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Nature and Her Simple Truths

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How could the ‘architect’ approach the issue of uniting the site and wider landscape with the imposition of the man made form?
Figure 1. Peter Zumthor’s Thermal Baths, Vals, Switzerland.
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Introduction

“Learn from Nature her simple truths of form, function, and grace of line.... Nature’s things seem to belong where they are put and to grow from their site.”

- Frank Lloyd Wright

The presence of certain buildings has a feeling of something being “secret” about them. This sense of secrecy may be explained or revealed by an understanding of their relationship with their ‘place’. It maybe that they simply belong. That belonging perhaps is suggested or reinforced by the feeling that it seems virtually impossible to imagine the place where they stand without them. Their purpose may be somehow implied by their contexts. These buildings have the impression of being self-evidently part of their surroundings. They appear to be anchored firmly in the ground and seem to be saying: “I am as you see me, and I belong here.”


Buildings that appear to be intrinsically part of their place have an integration which lends them such power that they seem to enhance the human awareness of connectedness to, and understanding of, the world. They even seem to honour human purposes and take humans to levels of profundity that verge upon the sacred. This state of resolution between building and site, once perceived, is so deeply desired that it forms a paramount and overriding design intention.

Therefore the purpose of profound architecture is to find its place; it must make us see the inherent character of this place in a new light. “We throw a stone into the water. Sand swirls up and settles again. The stir was necessary. The stone has found its place. But the pond is no longer the same.” The response to design disjunctions between building and site so as to leave the site intact is not a solution. That it is to be so ‘cowed’ by the failures of much of modern construction, that a resolution to leave a site physically undisturbed by any insertion appears to be the only way forward. That is not the point. Such fear of failure is to whimper in the face of the challenge of the problem. A building, if designed with an understanding of and commitment to this rooted connectedness, will settle into its environment after its construction. It is a new space but one that resonates with its surrounds. The space could now not be seen in any other light than its current state. Tension between built and landscape does not exist. It simply belongs.

* Zumthor, Architecture and Urbanism, 16.
How do we strengthen the relationship between form, space and the associated environment in such a way that we generate buildings which emphasise the importance of their surroundings? “...an incisive, precisely structured form affects the site in such a way as to reveal its intrinsic character.” – it reinforces the particular nature of that particular site.

As Frank Lloyd Wright once proclaimed:

“...the good building makes the landscape more beautiful than it was before the building was built.”

- Frank L. Wright

An architectural intervention is a powerful means of bringing to light the inherent qualities of a site. Architecture “...can enter into a meaningful dialogue with the existing situation...”* The intervention proposes to emphasise the intrinsic character of its particular site—the site is realised for what it is. The ‘modern’ architect sought to disassociate buildings from the earth. “Pilotis, walls of seemingly frameless plate glass, were intended to lighten the building’s contact with the ground...”** The modernist movement sought to do away with the “darkness below and to create an international style which was not bound to the earth...”***, it could be said that by doing so, scant regard for the earth was generated. With the building intended to ‘sit’ anywhere, a sense of place was lost. So developed a style that was not bound to the earth, rootless and floating, and that could quite easily ‘dock’ anywhere and be nowhere.

The intention here is to reconnect with that ground that the modernists so often do away with, to strengthen the connection between inside and out, to create a building that intrinsically reflects its site, is bound to its situation—that creates ‘place’, that honours its surroundings. The building can no longer be seen as an imposition on its site.

* Zumthor, Architecture and Urbanism, 16.
** Edwin Heathcote, “Monument Builders” (West Sussex: Academy Editions, 1999), 12.
*** Ibid.
“Leaving behind his earlier attempts to build in sympathy with the land, Wright invented in them built forms that would indeed “intensify,” and perhaps complete, the natural structures they were to work within.”

-Frank L. Wright

* De Long, Designs for an American landscape, 10.
Project Objectives

Project objectives

- Deliver a process that demonstrates techniques for the integration between the man-made form and their given site/landscape.

- Recognise the intrinsic nature of a site to enhance the space with the placement of a building.

- Analyse architecture that successfully connects with their environments and establishes a sense of place. Specify what makes these buildings part of their context – as opposed to a disparate.

- Create a series of buildings that successfully integrate within the landscape.

- Analyse the buildings’ commitment to identify with its site.
Brief

The retreat aims to achieve a profundity within its occupants -- to enter deeply into thought and feelings of contentment.

A design that aims to help its audience take the time to relax, to observe, and then perhaps, start to talk again...An architectural experience that emphasizes the joy of life and living -- to heighten our perceived reality; a connection between man, earth and cosmos. The retreat aims to achieve a profundity within its occupants -- to enter deeply into thought and feelings of contentment. By removing the everyday, it desires to inspire a connection with the natural environment, remembering the magic in a far simpler way of life.
The architecture of churches intimates the possibilities. Church architecture aims to connect with the divine; light diffused through stained glass, shadows and the massive nature of built elements suggest a focus on a higher power while denying a tangible experience, a physical offering for its users. The retreat allows its occupants an authentic experience of this earth, as it is, in its raw state, from the here and now and then onward, to forever. The building allows the occupant to solely focus on a connection between themselves and the earth. The occupant should experience the utmost joy of what it is to be human, alive on our planet, to surrender to and merge with the wonder that we otherwise take advantage of. It is an attempt to integrate the inhabitant into the surroundings – a connection through experience that is wholly focused on the clarity of life.

The architecture is a mode of assisting the occupant to withdraw from their current life and unite with their surroundings. These buildings that appear to be intrinsically part of their place have an integration that lends them such power that they seem to enhance a connection between man and nature. The occupant will be guided to profound levels of thought through integration between the architecture and the site. The space will allow the occupant to settle within the landscape and penetrate the depths of one’s being – to enter into self-awareness and connection.

You do not come to this place to pray to a deity to propitiate or placate the forces of nature but to learn about them and understand them through experience.
The process of establishing yourself within this building becomes ceremonial. The building will be a medium between you and your surroundings. To navigate the building with no order of progression other than your own sense of orientation, would not set any importance on the sequence of space. Tadao Ando’s architecture is often characterised in such a ritualistic way “...to the extent that the subject’s passage through his architecture invariably involves a carefully orchestrated spatial itinerary.” A progression through the buildings should be organised in such a way as to place importance on the ‘journey’ and its role in the wider program of the buildings. The way in which the occupant navigates this space is thus vital for the occupants understanding of how the building functions. The function of each space and their connecting pathways and common areas will influence the occupant’s journey through the building with the sequence of space emphasising the discovery of connection between man and his surroundings.

