



# MAGNETIC PAIR

The pull of coast and mountain sets up a dynamic play in this New Zealand holiday house. *Andrea Stevens* catches up with its architect, *Matt Chaplin*, to discuss paired and shared forms.

# scenario

matarangi house — COROMANDEL, new zealand

SUMICH CHAPLIN ARCHITECTS



02



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Coromandel Peninsula is part of a mountainous spine 100 kilometres or so east of Auckland. Formed by volcanism, the range emerges in the upper North Island before heading north into the sea. The peninsula's steep interior is cloaked in regenerating rainforest, with small towns and holiday settlements tracing its coast.

On its eastern flank, overlooking the Pacific Ocean, is a small sandspit known as Matarangi. Farming and forestry along the spit gave way to the first subdivisions in the 1970s, and remnants of the old Pine plantation still stud the western point.

It is unusual to have a flat foreshore in New Zealand, and even more unusual for it to be in Pine forest. In contrast to our native bush – which is dense, dark and disorderly – this forest feels neat, ordered and otherworldly, more like parts of Canada or Scandinavia.

Perhaps it is due to this alien quality that such a unique architectural enclave has evolved. Houses by several established New Zealand architects are set on large flat sites,

01 Walkway to the garage past the wood store and swamp Totara screen.

02 Entry slips past the garage and bedroom out towards the sea.

03 The courtyard is protected from the elements to all sides. Royal Botania Ninix extendable Teak and stainless steel dining table and chairs from ECC Lighting & Living. Teak outdoor sofa chairs, side tables and loungers from Outdoor Collections.

04 A snug den contrasts with the open plan living spaces. Coffee table from ECC Lighting & Living.

where lawns seamlessly merge into the broad beachfront reserve. There are few fences and most people have maintained the simple palette of grass and trees.

Matt Chaplin has returned 12 years after designing a house here to design a second, right next door to his original. "I was very conscious about designing a house next to one I had already completed," recalls Chaplin. "I decided that whatever I was going to do had to have some sort of relationship. I wanted them to look like they were drawn by the same hand, but stood apart as two distinct houses."

This time around, he has reacted to the site and landscape in quite a different way. He has set up the axis perpendicular to the beach rather than parallel; taken a more abstract approach with form; and the mountains and Pine forest have a stronger presence in the scheme.

A very clear sense of materiality gives this house its greatest character. The cladding in particular takes on qualities of the Pine bark. Chaplin has applied a greyish stain to the



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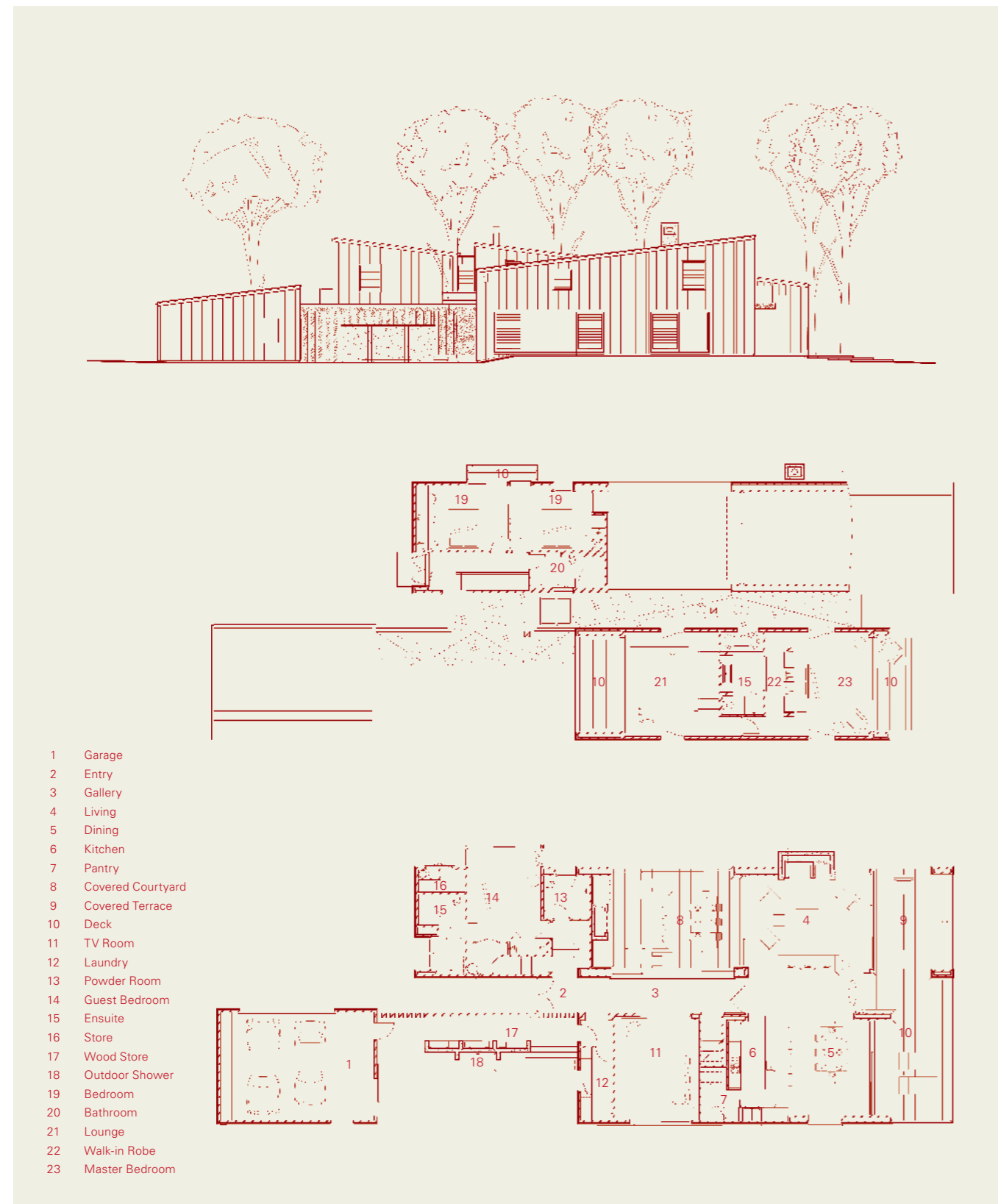




