

The Other Place

Building a Retreat of One's Own

By
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

How is one to ground themselves in an increasingly virtual and abstract world? The Other Place offers a complementary environment to daily life. Here one can establish the necessary critical distance from the conditions which define day to day life, and gain the perspective required to position one's self within, or against, these conditions. Interpretations of The Other Place, beginning with the ideology of Otium as expressed through the Roman villa, continue today, varying widely across cultures, regions and individuals. The Other Place, then, can be understood as representative of characteristics that are at once general, and quite specific, reflective of broad contextual considerations, and the particularities of its occupant.

The rich and complex process of designing and building a retreat of one's own, in the tradition of the Ontario Cottage, on an island property three hours northeast of Toronto is used to engage with, in a rich and tangible way, the architecture and understanding of the retreat as a complementary environment necessary in contemporary life. The act of building leads to an examination of how building and self are inseparable. Building, then, becomes a means of architectural and self understanding. As The Other Place facilitates a wholeness in contemporary existence found through its experience, so too is a wholeness in architectural education gained in the pragmatic relationship between theory and practice found in moving from the studio to building site and applying knowledge gained from one to the other.

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THE VILLA-COTTAGE IDEOLOGY

“The return to origins always implies a rethinking of what you do customarily, an attempt to renew the validity of our everyday actions, or simply a recall of the natural (or even divine) sanction for your repeating them for a season.”

- *On Adam's House in Paradise*, Joseph Rykwert

The Other Place is a complementary environment to one's daily life, which acts as a centring datum. As a reflection of its occupant, expressions of The Other Place vary infinitely. Although I did not realize it until much later, my experience with the Ontario Cottage had shaped my conception of this centring datum - a simple shelter on one of the many lakes of the Canadian Shield.

As a self initiated, and self built project, the thesis is an opportunity to experiment and learn at one's own risk and expense. Early in an architectural career the self initiated project is a testing ground for developing architectural sensibilities, methodologies, and strategies which this project implements at a scale that can be directly engaged by the designer-builder. As a process of architectural and self discovery, building a retreat of my own follows in the traditions of the founding Canadian Mythology, and the history of self built recreational properties in Ontario, inviting the risks and challenges of the unknown as I operate in a new context.

The design and construction of a retreat of one's own is driven by the desire to deepen an architectural and self understanding through the process of creating something tangible, beyond the increasing preoccupation with the virtual and abstract - a need to place myself in the world through the act of making. As a way to understand relationships between myself and my surroundings

through building, dwelling, and manner of being, this project allows for self realization, and an awareness of my own preoccupations, conceptions, strengths and weaknesses, while simultaneously developing sensibilities reflective of my own relationships to the world. In this context, the retreat is a dwelling which allows a different type of being to exist in its experience. The retreat is an expression of being; a simple and essential dwelling bringing one into relationship with the world through the act of its construction, stewardship of its natural surroundings, and habitation. A different state of being is created by designing a place where one's method of dwelling is necessarily altered, forcing a reconsideration of one's relationship to their surroundings. To live deliberately in a world where one rarely has the chance to do so.

Villa Culture & Otium

Without an architectural origin, neither the city nor the villa could exist. The myth of the primitive hut on the Palatine Hill as the beginnings of Rome lends itself well to the origins of both the architecture of the city, and the villa which would evolve at its periphery. The villa is not possible and cannot be understood without the city of which it is a social and economic satellite.¹ Villa culture began as an antithesis to urban life in its simplicity, informality, opportunities for intensive physical and intellectual stimulation, and relationship to the surrounding natural environment.² These features of the villa

1. Rykwert, Joseph. On Adam's House in Paradise; the Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History, 212. New York: Museum of Modern Art; Distributed by New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, Conn., 1972.

2. Ackerman, James S. The Villa: Form and Ideology of Country Houses, 12. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990.7.

3. Ackerman, 36,37. Op. Cit.

4. Ackerman, 37. Op. Cit.

5. IBID

6. Ackerman, 38. Op. Cit.

7. IBID

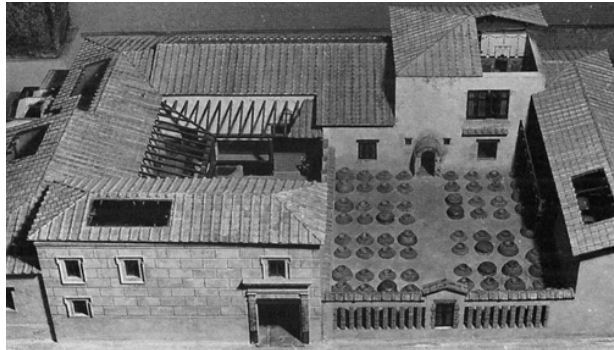


Figure 1
Villa Rustica Boscoreale (Modern Model)

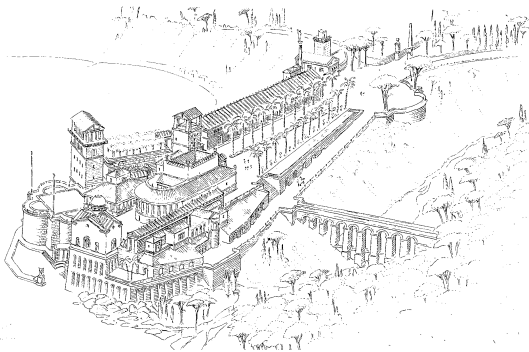


Figure 2
Villa Urbana, Pliny's Laurentinum, 2nd C. AD

ideology are also the principles of otium.³ The practice of otium is the antithesis of negotium; the business, affairs, and preoccupations associated with the demands of urban life.⁴ The villa is the architectural mechanism through which one experiences otium.⁵

Two main types of villas originate in the ancient Roman context, the villa rustica and villa urbana.⁶ The villa rustica is a basic shelter of minimal comfort and amenity that was closely tied to the agrarian roots of country properties.⁷ These agrarian roots are manifest in the architecture of the villa rustica as a distinct typology from urban buildings with a large kitchen and entry courtyard as prominent features.⁸ The inward facing nature of the villa rustica, with its organization around a courtyard aligned with stoic notions of simplicity and the satisfaction and fulfillment that can be found through physical labour.⁹ By the mid first century A.D. the villa rustica began to fall out of fashion¹⁰ as economic and cultural changes precipitated the first in a series of shifts in taste regarding the preferred villa type.¹¹

Distinguishing features of the villa urbana are the divorcing of the villa from agrarian functions,¹⁴ and the subsequent decline in the interest and involvement of the proprietor in the day to day operation of the villa.¹⁵ The villa urbana, no longer having a significant productive roll, became a place focused on recreation and leisure.¹⁶ The

architecture of the villa urbana changed to reflect the desire for the comforts of city living of the urban proprietor. Villas were now modeled on the city house¹⁷ to be elegant, with separate winter and summer apartments, baths, and promenades.¹⁸ The spacial organization of the villa urbana turned outward, organized along axis of the site to provide views through, and from the villa.¹⁹ The size, and luxury was seen as a token of decadence reflective of the more epicurean desires that formed the experience of the villa urbana.²⁰

After the Punic Wars, and continuing into the first century A.D. smaller country properties were dispossessed, and then accumulated by the urban based wealthy.¹² This amalgamation of small rural properties by the urban elite occurs repeatedly in later centuries with the Medici's in the 15th century, and Britain's Acts of Enclosure in the 17th century. In each case, a new type of country house emerged. In the late first century A.D. this was the villa urbana.¹³

Through the centuries, the oscillation in taste between the villa rustica and villa urbana based typologies has continued. Despite this oscillation in taste, and architectural expression, the ideology underlying the villa has changed little.²¹ The nearly unchanged perceptions of a mythologized and idealized country life²² are manifest in the desire for simplicity, informality, opportunities for intensive physical and intellectual stimulation, and

8. Ackerman, 42,44. Op. Cit.

9. Ackerman, 38. Op. Cit.

10. Ackerman, 39. Op. Cit.

11. Ackerman, 60. Op. Cit.

12. Ackerman, 52. Op. Cit.

13. Ackerman, 43. Op. Cit.

14. Ackerman, 51. Op. Cit.

15. Ackerman, 45. Op. Cit.

16. Ackerman, 42. Op. Cit.

17. Ackerman, 61. Op. Cit.

18. Ackerman, 38. Op. Cit.

19. Ackerman, 38. Op. Cit.

20. Ackerman, 41. Op. Cit.

21. Ackerman, 34. Op. Cit.

22. Ackerman, 7. Op. Cit.

a relationship to the surrounding natural environment²³ that are the foundation of villa culture and the experience of otium. The villa's separation from utilitarian design criteria²⁴ allow them to be a unique architectural expression of universal human concepts such as the relationship between city and country life, of artifice and nature, formal and informal.²⁵

The Ontario Cottage

While the practice of cottaging in Ontario mainly developed in the decades following WWII, the Ontario cottage is telling of the cultural and societal mythologies, history, and artistic expression of a collective relationship to the Canadian landscape. The historical relationship to landscape is one of survival. In response to this survival condition, a garrison mentality developed of "small isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological frontier."²⁶ This frontier is the "huge, unthinking, menacing and formidable physical setting"²⁷ that is the Canadian landscape. As the conquest against the unconscious forces of nature²⁸ continued, survival gave way to the productive relationship to the Canadian landscape.

In many parts of the province imagery of the productive relationship can still be seen in the patchwork of farmland where the wilderness was pushed back enough to establish a homestead, small fields and agricultural buildings. Once established, the expansion of the operation continued, eventually

relegating the 'wilderness' to small stands of forest at the back of agricultural properties. The productive relationship to the landscape is still characterized by an intimacy between the land and occupant, but has surpassed the desperation and extreme isolation characteristic of the survival relationship.

The productive relationship is the pre-cursor to the opportunity to generate wealth, which in turn becomes centralized in cities. Urban living and its comforts afforded wealthy Canadians and Americans access to resort hotels established outside of the city.²⁹ This became an early Canadian manifestation of a leisure relationship with nature. The retreat, as a built expression of man's relationship to the natural environment, acts as a signifier of shifting attitudes towards the wilderness. The retreat sits between the historical survival relationship to landscape, and the distancing from landscape of urban life, offering a leisure relationship with the natural environment.

Resort Hotels attracted wealthy Americans and Torontonians to the Muskoka region in the late 19th and early 20th century.³⁰ As major metropolitan areas developed, so too did a desire to escape the city to the newly favourable landscape of the Canadian Shield. Increased rail and steam boat transportation infrastructure brought wealthy guests from emerging urban centres to these resorts on the larger lakes in the Muskokas.³¹

23. Ackerman, 38. Op. Cit.

24. Ackerman, 34. Op. Cit.

25. IBID

26. Atwood, Margaret. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, 8. Toronto: Anansi, 1972.

27. Frye, Northrop. *The Bush Garden Essays on the Canadian Imagination*, 225. Concord, Ont.: House of Anansi, 1971.

28. IBID

29. Harrison, Julia. *Timeless Place: The Ontario Cottage*, 4 Vancouver: Univ Of Brit Columbia Pr, 2014.

30. IBID

31. IBID



Figure 3
Ontario Cottage

Individual cottage lots began to emerge on lakes throughout the Muskokas in small numbers in the early 20th century.³² The sale of desirable lake front property increased through the depression of the 1930s as farmers sold land to supplement unstable incomes.³³ At the same time, access to central and northern Ontario was improved through publicly funded infrastructure projects.³⁴

After WWII, higher wages, lower construction costs, a transportation boom resulted in more people being able to afford a piece of the country life, and the extension of the built environment further from dense urban centres.³⁵ The decades following the war created favourable economic factors for the establishment of a wealthy middle class, most notably the stable cost of living, and increase in the average annual wage.³⁶ With new found disposable income, an institutionalized 2 day weekend, annual vacation, and a crown land disposal program it was possible for broad segments of the middle class to afford a recreational property,³⁷ and a democratization of the villa typology took place. The middle decades of the 20th century also saw an increase in car ownership and the expansion and improvement of the province's roadways,³⁸ further facilitating access to cottage properties.

Through the 1950s and 60s new cottagers were faced with enacting the struggles of their predecessors in establishing a place for themselves in the 'wilderness' of their rough lake front lots.³⁹

These cottages were initially simple structures which were expanded and improved upon incrementally each summer through the addition of insulation, interior finishes, indoor plumbing, electricity etc...⁴⁰

Early cottage life at once enforced and defied the gender rolls typical of mid century North America. Wives and children would live at the cottage for the duration of the summer, while the husband remained in the city, coming to the cottage on weekends and holidays.⁴¹ While this enforced the roll of the husband as bread winner, the woman and children were left to manage day to day life at the newly established cottages,⁴² which involved developing necessary skills that are associated with the perception of the cottage as a masculine place, such as operating a boat, gathering, cutting, and splitting firewood, as well as other maintenance tasks, as well as caring for and entertaining children.⁴³

Over time, cottaging spread from Muskoka to surrounding areas with similar desirable characteristics of large, deep water lakes, exposed rock formations and tree lined shores.⁴⁴ In the 1980s second properties became taxable assets,⁴⁵ a legislation which has contributed to the commoditization of the cottage property. The steady increase in recreational property pricing continued to climb through the 1990s, to the recession of 2008, at which time prices stalled, but

32. Harrison, 13. Op. Cit.

33. Harrison, 15. Op. Cit.

34. Harrison, 14,15. Op. Cit.

35. Ackerman, 244. Op. Cit.

36. Harrison, 5. Op. Cit.

37. Harrison, 15. Op. Cit.

38. IBID

39. Harrison, 16. Op. Cit.

40. Harrison, 216. Op. Cit.

41. Harrison, 219. Op. Cit.

42. Harrison, 220. Op. Cit.

43. Harrison, 219. Op. Cit.

44. Harrison, 15. Op. Cit.

45. Harrison, 16. Op. Cit.

did not precipitously drop as could be expected.⁴⁶

As recreational property values were increasing, the original cottages of the early and mid 20th century continued to be expanded and upgraded, and new larger suburban cottage typologies emerged.⁴⁷ Two such typologies are the *condominium-cottage* and the *mega-cottage*. These typologies mark a distinct shift from cottages based on the precedent of the villa rustica, towards that of the villa urbana. The condo-cottage appeals to those who wanted a maintenance free second property that includes luxury amenities.⁴⁸ These properties are typically higher density buildings such as town houses, or mid rise multiple dwellings that employ materials and construction methods found in suburban construction.⁴⁹ While the condo-cottage is a product marketed to a specific type of cottage consumer, the mega-cottage is generally driven by individual wealth and status⁵⁰ - a large opulent second home, with all amenities of urban life, indelicately placed on a lake front lot. The mega-cottage makes up a small percentage of recreational properties, but is representative of the extreme 'villa urbana' spectrum of cottage typologies in contrast to the cottage origins of the simple shelter.

Reevaluating the Cottage Experience

The lineage of the Ontario cottage depicts a spectrum of cottages from the simple original structures of early cottages, to the mega-cottage,

46. Harrison, 17,18. Op. Cit.

47. Harrison, 17. Op. Cit.

48. Harrison, 34. Op. Cit.

49. Harrison, 37. Op. Cit.

50. Harrison, 34,37. Op. Cit.

and the movement from a villa rustica cottage typology in the mid 20th century towards a model which increasingly resembles the villa urbana in its similarities to the urban life that the retreat is to be a reprieve from. That is not to say that all cottages are becoming large second homes whose experience is indistinguishable from daily urban life, but that increasingly there is a shift in the understanding of what constitutes a desirable cottage experience.⁵¹ In designing and building a retreat of my own, I seek to move away from the increasing preoccupation with villa urbana typologies, in favour of rediscovering how the principals of Otium, as expressed through the villa rustica, can be experienced in the context of the contemporary Ontario Cottage.

A re-evaluation of the contemporary cottage first requires an understanding of the terms "modern" and "contemporary". Where the former refers to the broad conditions of a collective self conscious break with the past and traditions in favour of new forms of expression,⁵² the latter deals with the more immediate and nuanced characteristics of a given society, individual, work, or project. A distinction between "rustic" and "primitive" must also be made. Joseph Rykwert, in *On Adam's House in Paradise*, describes rustic is a derivative of the primitive, "[remaining] unaltered in spite of all the possible refinements it suffered, ... a conscious attempt to fuse the elements of style into a new unity by returning to a way of building which inevitably carried with it the seeds of a telluric immemorial

51. Harrison, 37. Op. Cit.

52. "Modernism." Merriam Webster. Accessed April 19, 2016. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/modernism>.

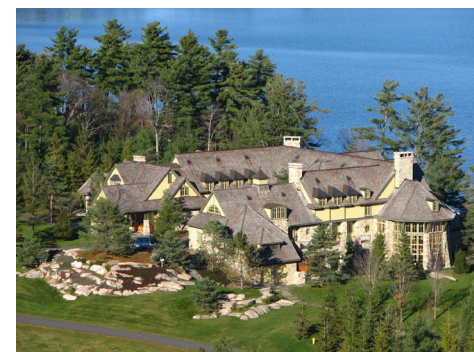


Figure 4
'Mega-Cottage'



Figure 5
Monastic Cell at Tourette, Corbusier



Figure 6
Primitive Hut

wisdom and rightness.”⁵³ Within the rustic there lies further ambiguity. The rustic referred to in this work is not popular aesthetic imagery, but rather “an attempt to pare away what is given and apparent, to find something else to satisfy our deepest emotions.”⁵⁴ When designed and experienced in this way, the retreat become a place where its occupants brush with the sublime and intimate, “reawaken[ing] sensibilities intrinsic to profound architectural experience.”⁵⁵

This understanding of rustic leads to a discussion of the pursuit of an essential architecture and asceticism. While commonly understood in the context of a religious practice, asceticism can be exemplified in architecture through minimalism.⁵⁶ This reduction of architecture through asceticism is manifest in the monastic cell, a room of one’s own. In the cell can be found the beginnings of the reduction to an essential architecture which is comprised of the most basic comforts and amenities.⁵⁷ The intent minimalism in the monastic cell was reflection through a spartan and secluded life, and is not unlike the intent of the minimal retreat where one seeks to find a renewed perspective in stripping away the superfluous. The return to essentials can be further pursued in search of origins in the primitive. By determining, or speculating on the principals of the primitive origins of architecture, as Rykwert does with the primitive hut in *On Adam’s House in Paradise*, “The return to origins always implies a rethinking of what you

do customarily, an attempt to renew the validity of your everyday actions, or simply a recall of the natural (or even divine) sanction for your repeating them for a season.”⁵⁸ This is precisely the intent of the retreat - an attempt to step outside of our immediate context of the modern condition, to establish a critical distance with which one can evaluate their situation and formulate a conscious response.

Thoreau’s motivations for building a cabin for himself at Walden are similar, as he states, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately...”⁵⁹ This statement reveals a desire to experience a different state of being from that which he was critical of in contemporary society. Later, Martin Heidegger would postulate that “dwelling...is the basic character of being,”⁶⁰ and “only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build.”⁶¹ It follows, that dwelling in a retreat of one’s own making is the logical expression, and means by which to fulfill a desire for a complementary environment which facilitates a distinct way of dwelling and being, and follows in an established tradition of self building.

It is human nature to dwell and build, “we build, and have built because we dwell... because we are dwellers.”⁶² It is no surprise that being a dweller, Thoreau’s first preoccupation in his deliberate being is to build. Building is an act with an expected physical outcome, but which also

53. Rykwert, 26,27. Op. Cit.

54. Cline, Ann. *A Hut of One’s Own: Life outside the Circle of Architecture*, 109. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997.

55. IBID

56. Aureli, Pier Vittorio. “Less Is Enough.” Lecture. Accessed April 20, 2016. Vimeo.

57. IBID

58. Rykwert, 70. Op. Cit.

59. Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*, 343. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971

60. Heidegger, Martin. “Building, Dwelling, Thinking.” In *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, 362. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.

61. IBID

62. Heidegger, 350. Op. Cit.

brings new definitions to its surroundings. The pine grove behind the cabin becomes Thoreau's parlour when entertaining guests. A derelict field becomes a primary source of nutrition and income, and Walden pond is given significance as a water source, place of bathing, relaxation, and speculative wonder.⁶³ All of these natural elements surrounding Walden were given new meaning and significance because of their relationship to dwelling, and are used to examine one's relationship to their context.

