

CHESTER HOUSE
CHESTER, NOVA SCOTIA

MACKAY-LYONS
SWEETAPPLE
ARCHITECTS LIMITED

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In Chester, an oceanside village on Nova Scotia's South Shore, this 1,350 square foot house was realized for a woman living in Seattle, seeking to return home to Canada. The site is privately tucked away, down the slope from the main street, at the edge of the village's boundary. While the space feels as though it sits on its own, it is within walking proximity to central Chester, making necessary amenities and nearby trails accessible.

This home is the pinnacle of minimal and modest design. A house within a house. The ground floor features two bedrooms and a staircase constructed of an origami-like folded perforated steel plate. This leads you to the upstairs, which features only one principal room. The living and dining area form a central open space, with secondary spaces creating a thickened perimeter around – a kitchen, a washroom, a covered balcony, and a bay window. A fireplace forms a central gathering place. This space invites well-being and refuge, creating a sense of safety as it is surrounded by protective thick walls inspired by Irish Tower Houses. These encompassing smaller elements help to mediate between the central room and the outside world.

The upstairs living space exists for the opportunity of prospect. Surrounded by glass, the top floor allows light to reveal itself from the shadows and offer a panoramic view of the forest. Small punch windows create vignettes of intimate landscape features. The dwelling submerses occupants in a relationship with nature, sounds of the babbling brook and dappling effect of sunlight through the canopy cover. The upper storey is a weathered steel sleeve that appears to slide over its wooden base.

Minimally detailed eaves, corners, and openings both underscore and elevate the architectural simplicity. A glass entry bite forms a porch reversed. An elevated blockhouse perspective in the treetops.

The downstairs wooden base creates an inversion, the upside down house. Challenging the notions of traditional living, the bottom floor is where the bedrooms lay. Refuge and privacy are created in a sheltered and quieter environment, forming protection for the user. The wooden base creates a solid and secure place that invites calm and contemplation. With the interior sparsely furnished, the client enjoys watching the light and shadows sweep across the monochromatic surfaces.

This two and a half story house is a prototype in the practice of modest living. Culturally and economically appropriate to its setting, the site transcends into the local culture, blending into the landscape. The goal in the design process is to set out and make a home of minimal form, cost and material. In contrast with the excesses of our current consumer society, the ethic of economy overlays the form and materiality of this dwelling.

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MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple Architects is based in the Canadian cities of Halifax, Lunenburg, and Kingsburg, Nova Scotia, and across the United States in Denver, Colorado, Boston, Massachusetts, and Portland, Oregon. The practice works locally and internationally on cultural, academic and residential projects, providing full architectural, interior design and urban design services. There are four Principals: Brian MacKay-Lyons, Talbot Sweetapple, Melanie Hayne and Shane Andrews.

In over 30 years of work, the practice of MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple has built an international reputation for design excellence confirmed by over 150 awards, including the prestigious 2017 Global Award for Sustainable Architecture; six American Institute of Architects (AIA) National and International Honor Awards for Architecture; four Architectural Record Houses Awards; the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) Gold Medal in 2015 and the RAIC Firm Award in 2014; eight Governor General's Medals; fifteen Lieutenant Governor's Medals of Excellence; eight Canadian Architect Awards; and thirteen North American Wood Design & Building Awards. In addition, the firm's work has been featured in over 700 publications and over 100 exhibitions internationally.

The American Institute of Architects named Brian MacKay-Lyons Honorary Fellow (Hon. FAIA, Int.) in 2001 and the Royal Institute of British Architects honored him as an International Fellow (Int. FRIBA) in 2016. Brian MacKay-Lyons and Talbot Sweetapple are Fellows of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (FRAIC), and Brian is also a Member of the Royal

Canadian Academy of Arts (RCA).

Both Brian MacKay-Lyons and Talbot Sweetapple are active in architectural education, Brian as a recently retired Full Professor and Faculty Member at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia for over 30 years, and Talbot as an Adjunct Professor since 1997 and now a Professor of Practice as of 2013. Between them, they have held 18 endowed Academic Chairs and Visiting Professorships at leading universities worldwide, including The Peter Behrens School of Architecture, Washington University in St. Louis, and Harvard University. They have also given over 220 public lectures on their work worldwide.

Both Brian and Talbot have long cultural roots in Atlantic Canada, through their common Acadian and Mi'kmaq ancestry, in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland respectively. While the body of work of MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple is known for its cultural responsiveness to local landscapes, climate and material culture, it also consistently possesses an archetypal quality which touches a global audience.

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PROJECT DETAILS

LOCATION

Chester, Nova Scotia, Canada

COMPLETION DATE

Fall 2021

PROJECT SIZE

1,350 sf

PROJECT TEAM

Architecture:	MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple Architects Design Lead: Brian MacKay-Lyons Project Architect: Matt Jones
Structural Engineer:	James Miller, Campbell Comeau Engineering Limited
Construction:	Special Projects

PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS

James Brittian

For further information, interviews or high-res images please contact:
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Upside-down house



