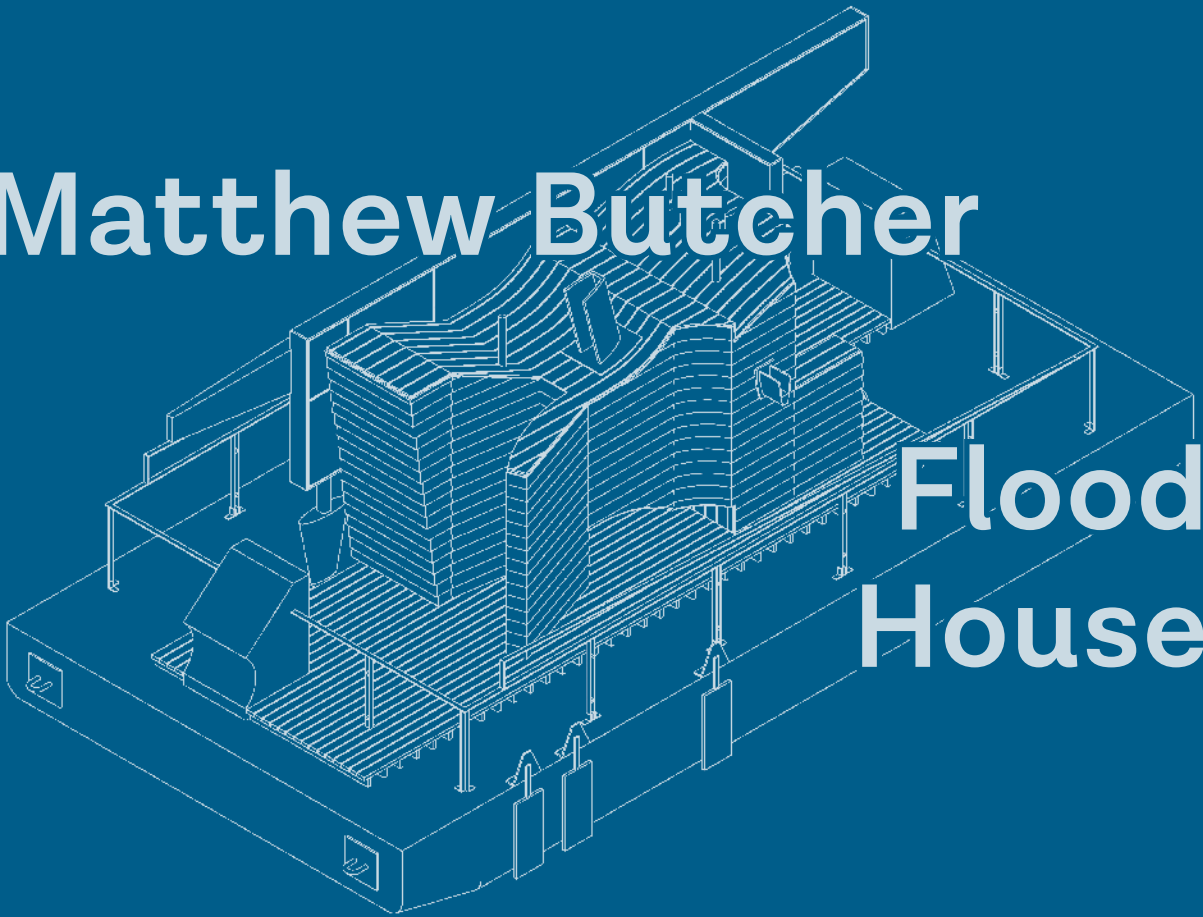


Matthew Butcher

**Flood
House**



Matthew Butcher

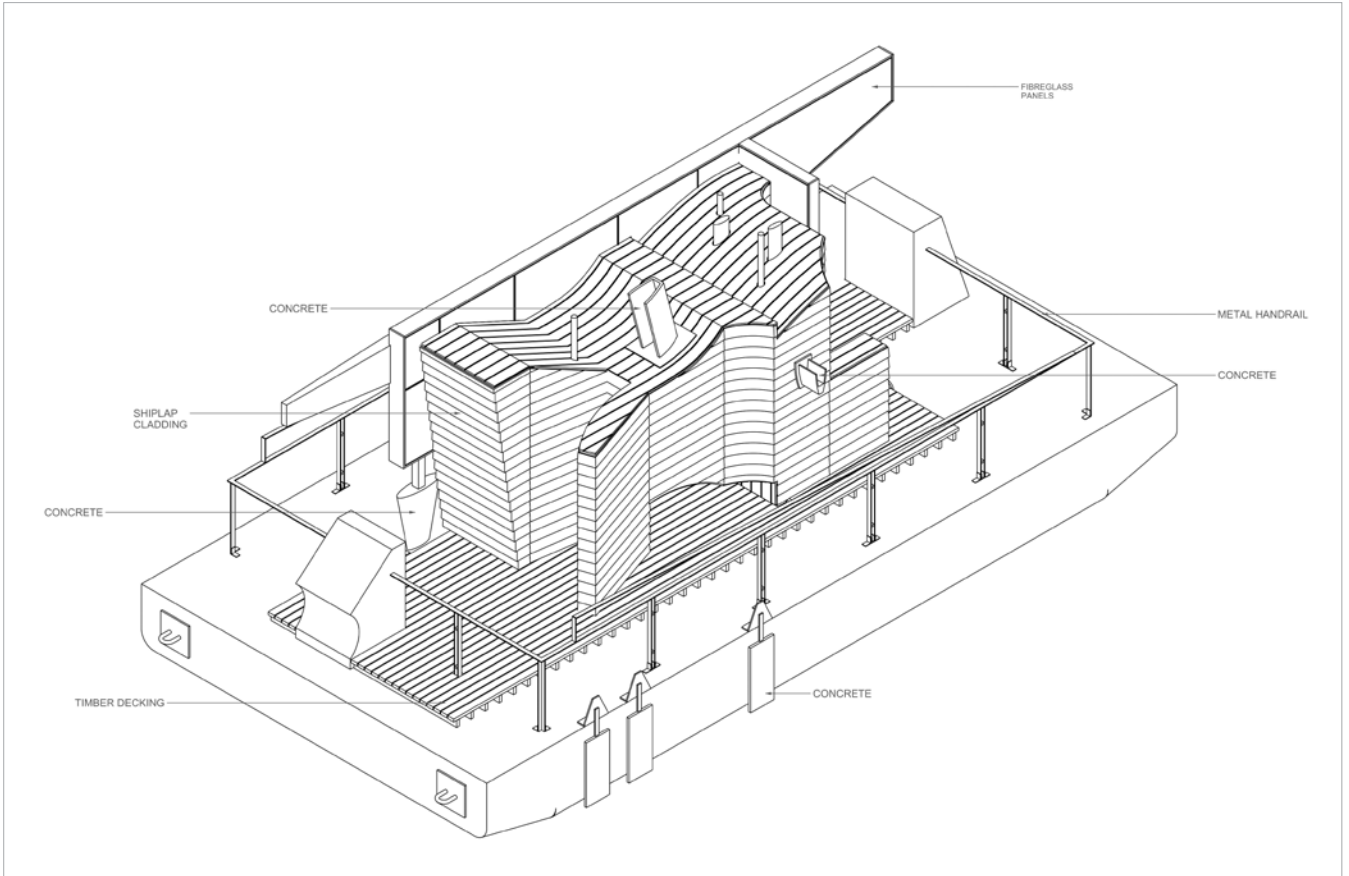
Flood House





LEVEL

N E W S



2

1 (previous) Flood House moored at Wakering on the River Roach.

2 Axonometric drawing of Flood House.

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Project Details

Author	Matthew Butcher
Title	Flood House
Output Type	Design and curation
Function	Floating mobile structure and extensive cultural programme
Moored at various locations in the Thames Estuary	16 April to 23 May 2016
Installation at Brunswick and Columbia Wharf, London	May 2016 to March 2019
Curators	Jes Fernie and Focal Point Gallery (FPG)
Commissioned Artist	Ruth Ewan
Commissioned Writer	Joanna Quinn
Structural Engineer	Tim Lucas
Naval Engineers	Ema Muk-Pavic and Rachel Pawling
Environmental Engineering Consultants	Rokia Raslan and Jonathon Taylor
Marine Logistics	Hart Marine
Marine Surveyors	Elliot Berry Marine Surveyors
Public Relations	Albany Arts
River Logistics	Crouch Harbour Authority; Natural England; Port of London Authority; Southend Pier and Foreshore Authority
Website Design	Mark El Katib
Funding	£50,000 Bartlett Materialisation Grant; £10,000 FPG
Selection Panel for the Materialisation Grant	Nina Pearlman, Manager, UCL Art Collections; Victoria Thornton, Open House



3

3 Perspective drawing of Flood House on Canvey Mud Flats.

Statement about the Research Content and Process

Description

Flood House was a performative design project that existed as a 1:1 structure that was towed to and moored at several locations in the Thames Estuary during the spring of 2016. The project also consisted of an interdisciplinary public art and education programme that ran in tandem with the structure's movements in the estuary.

Questions

1. How can a performative design raise awareness on climate change and the effects of flooding on the UK's coastline, particularly in the over-developed Thames Estuary?
2. How can this awareness be raised with a wider audience and local communities?
3. How can an architecture that is mobile, with no specific site, exist in a symbiotic relationship with an environment that is prone to flooding? How can it respond to the specific ecosystems and vernacular typologies of the River Thames?

Methodology

1. Field-based research to develop a structure in response to the architectural vernacular of the Thames Estuary;
2. Theoretical and historical research into representations of the environment in art and architecture from the 1960s and 70s;

3. Collaboration with individuals, companies and regulatory bodies who have specific knowledge of the complex river environment of the Thames Estuary;
4. Design and development of technical iterations for materialising a floating construction that is robust enough to survive and adapt to the fluctuating environmental conditions of the river and estuary;
5. A rigorous curatorial process to ensure delivery of a working project that is a significant and innovative interdisciplinary event.

Dissemination

Flood House was viewed by 18,000 people visiting Southend between April and May 2016. It was featured in print publications like the *Observer*, *Art Monthly* and *Architecture Today*. It was widely published and discussed online (e.g. *Wallpaper*, *Dezeen*, *It's Nice That*, *Hyperallergic* and *Disegno*) and in local press (e.g. *The Essex Chronicle* and *Basildon, Canvey, Southend Echo*). It was also included in the Phaidon publication *Mobitecture: Architecture on the Move* (2017). Matthew Butcher was interviewed on BBC Essex about the project.

