



**Bathing beauty**  
Simon Conder's latest  
Dungeness house is  
a seaside stunner P.10

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supplement  
on careers**  
Inside this issue



BUILDING DESIGN ARCHITECTS' FAVOURITE WEEKLY

# Arb imposes 10% fee hike to help fund spending spree

Regulator to consider scrapping profession's right to elect architect board members

**Marguerite Lazell**

The right to use the title architect will cost £8 more from next year after the Architects' Registration Board voted to raise the retention fee paid by architects by 10%.

As cash-strapped architects face the full brunt of the credit crunch, the board decided at its meeting last week that the fee should go up from £78 to £86. This will generate around £300,000 of extra funds to cover expenses, including a £6,000 new boardroom table.

The board also agreed that its prescribed exam fees should increase from £1,210 to £1,390, and to examine controversial pro-

posals to replace elected architect members with architects appointed by the government.

The move sparked outrage from architects on the board and former RIBA president Jack Pringle, who led a determined assault on Arb's activities during his tenure.

"Arb has lost touch with reality," he said. "It has a duty of prudence and economy and yet my understanding is they have more than £1 million in the bank. They could have any board table with that. I'm very disappointed to see subscriptions rise more than inflation. I'd give them 0/10 for prudence."

He added that plans to see architect board members appointed by

## ARB'S SHOPPING LIST

**£130,000** for new staff  
**£90,000** for 4.5% salary increase  
**£350,000** refit of offices  
**£90,000** furniture and fit-out, including a £6,000 boardroom table  
**£29,700** electronic and telephone equipment  
**£100,000** new IT system  
**£130,000** air-conditioning



the DCLG were particularly worrying given Arb's control over education. "It's very important our profession elects members to the board," he said. "The underlying concern is that this is further evidence that Arb doesn't understand the mood of the moment."

Board member George Oldham questioned Arb's decision to spend six-figure sums on new IT systems, air-conditioning and furniture, and called plans to appoint rather than elect architects "outrageous".

"There is a fundamental human rights issue here which goes beyond simple good practice... the principle of the ultimate sanction of the ballot box against the rule by

unelected servants of the government of the day," he wrote in an open letter to board members.

But Mike Starling, chairman of the board, defended exploring the idea of an unelected board and claimed the increased cost of the retention fee — which has not risen for two years — was due to rising workload. He said: "The Architects Act provides a lot of obligations for the board in terms of meeting the European directive. Costs have gone up steeply. We think we've been prudent."

The news comes as the RIBA draws up parameters for a "light-touch" review of Arb by independent consultants.

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Deyan Sudjic's new book, *The Language of Things*, is a personal manifesto about design's future direction, says Stephen Bayley. P.18



## Here's the design Boris binned

This is how Parliament Square would have looked under radical designs by Hawkins Brown, German firm Vogt and DSDHA — which have been controversially dropped by mayor of London, Boris Johnson.

The never-before-seen image shows the congested square transformed under an £18 million scheme to turn it into a paved plaza intended to celebrate British democracy and attract 30 million people a year by the London 2012

Olympics.

As BD revealed in July, the mayor scrapped the plans days before a major public consultation was due to begin. But opposition to this move continues, with Liberal Democrat leader in the London

Assembly Mike Tuffrey calling on Johnson to reverse his stance in BD last week. And in the House of Lords, Lib Dem peer Sally Hamwee and Viscount Falkland are among those calling on him to reconsider.

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## WORKS: SIMON CONDER ASSOCIATES

# End of the line

Blending with the Dungeness environment and being protected from it were major considerations for Simon Conder as he wrapped an 1890s rail carriage with a new skin. **Graham Bizley** takes a look

Pictures by Paul Smoothy and Chris Gascoigne







**PROJECT TEAM** Architect Simon Conder Associates, **Design team** Simon Conder and Pippa Smith, **Structural engineer** Fluid Structures, **Environmental engineer** Zef UK, **Quantity surveyor** Listers, **Contractor** Ecolibrium Solutions

A sea-scented breeze blows steadily across Romney Marsh, sending ripples through a threadbare carpet of yellow and green grasses. The horizon is an almost straight line broken by a thin squiggle of shacks that stitch together the land and sky. Should the weather change, the mood might quickly become bleak, even hostile, but the sense of escape from conventional life is exhilarating and has attracted a scattering of makeshift homes along the beach.

