

ARCHITECTURE COMPETITION

# PORTUGAL VEZ RIVER SPA



Oasis

HAIGHArchitects 2025

ARCHITECTURE COMPETITION

# PORTUGAL VEZ RIVER SPA



Oasis

HAIGHArchitects 2025

For further information on this and other HAIGHArchitects projects please visit [www.haigharchitects.com](http://www.haigharchitects.com)



ARCHITECTURE COMPETITION

PORTUGAL  
VEZ RIVER SPA

Oasis

## Introduction

This book presents the **HAIGH** Architects+Designers entry for the Portugal Vez River Spa International Architecture Competition

The design aims to create a modern sanctuary that offers refuge, relaxation, renewal, and exercise, all within the natural beauty of the Rio Vez region. The hybrid structure, developed from the form of a vernacular gable-roofed farmhouse, is linked conceptually to the adjacent Rio Vez weir, metaphorically creating tranquility in the river flow and a sense of suspension in the passage of time.

Bn  
Er

**BUILDNER**  
Architecture Competitions

ARCHITECTURE COMPETITION

# PORTUGAL VEZ RIVER SPA



Oasis

**HAIGH**Architects ©2025

The **HAIGH**Architects+Designers studio was founded in New York in 1985, by Paul Haigh and Barbara H.Haigh. The practice is recognized as a leading multi-disciplined architecture and design firm for its portfolio of award winning projects. The studio has completed projects for a wide variety of cultural and commercial clients in the United States, Italy, United Kingdom, France, Japan, and Australia.



# The Vez river

The Vez River is one of northern Portugal's hidden gems, known for its crystal-clear waters and the tranquil beauty of its surroundings. The river flows through a region rich in natural landscapes, including lush forests, rolling hills, and small traditional villages. Located near the Peneda-Gerês National Park, the area is a haven for nature lovers, offering diverse flora and fauna and opportunities for outdoor activities such as hiking, swimming, and exploring the river's scenic paths.

This part of Portugal is also steeped in cultural charm. The nearby villages are known for their traditional architecture, stone bridges, and welcoming communities. The Vez River itself is a defining feature of the landscape, providing a peaceful and inspiring setting that connects people to the rhythm of nature.

# The competition site

The SPA will be located on a picturesque site along the banks of the Vez River in northern Portugal. This peaceful and inspiring location offers a blend of natural beauty and historical significance, making it a unique canvas for architects. The site is adjacent to a restored historic watermill, whose stone walls and waterwheel provide a sense of timeless character. This proximity to the watermill creates an opportunity for designs that echo the region's heritage while introducing modern elements of wellness and comfort.

Surrounding the site are lush gardens, wooded areas, and paths that lead to the river, where guests can enjoy activities like swimming in natural pools and exploring tranquil river beaches. The soothing sound of the river and the vibrant greenery make this a setting that promotes relaxation and harmony with nature. The land's gentle contours and proximity to the river offer architects the chance to integrate views of the water and surrounding landscape into the design.

The building footprint for the SPA measures approximately 8x20 meters. The structure will be elevated to road level, creating a visible yet unobtrusive presence in the landscape. The basement will house a pool and machinery, allowing for functional separation and efficient use of space. The design must carefully consider the relationship between the SPA and its surroundings, ensuring that it blends seamlessly with the natural environment and complements the existing features of the site, such as the watermill.

With its serene ambiance and proximity to the Vez River, the site offers immense potential to create a SPA that feels like a natural part of the landscape. Architects are encouraged to use the site's unique qualities—its river views, garden settings, and connection to the watermill—to craft a design that prioritizes harmony, sustainability, and the guest experience.





# The competition task

**The Portugal Vez River SPA** competition challenges architects to design a boutique SPA that integrates harmoniously with the serene surroundings of the Vez River. The SPA will be situated next to a historic watermill, creating an opportunity to combine thoughtful, modern design with the natural beauty of northern Portugal. The competition calls for innovative and sensitive solutions that celebrate the unique character of the site while meeting the functional requirements of a wellness facility.

The site is located along the Vez River, adjacent to the old watermill with its original stone walls and waterwheel. Surrounded by lush greenery and offering views of the river, the setting is peaceful and immersive, providing a strong connection to nature. The building footprint is approximately 8x20 meters, with the SPA and pool raised to road level and a basement to house a machinery. The design must carefully integrate into the landscape, preserving the sense of calm and harmony that defines the area.

The sauna, jacuzzi, and Turkish bath module for the SPA have already been pre-purchased and are ready for installation. **Participants are required to incorporate these facilities into their designs, ensuring they align with the dimensions and specifications provided in the competition brief appendix.** These details will be essential for integrating the module seamlessly into the overall design while maintaining functionality and harmony with the surrounding spaces.





## Context



## Concept

The Oasis : Vez River Spa is designed as a contemporary sanctuary for refuge, relaxation, renewal, and exercise in the context of the natural beauty of the Rio Vez region.

