

**(Re)Connect:**  
Architecture and the Senses

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

I live in a society where a state of multi-tasking and over-stimulation is common. I am inundated with excessive information and seemingly addicted to distraction. My love affair with hi speed digital devices devours all sense of time and space. But in the process of making all information available to everyone, all the time, we are losing our connection with the value of direct experience. What I can see, feel, taste, smell, touch and hear is losing significance and with this loss I am becoming isolated from my own nature and perhaps even my own body.

In response to this contemporary condition this thesis proposes a place dedicated to rediscovering our innate sense of rhythm and to re-connecting with our place in the cosmos. This is not intended as a rejection of current technologies, but rather a place that examines the potential of architecture to bring us into the present moment. In doing so we are able to attend to the experience of being in our body and moving from moment to moment in the world; we learn to slow down and enjoy the incremental life of our senses.

The site for this exploration is an island in the rocky landscape of the Canadian Shield. Known as Twin Island, this place is the site of my family's cabin where I spend each summer. The journey to the island and the place itself are both a physical and spiritual symbol of transformation; of disconnecting then re-connecting. Architecture is used as an instrument to heighten one's awareness of the primordial power of water, stone, fire and darkness to spark the cosmological imagination.

Sinking deeply into her bed she penetrates earth, rock and ancient memory. Here, she finds her place. This is 'architecture minimum'; we are simply sheltered within the expanse of the universe.



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## INTRODUCTION

### *A New Awareness*

Embarking on this thesis I knew that it would be a design investigation; I am a student of architecture after all. I wanted to explore a topic that I was passionate about and I was compelled by my interest in place and identity. Although there were times of doubt, ultimately I knew that I needed to explore my personal connection to place which, for me, is Twin Island and the small cabin where I grew up.

The cabin is not the typical Ontario cottage where friends are entertained each weekend; this is a place for solitude and bonding within the context of our family of five. However, as I grow older it has become unusual for all of us to be there simultaneously. Last year, in the early phase of this thesis, I decided that I needed to encounter the island in a new way – on my own. As an attempt to alter my perspective even further I also decided that I would travel there at night. I arrived at the lake in darkness and canoed across the water by moonlight. Rather than stay at the familiar cabin, I pitched a tent at the far end of the island for the night. Getting around in the dark opened up an entirely new awareness of place; I could not rely on my eyes and memory. Instead, my sense of hearing and touch became incredibly powerful. This experience gave me an entry point for this thesis and a new vocabulary from which to design.

The process of creating a new architecture for the island was one that proved challenging for me as a designer. Working with a site that I was so familiar with is perhaps the ideal situation for an architect and something that, up until now, I had not had the opportunity to do. My time spent at the island provided me with a wealth of experience and knowledge about the place, to guide and enrich the design of a new building. But translating that experience

into a thoughtful and meaningful architecture did not come as easily as one might expect. Early iterations of the project came from what I describe as a 'top-down' approach, where I imposed a pre-existing concept onto the site. These designs were primarily planometric and lacked the tangible sensations and experiential qualities of the place. I soon realized that these were not satisfying solutions.

### Design Strategies

Casting aside my early attempts, I began a new approach which involved a combination of techniques. Rather than working on the project as a whole, I narrowed in on each place making moment. I took inspiration from the writing of Juhani Pallasmaa<sup>1</sup>:

Architecture of the fragile image is contextual, multi-sensory and responsive, concerned with experiential interaction and sensual accommodation. The architecture grows gradually, scene by scene rather than quickly manifesting a simple, domineering concept.<sup>2</sup>

Among the architects who are devoted to this type of design are Peter Zumthor<sup>3</sup> and Kengo Kuma<sup>4</sup>. Their practices include projects of varying scale and yet each building addresses issues of human experience and identity with a finely tuned level of specificity. Zumthor writes:

I'm concerned about the material, how things are put together, not the way it looks, but the way it is. I'm interested in the building itself, how you see it, how you feel it, how it is made, the building as a body.

-

Normal buildings, simple buildings, anonymous buildings - this is something that should be taught again. This is very interesting and important to us, the ability to see certain qualities in the ordinary and

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1 Juhani Pallasmaa (b.1936) is a Finnish architect and writer. Over the past decade much of the discussion of the experiential and the phenomenological has revolved around his writing, in particular his book 'The Eyes of the Skin' published in 2005.

2 Juhani Pallasmaa. *The Eyes of the Skin*. 196.

3 Peter Zumthor (b.1943) is a Swiss architect well known for his belief that architecture is not about theory but about experience; architecture is created for people and should evoke an emotional response. In 2009 Zumthor was awarded the Pritzker Prize and in 2013, the RIBA Royal Gold Medal. Among his noted projects are Therme Vals and the St. Benedict Chapel in Switzerland and the Bruder Klaus Chapel in Germany.

4 Kengo Kuma (b.1954) is a Japanese architect who strives for a level of transparency between interior and exterior through the use of light and natural materials. Since 2009 he has taught at the Graduate School of Architecture at the University of Tokyo.

to use it, work with it.

Kengo Kuma describes his architecture:

I prefer an ambiguous, unreliable condition, in which substance is scattered all over the place. I don't want to make particular architecture but to create a particular condition...More than, and prior to defining a style, what I desire is to create a certain type of place and a certain type of condition that can be experienced by the human body.

Alternating between active visualizations, narrative writing and digital collage I began to convey the moods and atmospheres I wished to evoke in the architecture. Ultimately this was a journey toward trusting my creative instinct: my body, my senses, my imagination, and translating what I have received from past experience.

### **Design Development**

As the design developed as orthographic drawings some critical questions emerged:

*Q: What should move? Building or body?*

The architecture is a fixed datum within the landscape; it does not instruct. Nature provides the cues and the body finds its place.

*Q: How can thresholds extend our comfort zone?*

Our skin is the first layer of protection between our self and our external environment, therefore, when unprotected, the skin allows us to experience the greatest range of conditions. This architecture very carefully and selectively closes in the body. The architectonics of floor, wall and roof act to simply enhance the experience by adding a layer of comfort. However, this remains quite minimal, not covering the body completely.

*Q: What are the limits of providing modern conveniences before they start to detract from the primordial quality desired?*

At one point the proposal included elements such as a solar hot water heater, solar powered lighting, a composting toilet, and a piped sink and bathtub. However, the current iteration of the design has gravitated toward the primitive, and has done away with all of these conveniences. The emphasis



is on architecture that is dependant on natural forces and the inhabitant to activate the space. The necessary requirements of light, warm water, heat and ventilation is provided by engaging nature and the elements.

*Q: How can the materiality enhance the quality of rootedness?*

The materials are sourced locally. The primary material, Eastern White Cedar is used for its natural anti-rot properties and its aromatic fragrance. As it ages the cedar will develop a silvery patina. Black granite tiles are sourced for the sauna floor as a reference to the primordial stone on which it stands. These materials possess a sense of time and place inherent to the site.

The result of this exercise is a place that attempts to evoke atmospheres and moods, making one feel a depth of time and groundedness in history and place. The building is “an architecture of courtesy and attention, it asks us to be humble, receptive, and patient observers.”<sup>5</sup> The new architecture aims to enhance the experience of the island through nurturing the body in which the human spirit resides. Above all, it provides a place where a sense of belonging is primary.



### **The Composition of Fragments**

My first attempt at composing this thesis resulted in two parts. The first part described the history of the site and the personal memories of growing up there. The second part contained the journey narrative through the proposed architecture. Upon revising the draft these two parts merged into one, weaving together memory, place and architecture. The result is a non-linear narrative that conveys the immersive experience of being in the present. Through images, drawings and text this thesis will carry you on a sensual journey across water, land and architecture. Perhaps it will conjure your own imagination of some place in your past. In the words of Gaston Bachelard, perhaps it will unlock a door to daydreaming.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Juhani Pallasmaa. *Encounters*. 196.

6 Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space*. 14.



Paradoxically, in order to suggest the values of intimacy, we have to induce in the reader a state of suspended reading. For it is not until his eyes have left the page that the recollections of my room can become a threshold of oneirism for him.



Each one of us, then, should speak of his roads, his crossroads, his roadside benches; each one of us should make a surveyor's map of his lost fields and meadows. Thoreau said that he had the map of his fields engraved in his soul.

Gaston Bachelard; *The Poetics of Space*



Fig.1: My studio desk at the School of Architecture.

## LONGING

I sit at my desk during another endless week. I arrive at my office every morning and stay until at least four or five o'clock. You'd think this would yield great results in productivity, but in all honesty this has not been the case.

Inside the office, the cacophonous sound of the air conditioning is relentless and as a result I have another headache today. My fingers are like icicles as I type on my keyboard and I'm wrapped up in my wool blanket in an attempt to keep warm. Outside it is 28°C.

My peers always praise this office – the solitude of being in a long line of cubicles without others looking over my shoulder. I sit surrounded by three white walls, fragments of sketches pinned everywhere, little notes and diagrams scrawled on post-its and piles of books that I have carefully organized. Through the window to my left I have a view over the rooftops. I know the river is down there, though I can't see it. I might be isolated, but by no means am I in solitude.

Without command my wireless internet connects when I turn on my computer. Currently I have seven internet tabs open. My phone buzzes on the desk as a new text message comes in. A new e-mail appears in my inbox; I read it, and then try to get back to work. Twelve minutes later I'm signing-in to Facebook to see what my friends are up to, then back to my inbox as e-mails flood in. A new thought pops into my head and in an instant I've opened a new tab in search of an answer. I am bombarded with more information than I can digest. This type of multitasking has become normal for me. I reluctantly admit that in the past few weeks I haven't gone more than thirty minutes without checking my email and I haven't turned off my cell phone in months.

I am a modern designer living in a world of instant connection to anyone or anything, at any moment.

But beneath the surface of being busy is a constant restlessness for solitude. I long to retreat from this place in order to disconnect so that I can reconnect with my roots. This is a universal desire for connectedness; of reuniting with my place in the cosmos.

### **Multitasking**

If you search the term multitasking you quickly see that there are two definitions. The term first appeared in 1965 in reference to computer processing capabilities.<sup>1</sup> But this term has come to be better understood in reference to the human ability to perform more than one task at a time. We pride ourselves on this computer-like function, but what had seemed like a coveted skill has proven to be problematic. “But one price of progress is seldom mentioned: a diminished life of the senses...as human beings we need direct, natural experiences; we require fully activated senses in order to feel fully alive.”<sup>2</sup>

In the process of multitasking our attention strays from the present as we are sucked into the time warp of cyber space, allowing ourselves to become disembodied from the real world. Information on any topic we could possibly imagine is available to us with the click of the mouse. We no longer have to go out into the world and find out for ourselves because we can read about it. It’s as if direct experience has become obsolete.

Today there is an endless amount of research on the inefficiency of multitasking and evidence that, in fact, this behaviour has resulted in media ‘addictions’ or ‘dependencies’ for many people. In her article *The Myth of Multitasking*, Christine Rosen writes:

Today, our collective will to pay attention seems fairly weak. We require advice books to teach us how to avoid distraction. In the not-too-distant future we may even employ new devices to help us overcome the unintended attention deficits created by today’s gadgets.<sup>3</sup>

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1 “Human Multitasking,” accessed February 1 2013, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human\\_multitasking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_multitasking)

2 Richard Louv; *Last Child in the Woods*. 56.

3 Christine Rosen. *The Myth of Multitasking*. 105-110.

We have lost control of ourselves, but is there not a simpler, more natural solution to this problem? Is not the point to limit our dependencies on these gadgets rather than resort to them as providing solutions? We must regain control by reconnecting with our bodies and our environment.

### **Biophilia**

In our contemporary way of living we believe we are separate from nature. In our cities we are no longer engaged in the natural world, going about our days in hermetically sealed buildings without feeling the touch of our natural environment. This loss of experience has caused a depletion of the memory of our connection with nature. Distancing our selves from our environment we deny our true identity and our participation in the greater whole. “For those city dwellers long divorced from natural contacts, a deep and moving experience in the wild is needed to rekindle the flame of our innate instinct that has been called biophilia.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Wilderness and Wildness**

In his book *The Practice of the Wild*, Gary Snyder argues for the distinction between the terms ‘wilderness’ and ‘wildness’. Environmentally conscious people fear for the destruction of nature, but ultimately, it is wilderness, not nature, that is endangered<sup>5</sup> This is an acceptance of the fact that humans and civilization are a part of nature and each person is intrinsically wild. Wilderness has not existed without some kind of human presence for several hundred thousand years, making it home to us, not just a place to visit.

We are faced with the reality of our damaged wilderness everyday. Snyder believes that this destruction is rooted in our arrogant disconnect from our true nature; we have fragmented our identity and forgotten our wildness. In order to begin to heal the split between the civilized and the wild, we must strive to be whole.<sup>6</sup>

A culture of wilderness starts somewhere in this terrain. Civilization is part of nature – our egos play in the fields of the unconscious – history takes place in the Holocene – human culture is rooted in the primitive and Paleolithic – our body is a vertebrate mammal being –

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4 Carl von Essen. *Ecomysticism*.186.

5 Gary Snyder. *The Practice of the Wild*. 194.

6 *ibid.* 24.





Fig.2: View of Twin Island taken from the southern mainland.

Fig.3: Acknowledging our place in nature.

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Fig.4: A map of the watery landscape of Frontenac County, Ontario.





and our souls are out in the wilderness.<sup>7</sup>

### **Twin Island**

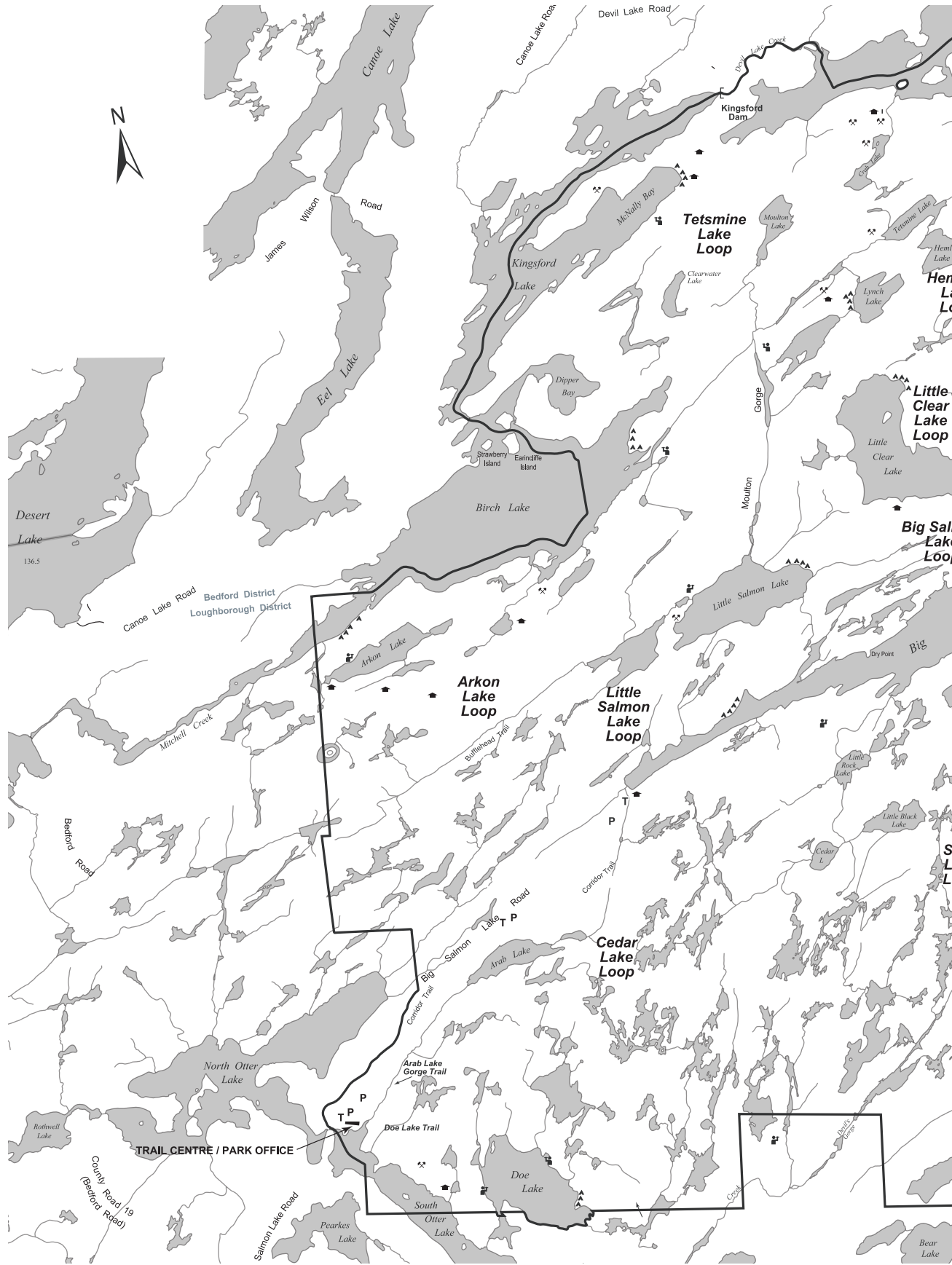
*In 1978 my parent's bought a piece of land; an island, or rather two islands – Twin Island on little Buck Lake. Located 35km north of Kingston Ontario, Buck Lake defines the south eastern perimeter of Frontenac Provincial Park. As a result, the western shore of the lake remains 'untouched', defined as Canadian wilderness. Along the eastern shore is a string of private cottages and somewhere in between these two conditions lies Twin Island.*

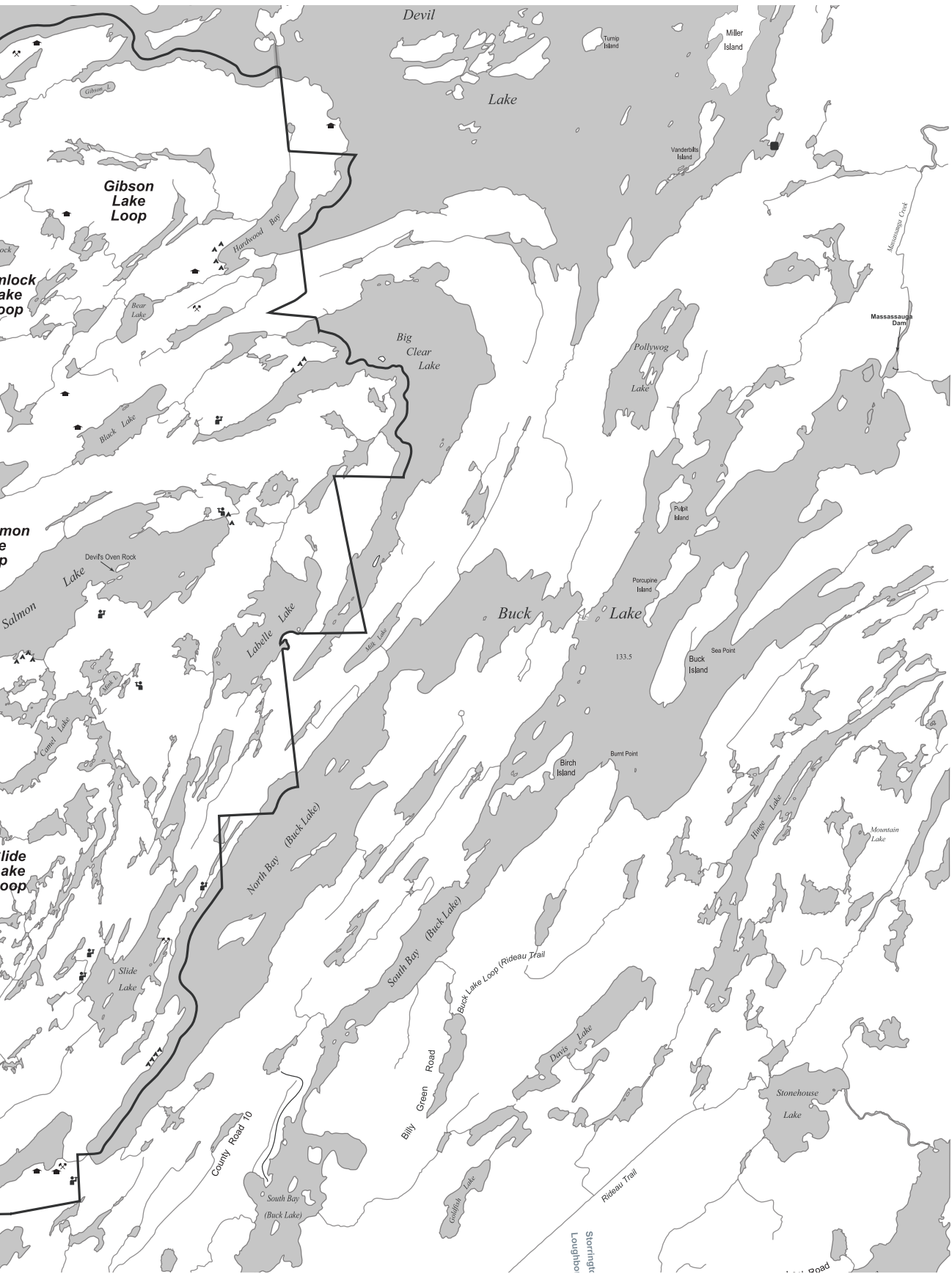


In the midst of my busy, city existence it is this place that I long for. My periodic retreat to the island helps me reconnect with my roots, my instincts, and it is here that I find my solitude.