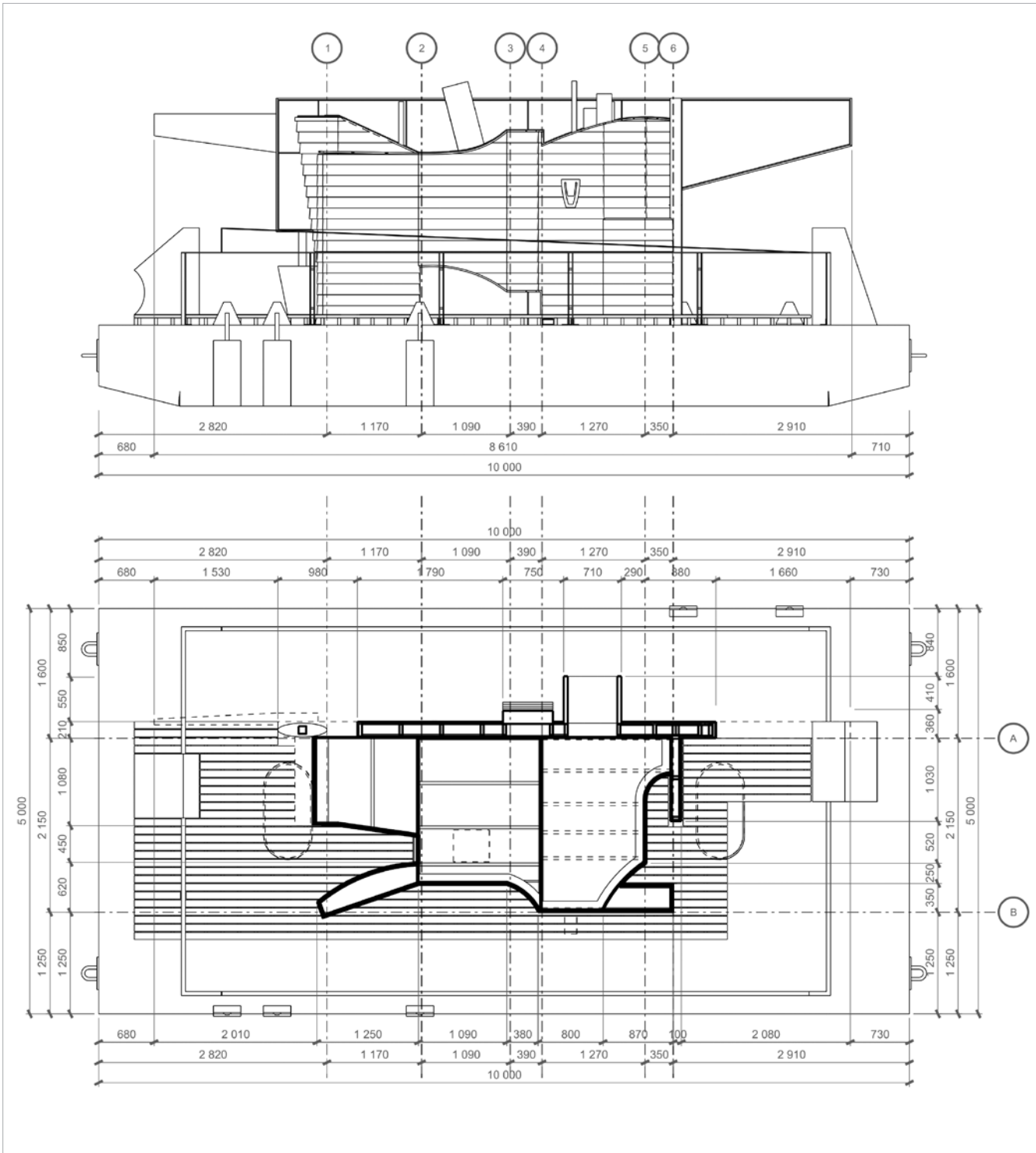
Project Highlights

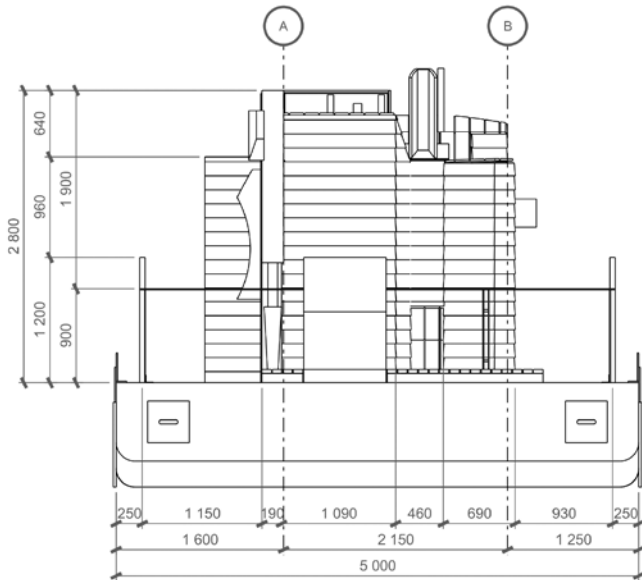
Flood House was included in the ongoing art programme Radical Essex, which formed part of the countrywide Arts Council England initiative Cultural Destinations. After it was removed from the Thames Estuary in May 2016, Flood House was exhibited until June 2019 at the Columbia and Brunswick Wharf in Hackney, London, where it introduced the annual Antepavilion competition run by the Architecture Foundation. The project has resulted in further commissions being proposed for the mooring used by Flood House adjacent to Southend Pier. The first is by the artist Mary Mattingly as part of the 2021 Estuary Festival.





4 Flood House at low tide, moored adjacent to the Southend-on-Sea pier.





5

5 Plans and sections.

Introduction

Flood House is a temporary floating house-like structure and associated public arts programme. The project is concerned with climate change and explores ways for living with the threat of flooding in the UK. The work has emerged from long-term research by the author into ecological architecture, which through the performative and poetic can rethink the way we design and live within the context of climate change. Projects preceding Flood House include Silt House (2016), Bang Bang House (2017) and Measure House (2017).

Flood House was 'performatively designed', working from the understanding that 'design artefacts – whether objects, materials, occasions, environments, or still and moving images – are inextricably bound to performance through notions of embodiment, action and event' (Hannah and Harsløf 2008). The performative nature of Flood House was manifest in the event and theatre that was created, as it was moved to and moored at several locations in the Thames Estuary through April and May of 2016. From Dauntless Boatyard on Hadleigh Ray behind Canvey Island, it moved along the Thames Estuary into the North Sea and up the River Crouch to Wakering, where it was towed to a mooring adjacent to the pier at Southend-on-Sea. The structure also incorporated a small weather station, which collected climate data from the specific sites it was moored at. Although the station was operational, the act of housing this equipment should be seen as principally a poetic gesture. The weather station sought to highlight the project's positioning in the estuary, cut off from the land and moving with the ebb and flow of the tide.



6

6 Flood House being towed in the North Sea near Foulness Island.

7 Moored at low tide on the River Roach at Wakering.



To help communicate the project's aims and ideas, a series of cultural commissions and public events were curated by Matthew Butcher, Jes Fernie and Focal Point Gallery. A website provided live feed data on the location of Flood House in the estuary and details of events associated with it.

After Flood House was removed from the water in May 2016, the wooden structure was relocated to Columbia and Brunswick Wharf in Hackney, London, to be installed on public display until June 2019. Although this element has now been demolished, the metal pontoons that it sat on have been sold and reused for other marine constructions. The weathervane attached to Flood House – an artwork by Ruth Ewan entitled *All Distinctions Levelled* (2016) – is currently being considered for permanent installation on a site in Basildon, as part of FPG's public programme, and will be included in the 2021 Estuary Festival: a festival of music, art and theatre that will take place at various locations along the Thames Estuary.



8

8 Jes Fernie presenting the project to the local community at Focal Point Gallery, Southend.

FINAL LOCATION: DAUNTLESS BOATYARD
TUESDAY 10 DECEMBER 10.10AM 8°C FEW CLOUDS 0.94M RISING TIDE
→ About → News → Commissions & Texts → Mapping

Flood House



MOORING POINTS

Dauntless Boatyard, Canvey Island: April 16 - 23

Wakering Boatyard, Wakering: April 24 - 29

Southend Foreshore, Southend Pier: April 30 - May 13

Dauntless Boatyard, Canvey Island: May 13 - 23

Flood House was transported by tugboat and moored in the following sites along the Estuary: Dauntless Boat Yard, Benfleet; Wakering Boat Yard, Pottton Creek and Southend Foreshore. It was visible from the shoreline while in motion, and for an extended period when it was moored at Southend Pier for the first two weeks in May 2016.

THE THAMES ESTUARY

9 Map on the Flood House website showing the various locations that the structure travelled to and was moored. Sites marked from left to right are:

Dauntless Boatyard in Hadleigh Ray, Southend Pier on Southend Foreshore and Wakering on the River Roach.

Aims and Objectives

1. To investigate the ways that architecture can highlight the effects of global warming, in particular the threat that flooding poses to the northern coast of the Thames Estuary around Canvey Island

The work aimed to act as a theatrical entity to encourage debate around rising sea levels and how they will affect the northern bank of the Thames Estuary in and around Southend-on-Sea. It did this in two ways: first, it created intrigue through its unusual form, referencing fishing sheds, bunkers and wrecked boats, juxtaposed dramatically with the vastness of the mudflat plains of the estuary. The structure can be interpreted as a premonition, a potential future model for inhabitation on that landscape if global warming persists. A similar tactic was used by Extinction Rebellion in the summer of 2019, when they sent a half-submerged house down the River Thames through London.

Second, the project's temporal movement around the estuary highlighted the way that the river and water are integral to the identity of southern Essex. The project emphasised how the inhabitation of this area in its current form is only possible because of its sea defence wall, which the structure used to navigate its route and circumvent the river's tributaries and inlets.

2. To develop a public education and interdisciplinary arts programme to make clear the intentions of the project and engage as large an audience as possible, specifically in the wider community in Essex

For greatest impact, the commissioning programme intended to position Flood House

so that the location was as present in the events and works as the structure itself.

This programme included:

- A series of public and educational events organised by Focal Point Gallery (FPG). These included talks by Matthew Butcher and Jes Fernie as well as a series of educational activities involving local schools. FPG hosted workshops and visits to Southend Pier where Flood House was moored between 28 April and 12 May 2016. This included visits from 30 pupils from The Westborough School, 60 pupils from Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School, the FPG's Saturday Art Club and Southend Children's Art Week;
- The commissioning of an artwork to be located on the structure by artist Ruth Ewan. *All Distinctions Levelled* (2016) aimed to engage with and expand on the main themes of the project;
- A short science fiction story by Joanna Quinn entitled *Mudlark*, which imagined the future inhabitation of Flood House on a permanently flooded Estuary;
- The project aimed to challenge the idea that architecture is a secure, fixed entity that seeks to negate the unpredictable or hostile nature of the environment.