Maintaining the restorative retreat requires investment of time, money, and work. The understanding of what constitutes work at the retreat is different from that of our day to day lives. Work at the retreat when seen as 'satisfying and rewarding', and 'fun to do', begins to relate closely to leisure, resulting in a dichotomy of work as leisure/leisure as work emerging.⁶⁴ In *A Place of My Own*, Michael Pollan speaks of the time (mostly Saturdays, the 'leisure time' of the post-modern man) and financial resources dedicated to the construction of his Other Place. Both of which, when accounted for at the completion of the project, were significant.⁶⁵ This work sacrifices a hedonistic reward for the tangible results of physical labour. It is this type of 'work' that "inscribes the place with leisure and meaning"⁶⁶ and adds immeasurable significance and connection to a retreat of one's own.

This tension-between what constitutes work and leisure is a long standing feature of the retreat in the form of productive labour. Productive labour involves a unification of the head and hands through intellectual and physical activity, with the intent of dominion over one's unruly spirit through action.⁶⁷ These activities are not undertaken for their own sake, but rather with the virtuous intentions of personal and moral betterment.⁶⁸ These moral and virtuous intentions are lost when hedonistic pleasure and amenity become prioritized. Shadows of productive labour can still be found in "puttering" at the cottage, engaging in tasks of maintenance and improvement. When these tasks are approached, and coupled with one's intellect, the tradition of productive labour at the retreat is revived.

The preceding discussion touches on a number of themes: one's relationship to the surrounding natural environment, simplicity, informality, and opportunities for intensive physical and intellectual stimulation.⁶⁹ These are the fundamentals of the practice of Otium. Just as the expression of the Retreat of One's Own varies across a range of conditions from the general to the specificities of its occupant, so too does the practice of otium. This relationship makes apparent that the retreat is the architectural mechanism through which one can experience otium. The complementary environment as the place of otium is a place a little closer to our origins that facilitates a "rethinking of

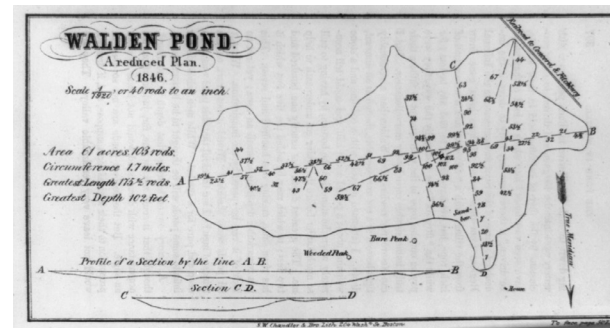


Figure 7
Walden Site Plan

63. Thoreau, 392, 405, 435. Op. Cit

64. Harrison, 231. Op. Cit.

65. Pollan, Michael. *A Place of My Own: The Education of an Amateur Builder*, 24. New York: Random House, 1997

66. Harrison, 231. Op. Cit.

67. Ackerman, 64. Op. Cit.

68. Ackerman, 93. Op. Cit.

69. Ackerman, 38. Op. Cit.

what you do customarily, an attempt to renew the validity of your everyday actions, or simply a recall of the natural (or even divine) sanction for your repeating them.”⁷⁰ This provides an avenue for gaining perspective on the condition of contemporary daily life.

The contemporary restorative retreat needs to be reconsidered, not as a place of hedonistic lavishness, but as a place of physical and psychological distance from the complexity of an urban existence in favour of a return to nature implied in the simplicity of spartan accommodation, where the practice of otium is at once restorative, and of gaining perspective on, and positioning with respect to the conditions of contemporary existence. A place where intense and intentional intellectual and physical activities are undertaken for the sake of a cultivation of one’s own self within the larger contemporary context.

The reliance of the retreat on contemporary social, technological, and economic conditions is undeniable, but perhaps, there is more to it than that. The simple retreat in the form of the primitive hut, although dependant on modernity is “an attempt to pare away what is given and apparent, to find something else to satisfy our deepest emotions.”⁷¹ When designed and experienced in this way, the retreat become a place not of a rustic aesthetic or experience which blindly enacts the struggles of our predecessors, but a place where its occupants brush the sublime and intimate, “reawaken[ing] sensibilities intrinsic to profound architectural experience.”⁷²

70. Rykwert, 70. Op. Cit.

71. Cline, 109. Op. Cit.

72. A Hut of One’s Own.” MIT Press. Accessed April 10, 2016.
<https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/hut-ones-own>.

BLACKJACK ISLAND

“At Bollingen, I am in the midst of my true life, I am most deeply myself.”

- Carl Jung

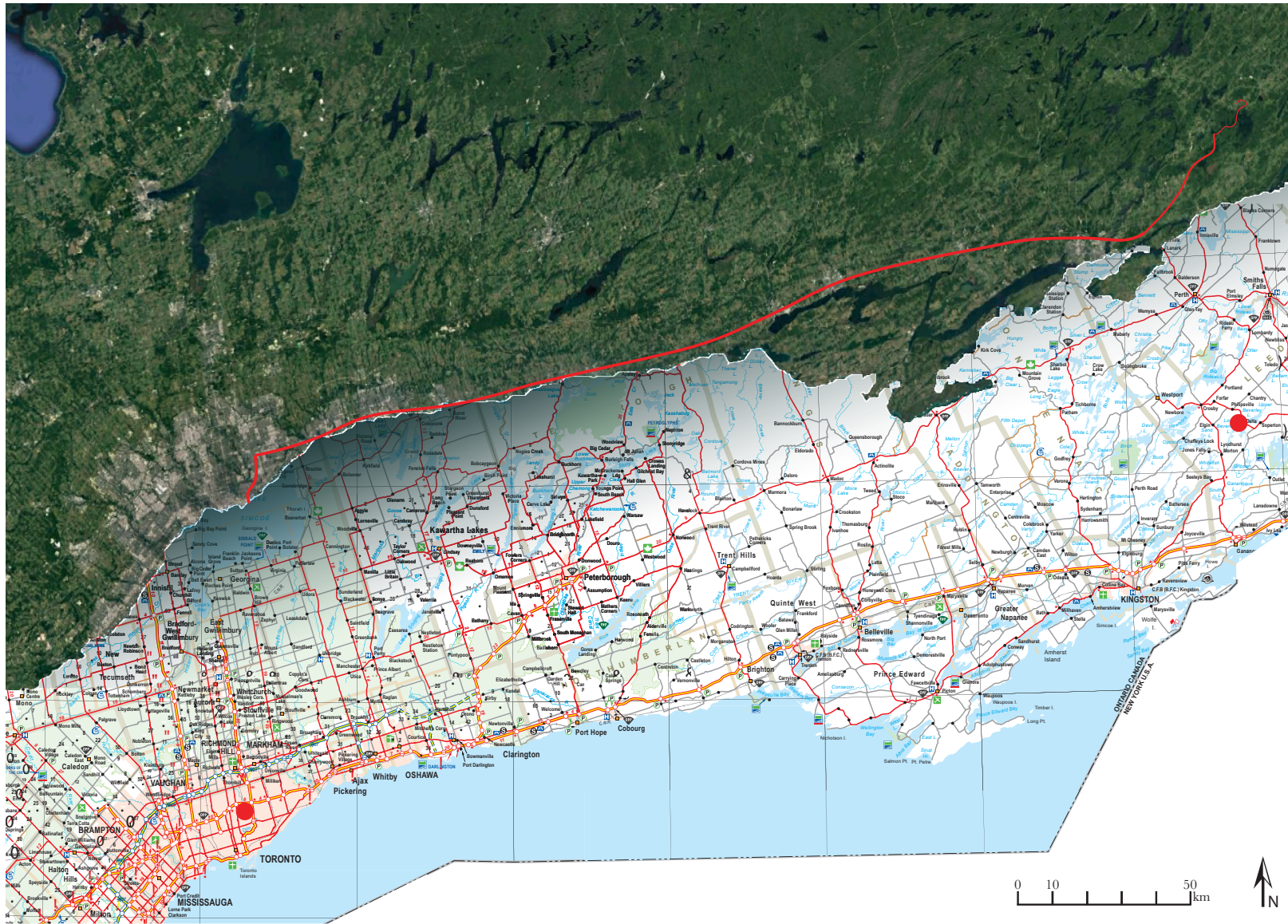


Figure 8

Take Don Valley Parkway N from Dundas St. W.
11 min (3.0 km)

Take ON-401 E to exit 623 ON-15 N in Kingston.
2 h 22 min. (260 km)

Turn right onto County Road 33/Lyndhurst Rd. from ON-15 N.
20 min. (32 km)

Turn Left onto County Road 42/King St. from County Road 33
11 min. (15 km)

Turn Left onto William St. from County Road 42/King St.
2 min (3.0 km)

Boat Launch (5 William St.) will be on the right.
1 min (600m)

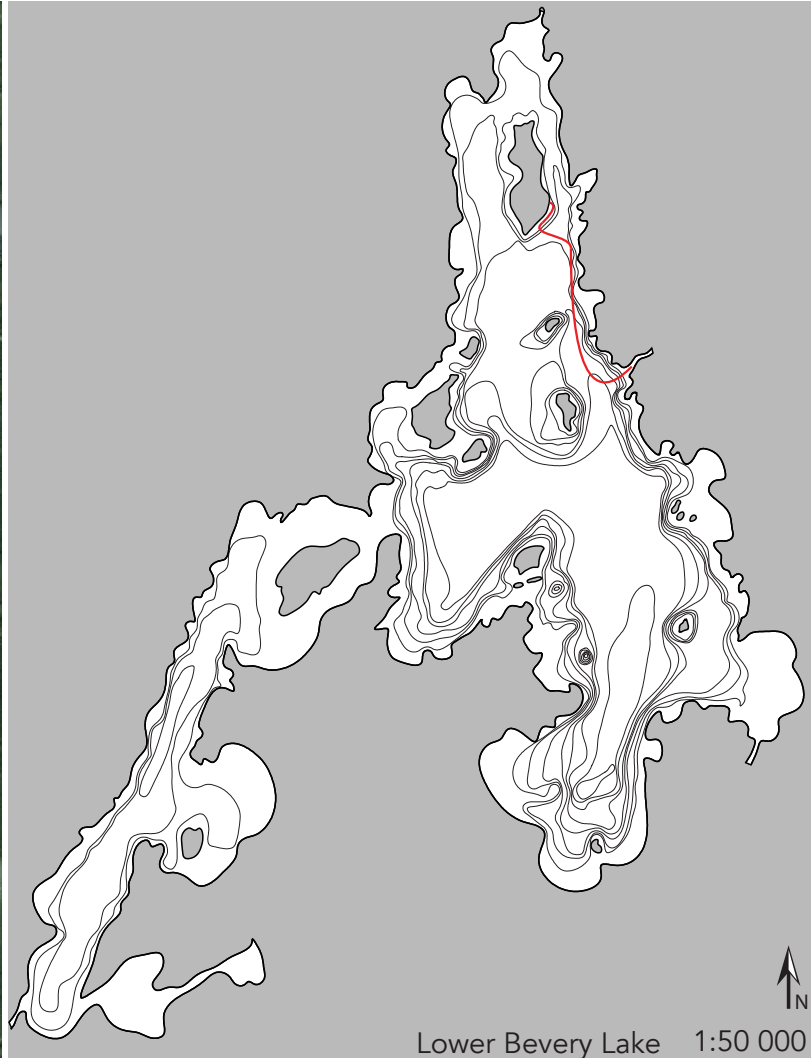


Figure 9

Follow Delta Creek South from the dock, into Lower Beverly Lake
2 min (200m)

Follow the NE shore of the mainland until opposite Black Jack Island.
5 min (600m)

Cross to the eastern shore of Black Jack Island, and continue North.
3 min (300 m)

7024 Blackjack Island will be the 5th property on the left.
2 min (200m)



Figure 10

7.5.16

It is 5:00 A.M. as I depart for the first time, car laden with the implements of waterfront life, and the necessary tools and materials to build a small retreat over the course of the summer. Beyond ‘just building something’ I desire to extend the roll of the designer to builder, enhancing the clarity of the design intent of the project, developing a level of craftsmanship uncommon in designers, and fostering a new understanding and experience which can be leveraged in future work to further increase the quality of the final design and built form.

Leaving for the cottage is characterized by a pre-dawn departure. The aim, to beat the traffic which congests Ontario’s highways on summer weekends, cars packed to overflowing, their passengers cramped between coolers, clothes and an assortment of cottage bricabraque, often with boat in tow. All are retreating from the “Here” of urban life, to “There” at The Other Place.

I have my own memories of this journey to my Aunt and Uncle’s property on McQuabby Lake. A progression of natural and man-made landmarks marked the approach with growing anticipation. Days were filled with the granite cliffs of the Canadian Shield, boat tours of the lake, and falling asleep to the call of the loon, happily exhausted after the day’s adventures. Over the years my affinity with this place grew until it was as if a part of me resided there permanently. This is my Other Place.



43.628145, -79.097644

5:20 A.M.



44.004466, -78.115887

5:50 A.M.



44.022332, -77.906465

6:15 A.M.



44.030947, -77.864955

6:20 A.M.



44.367345, -76.331974

7:30 A.M.



44.393423, -76.319199

7:40 A.M.

Figure 11



44.284593, -76.657015

6:40 A.M.



44.287406, -76.594275

7:00 A.M.



44.269077, -76.493679

7:10 A.M.



44.285865, -76.438881

7:20 A.M.



44.549468, -76.125786

7:50 A.M.



44.604104, -76.217025

8:00 A.M.

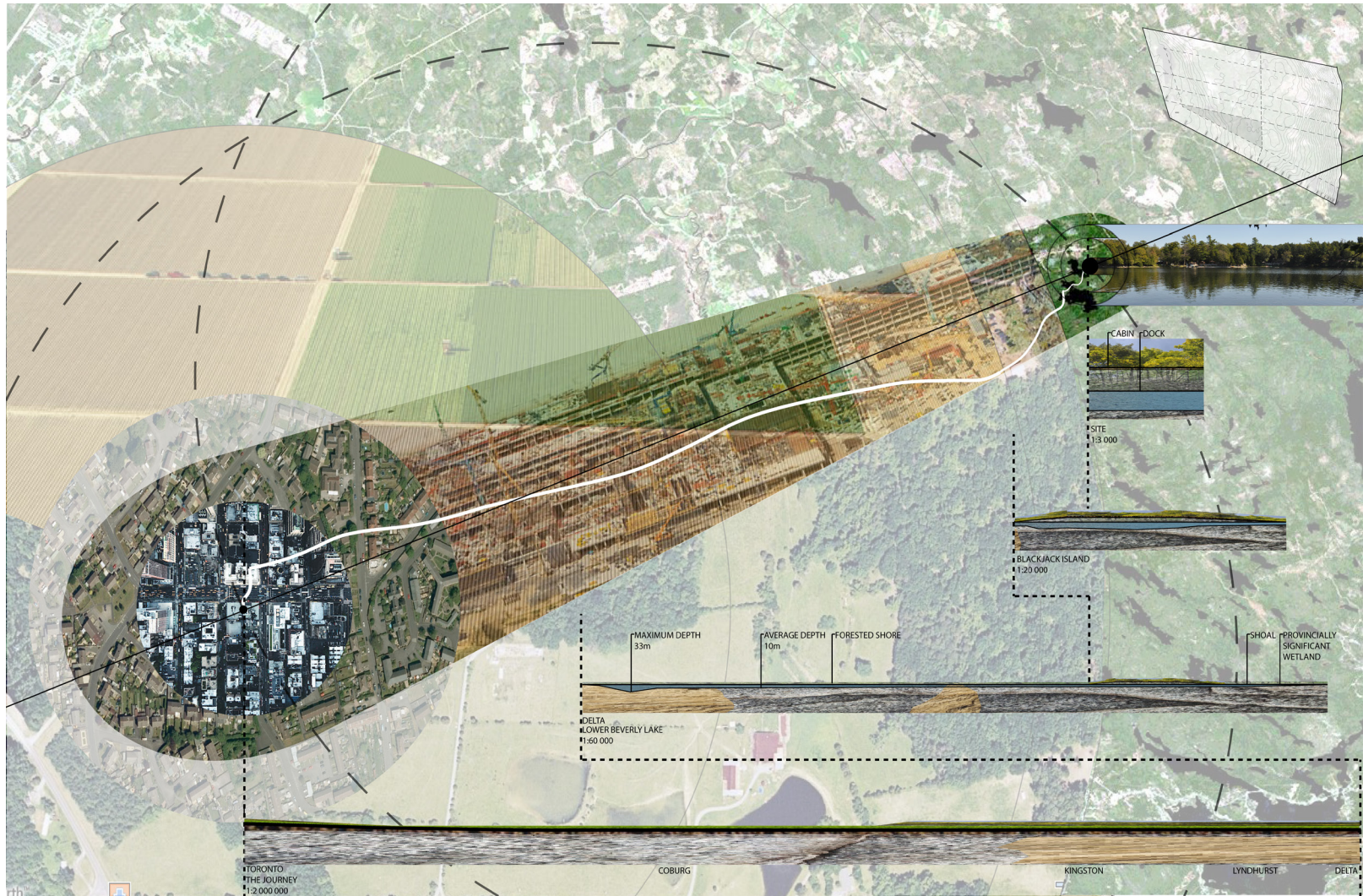


Figure 12

The retreat exists as a social and economic satellite at the periphery of the sphere of influence of wealthy urban centres. The retreat's ease of access from, and proximity to, urban centers is proportional to its desirability, and subsequent value. The liminal space between the urban and retreat is expressive of broader considerations of landscape that take into account the effects of the economic, social, and infrastructural concentrations surrounding urban centres of various scales.

The highway serves as a link between urban centres. There is a concentration of economic and infrastructural capital which closely follows these corridors. This concentration is most dense close to urban centres, thinning, but still present at points between. The extent to which this capital extends along the datum of the highway is indicative of a centre's size and sphere of influence. It is possible for a smaller centre to exist within the sphere of another larger centre, as with Toronto and the other smaller centres on the 401 east of the city. Leaving the highway, one passes through the band of capital dependent on its proximity to the highway, before entering a zone of decreased density and localized economy, social impact, and infrastructure. In the journey to the retreat this shift is typical of prosperous medium to large scale farming and rural communities. As one progresses into the Canadian Shield the productive landscape becomes less prosperous, with smaller farms nestled between large granite formations and wetlands. This is the transition to leisure based economies which serve the retreat, and the largely seasonal population it attracts.

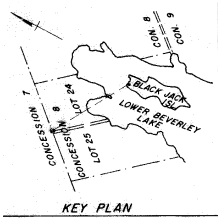
The orbital relationship between the urban center and retreat is inverted in the experience of the retreat. The desire of retreat becomes the central point around which the conditions of the urban centre orbit, and serve to facilitate. *Otium* becomes the end to which *negotium* serves.



Figure 13

Rounding the last point of Lower Beverly Lake's northeast shore, the transformative journey is complete. This is the moment just before arrival at the island where immersion into the environment of The Other Place is complete, and the experience of *being* at the retreat begins.