Cedar base/Corten top



Entry bite pinwheels with balcony above



Stairhall as lantern



A one-room house within a house



Cozy cedar refuge



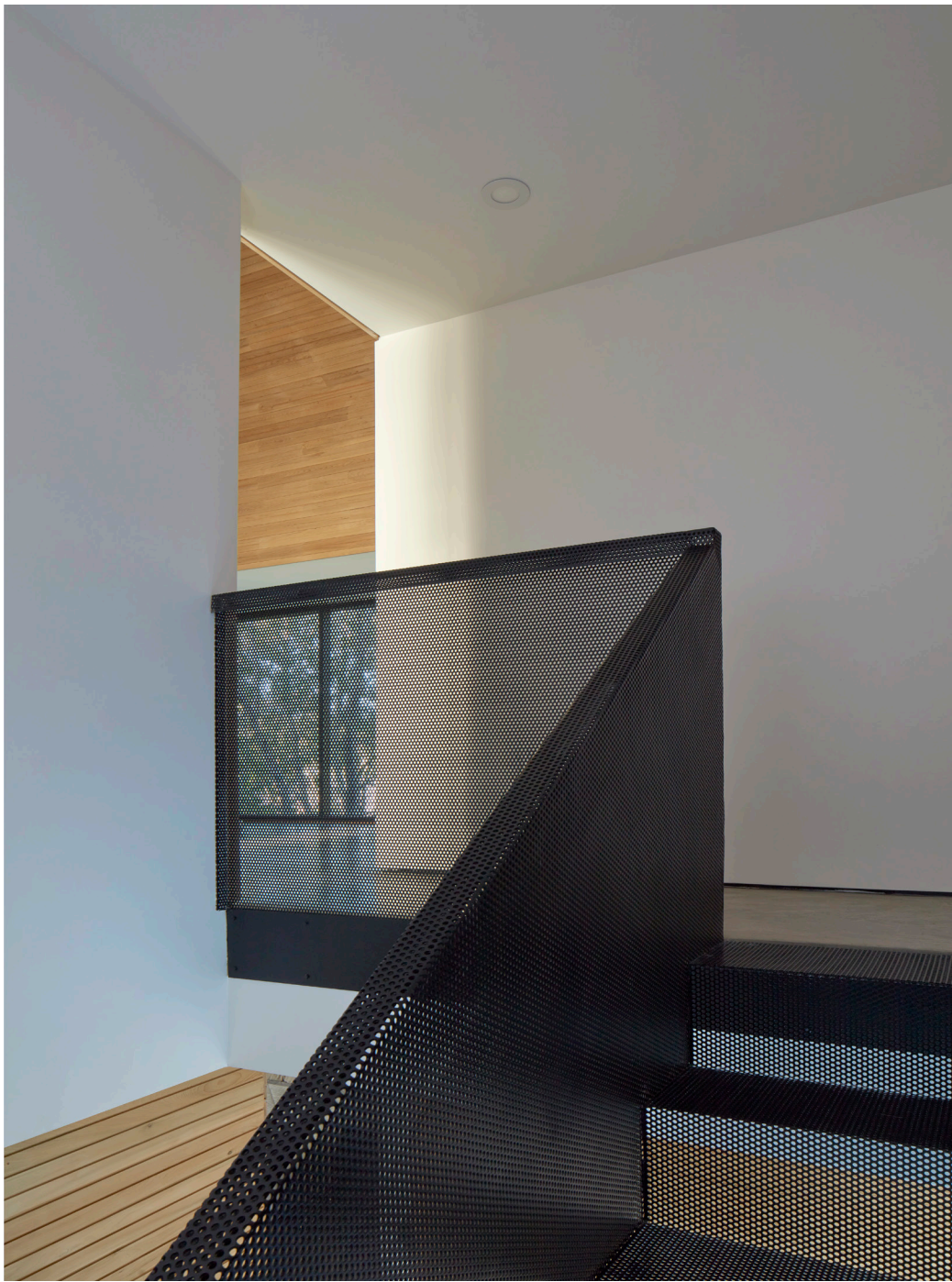
Interstitial spaces surround great room (kitchen, porch, stair, sleeping lofts, hearth)



