



DOMESTIC BLISS

Pardey in the New Forest | Nathaniel Kahn profiled

Forestry commission

John Pardey's Duckett House is a contemporary take on the agricultural vernacular of the New Forest and a celebration of domestic life

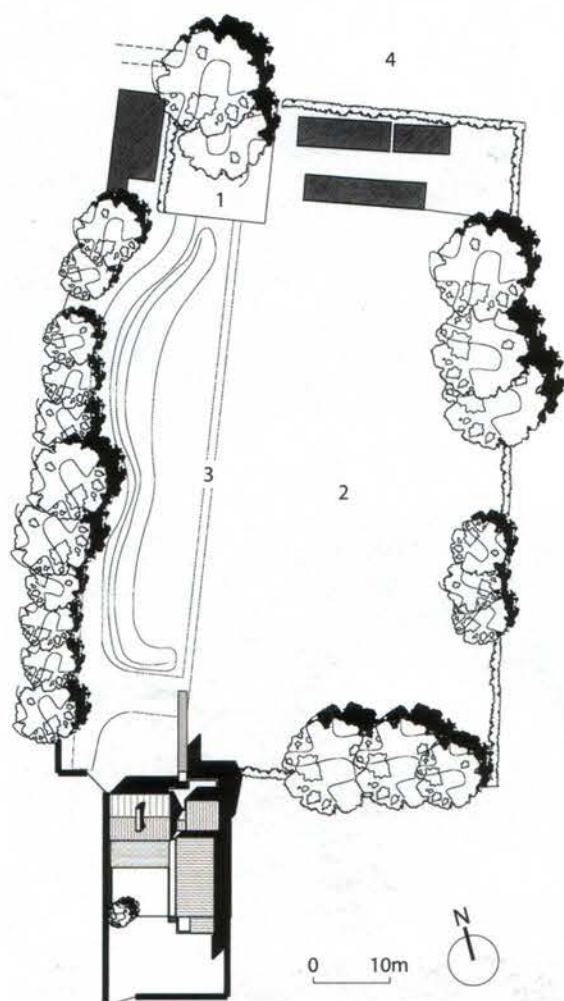
By Isabel Allen. Photographs by James Morris



John Pardey is a man with a mission, albeit a humble one. He wants to design 'the perfect courtyard house' and, ideally, he would like to do it close to home. Since moving from London to the Hampshire coastal town of Lymington in the early 1990s, he has been in a more or less constant state of warfare with a planning authority, and a populace, with a natural predisposition towards preservation and pastiche.

There have been low points – most recently the local development control committee's rejection of plans for a large Modernist country house in Lymington (AJ 10.6.04) – and Pardey's predicament is unlikely to improve with the New Forest's recent designation as a National Park.

But there have also been many triumphs – the most recent being Duckett House. Fortunately for Pardey, the forces of conservatism have been countered by the support of the odd sympathetic planning officer and a steady stream of enlightened clients. Will and Libby Duckett, two engineers in search of a house in which to raise their three children, approached Pardey after having seen an article on his renovation and extension of the house Basil Spence built for



- KEY**
- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| 1 entrance court | 3 gravel causeway |
| 2 paddock | 4 open forest |

site plan

The view from the entrance hall towards the living area, showing the Juliet balcony to the master bedroom. Sliding glazed doors allow the kitchen and living room to spill out onto the timber deck



Coloured beanbags in the children's play area contrast with the stone flooring and antique furniture in the hall



himself by the Beaulieu River in Hampshire (AJ 28.9.00). Having bought a site within a conservation area and on the outskirts of the picture-postcard village of Burley, their vision of a home that was 'extremely modern' could easily have remained a pipe dream. Yet the house has been built, with little sign of compromise – a result which can probably be attributed to the fact that it is an essentially modest piece of work. With a floor area of 195m² it is not that much larger than the house it replaces, with an aesthetic informed by the clients' proviso that the house should be 'modest, calm and simple in design; bold in concept but not too arrogant or showy'. What's more, it is tucked away, out of sight.

