

Norwegian Wood

Princeton Architectural Press
37 East Seventh Street
New York, New York 10003

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Visit our web site at www.papress.com.

First published in Norwegian in 2002 under the title
Wenche Selmer. Omtankens arkitektur—en biografi
by Gaidaros Forlag
Postboks 5178 Majorstua
0302 Oslo
Norway

English edition: © 2006 Princeton Architectural Press
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Printed and bound in China
09 08 07 06 5 4 3 2 1 First edition

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This publication was supported by NORLA—Norwegian
Literature Abroad, Fiction & Non-fiction and the Research Council
of Norway.

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Cover design: Deb Wood
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Special thanks to: Nettie Aljian, Dorothy Ball, Janet Behning,
Becca Casbon, Penny (Yuen Pik) Chu, Russell Fernandez,
Peter Fitzpatrick, Jan Haux, Clare Jacobson, John King, Mark
Lamster, Nancy Eklund Later, Linda Lee, Katharine Myers, Lauren
Nelson, Scott Tennent, Jennifer Thompson, Paul Wagner, and
Joseph Weston of Princeton Architectural Press
—Kevin C. Lippert, publisher

Set with Univers Light 8.5/13

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Tostrup, Elisabeth.
[Arkitekt Wenche Selmer. English]
Norwegian wood : the thoughtful architecture of Wenche
Selmer / Elisabeth Tostrup.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN-13: 978-1-56898-593-0 (alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 1-56898-593-2 (alk. paper)
1. Selmer, Wenche, 1920–1998. 2. Architects—Norway—
Biography. 3. Architecture, Domestic—Norway. 4. Building,
Wooden—Norway. 5. Small houses—Norway. I. Selmer,
Wenche, 1920–1998. II. Title.
NA1273.S438T6713 2006
728'.37092—dc22

2006004949

ELISABETH TOSTRUP

Norwegian Wood

THE THOUGHTFUL ARCHITECTURE
OF WENCHE SELMER

Princeton Architectural Press, New York

Foreword

4 Writing this book about architect Wenche Selmer has been a thoroughly positive experience. Many people, including Selmer's clients, colleagues, former students, friends, and acquaintances, have expressed their joy about the project: "She deserves a book," "Her architecture and her work as an architect are important to discuss," were some of the reactions I received. It is clear that Selmer's work has a unique appeal.

The following book consists of two parts. The first part gives an account of Selmer's life and work as an architect, dealing with the main features of her architecture and its devices and with her position as an architect, as a woman, and a teacher. In the second part, fourteen of Selmer's buildings are presented in detail, including vacation homes by the sea, in the forests, and in the mountains, as well as single-family houses and a few other buildings. The selected projects are "classic" Selmer houses, and several have been published in the Norwegian magazine *Byggekunst* and other publications. The summerhouses are concentrated in the area of Brekkestø where, in addition to a few characteristic cabins, the selection also includes several variations of one prototype. Selmer enjoyed designing variations of one familiar house type, thereby achieving new and personal designs without creating something radically "original" every time. The houses shown here have also been chosen based on their current condition, and whether they still provide an adequate impression of how Selmer wished for the places to appear. Of course, many other good examples exist that could not be included in this selection due to the limited space.

Most of the photographs were commissioned especially for this book, taken by photographer Frode Larsen, with some images by Jim Bengston, Espen Grønli, and Carl-Viggo Hølmekbakk. The black-and-white

photos were taken by Jens Selmer, Wenche Selmer's second husband, who was also her associate. In addition to the floor plans of each building, a few typical examples of working drawings are also shown.

There are many people whom I would like to thank for their support and encouragement. First and foremost I am grateful to the Selmer family, with a special thank you to Elisabeth Selmer, who from the very beginning assisted me more than I could ever have hoped for. Not only did she let me use Selmer's summerhouse on Beltesholmen as the base for my fieldwork, but she also compiled a complete list of Selmer's works for this book. I would also like to thank Espen Collett for good conversations and for taking me on excursions along the Brekkestø coastline. Selmer's brother, Jan Herman Reimers, and her nephew Johan Kloster and his family as well as her friends Grete Alm and Pus Holmboe, and family friend and colleague Birger Lambertz-Nilssen have provided good support and useful information. A big thank you is owed to all the owners of the houses and vacation homes who have welcomed my visits and provided information with kindness and enthusiasm. Among Selmer's former students at the Oslo School of Architecture, I would especially like to thank Carl-Viggo Hølmekbakk, Hildegunn Munch-Ellingsen, Pål Ring Giske, and Randi Fredriksen for their kind contributions. The Norwegian Museum of Architecture has been very obliging in giving access to its archives and other assistance.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank editors Lill Pleym and Janne Scavenius at Gaidaros Forlag, my Norwegian publisher, for their kind support, as well as Nicola Bednarek for her attentive work as my editor at Princeton Architectural Press.

4 Foreword

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Life and Work

The Thoughtful Architecture of Wenche Selmer

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Wenche Selmer (née Reimers)¹ is one of the few women who gained recognition as one of the renowned Norwegian architects of the twentieth century. Her own house, designed in collaboration with her second husband, Jens Selmer, received Sundt's Prize for Good Architecture in 1964–65, and in 1969 the couple received the Timber Award for wooden architecture. Selmer also exerted considerable influence through her work as associate professor at the Oslo School of Architecture, where the respect for her architecture grew with her authority as an educator of several hundreds of future architects.

It was primarily small wooden buildings that were Selmer's field of interest. Her work comprises around one hundred commissions, with thirty-six single-family houses, mostly in Oslo, and thirty-seven cabins or vacation homes, located primarily along the southern coast of Norway near Lillesand, but also up in the mountains. The remainder is made up of different extension and renovation projects. The work spans a period of forty-four years and naturally reflects different periods of Norwegian architecture, yet there is an obvious continuity in Selmer's production, which clearly evolved from her understanding as an architect.

Thoughtful is a word that can be used to describe many aspects of architecture. Selmer's architecture is thoughtful in its synthesis of the

aesthetic, technical, and financial sides, enhanced by her special understanding for the social and environmental aspects of architecture. The architect herself said repeatedly that there were two relationships she was especially devoted to in her work: the relationship of her designs to their surroundings and the relationship with the clients and their use of the houses. She emphasized the importance of achieving a coherence, of perceiving and working with the surroundings, and taking into consideration the existing when creating something new: "It is often the case that existing buildings on the site are not taken into consideration when something new is built. Even though they might be uninteresting buildings, maybe even ugly, they are still a part of the surroundings that one must relate to."² She also pointed out that every design is an encroachment on nature. For Selmer it was important to take her time to get to know the site, to look around, and get a feeling for the place. There was always something about the site that would stick in her mind: a particular stone or tree, a meadow, or another characteristic element in the landscape—something concrete that inspired ideas and started the creative process. One of her former students told me that sometimes Selmer would spend the night in a sleeping bag on the site to experience the sunrise before she designed the house.

The architect also placed great emphasis on how her houses were going to be used, who was going to live there, and what needs her clients had. Her social skills were useful in her dealings with clients. She was firm and direct, a good listener, and conveyed her ideas in a convincing manner. Her clients felt that they received something that was specifically for them, but at the same time it was a typical Selmer building.

Respect for the surroundings and for the occupants is a general goal that can be pursued in many different architectural ways. The objective of this book is to examine how Selmer used her expert knowledge as well as her personal skills and preferences in interaction with the different prevailing architectural currents in Norway. Which architectural devices did she develop and use to achieve her goals and her clients' wishes? And how did she position herself as an architect, a woman, and an educator? An outline of Selmer's childhood, education, and life as a young architect in postwar Norway will provide a foundation for a closer examination of these themes.

A Short Biography



Summer on Berø

CHILDHOOD

The First Years in Paris

Wenche Elisabeth Selmer was born in Paris on May 23, 1920, and spent her first years in France. She was the youngest child of Supreme Court advocate and diplomat Herman Foss Reimers (1874–1961) and his wife Bibi, née Bødtker Næss (1881–1945). The family moved to Paris in 1913 when her father, who was a specialist on international law, was employed as a counselor with the Norwegian legation (the precursor of the Norwegian embassy). Toward the end of World War I, Reimers resigned from the diplomatic service and started his own business in Paris, looking after a series of Norwegian interests in the wake of the war, among others for the Norwegian Ship-Owners' Association and the aluminum industry.

Selmer had a brother, Jan Herman, who was six years older, and a sister, Vibeke, three years older, as well as three half-sisters from her father's previous marriage, who arrived after World War I—one after the other—to live with the family in Paris. They had a large apartment on the fourth and fifth floors of a building near the Eiffel Tower. Reimers made a good living, and the family purchased several pieces of French furniture and other antiques, and welcomed Norwegian artists studying at the Matisse school in Paris into their home. Henrik Sørensen, Jean Heiberg, and Axel Revold often came to dinner, and Selmer's parents bought many paintings from them. Landscape painter Thorvald Erichsen became a special friend of the family, visiting nearly every day when he was in Paris for a few weeks several times a year.

Selmer's mother was an independent and energetic woman, the youngest of seven children of a relatively wealthy family in Bergen. She lost her father when she was sixteen years old and traveled at a young age on her own to Italy, France, and England with the money she had inherited. She had worked in England and lived in France before she met Herman Reimers and spoke both English and French fluently. In her free time she wrote novels and plays, mostly about family relations. One of her plays was close to being staged at *Den Nationale Scene* (the main theater in Bergen), but her family put a stop to it because a sister-in-law felt the play was critical toward her. Despite her many interests, Bibi Reimers was first and foremost a housewife who did everything in her power to ensure the well-being of her family and children.

Comfortable Years in Norway

Selmer was five years old when the family moved to Norway. They lived in Vinderen in the outskirts of Oslo, in "Blossom," a wooden villa from 1911 with a big garden, designed by architect Arnstein Arneberg (1882–1961). Arneberg, who had married Selmer's older half-sister Eva in 1923, refurnished the villa according to the family's wishes, creating a unique and grand atmosphere with their old French furniture, books, and art. Even the nurseries were outfitted with French walnut dining tables, which were used as desks.

Selmer enrolled in Roll and Ihlen's private school in Vinderen. In the small class of twelve students,

boys and girls, she made friends with whom she kept in close contact throughout her entire life. Even as a young girl she liked to design and made small model-houses, a hobby that was greatly encouraged by her brother-in-law, Arneberg. At the age of twelve, Selmer and her friends moved on to a new school with thirty students in the class.

During summer vacations the family stayed at their country estate off the coast of Kragerø, south of Oslo, which Selmer's parents had bought during a visit from France in 1920. It was comprised of a main house and several outbuildings and was outfitted with antique French furniture as well. Other vacations were spent in the mountains; the family of one of Selmer's closest friends owned a cabin in Geilo, and Bibi Reimers was a good skier and took the children on trips to the mountains both summer and winter, preferably in Jotunheimen. As a teenager, Selmer started to go on long overnight hikes in the high mountains with girlfriends. She developed a taste for the outdoors, which would give her great pleasure throughout her life and provide valuable insight for her later architectural work.

Financial Crisis

Herman Reimers moved to Norway to become partner with two business lawyers in the firm Brøgger, Reimers and Stuevold-Hansen. There was prosperity in Norway, and until the 1930s the business flourished. But Brøgger had invested in shares of the New York Stock Exchange and had convinced his colleagues to do the same, with loaned assets. As a result of the financial collapse in 1929, the three partners suffered a great loss, and the firm had to be liquidated. Reimers was in an extremely difficult situation because he had not yet established a clientele in Norway that could sustain an independent law firm in recession. He became depressed and did not know how to move on.

In the middle of this crisis, Bibi Reimers's spirit proved to be priceless: She made several painful decisions, selling many of the family's antiques and renting out and later selling the country estate near Kragerø. She also acquired several well-paid commissions for her husband through friends and acquaintances. In this way, he received several assignments from the League of Nations through C. J. Hambro, who was a delegate there at the time. Reimers became a member of the control committee for the popular vote that led the Saar area out of French and into German control after World War I in 1935. Later he received a similar commission for the popular vote on the area Alexandrette (Iskendrun) in Syria, which went to Turkey. Reimers was well suited for these international tasks, both because of his diplomatic and



At home, on Ekelyveien

judicial background and his knowledge of several languages.

These commissions helped solve the family's financial problems. Around 1937 they sold the home in Vinderen and moved to a house Arneberg had designed for them just west of Vigeland Park in Oslo. The home was built as a horizontally partitioned two-family house. The Reimers family lived on the second floor, while the first floor was comprised of Reimers's office and a small apartment that was rented out to actors Tore and Lasse Segelcke. Reimers held, for many years, a position on the board of the National Theatre and knew many prominent actors, writers, and others in the theater business. The house also included a basement with a furnished living room, which was used as a guest room and for entertaining.

It is clear that Selmer had a prosperous childhood, surrounded by beautiful objects and experiencing different environments in France and Norway. Her brother-in-law first taught her an appreciation for architectural quality, and several artists frequented their home, giving color to an environment on Oslo's west side that was strongly influenced by business, law, and diplomacy. She was a school child when the financial crisis hit the family and they had to suffer through a difficult time. But she also experienced how her mother's energy, creativity, and social skills were decisive in managing the crisis in a sensible and constructive way.

WAR, FAMILY, AND EDUCATION

Selmer attended high school, but she failed to graduate because she was bed-ridden for three months with a fierce case of sinusitis. Then the war came. The Reimers family was well informed about the political development, and through architect Odd Nansen, who had founded the Nansen Aid Organization in 1936, was engaged in helping Jewish refugees in Norway. Selmer herself was actively involved in relief work for the Red Cross and other organizations. In March 1941 she married Robert Collett, and their son Espen was born on the same day a year later.

Collett was a friend of Selmer's brother, Jan Herman, and studied medicine in Oslo when he and Selmer got engaged in 1939. He was also a naval officer and had been an assistant in the Norwegian Medical Corps under Johan Holst, both in the Winter War in Finland in 1939–40 and in northern Norway

during the German occupation of April 1940. He was later demobilized and came to Oslo to take his final medical exams in the winter of 1941, just before he and Selmer were married. They moved to Drammen, where Collett became assistant doctor at the hospital until he traveled to Sweden in the fall of 1941, on his way to join the Medical Corps in London. After her husband had left for England, Selmer moved back in with her parents, who were still living in the house near Vigeland Park. There she was interrogated several times by the Germans, who wanted information on Collett.

In order to be able to provide for herself and her son, Selmer's parents wanted their daughter to learn typing, but Selmer was already set on becoming an architect. As a first step she decided to do a ten-month apprenticeship as a furnishing carpenter and made, among other things, a beautifully detailed table with intarsia and slender, twisting legs.

Enrollment in the Building Department

In the fall of 1942, Selmer enrolled in the Building Department at the National School of Applied Arts and Crafts (SHKS), which did not require a high school diploma for students to be accepted. Most classes took place at night, and Selmer's parents looked after her son while she was at school. After four years at the Building Department, graduates were able to work as draftsmen or as assistants in an architectural office. Two years at the school could serve as preparation for those who wished to continue their architectural training elsewhere, a tradition that survived from the nineteenth century: many Norwegian architects first went to the SHKS, or the Drawing School, as it was called then, before they continued their education as architects at technical colleges or art academies abroad. When the Drawing School was established in 1818, it was intended to become a full-blown art academy after the model of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, but in the end it remained an arts and crafts school, while the National Academy of Arts was established in 1909 to teach fine arts.

During the war it was impossible for students to complete their architectural education abroad, and many had their schooling interrupted. After its architectural department was established in 1910, the Norwegian College of Technology (NTH) in Trondheim was the only school in Norway where architecture could be studied. Many of those who were enrolled at

the SHKS wished to continue their studies in Trondheim, but after the war, several classes were expected to come home from England and the concentration camps in Germany, and the school would have been overcrowded.

The Crisis Course—The Predecessor to the Oslo School of Architecture

Those were the prospects when Selmer was in her final year at the SHKS in 1944–45. Along with three fellow students, she started a study circle with the idea to develop a supplementary education for architects in Oslo. Their plan was to revive the Architectural Academy,³ which architect Herman Munthe-Kaas had led before the war. Head teacher Arne Vesterlid at the Building Department became the first supporter of the project, followed by the painter Henrik Sørensen, who provided enthusiastic encouragement. Selmer's brother-in-law, Arneberg, soon joined the group after hearing of their idea to start private tuitions and classes. During the peace celebrations in May 1945, he arranged a large meeting in Oslo's city hall, where he and Magnus Poulsson had their office at the time. There were between fifteen and twenty architects present, including Blakstad and Munthe-Kaas, Arneberg and Poulsson, Knut Knutsen, and Georg Eliassen—all of them important figures in the architectural profession. Many raised objections to the experiment, but they realized that Norway was facing an extensive reconstruction period and that the country needed the labor of these young people who wished to become architects.⁴

At the beginning of July, one month after the Liberation, the program officially started, with Vesterlid taking responsibility for the day-to-day management. The course ran for fifteen months and ended with a diploma. According to Selmer, the teachers were excellent, most of them "practicing architects who had never taught in a school; many of them had attended the meeting in the City Hall when we made the decision to go ahead."⁵ There were thirty-two students enrolled, all of whom had been involved in setting the premises for the program. During the fifteen months of their continuing education they designed a farm, a church in Røa, a school in Gaustad, a commercial building on Rådhusgaten, a town hall in Kirkenes, a regional bath with an indoor swimming pool, and worked on three zoning assignments, spending only four to five weeks on each

project. For her diploma in 1946, Selmer designed a vacation camp on Kalvøya.

"The Course for War-Stricken Architectural Students," or the State Architectural Course (SAK) as it was soon called, was meant to be a one-time affair but it was so successful that it was repeated, first every other year, and later annually. It became the predecessor to the Oslo School of Architecture, which was established in 1965 and is today an independent scientific college at the same level as the Norwegian College of Agriculture, the Norwegian Academy of Music, and several other colleges and universities.

A Point of Departure

The energy and vigor Selmer displayed in connection with the establishment of the SAK is remarkable considering how difficult the spring and summer of 1945 were for her on a personal level. Her mother was dying of cancer, and she had had no word from her husband since he left in the fall of 1941. If he had been captured by the Germans, his name would have appeared in a list of prisoners of war, but she heard nothing and eventually had to accept that Collett was dead. The most probable explanation is that the vessel he was on sank during one of the fall storms in the North Sea. Selmer received a modest widow's pension since her husband had been a naval officer, but the spring of 1945 remained "a big black hole" for her, even when she spoke of it later in life.⁶

The architectural education Selmer received was a combination of lessons in drawing—freehand, watercolor, painting, and geometric drawings—and craftsmanship; the students gained extensive knowledge in detailing, masonry, and wooden structures. It was a practical education that was to a great degree influenced by craft rather than theory and abstraction. Selmer's main teacher, Knut Knutsen, became her professional "idol," as Selmer said. There is little doubt that this education as well as her role in establishing the SAK influenced her as an architect and a teacher.



Arriving home from a commission in Paris

WORKING LIFE

Life as a Young Architect

After completing their diplomas in the fall of 1946, many of Selmer's fellow students traveled up north to participate in the reconstruction of Finnmark. Selmer, however, decided to stay in Oslo and work for her brother-in-law, mostly because she did not want her son to grow up in Finnmark where living conditions were poor. Arneberg was regarded as a nobody by the architectural hegemony in Norway because he never became a modernist, unlike many of his contemporaries and younger architects, but Selmer was happy to be learning from the talented architect. At the age of twenty-seven, after spending a year in his office, she traveled to Paris, where she and Espen stayed with her sister Vibeke. Vibeke had attended the National School of Applied Arts and Crafts and spent a year in England before moving to France in 1938 to work for a famous interior architect and decorator in Paris. She married a Frenchman who was a childhood friend of Jan Herman's, and stayed in Paris until she died in 1969, just a little over fifty years old.

In Paris Selmer worked several weeks for the world-renowned architect Le Corbusier, although she was not paid for her work. She then encountered a new and difficult situation as a young woman architect, having to "plod around from office to office and ask for work."⁷ She finally succeeded at the office of Marcel Lods, a well-respected architect who, among other things, was known for designing *L'école en plein air*. She stayed there for a year. During her time in France Selmer also had the opportunity to speak at



Sailing with Jens Selmer

the École des Beaux Arts about her involvement in the establishment of the SAK, inspiring the architecture students at the École to a student riot when they heard how she and her fellow students had practically chosen their own teachers.

After moving back to Oslo in the fall of 1948, Selmer was employed by the architects Arne Pedersen and Reidar Lund for several years, designing, among other things, the Norwegian student house at the Cité Universitaire in Paris.

Establishing Her Own Architectural Practice

Selmer's own office started, as is often the case, with extra work in the evenings. She eventually resigned from architects Pedersen and Lund in 1954 to establish her own architectural office in a room in the first-floor apartment in her father's house. She and Espen had moved down there in 1950 when architect Jens Andreas Selmer moved in with them. Jens Selmer and Wenche Selmer knew each other through mutual friends and fell in love after Wenche's return from France. They eventually married in 1954, when their daughter Elisabeth was expected. The office, which had work spaces for both of them, was an important element in the family's new house when they moved to Trosterudstien in 1963.

A new period in Selmer's professional life began when she was employed as an associate professor at the Oslo School of Architecture in 1976. In addition to

this job, Selmer worked on her architectural projects one day a week as well as during the early morning hours, evenings, and school vacations, until she retired from the Oslo School of Architecture in the spring of 1988. After this, she continued her work at the drawing table.

JENS SELMER— A LIFELONG COLLABORATION

A Residential Architect

In a 1980 issue of *Byggekunst* magazine, Wenche Selmer called her husband a support and source of inspiration for her and talked about his belief in her as an architect; together they developed thoughts on architecture that they expressed both in individual works and collaborative projects. What did Jens Selmer do, and what did he stand for?

Jens Andreas Selmer (1911–1995) is known as a residential architect who was a master at designing functional plans that combined maximum utilization of floor space with good spatial forms. From 1944 to 1984 he ran an architectural practice in Oslo together with Preben Krag, who died suddenly in 1980. The office, Krag and Selmer, asserted itself in the many housing projects of the postwar period and worked on a number of large commissions for the cooperative housing movement such as Bøler in Oslo, where high- and low-rise blocks of apartments, with one thousand homes in total, were completed in 1954. The project

received the Sundt's Prize for good architecture in 1956–57. Krag and Selmer also won first prize in the competition for the Grand Hotel in Larvik in 1947, and the Palé Hotel in Oslo in 1950.

Jens Selmer was educated as an architect at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm in the years 1932–36, when Gunnar Asplund was professor there. Even though Asplund, in retrospect, is most famous for his monumental buildings and the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930, the central theme in his teachings was residential planning. After finishing his education, Jens Selmer became an assistant for architects Backström and Reinius, a Swedish firm well known for their housing projects. Here he became thoroughly schooled in functionalist work methods.

Residential Architecture under Tight Constraints

After moving back to Norway in 1938, Jens Selmer worked with architects Blakstad and Munthe-Kaas, and from 1942 with Arneberg, until he started his own practice in 1944. The education and experience he had gained during his years in Stockholm gave him a strong position in Oslo's architectural scene, where Swedish residential planning served as a model. Many architects were involved in housing development after the war when the housing shortage was acute, especially for the 75,000 people who had lost their homes through acts of war. Jens Selmer won several competitions for standard types of housing (prototype houses that could be ordered from a

Cabin in Krokskogen



In Krokskogen: Wenche, Jens, and Espen, with Ulf Colbiarnsen (right)





The artists' colony at Ekely

catalog of several variants). Most sensational were the first prizes he won in all five program categories in the competition for reconstruction housing in the northern parts of the country in the summer of 1945.

Following this success, the architect soon received commissions from the cooperative housing movement, which would later become his and Krag's main client. The row of houses in the Korsvollbråten housing cooperative from 1946 and the Ekely artist's colony from 1947–60 are excellent examples from this first period. The plans follow ideals from the 1930s, while the facades and detailing are based on vernacular building methods, with saddle roofs and other traditional elements in the exterior. All in all, Jens Selmer designed between 4,500 and 5,000 houses.⁸ (It is unknown how many houses were built from his standard prototype drawings for residential housing.) He also taught at the SHKS architectural department in Oslo part-time until the mid-1960s, when the school of architecture was reorganized and the first professors were employed. He was highly appreciated for his ability to aid students at their drawing tables, as his explanations were clear and concise.

Influence on Wenche Selmer

Jens Selmer was an architect who always took care to complete his projects within their financial budgets. Achieving architectural quality under tight constraints, either through floor plans, spatial distinction, or use of materials, was precisely the challenge he was looking

for. Architect Gynt Krag, Preben Krag's widow, described Jens Selmer as the partner who was responsible for resolving the floor plans, while both Preben Krag and Wenche Selmer were good at coming up with unexpected solutions and details. Jens Selmer was especially technical; he was incredibly skilled in building technique and was able to simplify solutions, making much out of very little. He was extremely competent at analyzing structures and putting the details together. According to Jens Selmer, architecture should be clear and without "cheating."

Her husband's qualities were undoubtedly a contribution to Wenche Selmer's architectural work, both through his direct consultation and through working methods the couple developed together on collaborative projects. Both architects shared the same moderation and attitude toward materials and put an emphasis on the simple and unitary—they enjoyed the art of limitation. Wenche and Jens Selmer generally kept their practices separate and perceived one another as independent professionals. Nonetheless, their close contact and collaboration proved fruitful for both parties. It is difficult to say which projects they in fact did together and which ones Jens Selmer merely looked at. They worked in all degrees of cooperation. Still, it is clear that Jens Selmer's main work consisted of his large housing projects, while Wenche Selmer refined her skills as a small-scale residential architect.



Architectural Trajectories

REALISM IN THE SPIRIT OF THE RECONSTRUCTION

The Contemporary Architectural Scene

Functionalism, with its flat roofs, smooth concrete, and large glass sections, dominated Norwegian architecture from the end of the 1920s through the first half of the 1930s. But by the middle of the 1930s, a reaction manifested itself. Several former functionalists dissociated themselves from dogmatic functionalism, and various prominent architects reintroduced traditional Norwegian architecture. In two of the single-family house issues of *Byggekunst* magazine in 1939 and 1940, the selection was dominated by more traditional houses with saddle roofs and narrow volumes. Even the pronounced Norwegian functionalist Ove Bang showed in his Steen House from 1937 a desire for a synthesis between functionalism and traditional Norwegian building methods. In Finland, Alvar Aalto gave his buildings a more free and “organic” shape and introduced coarse timber and other natural materials—a step away from the functionalist focus on the machine and technology. Gunnar Asplund, the main architect behind the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition, which symbolized the big breakthrough for functionalism, disapproved of a one-sided rationalism in his lecture “Art and Technology” in 1936.⁹ And his summer residence from 1937, a low, outstretched saddle-roof house built in brick, also marks a loosening of the pure, strict, and geometric formal language of functionalism.

The period leading up to World War II, as well as the time during the war itself and the occupation, enhanced the national tendencies toward a concentration of the best in local tradition. After the war the

issues of reconstruction, poverty, and material restrictions further encouraged the support of familiar and safe solutions. This shift toward the local and traditional was expressed in *Norske hus for by og land* (Norwegian Houses for City and Country), a publication of standard houses that was distributed by the National Association of Norwegian Architects (NAL) in September 1940, initiated by the Reconstruction Fund of the Offices for War Damage. Several publications of the same spirit followed after the war, culminating in 1950 with *Norske hus—en billedbok* (Norwegian Houses—a Picture Book), an extensive book about Norwegian architecture, in which Norway’s building heritage from the 1200s and onward was emphasized.¹⁰ The book, which had already been planned during the war, was edited by several architects that are associated with 1930s functionalism: Reidar Lund, Arne Pedersen, Eivind Alnæs, and Olav Platou, under the direction of the somewhat older Georg Eliassen, who authored the texts.

Norway’s simple and unpretentious panel architecture from the beginning of the 1800s became a model for housing structures and was presented as a timeless “functional tradition.”¹¹ The functionalist idea of rational building design was developed further together with a study of regional features and well-proven solutions with a basis in climatic and material terms. The saddle roof was one of the building elements that was emphasized as especially suitable for Norwegian conditions, supported by the fact that asphalt felt was forbidden for housing structures for

many years, which ruled out the possibility of flat roofs. The objectivity associated with the functionalist program also served as a protection against exaggerated nationalism and "romance."

A similar renewal of traditional architecture in Sweden was referred to as the "New Empiricism" in the British *Architectural Review* of 1947, where, among others, a house of the well-known functionalist Sven Markelius was shown.¹² The term "neorealism" can also be used to describe this type of architecture. Neorealism had its roots in the national realism of the turn of the century.¹³ Norwegian postwar architecture was more realistic than romantic and, in the spirit of the age, the romantic mansions of the gentry were replaced by the social democratic "folkehjemmet."¹⁴ Herein lay the possible synthesis between the national and the simple, the functional and the "functionalistic."

Neorealism with a Personal Touch

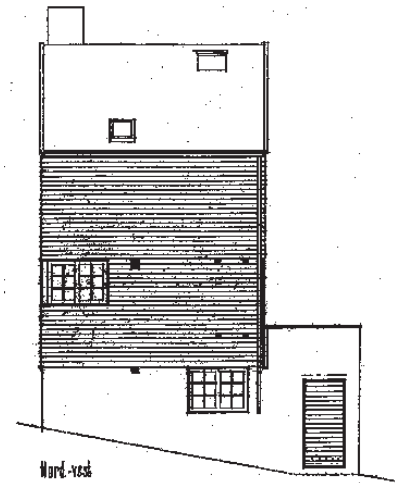
Nearly all of the single-family houses Selmer designed were located in or around Oslo, both in areas that had only recently been developed for housing and on individual sites that were separated from properties with older houses on them. In either case the sites were developed piece by piece, with the result of extremely diverse architectural environments.

Two single-family houses that Selmer designed were finished in 1955, one on Eikstubben and one on Sondreveien in Oslo. Even though they are different in their structure and expression, they share similarities

that are typical for Selmer. Both have saddle roofs, and are bare and precise in volume. The house on Eikstubben is tall with two full floors and has vertical siding. The house on Sondreveien, with horizontal siding, has one-and-a-half floors with the roof sloping down toward the entrance side on the northwest, and two floors in the slope toward the southeast. In both cases, the entrance facades have predominantly closed siding, and the entrances are indicated by clear sections that are "carved" out of the wall, with white-painted doors and adjacent windows.

In general, Selmer's single-family houses from the 1950s have several features in common: saddle roofs and precise and bare volumes with relatively narrow siding; continuity in wall surfaces with asymmetrical window placements; windows and doors that appear as large or small white-painted holes; and a subdivision of the volume in parts that are withdrawn under the roof and parts that are protruding as bay windows. The single-family house on Lillevannsveien in Oslo from 1957 is also an example of this phase of Selmer's production. The design of the facades is clearly influenced by functionalism's free and asymmetrical principles of composition.

While Selmer's single-family houses share the main tendencies of Norwegian single-family house architecture in Østlandet during the first postwar period,¹⁵ they have a personal touch and do not follow any specific role models. The years spent with Pedersen and Lund gave the architect experience



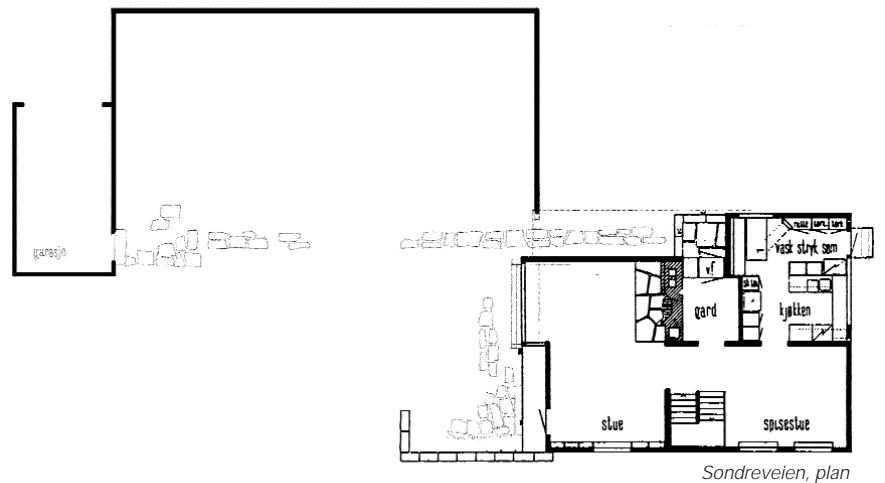
Single-family house on Lillevannsveien



Single-family house on Eikstubben



Single-family house on Sondreveien



Sondreveien, plan

upon which she could build. She simplified and refined forms and motifs from the Norwegian panel-house tradition in a pure and simple architecture that is free of the monumental features found in houses by Poulsson and Arneberg. Tradition is instead communicated by a timeless form—maybe more along the lines of the Danish functional tradition. The houses are built for use and pleasure in everyday life, not to be admired as an avant-garde piece of art.

Entrance Hall and *Vindfang* à la Selmer

Selmer's consideration for both the relationship of her buildings to their surroundings and her clients' use of the houses is demonstrated by the single-family house built in 1955 for the Johnsen family on Sondreveien. A fence that runs along the road from the garage to the house shields a sunny garden on the southwestern side of the house. At the same time, it leads up to the entrance and provides a passage into the garden. The entire access zone is formed with consideration for details: the paved path is lined with bushes by the fence on one side and opens up to an outcropping rock with a large pine tree, cowberries, and heather on the other. A window at eye level by the dining table in the kitchen welcomes the visitor. This simple architectural arrangement gives both maximum effect for the shielded outdoor space and creates a beautiful, inviting space in the transition between the public and the private zone. Selmer used similar solutions in later commissions, for example on Heierstuveien in Øvre Tåsen (page 185).

In the house on Sondreveien we also find a *vindfang*—a typical Norwegian building element—which would become Selmer's trademark: a *vindfang* is a small room at the entrance that aims to keep out the cold and draft by introducing two doors between inside and out. Selmer's *vindfang* are exceptionally small, approximately twenty-four inches deep and as wide as the doors, just large enough for a person to stand there and shut the outer door before entering the main part of the house. There is often a coconut rug on the floor to remove dirt from shoes. Selmer disliked conventional *vindfang*, which are often littered with rubber boots and other outer garments, and considered them a sad way to enter a house.¹⁶

The entrance doors in Selmer's houses are usually wide and made of wood, while a large window just next to the door provides visual contact between inside and out. In the case of Sondreveien, this window is rather narrow and small. Below it, a twenty-two-inch-tall closet, with a flower decoration on top, fills out a niche between the *vindfang* and the wall. The door leading from here to the main part of the house is made largely of glass, which gives an additional feeling of openness to the space. Coats and boots are placed discreetly in a niche, where they are out of the way. After the 1960s, Selmer's designs feature a larger window next to the *vindfang*, which reaches from floor to ceiling so that the entrance hall, as it is called on the drawings, becomes a bright room with a good visual connection to the outside. The

name “hall” in itself ties the space to the other rooms in the house rather than serving just as an “entrance.”

When the house on Sondreveien was constructed, building codes did not permit to build more than 860 square feet for a house with three bedrooms.¹⁷ The original clients, a couple now in their nineties, still live in the house and speak well of it and their cooperation with the architect. The building is freshly stained. Other than that, nothing was changed in close to fifty years, except for a small renovation in the kitchen, where a large, old washing-basin was removed and a dishwasher installed. The interior is heated with warm air through valves in the walls and hidden channels in the ceiling of the corridor.

The house has similarities to Jens Selmer’s early dwellings, but with its *vindfang* and the spatial design of the entrance, the flow between the rooms is more open here: the kitchen and living room are included in an ensemble that incorporates the staircase and the entrance.

The First Recreational Homes

Selmer’s vacation homes are closely related to the full-time residences she designed. But while both house types are dwellings, their utilization, structural requirements, and environment differ. While the residential houses are often located on rather small sites in zoned areas with buildings of a mixed character, the natural surroundings dominate in the vacation homes,

regardless of whether they are located near the sea or in the mountains.

Two important conditions separate Selmer’s summerhouses of the 1950s and 1960s from those of the later decades. First, there was a scarcity of building materials as well as rationing, which involved strict limitations for the size of houses during the first period after World War II. These limitations could vary from district to district and were somewhat expanded during the years.

The other condition had to do with zoning: During the first decades after the war, there was plenty of space, and it was easy to buy rather large sites near the sea. After a while, however, the pressure increased along the coast, and different restrictions were enforced during the 1960s, which would culminate in the Act of Coastline and Mountain Area Planning on December 10, 1971.

Coastal Building—Local Contextual Adjustment

One of Selmer’s main objectives—to show consideration toward the site and create a connection with it—had special validation in her designs for houses near the sea, where she took care to take into account not only the surroundings, the topography, and the climate, but also the character of local buildings. Along the Norwegian coast, old buildings are often gathered in groups, with outbuildings and piers, between the hills, as in Brekkestø and Åkerøyhavn. Single-family



Brekkestø



The Selmers' summerhouse on Beltesholmen



Kitchen on Kraksøya



Sailmaker's house in Brekkestø

houses are usually situated in a way that provides shelter from the strong winds but also a view to the sea. They are often close to the pier, the boat, and the shed and preferably on flat ground, near the fisherman's and farmer's fields. Comprehensive incisions in the massive stone crags were avoided, and foundation walls, carriage paths, and piers were built of stone, which could be loosened from the moors with a crowbar, or dug out from the marshes and fields in the hilly landscape. Even though the local residents did some farming, a little forestry, and had a few grazing animals, the sea was their most important source of income and means of communication on the roadless islands in the *skjærgård*.

Vernacular Inspirations

Selmer was inspired by these old buildings along the southern coast of Norway. She especially admired the small, one-and-a-half-story wooden houses, which were simple, without *décor*, and often featured asymmetrical placements of windows and doors. Her first commission, a summerhouse for the painter Per Rom on Fjelldalsøya near Brekkestø in 1953, was a well-proportioned white-painted one-and-a-half-story house in the traditional style.

The small summerhouse that Wenche and Jens Selmer built for themselves on Beltesholmen in 1957 is a tribute to coastal culture and became a prototype for several other summerhouses in the area (page 53). New clients came to see the house, and then the

design was tailored to fit their site as well as their wishes and needs. The fact that the house on Beltesholmen was the result of a close cooperation between the couple is obvious. At first sight the architecture is so inconspicuous that it seems as if the house has always been there. But closer inspection quickly reveals that a skilled and inventive architect was at work. Moderation and reserve are consciously used in the spatial design and the structural details. There is nothing redundant here—no excessive materials, space, or equipment. Concentrating on the necessary was a lesson Wenche and Jens Selmer learnt through experience by spending time outdoors in primitive conditions, staying in huts in the forest or traveling along the coast in a sailing boat. Their priorities also convey an experience of generosity and joy: "In such a place, a large drop-leaf table, with room for five games of solitaire and large table-settings, is a useful piece of furniture."¹⁸

The house has a 335-square-foot ground plan with two bedrooms under the sloping roof on the second floor. In such a small house without electricity or running water and drainage, many of the everyday tasks are performed outside, and life takes place in a close interaction between indoors and out. The carefully designed spaces benefit from the best nature has to offer and provide protection against the worst.

Many of Selmer's summerhouses were originally built without integrated electricity and water supply.

Water was collected from a well, and waste water thrown out or used to water the plants. The architect also designed and situated the outdoor toilets these houses used. In many of Selmer's vacation homes electricity and water were later installed in a sensitive manner without imposing on the original design.

Cabins in the Wood

The cabin for Mass and Gregers Kure on Ringkollen on the outskirts of Nordmarka near Oslo was built in 1953 (page 113). It is a good example of Selmer's sensitivity for and familiarity with outdoor life during all seasons both in the woods and the mountains. Features from this house are repeated in later designs of larger cabins. Here we find a sheltered space outside the cabin where skis can be stored and the snow brushed off. A large shed for wood and tools acts as a *vindfang* and provides shielded access to the outdoor toilet. As in Selmer's coastal summerhouses, the floor plan combines a living room, including a fireplace and a long sofa bench, with a dining area that has an open connection to the kitchen. Since the cabin has no second floor with bedrooms, the living room is outfitted with bed benches. The cabin's saddle roof is turfed and has a gentler angle than that of the houses on the southern coast. Its rough-edged siding is another feature the cabin has in common with traditional inland buildings. Selmer designed a much larger mountain cabin for the same family in Mysuseter in Rondane in 1960, a long saddle-roof building with a very practical design.