As humans, the depth to which we come in contact with our surroundings is a matter of our own sensory awareness that engenders the feeling of connectedness. As there are more senses than just the visual, the retreat should open the experience to more than the eyes. We have become too reliant on the visual sense as the single means of experience. To revel in everyday beauty, to revert back to the basic, primitive responses and the nature of ourselves amidst our mother earth and skyfather. The architecture should direct the occupant with the entirety of their sensory system. The retreat will offer this opportunity, yet only if the occupant is ready to listen, will they hear. The experience cannot be forced as the occupant must be open and willing to the journey.
Much like Ando’s response to the material pallet, it is true “...the architectural materials do not end with wood and concrete that have tangible forms, but go beyond to include light and wind which appeal to the senses.” It is the exposure to these basic elements that will initiate such an opening up and exploration of the senses by removing the excesses of contemporary life and taking one back to our primal beginnings. The architecture will thus direct and be directed by a concentration on light and dark, wind, mountains, caves, water, and fire, allowing a progressive shedding of the solely visual experience for the greater exploration of the surroundings in their most elemental forms.

“Light, whose beauty within darkness is as of jewels that one might cup in one’s hands; light that, hollowing out darkness and piercing our bodies, blows life into ‘place’.”

* Frampton, Corporeal Experience in the Architecture of Tadao Ando, 309.
Our modern architectural world is cast in a single indistinct tone of generally vivid day light; serving almost no point in a building. A comprehensive architecture should pursue a relationship between light and darkness to establish a sense of place that we can inhabit and feel connected to at the most fundamental level.

Naturally, the interior space of a building is likely to function far more effectively with a contrast between light and dark; Christopher Alexander recognises this as non-uniformities or a “tapestry of light and dark”*. Places which make effective settings for human events are thus defined by light, the way it is controlled and utilised can offer a multitude of spatial experiences within a building.

This functional definition of light, however useful, is secondary to the qualities of light that develop connections between the area and the occupant. Light by itself does not make light, there is also shadow, “...it is the shadows which give form to life”; each one giving form to the other and neither being able to survive without the other** and darkness, “which kindles the brilliance of light and reveals the light’s power, is innately a part of light”***. The changing contrasts between light, shadow and darkness allow the inhabitant to see the space in many different ways and, in doing so, they establish a more intimate relationship with this place. Light changes expressions with time and in the shifting shades of light and dark, one may feel more at peace with their surroundings as they see it from all angles. It may be well-lit, “resplendent with dignity and power”**** or a gentle light flowing from a single corner. It is from here that the senses are opened.

*** Ibid.
“Yet, the richness and depth of darkness has disappeared from our consciousness, and the subtle nuances that light and darkness engender, their spatial resonances—these are almost forgotten.”

-Tadao Ando

* Frampton, Corporeal Experience in the Architecture of Tadao Ando, 316.
Figure 4. The darkness below.
Mountains and Caves

Mountains and caves have been significant as holy places. “In elevated places, you are released from the earthly environment, which allows contact with the celestial, the sky father. In places deep in the earth, you are in touch with the origins of life, with Mother Earth herself.” It is natural to feel at peace in an underground room. The inward, enclosed quality is a place to retreat within, “…it is perhaps only there that one can find real tranquillity”.

** Ibid, 22.
“We came from the water; our bodies are largely water; and water plays a fundamental role in our psychology. We need constant access to water, all around us; and we cannot have it without reverence for water in all its forms.”

-Christopher Alexander

* Alexander, A Pattern Language: Buildings, 323.
“In the Buddhist story of creation, water was the first element to come into the world. From water was born the lotus, symbol of Buddha’s spiritual awakening.” It is a powerful idea that water is the beginnings of all things living, the creation of life as we know it. Ando mentions that “Water is a monochromatic material, seemingly coloured yet colourless. In fact, in that monochromatic world there are infinite shades of colour. Then, too, water is a mirror. I believe there is a profound relationship between water and human spirit.” For Ando water is a natural power which informs his architecture. The static concrete planes that Ando is all too renowned for come to life with the presence of nature in subtle ways, from the movement of the wind over a body of water, to the changing dynamic of space under the influence of light reflecting from the waters surface. Water is a vital element that should run throughout the scheme, to connect the occupant with their beginnings and to stimulate a profundity; bringing the occupant into harmony with the life-creating energy and essence of the earth itself.

* Meijenfeldt, Below Ground Level: Architecture, 22.

** Frampton, Corporeal Experience in the Architecture of Tadao Ando, 316.
“The biologist, L.J. Henderson, observed that the saline content of human blood is essentially the same as that of the sea, because we came from the sea.”

Furthermore among psychoanalysts it is common to consider the bodies of water that appear in people’s dreams as loaded with meaning. Jung and the Jungian analysts take great bodies of water as representing the dreamers unconscious. They even speculate, that going into the water may bring a person closer to the subconscious process in his/her life. Psychoanalysts guess that people who swim or dive often are closer to their dreams, more in contact with their subconscious, than people who swim rarely. Several studies have in fact demonstrated that “...water has a positive therapeutic effect; that it sets up growth experience.” All of this suggests that if our lives are diminished if we cannot establish rich and abiding contact with water.

* Alexander, A Pattern Language: Buildings, 323.
** Ibid, 324.
*** Ibid.
Figure 6. Open fire.
“Fire seems always to have held a fascination for humans. Our ancestors surround it with myth and ritual.”

Today we still make fire the focus of the living room wherever possible. Even the words connected with fire suggest its importance as a centre, a focus of life. The word focus comes from a Latin word which originally meant hearth. The French word foyer means fireplace; figuratively it also means home. Very early in the human history, then, home became the place that sheltered the fire.”


** Ibid.
Fire freed humans in the sense of permitting them to live more comfortably in cold regions, eat foods inedible without cooking, and enjoy protection from predators. But fire also bound them. As Alexander Marschak wrote in The Roots of Civilization, fire must be tended; it needs a home and place out of the great winds, the heavy rains, the deepest snows; it must be constantly fed.” From this a process evolves not just one person but the group; and the process shapes the group; it shapes the day, the pattern of life the culture."

“Not least the fire spirit must be treated correctly lest it become dangerous...”

**Ibid.
***Ibid.
Humans all seem to recognise the ambiguous nature of fire. The Egyptians expressed it in their many names for fire: The Useful One, The Executioner, The Living One, The Angry One, The Beautiful One, The Withering One.”

“This power is a reminder of links deep within us people, and to ways, when fires were marvellous and holy things.”


**Ibid.*
“Just possibly in this age of nuclear fires, it is time to regain some control over an element central to our lives, and to restore some of the attentiveness and respect for fire that even our remote ancestors knew.”

-David Lyle.

*Lyle, The Book of Masonry Stoves, 14.*
"...the quest for peace is a luxury we allow ourselves only in life's later years."

-Ernst von Meijenfeldt

* Meijenfeldt, Below Ground Level: Architecture, 21.
Social context

The building aims to focus on the connection between occupant, space and surroundings. To intimately deal with the relationship between self and environment the person should ‘feel’ to be in the midst of remoteness. Removing their familiarities and placing them within an expansive environment that will unsettle the occupant, to spur thought and reflection on the ‘isolated’ self. Separated from their controls and familiarities that associate them with everyday life.