From photographs, the position of the house, nestled against a backdrop of mature trees, looks like a straightforward response to the clients' request for a house which 'should be sensitive to its surroundings and seek to embrace them and blend with them rather than to impose on them'. But the choice of site was a bold and arguably counter-intuitive move. This apparently cosy plot is in fact the bottom of a large grassy field and the point which is furthest from the road. Cars are left by a cluster of ramshackle farm build-

ings next to the main gate, so that the house itself has to be approached by foot. Pardey has long been preoccupied by the architectural expression of the domestic entrance ritual. Here, the simplest of devices, a very long, very straight, very simple garden path, has been used to dramatic effect.

The visitor is forced to take the time to contemplate the architecture of the house from a particular vantage point. Conceived as a collection of pitch-roofed volumes, it pays more than a passing nod to the farmyards which populate the surrounding area. Black standing-seam roofs sit above boarded walls of western red cedar, which in turn sit on white rendered walls, evoking the dark roofs and white walls of the local agricultural vernacular. The composition is anchored by a large central chimney which clearly announces that this is a family home. Overall, the impression is of the functional clarity of, say, Scandinavian Modernism tempered with an exaggerated doll's-house

like domesticity – an effect which is reinforced by the fact that the straightness of the approach and the abstract simplicity of the surroundings make it impossible to judge the length of the path and, consequently, the size of the house itself.

If Pardey's willingness to sacrifice the convenience of a speedy drop-off point for the sheer delight of a prolonged sense of arrival seems a little wilful, it is a wilfulness which the clients have eagerly embraced. Having moved from London in a bid to escape the clock-watching freneticism of city life, the Ducketts were receptive to the idea of finding delight in the detail of domestic life. Their young daughter makes a habit of running the entire length of the pathway, adding a Hollywood-esque euphoria to the everyday ritual of coming home from school.

The front door opens onto a stone-floored, top-lit entrance hall. In the old farmhouse tradition, the hallway doubles as a formal dining room but also serves as



The master bedroom is expressed as a timber box topped with a pitched roof with glazed gable ends and sitting on a white-rendered wall. The single-storey wing contains the children's rooms

a music room – a hive of noise and activity as opposed to the muted formality so often associated with a grand entrance space. More importantly, it is a pivotal space where the different elements of the house interlock. Like Pardey's earlier Sellers House on the Isle of Wight (AJ 28.8.03) Duckett House is L-shaped in plan allowing for clearly divided zones; living in one wing, sleeping in the other with a study and guest accommodation at the junction between the two. It is, however, subtly more complex in plan – or rather in volume. Pardey's architecture is profoundly volumetric; not in the sense of the crazy sculptural spaces facilitated by computer technology but in a rather more elementary way. Carefully crafted compositions of simple rectilinear volumes designed – and best understood – through freehand sketches and hand-drawn models as opposed to conventional sections and plans.

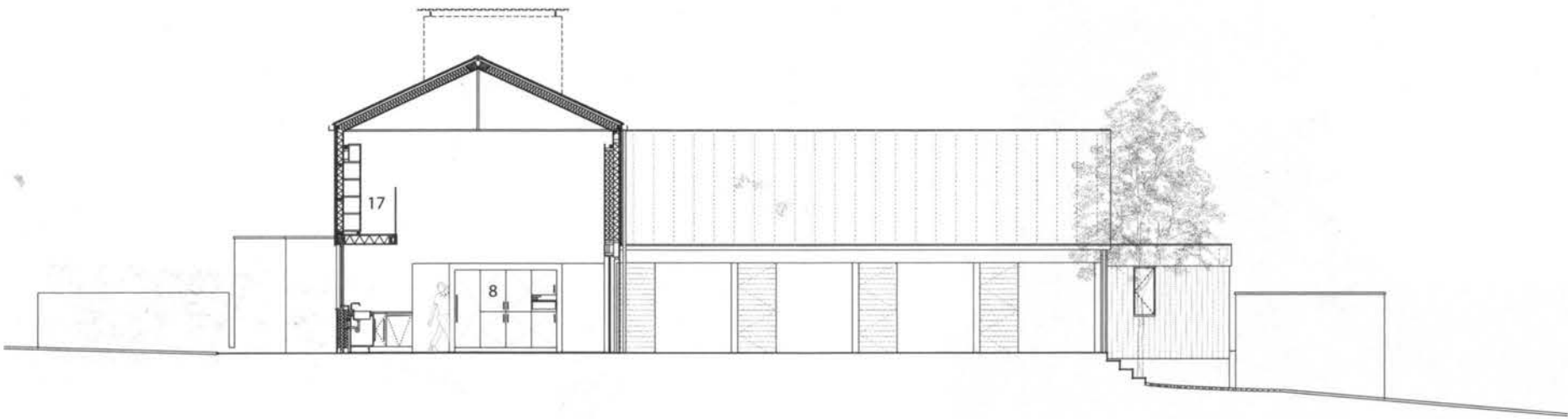
In their original brief the Ducketts wrote: 'We wish to have a contemporary, broadly open plan layout, but rather than one single massive space we envisage distinct areas each with their own function. These should feel at the same time both separate and linked.' Accordingly, the entrance hall offers a glimpse of the other key areas of the house.