The hybrid structure, developed from the form of a vernacular gable-roofed farmhouse, is linked conceptually to the adjacent Rio Vez weir, metaphorically creating tranquility in the river flow and a sense of suspension in the passage of time.

## Site



## Plan

Entering the Oasis Spa experience, an open Vestibule [T] with benches and shoe storage, leads to the main Entrance [P] and the open-plan Gym [O] and Massage [M] areas. The interior space planning integrates the prescribed Spa module [F], new showers and changing rooms, and accessible bathrooms off a communal hallway [N] to create a central core of spa-related areas. On axis with the entrance, the communal hallway frames a view of the Pool [A] and Weir Falls feature. The Pool and prescribed Jacuzzi [B] are open plan with areas for loungers [Q] and Refreshments [C]. With direct connections to the Pool and Gym, the Terrace [G] and cantilever Deck [H] invite relaxation and exercise above the mill stream.

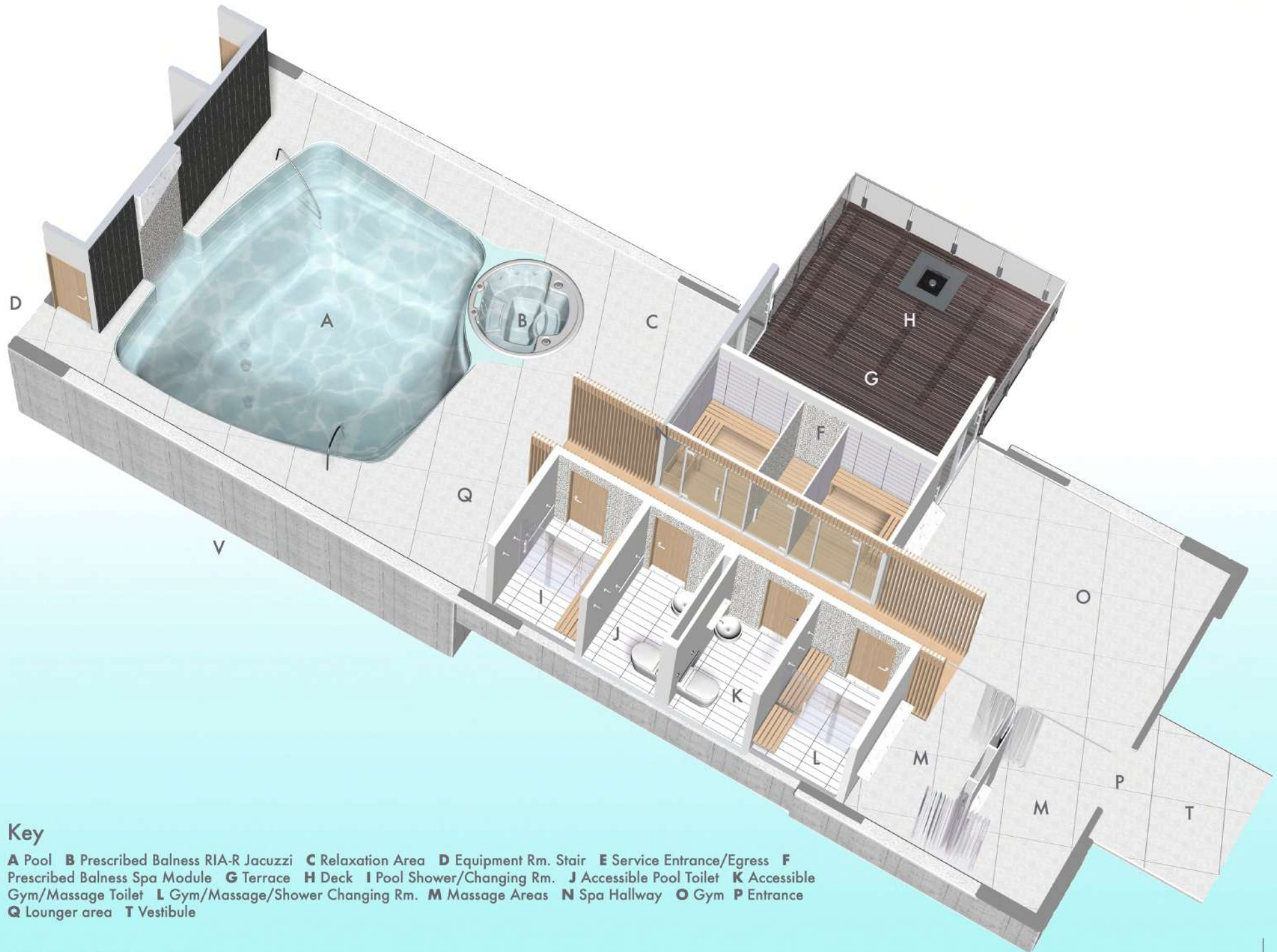
## Key

A Pool B Prescribed Balness RIA-R Jacuzzi C Relaxation Area D Equipment Rm. Stair E Service Entrance/Egress F Prescribed Balness Spa Module G Terrace H Deck I Pool Shower/Changing Rm. J Accessible Pool Toilet K Accessible Gym/Massage Toilet L Gym/Massage/Shower Changing Rm. M Massage Areas N Spa Hallway O Gym P Entrance Q Lounger area T Vestibule

