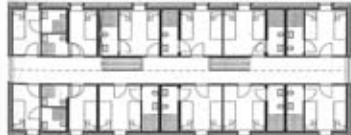




Cross section.



Long section.



First floor.



Ground floor.

Bureau SLA retreats to a pig farm

Text [Chris Scott](#)
Photos [Jeroen Musch](#)

Being relatively familiar with sparsely designed retreats, I was thrilled to discover Metta Vihara, a new meditation centre in the Dutch village of Hengstdijk. Here in the countryside of the southern Netherlands, the Triratna Buddhist Community has opened a haven of peace and tranquility that was once home to a pig farm. Responsible for giving the site a new lease of life is Dutch architect Peter van Assche of Bureau SLA. Creating a retreat that would express the Buddhist philosophy was of less importance, it seems, than satisfying the project's practical brief, which stipulated 'a building for as little money as possible'.

As a *mitra* of the Triratna community, Van Assche put his knowledge of the subject to good use, setting out to create 'a beautiful but not necessarily comfy building'. The result, both aesthetically pleasing and practical, fits perfectly into the landscape. The architect's respectful yet clever use of robust materials and vernacular elements – as exemplified by coloured corrugated steel as a façade cladding and his interpretation of the mansard roof – gives the building profile and depth. Practicality, again, was the reason for selecting Velux windows.

Raw basics continue inside, where bare limestone walls and concrete floors are combined with black bamboo flooring in the meditation hall, which offers a wide view of the flatlands.

When the perforated-steel doors are closed, light filtering into the interior generates the ideal atmosphere for meditation. Despite the clients' initial 'unconcern' for design, they totally embrace the concept. Equally keen on the 'new barn' are the locals, who have wondered, however, why a cowshed needs so many windows.

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