Planning the spaces will require the spectrum of connectedness between ‘self and others’. On one hand the occupant should feel the sense of isolation, solitary space, aloneness and reflection. On the other hand the occupant needs to engage socially to realise the impact that seclusion has. You would not be human without social interaction. No man is an island, all men are social beings. It is these two poles of experience between alone time and the coming together at the end of the day, that allows this process of reflection, understanding and ‘wholeness’ to take place.

If the design of the building denies the occupant contact this undermines who they think and feel they are.
Physical context

The site physically requires a distance between the everyday ‘comings and goings’ and isolation. To take the opportunity to embellish the role of this journey from mainland to retreat, may well enhance the experience at the retreat. Location of site is significant. It needs to be appropriate for its program. The raw element of nature is important - to gain respect for your surroundings. The occupant is to be in awe of their environment to intuitively feel part of something much larger than themselves.

The visitor most likely to seek this retreat could be one that is discontent with the usual getaway seeking something further. It may be they feel they have lost themselves within the demands of their every-day lives. Under stress, their lifestyles are no longer healthy, both physically and mentally.

The retreat serves to reunite oneself with their environment. To find that internal locus of control to go back into our complex lifestyles with a returned sense of balance and peace.
Programme of Spaces

Dining structure - *restoring a sense of sociability.*

Active social maturity – the building is involved in restoring a sense of community and social solidarity. The three outposts are very much about a separate identity, a personal response to the outside world. The main building sets to reintegrate the occupant within a collective environment.

**Outpost 1 - Unconscious**
Passively involved in the unconscious.

**Outpost 2 - Conscious**
Actively involved in the conscious; consciously reacting to the world.

**Outpost 3 – Subconscious**
Actively involved in the subconscious—an inward journey—inward into the subconscious—reducing the effects on your body—little to no external input allowing the body/mind to focus.

**Guest Units**
Retreating back to a state of solitary dwelling.
To follow is a series of buildings that I have felt connect (in part or as a whole) with their landscapes...They are an insertion that has grown to be part of their surrounding...to now imagine these places without their insertions would not be “OK” — it would be virtually impossible to imagine the place where they stand without them.
Leti 360 Resort

Architects: Studio Mumbai.
Location: Leti, Uttaranchal, India.
Completed: 2007
Figure 10. Leti Mountain, Aerial photograph.
“I think it is the responsibility of the designers to think about the bigger picture and the impact their designs have on the environment. And this is a great example of that where they are using local materials, thinking about transportation for the materials ... and it does really use materials in a way that doesn’t detract but actually adds to the experience and it makes one aware of the bigger environment.”

– Paul Priestman

Located at 2350 metres above sea level, Leti 360 resort is perched on a promontory in the foothills of the Indian Himalayas. The site is a 9km walk from the nearest motor able road and is accessed by a narrow footpath carved into the mountainside, part of a network of trails used by local villagers for daily travel and transport. The trail culminates at the central dining structure built on a plateau, around which four guest dwellings are discreetly set into existing agricultural terraces. Hiramony glacier and the peak of Nanda Kot (6861 metres) are visible to the north; the peaks of Nepal line the eastern horizon; and to the south, the Ram Ganga River carves its way through steep terraced valleys and mountain passes.*

Figure 11. Leti Resort, photograph of accommodation unit.
“The design of the resort was influenced by the inherent constraints of building in the area, concerns of environmental impact and cultural sensitivity, and careful observation of indigenous materials, climate and landscape.”* The buildings are constructed primarily of dry-stacked stone, in the tradition of the area. Glazed walls framed in teakwood have been introduced to let in natural light and to “visually connect the guests to the surrounding landscape.”** Stone was quarried locally and carried to site by porters and mules; all other building materials, included teak wood, glass, aluminium, copper, and canvas.”***

** Ibid.
*** Ibid.
Figure 12. Leti Resort, photograph of accommodation units.
Construction was completed over a period of seven months with the help of more than 70 village masons, carpenters, and craftsmen. Because of its remote location, the site is without electricity; stored solar energy is used to provide hot water and to charge solar lanterns for the accommodation units and main dining building.

“By simply being in such a location, the project offers a moment of humility and pause, allowing guests to feel a sense of belonging to the land.”

Already, only a year since the project’s completion, the landscape has begun to reclaim the site; “Lichen, ferns and moss have taken root in the stone walls of the structures, as the line between built and pre-existing landscapes begins to dissolve.”

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**Ibid.
Figure 13 & 14. Leti Resort, photographs of accommodation units.
Brione House

Architects: Markus Wespi Jérôme de Meuron Architects.
Location: Brione sopra Minusio, TI, Switzerland.
Completed: 2004-2005
Figure 15. Brione House external photograph.
The home is located in a privileged but sprawled urban area above Locarno, with an overwhelming view on the city, the surrounding mountains and the lake. Two simple cubes emerge from the hill – fragmentarily – more associated to the landscape than to the other existing buildings – more alike a wall than a house – and time less. Habitable interiors are generated through cavities within the masonry walls. Additional light is taken in through courtyards.

The mortared stone walls relate closely in texture and appearance with the hillside.

“The water of the swimming pool, embedded in the valley facing cube, merges perfectly with the lake.”

Figure 16. Brione House looking over the roof to the lake.
JD House

Architects: BAK Arquitectos.
Location: Mar Azul, Villa Gesell party, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
Completed: 2009
The plot of land in the coastal Mar Azul forest in Buenos Aires, Argentina is the site for BAK Architects’ JD House, a residence designed in concrete, wood and glass and “...blended into the topography and vegetation on the site.” The specifications for the house required two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a large, flexible social area, integrated into the kitchen. Generous outdoor expansions were available on the site.

The land on which the house is situated follows a gentle slope that “...provided a welcome challenge for the design.” In relationship to the street level, the house sits very high above the ground in order to adjust to the level changes on the site. This provides a heightened condition of privacy and a vantage point from which the inhabitants can view out onto the landscape.

The house is located in a clearing among trees of various heights. The slope was used to the advantage of the proposal to hide parts of the program, thereby reducing the presence of the building on the site. Large openings in the more social, gathering spaces extend the internal reality of the home into the forest through the use of outdoor terraces and wooden decks.

** Ibid.
*** Ibid.
**** Ibid.
BAK Architects play with the volumes, alternating between high and low ceilings and depressed floors to provide a dynamic space of a variety of functions. The level of transparency through the house is equally as important as the opacity of the gray concrete walls. The views through the house direct its users’ eyes onto the landscape beyond the house, whereas the concrete walls direct light and provide organized views within the house. While the house is visually open, the architects took great care to create private areas, such as bedrooms and bathrooms that are nestled and buried under the general “ground level” of the house facilitating the ‘darkness below’. The architects were careful to leave as many salvageable trees on the site as possible allowing them to pierce through several of the outdoor decks that are an extension of the house.:

The predominant materials of the house are exposed concrete, and timber, as well as the natural elements of the surrounding forest. The exposed concrete facilitates a raw quality, earth bound. To place a highly finished material such as plaster or a smooth textured painted surface would be inconsistent with the surroundings. The natural environment demands slight irregularity.
The Seed House

Architects: T3arc.
Location: Jiutepec, México.
Completed: 2011
This house is located in Jiutepec, Mexico, in a vast terrain. “The idea was that the house would not impact the natural context.” “Casa La Semilla has been a very quick and simple construction,” and given the qualities of concrete, “…it is difficult to determine the boundary between the inside and outside.”

