



ABOVE DIFFERENCES IN LEVEL AND INTERLOCKING VOLUMES MAKE THE HOUSE A FITTING PLACE FOR PARTIES. IN THE MIDDLE KOHJI KATAGI, FACING THE CAMERA.

PHOTO SALT DESIGN

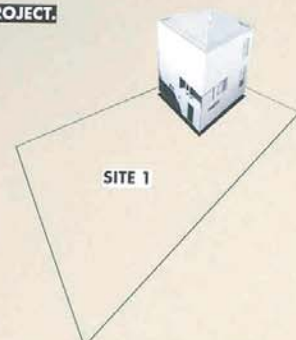
# BOX TO TRICKS

YOUNG JAPANESE ARCHITECT KOHJI KATAGI BUILT A HOUSE IN KYOTO THAT WAS DESIGNED, ABOVE ALL ELSE, FOR ENTERTAINING GUESTS.

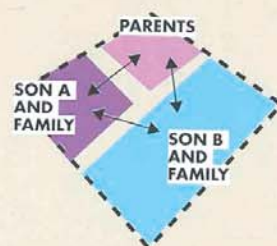
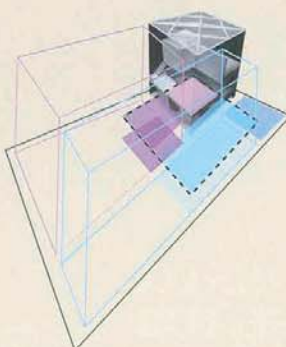
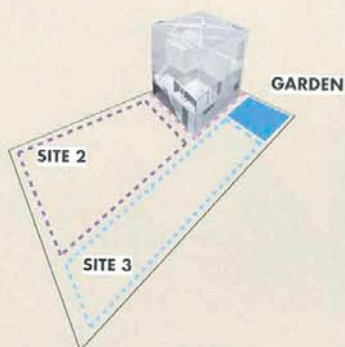
TEXT THOMAS DANIELL  
PHOTOS DAICI ANO



CURRENT PROJECT.

