

Denys Lasdun once said it's easy to design small buildings. But the brief for MJP Architects' 170m² Maggie's Centre in Cheltenham, which opened in September, though deliberately non-prescriptive and requiring no clinical facilities, is implicitly complex. MJP founder Richard MacCormac – a friend of the centre's namesake, Maggie Keswick Jencks – was touched by the disease when his partner, interiors expert Jocasta Innes, survived throat cancer.

Maggie's Cheltenham, commissioned in 2003, is tightly focussed on its brief. 'I'm not a calm person, but I'm very good at architectural calm', says MacCormac. But he also uses the vehicle of a small building with a generous budget to explore certain preoccupations that are relevant to the brief, such as the idea of a building within a building,

the architectural possibilities of thick walls, the notion of the building as a ship and, above all, an attention to detailed craftsmanship that he describes as 'self-imposed complexity'.

MacCormac also brings certain influences to the table. Having set up his practice when he qualified in 1969, he had no principal mentor. Instead, he has multiple influences, including his teachers at the Cambridge School of Architecture, Leslie Martin, Lionel March and Colin Rowe. He belongs to a generation that stood in the shadow of the 20th century's great architects; Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies van der Rohe, Alvar Aalto and Louis Kahn. Along with John Soane, they are constant references in his work. MacCormac is a continuity man, who connects us with these influences.

In an age of over-specialisation in architecture, driven by the complexity of construction, building >>

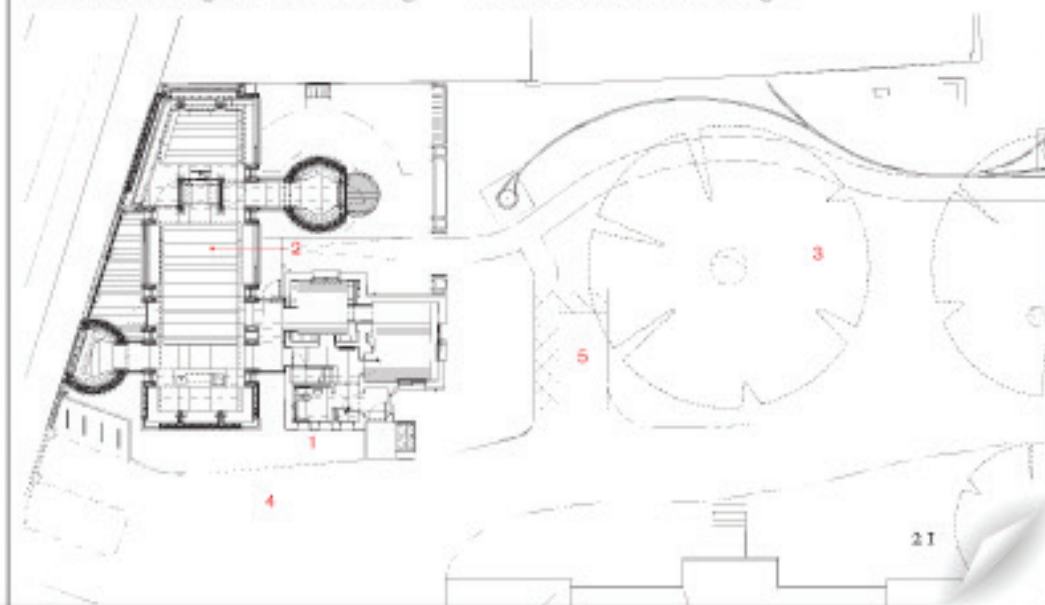
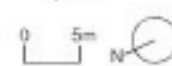
Architectural calm