Important Features in Selmer's Architecture

The qualities that define Selmer's architecture, such as the care she showed in shaping the houses in the terrain and—especially in the coastal areas—the adaptation to local building traditions, are already present in her first projects. Her single-family houses are characteristic saddle-roof houses, formed with measured means: they are simple forms with limited volume projections, rather than unrestrained romantic groupings. The spaces are well organized. With the help of sliding doors, occupants can partition areas or create an open flow between all rooms. The kitchen is bright and practical, with a dining area situated close to the living room. Selmer's characteristic *vindfang* entrance is already present in her first single-family house. The interiors receive plenty of light, and there is a good connection between in- and

outdoor spaces. Here, as in later projects, the walls are covered with untreated pine paneling; in the architect's first designs there were also white-painted doors, windows, and ceilings. While Selmer's vacation homes are inspired by local building traditions, the organization of their spaces, with their open interiors, breaks with this tradition. The houses have an outer simplicity and are carefully placed in the terrain so as to strengthen the interaction between the landscape and the building.

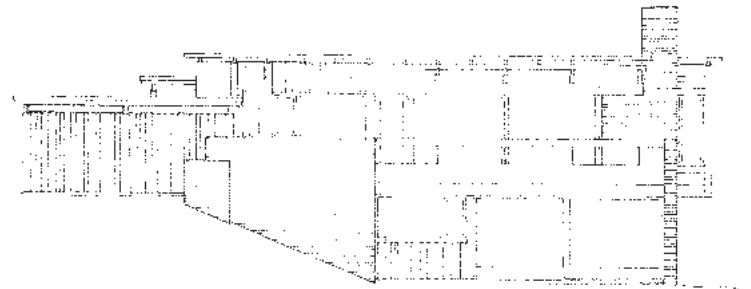
Today it is difficult to imagine the impact that the relative Norwegian poverty in the years after the war, when materials were scarce and space limited, had on the development of houses and cabins. In connection with the NAL's ninetieth anniversary in 2001, the Danish architect Nils-Ole Lund from Århus described the puritanism of this period and the impression it had made on him when he arrived in Norway in 1955 to work in Knut Knutsen's architectural office: "Oslo was no cheerful city, hell was not yet officially abolished, and the queues outside the state-owned wine store were supervised by the police. I was twenty-five years old, and only when I, as a single man, turned thirty, was I allowed a [one-room] apartment. A telephone was a luxury it took years to obtain."¹⁹

Cabin on Ringkollen





Single-family house in Besserud



Two-family house on Bauneveien

FACING INTERNATIONAL MODERNISM

Experimentation and Modernism

During the 1950s, modernism again became the dominating architectural style in Norway after having been absent since the 1930s. As mentioned earlier, the years following World War II had been characterized by realism with roots in the Norwegian building tradition. Ulf Grønvold, editor of *Byggekunst* magazine, has also called this architecture a hybrid style—a traditional building style with saddle roofs that featured modernist elements such as simplicity and matter-of-factness—a bare architecture without decoration.²⁰ Modernism was aggressively promoted in Norway by the PAGON group, the Norwegian section of CIAM, *Les congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne*. Arne Korsmo and Christian Norberg-Schulz were the two leading figures, both of them captivating and charismatic personalities who exerted great influence in their individual ways. Domestic and cozy elements were now seen as something dreary that belonged to the past, and several young architects, including Pritzker Prize winner Sverre Fehn, joined PAGON. The NAL had 550 members in 1950, over 100 of them working in Oslo. The modernists gained great influence in this small circle through magazines and architectural unions, and modernist projects were awarded in architectural competitions. During this period the challenges and impulses of modernism were absorbed and transformed in many different ways by Norwegian architects.

This was also true for Selmer, who in the late 1950s started to experiment with and vary her designs, first and foremost the single-family houses.

Her experiments were not random exercises, however, but represent a conscious search for new principles and an attempt to move boundaries within her own knowledge. At the same time as one of her typical postwar houses was being built on Lillevannsveien in 1958, she designed a clearly modernist house for Knut Selmer and Elisabeth Schweigaard Selmer in Oslo. But Selmer's new endeavors were most visible in the single-family house she designed for the family Brostrup Breien in Oslo, built in 1959. In comparison to her earlier houses, where continuous paneling holds the volume together as one form, a "dissolvement" of the building mass is striking here, achieved by a modular composition with large vertical windows and doors, a flat roof, and a long, straight veranda with a thin steel railing. Unfortunately, the house was demolished around 1990, but according to the daughter of the original owner, her mother loved the house and lived there until she was too frail to live on her own; she particularly liked the windows that reached from floor to ceiling and the fact that you could walk straight out onto the ground without the use of stairs (traditional Norwegian houses often had quite high basements with stairs leading up to the entrance).

Selmer developed a modernist direction, with flat roofs and rectangular volume compositions, up until the late 1970s, both as clearly defined "boxes" and as more complex arrangements. Typical examples are the houses on Myrhaugen (1962), Granstuveien (1964), and Bauneveien (1972).

Perfection of a Personal Style

At the same time, Selmer refined her own characteristic combination of traditional building methods and modern trends. In her designs there were sloping roofs where primary and secondary beams were clearly articulated as on Slemdalsvingen (1968) and in Lommedalen (1971), or there were slanted roofs, almost flat and gentle or clearly slanting. The plans had fundamental common qualities that were adjusted to the site.

The couple's own house on Trosterudstien in Oslo (page 131) from 1963 remains an outstanding result from this period and a perfect example of the close cooperation between Wenche Selmer and her husband. The plan is open, with continuous rooms and an effective interplay between indoor and outdoor spaces, so that the maximum effect of the small room dimensions is achieved. This is executed in both an inventive and a refined way. The house is special in the sense that it dissociates itself from a bourgeois lifestyle in all its minimalism. It has an architectural timelessness about it. It is both completely modern with its near-flat roof and large glass sections and "smells" of history with its tarred woodwork and exposed structures that are closely related to the Norwegian wood-house tradition.

The influence from Japanese wooden architecture is also evident, both in the structural systems and the articulation between inside and out and between open and closed. The different layers of glass sliding doors and "sliding curtains," with canvas mounted on frames so that it can be drawn along the inside of a window, are a good example. Traditional Japanese

architecture was an important source of inspiration for modernism both before and after World War II, and around 1960, *Byggekunst* magazine published several abundantly illustrated articles on Japanese houses.²¹

Other important designs of that period by Selmer remain classics in her production: the single-family houses on Vettaliveien (1967), Gråkamveien (1974), and Heierstuveien (1978), all in Oslo. These houses are somewhat larger than the one on Trosterudstien and have clearly defined sloping lean-to roofs. In this period we see the importance of wood as a material in structural elements and surfaces. Selmer generally liked to avoid moldings wherever possible and constantly developed and refined this ideology as a form of aesthetic simplification. The woodwork is left untreated indoors and tarred outdoors, with unpainted doors, windows, or moldings. The wooden structures thus stand as ornaments by virtue of their formal and material quality.

Recreational Homes with a New Twist

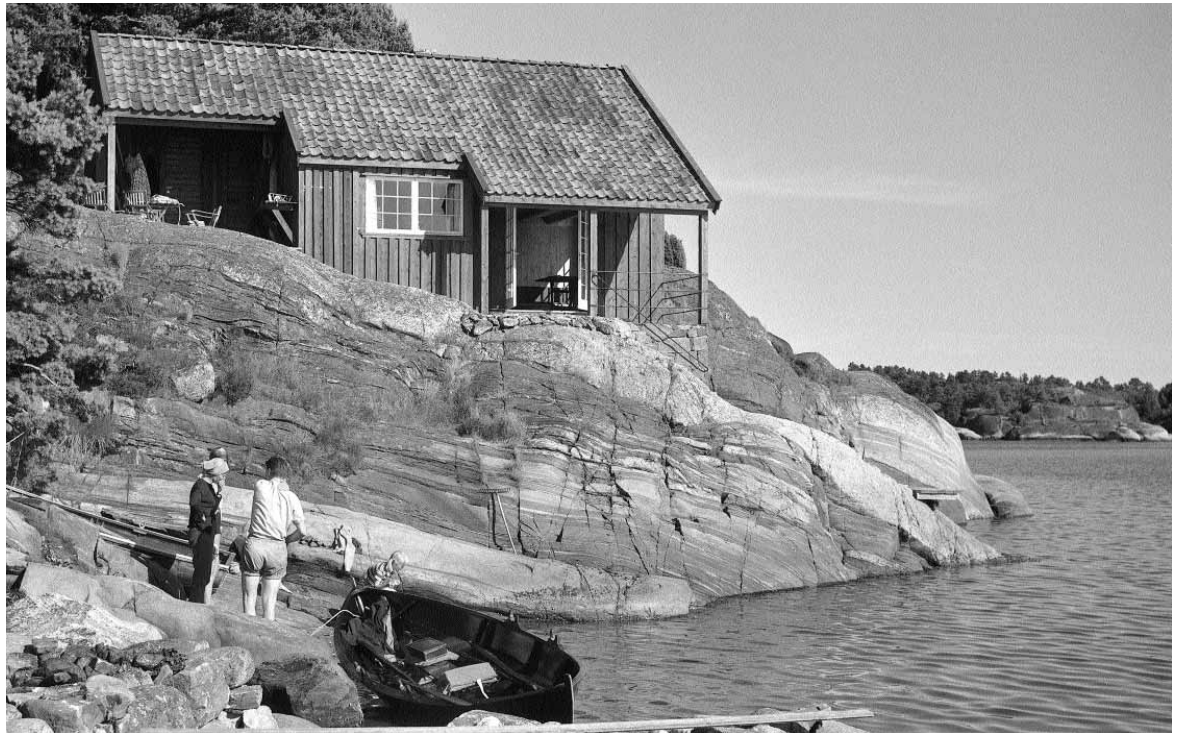
The interaction between international modernism and the Norwegian building tradition is also visible in the vacation homes Selmer designed. She built two summerhouses on Fjeldalsøya near Brekkestø in 1960–62: one for Herman Tank-Nielsen and one for the Aarnæs family. The cabins lie only a few hundred feet apart, but they are extremely different. Tank-Nielsen's house is located on a plain some distance from the sea and is modernist in its spatial design. It has one floor with an almost flat roof and large modular glass sections facing the sea. The entire north

The Selmers' house on Trosterudstien



Single-family house on Vettaliveien





Summerhouse for the Aarnæs family, Fjeldalsøya



Single-family house with photo atelier on Gråkamveien



Single-family house with photo atelier on Gråkamveien

wall is built as a pronounced mass in natural stone with a fireplace and chimney in one corner. Together with two narrow wings that were added later, the house now provides a sheltered yard on the inside.

The Aarnæs cabin is located on the seashore, and its exterior is formed according to the traditional vernacular style. It has a steep saddle roof with a master bedroom in the loft, red roofing tiles, small-paned windows, and red-painted board-and-batten siding. Yet, as will be shown later (page 71), the architect combined modern spatial principles with the traditional building manner, which resulted in an original and functional summerhouse.

The summerhouse for the Wigert family, built in 1962 on Hellersøya, further out in the same *skjærgård*, shows a special way of integrating features from old coastal buildings and developing them into a modern vacation home (page 79). It lies on the shore between the *svaberg* and the edge of the sea and is comprised of three individual houses, which create gaps and outer spaces that provide shelter from the wind. In this way, the volumes become smaller and more adjusted to the rocks and the scale of other coastal buildings. The main house is situated in the exact same location where the Wigerts had erected a cabin with old materials in 1950.

The architecture of these two summerhouses, as well as the one on Beltesholmen, was repeated and varied in later designs. Selmer's nephew, Johan Kloster, was allowed to borrow his aunt's drawings of her own summerhouse and built a variant with an

open plan on Lille Beltesholmen in 1965 (page 91). The families Christie and Stephansen each received their own version on Åkerøya in 1970 and 1975 (page 97). The summerhouse for the Ringdal family on Furøyholmen, west of Åkerøya, in 1964, and for the Grønvold family on Fjelldalsøya in 1967, were both more spacious than the Beltesholmen house and introduced large sliding doors in glass, but the architecture is mainly the same. A few common features in the interiors are worth mentioning: a large fireplace with a chimney is usually found between the kitchen and the living room, and the staircase up to the loft is small and steep—easy to use, but not of unnecessary size in such small houses.

A Modernist Pearl

In 1967 Selmer received a new type of commission when she was hired to design a summerhouse for her childhood friend Grete Alm. The novelty lay in the site, which was a zoned cabin area in Brunlanes, where the regulations stated that all cabins must have flat roofs and no more than one floor. The idea of adaptation took on a very different meaning than in the coastal summerhouses further south. The result became one of Selmer's finest works: a small piece of modernist wooden architecture that is easy to grasp, but has at the same time an expressive richness despite all its simplicity. The cabin was finished in 1968 (page 105).

Summerhouse in Brunlanes





The Beach House



The Beach House—A Building System

In 1965 Wenche and Jens Selmer were hired by Henrik Thommessen, a relative of Wenche Selmer's, to develop a master plan and a building system for a seven-hundred-acre site in Hoveneset between Grimstad and Lillesand. The area was zoned for twenty-eight Beach Houses, as the building system came to be known, on sites of approximately twelve acres each. The Selmers' master plan became a model for what would later be developed as a consequence of the 1971 Act of Coastline and Mountain Area Planning: the cabins are not conspicuous in their surroundings, none of them are closer than three hundred feet to the shore, and they have a common small harbor and recreational area along the shore.

The specific housing type the architects developed is a system of 7.9-by-13.8-foot units, which can be added in the longitudinal direction of the house. The materials arrive pre-cut. "The roof truss, load-bearing columns, and floor beams are bolted together and create a rigid frame that is raised on horizontal beams, placed on top of pillars. The purlins are placed on the roof trusses, and the floor beams on the upper and lower chord. Thereby, the skeleton is raised and floor-, wall-, and ceiling-panels can be mounted."²² At least two advantages are achieved: The loft gains a 27.6-inch-high knee brace wall and can therefore be used all the way to the outer wall, and the cantilevered roof provides a covered porch with a wooden floor around the entire house. This porch provides a sheltered entrance to one or more bedrooms, so that internal corridors are avoided. Parts of

the porch can also be built in, for example as a bathroom.

The architectural expression of the Beach House is closely linked to its clever structural system, which allows the scale to be small and slender. The cantilevered roof with visible purlins and slim supporting studs at the edge of the porch contribute to the light appearance of the house (the pillars in line with the walls of the units are load-bearing). This is also the case with the pile foundation as the house only touches the ground on a few selected points.

The architects developed seven variations of the prototype plan. The most common types have a base of 327 or 436 square feet—three or four units. The smallest is of similar size to Selmer's own cabin on Beltesholmen. As in her own cabin, there is a steep staircase up to the loft just by the entrance, and the living room is accessed through the kitchen. The shape and size of the living room are also comparable, but in the Beach House the main room faces a large glass section with sliding doors in the gable wall. It is possible to include a second floor, complete or partial, in the loft, and several examples have bedrooms in the loft in one part of the house, while the living area becomes a spacious room reaching all the way up to the slanting roof.

A Beach House was erected for the exhibition "Form and Flora" in Vigeland Park in the summer of 1965, sited in idyllic surroundings above the stream Frognerbekken. More Beach Houses were built for other clients, both as summerhouses and boathouses.

Around thirty total were erected, all supervised by the architect. The developer of Hoveneset went bankrupt in 1968–69, and the production of the building system stopped after a short while. In the summer of 2000, a few were still intact and very well kept in Hoveneset. Some were torn down, others rebuilt beyond recognition.

Structural Thinking

The Beach House project is interesting as Wenche and Jens Selmer's contribution to the efforts of the period toward systemization and mass production. Architects aimed at maintaining high architectural quality while providing possibilities for variation and flexibility. The Beach House combines Jens Selmer's technical and inventive abilities with Wenche Selmer's sensibility for a family's needs and the interplay between the house and its surroundings.

The Beach House's exposed structures were incorporated in several summerhouses that Selmer designed, for example in that for the Fylling family on Fjellaldsøya in 1972 and in an annex for the cabin for Klaus Lefdal on Åkerøya in 1974. Both had saddle roofs, horizontal west-coast siding, and minimalist details in the volume articulation, but their window design is different from earlier projects: here we find large windows divided into long, narrow, horizontal glass sections placed above each other with thin glazing bars between supporting pillars. Large sliding doors are also incorporated. The windows in the loft bedrooms span across the entire gable wall, as in the Beach House. The horizontal lines in the shape of the

building contribute to a successful interaction with the ground. Both summerhouses are treated with tar on the exterior, as are the suburban single-family houses, in contrast to most of Selmer's vacation homes near the coast, which are painted red.

Intensified Conditions in the *Skjærgård*

As interest in the properties along the shoreline increased with prosperity during the 1960s, the Norwegian Parliament passed a legislation to secure the outdoor interests of the public. The Act of Coastline and Mountain Area Planning, which was passed in 1971, resulted in a general ban against building any closer to the sea than three hundred feet.²³ All district authorities had to develop general master plans with zoning for vacation homes, public recreational areas, housing, industry, commerce, and farmland. The legislation encouraged a coordination of the different landowners' properties into one united plan. Furthermore, demands were made on the spatial design of the buildings and their placement in the landscape, which was important in natural areas by the sea and in the mountains where outdoor interests and development interests often opposed each other.

Most of the summerhouses that Selmer designed are close to the seashore. Some of them were built before the Act of Coastline and Mountain Area Planning was passed, others were given dispensation from the regulations. This occurred, for example, when the new building was a replacement for a house that was already on the site, or if it was situated in a built area that could tolerate a modest new house, as



Summerhouse for the Fylling family



Cabin near Vassfaret

on Åkerøya. It probably helped that Selmer was both a good listener and skilled at arguing her case. Most importantly, though, she was greatly admired for her respect for the surroundings evident in several fine examples of buildings near the shoreline.

Mountain Cabins

Selmer also designed several cabins in the mountains during this period. The architect liked to emphasize that a mountain cabin should first and foremost provide shelter from the natural forces such as snow, wind, and cold, and be a warm and cozy place for relaxation in front of the fireplace on dark winter nights. The cabin that she designed for her brother, Jan Herman Reimers, near Vassfaret in 1974, is a good example (page 119). It is placed well, hidden between the small trees on the site. The cabin has a calm, oblong shape with a moderate roof angle, and a roof of creosoted wooden boards that project somewhat from the wall. It has common features with some of the cabin types designed by other architects during the 1960s and 1970s, such as the Trybo-cabin, the Ål-cabin, and the Bete-Beitski cabin system. Selmer's mountain cabins are less systematized, however. Even though they have oblong windows between the studs, these are not part of a modular system of elements. The spatial composition and the facades are more individually designed, and the siding is continuous around the house, without any hint of modular division.

Experimentation and Variations

During this time Selmer worked with a broad spectrum of architectural expressions and forms, designing fine examples of both modernist and traditional architecture. She developed her own personal combination in the "classic" Selmer houses, which feature large glass sections and differentiation in window formats, exposed wooden structures, and, on the exterior, both rough woodwork and precision in the detailing. The kitchen and the living room are more closely connected now than in Selmer's early projects. On the floor plan, where the *vindfang* and entrance hall distribute the circulation to the bedrooms and the bathroom on one side and the living room on the other, the kitchen is now clearly a part of the living room space.

The vacation homes show a commitment to local context, yet at the same time their architecture is subject to variation and modernization. With her view on architecture, Selmer was well prepared for the dictations of the Act of Coastline and Mountain Area Planning, and was able to carry out deviating and individual solutions within the law. She protested strongly against rigid law-abiding standard solutions and showed how the intentions of the legislation could be met through creative designs that were suitable for each individual site. With the Beach House project, she was able to test out her views on recreational architecture with a modern, prefabricated building system. In other designs, her work is characterized by a relaxed and undogmatic attitude toward structure and form. Modules in visible roof structures and room sizes are adapted in a sensible way to fit individual sites.

BUILDING CUSTOMS, POSTMODERNISM, AND NEW PROSPERITY

During the 1970s, preservation of the environment and adaptation to the surroundings became important demands in the architectural debate and signified a confrontation with the radical international modernism. While Selmer had, in her own way, been pre-occupied with these considerations from the very beginning of her practice, from now on, the modernist features in her architecture became more modified.

The twin houses that were built for Siri Næss on Skådalsveien in 1976 are a unique example of the utilization of the Norwegian rural building tradition in a modern housing program (page 175). The commission was to build two housing units with modest room requirements in the garden of an old, rather elegant wooden house. Instead of building a conventional two-family house, Selmer solved the task by designing two separate houses that were linked together by a fence. The old house towers on the hill above and is reflected in the two tall gables below, which, with their simple design, are visually subordinate to the old house. The houses are masterly formed in relation to the slope of the terrain. The exterior walls have rough-edged board-and-batten siding extending all the way to the ground without divisions or ornaments, giving the houses a calm and pronounced distinction. The asymmetrical placements of the small-paned windows and the garden door provide visual interest to the facades. The interior is designed for an unconventional lifestyle, with a large degree of openness in the spatial arrangement.

The summerhouse Selmer designed for her niece Eve and her husband Abdel Errahmani in Provence in Southern France in 1977 also belongs to this period. The house is built in natural stone, but both the plan and the exterior shape are clearly related to the house on Beltesholmen, though the house in France is a little larger.

The furnishing of a large old brick house in Moss in 1980 shows Selmer's strong interest in existing qualities as a resource for the new architecture (page 193).

Independence and Adjustment

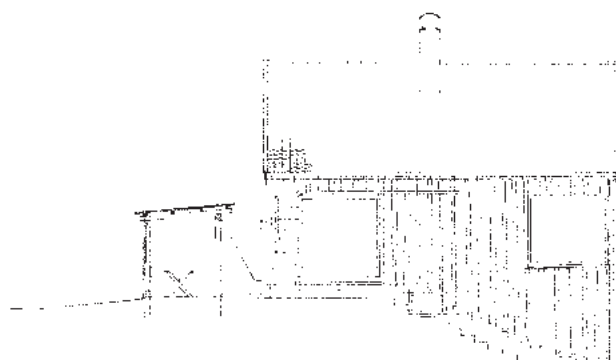
From the 1970s, Selmer designed more and more houses with saddle roofs and, in some cases, hipped roofs. She continued to develop her designs for the houses in Slemdalsvingen (1968) and Lommedalen (1971), a house on Nordbergveien (1976), and a small extension on Huldreveien in 1977. Continuous panel-siding now dominates the walls. The volumes become whole, without roof projections; some incorporate withdrawn sections and small extensions without losing the overall form. In this way, they share features with the houses of the 1950s, while the expression is different. Even though the main forms are simple one-and-a-half- or two-story houses, the volumes inside are utilized in a flexible way and show great openness in the plan and spatial organization. A half-landing is used where it makes sense on the sloping terrain, as for example in the house on Stjerneveien (1983).



House in Moss, roof terrace

Twin houses





Single-family house in Nedre Båstad



Single-family house on Orreveien

In 1980–81 Selmer erected three houses in Nedre Båstad in Asker near Oslo. Two of them stand side by side at the edge of a large old orchard, forming a small row. The main houses are compact two-story volumes. Shelters for cars, bicycles, and wood; an annex that is rented out; and a fence toward the road bind the houses together and articulate the entrance facade as an asset to the small street environment. A kitchen window next to the entrance provides insight into the interior. At the same time, the fence functions as a shield for the terraces and outdoor spaces in the garden, where the row of houses forms a neat edge toward the old orchard. The entire project seems informal and almost rough with coarse vertical siding, sliding doors, and asymmetrically placed windows of various sizes.

In the single-family house on Orreveien in Oslo (1987) Selmer combined her familiar themes in one “cubic” form, a two-story house with a square base and a pyramid-shaped (hipped) roof. The site is steep and mountainous, and the house stands in the middle of the slope. The entrance is on the bottom floor and accessed from a large terrace on top of a garage built in natural stone. The main floor has openings to all sides and an exit to a covered outdoor terrace at the top of the site. Up here, the clients can enjoy the evening sun and a panoramic view over the hills west of Oslo, all the way to the Norefjell mountains. In contrast to Selmer’s other residential houses, which are tarred brown, this house is painted red like the

vacation homes by the sea. The board-covered walls of the interior are also painted, differing from the untreated pine paneling that otherwise dominates Selmer’s houses.

The Last Recreational Homes

During the 1980s and 1990s Selmer received several more commissions for summerhouses by the sea and for extensions to cabins. The Grønvold family, for whom she had designed a summerhouse in 1967, owned a large parcel of land on Fjelldalsøya where Selmer had developed a coastline plan in 1977. Two of Grønvold’s daughters built their own vacation homes here, which were designed by Selmer, the first in 1983 and the second in 1986. For the third daughter, Selmer renovated an old washhouse in her parents’ farmyard in 1989. The houses serve as a good example of Selmer’s style at that time. They are saddle-roof houses with steep roof angles as on Beltesholmen, but they are more spacious and more freely shaped, with small projections and more varied window shapes and larger glass sections. The influence from the Beach House system can be seen in the second-floor windows, which often extend over the entire length of the gable.

In 1995 Selmer renovated a boathouse for Gerd Verdu near Langangen. It became both a pleasant boat-house/workshop and an informal summer home with impressive wooden structures in the large attic. The following year she completed a new summerhouse on

the same property, only a few feet from the sea. A red-painted one-and-a-half-story house with an open plan, a fireplace, and a large sliding door leading out to the garden, this design is a modernized and larger version of the earlier vacation homes. It was Selmer's last built commission for a new house.

All of the architect's summerhouses throughout the years are, in different ways, a result of her attempt to give her designs a sense of belonging to the local building traditions in terms of their forms and dimensions, while avoiding copying the old houses, as Selmer stated in *Fortidsvern* magazine in 1978.²⁴

The last mountain cabin that the architect designed was built in Rondane in Mysuseter, above the tree line, in 1993. The client was one of the sons of the family for whom Selmer had designed her first cabin on Ringkollen in 1953. It is evident that this cabin is more expensive, larger, and better equipped than the vacation houses that were built during the first decades after the war. It is a comfortable cabin with three bedrooms, a bathroom, and a spacious kitchen and living room. The building, with a fireplace in the middle of the central, square living room, is covered by a hipped, gently slanting pyramid-shaped turf roof.

As has been shown, Selmer held a steady course in a time characterized by an explosive offer of new materials and an abundance of expressions that spanned from nostalgia and postmodern excessiveness to smooth and polished high-tech designs. Her early commitment to local contexts and wooden house architecture provided a good basis for her later work. Her answers to the various problems of her time were founded in the architectural values on which she had always focused her work. While the changing times influenced her architecture, they resulted mainly in variations of how she interpreted her repertoire rather than an upheaval of it. Selmer's houses are still practical, energetic, and carefully situated in the landscape, expressing moderation based on the Norwegian wooden house tradition. Though their shape is simple, the architect's consideration for details makes them rich and full of joy.

Cabin for Nina Grønvold, Fjeldalsøy



The Means of Reflection



Measuring rocks on site



A rock becomes a foundation for the fireplace

The breadth of Selmer's architecture can seem surprising. Yet it is evident that the elements and methods that are characteristic of her architecture were developed at an early stage and then refined throughout her career. "To form a house simply and naturally in relation to materials, structure, climate, and surroundings, has been the foundation which I have built upon," she said in a 1980 issue of *Byggekunst* magazine. In the following chapters, I will therefore discuss some of her central methods in more detail, namely the relationship of her buildings to the surroundings, her idea of the house as a framework for the client's life, and her use of wood as a building material.

SURROUNDINGS AND USAGE

The House in the Landscape

Situating a house in the terrain was a main issue for Selmer. Not only would she sometimes spend the night in a sleeping bag onsite to experience the sunset and sunrise, but she also carried out detailed surveys with a measuring tape and leveling telescope. It was essential for her to become thoroughly acquainted with the qualities of the site. In this way, she developed ideas about how elements of the landscape could be utilized and incorporated into her design. Her general attitude was to use the existing site as a basis, avoiding large incisions in the environment. She placed the buildings so that they would

create sheltered outdoor spaces and provide interesting views. The landscape and vegetation, the sun and wind conditions, and the view were all carefully considered in her designs. Other elements such as fences, pergolas, and terraces contribute to the intimate connection between the house and the site, creating surprising spatial effects.

Close to the House Wall

Selmer treated the facades of her buildings based on the potential of their immediate surroundings. In her houses, there is always something beautiful to look at, even if it is a slope on the north side. There is plenty of steep terrain in Norway. Because wooden materials have to stand in airy places so as not to rot, brick or molded walls are often used in the foundations, which are partially sunken into the ground. (If not on solid rock, foundations have to go below the winter ground frost, usually 31.5 inches deep.) The transition between molded and brick foundations and the wooden structures aboveground entail a specific architectural problem. In the old days, dry walls of natural stone were used as basement walls. But while these are beautiful and belong to the surrounding environment, they do not satisfy the technical and climatic demands that are required of today's buildings. Selmer solved this problem by extending the exterior siding nearly all the way down to the ground, attaching furring strips on the exterior of the basement walls. The wooden siding is cut diagonally so as to

follow the contours of the terrain—a characteristic feature of postwar single-family house architecture in Østlandet.²⁵ In this way, the site is preserved and the house connected to the ground.

The landscape is always treated gently. Sometimes Selmer incorporated narrow passages covered with gravel between an exterior wall and a stone ridge, or inserted a few stairs of stone or tarred wooden sleepers where the passage was uncomfortably steep. She would use natural stone from the site to create supporting walls in the terrain, for example in front of terraces as in the house on Gråkamveien.

Inviting Accesses

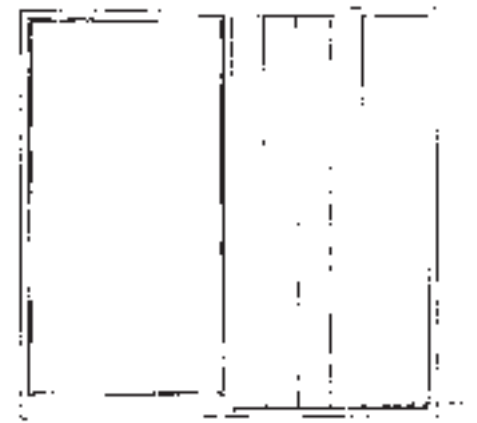
The accesses to Selmer's houses are inviting and never overly conspicuous: a gravel or paved path is divided into sections—each with its own, almost secretive, character—by small elements: Approaching the houses, you pass bicycles and stacks of firewood that are neatly placed close to the wall, a reminder of the people that live inside the house. A bright-red Berber bush stands next to a brown tarred fence or a stonewall. Sometimes a fence leads toward the entrance and at the same time shields a sunny garden. Almost there, you get a glimpse of the interior through the kitchen window before you enter the house under the roof over the front door. These features are modest in size but exemplary in the way they communicate a feeling of

intimacy in the large landscape. There is an underlying sense of a nuanced and strong spatial understanding.

The entrances to Selmer's houses are usually sheltered, either by means of a small separate roof or by withdrawing the entrance into the volume of the building. In either case, the door is protected against rain, as are the people entering or leaving the house. A large window next to the door provides the visitor with a glimpse of the hall, maybe offering a view of the rustic slate floor and an old dresser with a mirror—a direct and immediate visual impression in contrast to the kitchen window, which is higher up on the wall and provides a more distant line of sight.

Spatial Connections

Selmer was preoccupied with the connection between spaces as an important architectural device and avoided pure passageways such as corridors with doors in her houses. Her small *vindfang* are a part of this. The placement of windows and doors between rooms are chosen to provide long lines of sight and visual connection through the houses, thus creating light and open interiors, as well as providing enough wall space in the rooms. The placement of windows and their shapes vary according to the use of each room, its furnishing, and the spatial quality of the building. The houses also incorporate large glass doors, which further help to connect them to the surroundings.



Selmer vindfang



Entrance on Trosterudstien



Kitchen on Beltesholmen



Model, Gråkamveien

Each section in the house is shaped in an optimal way for its individual use, yet also in relation to other spaces so that overlapping room zones are created that provide expanded possibilities for use and interesting spatial effects. Sliding doors incorporated in the walls or behind bookshelves can be used to separate the sections from each other when required. The kitchen and pantry, the dining space, a second, larger dining space, a living room with a fireplace, and a study are all part of one room. Sometimes, a bedroom with a bath is placed next to the living room area. Other times, several bedrooms with baths are situated on the other side of the hall, on the same floor, or in the basement, depending on the site.

The Clients and Their Usage

Selmer showed great interest in how her houses would be used, what kind of people were going to live there, and what needs they had. She designed relatively inexpensive houses. Therefore she felt that it was significant to utilize the space wisely and seldom gave away as much as a square foot to something that did not seem appealing or useful to her. She learned to create an unstrained living environment that provided the basis for well-being, even within strict financial boundaries. When she first started her practice, she was shocked to find that the woman's workplace in the home was a forgotten space. The kitchen, laundry room, and study were neglected and often hidden away toward the north. In the houses

that she designed, Selmer emphasized the kitchen as a common workroom and living space that was flooded with warmth and natural light.

The architect showed great understanding for changing family constellations: life as a young family with small children and teenagers differs from that of aging pensioners with diverse hobbies and possibly reduced mobility. As she said, "We are working in a profession that ought to be art, but which also exists in reality. People live in our buildings. Both the technical and the practical side is important. It is tragic and pointless if an architectural school only produces fantasy projects."²⁶

Cooperation with Clients

Selmer was fortunate with her clients. When accepting a commission, she would first invite them to look at her own house on Trosterudstien or another of her projects in order to give them an idea of her "style." She would then carefully study the site and listen to her client's wishes and needs. Her proposal usually included both models and drawings, which were presented in a meeting with the client. Maybe at this point some minor changes were made, or the design remained as the architect had suggested. She completed the construction drawings for the bid and often hired the same craftsmen and carpentry suppliers for several houses, being careful to keep costs within the budget.

Her professional competence and social skills resulted in a relationship of trust that her clients

valued, but Selmer could also be strong-willed. When siting the house in Øvre Tåsen, for example, she convinced the client that there was no advantage to all rooms having a view; the overall result would be better if specific qualities were given to different places in the house. A garden with an outdoor space that receives sunshine when the family members are home from work and school was one such quality she wanted to incorporate in her design. Therefore she placed the house so that the kitchen and living room had easy access to the garden and an outdoor dining space in the sun, even though it was on the opposite side of the view (page 185).

Selmer's houses were thoroughly designed with building details and interior furnishing, and she would often visit the construction site (almost daily if it was close by) and follow the entire construction process.

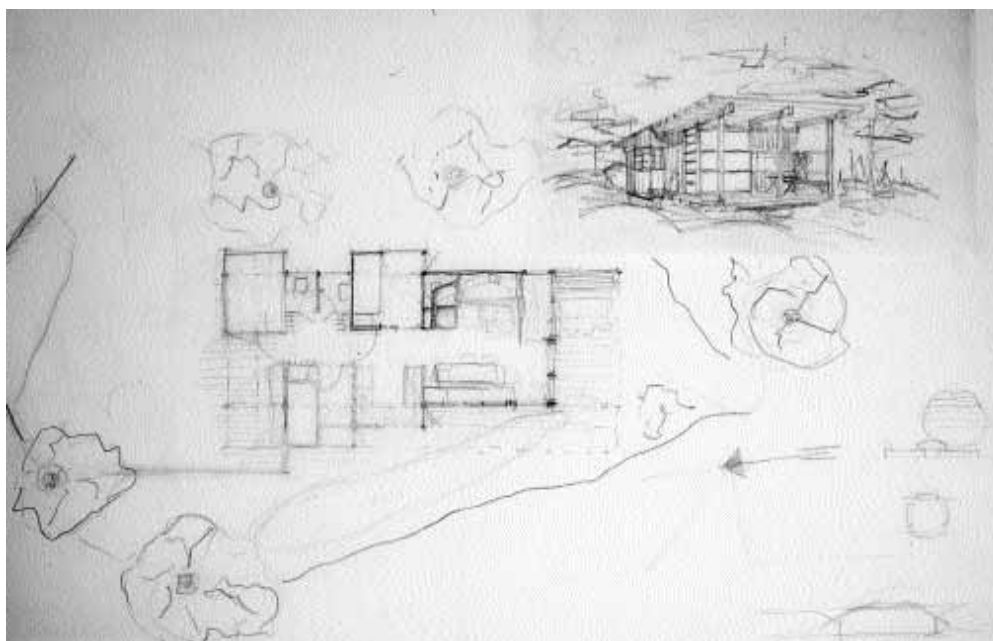
36 NORWEGIAN WOOD A LA SELMER

Wood is the dominating material in Selmer's architecture, although other materials have their place. The fireplaces are most often built in dark clinker stone with tall joints and coarse sand in the mortar. Sometimes red-brown ceramic tiles are used on the floors, with heating installed underneath. Ceramic tiles in discreet colors, sand-colored or white, were also used on bathroom walls and for kitchen worktops.

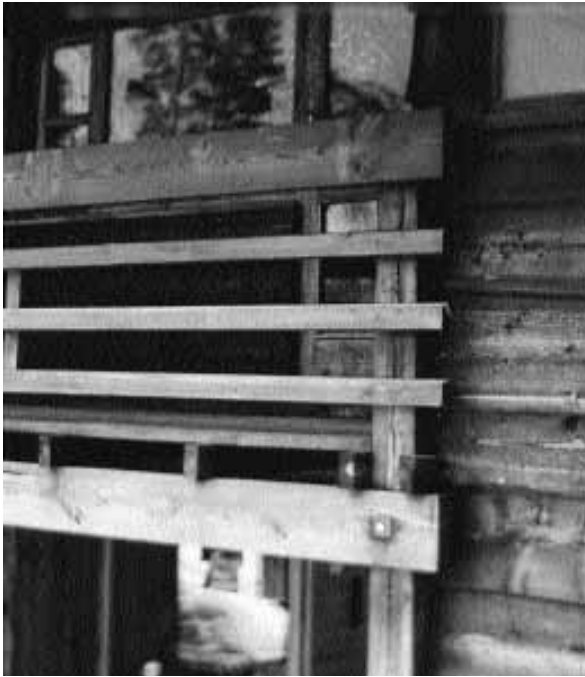
Selmer would occasionally design floors with large slate flagstones, usually a type of slate from Skjak in Gudbrandsdalen, which has a touch of rust. Beyond this, there is woodwork. The fundamental thought in Selmer's use of wood was that the material itself constitutes an important architectural device, has its own beauty, and is therefore only treated where it needs protection.

Selmer mainly worked with Norwegian timber—pine and spruce—in types and dimensions that could be obtained locally and that the local builders knew how to handle. Spruce is usually used in load-bearing structures and in exterior siding because it is more sustainable than standard pine. Pine, which darkens more slowly than spruce and has a more lively display of color, is used in the interiors. It is obvious but often forgotten that the natural selection of wood is decisive for the architecture of a region. Think only of how different the style of the wooden architecture of renowned Californian architects Greene & Greene, Bernard Maybeck, and Julia Morgan is, partly as a result of the very different conditions in California, whose redwood trees are much larger and have a better water resistance than Norwegian timber. During the last decades, an unusually large amount of various imported timber has entered the Norwegian market. Selmer, however, stayed true to local materials.

Surfaces that would be exposed to rough use such as worktops were often made of teakwood, a more water-resistant and durable type of wood. For



Sketches for the summerhouse in Brunlanes



Balcony, railing, and wall

the same reason, steps and thresholds, when they were unavoidable, were made of oak. Oak was also used for the tables that Jens Selmer designed, and which are found as coffeetables and dining tables in several of Wenche Selmer's houses.

Treatment of Wood

The treatment of wood in Selmer's architecture is a chapter of its own. She experimented with different techniques, all based on the tradition of Magnus Poulsson and Knut Knutsen. Her early single-family houses were treated externally with ferrosulphate, possibly mixed with *kjønøk* (iron black soot powder) and resin, and dissolved with water and some rye flour, following Magnus Poulsson's recipe. This mixture gave a grayish-black color to wood surfaces. Later, Selmer usually used a greasier tar-product (carbolineum), which left an uneven, transparent surface because it was absorbed differently. The organic qualities of the tree played an important aesthetic role in Selmer's architecture, similar to the old houses in the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History. The architect's cabins in the woods or in the mountains were treated in the same way.

