

SECOND NATURE

01



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**‘A Reverential Home
Amidst the Shifting
Sands’**

Blee Halligan completes Dune House in
Turks & Caicos.

**‘Creating Fresh
Perspectives: The Rebel’s
Rest Model’**

Early stages of model making proves its
worth when coming to a client with fresh
perspectives.

**‘Planning for a New
Place: Submitting
Palmetto House’**

Greg Blee on Blee Halligan’s venture into
the Florida landscape.

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Showcasing Blee Halligan’s emerging projects, we take an investigative approach that uncovers the distinct ecological, historical, and cultural context of each site.

Ensuring the sun rises the next day has been prevalent in many ancient cultures—from lighting bonfires to give it strength, to ceremonies hosted in the hope of its return the next day.

With the glow of the golden canopy in the Caribbean, the sun can be incessant, as can the days that it dictates. The past few weeks working with our photographer has made me come to appreciate the rising and the setting of the sun on the Island, more than one might back at home. Feeling its cyclical rhythm, seeing our projects trundle along, you notice the tension between the unfinished, and the anticipation for completion.

Second Nature is a way to carve out moments of stillness and appreciation into this rolling passage of time. In an age where our attention spans diminish with each scroll of the thumb, nothing seems to reach finality. Architecture forces you to spend time searching for exactly that. A dissection of a project into a model brings answers to questions of construction. The details, right down to the tiny dried petals that make up the palm trees, reflect our pursuit of the carefully constructed. We utilise time to try and embed function and resilience with thoughtfulness. Everything has purpose, with each day that passes.

What makes Lee's drawings so easy to behold is exactly what makes it so difficult to translate them into successful buildings. Physical existence is not important on the

paper where the effortless, sweeping lines bring an expression of place. The precision and knowledge it takes to translate those seductive lines into more than just a 'building' is not easy, it's a challenge. That translation is precisely the goal.

In this inaugural issue, you'll find our first 'Landscape Lesson' on the Red Earth in Turks and Caicos, where over time there has been a depositing of Saharan dust on the land. Blee Halligan's fascination with embedding architecture in landscape is essential to this expression of place and the weathering of time. The essence of being an absolute part of a place sees time in a non linear function; part of its now-ness, but also its history.

I think the final moment isn't something you can capture easily in architecture, but there are certainly moments that might define it for some people. The topping out, the handing over, or even reaching a specific stage of work. The final moment, for me, is a few more years down the line when the building is embedded, not just in the landscape, but in the lived experience of human existence within the home.

Second Nature is a breath— a pause— a comma. So we can, just for a minute, have a sun-downer whilst the sun-downs, and raise a glass to a moment in time in all its glory, whilst we wait for the new day.

Daisy Billowes
Practice Director



A Reverential Home Amidst the Shifting Sands

Blee Halligan completes Dune
House in Turks & Caicos.

With the completion of Dune House in the Turks & Caicos Islands, Daisy Billowes speaks to Lee Halligan & Kate Slattery about their experiences working on a project defined by its acuity to the landscape's natural topography.

Photography: [Jack Hobhouse](#)





Let's start with something easy. What is your favourite space in the house?

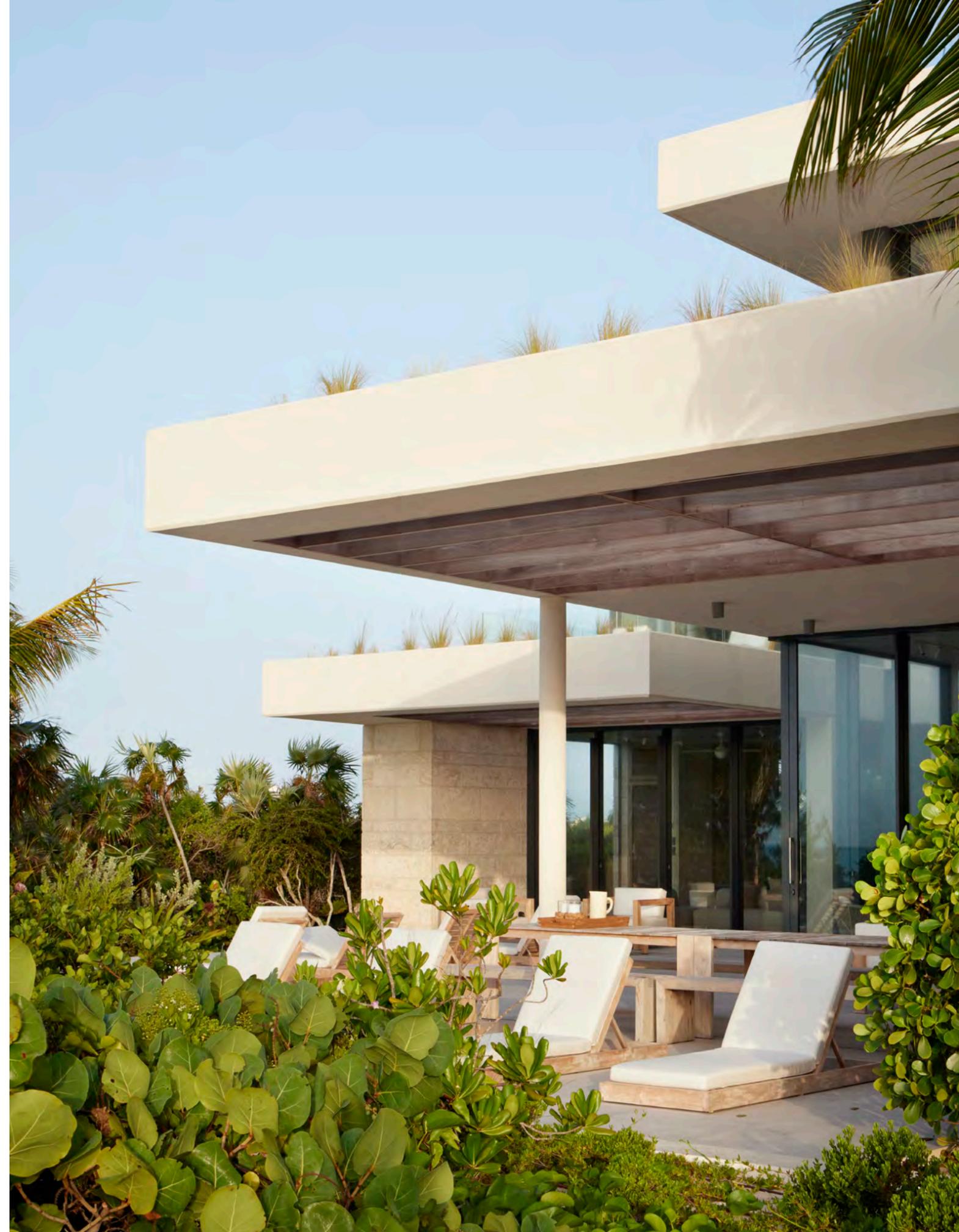
LH The staircase. It's not a space that you stop, but it's a space that changes every time you go there. It's our best staircase. It just feels a bit like a gallery, and you see all the strata of the house.

KS I really like being in Casita One, just off the main courtyard space. The landscaping has made it sing. You get to see a series of columns and the light coming in from there, and then there's the third side framed by the sunken living area. And when the light reflects off the pool there at night time it's quite lovely.

LH I like the rhythm of the columns, with the benches. Some areas like that you can't really always convince a client to do, so we were lucky that they— cause you don't really use it. No one really sits on those benches. Maybe another cool thing is the thickness of the walls. It's not really a space, but I find it satisfying that we've got things to work in the thickness of the walls.

DB Where do you notice the thickness?

LH It's in the outdoor showers, tucked into the walls, there's the kitchen spine, the laundry. It's all kind of very 'within the wall' thickness rather than rooms.





DB Do you think that makes the house feel more rooted?

KS Yeah, when you're looking at the plan, it's these two spines on the outer edge— a dashed spine along the outside of the plan. I imagine lots of people don't find that outdoor shower... which is quite fun!

LH I think it's similar to Bay House, hiding things in the thickness. They were built at a similar time and I don't think we've done that again. We were lucky that this client was up for using the length of the site, because it is a skinny lot. If it was another client that was just wanting this one relationship with the waterfront, we wouldn't have been able to be that generous with those walls.

DB Dune House is split into five, low rise buildings. Was this a request from the client, or was it a response to the site?

KS Their initial brief that came through was for two villas on the site, an A and a B.

LH I think they evolved a brief to make us break the building down pretty early on which then became a client request to drag the building out into many pieces.

KS They said from the beginning that they wanted to be journeying through the site, and wanted to let it reveal itself.

DB So they already had an understanding of the site?

KS There was an existing donkey track which was a starting point in how you would

navigate through the site, and then in terms of typography there was only really the dune to deal with, there wasn't really anything else further up the site. Because of this 'wave' that the driveway came in, it meant that we landed the building in response to where you would come around and the view opening up. I remember them very explicitly saying they didn't want to know where the front door was. They didn't want to be distracted by that. They wanted the architecture to entice, reveal and offer moments of pausing, rather than just trying to get to the beach.

LH That was this zigzagging, journeying through buildings, seeing a little pocket and courtyard, one on your left, one on your right as you work through.

KS They were always talking about kiting, so they must have had an awareness that the site was windy. They knew that creating those moments where you could be more introverted and protected was important. They really love socialising, so having those 'moments' to find is helpful for the way that they wanted to live there.

DB Was it a multi-generational house?

KS They had children at that point who were late teens, and they were talking about them coming down with lots of their friends, but also considering future grandchildren. They have four children, so they're talking about quite a big brood!

DB Lots of spaces for lots of people.

KS Yeah.





DB Dune House was designed by BH with teams in London and Turks, and a client in Chicago, all throughout COVID. Did this change the way you operated?

KS For us it was that first project that purely operated on Zoom.

LH I remember we had a really nice sit-down under the tree, the Casuarina tree, on site— and that's still there— and instantly knew that Jenny [client] was going to really enjoy the design journey. Usually Greg meets the clients, and during COVID Greg wasn't there, so I remember that really nice moment.

KS I don't know if it was a product of being on Zoom with COVID, but the client sent over so many images that weren't all architectural or Pinterest images, but very sculptural pieces of furniture or lighting which she found really interesting. I found that so much more helpful than a space that just happens to have a kitchen island that they might like, because it doesn't really give much indication of what they're enjoying about the whole space. When she sent over architectural references, they were very zoomed in and it was more about layering of textures or white-on-white— shapes and textures.

DB Even with CGI renders, it can be quite hard to imagine a building until you're inside it. Did you or the clients have any surprises when visiting the construction site, maybe

for the first time? Did the space feel different to how you expected it?

KS This project was before the birth of Enscape so we had very crude imagery, actually. Just exports from the model, not fancy at all. We leant on the model to make sure there was this 'strata' layer, so it was really crucial in understanding how the bounds were threading through. We were so embedded within that model to make those alignments work, it felt true to what was produced in the end.

