

Building

# Garden Gateway

Wendy Perring on Burd Haward's  
visitor centre at Mottisfont

**Photos**  
Jack Hobhouse





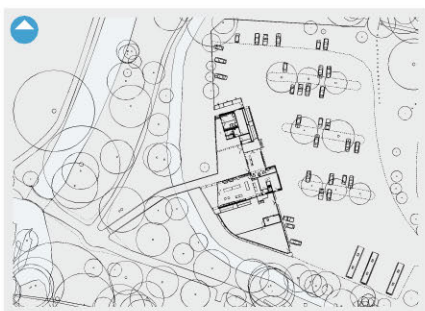


Hidden in the depths of the Hampshire countryside, Mottisfont is one of the National Trust's secluded gems. Built in the thirteenth century beside the beautiful but tempestuous River Test as an Augustinian priory, it morphed into a family home after the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and since 1957 has been a National Trust estate, famed for its beautiful gardens and artistic events.

I have been a visitor to Mottisfont for many years, captivated by its walled garden, magnificent trees and the river's tranquillity. This is a special landscape, both listed and a SSSI. Building amid such constraints almost invariably results in planning challenges and design compromise, but this has not been the case with Mottisfont's new visitor facilities, thanks in no small part to the vision and dedication of the client.

The previous visitor centre — a shabby hut tucked away in the car park — exuded the feeling of a backwater destination. The new building, by Burd Haward Architects, suffers no such identity crisis. It is a bold, confident statement, immediately signifying arrival at somewhere special and inviting entry — a fitting gatehouse to a garden of delights.





**Above**  
The plan form of the visitor centre expresses its role as a gateway between the car park and gardens.

**Top**  
The entrance route passes through the building to a raised west-facing court; model; east entrance; Mottisfont House.

The visitor centre is composed of a series of simple pitched-roof volumes connected by a central single-storey link building. The arrangement is playful from the outset and the scale is a clear reference to the local domestic vernacular and to agricultural buildings on the estate. The architects have borrowed colour tones from Hampshire red brick and clay tile, yet selected an altogether bolder palette of materials; Corten steel for the main volume and timber for the smaller service buildings.

The immediate impact is both stimulating and reassuring, as the tonal palette combines harmoniously with the historic context. The whole composition is lifted on piles above the floodplain and underlying peat deposits — a pragmatic move that also serves to heighten the visitor's sense of journeying from one world to another.

This modest building effortlessly mediates the transition from car park to ticket purchase to gardens. The central reception area is a simple glass and timber volume, low and uncluttered. Views of the landscape beyond are glimpsed through the substantial yet elegant timber columns, which suggest permanence and solidity. The space has a log burner, which will reinforce the sense of welcome in the winter months. It is the architectural equivalent of a handshake, affording a moment to pause before continuing the journey to the garden.

A picture of a finished floor would be good,  
but our advice at this stage would be better.



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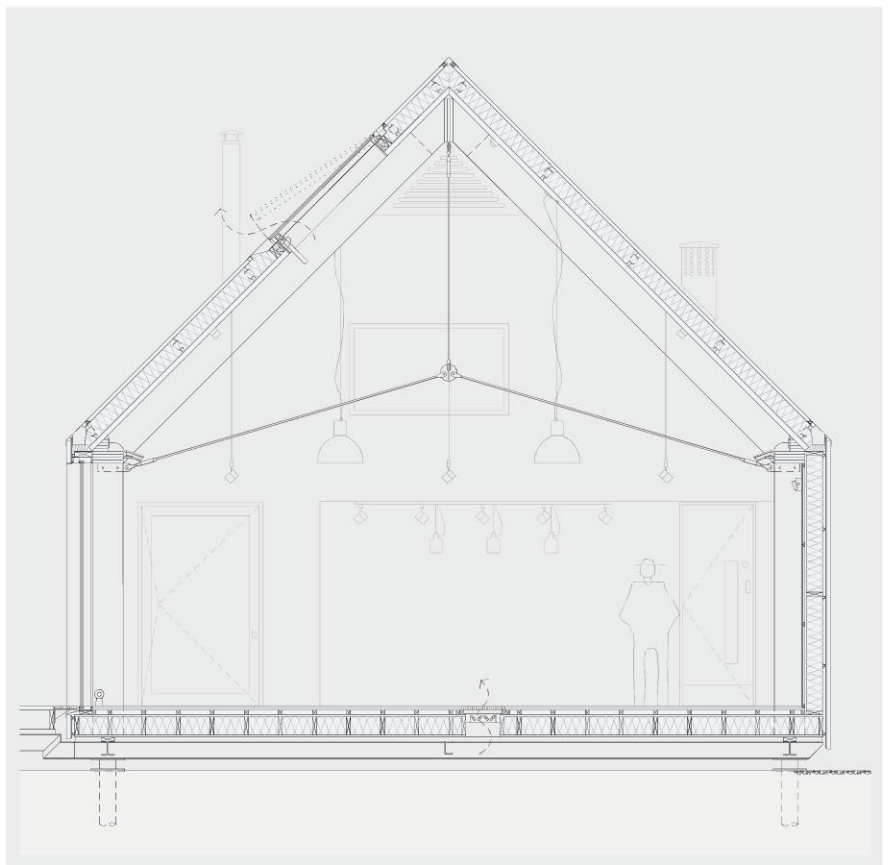
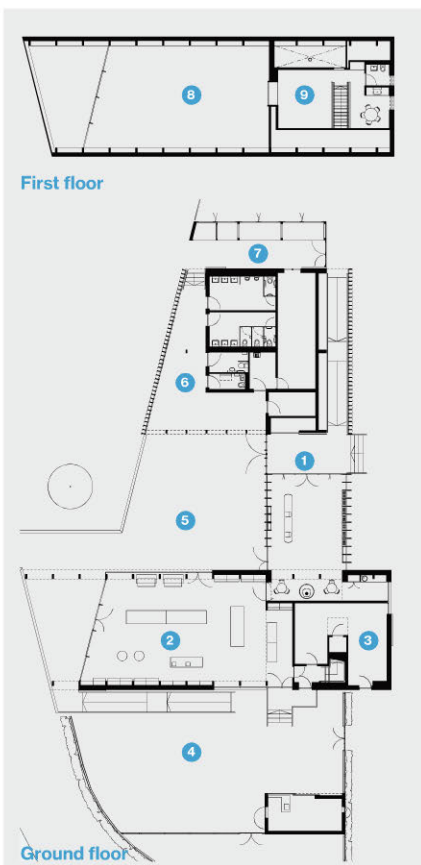
more than just a rooflight