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7    *ibid.* 194





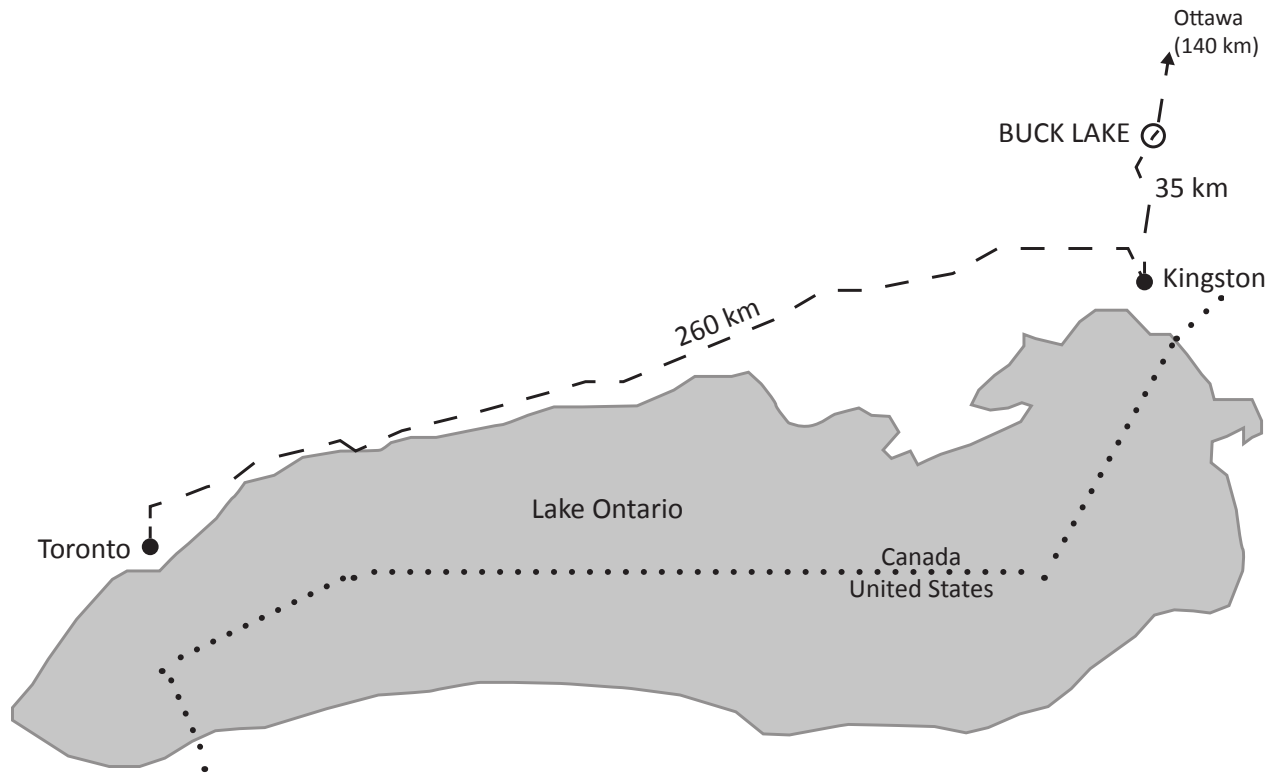


Fig.5: A map of the journey from city to Buck Lake in Southern Ontario, Canada.

Fig.6: An etching of Christian pilgrims during the middle ages on the route to Santiago de Compostella.



## DEPARTURE

### Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is a quintessential part of all the world's major religions and represents a spiritual journey. Today, Christians still make the trek to various healing sites such as Santiago de Compostella in Spain and Lourdes in France. In the Islamic tradition, making the *hajj* to Mecca is required at least once in the life of a practicing Muslim. In India there are thousands of *tirthas*, or places of pilgrimage visited by Hindus each year. Perhaps the most famous site is Varanasi on the banks of the Ganges river. Although less known, pilgrimage is also an integral part of Judaism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

The journeys often involve a large group of pilgrims, although the act itself is focused on the individual. “[A pilgrimage] was, and still is, both an outer and an inner journey, a physical journey to distant locations, that leads the pilgrim to a deeper spiritual understanding.” Similar to Joseph Campbell’s<sup>1</sup> hero’s journey, pilgrimage follows the process of a separation from everyday life, an encounter with trials or obstacles en-route to the sacred place and finally, a return to their community in a changed state.

There are various reasons or interpretations for pilgrimage but ultimately it is a quest to connect with the divine. Some pilgrims are in search of healing of the body or spirit, of penance, paying homage to a patron saint, a test of faith, or in search of spiritual development. The faithful may participate in a pilgrimage as part of a festival or simply as a retreat from daily life.

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1 Joseph Campbell was an American writer and mythologist who first used the term 'monomyth', otherwise known as the hero's journey. This refers to the basic pattern found in the mythological narratives of various culture around the world. This archetype was described in his book *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, first published in 1949.



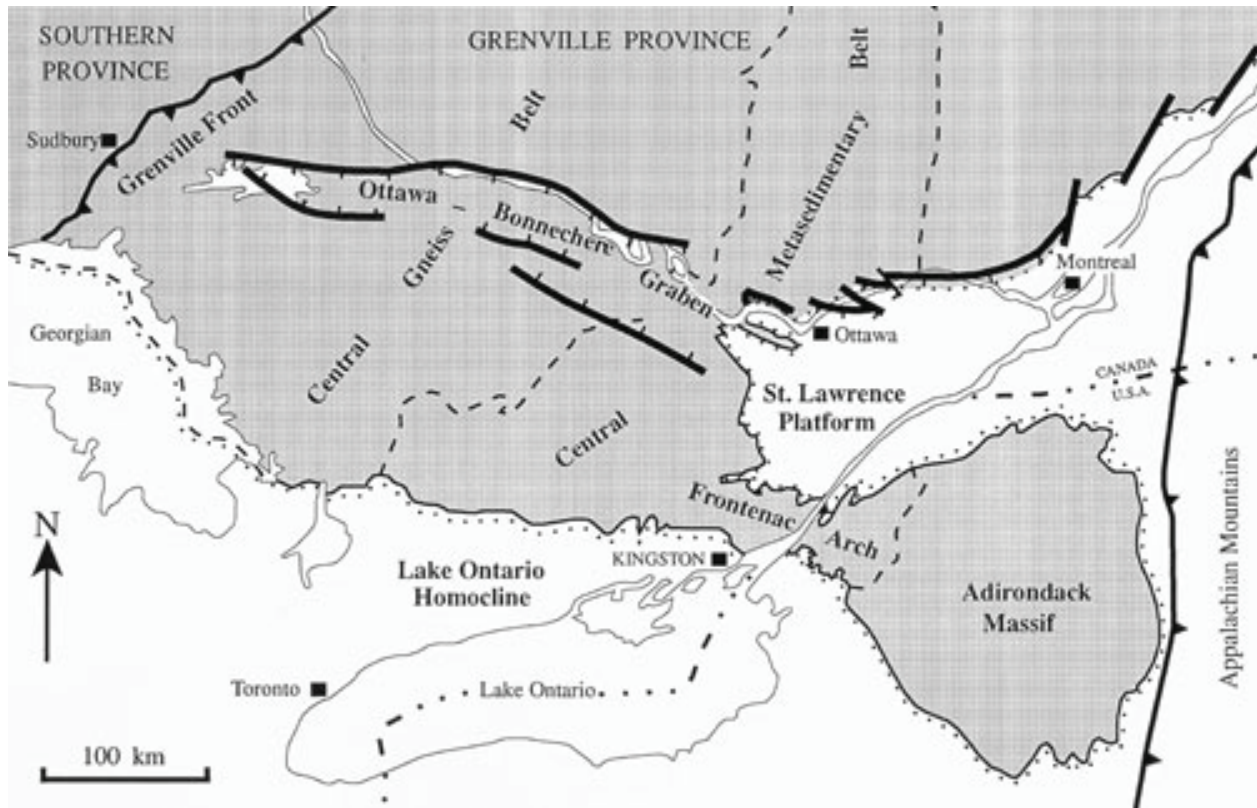
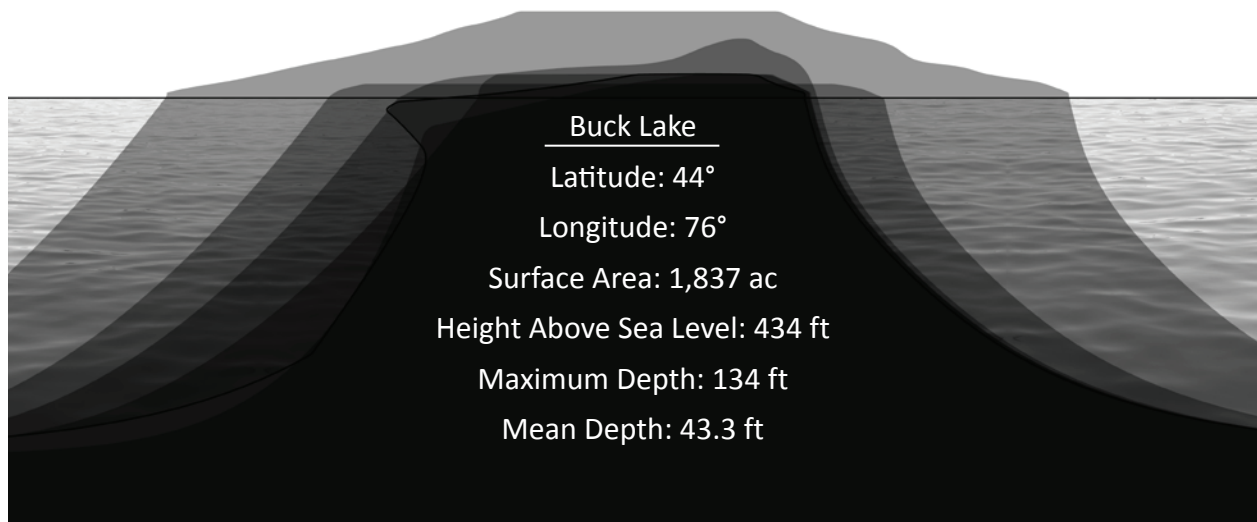


Fig.7: A simplified geological map of regional setting of the Frontenac Arch. Note that the arch connects Precambrian rocks (in grey) of the Grenville Province of the Canadian Shield with those of the Adirondack Mountains of northern New York State.

Fig.8: An overlay of cross sections through the Precambrian stone formation of Twin Island



## Journey

Each spring as the snow covered ground begins to thaw and the air becomes tinged with a note of warmth I begin to contemplate my next retreat to Twin Island. It's July, the most typical time of year for me to get away. I pack the car with my backpack, cooler, and water jug and drive three hours away from my city home. The route is really very simple - I take the 401 east for about 2.5 hours, then travel north for the remaining half hour on County Road 10, more commonly known as Perth Road.

Leaving Toronto, I merge onto one of eight lanes of congested traffic. I look in my rearview and grip the steering wheel as an 18 wheeler pummels by. My blood pressure spikes. The world rushes around me and I focus on catching up. Ahead someone slams on the breaks and we all follow suit. I am now sitting in stop and go traffic. Inching along in a sea of cars, the city looms all around me. I feel irritated by the other drivers, angry almost - "Get out of my way!" Getting through the city, space starts to open up around me. Eight lanes shrink down to four, there are only a fraction of the cars and the highway is flanked by large expanses of Ontario farmland. At some point along this trajectory the landscape changes again. The highway cuts through precambrian granite that has been blasted away. I look up the sheer rock faces. I smile because I know I am getting closer to my destination.

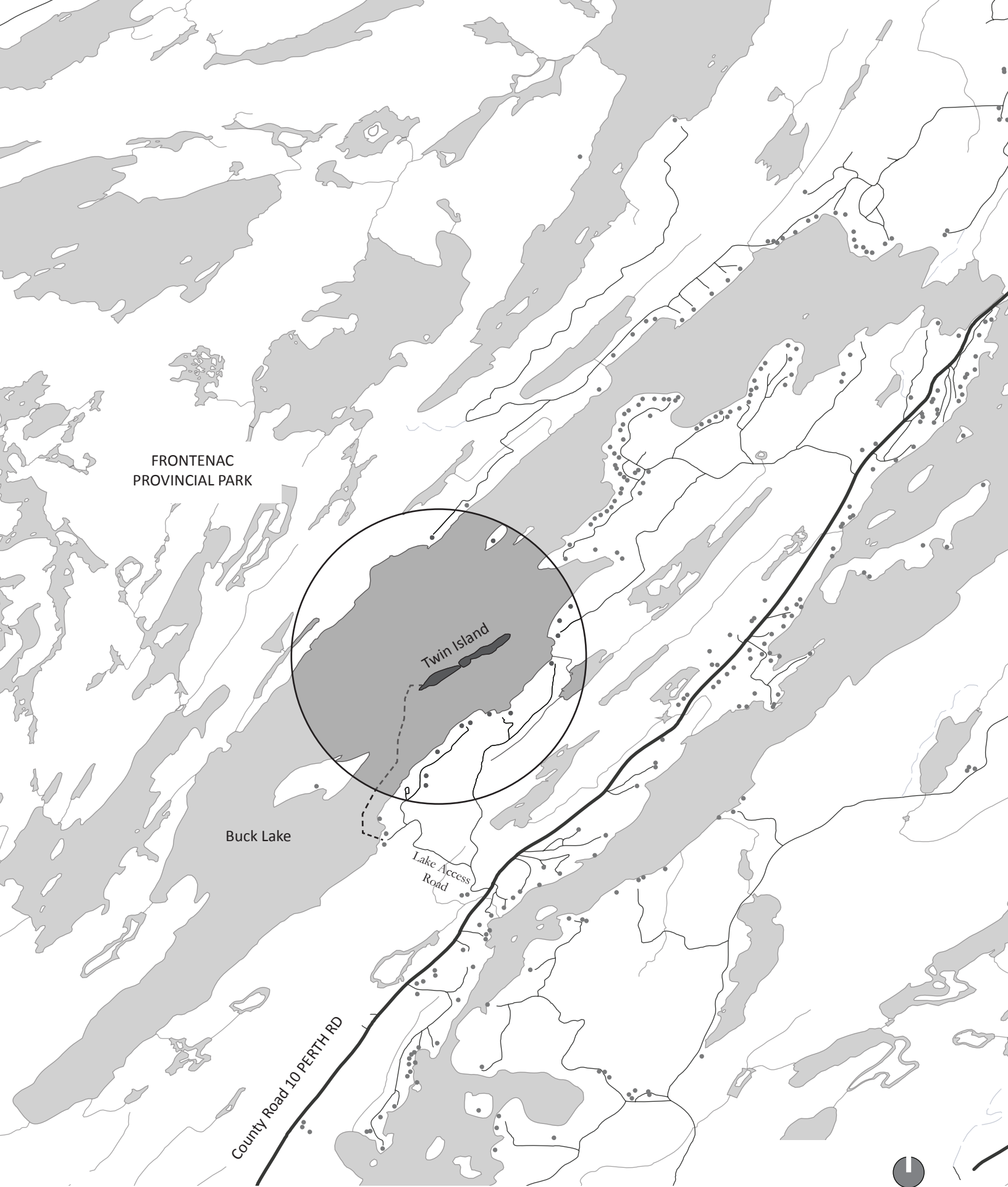
## Geology of the Shield

Typically associated with a northern land of forests and lakes, the Canadian Shield defines the quintessential Canadian landscape. But extending southward through Ontario and into the U.S. is a lesser-known portion of the Shield, the Frontenac Arch. The Arch is an hourglass-shaped formation that bridges the Algonquin Highlands of Ontario with the Adirondack Highlands of New York State. In Mohawk tradition, this massive landform is known as *The Bones of the Mother*.<sup>2</sup>

This land began as a massive mountain range. Over thousands of years the shield has weathered down to its roots. Coming upon the Arch, the flat countryside of southern Ontario is interrupted by rolling hills and rugged cliffs. The land is striated with lakes and wetland. Through the last ice age, glaciers gauged a network of basins across the rock surface creating thousands of granite hilltops.

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2 "Learn about the Arch Geology" accessed March 1, 2013, <http://www.explorethearch.ca/learn-about-the-arch/geology>



FRONTENAC  
PROVINCIAL PARK

Twin Island

Buck Lake

Lake Access  
Road

County Road 10 PERTH RD





As the land continued to shift and rise, a young Lake Ontario spilled its water across the Arch flooding those many basins and creating the watery landscape of the area.<sup>3</sup> The islands that dot the many lakes of the Frontenac region are, infact, those granite hilltops from thousands of years ago. Rooted in the great shield that lies below the lake waters, the rocky, granite islands are hills surrounded by water. They act as a reminder of what lies beneath, a reminder of a prehistoric land.