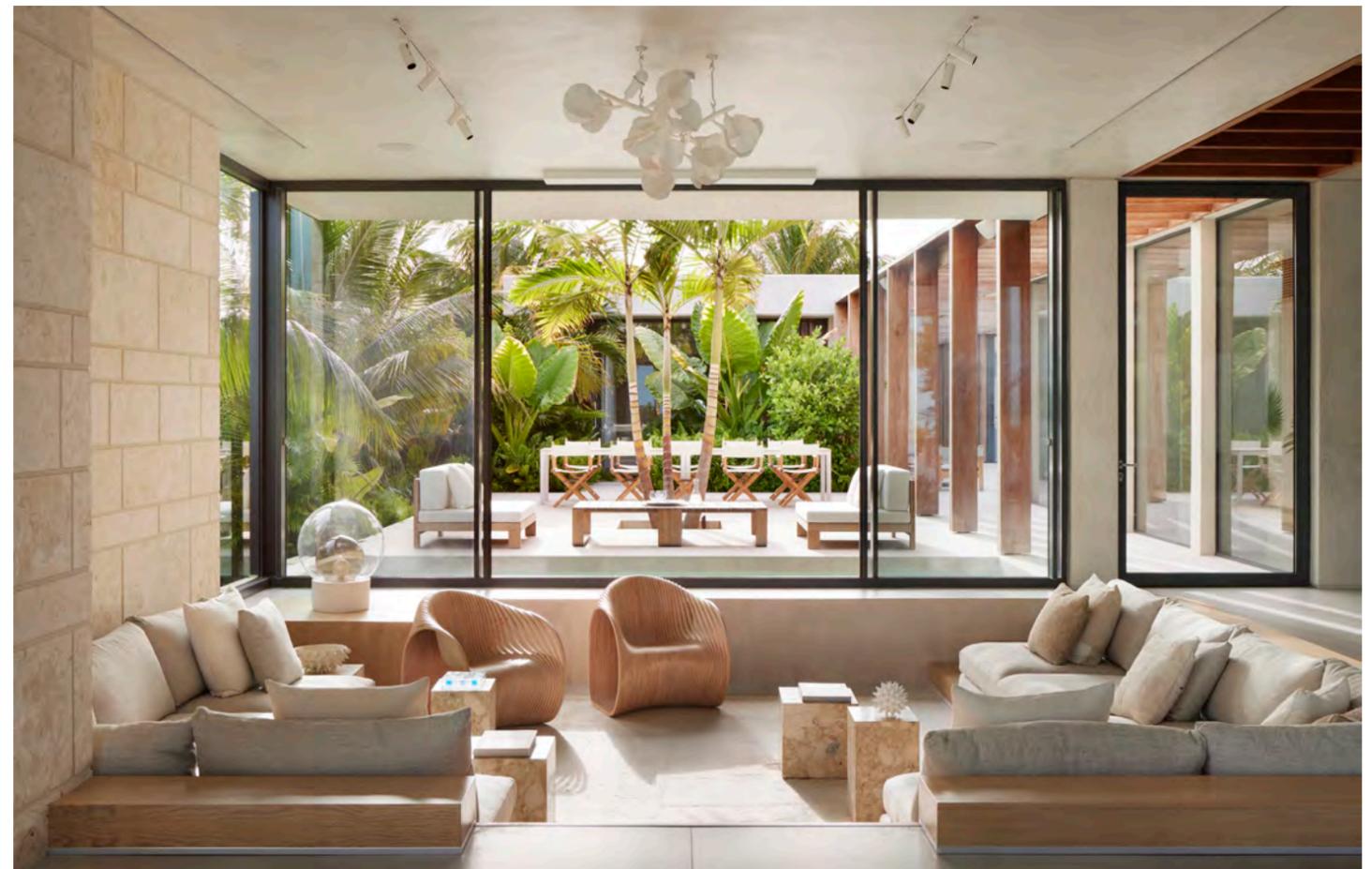
LH I would say the height of the room at 13 ft. Many clients want high ceilings, but this was the first one where I was like, 'Oh wow— that really does make a difference'.

DB There's an interesting play in the project between openness and privacy. How do you balance those seemingly opposite needs?

KS I think it's the spine language within the plan. It gave us the opportunity for privacy.

LH The house doesn't look out to the side much at all. There are moments; the staircase is a bigger window than it needs to be. It's the only one where you really connect with the size but I mean, it does successfully handle privacy.

KS Yeah, that stair— it just missed the two story volume of the neighbour.





LH There are some really good moments of planting. So many people love the long slot kitchen window which looks to the neighbour, but we consciously put loads of planting in that space.

DB I like that there's an outdoor shower someone might not have found yet?

KS Yeah, it's tucked around the side of the pool, and I think unless we were walking down the side of the house, you wouldn't know to find it— it's got quite dense landscaping around it. If you wanted to, you could definitely just go and have a proper shower around there.

LH The client really embraced open spaces. There are no cellular bathrooms, so there's a spirit in their house which is very— once you're in a bedroom, you're private. It doesn't need a closet, showers and all that business. The renting thing is interesting because the idea of renting the property came later and, you know, there are things like that which aren't for everybody.

KS The layout of the bathroom was driven by the client. There were moments where it looked like a kitchen island. There was a piece of furniture in the middle of the bedroom and you're like— wow, what is that? And it was part of the bathroom— not just in one defined space but around the room. The whole plan of the bedroom was turned on its head. We started with enclosed bathrooms and she just said, 'No, I don't need to do walls'. We were really fortunate that somebody wanted us to go against what's normal.



LH With privacy— I think the listing of the house, dragging it away from the beach— and with the height of the pool— you could be in that pool in your next-to-nothings and not be seen from the beach. That is credit to the careful placement of the building and keeping the Dune as privacy. The other thing is, if you're in your master bedroom, the 'pulling out' of the terrace and the shading structure at L1 gives you enough of a view line if you're in bed, you're not seen. Unless you're right on the terrace, you're very private.

DB Were there any particular building precedents that you were looking into when you started designing the house?

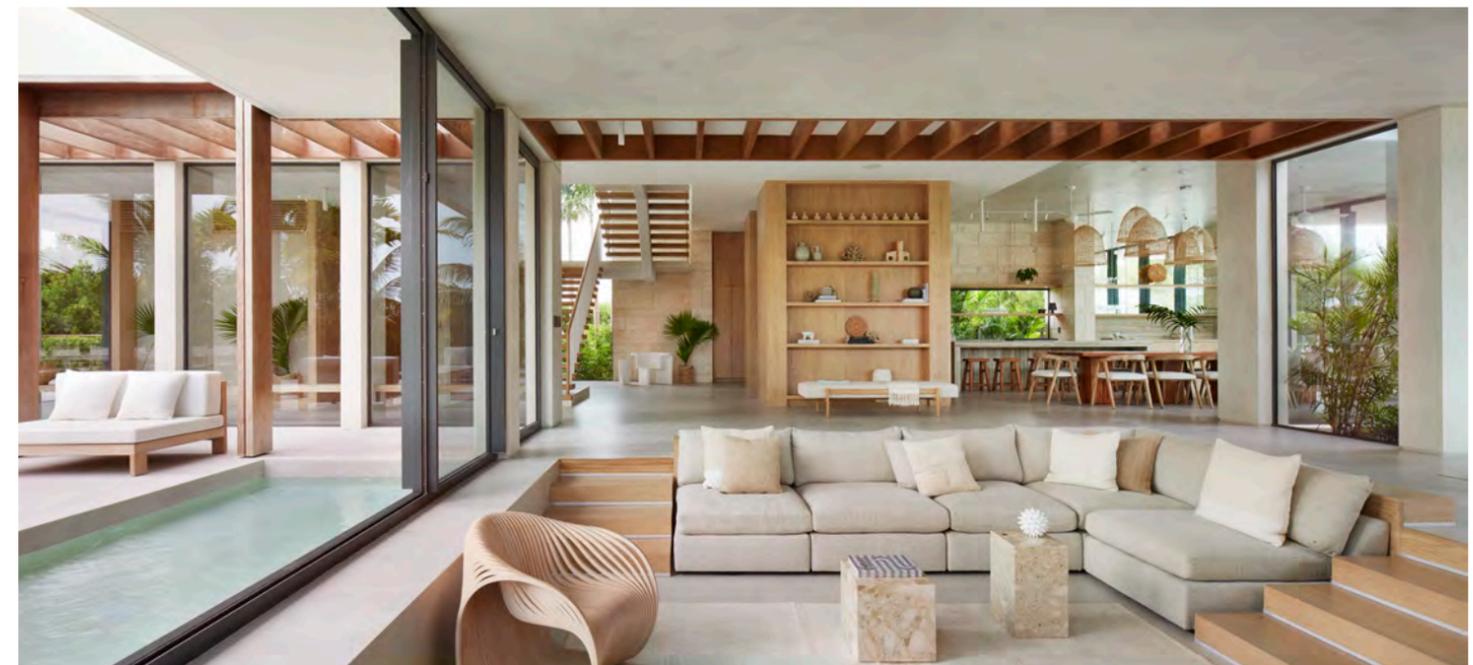
KS In terms of textures, there was Jamie Fobert's 'House in the Caribbean'.

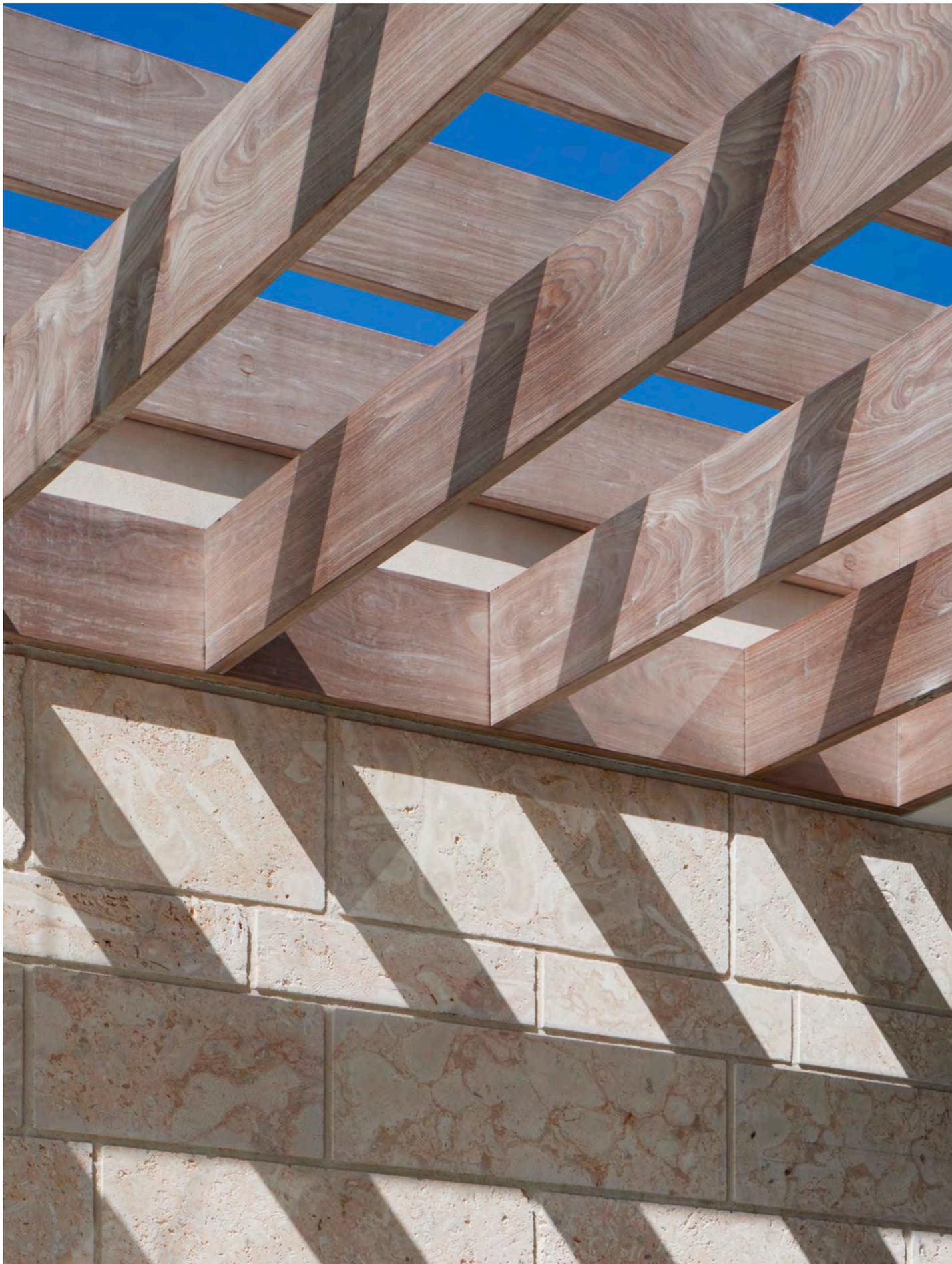
LH The strata of the stone, yeah.