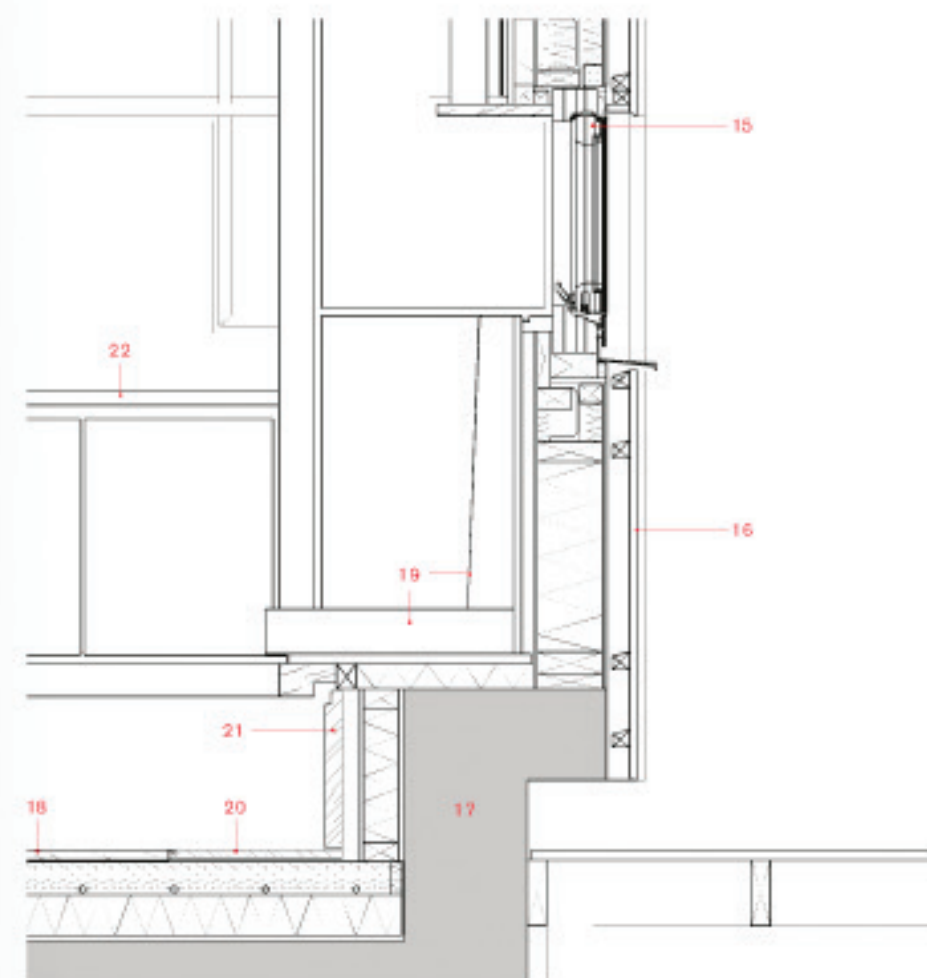
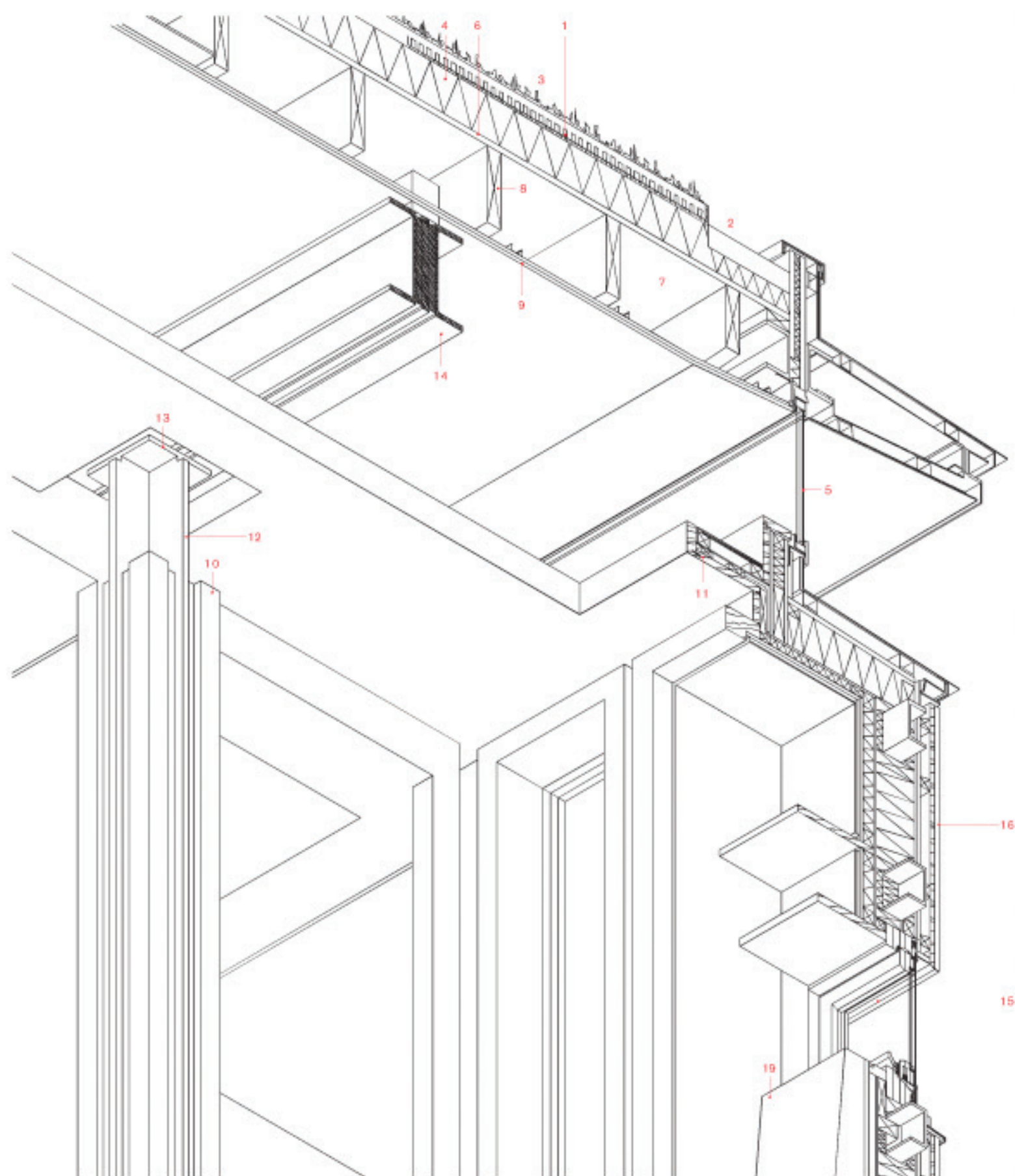
MJP Architects' Maggie's centre in Cheltenham showcases Richard MacCormac's rich and individual mix of ideas, writes *Felix Mara*.
Photography by *Peter Durant*