### **Threshold**

Arriving in Kingston, I pull off the highway. I feel the kinetic force of the car trying to stop at the red light after hours of travelling at high speed. I take a deep breath, releasing the tension in my neck and shoulders. Signalling left, I travel north on historic Perth Road. What originally would have been dense forest is now farmland that has been tended for hundreds of years. This area was some of the first lands to be cleared by the early settlers in Upper Canada. I stop in at a small grocer to pick up ice for the cooler. I always stop here because it's the only place I can find block ice, which lasts much longer than cubes. I turn off my cell phone to eliminate the distraction and, anyhow, reception is unreliable from here forward.

It's another 25km to the lake. The car meanders up and down taking some steep curves around tall rock walls. Periodically the rock gives way to water and the road bridges over a lake or wetland.

Suddenly, without warning I am at the gravel road that will lead me to Buck Lake. The car slows to a crawl, I kill the radio and roll down the windows. I take my first breath of the fresh northern air, rich with the scent of pine. I feel an intoxicating buzz surge through my body. The tires crunch as they feel their way over the large aggregate and after climbing and descending three steep hills, I arrive at the right-of-way. I park the car and take my first view of the lake through the windshield. In this moment of arrival I feel giddy knowing that I am actually here, after dreaming of it all winter long. Out of the car I stretch my legs and breathe in deeply. I take note of the wind direction, water level and of the bug situation. Is this going to be an easy boat trip? Will the wind aid or hinder my movement across the lake? Are the mosquitoes hungry, ready to feast on my sweet blood?

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3 "Learn about the Arch Geology" accessed March 1, 2013, <http://www.explorethearch.ca/learn-about-the-arch/geology>



Fig.9: The canoes are stored at the right-of-way while not in use.

Fig.10: The canoe leaves behind a trail of black vortices as it travels across the lake.

Fig.11: North west view of the exiting stone cabin on Twin Island.

## WATER PATH

The canoe rests upside down on the shore when not in use. Spiders and other small creatures appropriate the dark shell in the off season. One summer I thoughtlessly slid my hand underneath without realizing that I was disturbing a wasp nest that had formed on the inside of the boat. Before I knew it the angry wasps were after me in defence of their home. Needless to say, I now approach the canoe with greater caution.

I flip the canoe and slip it into the water; the weight of it breaks the surface. Going back and forth between car and dock, I load the canoe with my gear. In order to balance the boat I sit in the centre and back away from the dock. With a strong c-stroke on the right I orient the canoe north. I cross the lake with the wind at my back and sense its force moving me toward my destination. I am thankful for this blessing. My paddle dips on the left, on the right, slicing through the water, propelling me forward. I leave behind a trail of small vortices of black water. Before me the lake glistens with diamonds of sunlight, the entire surface completely alive as it laps at the sides of my boat. The back of my neck prickles with perspiration and my crossed legs begin to cramp. My mind takes me to the familiar story of how my parents created our home in this place.

### Stone Cabin

*My father was a recent architecture graduate and my mom, a teacher. Both were 26 years old. Their first stays on the island were in a tent to test out different locations for building a cabin. They came to agree on a building site that was clear of trees, just a landing of stone. There they built a small, one room cabin.*



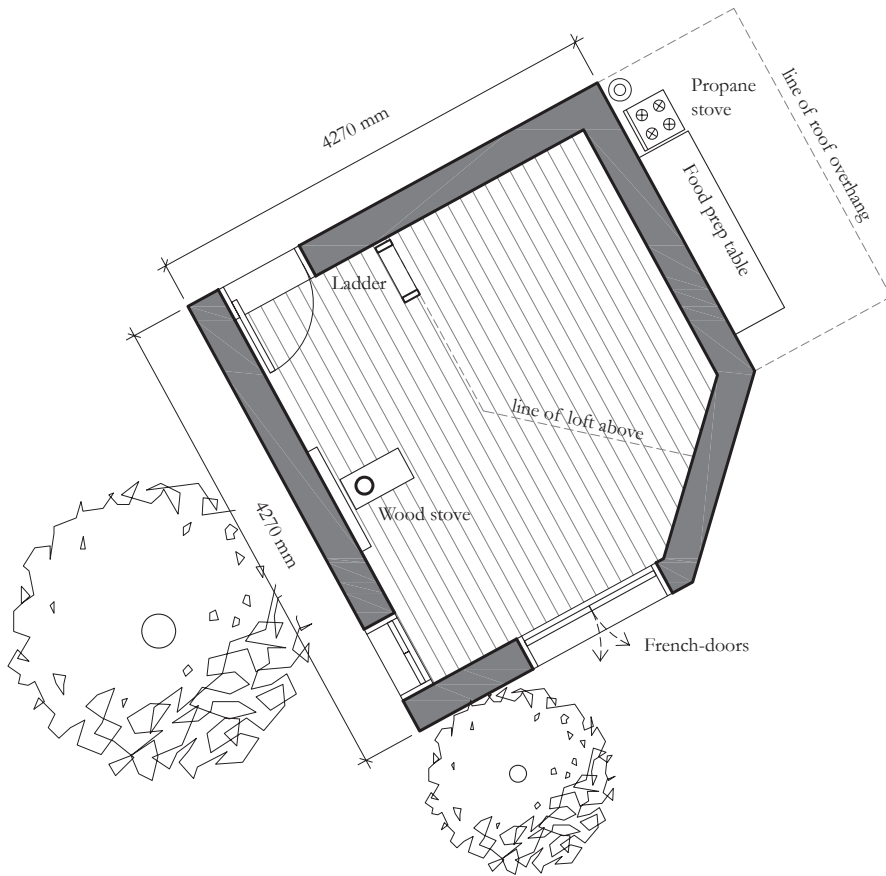


Fig.12: Floor plan of the existing stone cabin.

Fig.13: The rubble rock awaits its journey across the lake by barge.

Fig.14: The concrete for the existing stone cabin was mixed by hand.

Fig.15: My father adding another level of wood formwork to the concrete wall.

Fig.16: Interior view of the existing stone cabin.



*The building materials were collected locally and transported across the lake on a makeshift barge. Granite rubble rock was collected alongside the county road, the remnants of recent road widening efforts. The rock was unloaded on shore and one by one dragged up the steep incline. Wood formwork was set in place to ascribe the new boundary between inside and out. The rock was placed in the forms and then flooded with a concrete mixture. As the forms peeled away they revealed shimmering granite walls, standing strong, referencing the geological formations of the land on which they stood.*

*Growing up I spent each summer at the cabin, making Twin Island the wilderness embedded in my body and my imagination; it is the context of my fondest memories. For weeks at a time my parents, two sisters and I lived a simple life away from the city. No electricity or running water made our daily routines quite different from the norm. With limited resources we were mindful of our rations - our drinking water, ice to keep the food fresh, kerosene for the lanterns, or batteries for our flashlights.*

### **Simplicity**

I think of Thoreau<sup>1</sup> and his self-built cabin at Walden Pond where he lived in solitary retreat for over two years. He reflected in his journal: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived... I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life”<sup>2</sup> Many other great thinkers have written about leading simple lives, without modern conveniences. Martin Heidegger had a small, primitive cabin in the foothills of the Black Forest in Germany to provide an antidote to his city life. Carl Jung was another; he designed for himself a retreat at Bollingen in Switzerland. In his book *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung writes:

I have done without electricity, and tend the fireplace and stove myself.

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1 Among many things Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was an American transcendentalist author and poet. On July 4, 1845 he moved out of Concord, Massachusetts into a small, self-built home in the forest, on the shore of Walden Pond. In 1854 Thoreau published *Walden, Or Life in the Woods*, a book that chronicles his experience of living simply for over two years.

2 Henry David Thoreau. *Walden*. 143.





Top Image

Fig.17: View of the proposed cabin peaking out of the trees on the southern shore of Twin Island.

Bottom, left to right

Fig.18: The dark floating mass of Twin Island, isolated by the waters of Buck Lake.

Fig.19: A blue heron resting on the shore.





Evenings, I light the old lamps. There is no running water, and I pump the water from the well. I chop the wood and cook the food. These simple acts make man simple and how difficult it is to be simple!

... The less we understand of what our fathers and forefathers sought, the less we understand ourselves, and thus we help with all our might to rob the individual of his roots and his guiding instincts, so that he becomes a particle in the mass, ruled only by what Nietzsche called the spirit of gravity.



Before me in the distance is a dense mass of forest alone in the middle of the lake. A long black reflection reaches out toward me across the watery surface. It appears as if this piece of land has floated astray, away from the grounded shore of the mainland. As I get closer I see a glimpse of the cabin peeking out from the trees, but this is not where I will dock the boat. I turn the canoe, rounding to the north side of the island I am cautious at the tip for any jarring rocks hiding below the shallow waters. I see a blue heron standing on shore. It senses me and effortlessly takes off into flight. Its great wings and long craned neck silhouetted against the bright sky is the image of a creature from another time.

### Old Pine

Greeting me is a majestic old pine. The base of the trees stand straight but their extremities fall prey to the wind. The high branches do not resist the force and sweep toward the north making visible the strength of the prevailing south-westerlies. These are Eastern White Pine, known to the Iroquois as the *Tree of Peace*. Here, these trees miraculously take root in little to no soil. Their elaborate structural system bearing down within the cracks and crevices of this granite mass. I know I have arrived.

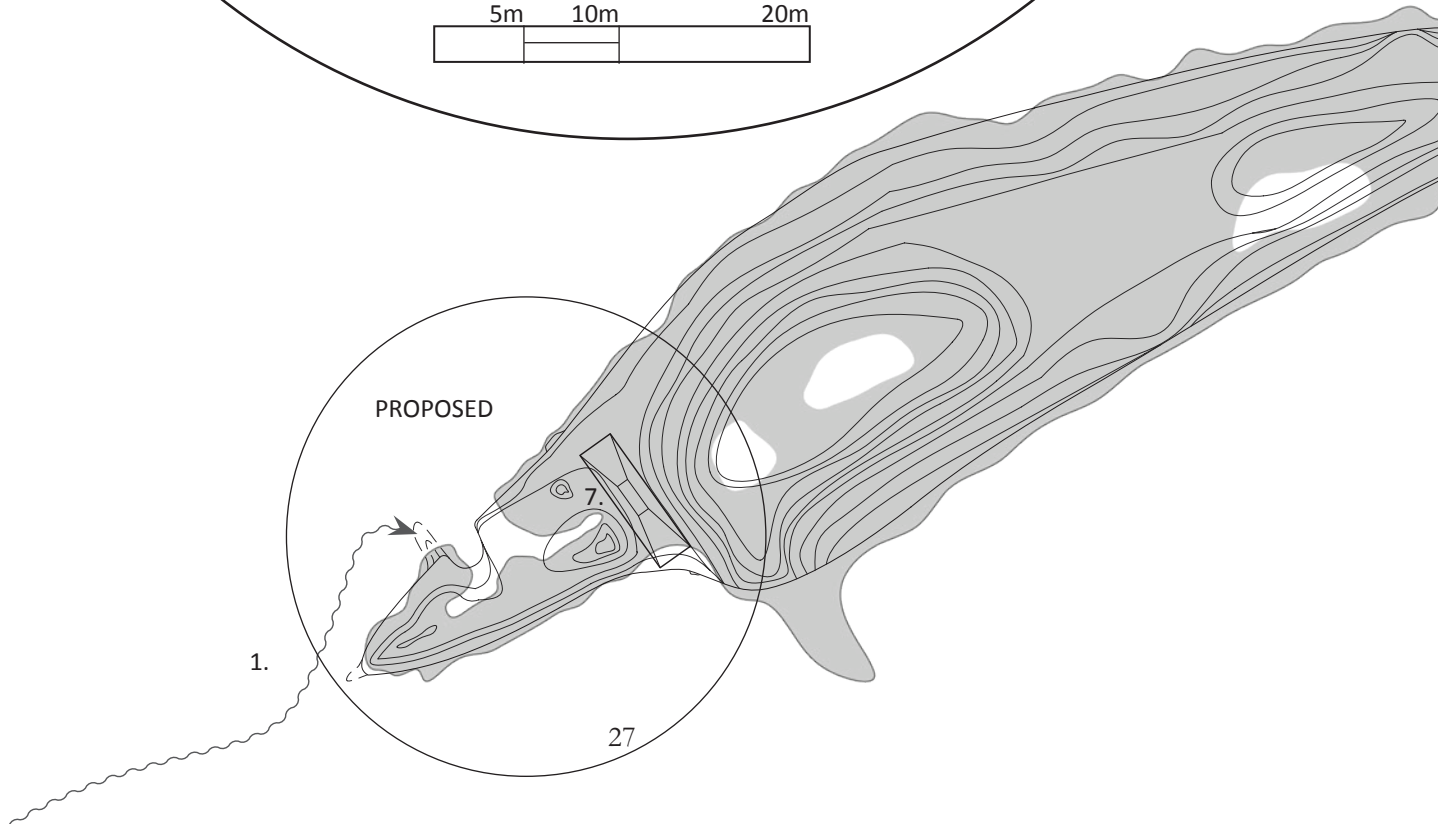
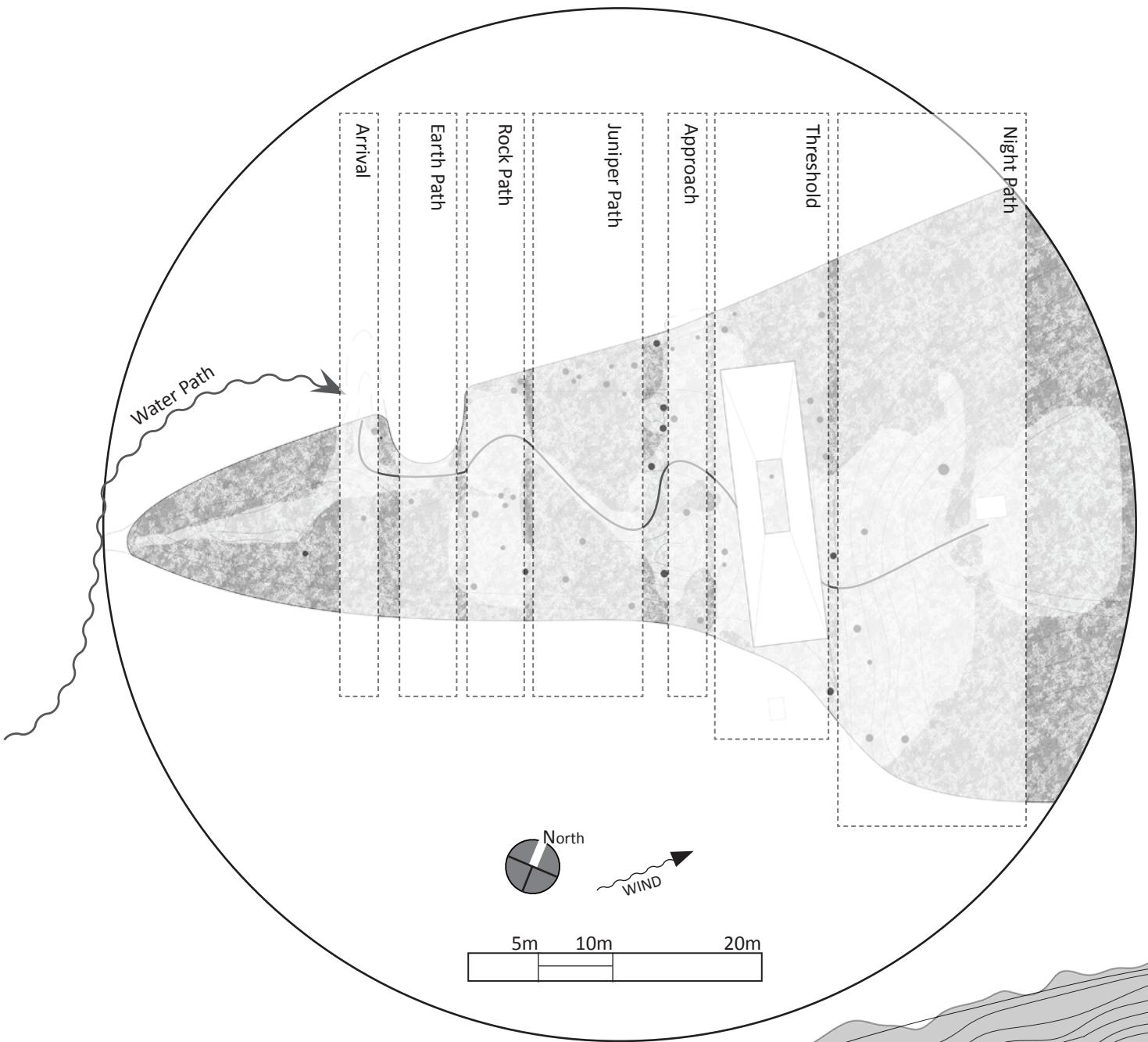




Fig.20: Proposed Site Plan

Fig.21: Site Plan of Twin Island

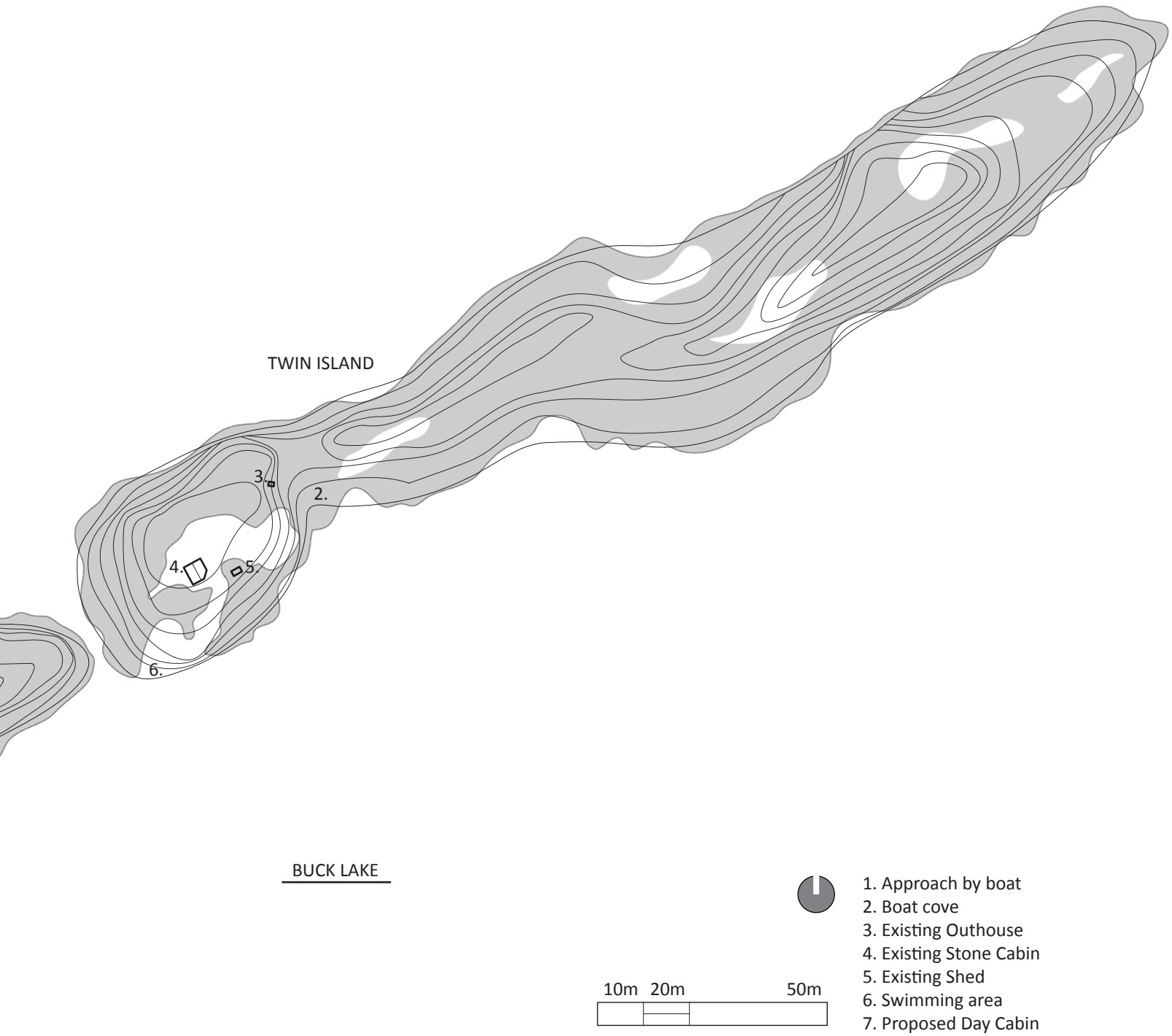




Fig.22: A black granite slab greets the canoe of the island's western shore.