KS A reference I went back to see a lot was Zumthor's, 'Secular Retreat'.

LH They're quite thick, those floor build-up AC zone bands. Often we try to do a little step up to make it go thinner. I think it was quite bold, to keep that thickness, and they got thicker over time. I kept on saying, 'is that gonna be okay?!'

KS There's a round column off the kitchen space. That's the only round element in the whole project. We were trying to make it disappear by having it curved so that the space can be even more extended.





DB Are there any elements of Dune House that you have already taken forward or will take forward in some new projects?

KS I think there were so many materials in that project, at least a dozen different natural stones. A huge amount of information we downloaded— that was really helpful.

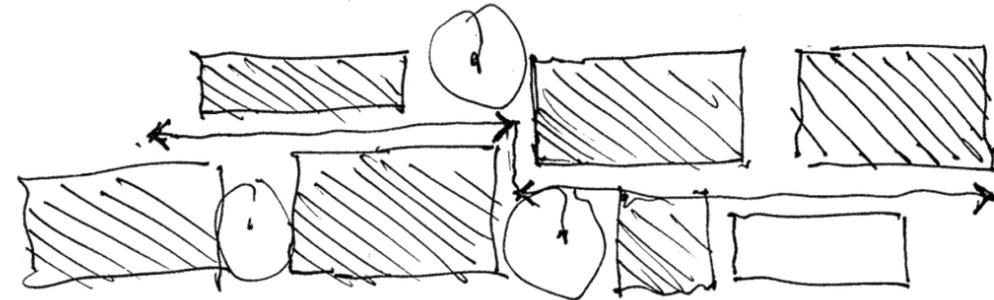
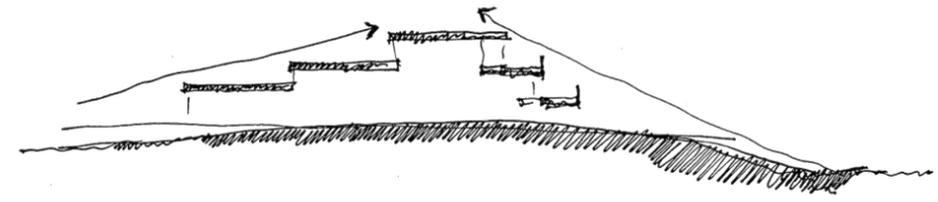
DB I remember going to visit the site as it was finishing and seeing the coral stone for the first time. I couldn't believe anyone had this on their wall. Just looking at all those fossils!

LH I think there are two things that I use as a demonstration to clients, other than all the luscious materials generally is; the dragging of the stone from inside to out and, the dragging of the timber pergola through the house. People really go 'wow'. That timber ceiling coming in through the living room really does bring inside out. Even the client forgot that we're having it and we persuaded her to keep with it. She's like— 'I'm really having raw timber coming through my house?' I know it's cheesy, but people see it and you don't really get it, but it's really visually, very strong.

DB How do you start to source these new materials?

KS My favourite thing about the coral stone is that Lee just obsessed about the Apple Store on Lincoln Road in Miami. We managed to track down who supplied stone in the DR, and now that is our go-to coral stone supplier.





DB The house has a strong connection to its environment. How do you kind of see it aging and weathering over time?

LH The Cumaru is weathering— silvering— and looks better. You know, when those criss-cross pergola infills went in, it's all very sudden and bright, rich timber. Now they're sort of silver. It's a good case study when clients are nervous about not having any protection on the wood. It doesn't need it, and they worry about the irregular weathering. I think it's nice that it's not even.

KS It would be nice sometimes to have more material that has an opportunity to change over time. When faced with a severe marine environment from the get-go, a lot of the products are specific and robust so there's not much wiggle room. The coral stone is still very pristine. It always surprises me.

DB What about the Dune itself?

KS I don't think it's shifted much over time.

LH Kate's right— it's our protection of the dune that's worked. We haven't had a huge cat five hurricane yet, but if you compare our treatment to the neighbour who has torn the Dune apart and put astroturf down

to the beach— that seems to get worse. It keeps losing green vegetation because of it. Whereas the sea grape and the sea rosemary are holding the dune well.

DB The final design of Dune House seems very coherent with your initial sketches. Was it an easy design process?

LH It changed quite a lot, didn't it?

KS For something that has an elegant narrative to it, it's very misleading how a simple sketch comes across as an effortless form on site. There was so much coordination needed to make the jostling of forms work.

LH I think it's one where we have to relax and let it find its feet a bit. A grid just wasn't appropriate. Maybe we were lucky in the time we designed it. Just before the post-COVID boom where everyone wanted a home designed for rental. We were in a naïve era where it was less formulaic, which was great.

DB Is this their forever home?

KS It's definitely a legacy. It's gonna be theirs, and it's going to be their children's.



DB Okay, and my final question: How would you spend your dream day at Dune House?

LH I'd be very happy in Casita One, in the courtyards where the dining table is, with the little plunge pool, in a bit of shade with a bit more privacy. I could happily just be in that area with a gin and tonic at the end of the day with the sunset. Open up all the windows so that you feel the sea, look across the kitchen. I mean, that's the best way.

KS I would like to cook in that kitchen. I think that it would feel like a really fun, choreographed experience of cooking and hosting. The plunge pool is probably the best space to experience the sunset, just sitting there and having a beer and looking out... I would definitely operate within the house from the bar, the bunk lodge to the other courtyard. I don't think I would spend much time on the full terrace.

DB And if you had, maybe, 12 mates staying with you?

LH That's when you definitely want to retire to your bedroom— when you've had enough..!

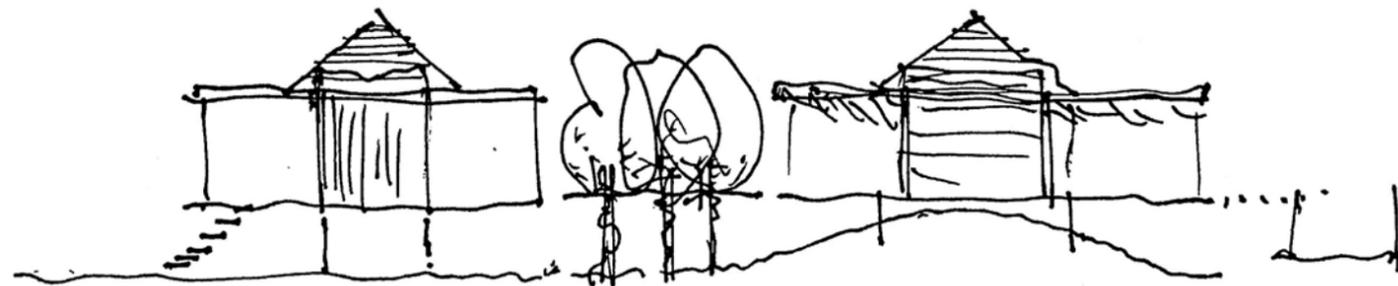




From the Drawing Board: The Landscape Edit

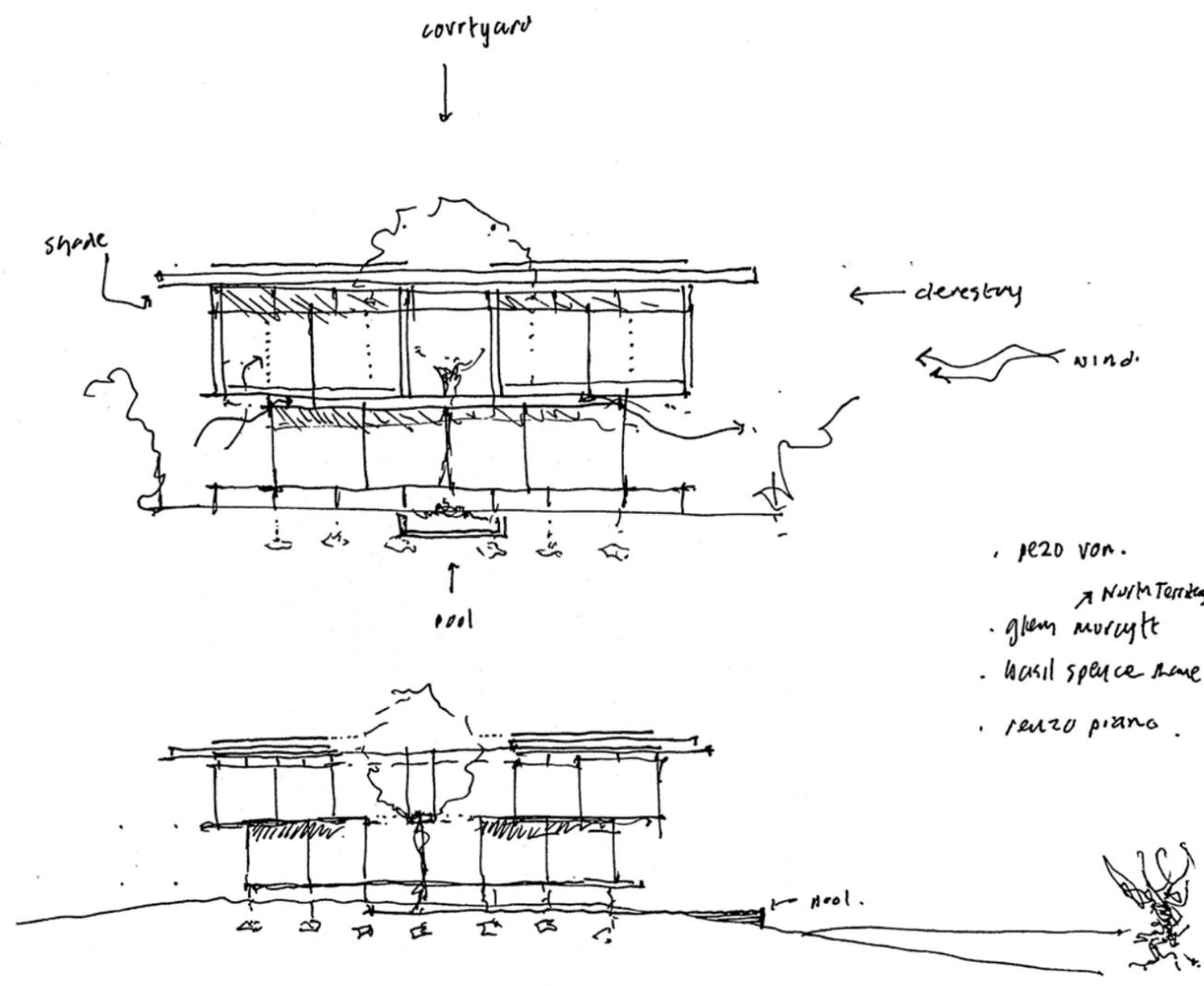
Daisy Billowes brings a fresh curation of Lee Halligan's drawings in 'The Landscape Edit'.

