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icon

**anish Kapoor
designs a tube station**

**milan in six pages
a small house in norfolk
new urban surfaces**



Marsh View House, Norfolk, by Lynch Architects
 words Kieran Long
 photographs Sue Barr

it is stories

The architectural theorist Beatriz Colomina writes that contrary to the myth, Daedalus was not the first architect – he built

that distinguish architecture from building. the labyrinth but did not understand its structure. Ariadne, however, interpreted it, with the help of a conceptual device (a ball of string), and thus should be conferred the title. Architecture is a critical and interpretative act as we conceive of it today.

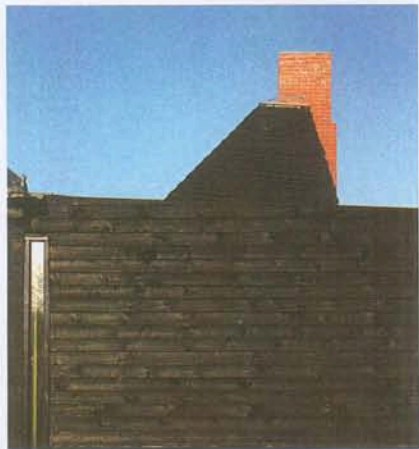
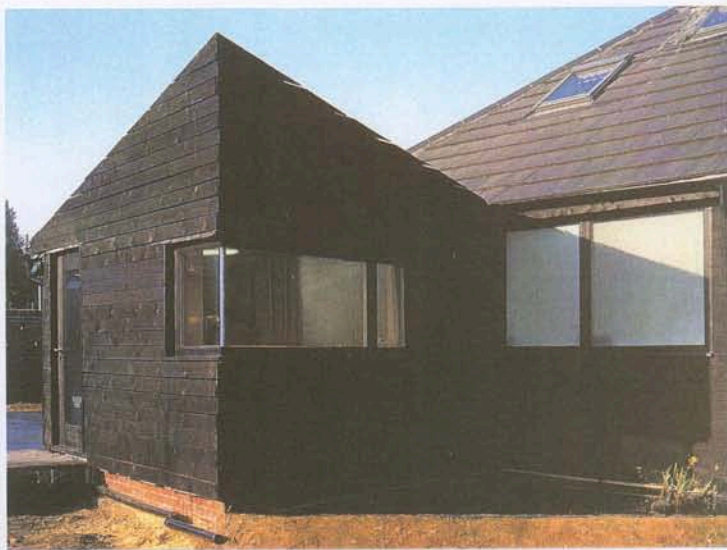
Patrick Lynch is a 33-year-old architect whose career so far has been conducted very much on his own terms. His work is concerned with narrative in a way that is intellectually ambitious, producing architecture that is strange yet familiar, implying rather than describing a genius loci. Marsh View, a new house for an artist in Norfolk, is his biggest project yet, embodying concerns enumerated in his 2001 essay "Measuring, matter and memory". In this he wrote: "The enjoyment and difficulty [of designing] resides in the tension between what you know, can see and control and what you can only glimpse, sense, sniff, barely hear. I'm sure that the way these shadows take up residence in a design project is, in some ways, entirely reasonable. Nonetheless, they resist direct description." For the American novelist John Barth, the problem of space is the impossibility of constructing original narrative. The hero of his short story *Lost in the Funhouse* ends up being damned to "construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator – though he would rather be among the lovers for whom funhouses are designed". Lynch explores narrative and sensory data to provide a way out of this postmodern loop.

After studying in Lyon and Liverpool, Lynch studied an MPhil at Cambridge University under

right the view through the studio space with the doors folded away. The exterior spaces are conceived as outdoor rooms



"For whom is the funhouse fun? Perhaps for lovers." John Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse*, 1968



clockwise from above the unsettling geometry is revealed in the south façade; the landscaping is as yet unfinished, but the small tarns are in place; the entrance and lobby to the house

right the strong verticality of the brick chimney sits as a marker in the landscape, and contrasts strongly with the rough timber cladding of the rest of the house

Dalibor Vesely, before leaving to work in Germany for two years. Lynch Architects was founded in 1998, and its early work was interested in material and inhabitation. In the Alexander-Sinclair residence (completed in 2000) in Clerkenwell, London, Lynch created a shopfront – a simple composition of rough concrete planks with a glazed opening edged in smooth concrete. A low window with opaque glass could be opened to provide seating on the mews outside and allow views in. This intervention was small, but nevertheless implied an engagement with the domestic interior and its physical context.