VEZ RIVER SPA



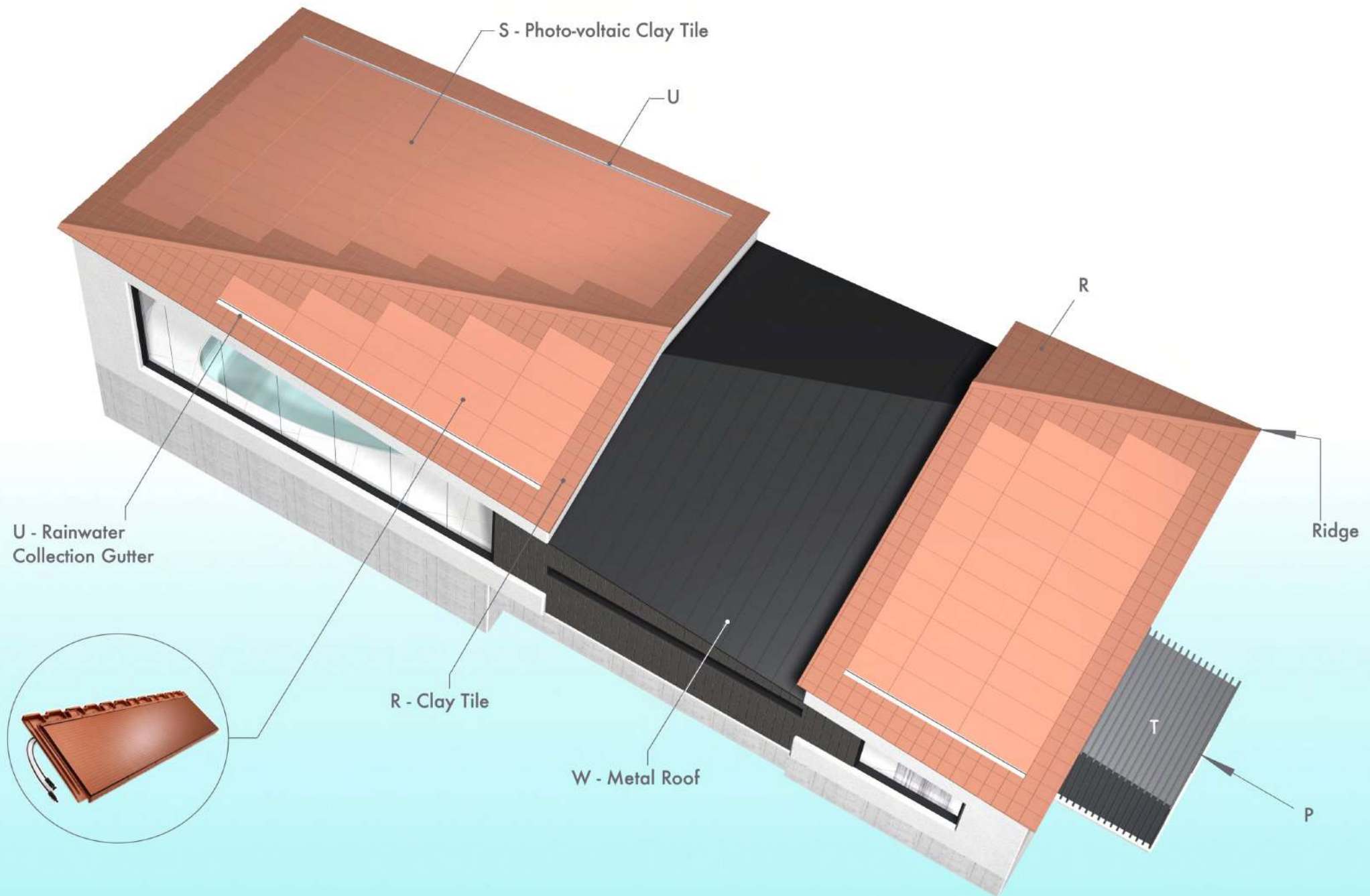




## Key

**A** Pool **B** Prescribed Balness RIA-R Jacuzzi **C** Relaxation Area **D** Equipment Rm. Stair **E** Service Entrance/Egress **F** Prescribed Balness Spa Module **G** Terrace **H** Deck **I** Pool Shower/Changing Rm. **J** Accessible Pool Toilet **K** Accessible Gym/Massage Toilet **L** Gym/Massage/Shower Changing Rm. **M** Massage Areas **N** Spa Hallway **O** Gym **P** Entrance **Q** Lounger area **T** Vestibule