This curation brings together drawings from Lee Halligan that capture the essence of his design philosophy. The intimate conversations that arise between designer and landscape reveal the thoughtful process behind our site-specific approach. Each drawing narrates a story of how we listen to place; responding to coastal winds, topographical nuances, and the natural rhythms that shape our architectural landscape.



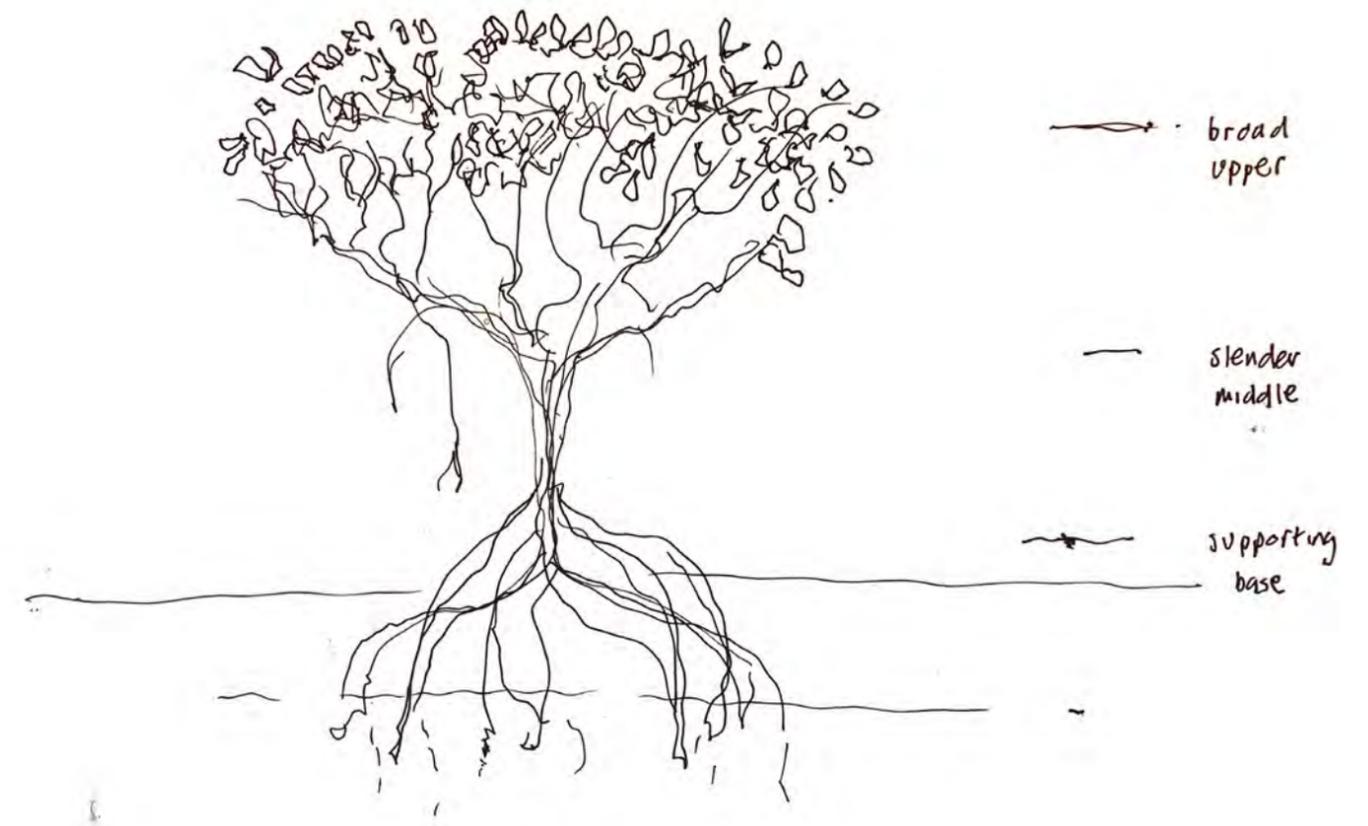
Studies for Stilt Houses on Flamingo Lake

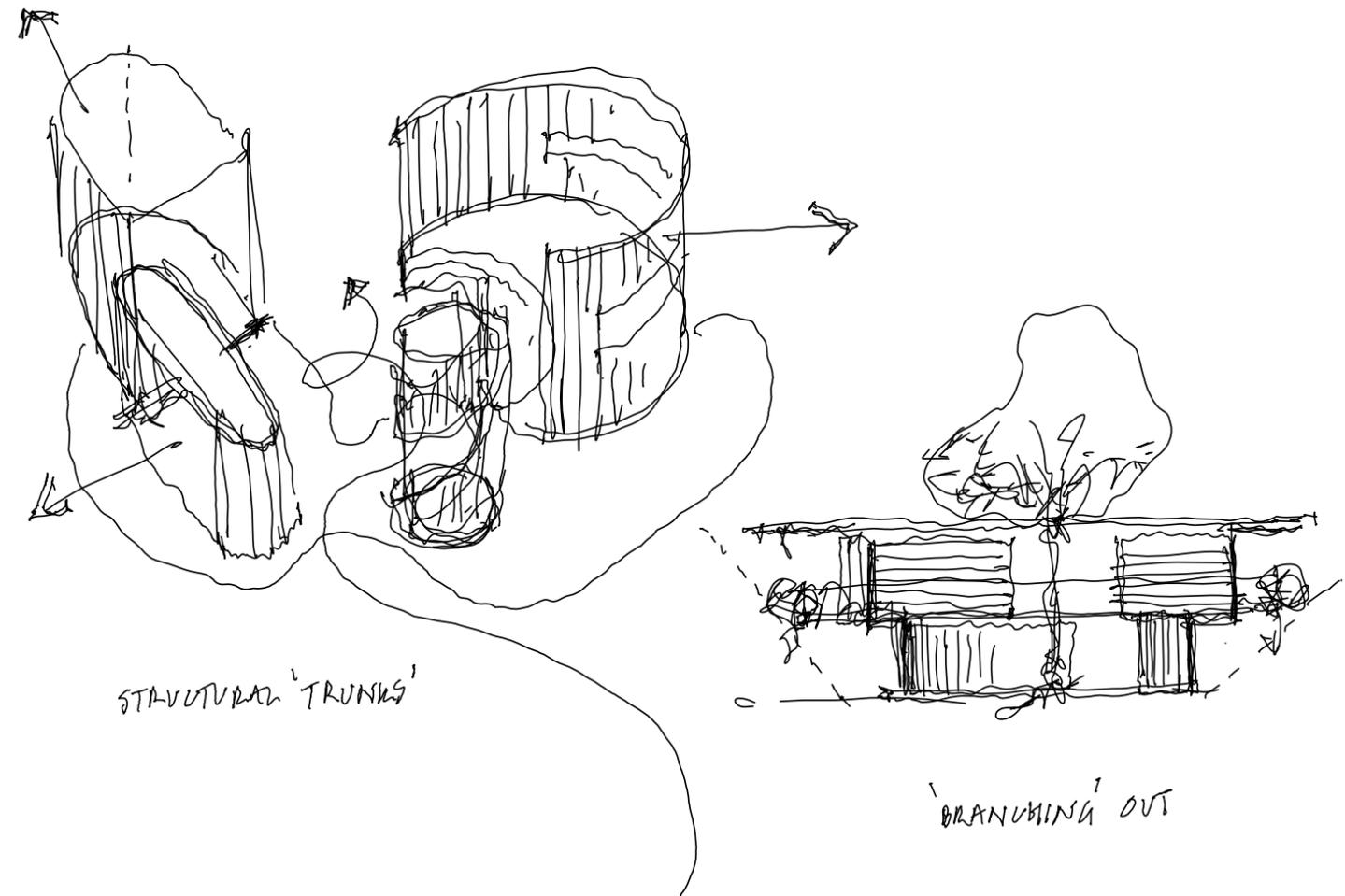
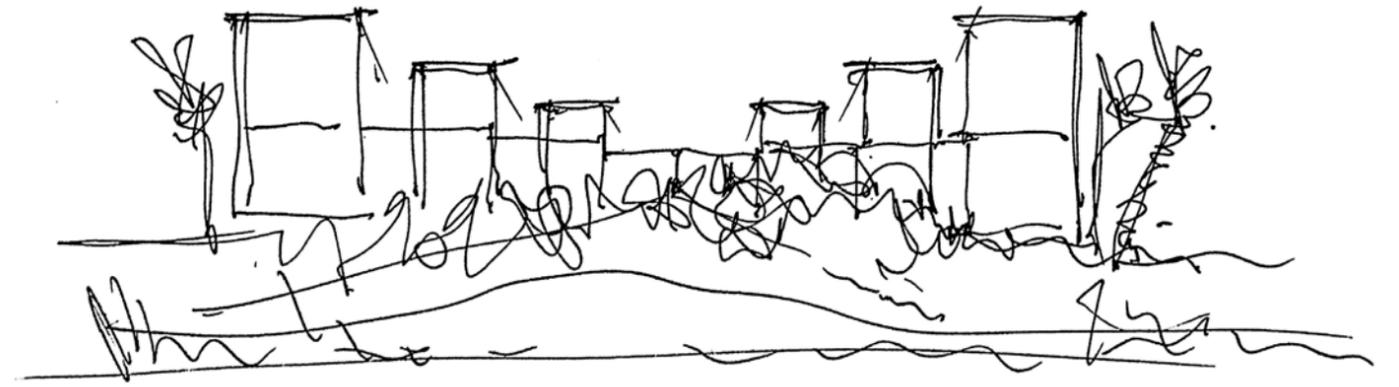