Between the room and the envelope



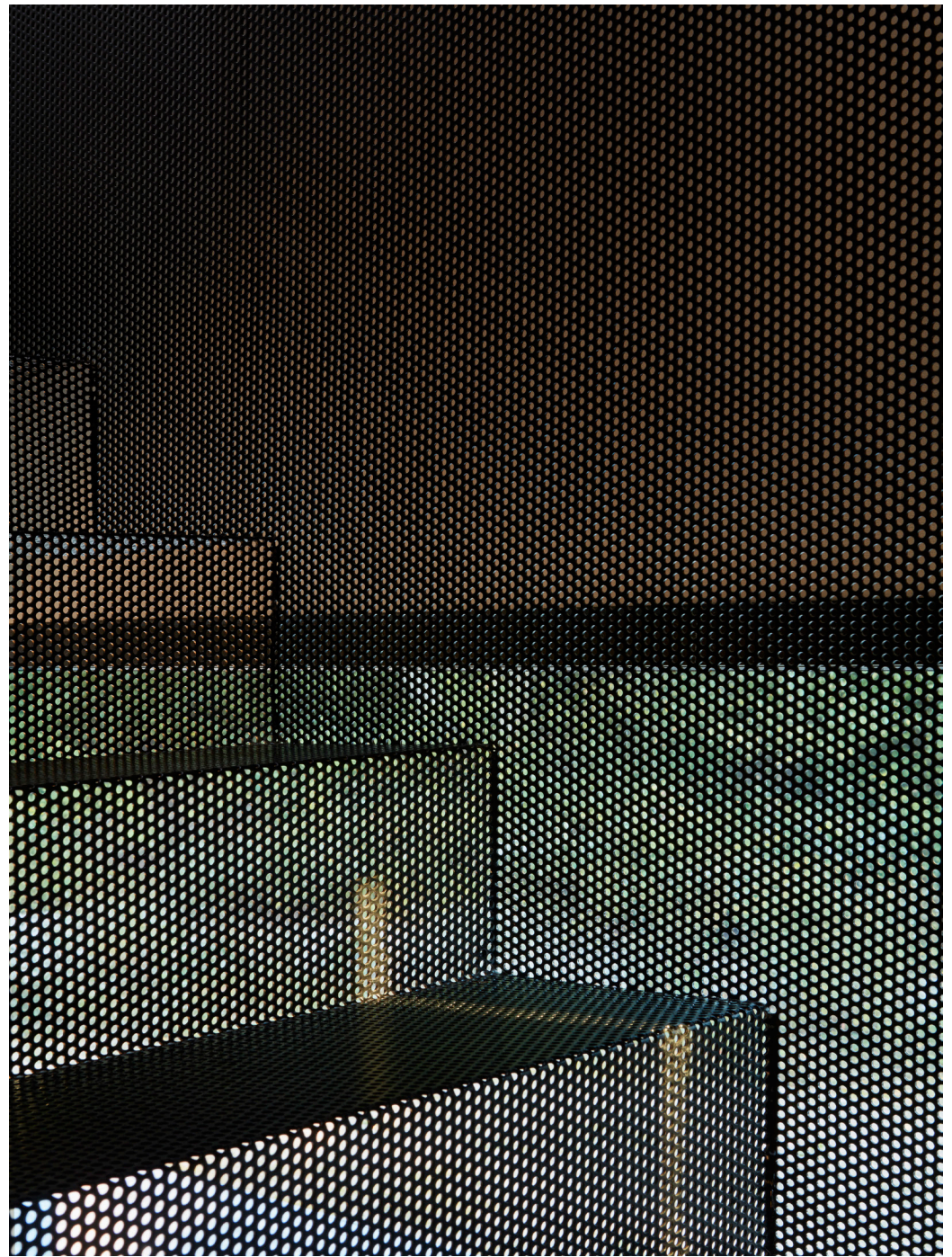
Recessed south balcony



