

The RIAI logo consists of the letters 'RIAI' in a white, sans-serif font, centered within a dark blue square. This square is itself centered within a larger, light grey square.

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The background of the cover is a photograph of a modern building's exterior. The building features a prominent, angular concrete structure with a large, triangular glass facade. The concrete is a light grey color with some texture. The glass facade is composed of many vertical panels, and the interior of the building is visible through the glass, showing a warm, yellowish light. Several people are standing in front of the glass facade, looking towards the building. The overall composition is geometric and architectural.

IRISH
ARCHITECTURE
THE RIAI ANNUAL REVIEW

SPA AND LEISURE BUILDING, HOTEL EUROPE

Gottstein Architects

A Sequence of Light and Landscape

Text by Gottstein Architects

The Hotel Europe is located approximately three miles west of Killarney town in Co. Kerry. The site is on an inclined landscape overlooking Loch Lein, the lower and largest of the Killarney lakes with the McGullycuddy Reeks mountain range forming the backdrop to the view across the lake. The nearby Black Valley and Gap of Dunloe, where huge glacial boulders emerge from the hills, define the local landscape.

Originally built in 1962, the hotel has been substantially extended over the decades and is now configured as a south-facing U-shaped building orientated towards the lake. The five-storey structure features reception, function, restaurant and bedroom spaces to the south and west, while circulation and administration are located to the north.

The client's brief was to integrate some 4,500m² of spa and leisure accommodation into the site, whilst maintaining the view and connection to the lake enjoyed by the existing hotel facilities and bedrooms. As the hotel is located within a 'Prime Special Amenity Area', much consideration was given to how to minimise the visual impact of the new building. The approach was to carve the building out of the hill, creating a series of stone 'boulders' that emerge from the landscape and stretch towards the foreshore of the lake, echoing the surrounding geological forms and imagery of the glaciated valleys. As the grass-covered volumes emerge from the garden, a series of indoor and sheltered outdoor spaces are created which are viewed as 'rooms' within the garden.

By virtue of being a predominantly subterranean structure, the building is naturally insulated by the surrounding soil to three sides. This drastically reduces the requirement for manufactured intensive insulants to the building envelope. Grass and earth removed for construction have been used to 're-carpet' the stepped roofs of the completed structure. The new grass roofs are made up of a layer of turfed soil, varying in thickness from 200 to 350mm. The mass of the grass roof contributes to the acoustic and thermal insulation performance of the roof. Given that the local authority will not permit the discharging of rainwater to ground in this area, the green roof reduces the demand on the surface water system by more than 50% whilst supporting a new grass ecology. Finally, the green roof also assists in reducing the hotel's carbon footprint by using CO₂. The remaining non-glazed surfaces of the building that are exposed, being the roof and stone façade, employ high performance insulation, substantially reducing heat loss.

Most of the glazed spaces within the building are south-facing to overlook the lake and mountains. These façades are

constructed of high performance solar control glass with a U-value of 1.0 w/m²k to minimise excessive heat gains/losses. The pool hall and relaxation areas are high temperature areas (design temperature 28° to 30° C) and the south facing glazed façades provide solar gain to the internal areas and alleviate heating in low temperature periods. Glazed façades to areas with a typical design temperature 21° to 22° C, such as the spa bistro, treatment rooms and reception areas, are provided with cantilever roof projections, which block the high angle summer sun, whilst permitting low angle winter sun to permeate into the building and heat the space.

Our intention was to explore the new building in terms of ritual, sequencing, light and landscape. Internally, the program is split over two levels: the Spa facilities are on the upper floor and comprise a total of 11 treatment rooms, male and female thermal suites with sauna, steam rooms and heated vitality pools and relaxation rooms. On the lower floor are the Leisure facilities, which are for complimentary guest use, and include a 20-meter swimming pool, an indoor-outdoor vitality pool, a unisex thermal suite containing a salt-water sole pool, sauna and steam room as well as generous relaxation areas and wellness studio facilities.

From the main hotel, one descends through the light-filled spa atrium, moving through the landscape and into the spa below where the view is temporarily suspended. Inside, the spa is experienced as a natural sanctuary within the hill. The largely subterranean environment is expressed as a contrast of dark and light, density and void. Internal courtyard gardens are 'scooped' out of the plan - bringing natural daylight deep into the building whilst allowing places for private contemplation. The reception areas, along with the treatment rooms and staff offices, are organised around the sunken courtyards. From the reception, we move towards the changing facilities, where burnt oak timber lines the floor and walls. These spaces are dark and contrast in scale and light with the transition spaces. As one emerges from the changing rooms, the circulation routes are terminated with framed scenes of the lake and the light is used to pull the user through the building towards the water.

