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HOUSES

Situated in the Tarn et Garonne region of south-west France, on the ridge of a steeply sloping valley, this house uses formal distortion and spatial compression to bring internal and external forces into tense equilibrium. Locking into views to and from key vantage points, and controlling routes and aspects across plan and section, the architects have produced a building where slants and chamfers, and nips and tucks, combine to achieve a figure of balanced eccentricity.

Despite its rustic materiality, in form and detail the building has a palpable tautness that amplifies the directness of the

**HOUSE, TARN ET
GARONNE, FRANCE**
ARCHITECT
**VICKY THORNTON,
WITH JEF SMITH OF
MELD**

BALANCING ACT

Thornton and Smith find formal and spatial equilibrium in south-west France.

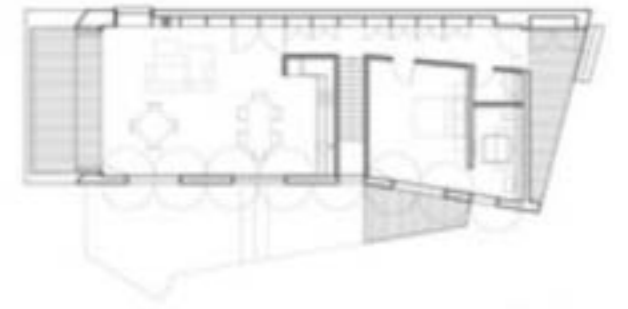




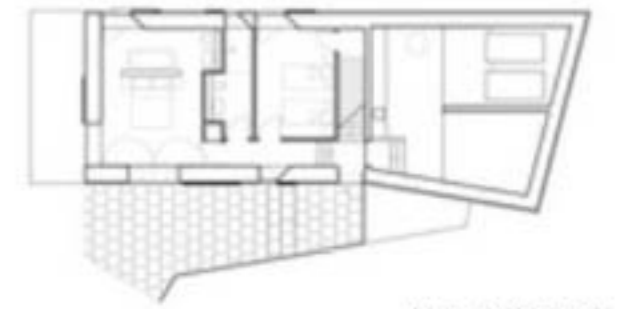
2



3



upper (entrance) level plan



lower ground floor plan

relationship between inside and out; be that where rooflight sits above stair to relieve the pressure of a constriction in plan and section, or where deep set apertures frame chosen views.

Complementing the degree of complexity permitted in form, a spirit of simplicity has presided over the architect's organisation of functions and choice of materials, with the house expressed as two distinct architectonic elements; a timber box containing living spaces

and master suite, sitting above and cantilevering over a rubble limestone base that contains guest rooms and a partially buried pottery workshop.

Adding to the cautiousness of the building's carcass, internally the main volumes of the house are lined in OSB; a move that sees a single material stretched across the spaces, taking the shorter distance between two points to give interiors consistency and unity. Externally, vernacular materials and elements extend this pragmatic attitude with

the use of timber shuttered windows and galvanised steel doors transposed from local farm buildings. Here though there is real refinement, as timber shutters close flush to continue the board on board rhythm of the chestnut cladding, and sliding steel screens neatly hang over apertures in the rubble from neatly concealed rolling gear. In this house, poise and precision reside.

Architect
Vicky Thornton, with Jef Smith of MELD, London

1 (previous pages)
External view from west.
2
The principal living space is clad in OSB, with phenolic ply used for joinery elements. Elsewhere OSB is painted to distinguish more private spaces from those shared with guests.
3
The north-westerly view from living room provides a spectacular backdrop.

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site plan



long section

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