Marsh View is near the Norfolk coast, between a group of villages known as the Burnhams. The site was previously occupied by a banal and ugly bungalow, built by a developer from a pattern book of designs as part of a mini-estate. Despite its name, the old building on the site had never had a view of the marsh. The new house occupies the plot of the pre-existing building, recreating the form of the bungalow, but radically reworking the façades to provide larger openings and glass doors. The two timber elements, one housing a studio and general purpose room and the other forming the entrance lobby, provide the longed-for views of the adjoining water meadow.

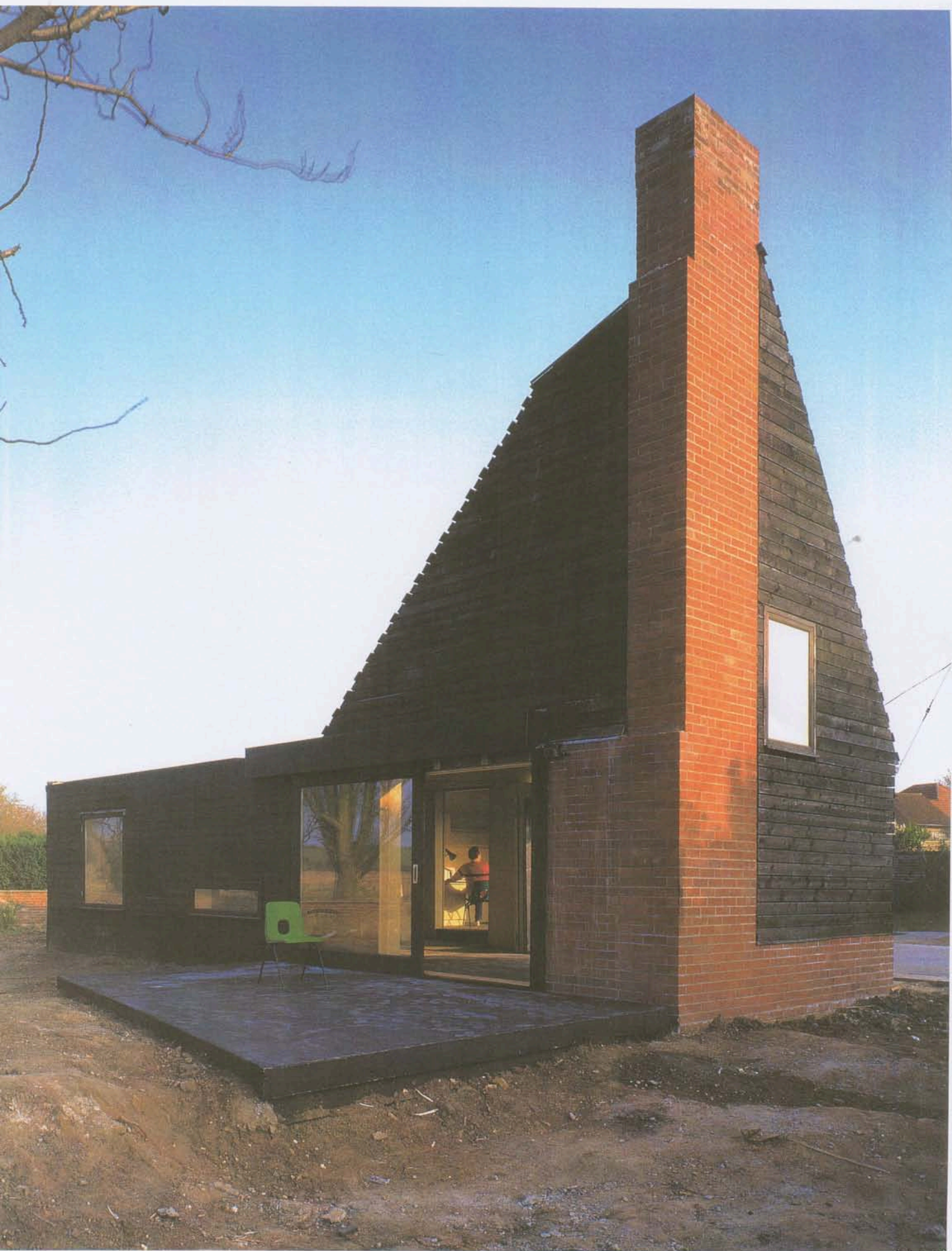
The client, Alison Mitchell, is a weaver in her fifties who wanted the building as a villa, weekend retreat and studio. Mitchell's work investigates three-dimensional surfaces in fabrics. She is also blind in one eye, and suffers from a brittle-bone disease – conditions that the project had to respond to. The client's brief called less for specific areas of programme to fill the building, and