Ascending to the great room



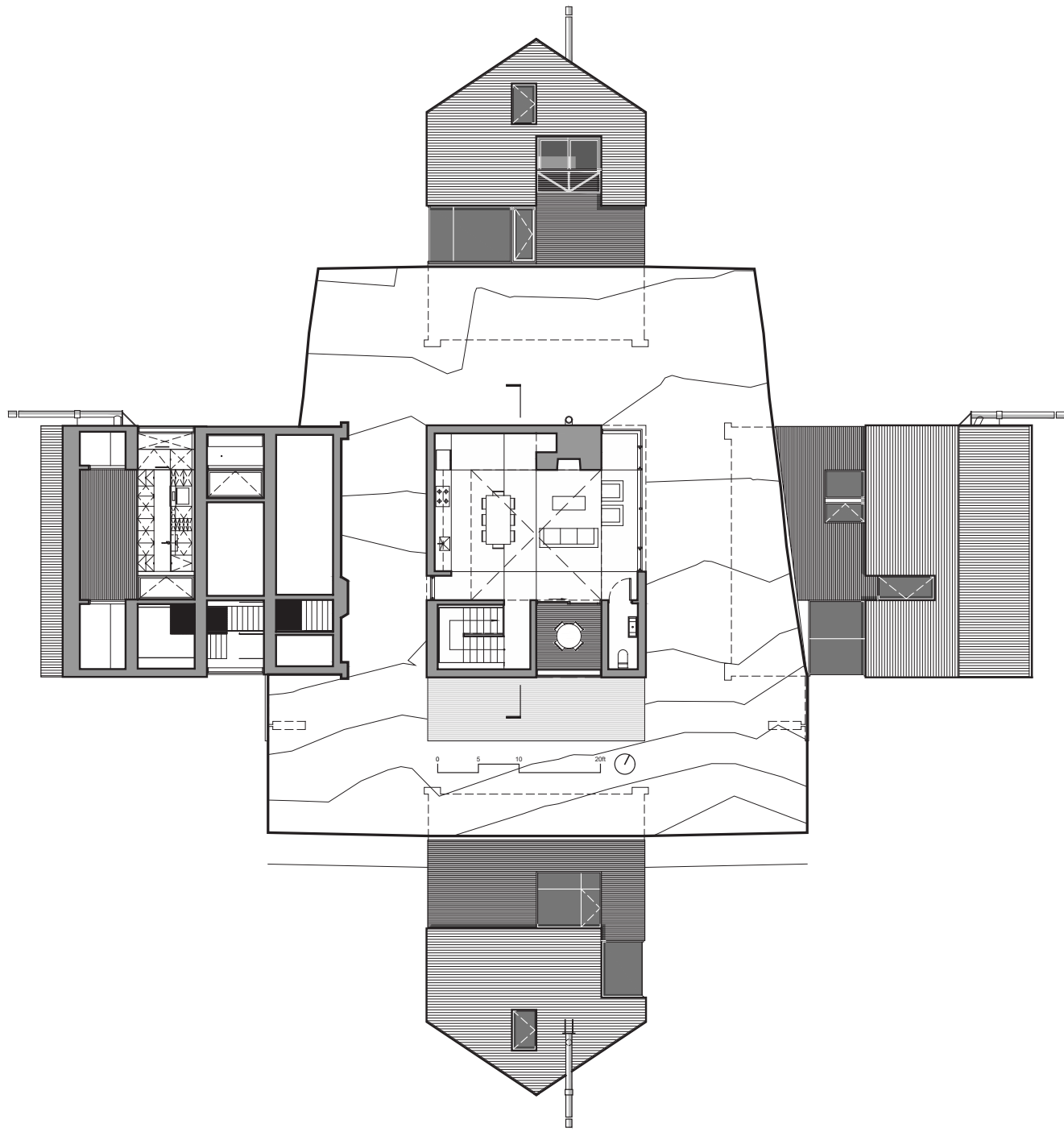
Folded origami staircase

