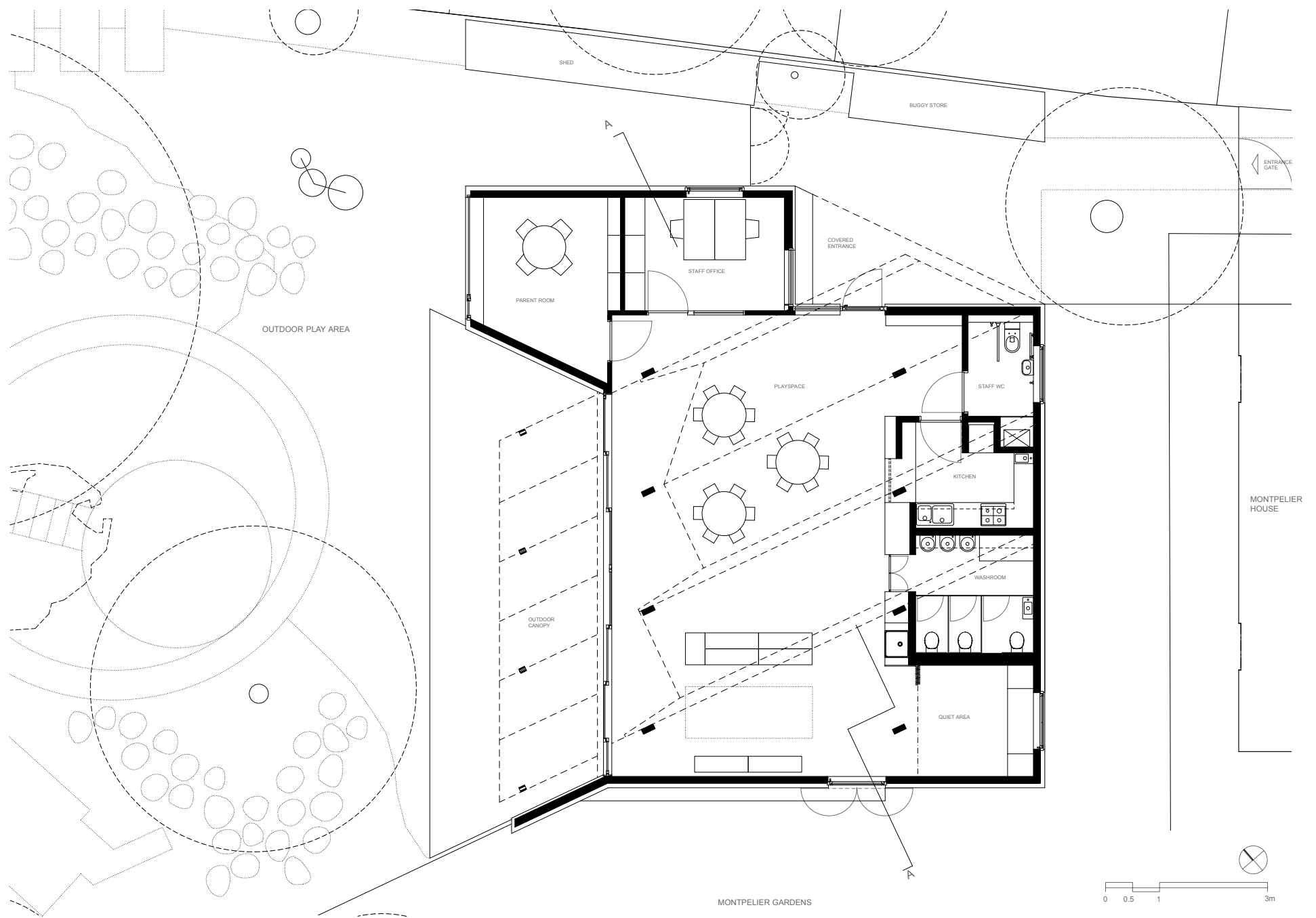


Fig. 28 Ground Floor Plan