** Ibid.
*** Ibid.
Existing trees were planted very close together, “…they have grown tall and slim. Our proposal uses the trees as an advantage, covering the south sun while having a completely open facade to them.” The architects managed to cover 200m² supported by three central columns and a concrete beam that spans the entire length. By doing so T3arc have managed to have very few obstructions in the rest of the house, “…and have had the freedom to manage the space under the roof as it is best suited.”

The home is oriented north, because Jiutepec is a very hot area of the state of Morelos, Mexico. The house only has a master bedroom and a small room for a child; the rest of the house is open, with a bar for cooking and the living and dining areas together with an open view of the landscape.”

“Casa La Semilla is respectful to its surroundings, allowing the inhabitants to live as close as possible to nature.”

** Ibid.
*** Ibid.
**** Ibid.
The Decaying Dutch Harbour Bunkers

Architects: Unknown.
Location: Alutian islands, Alaska.
Completed: 1941
The decaying bunkers of the Aleutian Islands Campaign serve to memorialize a little-known chapter of WWII lore. As a little historical context, the Aleutian Islands Campaign, which began in early June 1943, involved a struggle to regain American control of the remote islands of Attu and Kiska during the Pacific Campaign of WWII. Beginning in 1941, the US Army constructed over 100 buildings to secure the Dutch Harbour Naval Operating Base. Included are the bunkers and observation posts featured. At 273 metres above sea level, these installations remain the highest coastal defence stations built in the United States.∗

The bunkers themselves are architecturally unremarkable. Constructed almost entirely of steel reinforced concrete, they were designed to be, above all else, steadfast in their operation. The bunkers share an intrinsic quality with their landscapes. The bunkers were constructed to maintain a low profile and ‘blend in’ with their sites to avoid enemy spotting. Their relationship between the built and the un-built structures lend them such a quality that the buildings nestles themselves within their environment to which they seem indifferent and seem to just ‘belong’. The heavy nature of the low slung concrete roof projects the lands flowing nature and extends it beyond the constraint of the building.
Fallingwater (Edgar J. Kaufmann, Sr. House)

Architects: F.L. Wright.
Location: Mill Run, Pennsylvania, USA.
Completed: 1936
Figure 29. Fallingwater. The home share an intimate relationship with the stream.
“One of the underlying principles of all of Frank Lloyd Wright’s work was the relationship of building to site; this interaction became something at which he was a great master.”

Fallingwater is widely considered Wright’s “...architectural masterpiece.” It is known as one of the best known private houses in the world. It is the fullest realisation of his lifelong ideal of a living place completely at one with nature. It is constructed on three levels mainly of reinforced concrete, sandstone and glass. Its soaring cantilevered balconies are anchored in solid rock arranged around a central vertical core. The house appears to float in space above the waterfall. It is intimately related to the rushing stream, the rock ledges and the forest.

* David Larkin, Master drawing from the Frank Lloyd Wright Archives (Thames and Hudson Ltd, London, 1990), 54.
The cantilevered floor planes of the house are held together by rough sandstone walls of varying thickness quarried nearby and laid in alternating courses. The south elevation, facing the view of the stream, has walls made primarily of glass, exposing the internal space to the stream, directing the occupant out and across the gulley.

Wright placed the house on the Waterfall “Not to look at your waterfall, but to live with it...”** He wanted an intimate relationship between the built and nature. You would typically expect the home to be placed further up the slope, to look down at the stream.

“The real essence of Fallingwater is that almost mystical blend of man and nature that Wright achieved in this building.”***

* Sommer, Frank Lloyd Wright, American Architect, 114.
** larkin, Master drawing from Frank, 41.
*** Ibid.
In 1939 a guest house was added to the complex on the slope above the main house. It is reached by a terraced walkway (figure 30). The terracing aims to softly alter the grounds slope in order for it to be useable space. It has the effect of pushing the house further out into nature. The threshold between built form and the untouched landscape is extended, blurring the transition.

Left: Figure 30. The homes protruding floor plates imitate the rock ledges.
Right: Figure 31. Terracing.
Wright proclaimed that Fallingwater is:

“...one of the great blessings to be experienced here on earth.”

“Fallingwater redefined the relationship between man, architecture, and nature with Wright's integrated design of the existing waterfall and the house itself.”

* Larkin, Master drawing from Frank, 41.
Goetsch-Winkler House

Architects: F.L. Wright.
Location: Okemos, Michigan, USA.
Completed: 1939
The site is flat and the horizontal planes of the structure are pronounced. A drop in the land on the southern end of the site means that the living area looks over the trees. The plan is arranged in a narrow band with “...a clear view from one-window wall to the other.” The home uses flat horizontal planes mimicking the long flowing lines of the landscape.

Thermal Baths

Architects: Peter Zumthor.
Location: Vals, Switzerland.
Completed: 1996
Figure 34. Outlook over the roof of the baths.
The baths in Vals, Switzerland exploit the texture and depth of colour the natural stone offers the baths surfaces. The baths are located in the alpine region of Switzerland and delicate attention to the way in which the baths place themselves within this environment has occurred. The choice to use a natural stone quarried nearby seems to respond positively to the buildings environment. The influence materiality has on a buildings ability to ‘be’ part of its context is a powerful means.

Figure 35 (left). Figure 36 (right). Internal environment of the baths.
Sections through the building reveal an intense relationship between building and earth. The baths bank into the land creating a subterranean space. The roof is not pronounced but instead merely becomes part of the landscapes endless surface. Differentiation between building and landscape becomes blurred and we see the buildings’ ability to blend with its environment.

Figure 37. Section through the baths.
Site selection
Figure 39. Great Barrier Island.
Figure 40. North Island, New Zealand.
The site was located based upon the requirements of the brief which stipulated that the building was an architectural experience that emphasized the joy of living on this planet; a journey that begins to connect their being with their environment. It was to be a place devoted to connecting the individual with their surroundings. An area that was remote and engaged strongly with a natural environment was desired. It would be beneficial if the landscape was somewhat dramatic in scale, establishing an immediate sense of awe and respect within the surroundings.