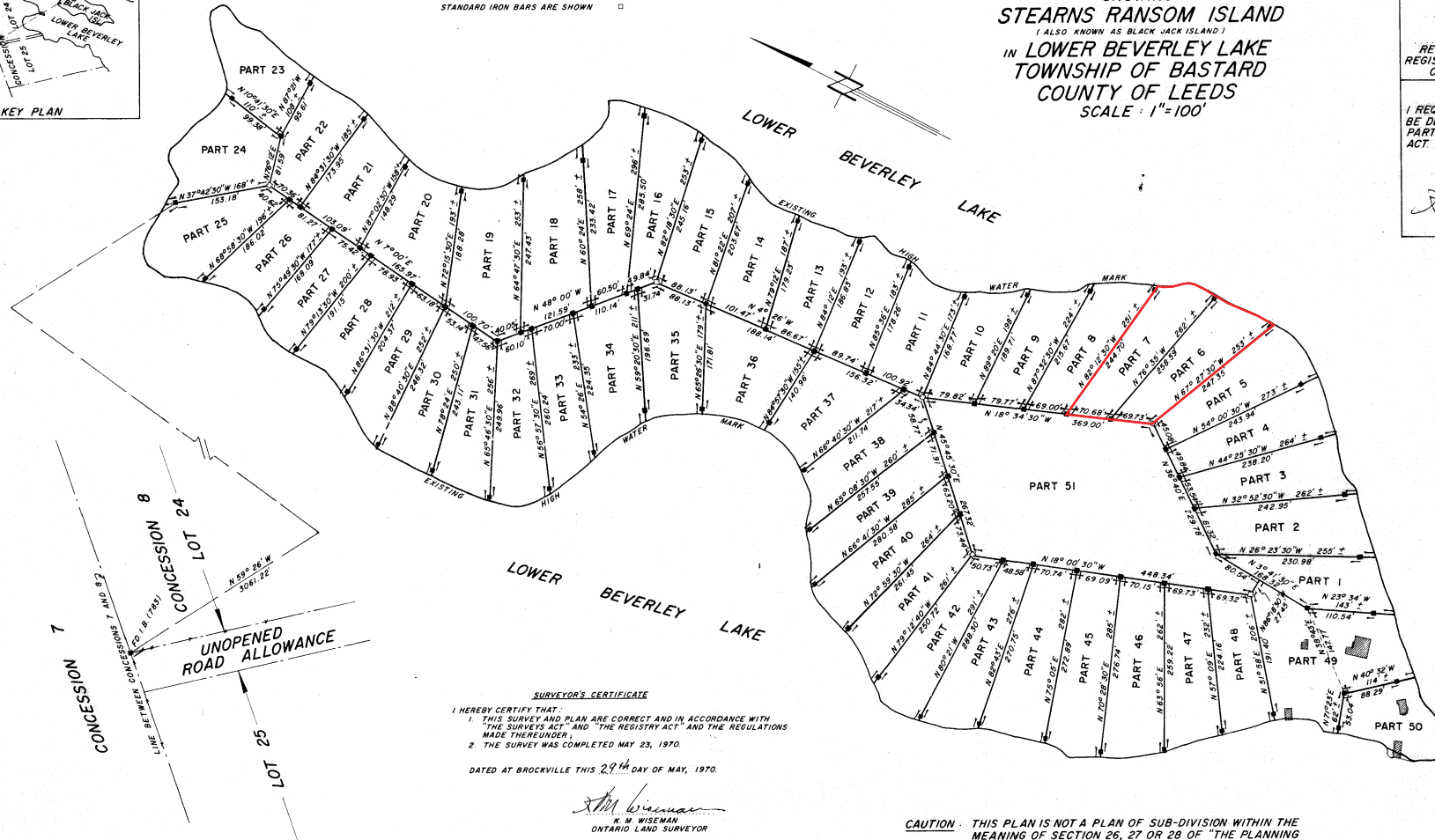
This moment of arrival completes an inverse tracing of the historic Canadian relationship to the wilderness where one moves from a place of wealth, comfort and negotium, through a productive landscape, to the retreat set within nature, a survival relationship that has been transcended to one of leisure.



NOTE: BEARINGS ARE ASTROMIC AND ARE REFERRED TO THE MERIDIAN THROUGH THE MOST NORTHERN ANGLE OF LOT 24, CON. 8, TWP. OF BASTARD.
 5/8" SQUARE IRON BARS ARE SHOWN ■
 STANDARD IRON BARS ARE SHOWN □

REFERENCE PLAN
 SHOWING
STEARNS RANSOM ISLAND
 (ALSO KNOWN AS BLACK JACK ISLAND)
 IN LOWER BEVERLEY LAKE
 TOWNSHIP OF BASTARD
 COUNTY OF LEEDS
 SCALE: 1"=100'

RECEIVED AND DEPOSITED
 AS
PLAN R/139
 REGISTRAR FOR THE
 REGISTRY DIVISION OF THE
 COUNTY OF LEEDS
 I REQUIRE THIS PLAN TO
 BE DEPOSITED UNDER
 PART 2 OF THE REGISTRY
 ACT.
 June 18, 1970
K. M. Wiseman
 K. M. WISEMAN, O.L.S.



SURVEYOR'S CERTIFICATE
 I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT:
 1. THIS SURVEY AND PLAN ARE CORRECT AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH
 "THE SURVEYS ACT" AND "THE REGISTRY ACT" AND THE REGULATIONS
 MADE THEREUNDER;
 2. THE SURVEY WAS COMPLETED MAY 23, 1970.
 DATED AT BROCKVILLE THIS 29th DAY OF MAY, 1970.

K. M. Wiseman
 K. M. WISEMAN
 ONTARIO LAND SURVEYOR

CAUTION: THIS PLAN IS NOT A PLAN OF SUB-DIVISION WITHIN THE MEANING OF SECTION 26, 27 OR 28 OF "THE PLANNING ACT".

Figure 14

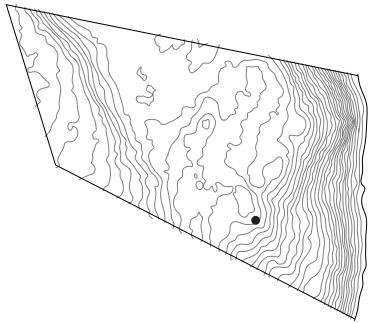
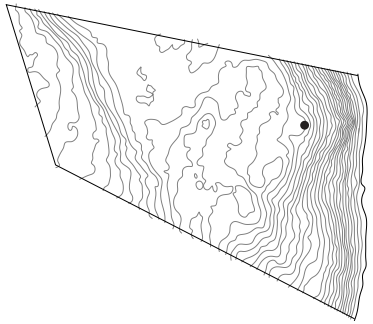
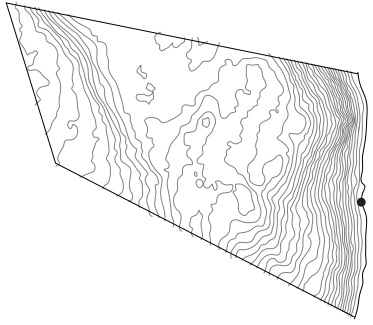


Figure 16



DESIGN

“The cabin is so small you have to go outside, that’s the point!”

- Tom Kundig



Figure 17

Lakefront
Large, deep water lake
Good swimming
Good fishing
A variety of terrain typical to the Canadian Shield
A lake context of humble cottages and homes
Relative ease of access from the GTA
Loons
Affordability

A place of minimal shelter and amenity
Off grid
Ideal for 1-2 occupants, able to sleep 4-6 if needed
Privacy from the lake, with views to the surroundings from within
Compact - footprint of 107.6 SF or less
Unfinished loft (not count towards total SF per OBC and local bylaws)
Expressive of historical and contemporary relationships to landscape
Passive ventilation and solar strategies
Large overhangs-shade and habitable outdoor space
Hearth - wood stove
Thermal mass-passive temperature control
Raised from grade for ventilation and storage below



Figure 18

Rooted in the history of the survival shelter's translation to a leisure retreat, the surrounding nature is shapes the experience of habitation, allowing a revitalization and reawakening of the wild within us all.

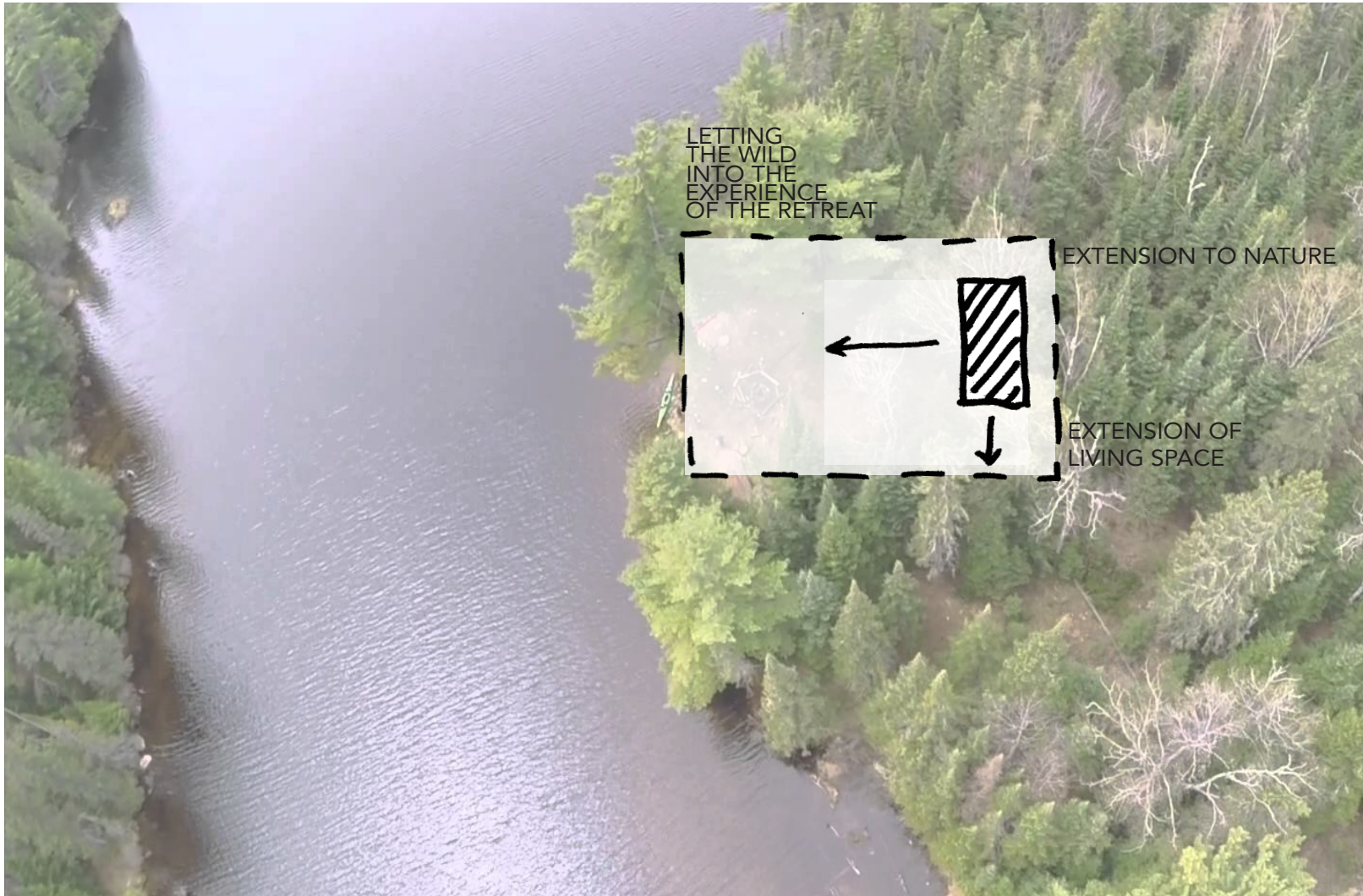


Figure 19

The minimal enclosure provides basic shelter, amenity and comfort, encouraging the occupant to extend habitation to the surrounding nature. Simultaneously, the wild is permitted into life at the retreat in ways unacceptable in day to day life.

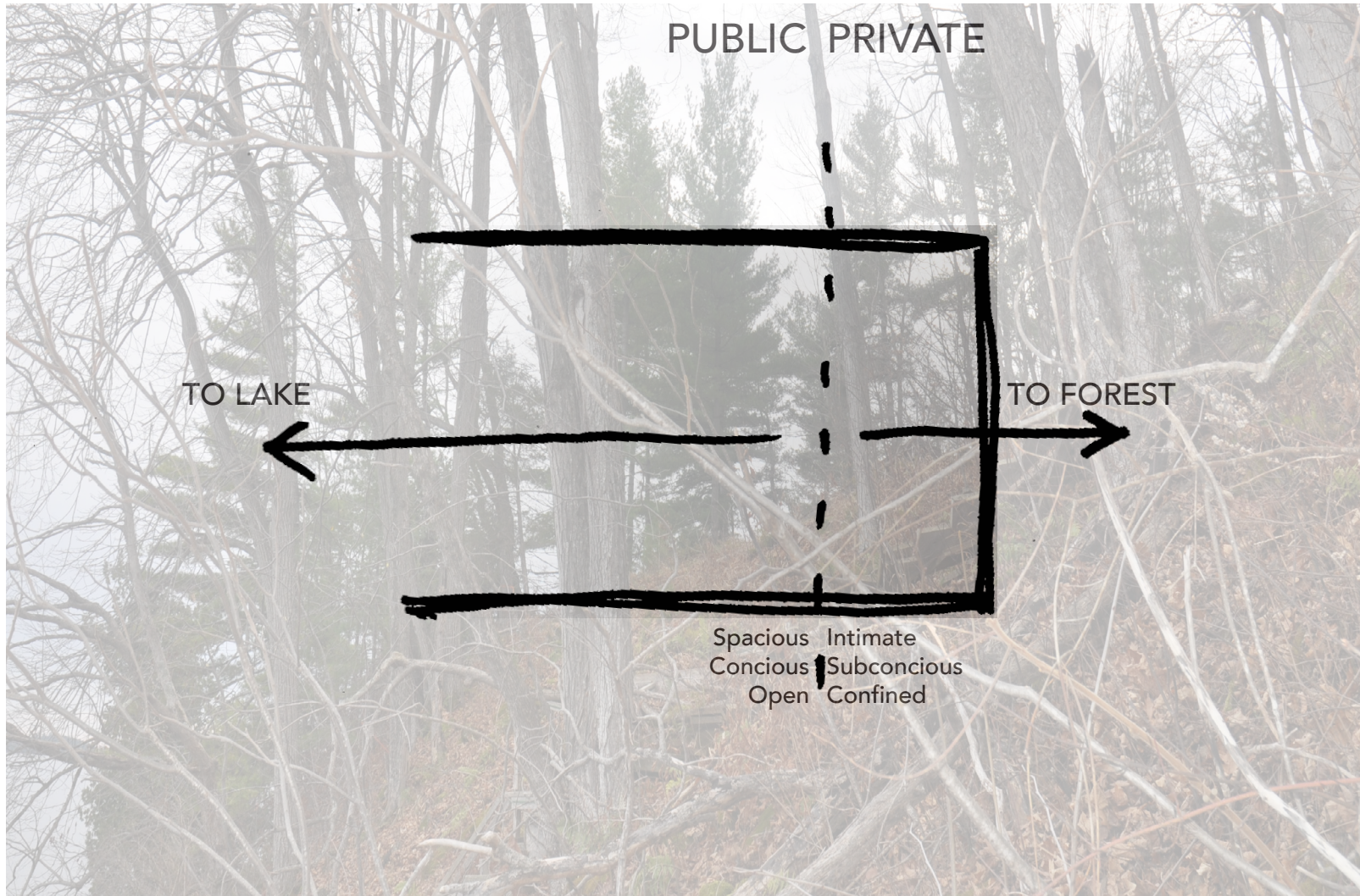


Figure 20

An East-West axis serves as an organizational element. The public spaces open towards the lake, and the intimate spaces of the sleeping loft and washroom take advantage of the privacy afforded by their immersion in the forest.



Figure 21

There is a depth of view developed looking from the interior of the retreat, past the hearth, through the forest, to the lake, far shore, and distant horizon.

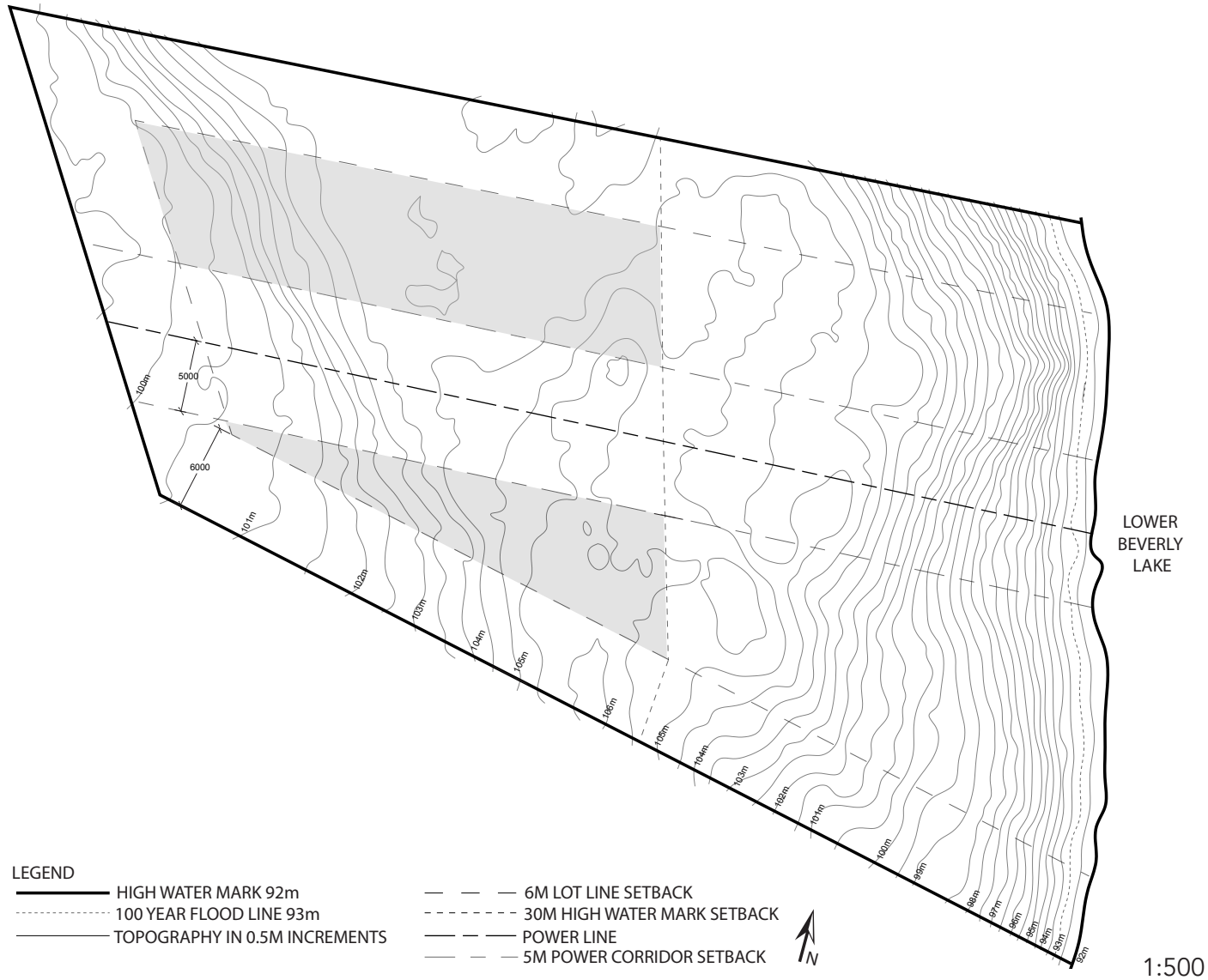


Figure 22

Two buildable areas exist on the site to the north and south of the power line. The narrow, otherwise unbuildable, portion of land on the southern portion of the property between the power corridor setback and lot line setback was selected as the building site. Locating the retreat here takes advantage of this high, flat, otherwise undevelopable land, with excellent views to the lake, while preserving the larger buildable area for future development.