Elevations

East



West

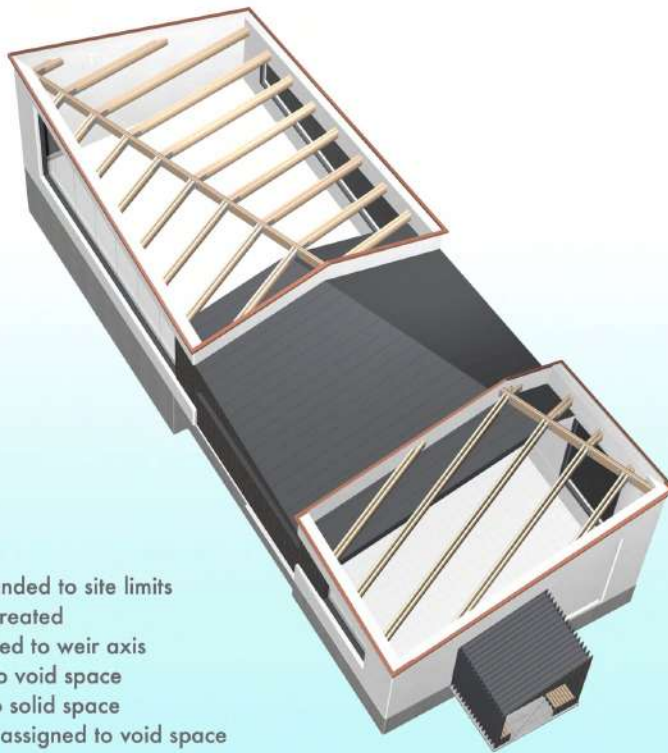
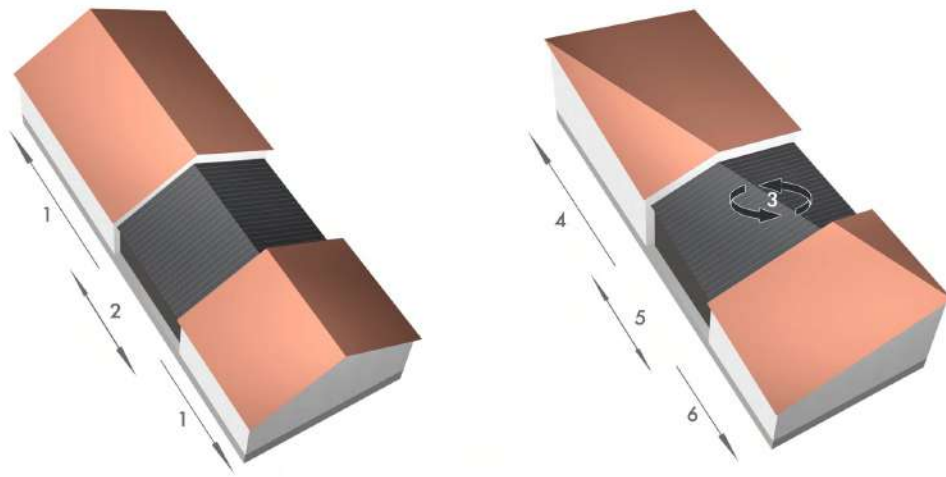


The rotation of the ridge line creates a modulation in height to the East and West facades, enabling the butt-glazed fenestration to echo the roofline and provide expansive views to the Rio Vez and the existing pools and landscape. A translucent slot window allows light and privacy in the Spa areas. The North and South elevations express the solidity of the form and the hybrid transition from the gable roof to the shed roof archetype.

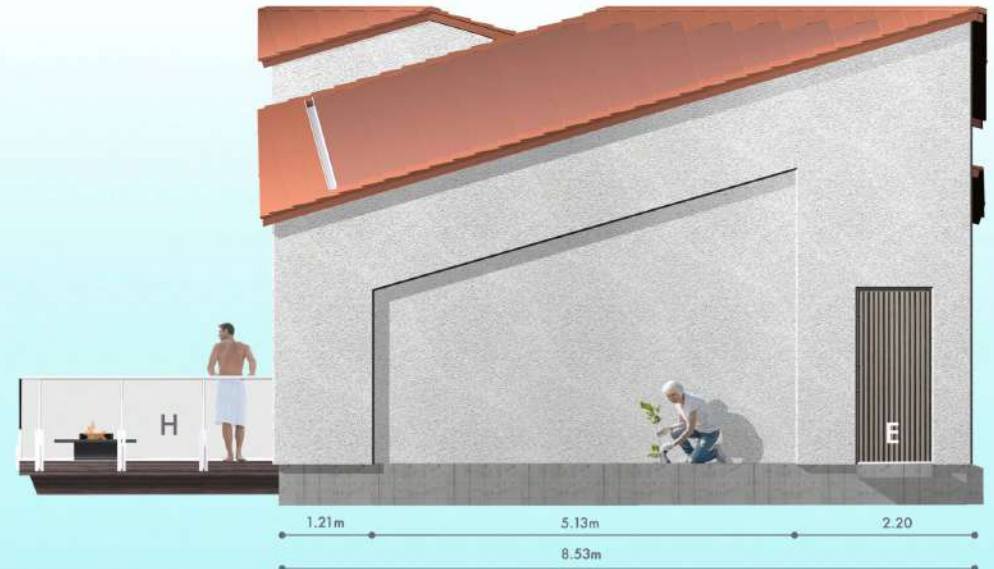
**A** Pool **E** Service Entrance/Egress **F** Spa **G** Terrace **H** Cantilever Deck **M** Massage Areas **O** Gym **P** Entrance **R** Clay Roof Tile **S** Photo Voltaic Clay Tile **T** Vestibule **U** Roof Gutter **W** Metal Roof