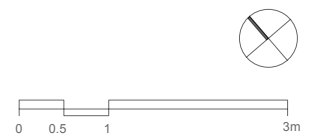
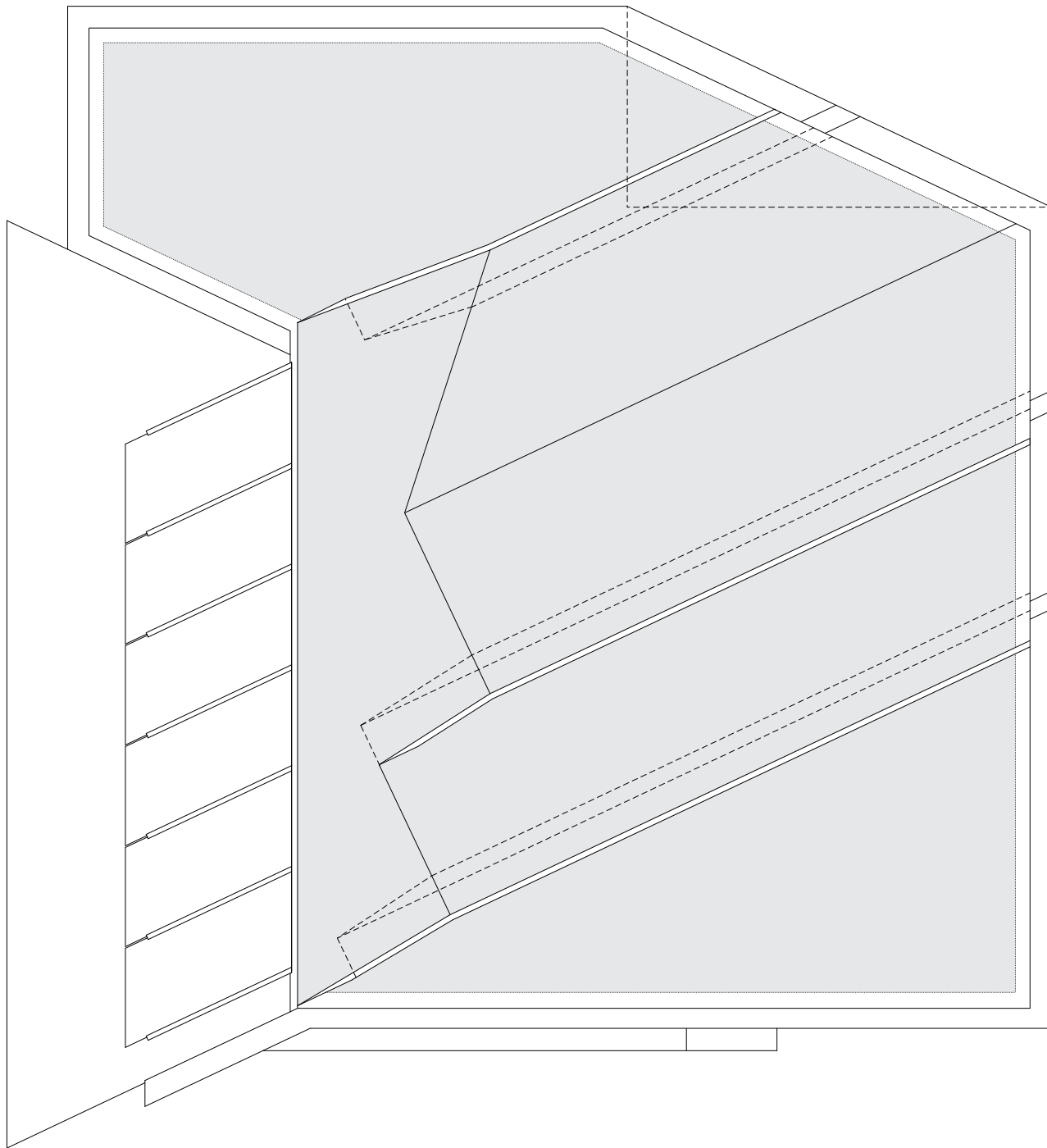


