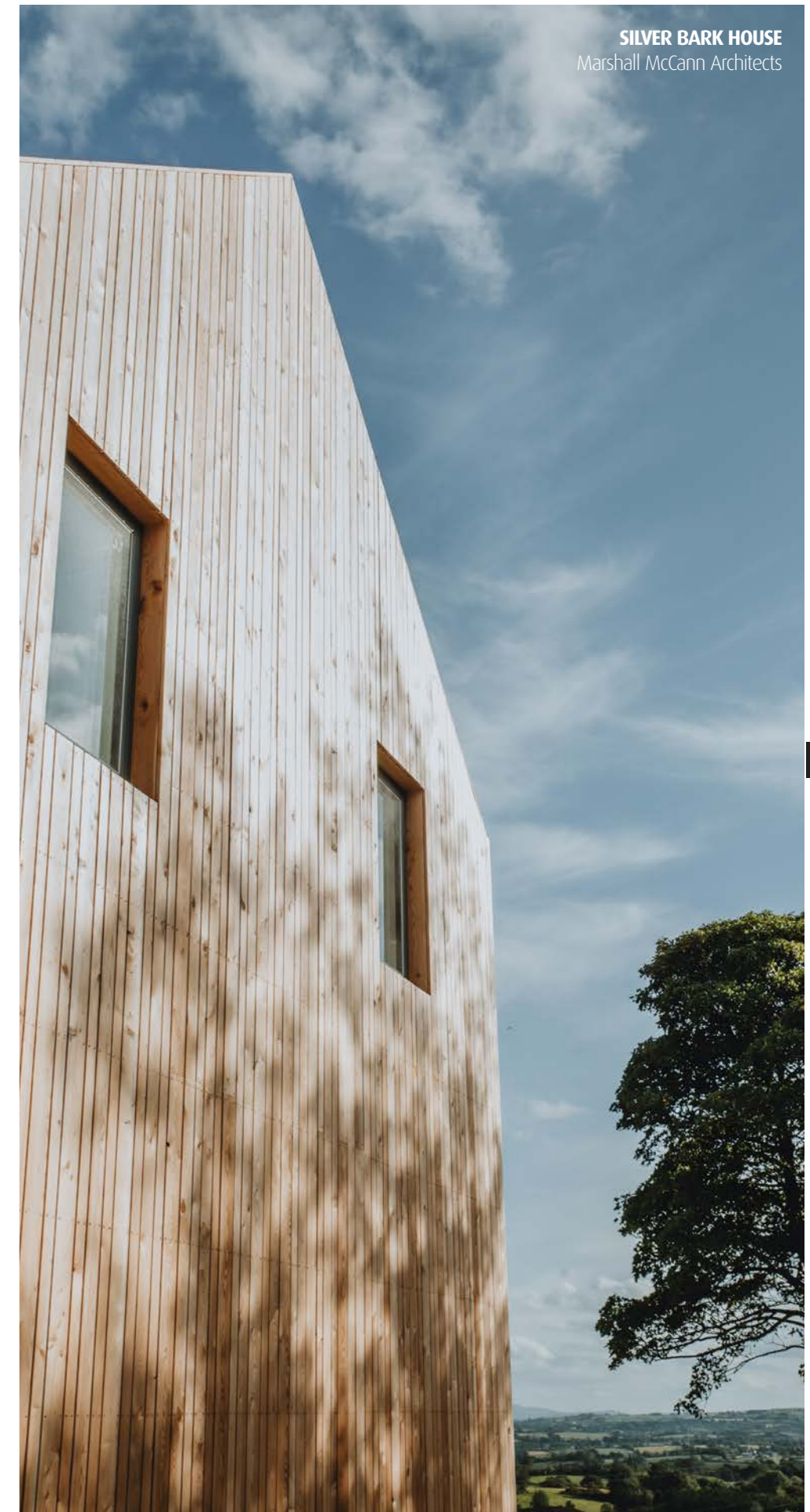


// Hillsborough is experiencing an 'invasion' of fake Georgian-style housing. In that dismal context, it is indeed most refreshing to ... observe this unashamedly contemporary piece of good architecture. //