Here, as at the Sellers House, the main living space lies to the right of the entrance hall, with a kitchen giving way to a 'linked but separate' living area clearly visible beyond, while sliding glass doors allow the entire space to spill out onto a raised external terrace. Whereas at the Sellers House, a single-storey kitchen opened out to a lofty double-height living room, here the formula is reversed. The double-height kitchen is clearly the heart of the house, while the single-storey living area, with its large masonry-built fireplace, is more cosy and domestic in feel. The Sellers mezzanine, which was inserted above the kitchen area as an afterthought, was spatially effective but of indeterminate function. Here the upper floor houses the master bedroom, where full-height glazing offers views of the valley and an internal oak-shuttered Juliet balcony overlooks the kitchen below.

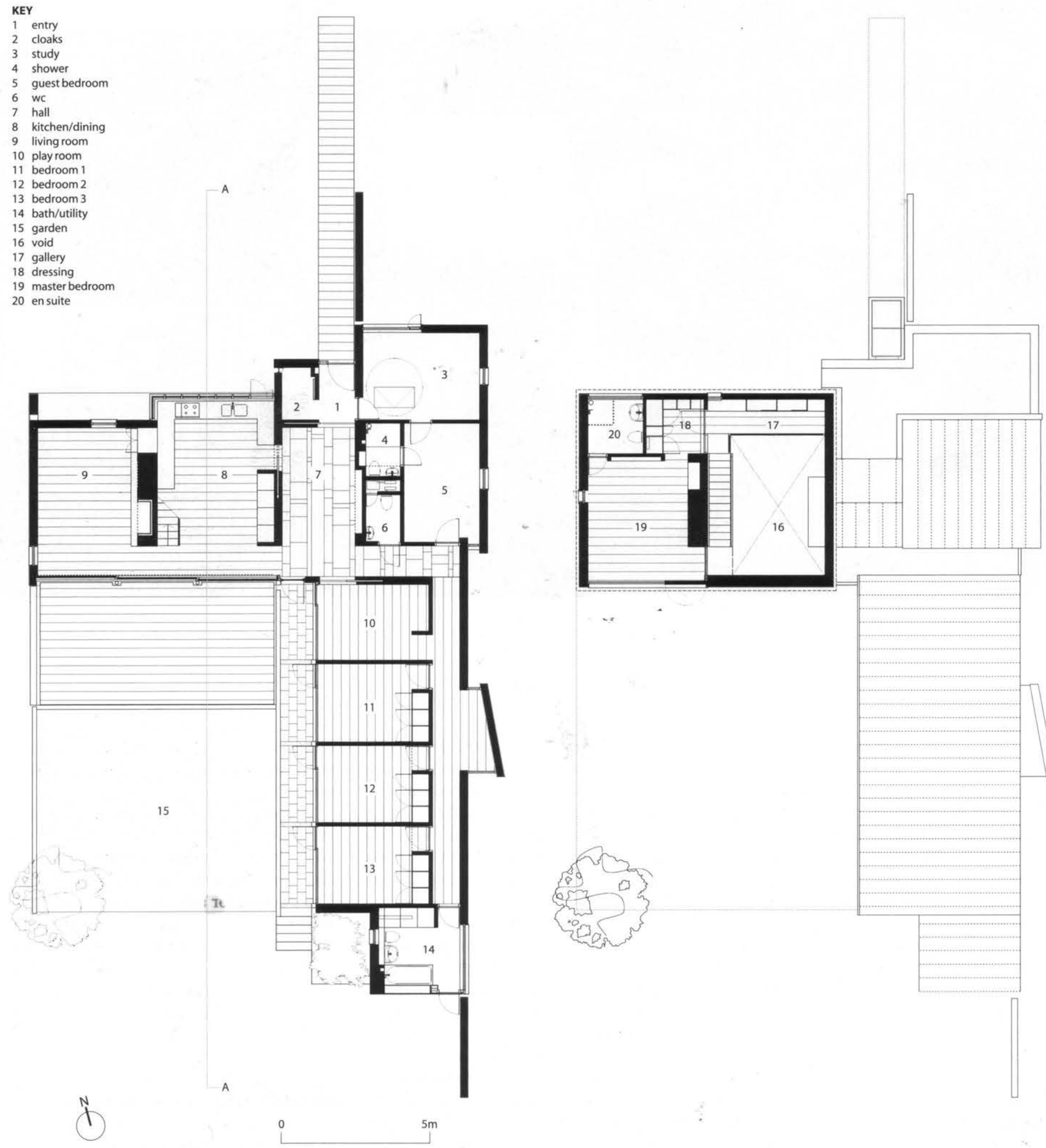
Also at first floor level is a galleried library area above the kitchen. Tiny in size, this library area allows every member of the household to enjoy semi-private space, apart from – but not entirely detached from – the bustle of family life, and to enjoy the