In this capacity, Flood House suggested a new way in which we might live with the threat of flooding, where architecture will embrace tides, currents and ecosystems. The project proposes a nomadic and poetic form of dwelling that has reciprocity with the location in which it is sited.



10

10 Extinction Rebellion,
Sinking House, 2019.



11

11 Flood House at Southend Pier with rising tide. The Kent coast can be seen in the distance.



12

12 Adventure Island in Southend, with Flood House in the distance.

13 Educational event on Southend Pier for Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School.



13

Questions

1. How can a performative design raise awareness on climate change and the effects of flooding on the UK's coastline, particularly in the over-developed Thames Estuary?

The Thames Estuary is on the frontline against climate change. In 1953, the area experienced one of the UK's worst floods for 200 years, which led to a large loss of life, destruction of property and general devastation of the landscape. 60 years later, in 2013 and 14, severe floods returned to Canvey Island as water breached sea defences.

2. How can this awareness be raised amongst a wider audience and local communities?

The purpose of this investigation was to present an architecture that together with other art forms can act in an innovative narrative capacity to communicate specific qualities of a place and creatively engage audiences with political, social or environmental issues.

3. How can an architecture that is mobile, with no specific site, exist in a symbiotic relationship with an environment that is prone to flooding? How can it respond to the specific ecosystems and vernacular typologies of the River Thames?

Flood House is an alternative architecture that suggests a symbiotic way of living with the environments we inhabit. In this capacity, the project sits in opposition to proposals to build a larger and more efficient flood barrier in the estuary as set out in the report *Thames Estuary 2100 (TE2100)* by the Environment Agency (2011). This report explores and

outlines the agency's response to the threat of coastal flooding in the UK and its potential impact on the Thames Estuary to the east of London. Proposals include a new flood defence and increasing the height of existing sea walls to protect valuable land. These are, however, solutions that would further exacerbate the problem of climate change as they would utilise vast natural resources to be both built and maintained.

Flood House is a model of a dwelling that can occupy and inhabit another form of defence strategy for coastal realignment, one that seeks to work with the flood. This alternate defence strategy – also mentioned in the *TE2100* report but not presented as a long-term solution – works by puncturing holes in the sea wall to allow excess water to filter onto reclaimed land and salt marshes. This new landscape utilises flora and fauna as a natural sea defence, allowing water to be stored and protecting land and property upriver. Although it means that land will become harder to develop, it provides a more ecological and accepting way of living with the effects of climate change, while also seeking to prevent further damage. Sited on this landscape, Flood House works in parallel with the coastal realignment defence strategy, adapting to the ebb and flow of the tide and shifting location in response to its currents.

QUESTIONS



14



16



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17

14-5 Historical photos of Canvey Island after the 1953 Great Flood.

16 Current sea wall defence, Canvey Island.

17 Aerial view of Wallasea Island, Essex.

Context

Flood House was conceived within the context of the innovative interdisciplinary practices that operated across art, architecture and performance in the 1960s and 70s. It specifically references the work of Florentine architect and artist Gianni Pettena, whose practice is important for three main reasons: first, it seeks to draw attention to human effect on the environment for economic or political gain; second, his performances and built structures highlight the processes that make up the natural environment and our experience of them; and third, he expands the vocabulary of architecture to challenge notions of an autonomous discipline that focuses exclusively on buildings.

Flood House seeks to build on Pettena's ideas, recontextualising them to develop a way that architecture can respond to and raise awareness of rising sea levels and more broadly climate change in the twenty-first century, as well as propose radical and creative ways of inhabiting coastal sites. Events, artworks, literature and performance widen the scope of what an architecture can be, and how it can engage with and communicate ideas about contexts that exist not only within the framework of the discipline but also the social, environmental, cultural and political.

Flood House should be considered in conjunction with Butcher's design research conducted for Silt House and Bang Bang House, discussed in a refereed article for *Architecture Research Quarterly* (see pp. 58–71). These projects differ from Flood House in that they exist as drawings and models that propose permanent inhabitable structures located in this flood prone environment and explore the poetics and practicalities of building and living there.

Flood House has synergy with the contemporary work of Berlin-based art and architecture collective RaumLabor. Similarly, RaumLabor have been influenced by artists and architects from the 1960s and 70s working across the fields of art, architecture and performance. Their practice consists of events, temporary structures and happenings that raise awareness on political and social issues. This can be seen in the project *Floating University* (2018), which aimed to promote and facilitate discourse around the future of the urban environment, particularly within the context of climate change.

Despite the resonances between these projects, Flood House was the event as well as the architecture, deviating from RaumLabor's architectural proposals that traditionally operate as structures which house or frame events and discussion. Flood House, meanwhile, utilised the specific nature of the complex and contested site of the River Thames.

18 Gianni Pettena, *Tumbleweed Catcher*, 1972. The project involved the construction of a scaffold tower that would collect tumble weed in Salt Lake City. It sought to highlight the sometimes arbitrary assignment of land as urban or rural.

CONTEXT



18

Methodology

1. Field-based research to develop a structure in response to the architectural vernacular of the Thames Estuary

To develop Flood House's form, certain estuarial-vernacular architectural forms and materials were referenced to create a hybrid design, including fishing sheds, decommissioned boats and Second World War pillboxes. To find these vernaculars, Butcher utilised local knowledge of the area from individuals and institutions in and around Canvey Island and Southend. This included conversations with the curators at the Bay Museum and Research Centre on Canvey Island and correspondents with Beyond the Point, a local amateur organisation seeking to map and record forgotten or hidden structures. Butcher personally visited the coastline around Canvey Island, photographing and surveying specific sites of interest that could be considered as estuary vernaculars. The purpose of the exercise was to generate a formal and material logic for the structure, reminiscent of the estuary but unusual enough to generate intrigue.



19

19 Beached and rusted boat on the River Roach.

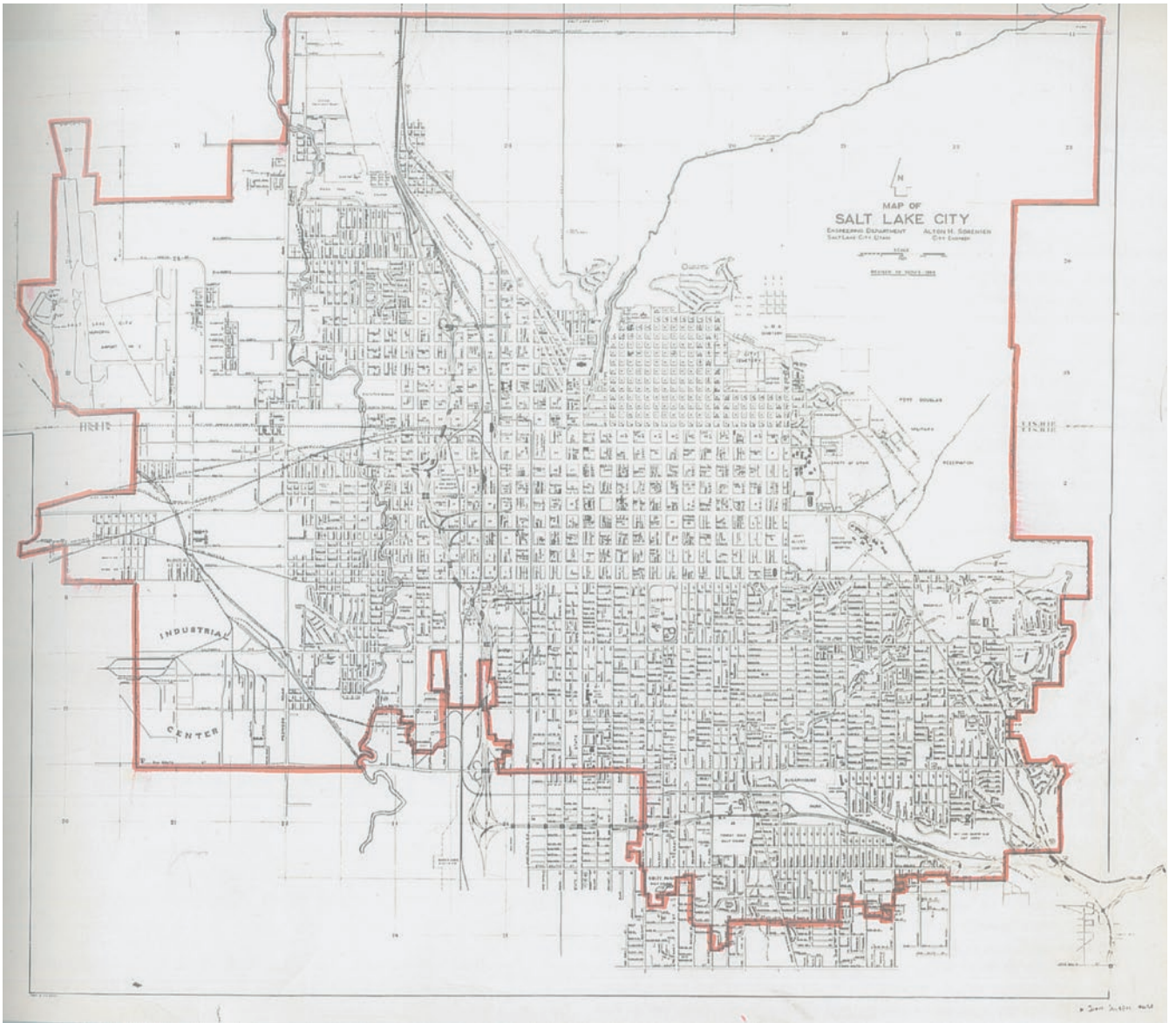
2. Theoretical and historical research into representations of the environment in art and architecture from the 1960s and 70s

The purpose of this research was to identify specific formal, material and spatial strategies first developed in the 1960s and 70s as global warming and its effects began to be more broadly discussed. The influence of Gianni Pettena's artwork *Red Line (Siege)* (1972) can be seen in Flood House. Pettena and his students drove a pickup truck around Salt Lake City and visualised the ephemeral border of the urban environment with red paint. Flood House was influenced by Pettena's desire to highlight how such borders determine our understanding of what is urban and what is rural, and how such precepts relate the political and social to nature. Flood House specifically follows the path of the sea defence wall, emphasising the way this infrastructure has defined the nature of the estuary landscape, dividing it into areas of tidal mudflat and urban and suburban development. This division is artificially created; without the sea wall these two conditions would be much less defined.