This is Dungeness, a dynamic shingle promontory jutting into the English Channel from the Kent coast, and the largest shingle structure in the UK. There is something of the Wild West about it. Telegraph poles lean at precarious angles, lurching between ramshackle huts held together by layers of paint that look as if a strong gust might strip away their patchwork cladding. Two lighthouses stand at the tip of the beach and behind them, to cap off the surreal scene, lurks a nuclear power station.

Simon Conder is no stranger to these parts. The Black Rubber House designed by his practice won numerous awards including the RIBA's Stephen Lawrence Prize in 2004, and put Dungeness on the architectural map. Now he has completed a second house a few hundred metres away, El Ray, for a couple and their baby. It is the last house but one before the road runs out at the western end of the beach.

El Ray, budgeted at £1,780 per sq m, is a more refined affair than its neighbours. Until 1999, the privately owned Dungeness Estate would only grant its tenants three-month leases, so there has never been much incentive to build with any permanence. The improvised nature of the houses, often bodged together from whatever materials were found lying about, gives the



The dwellings and the landscape have a direct relationship.

enclave a picturesque eclecticism. Crucially, no delineation of plot boundaries is permitted, so the relationship between these dwellings and the landscape is very direct, and the trappings of suburban domestication have not crept in.

Ninety nine-year leases are now available, and the charms of the area have caught the attention of a more affluent clientele. The original inhabitants were fishermen, but after the first world war workers for Southern Railway were allowed to purchase redundant carriages which were dragged off the end of the line on to the shingle and used as holiday homes. Ad hoc lean-to additions have been made, and many of the carriages are now completely concealed except for the telltale curve of a central section of roof. The original El Ray was one such house in a row of five.

Conder describes the client's agenda as simple. "They wanted a two-bedroom house rather than a leaky shack, and they wanted a house in which they could stand up straight."

For the architect, minimising the negative environmental impact of construction was a key con-

cern. The beach is a conservation area, a site of special scientific interest and a national nature reserve. Broom and blackthorn have colonised the shingle, but much of the diversity along the shoreline comes from plants imported by the inhabitants.

FSC-certified timber was used wherever possible, and the structural frame was made with I-section timber joists, while insulation and sheathing boards use recycled materials. For deliveries, a plywood track had to be laid from the road to prevent lorries churning up the shingle.

A 6.5m-high wind turbine will provide a surplus of electricity for the house, an investment that seems worthwhile just for the cheek of erecting it next to a nuclear power station. The plan is compact, and all rooms benefit from passive solar gain. High levels of insulation mean the only

**The client wanted a two-bed house, not a leaky shack**

source of heating for much of the year will be a wood-burning stove that uses driftwood from the beach. For very cold periods, electric underfloor heating in the bedrooms and bathroom will be powered by the wind turbine.

In terms of building, planners struggle to pin down how new additions should fit in with the conservation area. Conder recalls standing on the site with planning officers asking what the design was supposed to be fitting in with — neighbouring shacks, a nearby 1950s coast guard station, the lighthouse or the power station? For the Black Rubber House, Conder made direct reference to the colour and form of existing houses, whereas El Ray is more distant in its associations. Its form is nothing like any nearby building, and the scale of its main glazed opening is unique on the beach.

Approaching from the land side, the house appears semi-circular, a gesture that isolates it from its neighbours and reduces its bulk to a minimum. A timber ramp rises slightly above the shingle to a central entrance between two asymmetric slot windows. Walls are clad in unsealed Itaua timber, a sustainably sourced hardwood, fixed in single vertical lengths cut off in a neat line just above the shingle. The boards are fading to an iridescent silvery-brown that tones beautifully with the vegetation and pebbles.

The roof, also clad with unsealed Itaua, forms an unofficial promenade deck that rises in a shallow pitch from the entrance towards the sea. Looking inland, a pattern of drift lines becomes apparent in the shingle where over the centuries high tides and storms have deposited stones in parallel ridges. Moving inside through the entrance porch, a short passage passes two bedroom doors and the bathroom. Then there is a big surprise: parked in the main space is the original ►



An old railway carriage that stood on the site is now the kitchen. The two internal courtyards are lined in unsealed Itaua timber.



# WORKS: SIMON CONDER ASSOCIATES

1890s railway carriage. It is treated as an objet trouvé, stripped back to its carcass but with the original paint left as found. The contractor didn't dare move the carriage in case it fell to pieces, so it was winched up a little while the ground floor slab was cast around it. A kitchen has been built inside which you step up into — a room within a room.