Oak-faced panel doors and matt grey basalt worktops meet the client's request for a kitchen that was 'as unkitchen like as possible'. Only the purpose-designed stainless steel sink signals its function





section aa



ground floor plan

first floor plan



spectacular high-level views. It also elevates the staircase from being simply a means of access to the most private room in the house, to a more symbolic ascent to a semi-public space. This subtle shift in status may seem like a rather esoteric point but it does make more sense of the predominance accorded to the staircase, a semi-cantilevered sculptural element inspired by 'Steps and Stairs', an essay by Jonathan Miller which poetically addresses the symbolic potential of the staircase, and by the simple folded-timber cantilevered stair which Louis Barragán designed for his own home.

The decision to locate the master bedroom in the main living space and the guest accommodation off the study mean that the 'sleeping zone' is effectively a children's space. An open doorway at the far end of the entrance hall offers an immediate glimpse of a play/chillout area; its coloured bean-

bags and timber floor contrasting against the entrance hall's antique furnishings and stone floor. Affectionately dubbed the 'accident and emergency room', on the basis that it could be called onto service as a bedroom for an additional child, it currently acts as a transitional space to the children's bedrooms beyond.

As at the Sellers House, these rooms are identical cellular spaces ranged along a corridor, each with full-height fixed glazing overlooking the semi-enclosed outdoor courtyard. Once again, the simplicity of the planning is enriched by Pardey's volumetric games: the mono-pitch roof creates the necessary height for the corridor to be straddled by a high-level storage platform, thereby creating the necessary wall space on the eastern elevation to provide slit windows which capture the rising sun. The run of bedrooms terminates in a laundry room/family bath-

room where a long low window allows views of the surrounding fields to be enjoyed from the comfort of a warm bath.

Every aspect of the design is informed by an appreciation of the landscape, reflecting both Pardey's instinctive preferences but also the Ducketts' clear instruction that: 'Our hope is for a home where the interior and exterior spaces blend almost seamlessly. During daylight hours, the natural focus will be the wonderful outdoor views.' The house, in turn, contributes greatly to the view – or at least it would, if anybody saw it. In reality its delights are the sole reserve of the Ducketts and their visitors.

The tragedy of Pardey's stand-off with the local bureaucracies is that his considered – and highly contextual – oeuvre is best able to flourish in instances where it can make only a minimal contribution to the public realm.