Using an island appeared most suitable given the predicated physical separation from the mainland. A site positioned offshore also embodied the sense of ‘journey’ as the significance of remoteness is heightened. When the process of physically removing oneself from society occurs, this ‘voyage’ should be taken advantage of through the recognition that the journey is gradually separating you from your familiarities.
Great Barrier Island

With limited connection between the island and the urban life of the mainland, Great Barrier stands as an isolated and still somewhat untouched environment. Visitors are confronted with the thrills and uncertainties of living in isolation, both of which the Barrier has in abundance. Great Barrier has an overwhelming sense of separation. Situated 100km North East of Auckland, on the edge of the Hauraki Gulf, many parts of the island remain unspoilt and a world away from most influences of modern society.
Site Analysis

Narrowing down potential site areas on the island was the next step. The southern end of the Barrier is reasonably populated with holiday homes, thus it was the northern parts of the eastern coastline that were of interest. This is mainly virgin land with very little, if any, human interference. There are vast ridge lines that extend from the eastern coastline stretching back to the highest point (Mt Hobson), 627 metres.

This offered the opportunity for dramatic vistas outwards over the Pacific Ocean and back up through the valleys.

Site location was mostly determined using aerial photography and maps. Whangawahia Bay offered land that sat at the foothills of several ridgelines and gulleys, flanked by a peninsula to the northeast. This would afford some protection but still allow sufficient exposure to maintain a connection between man and environment.

Whangawahia Bay was established as the general area to design within.
Figure 45. Entrance to Whangawaha Bay.
Figure 46, 47, 48 (left to right), Whangawahia Bay.
Figure 49. Whangowaha Bay.
Figure 50. Site sketch, Whangawaha Bay.
Figure 51. (above), Figure 52 (right). Whangawada Bay.
Once the general area had been mapped, the specifying of a physical area for a footprint to be established followed. In order to grasp an overall sense of place the decision was made to physically model the entire bay at a scale of 1:1500. This proved to be one of the most positive and rewarding decisions made during the process. There was no longer simply flat 2-dimensional images of the terrain to work with and the site was now able to be dealt with as it was, a rolling, fluid landscape. The intricacies of this site meant it wasn’t enough to study flat maps and contours; to really grasp the depth of the area the site model was a necessity.
Maximising solar gain, the predominant wind directions, existing shelter, surrounding views and the general site topography were used as the starting point from which to determine placement and orientation. The site itself is nestled back 400 metres from the shoreline and sits roughly 50 metres above sea level, sheltered from the prevailing westerlies whilst giving the opportunity for morning through afternoon sun and dramatic views. Rakitu Island Sits 8 kilometres off shore and offers a fairly powerful backdrop for the outlook-beyond the bay itself. An awareness of the inherent qualities of the site was an integral part of the design process.

Through an initial sketch design phase identifying predominant centres and vistas started to determine certain axis from which a building geometry could be worked. Having indentified the primary site (the dining structure) as a centre within the context, that is the plateau along the upper ridgeline, I made the decision to not occupy this space but rather play off it and become secondary to it. The sites centres were to remain intact but be enhanced with the careful placement of form. Exploring this concept through these sketches proved useful and the realisation that a centre requires subsidiary spaces in order for that centre to be prevalent required me to form a larger whole; that is to occupy more than one space and enhance the one before, by its careful placement. Subsidiary built geometries needed to be designed. What actually came about was a composition, not only between space and form but now a composition between multiple forms and their associated spaces to form a complete and hopefully integrated whole.
Other implications for design include the facility being able to run off the grid. There is no water, electrical or waste supply on the barrier so the centre needs to be self sustainning. Systems include:

- Water collection systems - off the roofs supplemented by nearby stream water
- Water storage - 2 x 20,000 litre underground storage tanks - gravity fed systems
- Waste systems – 2 x 20,000 litre underground storage tanks linked to a series of sand and textile media filters irrigated over neighbouring forest.
- Correct building orientation - for maximum solar gain - oriented north
- Thermal massing systems – maintaining a temperate internal climate
- Solar protection - on the eastern and western facades – protecting internal spaces from over-heating
- Cross ventilated spaces – ensuring a cool indoor environment during the summer months
- Gas turbine - for ancillary use
Figure 56. Terracing at Leti 360 Resort.
Requirements of Space

Dining structure - supporting a sense of community - restoring a sense of sociability.

Entrance/gathering space.
Communal cooking/prep. (open fire, the fire is the hearth of the building).
Communal eating/dining.
Lounge/reading room.
Courtyard/outside space.
Pool.
Cellar.
Store room.
Service store.
Helicopter pad/clearing (6m radius).
Laundry.
Bathrooms.
Showers.

Live-in - permanent residence

2x individual living spaces for staff (bedroom, living, bathroom, open space).

Guest dwellings - temporary residences

5x individual living spaces (bedroom, living, bathroom, open space).
**Outpost 1 - Unconscious.**

Entrance.
Bathing/washing.
Sleeping room(s).
Lounge.
Bathroom.

**Outpost 2 - Conscious.**

Entrance.
Washing space.
Bathing pool.
Bathroom.
Warming pit.

**Outpost 3 - Subconscious.**

Entrance.
Changing space.
Cold pool (cleansing pool).
Reservoir pool (for main pool).
Overspill pool.
Main pool (heated to 38°C, high salinity).
Warming platform (on exit).
Bathroom.
Wood store.
Heating cellar w. hypocaust under main pool.
Design Process

Figure 57. Development sketch. Stairwell.
Figure 58. Site map. Whangawahi Bay. Trail into site indicated with broken line. General area of buildings denoted.
**Uncô’nsčious**

**Outpost 1**

Passively involved in the unconscious.

Entrance.
Bathing/washing.
Sleeping room(s).
Lounge.
Bathroom.

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Figure 59. Site plan indicating location of Outpost 1 relative to trail.
**UNCÔ’NSCIous** (ûn-kô’ nshus) a. & n. 1. Having no conscious (was unconscious of any change; lay unconscious for some hours; has an unconscious prejudice; examples of humour); hence ~LY adv., ~NESS n. 2. n. Part of mind whose content is not normally accessible to conscious but which is found to affect behavior; COLLECTIVE unconscious. [f. UN-² 1 + CONSCIOUS]

The building is situated on a peninsula which looks back over a gulley and the stream that runs through it. Such a space covers the ideal backdrop for self reflection, a quality which the architecture aims to communicate through building with an introspective focus -- the occupant is encouraged to look within instead of out. For this reason the building took on a predominant south-facing orientation - the north view faces toward the Pacific Ocean and such exposure would have compromised the desired meditative setting of a more enclosed space. Instead the building looks upon the gulley, the trees and the stream, and in doing so establishes its own calm, settled environment nested within the much bigger landscape.
The initial sketch demonstrates the building’s desire to interface with its immediate site through a protrusion from the peninsula and a close interaction with the form of the gulley. The prescribed geometries from the peninsula and the entrance to the site begin to illuminate a possible building footprint.
The sketch demonstrates the immediate area of the gulley the building is associated with — it is a focal point for the architecture. The way in which the footprint sits seems to dominate, rather than integrate naturally, with the environment of the peninsula. The landform of the peninsula needs to remain the primary structure and the building should be a subsidiary space that reflects the encircling nature of its site—it is not currently doing so.
A possible technique for allowing the building to ‘sit’ within its site and play a secondary spatial role is to pull back from the southern side of the peninsula and retain this land, allowing the building to effectively sink into the landscape. The way in which the building cantilevers out over the gulley does not reinforce the notion of the building as a complement to its environment. It is instead dominating the gulley environment and its anchoring to the site is not sufficient to support such a drastic cantilever, preventing the building from gaining a true sense of ‘belonging’.