On the sea side, the main living space is fully glazed, with huge sliding doors opening onto a timber deck. From the kitchen sink you look through the empty carriage windows out across the beach to the sea. This strip of beach is beyond the range of most walkers, so the occupants often have several kilometres of horizon to themselves, with only a few passing freighters. The walls splay out slightly near the big doors and continue to the outside, widening the viewing angle and also providing shelter from the wind and the

hum of the power station.

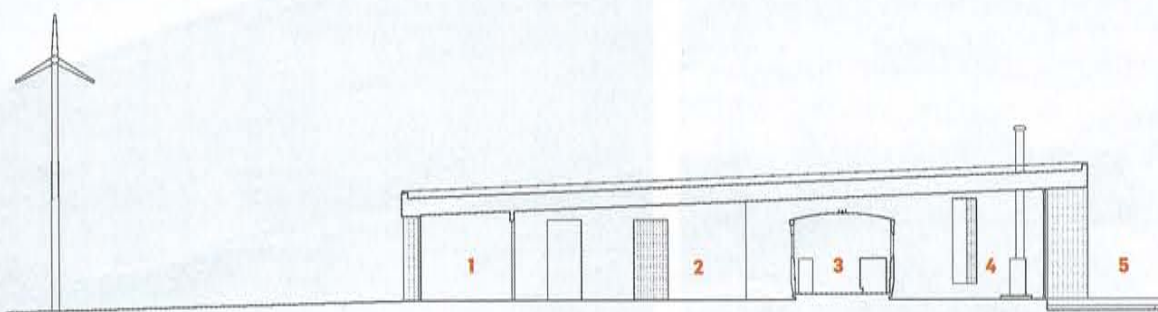
All the internal floors, walls and ceilings of the house are clad in birch plywood, even the shower cubicle. "It's coated with about 17 coats of lacquer," says Conder.

The effort made to limit the palette is extreme and has resulted in stunningly inventive details. Not wanting unsightly trickle vents in the sliding glass doors, for example, the architect designed a bespoke birch plywood hit-and-miss grille that sits flush in the floor. To open the vent, the grille is lifted out and an identical plywood grille beneath is slid across — a

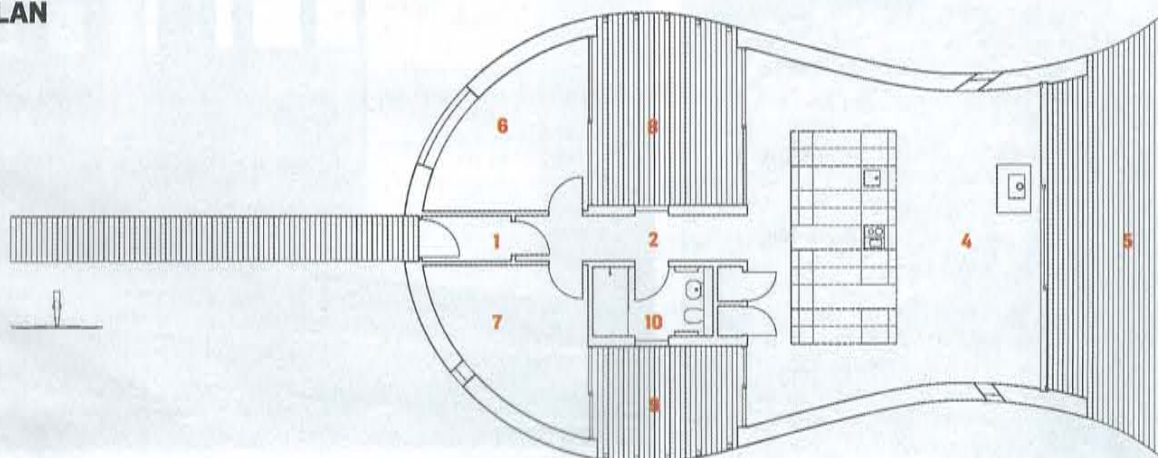
**Parked on the floor in the main space is the original 1890s railway carriage**