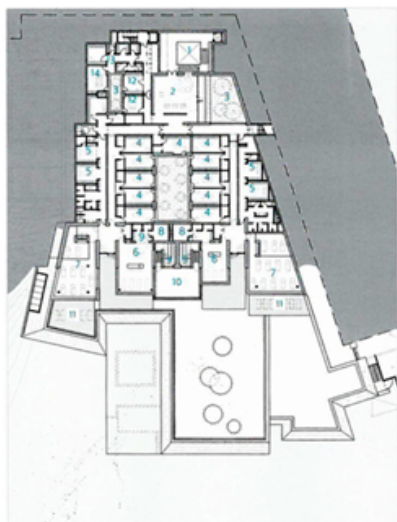
Moving towards the 'garden rooms' the threshold between interior and exterior is blurred, as dark stone slabs wrap around from the outside, through the frameless glazing, and into the room to line the floor and walls, reinforcing the feeling that the space has been hollowed from the landscape. These rooms accommodate the pool hall, relaxation rooms and thermal suites, which are all designed to overlook the lake and engage with the setting. The infinity-edge pools are orientated to form a strong visual connection with the lake, uniting one body of water with another. It is meant as a personal experience between the building user and the landscape, where the ancient act of bathing can be celebrated.

Location: Killarney, Co. Kerry

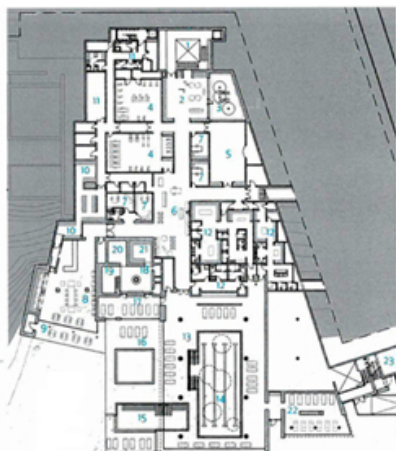
Image

- 1 The infinity-edge pool forms a strong visual connection with the lake.
- 2 The new Spa and Leisure building has been carved out from within the contours of the landscape.

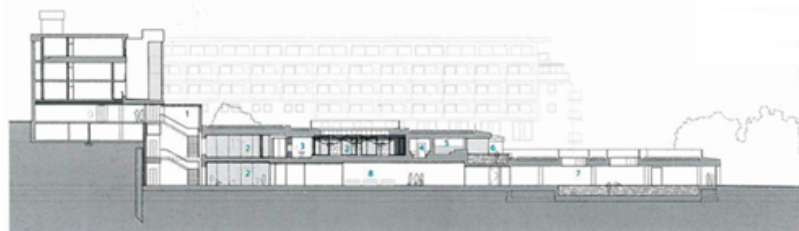
Project Photography: Paul Tierney



Floor plan level -1



Floor plan level -2



Section

Section

- 1 Atrium
- 2 External courtyard
- 3 Treatment room
- 4 Steam room
- 5 Finnish sauna
- 6 External vitality pool
- 7 Pool hall
- 8 Retail & lounge

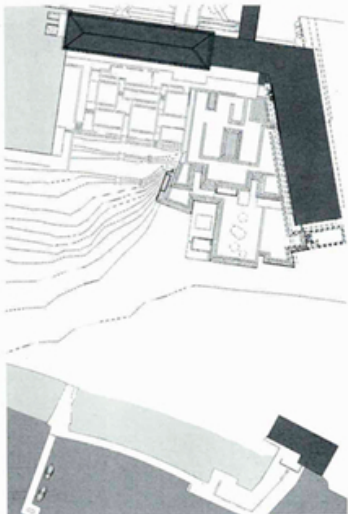
Floor plan level -1
(Spa Level)

- 1 Atrium
- 2 Reception
- 3 External courtyard
- 4 Treatment room*
- 5 Changing area*
- 6 Heat experience*
- 7 Relaxation*
- 8 Steam room*
- 9 Finnish sauna*
- 10 External vitality pool*
- 11 External terrace*
- 12 Administration
- 13 'Back of house'
- 14 Staff kitchen

*Each female and male

Floor plan level -2
(Leisure Level)

- 1 Atrium
- 2 Reception
- 3 External courtyard
- 4 Fitness
- 5 Thai chi
- 6 Retail & lounge
- 7 Administration
- 8 Bistro
- 9 Bistro terrace
- 10 Kitchen
- 11 'Back of house'
- 12 Changing area
- 13 Pool hall
- 14 Lapping pool
- 15 External vitality pool
- 16 Pool side terrace
- 17 Relaxation
- 18 Heat experience
- 19 Sole pool
- 20 Sauna
- 21 Steam room
- 22 Relaxation
- 23 Plant



Site Plan

As one emerges from the changing rooms, the circulation routes are terminated with framed scenes of the lake and the light is used to pull the user through the building towards the water.



Image

- 1 Thresholds between interior and exterior have been blurred
- 2 Courtyards provide daylight into the subterranean spaces