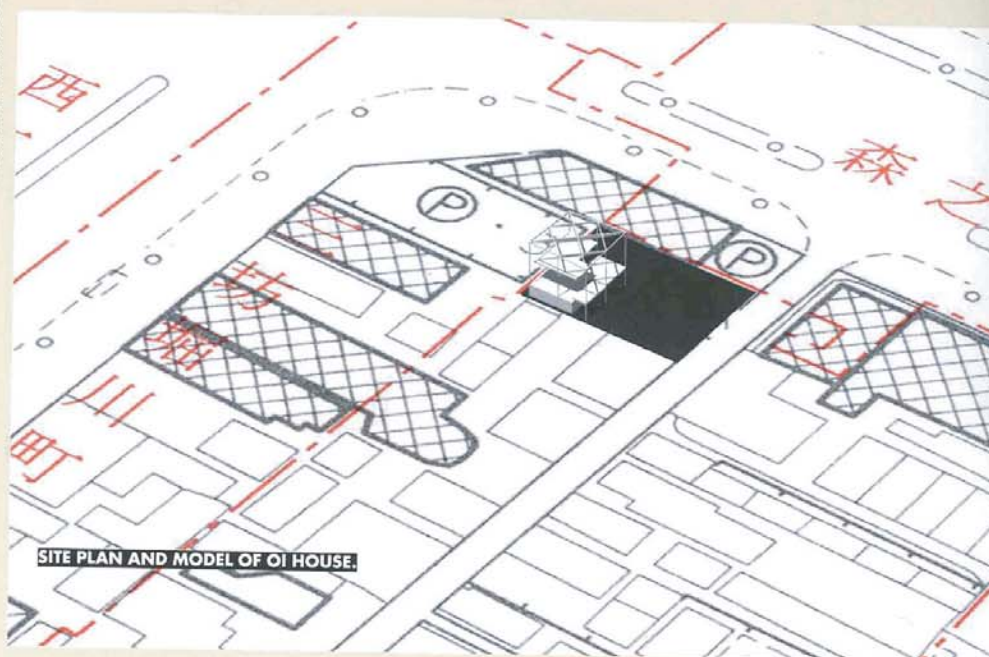
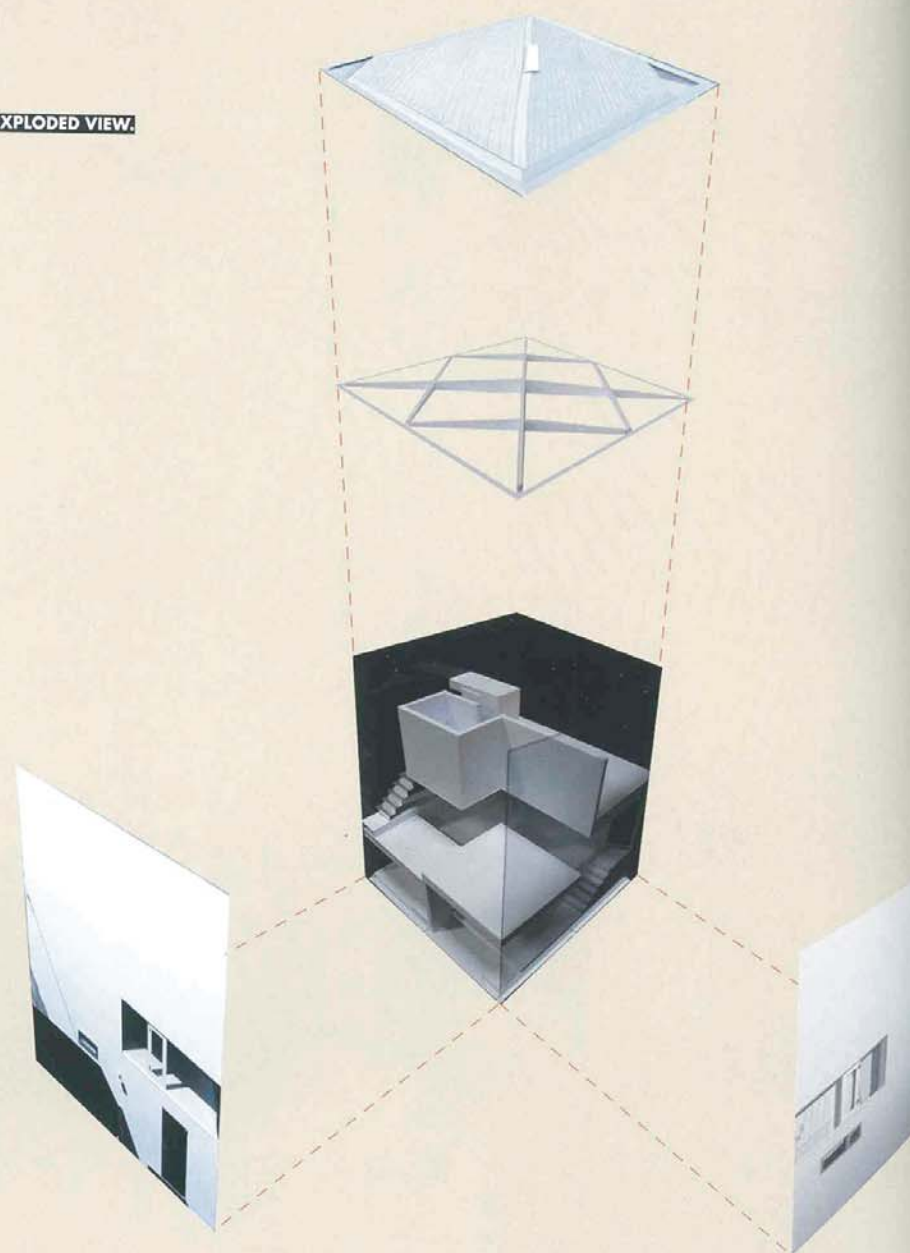


FUTURE ENLARGEMENT.