The coastal summerhouses usually had panel-siding that was painted a dark red color with a brownish tint, "blood-maple," or more specifically, NCS No. 6030-Y90R. The color was chosen as part of Selmer's attempt at local contextual adjustment. The coastal buildings in these areas were usually painted

—the residential houses often in white and the out-houses in red or ochre. Painting became common in Norway around 1700, and the buildings became more colorful up until the 1960s, with colors changing over the course of different periods. In addition to white, different gray and light colors were used on the walls as well as darker colors such as ochre and red on residential houses. The back facade could be either red or ochre-colored in contrast to the representative white front. Windows and doors, moldings, corner coverings, and cornices were often painted in other colors within a varied spectrum, including light and dark blue, green, gray, and brown, in addition to red and yellow.

Both the interiors of Selmer's single-family houses and those of her vacation homes feature untreated pine woodwork on the walls, ceilings, and in the furnishing. When the wood eventually darkens, it can be washed with a strong solution of green soap and water. Rising bristles can be sanded down, if an extra fine surface is desired. The floors of wide pine boards were usually treated with a mixture of boiled linseed oil, turpentine, and a tint, which gave the floor a dark brown color (see page 207). A similar oil treatment was used on the worktops in the kitchen and other exposed spaces. The treatments of the materials and surfaces in Selmer's houses contribute to an architecture that is both beautiful and easy to maintain and care for.

An Effortless Combination of Tradition and Modern Ideals

Several new materials such as mineral wool insulation, insulating glass, plastic, and foils, among others, were introduced in the construction business during the 1950s. These materials were of great importance to wooden architecture and paved the way for slender structures, floor plans that were more open and free, larger glass surfaces, and houses without basements that enabled easier access between indoor spaces and the ground outside.

Woodwork was significant in the structural systems, surface materials, and the spatial composition of Selmer's architecture. She used regular stud walls as the load-bearing system, which provided great freedom for shaping the house plastically. Compared to the modular system, which dominated the 1960s and 1970s, she was able to design rooms more individually. She could, for example, move a wall outwards to achieve a special view, as with a bay window. The support of the roof becomes decisive. Here Selmer also varied in a reasonable way, arranging the rooms with a suitable unanimity without being too dogmatic. Pillars are placed to both meet structural needs and fit the layout of the room. The small touches are important in this architecture, but it demands a great sensitivity to maintain a strong architectural whole.

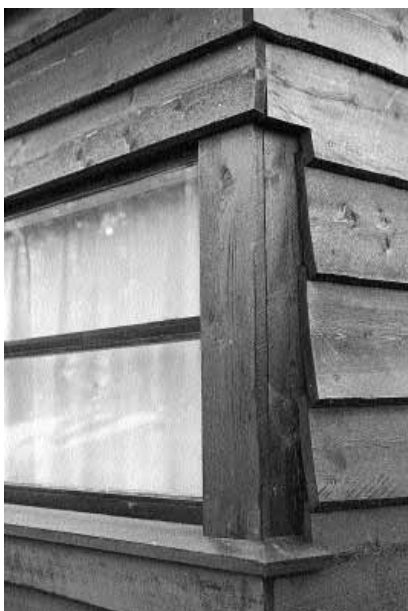
The structural elements in the roof and under the attic floor in Selmer's houses are exposed, just as in traditional Norwegian wood houses. Beams, purlins, and rafters become important architectural

components and are treated as beautifying elements. Their proportions, placement, and rhythm are shaped with great consideration.

The Art of Simplification

It is an art of simplification that permeates Selmer's detailing both in the interiors and exteriors. It is a demanding art that the architect performed with a quiet inventiveness. Her avoidance of moldings is an important method, executed, for example, by concluding the paneling with a retracted board, a cornice that is level with the height of the roof beams. In a similar way, the base board is a retracted board along the floor, and moldings around the doors and windows are also avoided. The siding replaces casing. Both inside and out, interplay occurs between the wall siding and the windows and the doors, where the paneling is precisely cut so as to cover the slit around the top and side frames. Inside Selmer used three-quarter-inch-thick smooth paneling, often quite wide, vertical or horizontal, resulting in a precise appearance. In the garden and terrace doors, the threshold is lowered so that its upper edge is level with the floor. This is both functional and contributes to the clarity of the architectural expression.

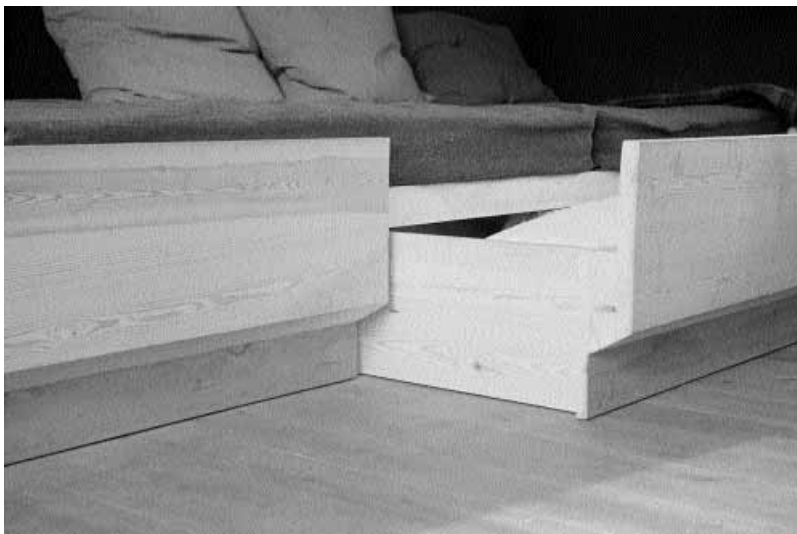
Just as her interiors, Selmer's facades also vary throughout her long practice. Exterior vertical siding could be rough, one-inch-thick board-and-batten siding with three-inch-wide lower boards and upper boards with varying widths of two to nine inches as in



House corner



Wall and window



Drawer in a sofa bench

the house on Vettaliveien; or broad, rough-edged upper boards as in the house in Nedre Båstad. Or it could be one-inch horizontal west-coast siding, narrow and with precise appearance as in the house on Søndreiveien, or rough-edged boards of various widths from nine to eleven inches as on Gråkameveien. Externally, the ends of the protruding roof rafters are a rhythmic element in the facade. The ornamentation of Selmer's architecture results from a deliberate interaction between the different forms and roles of the woodwork, gathered under the motto of simplification.

Interior Furnishing

A series of clever details and interiors belongs to Selmer's repertoire. She developed a lot of fixed furnishing for her buildings: besides the kitchen and the pantry she also designed bathroom interiors, benches, desks, and bookcases for the bedroom and study as well as shelves for different types of storage, wardrobes, and lighting arrangements with lamps hidden behind a smooth pine board.

Her closet solutions are worth noting: they are designed to appear built-in, with the closet doors forming a discreet spatial demarcation in alignment with the walls. Closets that stand as large, isolated elements in the room are thus avoided. Selmer invested a great deal of thought into these solutions and designed many special closets in addition to the mandatory clothing wardrobes. Examples of these are

shallow cupboards for glasses and other items, inserted in the dining room wall in the house on Vettaliveien, and the ironing-board cupboards in the laundry rooms of many other houses. Closet doors and drawer fronts are designed to be a part of the totality of the architecture, together with the ceiling, walls, and other doors and sliding doors, all made to the specifications of Selmer's drawings. Pine is the dominating material in the interior. There is a multitude of detailing and adjustments that makes the different parts look related and creates a harmonic whole.

Selmer's methods, from the floor plans of her buildings to the small, simple details are all part of an anti-bourgeois housing architecture. Her cabins and residences are counterparts to conventional houses that are modeled on the homes of the gentry, where representation rooms are exposed to visitors, while kitchens and bedrooms remain hidden behind the scenes. Selmer's architecture instead is in keeping with the strong ideals of modern architecture; several other ideological sources are also evident, such as Knut Knutsen's practice as well as the companionship with Jens Selmer and their everyday life. Perhaps the experience of her father's bankruptcy during the architect's childhood could also have contributed to Selmer's study of the art of limitation. The question "what can you do without?" was, to a great extent, self-experienced.

Attitudes and Roles

After learning about Selmer's working methods and her approach to architecture, we shall take a closer look in this chapter at her roles as an architect, as a woman, and as a teacher at the Oslo School of Architecture.

SELMER'S APPROACH TO CRITICAL REGIONALISM

Critical regionalism is a term that was coined in the architectural debate of the last decades, among others by the architectural theorist and historian Kenneth Frampton.²⁷ The fundamental strategy of critical regionalism is to integrate the influence from the universal civilization in an architecture that originates from characteristics of a particular place. Critical regionalism involves having a critical consciousness and awareness. It can find its most important inspiration in elements such as the quality of natural light in a place; in the peculiarities attached to a specific method of building; in tectonics; or in the topography of a given area. Critical regionalism, according to Frampton, distances itself from the optimization of advanced technology. It finds its position between the uncritical cult of progress on the one hand and the longing for the pre-industrial condition on the other. It promotes an identity-creating culture and at the same time discreetly includes universal technique.

A Knut Knutsen Student

Selmer's architecture fulfills these demands. She belonged to the school of Knut Knutsen, an architect who exerted immense influence on Norwegian postwar architecture. Many of the postwar architects were his students at the SHKS and later at the Oslo School of Architecture, where he was a highly esteemed teacher. He also educated through his many large- and small-scale projects. The polarization that was in progress during the postwar era between Arne Korsmo, as a representative of international modernism, and Knut Knutsen, with his allegiance to

Norwegian nature and folk architecture and the arts and crafts movement, is a strong simplification. It ignores the similarities between the two as well as Knutsen's extensive international orientation and his versatility in architectural expression. Nils-Ole Lund contributed to the balance when he wrote in 1981:

However, during the 1950s, international inspiration fostered an architecture that showed a consideration for the characteristically Norwegian by understanding that the national is not a question of historically conditioned motifs, but of an adjustment to specific circumstances. Gradually this tradition grew so strong that around 1980 it could be said that Norwegian architecture was possibly the strongest in Scandinavia. . . . My theory is that it was Knut Knutsen who, during the first decade after the war, created the foundation for this evolution.²⁸

Sverre Fehn describes Knutsen as a renovator, who by being well acquainted with history, had the self-awareness it took to break with the established form ideals. He practiced criticism toward both old and new trends. Knutsen proved to be a great master in working with building materials, giving the relationship of his architecture with nature a whole new dimension. "The key to his architectural expression lies in his reading of the formations of the ground and the vegetation of the sites," Fehn says.²⁹ This lesson was fundamental for Selmer.

Selmer also emphasized Knutsen's great achievement in continuing the wooden house tradition, uniting a historical development with a new method of thinking and "giving new interpretations of space, volume, and surfaces without letting go of a humane and poetic content created and continued by generation after generation in a diverse folk architecture."³⁰ He developed a very personal architecture that had deep roots in regional traditions, and it was precisely this aspect of Knutsen's versatile practice that Selmer carried on in her work with the site, the people, and in her

building methods and choice of materials. She did this in a somewhat different way than her mentor. Some of the houses have clear similarities, but viewed as a whole, Selmer's architecture has simpler forms; her houses are mainly rectangular and less influenced by Knutsen's irregular "principles of addition." Her production is also more uniform and less versatile than Knutsen's, which counts around nine hundred large- and small-scale projects.

Critique of the Bourgeois and Popular Nostalgia

Frampton states that it is important to distinguish between critical regionalism and superficial attempts at reviving the hypothetical forms of a lost folk architecture expressed in the tendencies of nostalgic historicism. A common populism is apparent there in opposition to critical regionalism because architectural means of expression are seen more as communicative or instrumental signs. Such signs are not an expression of a critical understanding of reality, but rather the sublimation of a desire for direct experience communicated through superficial information.³¹

When Frampton wrote this, postmodernism as an architectural ideology and style had been in progress for several years, especially in the US. It also made its mark in Norway, where it coincided with growing preservation interests. Hence, demands for local contextual adjustment of new buildings followed, with generally positive results. But, as with international modernism, postmodernist style elements soon spread uncontrollably and without distinction throughout the country, now under the wing of a claimed local contextual adjustment. Nostalgic yearnings found answers in trivial forms, often overgrown with an annoying accumulation of historicizing motifs—gables, bay windows, and ornaments—in glaring colors and materials, without any understanding of the architectural connections and without consideration for the topography and environment as a whole.

Selmer's work is a protest against this form of utilization of historical building shapes and against this kind of postmodernist mentality. This becomes clear in her way of solving architectural problems with a focus on simplification, "honest" materials, and the relation between content and expression. Her lecture with the ironic title "The Knutsen-school. Norwegian Architecture on a Sidetrack?," held at the seventy-fifth anniversary of the NAL in 1986, opposes postmodernism, concluding: "The Knutsen school

represents a necessary ballast in an uneasy time where the loans from the past are characterized by casual choices from the leftovers of history."³²

Critique of Relentless Global Modernization

How did Selmer's architecture separate itself from populism and sentimental regionalism? The answer is simple. Her renewal of regional traditions and building methods came from within, not as a representation of an old facade glued onto the latest fashion of the industrial market. Her architecture is a consistent expression of criticism of aggressive consumerism and the large-scale modernization of the global market. Selmer's critical regionalism occurs in her tectonic adaptations, in her new ways of connecting buildings with the qualities of the site. Her roots in tradition inspire innovation. Her analysis of new forms of living is expressed in architectural works of high quality. Her architecture is a criticism of both the bourgeois architecture and the imitations of the lower middle class.

Selmer emphasizes the sensory experience of architecture, especially the tactile experience tied to the physical qualities of a place, its light and materials, rather than the visual impression from the outside, which Frampton calls the perspective way of viewing architecture. Her designs and innovations are modest, not ostentatious, and they are the result of a close cooperation with the user. Her critical regionalism is seemingly simple; it breaks less with the surroundings and in this way distinguishes itself from the work of some of her male colleagues, who were more original, expressive, and without compromise in their designs. While this may be an expression of gender, it is also something typically Norwegian: democratic, egalitarian ideals are stronger among Norwegian architects than, for example, in Finland where the architectural culture is more elitist. Through her critical regionalism, Selmer participated, in her own way, in a global culture's collective perception of their surroundings. In her work she persistently dealt with the paradox of time and change, which, according to Paul Ricoeur in his book *History and Truth*, refers to the question of how to become modern and at the same time return to one's roots.³³

A WOMAN'S LIFE AS AN ARCHITECT

Single Mother, Student, and Architect

Selmer's professional life was, from the very beginning, also characterized by being the life of a woman. When she started her education at the SHKS during the war, at the age of twenty-two, she was already a single mother. After Collett left in the fall of 1941, she moved, as mentioned earlier, home to her parents, which made it possible for her to go to school while they looked after Espen. The caregiving went both ways, because Selmer's mother suffered from cancer and was hospitalized for long periods of time. She had been ill at an earlier stage as well, before the war, and fell ill again in 1943–44. She died in the summer of 1945, at the same time as Selmer started her architecture class. After her death, Selmer's father employed a housekeeper who cared for Espen when Selmer was at school. These were trying times with housing shortages, and the first floor of the house was rented out until 1950. Selmer and her son shared a room in her father's apartment on the second floor.

It is not hard to imagine that these first years were especially demanding for Selmer. Having to combine family life with her life as a student and later as an architect left its traces. In an interview with *Byggekunst* magazine in 1980 she emphasized that women students should become more conscious in the choices they make:

It is necessary to see oneself as a victim of the circumstances, but we also create our own lives. We have to acknowledge that. Nature has exposed us to pregnancy and childbirth, which entails responsibility and care. But the moment in which to take on this important responsibility is our own

decision. During the study period, and in the first years after this, we have to concentrate on the profession we have chosen. It takes great mental and physical strength to combine the role of caregiver and demanding studies. No one can, beforehand, imagine how a child can turn your life upside down, until this is a fact. Do not let yourselves be pressured into marriage and motherhood by the expectations from your surroundings. When I choose to state this so strongly, it is because I daily encounter student mothers in the same situation that I myself had to struggle through. We struggled, is what I probably should say, because the little person I was responsible for had to tolerate more than was probably reasonable.³⁴

When Jens Selmer moved in with Wenche and Espen into the first floor of her father's house in 1950, Wenche received some assistance in her role as caregiver.

The Architectural Practice at the Core of the Home

Selmer started her own practice in a room in the apartment in 1954, a year before her daughter, Elisabeth, was born in the summer of 1955. In the years that followed, she ran her full-time practice from her office at home, partly because Espen had made it clear that he thought she should stay home. Elisabeth Selmer recounts that her mother mounted a low enclosure in the doorway between the office and the living room. Thus, Elisabeth could play in the living room near her mother without being able to touch the drawings and



*Playtime with the grandchildren
in the living room*



Working outside on Beltesholmen

models in the office. When she was a little older, Elisabeth stayed at a nursery and later in a kindergarten near Vigeland Park for a few hours every morning. Selmer's father remained fit for a long time, but needed more supervision in the last few years before his death in 1961.

The years on Gustav Vigelands vei were characterized by this living situation with three generations sharing the same house, first Selmer as a single mother with her parents, then with her father, son, and the housekeeper, and later with Jens Selmer; all as partners in a mutually supportive and caring relationship where roles varied over time. The house and its flexibility made this possible.

When the estate was divided after Selmer's father passed away, her siblings, Jan Herman and Vibeke, gave their inherited portions of the house on Gustav Vigelands vei to Selmer because she had cared for their father. This enabled her and her husband to build their own house. They swapped the property for a sunny site on Gråkammen and built a new house with the profit.

When the family moved to Trosterudstien in 1963, Espen had moved out and was studying medicine in Switzerland, while Elisabeth was still at school. The architectural office received a central space in the new house (page 131), with drawing tables for both Wenche and Jens Selmer. The office was not a secluded room, but part of an open living space, which also included a sitting nook, a dining

area, and a kitchen. The work did not take place at an unapproachable distance, but in the midst of family life. If Elisabeth and her friends were making too much noise, a sliding door could be closed to separate the living room and office from the kitchen and dining area. Wenche Selmer usually got up very early and was often already sitting at her drawing table when Jens and Elisabeth were having breakfast. She often worked in the evenings too, after she had cooked dinner and they had eaten together. Elisabeth moved out in 1975, and Espen moved back to Oslo from Switzerland with his wife and two sons in 1978. Wenche Selmer looked after her grandchildren one afternoon a week, and the boys played on the living room floor only a few feet away from the drawing table, as if the room was solely planned for their enjoyment.

Work was often brought along on summer vacations too. Selmer had constant commissions for vacation homes in the area of Brekkestø, and it was often necessary for her to do registrations, adjustments, and design work when she was in the vicinity. She mostly worked in the living room, where a drawing board with a tracer was mounted on a table that was placed in front of the sofa bench by the glass door leading out to the garden. Occasionally she put up the drawing table in the open air, if the weather permitted working outside.

Theory and Practice

In Selmer's life theory and practice were deeply connected, and there is coherence between how she organized her own life and the choices she made in her architecture. Her work was based on an understanding of the abundance and complexity that a house must encompass. It was based on the importance of the practical aspects of housing architecture, on solutions that ease daily life and leave room for joy and beauty.

In Selmer's home, drawings and models were always lying on the drawing table, even when friends were visiting, and Jens and Wenche Selmer would often discuss architectural questions in their free time. But it is also clear that Selmer had the ability to block out work and do other things in the house or with her children. She was both full of initiative and the center of the family's social life.

Reconciling Professional and Family Life

Selmer belonged to a generation that was born and raised just after women received the right to vote and common access to higher education. But women were still only modestly visible in the professional arena. In 1915, the NAL had only one female member out of 135. In 1946, when Selmer had finished her schooling, this number had increased. Immediately after World War II, there were many commissions for architects, and the community spirit of the reconstruction called for women as well as for men to contribute professionally.

While many female pioneers in architecture as well as in other academic and artistic professions chose not to marry and have children, women later saw it as their right to combine having a family with work. The postwar period was characterized by strong egalitarian ideals, both in society in general and in the architectural profession. Live-in maids became more and more rare, and career women had to choose alternative means of child-care and often hired a cleaning lady, as Selmer also did. A house that was comfortable, easy to maintain, and designed for effortless family life was therefore the goal of any female architect.

Selmer's Niche in the Architectural Field

When Elisabeth Seip wrote her seminal article on women architects in *Women's Cultural History* in 1985, she still noted a traditional work division between women and men in the architectural profession. Women were seen as having good professional

skills, but mainly using them for modest building tasks, housing, and institutional buildings. "The more prestigious assignments, government buildings, national theatres, churches, office buildings, and so on, are kept by or left to the man, depending on how you look at it."³⁵ It is only during the last ten to twenty years that women architects have started taking on work in more heroic fields. Selmer clearly belongs to the first tradition. Within this field she chose the small building tasks, single-family houses and vacation homes for individual clients, a person or couple with whom she could be in direct and personal contact.

Yet this was not an area she and other women architects had to themselves. Throughout the twentieth century, architects as a group were engaged in dwelling problems, both regarding individual and standard houses. Being able to contribute to the quality of life of ordinary people was a part of the democratic ideals of the modern movement. Architectural competitions for standard houses and cabins were held in the 1920s and 1930s, during the rebuilding period in the fall of 1945, and several times in the decades after the war. The central themes were to achieve high architectural quality with little space and to view each unit from a collective perspective. Even though Selmer's projects were mainly individually designed houses of higher standards than the common dwellings financed by the Norwegian State Housing Bank, her efforts were the same: simplicity was a means to achieve quality and beauty.

When the opportunity arose for Selmer to establish a larger office outside her house while Elisabeth was little, the architect chose to stay at home, and with that she chose the small commissions. She had an employee for a short period of time. Otherwise, she turned down larger commissions because she worried that increased responsibility and extensive administration tasks would make her family situation with three generations living together impossible. Her architectural practice was an integral part of life in the house, but Selmer remained extremely professional in her contact with clients, authorities, the building industry, and craftsmen.

Poetics of Practicality

As has been shown, Selmer had a special sensitivity for all aspects of family life. For her, practical simplicity worked hand in hand with beauty and architectural ideals. She shared this perspective with many women



Wenche and Jens Selmer in the garden

architects from her own time and the generations before her.

There have been other architect couples where female architects were married to and cooperated with famous architects, for example Aino Marsio-Aalto (1894–1949). She married, in 1924, the world-renowned architect Alvar Aalto (1898–1976), and in many cases it is difficult to discern between her and his work. Göran Schildt has described this in his biography of Alvar Aalto, *Det hvita Bordet* (published in 1982); according to Schildt, Aino had a more developed sense of the prosaic realities and limitations of life than Alvar, who sometimes soared high above the real world. Alvar could give his architectural visions full play, knowing that Aino would bring them down to earth again.³⁶

This description is probably valid for many architect couples, including the less renowned ones. In the case of Wenche and Jens Selmer, however, both were down-to-earth and practical in their own way. Jens Selmer was more of a technical person who was known for his cunning detail solutions, while Wenche Selmer was more of a social person; Jens Selmer leaned toward a stricter form of architecture, and Wenche Selmer toward a more open one. Her architecture shows great sensitivity and skill without being pioneering. This quality is something she shared with women painters at the end of the nineteenth century, as Anne Wichstrøm describes in her book *Kvinneliv, kunstnerliv*.³⁷

Nevertheless, it is interesting, and not unusual, that all architects Selmer named as being the most important to her, in a questionnaire for the Norwegian Artist's Encyclopedia in 1981, are men: Arnstein Arneberg, who supported the students in the foundation of the Oslo School of Architecture; Knut Knutsen as a teacher and professional idol; Jens Selmer as a professional partner and husband, as well as Frank Lloyd Wright, Sigurd Lewerentz, and Alvar Aalto.

Out of the Shadows

Her choice of working from home contributed to the fact that Selmer was regarded as being somewhat in her husband's shadow professionally speaking. When the jury for the Timber Award announced that Jens Selmer had received the award, Wenche Selmer had to tell them that she herself had designed some of the houses for which her husband was given the award, and others they had designed together. This clearly shows that prejudice was still widespread in the architectural circles as late as almost 1970. In the end the couple received the award together.

While Jens Selmer in his practice with Preben Krag, and before then, had been responsible for the design of nearly five thousand dwellings, Wenche Selmer worked on only between two and five relatively small houses a year. With her husband's income, there was no pressing need for her to earn a large amount of money, so she spent a lot of time on her projects. Selmer used to joke that she was a

SELMER AS A TEACHER

“luxury architect” because she had the opportunity to work so thoroughly and consciously on her designs. She had a great supply of commissions and could choose to take on the ones that interested her and turn down others.

Selmer’s practice was independent. Yet she put Jens Selmer’s name next to her own on many of the drawings for which she had sole responsibility. In 1980 she said in an interview with *Byggekunst* magazine that she and her husband regarded themselves as independent individuals, also concerning their work, and argued that all women, in light of feminism, should put their names on what they actually execute. Still, this must have been a sensitive and difficult issue for her. The solidarity of marriage and the fact that she perceived her husband to be her most vital support may have led her to make this concession. From the early 1980s, Jens Selmer suffered a long-term illness that caused him to give up his office in town. He regained strength, but gradually became weaker with age, while Wenche Selmer was still very strong. While she was teaching at the Oslo School of Architecture, he did most of the housework. The fact that Selmer put his name on her own drawings can be seen as a sign of a generation’s culture, and of her love and generosity in light of the strong connection between her practice and their joint home.

In 1976 Selmer was hired as assistant professor at the Oslo School of Architecture, first as a substitute, then in a permanent position as associate professor. She was deeply committed to teaching but at the same time continued to run her practice.

The subject area Selmer was assigned to was Building 1, which at the time was led by Professor Per Cappelen, who also belonged to the Knutsen school. When Cappelen died suddenly at the turn of 1978–79, Selmer was given responsibility for the classes until a new professor was employed. Her team also included Associate Professor Knut Støre and a young architect, Harald Marrable, who was hired as a part-time teacher. Both supported Selmer, who immediately showed her competence with an obvious and kind authority.

Building 1 was the basic class in architectural design for the first-year students in the spring semester, with additional optional classes for advanced students in the fall semester. These were so-called studio classes where students received project assignments on which they worked for the entire semester. Selmer offered two types of studio classes that ran every other fall: one course was called “Detailed Design of a Small House” and the other “Intensive Design Work.” In “Detailed Design” the students were given the opportunity to thoroughly design a small house from the first sketch to construction drawings with schemes and detailing. The other class was complementary: students were trained in working on numerous tasks, making decisions, and concretizing several projects at a fast pace.

Selmer’s teaching method was immediate and direct, which made her guidance and critiques anything but general and categorical. She took her students and their opinions and feelings seriously and was never condescending or judgmental. At the same time she made clear what she did not like.

Her teaching was closely tied to her practice. In her lectures, Selmer usually showed her own buildings in drawings and photographs. Especially her own house on Trosterudstien functioned as an educational tool and example, illustrating many themes, from the relationship to the site and the use of individual rooms to the details in sliding door and window fittings. In addition to her own work she referred to Knut Knutsen’s and Sverre Fehn’s architecture, among others.

Selmer was especially praised for her “proofing,” in other words the guidance she provided individual students when confronted with their ideas and



Selmer prepares a lecture

sketches at the drawing table. Here she was unsurpassed. A former student stated that she was good at everything: she was an expert in situating the building, finding qualities in the surroundings and recognizing how they could add to the interiors; she had a fresh and modern view of floor plans; and she was good at designing openings and lighting, not to mention dimensions and details. Her judgment and competence concerning technical questions were undisputed, and a series of her solutions and details have been incorporated in the fundamental vocabulary of the work of other architects. In this way, some of her window details, sliding doors, interior furnishing, and surface treatments have remained as prototypes. There was an educational power in the skilled inventiveness these solutions represented; Selmer did not hesitate to question the quality and justification of standard products and often developed new solutions herself. She was both an uncompromising perfectionist and a pragmatic, and these two qualities contributed to the energy present in her lessons.

Selmer's primary professional interest was not to continue a "Norwegian" tradition, as her former students Jan Olav Jensen and Carl-Viggo Hølmebakk wrote in 1998: "She viewed building as a change in people's living conditions—something one should deal with responsibly and with the utmost consideration. Her professional commitment stretched far beyond what she, as an architect, had the opportunity to implement."³⁸

This broad involvement was clearly visible in her positive and constructive attitude toward student projects, which could take completely different architectural directions than her own architecture. It says a lot about Selmer's competence as a teacher that some of her classes had the largest amount of applicants in the school, with over sixty applications for thirty places.

The Price of Modesty

After having led the studio classes with great success, Selmer applied for the vacant position of professor in Building 1. She had great doubts, because she knew that she would be competing with many renowned professionals, mostly men who had large offices with many employees and could display a long list of merits. In the expert evaluation, she was assessed competent for the position, but was not included in the final three who were nominated. When Selmer died, Hildegunn Munch-Ellingsen, on behalf of the many female students from that time, expressed great regret that she and her fellow students had not intervened to strengthen Selmer's candidacy. She wrote in *Arkitektnytt* magazine that they had failed both Selmer and the feminist cause by not realizing the wrong that had been done, before it was too late.³⁹ During the mid-1970s to mid-1980s, students had great influence in the management of the school, so it is possible that a strong student pressure could have helped Selmer in her application. Their arguments would have been strong: Selmer was just

POSTSCRIPT

as qualified as the other applicants and in addition had proven that she was exceptionally competent when she had taken over Building 1 after Cappelen died. Students therefore already called her “our professor” and maintained that the school had to take care of the female professional role models they had. There were no women professors at the Oslo School of Architecture at that time, and no other female employees on the faculty staff besides Selmer.

Seen from an equal opportunity perspective, Selmer's cause is typical. She suffered on account of her modesty, a quality that is still more widespread among women than men in working life. She also experienced how quantity, the volume of work, can dominate over other qualities that can be equally valuable in educational contexts. Selmer had chosen a small and personal practice at home in order to combine professional life with family life instead of a large office with colleagues and employees whose combined work effort naturally resulted in a more impressive oeuvre.

After a round of trial lectures by the nominated candidates, architect Bengt Espen Knutsen, Knut Knutsen's son, was employed as professor. Selmer continued her work as associate professor and remained highly regarded by her students. Jan Olav Jensen's and Carl-Viggo Hølmebakk's words in *Arkitektnytt* magazine shall conclude this description of the educator Selmer: “During the period Wenche Selmer was subject area manager in Building 1, she was to us—next to Sverre Fehn and Christian Norberg-Schulz—one of the three undisputed professional authorities of the school.”⁴⁰

Selmer retired from the Oslo School of Architecture in the spring of 1988 and continued with her practice at home. She received commissions from new clients as well as old ones who wanted extensions or renovations for their cabins and houses. Her work occupied her until the very end. Jens Selmer, who gave up his office in 1984, also had a drawing table at home and participated in some of the projects. But his health deteriorated over time, and he died in August 1995. At this time, Selmer had already received her first cancer diagnosis. The illness was initially cured, but the doctors warned that it could start again. When it did so during the winter of 1998, Selmer refused treatment and died on May 30, 1998, in her home on Trosterudstien.

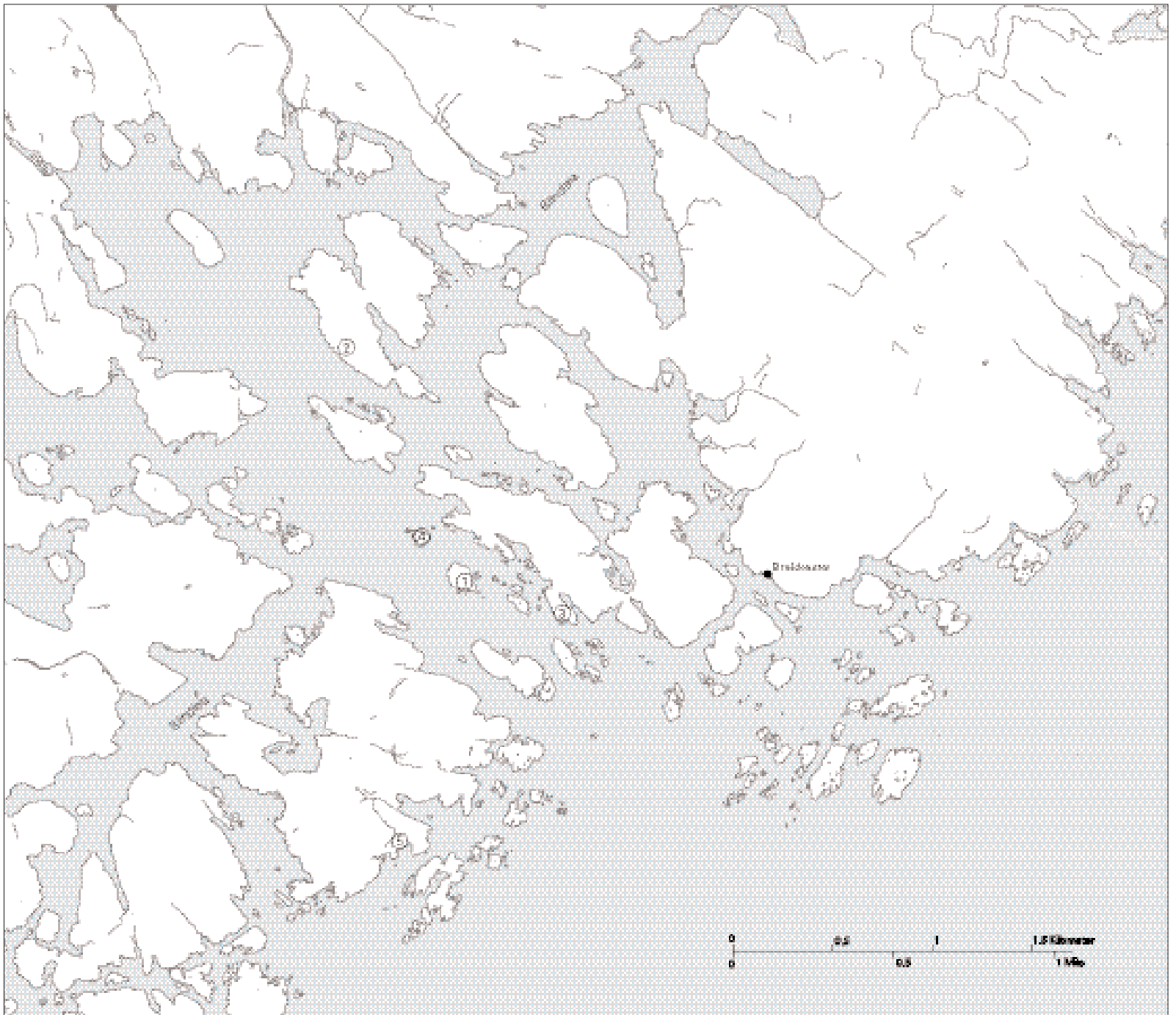
During her entire life, Selmer was fond of the outdoors and kept herself in good shape. Even during the later stages of her life she took part in skiing trips in Rondane and went on long walks almost daily. She also was an active participant in “Grandmothers Against Nuclear Weapons,” an activist group that was founded in 1983 by a handful of women with the aim of spreading information about the life-threatening consequences of the atomic age. The group consists of around fifty grandmothers, all of them women who had been active in various fields of society. Their brochure states that all members have experienced several wars, and most of them have extensive knowledge of peace work. Every Wednesday at noon—during Stortinget's (the Norwegian Parliament's) question hour, twenty to thirty members meet in front of the parliament building and hand out leaflets. Besides taking an active part in these meetings, Selmer was also involved in the design and production of information material.⁴¹

In addition, Selmer participated in the GAG, the Old Architects Group, which gathers every fortnight in the offices of the NAL. Jens Selmer had joined GAG before Wenche Selmer did; they subsequently attended the meetings together for a couple of years, and Wenche Selmer was among the most enthusiastic up until the very end.⁴²

A photograph showing a wooden dock made of parallel planks extending from a rocky shore into a body of water. In the foreground, a large, layered rock formation with horizontal strata is visible. The text "Selected Buildings" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Selected Buildings





- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|----|--------------------------------|
| 1 | On a Solitary Islet | 8 | In the Mountains |
| 2 | On the Hillside | 9 | Behind a Spruce Hedge |
| 3 | At the Mouth of the Sea | 10 | By the Moose Trail |
| 4 | On Another Small Islet | 11 | House with Photo Atelier |
| 5 | In a Harbor with Old Houses | 12 | Twin Houses |
| 6 | On a Pine Hill with a View | 13 | In a Garden with a Steep Slope |
| 7 | In the Woods | 14 | A Loft in Moss |



On a Solitary Islet

SELMER'S SUMMERHOUSE ON BELTESHOLMEN,
1957



Scale 1:200

Before they built their own summerhouse on Beltesholmen, Wenche and Jens Selmer had spent several summers on Kraksøya near Blindleia (the inner shipping lane). This had given them the opportunity to search the *skjærgård* for a site for their own summer residence. Beltesholmen, with its smooth reefs and small creeks, its *svaberg* and moors, and, further up from the sea, cultivable soil, is the equivalent of every *skjærgård*-lover's dream. Sheep-grazing had kept the vegetation low, but there were some pine and rowan trees, and a large old alder tree as well as heather, honeysuckle, and briar. The islet is situated in the middle of the mouth of the fjord, between Hellersøya and Åkerøya, between the inner and the outer shipping lane with a view toward the open sea.

The building method was more or less adapted to the capacity of the local carpenter and to the building customs of the area. The financial resources also set limitations. Selmer's initial idea was for a house of 13.1 by 26.25 feet, but in order to avoid any blasting on the site, she settled on a smaller house of 13.8 by 24.3 feet. The construction took three weeks and took place in the middle of the spring farming, with the carpenter farming his smallholding during the day and building during the night and on rainy days.

The cabin, which looks like one of the local fishermen's houses, as if it has always been there, is sited some distance away from the sea, in a hollow—a marsh that had to be drained—next to the alder tree. A storage shed with a lean-to roof that slopes down

from the gable wall in the northeast is adapted to the cliff at the bottom, anchoring the house to the ground and connecting it to the landscape.

The facade facing the sea seems closed from the outside, but through the strategic placement of windows the interior becomes bright and open inside; it is possible to look from the interior yard straight through the house to the sea on the other side. The floor plan, which is simple and elementary, was, according to Selmer's son Espen, inspired by the small hut the family had rented in Krokskogen for many years and where they had spent many weekends and vacations. Living in primitive conditions in the hut as well as spending time in Jens Selmer's Colin Archer sailing smack had made the couple realize what was really necessary and what they could do without.

A spacious entrance hall was used to store outerwear, boots, life jackets, bathrobes, fishing equipment, and other tools. Under the staircase to the loft, where in similar cabins the refrigerator is located, Selmer placed a closet for tools, while the fridge was in the loft. This was simply because the tools were used more often than the fridge in the Selmer family. A small pantry beneath the entrance hall, accessed through a trapdoor in the floor, provided room for potatoes, vegetables, and cold beverages.