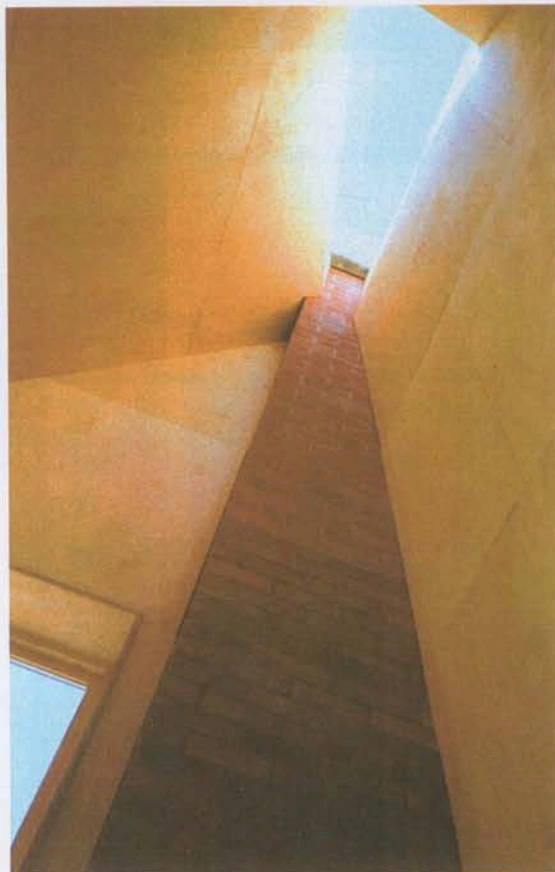
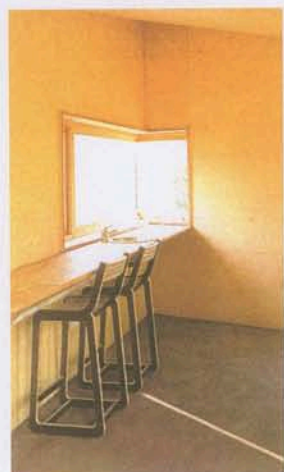
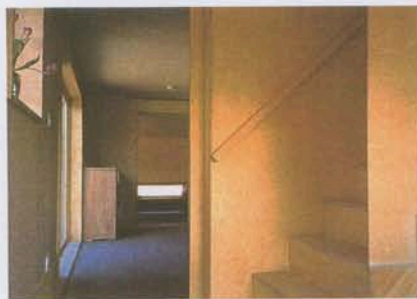
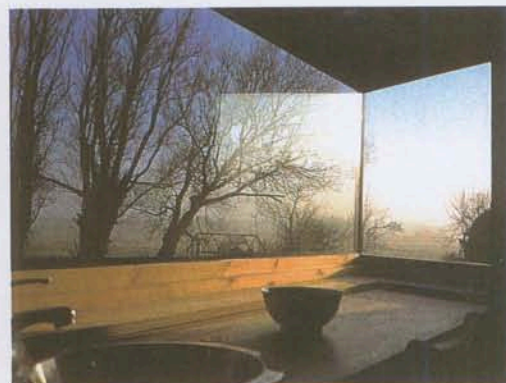
instead enumerated specific views, windows and spaces. For example, she wanted a "tall section of roof with a skylight at the top so the full moon would cast shadows into this high-up void," and "a window that wrapped around two walls without a central support structure".

Lynch has taken these moments and articulated them architecturally. The main room, with its soaring, 7.5m-tall chimney, is disorienting in its scale, but the room inside is given narrative by the simple composition of window, chimney and hearth. The large window in the west-facing wall allows the evening light to enter the building. **At certain times of the year, this light falls across the fireplace as the sun begins to set, uniting time, home and ritual in a play of natural light.** The high roof, with its oculus at the top, provides a view of the stars at night, and acts as a sundial in the day.

The house is lined in plywood, a material that, though cheap, is textural and diverse here. The low part of the studio room uses ply for the walls and the ceiling, and the small step down into this space from the existing house helps the thin material to have mass. The soffit seems to press downwards, creating an almost cave-like atmosphere. This is thrown into relief by the tall part of the room, with its oculus that completes a play of scales between the low space of the east end of the room, the strangely enlarged proportions of the west façade with its brick chimney, and the scale of the landscape and the huge skies in this part of Norfolk.

The floor of the house is concrete, with





top the building at dusk.

Pic: Patrick Lynch

centre left the entrance showing the junction of the black painted brick and the timber

centre right looking from the kitchen towards the studio space.