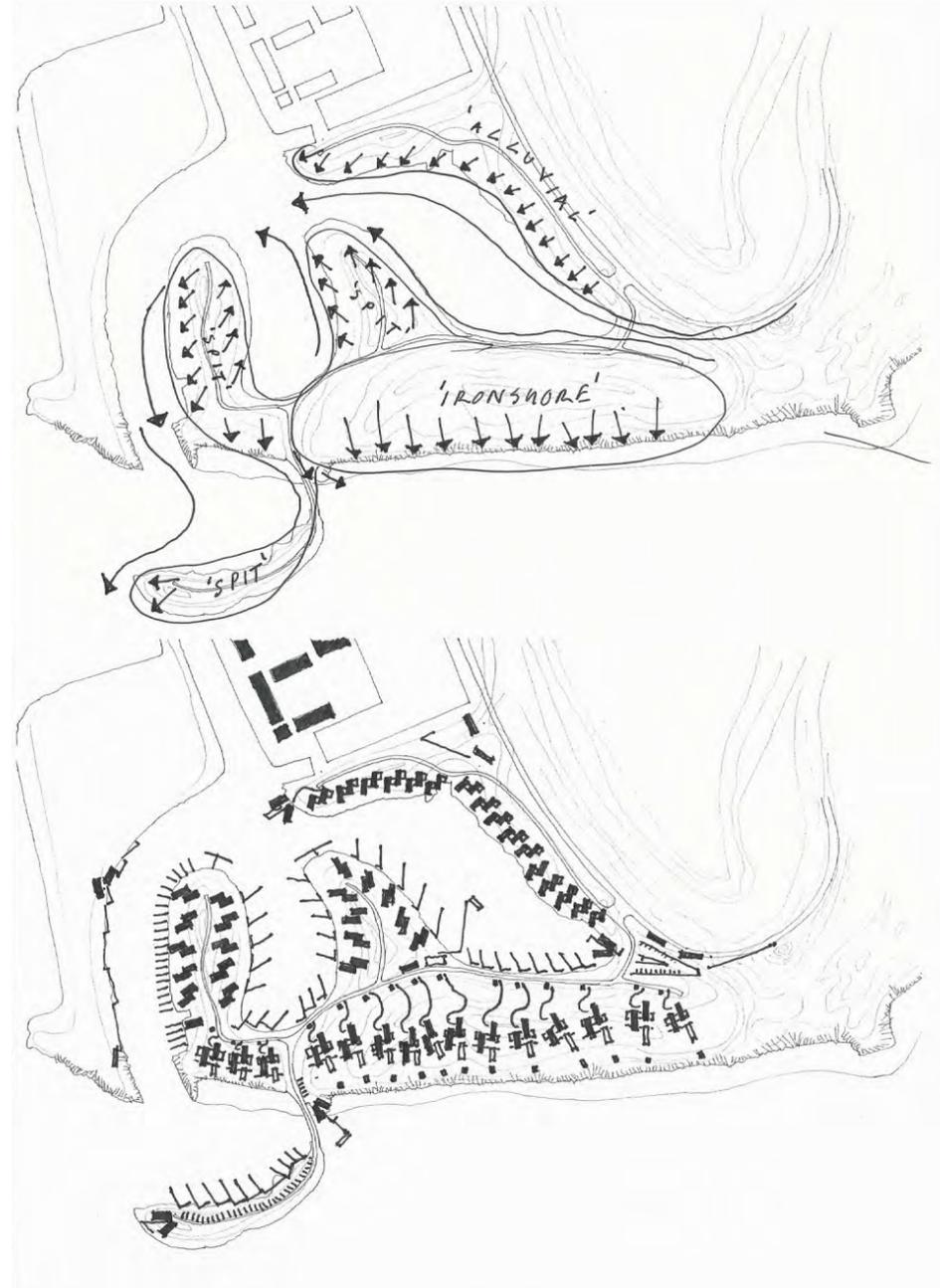
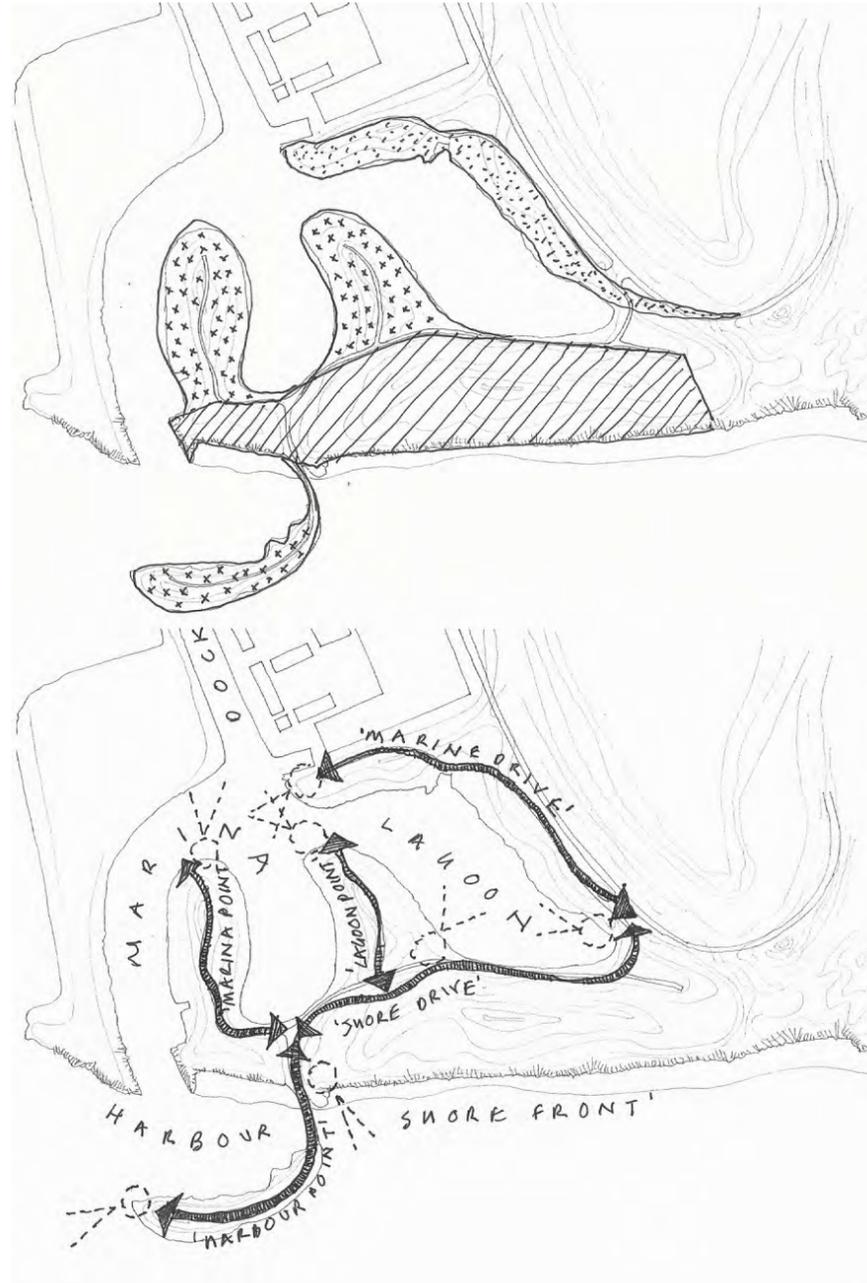
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- glem muruyte
- basil space home
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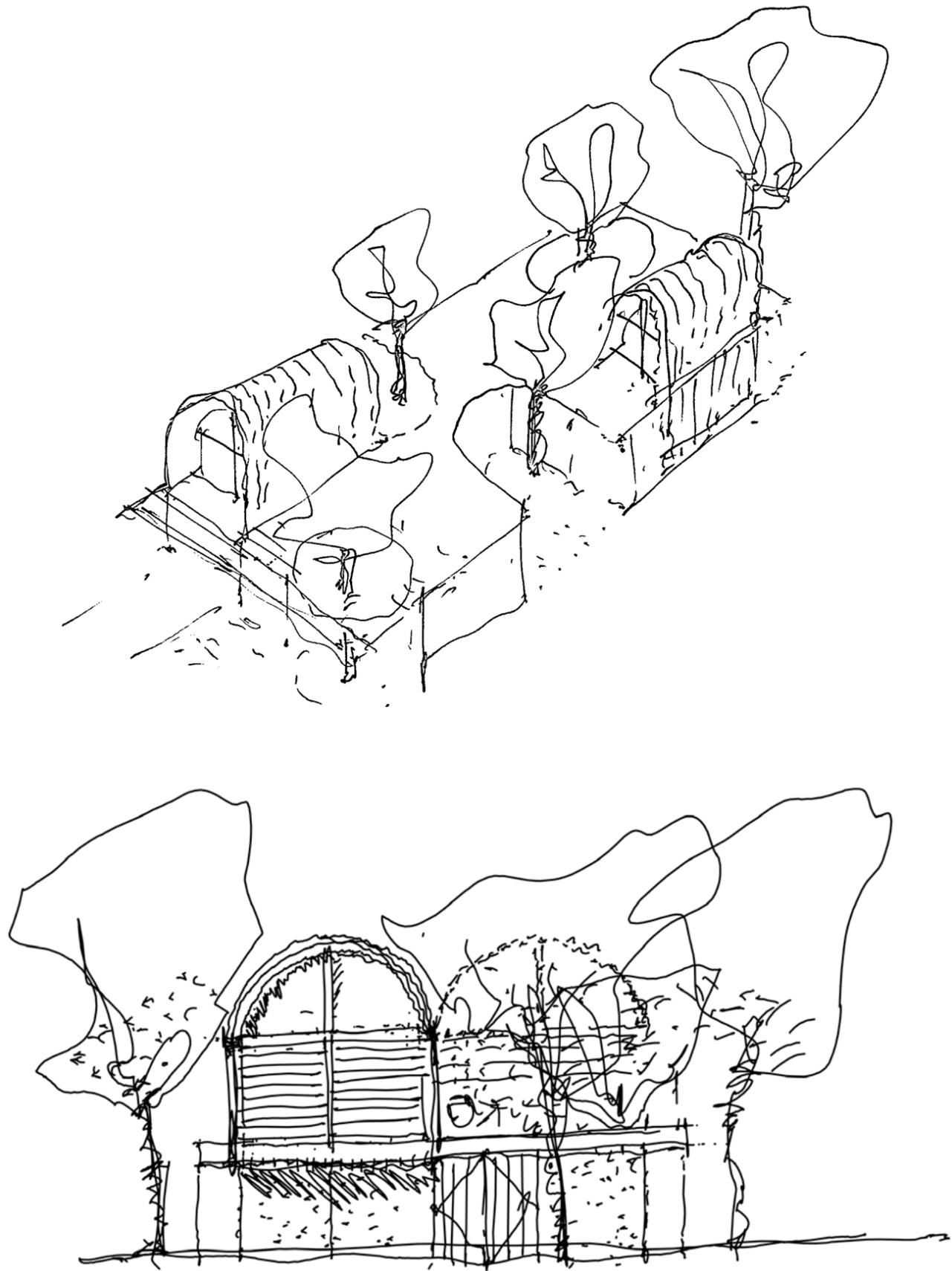
MANGROVE VILLA.