SECTION



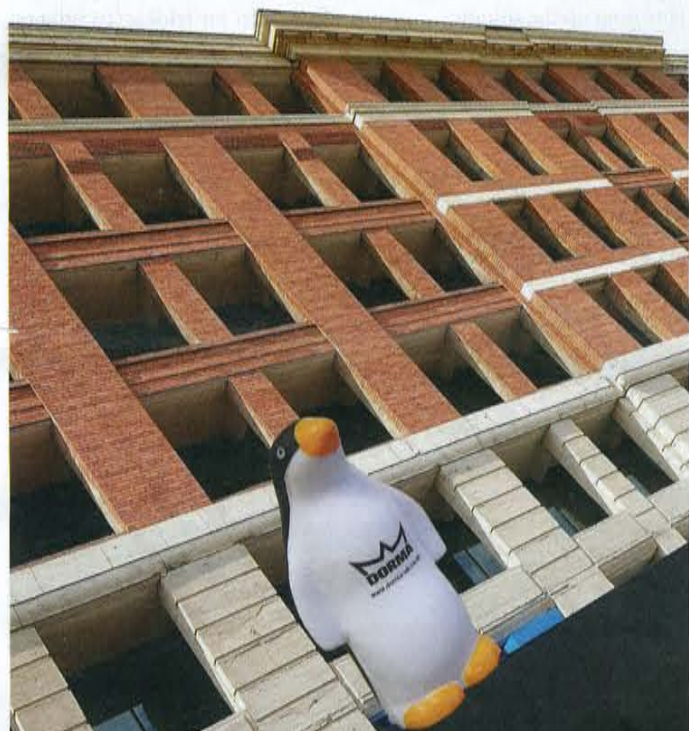
PLAN



- 1 Lobby
- 2 Hall
- 3 Kitchen
- 4 Living area
- 5 South deck
- 6 Bedroom 1
- 7 Bedroom 2
- 8 Courtyard 1
- 9 Courtyard 2
- 10 Bathroom



**100 YEARS**  
**DORMA**



Where's the  
**DORMA**  
penguin?

TO CELEBRATE THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF DORMA, we're challenging readers to identify the architecturally significant location the DORMA penguin can be seen visiting in the picture.

The DORMA penguin will be visiting a different location each month, the winner will receive £50 worth of drinks vouchers.

All you have to do is provide us with the name of the building featured in the photo, together with your name and job title. The email address to send competition entries to is:

[dormapenguin@bdonline.co.uk](mailto:dormapenguin@bdonline.co.uk)



Curves minimise the building's perceived bulk.



Looking south over the deck. Interior walls are lined with birch-faced plywood.

sublime marriage of childlike simplicity with refined elegance.

Itauba-lined private courtyards separate the bedrooms from the living space, giving two outdoor spaces sheltered from the constant wind and the prying eyes of passers-by. Views through the house are punctuated by light and dark, and by reflections in the layers of sliding glass doors.

What makes Conder's work so endearing is his single-mindedness in what he decides to express and his finely tuned judgement of how much it is necessary to do to achieve that expression. El Ray packs an

extremely rich variety of experiences into a small volume with a subtle balance of deliberate deviations from what is superficially a singular entity. Looking in one direction, the eye is often drawn by something else in peripheral vision, a reflection of the sky that keeps the composition dynamic and throws in the unexpected.

Traditional ideas of "home" are intrinsically linked to notions of security, shelter and comfort. In the true spirit of Dungeness, El Ray provides those qualities and also enables a proximity to the elements that threaten them.

## IN DETAIL

### EL RAY, DUNGENESS

#### Architect

Simon Conder Architects

#### Structural engineer

Fluid

A desire to build with lightweight, easily transported and erected materials that could be manipulated on site in a low-tech way led towards a timber structure. The walls and roof are framed out with timber I-sections built off a concrete raft slab that sits directly on the shingle.

On the sea side, the large opening is formed with two portalised goalpost frames

made from Kerto, a laminated engineered timber product.

Cellulose insulation made with recycled newspaper and jute fully fills the voids between the joists in the roof and walls. The construction is breathable so has no vapour barrier; the elements get progressively more vapour-permeable towards the outside to allow any water vapour to move to the outside.

Externally, the roof and walls are clad with untreated Itauba boards. These are fixed with stainless steel screws in widths carefully co-ordinated to line through from horizontal to curving vertical surfaces. The roof rises gently towards the horizon like the deck of a boat, giving panoramic views across the beach.