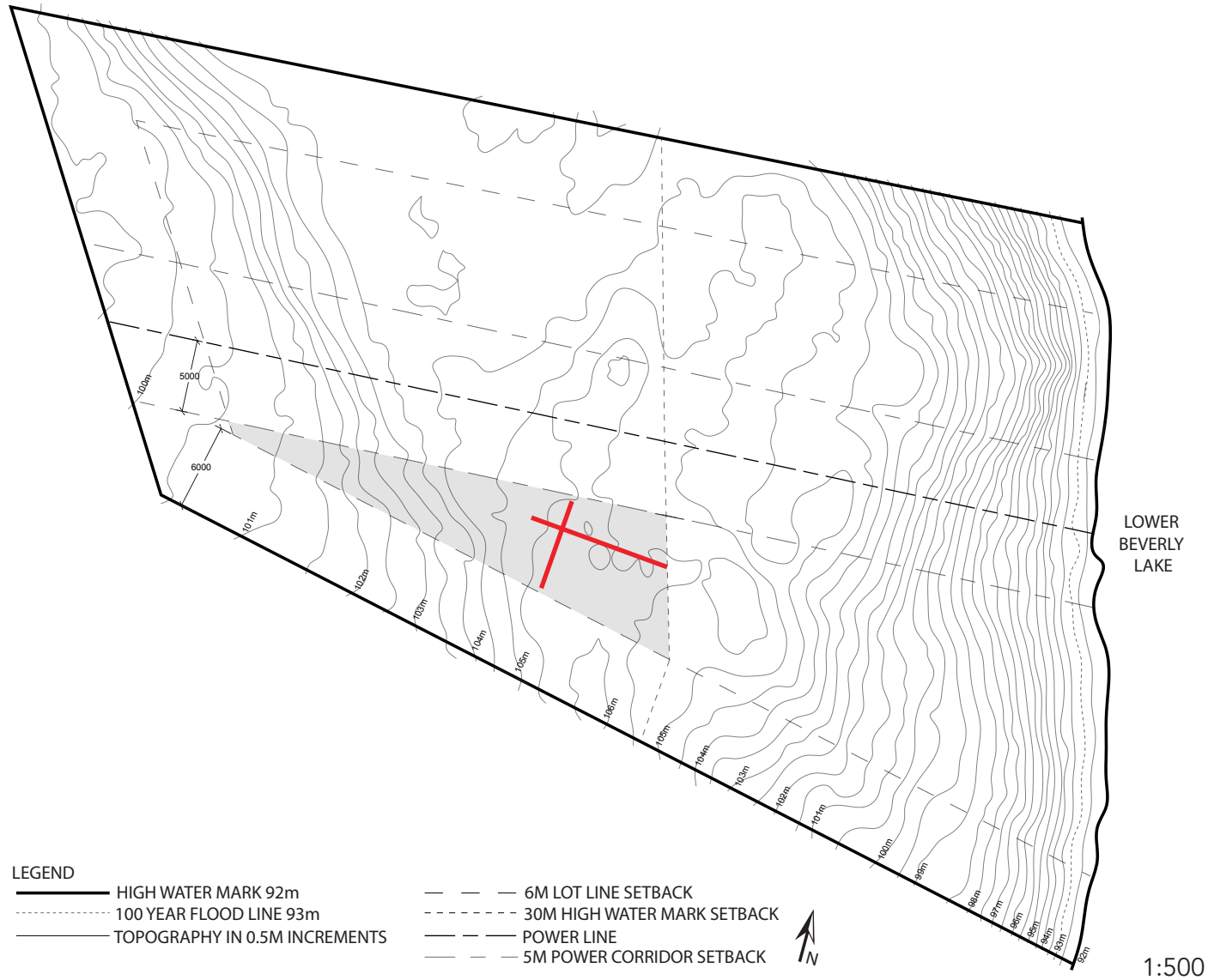


Figure 23

The property has no architectural or personal history, being undeveloped and recently acquired. The actions of building begin to develop a history which will be enriched with time.

The form of the retreat inscribes the cardinal axis on the site. The retreat serves to place us in the world, acting as a mechanism for reorientation, providing a concrete placement and direction in an abstract world.

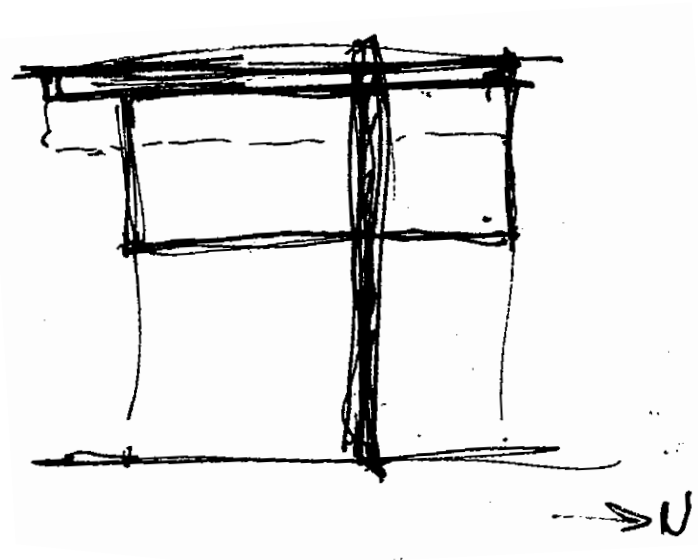
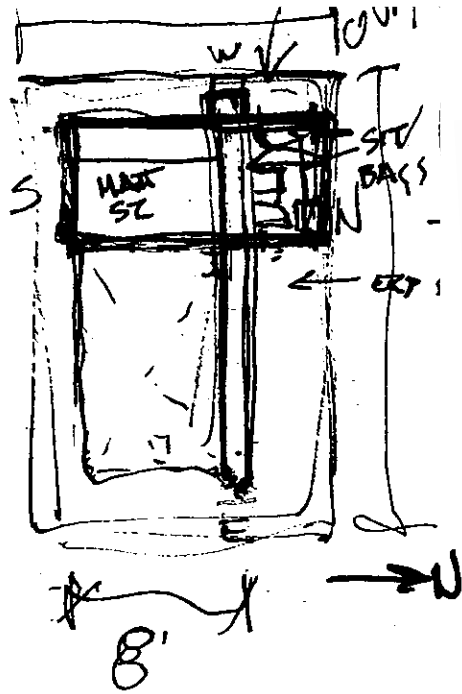
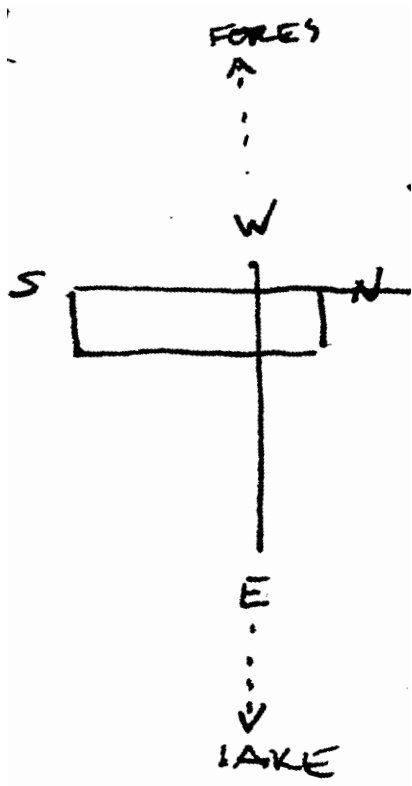


Figure 24

23.02.16
Early design sketches.
Concept. Plan. Section.

“...if one designs to construct a dwelling...consider first how slight a shelter is absolutely necessary.”

- *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau

The retreat is scaled in proportion to its occupants. This creates an intensity of direct habitation which informs a unique set of rituals and routines that shape the experience of dwelling at the retreat. One awakes when rested, eats when hungry, sleeps when tired, and is free from the construct of time which dictates daily life.

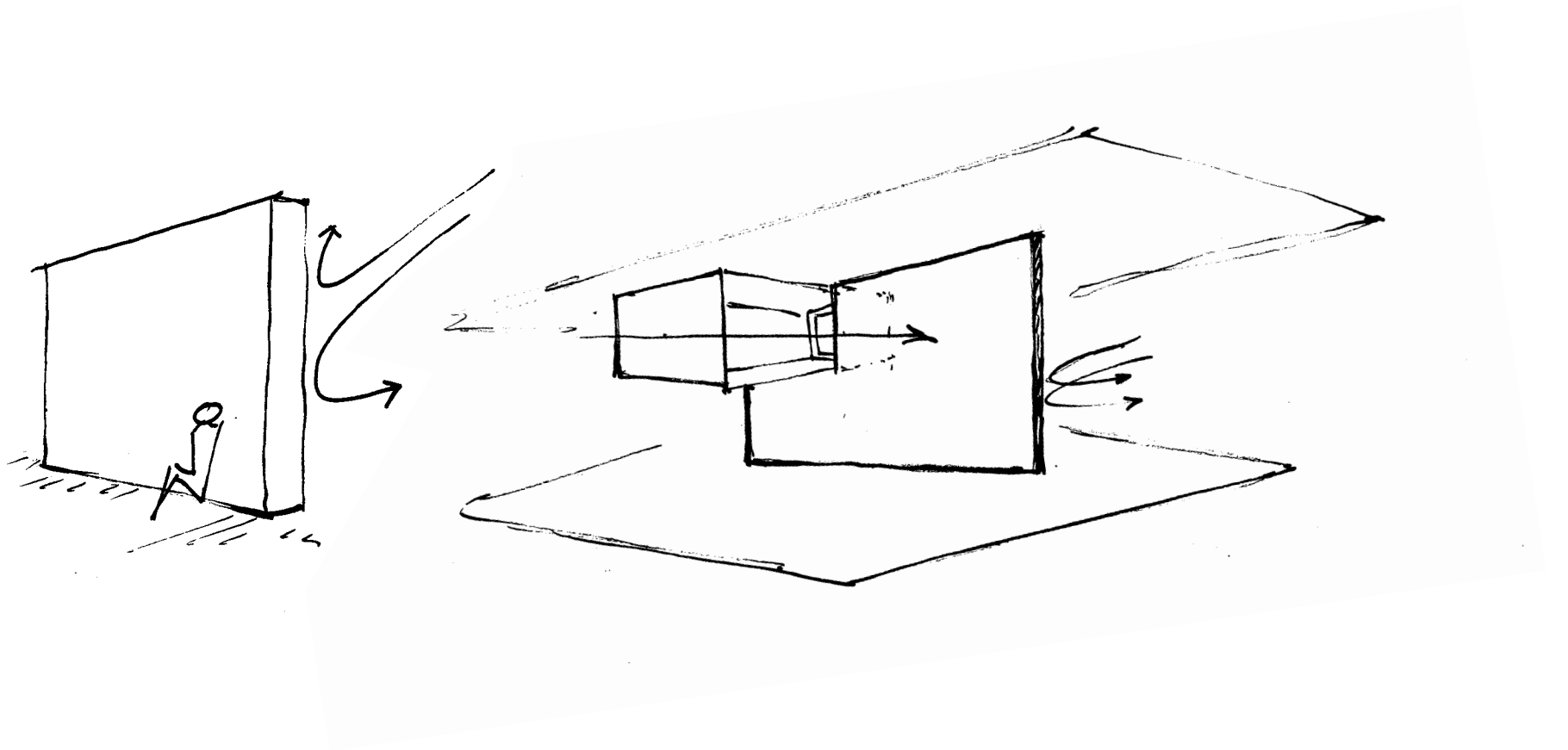
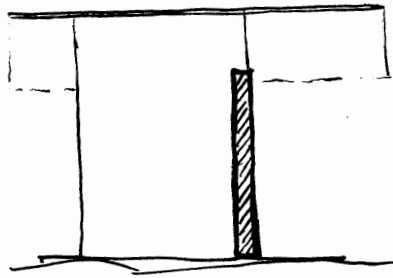


Figure 25

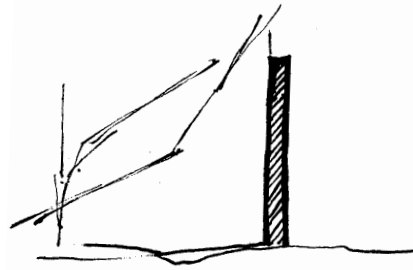
The retreat has long been understood as the built expression of man's relationship to the natural environment. The concrete block wall provides protection from the malevolent north, and represents the historical relationship between man and the wild in Canada. The loft volume punches through the block wall framing a view to the north, representative of the transcendence of a survival relationship to the natural environment in favour of a leisure relationship.



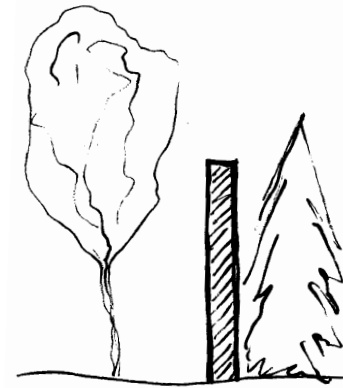
Pre 2016



2016



2080



2150

Figure 26

Temporality and permanence are evident in the occupation and materiality of the retreat. The occupation of the retreat is in constant flux in response to temporal environmental conditions. At a larger scale, long after the wood structure of the cabin decays, the block wall will remain as a windbreak still providing a minimal level of shelter.

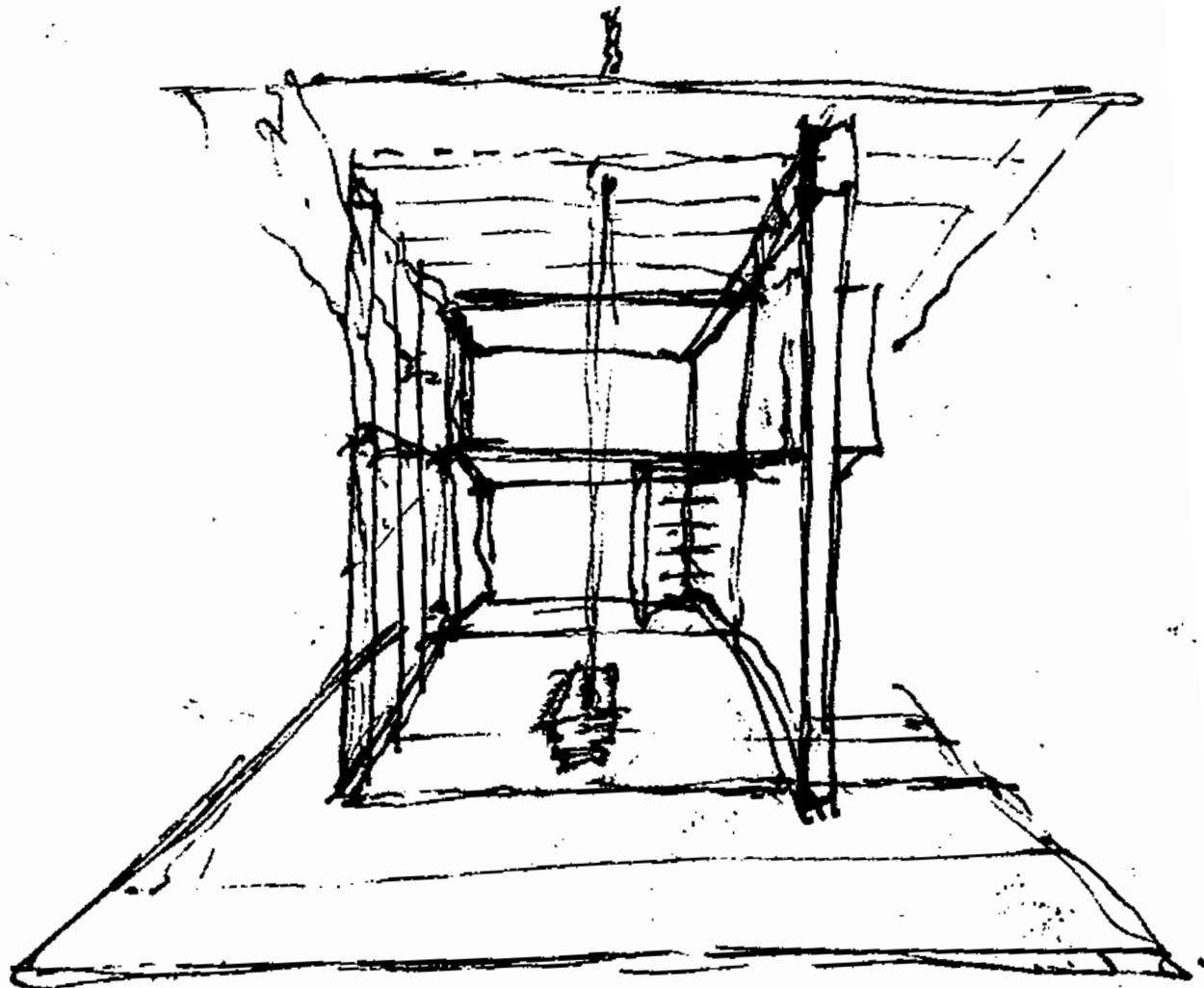


Figure 27

23.02.16

Sectional Perspective.

The desire for a small, off grid retreat is a response to the suburbanization and commodification of the retreat, where large, luxurious second homes are indelicately placed on lake front lots, recreating the (sub) urban conditions which the retreat is intended to be a reprieve from. Conceived as a minimal shelter providing a basic level of amenity and comfort, the retreat encourages interaction with the surrounding forest and lake. The simplicity and spartan accommodation is indicative of this return to nature. Lastly my own skill, schedule, and budget were to be considered, all of which prohibited anything more than a small, simple retreat.



Figure 28

8.04.16

1:1 Partial Mock-Up

The mock up installation was a chance to test aspects of the assembly and gain a sense of the spatiality of the 64 SF main living space. The primary design change resulting from this exercise was the reduction of the stud spacing from 24" O.C. to 18". While the wider spacing would have been acceptable, the 18" spacing added structural stability. The experience of inhabiting the installation was comfortable with one or two people. The mock up also fulfilled a larger intention of the design brief, as an immersive retreat within the busy context of the school at the end of term.