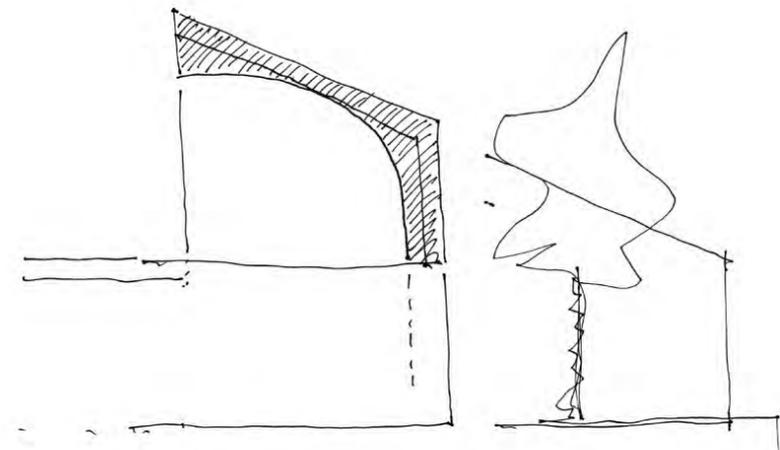
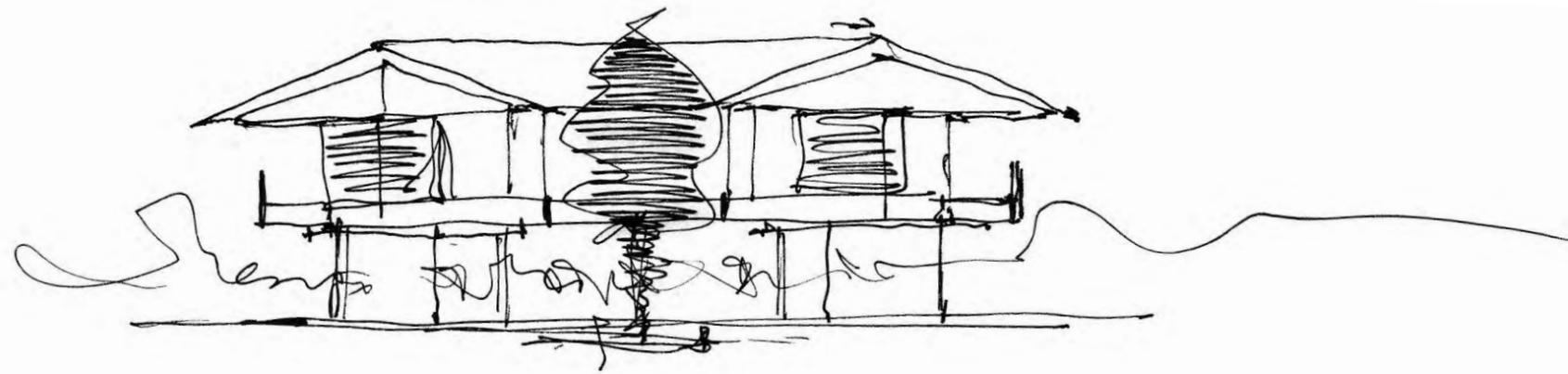
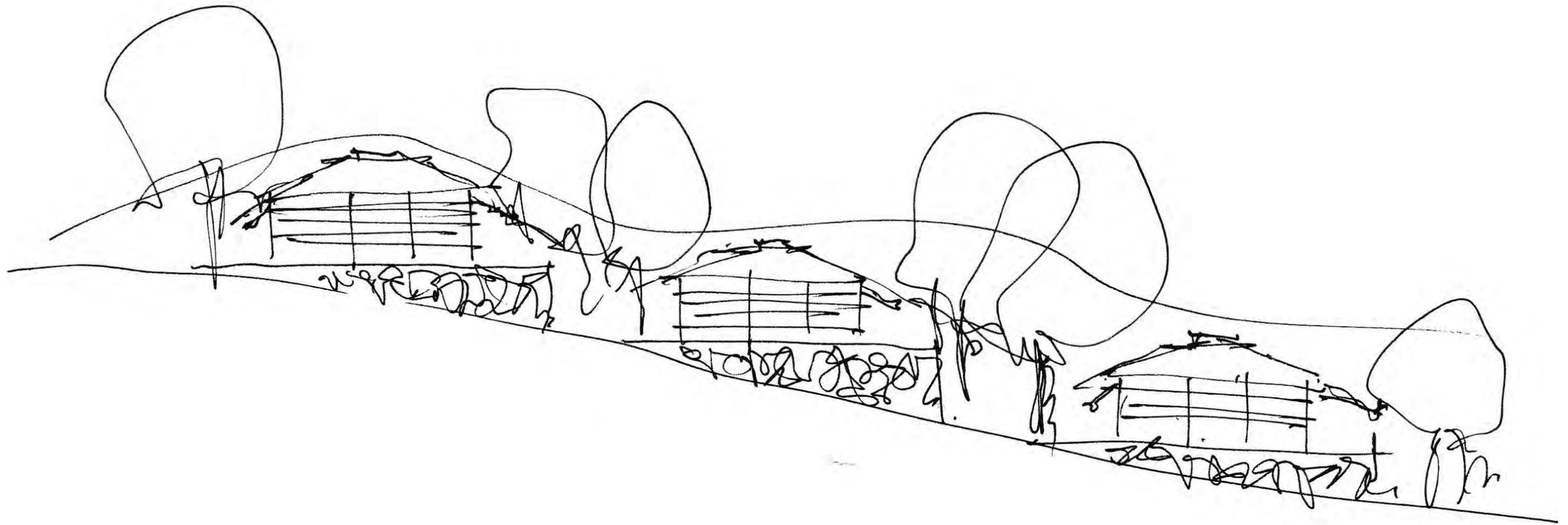
Sand Drift Villas on Long Bay Beach (Above)
Structural 'trunks' for Channel House (Below)





Palmetto House in Florida





Concept studies for The Pavilions at Apes Hill, Barbados (Top)
Studies for Channel House on Leeward Channel (Left)
Concept sketch for Juba Banks, Juba Sound (Right)



Planning for A New Place

Greg Blee on submitting planning for our project 'Palmetto House' in Florida.

As Blee Halligan continues to grow its international presence, Greg Blee shares insights from the studio's latest venture into the competitive US market. Daisy talks with Greg about the realities of working within Florida's planning constraints, the surprising quality gaps he discovered in Miami's luxury market, and how the studio's expertise in challenging tropical environments is shaping their approach to this ambitious new chapter.

Visualisations: [Blee Halligan](#)



How are you finding your feet in the US market, and how is it potentially different from somewhere like Turks and Caicos?

GB I suppose everyone is indoctrinated into the idea that it's the one you want to crack in life. It's obviously incredibly competitive so there's some intrigue into testing whether we're good enough to succeed there. It's the most capitalist country in the world with the most capitalist oriented dog-eat-dog city in the country. So that's a challenge that's going to be interesting— to see if we're good enough.

DB Does it feel drastically different from TCI?

GB Yes. It's like rewinding six years in my career, or maybe even 10 years, and trying to work within the constraints of a city. But it's like a tropical paradise as well. So it's utilising two bits, I suppose, two bits of experience, one which was doing work in big urban environments and one which is learning how to do projects in moist, damp, hot tropical environments.

DB You've just submitted planning for Palmetto. How did you first go about researching the area for the project, and are there any buildings that struck a chord that were nearby?

GB I met the client out there, who wanted me to do a drive around with some contractors, and it was quite obvious that the perception from the outside was that somewhere like Miami that is so wealthy and booming would have some great buildings, but it was in fact the opposite. It was really badly built, slightly naff architecture. So that was the opportunity.





GB With a free market mentality and the whole of America, you would imagine that every big city that's doing really well would have good trades, good craftspeople, and good builders, and for whatever reason, that doesn't seem to be the case. Maybe laziness has set in. It was quite shocking how poor the quality of the buildings in this beautiful part of the city were.

DB I remember seeing a reference for Stuart Avenue from Brillhart that was nearby?

GB Yeah, the thing is that everyone's money is so private that you end up not knowing what house is behind the hedge, so you have to go and hunt them out and see the really nice houses through a gap. They're not very present on the street, which is actually quite nice.

DB Is that the aim, to be hidden?

GB I dunno, I think it works. There are a number of factors. A lot of the trees are protected, which creates an ambiance of wildness, even if you're in the city, so they're all set back away from the trees. Then the privacy element shows that's what people wanted to do anyway. So there are bits in the Pacific Palisades, or Los Angeles.

DB There's a bit of history around the area that I've looked into from the 19th, 20th centuries and the introduction of the railway. The beginnings of millionaires row in the

early 1900s. Gatsby-esque estates, Singer Sargent paintings, peacocks introduced in the 20s, and more recently the area became a kind of Mecca for artist-hippies and Cocaine Cowboys at the Mutiny. How much of this sort of history do you consider when you build in such a famous neighbourhood?

GB I think all that research was super helpful and places you in the context of the development of a city. Miami has changed a lot from those days from all of those times that you mentioned and it's very difficult to kind of latch onto any of that stuff anymore. Like the wild '80s has been demolished: it's very sanitized as a city now, and I think some of the architecture that you dug up was referencing Italian ornate architecture or, like, French Riviera kind of atmosphere, which is not that interesting.

DB When you see these cities pop-up like when the railways—

GB The railway bit is fascinating.

DB There's a fad right, and everyone kind of moves on, it's not like the history of, say, in the UK where there is like a very clear area style— if you find that?

GB I think it's difficult. I think what is very present, which is why Miami is a really interesting city, is the crush of different communities. That still feels very strong, which is also very nice. You know, little

Havana, you can't interact in English— no one speaks English. I think the railway element was really fascinating about this kind of 'American Dream' or this kind of crazy opportunistic quality that some of the Americans have that I don't think any of that really has found its way into the architecture that we're doing. Unfortunately.

DB What are the fundamental architectural elements of this concept for Palmetto?

GB Well, in simple terms, we say it's shaped by the trees. And I think that is real and it has been the design which morphed a lot during the design phases due to various constraints or imposingness about keeping these oak trees, which are protected. The oak trees are the only thing that are properly protected. We were fortunate that one of them in the middle was deemed unsafe. So, we could remove one, but we've had to shape the building around the root balls.

DB Did the client know about that before pursuing?

GB No, that is just a total fluke. I don't think the client (who's been fantastic) quite realised how strict the city is on the protection.

DB How has this new journey of bringing

Blee Halligan's design philosophy to Miami?

GB It's been hard work and thankfully Ollie and Harry— if it wasn't for Ollie and Harry we wouldn't have done it— and the client.

DB I think because the client's worked on a previous project in Turks, it's quite easy for the fluidity of knowing how we design and what they like?

GB I think there's a bit of that but I think it was more. I think it's more that there was a bit of an understanding that we're all discovering how to do it together. So they never— a lot of our clients would have beaten us around the head when we made a mistake, but that never happened with Steph and I'm not sure whether I would have done it if I had known how difficult it would be. And I don't have the patience to have gone through the process quite as analytically as Ollie has done.

DB What specific skills did Harry & Ollie bring to help you through it?

GB Academia. Intelligence. I suppose I operate more on a fudge-it level. Whereas you have to be really organised and it's really complicated and it's a process. So they nailed it. They did brilliantly.







DB So the house, like you were saying, embraces its tropical landscape. So, maybe talk a bit more about the design, the trees are dictating how the building plan works, right?

GB Right, yeah. So it works in plan and section. So we had to analyse the tree canopy. There are constraints about how tall you can build a building, so we really pushed the upper limit of how high we could go and how close to the tree canopies we could put the building. The vault came from that desire to allow the canopy to push in against the building form. So it became subservient to the trees, which is going to be a nice thing to see. It's not a box with trees around it. I think on a strategic level, the vaulted presence is a very unusual form— and we're trying to make an impression, I think that was helpful. It's a very affluent neighbourhood and I think seeing something that is different will give us more of an opportunity for more work.

DB Do you worry about the landscape in terms of what can happen in its most disastrous moments with either flooding or hurricanes?