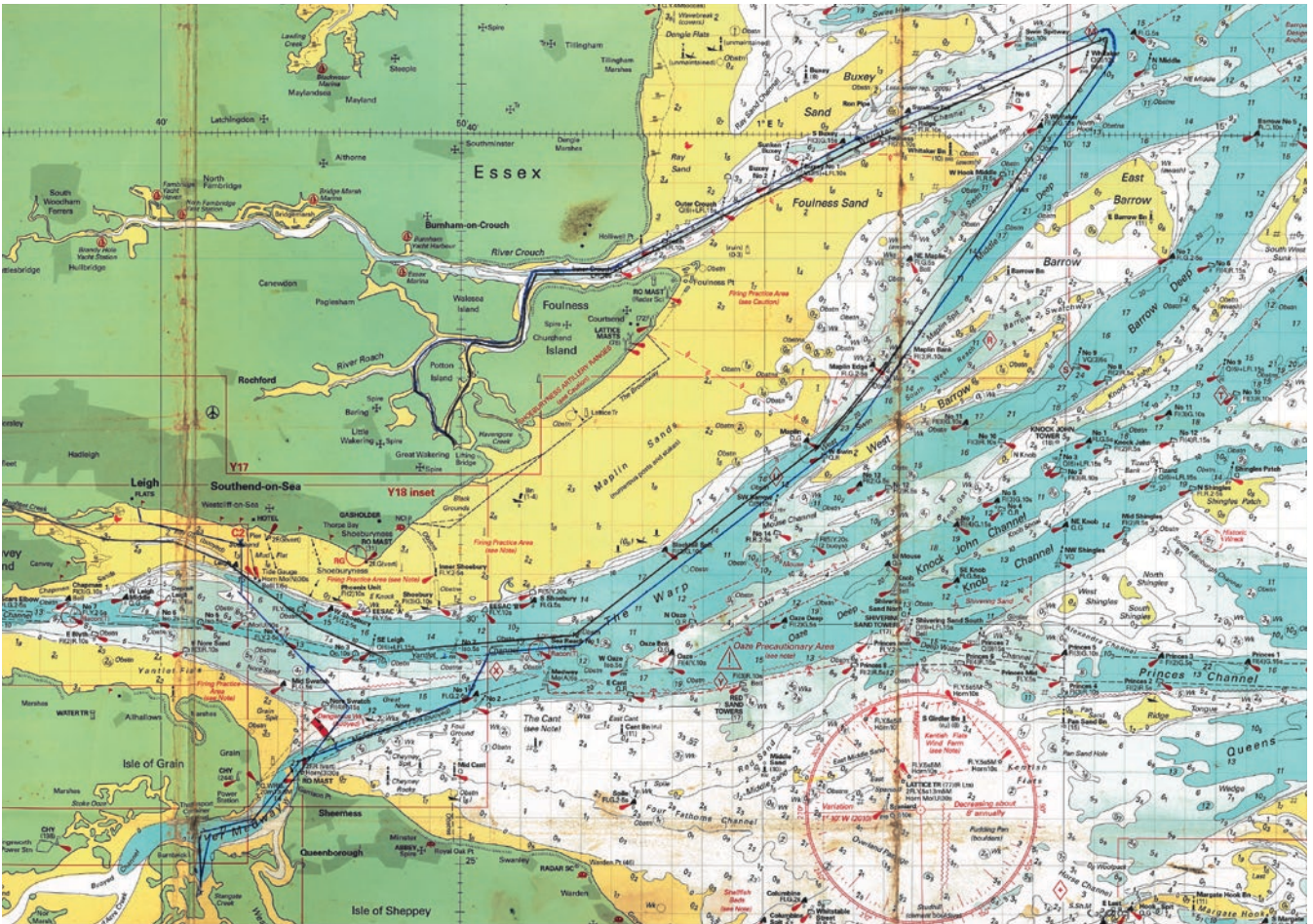
20

20 Gianni Pettena and students with the pickup truck used in the creation of *Red Line (Siège)*, 1972.



21

21 Gianni Pettena, *Red Line (Siège)*, 1972. Map of painted route following the city limits.



22 Sea navigational map showing the route taken by Flood House along the Thames Estuary, including its journey to the River Roach. The route is depicted by a black and blue line.

3. Collaboration with individuals, companies and regulatory bodies who have specific knowledge of the complex river environment of the Thames Estuary

These collaborations were necessary to navigate the complexity and safety of Flood House in the estuary – one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world – and develop the logistics of moving it from site to site. Thames-based contractors Hart Marine and Elliot Berry Marine Surveyors developed the logistics. They advised on the best means of floating the structure, placing it on Unifloat pontoons that are generally used by the British Military to construct temporary harbours. The use of the pontoons was important as they could be reused.

Complex and lengthy negotiations were undertaken with the bodies that manage river traffic in the Thames Estuary – the Port of London Authority, Natural England, Southend Pier and Foreshore Authority and the Crouch Harbour Authority – to ensure the unique nature of the project was logistically possible and met with complex regulations. One of these conversations prompted Butcher to deviate from an initial design proposal where the structure was piled into the estuary's mudflats. It was also suggested that a floating structure would be more dynamic and less invasive to the environment. Natural England were consulted to ensure that the structure's mooring in the estuary would not have any adverse effects on its eco systems or local wildlife.

23 Flood House moored in the Thames Estuary at Southend Foreshore.

24-5 Hart Marine digging mooring adjacent to Southend Pier.



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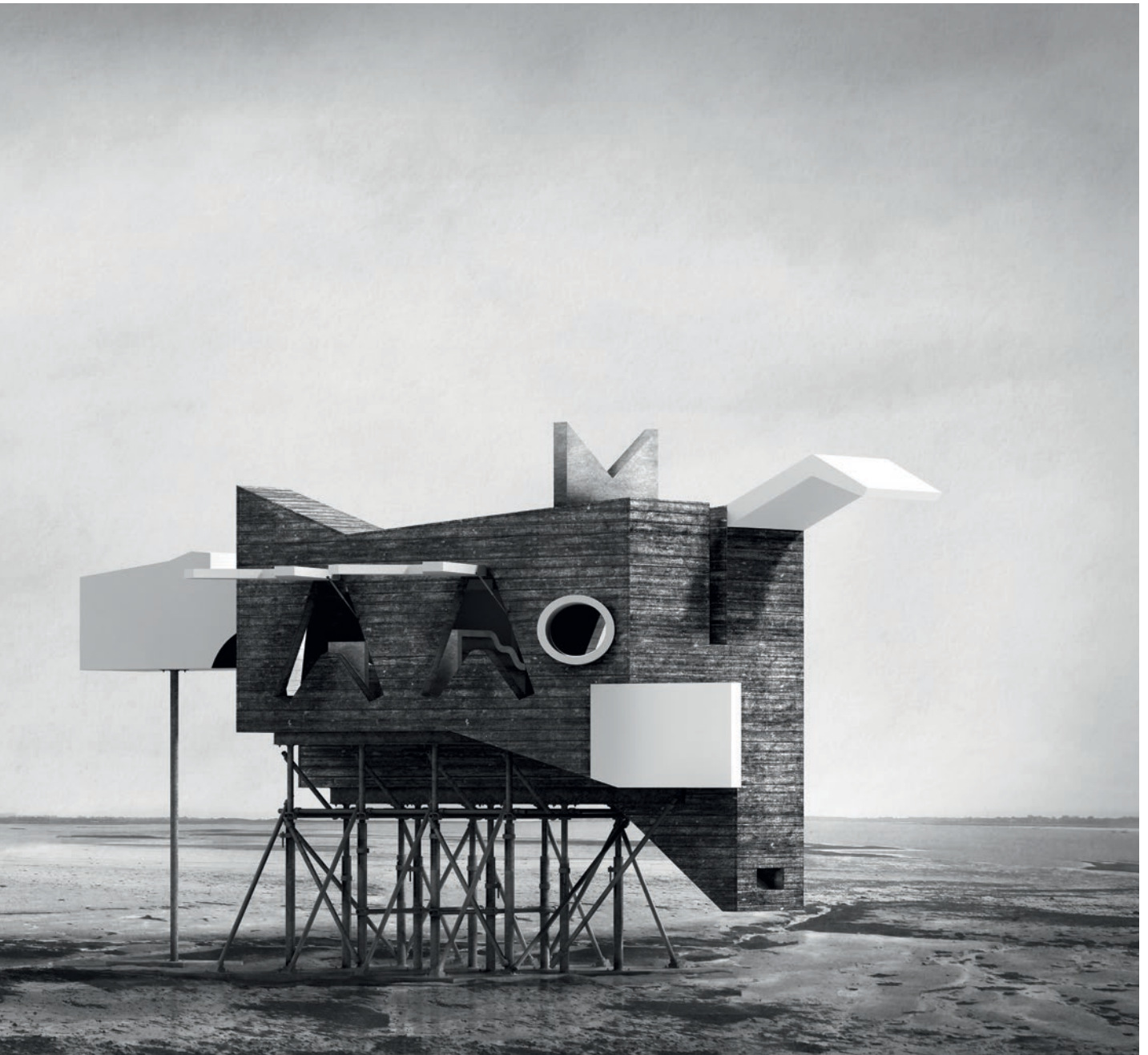