Pic: Patrick Lynch

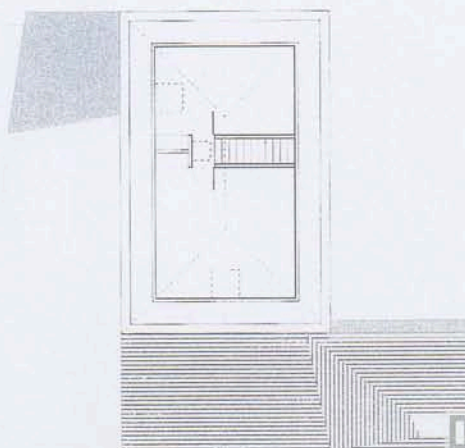
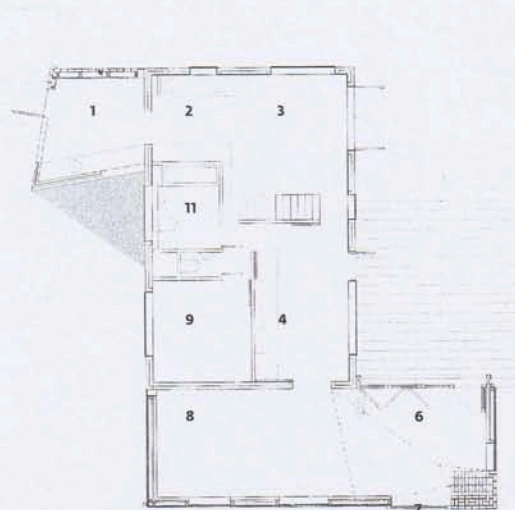
far right a breakfast bar looks out on to the water meadow. Pic: Patrick Lynch

above the entrance space
right the dizzying view up to the oculus

underfloor heating throughout, and this forms a ground datum on which the building sits. A concrete ramp rises up to the entrance, and at the back of the house a patio extends from the large glass door looking out across the marsh. The new wing with its distended roof shelters a more formal south-facing courtyard, domestic in proportion. The back garden, facing north and east, is not yet landscaped, but is less defined in form and proportion, bleeding into the water meadow beyond.

In the gardens are small ponds, situated intriguingly at the edge of the site. This is a reference to Edgar Allan Poe's *House of Usher*, and David Leatherbarrow's reading of it in his essay "The Poetics of the Architectural Setting: a study of the writings of Edgar Allan Poe". In the story, the tarn becomes part of a physical manifestation in the fabric of the building and its surroundings of the disintegrating psychological state of Roderick Usher and his family. At Marsh View the tarn is redeemed as an outward-looking device. Situated at the very edge of the site, it reflects only the surrounding vegetation and landscape. This essay is influential for Lynch, perhaps not just because of the narrative in his work, but also as a way of acknowledging some link between built fabric and psychological condition, whether unconscious or not.

The building also has more obviously architectural references to its context. The existing building has been painted in the manner of local vernacular buildings with their blackened brickwork. **The strong verticality of the chimney is intended to take its place in the landscape with** ✨



other landmarks in the vicinity, including a nearby black timber windmill and a flint church tower.

The exterior is fascinatingly rough – softwood painted black clads the building, the planks echoing the proportions of the bricks of the existing house, but also revealing the construction of the building. The insulation of the building is visible through the gaps in the wood, and the nails that fix them to the timber frame are showing.

In her 1988 essay *Architectureproduction*, Colomina writes: "Ceci tuera cela [this kills that]. Narration implies an object, a truth existing previous to its discursive formation, an object that the narration will represent in the most faithful manner". Colomina here draws a distinction between architecture and the advertisement, which "triggers desire in the society of consumption". Lynch can be said to be drawing a similar distinction between narrative and objecthood, searching for the truth in architecture through literacy and embracing the unknowable.

Marsh View understands that architecture is a critical, interpretative and post-linguistic act, and his work is thus strong enough to stand up to a multiplicity of interpretations, of which this is only one. This architecture has the potential to release us from the funhouse, and allow us to be lovers again. ♪

Architect Lynch Architects,
www.lyncharchitects.co.uk

Engineer Mervyn Rodrigues at Peter Dann Ltd

Contractor Neville Bray Construction

Marsh View can be rented. Tel Alison Mitchell: 020 8809 1925

top left ground plan

- 1 breakfast room
- 2 kitchen
- 3 dining room
- 4 study
- 5 old patio
- 6 oculus room
- 7 evening patio
- 8 living room
- 9 bedroom
- 10 WC
- 11 bathroom

above first-floor bedrooms

below long section

bottom cross section

left model photograph

