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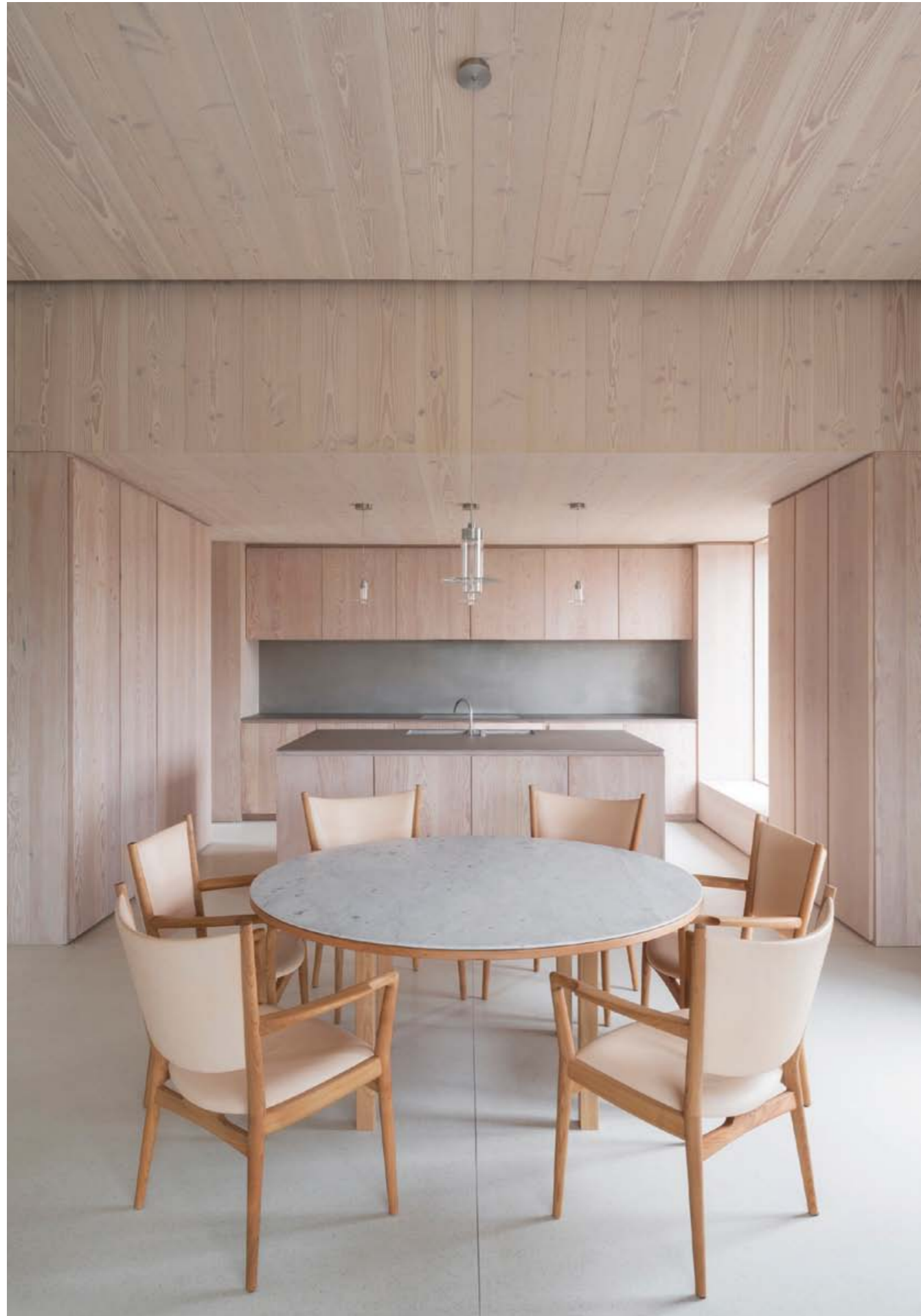
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THE BEARABLE
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THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIVING WELL

Working with philosopher Alain de Botton, award-winning architect John Pawson created The Life House – a striking, minimalist holiday rental property in Wales that allows guests to transcend the rat race.