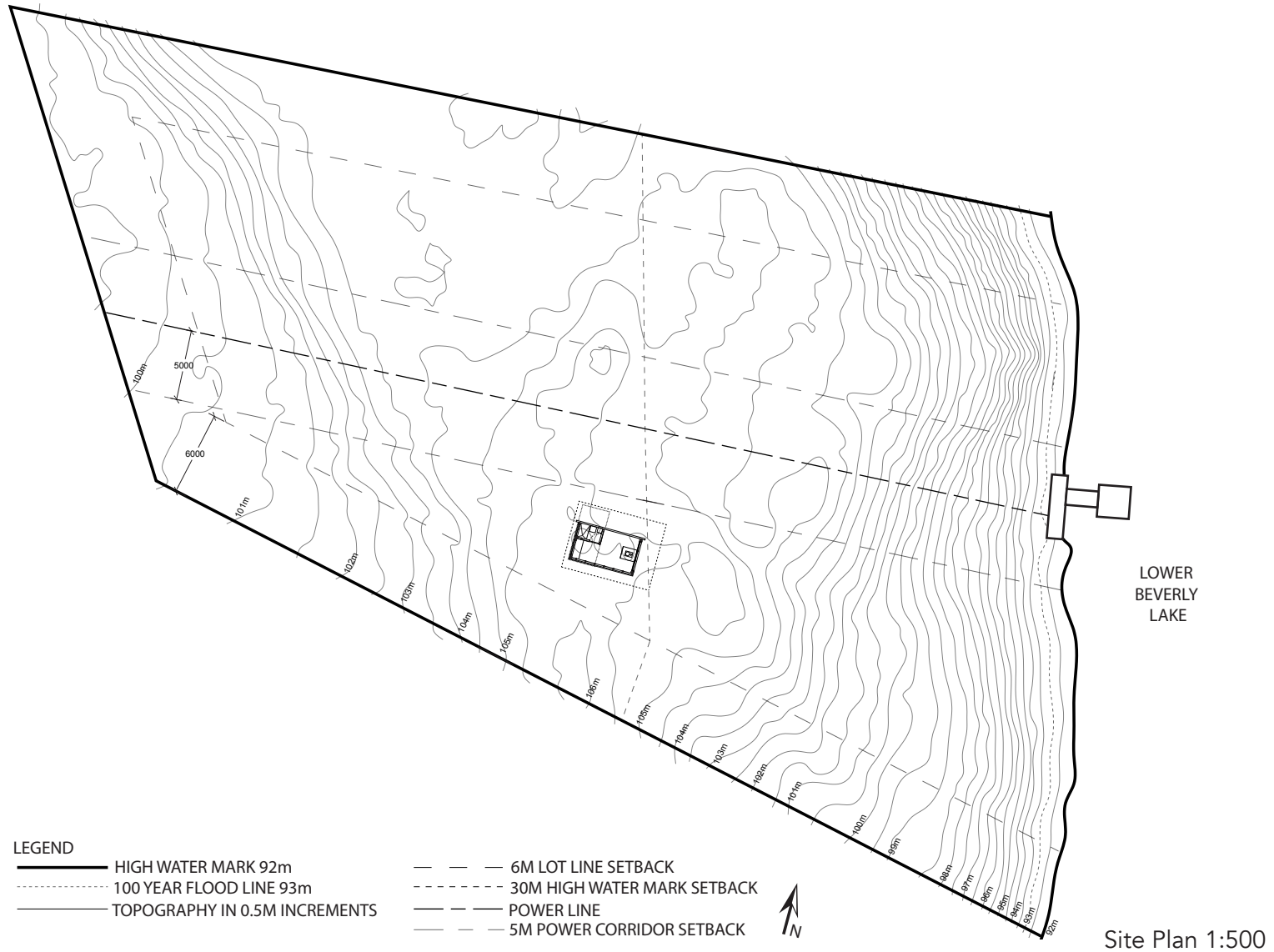
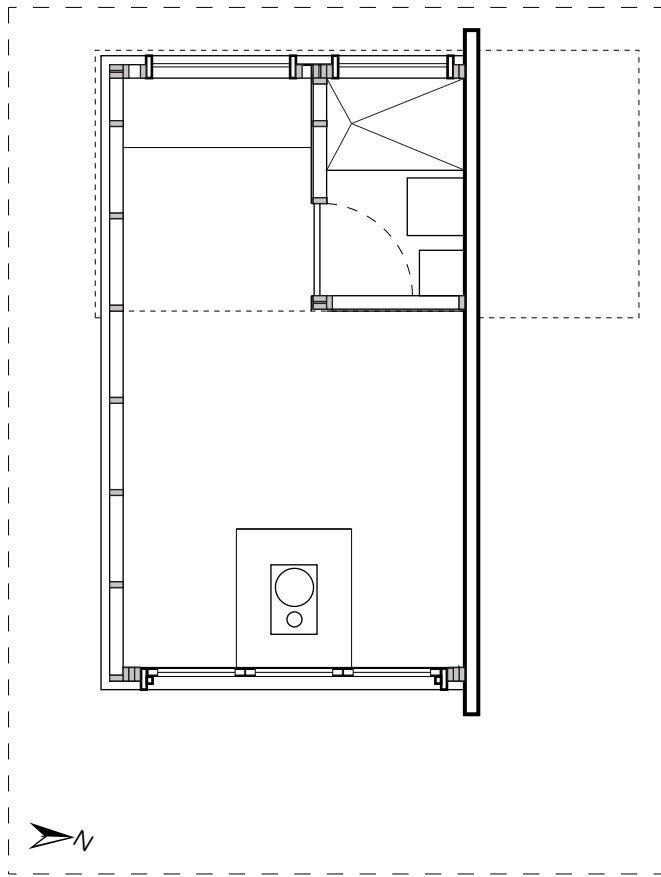
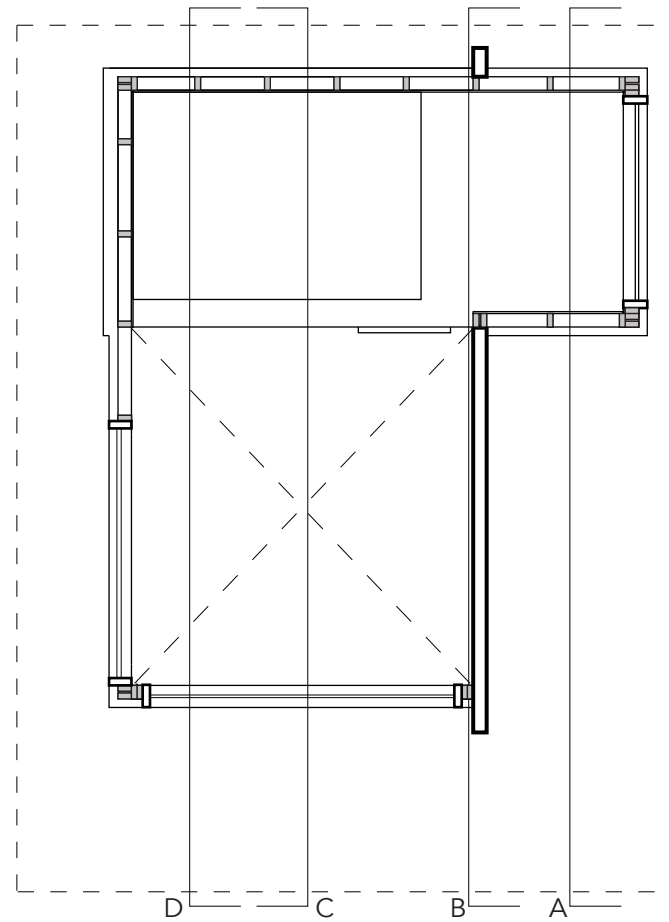


Figure 29

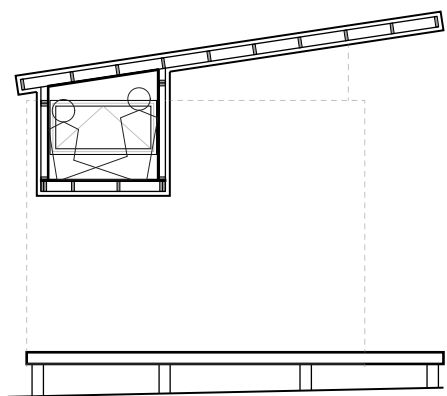


Ground Plan 1:50

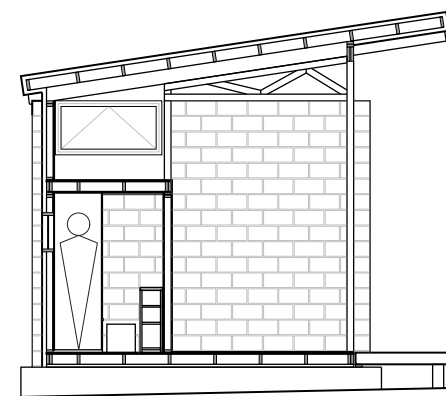


Loft Plan 1:50

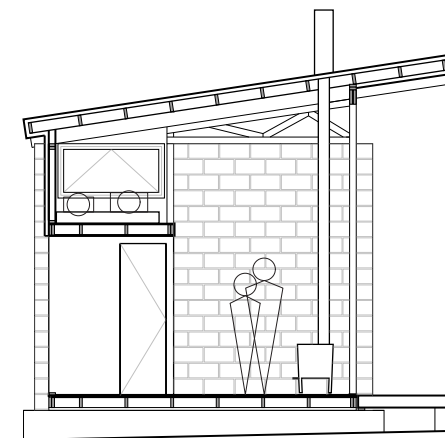
Figure 30



Section A 1:100



Section B 1:100

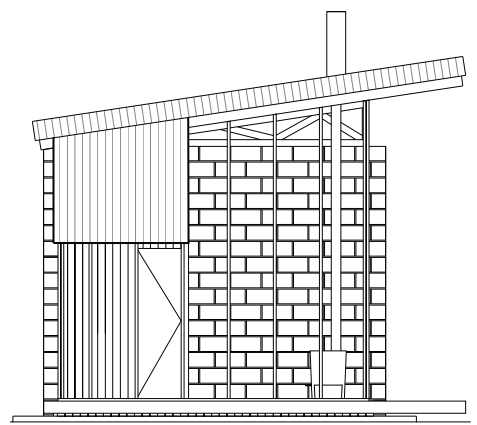


Section C 1:100

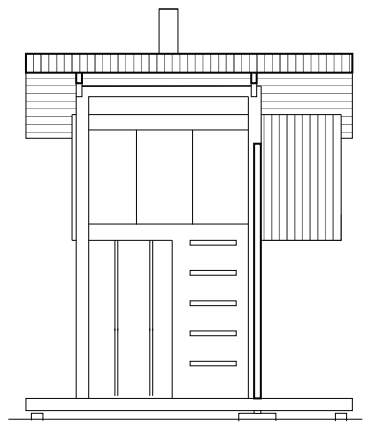
Figure 32



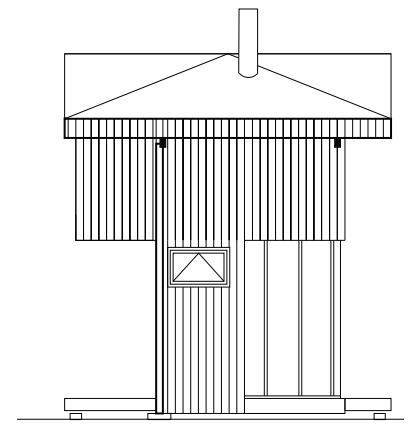
Island Section 1:750
Figure 31



South Elevation 1:100



East Elevation 1:100



West Elevation 1:100

THINGS BORROWED

“It is difficult to begin without borrowing, but perhaps it is the most generous course thus to permit your fellow men to have an interest in your enterprise.”

- *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau

		MAY					JUNE				JULY					AUGUST				SEPTEMBER			
		1-7	8-14	15-21	22-28	29-4	5-11	12-18	19-25	26-2	3-9	10-16	17-23	24-30	31-6	7-13	14-20	21-27	28-3	4-10	11-17	18-24	25-1
RUSS	BOAT & MOTOR																						
PARENTS	LADDER																						
	PRY BAR																						
	STAPLE GUN																						
	MASONRY CHISEL																						
	FRAMING HAMMER																						
	SLEDGE HAMMER																						
	CHAIN SAW																						
	CIRCULAR SAW																						
	JIG SAW																						
MIKE MARX	MAINLAND DOCK																						
	FRIDGE & KITCHEN																						
JOHN & LAURIE	GRINDER																						
NORM & JOANNE	BUNKIE																						
ART & CHERYL	SPRAYER																						
	CLAMP																						
BILL & CHRIS	RAKE																						
	WHEEL BARROW																						
	20' LADDER																						
CHARLIE HEALEY	BOAT MOTOR																						

Figure 33

There was a body of tools used over the summer that were borrowed in addition to the tools I owned. A number of people lent me tools, thus taking an interest in my project. The community of people who lent tools, or provided support and encouragement was unexpected, but crucial to the success of this project. Highlighting these tools makes apparent the effort, and implements necessary in realizing this project that are otherwise not acknowledged.

The tools I borrowed fall into five categories:

Things I knew I needed and could borrow instead of buy. These were mainly the things which I borrowed from my parents. For the most part, these ‘core’ tools were on site for the duration of the project.

Things I forgot. These items are seemingly obvious tools, that I inexplicably did not think of in planning for the construction of the retreat. These tools were lent to me by others on the island.

Things that made working easier. These are tools that I could have operated without, but which made the construction process more simple, quick, or easy.

Things that were unanticipated. As the title suggests, borrowing these items was the result of unexpected circumstances.

Things that improved day to day life. This category deals with things other than tools, that made dwelling on the island easier while building a place of my own.



Ladder



Pry Bar



Staple Gun



Masonry Chisel



Framing Hammer



Sledge Hammer



Chain Saw



Circular Saw



Jigsaw

Figure 34

Things I Knew I Needed and Could Borrow Instead of Buy

Ben & Mary Lynn Benninger

Although I had very little help during the construction of the cabin, my family provided support in many ways. As I accumulated construction material before the build began, their basement became a storehouse. They were also generous in lending tools, and a car, for the duration of construction.

The first weekend in May marked the move to the island. This was the first time my family saw the island and the building site. Any skepticism they had was affirmed when they saw the challenging site, a steep slope rising 14m from the shore up which all the building materials had to be carried.

The long days of construction, often ended with a call home, providing an update on the days events and letting my family know I had survived another day unscathed. It was not until August that my parents returned to the island. By then, the cabin enclosed. What they had previously understood through drawings and diagrams could now be inhabited.



Rake



Wheel Barrow

Figure 35

Things I Forgot

Bill & Chris Dunlop

After renting a cottage on the Blackjack Island for a number of years, Bill and Chris built their modified A-Frame cottage in 1997. Since then, Bill has helped to build a number of other cottages on the island. Bill's background in the trades gives him a broad range of skills that were assets in building, and maintaining his cottage.

My neighbours to the north, Bill and Chris would often visit me while working. Bill, in addition to an open invitation to use the tools stored in the crawl space below his cottage, often had advice or stories to share that helped in building the retreat.



14' Boat &
Johnson 9.9 HP
Outboard Motor.



Clamp



20' Ladder

Figure 36

Things That Made Working Easier

Russ Norris

Russ is a friend and contractor whose consultation throughout design and construction provided valuable practical insight. His early enthusiasm and involvement in the project brought him to site on a number of occasions in the design phase, as well as early in construction. He generously lent his boat and motor for the summer.

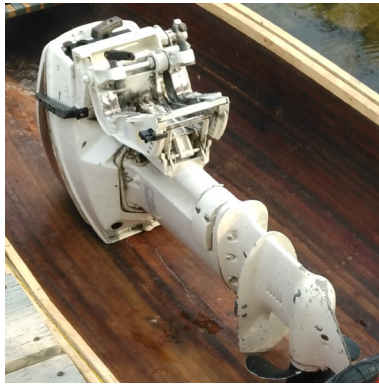
Art & Cheryl Lester

Art and Cheryl live locally, allowing them to spend time at their cottage through the week, a luxury of proximity most people do not have. Their cottage is located on a west facing bay, with great afternoon sun, and the best view of the sunset on the island. Its location, large deck, and fire pit make it a popular gathering place in the evening.

Art and Cheryl were always happy to help in whatever way they could, and frequently included me in local social life outside of the island. Art was particularly helpful in the last weekend of construction, spending most of the weekend helping to complete the soffit.



Grinder



Johnson 15 HP
Outboard Motor



Sprayer

Figure 37

Things That Were Unanticipated

John & Laurie Middleton

John and Laurie have had a cottage on Blackjack Island for nearly 20 years. Laurie is originally from eastern Ontario, and grew up going to her family cottage. John, an engineer by trade, has made a number of additions and improvements to their property - an 8' addition to the back of the cottage, an expanded covered deck, and a small bunkie. This incremental growth through the accumulation of multiple small additions is common in Ontario cottages.

I met John and Laurie in the middle of the lake when my boat broke down and they towed me back to the island. The tow was the first of many times they would help me over the course of the summer, be it with an invitation to dinner, donation of the sliding door, a helping hand on site, or loaning a tool.

Charlie Healey

Charlie lives at the mouth of Delta Creek, on the North East shore of Lower Beverly Lake. Having lived in the area his whole life, he seems to know everyone, and have done everything, earning him the title of the unofficial mayor of Delta. I would often see him working around his immaculately kept property when I would come and go from the mainland.

Charlie was a valuable source of local knowledge, guidance, and advice over the summer. When my boat motor was in the shop for most of May, Charlie lent me one of his which allowed me to continue to move materials to the Island quickly and easily, rather than having to paddle them over in a canoe.



Bunkie



Mainland
Docking



Fridge & Kitchen

Figure 38

Things That Improved Day to Day Life

Norm Hallyburton & Joanne Furletti

Norm has a long history on Blackjack Island, his father having owned a cottage on the island prior to Norm building his own. He has also helped to build a number of other cottages on the island. Norm's advice to me while building was "Just keep digging, just keep building."

I met Norm and Joanne my first evening on the Island. Joanne insisted that I sleep in one of their bunkies until I finished building. The bunkie became home for the next four months. Over the summer I frequently chatted with Norm, Joanne, or her son Tony, on their screened in porch overlooking the lake.

Mike Marx

Mike has had a presence on Lower Beverly Lake since 1987 when he purchased the *Creek Cottage* with his son. Since then, he has purchased two more properties, *Pine Lodge* on the eastern shore, and a West facing lot on Blackjack Island where he has built a cabin.

Mike was the first person I met at the lake when I put in the boat in April. The *Creek Cottage* is located adjacent to the boat launch used by the islanders, where Mike rents a number of docking slips, one of which he offered to me for the summer. Over the course of the summer Mike also lent the use of the *Island Cabin* for keeping and preparing food, as well as the *Creek Cottage* to accommodate the friends and family who came to visit.

The garrison mentality arose from the earliest relationship between Canadians and the landscape, one of survival. The nations earliest settlers were united in a common struggle against the physical and physiological frontier of the vast and imposing wilderness that enveloped and isolated communities and individuals. The garrison fortified itself against its malevolent context and turned inward as a self sufficient community to facilitate survival. Two hundred years later aspects of the garrison mentality would emerge again in the Canadian social fabric through the development of recreational lots at the far periphery of the country's urban centres. While increased technology and prosperity allowed greater access to these areas, the relationship to the landscape was still one of subjugating the wilderness where the new cottagers relied heavily on one another to establish a place for themselves in this new frontier. As recreational properties became more developed and luxuriated, this revival of the garrison mentality and the sense of community it brought was lost. There are, however, discreet instances where aspects of the garrison mentality are still present in the sense of isolation and corresponding community that develops. Island dwellings are one such place.

Living on Blackjack Island for the summer revealed an unexpected expression of aspects of the garrison mentality in a contemporary context. The physical and perceived isolation of the island creating a strong micro community among fellow inhabitants. Assistance was offered freely, whether a tow when the boat broke down in the middle of the lake, or a hand during construction. Tools and materials are widely shared on the island with the understanding that "if you use it, replace it" and "once it is on the island, it doesn't leave." The latter resulted in the donation of a sliding patio door from a neighbour who was replacing it. Meals were often shared, especially on weekends when islanders would return from their urban lives.

CONSTRUCTION

Every building is created twice.
The first creation is mental, conceived by the right-brain imagination.
The second creation is physical. A series of actions which result in the
manifestation of an abstract idea.