The key quality of the cabin lies in how its interior is shaped for combined use, allowing a minimum amount of furnishing. The drop-leaf table is big enough to seat eight to twelve people for a meal or

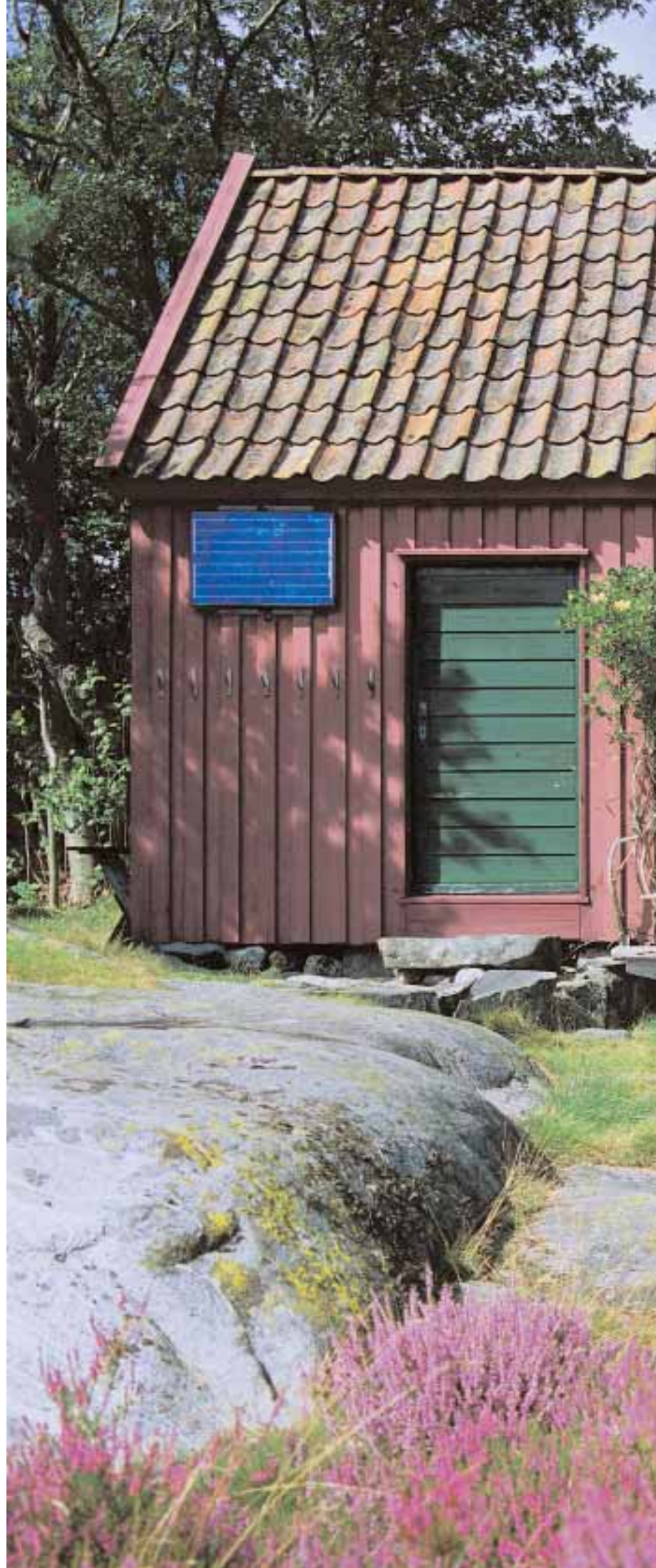
can be used to play board games. A wide thirteen-foot-long sofa bench provides sleeping space for two people and also functions as a place to curl up on with some reading material during the day. In the corner by the glass door, Selmer used to place an outdoor table with a drawing-top and tracer, so that she could sit on the sofa and work on her local architectural commissions. The light and warmth from the fireplace reaches through the entire room. Situated between the kitchen and the living room, it has a wood oven on the kitchen side that is connected to the same chimney. Hidden in the wall between the living room and the entrance hall is a sliding door that can be used to separate the living area from the kitchen.

The opening between Håholmene and Meholmen is the focus of the landscape. The vegetation was kept low between the house and the sea so that the opening would be visible from the sofa bench in the living room and from the dining table, where a pair of binoculars was kept readily available. Regattas, large ships, and sailing boats passed through the opening as well as the daily ferry, *Øya*, which helped the family keep track of time.

The design of the kitchen, with a window over the work top and a glass door leading outside, gives the entire space a sense of dimension, providing light from several angles and a view of different aspects of the site. It is outfitted with shelves instead of cabinets, just as was the hut in Krokskogen. In general, shelves are used in the house to give more air to the rooms. The only two cabinets are the food cabinet in the kitchen and the tool cabinet, both located under the staircase. Drawers underneath the bench bed provide storage space for linen and wool blankets.

The materials, vertical pine paneling on the walls and pine wood in the ceiling, give a warm and serene tone to the interior. The pine beams that carry the loft floor are the only form of ornamentation, a sort of pronounced spatial and structural articulation that results in a play of light and shadow. The window and door frames and moldings are left untreated, in keeping with the rest of the interior woodwork. The floor was treated with a mixture of oil and turpentine, with a tint of umbra, which resulted in a dark brown color.

On the second floor—the loft—are two bedrooms, one at each gable end, with storage space in between. The staircase is steep but solid with a thick rope alongside the wall to hold on to. A washbasin can be carried to the table in front of the bedroom window, where it is possible to stand undisturbed and





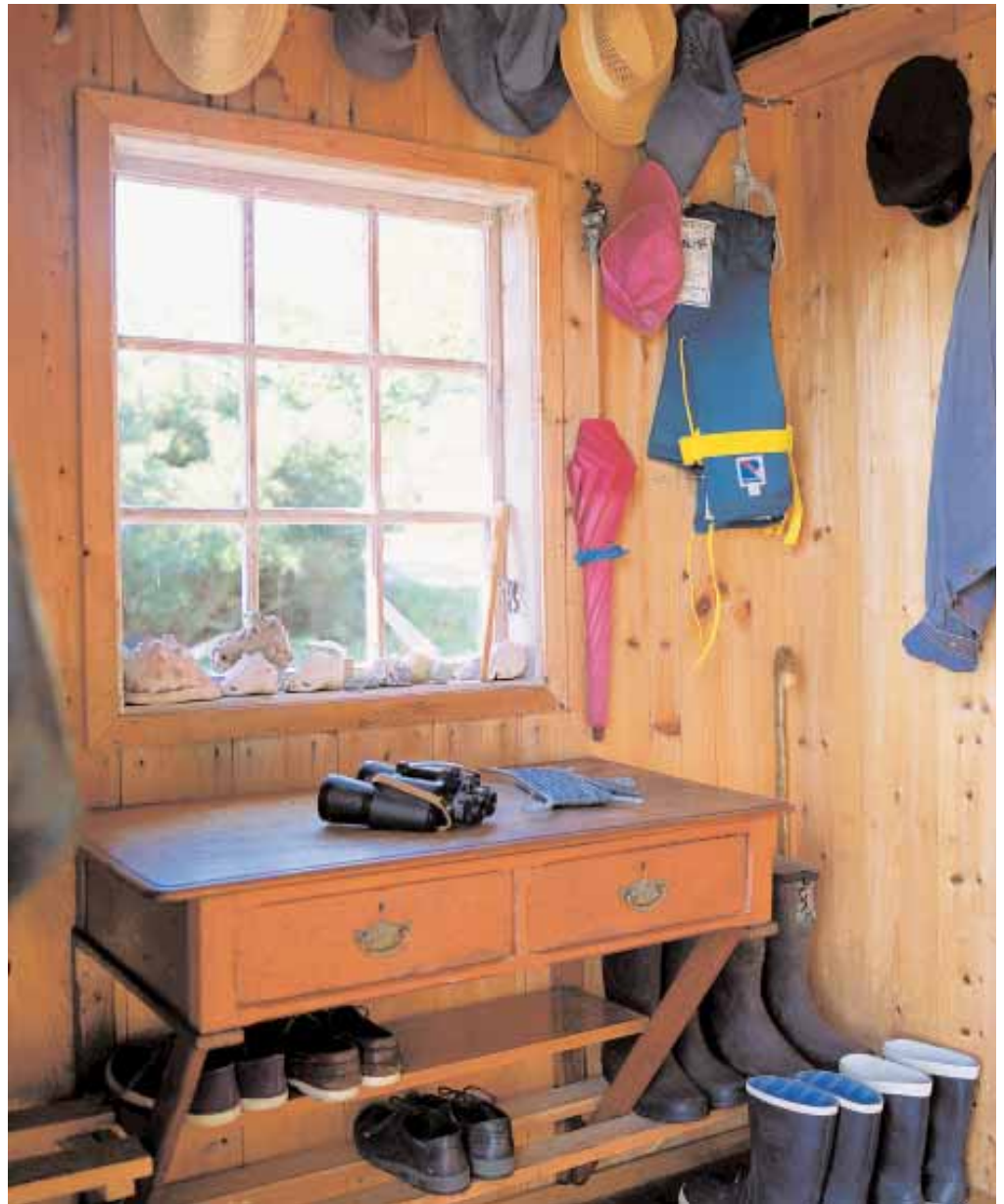


enjoy the view. There was also a so-called "curiosity" in the kitchen; a cabinet from a ship's cabin with a porcelain sink that could be folded down for use. Usually, children and guests slept in the bedrooms upstairs, while the hosts used the broad sofa bench in the living room. When there were not enough beds for all guests, a tent was put up in the garden.

In such a small house, the connection to the outdoors is essential. With doors on three sides of the cabin, it is always possible to use one that is sheltered from the wind. Breakfast and lunch can be served outside at a long table standing in front of a sunny wall facing the sea. This spot, with its easy access to the tools in the shed, was also used for different carpentry work.

In the afternoon, the sun shines on the lawn on the land-facing side of the house, where the *svaberg* slopes slightly downward and the alder tree protects against the prevailing southwesterly wind. Here the glass doors to the living room can be opened, and one can sit in the door opening or in the deck chairs that are stored on hooks on the exterior wall. An almost invisible path leads down past the well toward the "pit," a piece of land further in on the islet, where the family grew potatoes, onions, carrots, lettuce, and other vegetables, as well as dill, chives, strawberries, red-currants, black-currants, and raspberries.

Besides gardening, the Selmers enjoyed many other outdoor activities. Boats are an obvious part of life on an islet. For many years, the family's only boat was a small sailing boat, in addition to a small rowboat with two pairs of oars. After twenty summers on the







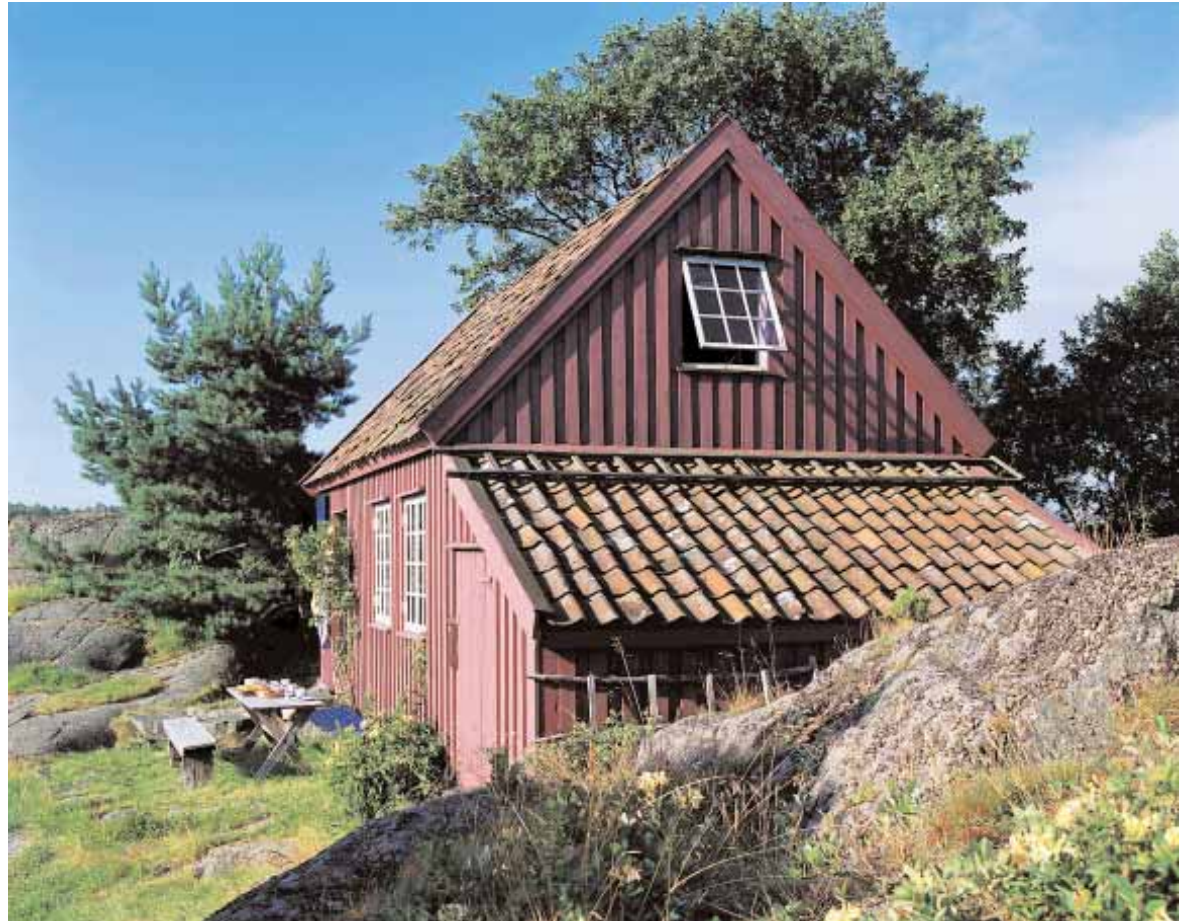
island, the Selmers replaced the sailing boat with a small offshore sailing boat with a motor, which they used to travel to and from Oslo, a voyage of some 180 miles. In the summer, it was tied to a buoy outside the cove. The family's favorite boat was the new rowboat, a sixteen-foot tarred wooden fishing boat with two pairs of rowlocks. With two oarsmen, it easily glides through the water and can endure quite heavy seas. Besides these boats, two kayaks were used to get around and explore the surroundings. In later years, a ten-foot plastic dinghy with a small outboard motor was also available. Wenche and Jens Selmer were renowned for rowing in all kinds of weather. The southwesterly winds are rough on the islet, and since the house is not insulated, it can only be used during the summer.











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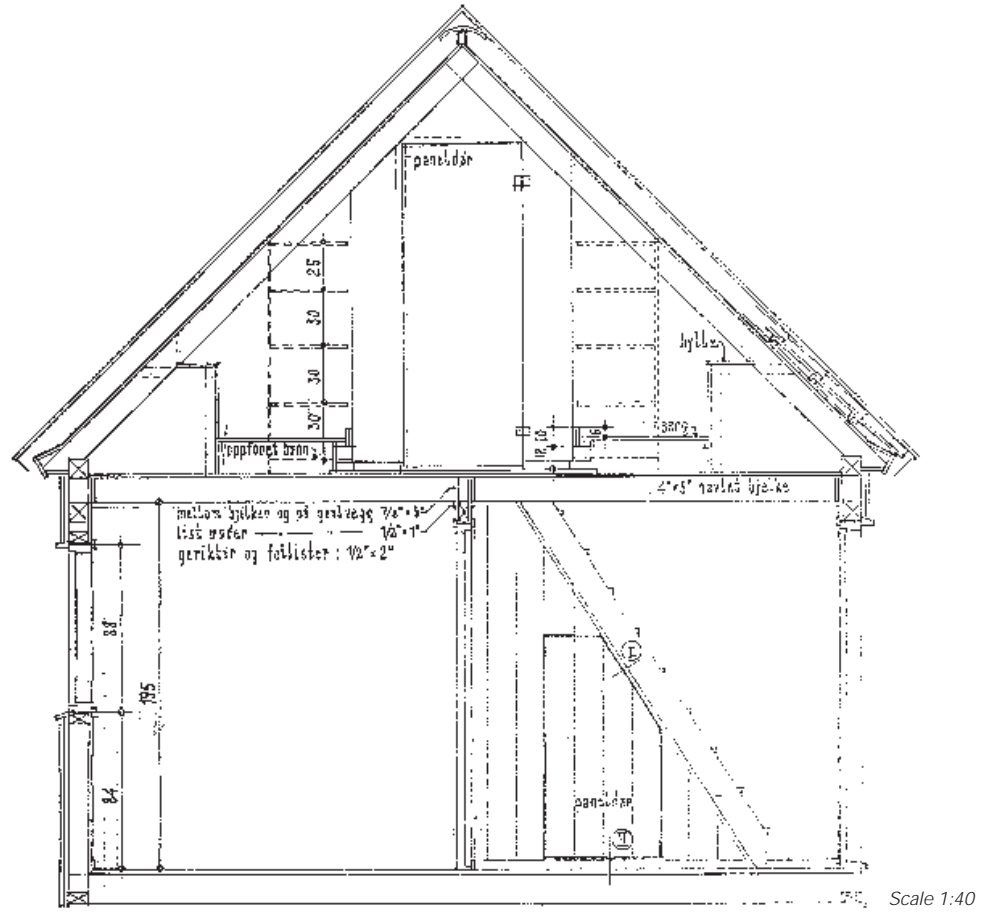




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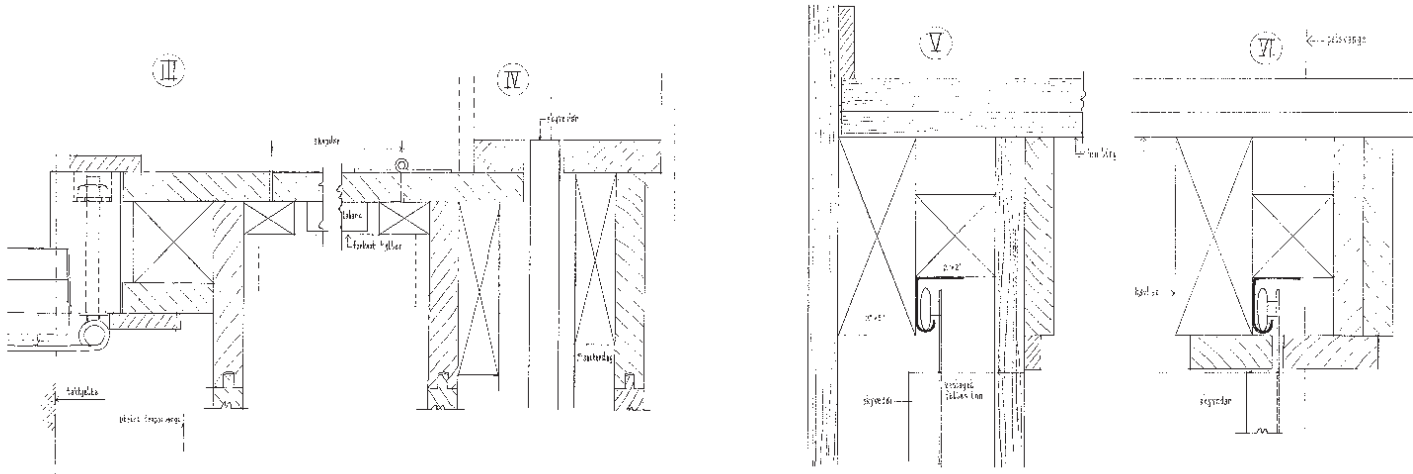




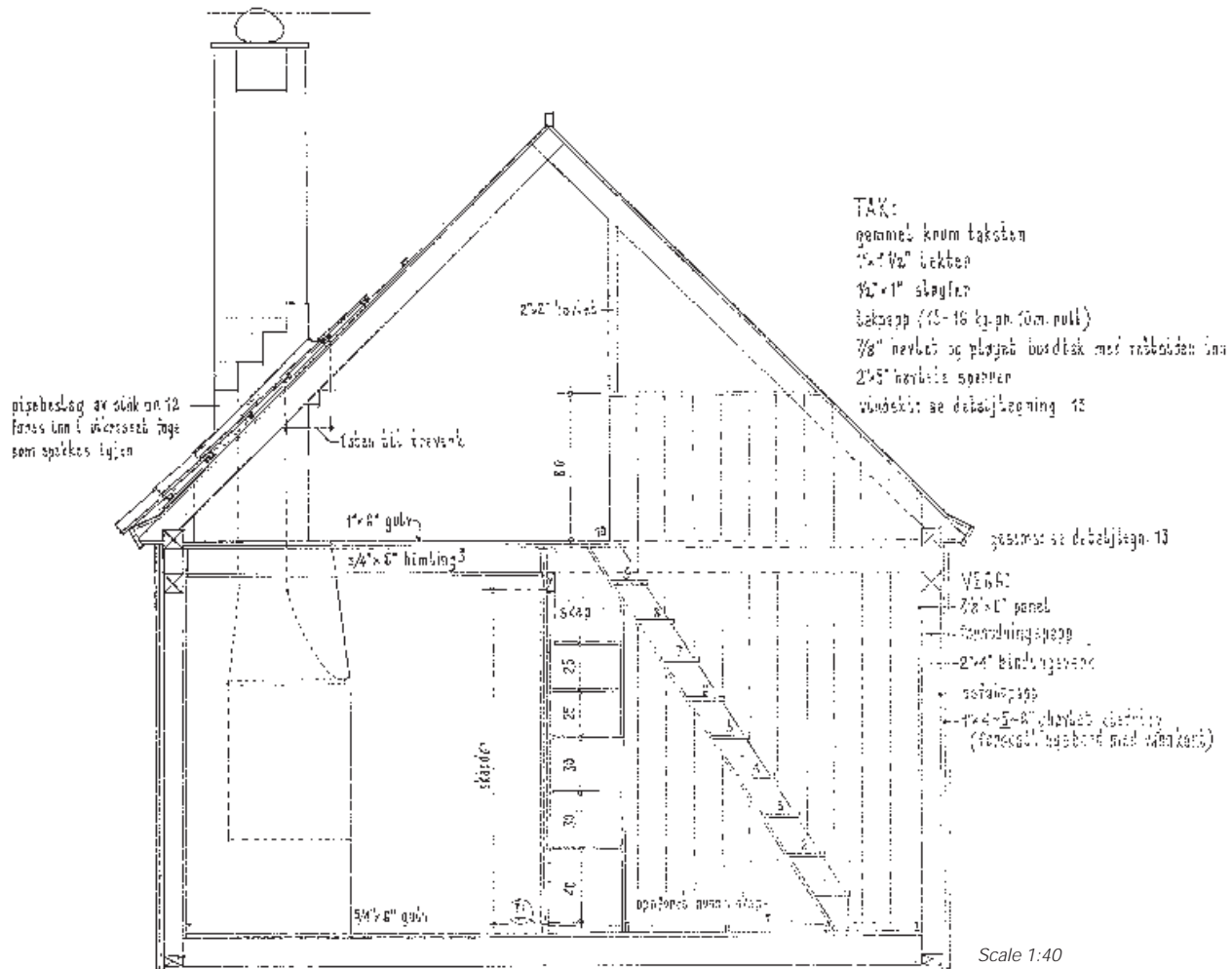


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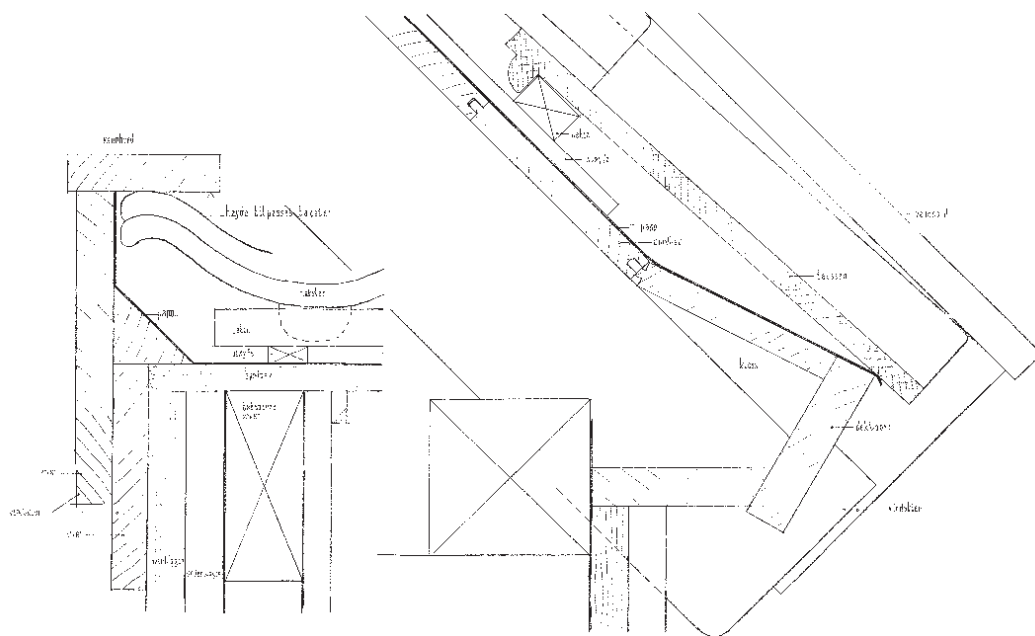
Scale 1:40



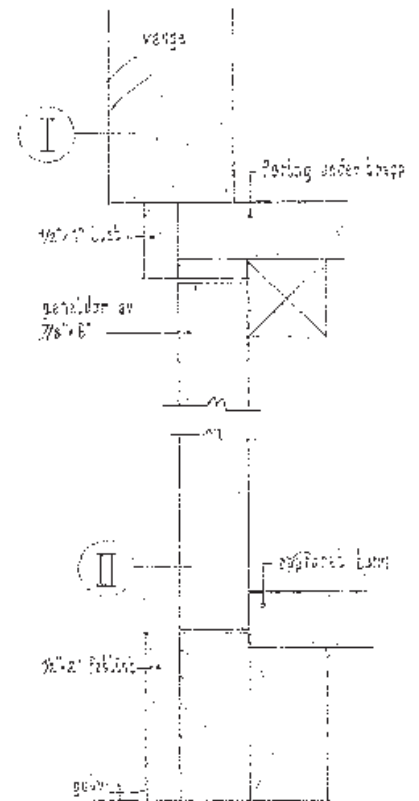
Details, kitchen: door, cupboard, sliding door (horizontal and vertical). Scale 1:5



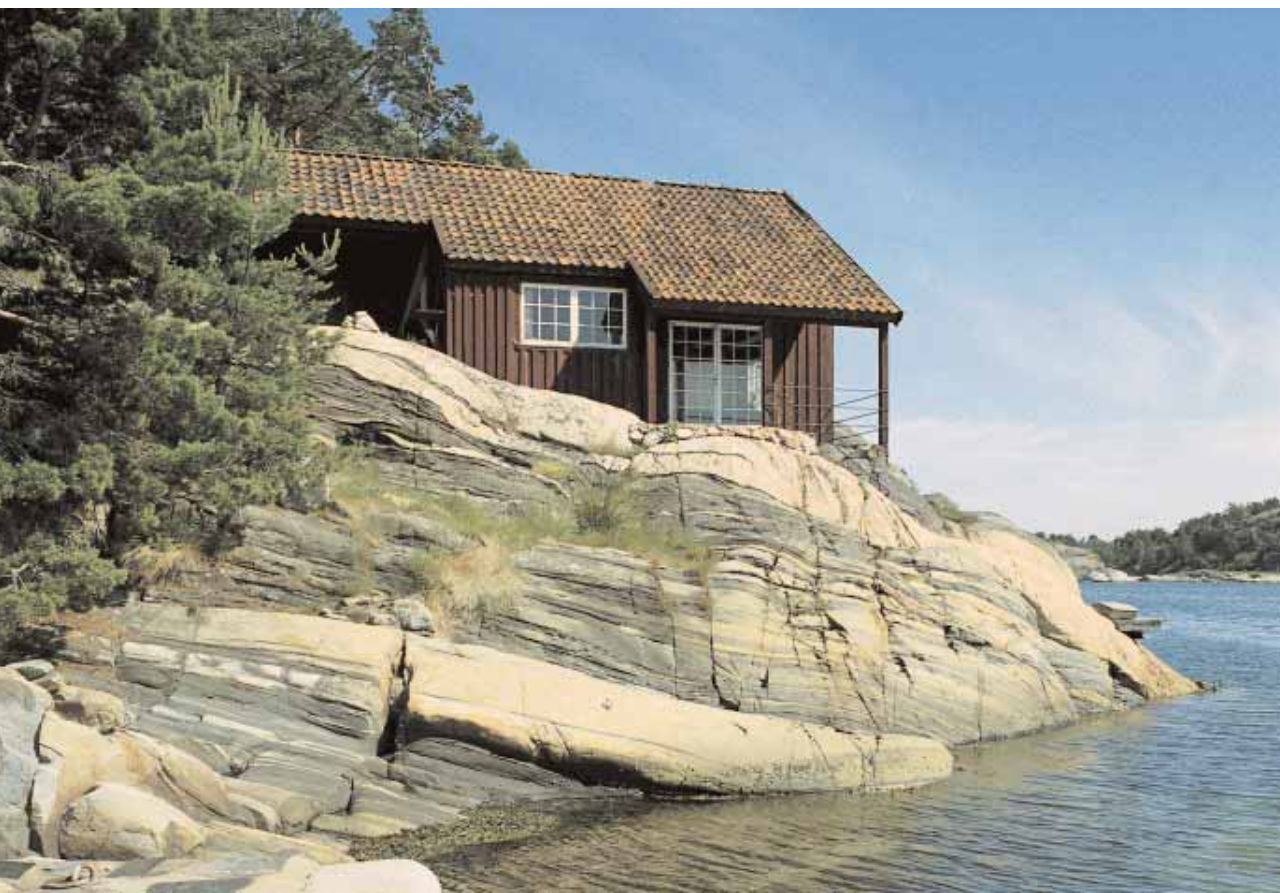
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Cornice details. Scale 1:5



Details (vertical) of tool cupboard by stairs. Scale 1:2.5



On the Hillside

A SUMMERHOUSE FOR THE AARNÆS FAMILY, FJELLDALSØYA, 1960–62



Scale 1:200

The island on which Selmer built a summerhouse for the Aarnæs family is named Fjellaldalsøya (mountain-valley island), and rightfully so. On the west side of the island the ground falls steeply toward the sea. A two-and-a-half-acre site stretches from the sea up a steep hill and into a pine forest. Originally, Selmer planned to locate the house high up among the trees, but after she conducted a survey with the client and friends, they decided that the best place for the cabin was down on the *svaberg*, only a few feet from the sea. Here, a foundation wall was built for the house—a solid “shelf” on the mountain that could withstand the fall storms. The cabin’s rooms rise two levels in accordance with the sloping ground. The ridge of the roof stretches continually along the entire length of the house and is placed high enough to provide space above the living room for a loft bedroom with a window facing the sea.

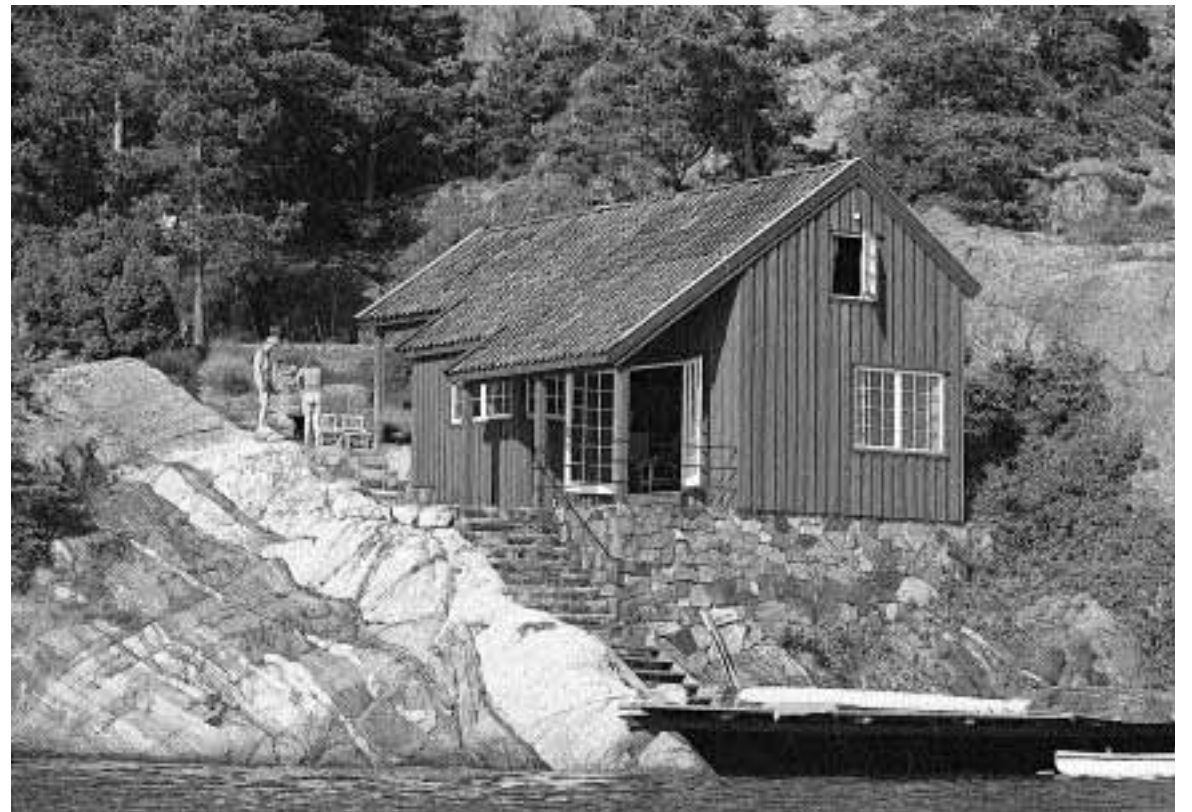
The stonework on the terraces and stairs, which was mostly carried out by the client himself, functions in direct connection with the indoor spaces and ties the house beautifully to the rocky site. Other outdoor spaces on the hillside include a barbecue area, seating arrangements with benches and tables, space for firewood, and an outdoor toilet. The forest is thus occupied by human activity, while the site remains dominated by the trees and the heather. A pier in front of the house provides a place to launch a kayak or to sit and enjoy the landscape. A boathouse includes space for tools and a

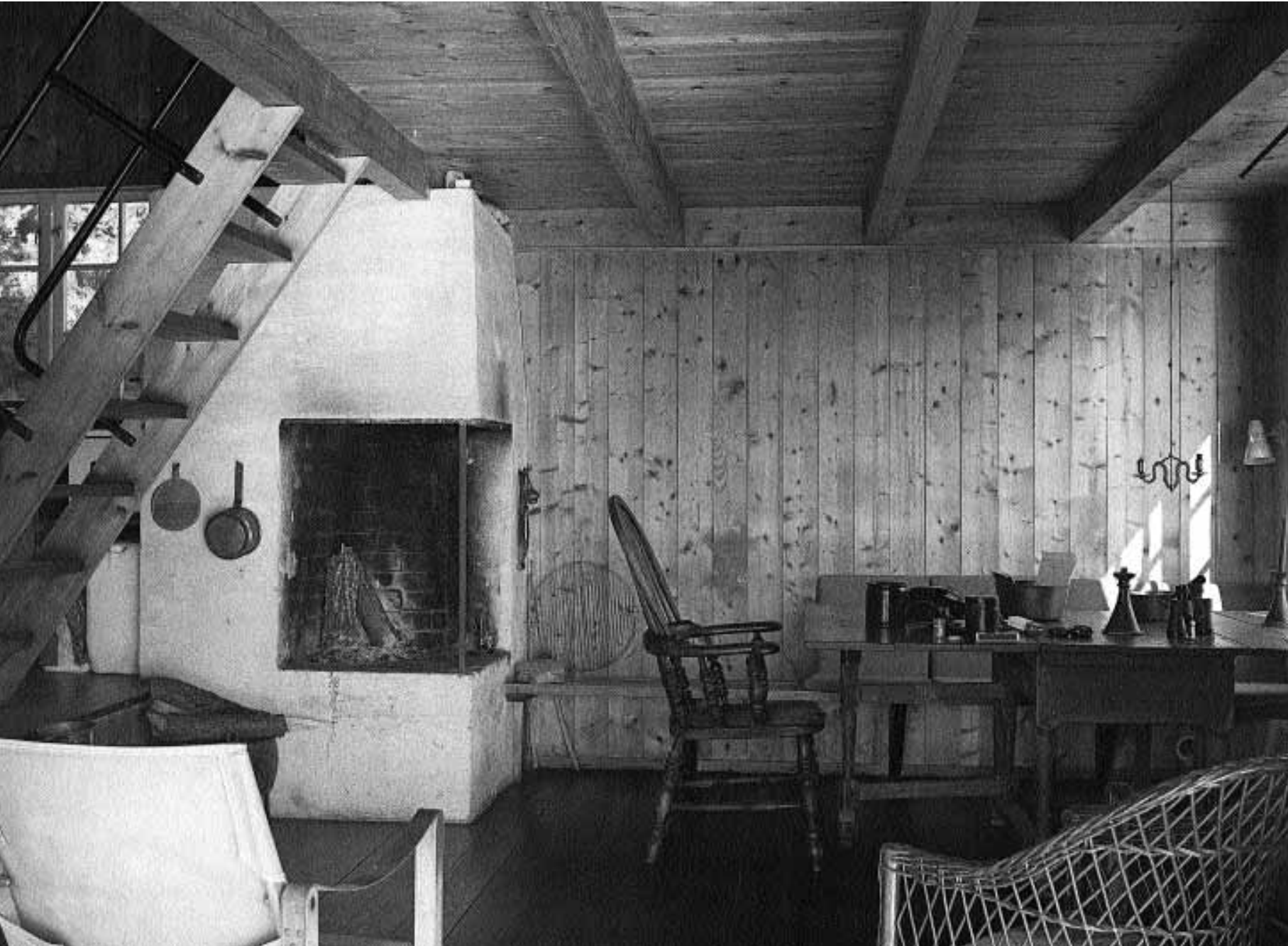
workshop as well as additional sleeping quarters in the attic.

The cabin’s exterior was clearly influenced by local building traditions as is evident in its saddle roof, vertical board-and-batten siding, and its foundation wall of stone, as well as in its dimensions, minimalist details, red roofing tiles, red walls, and white-painted small-paned windows. If examined more closely, qualities that are different from other traditional houses in the south are easily discovered, most notably the brightness and openness of the interiors. This is particularly exciting because the house, with its predominantly solid walls, appears closed from the outside.

Window and door openings are cleverly placed and shaped in accordance with the rooms and the interior furnishing. On the mid-level of the house, a corner window provides light and a view for a seating arrangement with fixed benches and a dining table. The morning sun illuminates the worktop in the kitchen behind the fireplace where the window also provides a splendid view of the honeysuckle-grown rock wall. And the living room, covering 13.5 by 13.5 feet on the lower level, receives light from two sides, south and west. Large, two-leafed glass doors on the west side admit light and look out onto the terrace and the *svaberg*.

On the south side a window is placed asymmetrically in the facade near a sofa bench that stretches along the entire length of the wall. The combination of the window and the table in front of the bench, which





both have a height of about 27.6 inches, seems just right. In a house that almost slides down the *svaberg*, the relatively large table and window seem to balance the room and keep it steady, strengthening the experience of the house's location safely above the water while at the same time infinitely close to the sea.

The cabin's interior is characterized by various refined architectural elements, which together constitute a diverse whole. It is a small house: the entire living space including the kitchen is 13.5 by 20 feet, with an additional three feet for the dining area. The total length, including the three bedrooms, is a little over 32.8 feet. Both the horizontal and vertical dimensions are utilized to provide optimal spaces and room connections. The difference in level between the living room and the kitchen/dining space, three stairs in height, is realized along the whole width of the house so that each floor is visibly separated. The stairs are

made of boards placed on a steel frame, which is fastened to the wall. The staircase up to the bedroom has open steps inserted in a wooden stringboard and a thin banister of steel, so that the stairs appear light and open in the room. From the living room on the lowest level you can see the entire length of the cabin and look out through the glass door to the upper terrace on the north side. This door is placed at the end of the circulation line according to which the different room zones and functions are organized. All outer doors are well protected under the roof.

The house has an unusually uniform architectural character, which is partly a result of the owners' taste. Furniture and objects are chosen with care and are almost austere. This is true not only for the selection and arrangement of benches, tables, and chairs, but also for kitchen equipment such as crockery, bowls, plates, and pans. The plates are stacked on top of old



Dutch jars, for example, in a both practical and aesthetic manner. This consideration for details is also evident in the colors and the choice of fabrics in cushions and chairs. The walls of untreated pine paneling are left bare, without pictures or other items. The floors are treated with linseed oil according to Selmer's recipe and have a dark brown shade.

