



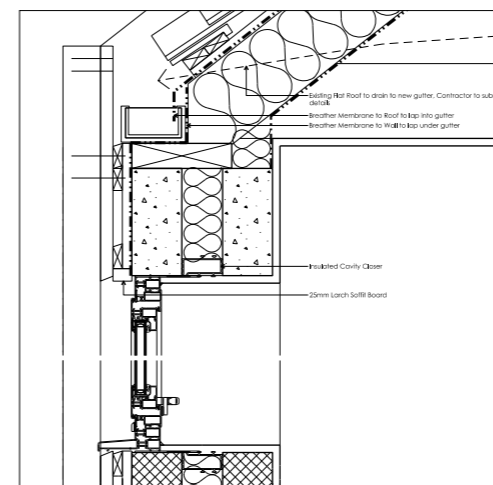
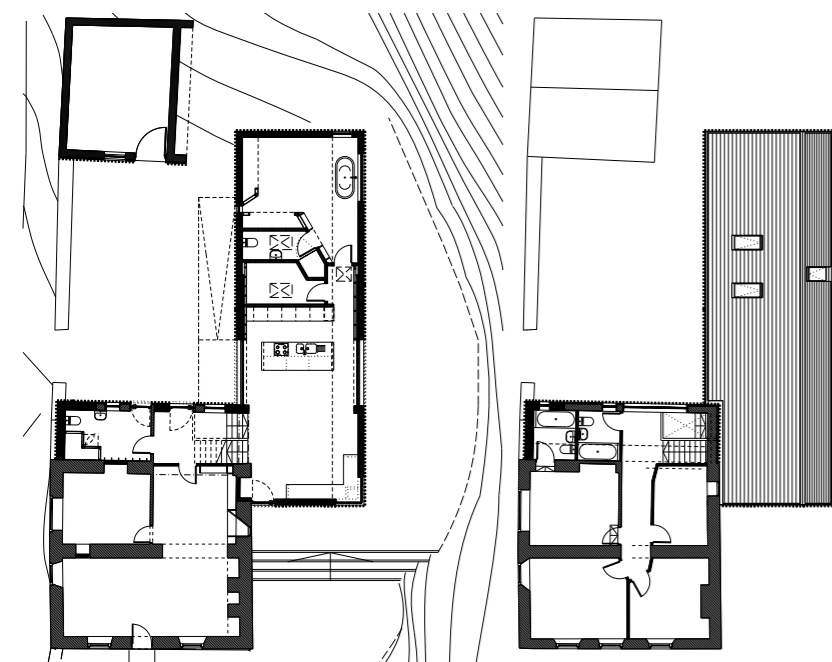
**Rob Gregory visits an inventive farmhouse adaption by Mitchell Taylor Workshop.**

When Alexander Sturgis took up the post of director at the Holbourne Museum in Bath (newly extended by Eric Parry Architects, see AT219), he bought a run-down farmhouse in St Catherine's Valley, three and a half miles north-east of the city. He and his wife Anna Benn and their three children wanted to create a new home at Starfall Farm. The 100 square metre farmhouse, a derelict L-shaped cowshed and two acres of land, all of which had been polluted by an ugly 1960s extension, cost £700,000, but architect Peter Clegg of Bath-based FCB Studios visited the site prior to purchase and advised them to proceed. He introduced them to local architect Piers

Taylor of Mitchell Taylor Workshop, who had already outwitted local planners with his own house Moonshine, half a mile north of here.

The brief was simple: to make the house as big as possible, to re-characterise the 1960s extension, and to provide a series of contemporary interiors that would have a more direct relationship with the spectacular setting. This was easier said than done. Sturgis had already experienced a major planning challenge with the Holbourne Museum extension and, as everyone recognised, any proposed alterations to this green-belt farmhouse would inevitably attract close scrutiny.

With little possibility of extending the



footprint the logical move was to develop a strategy for the L-shaped barn that turned the north-east corner. Originally detached, only part of the short limb was retained, with the rest dismantled and replaced with a new range of accommodation of similar proportion and floor area of 80 square metres. A new stair was located at the point of connection, not only allowing for the reconfiguration of the farmhouse's contorted interiors but also helping resolve a deliberately imposed level change between new and old. This was critical in creating a stronger connection between both parts of the farmhouse, literally placing the new kitchen/dining/living space at the heart of the section. It was also key in relation to the new extension's relationship to the landscape, raising it sufficiently high to capture westerly views across St Catherine's Valley, and to catch as much daylight as possible through a series of apertures cut into the super-insulated block-and-timber walls. The barn's original pitched roof that rises more steeply to the east, and a series of rooflights captures the first rays of morning sunlight. The asymmetric form also expresses in an understated manner the lie of the land and the trajectory of the sun, rising suddenly and dramatically above steep terrain to the east, before setting gracefully to the west, so the family can watch the sun fall behind the fields.

When the client's previous home in London sold for less than anticipated, the budget had to be significantly reduced to



just £200,000, to include the refurbishment, new build and landscape elements. However, the constraints focussed the minds of the architects to be inventive with their specification, such as the interior varnished screed and plaster, and untreated Siberian larch to both new and old facades. It's a mark of Taylor's commitment to the project that he stepped in to help the carpenter cast and trowel the kitchen counter, saving an astonishing £17,000 on a precast contractor's quote. Describing how, after three failed planning applications, they had to simplify what he now regards as 'slightly overwrought proposals', Taylor concludes that 'I came away wondering if any of the joy had been retained, but actually came to really enjoy the economy of the moves and the simplicity of the linear 'bar' on the side.'

*Rob Gregory is regional director of Levitate, a teaching fellow at Bath University and programme manager of Bristol Architecture Centre.*

**Above** New-build eaves detail; the pivotal kitchen/dining/living space acts as the focus for internal circulation and views out to the landscape.

**Left** Bedroom with bath in the new building; a narrow double-height addition to the existing farmhouse contains a new entrance, staircase and bathrooms. An articulated surface of vertical timber sections unifies the complex of buildings.



**Mitchell Taylor Workshop**  
Piers Taylor studied in Australia and at the AA and the University of Bath before setting up MTW and building his own house. He currently teaches at the AA and Cambridge.

**Project team**  
Architect: Mitchell Taylor Workshop; design team: Piers Taylor, Tinyue Liu; structural engineer: Structures 1; qs: Peter Balingall.

**Selected suppliers and subcontractors**  
Contractor: Craftspace Construction; windows: Smart Systems; landscape: Anna Benn; larch Supply: Russwood; appliances: Smeg; insulation: Celotex; ironmongery: D-Line; sanitaryware: Duravit; rooflights: Velux; wall insulation: Pavallex (NBT); floor insulation: Celotex; vapour barriers: Visqueen; underlay: Roofshield (Proctor Industries); glazing: Pilkington K.