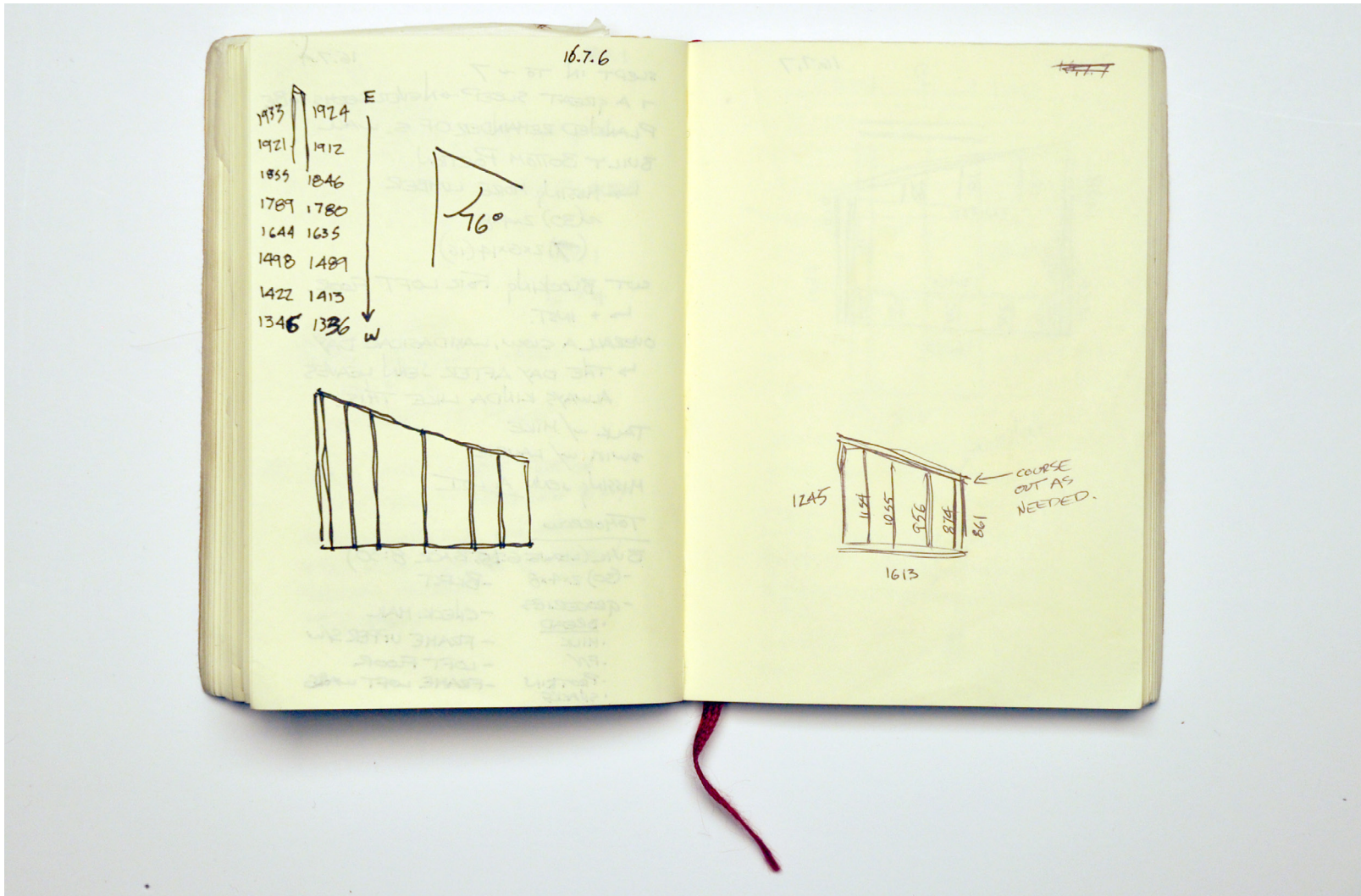


Figure 40

80	30kg bags of concrete mix	3	3x100' rolls of tyvek	9	cases laminate flooring
50	30kg bags of mortar mix	4	packages of 2000 3/8" staples	1	roll laminate flooring underlay
400	liters of water	12	rolls tuck tape	7	8' lengths of quarter round
40	8' lengths of rebar				
220	4x8x16" CMU	4	36x86" rolls of black aluminum screen	1	Jotul 602 Stove
1	6"x8' sonotube	100	SFP 1x2x8 strapping	10	5x18" sections of black stove pipe
4	adjustable beam seats	53	14sf packages of pine board	1	5-6" stove pipe adaptor
		4	12"x10' rolls of black aluminum fascia	1	Cathedral Ceiling chimney kit
95	SPF 2x4x8			2	6x24" chimney sections
10	SPF 2x4x10	2	rolls Grace Select roofing underlayment	1	6x36" chimney section
20	SPF 2x6x8	20	1x3x12 strapping	2	tubes of high heat silicon sealant
12	SPF 2x8x8	30	2x2x12 strapping	3	48x76" stoveboard
25	SPF 2x6x14	500sf	Hygrade Slate Gray metal roof	2	Stoveboard spacing installation kits
		1	package 1" roofing screws with washers		
34	PT 2x6x8	1	package 2-1/2" roofing screws with washers	1	24x80" solid pine door
16	PT 5/4x6x8			3	nickle door hinges
		1	6' sliding glass door		
4	3/4" standard spruce plywood	3	22x66" fixed windows	18	3/4" black iron floor flanges
19	1/2" standard spruce plywood	1	21x25" Awning Window	4	3/4x36" lengths black iron pipe
35	15/16" finished pine plywood	1	21x48" Awning Window	3	3/4x18" lengths black iron pipe
		1	24x53" Awning Window	7	3/4x24" lengths black iron pipe
3	buckets 3" spiral ardox framing nails	2	cans spray foam	20	3/4" black iron 90 degree elbows
3	buckets 2 1/2" deck screws			2	3/4" black iron 'T' joints
100	black 2" construction screws	1	roll foam gasket	18	3/4x3" lengths black iron pipe
10	3/8x6" expansion anchors	2	exterior solar wall mounted lights		
8	3/8x8" expansion anchors	1	package wood shims	1	bamboo counter top
2	boxes of 1-1/2" ardox finish nails			1	24x32" Shower Base
100	framing cleats				

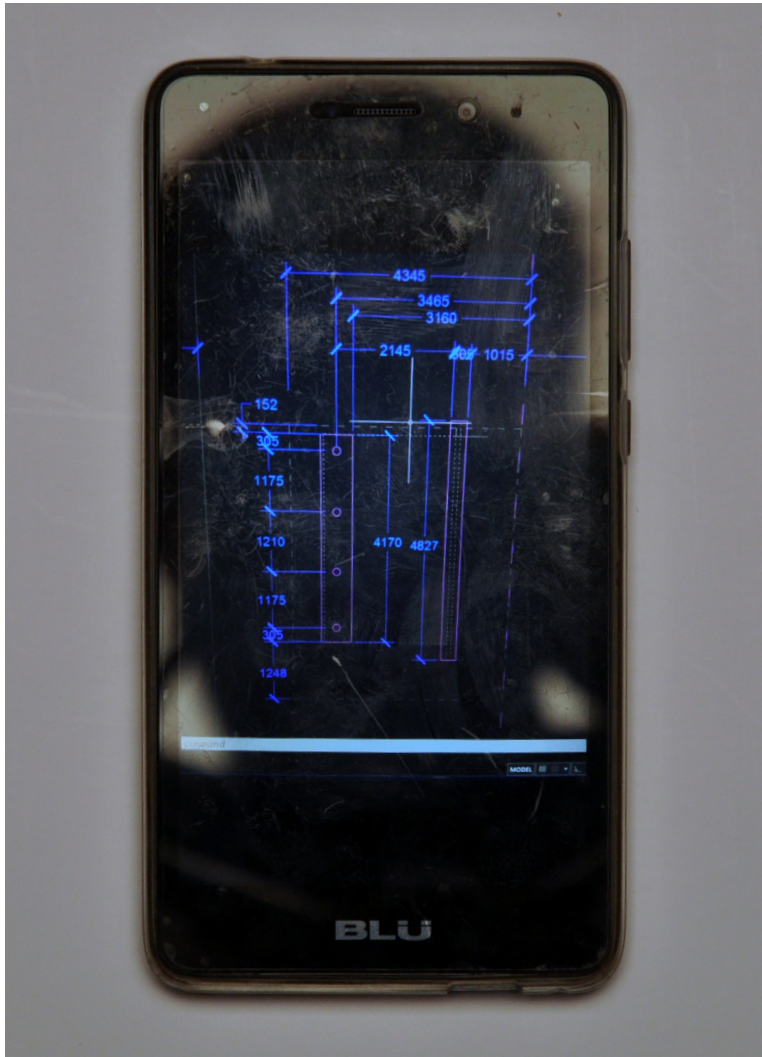


Figure 41



8.5.16

Up early after a cold and rainy first night on the island. I began to make distinct the beaver path leading from the dock to building site, clearing the many small maple and birch trees along its edges. By noon a clear path has been established and an area for material storage cleared west of the building site.

With the building site cleared, I have begun to reconcile the abstract drawings to the actual site conditions by staking the four corners of the roof overhang, and within that area, the areas to be excavated for footings. The actual condition of the building site continues to be more clearly revealed and understood through the removal of overburden, and an intimate understanding gained through doing these actions directly, physically with axe, shovel and rake.

“Going onto site with a ball of string and stakes, you learn a lot.”
- Paul Syme

Even with a topographical map provided by the conservation authority, there exists a discrepancy between the site conditions designed to, and the reality of the character of the site which can only be reconciled through direct interaction. The removal of the subsequent layers of distance, undergrowth, and overburden reveal the true grade, and underlying geology of the building site. As a familiarity with the site is developed, a sensitivity to the natural contours and pathways of the property informs site work. A Beaver sleuth where saplings were dragged from the interior of the island to shore becomes the pathway from the dock to building site. A meandering path through the forest to neighbouring properties is tread over time.



Figure 42

Selection
Loading for transportation to mainland storage
Unloading and storage at boat launch*
Loading onto boat or barge*
Boat and barge to island*
Unloading materials onto dock*
Carrying materials up the hill to site*
Storage on site
Preparation for use in construction
Use in construction

* Denotes material handling not required in mainland construction.

Building on an island necessitates the paramilitary exercise of transporting materials across the lake. The additional steps in getting materials to site create inefficiency in material handling. An estimate 25-30% of the construction time was taken up in moving materials from the mainland to Blackjack Island. This runs counter to modern construction methods which maximize efficiency in material handling, but is suited to the process of building a retreat of one's own.

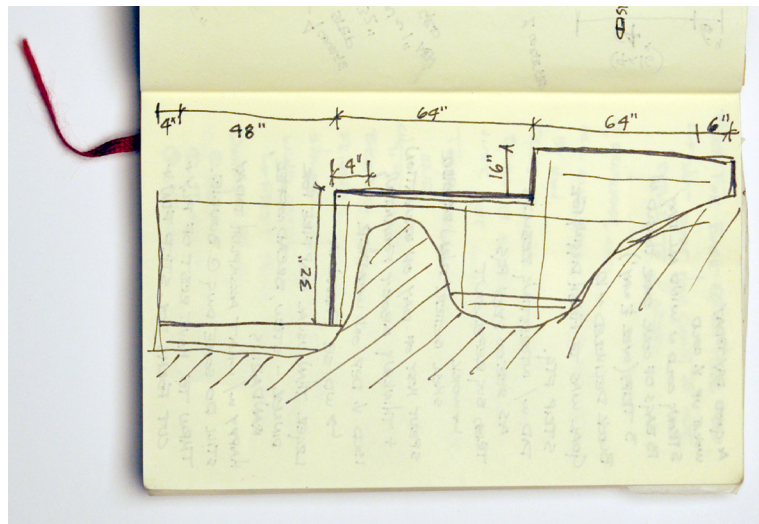
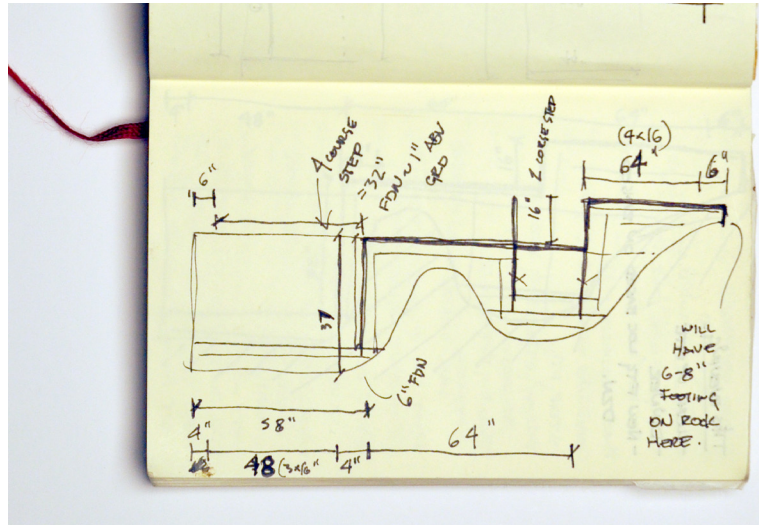


Figure 43

16.5.16

I have only just completed excavation and am already facing significant extra work and delay. Based on the test holes dug on a previous site visit, bedrock was anticipated to be no more than 12" below grade. At the west end of the excavation for the strip footing, rock is 4' below grade. The shape of the bedrock exposed in excavating the foundation necessitates a step footing meaning more concrete and rebar will be needed. This will add an additional 2 weeks to the schedule before I can begin laying block for the north wall as each pour will need to cure for a week before the next. The unexpected challenges begin.

Excavation was intentionally kept to a minimum due to the island site prohibiting the use of heavy equipment, and the difficulty of digging in a forest by hand. The excavation that was required was completed in only two and a half days, but required a reconception of what it meant to dig, and how tools were used to accomplish this. The primary tools used were an ax and 5' pry bar. The ax to cut through the tangle of roots, and the pry bar to remove the large rocks encountered. A shovel was only used to clear any soil or clay which was loosened by the previous actions.



Figure 44







Figure 45



Two types of footings were used, each suited to a different purpose and conceived of in different manners. The north footing is a formed strip footing which rests entirely on bedrock. The design driver for this footing was functionality as it is required to carry the weight of the block wall. The south footing was originally intended to be four 6" concrete piers set 4' below grade. After spending time on the island, and the local input of those who build there, the design was changed to a 6" floating slab with four 6" concrete posts rising 2' above the slab. This type of footing is common on the island for buildings of similar size.



Figure 46

The crisp lines of the concrete footing against the organic form of the underlying bedrock are a striking juxtaposition. This is a key detail of where the precise geometry of the manufactured meets the natural, a detail which can be understood as representative of the project as a whole. The retreat set simultaneously within and against nature, seeking to engage with it.



Figure 47

3.6.16

This morning began with 3 boatloads of 10 blocks each being brought to site. The blocks are the most difficult of the materials to carry from the dock up to site thus far. Unlike the bags of concrete, which I could put on my shoulder, my skeletal structure carrying most of the load, two blocks at a time are carried placing all the strain on arms and shoulders. There will be over 100 such trips up and down the hill between the dock and pile of blocks on site.

6.6.16

The voids of the 4x8x16 block do not pass all the way through the block as expected. The bottom of these voids needs to be chipped out with a masonry chisel and hammer for the wall to be reinforced and grouted solid. A number of blocks split in unexpected ways, damaging the face of the block. These have to be discarded or used below grade as the face of the block is exposed as a finish on both the interior and exterior.



Figure 48

4.6.16

I hate laying block. Hopefully it is only laying the block for the stepped footing below grade that is this unpleasant, and things will get better as the wall goes up.

11.6.16

I am now past the steps in the footing and will be laying even courses of 11 blocks each. The first two full courses will be grouted solid, then continuing with every other void reinforced and grouted solid. Each end void, and where the framed walls tie into the block will also be reinforced and grouted solid. I really don't like laying block, but it is getting better. There is a clear improvement over the lower courses I laid.

“Okay, I'll learn block.”

A limitation of any designer is the available skill to properly execute their design. Being both the designer and builder, I became acutely aware of how my own limitations as a craftsman began to restrict design. The decision to incorporate exposed concrete block was a key moment in the design process. A willingness to risk developing a new skill through the construction of this project enriched the design process and final design of the retreat. By successfully implementing the block in construction, the experience of dwelling there will also be enriched.

Research, and advice from those familiar with masonry construction, began to mitigate the risk of using block as a prominent feature. Advice during construction from others on the Island familiar with the material from building their own cottages led to minimal mistakes during construction, and those few mistakes only being made once. Patience, common sense, and extensive use of a 4' level resulted in a straight and true block wall rising in the forest, around which the rest of the minimal shelter would be built.



Figure 49

In any act of making there is an expected physical outcome, and the possibility to bring new definition to an object's context. The contrast of the block wall standing alone in the forest heightens this redefinition of the retreat's context which takes place at the scale of the building, site, and island. At the scale of the building, the wall became a datum from which the rest of the construction would be built. The contextual redefinition of the site and island are physical in the form of the pathways linking the dock to the retreat, the retreat to neighboring properties, and notional in how all things became referenced back to the retreat, a new point of reference from which the unfamiliar natural surroundings could be better understood.



Figure 50



7.5.16

The first day at the island has been one of extreme lows and highs. It began with a kayak trip to the island to get the boat in which the kayak rolled as I tried to get out at the island soaking me and my cell phone. After this I realized I forgot the gas line for the boat and had to go back to the mainland to get it. After I finally got the boat going, it stopped working on my first trip back from the mainland. Thankfully my neighbours, John and Laurie, were on the lake and gave me a tow back to the island...

4.9.16

Repeated wakes from speedboats buzzing past the slight point my dock is on over the Labour Day weekend, and low water levels from the dry summer caused my boat to bounce off the rocky bottom and develop a leak, nearly sinking it. This morning was spent getting a fiberglass patch kit, finding and patching the leak. I will get the boat back in the water tomorrow and we'll see if the patch holds..

“Skill is a trained practice, modern technology is abused when it deprives its users precisely of that repetitive concrete hands on training. When the head and hand are separated, the result is mental impairment.”

-*The Craftsman*, Richard Sennett

The troubles with the boat over the summer highlighted a reliance on certain working methodologies, and specific equipment crucial to how I was operating. Building a small, simple retreat on an island suggests ways of working that favour the manual, with limited use of mechanical means. When critical pieces of equipment which make operating in this context easier such as the boat and motor fail, a manual contingency is required. This contingency often required additional time and effort to complete what otherwise would have been a simple task. These unforeseen interruptions forced the development of a new skill, or prompted a new relationship to my surroundings.



Figure 51

20.6.16

Floor framing was completed today. Everything had been pre-cut, and just needed to be placed, squared and fastened. The extra care and time invested in ensuring the footings were level paid off with almost no adjustment required to level the floor framing in both the N-S and E-W directions. Even without the sub floor installed, having something level to work on has made working noticeably easier and faster.

Any perceived level or flat ground on the island is not truly level. No where was this more true than on and around the building site. Anything remotely close to flat or level was a result of human intervention. While this did require extra care in construction to ensure the building remained level, it also created opportunities to integrate the existing topography into the design. For example, the retreat was sited on a relatively flat portion of the site, just past the top of the hill rising from shore. This maximized privacy from the lake, and allowed one to step from the retreat onto the deck and onto the top of the hill looking over the water maximizing the view to the lake.



Figure 52

25.6.16

After spending the morning replacing the communal mainland dock with a group of other islanders, I began framing the walls. The walls are anchored to the solid cores of the block wall and act as buttresses. I am glad to finally be stabilizing the block wall. Although it has withstood wind gusts of 60km/h and greater in the last couple of days, it will be good to have the peace of mind that the wall will now be further strengthened.

2.7.16

As the framed walls continue to go up, a sense of space is developing beyond the planes of the floor and block wall. However, I realized I made a mistake in the order in which the walls were constructed. For all the walls to have been built laying flat, and then tipped up into position I should have built the south wall first, followed by the east wall, then west wall and finally the interior walls. By beginning with an interior wall framing, placing all of the other walls became more difficult.

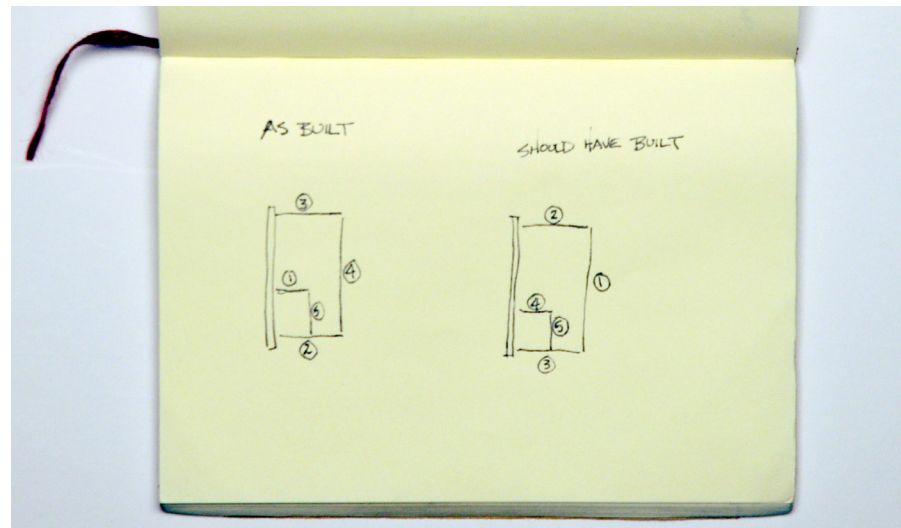


Figure 53



Figure 54



Figure 55



Figure 56



Figure 57



Figure 58

09.07.16

The Big Rain.

Today was one of the few rainy days we have had at the lake. Precipitation seems to have bypassed this area this summer, either following the course of the St. Lawrence to the south east, or the Rideau Canal to the south west. The rain today has made up for the lack of rain to date, with around 6" falling in three major waves over the course of the day, the first this morning followed by two in the afternoon. At its peak the rain obscured the mainland shore only a couple of hundred yards across the lake. The dry soil was unable to absorb the rain as quickly as it fell. Small rivers formed on the dry ground flowing into the lake. It is impossible to safely work on the roof framing. Much of today was spent performing maintenance on tools and equipment or 'rained in' at neighbouring cottages.

Dwelling on an island heightens one's awareness of their relationship to weather and climate. Life becomes attuned to phenomena beyond one's own control. Weather - the state of the atmosphere at a place and time - can create unsafe conditions on the lake restricting access to the island. The weather can vary daily, or even hourly, with increased wind creating rough conditions on Lower Beverly Lake in the afternoons between 4 and 6 pm. Seasonal conditions render the island inaccessible during the shoulder seasons, and in mild winters when the lake does not freeze sufficiently to provide safe access.