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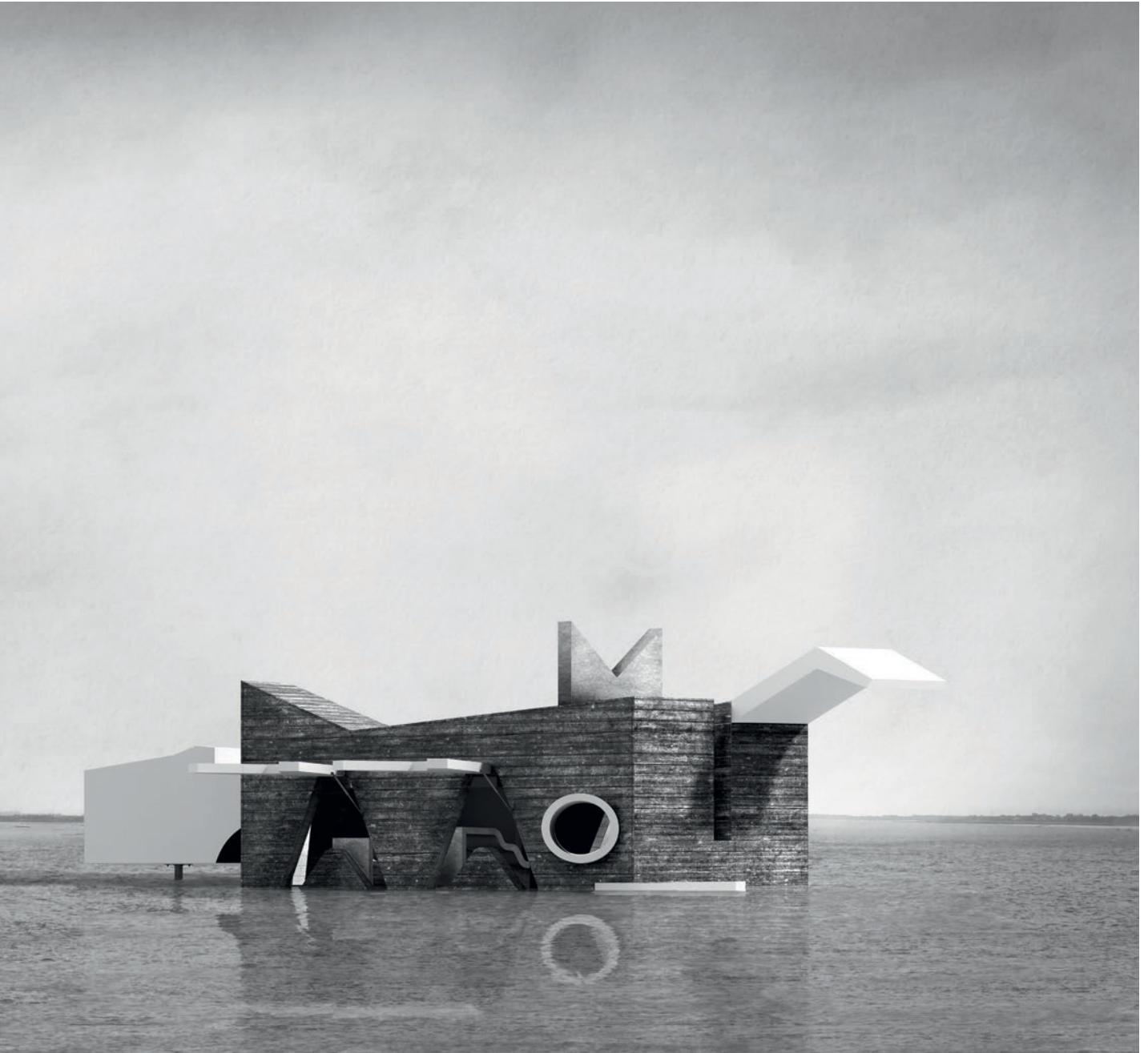
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26 Initial design for piled fixed structure.





27 Piled fixed structure flooded at high tide.

4. Design and development of technical iterations for materialising a floating construction that is robust enough to survive and adapt to the fluctuating environmental conditions of the river and estuary

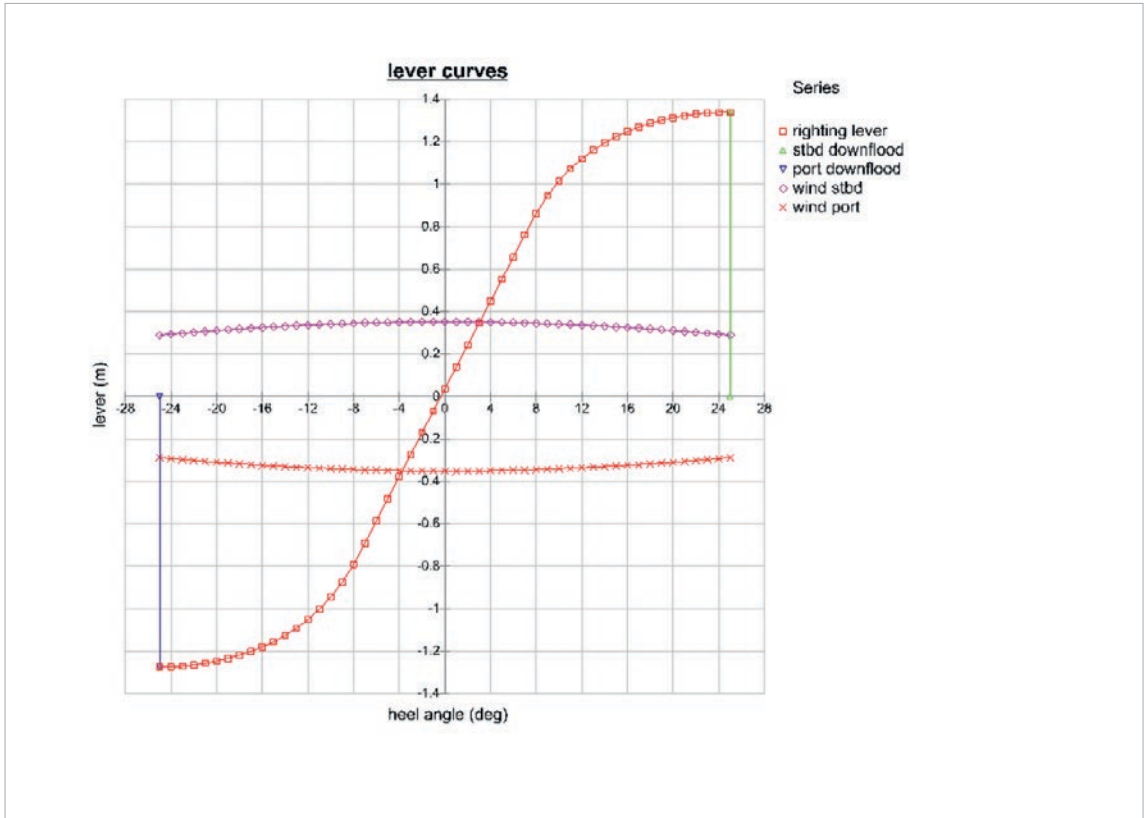
Naval architects Rachel Pawling and Ema Muk-Pavic were consulted to ensure the buoyancy of the structure and assess its stability and durability. They produced computational models in a variety of environmental conditions associated with the estuary. These models defined the final form of the structure, which needed to evenly distribute its weight across the surface of the pontoons.

Structural engineer Tim Lucas advised on the structure's durability. The structural system employed in the final design was a bespoke semi-monocoque structure that allowed it to maintain its formal complexity. This structural system allowed for it to be built in fragments that were easy to transport from the workshop in London to Canvey Island. This system also allowed for easy assembly in the estuary, where individual segments were craned onto the Unifloat pontoons and bolted together.

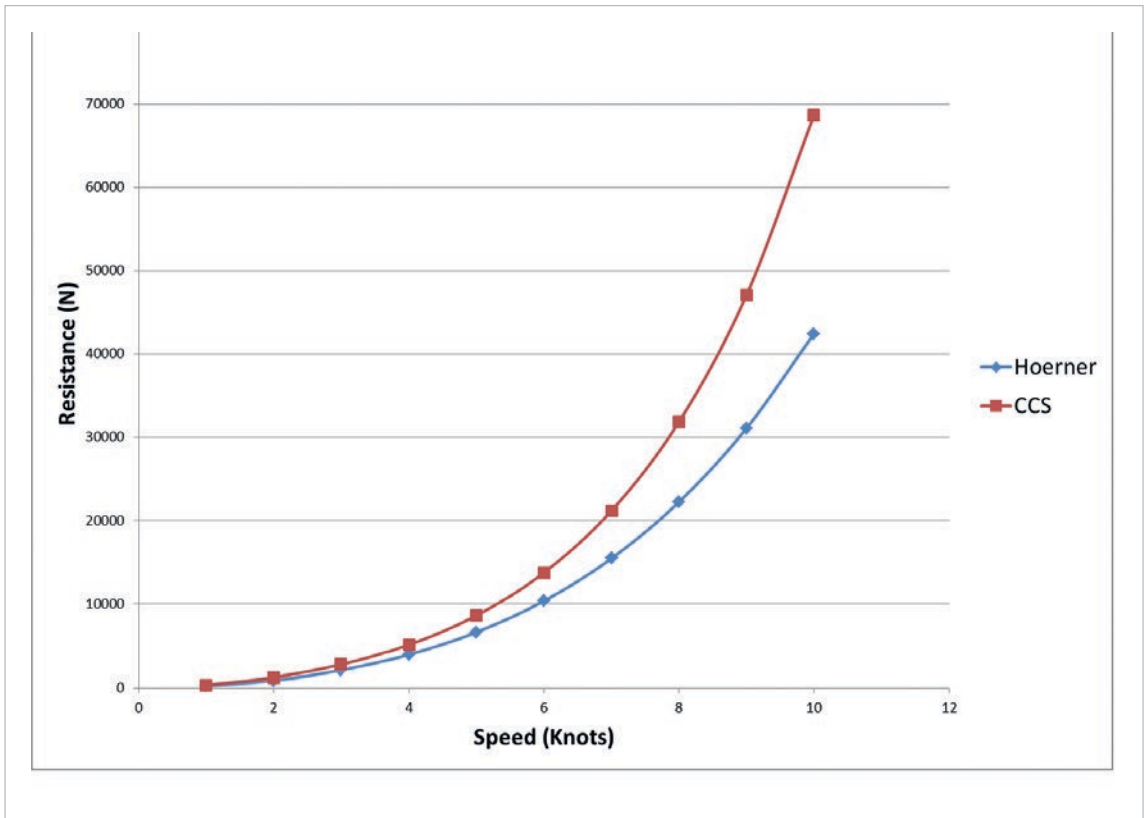
28 Diagram of stability for Flood House showing possible lateral movement experienced in various high-wind conditions.

29 Diagram showing two different pontoon hull designs for Flood House, comparing the speed that each can be towed versus potential drag.