THE THREE HOUSES WILL BE CONNECTED BY AN 'AERIAL GARDEN' ON THE SECOND LEVEL.

EXPLODED VIEW.



SITE PLAN AND MODEL OF OI HOUSE.

THIS PAGE THE BUILDING SITE WAS FORMERLY USED AS A CAR PARK.

THE RECONFIGURABLE ELEMENTS OWE A DEBT TO LESSONS IN EFFICIENCY FOUND IN TRADITIONAL JAPANESE RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE

FROM OUTSIDE, THE OI HOUSE IS A SMALL white cube, 7 m per side, set at the rear of an otherwise empty lot in central Kyoto. Yet inside, despite having a total floor area of only 98m<sup>2</sup>, the house unfolds into an array of expansive, interpenetrating spaces. Similar to Adolf Loos's *Raumplan* approach to architectural composition, small shifts in level are used to create experiential variety and constantly surprising views.

Designed by Kohji Katagi of Salt Design, a young Kyoto practice composed of graduates from Seika University, the house was commissioned by a retired couple whose principal request was for an exceptionally large living area that included a 'party space' for entertaining guests. Constrained to a small floor area by the low budget, the architect came up with a solution that permitted him, in his words, to 'subtly articulate the functional spaces as overlapping or nested volumes, rather than clearly dividing them with walls'. Each room is an incomplete box that intersects adjacent spaces in plan and section, resulting in a complex composition of platforms and alcoves with varying ceiling heights. The walls and floors also partially frame scenes inside and outside, allowing the central living area and the

surrounding secondary areas to act as reciprocal backdrops, enhancing the apparent depth and breadth of the house.

Passing through the front door, you walk across the entry hall (a cubic volume filling exactly one quarter of the plan) before climbing a short flight of steps to the main living area. Here, the roof plate of the entry hall becomes a raised section of floor occupying one quadrant, set at exactly the same height as the kitchen counter running along the walls of the opposite corner. A few steps lead from the kitchen-floor level up to an intermediate platform and then to one end of the countertop itself, from which a folded metal-plate stair ascends to the private area. The upper level is further connected to a slightly raised sleeping loft that offers a view of the spaces below.

Occupying the middle zone of the house, the main living area is an interstitial space, defined by the volume of the entrance hall projecting up from the ground and the volume of the private area hanging from the ceiling. These two smaller enclosures are nested within the main shell of the house, which is clad in white stucco and lined with lauan plywood. This composition causes the

main space to be perceived somehow as exterior – a sensation enhanced by the corner notch of full-height glazing that bounds the raised sitting platform.

The ambiguous alternation of spatial relationships is reflected in the treatment of textures and details, which invert normal relationships between the building frame and the installed fittings. The entry-hall volume, for example, has the precise jointing and smooth finish of furniture, whereas the kitchen counter is made of the same lauan plywood that lines the building shell, visually merging the counter with the main structure. By contrast, the folded-plate stair that perches on the counter has the delicacy of a well-crafted fixture resting in place rather than being integrated into the structural framing. Storage units and spaces are cleverly hidden within the rooms, and various elements slide and rotate to

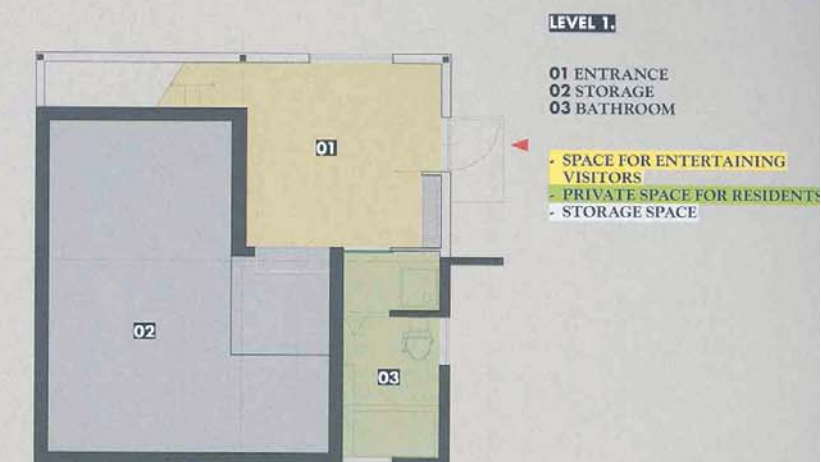




SECTION NORTH-SOUTH.