VEZ RIVER SPA





- 1 Vernacular form expanded to site limits
- 2 Interstitial connector created
- 3 Gable ridge line rotated to weir axis
- 4 Pool areas assigned to void space
- 5 Spa areas assigned to solid space
- 6 Gym/Massage areas assigned to void space

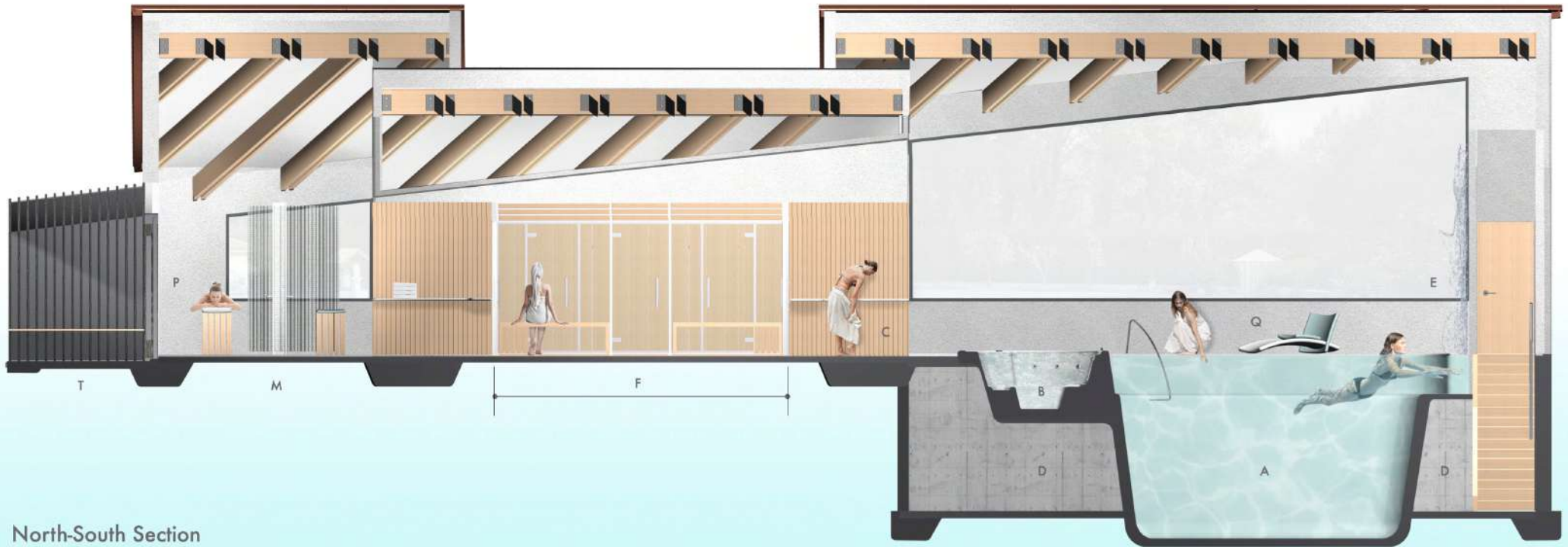


## Hybrid Form Concept

The Oasis Spa building is a tripartite hybrid form generated from a rural gable roof archetype. The pool area and gym/massage areas are split and expanded to the extents of the site footprint, creating an interstitial space for the spa areas. The gable ridge is rotated to maximize roof area and solar orientation for the PV clay roof tile. This rotation is conceptually linked to the angle of the weir across the Rio Vez. The primary structural elements aim to enhance the overall sustainable strategy and coherence. The roof framing consists of a glued laminated double flitch ridge beam supporting glued laminated double roof rafters. Support walls are hempcrete blocks with in situ concrete lintels and integrated steel posts transferring loads to the concrete foundation.