This house has a unique character, a kind of gentle vividness, which is expressed through the spatial arrangements in accordance with the drama of the site. The dynamic of the landscape is echoed in the interplay between the wall face, which moves in and out in proportion to the eaves, and the varied floor levels inside and out. Combining opposites such as high and low, and open and closed in its experience, the cabin complements the site. In this context, it is also worth noting a small element, namely a built-in outdoor cabinet for tools and equipment that is inserted in the building volume. It is almost invisible, with a door merging with the board-and-batten siding on the exterior wall facing the stone stairs. The baylike volume that holds the dining space is extended in width to

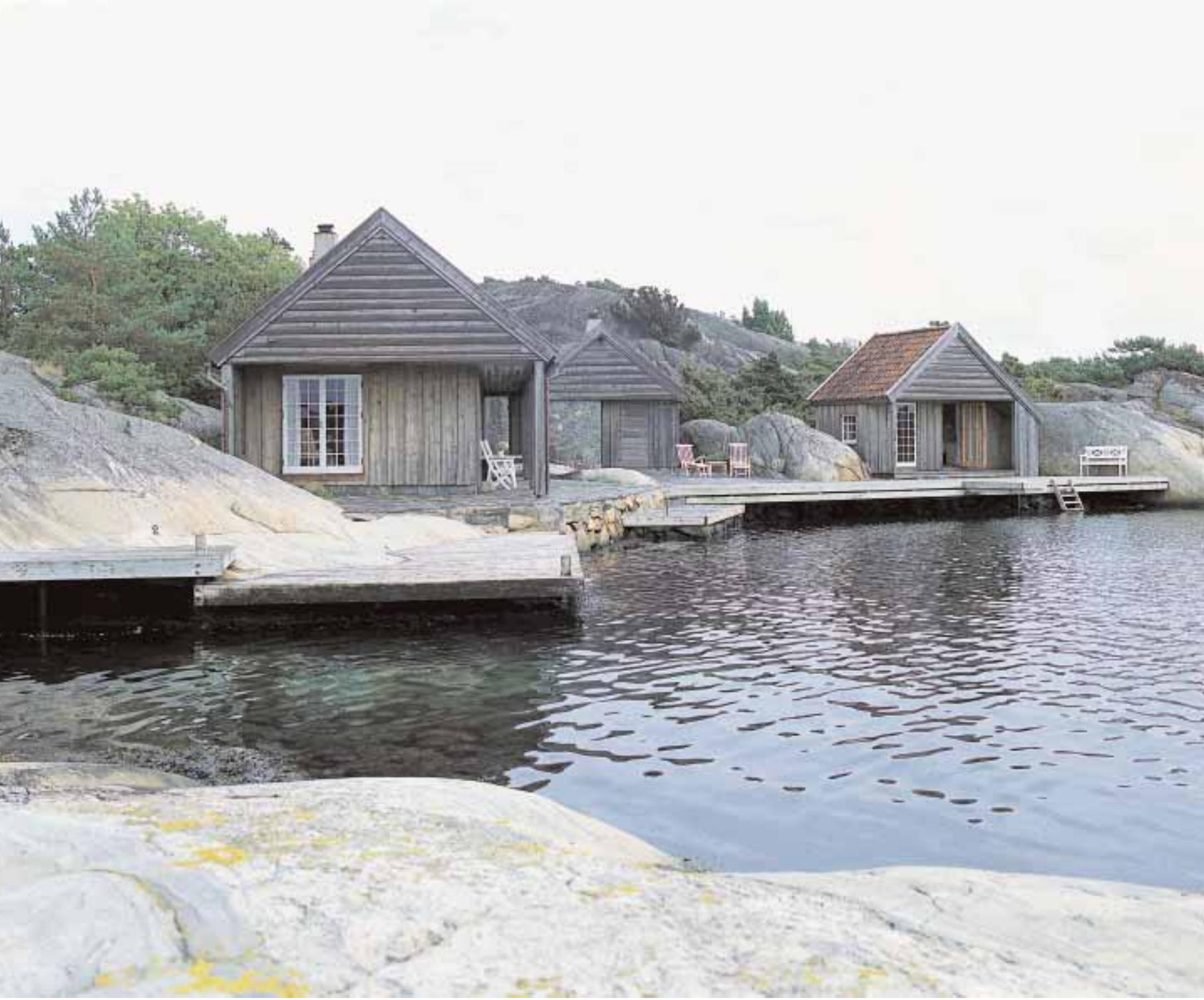
include the closet under the length of the eaves. This arrangement thus provides rhythm to the unified shape of the cabin.





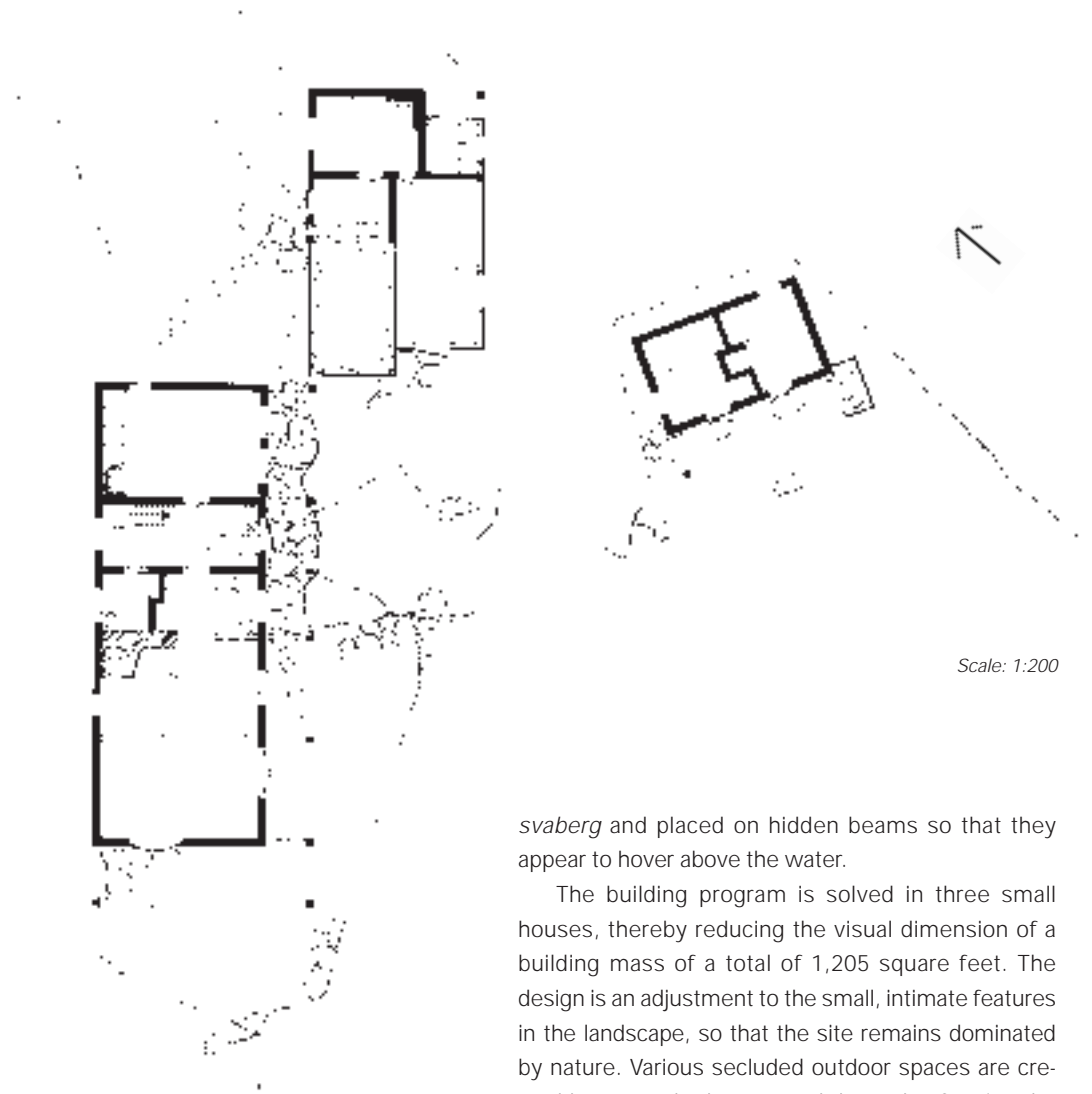






At the Mouth of the Sea

KISTEGLAD, A SUMMERHOUSE
ON HELLERSØYA, 1965



Scale: 1:200

Hidden behind the *svaberg* at the far end of Hellersøya is a small group of houses. Weathered and gray like the rocks that surround them, they stand as a welcoming committee in the *skjærgård*, a pleasant sign of human presence in the rugged landscape.

When Selmer received this commission, a small red cabin stood where the main house stands today; its asymmetrical gable is repeated in the new house furthest to the east. When rot and carpenter ants became a serious problem, the cabin was torn down, renovated, and relocated, thereby providing an empty site to build on. The client decided to build several low-lying houses—a summerhouse, a sauna, and a guesthouse—here to create a small harbor in the idyllic spot. The location was strangely calm, so much so that the resident fishermen used to anchor their boats there during a storm. A paved stone pier between the rocks creates a level plane for the buildings and links them to each other. The wooden docks connected to this pier are custom-made to fit the contours of the

svaberg and placed on hidden beams so that they appear to hover above the water.

The building program is solved in three small houses, thereby reducing the visual dimension of a building mass of a total of 1,205 square feet. The design is an adjustment to the small, intimate features in the landscape, so that the site remains dominated by nature. Various secluded outdoor spaces are created between the houses and the rocks, framing the landscape in a unique way. Some of these spaces are narrow, with just enough room to pass through and to store tools. Others provide seating spaces. Between the cabins and the hills, where an alder grove and a well used to be, there is now a large flagstone-paved yard, which is sunny and sheltered from the wind. This space provides several possibilities for interaction between inside and out in an area where steep rocks and the sea otherwise limit one's mobility. A natural opening in the rock is wide enough for a small path that leads to the sandy bay on the other side of the headland and further into the island.

The main house has a kitchen and a living room on the first floor as well as a small entry hall with a staircase that leads to a bedroom upstairs. Another bedroom on the first floor is also accessed from the entry hall so that the hall creates a welcome separation between the bedrooms and the living room. The out-house originally housed a cistern, storage room, sauna, and a toilet, while the guesthouse provided two bedrooms for visitors. Almost all rooms, which





are quite small in dimension, have windows letting in light from several directions.

Stepping inside the main house, one first notices the hall where the slate flagstones on the floor are a reminder of the stone pier outside. The stairs leading up to the bedroom in the attic are open, and a window provides a view of the hill. The living room and kitchen are 23.3 feet long by 14.1 feet wide, with light coming in from three sides. The tall room with exposed roof trusses also includes a large fireplace and wood oven. Because the house is placed close to the seashore and has relatively small rooms, it appears almost to have been squeezed into the narrow site. The fact that the main room is extended vertically results in spatial harmony; it becomes rich and exciting like a small cathedral.

The original kitchen was custom-designed and built of teak. It was very small and compact, with narrow work tops. The present owner, who took over the place in 1976, needed a larger kitchen with a dishwasher and more shelving and therefore expanded it into the former washing room behind the fireplace. The windows by the kitchen work top and the dining table provide a view of the sea. Two-winged glass doors on the gable side and the long side of the house further open up the room to the pier.

The guest rooms are small and have their own access to the pier. All doors on the sea side are covered by the roof, protecting them and anyone entering or leaving the house against rain and sea spray. This porch thus becomes a transition zone, offering both physical and emotional protection, important in a house that is located so close to the shore.

Electricity and water were installed at a later time, provided from Lillesand and placed in ditches, out of sight. In the 1990s, Selmer was commissioned to do the last changes to the cabins. In the outhouse, the cistern was converted into an extension of the storage room and workshop (used for cooking crabs, among other things), and a summer office was established in what used to be the sauna. A new bathroom with a flush toilet and a shower were also installed. Today the group of buildings is a practical and beautiful summer residence with sleeping accommodations for seven.

The architectural quality of the cabins is exemplified in the gables, which, with their horizontal west-coast siding and lack of windows, convey an atmosphere of both tranquility and tension. The stone wall of the original cistern links the house to its surroundings, and the horizontality of the gables and the arrangement of the buildings along the pier form a strong tie to the horizontal plane of the water. New spatial constellations are constantly created between



the three separate units. The interplay of light and shadow between the roof projections, pillars, and walls vary and give depth to the scene. The transition between inside and out, between the houses and the pier, is realized with siding that ends well above the stone floor and with large rocks that lie in front of the doors, accentuating the connection to the site. The woodwork—rough, pressure-impregnated siding that has remained untreated for thirty-five years—further expresses the profound kinship with the surrounding landscape, with its shimmering silver-gray color and warm and robust appearance.



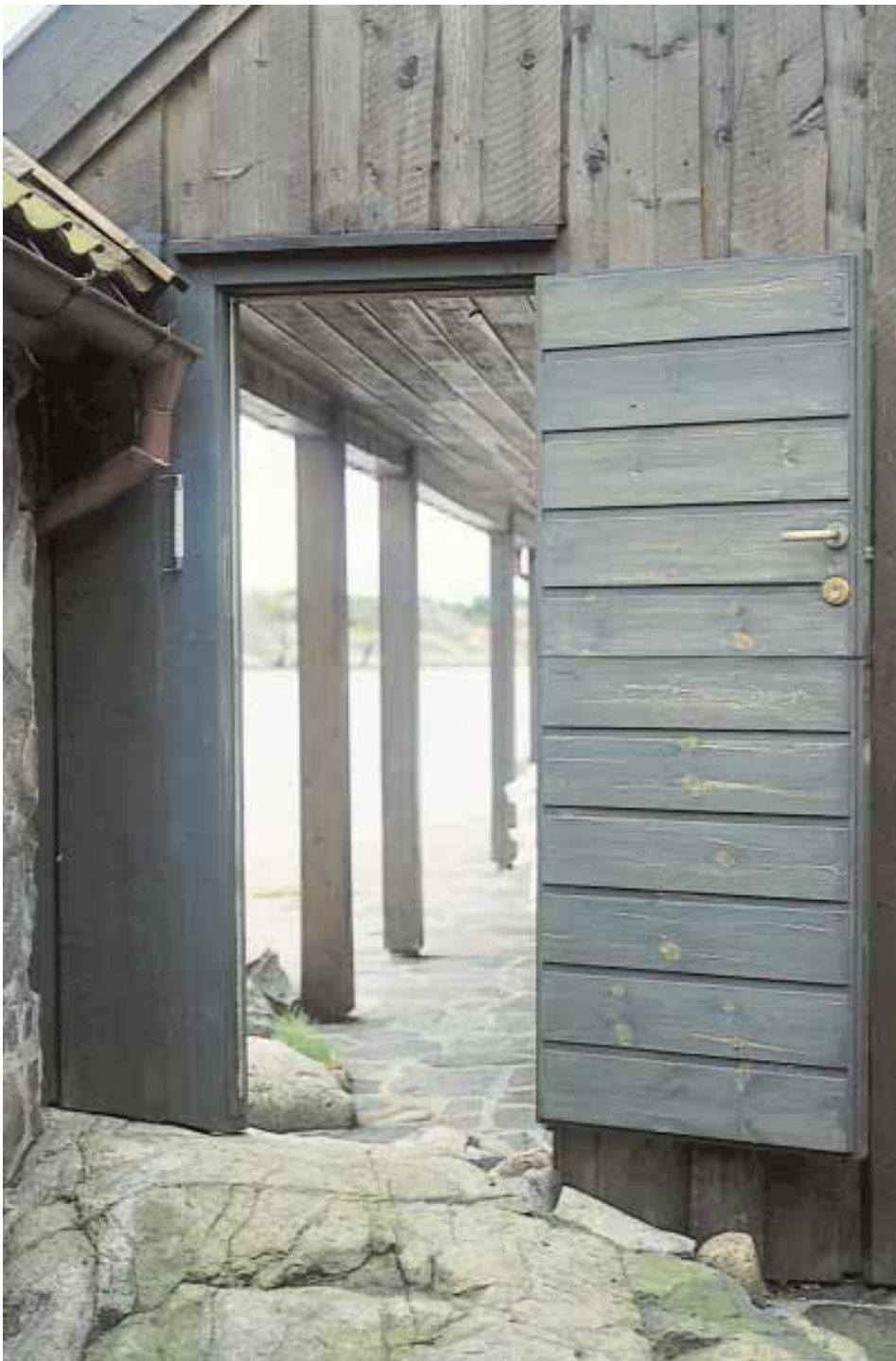








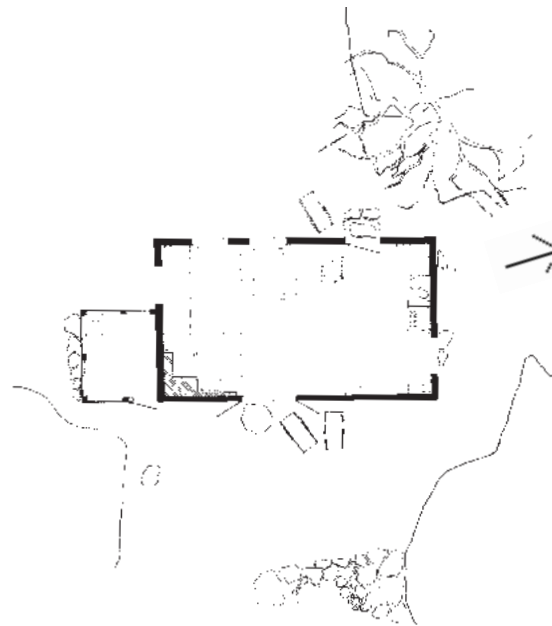






On Another Small Islet

A SUMMERHOUSE ON LILLE
BELTESHOLMEN, 1965



Scale: 1:200

Early in the 1950s, before Wenche and Jens Selmer built on Beltesholmen, they spent summers with Wenche Selmer's older sister, Elisabeth Kloster, on Kraksøya. Her sons, Johan and Robert, both later built their own cabins in the area. Johan Kloster received Lille Beltesholmen, a small islet near Beltesholmen a little further in toward Blindleia, as a gift from his mother, who had bought it several years earlier.

In the first half of the 1960s a new building law was pending, with forecasts of bans against building near the coastline, so Kari and Johan Kloster were eager to build their summer home before the law became valid. Selmer allowed them to borrow the drawings of her own house on Beltesholmen and helped them locate the house on the site. The couple planned on building the cabin themselves, and both their time and finances were limited. They therefore chose an open solution on the first floor—a large room without walls, whose spaces were organized for different activities in an optimal way.

The kitchen area was realized with a work top along one of the gable walls, and the kitchen door present in Selmer's prototype is left out. Apart from this, the greatest change from the house on Beltesholmen is the placement of the fireplace at the far end of the living room. This works well in this cabin because the open staircase in the room

demands empty space around the stairs. If the fireplace had stood right across from the stairs as it does in the prototype, this space would have become too cramped, and the openness of the room would have been impaired.

From the dining area one can see the beach and Blindleia in the west and at the same time have a view of the entire room. Upstairs are two bedrooms with storage space in between. An extension, including a shed and an outhouse lavatory, does not cover the entire gable wall, leaving space for a south-facing window above the seating arrangement near the fireplace. Here, a nook on the outside provides a good spot for sitting in the sun.

The cabin lies on a small plain behind a low hill that shelters it against winds from the south and east. A small bay with a sandy beach is located in front, toward the west. A low boathouse is also placed here, while the pier is located elsewhere on the islet where the water is deep and the wind less strong. The summerhouse is of a quiet nature and resembles a small gem in the surrounding *skjærgård*.





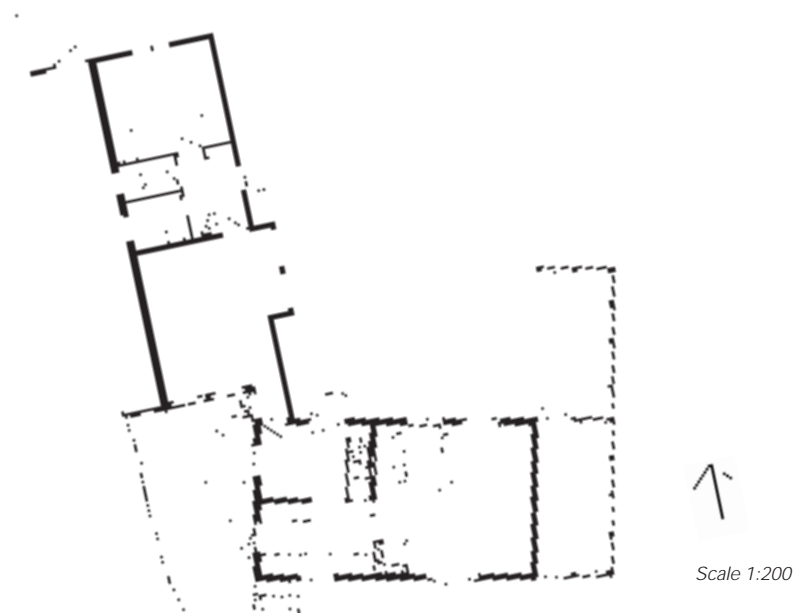






In a Harbor with Old Houses

A SUMMERHOUSE ON ÅKERØYA, 1970



The clients read an article on the Beach House in *Bonytt* magazine and commissioned the Selmers to build a similar house on a site they had inherited on the family's old estate on Åkerøya. When Wenche and Jens Selmer saw the site, located in an old settlement, they decided, however, that a house that was more similar to their own on Beltesholmen would suit the surrounding building environment much better and blend in with the existing architecture. Since the clients had just recently built a single-family house in Oslo, the budget for the cabin was limited. The solution was a mirrored Beltesholmen house, with the addition of a shed that serves as a shelter for an outdoor space on the northeast.

Åkerøya is quite a large island, with around forty permanent residents and some four hundred summer guests in one hundred houses. It has a few footpaths that are accessible from the client's summerhouse but no automobile traffic; the sea is still the most important means of transport. The family shares a pier with a related family, who built another Beltesholmen house just next door. A large crab-pot (a submerged box for the containment of live crabs) is located near the pier, storing the latest catch. This is the place where fishing, swimming, boating, and socializing is a natural part of the day.

The cabin is a typical south-coast house with stone stairs placed in a natural crevice in the hill leading down to the pier. Glass doors in the living room open out to a terrace on the hill, where the view over the outer ship-

ping lane is phenomenal. On the land-facing side of the house, the site is flatter. Here it is warm and sunny, with southern roses growing on the *svaberg* along a path that leads to the mailbox and further on to the paths that are laid out over the island. There are also some cherry trees and other typical trees and bushes as well as strawberries and vegetables.

In 1993 Selmer designed an extension for the cabin with a living room, kitchen area, spacious bedroom, shower, and an indoor biological toilet. The living room looks out to the sea in one direction and to the yard on the other side. The attic houses additional sleeping places for grandchildren and friends. The extension is fully insulated and has heating in the floor because the owners live here for several months at a time. They appreciate these comforts, which also include a bedroom on the main floor.

The extension is located next to the hill in the west, with the roof ridge low enough to allow the afternoon sun to pass over into the yard. Behind a wooden fence and hidden in the gap between the extension and the hill is room for different tools and equipment. Where the extension is connected to the old house, Selmer located a sheltered terrace between the house and the hill on the south side, with a view of the sea. Here, the stairs lead down to the pier, and the main house can be entered through the glass kitchen door.

When entering the house, one is immediately struck by the brightness and openness of the interior,





the result of the careful placement and shape of windows and doors. Although much is similar to Selmer's house on Beltesholmen, the interior has a different character, being lighter and dominated by the colors white and blue, which are repeated in the china, the kitchenware, and the textiles. The pine paneling, with wide vertical boards, is of good quality, resulting in a homogeneous wall surface. On the second floor a skylight in the corridor provides light for the wash basin, which is mounted in a bench closet. Just as in Selmer's house on Beltesholmen there are two bedrooms on this floor.

In the main house the gable facades on the first floor are closed, while the long sides open up to the sea and the yard. The houses that make up the cabin's building environment in Søversvik lie one by one like a string of pearls when viewed from the sea. Both the interior and exterior character of this summer house clearly belong to this place.











On a Pine Hill with a View

A SUMMERHOUSE IN BRUNLANES, 1968



Scale 1:200

The client for this summerhouse in Brunlanes near the town of Larvik was a childhood friend of Selmer's. The site is located in a zoned cabin area, with several cabins situated in rugged topography among large solid rocks, pine trees, junipers, and other vegetation. Eighty cabins in total were built here, with a quarter or half an acre of land each, in addition to a common area. Even though the distance between the cabins is quite small, the layout is such that they are hardly visible from their respective sites. The zoning included regulations stating that the buildings had to have flat roofs and had to be stained in a color that blended in with the natural environment. The site is located a ten- to fifteen-minute walk from the sea and has a fine panoramic view of the fjord and the ocean.

The flat roof was a challenge for Selmer. Apart from the aesthetic consequences, this limitation prevented the design of a bedroom attic, which she normally integrated in her southern cabins. But the architect had for several years worked on flat roofs as part of a formal language, as can be seen in her own house in Gråkammen. In Brunlanes she chose a long rectangular roof, with a slight slope in the longitudinal direction. Large overhangs on the south and north end provide shelter for outdoor spaces. The wooden trellis floors of these covered terraces continue outside the roof and are custom-cut along the rock outcropping in the southwest. A few steps in a narrow passage outside the kitchen compensate for the minor difference in levels between the two ends of the house. The ter-

race on the living room side incorporates complex qualities: the roof, which is carried here by three pillars; a large sliding door that provides access to the living room; a horizontal window next to the sliding door; a sitting nook by the sheltered wall in the east; and the wooden trellis floor, which seems to float above the ground on one side and is adapted to the outcropping rock on the other. This entire transition between the building and the landscape is a masterful articulation, executed by simple means. With the long side facing west, the cabin is sited so that the sun and the view can be enjoyed all day long in various in- and outdoor spaces.

The cabin is small, with a total footage of only 458 square feet, including two bedrooms, a shower, and a toilet. The corridor space is kept at a minimum and forms part of the spatial experience, closed off by glass doors that provide a view of the entire length of the house and the landscape surrounding it on either side. In the center, the house is extended by two projections, one on each side, containing the kitchen and a bedroom behind the fireplace, respectively. In this way, the building mass is kept small in its dimensions, while every room is provided with optimal conditions. The kitchen is an open niche connected to the living space but shielded from passers-by. The bedroom can be closed off if required. These wall projections show an effortless use of the structural system where normal stud walls are combined with pillars and three longitudinal main beams.



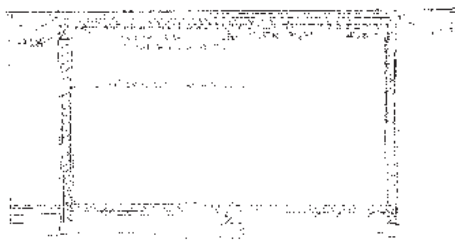
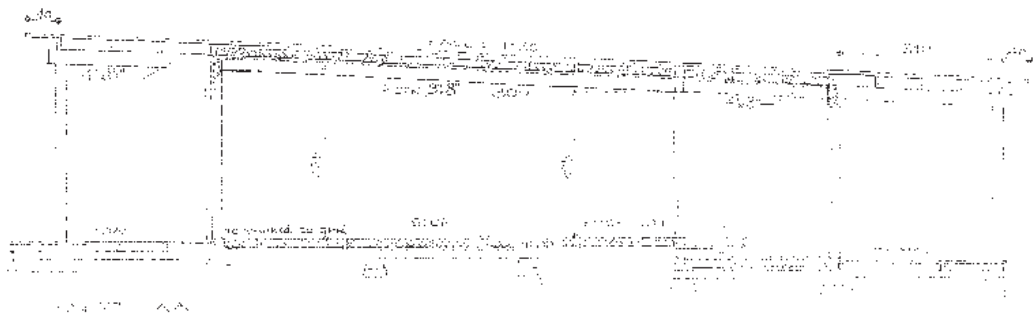
The living room with a dining space, sitting nook, and a fireplace, is only 13.1 by 13.1 feet, about the same dimensions as similar rooms in Selmer's prototype on Beltesholmen. The difference lies in the windows, which in this case direct the focus of the room toward the corner and the end wall near the terrace. They also have a different design and play a different role in the room. Selmer incorporated three different types of windows side by side: a sliding door with 6.6-foot-wide glass panels, horizontal windows placed at dining-table height, and a tall glass section reaching from floor to ceiling with horizontal glazing bars. The latter creates a formal vivacity in the composition. The interplay between proportions and materials and the variation in the light and view provide a special dynamic to the room. The structural elements and details are particularly simple with minimal molding and form a whole with the rest of the interior. The large longitudinal beams are exposed, creating a pattern of shadows on the ceiling. The wall covering is of wide pine boards, and the floor is brown with pine boards that are oil-treated according to Selmer's recipe.

The exterior walls have a board-and-batten siding with upper boards of different widths that are concluded at the top by four-by-eight-inch-thick beams filling the entire thickness of the wall. In the execution, the siding was changed from rough-edged boards as shown in the drawing on page 110. The structural system is clearly articulated through the pillars, the beams, and the rhythm that results from the organization of the plan, visible in the exposed rafters that protrude from under the roof. The covered terraces are an extension of the rooms of the cabin, emphasizing its horizontal character in the landscape, while serving as sunshields and protecting the outdoor furniture and firewood from rain. With strict conditions as a point of departure, Selmer succeeded in creating an emphatic and solid piece of modern architecture.









CHITTT BR

Scale 1:100



In the Woods

A CABIN ON RINGKOLLEN, 1953



Scale: 1:200

The client for this cabin in the woods was another of Selmer's old friends. The family wanted a house for weekend trips and short vacations, a place where they could go skiing, pick berries and mushrooms, and catch crawfish. Unfortunately, the cabin was torn down a few years ago after being sold by the family in the mid-1990s, but the author was fortunate enough to visit the cabin when it was still standing.

The site lies on a pine heath covered in heather near the small lake Røstjern on Ringkollen, north of Oslo. According to Selmer, the plan was tread out in freshly fallen snow, and when the exterior siding was nailed into place, a platform was built around the house to avoid destroying the heather. The shape of the cabin, which lies quite low in the landscape, is extremely simple, with a rectangular saddle roof covered in turf. The roof is three times as long as it is wide, which contributes to the solid expression of the house. The exterior wall is withdrawn under the roof both at one gable end and along a substantial part of the long side, creating a porch with room to sit and to store different items. The large wood shed under the same roof provides storage space for skis, backpacks, and other equipment.

Inside, the combined children's room and hall is ingenious in its own way. In the long bunk beds along the wall—the lowest bed with extra width—children of different sizes can lie feet to feet. The mattresses have a durable covering so the bed can be used as a sofa during the day—a favorite place to sit and read, to

chat, or play games. A wide sliding door separates the space from the kitchen. The wood-heated sauna next to the children's room was frequently used and also functioned as a drying room.

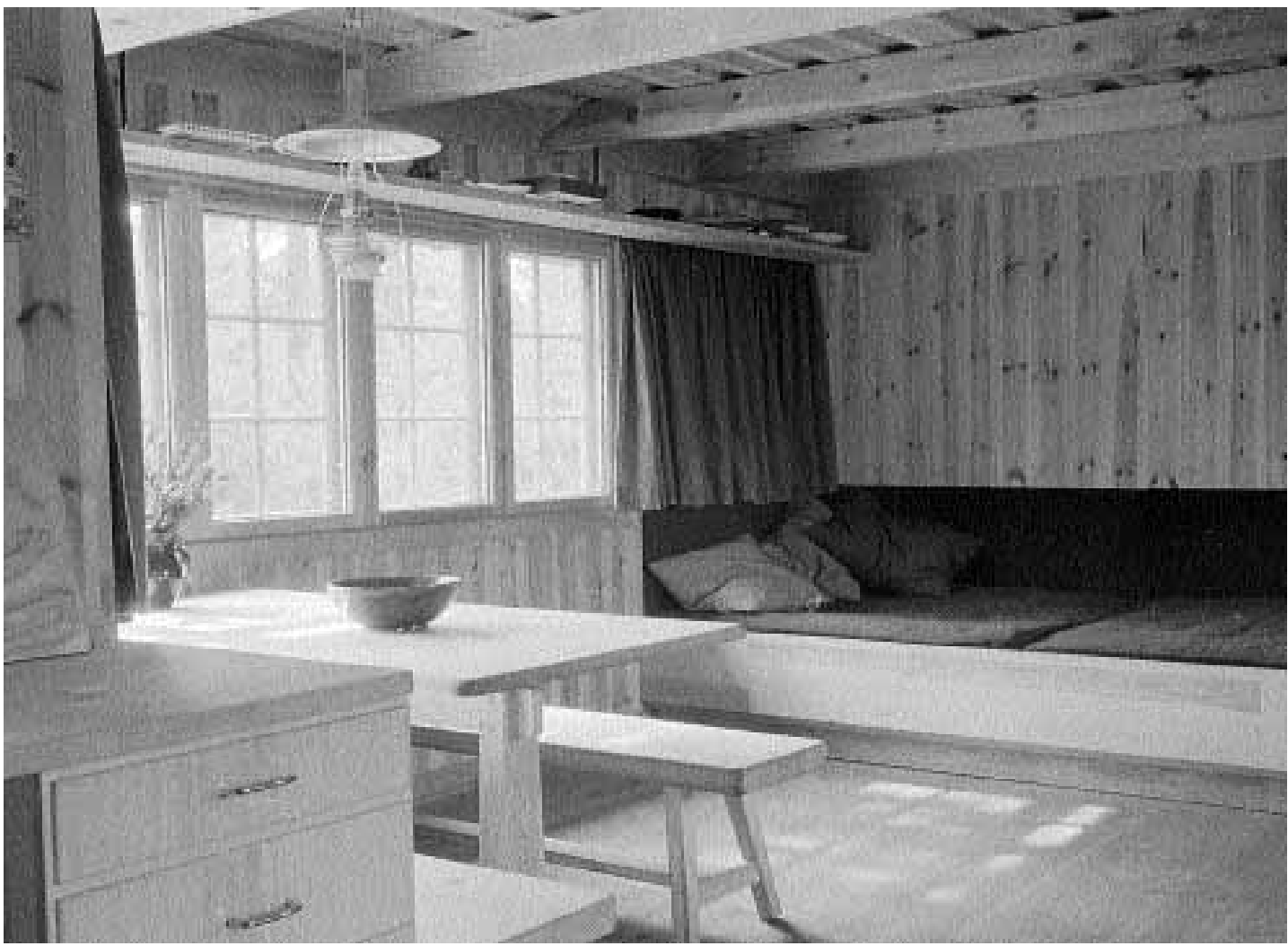
The kitchen has its own access to the outside and is outfitted with a wood-heated stove, located at the back of the fireplace. A clever detail can be found in front of the kitchen door: a hole in the floor, or rather a loose piece of floorboard, into which the dust can be swept; sweeping the floor was a common, and in this way amusing, task for the children before returning home to Oslo.

The living room is similar to that in the house on Beltesholmen, only slightly shorter and with a different window arrangement. The sofa covers the entire length of the wall, and a brick fireplace separates the living room from the kitchen. The dining space—complete with a fixed bench—is located opposite the fireplace.

With its combined sleeping and dwelling possibilities, the cabin has a spaciousness and warmth that is welcoming after returning from long trips in the wood. The architecture has a firmness and serenity that is both secretive and inviting when viewed from the outside.











In the Mountains

A CABIN NEAR VASSFARET, 1974



Scale: 1:200

Selmer's brother, Jan Herman Reimers, owned this piece of land near Vassfaret and gave her the commission to build a cabin with a living room, two bedrooms, and a sauna. Selmer had once told him that she could build a cabin for 100,000 Norwegian kroner (approximately \$15,000), so he opened an account for her in the amount of 120,000 Norwegian kroner, demanding that she would not spend a penny more. Reimers lived in Canada at the time, so Selmer had a free hand with the design after her initial sketch was approved.

Situated near Sørbølseter, an old *setergrend* (a summer farm settlement in the mountains) just below the tree line at the south end of Vassfaret, directly north of the lake Krøderen, the cabin is 754 square feet, including a storage room. It has a calm rectangular shape with a roof that is slightly cantilevered on all sides to prevent snow from collecting in front of the walls. The roofing of creosoted wooden boards forms a harmonious whole with the walls of horizontal rough-edged siding stained in the same tar-brown color. At the west end of the house, a spacious storage room is located with its own entrance, which can also be used as a *vindfang*. Here, there is room for firewood, skis, outdoor furniture, backpacks, and food. Windows on three sides provide a good working light. On the original drawings, the toilet was also placed here but in the final design it was realized as a small outhouse.

The wall facing the valley is partly withdrawn under the roof, creating a thirty-two-inch-wide and twenty-foot-long covered porch outside the corridor

and kitchen. The glass door that is located here usually functions as a front door, making this a convenient place to put down luggage and goods and brush off snow from outer garments before entering the house. Just inside is a wide corridor that also functions as a kitchen. Here, Selmer demonstrates her ability to create a space with special quality out of something common and trivial. The corridor receives carefully planned light from three different sources: the glass door admits plenty of light that illuminates the floor; the window behind the wardrobe lights the opposite wall; and a broad window above the kitchen worktop provides a good view. The kitchen is beautiful and practical and exactly the right size: whoever is working in the kitchen can at the same time participate in the social life of the cabin, in direct contact with the living room and the bedrooms. The sliding doors to the bedrooms are usually left open so that you can see straight through the corridor and out into the sunny valley.

The living room is wide and contains a long dining table with benches placed near windows that provide sunlight and a view, as is often the case in Selmer's mountain cabins. On the other side, a fireplace is the focal point for a sitting nook placed against the back wall. The view of the valley toward Norefjell is panoramic and visible from both the dining table and the sitting nook. A large window in the gable wall provides a view of the hillside and lets in the morning light. The large dimensions of the fireplace, which has a forty-four-by-seventy-one-inch-wide foundation, and



the solid ridge purlin and the pillar that supports it give the living room its special, almost rough character. This is further reinforced by the high ceiling of this room, which is in contrast to the rest of the cabin.

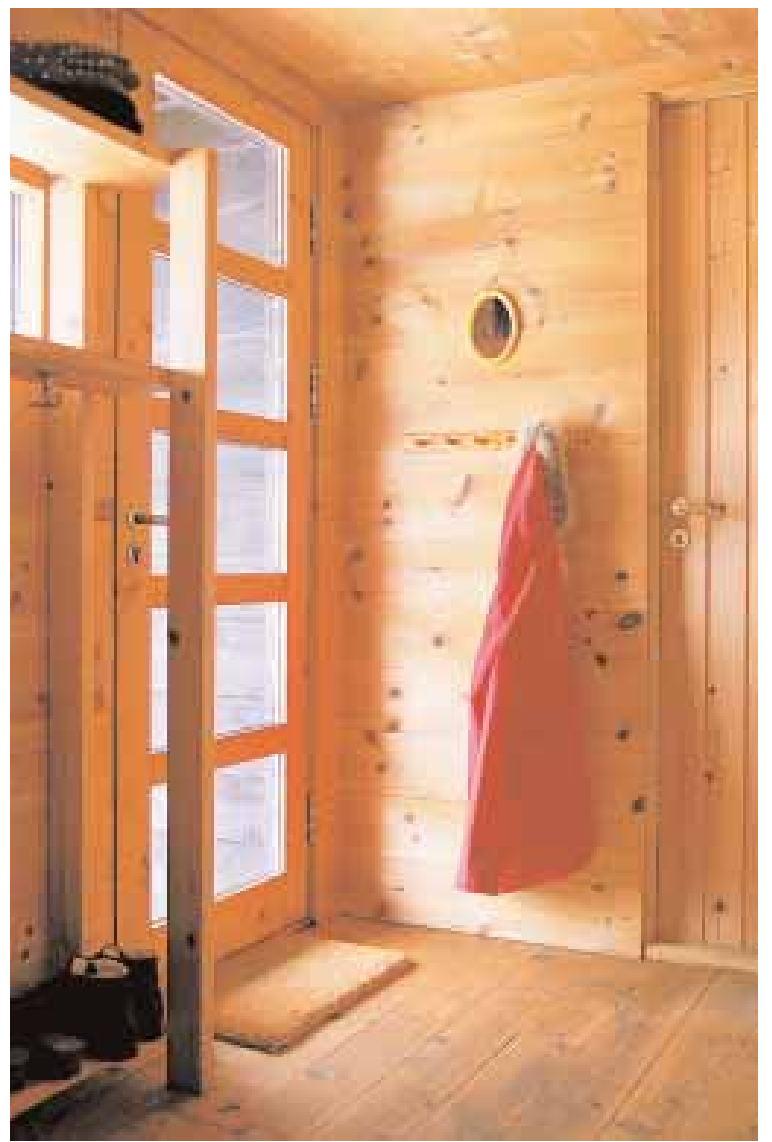
The sauna, which is also used as a washing room, is located behind the chimney. Just as in the bedrooms, this room also has a window facing the forest in the north, and the sliding door to the kitchen is often left open. The lower sauna bench can be slid under the upper one, providing more floor space when the sauna is not in use. By opening a small hatch in the roof, the warm air can be let out into the bedroom next door. The spatial interdependence between the corridor, the kitchen, the sauna, and the living room is convincing; the rooms serve as an extension of each other, while being individually shaped and defined. Water from the well is transported in frost-proof pipes into the basement and the kitchen. The small basement is also used as storage for food and beverages.

The interior walls are covered with broad horizontal smooth paneling, while the ceiling in the living room has 8-inch-wide upper boards with 3.5-inch-wide gaps, creating a playful pattern of shadows on the ceiling. The interior furnishing, including the beds, closets, wardrobes, the kitchen, the dining table, and the benches, is of pine and was made according to the architect's drawings. The tables in the living room were designed by Jens Selmer.