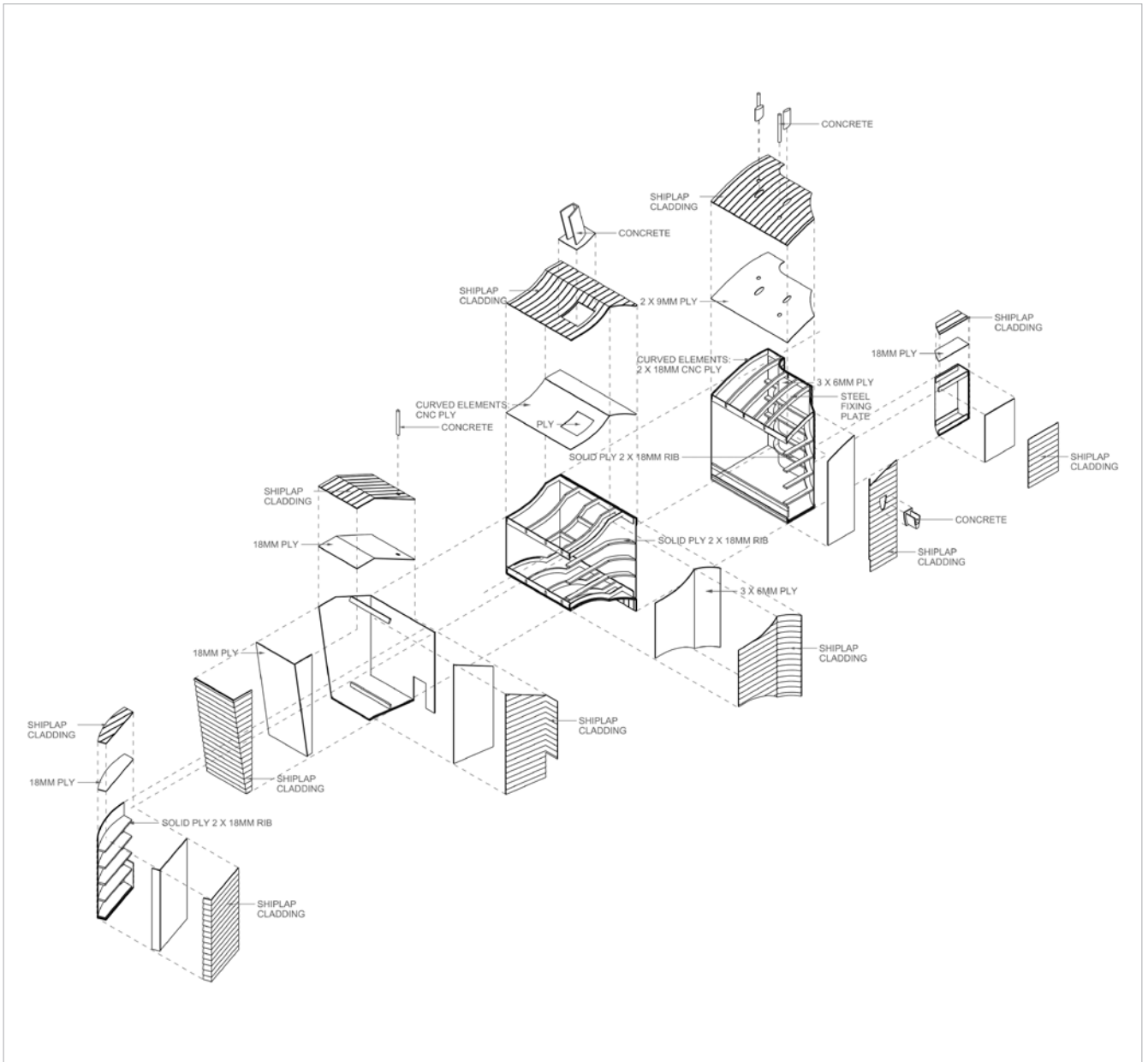
METHODOLOGY



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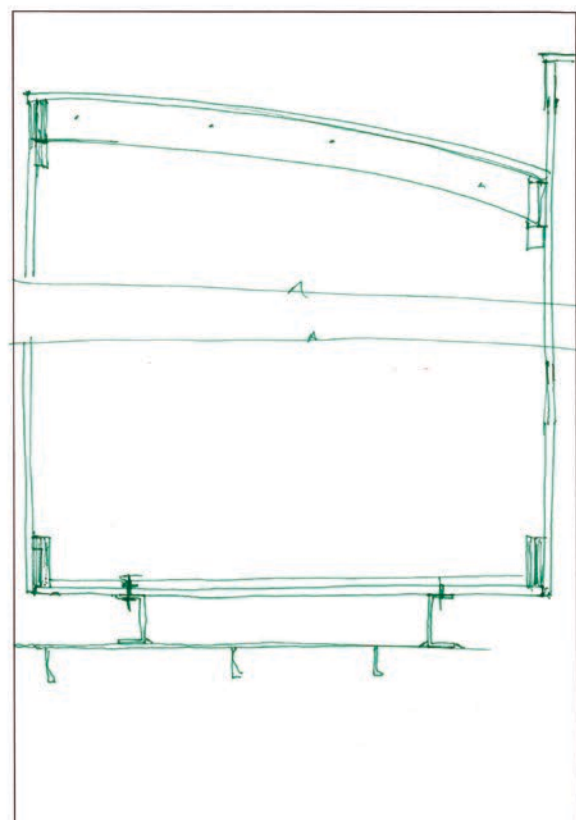
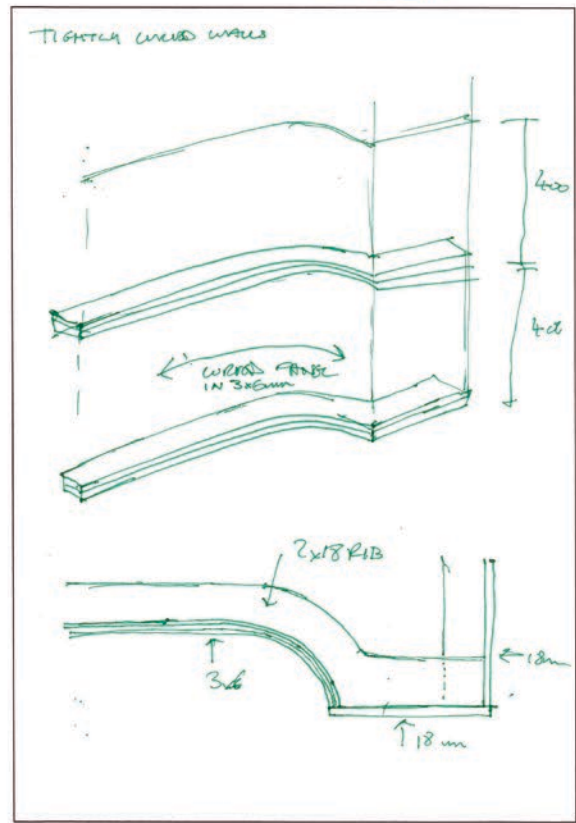
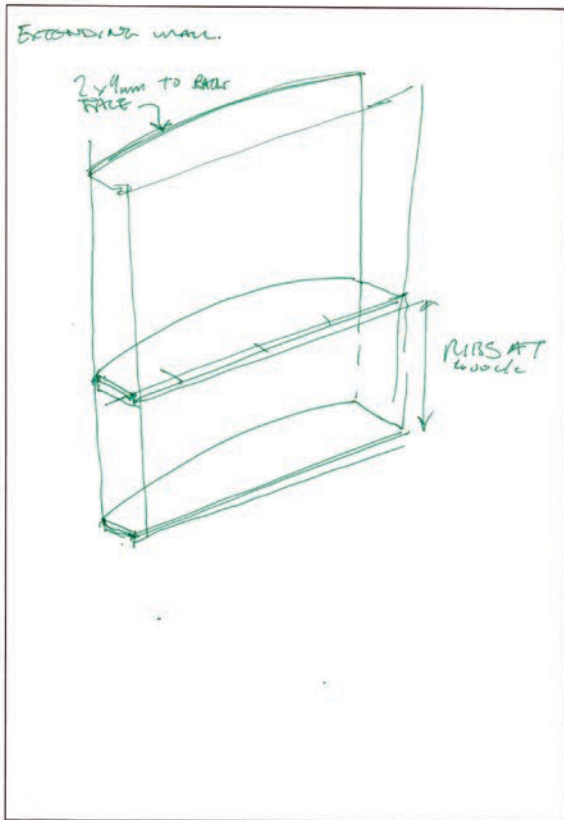
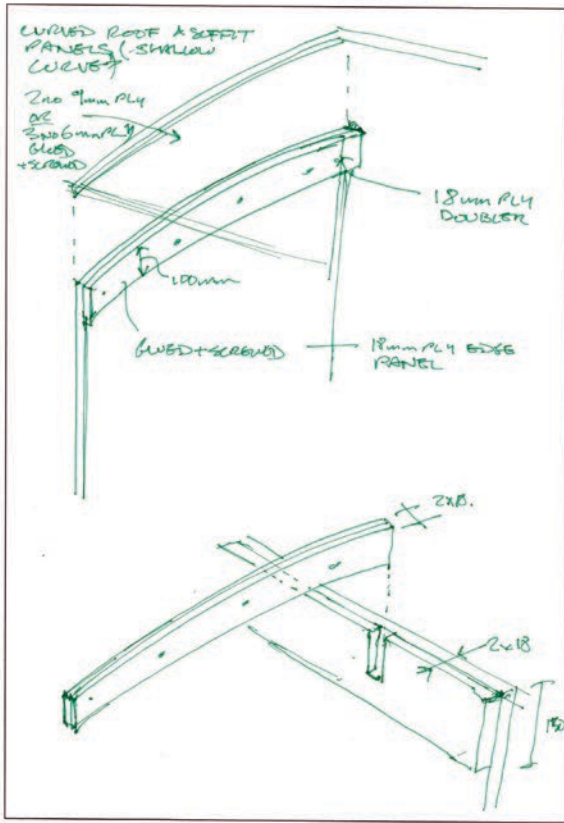
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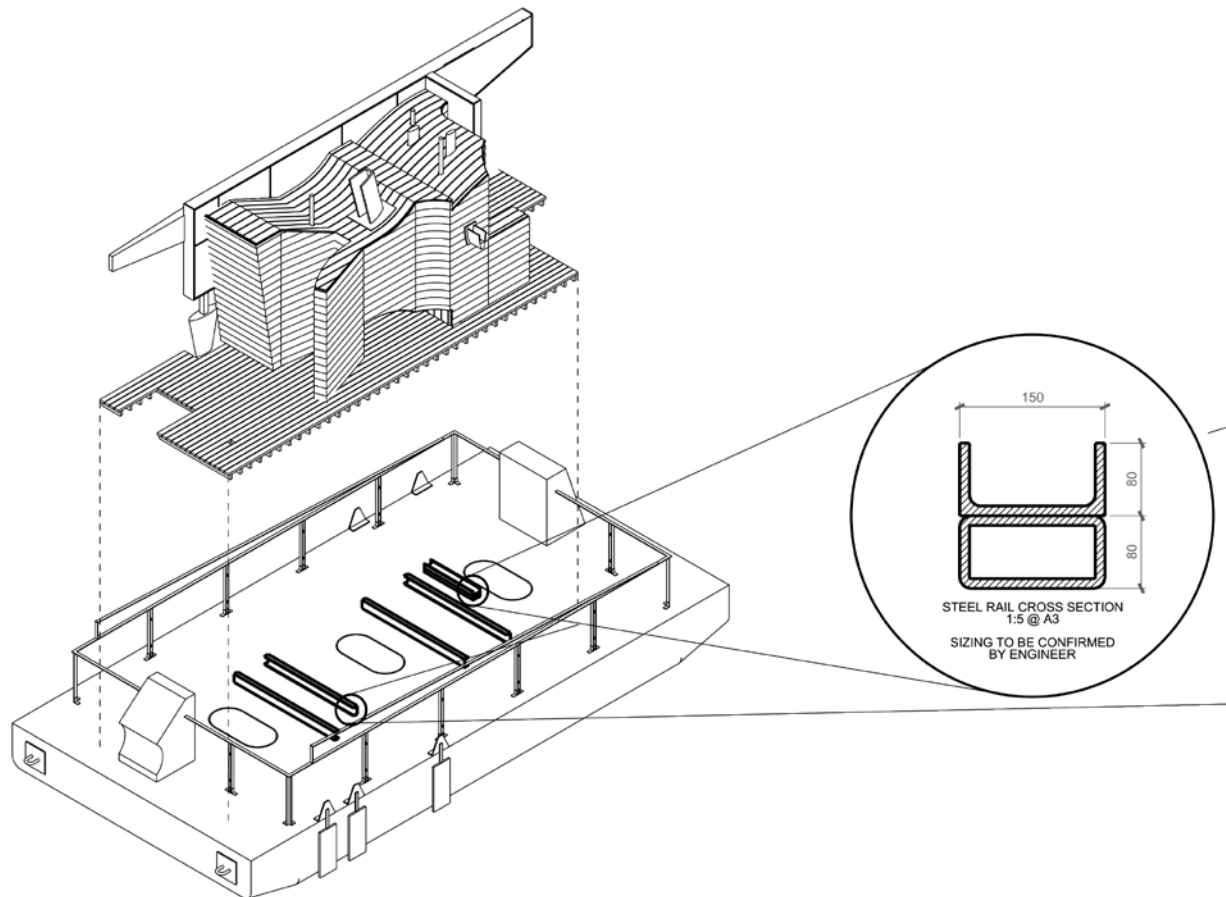
30 Structural design development drawing.