Pulling the building back from the peninsula allows the building to act as a subsidiary of the two spaces and it settles within the environment somewhat better. The land has been retained and the building sinks below the ground level. To substantially anchor the building amongst the hillside a central vertical core has been given significance through the arranging of the floor and roof plates around this now principle feature.
Entrance into the building has been determined, continuing the notion of the original sketches with a dropping down into the main space. A series of stairs takes the occupant from the peninsula’s ground level down into the space in which the inner gulley, the trees and the stream, is revealed to them. This has created a space where introspection can occur and external input from the wider landscape becomes limited.

Figure 66. Plan.
The sketch starts to delineate the linear line of the building form. The push and pull of the form starts to complete an effective integration between the site and building. The linear line does not, however, allow a successful merge between built form and landscape. By breaking down the straight line a ‘give-and-take’ between landscape and building occurs—the straight line keeps the building at arm’s length, remaining as two disparate parts, whilst the push and pull of the form allows a subtle integration.

Roof lines also begin to be denoted—the threshold between inside and out needs to be increased to allow a wider gradient to be established as this will further a sense of the building and the landscape when looking out from within the space. The solid boundary of the building becomes blurred.
Section AA shows the long low roof line extending from the perceived landscape – it directs the building line out into the environment, establishing the connection between occupant and environment as there is a sense of placement amongst the hillside, the trees, the birds and the stream.
cṑncious

Outpost 2

Actively involved in the conscious;
consciously reacting to the world.
Aware of ones being within ones surroundings.

Entrance.
Washing space.
Bathing pool.
Bathroom.
Warming pit.

Figure 69. Site plan indicating location of Outpost 2 relative to trail.
cō‘nsious (-shus) a. & n. 1. a. Aware, knowing, (of fact, of external circumstances, that, or abs.); with mental faculties awake; self-conscience, affected; (of action, emotion, etc.) realized by the doer etc. (with conscious superiority; a hardly conscious movement); (as suf.) aware of, concerned with, (class-conscious; clothes-conscious); hence ~LY² adv. 2. n. The conscious mind. [f. L conscious knowing with others or within oneself, f. CON (scire know); see –ous]

The initial intention was to have a building that gradually arose and revealed itself from a North East facing slope. The building functions as a bathing house where the occupant would reside and cleanse themselves whilst heavily exposed to the outward view, creating an awareness and appreciation for their surroundings.

Figure 70, 71, 72 (left through right). Outpost 2, site location.
The sketch plan indicated a retaining wall that runs from the top of the slope down towards the entrance of the building, effectively concealing the living space within. This living space is subterranean with the opportunity to create the desired NE opening which would gift the internal space the morning sunlight. The building was oriented with the slope, view and solar gain in mind. The entrance is denoted by the broken line, occupants will enter the building from the bottom of the slope to rise up into the space.

The sketch plan is a rough working plan that, as of yet, still feels loosely attached to its site. The fact that the hillside has been ‘pierced’ without any real attempt to merge the building within its site denies it a real sense of belonging at this stage.
With the addition of a retaining wall on the east face at the bottom of the slope the building starts to settle a little better into its site. It pulls away from the rigid body of the sketch plan in an attempt to find its way into the site avoiding an alienation. The large mass on the north wall acts as a vertical anchor grounding the entire composition whilst a strong connection to the east view is maintained. The sheer length of the retaining wall along the north face allows a subtle transition between the natural contour of the site and the insertion—the building begins to show more consideration for its surroundings.
The additions to the scheme create a continual loss of any distinct edge to the building, enabling a sense of integration and the extension of the building into its site. The use of the terrace becomes an effective tool in not only continuing to help place the building within the context of its surroundings but opens up the internal space to the northern aspect, allowing a perspective on to an area that was physically unusable given the slope of the site. Continuity between internal and external environment starts to be achieved.

The bathing space now becomes prominent and launches the occupant out and over the tree tops, giving a visual connection between man and physical place, as well as nurturing an awareness of the sheer scope and wonder of this outlook.
Figure 76. Preliminary model photograph.
The sections show two alternate ways of the building meeting the land. Both share an intimate relationship with the site.
sūbcŏ'nscious

**Outpost 3**

Actively involved in the subconscious—
an inward journey—
inward into the subconscious—
reducing the effects on your body—
little to no external input allowing the body/mind to focus.

Entrance.
Changing space.
Cold pool (cleansing pool).
Resevoir pool (for main pool).
Overspil pool.
Main pool (heated to 38°C, high salinity).
Warming platform (on exit).
Bathroom.
Wood store.
Heating cellar w. hypocaust under main pool.

Figure 78. Site plan indicating location of Outpost 3 relative to trail.
subconscious (-shus) a. & n. (Of) part of mind that is not fully conscious but is able to influence actions etc.; hence ~LY² adv., ~NESS n. [f. SUB-7 (7) + CONSCIOUS]

Water has been a key element in the process so far—it is from water which everything has arisen—water is the giver of life and therefore there was a tendency to incorporate water into the scheme, in keeping with the focus on the fundamental aspects of both nature and those who live within it. This building is no different. To reduce the external input the occupant is in contact with; to realise themselves as a medium between our mother earth and sky father.
The initial sketch demonstrated an intangible connection with the water—the sense that you could see the lake environment in part, but were never physically connected with it. The occasional glimpse of the water was gifted through small slits in the wall—exposure to and withdrawal from a correspondence with this area was the key element of this building.
The second image begins to show the occupant’s isolation from their surrounding environment—high concrete walls create a barrier between the interior and exterior, with small breaks allowing the opportunity for a glimpse outward—there is no roof to speak of and a connection to the sky is the only external input granted.
A plan showing orientation is developed. The axonometric shows the internal space is now revealed to the outside which weakens the focal idea of reflection and going inside oneself. There is too much release gifted in the horizontal direction.

Figure 84. Preliminary sketches.
The site plan puts the building into perspective relative to the lake and north orientation. Entrance to the building is denoted by the arrow. The building sits isolated within its landscape.