# Silver Bark





In reviews such as this, I would normally start by viewing the interior, leaving commentary on the exterior aesthetics as a parting shot. However, in the case of Silver Bark House, the exterior form was so visually appealing, cohesive in appearance and physically unadulterated, that I felt compelled to enter into discussion with Martin Marshall of Marshall McCann Architects before proceeding to the interior spaces. As with all seemingly simple forms, the expressed simplicity belies the detailed considerations and interventions which are required to deliver the sophisticated outcome which in this case is overwhelmingly evident.

These high exterior qualities are essentially provided by the roof and walls being clad in the same material - Siberian Larch - and through discreetly employing sensitively

detailed concealed rainwater gutters and downpipes. A visually seamless wall-to-roof junction and absence of clutter right across the façades reinforces those unique architectural attributes; because of the visually successful cladding of these two exterior elements, I was naturally eager to discover how their supporting structures were formed.

Through referring to relevant detailed sectional drawings, kindly provided by the architects, it was evident that the substructure of the exterior walls is formed in prefabricated three-hundred-millimetre-deep timber framing, with the roof structure consisting of a similar depth of rafters supporting corrugated metal sheeting, sandwiched between timber battens all capped with larch boarding. Further, both the walls and roof structures are packed with three-hundred-millimetre reclaimed cellulose

insulation which, with airtight seals at every junction, results in an extremely high thermal performance building.

One of the most disturbing aspects concerning new-build houses in the rural countryside - where Silver Bark House is located - is the often gross and rurally incongruous scale of such structures. While Silver Bark House, with its five double bedrooms and built-in garage, is indeed a large dwelling, its massing is ingeniously and sympathetically reduced by the accommodation being arranged in two separate two-storey blocks of similar size, connected by a delicately detailed single-storey link.

Whereas the foremost of the two two-storey units is appropriately set parallel to the main road, its counterpart is positioned at an >



➤ angle, thereby not only creating a pleasing element of surprise as one circumnavigates the dwelling but also a generous entrance loggia, the form of which, by virtue of its angular configuration resembling openly outstretched arms, welcomingly leads to the front doorway.

Immediately beyond this engaging introduction to the house's interior exists an

equally impressive, spatially generous hall which very evidently acts as the house's circulation fulcrum. Such is the spatial quality of this hall, ample opportunity exists for use as a special living space, extra to those others provided elsewhere.

As if in deference to the economical and cohesive application of materials on Silver Bark House's exterior, the finishes of the interior

are equally consistently minimalistic and unified in appearance, albeit in a contrasting but complementary format. Walls, ceilings, woodwork, kitchen and other similar storage units are all subdued white in colour, with the floors paved in mellow light grey, large format, butt-jointed ceramic tiles.

Even the proprietary window system - 'Kastrup Alu-clad Timber' - with its clean lines, is in ➤

➤ complete harmony with the architecture which, given the generally limited availability of such proprietary products, is a quality often somewhat difficult to achieve. To punctuate and complement this clean-lined stunning uniformity, architectural incident is discerningly introduced at key locations.

Accessed directly off the hall exists the combined kitchen and dining spaces, the floor level of which articulately drops downwards to form the 'open-planned' living space. The kitchen/dining floor also instinctively extends along the house's south wall to form a window seat which subtly defines this comfortable recessed area. The living space straddles the full width of the respective building block, too, from the south-facing aspect, give stunning panoramic views over the drumlin-undulating countryside and the Mourne mountains beyond, and from the north-facing aspect a superbly landscaped patio and garden complete with a sunken fire pit.

As well as being appropriately sited in relationship to the main road, the front building block also provides a windshield which protects the enjoyment of this essential external facility from the often-experienced strong winds, which are mainly generated by

the lofty location. Protection from these strong winds is also assisted by the presence of a tall wall structure, which forms part of the fire pit assembly, while also acting as a back to the in-built seating.