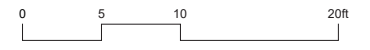
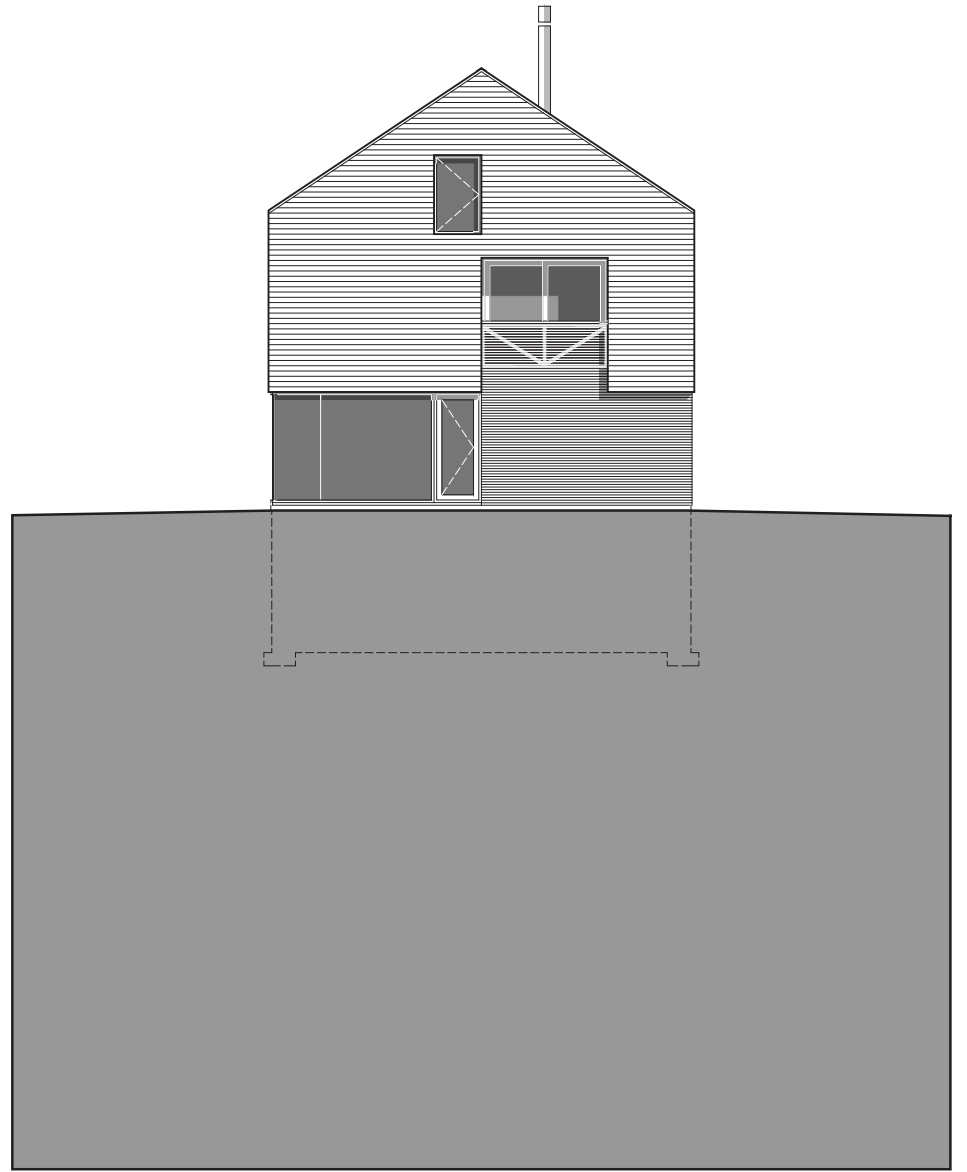
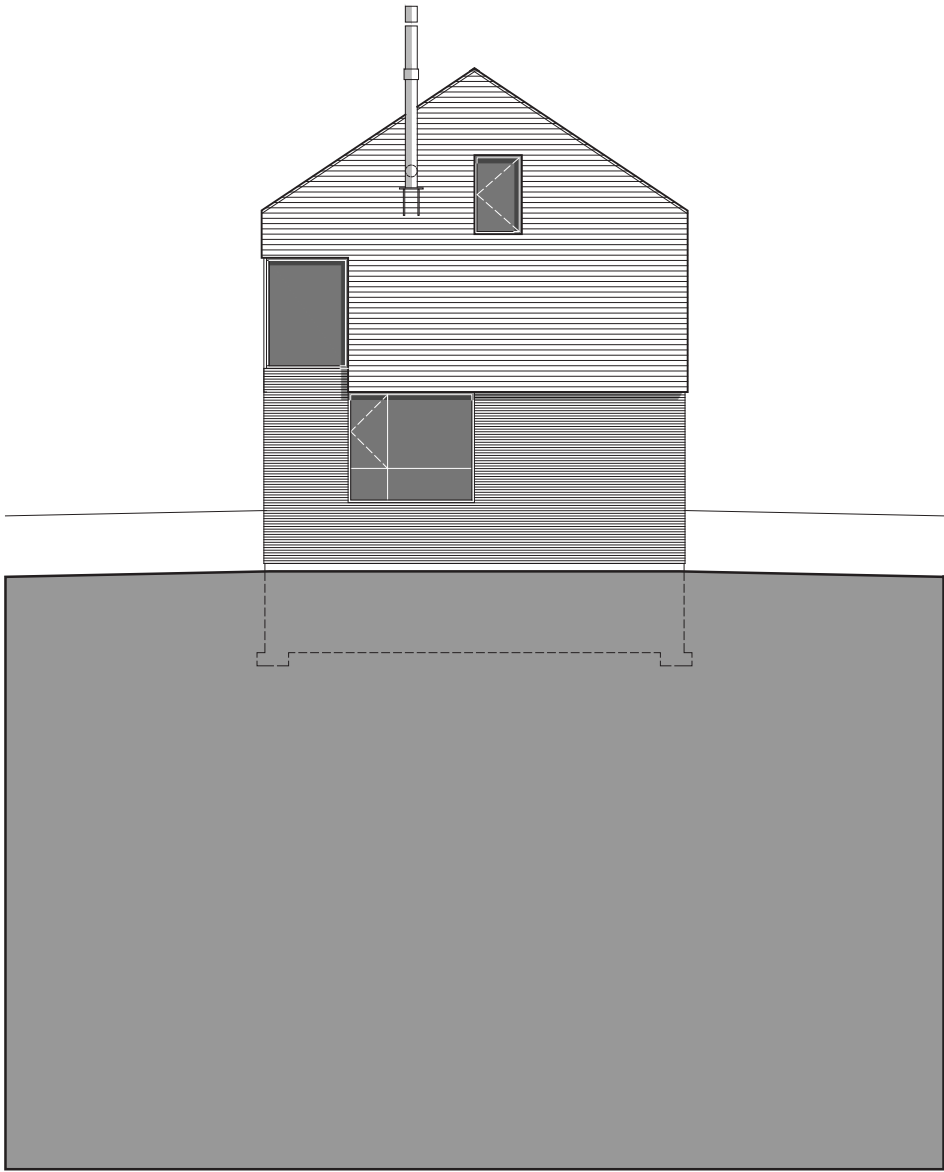