Fig.23: The mossy shoreline of Twin Island.

Fig.24: Barefeet delight in the shallow lake water.

Opposite Page  
Fig.25: Island cross section  
Scale 1:200

## ARRIVAL

Shoes off, I step out of the canoe onto a surface of black granite. The gentle sloping rock extends from shore before dropping away into the depth of the deep, cold lake. The water gently laps around my ankles and my toes flex and grasp on the dimpled surface. I linger in the coolness of the soft lake water. I reach down to cup a handful and splash the sweat from my face and neck. There is a damp earthy smell of the water's edge. Little green grasses and flowers make their home here.

This threshold is its own little world where roots, dirt, rock and water collide. If it were a rainy day I would drag the boat on shore and flip it over, but today the sky is blue. The waves are not too strong, so I leave the canoe floating in the shallow cove and secure the rope to a tree.

### Island Mythology

Across cultures islands are revered as sacred places. These small worlds embody the entire world and have come to symbolize a utopian vision of a better place.

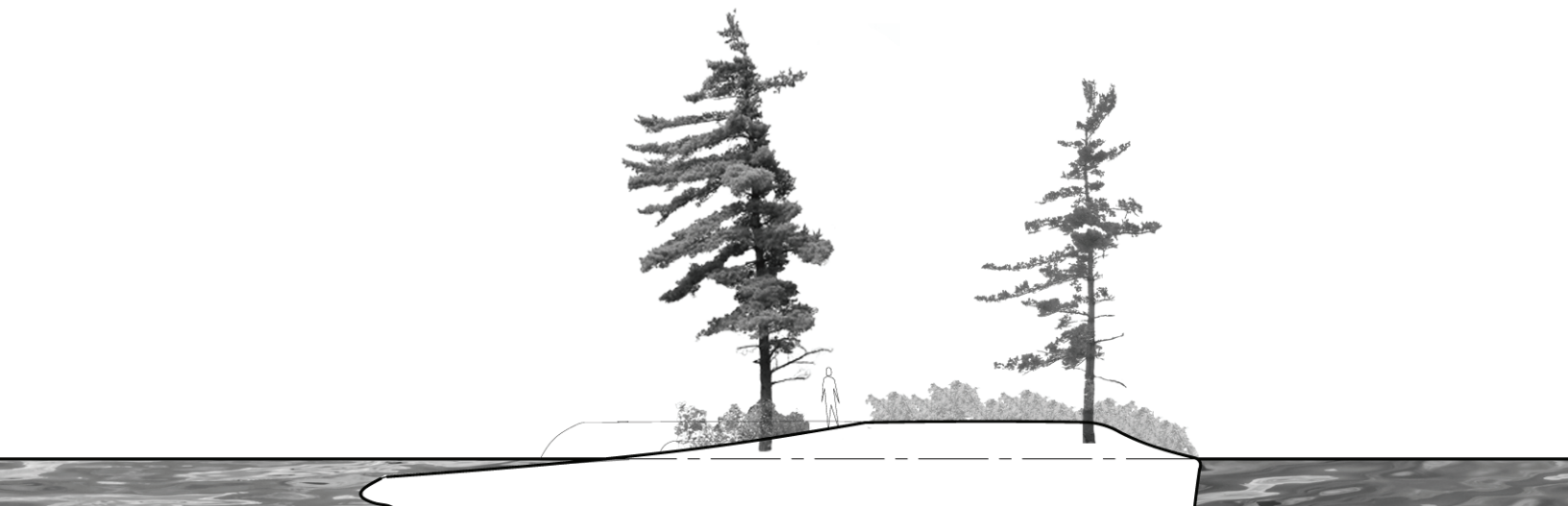




Fig.26: The island as a microcosm of the universe exists in isolation, separate from the chaos of the mainland.



Fig.27: The island as a piece of the greater whole



Existing in seclusion, islands are untouched by the chaos and progress of the mainland; insular and self-sufficient, islands represent the capacity to stand alone.

Due to their physical isolation, islands have become an archetypal setting in literature and myth evoking tales of escape, solitude, refuge, or captivation.<sup>1</sup> The island represents a station along the route of a larger journey. The character leaves his home and community in search of something. The journey required to reach the far off land invokes a sense of adventure. Life on the island imposes hardship on the visitor, and challenges them to adapt their ways in order to survive. This struggle probes a new level of self awareness; a movement from innocence to experience, from ignorance to knowledge. Upon transformation the character is prepared to leave the island, returning to his community with something of value. These qualities imbue the island with a sense of drama, an ideal setting for a tale of rebirth and transformation.

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1 Ami Ronnberg, *The Book of Symbols*. 124



Clockwise from top  
 Fig.28: View south where the island disappears into the lake.

Fig.29: Barefeet walk across the dry, soft ground.

Fig.30: Fallen needles from the white pine trees create a soft carpet across the island floor.

Fig.31: A tiny damselfly rests on bare skin.

Opposite Page  
 Fig.32: Island section  
 Scale 1:200

## EARTH PATH

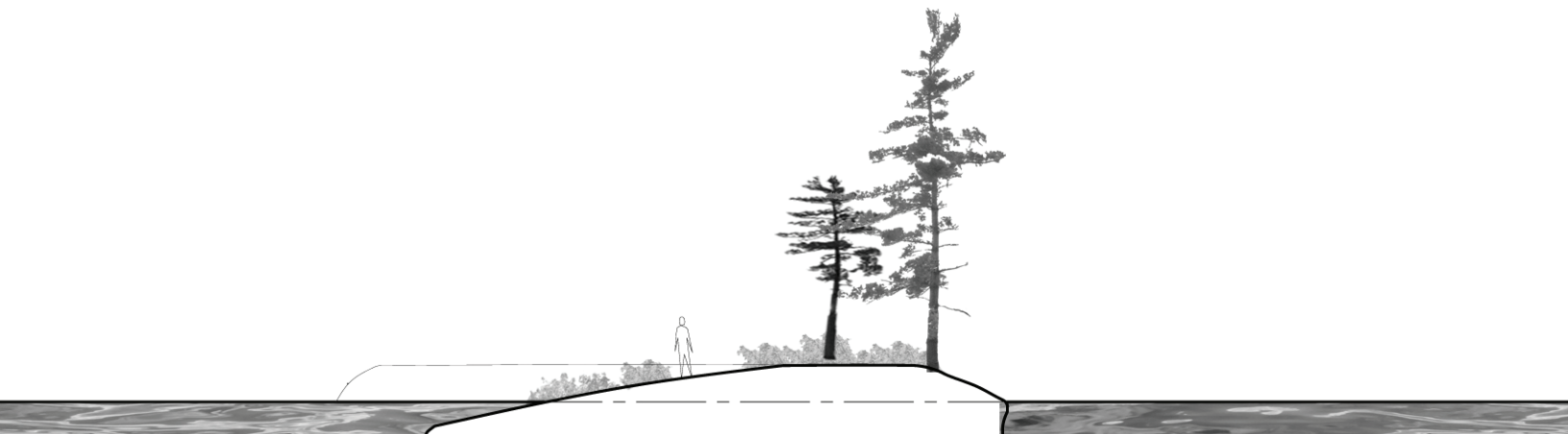
I carefully step up, off the rock and the bare soles of my feet touch down onto the needle covered ground. The white pine needles are dry and soft and provide a luxurious carpet on top of the hard granite island. Swept across this carpet are traces of oak and maple leaves that put some crunch in my step.

The forest appears dense from a distance. Being in this space I realize that this is not the case. Here the trees are not too dense - I can see the lake to the north, west and south. Several meters to the southwest the island disappears into the water.

I head inland across a ridge. Two purple damselflies dart past chasing one another. As they come close I hear the vibrations of their delicate, veined wings colliding.

### Discovery

Though the island is small, it has taken many trips to learn its secrets. Each visit include a walk across the land to take note of its current state. There is no physically defined path across the land, yet a natural path is implied by the







Clockwise from top left  
Fig.33: The largest caterpillar I have ever seen. The pinecone next to it gives a sense of scale.

Fig.34: The caterpillar gets knocked over on it's back.

Fig.35: A fallen birch trunk is in the process of decomposition on the island floor.

Fig.36: Strange stalactite-looking spikes inside a living tree trunk.

Fig.37: The remains of a fallen tree.

Fig.38: A lost piece of dock washes on shore.

Fig.39: The bark of a decomposing tree trunk peels away.

Fig.40: A large crayfish on shore.





topography and foliage. It is difficult to walk along the water's edge because of the steep incline, so I always take the ridge which meanders through the centre of the island. The terrain shifts up and down, and is dotted with swatches of juniper bush; carefully, I maneuver around these unfriendly inhabitants, and stick to the trail of the fallen pine needles. This journey affords various conditions; there are moments when I am completely enclosed in the silence of the forest, and at others, I am completely exposed to conquer a panoramic view across the lake.

I walk this path each and every year. I notice newly fallen trees, or the remains of a blackened trunk caught in a lighting storm. I visit the tiny sapling I planted as a child and see that it is inching up toward the sky (incredibly slowly). I smile to myself as I notice the lack of wild flowers I so earnestly tried to plant, haphazardly throwing seeds across the pine cover ground. This year for the first time, I heard the screeching and scurrying of two feisty little red squirrels, bounding from branch to branch amongst the canopy overhead. I assume they became stranded after a long winter, not having the chance to make it back to the mainland.

This island is an infinite treasury of information; the potential for new discoveries is inexhaustible.



Clockwise from top  
 Fig.41: View of the rock outcrop.



Fig.42: Detail of the crunchy lichen and moss that inhabit the surface of the granite floor.



Fig.43: The shimmering quality found in some of the stones on the island



Fig.44: Varied colours in the stone.



Fig.45: A mound of soft, squishy moss.

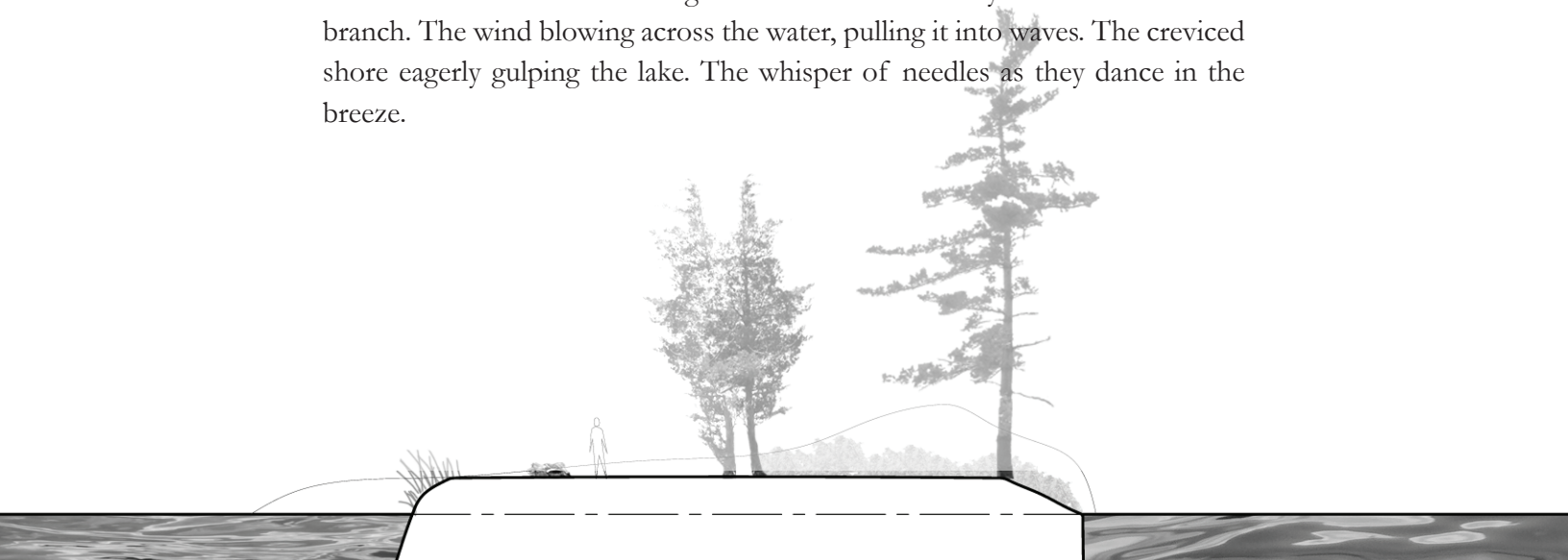
Opposite page  
 Fig.46: Island section.  
 Scale 1:200

## ROCK PATH

I take one step up and reach a bare outcrop of granite covered with crunchy lichen of the most beautiful blues and greens. The stone holds the heat from the distant sun and it warms the soles of my feet, rooting me to the island's foundation. As I continue I land on the most luxurious bed of moss, squishy and delicate yet incredibly resilient to the weight of my body. Standing here I am about 1 meter above water level. I lift my hand to shield my eyes from the glare of the sun reflecting off the water. I am offered an unobstructed view to the west of a shady silhouette of Frontenac Park beyond.

### New Sounds

The cicadas start whirring and it is as though they are right above me. They start off softly, getting louder and LOUDER. My whole being is engulfed in a cacophony of natural sounds. Just as I think it's too much, they die down again - a buzz saw gradually spinning to a halt. In this new kind of sonic environment my ears open to the whole world; it is as if I am truly hearing for the first time. Birds chatting with one another as they dart from branch to branch. The wind blowing across the water, pulling it into waves. The creviced shore eagerly gulping the lake. The whisper of needles as they dance in the breeze.







Clockwise from top  
 Fig.47: View of the path ascending through the juniper bushes.

Fig.48: The hard and sharp needles of the juniper make it very prickly to touch. The round juniper berry begins as light green, maturing into a deep blue colour.



Fig.49: As we move across the land, our bodies participate in the rhythm of the earth.

Fig.50: The blue sky above is filtered through the green needles of the white pine.



Ultimately to acknowledge the life of the body, and affirm our solidarity with this physical form, is to acknowledge our existence as one of earth's animals, and so to remember and rejuvenate the organic basis of our thought and our intelligence.

David Abram

Opposite page  
 Fig.51: Island section.  
 Scale 1:200

## JUNIPER PATH

I turn around so that I may continue. I am confronted with a swath of junipers that lie low and dense along the ground. Fortunately this vicious brush parts, giving way to a natural path that leads up a slight slope toward a rock pile. I tip toe through this passage to avoid craggy roots and branches. My bare legs feel the sting of the juniper as I rush past. Through the junipers I rise up about one meter before descending back down.

### Rhythm

As we move across the land our bodies participate in the rhythm of the earth. As our weight shifts from one foot to the other we alter our viewpoint of the world. The land shifts up and then drops down again requiring balance and attention. Sensed through our skin, our muscles, we feel the earth acting upon us. We cannot avoid this participation, but in acknowledging it we can develop our sense of orientation, receptivity, creativity, perception and imagination.



Before me is a screen of green lace, the white pine sheltering me from the elements. Looking up, the sunlight is filtered through this filigree. My eyes squint in the brightness and transform my view into an abstract painting of blue and green strokes punctuated with a heavenly light.