The sketch shows the connection to a possible second space. In doing so, the isolation shown by the previous sketch has begun to be reduced.
This Sketch shows the use of retaining the land against the entranceway and burying half of the building within the slope. On a micro-scale, the building appears comfortable and well-fitted within the landscape. On entrance to the building a centre nodal wall divides the space in two, recognising that this building was to be about self reflection thus it offers two different spatial conditions in which to find oneself in this state. To the right upon entrance the roof line is continuous whilst the floor is raised through a series of stairs that take the occupant to a platform, a platform that spatially compresses the occupant (the floor slowly raises towards the ceiling) and initiates a view out over the lake environment.
Following the nodal wall upon entrance and taking the left path results in the occupant being forced onto a series of downward stairs with the roof overhead enclosing the space, keeping the occupant firmly within the internal environment. A view down onto the last stair gives a glimpse of water pooling over the ledge, establishing but not yet immersing the occupant within the notion of bathing. Once at the last stair, the occupant is compelled to get into the water—to push off from the step and be released into the space, simultaneously revealing the sky above. Vertical concrete walls enclose the pool and contain this upwards view, impressing upon the occupant the idea to float on their back. This enables them to look towards the sky and dwell on the cornerstones of their being and their connection with this earth, with little to no external input. The water is of a high salt content to aid the occupant—expending little energy on trying to stay afloat and concentrating instead on the deep contemplation that this place invites. The pool sits 8 metres below ground level, reinforcing a vertical connection with the sky, the only open space here.
Guest dwellings - temporary residences

Retreating back to a state of solitary dwelling.

5x individual living spaces

Sleeping platform.
Bathroom.
External shower.
Terrace.
Warming stove with wetback.

Figure 87. Site plan indicating location of Guest units relative to trail.
When deciding where to place the guest unit’s orientation toward vista, solar gain and proximity to the main centre was of primary concern. Placing the accommodation units on the same ridgeline as the main centre facilitated the occupants to frequent the main building and their own dwelling with relative ease. According to Christopher Alexander “Give those parts of the house where people sleep, an eastern orientation, so that they wake up with the sun and light.” The eastern vista allowed the morning light to penetrate the living spaces and capture the view out over Whangawahia Bay.

* Alexander, A Pattern Language, Buildings, 659.
The dwellings are individual sleeping spaces where the occupants retreat back to at the end of the day – one’s own space to withdraw to; “No one can be close to others, without also having frequent opportunity to be alone.” Originally the dwellings became isolated incidents within the larger landscape as the figure shows. They currently consist of a sleeping platform, bathroom, external shower, terrace and warming stove with wetback. It seemed an arbitrary decision to spread these one-off instances amongst the landscape in order to facilitate the sense of separation and withdrawal needed in order for the occupant to be able to reconnect with a community environment in the afternoon (within the dining structure).

* Alexander, A Pattern Language, Buildings, 669.
Instead, placement of several of these dwellings within proximity started to arise. The focus was on orientating each of these spaces to the eastern light and view but still maintaining the sense of seclusion each of these units should have. In doing so the contour was used to establish privacy through level change. Units were placed higher or lower depending upon their and their neighbours living spaces. The sense of isolation is still present. By placing several of the units within proximity the nature of the site became far more evident. The decision was made not to establish the units on the dominant plateau, but similar to the main building, saddle the side of the major space emphasising the ridgeline and allowing it to remain the primary structure. The units are subsidiary spaces that contribute to a wider whole whilst the landscape still remains virtually intact and still the dominant figure.
Figure 93. Final plan. Guest units.
Dining structure - restoring a sense of sociability.

Active social maturity –
the building is involved in restoring a sense of community
and social solidarity.

Entrance/gathering space.
Communal cooking/prep.
(open fire, the fire is the hearth of the building).
Communal eating/dining.
Lounge/reading room.
Courtyard/Outside space.
Pool.
Cellar.
Store room.
Service store.
Laundry.
Bathrooms.
Showers.
Helicopter clearing
(6m radius).

Figure 94. Site plan indicating location of Dining structure relative to trail.
Visiting the dining structure will primarily occur at the end of the day—the coming together of a group to share a meal; “Without communal eating, no human group can hold together.”* It is the activity of preparing and sharing a meal as a group that will institute some semblance of social solidarity and allow the occupant to experience the full spectrum of; from solitary relax space, through to social interaction. This building then becomes a place to converse, share stories, pastimes and the salt and bread of the day.

* Alexander, A Pattern Language, Buildings, 697.
The main space was to be placed aloft Whangawahia Bay, granting a vista out and over the bay and allowing a visual connection between the subsidiary outposts that flank this major space. The building is primarily to be used in the afternoon; a western location seemed pertinent, capturing the evening warmth.

Christopher Alexander, in his Pattern Language, raises the issue of site repair and its fundamental contribution to the placement of any building; “Buildings must always be built on those parts of the land which are in the worst condition, not the best.” The idea is very simple but it is the exact opposite of what would usually occur. When someone thinks of building on a piece of land they will usually place the building on the best possible site – “…where the grass is most beautiful, the trees most healthy, the slope of the land most even…” It is only human nature; and for a person who “…lacks a total view of the ecology of the land…” to build a building in the best possible place. For this reason the plateau aloft the ridgeline was not favoured as the initial site. Instead the placement of the building was pulled back and would run along the contour allowing the ‘most beautiful’ part of the site, the large open plane of the plateau, to stay intact. The building would only act as a support structure that would indeed intensify the importance of this major space through its careful placement alongside.

No longer am I dealing with a site where the “…slope of the land is the most even…” but a considerable slope of which little activity could currently take place. In doing so we leave those areas that are “…the most precious, beautiful, comfortable, and healthy as they are…” and build new structures in those parts of the site that are possibly in need of rejuvenation. The overall site becomes a far more pleasant environment to be part of.

* Alexander, A Pattern Language, Buildings, 509.
** Ibid.
*** Ibid.
**** Ibid.
***** Ibid, 511.
With the general placement of the building in mind, formally the building needed to come into fruition. The main space was about a gathering of persons, a socialising and the sharing amongst a group. Communal eating and cooking is the focus. The preparation, cooking of food and the eating atmosphere is of vital importance.

The need for fire is almost as fundamental as the need for water; “Fire is an emotional touchstone, comparable to trees, other people, a house, the sky.” Fire would be the focus; fire would allow light, warmth, the feeling of security and the ability to cook with. Christopher Alexander mentions that the traditional fireplace is nearly obsolete and today “…new ones are often added to homes as ‘luxury items’; “Stripped of the logic of necessity, they seem an afterthought, not truly integrated.” The fire is at the centre of this space, it is an integral part in the goings on of this retreat, the focus, a hub, the heart, and the placement of the fire within this building should reflect that.
The use of the retaining wall was again of essence within this scheme. The placement of the building such that it did not destroy the open grassy plateau atop the ridgeline, meant the building is to play a ‘secondary’ role and be a subsidiary space. The figure shows the land is now terraced and the building footprint begins to settle below the plateau. Arranging the contour such that the building can be gently placed within this currently unusable area, and allow a platform for social interaction whilst capturing the vista and western sun.

