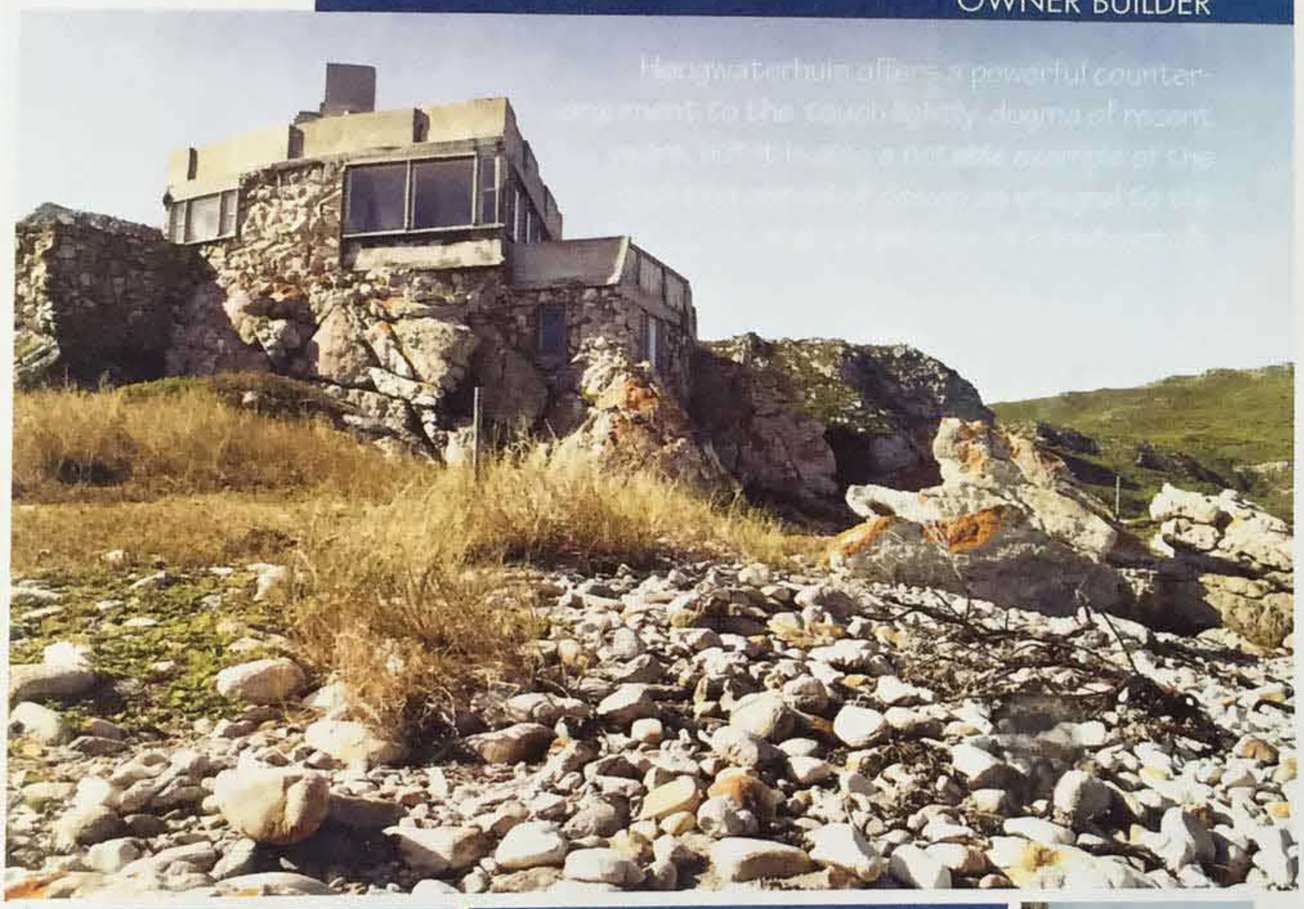
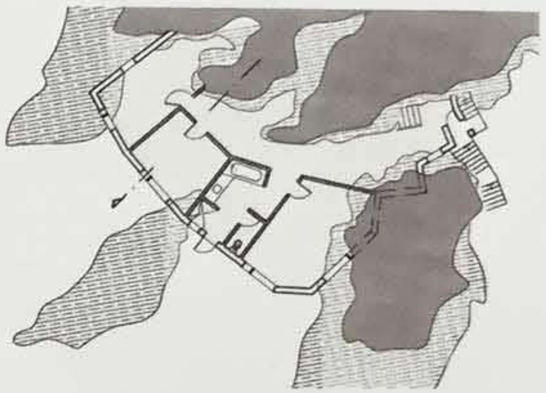
HOOGWATERHUIS:

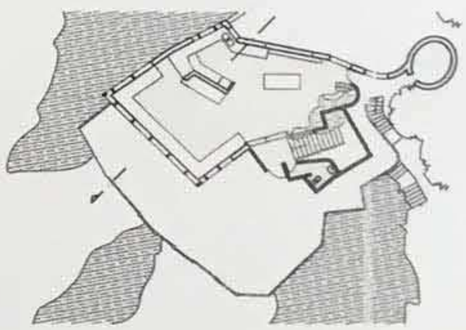
OWNER BUILDER

1969-1977





Bedroom level plan.



Living rooms plan.

Hoogwaterhuis overlooks Maasbaai, a remote bay past Pringle Bay, outside of Cape Town. This stretch of coast is known as Hangklip, after the mountain peak which overhangs the bay and which, paired with Cape Point, acts as a sentinel to the mouth of False Bay. The overbearing presence of this peak, with the rocky coastline as foreground, defines the character of the place, and continues to evoke the sense of remoteness and refuge which drew escaped slaves to find shelter in caves on its precipitous rock-face in the 18th century. The rocky promontory below this face, on which Hoogwaterhuis is sited, has also served as shelter in the past. Strandloper habitation is evident in rocks arranged as a hearth, which have been fused together by the actions of fire and animal fat drippings. These dwellings remain evident as mysterious dark gullies leading off the bedroom passage of the lower floor. These past reading of landscape as hard-won shelter and vantage point in an unwelcoming environment appear to inform Hoogwaterhuis in its tenacious relationship to site and its spare, rugged, construction.

The house, completed in 1977, was designed by the owner who built it on weekends over an eight-year period with a regular team of five labourers. The owner, Ruben Stander, had in his time been a leading structural engineer, and was responsible for innovative construction techniques such as slip-casting, which was first employed in South Africa in the construction of the Trust Bank buildings in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Stander had contemplated building on the koppie while observing the site over a long period from an earlier house which looked onto the site. As a teenager he had aspired to being a sculptor: then, late into middle age, he decided that this house was to be his only work of sculpture. He drew plans for submission to Caledon municipality, but the design changed completely during the lengthy construction period while engaging with the specifics of site and the pragmatics of building in what was then an inaccessible location.

The lower levels of the house begin with a process of accretion, using stone from nearby to form a rubble wall plinth founded directly on to bedrock, with short spans over deeper gullies. This responsive, accretive process determines the organic plan of the lower, bedroom level and serves to bind the building to the outcrop, from which it appears to emanate. This plinth, level though irregular in plan, supports a concrete superstructure (with stone infill panels), comprising an open-plan living area and a roof deck above.

The floor of the living area introduces geometry into the design, with near-right angles and a regular, repetitive fenestration pattern on the sea-facing sides. However, the entrance side remains organic in plan as it encircles the apex of the rocky outcrop, which protrudes through the floor, and which articulates the vertical circulation elements – both up to the roof deck and down to the bedroom level. This rocky protuberance marks the points of entry (at both levels) and anchors the plan of the house, which itself suggests the metaphor of a boat, being surrounded on three sides by the sea. The outcropping also demarcates the main circulation routes, and this theme of rock-face as marker of circulation continues downstairs where the passage is pressed up against and proceeds along the lower rock-face of the outcropping.

The living room level revolves around a substantial fireplace, with a long, continuous low couch on the sea-facing sides. The fenestration is all fixed and set in very thin teak sub-frames, apart from smaller opening casement windows. The concrete mullions are extremely thin (tapering from 90mm to 50mm), considering that they serve as piers to the roof deck, so as not to disrupt the wrap-around sea views. Their extreme slenderness was achieved by pre-casting these elements in horizontally laid moulds, as controlled pouring would not have been possible had the shuttering being *in situ* and vertical. Small starter bars were left to protrude from the moulds, which were then used to locate the mullions in pockets left in the upstand wall below the windows by applying fresh concrete. The window lintels