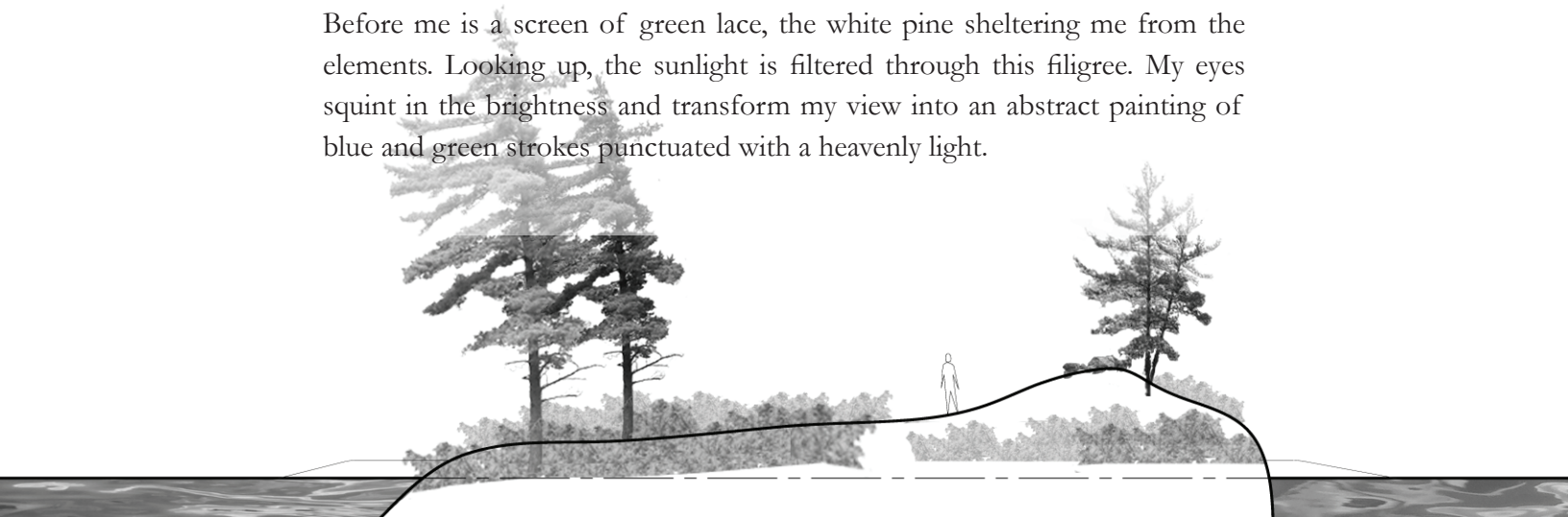




Fig.52: West Elevation



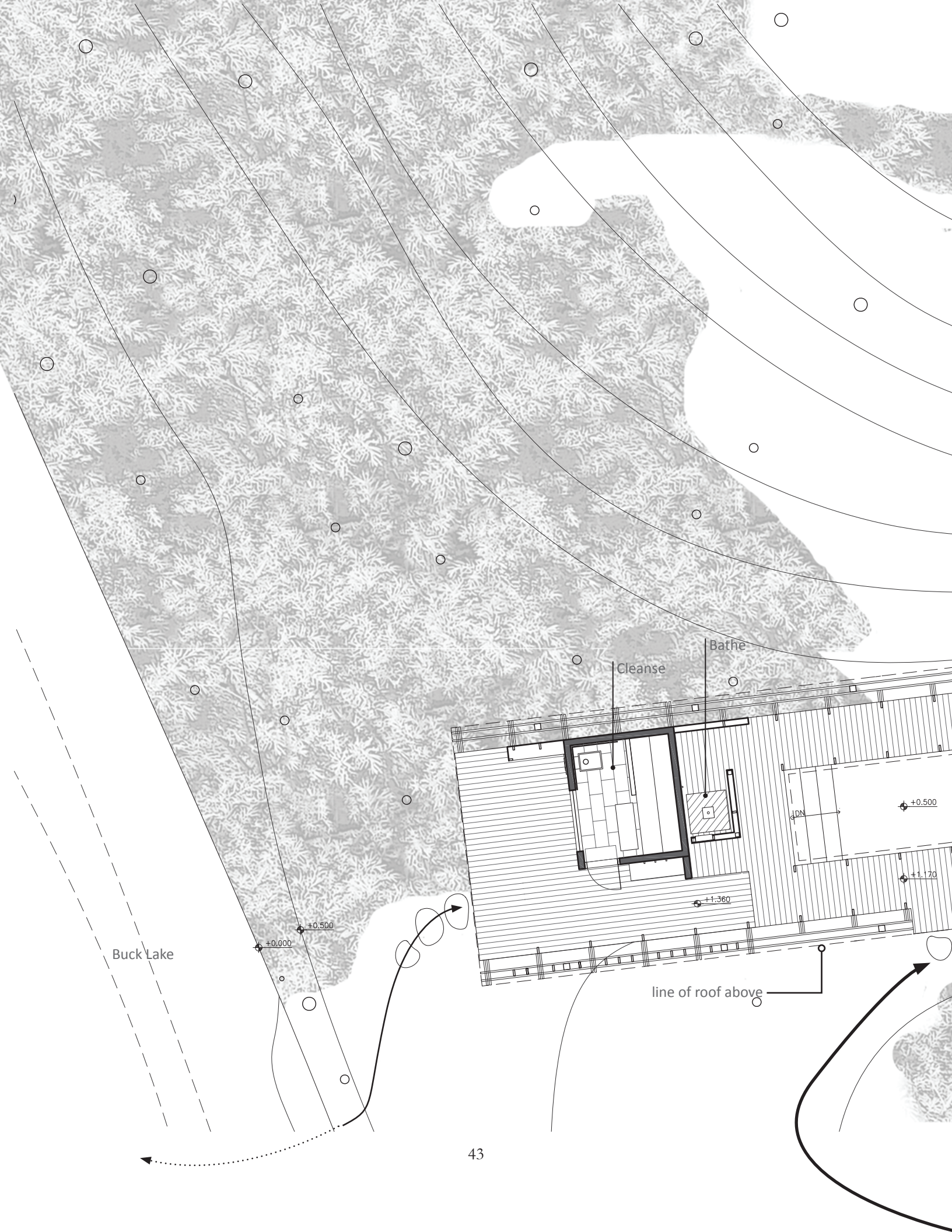


## A P P R O A C H

Sitting in the gentle island valley is a long, low building. It loosely straddles the island from side to side. Its horizontal impression recedes into the space as the line of roof and deck frame the hill beyond. It nestles within the contours of the site and rests just above the forest floor, not impeding spring runoff or heavy rainfall. But it does impede my path; I must cross this threshold to continue my journey.







Buck Lake

Cleanse

Bathe

line of roof above



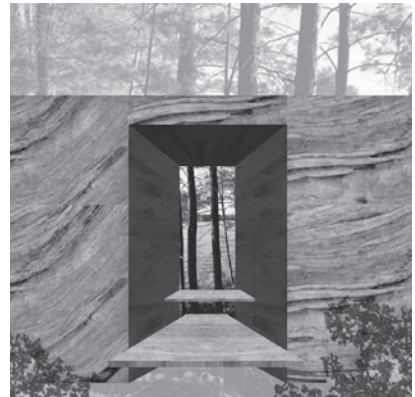




Clockwise from top  
Fig.54: Aerial view of the stepping stone threshold which provides access to the structure.

Fig.55: A collage to visualize the concept of threshold as a portal.

Fig.56: Shadows cast across the body create a play of light and dark.





## THRESHOLD

A weathered granite stone welcomes me up. On the smooth wooden deck I have some respite from the textured ground and the roof above provides shade. I feel a sense of arrival being suspended within this robust timber structure. I take a moment to honour and admire the natural colour and grain of the cedar; it has a miraculous capacity to stand up to decades of weather without pressure treatment. This portal delivers me into a space neither interior nor completely exterior.

Both deck and roof circumscribe a central courtyard that is open to earth and sky. It is an accommodating walkway that allows me to traverse the moment where sunlight meets shade, warm meets cool, land meets architecture. I hear the sound of my feet padding across the hard surface; HEEL, toe, HEEL, toe. I think of a monk ambulating, falling into a trance.

### Shadow

In making for ourselves a place to live, we first spread a parasol to throw a shadow on the earth, and in the pale light of the shadow we put together a house.

-

And so it has come to be that the beauty of a Japanese room depends on a variation of shadows, heavy shadows against light shadows - it has nothing else.

-

We delight in the mere sight of the delicate glow of fading rays clinging to the surface of a dusky wall, there to live out what little life remains to them. We never tire of the sight, for to us this pale glow and these dim shadows far surpass any ornament.

Jun'ichiro Tanizaki; *In Praise of Shadow*

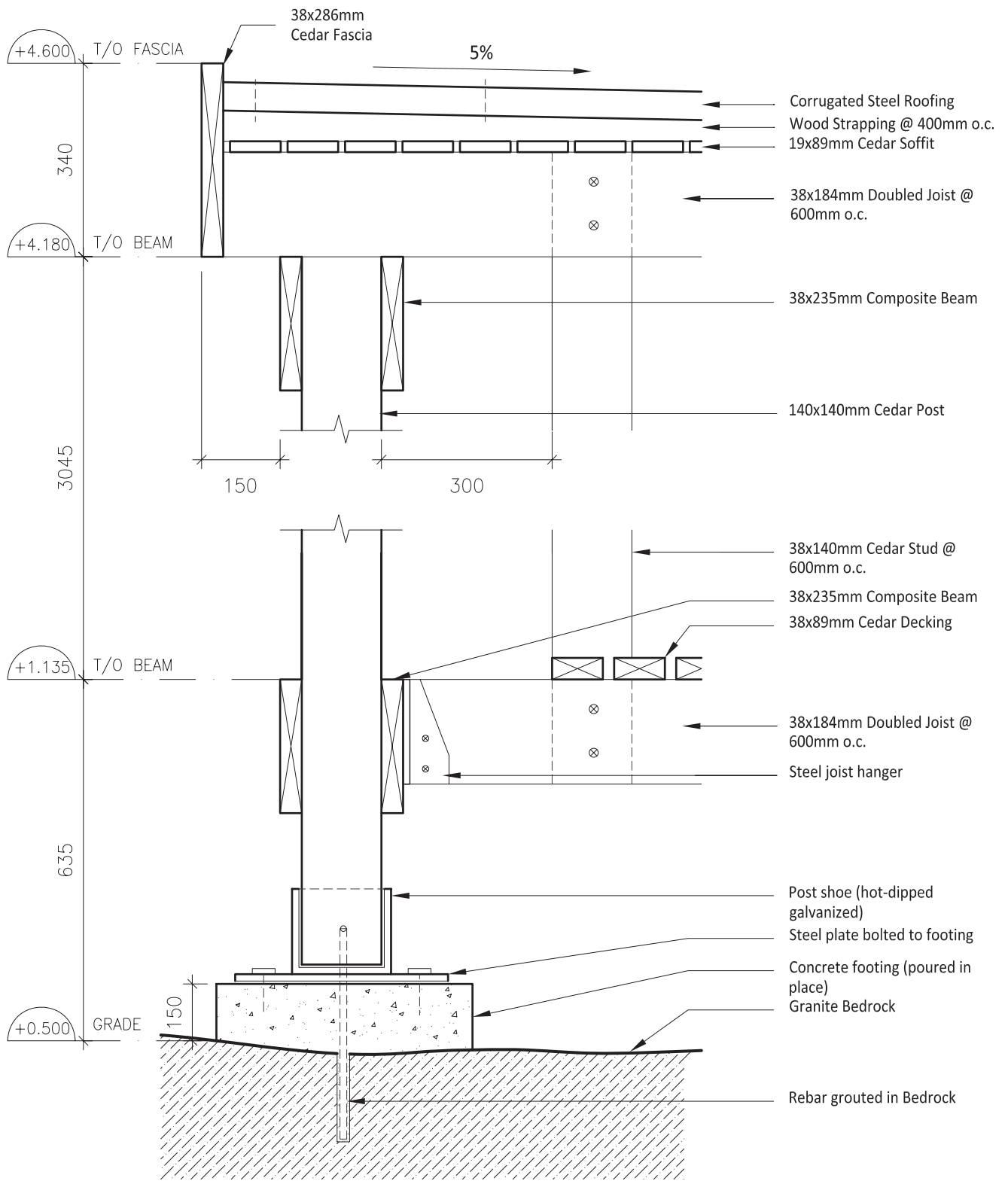


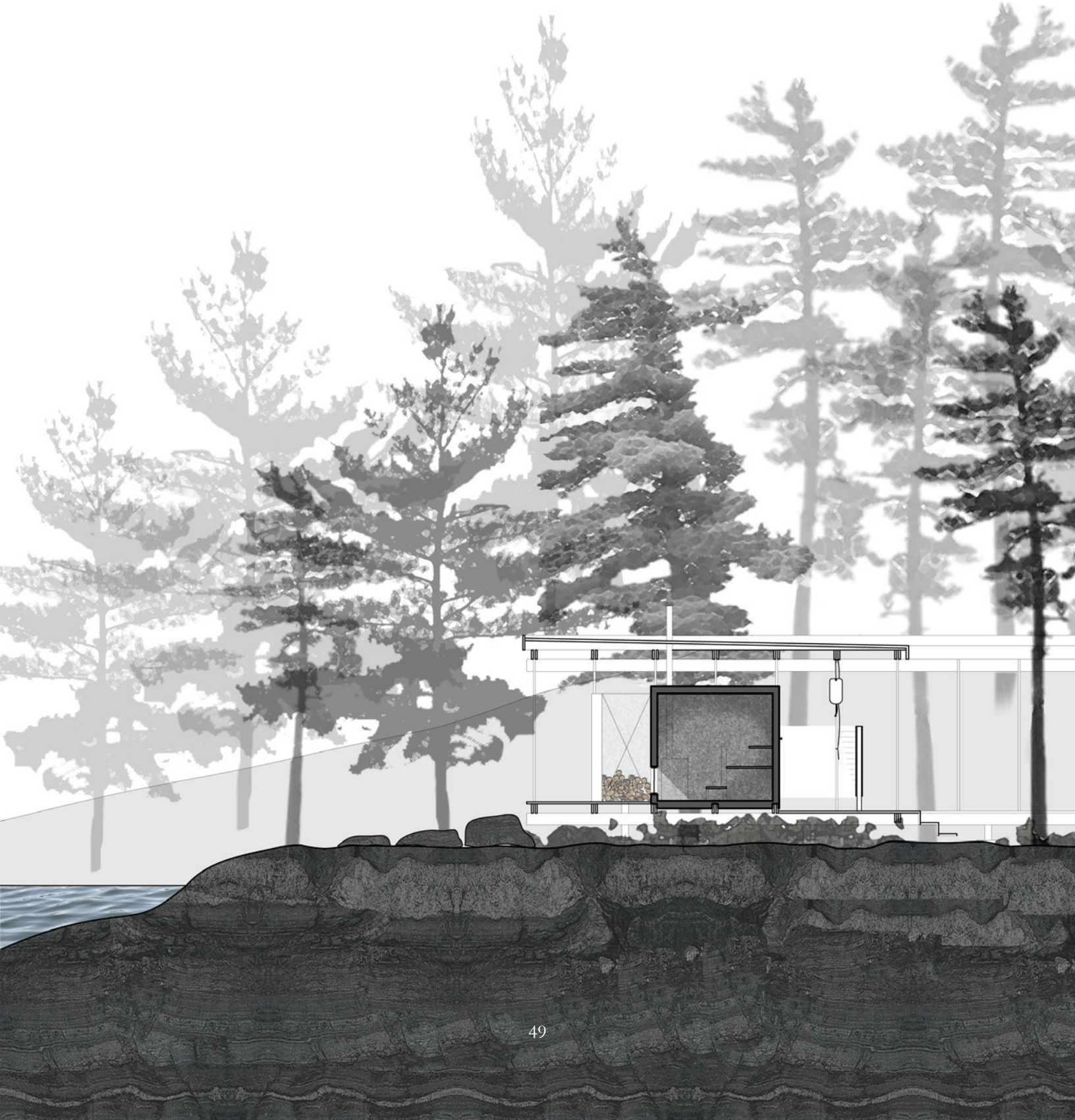
Fig.57: Structural detail @ footing & canopy. Scale 1:10

Opposite Page  
 Fig.58: Cross Section through 'Room of Earth & Sky'. Scale 1:50

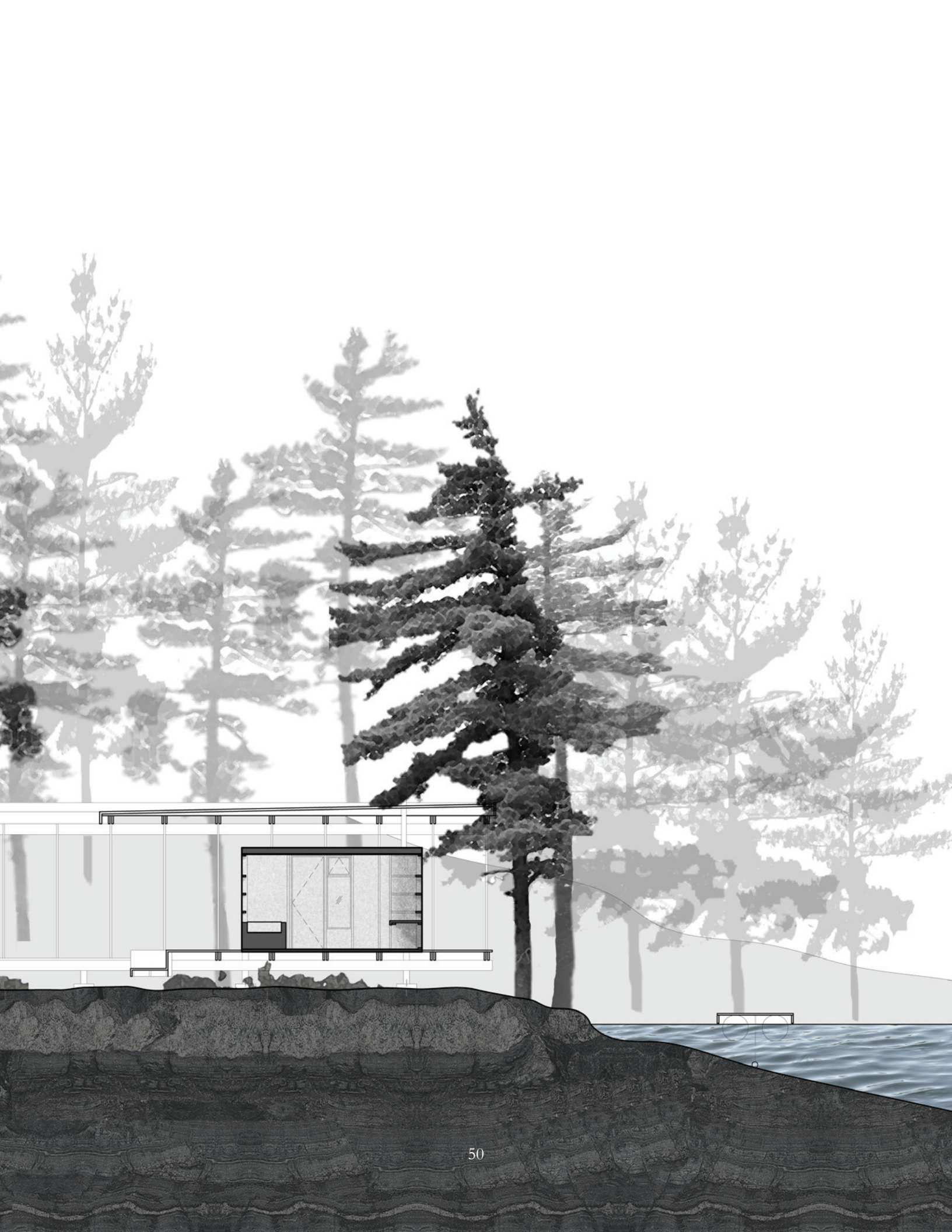




Fig.60: Longitudinal Section through proposed building.  
Scale 1:100











Clockwise from top  
 Fig.61: Stepping back down onto the island floor.

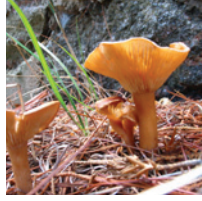
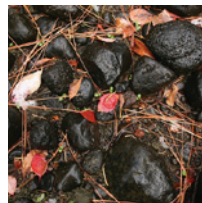
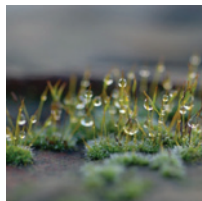
Fig.61b: Lounging on the deck 'chaise' in the 'Room of Earth & Sky'.

Fig.64: Sunlight filtering through the tree canopy, caressing a mossy mound.

Fig.65: Mushrooms sprouting up between pine needles on the damp forest floor.

Fig.63: Black granite slick with rain after a storm.

Fig.62: Morning dew clinging to a patch of moss.



## ROOM OF EARTH &amp; SKY

Wooden steps invites me down into this outdoor room. I am once again on the soft forest floor from which the tree trunks emerge and soar up into the blue sky. The smell of pine sap is strong in the air and the gentle breeze brings it to my nose. I hear the bristle of needles high above me. I take a deep breath filling my lungs to capacity. I n h a l e e x h a l e . The forest circulates within me as I breathe in the lofty sky and release a heaviness that's been weighing for weeks. I inhale again and feel the surge of fresh oxygen coursing through my veins. I feel as though I am beginning to belong here.