Above Dining room with inglenook and yoga room beyond. European oak was specified throughout
Above right Sketch by Richard MacCormac

Site plan

1. Original lodge
2. New building
3. Garden
4. Car park
5. Disabled parking space





1. Flag UK single-ply roof membrane
2. Gravel border
3. Extensive green roof
4. Tapered phenolic insulation
5. Double-glazed clerestory window
6. 18mm plywood
7. Roof void zone with cantilevered steel joists supporting overhang
8. Timber joist
9. Gypsum board ceiling
10. 75x75mm English oak infill post
11. Finger-jointed solid oak framing
12. Cruciform steel column
13. Steel plate
14. Composite beam formed from rolled steel channels
15. Laminated oak window with thermally broken aluminium glazing system
16. Bespoke board and batten European oak cladding with Osmo oil finish
17. Upstand at edge of concrete raft
18. Pietra serena sandstone floor finish
19. Bute Fabrics 'Tree' and 'Kames' wool and nylon mix woven upholstery
20. English oak flooring with Osmo oil finish
21. Pietra serena sandstone skirting
22. DuPont Zodiac chalk white quartz kitchen worktop

Scale 1:20

Maggie's Centre

MJP Architects

Roof, external wall and inglenook

The structure supporting the steel and timber roof consists of eight cruciform steel columns supporting longitudinal composite I-beams formed with channels. This enables the roof to float over a non-loadbearing external envelope conceived as a series of pieces of furniture that form alcoves capped by a continuous cornice. This gives rigidity to the assembly, and reflects daylight under the roof. The joinery envelope perches on the upstand at the edge of the concrete raft framing alcoves for seating and kitchen units and ensuring that, externally, the oak cladding stops short of the ground.

The focus of the interior is the inglenook, which is conceived as a small room within the larger scale of the main space. This enables the main space to be subdivided by two large hinged screen doors which fold into the sides of the structure. Sliding folding shutters above the stove serve the same purpose. A concealed clerestory provides acoustic separation between the cornice and the underside of the roof.

Like the alcoves at the perimeter, this structure is articulated as a framed enclosure separate from the oversailing cornice. The cruciform steel columns supporting the roof are embedded in the joinery from which they emerge through apertures in the cornice. This intricacy was inspired by the trellises and screens in Maggie Keswick Jenck's book *The Chinese Garden*.

Richard MacCormac, chairman, MJP Architects