

## ANDERTON HOUSE, GOODLEIGH, DEVON

The Anderton House (formerly known as Riggside) is one of the best-known designs of Peter Aldington of Aldington & Craig, one of the most influential architectural practices of post-war domestic housing in Britain. The significance of the Anderton House is recognised by its Grade II\* status and, in 2003, it is one of only seven buildings which date from the 1970s to be given this accolade.

Peter Aldington's work has echoes of Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier in its willingness to blend the traditions of local vernacular with the austerity of the modern movement, which Aldington has expressed as 'listening to the past to make a building of the present that would serve for the future'. In the late nineteen fifties and sixties, architectural design was becoming ever bigger – new towns, power stations, factories, hospitals set the trend and drove architectural expertise and creativity. Such was the momentum that the more lowly qualities of human scale, for a while, went by the board. Concern grew that the sense of community and scale in small rural towns and villages especially was in danger of disappearing. In contrast to these large public works a few architects began to build for themselves or their friends houses that were at once self-effacing and more intimate. Such small houses were the perfect opportunity for architectural experimentation and free planning in a number of idioms.

Peter Aldington was one of the first to anticipate the increasing requirement for a return to greater humanism in housing. He returned to a more intimate and vernacular scale: his first private commission in 1961 at Askett Green in Buckinghamshire was to build 'a modern interpretation of a cottage.' In 1969, Ian and May Anderton, friends of the Aldingtons from Preston, commissioned a small family home in Goodleigh, North Devon for themselves and their daughter, Liz, then a student. Ian Anderton was a commercial pharmacist who was moving his premises to Barnstaple. He wanted the new house also to be suitable for his eventual retirement. A highly detailed brief was first drawn up with the clients by Peter Aldington's partner, John Craig, part of their practice's characteristic working method at the time. The brief asked for a house that made the most of the views across the valley, encouraged a main living areas that was open plan though with some demarcation and three private and acoustically insulated bedrooms. Finally, a study area was required for Ian Anderton – not secluded from daily activity but rather at the heart of it in the living area and of a form which would allow the inevitable clutter of papers and books to be concealed. The Andertons were delighted with the result and lived happily in the building for over twenty five years.

In 1998 the house came on the market, a remarkably intact example of carefully considered and coherent architecture from the early 1970s. It acquired its Grade II\* listing around the same time, protection against any hasty 'improvement' by a new owner. However, like the rest of Goodleigh, the house had suffered flooding problems on its sloping site and did not sell. Peter Aldington contacted the Landmark Trust on Liz Anderton's behalf, who was keen that the architecture of her parents' house be preserved and offered us a generous reduction on its price to achieve this. The house met all our usual criteria for architectural and historical significance with a degree of genuine vulnerability and we were able to raise the balance needed to acquire it, Liz Anderton generously allowing us to phase our payments.

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Its simple, almost barn-like form represents one of the simplest structural forms of shelter. As Peter Aldington himself expresses it, 'By using a frame and a tent-like roof we were able to make a living room on a small footprint into an apparently endless space.' Explicit expression of structure is an important aspect of Peter Aldington's work and gives the materials used an aesthetic as well as a structural role: in the Anderton House almost every brick and piece of timber used can be seen beneath a simple coat of paint or varnish.

The house's timber frame was pre-fabricated in Oxford so that Peter Aldington could oversee its detail. The roof is a simple structure, supported by posts and twin beams, which could be erected and tiled quickly and cost-efficiently. The roof appears to float above the walls through the clever use of a narrow clerestory which flows into the glazed gable ends, giving an effortless flow of space and an attractive confusion of inside and outside. The low roof pitch avoids any sense of heaviness and bracing has been deliberately avoided.

The passage of light through glass is used to accentuate different zones and moods through the house. This is most clearly seen in the living space, where large sheets of toughened and laminated glass allows the long views to be appreciated both inside and out. Its surface is set back from the building's edges and at an angle to avoid reflection and glare, while the lowered living room floor allows both internal and external spaces to be revealed invitingly. The sense of involvement with the landscape is further heightened by continuing the Wheatley Golden Brown quarry tiles used for the floor of the living space outside onto the terrace and by the lack of a definable edge to the glass corner of the living room. 'It was,' wrote Peter Aldington, 'perhaps the nearest we came to an integration of inside and outside spaces.'

By contrast, the entrance to the building on the north side and the bathroom windows use darker, textured glass so that the entrance draws the visitor into an almost burrow-like space before the bright openness of the open-plan living area. The interior has many complicated and boldly executed built-in cupboards and fittings, another typical feature of Aldington designs. The Anderton House is modern but far from minimalist and at times is almost playful, drawing warmth from varnished pine. The internal timber is found in a strongly horizontal plane and deliberately obtrusive. The use of concrete breezeblocks is honestly expressed throughout, albeit painted white. An innovative solution to the requirement for a central study area was found in the high-sided box that dominates the open-plan living area, christened the doghouse. The circular pod beside the entrance that contains the bathroom complements this cube. The bedrooms are functional sleeping spaces but here too there is warmth and practicality, with roomy built-in cupboards and carefully conceived diagonal panelling. Liz Anderton's bedroom was provided with an entirely functional and visually pleasing built-in desk and shelving lit by the clerestory.

The Andertons found themselves entirely happy with the end-result. It remains instantly evocative of the early 1970s. Here is a comfortable family home almost like so many others built across the countryside in the last decades – and yet lifted to a different level of experience by the mind of an architect who is a master of his chosen idiom.

*The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Anderton House sleeps up to 5 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.*