I can comfortably spend my day here if I so choose. I can sit on the deck with my legs hanging over the edge to contemplate the fragment of the world within its bounds. I stretch them out into the open space and feel the warmth of the sun. There are moments where the deck graciously expands. I bring out pillows and lounge on this chaise for hours.

This outdoor room acts as a stage for ordinary yet sacred phenomena: a scattering of leaves, melting of snow, patterns of light and shadow. On rainy days the water penetrates this space as if on display. It cascades off the inward sloping roof and darkens all that it touches. It splashes against the hard rocks and then meanders its way through crevices back to the island floor. The rock becomes slick, the needles catch in an eddy and flow.

**Inside/Outside**

*The one room cabin was reserved as sleeping quarters. As soon as we awoke we were out the door. Food was prepared, cooked and eaten outside, and our living space was the entire island. Once we reached a certain age we had free range of the land, and would trek away from the watchful*

*eyes of our parents. With a love for playing 'house', the three of us created our own shelters in the woods, which most often took the form of a teepee. After gathering long, fallen branches we lashed them with rope and wrapped the skeleton with a sheet. It took some trial and error, but we soon had the hang of it.*



As an adult I love the endless hours of reading an engaging novel. My place of repose changes multiple times throughout the day based on the weather conditions. I sit on the east side of the island with my morning coffee soaking up the early rays of light. When the sun is high in the sky and scorches my skin, naturally I retreat into the shade of a big pine. When there is a relentless south westerly wind battering the island I move to the west side where I am more protected by rock and tree. My body tells me what it wants, the comfort it desires. Through years of experience I have refined my places of repose to find the perfect habitat in which to spend my days. I find my comfort in nature. I am never disappointed.

There's no rush about calling things sacred. I think we should be patient, and give the land a lot of time to tell us or the people of the future. The cry of a Flicker, the funny urgent chatter of a Gray squirrel, the acorn whack on a barn roof – are signs enough.

Gary Snyder; *The Practice of the Wild*

Fig.66: Aerial view of Moose Mountain Medicine Wheel in Saskatchewan, Canada.



Fig.67: A Japanese stone monument marking the presence of a 'kami', or spirit, in the woods.





### Sacred Space

Modern thinkers ridicule the notion that land could have anima, but for generations this was the worldview of our ancestors. Native and Shinto cultures, among others, believe land is alive and divine. Gods inhabited mountains, trees and rocks, and thus these things were inherently sacred. The world was a stage for miraculous happenings and through our imagination and thoughtfulness we could participate.

Although the world itself is understood as divine, certain locations are regarded specifically as sacred space. These places are different from others in that they are experienced as more animated, intensified, focused and centered , and require our attention. Dr. Maureen Korp describes the powerful qualities of sacred space in her book *Sacred Art of the Earth*:

Symbolically we may understand it as an irruption of power - a fluid energy from above and below. This power may or may not be concretized or contained in the form of pillar, mountain, mound. We may or may not recognize it by name as a god, an experience of the sacred personified in a theophany. We may only apprehend this power as a sort of energy from time before time, certainly from time before now. The place is not like other places, and in that way we experience it as a localized, site-specific kratophany.<sup>1</sup>

### Sacred Rites

*As children, when we found dead birds or dragonflies we would hold funerary ceremonies in honour of them. Holding these tiny creatures in my hands I felt the power of their beauty. With stones and pieces of birch bark we would mark their final resting place on the island.*

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1 Maureen Korp. *Sacred Art of the Earth*. 85.



Fig.68: The door to the cabin.

## R E S T

**Distant Company**

Stepping up onto the eastern deck I have a view down the narrow walkway to the lake beyond. Making my way toward the water, I see another home nestled in the distant shoreline. Though I cannot make out the faces, I see an old couple sitting on their dock, deep in conversation. Their small aluminum fishing boat bobs up and down on the water. The wind carries a foreign sound to my ear, the elongated vowels of their native tongue. The melancholic sound drifts in and out of range and I contemplate their subject. Perhaps they speak of their homeland, the rugged landscape of Finland. I've been told the landscape of Buck Lake reminds them of the place they left many years ago. Perhaps they talk about their grandchildren who will be visiting for the weekend.

**Threshold**

Unlocking the wooden door, I enter the room and close it behind me. The space is compact; inside this little world I am warm and protected. I reach up and touch the low ceiling above, registering the scale of my body. I move around the room in just a few paces.

The inner structure of the walls are exposed, a timber skeleton blanketed in cedar from the outside. The exterior of this skin naturally weathers, developing a glistening silver patina but the inside remains fresh and golden. From inside I can read the horizontal lines of the tongue-and-groove boards. The pattern of darkened knots across the wall recall the branches that once sprouted from the tree, an Eastern White Cedar and the lingering fresh scent conjures memories of cedar groves.

Sunlight enters the shady room from two small south-west facing windows



The capacity to be alone... becomes linked with self-discovery and self realization; with becoming aware of one's deepest needs, feelings and impulses.

Anthony Storr; *Solitude*

Fig.69: Sitting on the daybed one gets a framed view of the tree trunk beyond



and provides enough light for daytime activities.

After a long winter of being closed-up, I sense the room's longing to freshen itself. I open window hatches that push out like awnings. Fresh air infiltrates the room through the low opening on the south west side. It asks the old air to dance; gently swaying and twirling they go, before leaving hand in hand. They exit through the upper hatch on the opposite wall.

### Lost & Found

*We have a collection of objects found on the island. A basket of pine cones and acorns, a jar holding a bouquet of weeds. As kids we liked to pick special rocks from the shore and paint them with images of flowers and insects. There is an empty turtle shell about the size of my hand that was found one spring. My latest finding was a feather I plucked from the water last fall. It's brown and spotted white. I think it belonged to a loon.*

### Read

Shelved within the stud space is a collection of books. Mostly novels, each one is a different adventure from a different time. I pick one up and turn it over in my hands. The soft, aged pages smells like an old library. I lie down on the built-in daybed. It conservatively accommodates the length and width of my body while still being comfortable. I lay back into the down filled cushions. The cotton sheets feel cool and crisp on this hot summer day.

At the foot of the bed the wood wall gives way to a window. It frames a view of a rock face beyond. The sun will peer through in the late afternoon, reminding me of the hour.

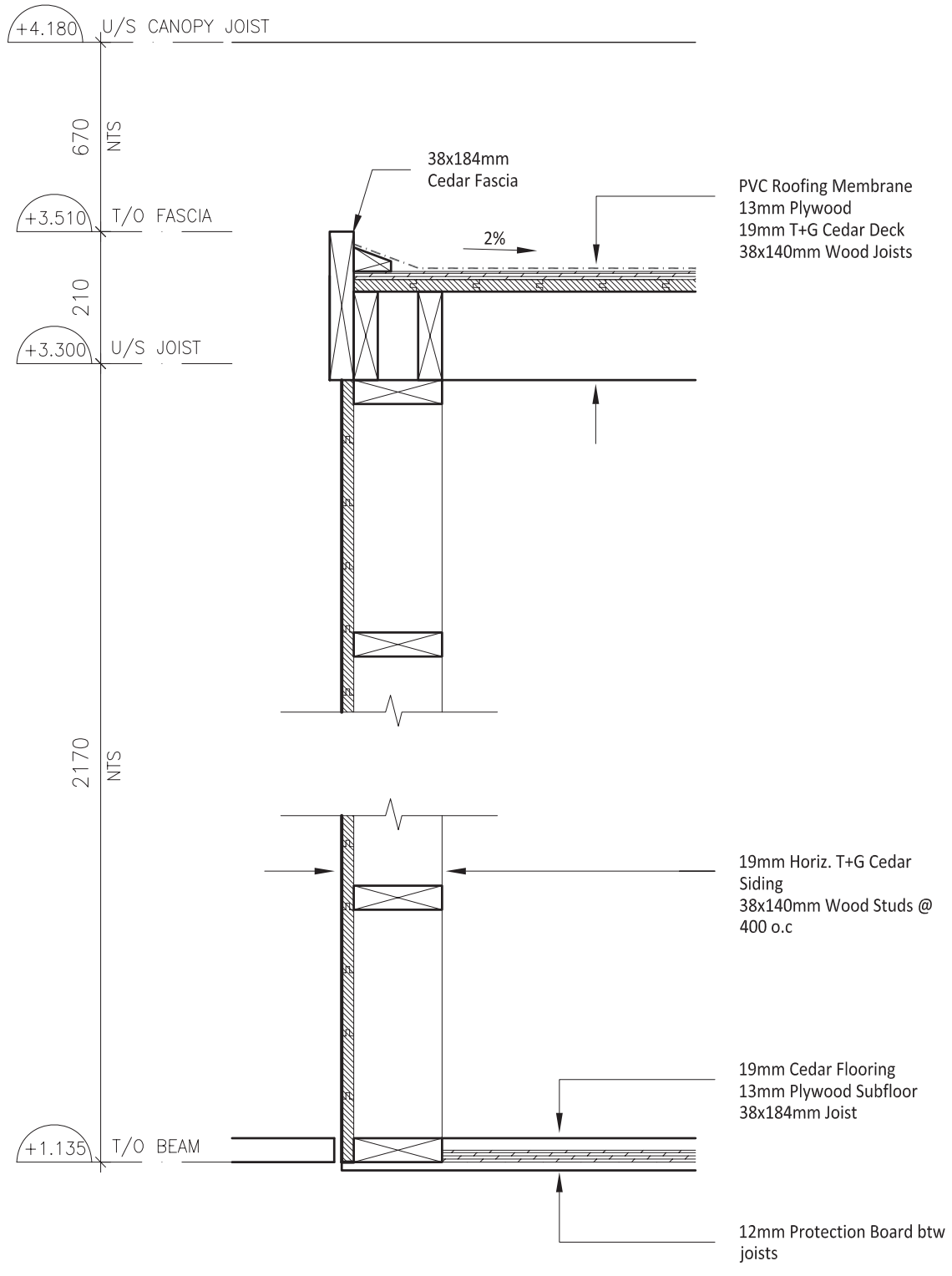


Fig.70: Wall section detail @ 'Rest'.  
Scale 1:10

Opposite Page  
Fig.71: Cross Section through 'Rest'.  
Scale 1:50







Fig.72: Pine and maple logs, split and stacked, ready to make the next fire.

Fig.73: Hands strike a match.

Fig.74: The fire burns hot



## F I R E

The sun has travelled all day and now hangs over the west horizon – it's late afternoon and time for sauna. I access the stove from the exterior, reaching through the wall into the stove on the inside. The small cast iron door is resistant but just as I am about to give up, it pops up on its hinges and creaks open. The scent of stale ash lingers and in the low sunlight the tiny particles catch in the air and dance before my eyes. I can taste the smell in the back of my throat, a scent that pervades all time and place. Kneeling down onto the hearth I remove a charred log, the remains of a past fire.

I gather my material. I select the new wood from a stack, carefully protected within an alcove. The hardwood logs of maple have already been chopped and split to size, left to season over the past year. In a galvanized bucket I have kindling and some old newspaper. I crumple the paper and place it in the centre of the stove. Around it I arrange the kindling like a teepee. I open the intake vent and strike a match. For an instance I notice the scent of sulphur emitted from the small flame, and then it is gone.

The paper is quick to catch and then spreads its flame to the small pieces of wood. The wood is slow to catch but then, a whoooooosh and crackle, the fire is made. Faster and FASTER the flames begin to devour its meal and the heat builds. I add the larger logs of wood to feed the flame. The heat reaches out for me as my skin absorbs its energy. My cheeks flush red. I close the door and wait. It will take about thirty minutes to reach the desired temperature.



Fig.75: West view of the sauna

## C L E A N S E

### **Finnish Sauna**

To understand the sauna as simply a place to bathe is a misunderstanding of the Finnish concept. The sauna is a ritual of liminality, of which cleansing is only one aspect. “Liminality refers to the threshold, the interstitial period between two states. Thus, the essential nature of liminality is separation.”<sup>1</sup> For the Finns, sauna is a holy place and upon entering, one is set apart spatially, temporally and socially.

Traditionally the sauna is located on an edge – between home and field, or forest and lake. This threshold is an indication of the threshold between work and leisure, the week and the weekend, the profane and the holy. The sauna is also a symbolic separation from ordinary life, physically, emotionally and spiritually. The participant strips away her clothes to reveal the nakedness of her body. This nudity is a non-suggestive and non-erotic gesture in the sauna, reflecting the vulnerability of our physical being. One is immersed in the emotional experience of relaxation and invigoration of mind and body, as they are unencumbered by the weight of the outside world. In the sauna one is free to look inwardly and engage their inner self. “The sauna is a place to think about things where the Finn learns to understand him/herself and his/her relationship to the rest of the world.”<sup>2</sup>

The transformative quality of the ritual is conceptualized as moving from a state of impurity to purity, or dirty to clean. “There is a sense among Finns that ‘real’ cleanliness is possible only from the sauna. Merely washing (in a shower or bath) is useful and convenient on a day to day basis, but this is superficial and inadequate in itself.”<sup>3</sup> In ancient Finnish tradition one would partake in a

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1 Peter Land. *Sauna as Symbol*. 83

2 *ibid.* 86

3 Peter Land. *Sauna as Symbol*. 84





Fig.76: As we touch the world, the world touches us.



ritual cleansing in the sauna before important ceremonies and occasions.

The idea of the sauna as a place for renewal or rebirth is reflected by its role in significant rites of passage. Finns suggest that the old-fashioned smoke saunas were ideal places to give birth. The smoke and heat created an anti-bacterial environment and the room could be heated to a comfortable temperature for a new-born baby. Warm water was available for washing, and the sauna oven was used to dispose of the afterbirth. There are also various traditional marriage rituals involving the sauna including marking the end of the woman's girlhood before the ceremony and marking the union of the couple as part of the ceremony.<sup>4</sup> Finally, after consummating the marriage, the couple would have sauna as the last stage of the ceremony. Marking the end of the life cycle, the sauna was also a place of death. "Some sources say that, in their last hours, people would drag themselves or were carried to die in the sauna."<sup>5</sup> The body would receive a ritual washing in preparation for the funeral.

### Shedding Skin

I remove my clothes, slipping the cotton over my body to expose my naked skin to the air. I hang the clothes on a peg in the cedar wall. The breeze catches the corner of the shirt and it dances in space.

### Mind of the Skin

Our skin is the interface between our bodies and the surrounding environment. As it protects us from external forces, it also allows us to experience our world through an acute system of sensory receptors. Although we identify multiple senses, each is an extension of touch. Juhani Pallasmaa writes, "even the eye touches; the gaze implies an unconscious touch, bodily mimesis and identification."<sup>6</sup> As we touch the world, the world touches us.

Unlike the digital world and internet connection, the sensual world is real, not disembodied. Our body provides us with direct experience and allows us to exist in the present.

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4 ibid 112

5 ibid. 113

6 Juhani Pallasmaa. *The Eyes of the Skin*. p42.



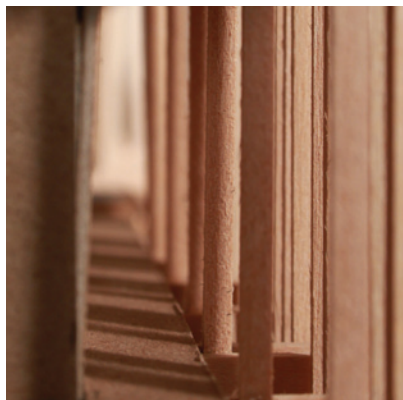
Clockwise from top  
 Fig.77: The dark and steamy interior of the sauna. Daylight washes the floor from the low windows.

Fig.79: Bare feet track through warm puddles on the granite-tiled floor.

Fig.80: The late afternoon sun shines through the wood screen.

Fig. 81: Deep shadows pattern the deck at the entry to the sauna.

Fig.78: A wet palm print leaves a trace on the dry wood wall.



## Perspire

The thermometer reaches 70° Celsius; I enter the sauna. Inside it is dark and hot. The only light floods the floor from a low window and there are no views out. Sounds of outside are muted by the heavy, insulated walls that act to keep the hot air in, and the cooler air out. I hear the muffled roar of the fire in the stove and the aluminum chimney makes a ping-ponging as it expands with the heat. The smell of wood and fire is dominant. As I near the bundle of dried oak leaves hanging from the ceiling I inhale and get a whiff of their musty sweetness.

I climb up the raked benches and take a seat at the top. Up here the blackened ceiling is just inches from my head. Dipping the wood handled ladle into the bucket of water, I throw it onto the hot rocks and watch it hiiiiiss and POP. Steam forms engulfing my entire body and beads of sweat appear almost instantly from deep within my skin; as they roll down my face I catch their saltiness on my tongue. Now, I breathe just through my mouth to avoid burning the inside of my nostrils. My breathing is audibly heavy and slows as I relax, my muscles melting into the heat.

I place my hand on the wood wall. My palm, wet with perspiration, leaves its mark and I watch the impression slowly evaporate into the steamy air. It disappears without a trace. After some time, I climb down from the top bench and feel the temperature fluctuate as I descend. I step into a puddle of warm water and track my footprints to the door. I grab the hot wood door handle, its dryness saps the moisture from my skin. With some effort I push the door open, the cool fresh air instantly flooding me.

I feel relief as the steam radiates from my skin and my eyes adjust to the light under the shade of the overhang. A screen of columns cast deep shadows across the deck and I am simultaneously touched by light and shadow as if standing in an ancient forest. I linger in their depths.

Leaving the shade I emerge into the full orange glow of the evening sun.