**GLAZING**VISION

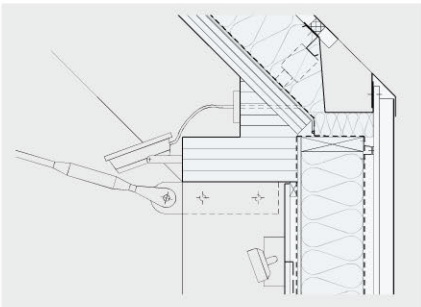
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#### Above/below

Floor plans, shop interior showing triangulated structure, construction section and hidden-gutter eaves detail.



#### Key

- 1 Entrance, reception
- 2 Shop
- 3 Shop store
- 4 Plant sales
- 5 Entrance court
- 6 Covered terrace, wcs
- 7 Log store
- 8 Void
- 9 Staff office







The welcome space opens onto a west-facing entrance court that forms the heart of the composition. It is generous in size and enclosed on three sides by the timber fins which, as well as being structural, are a playful device, reminiscent of an old-fashioned stroboscope, animated by passing visitors. The entrance court provides shelter and simple fixed seating (designed by the architects) with a view. It allows a moment to pause and contemplate, or to wait for friends while they use the adjacent facilities.

It is a rare relief from the norm not to be forced to pass through the gift shop on the way in and out. Rather, the visitor can choose to enter the larger Corten-clad volume containing the shop — perhaps enticed by its intriguing materiality. Inside, the clarity of the triangulated structure and agricultural references are revealed in a lofty, flexible, barn-like space.

Meticulous attention to detail is evident at every turn. The volumes on either side of the court are carved away to form secondary spaces accessed between the timber columns. This is a crafted building — not laboured, but highly considered. Every junction has been carefully thought through, with nothing left to chance. This preoccupation with materials, understanding of the effects of weathering and celebration of craftsmanship have resulted in a building that is contemporary, confident and at ease with its setting.