Vertigo: perforated steel

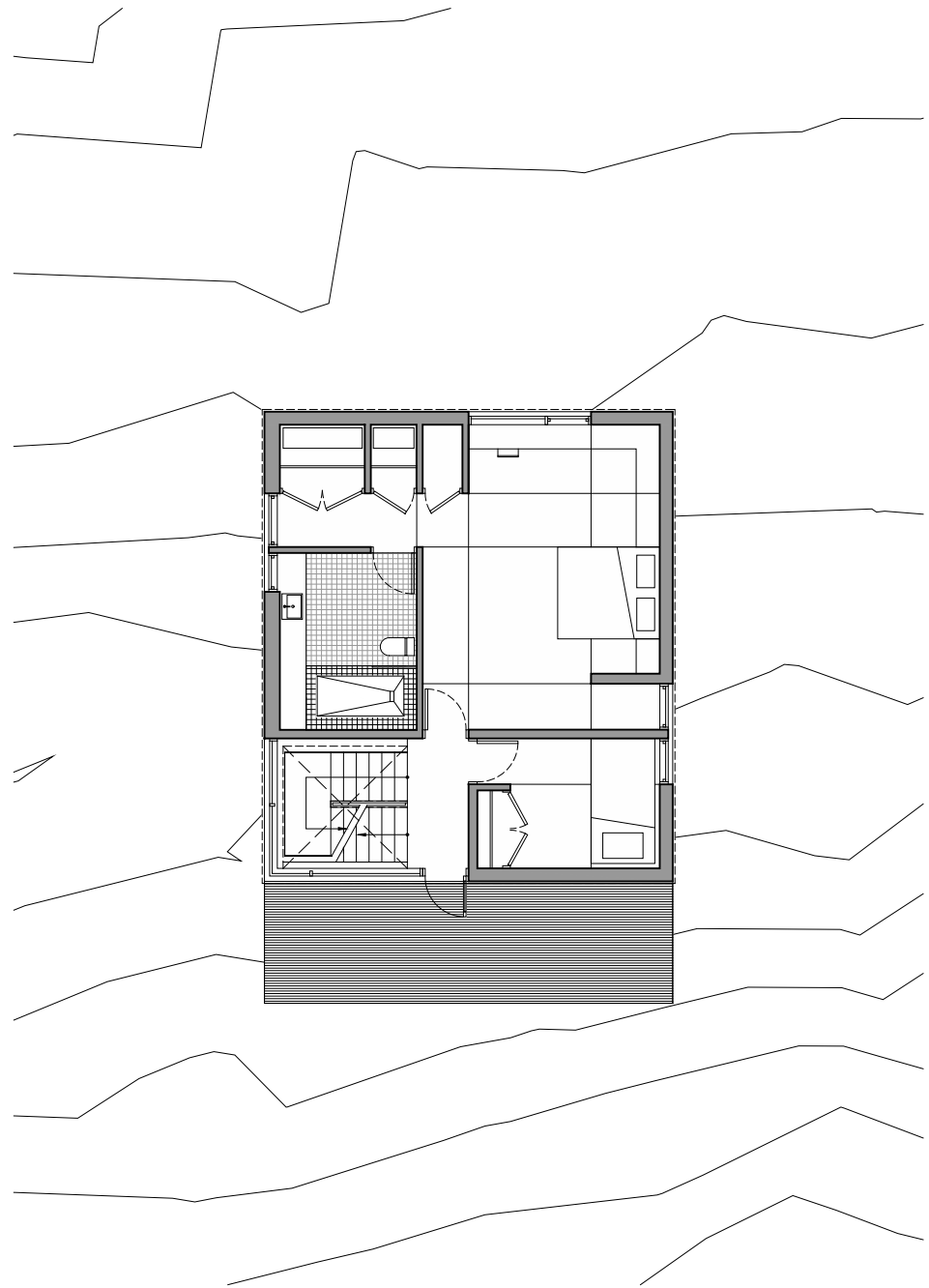
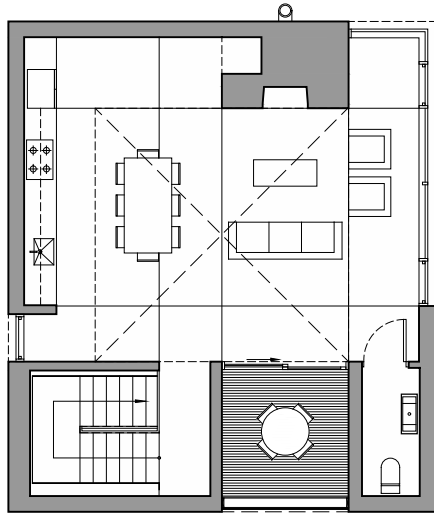