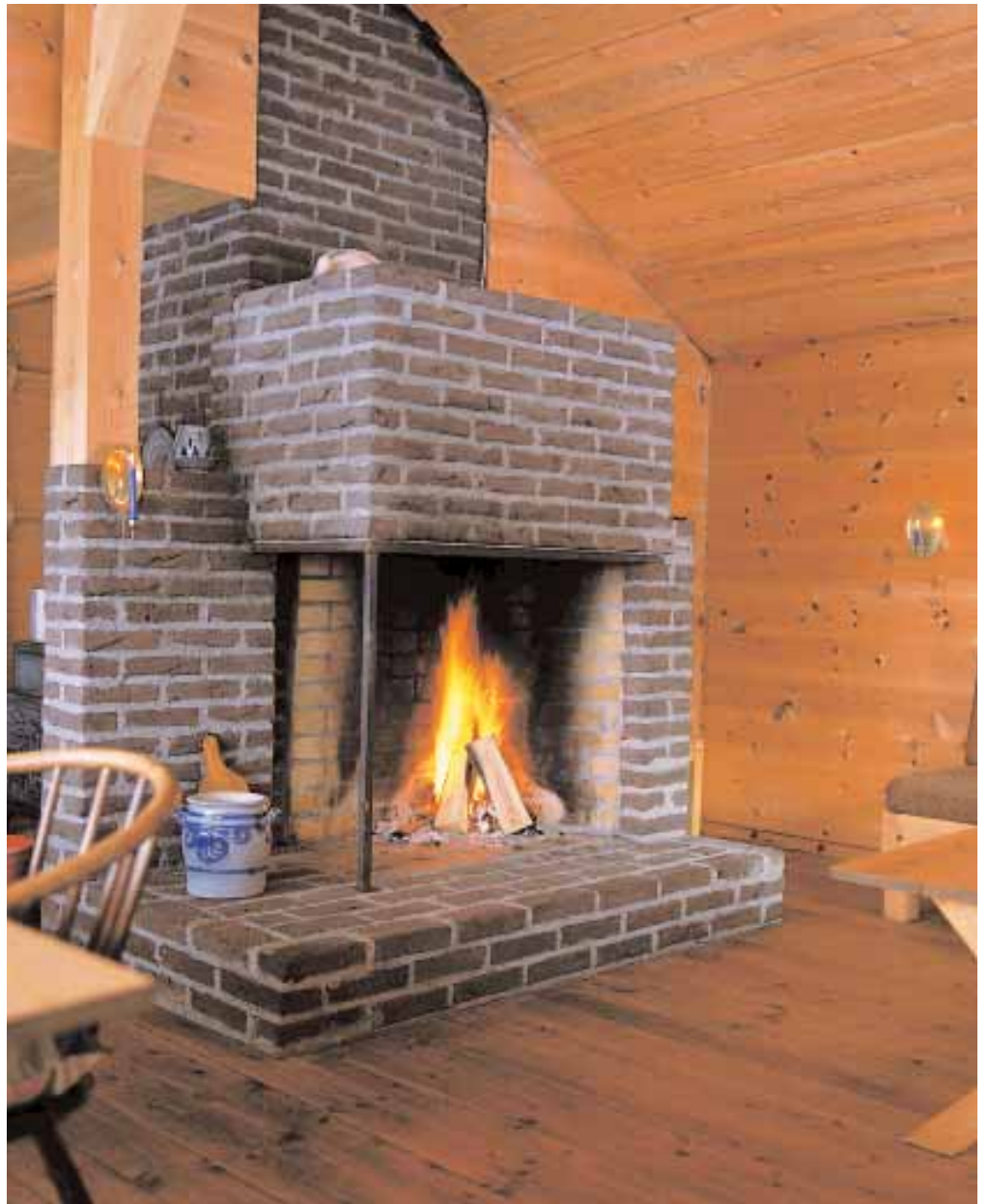
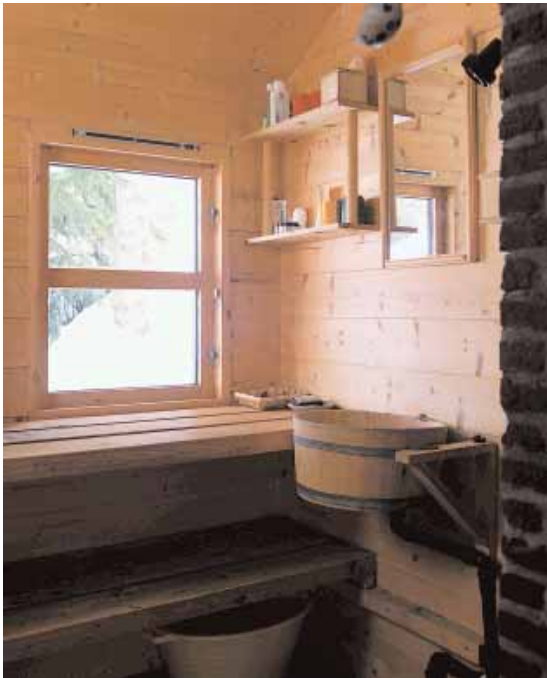
A strong quality of this cabin lies in how it appears to be resting in the landscape in a powerful yet unobtrusive way. The porch, the glass door, and the many windows make the building inviting. As the cabin has no electricity, it is essential to make efficient use of daylight. Yet this is not a glass house but a warm cabin that protects against the harsh mountain climate, providing the opportunity to enjoy the best of the different seasons, both in- and outdoors.





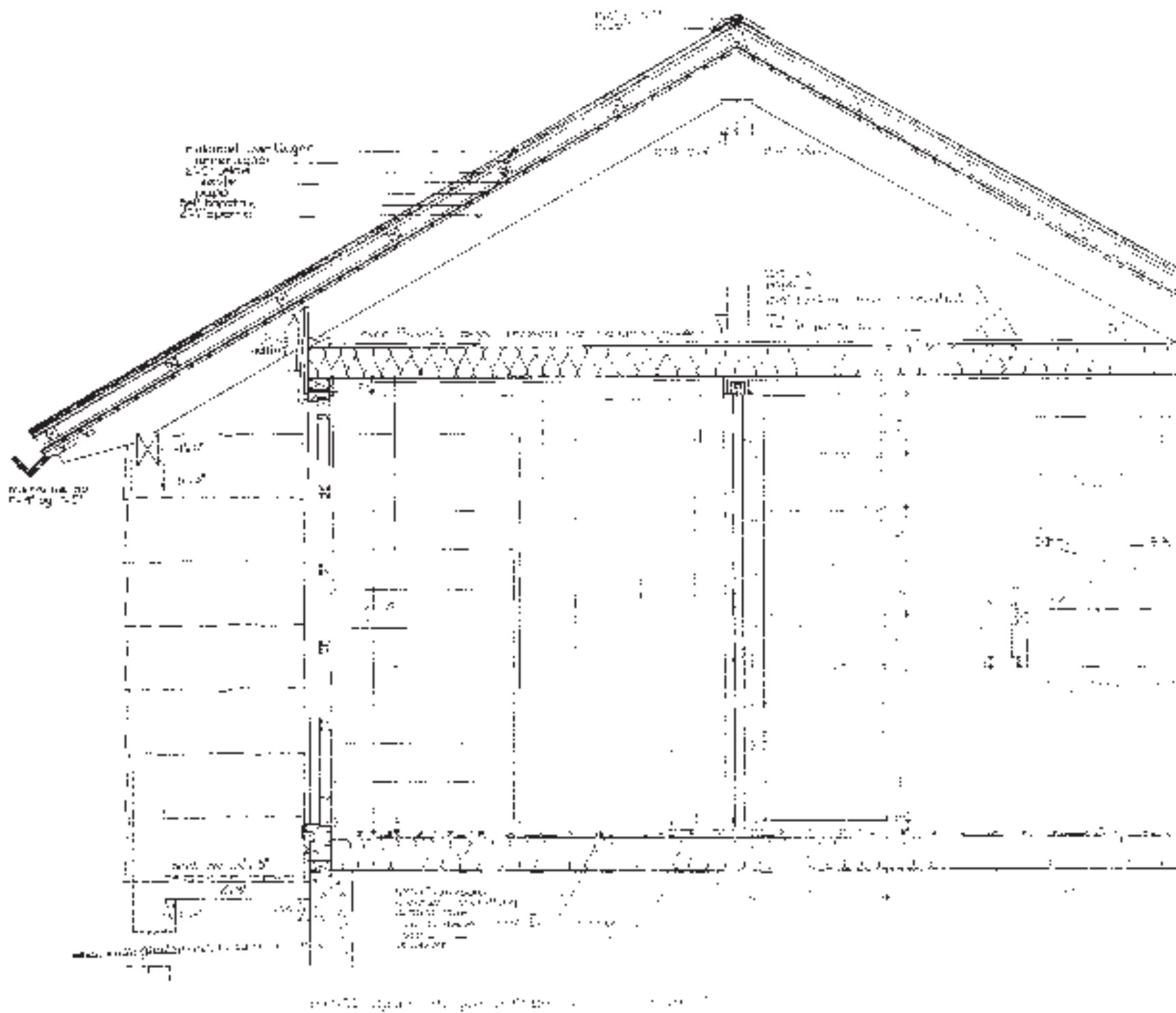


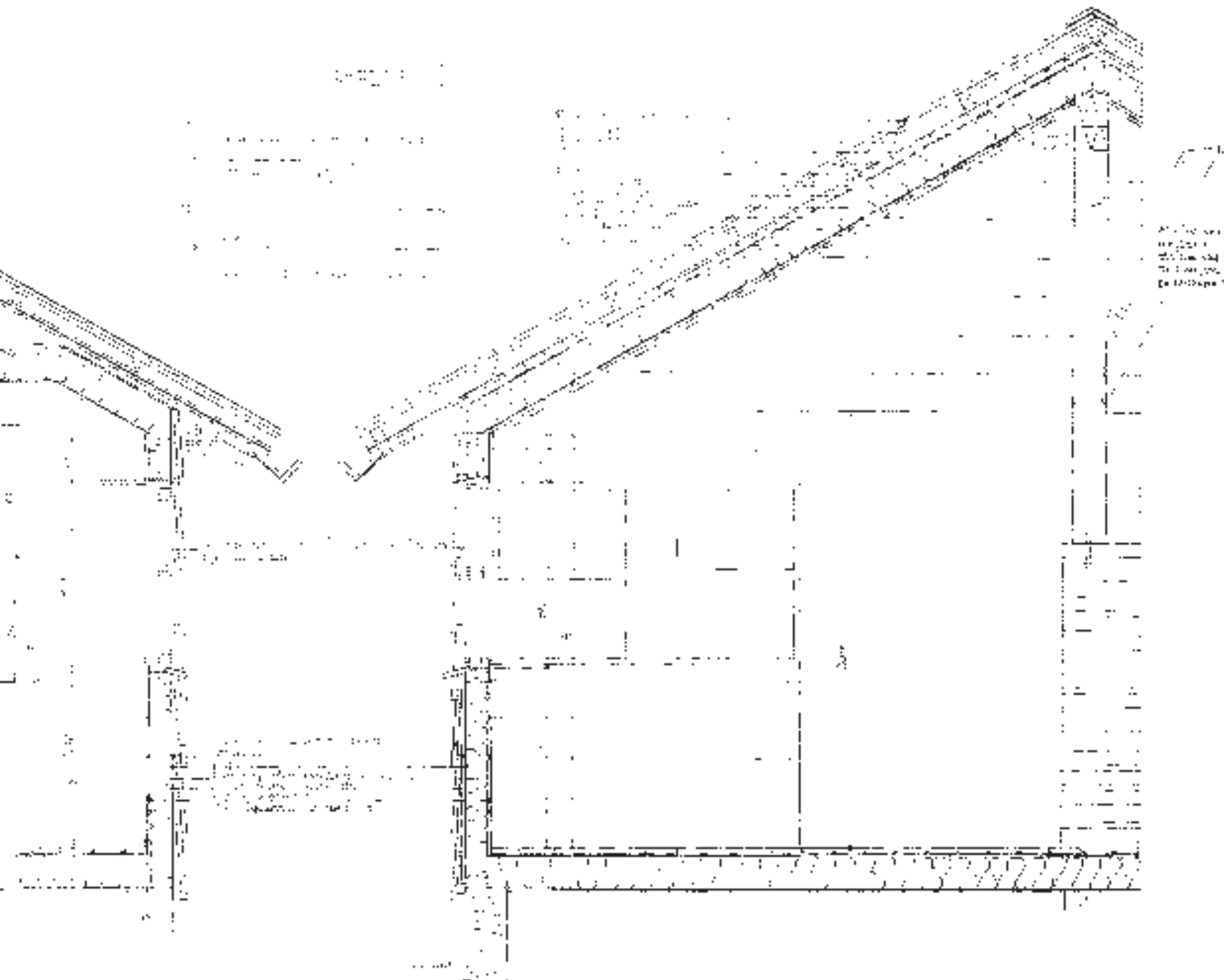










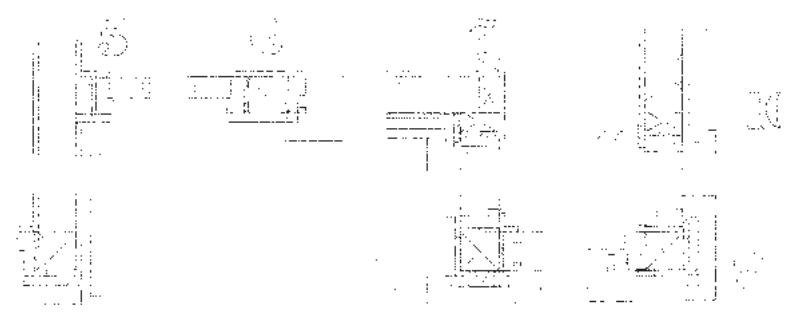


Architectural
Drawing
Scale: 1:25

Architectural Drawing

Scale 1:25

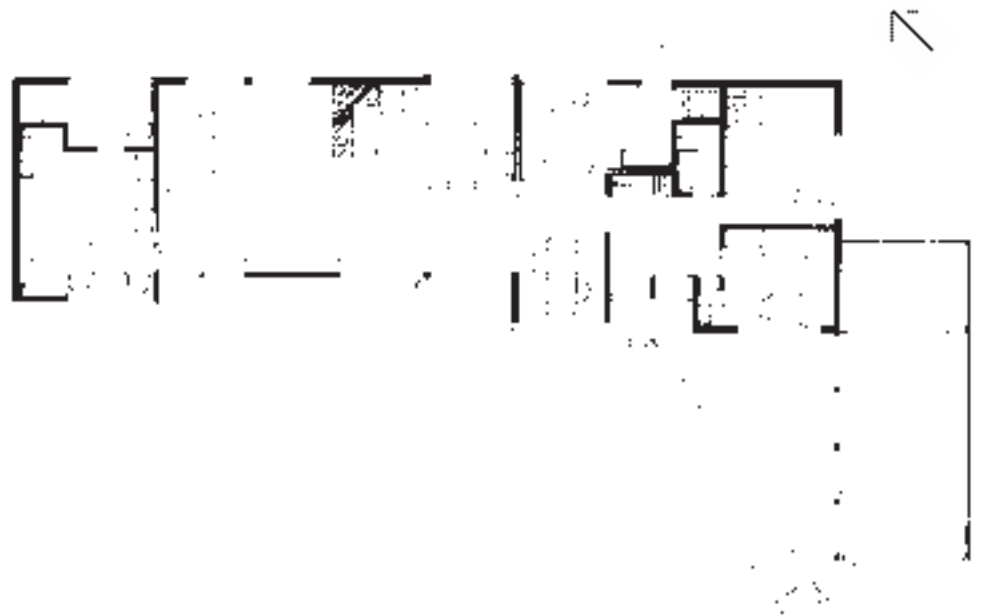
Details (horizontal). Scale: 1:20





Behind a Spruce Hedge

THE SELMER HOUSE IN GRÅKAMMEN
IN OSLO, 1963



Scale: 1:200

“That which is not evident on pictures and drawings, is not worth talking about,” the architect said about her own house in the book *The Timber Award*. All the same, I will attempt to write about Selmer’s design. Here, on Trosterudstien, she and her husband were given the opportunity to show a unique display of architectural inventiveness while keeping the budget as low as possible. The house is small, with a total footage of 1,356 square feet, and served as the home for a family of four; in addition it contained work spaces for both Wenche and Jens Selmer. Wenche Selmer ran her architectural practice from here.

The house is hidden behind a thick spruce hedge that grows alongside the road, with the carport and the path to the entrance located in a discreet opening. Further protected behind some bushes and small trees lies the low rectangular building, which is placed so that almost every room faces the garden in the southwest. The lawn, with its daisies and other flowers, looks like a meadow and reaches up to a small tiled terrace, which is partially covered by the roof.

The overall volume has several recesses and projections in the facade, shaped to fit the inner spatial qualities. The entrance, protected by the roof, has a *vindfang* with a wooden outer door and a glass door inside. The window stretching from floor to ceiling next to the *vindfang* makes the small entrance hall feel spacious. It leads to two bedrooms on one side and the rest of the rooms on the other. From the hall the view of the house, with the living room, the

workspace, and the door opening into the master bedroom, is unobstructed. Large glass surfaces with sliding doors are located toward the garden, making it a part of the experience of the living room.

The kitchen, small and effective, is situated toward the northeast. A wide, horizontal window provides light over the work top and a view of the trees outside. An ironing board that can be unfolded from its own cupboard can also serve as a serving table for the dining space, which is located in a small niche, a 7.9-foot-wide projection in the facade with a large window at table height. Sliding doors can be used to close off the kitchen and the dining area, individually or together, as well as the master bedroom from the living room.

In the main part of the house, both a sitting nook and the workspace benefit from the open room zone, with its glass surfaces facing the garden. Surprisingly, the workspace is just as big as the living room, which has a sofa in the corner and a fireplace that separates it from the office. The entire space is so effectively utilized that it seems to be much larger than it actually is. A horizontal window, set slightly into the wall below a built-in bookshelf and just above the sofa, provides a view of the trees in the north. Venetian blinds made of hand-planed pine slats give shelter from visibility when required.

The large windows in the workspace also have venetian blinds of wooden slats. Here, the ceiling slants upward toward the north, providing the room



with optimal light and air. Custom-made drawing-drawers of pine are mounted on the wall at a height that is suitable for their use as an extra table. The glass wall facing the garden can be closed off with light sliding panels of canvas.

The master bedroom is at the west end of the house, situated two steps up in accordance with the ascent of the ground, which here has a rocky surface that is somewhat higher than the lawn. The theme of horizontal windows in the wall projections facing the garden, as in the dining space, is repeated here in a niche, where an old desk Selmer inherited from her mother stands. The interior furnishing provides storage space and is arranged so that the remaining floor area forms an almost square shape, which makes the room seem spacious and harmonious. The master bedroom as well as the adjacent bathroom are covered with pine paneling on the walls and the ceiling. Instead of a stainless-steel grate over the drain in the bathroom, two loose floor tiles serve the same function—an example of how the architect has succeeded in limiting the number of materials used in the building. The smaller bedrooms at the other end, toward the east, appear to be larger than they are due to the optimized use and shape of the interior furnishing and the placement of windows. Located on the long side of the room, the windows are horizontal, with their lower frame at table height.

All these carefully formed sections in the individual rooms are also expressed in the facade. The interplay of the small variations creates a larger whole. The roof, which is almost completely flat, is concluded by a cornice board in the front, facing the garden. The roof beams are projected, creating a regular rhythm under the cornice. In this way, the terrace in front of the living room and the entrance are sheltered. As a counterpart to these withdrawn sections, the projecting niches emphasize the tar-brown board-and-batten siding on the walls. Over the bedrooms at each end of the house the roof slopes slightly upward; they stand as finishing touches that echo the projection of the dining niche with its horizontal window.

The simple rectangular shape is reinforced on the inside by the unity of the materials—red-brown clinker tiles and pine woodwork—while the exposed roof structure with double main girders and beams creates an impressive rhythmic pattern in the room. Selmer's avoidance of moldings is consistent throughout the detailing: Vertical paneling on the walls is concluded at the bottom and top by wide, horizontal withdrawn

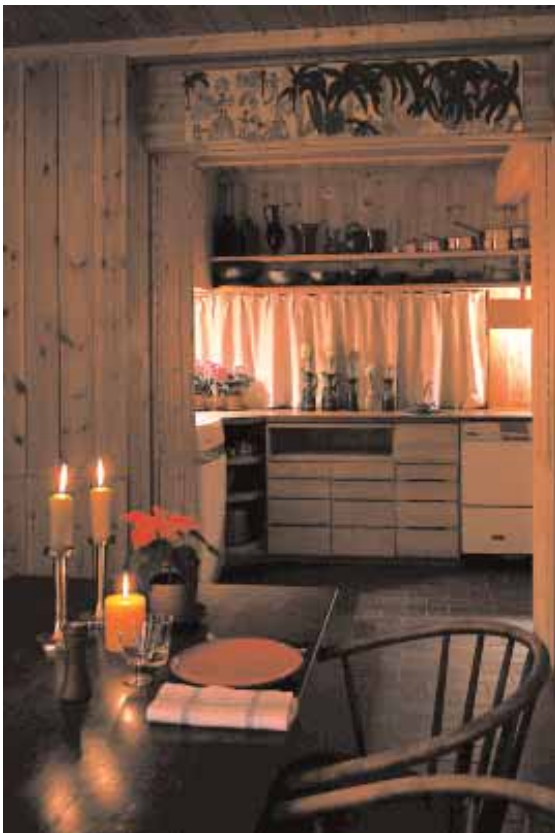


boards that have the same height as the ceiling beams. Dark brick with coarse joints in the fireplace constitutes a third material, which in color, shade, and physicality bares kinship to the rest of the room. The variations in the wall face, such as windows, doors, shelves, and wooden slats, together with the furniture and other equipment, result in an atmosphere of abundance, where small nuances excel inside a self-imposed simplicity.



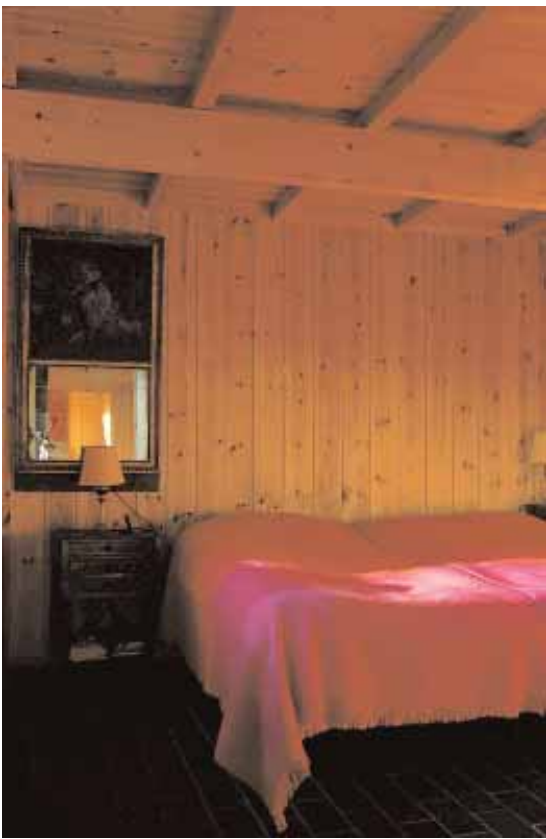
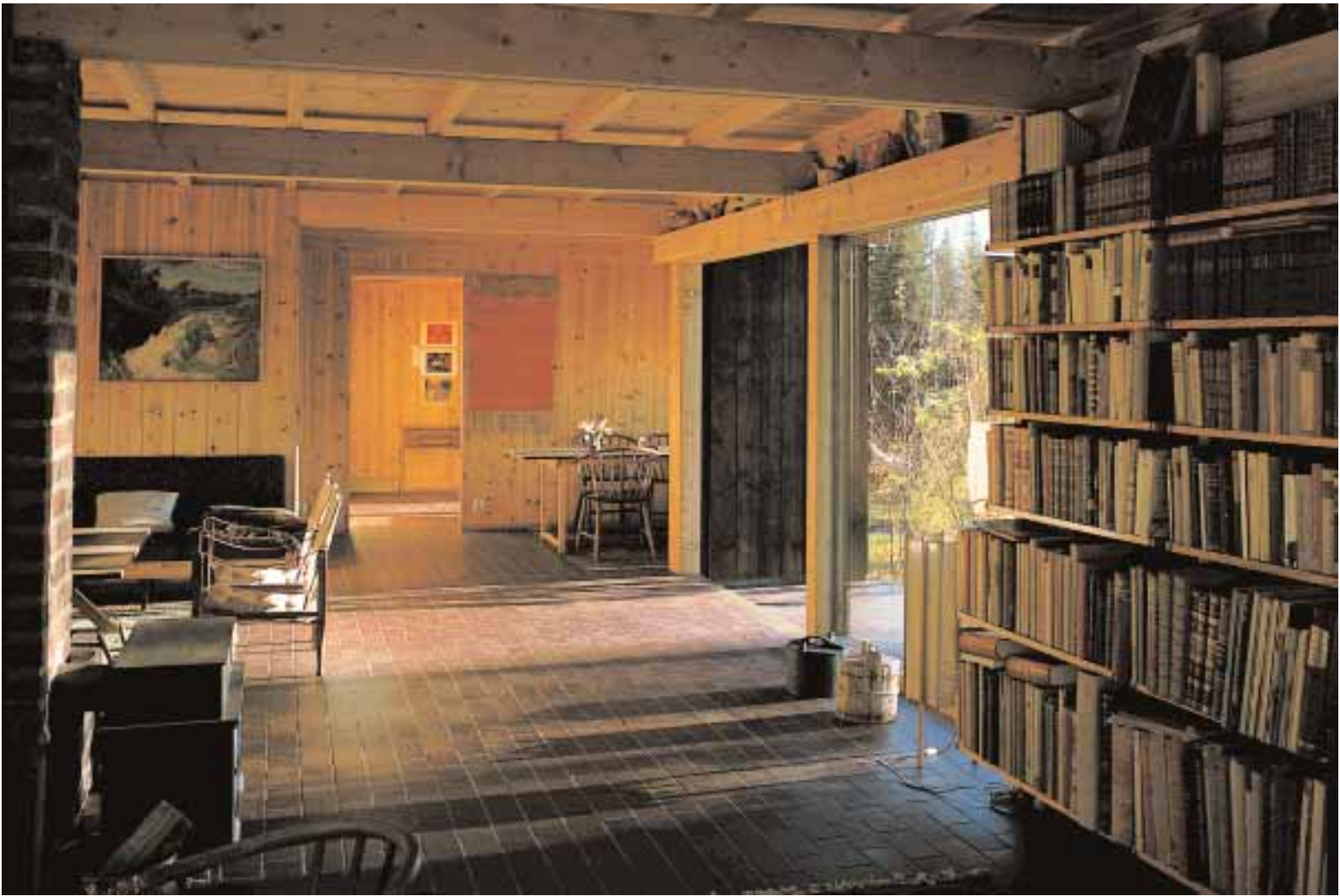










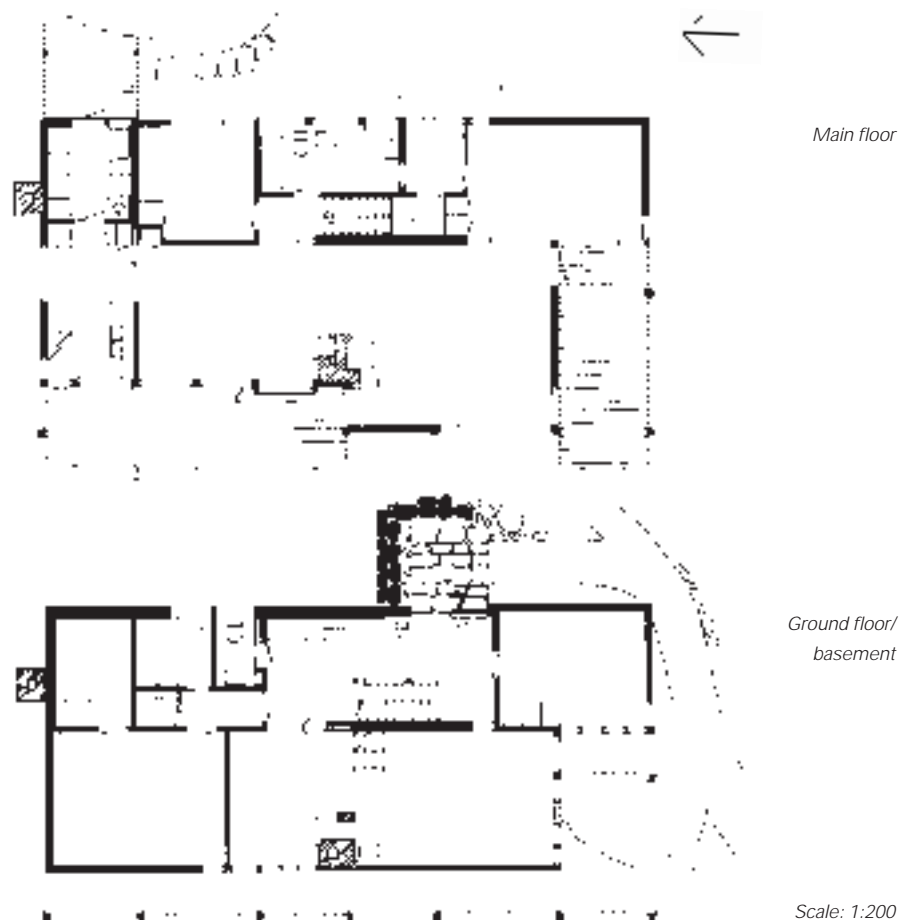






By the Moose Trail

A HOUSE IN SKÅDALEN, OSLO, 1967



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The clients for this house in Skådalen saw an article about Selmer in a newspaper, where she stated that she could build as cheaply as if her houses were prefabricated. They gave her the commission to build a single-family house for them after visiting the architect's own house on Trosterudstien. The site on Vettaliveien is situated toward the west, at the edge of the woods near the forested valley between Vettakollen and Voksenskollåsen. A stream trickles through the valley, and moose are frequent visitors. Across the valley, over the treetops, part of Midstubbakken and Holmenkollbakken, two renowned ski jumping arenas, are visible. With the long side of the house facing the valley, several rooms receive both afternoon sun and have a great view. The house sits on sloping ground, resulting in two floors in the lower part and one floor in the upper part.

The clients wanted the ground floor to have a rough quality, so that you could come straight in after a day of skiing in the woods without worrying about

soiling the floor. The smells of tarred wooden skies, which were common in the 1960s, and of impregnation used on skiing boots, were to be part of the atmosphere. You would enter the house here, take off your skis, get undressed, spend some time in the sauna, maybe sit a while in front of the fireplace, and then ascend into the more "civilized" part of the house. Selmer designed this room with slate flagstones on the floor, rough-edged wooden paneling on the ceiling, and a wood oven and fireplace. Near the fireplace five steps lead up to the entrance hall with the wardrobe. During the first years this room was also used as a workshop with a carpenter's bench, a chopping block, and other equipment, but it now serves as a study and a TV room. Its large windows face south and west and are sheltered by the balconies on the second floor, creating an effect that is both open and protected.

The entrance is on the east and is protected by a separate roof. It is beautifully resolved on the exterior



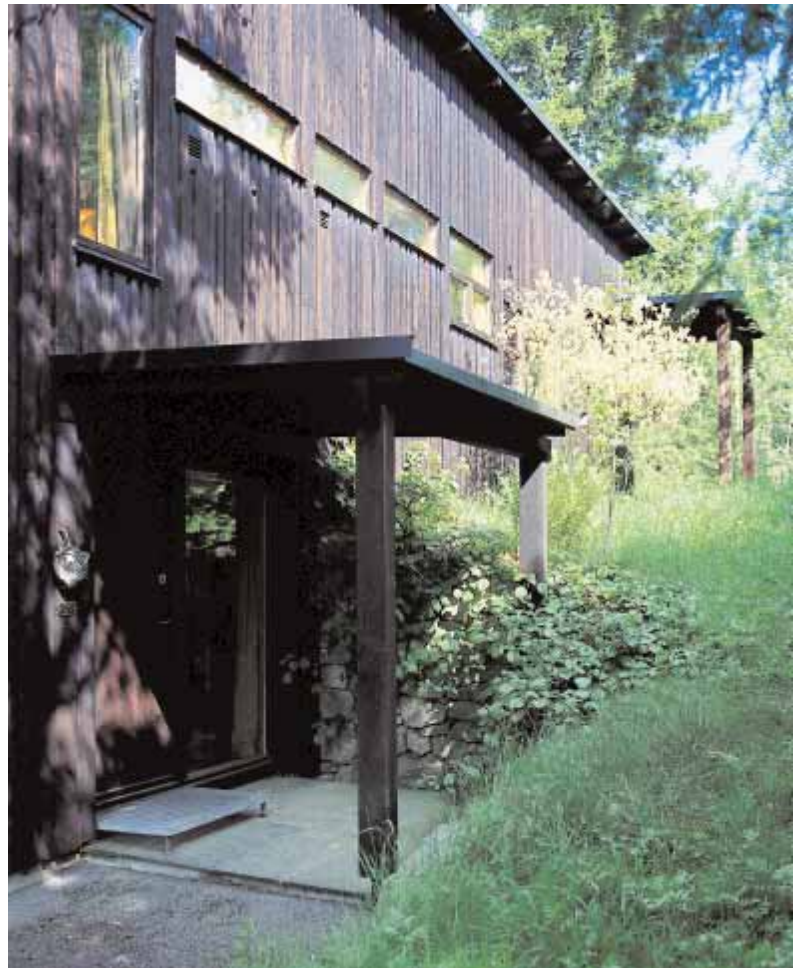


with a stone wall on one side that acts as an edge against the vegetation in the ascending terrain. In typical Selmer style, the window next to the entrance stretches from floor to ceiling. Inside, a straight staircase with open steps of oak leads up to the main floor. The openness, further enhanced by the large windows in the adjacent TV room, creates an airy atmosphere, and the stairs are very comfortable to walk on. As in the hobby and TV room, there are slate flagstones with floor heating in the hall. This particular type of slate from Skjåk has a rusty, red nuance.

The main floor is raised above the ground, looking out into the treetops. It has access to the terrain from the laundry room in the northeast. Two large balconies, facing south and west, respectively, constitute the outdoor spaces for meals and relaxation. Coming up the stairs, you enter a large continuous open space consisting of the kitchen, dining area, living room, and master bedroom, with light entering from three different directions. A large fireplace creates a division between the dining area and the sitting group. The experience of the fireplace merges with the view through the large glass sections in the facade. A wall hides the work top and oven in the kitchen, which can be closed off by a sliding door. Mostly, this door is left open, however, to enjoy the view toward the north through the kitchen window. The kitchen works well, with extra facilities in the combined laundry room and pantry. Farthest toward the south is the master bedroom, whose large sliding door is usually left open during the day. The entire floor is covered with sisal carpeting, except for the kitchen, which has oil-treated pine flooring.

As in many of Selmer's houses, there is a variety of built-in furnishing designed by the architect. The interiors of the kitchen and the laundry room include several smart solutions, such as a built-in ironing board and a retractable bench above the sink in the laundry room. In the living room the sofa bench, window bench, and bookshelves are custom-designed. Various beds and shelves in the bedrooms and the study as well as the wardrobe are also built to Selmer's drawings. In addition she designed lighting fixtures with wooden slats that filter light down along the walls in several rooms. Another Selmer specialty are the various closets, which are set into the wall and are almost invisible. The fireplace is built with grade-C brick with large, coarse joints. Selmer used to come by every morning to supervise the masons on the construction site, ensuring that they followed her instructions.

On the exterior, the house looks tall, with pillars, balconies, and large withdrawn glass sections as the main elements. The wall planes, especially on the east facade, form a more closed surface with vertical siding in a rhythmic pattern of boards of different widths. The slanted roof slopes slightly toward the west and has barely any projections and minimalist detailing, contributing to the tall appearance of the house. The transparent tar-brown color of the woodwork makes the house blend in with the surrounding fir-tree forest.