31 Early structural design development sketches.

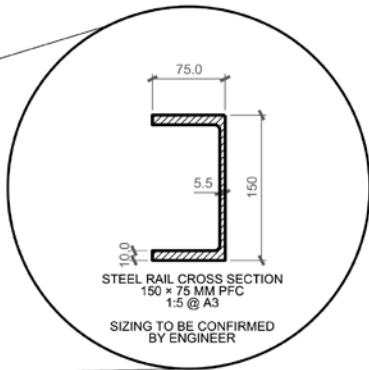
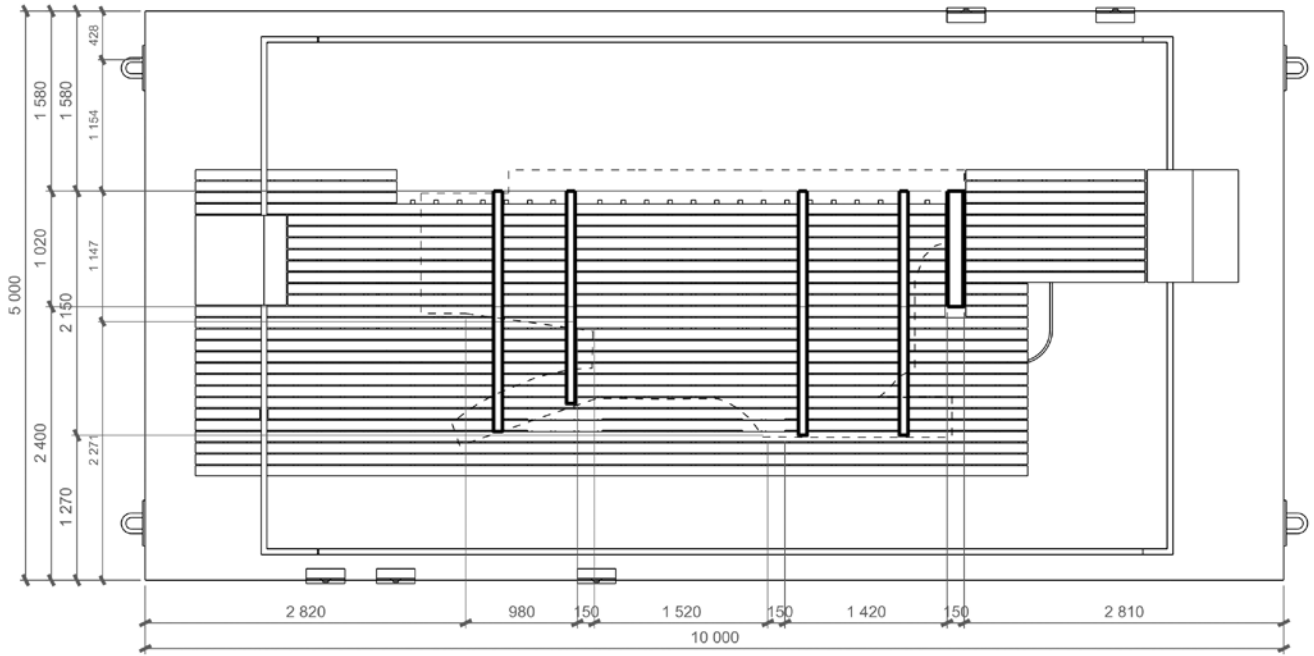
32 (overleaf) Early construction diagrams, showing fixing of main structure to the Unifloat Pontoons.

METHODOLOGY





METHODOLOGY



5. A rigorous curatorial process to ensure delivery of a working project that is a significant and innovative interdisciplinary event

Lengthy discussions and planning took place with the curatorial team. This included detailed research into artists and writers who could produce work that related to the main themes of the structure; and then carefully developing briefs which the commissioned artist and writer could respond to. Two significant works emerged from this process.

Artist, Ruth Ewan, made a weathervane that was situated on the roof of Flood House. The title of the work, *All Distinctions Levelled*, is taken from a speech by the fourteenth-century priest and political activist John Ball, and refers to the concept of social equality as well as the rise and fall of the tide. In conjunction with this, the Electric Belles choir performed Sydney Carter's song 'John Ball' at an event held on Southend Pier.

Joanna Quinn was commissioned to write a short science fiction story, which she entitled *Mudlark*. Quinn imagined the inhabitation of Flood House in a near future when flooded land is commonplace. The story was published on the project's website and extracts were read at various public events. It provides detailed descriptions of the structure, how it would act as a dwelling within a landscape that is flooded and the lives of its inhabitants who collect data on pollution in the water: 'for those who might find this planet in the future, so they could see what happened to us' (Quinn 2019, p. 2). It is a detailed portrayal of life off-grid, dictated by the movements of the tide. Quinn developed the description of the structure's interior from initial designs by Butcher; the finished structure could not be boarded

due to restrictions imposed by the Port of London Authority. The story was critical in enabling people to imagine themselves on the structure.

To further develop the scope and nature of the educational and public programme, Butcher worked with FPG's education and public programmes officer Sharon Byrne. Through this consultation, Byrne and Butcher specifically utilised existing connections with local schools to set up a series of educational workshops in conjunction with the themes of Flood House. Participants engaged in a range of activities, including writing stories to imagine what living in a floating house would be like. Students from Southend's Westborough School and Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School took part in these workshops.

To engage with an as large and varied audience as possible, Butcher and FPG consulted with the public relations company Albany Arts to develop local and national publicity strategies. What was important in this process was to engage with writers interested in ecology, climate change and flooding.



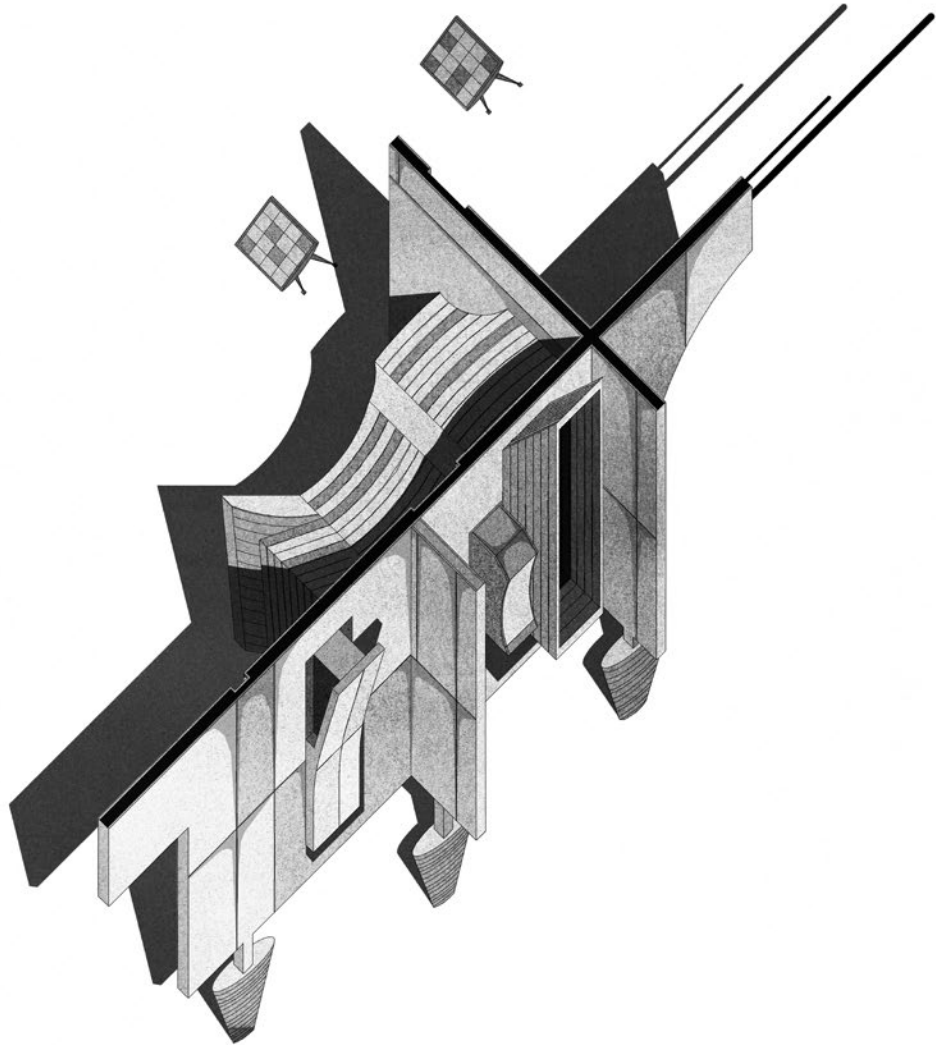
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33 Electric Belles singing 'John Ball' by Sydney Carter at the launch event for Flood House on Southend Pier.