This precarious relationship to weather and climate results in a sense of acute isolation, at times peaceful, more often a reminder of one's insignificance against the forces of nature, reminiscent of the historic survival relationship with the wild. The latter was continually diminished in relation to the progress of building the retreat. A place of simple shelter offering protection from, and a place amidst the forces of nature.



Figure 59

11.7.16

The building process is a series of successive challenges increasing in difficulty. From delivering materials to the island, building the block wall, to placing the beams and joists, the completion of each task led to another seemingly more impossible than the last. Overcoming each challenge depended on problem solving, and an awareness, and testing, of material limitations as well as my own.

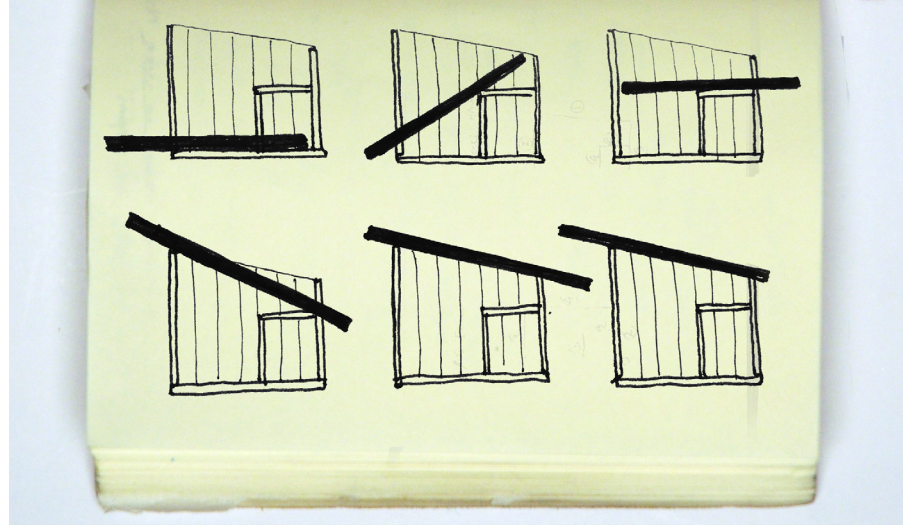


Figure 60



Figure 61

13.7.16

Working on the rafters has been hard on my body as I am perpetually crouched on the beams while manhandling the 2"x6"x14' joists into place. My knees and back are taking the worst of the abuse. It is daunting to work on such a skeletal structure, especially when using both hands to complete a task.

The retreat provides the opportunity to engage in productive labour through activities that enliven and enrich the body and intellect. These are the fundamentals of otium, the tangible results of which satisfy in ways the abstract results of our day to day work fail to satisfy.

Engaging the head and hands in productive labour develops knowledge that informs the immediacy of the current project and future work. The practice of otium in building and inhabiting a retreat of one's own is not just a hedonistic experience, but one which furthers architectural understanding, and how a building comes together not just in theory, but in reality. In this expression of otium, design and the act of making can occur in parallel, one informing the other. In this case, where the designer and maker will also be the inhabitant, design can be seen to continue indefinitely as future development of the retreat takes place.



Figure 62

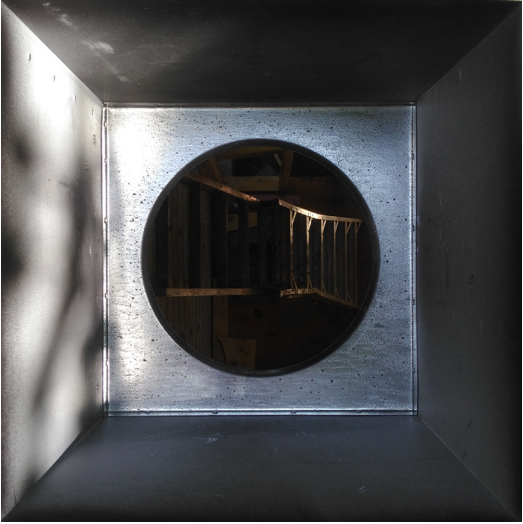
20.7.16

The roof deck is on.

A pristine plane amongst the trees from which a new relationship to the context of the forest and lake is found.



Figure 63



20.7.16

It feels strange to cut a hole into this newly completed object for the chimney penetration. With so little else done it seems out of sequence to be installing this now.

A building is a culmination of moments of action which submit to the intention of the greater whole, that is the realization of the design and vision of the project. No one action is greater than the intended sum of its parts, despite there being key moments of accomplishment in a project in which sudden great progress seems to have been made. In reality this is the coming together of a series of smaller actions to achieve an anticipated result. At times these moments are uncomfortable, and appear as if occurring out of order, but when put in the context of subsequent actions required to achieve the desired outcome, find their place in submission to the project's realization.

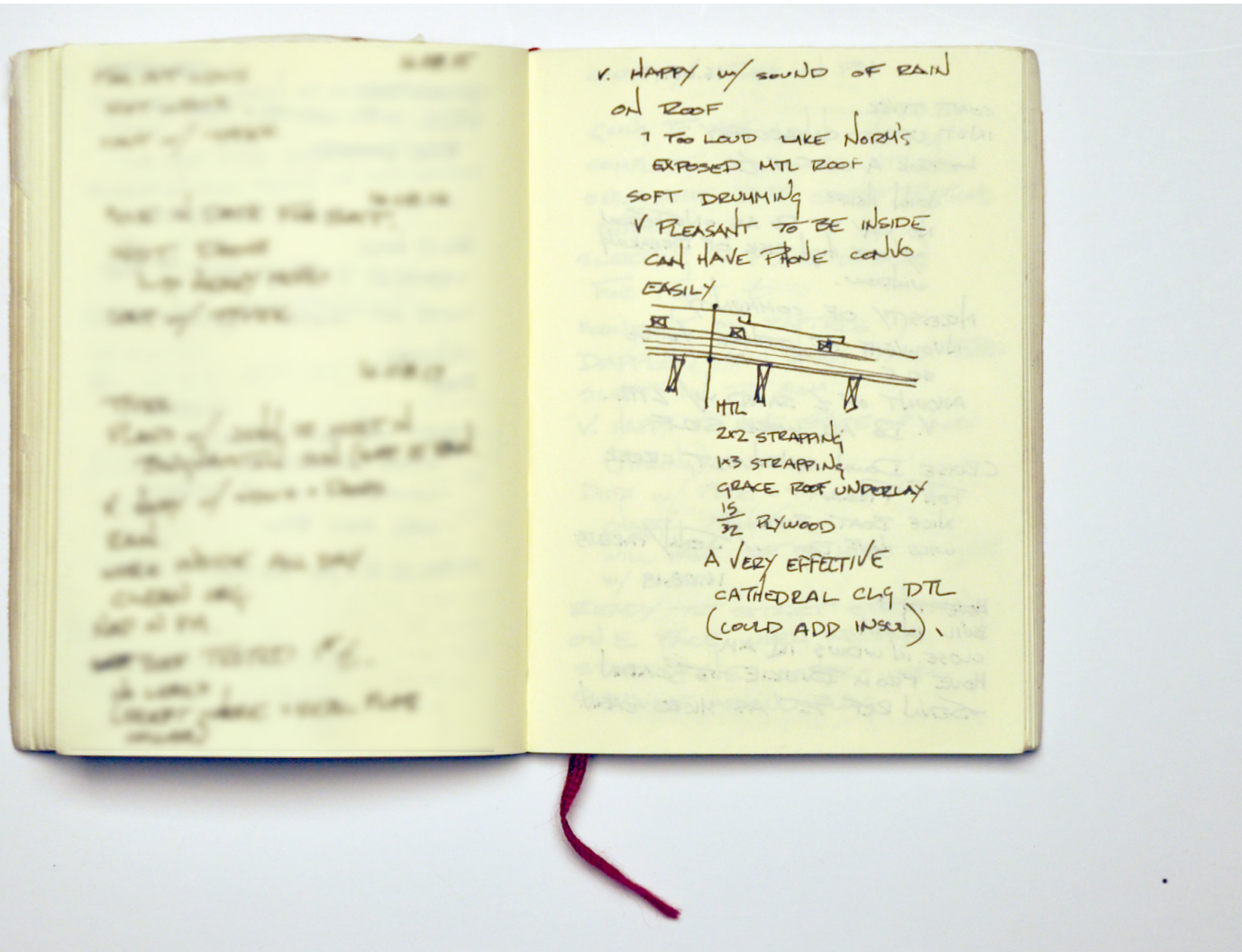


Figure 64

When sourcing materials for the retreat, I spoke with a number of companies regarding the possibility of the donation of building materials. One of these companies was Hygrade Roofing, a company well known locally for metal roofs. Hygrade generously agreed to donate materials and installation of their metal roofing system.

Hygrade's roof assembly is distinguished from typical sheet metal roofing by its dual strapping, and proprietary metal shingle profile. The dual strapping reduces noise from rainfall in cathedral installations as was the case with my roof, and the bundles of metal shingles are easier to deliver to the island and install than 3x20' lengths of typical corrugated metal roofing.



Figure 65

21.7.16

Today I completed the Tyvek skirt around the perimeter of the roof, laid the Grace roofing underlayment provided by Hygrade as part of their roofing system, and installed the 1x3 strapping. My pre-insallation responsibilities are now complete and the roof is ready for installation. The roof is now waterproof!

Because the roof construction used the underside of the roof deck as an interior finish, there was a concern that the nails used to secure the strapping to the roof deck would, if not carefully placed at the joists, puncture the roof deck causing aesthetic and safety problems. In discussing this with Hygrade, it was agreed that I would be responsible for laying the roofing underlayment and the 1x3 strapping. This way I could ensure that the strapping was fixed into the joist and not just the roof deck. The secondary 2x2 strapping would then be nailed to the 1x3s using a shorter nail that would not penetrate through the deck.



Figure 66



9.8.16

After a series of delays on my part, the Hygrade steel roof installation was completed today! Local installers Brandon and Ty arrived in the morning, and made quick work of the relatively small install.

I could not be more happy to have the roof installation complete! I am looking forward to the first rain, being able to listen to the drum of rain on the metal roof (and to see if it is watertight!).

The roof installation was the only 'sub contracted' part of the project, and overall went very well. Any possible conflicts were identified and resolved early. Hygrade, and their installers were great to work with. The only downside was that the detail intended to prevent nails from puncturing the roof deck did not work in all cases. The power of the nail gun, and or, nail placement in the 2x2 strapping, resulted in the nails still puncturing the roof deck in some places. This was no one's fault, but will need to be remedied for occupant safety.



Figure 67

The negative of the hammer is a reminder of the unseen tools that were crucial to the realization of the project. One never sees the hammer, and may not recognise the signs of its use in a completed building. The hammer, like many other tools whose use will never be recognized in a finished work, was instrumental in completing the framing. Its impact indispensable but unapparent.



Figure 68





Figure 69



Figure 70

The detailing of the deck at the entry to the retreat ties the project to the landscape. The deck bridges between the entry and knoll at the top of the hill rising from shore. One takes a single step down from the retreat onto the deck; one step down onto the large flat stones removed while excavating the footings, and one more down to grade.



Figure 71

19.8.16

Move in day.

While still far from finished, the cabin is now fully enclosed and tonight will be the first night sleeping in a place of my own! Inhabiting a place still under construction is not ideal, and creates an interesting tension between dwelling and construction site. This will no doubt change how I work within the retreat, (limiting dust, sawdust and dirt) as well as limit my freedom to inhabit the building as a true dwelling.

20.8.16

I could not have asked for a more beautiful morning after the first night in the cabin. The dappled sunlight through the trees, poured through the clear-story window. I am looking forward to watching many more sunrises from the comfort of the loft.

The retreat is the architectural mechanism through which otium can be experienced. Dwelling at the retreat configures in rich and multiple ways daily and seasonal phenomenon and activities in such a way that they are acutely experienced. The nature of dwelling at the retreat requires an investment of work in the form of daily and seasonal tasks, and maintenance. Engaging in these tasks at the retreat is seen as pleasurable, developing a tension between what is work and leisure. It is in this tension between what constitutes work and leisure that otium exists in the activities undertaken that serve to enable one to dwell as they desire while there.



Figure 72

31.8.16

I continued preparing the pine board cladding for installation today. I am using the torch at the dock due to the extremely dry summer, and risk of fire when charring the board in the forest. While I have been getting the desired results, it requires a lot of propane. I just finished the second tank and will need at least a half a tank more to complete charring all of the cladding.

Shou-sugi-ban is the Japanese term for the ancient practice of charring wood surfaces in building. Beyond the semi-iridescent black finish which this gives the wood, it also solidifies the natural resins in the wood, and adds a layer of carbon that is resistant to insects, decay and weather. The intent with this project was to not char the wood so heavily that it would crack, but to treat it with the flame just enough to blacken it so that the cladding would appear as a black monolith from a distance, while still preserving the appearance of the wood grain when viewed closely.



Figure 73



09.09.16

The retreat uses a rainscreen enclosure where Tyvek applied over the sheathing acts as a drainage plane. Two layers of 1x2 strapping create an air space between the charred pine board cladding and the drainage plane, allowing any moisture that gets past the cladding to drain to the bottom of the wall, and air to circulate behind the cladding preventing rot.

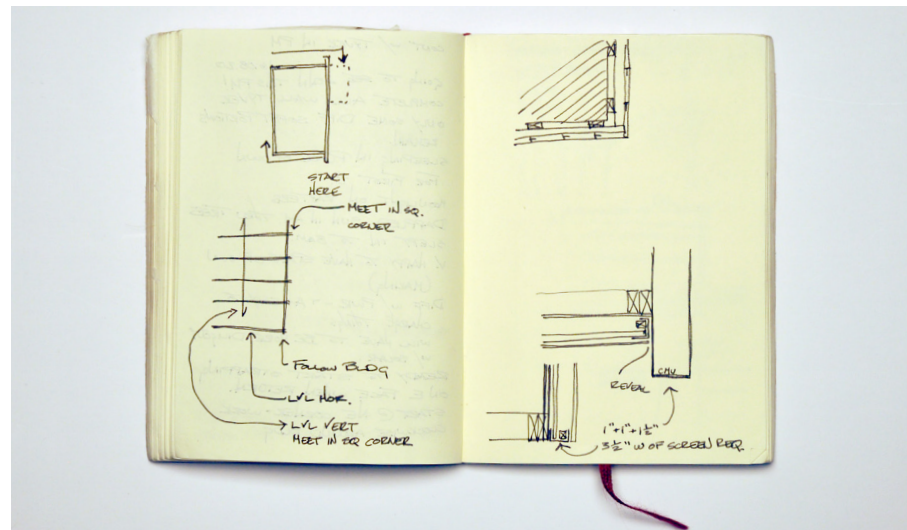


Figure 74



Figure 75

A rule of thumb when estimating time to complete a task:

Add $1/3$ t when working on a ladder

Add $1/2$ t when working overhead

Double the amount of time when working overhead on a ladder



Figure 76

The cladding and soffit are the same material, with different treatments. This was an intentional decision to limit the material palette, while using material treatments to highlight the distinction of architectonic elements. The untreated soffit contrasts the darkness of the blackened cladding and block, creating relief in the area sheltered below.



Figure 77

Material procurement and lead times did not cause any delays in the project schedule, however delaying placing the window order for the north and east windows made their installation more difficult than necessary. The window order should have been placed as soon as framing was completed. Instead, cladding was nearly complete when the order was placed. As a result, the windows did not arrive on site until after the enclosure was completed and had to be installed as retrofit windows. This involved trimming the nailing strip from the window perimeter and screwing through the jambs into the framing. The unintended benefit of this is that replacing the windows in the future will be easier as the cladding does not need to be removed to access the nailing fins.



Figure 78



16.9.17

The wood stove was among the final materials to be delivered to site yesterday. Having been of substantial preoccupation since early in the design, and one of the first items purchased for the construction of the cabin, installing the stove was of particular satisfaction. While a culminating moment in the construction of the retreat, this also used what was by far the most inferior product in the entire build, the stove pipe. Nearly impossible to snap together, not sealing tightly when joined as the flue, and requiring immeasurably more time and effort than necessary to assemble, in future I would use any other brand.

The wood stove is suited to use in a simple off grid retreat as the surrounding forest acts as a fuel source. The stove appeals to all of the senses - the aesthetics of the stove itself and dancing firelight within, the smell of burning hardwood, the comforting feel of the dry heat, and taste of slow cooked foods prepared on the cook top.

The placement of the stove in the north east corner of the retreat puts the stove adjacent to the block wall which can be used as a thermal mass to capture and then radiate heat once the fire has gone out. With a maximum burn time of about 6 hours, the thermal mass maintains a comfortable interior environment overnight.



Figure 79

The material pallet was restricted to simple raw materials:

Untreated pine

Charred pine

Exposed concrete block

Cast Iron

The simple, spartan accommodation of the 106.6 SF retreat necessitated a limited material palate which focused on materials that resonate with the natural surroundings.

A RETREAT OF ONE'S OWN

“Why cannot every life hold out hope for a resonant, centering datum? This need not keep others at bay, cast them as strangers, or be situated outside the city. The hut’s memory suggests strategies for making such a datum. It might frame in rich and multiple ways itself, its inhabitants and their relationships, its equipment, its social context, the theater of passersby, the sun and tracking shadows, glimpses of the sky, breeze and wind, rain and snow, flora and fauna. It might be neither too big nor unnecessarily flexible, instead helping its occupants to configure intensities of situation. It might encourage reflective moments thought at a slower pace. Configuring daily, weekly, and seasonal routines, such a datum could dignify and sustain any life, attuned to the commonplace closely watched.”

-Heidegger's Hut, Adam Sharr



Figure 80

Over the course of the summer, a property without an architectural or personal history began to bear traces of the intensities of activities which were taking place there. In gaining familiarity with the site, I tried to be sensitive to the particularities, features, and naturally occurring paths of movement through the property. One such pathway which was well tread by the end of the summer is the path across my property from the retreat, past the fire pit, joining with the path at the neighbouring cottages. During the first month of my time on the island I took a number of routes from the building site to my neighbours' that seemed more direct or interesting, but continually, returned to this route; a natural path of least resistance which I was drawn to.



Figure 81

In contrast to the extraverted nature of urban life, where one is forced to constantly be negotiating interactions, the retreat seeks to be introverted, set within the nature found at the island rather than forcing nature out of its path. The retreat does not attempt to be a display of social or public standing as is a common occurrence with new cottage constructions. Within its privacy the retreat of one's own can be expressive of the self, being shaped, growing and adapting in response to one's development. The retreat is a welcoming place for its inhabitant, however, as hard as one may try for a place hidden from the rest of the world, that is impossible in the contemporary context. Thus, the retreat still considers the public and private. Nestled within the forest, and set back from the top of a steep rise from the shore, there is privacy from the public face of the lake, but ample views from within and around the retreat to the water. More privacy is afforded the further one moves back from the shore into the forest.



Figure 82

The geometrically defined object within nature emerged as a reoccurring theme throughout the project. The inscription of the cardinal axis on a blank site plan in design, the detail of the footing meeting bedrock, the stack of blocks in the forest, and the roof plane amongst the trees, all culminate in the object of the completed retreat. The final product does not blend into the site, but becomes a focal point in its context, redefining its surroundings in relation to it. While an interesting way to understand architecture and its relationship to its context, I find this somewhat disappointing in this case. I am not sure what I was expecting, perhaps something more humble in character. Perhaps this dissatisfaction is a result of how the infinite possibilities imagined in design slowly become limited and defined in the completed project.



Figure 83



Figure 84



Figure 85

The creation of a building is in itself the creation of a mirco-climate. In the case of the retreat, a variety of mirco-climatic conditions are also created in its immediate vicinity. The large overhangs provide outdoor spaces which are shaded, and sheltered from the elements. The block wall has noticeable diurnal effects. During construction I would work on the south side of the wall in the morning hours, and found working on the north side of the wall more pleasant in the afternoon. The thermal mass of the block also serves to moderate the internal temperature of the space, causing a noticeable difference during the day and night between the interior and exterior environments. As I continue to spend more time at the retreat it will be interesting to observe how the micro-climates within, and around the building will continue to inform how one inhabits both the indoor and outdoor spaces.