Internally, as a representative example of the many carefully afforded detailed considerations and intent required to maintain architectural minimalism, door hinges are concealed within the thickness of the door with latches working by discreet magnetic

mechanisms. This applaudable minimalist objective is also very evident in the two stairways which lead respectively to two separate suites of bedrooms.

Fabricated in natural oak, the design of these stairs is straightforward and completely devoid of ornate embellishment; the stringers are articulately set some fifty millimetres off the flanking walls. The significance of these stairways in providing conspicuous architectural incident is highlighted ➤

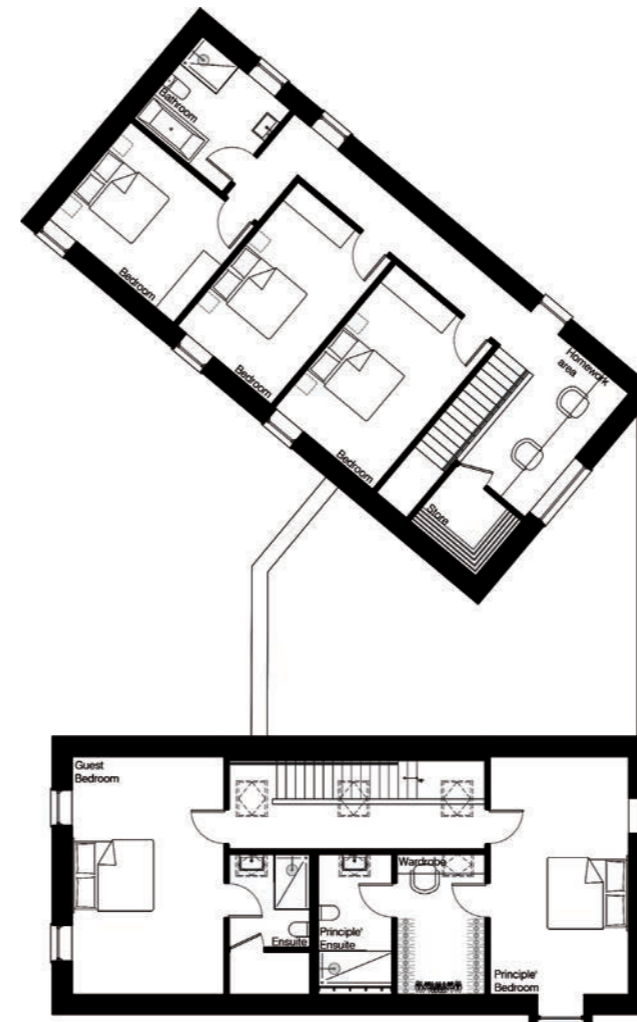


advanced installation results in Silver Bark House being only one single point away from achieving an Energy Performance Certified 'A' rating.