Fig. 29 Roof Plan

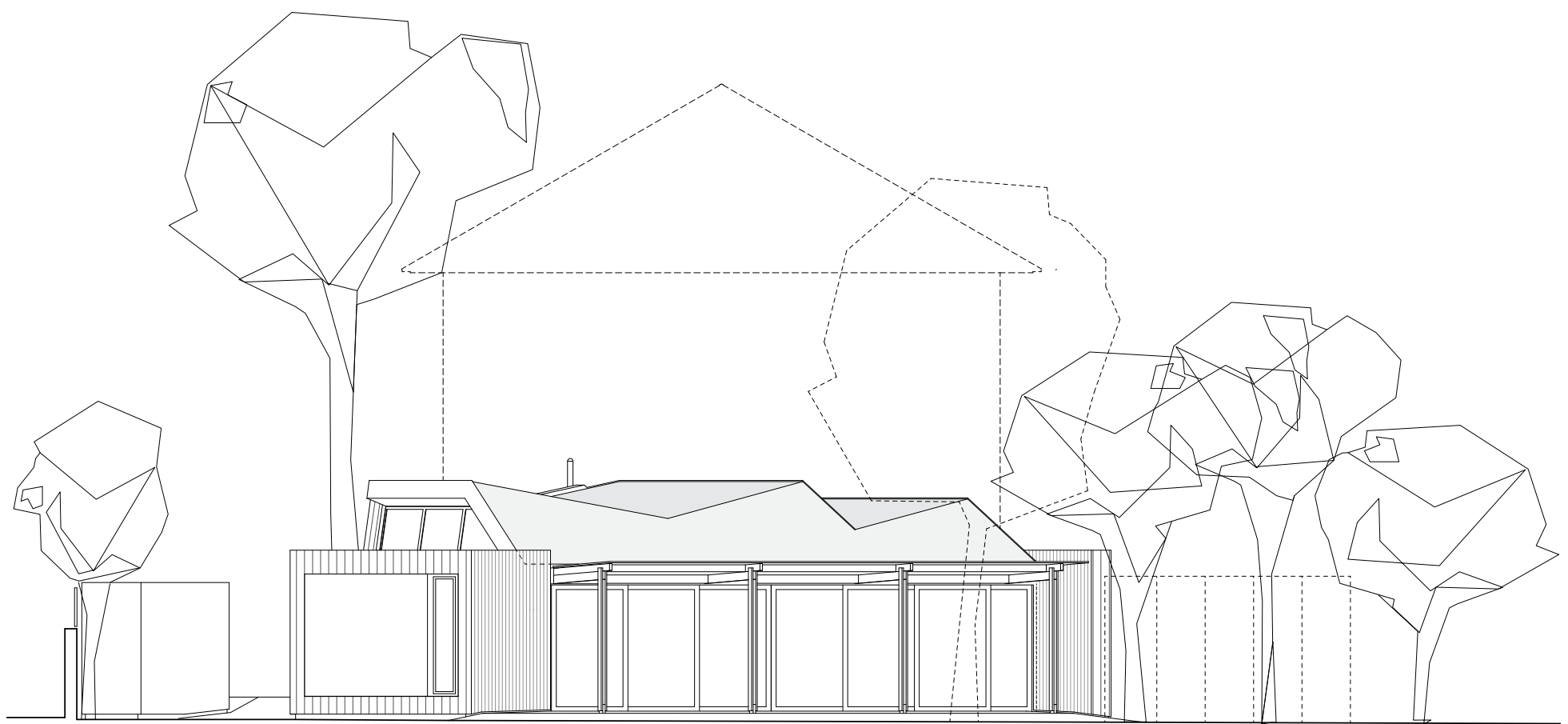


Fig. 30 West Elevation

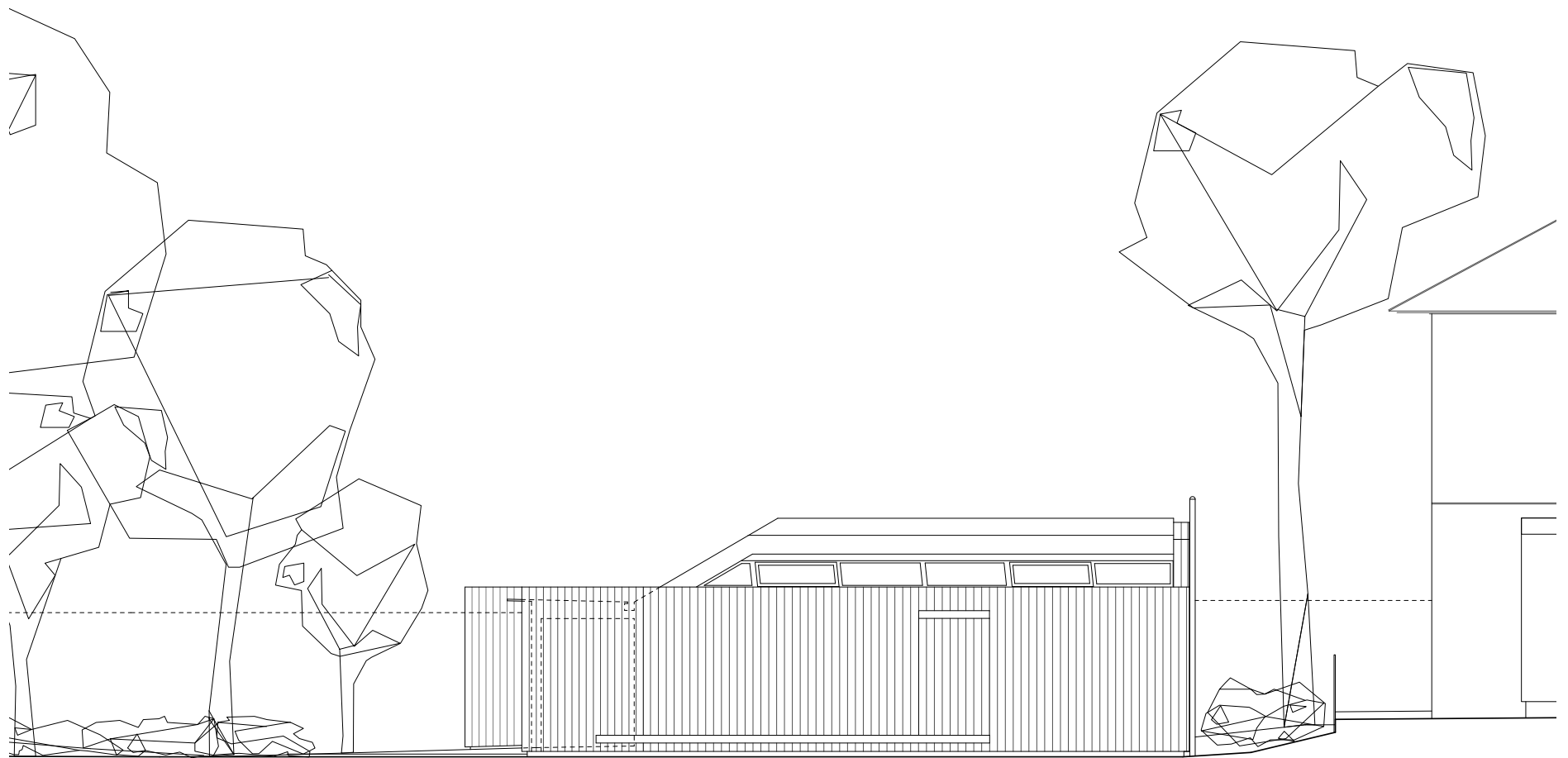


Fig. 31 South Elevation

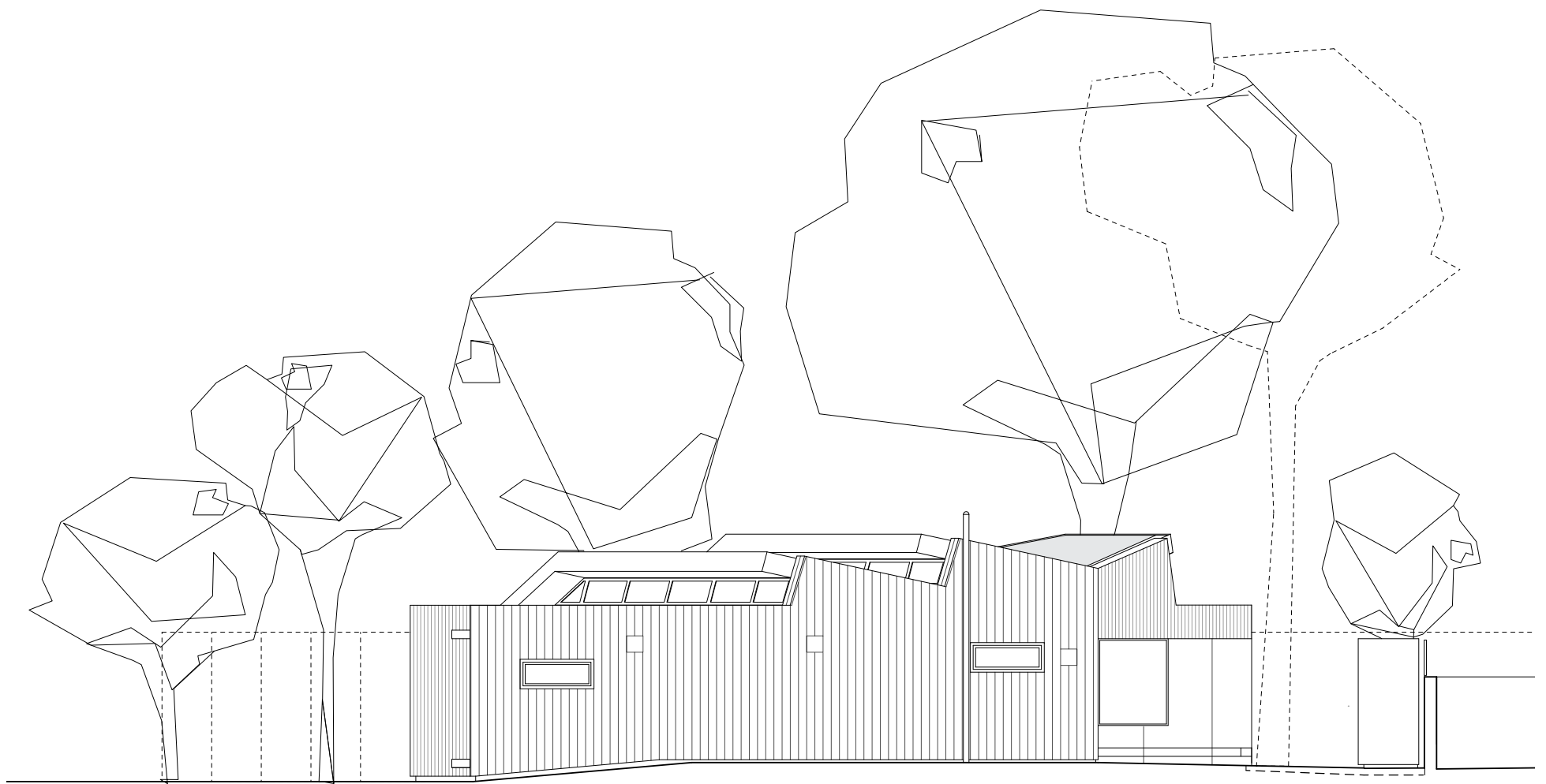


Fig. 32 East Elevation

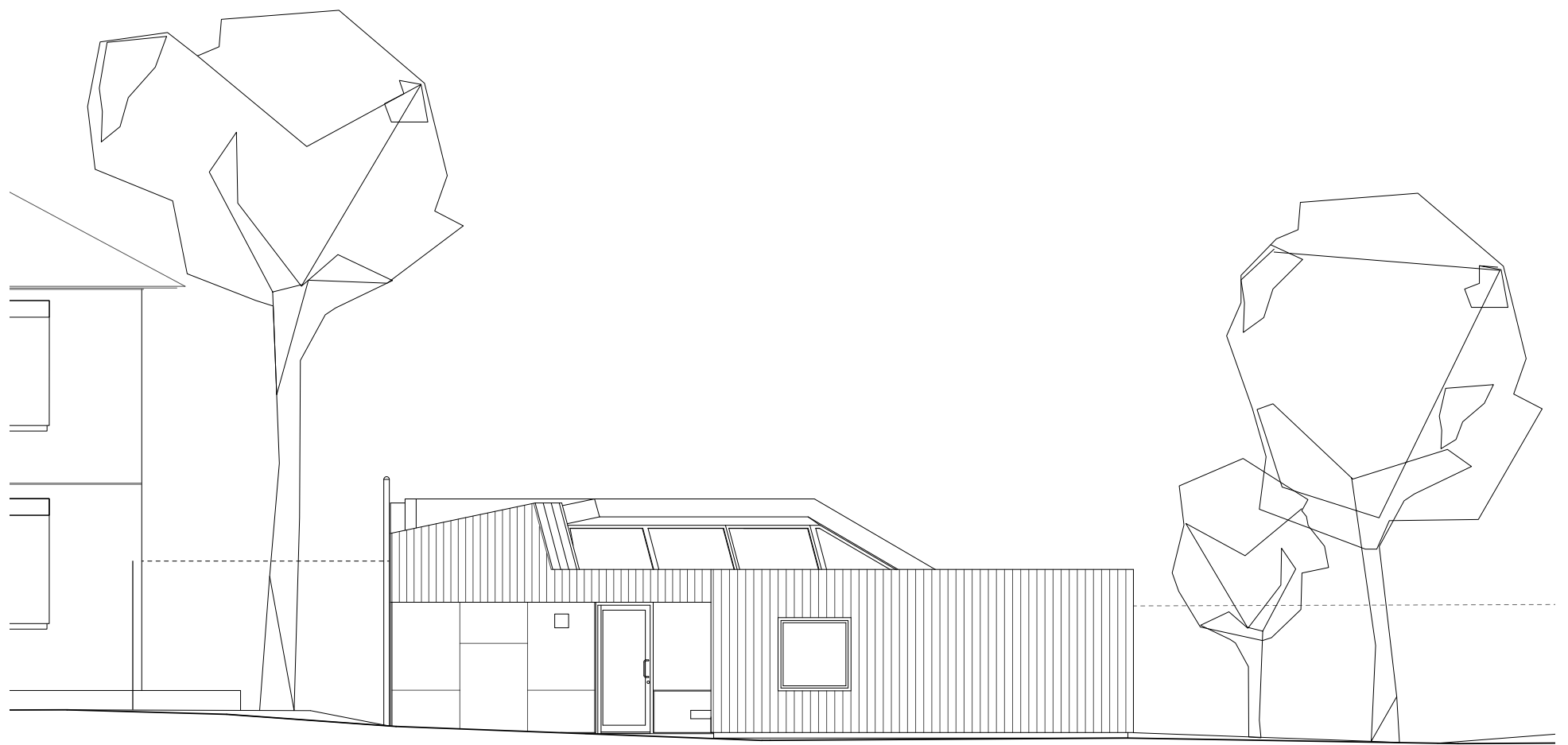


Fig. 33 North Elevation



Fig. 34 Book Window



Fig. 35 Building – Garden Interface showing sedum blanket on roof