## Sections

The procession of spaces from the entrance along the North-South axis follows the modulation of the exterior forms. Leading from the Gym/Massage areas through the intimate, sloped-ceiling Spa hallway to the pool, the Weir Falls feature wall completes this axial progression. A discreet service access stair are planned behind the pool feature wall. The West-East section reveals the relationship between the millstream retaining wall and the cantilever deck projection; the retaining wall is cut back at the deck level with the top remaining aligned to the new sill. Mechanical space surrounds the pool and jacuzzi in the basement area.



North-South Section

**A** Pool **B** Prescribed Balness RIA-R Jacuzzi **C** Relaxation Area **D** Equipment Rm. + Stair **E** Weir Falls **F** Spa Module **G** Terrace **H** Deck **M** Massage Areas **N** Spa Corridor **O** Gym **P** Entrance **Q** Loungers **T** Vestibule **U** Existing Bulkhead Wall **V** Mill Stream

The exterior materials emphasize the contrast and layering between the solid and void volumes. A continuous Diathonite coating, made from natural cork, is spray-applied over the hempcrete block substructure to create a monolithic appearance. The central Spa structure is clad in vertical spruce tongue-and-groove boards processed with a traditional Japanese shou sugi ban charred surface for long-term sustainability. A lightweight metal roof completes the monolithic appearance. Roof tiles, in traditional red clay, employ the latest integrated photovoltaic technology. These flat-faced roof tiles allow for inset rainwater collection gutters. See detailed material descriptions on subsequent presentation panel.

VEZ RIVER SPA



Selection of the primary materials for the Oasis Vez River Spa responds to the principles adopted for sustainable architecture in Portugal, including the use of local and natural materials, climate responsiveness, respect for vernacular architecture, energy efficiency, and water management.

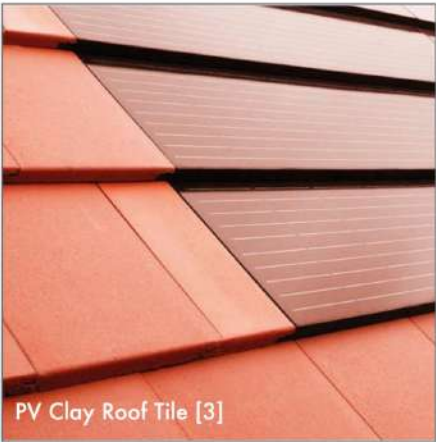
West-East Section



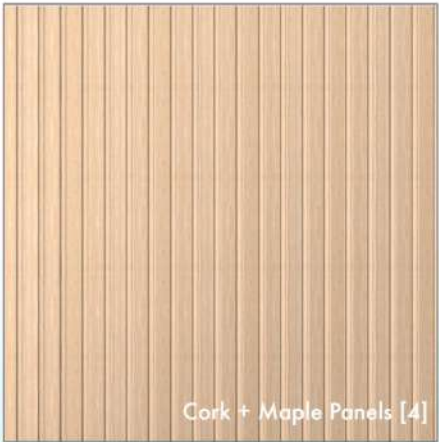
Diathonite Surfaces [1]



Shou Sugi Ban Spruce [2]



PV Clay Roof Tile [3]



Cork + Maple Panels [4]



Accent [5]



Estremoz Stone [6]

Materials Description : An exterior-interior dialogue is established by the continuation of Diathonite [1] surfaces on interior walls and ceilings. Acoustic and thermal performance is an enhanced feature of Diathonite coatings. The walls of the Spa hallway connector are maple veneer panels [4] with cork detailing. Cork floor surfaces coordinate with the wall finishes. Interior accent colors [5], for furniture and accessories, complement the overall specular interior. Locally sourced neutral gray Estremoz stone [6], with a bush-hammered finish, provides non-slip surfaces in Pool and Gym areas.





VEZ RIVER SPA









Deck + Terrace

VEZ RIVER SPA





Massage + Spa





VEZ RIVER SPA

Pool + Weir Falls





Pool + Jacuzzi



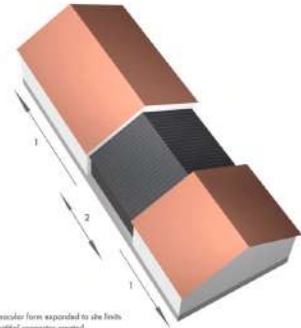




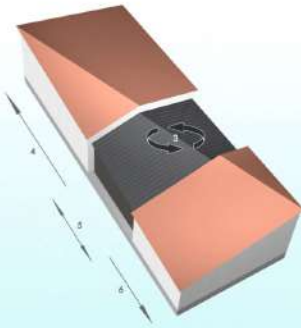
# VEZ RIVER SPA

## Hybrid Form Concept

The Oasis Spa building is a tripartite hybrid form generated from a rural gable roof archetype. The pool area and gym/massage areas are split and expanded to the extents of the site footprint, creating an interstitial space for the spa areas. The gable ridge is rotated to maximize roof area and solar orientation for the PV day roof tile. This rotation is conceptually linked to the angle of the weir across the Rio Vez.