Clockwise from left: southern and eastern elevations are cedar clad and extensively glazed. The purpose-designed oak bed in the master bedroom incorporates a seat from which to enjoy the view. Each child helped to choose the single coloured wall in their bedroom. A 'lay-by' space off the corridor provides an informal play area in the children's wing



COSTS

Data based on tender sum, for gross internal area

SUBSTRUCTURE

FOUNDATIONS SLABS £245.11/m²

Includes £7,345 for demolitions. Strip foundations, beam-and-block floor

SUPERSTRUCTURE

FRAME £87.51/m²

Cedar and steel frame in combination with loadbearing blockwork

UPPER FLOORS £61.54/m²

Timber joist

ROOF £232.82/m²

Parallam I-section truss joists and timber joists

STAIRCASES £20.51/m²

4mm steel folded plate with 40mm oak treads

EXTERNAL WALLS £167.36/m²

Ground floor: blockwork cavity walls with render. First floor: timber construction with Western Red Cedar boarding

WINDOWS £168.64/m²

COMAR 45lt windows, Schüco Royal S120

EXTERNAL DOORS £45.10/m²

Bespoke joinery

INTERNAL WALLS AND PARTITIONS £62.30/m²

Blockwork, plaster/ timber plus plasterboard, skim coat

INTERNAL DOORS £34.85/m²

Painted ply, oak-veneered

INTERNAL FINISHES

WALL FINISHES £34.65/m²

Plaster, PermaRock Scratch render

FLOOR FINISHES £55.83/m²

Pietra Laro Limestone. Nordik1 white oiled oak

CEILING FINISHES £28.91/m²

Plasterboard and skim coat

FITTINGS AND FURNISHINGS

FURNITURE £15.38/m²

Bespoke joinery

SERVICES

SANITARY APPLIANCES £44.14/m²

Ideal Standard

DISPOSAL INSTALLATIONS £15.85/m²

Soakaway and land drains

WATER INSTALLATIONS £5.13/m²

SPACE HEATING/AIR TREATMENT £87.18/m²

Myson underfloor heating. Jaga trench heaters

ELECTRICAL SERVICES £44.39/m²

COMMUNICATION INSTALLATIONS £5.13/m²

BUILDERS' WORK IN CONNECTION £20.51/m²

EXTERNAL WORKS

LANDSCAPING £122.35/m²

Hogging access track



PRELIMINARIES AND INSURANCES

PRELIMINARIES, OVERHEADS AND PROFIT £140.19/m²

COST SUMMARY

	Cost per m ² (£)	Percentage of total
SUBSTRUCTURE	245.11	14.05
SUPERSTRUCTURE		
Frame	87.51	5.01
Upper floors	61.54	3.53
Roof	232.82	13.34
Staircases	20.51	1.18
External walls	167.36	9.59
Windows	168.64	9.66
External doors	45.10	2.58
Internal walls and partitions	62.30	3.57
Internal doors	34.85	2.00
Group element total	880.63	50.47
INTERNAL FINISHES		
Wall finishes	34.65	1.99
Floor finishes	55.83	3.20
Ceiling finishes	28.91	1.66
Group element total	119.39	6.84
FITTINGS AND FURNITURE	15.38	0.88
SERVICES		
Sanitary appliances	44.14	2.53
Disposal installations	15.85	0.91
Water installations	5.13	0.29
Space heating and air treatment	87.18	5.00
Electrical services	44.39	2.54
Communication installation	5.13	0.29
Builders' work in connection	20.51	1.18
Group element total	222.33	12.74
EXTERNAL WORKS	122.35	7.01
PRELIMINARIES AND INSURANCE	140.19	8.03
TOTAL	1745.38	100

Cost data provided by John Pardey Architects

CREDITS

TENDER DATE

October 2002

START ON SITE DATE

January 2003

CONTRACT DURATION

7 months

GROSS INTERNAL FLOOR AREA

195m²

FORM OF CONTRACT

JCT Minor Works

TOTAL COST

£339,253

CLIENT

Will and Libby Duckett

ARCHITECT

John Pardey Architects: Magnus Ström

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

Barton Engineers

SERVICES ENGINEER

E+M Technica

MAIN CONTRACTOR

Dunford Construction

SUBCONTRACTORS

Roofing Mansbridge Roofing; steelwork VR

Construction Services

SUPPLIERS

Stone flooring, worktops Stone Age Masonry; purpose-made stainless steel sink Associated Metal (Stainless); taps Vola (UK); sanitaryware Ideal Standard; underfloor heating Myson; trench heaters Jaga Heating Products (UK); towel radiators Vasco; Western Red Cedar, truss joist I beams Crendon Timber Engineering; metal roofing VM Zinc; render PermaRock; wine cellar Spiral Cellars; windows Comar; sliding door system Schüco; oak flooring Nordik; sisal matting Fired Earth; purpose-made bed New Forest Antique Restorations; purpose-made sofa Saxum Design (Sarah George)