SECTION EAST-WEST.



LEVEL 1.

- 01 ENTRANCE
- 02 STORAGE
- 03 BATHROOM

- SPACE FOR ENTERTAINING VISITORS
- PRIVATE SPACE FOR RESIDENTS
- STORAGE SPACE



LEVEL 2,3,4.

- 01 SPACE A (LEVEL 2)
- 02 SPACE B (LEVEL 3)
- 03 SPACE C (LEVEL 4)
- 04 CLOAKROOM
- 05 CABINET
- 06 KITCHEN COUNTER

- SPACE FOR ENTERTAINING VISITORS
- PRIVATE SPACE FOR RESIDENTS
- STORAGE SPACE



LEVEL 5,6.

- 01 SPACE D (LEVEL 5)
- 02 SPACE E (LEVEL 6)
- 03 UTILITY (LEVEL 5)
- 04 TOILET
- 05 VOID

- SPACE FOR ENTERTAINING VISITORS
- PRIVATE SPACE FOR RESIDENTS
- STORAGE SPACE





**'THE PROJECT IS NOT DESIGNED AS A SEAMLESS SEQUENCE, BUT RATHER AS A COLLECTION OF STATIC SPACES AND VIEWPOINTS THAT INTERLOCK TO FORM A SIMPLE CUBE'**

alter the spatial configuration. The clearest example is on the upper level, where – reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's *Door at 11, rue Larrey* – the door to the sleeping loft has two possible positions: it can either close off the small loft or be set perpendicular to create a larger, combined private area that is shielded from the rest of the house.

Chairs are not used anywhere – people sit directly on the wooden floorboards or on tatami – and the differences in height are generally small enough to avoid any need for balustrades. The

overall experience is of a stepping, spiralling sequence of more-or-less open, more-or-less continuous spaces, yet according to Katagi the project is 'not designed as a seamless sequence, but rather as a collection of static spaces and viewpoints that interlock to form a simple cube'. All these semi-autonomous spaces are sheltered by an exposed roof structure of glue-laminated timber beams. These are rotated at 45° to the orthogonal floor layouts below, heightening the sense of disjunction and independence from the main building shell; Katagi calls it 'an attempt to blur the space'.

The owners of the house own the entire site, and the building has been positioned to allow their two children to build houses adjacent to the parental home at some point in the future. The architect has proposed using short enclosed bridges to link the three houses at precisely the same level, creating the option of a larger living area that will merge the houses into a single

complex. In anticipation of these bridges, the Oi House has two full-height operable windows already in place.

The realization of such a pragmatic and pleasant system of living and storage spaces within this small volume is an admirable achievement. The reconfigurable elements as well as the multiple roles given to each space, both functionally and perceptually, owe a debt to lessons in efficiency found in traditional Japanese residential architecture – the skill to make necessary constraints go unnoticed, and to allow large living in small spaces. As Katagi notes, the appearance and site positioning of the Oi House cause it to resemble a *kura*, the name given to the small, white-plastered storehouse traditionally used as an annex to a larger family residence. Perhaps, in the future, that is exactly what it will become.

[www.salt-design.net](http://www.salt-design.net)



OPPOSITE TATAMI COVER THE FLOOR OF THE PRIVATE SPACE LOCATED ON LEVEL 5, UNDER THE ROOF CONSTRUCTION.

THIS PAGE THE WHITE BOX HANGING FROM THE CEILING ACCOMMODATES THE RESIDENTS' PRIVATE QUARTERS, WHICH ARE REACHED BY ASCENDING A STAIRWAY OF FOLDED METAL PLATE.