Detail drawing and text by Graham Bizley

### CUTAWAY SECTION THROUGH ROOF, WALL AND SOUTH DECK

#### 1. Foundations

300mm-thick reinforced concrete raft slab cast directly on levelled shingle base. 190 x 74mm-high concrete upstand cast on to ground floor slab. All outer and top faces of concrete painted with three coats liquid applied bituminous damp-proof membrane to 100mm below shingle level.

#### 2. Ground floor

2,440 x 1,220 x 18mm birch-faced plywood floor boards bonded to battens below. 75 x 50mm treated softwood battens on adjustable joist feet at 407mm centres in both directions and to fully support all joints and edges. 100mm mineral wool insulation packed between battens.

#### 3. Typical wall structure

Floor plate formed from two layers 25mm WBP plywood cut to curvature of wall. 300mm composite timber I-section studs at 600mm centres (400mm centres on tighter curves). 50 x 50mm treated softwood horizontal noggins at 1,200mm centres. 300mm blown cellulose fibre insulation between studs.

#### 4. Typical external wall cladding

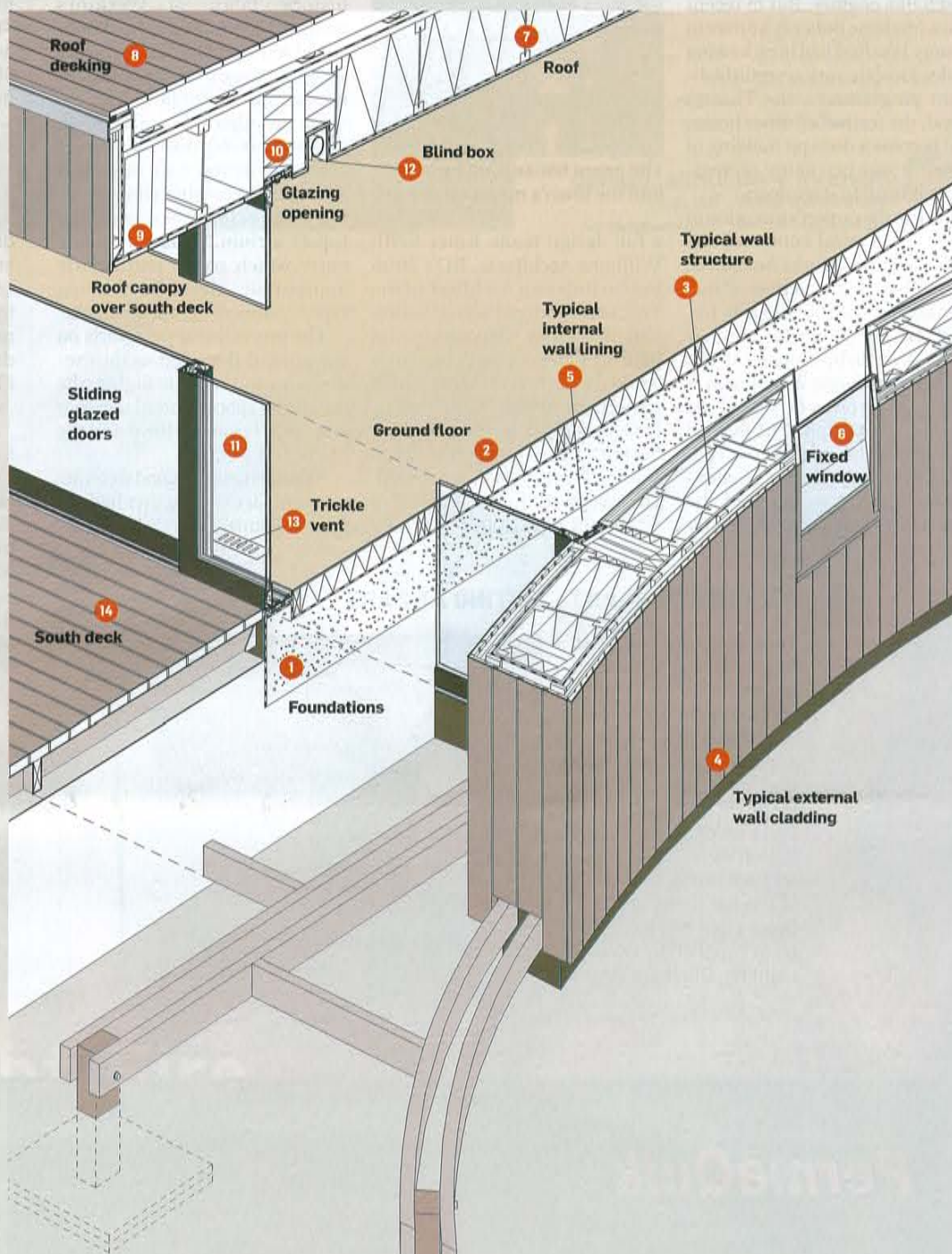
144 x 19mm vertical shiplap Itauba boards screw fixed to battens with 1 no. offset stainless steel fixing per board at 450 centres. Two layers 38 x 19mm horizontal treated softwood battens bent to curve of wall and fully bonded together. 69 x 19mm treated softwood vertical battens aligning with studwork. Breather membrane. 9.2mm vapour-permeable external sheathing boards made from wood waste.