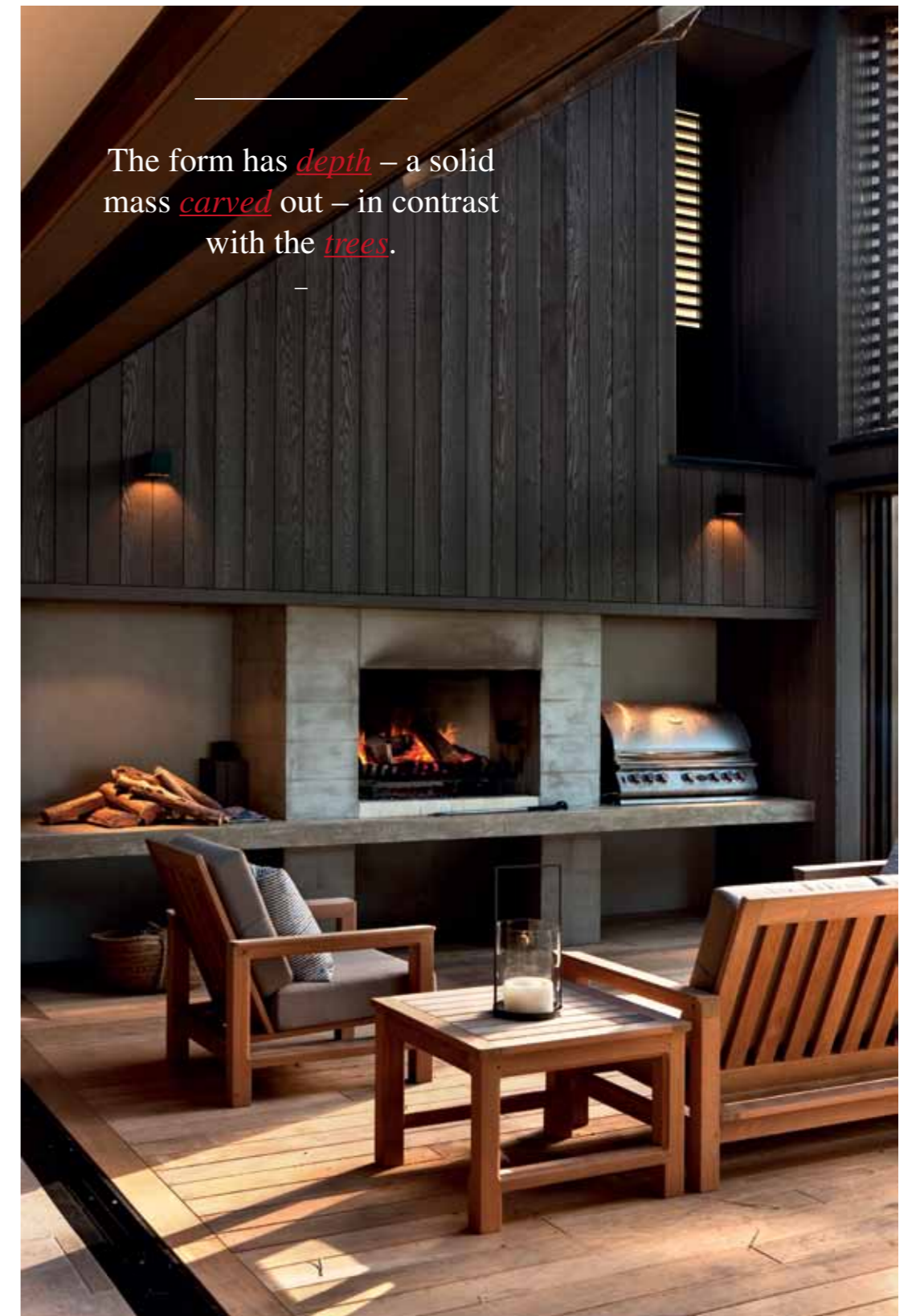
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The form has *depth* – a solid mass *carved* out – in contrast with the *trees*.