GB I mean yeah, there's this thing— slab level they call it— so at what height do you position the living spaces off the ground? So that restricts how high you can put the building because there's no ball height, which is defined. And as time goes on, the full level creeps up because of the concern that rising sea levels are flooding.

DB And the trees are protected enough so that the hurricane wouldn't be an issue?

GB The presumption is they're over 100 years old, so their roots are very well established and they're pretty sturdy trees. I don't think you'd ever have a forceful enough hurricane that would topple them all. The protection element is a little bit vague. It's a little bit woolly as well, because there are all sorts of tricks that some people use to get rid of the trees, which we haven't had to do, which made me feel a bit better.

DB When you work around those roots, is it pretty easy to dictate where they will be?

GB We have an arboriculturalist on this project who's told us exactly where the edge of building can be. Yeah.

DB What about your idea of introducing more landscaping around? Kampong nearby, has a history of introducing over 30,000 plants to the US/Florida. Are there imported plants that either the clients want or that might be necessary?

GB Yeah, we've got a lot of work to do on that front. I mean, it's slightly the opposite of work in Turks and Caicos, where we end up having to reinstate a landscape. This is about how little we take away. So it's the opposite, but I think it is this incredibly beautiful neighbourhood. It's kind of Jurassic in feeling. So I think, you know, if we have time or we need to find time to really work at that, there are loads of native plant nurseries just out of town. We need to spend energy trying to reinstate a native landscape.

DB Blee Halligan has a strong connection to this kind of challenging tropical environment. How did your expertise in this influence any material and structural choices?

GB We're still working on that. I think this goes back to how poorly everything's built. So I was quite keen to try some new techniques to get the quality to where I want it to be. I think we need to work harder at that in the detailing now. Mainly people build buildings on site. I think the off-site fabrication element could be really interesting, where you build stuff in a factory, with factory tolerances, and then assemble the final product rapidly with less disturbance to the natural environment. All comes in on a flat-bed lorry, you crane it into position. So, I was keen to push that dialogue. I think the barrel vaults will inevitably be built in a factory. The more extreme version is that I want to build the whole thing in a factory, but I don't think we'll be able to do that this time. Maybe for the next one. But no one does it like that but it seems logical. You want to keep the footprint of the building to an absolute minimum, but unfortunately on-site construction usually spreads because you have to store materials.

DB Were there any surprises or challenges when submitting the planning?

GB Yes, it's been a nightmare. I think there are 20 different city departments and each

one of them reviews your pack of drawings independently. Nothing is coordinated in terms of review from the city and they're so busy— they make mistakes, and we make mistakes. After that, it's a question of fielding their comments and updating drawings and resubmitting drawings. So it's a very different process.

DB You've created these nests in the upper level. How did this kind of design element reflect what the client wanted in terms of family living?

GB They are retired in their mid 30s and very family focused. So this is, yeah, it's a family home. Because of the constraints of the tree canopies, a conventional house with the amount of space that they wanted for their family wasn't going to be possible unless we took quite a bold approach to the planning. So, the 'nest' idea came out of the desire to remove corridors so there are multiple points of access. There are two points of access to the upper floor, so— that feeling of retreating back into your private domain is quite powerful because you go up the staircase and straight into a room rather than going up a public staircase— into a public corridor— into a room. We're deleting the corridor. The term 'nest' came out of this idea that you transfer from a communal environment into a private space.







DB Lee was talking about being able to 'retreat' in Dune House—

GB I mean Lee came up with the idea. So, the kids' bedroom is connected to the parents' bedroom at the moment, but in the future, you'll be able to close that off when they get older. It's going to be very fluid how the bedrooms work upstairs.

DB My favourite render from the project creates this 'moment' in the house, with the vaulted ceiling. Do you ever think about these in-between spaces? Do you purposefully create these beautiful breathing moments or is it just a product of great architecture coming together?

GB I think we're becoming more conscious of trying to make every space an event, let's say. These buildings that we're doing are so expensive, it seems like a missed opportunity if you don't make the most out of every space, even if it's a corridor. The one you're talking about is just a consequence of squeezing the building and the barrel vault. It has turned out to be a beautiful thing just because we've got a curved ceiling. I suppose it's our duty to kind of consider those spaces as important as the main areas of a home, rather than just functional and boring.

‘Seeing Red: A History of the Red Earth in Turks & Caicos’

Lee Halligan on the journey of Red Earth for the first of Second Nature’s ‘Landscape Lessons’.

The rich red earth that punctuates the landscape of Turks and Caicos tells a remarkable story of transcontinental connection— one that spans thousands of miles and centuries of time. From the annual dust clouds that drift across the Atlantic to the pottery sherds still emerging from red soils today, this crimson thread weaves together climate, geology, and human creativity in ways that continue to inform our architectural palette.

Photography: Lee Halligan





When seeking to define a colour palette for our buildings, Blee Halligan often looks to the land beneath our feet for clues. The tones of the sand, soils and rocks of Turks and Caicos vary widely from site to site. On close inspection, the geological strata of the islands are always a rich source for inspiration.

In Frenchman's Creek and Pigeon Pond Nature Reserve, there are soft clay soils that are a rich red, with rocks in pinky hues that match. When researching into the topic we have uncovered interesting sources for inspiration that span from the Sahara Desert to Lucayan earthenware.

Dusty Skies | Wind

The first reference we observed to these pockets of red earth came when the 'Godzilla' dust cloud formed across the Caribbean in June 2020. These annual plumes derive from African deserts, where dry soil, sparse vegetation and strong winds create a high-level atmosphere laden with red dust.

Millions of tonnes of this mineral dust are transported across the Atlantic every year within the 'Saharan Air Layer' in the upper atmosphere. High-dust season is from May to September, and a highly active dust period is usually followed by a rainy period, that purifies and cools the air across the Caribbean.

Local folklore in the Turks and Caicos recounts that a more-active dust season in the months of May and June is often a hopeful indicator of a less-active hurricane season, due to the subtle cooling of temperatures on land, but also in the seas.

Clayey Soils | Earth

This desert dust provides valuable micro-nutrient iron that is essential for clay-rich soils, which would otherwise not be present across these carbonate-rock-dominated islands. Soils are effectively fertilised yearly by these eolian particles, with the clayey minerals having a direct impact on the nutrient-holding potential of our soils.

Over time, this dust has accumulated in the more protected parts of the islands and has gathered and compounded to form the clayey pockets, and pigmented rocks, like those that we have observed at Frenchman's Creek and Pigeon Pond.





Earthen Wares | Fire

These clayey deposits formed from Saharan dusts are not strictly classed as clay from a geological standpoint, but they have proven to be the best source of material for pottery making on these islands. The indigenous Lucayan people (700 AD to 1500) would historically burn and crush conch shells and mix these with the clayey soils as a 'temper' to prevent cracking in the firing process.

Lucayan pottery is generally undecorated, but sometimes where clay has been pressed out onto a woven palm mat, the pots have been patterned with basket-like impressions. This has been specifically observed on griddles, which were used for baking cassava bread, and where the dimpled texture enhanced thermal conductivity.

Pottery found by archaeologists in Turks and Caicos is today called Palmetto Ware. It is generally characterised as being thicker, softer and more breakable than traditional Taino pottery that is found in Hispaniola and Cuba, and to this date none has been found fully intact. However, 'sherds' of red pots can still be found, often preserved in the clay-rich red soils that helped shape them.





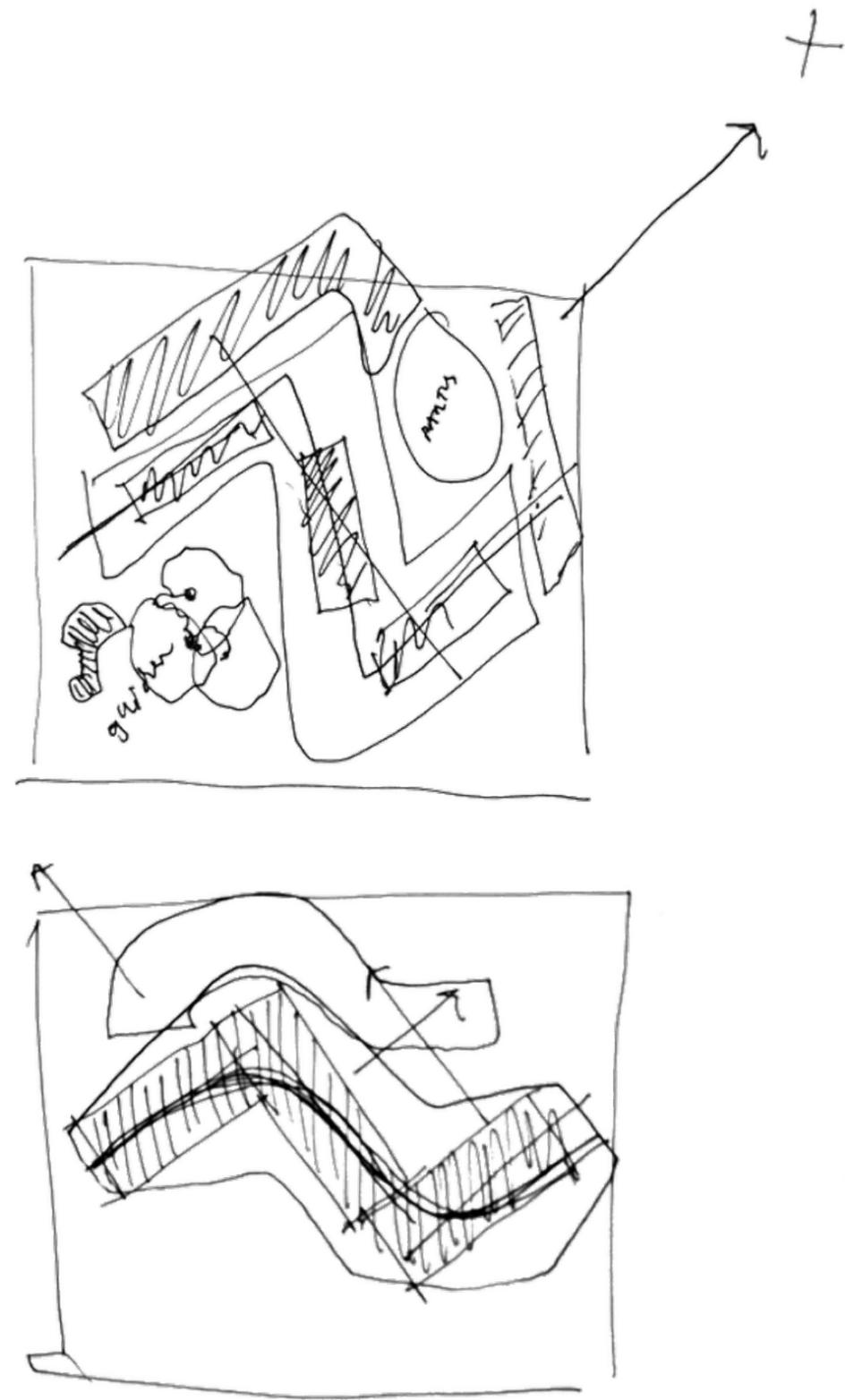
Creating Fresh Perspectives: The New Rebel's Rest Model

Early stages of model making proves its worth when coming to a client with fresh perspectives.