#### 5. Typical internal wall lining

6mm WBP birch-faced plywood boards pinned & bonded to ply behind. 6mm WBP plywood boards screwed to battens. Two layers 38 x 19mm horizontal treated softwood battens at 480mm centres approx., bent to curve of wall and fully bonded together to form void for services. 6.4mm vapour-permeable internal sheathing boards made from wood waste.

#### 6. Fixed window

25mm WBP plywood subframe fixed to studwork. 19mm planed all round (PAR) Itauba external reveal (width of board varies depending on angle of window reveal). 180 x 19mm PAR Itauba cill. 1.5mm pressed aluminium drip flashing at head. 34mm double glazed sealed unit consisting of 6mm outer pane, 12mm cavity and 6.4mm inner pane, argon filled with low-e coating, fixed with dry glazing tape. Removable internal bead panel consisting of 6mm WBP birch-faced plywood on 18mm WBP plywood backing.



6 x 6mm maple corner beads at internal junctions with plywood lining.

#### 7. Roof

1.2mm EPDM rubber waterproof membrane adhesive bonded to plywood. 25mm WBP plywood. 400mm deep composite timber I-section beams at varying centres to suit span. 400mm blown cellulose-fibre insulation between beams. 9mm oriented strand board. Vapour barrier. 6mm WBP plywood boards screw fixed to OSB. 6mm WBP birch-faced plywood boards pinned & bonded to ply above.

#### 8. Roof decking

119 x 25mm PAR Itauba decking fixed with two stainless steel screws to each joist with 11mm approx gaps between planks.

125 x 50mm treated softwood joists at 600mm centres on adjustable joist feet. 150 x 150mm EPDM mat below joist feet.

#### 9. Roof canopy over south deck

Structural opening formed by two 400 x 90mm Kerto beams bolted either side of vertical posts at both corners made from two layers of 240 x 45mm Kerto. 144 x 19mm vertical shiplap Itauba boards to external faces fixed to battens as (4) above. Breather Membrane & 19mm PAR Itauba boards to soffit with 6mm approx gaps between planks, widths to line through with vertical cladding to reveal.

#### 10. Glazing opening

Vertical posts at both jambs made from four layers of 240 x 45mm Kerto.

25mm WBP plywood internal lining. Two 400 x 90mm Kerto beams bolted either side of posts. 200 x 50 treated softwood ply plate between beams at head.

#### 11. Sliding glazed doors

Proprietary sliding doors made from 94 x 50mm thermally broken extruded aluminium frames and 28mm double glazed low-e coated sealed units.

#### 12. Blind box

145 x 130mm recess in ceiling for roller blinds. 12mm birch-faced WBP plywood top and sides fixed on softwood studs at 600mm centres. 6 x 6mm maple corner beads at internal junctions with plywood lining.

#### 13. Trickle vent

170 x 25mm duct cast

through concrete upstand. 272 x 100 x 18mm birch-faced plywood slotted lift-out grill. Sliding 18mm birch-faced plywood slotted grill below floor boards allowing vent to be opened or closed.

#### 14. South deck

140 x 90mm PAR Itauba posts at 1,500mm centres approx bearing on 2 layers 600 x 600 x 40mm concrete paving slabs set 300mm below shingle level. Paired 125 x 50mm treated softwood joists bolted either side of posts and spanning to galvanised steel joist hangers on concrete upstand. 125 x 50mm treated softwood struts between centres of joists to prevent racking. 44mm PAR Itauba decking fixed with two stainless-steel screws to each joist with 11mm approx gaps between planks, widths to line through with vertical cladding to reveal.