

BRICK

Bulletin

SUMMER 2006

TWO'S COMPANY

Woolf Architects reinterprets Hampstead's grand houses in twin homes for two brothers

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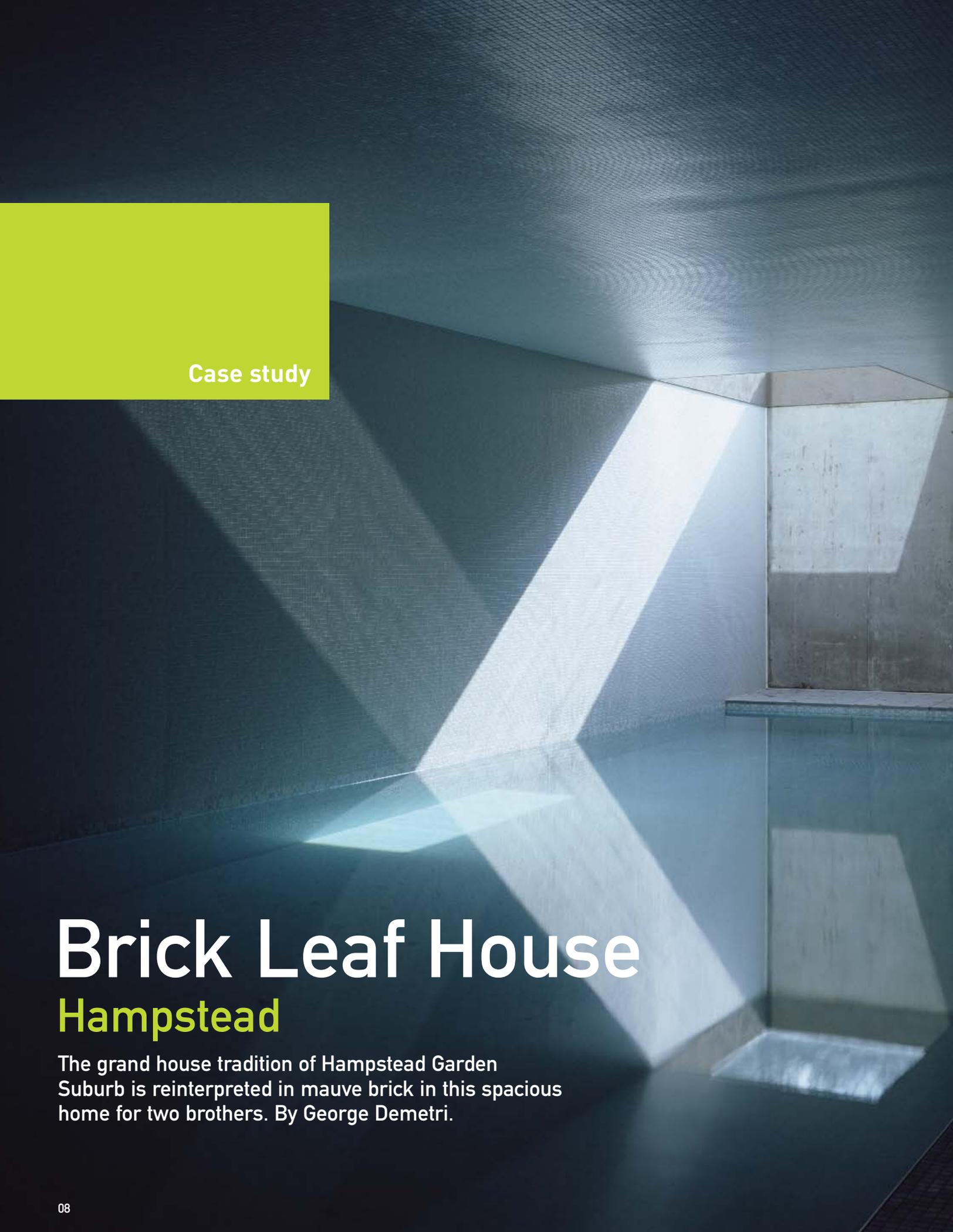
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Case study

Brick Leaf House

Hampstead

The grand house tradition of Hampstead Garden Suburb is reinterpreted in mauve brick in this spacious home for two brothers. By George Demetri.



Architect Woolf Architects
Structural engineer Price & Myers
Services engineer Furness Green Partnership
QS Capita Property Services
Landscape architect Schoenaich Rees Associates
Brickwork Fieldcrown
Main contractor Bluestone

For more details on this project, please ring the BDA on 01344 885651.

A newcomer has emerged among the large detached houses of London's leafy Hampstead. Designed by Woolf Architects, its pared down, informal minimalism sits rather well amid the mature trees on the edge of Hampstead Heath.

The clients for Brick Leaf House, two brothers, wanted a modern white building in the style of Luis Barragan. The planners suggested something contemporary in concrete, but Jonathan Woolf talked them round to brick. 'We wanted to work with a material that would age gracefully in the way that the mature elements of the plot – the trees – have done without the need for maintenance,' Woolf says. 'Also, brick is the palette of the area – Hampstead Garden Suburb.'

Originally conceived as a Palladian villa on the edge of the city, the double dwelling had sufficient area to warrant designing in the grand house tradition, albeit in an abstracted Garden Suburb sort of way. 'I wanted to create an urban feel, the type you get where a brick building abuts hard up against a stone road, very much like the hill towns of Italy and Spain,' Woolf says.

Brick Leaf House sits at the top of a steep, granite-cobbled ramp that rises 9m from street level. Its outline is notched to suggest two separate houses – one slightly inclined against the other – an impression reinforced by the two separate entrances. But there is really only one building. The ambiguity extends to the boundary of the site, formed not by timber fencing but by green-painted railings that blur the distinction between public and private space.

The two self-contained but interconnected homes each have an area of 370m², with another 186m² of shared accommodation that includes an inspirational, cave-like underground swimming pool. Woolf's determination to pursue a contemporary idiom throughout was achieved by using standardised components, rather than by reinventing the wheel.

White windows with broad architraves, though in powder-coated steel, continue the



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British tradition. They are set close to the face of the brickwork, minimising the facade's visual depth so as not to distract from the textural quality of the bricks and the strong form of the building.

A steel frame permits the large internal spans of the 'public' rooms and allowed adjustments to be made during building.

Floors are of composite concrete construction.

Resisting the temptation to go for a red brick, the architect specified a hand-made mauvish brick with a bucket-handle jointed mortar in a matching colour. In the rain, the rich textural effect echoes the wet bark of the 150-year-old copper beech tree in the garden. When dry, side lighting picks out a strong, rustic texture. The contrast between the brickwork and the light grey granite setts is also memorable, all the more so because of the steep incline.

Brick Leaf House is an understated building that does not fit easily into any ideological category, but it announces its purpose with simplicity and clarity. This extends to the brickwork which, treated consistently throughout, plays a key role in this new take on the grand house tradition of north London. ■