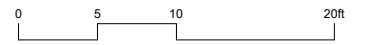
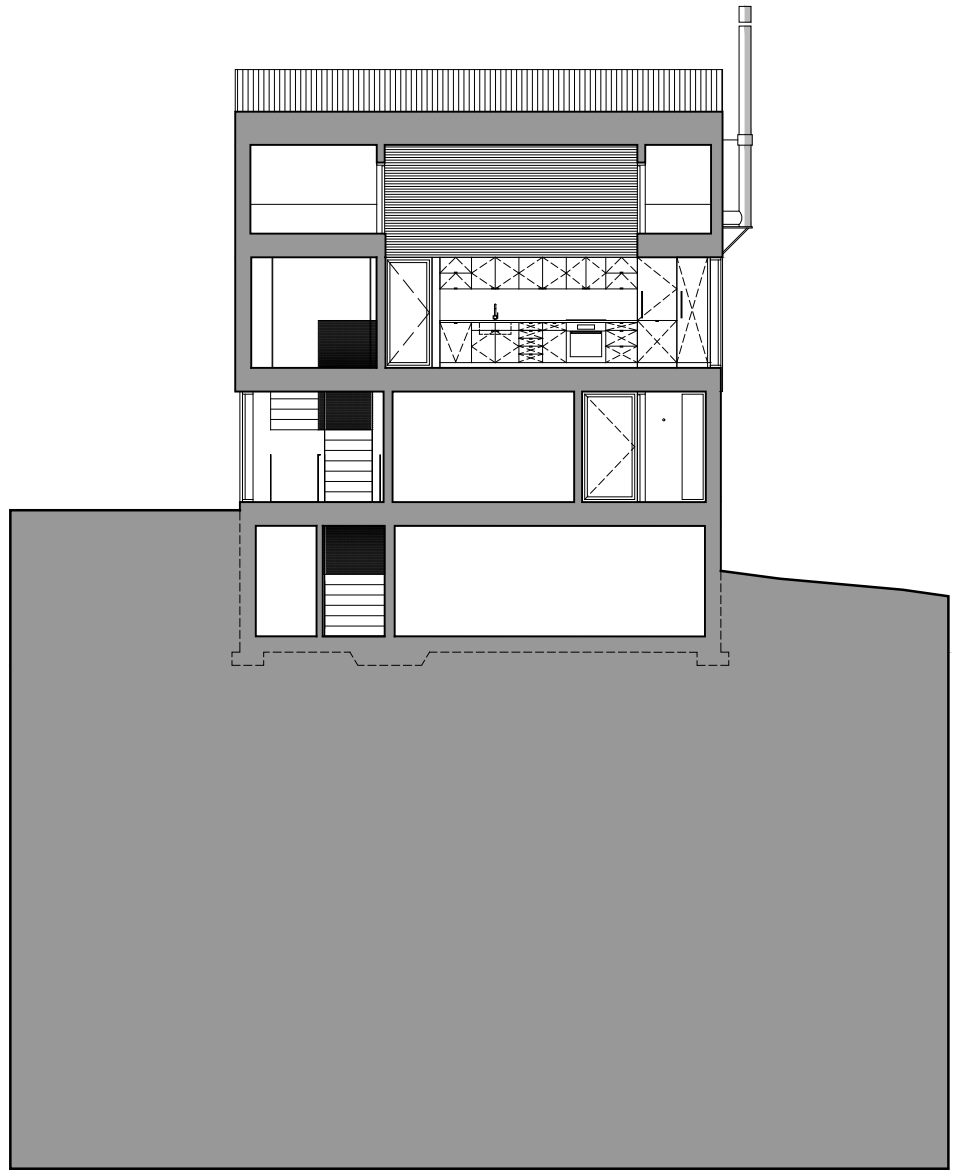
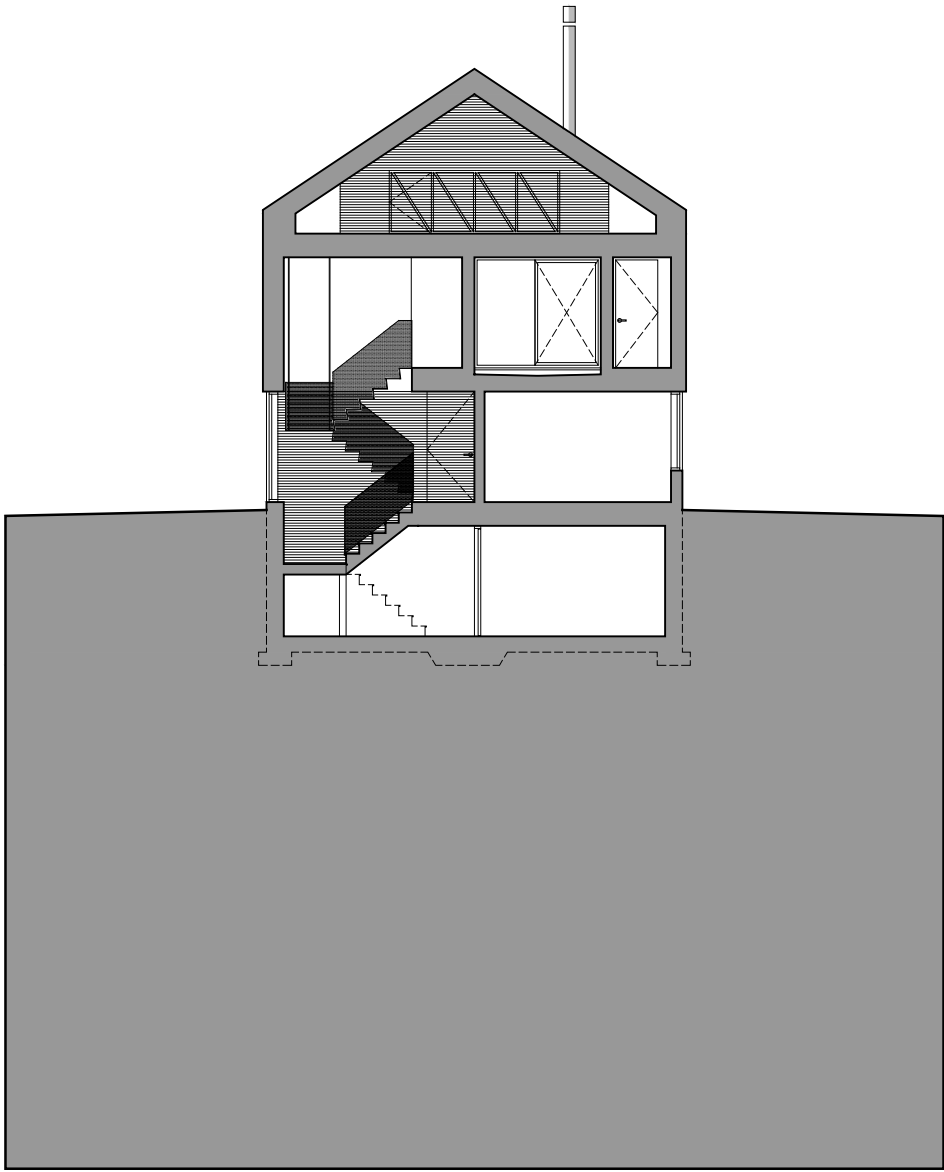
Best bedroom below