Figure 86



Figure 87



Figure 88

The hearth is a central feature of the retreat. Originally centered on the east wall, the donation of the sliding door precipitated a design change where the stove was moved adjacent to the block wall, better utilizing its thermal mass to retain, and re-radiate heat from the stove. The scale of the space in relation to the stove, and amount of glazing in the sliding door meant that moving the stove did not impact the visual relationship of looking past the hearth to the forest and lake beyond that was so heavily considered in design.



Figure 89



Figure 90



Figure 91



“And all the spaces of our past moments of solitude, the spaces in which we have suffered from solitude, enjoyed, desired, and compromised solitude, remain indelible within us and precisely because the human being wants them to remain so...In the past, the attic may have seemed too small, it may have seemed cold in winter and hot in summer. Now, however, in memory recaptured through daydreams, it is hard to say through what syncretism the attic is at once small and large, warm and cool, always comforting.”

-*The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard



Figure 92

“With this more substantial shelter about me, I had made some progress toward settling in the world.”

-*Walden*, Henry David Thoreau

CONCLUSION

“I speak understandingly on this subject, for I have made myself acquainted with it both theoretically and practically.”

-*Walden*, Henry David Thoreau

The design and construction of a retreat of one's own was driven by the mutual desires to deepen an understanding of architecture and the retreat, and to create something tangible, beyond the increasing preoccupation with the virtual and abstract - a need to place myself in the world through the act of making. The completion of construction brought to a close the summer spent building on Blackjack Island, but it was not an end, rather the resolution of a set of thoughts and actions which allowed a number of new ones to begin to unfold.

Although the scope of work defined by the thesis may be complete, the development of a retreat of one's own is a process that continues to grow and adapt with its occupant. As a complementary environment to urban life, there is an increased flexibility for the retreat to be shaped by its occupant's own life, as can be seen in generational recreational properties where decades of growth and change are reflected in the numerous additions, and renovations. Future development of the retreat property will be informed by the actions and lessons of this first small intervention, enriched by the specific knowledge gained through occupying and operating on site, and the familiarity with the retreat's context, both immediate and extended.

This project put me in the unique position of being the client, designer, and builder. Decision making and design changes in construction were simplified, however, there was an undeniable bias towards design in decision making. The client-architect relationship is inherent to the profession. Beyond this primary relationship the architect and client have the opportunity to redefine how relationships with consultants and sub-contractors are structured, and ultimately how projects are built. By foregoing the typical design-bid-build relationship where each party's interest in the project is often at odds with the others, in favour of a linear structure, efficiency in construction, and extension of design into construction can occur. This requires the architect to take the risk of developing additional skills, and taking on more responsibility in realizing their work.

As a self initiated project, the retreat provided a opportunity realize a built project in a context where small mistakes were learning opportunities rather than liabilities. The lessons learned span the entirety of the design and construction process, from the site planning, to unanticipated construction contingencies and the detailing of how different materials come together. I doubt that the lessons learned have ended with construction, but will continue as I inhabit the space and realize over time the impact of the decisions made over the life of the project. These lessons learned early in my career can be carried into practice, and leveraged in future work.

The retreat is a place uniquely my own, a welcome centring datum, and complementary environment to urban life. After a summer living on the island building a retreat of my own, I learned much about myself, the lake, and its surroundings, but have only begun to discover the wealth of local, personal, architectural, historical, and practical knowledge that can be found through the unique experiences found in *The Other Place*. I look forward to returning here in the years to come to grow and further develop the retreat as I continue to grow and develop as an individual, architect, and contributing member of the Blackjack Island community. I was welcomed to the island with graciousness and generosity. So much was given by others to help me establish a place of my own here. Having since made some progress toward settling in this context, I hope to reflect the same spirit of community with which I was welcomed.

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APPENDIX A

AS BUILT DRAWINGS

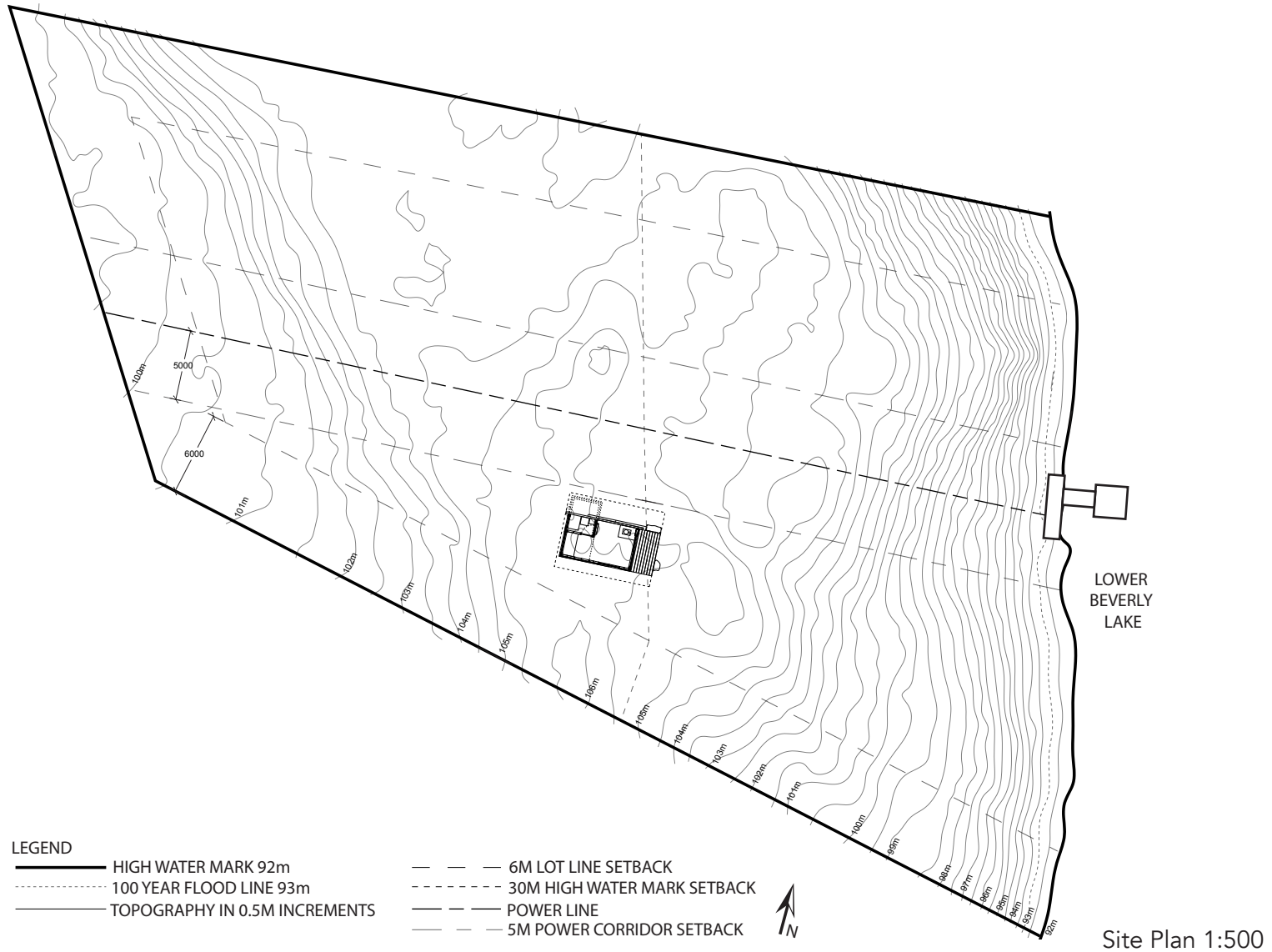


Figure 93

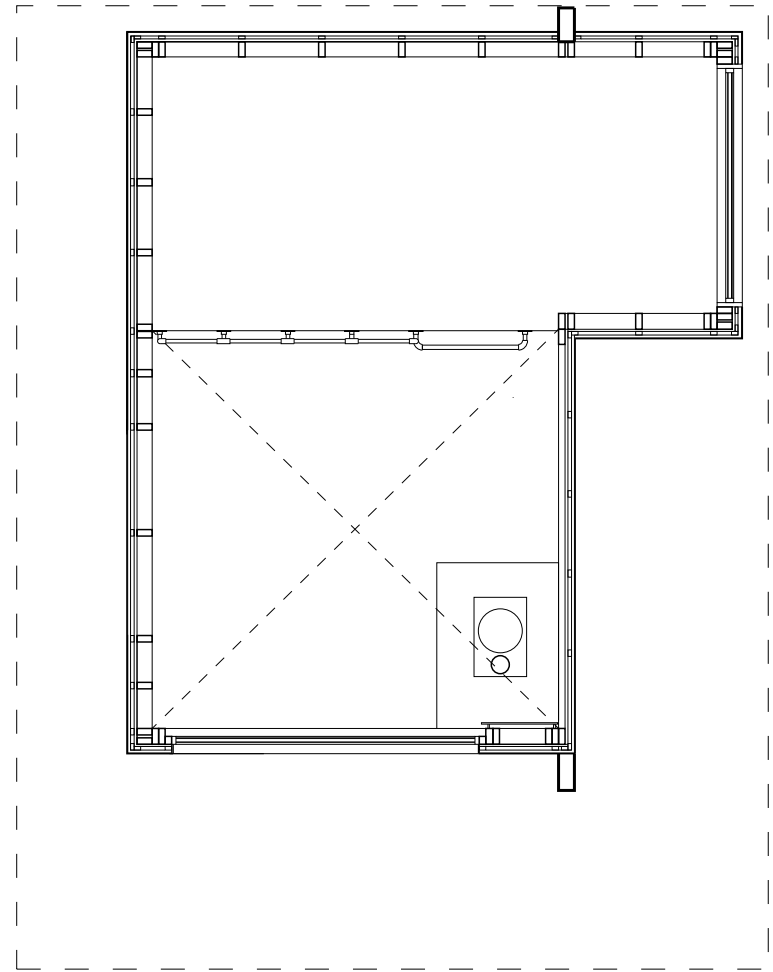
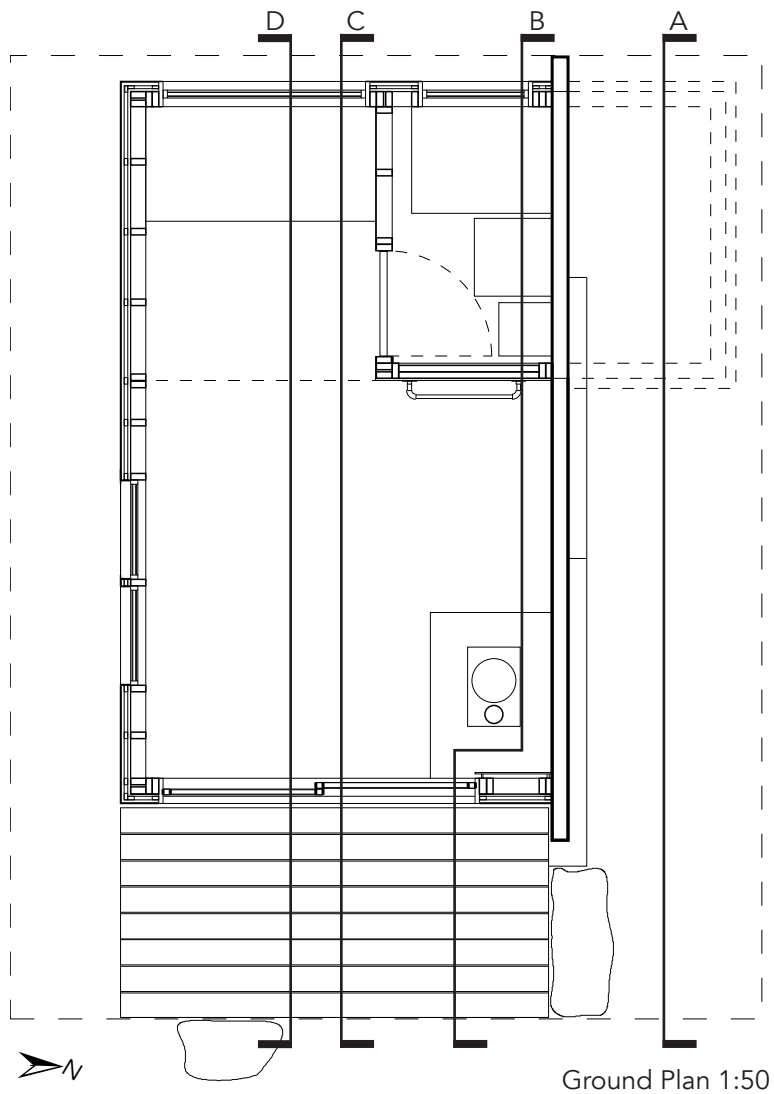
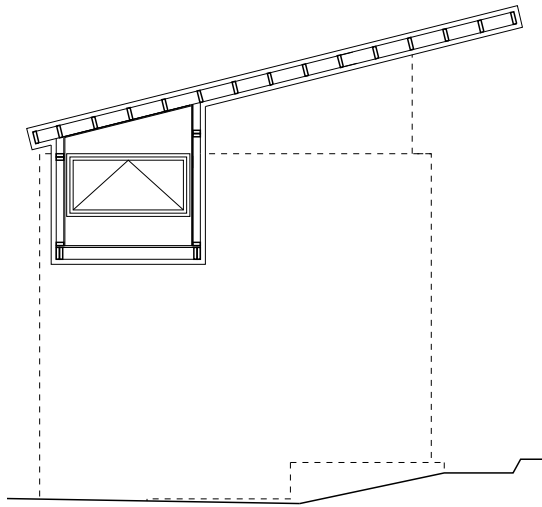
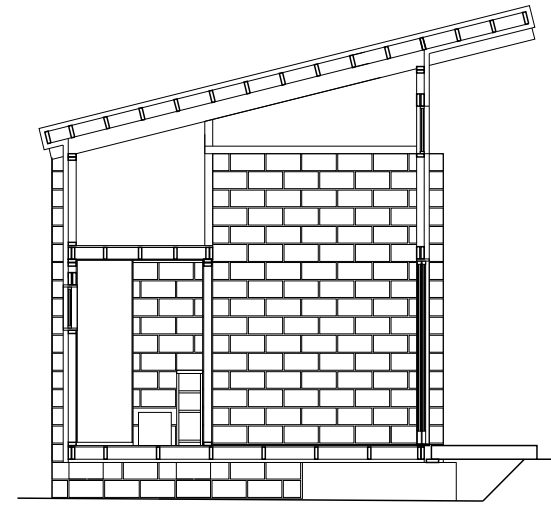


Figure 94

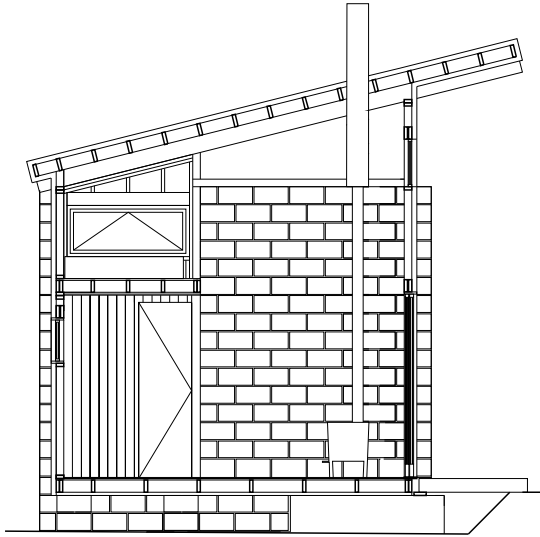


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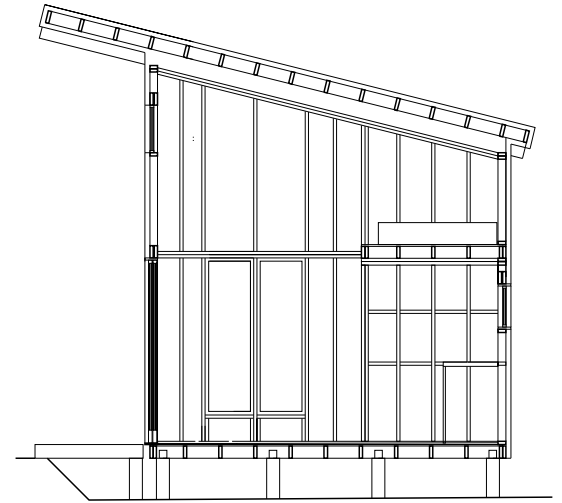


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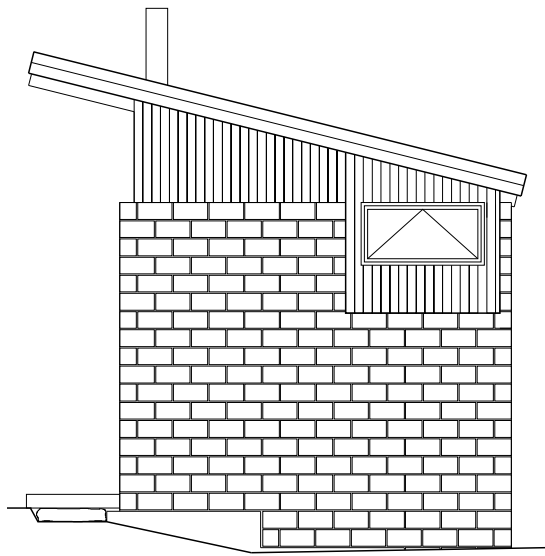
Figure 95



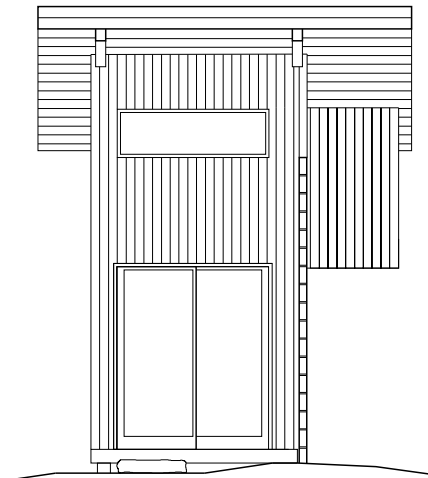
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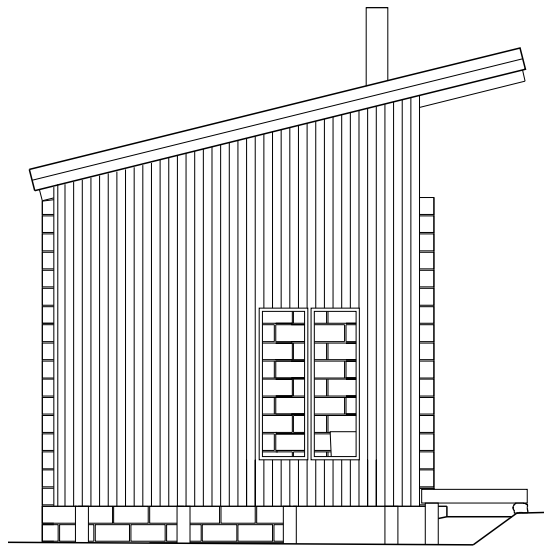


North Elevation 1:100

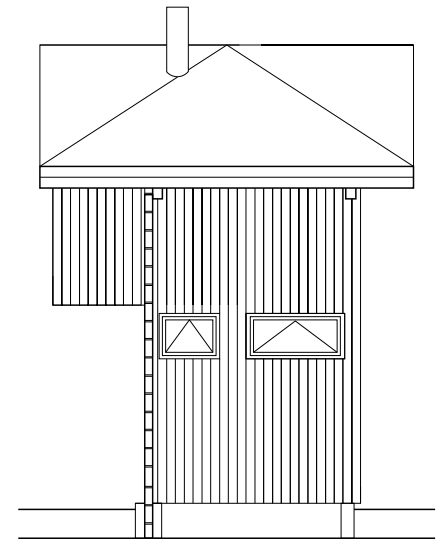


East Elevation 1:100

Figure 96



South Elevation 1:100



West Elevation 1:100