Fig. 36 Garden as play space



Fig. 37 Garden as play space



Fig. 38 Interior in use

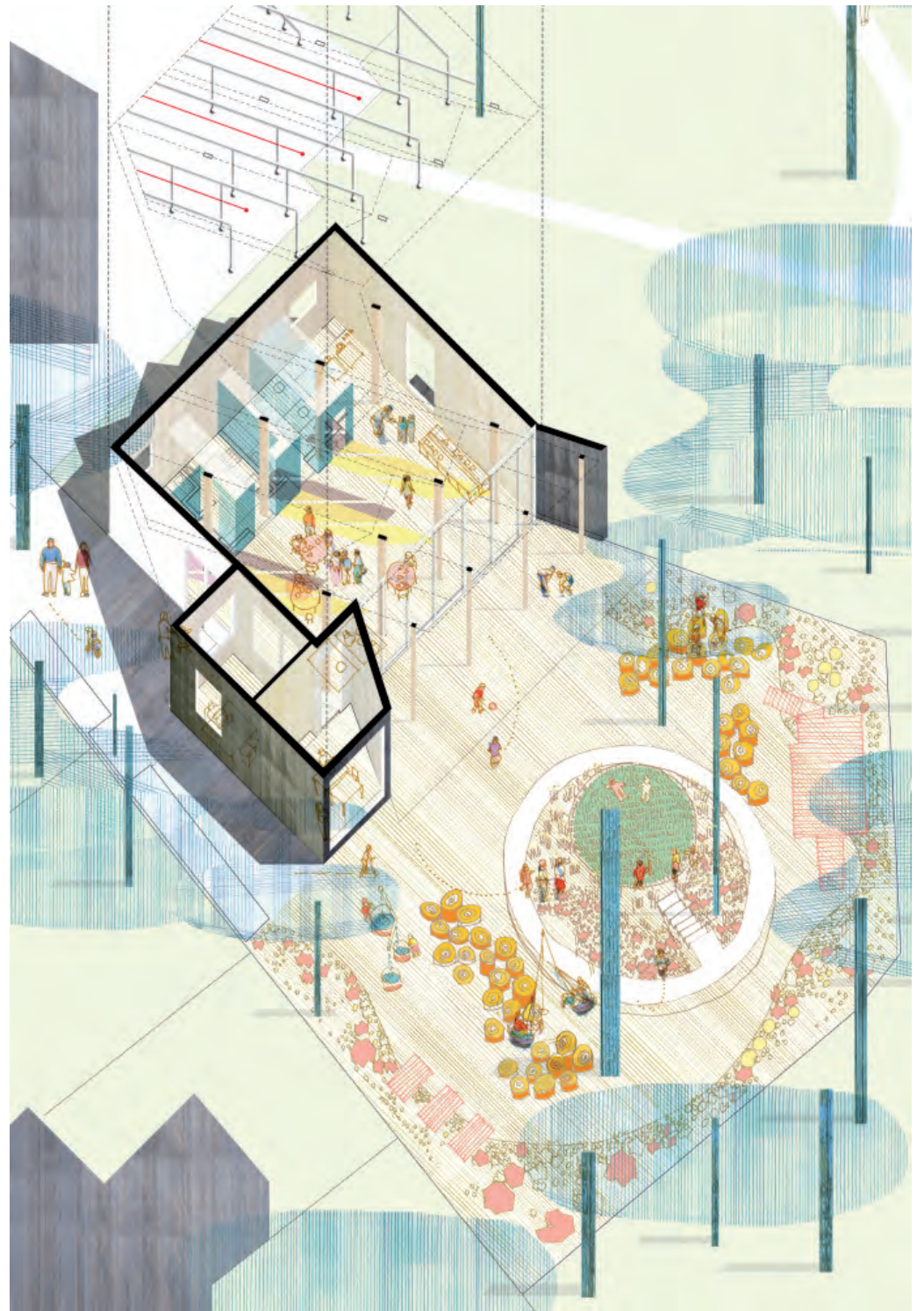


Fig. 39 AY Architects in collaboration with Michiko Somi



Fig. 40 AY Architects in collaboration with Michiko Somi

Stephen Lawrence Prize

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[Stephen Lawrence Prize Shortlist 2012](#)

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Stephen Lawrence Prize 2013

The RIBA has announced **Montpelier Community Nursery by AY Architects as the 2013 Stephen Lawrence Prize winner.**

The judges for this year's prize was Marco Goldschmied, Baroness Doreen Lawrence, Mary Duggan and Phil Coffey.

The RIBA Stephen Lawrence Prize is funded by the Marco Goldschmied Foundation, and was set up in memory of the teenager who was setting out on the road to becoming an architect when he was murdered in 1993. The prize, which rewards the best examples of projects that have a construction budget of less than £1 million, is intended to encourage fresh talent working with smaller budgets.