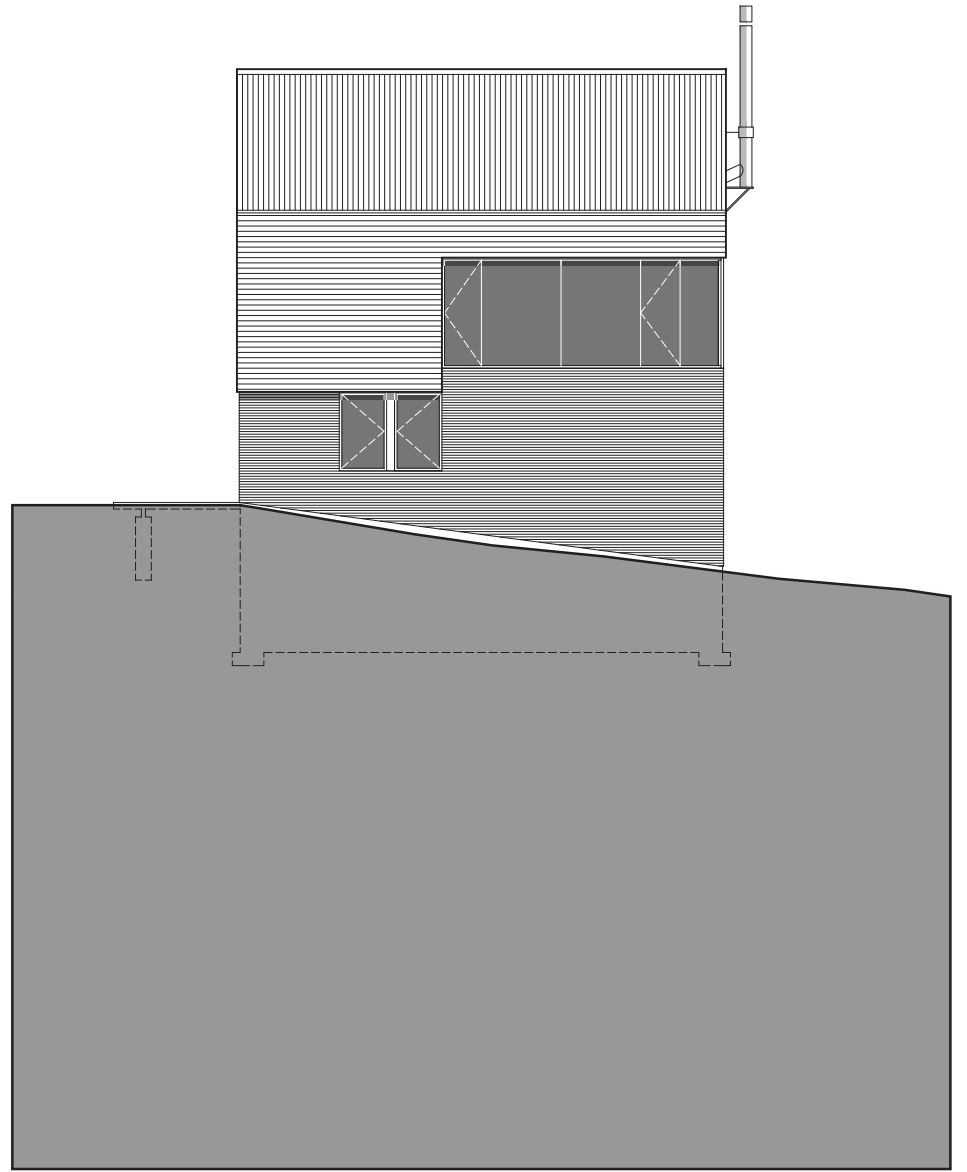
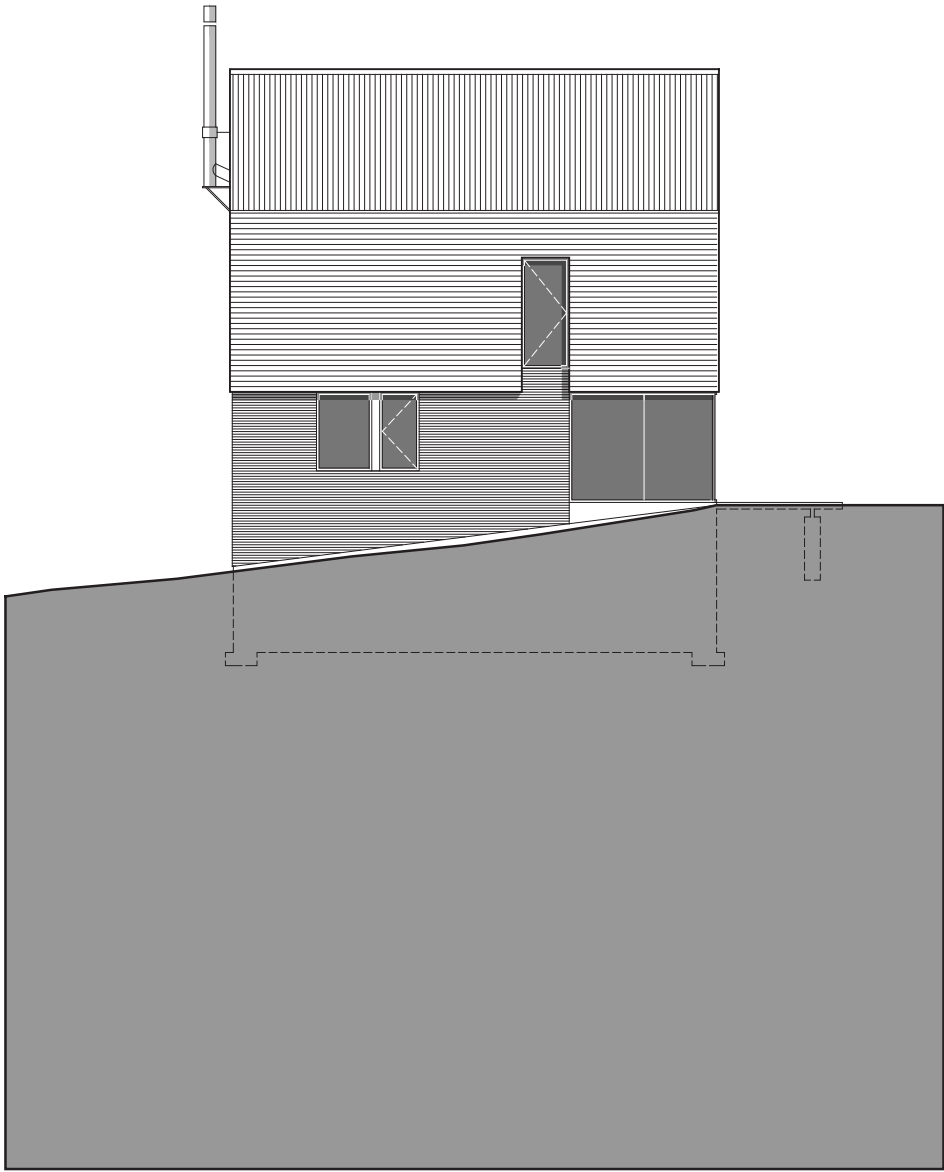




North and south elevation







East and west elevations