WEBLINKS

John Pardey Architects

www.johnpardeyarchitects.com

Barton Engineers

www.bartonengineers.co.uk



Above: a grey sofa made by Sara George of Saxum Design faces an open fireplace which rises through the double-height space and supports the cantilevered stair. Left: a long, low window in the family bathroom allows the views to be appreciated from the comfort of a warm bath

A staircase of folded steel plate

At the heart of the house is a large masonry-built fireplace which divides the sitting room from the kitchen – a double-height space with a first floor gallery running along one wall. The rear wall of the chimney breast supports a cantilevered staircase which rises along it to give access to the gallery and the adjacent en suite master bedroom.

The staircase consists of a 4mm-thick steel plate carriage, folded to form treads and risers. It is 740mm wide and welded to a 10mm steel string that is secured to the chimney breast with M12 resin bolts. The folded plate cantilever spans from ground floor to landing so that the forces act together to achieve stability.

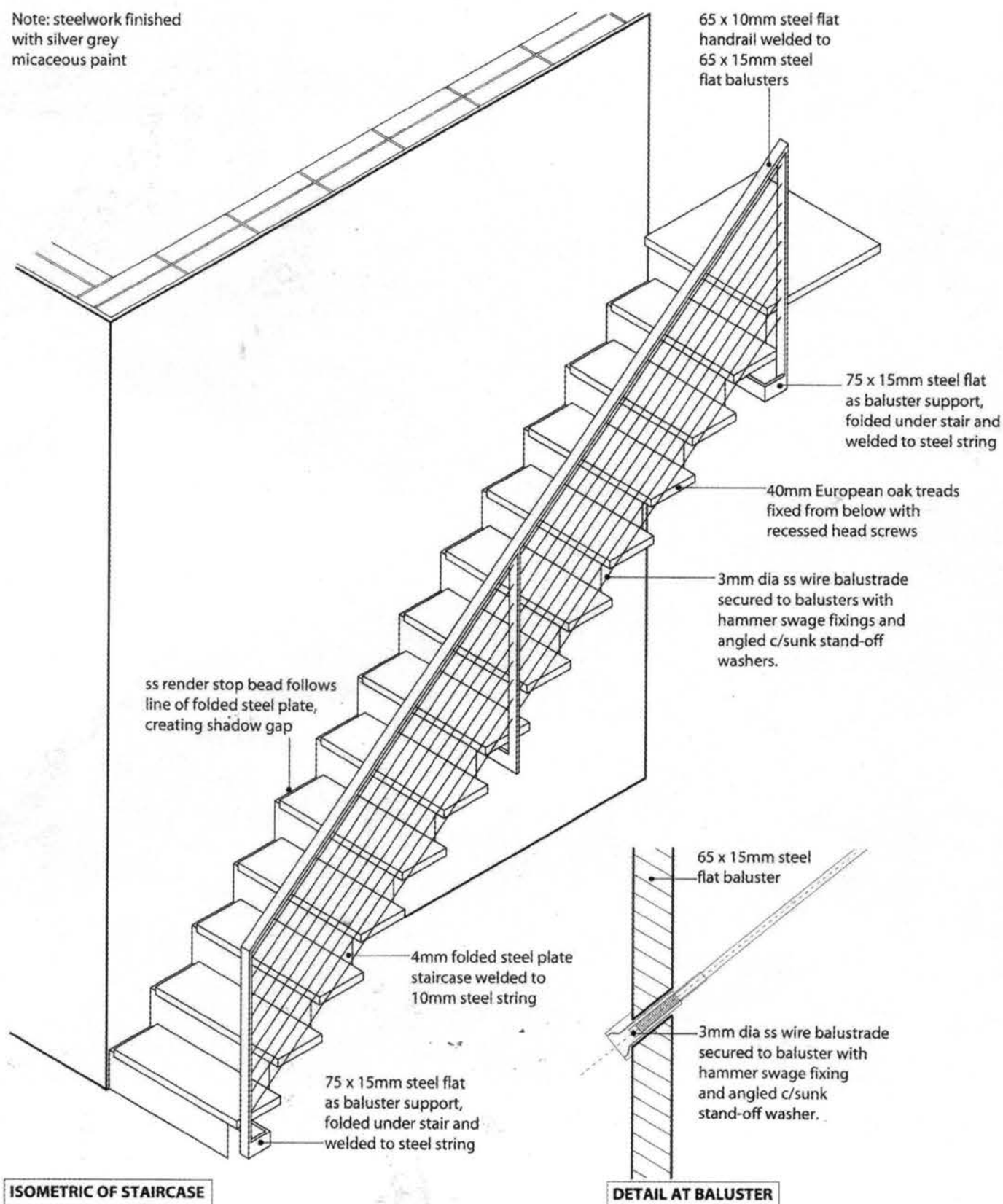
The 40mm-thick European oak treads are secured from below with recessed head screw fixings (all slot heads neatly aligned), and project over the outer edge of the folded steel carriage. The resulting problem – how to fix the balustrade – was solved by another cantilever. Three 75 x 15mm steel flats are welded to the wall string as baluster supports; they project below, and free of, the folded steel plate and turn up beyond the treads to form 65 x 15mm balusters. A continuous 65 x 10mm handrail is welded to the balusters.