Montpelier Community Nursery



Architect: AY Architects
Client: Camden Community Nurseries
Photographer: Nick Kane
Stephen Lawrence Prize 2013 Winner

The Filling Station



Architect: Carmody Groarke
Client: Argent Estates/Bistrotheque
Photographer: Luke Hayes

Church Walk



Architect: David Mikhail with Annalie Riches
Client: David Mikhail and Annalie Riches
Photographer: Tim Crocker

Slip House



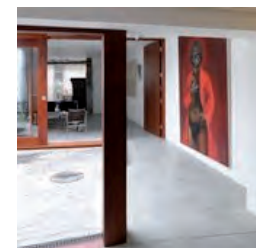
Architect: Carl Turner Architects
Client: Private
Photographer: Tim

Chapel of Saint Albert the Great



Architect: Simpson and Brown Architects
Client: The Order of Preachers

25 Tanners Hill



Architect: Dow Jones Architects
Client: Private
Photographer: David

Montpelier Community Nursery

[Exterior](#)

[Classroom](#)

[Entrance](#)

[Garden view](#)

[Interior](#)

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Montpelier Community Nursery - exterior

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The school takes the form of a pavilion opening onto a part-sheltered play area with a park beyond. The selection of materials is a key part of the scheme's success. The black stained Siberian larch sits inconspicuously in the treescape and contrasts with the white-washed internal woodwork allowing the playful objects to come to life.

All the details were well controlled, from exposed conduits to the selection of nursery furniture and material finishes. Simple decisions made for an all-encompassing education experience: thoughtful pram stores and recessed entrances took some of the madness out of drop-off and pick-up times; the door on to the park allowed quiet surveillance; and there was a seamless link to the outer play area and garden.



Architect: AY Architects
Client: Camden Community Nurseries
Photographer: Nick Kane

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AY Architects' Montpelier Nursery bags 2013 Stephen Lawrence Prize

26 September, 2013 | By [Laura Mark](#)

AY Architects has won the £5,000 Stephen Lawrence Prize for its nursery in Camden, north London

The £429,000 project saw off competition from two private houses, a housing project, a chapel and a restaurant to win the prestigious prize sponsored by the [Marco Goldschmied Foundation](#), which celebrates schemes costing less than £1 million.

Set up in memory of the black teenager Stephen Lawrence, who was setting out on the road to becoming an architect when he was murdered in 1993, the award is intended to encourage fresh talent working with smaller budgets.

Defeated contenders this year were [25 Tanners Hill](#) by [Dow Jones Architects](#), the [Chapel of Saint Albert the Great](#) by [Simpson & Brown Architects](#), [Church Walk](#) by [David Mikhail](#) and [Annalie Riches](#), the [Filling Station](#) by [Carmody Groarke](#), and the 2013 Manser Medal winning [Slip House](#) by [Carl Turner Architects](#).

In a statement the judges, who included Doreen Lawrence and winner of the 2012 Stephen Lawrence Prize [Mary Duggan](#), said: 'The architects were key to the vision for the nursery which was delivered without compromise and produces an all-encompassing educational experience.'

'The selection of materials was a key part of the success. The black stained Siberian larch cladding allows the nursery to sit inconspicuously among the treescape and contrasts with the white-washed internal timber against which the playful objects to come to life.'

[Read Sarah Wigglesworth's building study of Montpelier Nursery \(AJ 21.03.13\)](#)



Project data

Client Camden Community Nurseries
Structural engineer Price & Myers
Services engineer King Shaw Associates
Contractor Forest Gate Construction
Contract value £429,000
Date of completion April 2012
Gross internal area 136m²

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Friday 11 October 2013

AY Architects takes 2013 Stephen Lawrence Prize

26 September 2013 | By [Andrea Klettner](#)



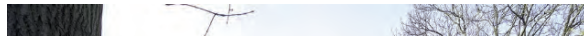
Award handed out at Stirling Prize ceremony in central London

AY Architects' Montpellier Community Nursery in Kentish Town has won the 2013 Stephen Lawrence Prize, beating five other projects to the prize.

The prize, sponsored by the Marco Goldschmied Foundation, is for projects with a construction budget of less than £1 million.

Also on the shortlist were:

Tanners Hill, Lewisham, Dow Jones Architects
Slip House, Brixton, Carl Turner Architects
The Chapel of Saint Albert the Great, Edinburgh, Simpson & Brown Architects
Church Walk housing, Stoke Newington, David Mikhail Architects
Filling Station, King's Cross, Carmody Groarke



Source: [Nick Kane](#)

Goldschmied said: "The Montpellier Nursery is one of those rare new buildings that are happy and serene in their context from the outset. It is the product of a genuine community effort involving many of the parents working closely with the local authority to make it so. Throughout their lives the children will affectionately recall the time they spent there."