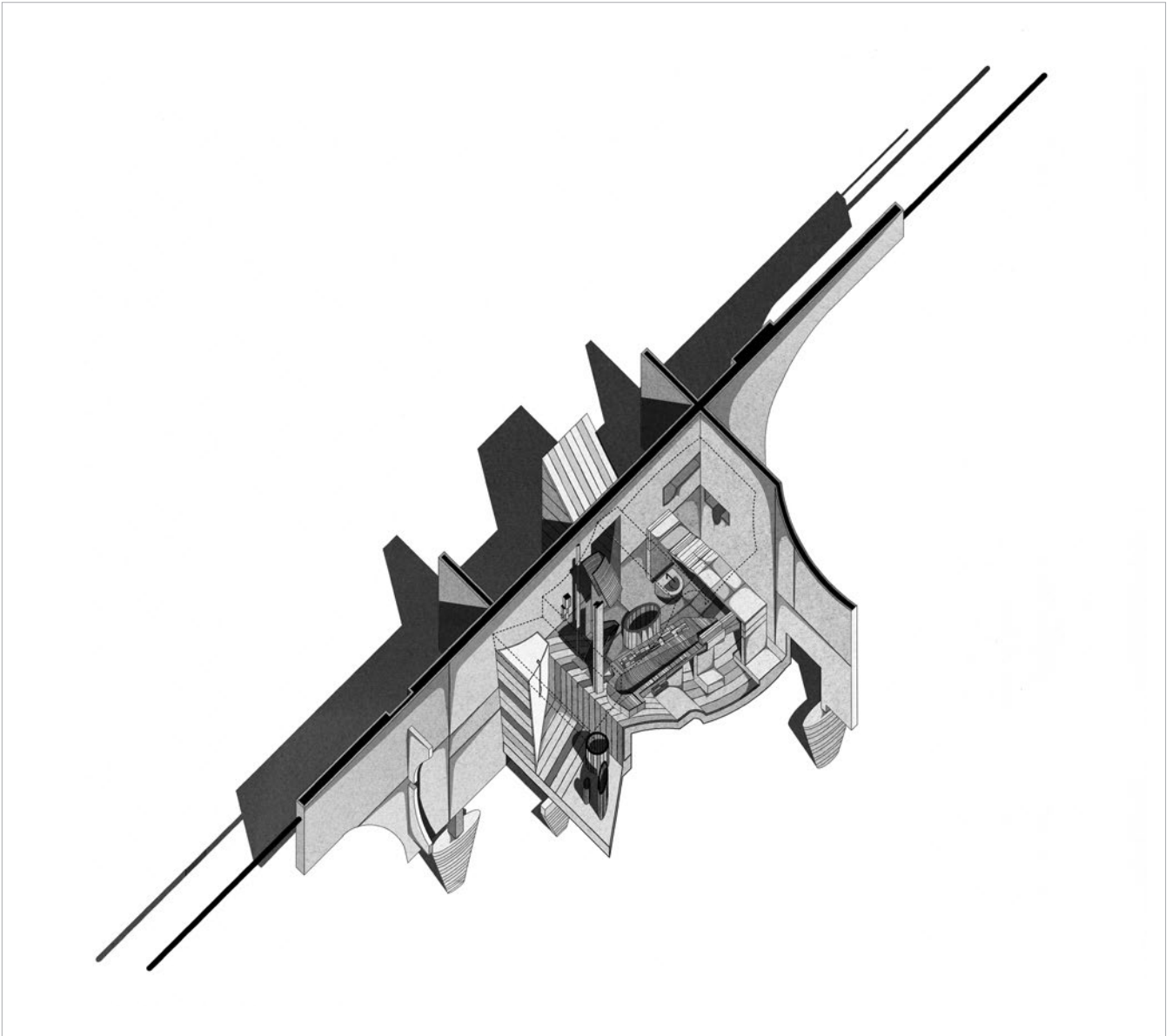
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34 Ruth Ewan, *All Distinctions Levelled*, 2016.

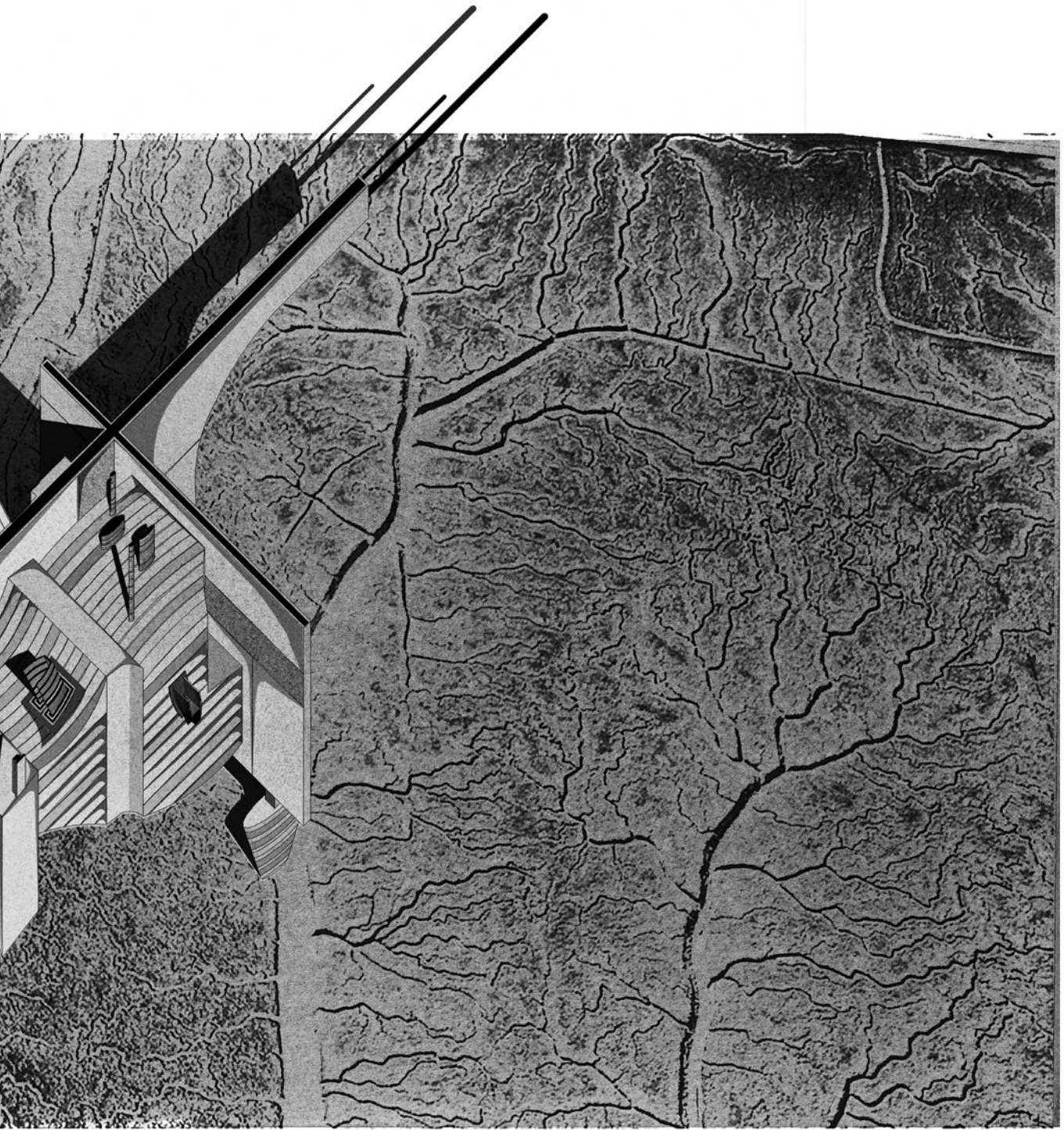


35

35-7 Initial designs for Flood House, including the structure's unrealised interior that was used by Joanna Quinn in the development of *Mudlark*.







Dissemination

- Focal Point Gallery (FPG) offsite project, launched in conjunction with the exhibition *The Peculiar People* (2016);
- Flood House was viewed by over 18,000 people visiting Southend Pier;
- Published in print, including *Architecture Today* (2016), *Art Monthly* (2016) and *The Southend Echo* (2016);
- Published extensively online, including *Wallpaper* (2016), *Dezeen* (2016), *It's Nice That* (2016) and *Hyperallergic* (2016);
- Critically appraised in the environment section of the *Observer* (2016) in an article by Lucy Siegle on ethical and green living;
- Included in Phaidon's book *Mobitecture: Architecture on the Move* (2017), edited by Rebecca Roke;
- Featured as a news item on *Yahoo* and the major Chinese business website *QDaily*;
- *CoverageBook* have estimated that over one million people have viewed online coverage featuring Flood House;
- Matthew Butcher was interviewed on BBC Essex (2016);
- The Flood House website has been visited over 20,000 times since its launch.

Talks on Flood House

- Radical Essex Architecture Weekend (2016)
- Silver End Village Hall, Essex (2016)
- FPG, Southend-on-Sea (2016)

Lectures and talks in which Flood House featured as a significant part

- University of Greenwich, London (2018)
- The Bartlett School of Architecture, London (2018)
- Umea University (2018)
- Kent School of Architecture, Canterbury (2018)
- University of Genoa (2017)
- University of the Creative Arts, Rochester (2016)

Conference papers

- *Postcards from the Edge: An Architecture of Estuarial Mudflats Unmoored Cities*, The Bartlett School of Architecture, London (2019)

Project Highlights

The project was included in the year-long county-wide art programme, Radical Essex, which formed part of the country-wide Arts Council England initiative, Cultural Destinations. After travelling up the Thames Estuary, Flood House was moved to Columbia and Brunswick Wharf in Hackney, London, in May 2016 to be installed on public display. Flood House became one of the catalysts for the innovative annual Antepavilion commission by the Architecture Foundation. Antepavilion asks young architectural practices to design and build an experimental structure for an evolving series of installations on public display. Butcher chaired the selection panel for the winning design in 2017 and helped write the brief for the project.

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38-9 Flood House being installed and in-situ at the Columbia and Brunswick Wharf, Hackney, London.

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