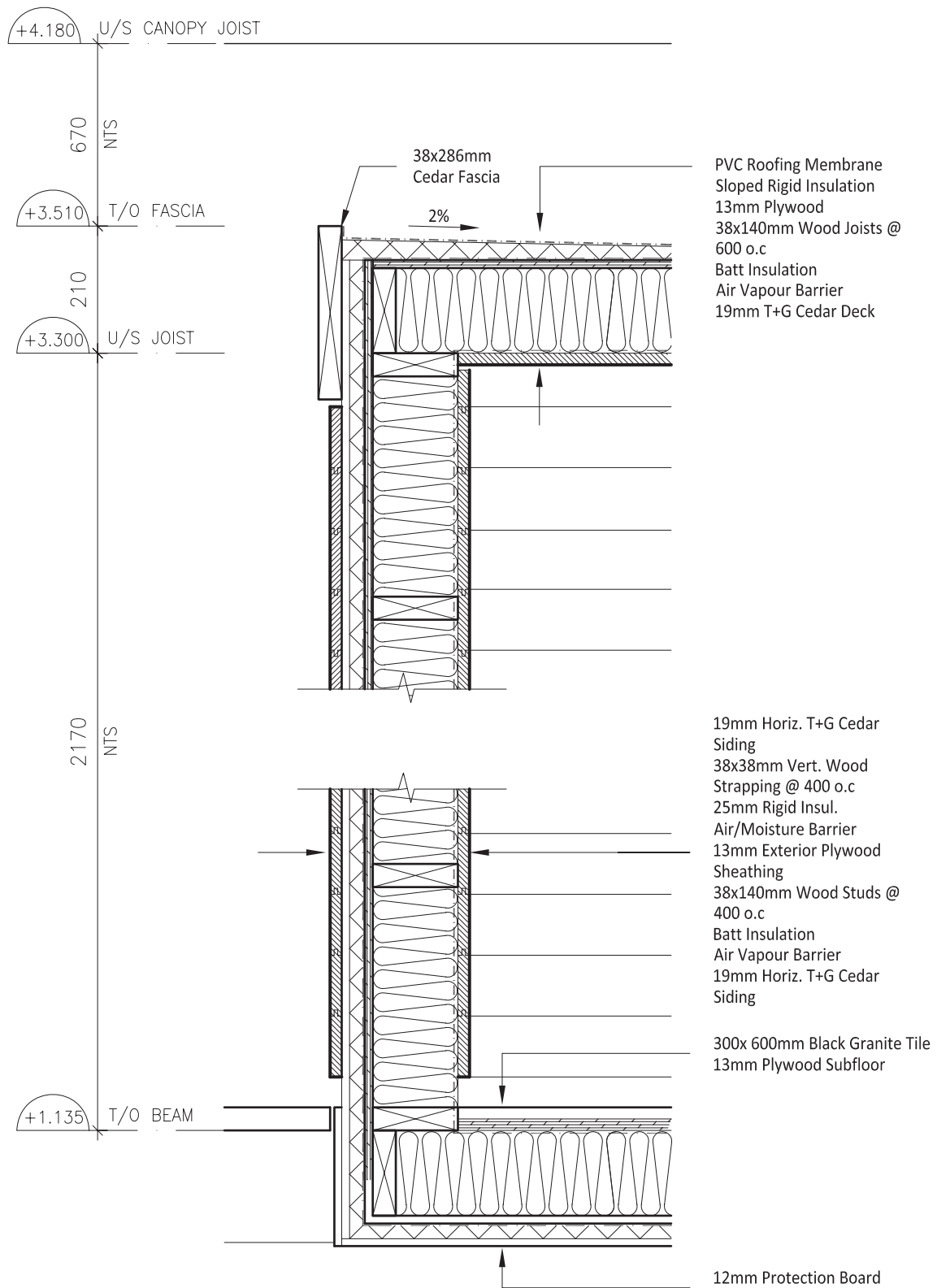


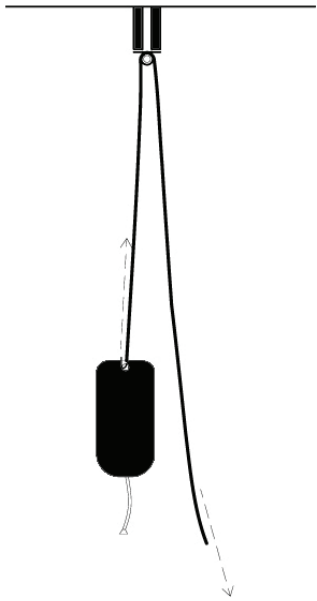
Fig.82: Wall section detail @ Sauna  
Scale 1:10

Opposite Page  
Fig.83: Cross Section through Sauna  
Scale 1:50

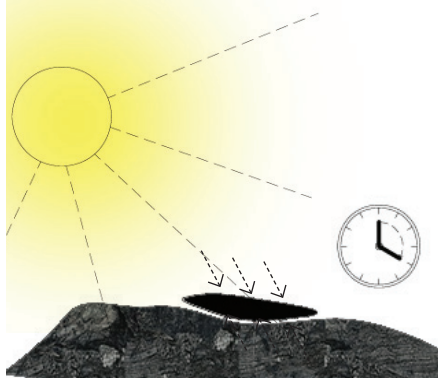








3. Hook bag to pulley system & using the rope, raise the bag to the desired height for showering.



2. Leave bag in direct sunlight for 3-4 hours until the water has reached a desirable temperature.



1. Fill black bag with 5 gallons of lake water.



Right  
Fig.84: View of outdoor shower.

Left  
Fig.85: Diagram of the shower preparation process.

**Bathe**

Earlier in the day I filled the shower reservoir with water from the lake. This black bag holds five gallons of water, enough for one generous shower. I placed it directly in the sun to absorb the heat and raise the temperature of the water to a pleasing temperature. Today was hot and sunny, so this took only a few hours. Now I carry the heavy bag over to the shower room. Hooking it onto a pulley system, I pull the rope to raise the bag up to the ceiling. Tethering the rope to the column it is now secure for me to shower. The warm water rains on me from above. After making its way over my hair and skin the water drains away through the deck.





Fig.86: Reflections of the shore line cast across the mottled surface of the lake.



## IMMERSION

### Water as Symbol

Water is a pervasive and powerful symbol across cultures. Its meaning can be broken down into three predominant themes: a life source, a vehicle of cleansing, and an agent of renewal.

Thought of as the earth's lifeblood by the Cherokee Indians<sup>1</sup>, water is the primal origin of all things. It symbolizes the beginnings of creation - our unshaped cosmos, as well as mother and womb. A single drop of water is a microcosm of the entire universe, reflecting and encompassing nature.<sup>2</sup> Its reflective surface mirrors what it sees, doubling the surrounding environment. It is this reflective surface that is the intersection of the celestial and terrestrial realms. Like a finely tuned instrument, water registers the minute impacts and vibrations of its surroundings. It nourishes all things, its coolness restoring the earth from the scorch of the sun.

Perhaps water is best understood in terms of its fluidity, movement, process and rhythm. "Water may lack an innate rhythm but it serves as a source of rhythm in the meteorological and physiological spheres, regulating body temperature, mediating and reflecting gravitational pulls in the tides, and playing an integral role in changes of the weather and seasons."<sup>3</sup>

In psychological terms, water symbolizes the unconscious, the formless powers of the soul, of hidden and unrecognized energy. The contemplation of water then represents looking inward to the depths of one's self. In *Water and Dreams*, Bachelard explains that "during this contemplation in depth, the subject... becomes conscious of his own intimate nature...it is rather a deepened

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1 Charlie Rylie. *The Healing Energies of Water*. 24

2 *ibid.* 44

3 David MacCauley. *Elemental Philosophy*. 44

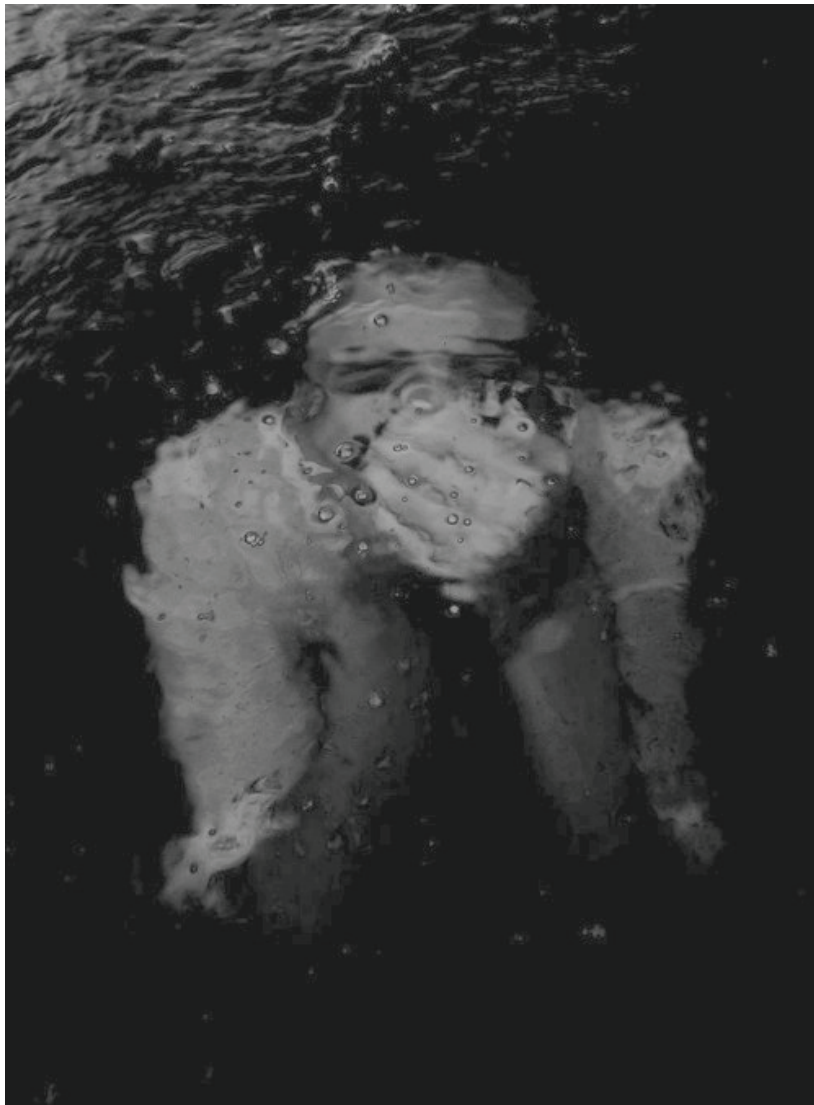


Fig.88: The body immerses itself beneath the water's surface.

perspective on the world and ourselves.”<sup>4</sup>

### Evening Swim

I make my way down the west side of the deck. Delicately, I step down across four stones that lead me into the warm, shallow water. I take four steps across the sandy bottom before reaching the submerged ledge from which I dive. I push off, gliding through the water before turning around to look where I've come from. With a quick thrust of my legs I bob up and then sink below the dappled surface. As I descend I cross the threshold from the warm surface water to the icy cold liquid below. In an instant I re-emerge, my hair slicked back, drops of water caressing my eye lids. I lie, face up, limbs splayed in the water, ears submerged, eyes open, I am supported, my body suspended in space. The water gulps in my ears, but rising above this is the sound of my breathing engulfing my body. I watch the clouds pass over me and trees bristle in the wind. I pull my limbs inward, gliding like wings. The water rushes over and under me, momentarily drowning the sound of my breath, transporting me to a hollow cavern deep below.

I think back to the fun I had as a child playing in the lake for hours.

### Wild Play

*My sisters and I would spend much of the days in the water. Pretending to be otters, the three of us would stand on the rocky ledge, arms glued to our sides and glide into the lake one at a time - big, medium, small. Embodying the otter, we would flail our prostrate bodies through the water for as long as we could before sinking below the surface. Then we would clamber back onto shore to dive again and again.*

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4 Gaston Bachelard. *Water and Dreams*. 50



Fig.89: The large glowing sun hangs low on the west horizon.



Fig.90: The low evening light hits the trees horizontally.



## EVENING RITUAL

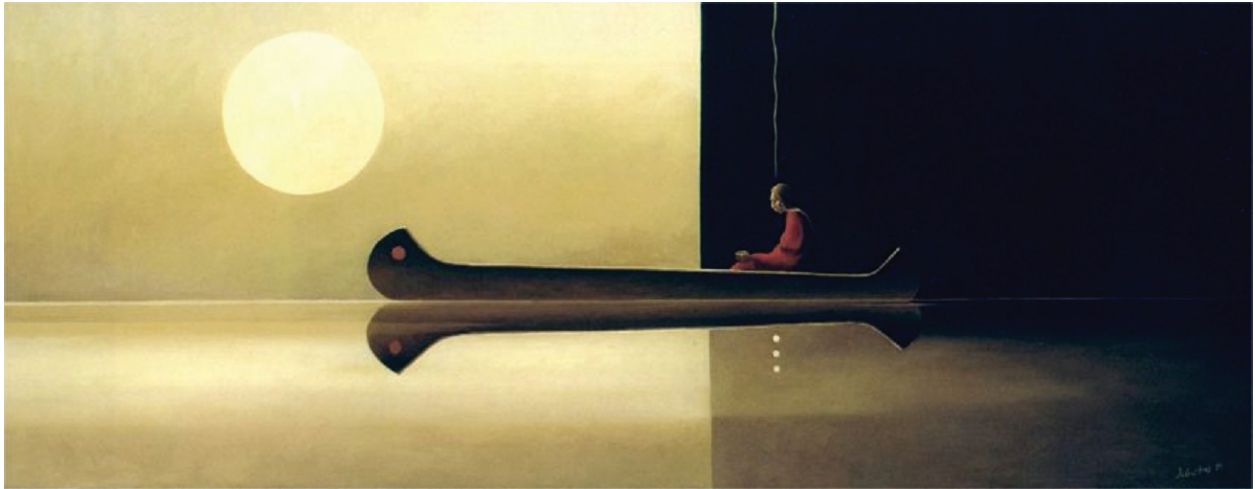
Each evening we gather to watch the sun set in the west. Hanging low on the brink of disappearing behind the tree line, the intense orange light animates the island's western shore. Colours are most vivid at this time of day, the dark water becoming cerulean blue, the green of the leaves and pine glowing to a golden hue, the dry needle covered ground alight in a red flame. Each trunk is hit with a nearly horizontal light, strongly defining east and west, shadow and light, cool and warm. This time of day is my favourite at the island – the wind slowing, the light dimming, a magical serenity takes hold.

When it's time, it disappears quickly from sight. The light fades, heat disperses, it's time for night.

### **Darkness**

Many creation myths represent the beginning of time as darkness and from that darkness our world was shaped. The night itself acts as a cool, silent hiatus to the heat of the day and so it is thought of as healing and restorative. On the other hand, darkness is often associated with fear and the unknown. At night criminals come out, and in our sleep we are haunted by the monsters of our nightmares. As the sun sets, our conscious light of day is swallowed by unconscious night. This is often referred to as the dark night of the soul.

If one pushes past the fear of the dark, the night reveals itself as a source of transformation and inspiration. In the dark, one's vision is impeded, so the other senses are heightened allowing for a new type of awareness. Although many sleep through the night the earth is still very much alive in the darkness. A magical world of new creatures emerges – fireflies, bats, and owls. When one's eyes adjust to the darkness the constellations are revealed, symbolizing



Oh night thou was my guide  
Oh night more loving than the rising sun  
Oh night that joined the lover to the beloved one  
Transforming each of them into the other.

St. John of the Cross; *Dark Night of the Soul*

Fig.91: Man crosses the threshold  
from night to day, dark to light.

the glimpses of illumination from within the darkness.

This concept of darkness as an agent of transformation holds significant meaning when discussing the life of the soul. The metaphor appears in great stories and myths of many cultures, throughout history. Mohammed for instance, describes his massive breakthrough into what he felt was a cosmic revelation as *The Night Journey*, which occurred in a dream. Siddhartha, after years of discipline and deprivation, finds a new way of experiencing life in what we now call enlightenment, and became the Buddha. Jesus transformed into the Christ at baptism through an opening to a new type of divine awareness. Other tales include that of Gilgamesh, Osiris, and Odysseus.

The classic story of the night sea journey is that of Jonah and the Whale from the Bible's Old Testament. Jonah's story is the quintessential representation of man being swallowed by a sea monster and being carried into the dark depths of the ocean before being released back on land. In psychological terms, this archetype has been interpreted as a journey into the unconscious with the goal of moving toward one's primitive or ancient part of themselves.<sup>1</sup> Primitive in this sense refers to having an engagement with one's soul. In this state one achieves a more complete self awareness as an individual, but also within the whole of the cosmos. As their primitive self, one is more in tune with the depths of their nature, their instincts<sup>2</sup> thus characterizing this process of rebirth as an essential theme of human life.

Separation from his instinctual nature inevitably plunges civilized man into the conflict between conscious and unconscious, spirit and nature, knowledge and faith, a split that becomes pathological the moment his consciousness is no longer able to neglect or suppress his instinctual side.<sup>3</sup>

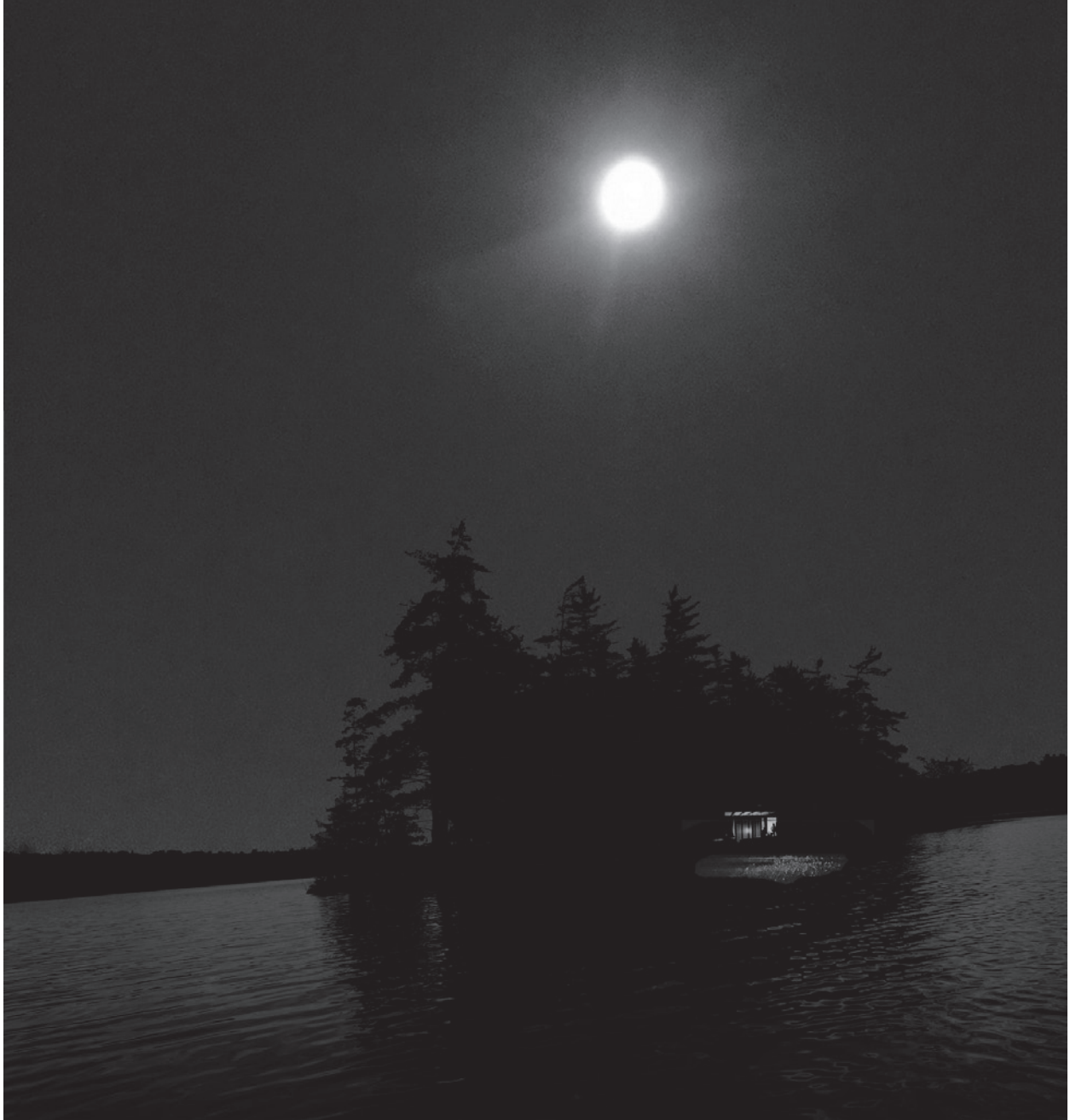
In contemporary society the general discontent and emptiness felt by many can be attributed to a disconnect between body, mind and spirit. We have lost contact with our true self and so we seek meaning and purpose. On our own night sea journey we are the sun setting in the east, traveling underwater before rising in the west. This is the individual's ritual of departure, initiation and return.