Daisy Billowes sits down with Ollie Hall and Will Fry to explore the meticulous craft behind Blee Halligan's latest architectural model for the 'Rebel's Rest' project. As the practice continues to push boundaries in Caribbean design, physical model making remains an essential tool for both design development and client communication.

Photography: [Blee Halligan](#)





Thanks Ollie & Will for talking to me about our new model for the Rebel's Rest project! Why don't you kick things off by both telling me a bit about your model making experience and what draws you to it.

OH I've always really enjoyed model making and that blossomed when I took up a position as a professional maker in a large London studio for six months. When I was there, I was working on a lot of international projects, which range from skyscrapers to airports and university buildings. Then when I was completing my education in Denmark, I was tutored by someone who'd worked for an architectural company that made quite a few famous models in the architecture world, and through that experience, it led to a series of private commissions, including from a series of art museums, across Scandinavia.

WF Mine comes from University. I spent a long time with it there, and was taught quite a few skills but I've also done quite a bit of woodwork in the past. I find it incredibly enjoyable— it's like meditation for me.

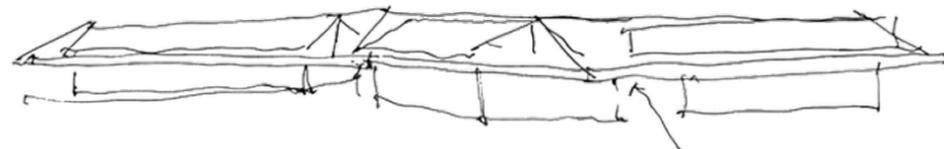
OH Yeah, there is something very immediate that you can see space in a way that you'll never see in a 2D drawing or even in most visuals, it's quite hard to capture that sense of space. So it's a really important tool for

architects when designing a space, but also for conveying your idea to the client and making sure that they understand what the end product is going to be like.

DB Can you tell us briefly about the Rebel's Rest project and why a model was chosen to be made?

OH So, the clients are a couple from Canada and they currently have a property on Turtle Cove. They're looking to do a new strategic masterplan with a main house and a series of amenities across the whole landscape. The way they live is to really embrace the outdoors. They're big on kite surfing— all outdoor activities really— and they like to live the sort of traditional Caribbean lifestyle, windows and doors open, embracing nature. That's really been the driving point for the project; how can we look at what it really means to live in the Caribbean and design a house that responds to that?

WF The site location is set up on a hill, looking over the sea. It's got quite a lot of terrain changes, so the site model is quite critical to help us understand the relationship between the function of the buildings, their shape, and the hierarchy between them.







DB How did you kind of manage your time working together on this, what was the split like?

OH I found it enjoyable actually— we made a plan together about how we were gonna tackle the model as a whole and then split it up between us. So then going off and sort of completing your piece to the same level was quite an exciting moment.

WF Yeah, it was bringing both of them together, seeing the landscape with the building. It was really exciting. Ollie had lots of confidence in me to allow me to go and, you know, experiment with materials I've not tried before. I'm really happy it's turned out so well.

OH Will's an extremely talented carpenter with quite a lot of experience in that, so it made sense that Will tackled the wooden element to the building and I had a background working with terrain and landscapes.

WF Yeah, I think you working on the landscape allowed you to explore the masterplan even more in the back of your mind.

DB The design features a kind of Z-shaped roof. How did you approach translating that?

OH The Z-shaped roof came about by

responding to the specific locations, so there's the reef nearby, which has a very similar geometry and by positioning the building and shaping it this way, it allowed us to take advantage of the views out across the reef in both directions.

WF It's a reflection of the reef really and yeah, you have the views from the pushing and pulling of the form. In the model process, we first had to understand the palette of materials, but also what we could manipulate. It needed a strong look, but also needed to flow. It's made out of 3mm walnut layers glued together and then cut on an angle with various different planes. I also used various different Japanese hand tools. We think walnut best reflected the shingles and had some good contrast with the landscape.

DB What were some of the more challenging aspects of representing volumes to communicate the, kind of, spatial experience?

WF I think it was the scale and the space differences between the various volumes. How it's best to represent this in terms of their proximity. But also, how we could connect them with a story of different pathways between them. We wanted to show off a masterplan that could envision not just the main house, but also the whole scope of the site.



OH It was important for us to explore the negative space between the volumes as well. So through modelling this, we were able to look at the specific view corridors within the landscape, and also how we can create paths and routes between these spaces in order to best inhabit the site. I think the client was quite responsive to all the changes that came about through this model making process and enjoyed sort of hearing about how we'd come across these. Being able to see the site at this scale allowed us to really investigate the connections between the different buildings, as well as the exact positions on the site. So looking at how the topography works up close and being able to manually sculpt it, was really beneficial.

DB What was the most surprising thing you learned?

OH A surprising moment during this process was actually looking at the direction of the roofs. So by accident, we initially modelled one of the roofs the wrong way round, but by looking at it on the model, we actually felt that this worked so much better. So these sorts of accidents are quite nice when model making, you often make lots of little errors and this can enhance the design process of the project.

WF I think with model making, there is always a level of surprise and understanding that you get with a physical model versus a digital one. I think we really started to understand what, after viewing it as a whole,

what the negative space between the buildings would be like. With this project, we haven't really fully thought about the walkways between the dwellings but now placing them into the model has made it really easy to create something fluid, and that sings.

DB If you were to make this model again, what would you do differently?

WF I think it would be great to have even more context and possibly showing the sea in correlation with the building. I'd like to do some more planting and get closer to the Turks and Caicos landscape, and maybe incorporate some more furniture—potentially steel or metal.

DB How did you find the scale you chose to work at?

OH We chose the 1:200 scale as we felt it was the perfect blend of being able to capture the landscape in a small enough size to work with it closely, but also have the building in enough detail that we can look at the two together and how they interact.

WF 1:200 is always a challenging aspect to convey detail but I think we're very lucky that we were both working very precisely. I think it would be really interesting in the future to push 1:50 and really experiment with the details that we are wanting to convey in this project.

DB What is your biggest takeaway from building this model?

OH I think the most surprising part of the process was, I mean it happens with every model, but, understanding scale. When you're viewing drawings in 2D, you think you understand the scale of the project, but actually seeing it in a real physical piece, you get a much better understanding of the size of things and what's appropriate.

WF I think it's the Z-like roof. It's really shown how important it is to this project scheme and how interesting the project could be. There's a level of convincing that it is needed for something like this, considering the roof shape and, you know, the spread out volumes throughout the site.

DB You mentioned about the site's relationship with the reef and how crucial it is to the design of the place. How did you approach representing the, kind of, almost stubborn Turks landscape in a way that tells the whole story at the site?

OH It's quite important to represent the roughness of it and capturing the strong coarse texture of the land, because this is sort of driving our design in terms of inhabiting the landscape without trying to touch it too much. So making it in this

plastered, quite rough texture, it allowed us to view the landscape of something more sacred and something to respect as opposed to something to just easily carve away. It was our first time trying to model the Caribbean landscape, so we were looking at ways of creating this ground surface. We were using a variety of different materials to try and imprint this texture, and then with the landscape, it was sort of a learning process for us about how to capture the local flora.

WF I think the stubbornness can also be delicate too. We made a series of palm trees by removing dried petals from flowers and then carefully placing them onto some trunks that were from the sea-foam trees. The palm trees are so delicate and a key aspect in the landscape, so the placement of them needed to be careful. With construction— it's the same approach. The clients also really wanted a tennis court to be part of this project as it's something that they're very passionate about. We've embedded it into the model with a very soft approach compared to the rugged landscape. You want something that is clean, but also doesn't change the texture for the colour palette. I think there is a larger conversation about what colour we would actually go with for the court, and something along the lines of clay or a natural material would be really interesting.





DB So we're in London now, but the client will be in TCI. Did you plan for any sort of transportation?

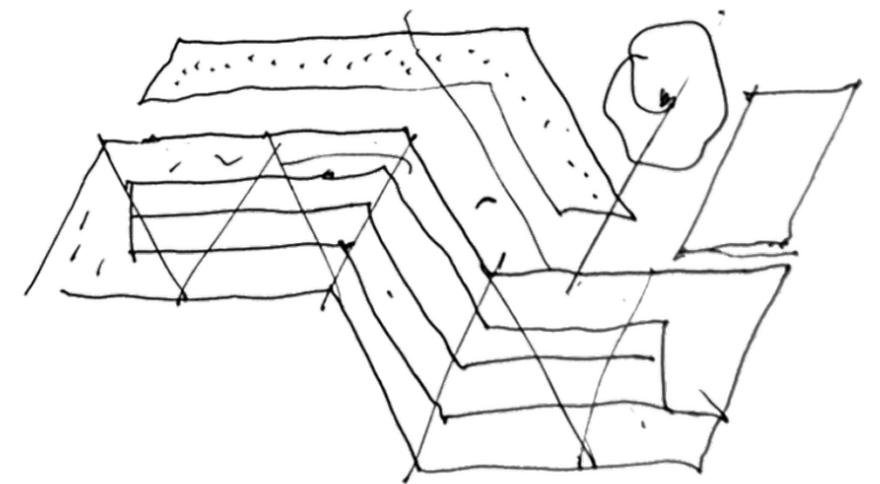
OH The dimensions of the model were restricted by the airline's carry-on size when travelling to TCI. So we've actually made the model's landscape split in half so that it can easily fit into a suitcase. We also needed to consider how we could make this model as light as possible for traveling so that the client can see it. From the beginning we were planning for the model to be interactive as well. We wanted to be able to take both the buildings out of the model as well as be able to take the roofs off the model. So, we needed enough detail inside the model, so that when we did open it up, the client could see what's happening in the internal spaces as well.

DB Have you shown the client this model yet?

OH No! We're really excited for them to see it— it'll be a total surprise and hopefully they'll respond positively to it.

DB The main thing is, models aren't just a beautiful object that you've made for them, but they also play a huge part in the client understanding why we make decisions as architects, right?

OH Yeah, when we sit down with the clients and talk through the model, we're hoping that we can refine all the small details of the model and that the site's strategic masterplan will be cemented by looking at the model in this detail. We should be able to view the project in a different way from before and really capture those small moments that we hadn't noticed.



On the Horizon: Projects Taking Shape

Showcasing Blee Halligan's emerging projects that connect with nature and respond to place.

We are now on-site for our project Gull Wing, an expansive 10 bedroom home that is located on a raised lot at the western tip of Long Bay Beach, Turks and Caicos Islands. The home is positioned at the top of a small cliff of dune grass, with panoramic views looking out across the Caicos Bank.

Our Hill House project has now been handed over to the client. The profile of the mono-pitched home can now be fully appreciated against the hillside. We designed the home to be shaped in a 'wind-pruned' fashion, leaning back from the prevailing winds and providing a place of calm refuge on the wilder side of Providenciales.

Our first and second villas at Sanctuary are completed. Their owners are now happily the first residents of the scheme. There are still pockets of new landscaping to be installed, but the house is starting to sit well within the natural undulations of the land.

'The Big Roof at Little Bay' is our competition entry design for the new Parliament Building for the island of Montserrat. Designed as a building that responds to its specific geographic location and also as a symbol of a significant and optimistic moment for Montserrat. The Big Roof at Little Bay responds to the natural beauty of Little Bay and is anchored with local stone elevations, splayed in plan to capture and embrace the spectacular view.











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