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BLUEPRINT

ORIGAMI HOUSE

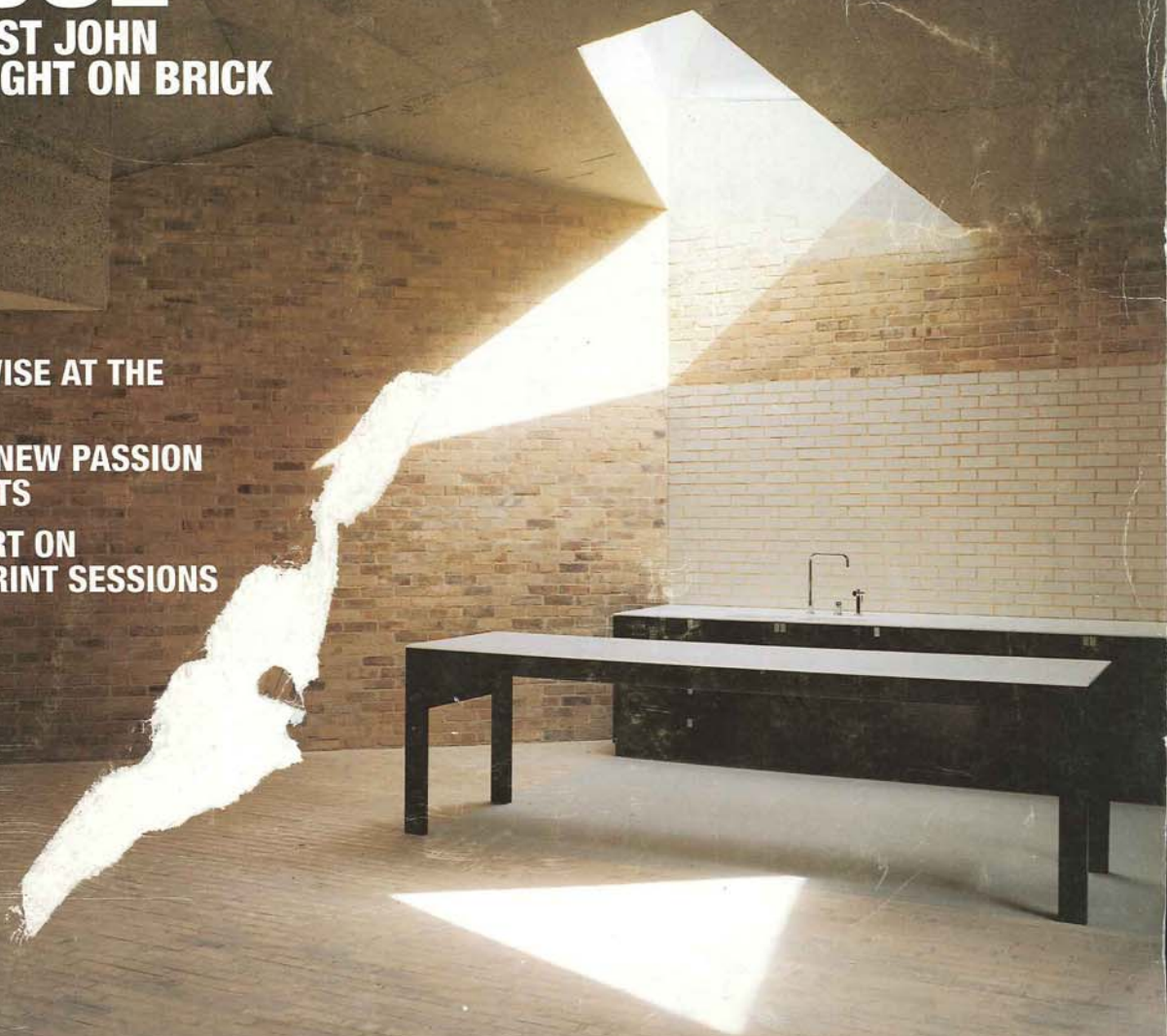
**CARUSO ST JOHN
SHEDS LIGHT ON BRICK**



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SETTING FREE THE LITTLE GREY CELLS

Caruso St John's west London house is set to shake up architecture in the way that the practice's first major building, Walsall New Art Gallery, did six years ago, says **Vicky Richardson**

PHOTOGRAPHS *HÉLÈNE BINET*



Four years and 22 party wall agreements later, Caruso St John's Brick House is finally complete. Like all the best architectural projects, getting the house built has been a struggle. The working drawings alone took eight months to complete and the design made huge demands on the builder. But the first sight is breathtaking.

The firm has tackled larger, more public projects in recent years, such as Barbican Concert Hall, Stortorget Square in Kalmar, Sweden, and phase one of the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood. But the Brick House is the first to demonstrate its skill at handling interior space since the New Art Gallery, Walsall, was completed in 1999.

The house has no facade – simply a door from the street that leads to a

compressed, ramped entrance hall – so nothing prepares you for the extraordinary main space with its gravity-defying, rough concrete ceiling. Impossibly heavy at 450mm thick, but hovering as lightly as a canvas tent, the roof draws your gaze upwards: it feels like being on top of a mountain rather than hemmed in on a wedge of land in central London.

The only reference to conventional domestic architecture is the familiar Cambridge brick, apparently the sort used for west London tube stations, set in a very ordinary running bond. In other respects the house is like nothing you've seen before. It manages somehow to be archaic and shockingly new at the same time.

Built for a wealthy but not showy

client, the house is virtually invisible from the outside. Tucked away behind the stucco Regency terraces of Bayswater, west London, this anonymity suits the clients down to the ground.

According to architect Adam Caruso 'it's poor, modest and hidden', though of course, the client couple are not poor by any stretch of the imagination and the vast scale of the rooms (not to mention the plant room with its immensely complicated services and networks) reveals their underlying grandeur. Even Caruso admits that the gargantuan nature of the roof – which required a forest of shuttering for the concrete to be poured into – was 'beyond what's reasonable to do at this scale'. ▶



The living room of the Brick House, at first floor level, is an extraordinary room topped by a heavy ceiling, folded in different directions as though made from paper rather than cast concrete. Brick wraps around the walls and floor, apart from the kitchen (left) which uses concrete.