The jury included Baroness Lawrence, Goldschmied and architects Phil Coffey and Mary Duggan.

www.bdonline.co.uk/news/ay-architects-takes-2013-stephen-lawrence-prize/5061215.article

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Secluded wonderland: Montpelier Nursery by AY Architects | Building study | Architects Journal



Secluded wonderland: Montpelier Nursery by AY Architects

21 March, 2013 | By Sarah Wigglesworth

Sarah Wigglesworth finds AY Architects' Montpelier Nursery in Camden an enchanting and imaginative building that perfectly captures the needs of childhood. Photography by *Nick Kane*

Entering the nursery from the freezing outdoors, my nostrils are ambushed by the warm, sweet aroma of lunch, which is being served from the kitchen hatch. Bliss ... Sitting on their miniature bent ply chairs around small tables, children are quietly and happily devouring their freshly cooked Caribbean meal. Through lines of columns in the lofty space, there are views ahead and across onto a wooded garden and intensely green slope. Despite the bitter cold, a scattering of pale pink blossom heralds the arrival of spring.

The classroom is full of light; natural light, there is not a lit bulb anywhere, despite the cloudy day. Saw-tooth, south-facing rooflights are augmented by a larger north-facing rooflight; light reflects off the pale white coated walls onto the cross-laminated timber roof structure to create a bright ceiling. As lunch finishes, the collateral damage of scattered rice and beans is hardly noticeable on the white-flecked, grey lino floor. The quiet area in the corner is made up with sleeping mats, and calm descends as the children fall into afternoon slumber.



The Montpelier Nursery is one of only two community nurseries operating within London Borough of Camden providing affordable childcare for working parents with children between two and five years old. Managed by a voluntary committee of parents, it had been operating from a dilapidated temporary structure since 1983. AY Architects' founding partners Anthony Boulanger and Yeoryia Manolopoulou (parents of two nursery-age children) prepared a feasibility study and obtained planning permission that unlocked funding of £429,000 from Camden's Early Years Capital Programme to construct a 130m² nursery for 24 children. The initiative was set up by parents for the community, a demonstration of self-help and persistence to the best ends.

The nursery responds skilfully to its site, a pocket park at the centre of a triangle of houses sloping downhill towards Kentish Town. At the centre of the former Montpelier estate is a Regency villa, which sits behind the nursery and is used as a youth facility by Camden Social Services. The park is public and has three points of access. The nursery managed a land swap with the villa and park to create a better relationship with the rest of the garden, while gaining more play area and offering a new bench in the public realm against the warmed south-facing nursery wall.

The sedum roof echoes the zig-zags of neighbouring dwellings

The magical, secluded nature of the open space, with its mature trees, muted colours and encircling houses is celebrated in the subdued cladding of the building and sedum roof that echoes the zig-zags of neighbouring dwellings.

AY makes a virtue of the way in which life helps create architecture, and it appreciates that the dynamic programme is part of a broader dialogue with history, place and material. Thus, the plan of the building is simple: a large main room with a wall of supporting spaces including kitchen, stores, WCs and quiet room. This arrangement is animated and elaborated by light, vista and the colourful children's drawings everywhere. Windows, doors and overhangs are arranged to create settings that encourage carers to occupy them flexibly and with imagination.

Understanding the importance of a seamless transition between inside and outside in the learning-through-play that characterises education at this age, AY has made whole walls openable, connecting grounded indoors with dancing nature and offered covered outdoor thresholds for making all manner of mess. For the architect, there is an enjoyable game at play in the geometric shift between the orientation of spaces and roof. So while the plan takes its lead from the villa, the roof

www.architectsjournal.co.uk/secluded-wonderland-montpelier-nursery-by-ay-architects/8644371.article

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Montpelier Nursery
115 Brecknock Road, Kentish Town, N19 5AH
020 7485 9813
Ofsted URN: 100616

Montpelier Nursery is located in a beautiful eco-building, designed specifically for local children by former Montpelier parents. The nursery provides care for children aged two to five.

Children at Montpelier learn a lot through outdoor activities and natural play. We have a substantial outdoor space surrounded by mature plants, shrubs and trees that can be used for growing plants, fruit and vegetables and exploring nature, as well as giving children plenty of space in which to run about. The nursery and grounds are set within a green space, which is well used by the local community.

We create a sense of belonging and all children feel included, secure and valued. Our indoor provision promotes creative and imaginative play and is always supported by caring and trusted nursery workers. There is extraordinary continuity of service among our staff which makes Montpelier a unique home-like environment. The children are given freshly cooked meals every day and eating together is an enjoyable social experience. Children are respected as autonomous and competent learners who learn by doing rather than by being told. We regularly invite other professionals to run special events.

Montpelier nursery, 115 Brecknock Road London N19 5AH, 020 7485 9813

Camden Community Nurseries Ltd.
 Company limited by Guarantee No. 2575796
 Charity number: 1002534
 Registered office: 16 Acoll Road, London NW6 3AG



Video

V.01 'Montpelier Film' by Caz Stuart <<https://vimeo.com/16920274>>