**Above**  
Structural timber diagram.

**Above left, left**  
View across the entrance court; reception area and ticket desk.



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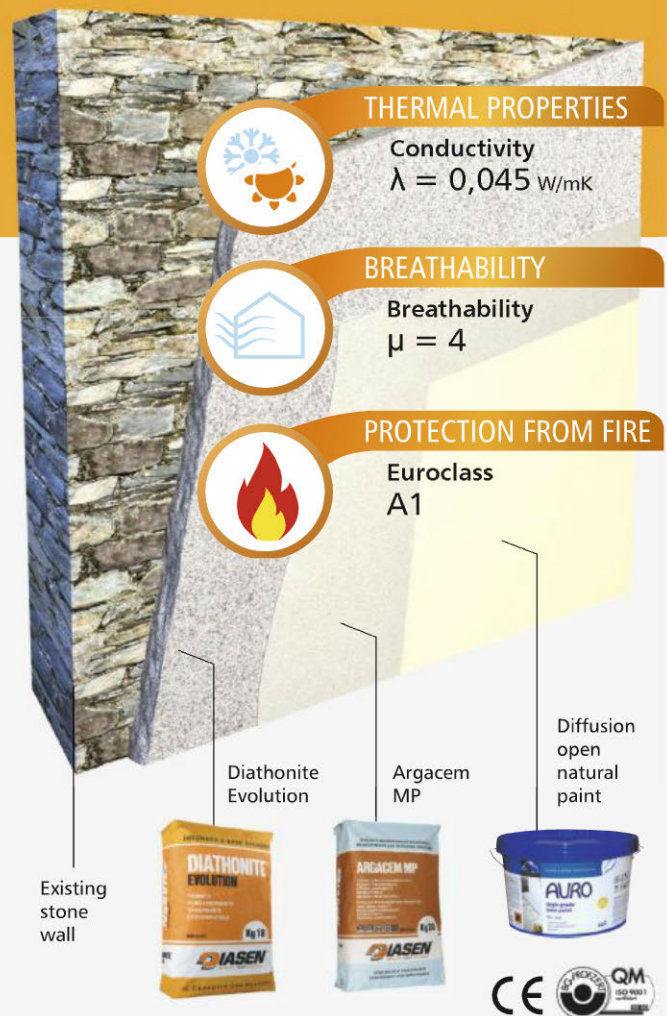


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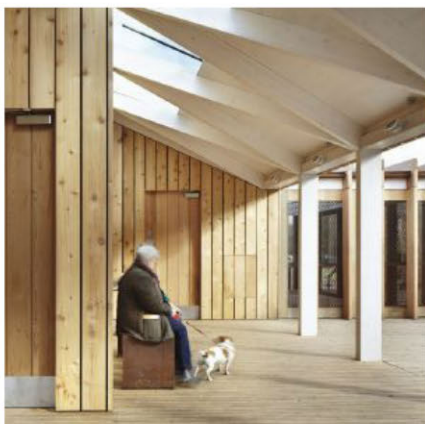
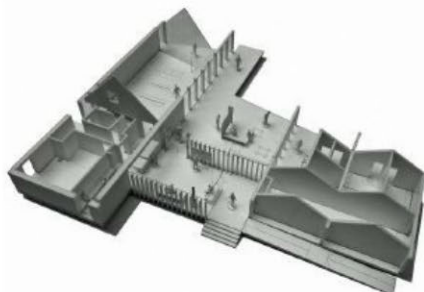


#### Right

A southerly side door in the Corten-clad flank of the shop opens to the external plant sales area.

#### Below

Interior model; sheltered waiting area beside the entrance court.



Environmentally this is a building with a light touch. Screw-pile foundations ensure that in the (unlikely) event of the building being removed, no trace will remain. The materials throughout are largely natural and self-finished, while playful touches of decoration in some areas give a nod to the rich Arts & Crafts history of Mottisfont.

The primary timber structure is tactile and durable with low embodied carbon. And as with many of Burd Haward's buildings, the environmental strategy is based on seamlessly integrated passive measures. The building doesn't shout about its sustainable credentials; they simply exist, and they work.

The new visitor centre cleverly captures the spirit of its location, the history of the place, the boldness of its client and the joyfulness of Mottisfont. It is worth making the trip to visit — you will not be disappointed. **✓**

#### Project team

##### Architect

Burd Haward

##### Project team

Buddy Haward, Camilla

Parsons, Nathan Ireland

##### QS

AECOM

##### Services engineer

Max Fordham LLP

##### Structural engineer

Mann Williams

##### Landscape

Grant Associates

##### CDMC

Andrew Goddard Assocs

##### Timber frame

Constructional Timber,

Thomas Consulting

##### Ecology, hydrology

ECS, Cole Easdon

#### Selected suppliers & subcontractors

##### Main contractor

EW Beard

##### Steel frame, cladding

Fabrite

##### Timber frame

Sylva

##### Piling

Screwfast Foundations

##### VR structural glazing

Glassolutions

##### Steel doors

Wellington Glazing

##### Carpentry, joinery

RP Carpentry, Romsey

##### Joinery

##### Stencil-applied paint

Hare & Humphreys

##### Acoustic baffles, panels

Skanda Acoustics,

Custom Audio Designs

##### Ironmongery

Dorplan

##### Sliding door gear

PC Henderson

##### Corten steel sheet

ASD Glen Metals

##### Aluminium roofing

Architectural Profiles

##### Timber cladding

Vincent Timber

##### WRC cladding fixings

Silva Timber Products

##### Windows

Venturi

##### Rooflights

Glazing Vision, The

Rooflight Company

##### Timber board linings

Tilly Holzindustrie

##### Woodburning stove

Stove Tec

##### Flooring

Orlestone Oak (timber),

Altro (resin, safety),

Forbo-Nairn (lino),

Hammer Carpets,

Jaymart (entrance mat),

Hopping Softwood (deck)

##### Worktop, integral sink

GEC Anderson