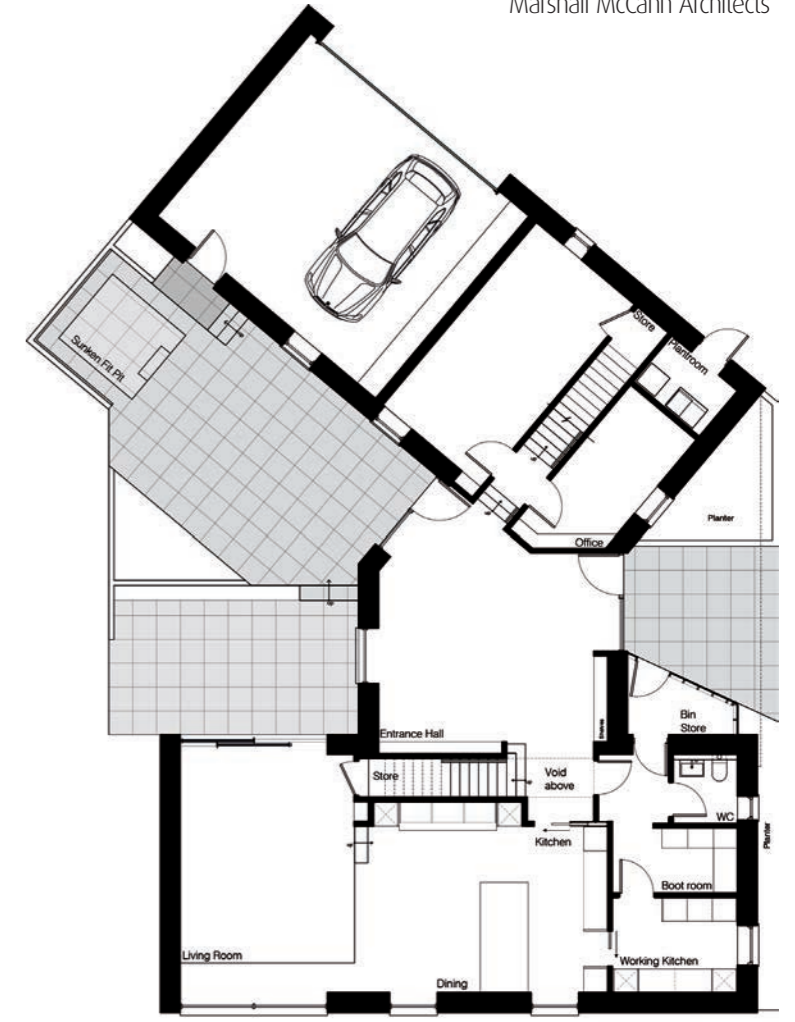
The late Richard Rogers, architect, once said: "Good architecture is more than often commensurate with the enlightenment of the client." As Martin Marshall readily confirmed, this was very much the case with his client - FourSeven Ltd - who fully supported and encouraged the architectural principles herein described. A somewhat unique arrangement occurred in this case, in that the client commissioned Marshall McCann to progress a single 'design-to-sell' house.

Currently, nearby Hillsborough is experiencing an 'invasion' of fake Georgian-style housing. In that dismal context, it is indeed most refreshing to not only observe this unashamedly contemporary piece of good architecture but also to learn that it sold well before construction completion, with the fortunate purchasers already relishing living within this most excellent architectural gem. ■

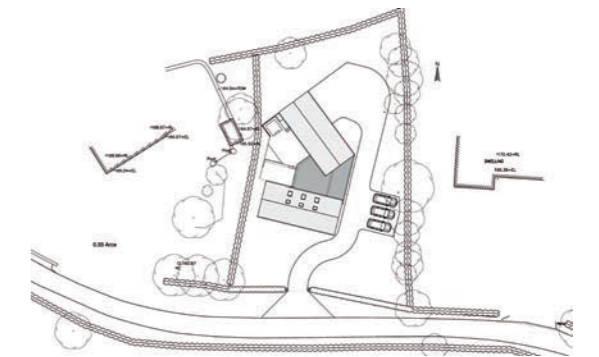
Barrie Todd



First Floor Plan



Ground Floor Plan



Block Plan

THE PROJECT

Client: FourSeven

Architect: Marshall McCann Architects

Quantity Surveyor: FourSeven

Structural Engineer: Hilliard Tanner

Kitchen: Laura Dallat interiors

Bathroom: Ceco Products

Main Contractor: FourSeven

Photography: Captured by Keri-Leigh Kearney

by being discreetly but dramatically illuminated by LED fittings concealed within the articulated gaps.

Marshall McCann, a brother and sister partnership, are renowned for designing contemporary passive houses and Silver Bark House presents a very good example of that skill. Having designed and constructed Martin's own passive house in 2014, which went on to win 'Energy Efficient House of the Year NI and UK 2017', and with their first commission winning a Royal Society of Ulster Architect's Design Award in 2022, it's

therefore unsurprising that installed in Silver Bark House is a sophisticated, energy-efficient environmental control system consisting of a combined mechanical ventilation and heating facility which provides ventilation, heat recovery and domestic hot water, all aided by an in-line, air-to-air heat pump.

The heat recovery system generates eighty per cent of the heating supply, with the air-to-air heat pump providing the remaining twenty per cent. Together with the high thermal value provided by extensive insulation and air tightness seals, this complex and technically