Figure 99. Developed plan.
Located on the side of the ridgeline, the building is somewhat hidden upon arrival, it was necessary to allude to a sense of entry and welcoming. The gradual wall rising out of the upper plateau denotes a physical connection between the dining structure and the upper open plateau. The intermediary space is also level in slope and begins to reflect the intrinsic quality of the plateau. It becomes a terraced space granting the visitor a sense of place and arrival.
How the retaining wall would allow the occupant to ‘drop down’ off the upper contour to be part of this lower platform was of importance. Exploration into how the occupant could enter the space is looked into. Opportunity for the occupant to enter the space was created by pulling the wall back and allowing the occupant to drop down into the space between the retaining walls. This method did not compromise the retaining wall and allowed a gradual entrance into the lower platform, suggesting a subtle transition between landscape and contrived space.
The final plan shows the retaining wall terracing the upper contour – a subsidiary space is formed below. The slight crank in the wall follows the contour and conforms generally to the topography. It does not set out to alter its environment merely emphasize the buildings existing disposition; to settle within the environment through careful placement and arrangement of space and site. The lower internal space now sits comfortably within the environment. Passageway into the building is softly made between the two retaining walls, from the upper platform to the lower terraced area, a gradual transition between indoors and out, a buffer zone.

The dining structure shares an intimate relationship with the earth; it has become part of the landscape; it does not sit aloft its site, instead it is bound to its place; an extensive regard for the earth is generated.

The building becomes rooted within its site.

The view over the gulley is captured with the low extensive roof line; the occupant shall feel part of their surroundings, also bound to their earth.
Figure 103. Site map, Whangawahia Bay. Trail into site indicated with broken line. General area of buildings denoted. 1. Unconscious. 2. Conscious. 3. Subconscious. 4. Guest Dwellings. 5. Dining Structure.
With five buildings in total new design decisions and new implications had to be met for each one. Variations within each; from slope to solar orientation, site features to vistas and so a series of strategies evolved. Strategies were revealed throughout the precedent study but culminised when put into practice with the undertaking of the design. These resulting strategies became a mode to integrate building and landscape.

- The terrace.

The ability to manipulate slope with the addition of the retaining wall is a simple but effective tool – to delicately merge the built with the natural environment – to procure habitable space within challenging terrain.

- The use of underground space – to incorporate the “darkness below”.

To place a building on piles and create a void between figure and ground denies the building a sense of belonging. Closely relating the building with the site insists that underground space be exploited; “...a house feels isolated from the nature around it, unless its floors are interleaved directly with the earth that is around the house.”

* Alexander, A Pattern Language, Buildings, 786.
- Site repair.

In *A Pattern Language*, Christopher Alexander raises the issue of site repair and its fundamental contribution to the placement of any building; “Buildings must always be built on those parts of the land which are in the worst condition, not the best.” The idea is very simple but it is the exact opposite of what would usually occur. When someone thinks of building on a piece of land they will usually place the building on the best part of the site. This strategy sets out to repair those ‘places’ where the site is not the most perfect in order to preserve an existing beauty. The building should function to intensify the importance of the most ‘beautiful’ space through its careful placement.

- Orientation

Maintain open north-facing spaces for light and warmth. Shelter those spaces that are in need of protection, placing them away from predominant wind zones. Take the opportunity to include a vista beyond the site. Take the time to encompass space beyond the immediate.

- A gradual transition.

Create buffer zones that lend a soft transition between the external and internal environment, blurring the distinction between the built and the natural.

- **Low, extensive roof lines.**

The roof line has the ability to project the space beyond the internal environment encompassing the vista and surrounds. The occupant feels ‘in-place’ with their environment, an extension beyond the floor plate.

- **Materiality.**

Local materials belong. Foreign materials isolate the building from its environment. Attention to the buildings construction and finish is crucial in order to achieve a sense of integration and harmony.

- **The building and the contour.**

I have dealt with two strategies to place the building within its site; to run the building parallel with the contour or run the building adjacent to the contour. I do not believe one is ‘better’ than the other. Through the research it was noted that to integrate a building that runs along the contour was felt to be ‘easier’ than one that ran against it. When the building ran adjacent to the contour, there was the notion that the building was staking the land and not merging with it. Extending the building beyond its platform required a ‘fingering’ into the landscape much like a tree roots itself to the cliff face.
Conclusion

A building's ability to belong to its site can be suggested by the sense that it seems virtually impossible to imagine the place without it. The dialogue between the form and its site is rich enough to suggest this 'belonging'. The building has the impression of being self-evidently part of its surrounding. It is anchored, rooted firmly in its site; “I am as you see me, and I belong here.” Reconnecting with its context intensifies a building’s ability to recognise its location and blows life into ‘place’. It can only enhance the users’ experience, relating architecture with its situation. It is only here that this building can exist; it is bound to its situation; the building honours its surroundings. Buildings that accredit this relationship have an adept resolution and convey a responsibility to their environment. The process of design should recognise neither the site as an imposition, nor an afterthought, but as an overriding design intention that can only inform a design response; an integral component at the architects' avail.

A building that is bound to its earth, rooted and settled can no longer be seen as an imposition. The building and site will not be seen as a sum of disparate parts, rather a composition; a dialogue between the architect, the occupant, the site and their building.

Nature reveals all. It is from nature that everything has arisen. Listen to her simple desires. Her simple truths.

* Zumthor, Architecture and Urbanism, 16.
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Church on the Water & Theatre on the Water.

Architects: Tadao Ando.
Location: Hokkaido, Japan.
Completed: 1987
The church on its own sits isolated although placed well within the sloping site. Establishing a secondary space (the theatre on the water) linked via geometries, site lines and pathways establishes a strong connection between two spaces and enhances a connection between building(s) and ground. A secondary space allows a composition between multiple spaces to be established. The placement of a secondary building acts to enable a better integration at a macro scale.

The building feels far more a part of its site with the addition of a second space reinforced with a strong physical/visual connection. The sense that this building belongs within its landscape becomes more evident.
Children’s Museum

Architects: Tadao Ando.
Location: Himeji, Japan.
Completed: 1987-89
Figure 33. Site plan.
On a hill overlooking a large lake, this museum is a cultural facility for the artistic education for children. It is made up of three units – the main museum, an intermediate plaza and a workshop complex – all linked via a long pathway, interrupted by a series of walls that dramatically slice through the hillside. A strong connection is gained between building and site with the introduction of the pathway.

A series of pools built around the centre serve to “unify the architecture with the scenery of the lake.”

The use of subsidiary buildings to enhance the relationship between the primary building and the landscape comes into full view within this project. The use of smaller ‘outposts’ allow a hierarchy to be established, a sense of the building being physically anchored because of these smaller flanking spaces supporting the central building.

Site lines between each of the buildings and out into the site allow the occupant to establish a sense of place, a sense of place within the natural and built environment.

Declaration

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is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of
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I confirm that:

• This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
• The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
• Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number:.................................

Candidate Signature: .............................................................................................................. Date: ............................................

Student number: .........................