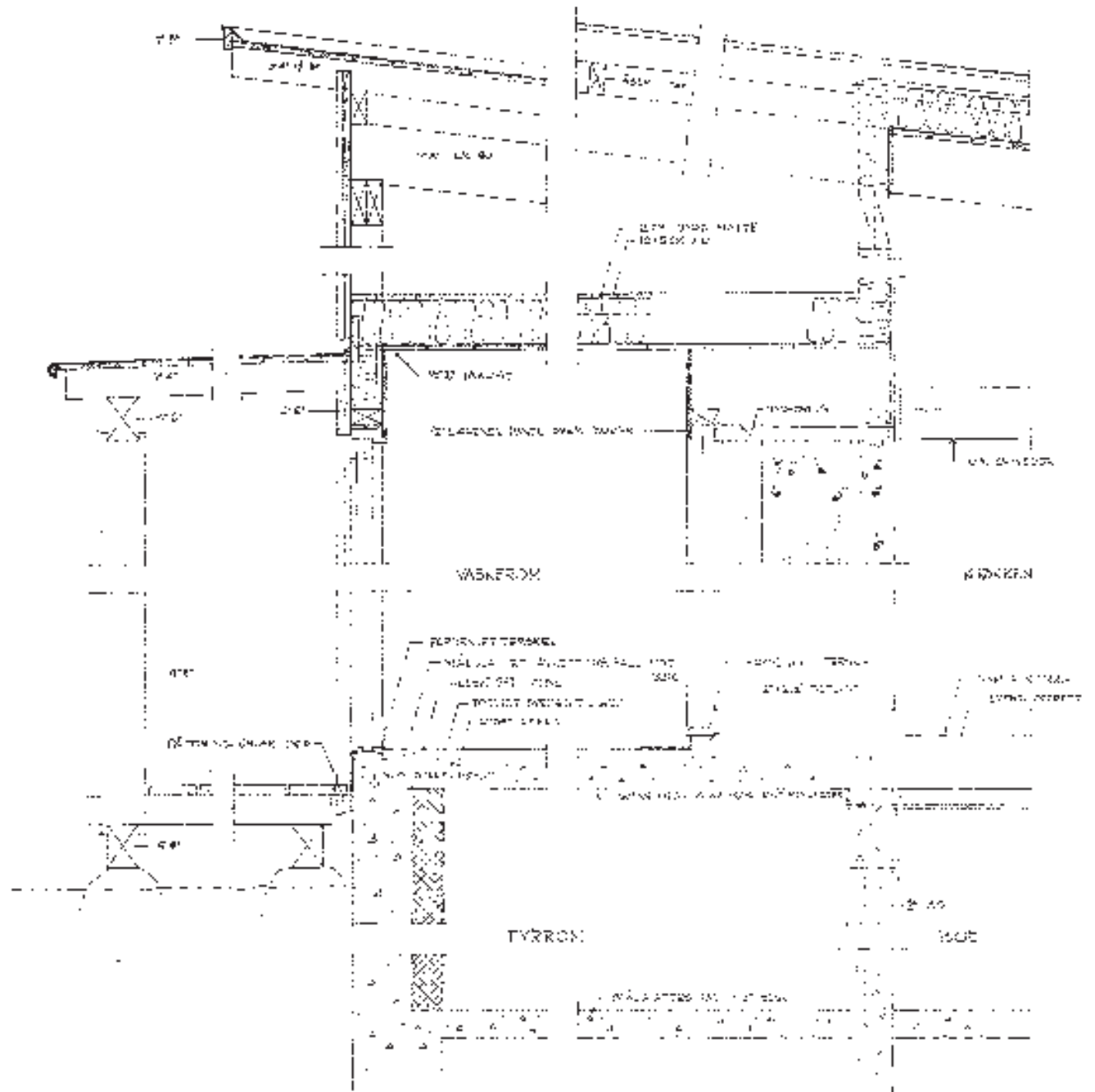


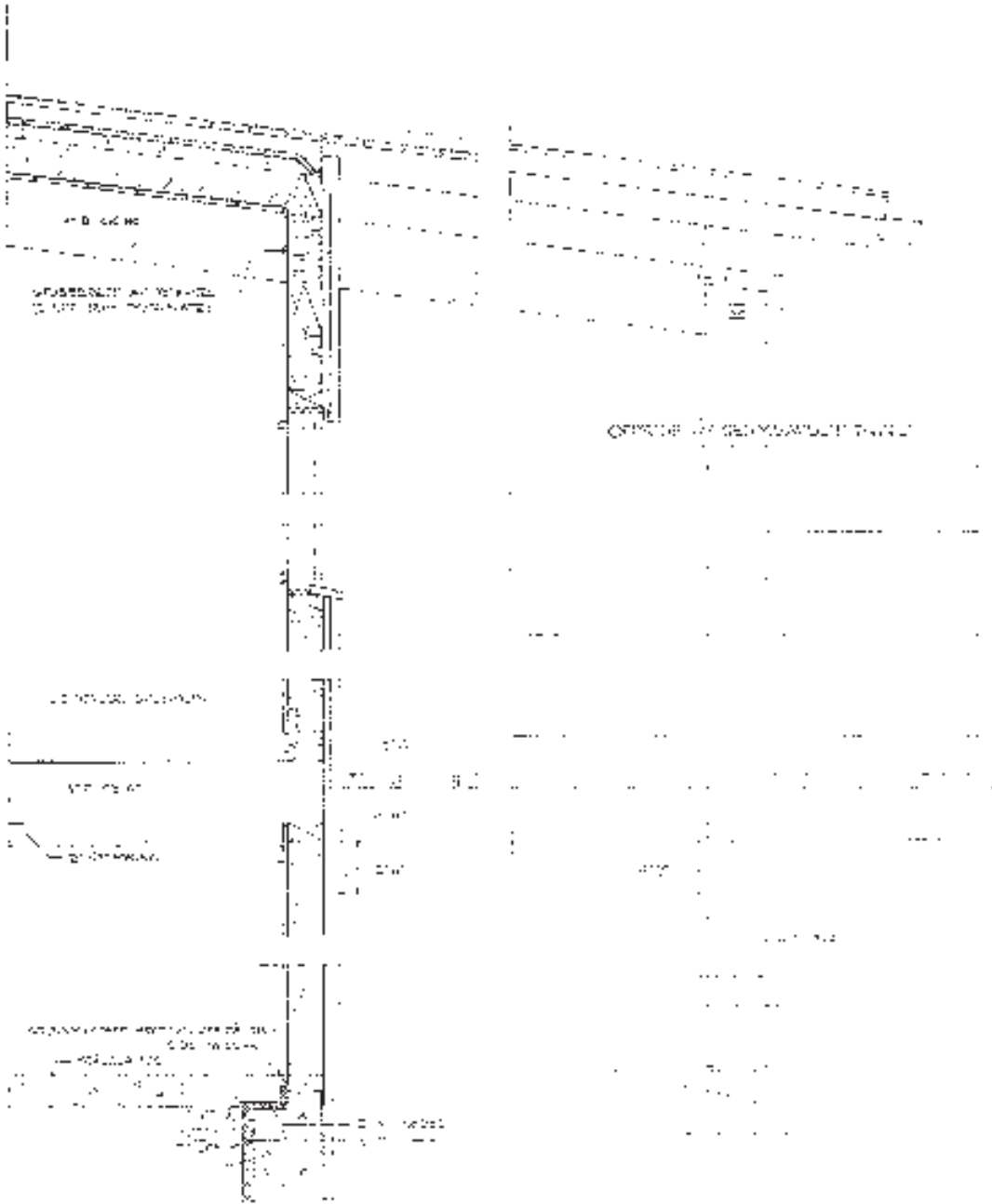




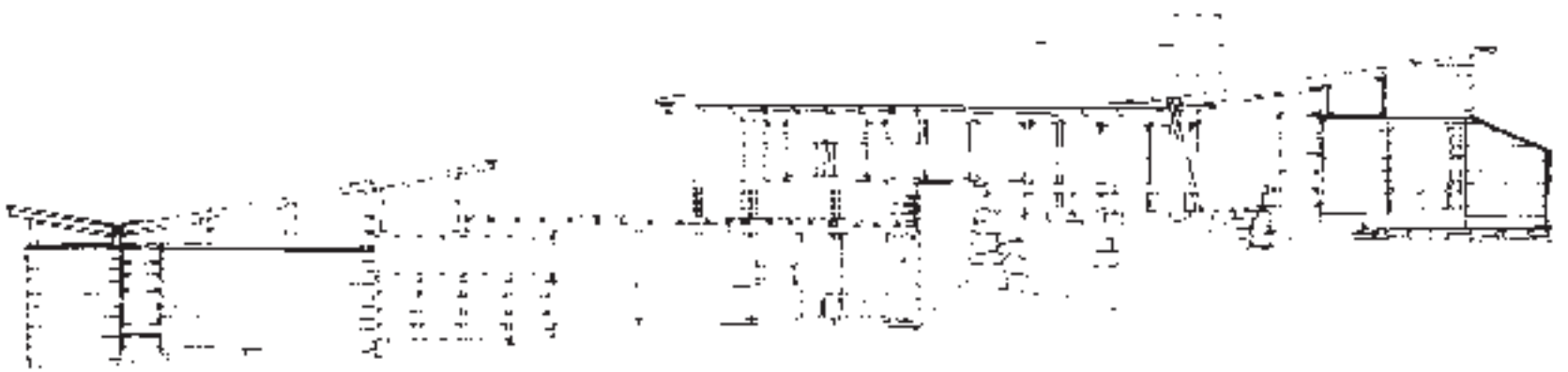








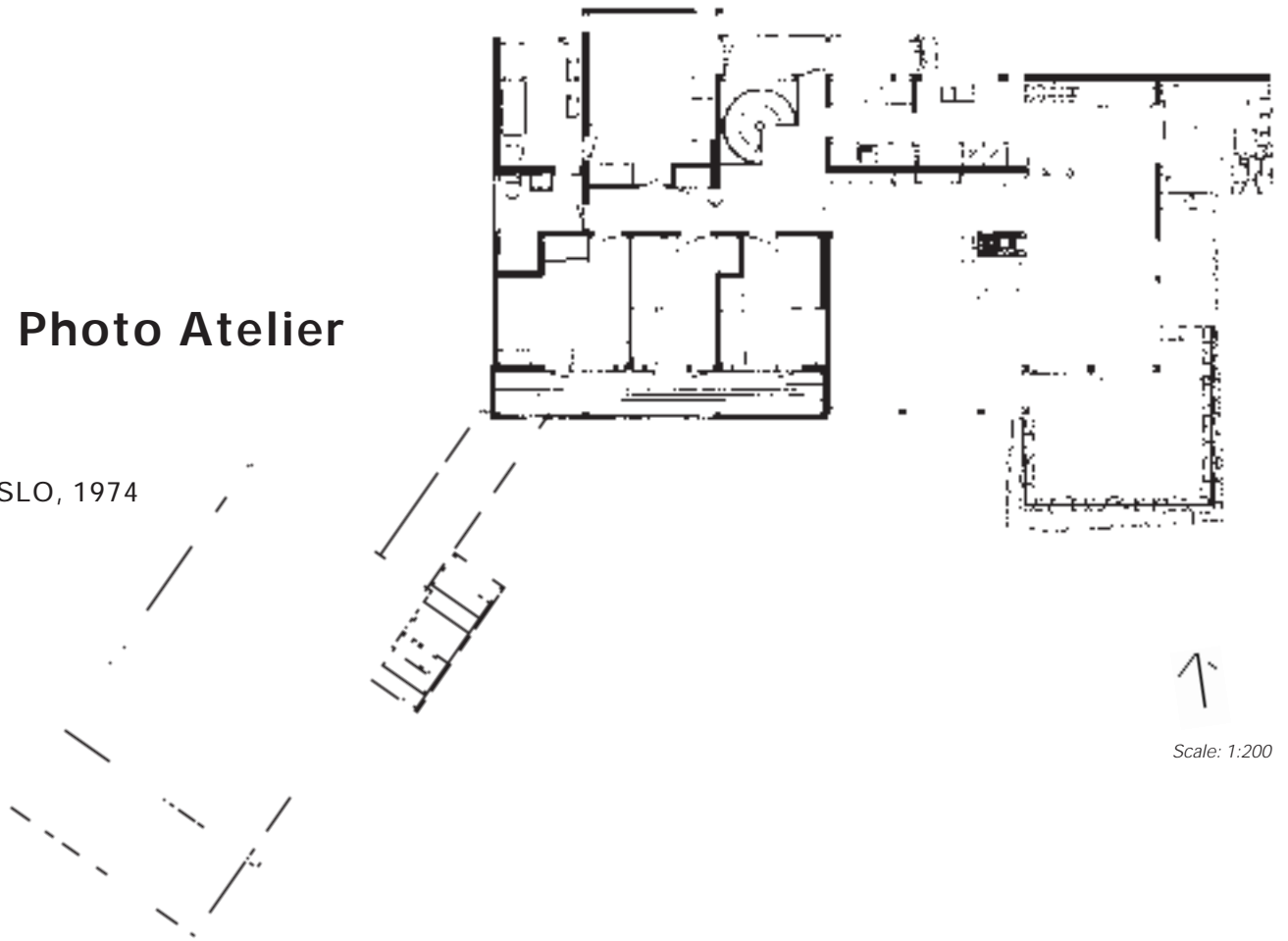
Details, vertical section. Scale: 1:20



Elevation viewed from South East

House with Photo Atelier

A HOUSE IN
GRÅKAMMEN IN OSLO, 1974



Scale: 1:200

157

The site of this house in Gråkammen ascends from the road toward the north, with a height difference of approximately forty-nine feet, widening at the top. Up here the view of the city is panoramic, and due to its high location the house receives sunlight throughout the day. An access road winds itself up the hill toward the house. With a four-wheel drive, it can be used summer and winter, but the garage is situated down by the road.

The client, a photographer and his family, had seen Selmer's own house on Trosterudstien as well as the one she designed near the moose trail in Skådalen. They liked the lifestyle these houses represented and approved the architect's first model for a house on their site. In addition to their spatial needs, the family had some specific wishes for the design. These included keeping the interventions in the topography and vegetation of the site at a minimum, large glass windows that extended from ceiling to floor to achieve maximum contact between inside and out, and the incorporation of a large fireplace in the center of the living space. Besides this, Selmer was given free play.

The photo atelier was added at a later time, after the family had lived in the house for several years, during which time the photographer worked in a room on the ground floor. But with an increasing workload he needed more space and decided to build a separate studio. The atelier, situated along the access road in an oblique angle to the house, brings tension to the entire composition. The shape of its roof is simple and resilient, while its rough brown walls and large glass panes are a welcoming feature. Between the house and the atelier a small open shed is used as storage for firewood and tools.

The main house is rectangular with a roof that slopes slightly upward toward the north, and a much smaller, lower lean-to roof over the bedroom extension on the north side. In the front part, it has two floors, with the main entrance on the ground floor. Due to the ascending site the upper floor leads directly out to the ground on the east side, where two generous terraces are placed in front of the living room and kitchen. The living room terrace is lined with a beautiful wall of stone from the site, while the other

one has a small sheltering wall that forms an extension of the kitchen wall. The forest starts just beyond the terraces.

The entrance on the ground floor is realized with a Selmer *vindfang*. Its wooden outer door is often left open, while the inner glass door bids welcome to the entry hall, which is tiled with ceramic floor tiles with built-in heating as all other rooms on the ground floor. Next to the hall is the former playroom, which is now a comfortable TV room, with a glass sliding door opening toward the south. Further in, with lofty windows facing north, is the study, which used to be the photo studio. To the right of the entrance is a storage room with a wardrobe that is equipped with a stainless-steel sink, shelves and pegs, and space for wet boots and skiing equipment. A generous spiral staircase leads up to the main floor where the living spaces and the kitchen are on one side, and the four bedrooms and two bathrooms on the other. In the living room, the walls are covered with burlap-texture wallpaper in a straw-yellow color. Untreated pine woodwork is found on the ceiling, doors, walls, and in the built-in furnishing, while the pine floor is oil-treated according to Selmer's recipe.

The room's large windows and glass sliding doors bring the experience of nature inside; the forest becomes almost another wall in the living room, with its varied scenes of trees, stones, and moss. Two different window designs create a special effect; windows with large glass panes are connected to windows that are divided by horizontal glazing bars to make an effective transition between the closed wall and the large glass elements. Looking out from the inside, the attention is focused on individual parts of this glass wall, which acts as a filter toward the forest.

The fireplace in the living room is a large, free-standing sculptural object of brick. Its rectangular shape expresses solidity while it is wide open toward the living and dining areas. An adjacent wood oven of iron is frequently used. Both the fireplace and a wall with custom-designed shelves mark a division between the different room zones. There are also several options for closing off rooms with sliding doors that are concealed in the walls.

The bedroom section is compact, with four bedrooms and two bathrooms. Walls, ceilings, window frames, and doors, as well as the beds, shelves, desks, and partly built-in closets, are of pine. This creates an impressive architectural whole, which leaves room for individual features and a certain flexibility concerning





future changes. A large balcony can be reached from all bedrooms through glass doors.

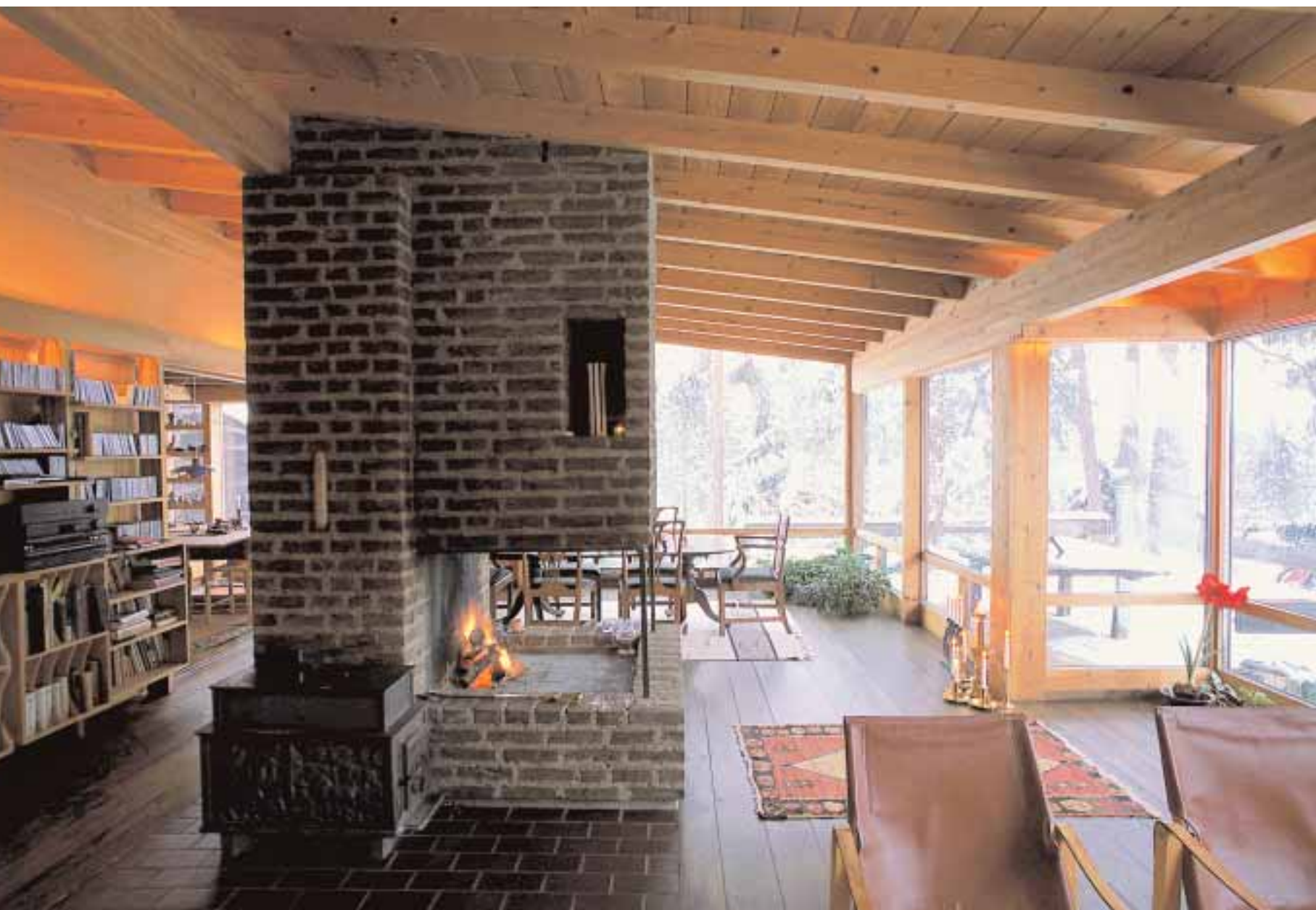
The north facade of the house is particularly beautiful and exciting in its composition, with large wall sections of horizontal, rough-edged siding rhythmically intersected by windows, the bedroom balcony, and the balcony door. This facade is unfortunately difficult to photograph due to the trees and the sloping ground. The house is lovingly built, and it is evident that the architecture serves as a lasting frame for the family's life. The architectural quality is achieved by the structural elements, materials, the spatial layout, and the house's connection to its surroundings. The use of materials and the modern way the details are executed are key devices in this architecture. Beauty results from the juxtaposition of building parts and structural elements, which are carried out with minimal molding. The roof beams and window glazing bars constitute a form of moderate ornamental articulation in the spaces.











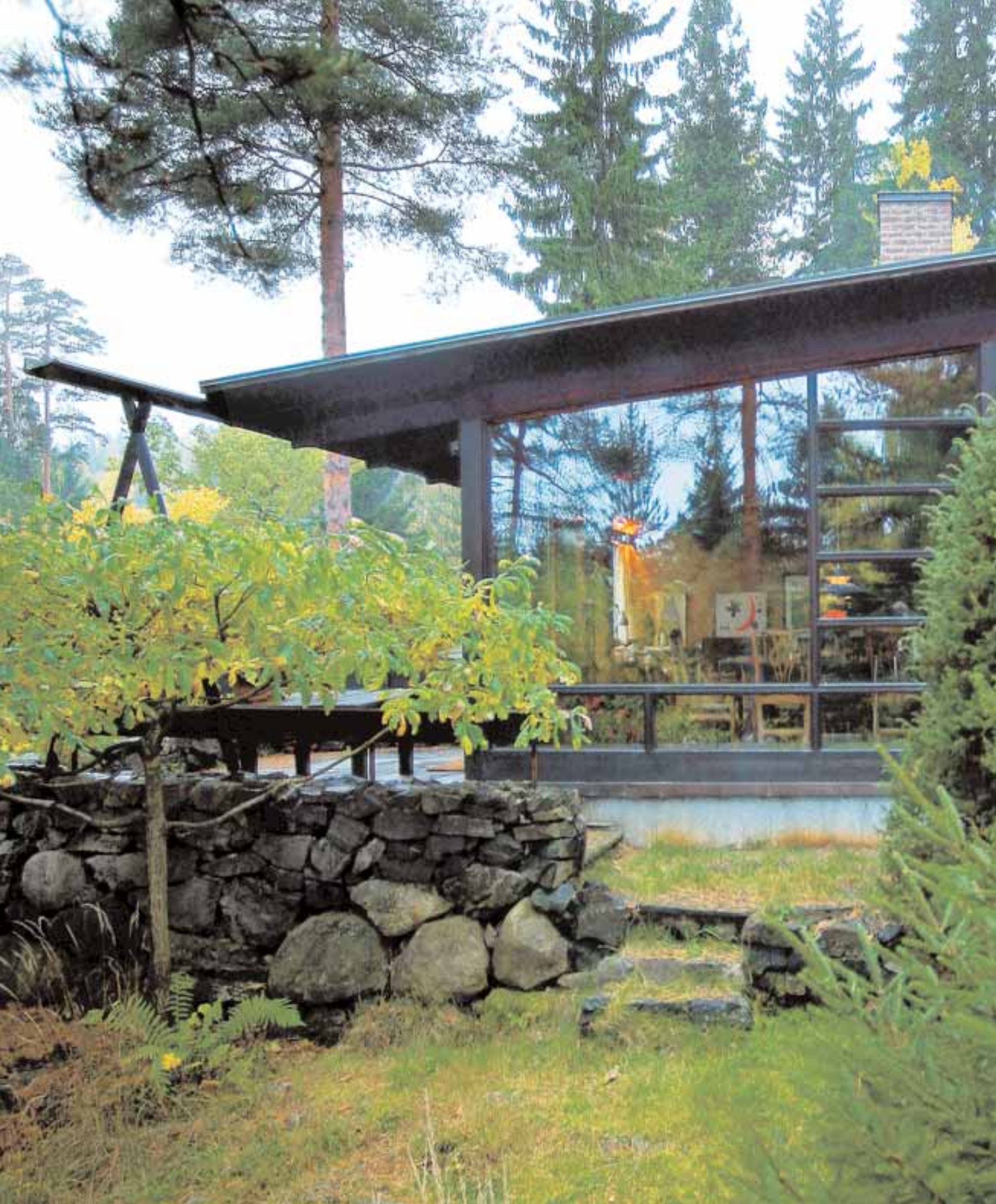




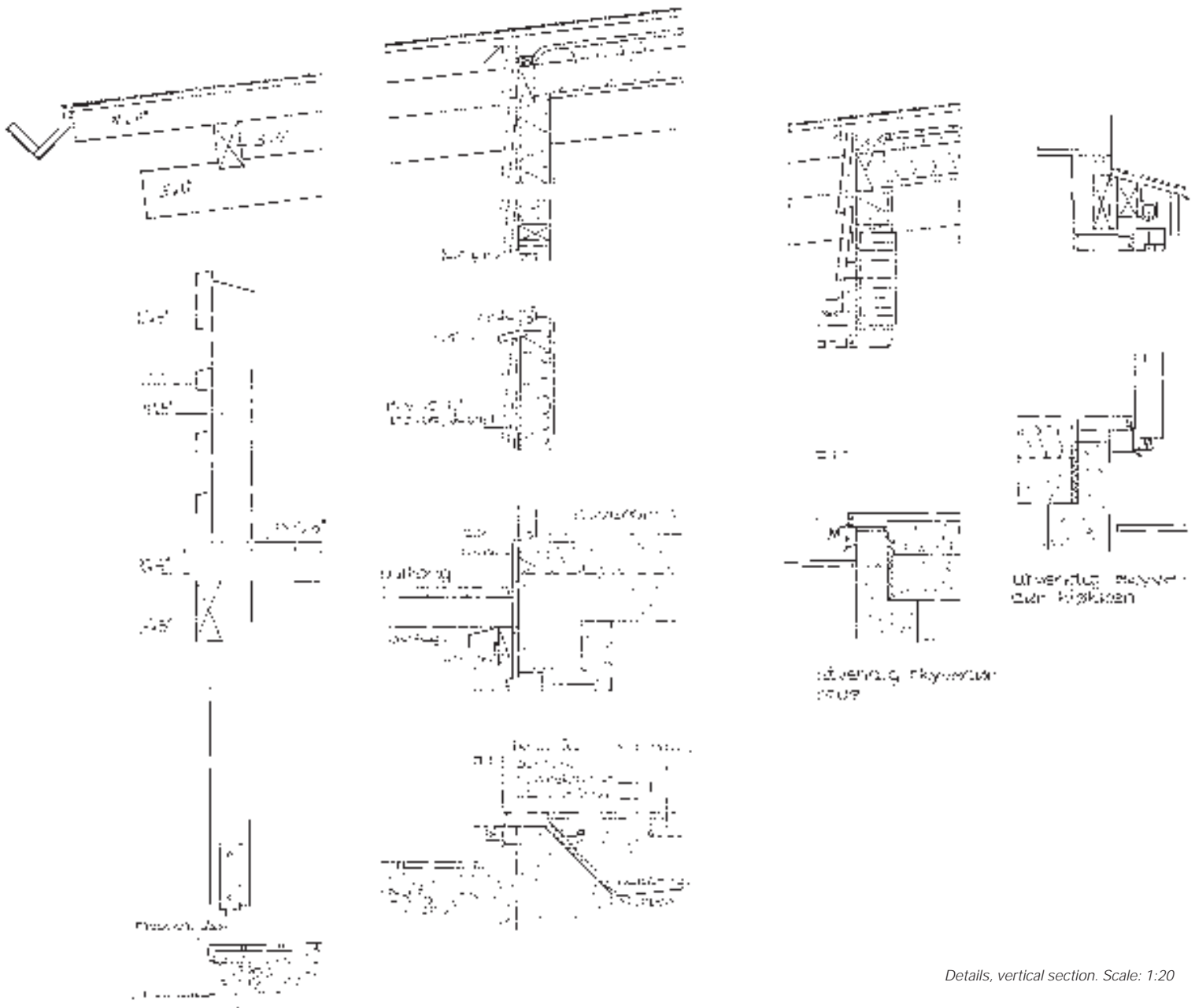
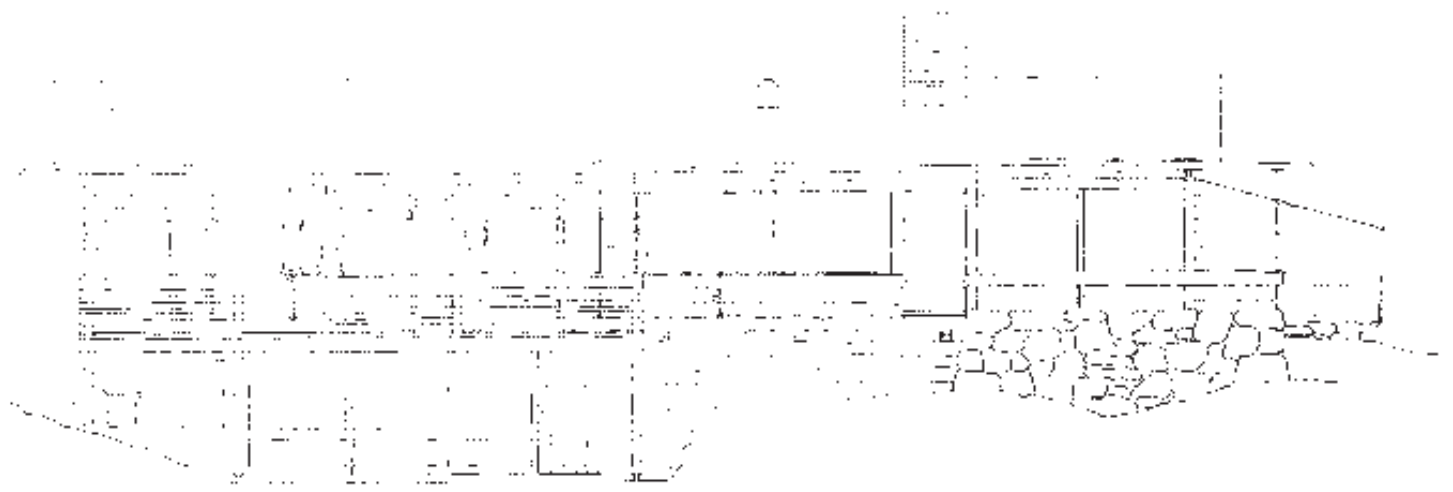




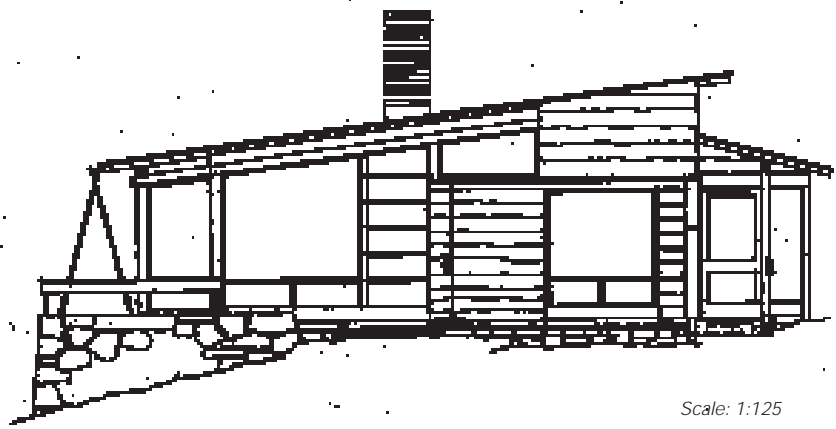
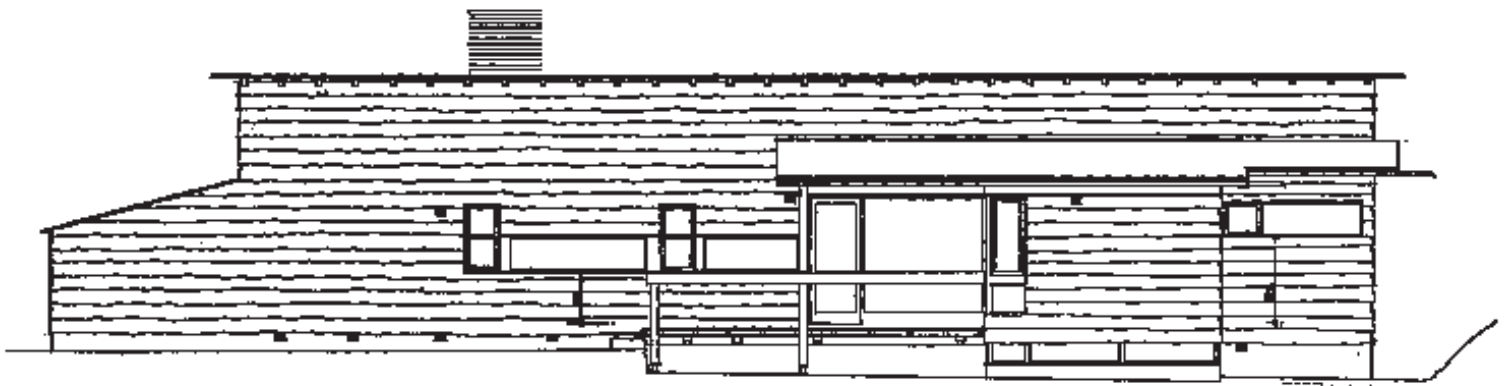




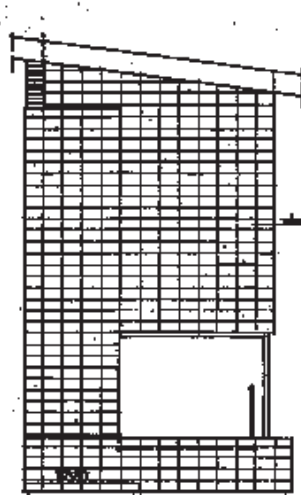




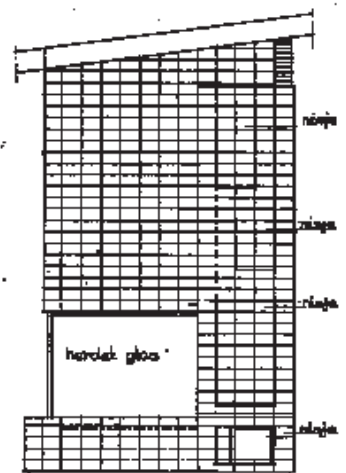
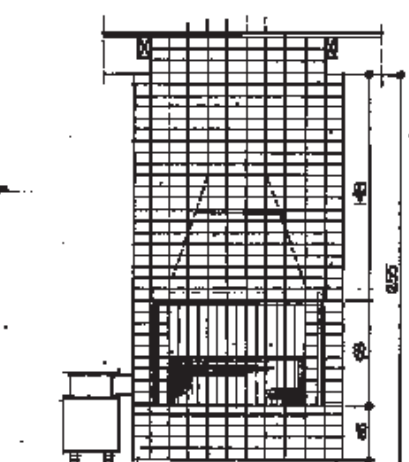
Details, vertical section. Scale: 1:20



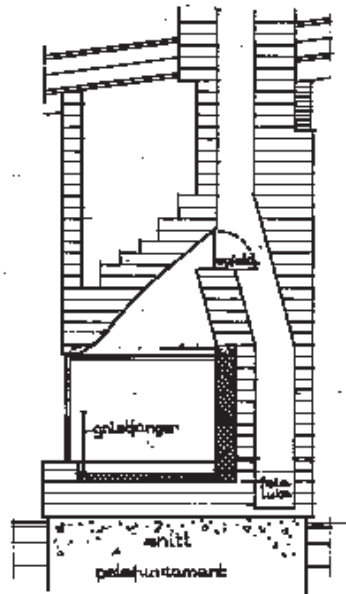
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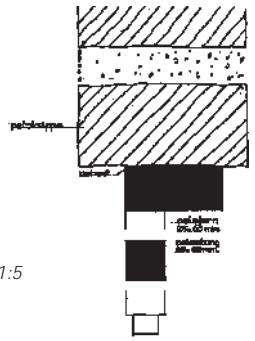
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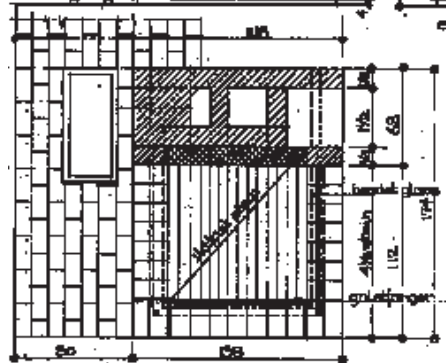
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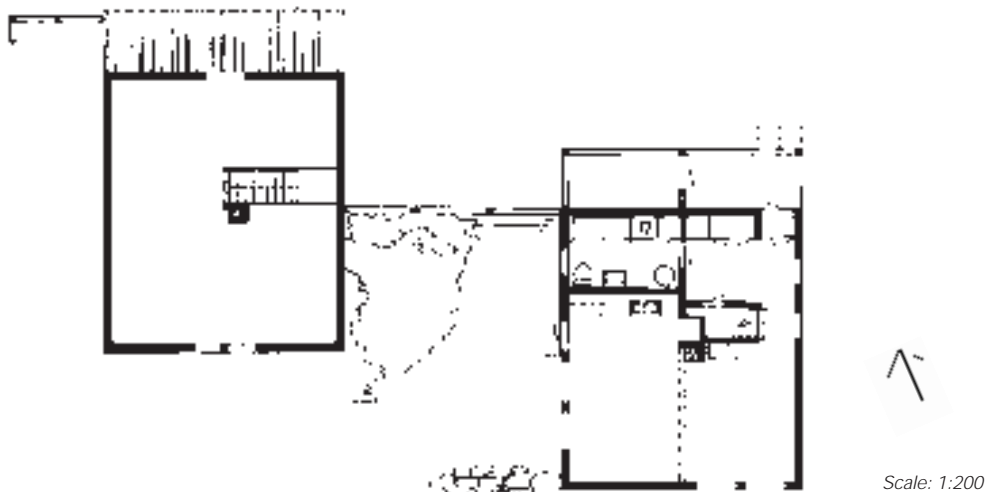
Synbar stein i peis og pipe skal være dørste.
møkkfjernet håndbarnet stein fra Steiberg & Co. Oslo
Det anbefales grov sand i fugene som trøskles
op i liv med steinen.
Stort luktst stein.
Peisen månes for gulvet legges og drager og
tøbbelen dekket godt til.
Pensjon og sking skal stå ubehandlet og må
ikke bli fuktig med kalklokket.
Hvorvidt øyeblikket 1 gang under oppmåling,
2 gang etter at varme er satt på i huset.
Etter øyeblikket skal sørge for å fjerne fra
hylling frem.

Details of fireplace. Scale: 1:50



Twin Houses

TWO SMALL HOUSES NEAR SKÅDALEN
IN OSLO, 1976



Selmer's task here was to design a two-family house for two single people in the garden of a large two-story wooden house from 1917. An important factor in the design was that it was financed with the help of the Norwegian State Housing Bank, which imposed strict regulations concerning land use and materials. The client also expressed certain wishes that had to be met. She specified wood paneling inside and out, small-paned windows, a living room with windows on three sides, and a dining room and work space on the ground floor. In addition, the building was to match the old house, which was a bit stately and self-conscious with pointed gables, located high up on the hillside of the site.

The thought of a two-family house under one roof was abandoned in favor of two separate and identical houses, with one living unit in each. Selmer's original idea of combining a bedroom downstairs with a more open bedroom mezzanine in the loft was also given up to obtain a more economical floor plan. The houses were displaced in relation to each other, coinciding with the descending ground, so that both would receive maximum sunlight and have a view. This also ensured that the view from the old house was not blocked.

A house with one-and-a-half stories and a steep roof angle, as seen here, measuring about twenty by twenty-three feet, is one of the most common house types in Norway. It is interesting that Selmer chose such a plain, traditional form in this neighborhood on

Oslo's west side, which is known for its strive for originality and distinction. It is a sign of professional integrity, which should be highly respected. Both buildings are set on concrete piles, with minimal groundwork on the site, and the floor is situated so as to provide direct access from the ground. The tar-brown board-and-batten siding reaches all the way to the ground, enhancing the houses' visual connection to the landscape.

Despite the houses' simple shape, or maybe because of it, the different facades present strong and various qualities. The gable sides facing the road are powerful and tall: without white-painted molding or other decorative elements, but with conscious window placements and proportioning, they appear as strong yet simple companions to the old house, which is seen in the background between the twin houses. The houses were originally tied together with a fence that blocked the view from above to the outdoor space of the lower house. The upper twin house also had a fence on the west side, which blocked the view from the common access path, giving the outside space in front of the kitchen and dining area a sheltered intimacy.

Indoors, the kitchen and the living space are in the same room, covering most of the first floor. As in all of Selmer's small cabins, the space is optimally used. A staircase leading up to the second floor stands as a sculptural object, incorporating a built-in storage room (off the entrance) and a niche for the refrigerator. It is

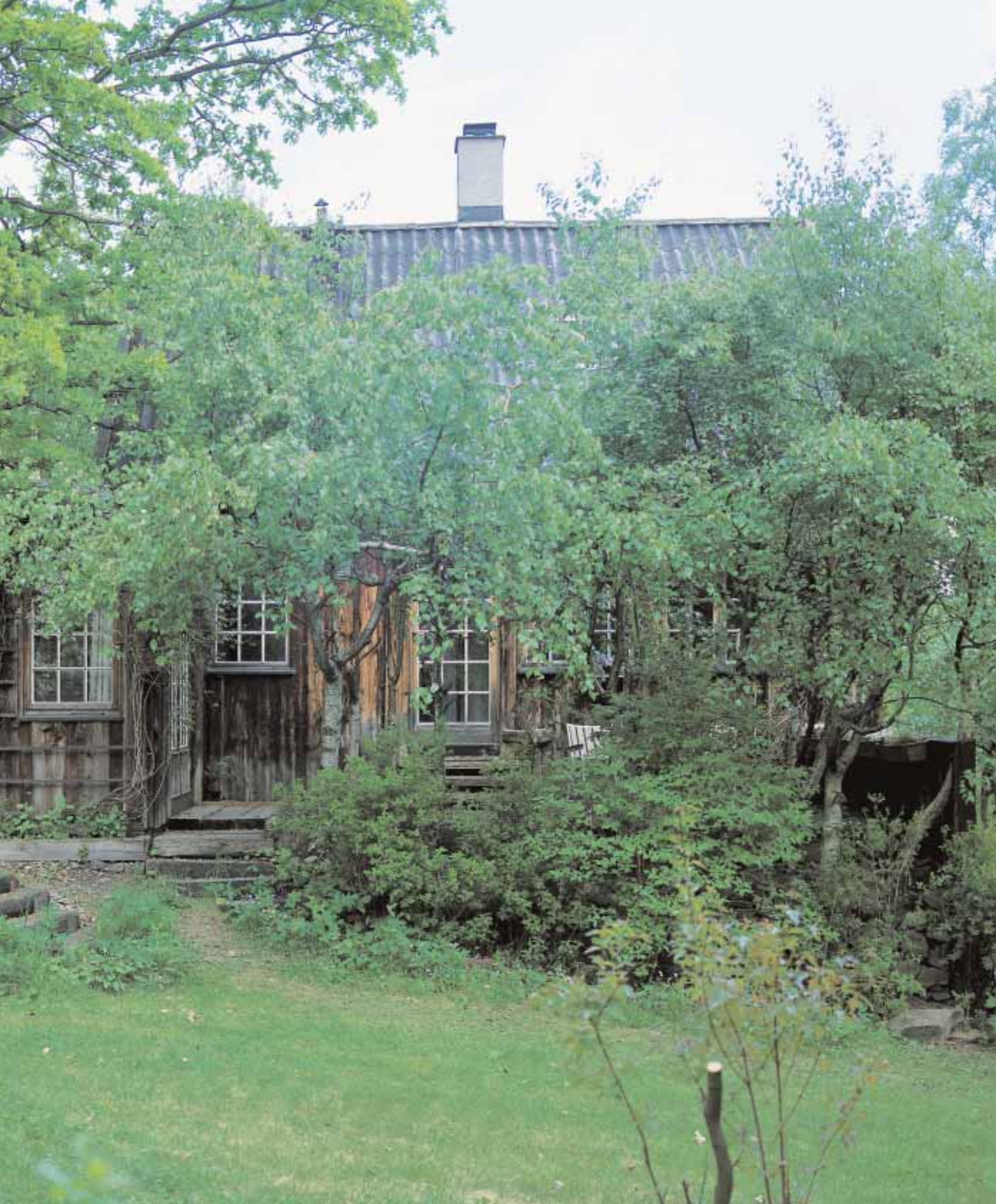
connected to the chimney and the fire wall behind the wood oven, which has a central location in the room and is usually sufficient to heat the entire house, except for the bathroom. The kitchen is located in a larger niche that is partly concealed behind the staircase/fireplace element, but it is entirely open when you walk around the chimney. Its furnishing is a type of cabin kitchen that was designed by the architects Lund and Slaatto for the Ålhytta cabin system.