A balustrade of 3mm stainless steel wire rope, obtained from a local yacht chandlery, is secured by 'standard special' hammer swage fittings with angled countersunk stand off washers. All steelwork is finished in silver grey micaceous paint and the oak treads are oiled.

In the architect's own words: 'The cantilevered stair takes flight off the chimney and aims to make the owner's ascent to bed each night a minor ascent to a higher plane.'

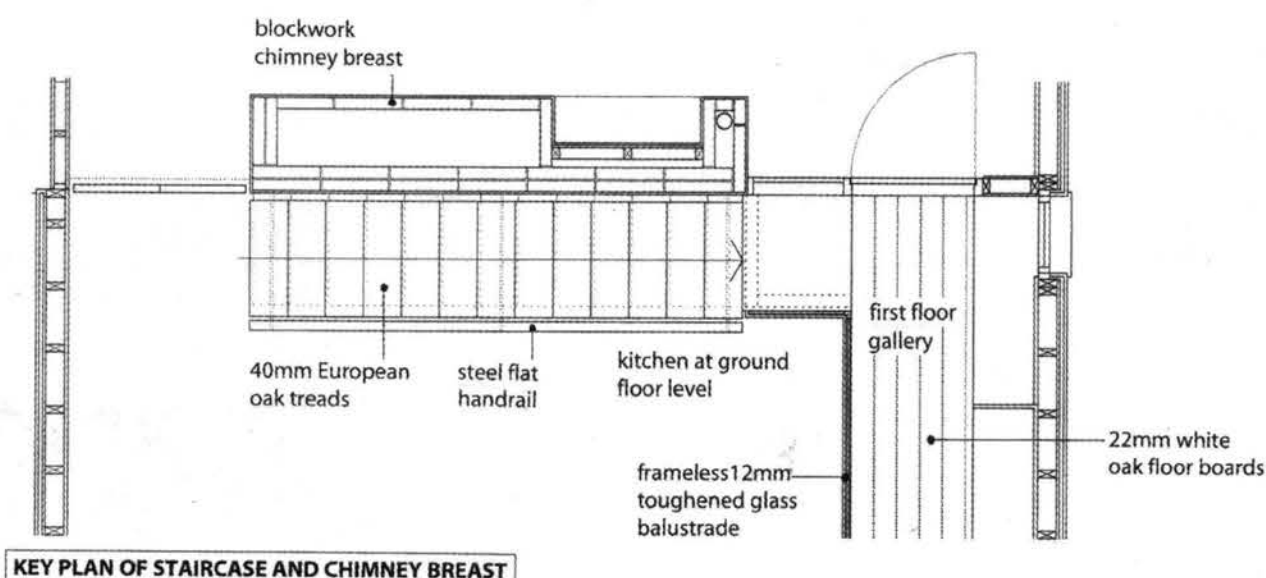
Susan Dawson

Note: steelwork finished with silver grey micaceous paint

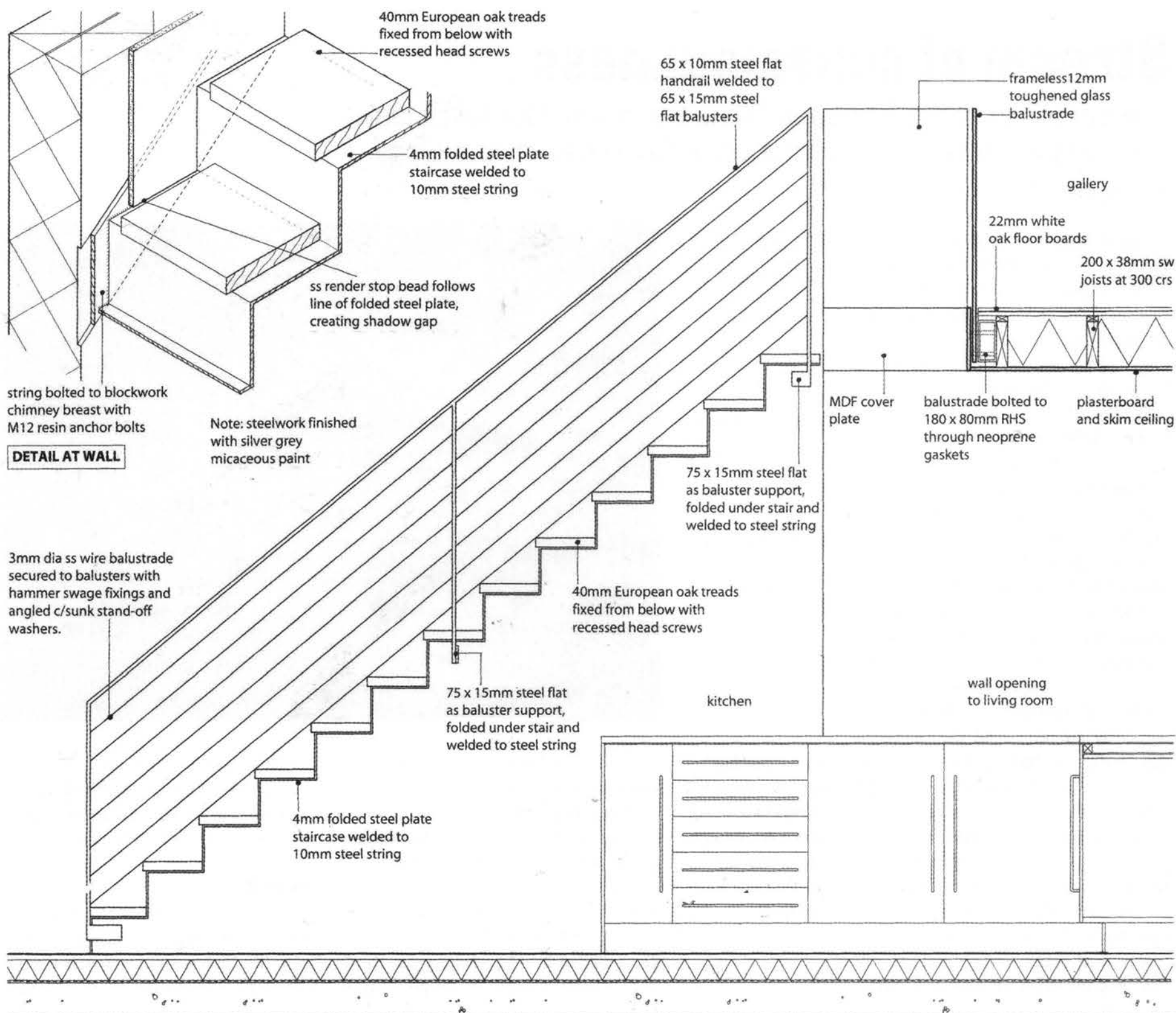


ISOMETRIC OF STAIRCASE

DETAIL AT BALUSTER



KEY PLAN OF STAIRCASE AND CHIMNEY BREAST



ELEVATION OF STAIRCASE