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1 Carl Jung. CW:9i: 187

2 ibid.

3 Carl Jung. *The Undiscovered Self*. 558.



But however cosmic the isolated house lighted by the star of its lamp may become, it will always symbolize solitude.

Gaston Bachelard; *The Poetics of Space*

Fig.92: The lantern shining amidst the darkness marks the presence of an island inhabitant.

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Fig.93: A cross section of the uphill climb to the moon viewing platform.  
Scale 1:100



**Lantern**

As twilight fades and darkness takes hold I hear the first call of the whippoorwill from a distance, signaling me with its nightsong. I take refuge in the cabin from the barrage of mosquitoes out for their nightly feast.

Sitting at the desk I am alone in this dark room. My bare feet rest one on top of the other. Removing the thin glass chimney from the oil lamp I turn the wick down low to light it. I control the light by adjusting the height of the wick. If I turn it up too high the glass will blacken. If it's too low the flame will put-put; getting it just right is a test of balance. The lamp casts a warm orange hallow across the desk. Glancing up from my page, I stare at the liquid kerosene in the belly of the lamp. I look past it through the small corner window. This is my night window. It signals my presence here on the island.



## NIGHT PATH

The wind has died down and the air is very still. The heat from the day softly radiates as the earth begins to cool itself. Most of the mosquitoes have gone to sleep, and the night takes hold. Emerging from inside, I step off of the north side of the deck onto a stepping stone at the base of the hill. Standing here in the dark I wait to allow my eyes to adjust. The howl of wolves reaches me from a distance, but I am not afraid. I know I am safe here on the island, protected by the great expanse of water between us. My pupils expand grasping for any spot of light and before long the black veil gives way to a subtle glow and the greenish spark of fireflies amongst the trees. The sound of crickets is heavy in the air and I am aware of the land gulping the lake water on either side of me. From this spot there is a clear path up the hill and I begin my ascent.





Fig.94: View to the moon and the starry night sky through an opening in the trees.



### Gaze

Once at the top of the hill I am standing in a clearing, within a ring of trees. The moonlight is streaming in washing the scene with a silvery haze. A small wooden platform sits at the centre of the space. It too is elevated above the ground. I sit down on its edge before lying back and spreading out across it. Stretching my limbs in all directions I fill the plane and feel the limits of my muscles. The loons are calling to one another with their eerie cries reverberating across water and stone. Above me are stars and the moon, not quite full. Gazing into this outer landscape I am brought within myself. I gaze at them, they gaze back.

### Moon

The moon is the closest celestial body to earth and is the only true satellite of our planet, creating a special kinship between the two. The moon spins on its own axis at the same rate that it orbits the earth, and so, earth is always viewing the same face of the moon. The moon itself bears no light. “Purely astronomically, the sun has light while the moon only borrows from the sun; that is, the sun gives light to the moon...”<sup>1</sup> It is this lit face that is always turned to earth, and thus, the moon’s *dark side* is never shown. However, the lunar phases cause the appearance of the moon to be on a recurrent cycle of appearing and then disappearing into darkness.

As a symbol of fertility, the moon presides over conception, pregnancy and birth and the agricultural cycles of planting and harvest.<sup>2</sup> There is a strong association between moon and water as the lunar phases regulate the falling of rain and ebb and flow of every body of water.

Often identified as Yin energy, the moon is described as feminine, dark, moist, diffuse, vague, intuitive and receptive. According to Marie-Louise von Franz, “For a man the moon would represent an aspect of the feminine personification of his unconscious, while for the woman it would personify her vegetative life basis, her instinctive life.”<sup>3</sup>

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1 Marie-Luise Von Franz. *Alchemy*. 149

2 Ami. Ronnberg. *The Book of Symbols*. 26

3 Von Franz. *Alchemy*. 150

Ah! The gentle fluency of the reverie which helps us pour ourselves into the world, into the well-being of a world. Once more, reverie teaches us that the essence of being is well-being, a well-being rooted in the archaic being.

Gaston Bachelard; *The Poetics of Reverie*



Clockwise from upper right  
Fig.96: Falling asleep with the island as her bed.

Fig.97: Dreaming of a cosmological union.

Fig.95:Contemplating in the light of the moon

### Dream

Sinking into the weight of my body I sense my breathing slow, my eyelids growing heavy and my body becoming one with the darkness. Closing my eyes, I recall the effort that went into building this sanctuary; the physical labour that spanned bodies and generations. I think of the backbreaking effort my parents took in hauling the tons of rock across the lake, as if they were an ancient people, gathering stone to create a great monument. And then I think of my place, here on the southern tip of the island. Built over a few summers it has taken shape as time and resources have allowed. The first summer we laid out the frame work of deck and canopy. The 'Room of Earth and Sky' was the first space to take shape. Then, a year later, the heavy walls of the sauna were erected providing a proper place to 'Cleanse' ourselves. That year the sauna allowed us to extend our visits well into the chilly months of autumn. Finally, the cedar cladding went up, inscribing the interior place of 'Rest'.

Here under the night sky and embraced by the forest I drift into sleep and my unconscious takes hold. Sinking deeply into this bed I penetrate earth, rock and ancient memory. Here, I find my place, simply sheltered within the expanse of the universe.

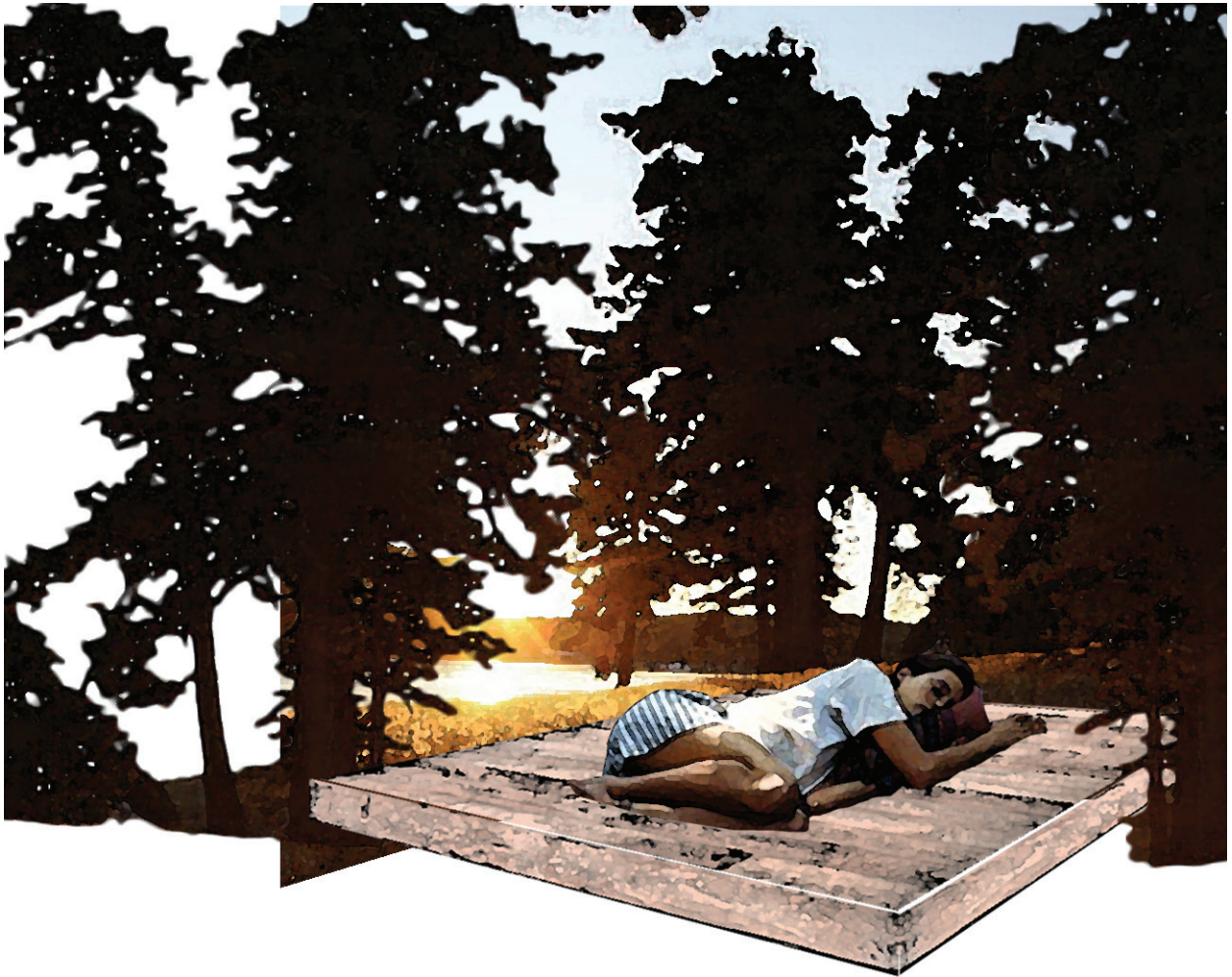


Fig.98:Sunrise through the trees



## RETURN

**Waking**

On the edge of a dream I hear the song of a chickadee. Its simple and pure two-note whistle pulls me into consciousness and the roar of a dawn chorus. Each and every bird signals to one another the rise of a new day; the sun has travelled all night beneath the earth and now emerges on the east horizon. The low morning light casts deep shadows through the trees. I realize I have spent the night under the stars and I am slightly damp with dew. The morning sun seems to move quickly and soon I am warmed by her rays.

**Reflection**

Climbing back down the hill I head to the canoe. Out on the water I make my way around the island to return to the cabin for a hearty breakfast. I possess an inner sense of realignment; my body has reconnected with its natural rhythm. Moving from moment to moment across land and architecture I have fallen into rhythm with this place, returning to my body and returning to my senses. I belong. I feel fully alive.

Fig.99: The old wood formwork for the concrete walls remain on the island.



## CONCLUSION

### Original Intentions

In 1978 the small stone cabin was the perfect getaway for my parents, a young married couple still five years away from starting a family. But it was just the beginning of an idea. From its inception there was an intention to expand this primitive hut into something larger, more accommodating for a bigger family and perhaps more convenient. Then, my sisters and I came along and priorities shifted. Life sped up, and now 35 years later the cabin still remains in its original form. Despite being ‘unfinished’ we use the cabin each and every summer. Over the years moments of the larger dream have been revealed – *This would be the front door, and we could hang our cross-country skis on the stone wall; There would be a country kitchen with a low ceiling; The existing room would be a quiet den; The bath house would be over there.* There are traces of these ideas: a stack of old formwork to build new walls, a coil of piping to draw water up from the lake, a cast iron claw-foot tub and pair of sink basins. These items tell of an unfulfilled vision, one that I have taken upon myself as the next generation in this place.

My father was my age when he designed and built the cabin. As his first built project I see it as an example of his unfettered creative instinct that had emerged within the context of his architectural education of the early 1970’s. This project was a testing ground for academic concepts, building science, materiality and craftsmanship. Still sitting on the family bookshelf are his copies of *Handmade Houses: A Guide to the Woodbutcher’s Art*, and *Woodstock Handmade Houses*, published in 1973 and 1974 respectively. Looking through those books I get a sense of the architectural and cultural influences of that time. Now, as the culminating project of my formal architectural education, I address the same site, with similar problems but from a new vantage point.

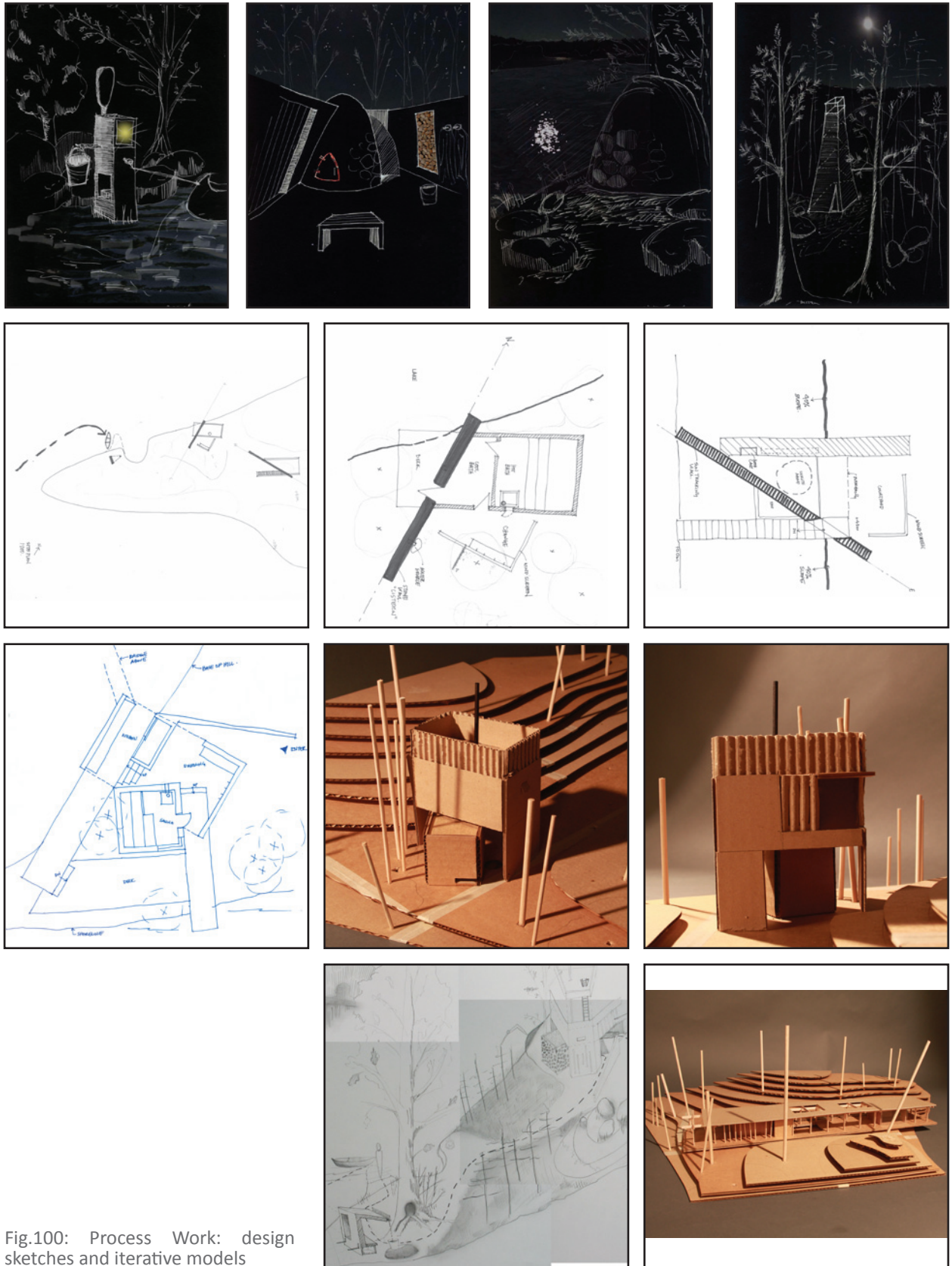


Fig.100: Process Work: design sketches and iterative models



Through the rigorous investigation of what this place means to me I have come to propose an architecture that reflects my world and my own creative voice. But the process of reaching this final proposition was one of ebb and flow.

### **Somatic Design**

I began designing with a ‘top-down’ approach of imposing a pre-existing concept onto the site. When looking at the various early iterations of the project it is evident that I was designing with broad strokes. I suppose this is the approach I used through much of my undergrad design work. At the time I recall struggling with its limitations but I seemed to fall short in finding a successful new approach. The old method does not engage the physical properties of the site in a way that would provide a meaningful experience of the place. Upon realizing the fundamental flaw in my method I shifted my approach to the somatic – of focusing on the precise moments when the body meets the architecture. This incremental engagement of the senses as we move through space is how we connect with our environment, whether natural or built, and fulfill our instinctual desire for rootedness in body and place.

### **Finding my Voice**

When intervening on a site with a pre-existing building it has to be considered how one will respond to the previous architect’s design, especially one with whom I have family ties. A precedent was set by my parents and perhaps I felt a self-imposed sense of duty to take up where they left off. I had to re-examine their motives in order to determine my own motives as designer. Although in the past I would often discuss my architectural projects with my father, I approached this project differently. I have not shared my thesis work with him since M1, when the idea was yet to be fully formed. I think I needed this separation in order to truly distinguish my creative instinct from his own. I began with some basic, but fundamental questions. What was truly missing from our experience on the island? Did I really want to add the conveniences we lacked? The answer was no. The primitive tasks of collecting water in a bucket to wash, building a fire to keep warm, and striking a match for light, that are all associated with our established island lifestyle are endearing and fulfilling qualities that I believe make the experience so desirable. It is through the incorporation of these primitive activities that the body and senses are



Fig.101: The experience has been physically acquired through my senses, making the island a part of me.

called upon. Furthermore, through these meditative acts we engage the spirit making our time on the island inherently sacred.

Another architectural consideration was the material choice. For example did I need to respond to the use of stone and poured-in-place concrete? I found my answer upon reflecting on the lasting presence of the material. If the stone cabin were not maintained, over many generations the roof would rot away; the drywall would disintegrate; the pine flooring would disappear. What would be left are the ruins of the 1 foot thick stone and concrete walls. With my proposal of an all wood design, however, the entire building will disappear with time. Its only trace will be the points of connection where the rebar penetrates the island's bedrock, and with time the layers of pine needles and junipers would conceal these scars. The building, like the body, is impermanent.

### **Learning to Trust**

From the beginning, my encounter with Twin Island has been through the architectural lens of the cabin. "Maurice Merleau-Ponty has argued that our understanding of the world is inextricable from the space around us. We are constituted by an intricate, intertwined interplay between our body, our consciousness and the space we live in – we live in it and it lives in us."<sup>1</sup> In this way I feel that my experience at Twin Island has shaped me both as an individual and as a designer. As an architect I perceive the island as a set of physical properties that create an atmosphere for incremental, sensual experience. As well, I see the landscape as a set of architectonic elements that define space. The ground, trees and sky provide a natural vocabulary from which to create architectural space.

Upon reflection I realize that my experience of body, mind, and soul being graciously sheltered on the island is more than a memory. The experience has been physically acquired through my senses making the island a part of me. I now see that this thesis has been a journey toward appreciating and subsequently trusting my creative instinct as a potential source of inspiration. Now, at the end of this exercise, it is not just physically embodied, but inscribed in my creative instinct as well. As a designer I have tools that have potential to make beautiful and meaningful places.



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1 Paul Brislin. *Human Experience and Place*. 8.

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