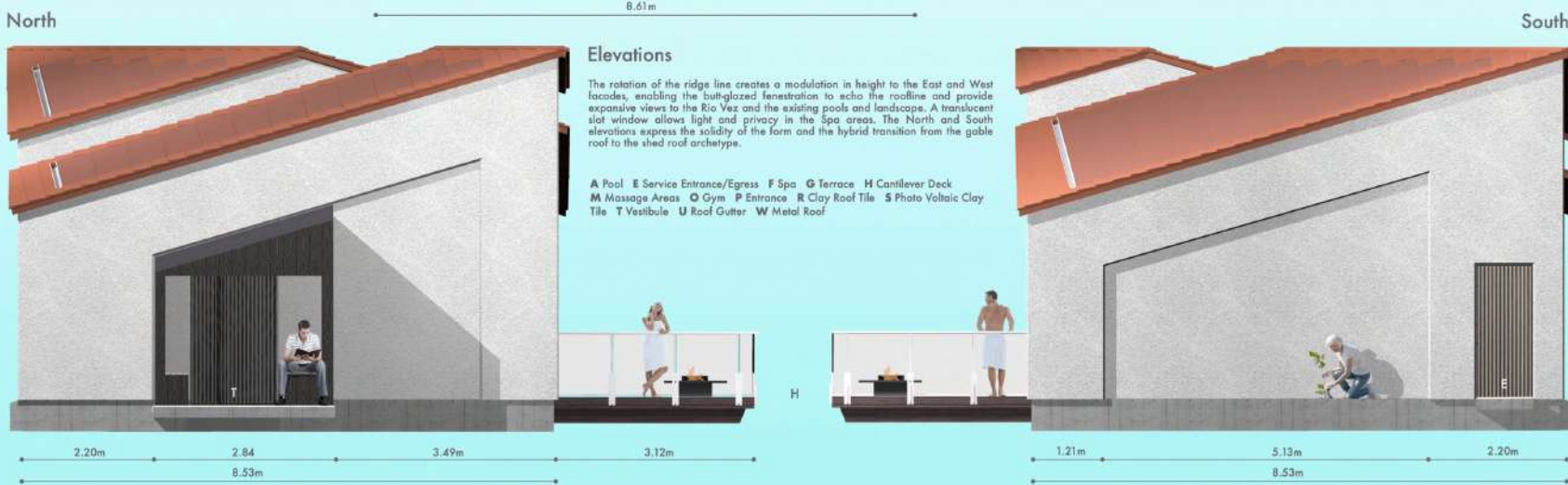
1. Vertical form expanded to the limits
2. Interstitial connector created
3. Gable ridge line rotated to weir axis
4. Pool areas assigned to solid space
5. Spa areas assigned to solid space
6. Gym/Massage areas assigned to solid space



**Structure**  
The primary structural elements aim to enhance the overall sustainable strategy and coherence. The roof framing consists of a glued laminated double flitch ridge beam supporting glued laminated double roof rafters. Support walls are hempcrete blocks with in situ concrete lintels and integrated steel posts transferring loads to the concrete foundation.

Oasis

2



### Elevations

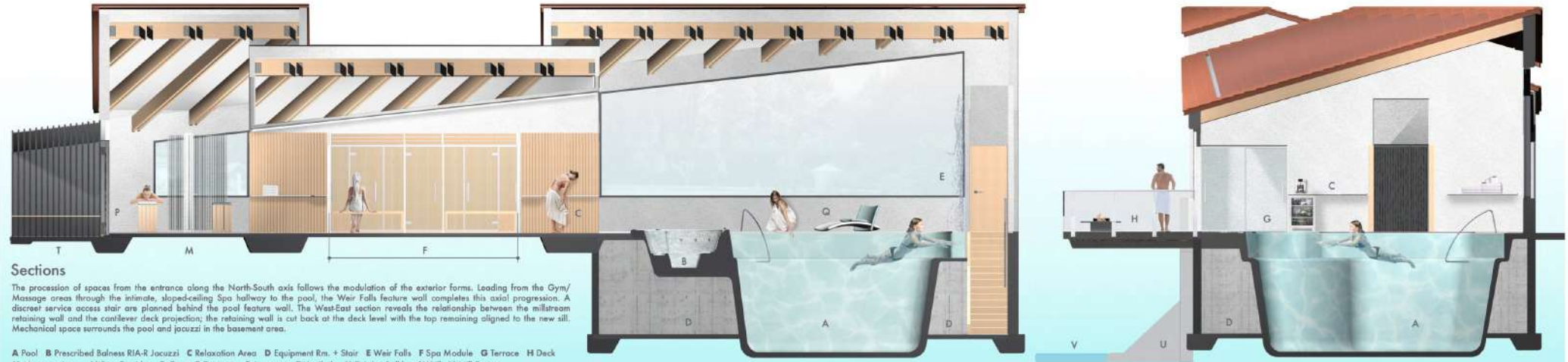
The rotation of the ridge line creates a modulation in height to the East and West facades, enabling the butt-glazed fenestration to echo the roofline and provide expansive views to the Rio Vez and the existing pools and landscape. A translucent slot window allows light and privacy in the Spa areas. The North and South elevations express the solidity of the form and the hybrid transition from the gable roof to the shed roof archetype.