The *vindfang* in both houses is situated next to the wardrobe in the entrance hall, which receives light from an eastfacing window. The entrance hall serves as an extension of the living room, which offers several places to sit, such as a sofa group and a combined dining table and desk. These spaces have windows with different lighting conditions and views. The glass door leading to the garden from the kitchen is an additional source of light. The exposed beams in the ceiling give the room character.

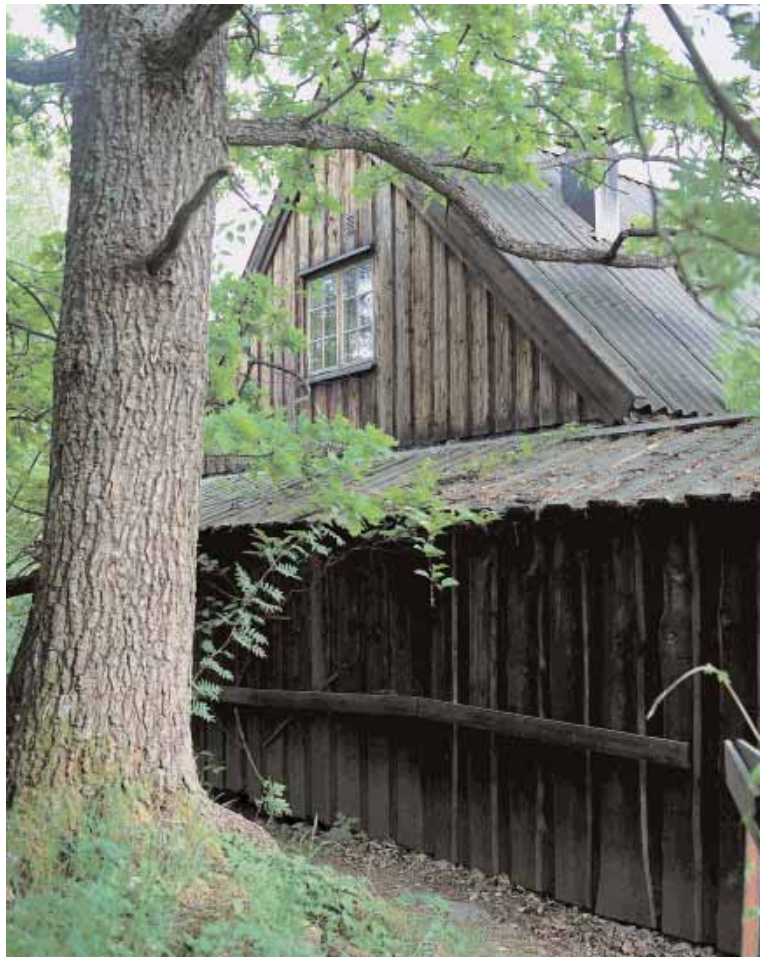
The entire second floor is an open space, with sleeping and workspaces on either end, one side with a window facing the city, the other looking out to the old house. The roof insulation is located in the main beam layer, so that the paneling provides a smooth ceiling surface where only the ridge purlin is a visible structural element, unusual for Selmer. A hallmark in her architecture is her use of exposed roof beams in residential buildings and visible rafters in the summer cabins—at least the early ones, which were often without insulation. The roof solution in the twin houses can also be explained by the regulations of the Norwegian State Housing Bank.

For both houses Selmer later designed extensions, the first in 1988, the second in 1996. In both cases, an extra bedroom was placed where the fences used to be, in extension of the outdoor sheds and with an entrance through the bathroom. The new volumes are of small dimensions with gentle saddle roofs and are unobtrusive in the landscape. All in all, it is amazing how the twin houses with their traditional building style serve an unconventional and modern lifestyle with their combination of old furniture and an open floor plan.





















In a Garden with a Steep Slope

A HOUSE IN ØVRE TÅSEN IN OSLO, 1978

Scale: 1:200

The site for this house in Øvre Tåsen is the garden of an older house on Heierstuveien, a quiet road in a single-family house area. The garden slopes down from the road, quite steeply toward the east, and the house, situated far out on the slope, has a panoramic view of the city. A garden on the southwest side receives sunlight in the evenings and is often used by the family as a dining space, with seating outside the kitchen or on the terrace.

The house is accessed from the open carport by the road along flagstones in the grass that are lined by a fence leading to the entrance. Close to the carport the fence, which is in line with the house wall, is quite low, around three feet high, and a gate opens up a shortcut for the familiar visitor. Since the ground slopes slightly, the actual height of the fence increases as it approaches the house. Its paneling of horizontal rough-edged boards merges with the siding on the house, while the kitchen windows create a link between inside and out as you walk toward the entrance. Designed without moldings, the windows appear to be cut out of a continuous wooden surface. The passage continues a step past the entrance to an outlook over the city and leads further on to the entrance of the basement, which was designed to be rented out as a separate unit after the client's children moved out.

A large window next to the stairs leading to the basement makes the entrance hall bright. Doors to the bathroom and bedroom on one side, and the

kitchen and living room on the other, are arranged so that long lines of view are created, ensuring that indirect light enters all rooms. A study with a desk, a foldable ironing board, drawers, and shelves, serves as a passage between the entrance hall and the kitchen. The workspace in the kitchen is organized along two opposite walls, with tall cabinets for food and china on the wall toward the living room. The kitchen is thus sheltered from the living room, while there is an open connection to the outside dining area in the garden, which is accessed through a glass sliding door. Here the fence shelters the garden from the neighboring house and the road, making this a protected and warm place to sit in.

The living room is large and has several sections, each with its own character. There is a large dining table with chairs, and a bright corner with tall windows and a sliding door leading out to a brick terrace with an outdoor fireplace. A fireplace with a chimney constitutes a powerful element of brick in the room. Next to it is a wood oven, which is used to heat most of the house. Near the sitting nook that faces the fireplace is an opening leading to a separate room, which is used as a study. In the bedroom, windows face toward the east and the south, providing a panoramic view over the city and the hillcrest Grefsenkollen, which can also be enjoyed from a balcony on the south side, accessed through a glass door from the bedroom. The bathroom can be accessed both directly from the bedroom and from the toilet, which



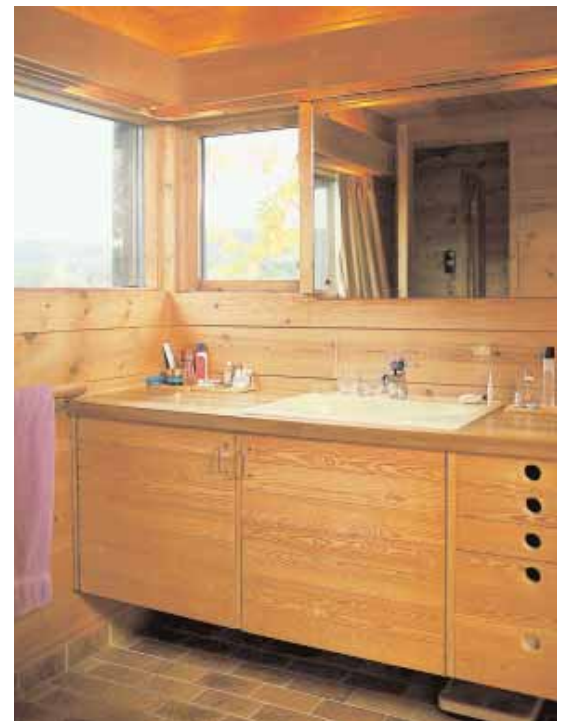


also has an entrance from the hallway, a practical arrangement. The bedrooms in the basement have their own bathroom, which is connected to a sauna. As in many of Selmer's houses, the closets are built-in, with doors that are executed in pine (including edges, hinges, and handles) and merge with the walls and the rest of the furnishing.

The exterior form of the house is a nearly rectangular building mass with two longitudinal slanted roofs, one taller and wider than the other. There are certain similarities to the house with photo atelier in Gråkammen, which Selmer had used as a model, adapting its elements to the new site. Here in Øvre Tåsen, the main impression is modified by the

intimate spatial constellations, which are already encountered by the carport: Down by the road, a bench and terracotta pots with plants are inviting elements. Approaching the house, the fence creates a link between inside and out. As the ground descends, the house becomes taller, and the brick terrace forms a division between the basement and the main floor that is in accordance with a functional division, as separate outdoor spaces are created for the residents in the upper and lower parts of the house. The homogeneous use of materials appears harmonious and natural, supporting the dramatic interplay between inside and out and varying its character from the intimate to the almost magnificent.





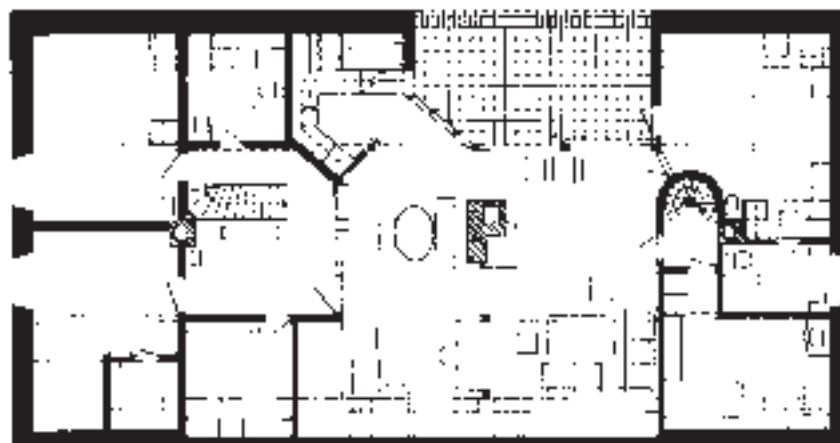






A Loft in Moss

AN INTERIOR OF A HOUSE, 1980



Scale: 1:200

In 1980 Selmer was commissioned to renovate an old one-and-a-half-story brick house from 1859 on Storgaten in the town of Moss, some thirty-five miles south of Oslo. The owners, a family of five, had run an office from the first floor of the house for a few years and now wanted to make full use of the rest of the building. The attic, with two staircases and three chimneys, was not insulated and had two partially useful rooms with windows in the gables as well as storage rooms and an open space for drying laundry. The floor surface was 2,700 square feet, which the family wanted to convert into four bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen, and a multifunctional living room, as well as a roof terrace.

"The renovation of old houses is a nice challenge," Selmer said in connection with this commission. "The challenge lies in both the individuality and the limitation of the place and the house." In this case, the architect wanted to build on the existing qualities of the attic with its broad floor boards, large supporting wooden structures, and a free-standing "crooked" chimney that dominated the space. The attic's dividing walls of brick timbering and a knee brace wall of brick would, along with the chimney, remain in place to uphold the impression of the old brick house.

The bedrooms were placed at each gable end, where windows provide light. The large middle section of the attic gets light from two sides: the main source of light are the glass walls surrounding the roof terrace on one side, while skylights are located in the slanting

roof opposite. New stairs were built where the old ones used to be, each placed against their own chimney. This is also where all vertical pipes were concealed. The main stairs that ascend from the hall on the first floor are made of wood, while the second staircase, leading to the bedroom, was replaced by a spiraling staircase of steel. Next to it, the brick wall toward the living room is curved so as to follow the shape of the stairs.

The main staircase ascends into a spacious hall where the connection to the living room is solved with great care and inventiveness. The dividing wall is parted into three vertical sections with tall glass panes in between: one section is used for a wide wooden door, whereas the other two are designed as custom-made bookcases with open shelving, a cupboard, and drawers on the living room side. Above the bookcases are built-in lighting fixtures behind a pine board, and above these are glass panes. In this way, a fluctuating and intricate visual filter is created between the hall and the living room, which also expresses the continuity of the large attic on the ceiling. A mirror on the back of one of the bookcases in the hall enhances these visual connections.

The large living room covers the entire width of the house and encompasses a 170-square-foot-large roof terrace that is located on the long side facing north-east. The fireplace is unique and was a difficult task for the architect, as its chimney through the attic is in fact crooked. When the house was built, it was deemed

important to place the chimney precisely in the center of the roof when viewed from outside, even though this did not coincide with the location of the chimney on the first floor. Selmer was excited by this challenge, and it was one of the main reasons for her to take on the commission. Her solution for the fireplace is exquisitely successful; the diagonal of the chimney together with the right-angled base give a special resilience and softness to the room. Old stones were brushed off and built with coarse joints.

Two different sitting nooks are located along the long side toward the east, one covered with a red fabric to match the brick wall, the other with a wide bench bed in an alcove. Another feature of the living room is its fixed furnishing, including a desk and shelves for books, records, and a stereo. Wood is the main material, but steel profiles are used for fastening in an unobtrusive way, giving this furniture a unique lightness in the room. This is especially true of the low double shelves that span the entire length of the room and are placed a distance in from the outer wall so that both the floor and the wall surface stand untouched. The three skylights with thin lead

glass panes provide plenty of light for this part of the room.

The kitchen is small but has sufficient space for a worktop and shelving without becoming crowded. It can be shut off from the living room by a sliding door, but is often left open as a niche in connection with the dining area, which is located next to the slanting chimney wall.

The roof terrace, which is surrounded by the living room, kitchen, and bedroom, is designed with ceramic tiles over an integral cast with heating cables. Inside the brick cornice, it is both sunny and sheltered, and provides a scenic view to Mossesundet and Jeløya toward the outer Oslo fjord. Glass doors lead into the kitchen/dining space and into the bedroom, while the living room has access to this outdoor space through a large sliding door, providing the entire living space with plenty of light.

Besides the organization of its spaces, the house is mainly characterized by its materials and structures. The floor was sanded down and joined with a type of filler that is normally used on boat decks. Then it was washed ten times with green soap before use. There





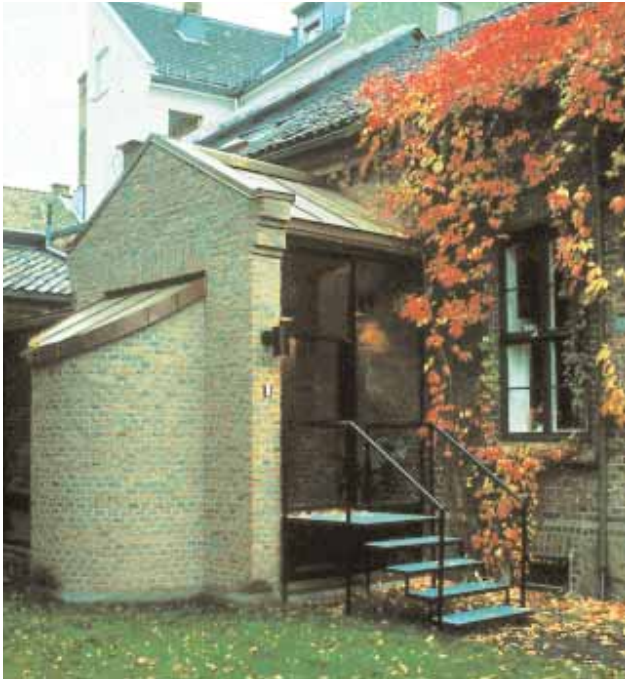
is no other insulation than the original double floor clay. This type of solution presupposes a cooperation between the residents of the two floors, as both heat and sound insulation are less effective than usual. The floors in the bedroom and the hallway both have sisal carpeting in a natural color, while the bathrooms have ceramic tiles with floor heating. The large, load-bearing wooden structures are visible elements in the space. In the midsection, the ceiling is placed over the collar beam with twelve inches of insulation, while the slanted ceiling is insulated with six inches of mineral wool. The brick chimneys were brushed off and filled up again. The brick walls, which were white-washed, were in bad condition and torn down. The bricks were brushed off and rebuilt, which gave them a light coloring that is visible in the brick timbering walls toward the bedrooms and the knee brace walls on the long sides of the house.

In addition to these old materials, the spaces are characterized by the use of pine in the furnishing and

the paneling on the walls and ceiling. Selmer used Class-B paneling, ordered from the carpenter with extra deep matching (0.4 inches) so that the broad boards, three-quarter by six, seven, eight, and nine inches, fixed alternately, would not slide apart when shrinking.

A few years after the renovation, Selmer was commissioned to design a new entrance for the first floor of the house. For this task she hired architect Hildegunn Munch-Ellingsen as an associate. The new entrance would provide a link between the house and the old washhouse in the side wing, which had remained unfurnished, and at the same time create a comfortable access to the basement. This space was previously furnished as a den with an entrance from a staircase through a trapdoor. Now it would receive a wardrobe and a toilet and be used as a sort of private party room that could also accommodate the family's teenage children when they wished to be on their own. These quite complicated functions are elegantly





solved with a small extension, whose brick wall is placed approximately six feet outside the old wall. The space in between was given a light design with glass doors and steel profiles. The brick wall is curved on the outside, shaped around the spiraling staircase that descends into the basement. With the sloping roof mounted over the curve, the entire extension has a pronounced expression despite its small dimensions.







Notes

- 1 For simplicity's sake, Wenche Selmer is referred to by her married name "Selmer" throughout this book.
- 2 Beate Hølmebakk and Tanja Lie, "Ideer fra himmelen—et intervju med Wenche Selmer," in *Arkitektthøgskolen i Oslo, 1994–1995* (Oslo: Arkitektthøgskolen i Oslo, 1995), 23–24.
- 3 The Architectural Academy is an important institution in the development of the architectural profession and education in Western Europe. Throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries the Italian and French architectural academies played a central role. The Architectural Academy is the professional body of the National Association of Norwegian Architects (NAL), which is responsible for supplementary education courses under the direction of the association and is consulted in questions regarding educational institutions in Norway. From the nineteenth century and onward, the polytechnical architectural education, after the model of the technical colleges in Germany, became a very strong competitor to the academy or beaux arts tradition.
- 4 Wenche Selmer, "Profil 6—Wenche Selmer," interview by Elisabeth Seip, *Byggekunst* 8 (1980): 370.
- 5 Hølmebakk and Lie, "Ideer fra himmelen—et intervju med Wenche Selmer," 21.
- 6 Ingrid Høivik, one of Selmer's co-activists in "Grandmothers Against Nuclear Weapons," personal communication.
- 7 Elisabeth Seip, "Profil—6 Wenche Selmer," *Byggekunst* 8 (1980): 371.
- 8 Mette Sjølie, *Sosial boligbygging i Norge 1945–1980. En studie av Jens Selmers arbeider* (Oslo: Norsk Arkitekturmuseum, 1989), 5.
- 9 Kenneth Frampton, "Stockholm and the Legacy of Funkis," in *Asplund*, eds. Caldenby, Claes and Olof Hultin (Stockholm: Arkitekturförlaget, 1985), 35–39.
- 10 Georg Eliassen, ed., *Norske hus—en billedbok* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1950).
- 11 Helge Waaler, "Villaarkitektur på Østlandet 1945–55" (master's thesis, Bergen: University of Bergen, 1999), 10–29.
- 12 "The New Empiricism: Sweden's Latest Style," *The Architectural Review* (June 1947): 199–204.
- 13 Olle Svedberg, "Nyrealismen." *Arkitektur* 3 (1988): 28–33. He uses the term to refer to, among other things, Vittorio Gregotti's use of the word with regard to similar Swedish-inspired architecture in "New Directions in Italian Architecture" from 1968.
- 14 Waaler, "Villaarkitektur på Østlandet 1945–55," 100. The term *folkehjemmet* originates from Sweden and can be translated with "the people's home." It was introduced in Sweden by the future social democratic prime minister Per-Albin Hansson in a speech in 1928, when he compared the good society with the good home, where there is equality, consideration, helpfulness, and where no one is privileged. Earlier on, *folkehjemmet* had been a term used in the conservative world of ideas, but it was taken over by the social democrats. In architecture, one refers to the period from the 1930s up until the late 1950s as the era of *folkehjemmet*.
- 15 Waaler, "Villaarkitektur på Østlandet 1945–55." Selmer's house on Sondreveien is one of the six selected study objects in Waaler's thesis.
- 16 Hølmebakk and Lie, "Ideer fra himmelen—et intervju med Wenche Selmer," 24.
- 17 It was forbidden to build single-family houses in the cities during the period of 1952–1957. For a while there was an injunction to build the house on Sondreveien as a temporary two-family house, but then the client received a building permit for a single-family house. Waaler, "Villaarkitektur på Østlandet 1945–55," 5, 79.
- 18 Wenche and Jens Selmer, "Wenche and Jens Selmer," in *Treprise—Ten Norwegian Prize-Winning Architects*, ed., Dag Rognlien (Oslo: Arkitektnytt, 1978), part 2, 20.
- 19 Nils-Ole Lund, "At lære af Norge," *Arkitektnytt* 1 (2001): 15.
- 20 Ulf Grønvold, "I hybridenes dager," *Byggekunst* 7 (1991): 403–11.
- 21 While Christian Norberg-Schulz (1951) and Geir Grung (1959) had written about architecture in China in *Byggekunst* magazine earlier on, several articles were now published on architecture in Japan: Gullik Kollandsrud, "Modulens hjemland," *Byggekunst* 2 (1959): 41–50, and Nils-Ole Lund, "Japanske Bondehuse," *Byggekunst* 2 (1963): 50–55. Other Nordic and foreign architectural journals also published articles on Japanese architecture and applied arts during this period.
- 22 Jens and Wenche Selmer, "En utstilling om noen trehus," Galleri Palladio (Oslo, November 1982).
- 23 *The Act of Coastline and Mountain Area Planning, December 10, 1971*: "The objective of this legislation is to present a coordinated utilization of the coastal areas and mountain ranges with the aim to protect their natural values and the possibilities of public access, and secure that the development for recreation and tourism is based on a thorough social assessment in the best interests of the users and the landowners."
- 24 Wenche Selmer, "Tradisjon og egenart," *Fortidsvern* 4 (1978): 21.
- 25 Waaler, "Villaarkitektur på Østlandet 1945–55," 85.
- 26 Hølmebakk and Lie, "Ideer fra himmelen—et intervju med Wenche Selmer," 25.
- 27 Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Washington: Bay Press, 1983): 16–30, 21.
- 28 Nils-Ole Lund, "Fremvæksten af en norsk arkitektur," *Kunst og kultur* (1981): 67.
- 29 Sverre Fehn, "Knut Knutsen," foreword to *Knut Knutsen, 1903–1969, en vandrer i norsk arkitektur* by Arne Sigmund Tvedten and Bengt Espen Knutsen (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag A/S, 1982).
- 30 Wenche Selmer, "Knutsen-skolen. Norsk arkitektur på sidespor?" *Arkitektnytt* 15 (1986): 413–15, 413.
- 31 Frampton, "Stockholm," 21.
- 32 Selmer, "Knutsen-skolen," 415. This final paragraph of the manuscript was changed in the published issue.
- 33 Paul Ricoeur, "Universal Civilization and National Cultures," in *History and Truth*, trans. Chas A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 276–77.
- 34 Seip, "Profil 6—Wenche Selmer," 373.
- 35 Elisabeth Seip, "Arkitekt betyr overbyggmester," in *Kvinnenes Kulturhistorie* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1985), bind 2, 307–13, 311. See also Renja Suominen-Kokkonen, *The Fringe of a Profession* (Helsinki: Finska fornminnesföreningens tidsskrift, 1992), 98.
- 36 Quoted in Seip, "Arkitekt betyr overbyggmester," 310.
- 37 Anne Wichstrøm, *Kvinneliv, kunstnerliv* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1997), 158.
- 38 Jan Olav Jensen and Carl-Viggo Hølmebakk, "Wenche Selmer som lærer," *Arkitektnytt* 11 (1998): 6.
- 39 Hildegunn Munch-Ellingsen, "Til Wenche Selmer," *Arkitektnytt* 11 (1998): 7.
- 40 Jensen and Hølmebakk, "Wenche Selmer som lærer," 6.
- 41 Meta Christensen, personal communication.
- 42 Sven Erik Lundby, personal communication.

Glossary

<i>dal/-en:</i>	valley, dale, glen (e.g.: <i>Skådalen</i>)	<i>sti/-en:</i>	path, footpath, trail (e.g.: <i>Trosterudstien</i>)
<i>fjell/-et:</i>	mountain, rock (e.g.: <i>Norefjell</i>)	<i>stø/-en:</i>	landing place for boats (e.g.: <i>Brekkestø</i>)
<i>gate/-n:</i>	street, lane (e.g.: <i>Storgaten</i>)	<i>sund/-et:</i>	sound, strait(s), channel (e.g.: <i>Mossesundet</i>)
<i>haug/-en:</i>	hill, knoll, mound, barrow (e.g.: <i>Myrhaugen</i>)	<i>svaberg/-et:</i>	<i>Sva</i> from Old Norse <i>sva</i> (= a bare, smooth place) and <i>berg</i> (= rock, mountain; bare, smooth, sloping rock). Owing to the geology and topography of Norway the greater part of the coastline consists of <i>svaberg</i> , where weather conditions are too harsh for vegetation to grow. Because the hard rock (largely granite) was worn smooth during the last Ice Age, the surface is nice to walk on in good weather but is slippery when wet.
<i>havn/-en:</i>	harbor, haven, port (e.g.: <i>Åkerøyhavn</i> —Field-island-harbor)	<i>Sørlandet:</i>	the southernmost part of Norway
<i>holme/-n:</i>	holm, islet (e.g.: <i>Beltesholmen</i>)	<i>tjern/-et:</i>	small forest or mountain lake (e.g.: <i>Røstjern</i>)
<i>kolle/-n:</i>	knoll, small rounded peak, hill- or mountaintop. (e.g.: <i>Vettakollen</i> , <i>Holmenkollen</i>)	<i>vei/-en:</i>	road, way (e.g.: <i>Sondreveien</i> , <i>Gråkamveien</i> , <i>Skådalsveien</i>)
<i>nes/-et:</i>	headland, point, promontory (e.g.: <i>Hoveneset</i>)	<i>vik/-en:</i>	bay, inlet, cove, creek (e.g.: <i>Søversvik</i>)
<i>seter/-en:</i>	mountain summer dairy farm (or pasture). In use until well into the 20th century, when the <i>seter</i> buildings began to be used as weekend or vacation cabins (e.g.: <i>Sørbølseter</i> , <i>Mysuseter</i>)	<i>vindfang/-et:</i>	a room for "catching" (<i>fange</i>) "the wind" (<i>vind</i>) = vestibule, small enclosed porch or entry between the outer and inner doors of a house or building
<i>skjærgård/-en:</i>	Old Norse skjærgård from <i>skjær</i> (= rocks at, or just below, the surface of the water; Eng. <i>skerry</i>) and <i>gård/gard</i> from gard (Eng. <i>guard</i> and <i>yard</i>). <i>Skjærgården</i> is the belt of islands, holms, and reefs along most of the Norwegian coast (archipelago). The continuous belt protects the coast from the North Atlantic Ocean. From the time of the earliest settlements this has made it possible to establish small communities and carry on fishing, shipping, and trade along the coast.	<i>Østlandet:</i>	the southeastern part of Norway, with the interior bordering on Sweden
<i>skog/-en:</i>	forest, wood(s), woodland (e.g.: <i>Krokkbogen</i>)	<i>øy/-a:</i>	island, isle (e.g.: <i>Fjeldalsøya</i> , <i>Hellersøya</i> , <i>Åkerøya</i>)

The Cabin Tradition in Norway

Today there are some 400,000 cabins in Norway, distributed among a population of 4.6 million. The cabins are largely situated along the coast and in the mountains, unlike in other countries in Europe where they are often located in the woods. For a long time the cabins were small and primitive, without electricity and running water. Today they are larger and the standards are often as high as for a private home.

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Elisabeth Tostrup, page 32.

Drawings:

Architect Håvard Iversen has drawn the introductory drawings for the selected buildings in part 2.

The remaining drawings are reproductions from NAM's (The Norwegian Museum of Architecture) archives.

List of Works

YEAR	REG. NO.	CLIENT	CATEGORY	ADDRESS
1953	24	Per Rom	summerhouse	Fjeldalsøy, Brekkestø
	43	Mass and Gregers Kure	cabin	Ringkollen
1954	31	Elisabeth and Johan Kloster	house renovation	Klostergården, Tromøya
	59	Kirsten and Knut Fougner	cabin	Roa
	61	Knut Foyen	house	Leangveien 40 b, Asker
1955	51	Elsie and Morten G. Johnsen	house	Sondreveien 20, Oslo
	52	Cato Hambro	house	Eikstubben 9, Bærum
	68	Irmelin Christensen	farmhouse	Brekkestø
1956	21	Carl Ruge	house renovation	Holmenkollveien 6, Oslo
	44	Mass and Gregers Kure	house	Sætravei 8, Oslo
	62	Kaja and Hermann Knudtzon	house	Blindernveien, Oslo
1957	69	Hans Cappelen	enebolig	Øvre Ullern terrasse 27, Oslo
	82	Wenche and Jens Selmer	summerhouse	Beltesholmen, Brekkestø
1958	14	Pauline Snipstad	house	Lillevandsveien 19, Oslo
	15	Knut Selmer and Elisabeth Schweigaard Selmer	house	Bjørneveien 85, Oslo
	20	Betty Schweigaard	apartment, first floor	Tidemandsgate 7, Oslo
	20	Joh. P. Sanner	apartment, second floor	Tidemandsgate 7, Oslo
1959	70	Brostrup Breien family	house	Dr. Holms vei 2 c, Oslo
	60	Engelschjøn family	renovation of farmhouse	Fjeldalsøy, Brekkestø
	11	Sverre Sunde	house	Harald Løvenskjolds vei 22, Oslo
1960	2	Inge and Muriel Aarnæs	summerhouse, boathouse	Fjeldalsøy, Brekkestø
	42	Mass and Gregers Kure	house and renovation	Sætravei 8, Oslo
	84	Herman Tank-Nielsen	summerhouse	Fjeldalsøy, Brekkestø
		Henrik and Anette Thommessen Siporex	house, extension prefabricated house	Bygdøy, Oslo
1962	30	Odd Narud	house	Myrhaugen 20, Oslo
	80	Sofie Helene and Knut Wigert	summerhouse	Hellersøy, Brekkestø
1963	1	Arve Øverlie and wife	house	Nordseterveien, Lillehammer
	83	Wenche and Jens Selmer	house	Trosterudstien 1, Oslo
1964	23	Lisen and Frode Ringdal	summerhouse	Furøyholmen, Høvåg
	53	Ole Hellen	house	Granstuveien 2, Oslo
1965	36	Henrik Thommessen	summerhouse prototype, coastal master plan	Hoveneset, Homborsund
	72	Anne and Finn Arnesen	house	Voksenliveien 4 b, Oslo
	49	Kathinka and Petter Fylling	house	Voll terrasse 5 b, Bærum
	47	Pus and Carl-Fredrik Holmboe	cabin	Gausdal
1967	39	Rolf and Gunvor Mathiesen	house	Vettaliveien 14, Oslo
	56	Kristi and Arne Grønvold	farmhouse	Fjeldalsøy, Brekkestø
1968	22	Gunnar Rogstad and wife	house with bedsit	Slemdalsvingen 39, Oslo
	76	Grete Alm	summerhouse	Brunlanes
1969	12	Sverre Sunde	summerhouse, boathouse	Tydilleholmen, Søgne

	34	Dik Lehmkuhl	fireplace	Haukholmen
	74	Unni and Stein Akre	summerhouse	Hvasser
	16	Signe and Reidar Skaar	house	Ås
1970	37	Gunvor and Rolf Mathiesen	summer house, extension	Krossen, Blindleia
	26	Jan Herman Reimers	renovation of apartment	Nes hageby, Asker
	3	Inge and Muriel Aarnæs	house renovation	Båstadveien 49, Asker
	8	Sverre Sunde and wife	extension	Usterabben
	65	Karen and Edvard Christie	summerhouse	Åkerøya
1971	35	Randi and Svein Manum	house	Bjørnelia 47, Lommedalen
	46	Pus and Carl-Fredrik Holmboe	house	Robergåsen, Sandefjord
1972	66	Maja and Otto Closs	renovation	Ekraveien 54, Oslo
	71	A. Bratland	semi-detached house	Bauneveien 5, Oslo
	50	Kathinka and Petter Fylling	summerhouse	Fjeldalsøy, Brekkestø
	75	Unni and Stein Akre	renovation	Rustad gård, Ås
1973	41	Klaus Lefdal	annex	Åkerøya, Brekkestø
1974	27	Jan Herman, Bibbi Reimers	cabin	Sørbølseter, Vassfaret/Krøderen
	40	Jim and Trine Bengston	house	Gråkamveien 7, Oslo
	48	Gro and Robert Kloster	extension and renovation	Bø, Lier
	73	Finn Arnesen	cabin	Valdres
1975	10	Christian Stephansen	cabin	Åkerøya, Brekkestø
1975	64	Nils and Vigdis Christie	attic renovation	Tostrup terrasse 9, Oslo
1976	4	Boss and Arne Thorkelsen	boat house	Thorkelsholmen, Portør
1976	40	Jim and Trine Bengston	atelier	Gråkamveien 7, Oslo
	9	Edgar Sæther	house	Norbergveien 49 c, Oslo
	29	Siri Næss	two houses (twin houses)	Skådalsveien 27, Oslo
1977	78	Eve and Abdel Errahmani	summerhouse	Provence, Frankrike
	37	Gunvor and Rolf Mathiesen	summerhouse, change, extension	Krossen, Høvåg
	17	Solveig and Tore Sandberg	cabin	Bøganeset, Nes
	54	Hans Hertzberg	extension	Huldreveien 11 B, Oslo
	55	Engelschiøn and Grønvold	coastal plan	Fjeldalsøy, Brekkestø
1978	7	Heidi and Tor Steensland	house	Heierstuveien 3, Oslo
1980	19	Ulla and Terje Riseng	attic renovatoin	Storgaten 12, Moss
	13	Åse and Aksel Schmidt	house with annex	Nedre Båstad vei 42, Asker
1981	16	Ingrid and Knut Sanner	house	Båstadryggen 39, Asker
	67	Frøydis Bryhn Dahl and Finn-Erik Dahl	house	Nedre Båstad vei 40 b, Asker
	38	Gunvor and Rolf Mathiesen	cabin	Tossevikseter
1982	33	Liv Simonsen and Erik Anker	outhouse and garage	Tuengveien 5, Oslo
	7	Heidi and Tor Steensland	cabin, extension	Skåbu
1983	58	Nina Grønvold	summerhouse	Fjeldalsøy, Brekkestø
	63	Karin Denstad	house	Stjerneveien 8 c, Oslo

1984	32	Kristoffer Prestrud	extension, renovation	Lillebakken 4, Oslo
1985	25	Kristian Romsøe	house	Lillehagveien 29, Bærum
1986	87	Per Sandbakken	summerhouse, extension	Fjeldalsøy, Brekkestø
	57	Helene Grønvold	summerhouse	Fjeldalsøy, Brekkestø
1987	81	Christian Brinch	house	Orreveien 11 c, Oslo
1988	29	Siri Næss	extension	Skådalsveien 27, Oslo
1989	56	Kristi and Arne Grønvold	renovation of washhouse	Fjeldalsøy, Brekkestø
	28	Else and Christian Oppegård	house	Børter, Enebakk
1990	85	Ulla and Terje Riseng	summerhouse, extension	Jeløy, Moss
	25	Kristian Romsøe	summerhouse, extension	
1991	86	Cecilie Hermann	cabin, renovatoin	Haugseter, Rondane
	88	Jean Claude Hermann	renovation, Banque Indosuez	Karl Johans gate 45, Oslo
	89	Von der Lippe	boat house	Gamle Hellesund
1992	5	Knut and Kristin Øgreid	summerhouse	Makrellholmene, Brekkestø
1993	65	Karen and Edvard Christie	summerhouse, extension	Åkerøya
	45	Bent Kure and Eva Buer	cabin	Mysusetter, Rondane
1995	6	Gerd Verdu	renewal of boat house	Langangen
1996	79	Gerd Verdu	summerhouse	Langangen
	74	Unni and Stein Akre	annex	Hvasser
	29	Siri Næss	extension	Skådalsveien 27, Oslo
1997	77	Knut Arne Trellevik	extension, renovation	Blikksund, Blindleia
	82	Anniken and Finn Bugge	summerhouse, renovation	Risør

Selmer's Recipes

TREATMENT OF WOODWORK

Oil-sanding floors

This is a treatment that results in different tones, including the look of white-scrubbed floors. A solution is made of 50% boiled linseed oil and 50% white spirit or turpentine mixed with a color substance, for example, Talens, Amsterdam oil color.

The following recipe will produce a grayish-brown tone on the floor:

- 1 liter of boiled linseed oil
- 1 liter of white spirit (or turpentine, which smells better)
- 3–6 tubes of Raw Umber
- 1/2–1 large tube of Ivory Black
- (The colors are mixed in with the linseed oil.)

The mixture is enough for approximately 440 square feet of floor space. The necessary amount will vary according to the type of wood and the dryness of the material. The mixture should be tested on the floor material in question, so that the right amount of color substance is added. The solution is poured onto the floor in a pool of about eight inches in diameter and is rubbed into the floor with a cloth. The mixture is then sanded into the woodwork using sandpaper (180–200) on a cork block, moving in the direction of the fibers. A sanding machine can also be used. A rotating sanding-wheel on a drill creates stripes across the direction of the fibers and should therefore not be used in connection with the method described here. The mixture together with the sanded woodwork creates a paste on the surface that is dried using a clean cloth. No visible moisture should be left on the floor.

Aftertreatment: The floor is cleaned with a cloth, dipped in a solution of 50% boiled linseed oil and 50% white spirit. This treatment is repeated whenever needed. The floor is scrubbed with genuine green soap.

Note: The cloths should be burned after use due to the danger of self-ignition.

Oil treatment of work tops in teak

A solution of 50% boiled linseed oil and 50% turpentine is rubbed into the work top with a cloth, sanded with fine sandpaper (oil-sanded), and wiped off with a cloth. This treatment will also work without the use of sandpaper and can be used on other woodwork. Jens Selmer used to add a bit of Raw

Umber to the solution when treating oak and pine because he wanted darker surfaces as a contrast to the untreated pine walls, and preferred the visual weight a dark tabletop achieved.

External wood treatment

For many years, Selmer used carbolineum for the treatment of external woodwork. After this was forbidden, she recommended using an oil-based tar-stain that can be thinned out with white spirit to achieve the right color. She recommended trying this on a piece of wood before the final solution was selected. For 10 liters of a similar stain you need:

- 3 liters of wood-tar
- 3 liters of boiled linseed oil
- 3 liters of turpentine
- 1 liter of Xylamon fungus-killer

Color powder, which is stirred into the linseed oil, can be added accordingly: 200g umber + 50g oxide black. Green umber gives a grayish brown color, while burnt umber results in a more reddish brown color. The color code for the red paint Selmer used on her summerhouses is NCS No. 6030-Y90R.

About the Author



photo © Wenche Frølich

Elisabeth Tostrup is professor of architecture at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design, where she worked together with Wenche Selmer during the years 1983–87. Tostrup graduated from the Department of Architecture at the Norwegian College of Technology in Trondheim. She was a practicing architect for many years and won prizes in important architectural competitions in Norway. In 1993 she won the EAAE international essay competition on Writing in Architectural Education, and the thesis for her doctorate *Architecture and Rhetoric* (1996) was published in England and the USA.

Tostrup teaches architectural design and supervises postgraduate research. Her aim is to increase self-awareness in the architectural profession through intensified theoretical discussions, greater openness within the profession, and better communication with practitioners in other fields that are related to architecture. The author emphasizes that in architecture poetry and realism are two sides of the same story. Poetic realism can therefore serve as a keyword in these endeavors, not as an architectural style, but as an attitude toward architecture.