Words Michele Koh Morollo
Photos Gilbert McCarragher and Hazel Gwatkins Photography



In 2010, Alain de Botton, Swiss-born British philosopher and author of *The Architecture of Happiness*, founded Living Architecture, a non-profit holiday home rental company in the UK that aims to connect people with remarkable architecture. Unlike other commercial holiday rental brands, Living Architecture commissions renowned architects to design exclusive residences that communicate with and enhance their environments, while conveying powerful philosophical messages to the guests who rent them.

In November 2016, de Botton collaborated with internationally acclaimed Royal Institute of British Architects award-winning English architect John Pawson to create Living Architecture's seventh property, The Life House, in the small village of Llanbister in Mid Wales.

Pawson, whose designs are known for their minimalist aesthetics, aimed to craft a peaceful rural retreat that serves as a sanctuary for calm contemplation.

Constructed from more than 80,000 handmade Danish bricks in light and dark colours, Pawson and his team incorporated pale polished concrete floors and white-oiled douglas fir timber ceilings, doors and furniture to create an uncluttered and tranquil ambience. The purity of this material palette is the antithesis of the colourful, embellished interiors often found in urban settings, making The Life House an ideal respite from fast-paced modern living.

The house, which sleeps six people, was designed with rest, restoration and reflection as its main priority. A stay here is meant to encourage a state of complete serenity. The various rooms and functional zones are arranged as a series of self-contained folds that open to two corridors.

“Meeting at a right angle, these passageways generate extended internal vistas and a plan designed to allow groups living in proximity to spend time together and >>

apart, in a spatial arrangement that shares certain characteristics with the monastic cloister. The corridors – one light, one dark – represent more than just the means to get between the different parts of the house, they are key architectural experiences, each charged with its own distinctive character,” says Pawson.

Inspired by Japanese aesthetics and the architecture of Benedictine monasteries, the simple yet luxurious house includes a contemplation chamber buried into the hillside – a quiet, cavernous space where guests can lie down to meditate. There is also an outdoor meditation and contemplation zone with a view over the rolling Welsh countryside.

Pawson experimented to produce a residence that is bedded into the land. “The proliferation of blackened gorse in the surrounding heathland is reflected in the dark exterior brickwork, while the rough moor grass provides a reference for the lighter bricks used inside,” he says.

A single, rectangular, open-plan kitchen, living and dining room connects to two corridors, which take guests to three double bedrooms, each with an en-suite bathroom, in the north and south wings. In the first bedroom, the bathtub is positioned next to an expansive window, so guests can enjoy a view of the countryside while they soak. The second bedroom has a carefully curated library of therapeutic literature from West and East, and an elongated reading desk overlooking the landscape. The third bedroom is

equipped with a powerful audio system and carefully selected transcendental and relaxing music. For privacy, all the bedrooms are located along the corridors, separated from the main communal area.

“In this house I wanted to create a modern, secular retreat, where guests can experience the benefits of introspection, solitude and immersion in nature. The location is wonderfully remote and I wanted to create a sanctuary where people feel at home, but never insulated from the elemental character of the surrounding landscape,” says Pawson, who worked on the house for five years, with de Botton and project architects Shingo Ozawa, Justine Bell, Chris Masson and Charlotte Moe.

De Botton adds, “With The Life House, we were looking to reinvent the monastery for a secular modern age, based upon the concept of a retreat, to take us back to the earliest days of Buddhism in the East, and of Stoic philosophy in the West. In both cases, the busy city was held to provide certain opportunities while, at the same time, cutting us off from others. Chiefly, the risk is that we will forget to make time for ourselves, and omit to understand our own minds – and our need for calm and perspective.”

To further enhance the philosophical experience of the property, guests are provided with a book produced by John Pawson and Living Architecture that explains how one can enjoy the pleasures of daily rituals such as conversation, cooking, listening to music, bathing, and the solitude that The Life House encourages. ■

