

David Nossiter Architects

Church Hill Barn, Suffolk, UK

Project Description:

The site, situated on the Essex/Suffolk borders within the landscape immortalised by Constable was originally the home farm of the nearby estate, destroyed by fire in the 1950s. It consists of a collection of farm buildings forming a courtyard. The centrepiece of the site with views over the rural landscape is a large barn of cathedral-like proportions.

Cruciform in plan with a collection of smaller spaces surrounding it, the arrangement sought to provide shelter for different farming activities under a single roof. The barn complex is the legacy of the model farm movement.

The clients purchased the buildings in dilapidated condition. Having sold their own property in nearby Colchester they decided to reside in a caravan on the site during the build. David had worked on a previous project and was the natural choice of architect.

The barn is a Listed structure and the contemporary refurbishment required lengthy agreements with the local planning authorities.

A large component of the renovations consisted of the refurbishment of the roof. Roofing slates and timber materials were salvaged from the other agricultural structures on the site that were too decayed to be usefully renovated. In order to allow the existing structure to be viewed internally but still conform to modern standards of thermal performance, the roof is a 'warm roof construction' meaning that all of the insulation is located on the exterior of the roof above a new timber deck.

The external walls were insulated with sheep's wool and clad with larch timber, which has been left to weather naturally. The original openings have been simply fenestrated with glazing set back from the external wall line. Oversized bespoke glazed sliding doors fill the hipped gable porches, allowing views from the courtyard towards open fields. Two three-metre square roof lights allow day light deep into the interior of the eight-metre tall central spaces.

It was decided early on during the design process to keep the spaces as open plan as possible. Where necessary partitions and screens are designed as over scaled freestanding furniture. Constructed from birch faced plywood sheets, they organise the spaces, providing privacy for bathrooms and sleeping areas.

A reminder of the barn's agricultural past, lighting is operated using existing switch boxes and concealed within the existing structure, existing metal grilles and new joinery.

Polished concrete flooring flows throughout with 10mm floor joints aligning with the spatial demarcation. A biomass boiler is assisted by a mechanical ventilation and heat recovery system that recirculates warm air stacking in the taller spaces.

Landscaping and planting reflects the internal spaces and is kept simple with wildflower planting and brick paving salvaged from the existing barn complex.

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