A Pool E Service Entrance/Egress F Spa G Terrace H Cantilever Deck  
M Massage Areas O Gym P Entrance R Clay Roof Tile S Photo Voltaic Clay  
Tile T Vestibule U Roof Gutter W Metal Roof



North-South

West-East



View



VEZ RIVER SPA

Selection of the primary materials for the Oasis Vez River Spa responds to the principles adopted for sustainable architecture in Portugal, including the use of local and natural materials, climate responsiveness, respect for vernacular architecture, energy efficiency, and water management.

The exterior materials emphasize the contrast and layering between the solid and void volumes. A continuous Diathonite coating, made from natural cork, is spray-applied over the hempcrete block substructure to create a monolithic appearance. The central Spa structure is clad in vertical spruce tongue-and-groove boards processed with a traditional Japanese shou sugi ban charred surface for long-term sustainability. A lightweight metal roof completes the monolithic appearance. Roof tiles, in traditional red clay, employ the latest integrated photovoltaic technology. These flat-faced roof tiles allow for inset rainwater collection gutters. See detailed material descriptions on subsequent presentation panel.

Oasis

3

Competition Presentation Board





Deck + Terrace



Pool + Weir Falls



Diathonite Surfaces [1]



Shou Sugi Ban Spruce [2]



PV Clay Roof Tiles [3]

Materials



Massage + Spa



Pool + Jacuzzi



Cork + Maple Panels [4]



Accent [5]



Estremoz Stone [6]

## VEZ RIVER SPA

Interior Materials : An exterior-interior dialogue is established by the continuation of Diathonite [1] surfaces on interior walls and ceilings. Acoustic and thermal performance is an enhanced feature of Diathonite coatings. The walls of the Spa hallway connector are maple veneer panels [4] with cork detailing. Cork floor surfaces coordinate with the wall finishes. Interior accent colors [5], for furniture and accessories, complement the overall specular interior. Locally sourced neutral gray Estremoz stone [6], with a bush-hammered finish, provides non-slip surfaces in Pool and Gym areas.



## Recent Publications



### INA 10 : International New Architecture : August 2012 Volume 3

International New Architecture collaborates with the American Institute of Architects, featuring first class design firms and their works with its professional vision and publishing experience. INA 10 features HAIGH Architects Corning Museum of Glass : Contemporary Sculpture Galleries. Emphasis is placed on high resolution images and drawings and analyzes the firm's unique design concepts and practice in vivid and detailed form.



### 30 Years of Emerging Voice : Idea Form Resonance

Published by Princeton Architectural Press. In an unprecedented collection of design projects and practices including HAIGH Architects, 30 Years of Emerging Voices: Idea, Form, Resonance documents close to 250 of the most innovative North American design firms of the past three decades. Since 1982 The Architectural League of New York's Emerging Voices program has recognized architects, landscape architects, and urban designers whose distinctive voices promise to influence architectural discourse, design, and practice for years to come.



### Knoll : A Modernist Universe by Brian Lutz : Rizzoli

The history of Knoll is the history of modern design. Comprehensive in narrative and scope, this monograph is a classic in its own right with images and texts on furniture, furnishings, systems, graphics, and unique insight into the modern world that is Knoll. Included are furniture and architecture projects designed by Paul Haigh in his early work for Knoll.



### 1,000 Product Designs: Form, Function, and Technology from Around the World by Eric Chan

1,000 Product Designs features the most innovative designs in recent years. This unprecedented collection of products from all over the globe is a window into different cultures and societies, featuring everything from furnishings to personal items and accessories to electronics. Included are Paul Haigh designs for lighting and glass.



### Glass is Tomorrow : Pro Materia 2015

The Glass is Tomorrow book is co-edited by Archibooks and Pro Materia. The project looks to recap 9 workshops, held between 2011 and 2015. Featuring over 400 pieces and prototypes, for limited edition or mass production, the Glass is Tomorrow collection exemplifies reflection, experimentation and co-creation. The 280-page edition features an introduction by Glass is Tomorrow Pro Materia director Lise Coirier, with the Corning Museum of Glass GlassLab co-creator Paul Haigh, and Nationalmuseum Stockholm's Anders Bengtsson.



### LOFT: The Scandinavian Bookazine : Vol. 3

Loft's main focus is on Art, Architecture, Design, Interiors and Culture. The subject of Loft is creativity. Volume 3, features the exhibition, Making Ideas: Experiments in Design at GlassLab designed by HAIGH Architects, and the associated GlassLab program. The exhibition at the Corning Museum of Glass, features over 150 design prototypes by more than 45 international designers.