05  
A view through the main living room to the west-facing courtyard. Lintelco Log coffee table from ECC Lighting & Living. Stone tiles are Dura grey limestone Vaccaria finish from Designsource.

06  
East elevation (top), first floor plan (middle) and ground floor plan (bottom).

07  
The courtyard is dressed like an outdoor room.

07



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ban-sawn Cedar, and as it wraps indoors it brings the colour, grain and texture of the forest with it. It references the verticality of the trees, but it is not stick-like. The form has depth – a solid mass carved out – in contrast with the trees. It is low and grounded as the Pines soar past. He references the residential timber vernacular of Brian MacKay-Lyons, in his clarity of materials and simplicity of form.

On approach, the house is unassuming and almost casual. The forms sit simply on the grass: a garage to the right and an enclosed sleeping tower to the left.

Entry is marked by a recess and colonnade of swamp Totara posts, reflected in the ground by railway sleepers and pebbles. Materials are very tactile, heightened by the smell of the woodpile, which reinforces the forest, open fires, and a return to the elements.

This walkway leads to the front door, and it is from here that the house arrangement can be understood as two volumes to either side of a central gallery. They move independently, each rising from single-storey to double-storey but in opposite directions.

One volume rises southward, to contain children's and guest bedrooms and to catch a glimpse of the mountains. The other is pulled by the coast, and rises to contain the main bedroom. Pointing directly north and out to sea, the central gallery leads to the view and main living spaces.

"Most people keep their holiday houses for a long time, a lot longer than their city homes," explains Chaplin. "They often become family heirlooms, and so need to be able to serve

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08  
At night the paired forms become transparent.



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09

09 The covered veranda looks out across and esplanade towards the sea. Bean bag from Coast New Zealand.  
10 The view from the main bedroom on the first floor.

that by being flexible. Everyone needs space – parents, children and eventually grandparents and grandchildren. If it’s raining, it’s important that everyone can relax, so multiple living spaces are critical.”

Chaplin has anchored these social spaces around a sheltered courtyard, which is enclosed on three sides by the house structure, on the fourth by sliding screens, and with mechanical louvres overhead. It feels like an outdoor room with its wide timber floorboards and outdoor fire. Shutters secure it at night, allowing adjacent rooms to remain open to the breeze. Its generous height allows bedrooms to overlook it, enabling family members to subtly keep in touch with what is happening below.

Another carefully planned device is the ‘sleep-out’, a two-storey bedroom wing adjacent to the front door. It is not a true sleep-out – it is not separated physically from the main house – but it achieves separation by being tucked away with its own staircase. Once you pass this sleeping tower, the rest

of the house can operate as a cell – a smaller unit of the whole. This allows the house to be inhabited by a lot or a few without it feeling over-scaled.

All these strategic separations and connections – with their inherent flexibility for large or small groups – come about from the pairing of the two forms and their independent second storeys. Each pavilion has a slightly different character, and can be read as clearly from afar as from within. Chaplin has kept the forms simple and intact, and made openings without losing formal clarity.

This house displays many of the characteristics of his previous work, albeit in a more abstract way: clear, uncluttered forms, a ‘carving out’ of the block; solidity, and a sense of being anchored to the ground. “I hadn’t done a monopitch before,” says Chaplin. “The simplicity of the plan diagram wanted to be reflected in the elevations. You are looking at pure form, it’s not additive. There are openings and a few decks pop out. It’s very simple.”

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