

**An extract from Ivor Smith's book  
'Architecture and Inspiration'.**

‘ The Courtyard at Ewelme in Oxfordshire was designed for my own family. The site is an orchard on the south side of the village Street where the houses form an edge. The new house follows a pattern of its neighbours and continues the character of the street.

The house has a square plan with its diagonal facing to south towards the view. Following the precedent of Alto's apartments in Neue Vahr, the walls on the north east and north west side are solid to protect against the cold and noise, whilst in contrast the facades to the south east and south west are more open towards the Sun and view. An early sketch demonstrates the way the movement of the Sun lights the house in different ways at different times in the year. The ground floor is arranged so that the living room enjoys the sun throughout the day, the dining kitchen benefits in the morning and the study in the evening. Although these rooms have openness to the garden, the solidity of the columns gives a sense of enclosure. When required, the kitchen, living room and study can be shut off as separate rooms but other times double doors from floor to ceiling give them more open plan - a good place for a party! On the first floor the main bedroom is at the south corner with two single rooms on each side; these have removable partitions between them so that the house can be changed from five bedrooms to 4 or three. In deference to Louis Khan, the service rooms, the bathroom, utility and cloakroom, occupy the north corner; and the rooms they serve, the living rooms and bedrooms, are towards the south.

The house is organised on a Tartan grid where the overall square is divided into spaces that are square, square and a half, or double-square, a discipline that gives a consistent scale to the whole. The narrow bands of the grid accommodate the columns, the fireplace, bookshelves and cupboards. Externally the pure geometrical form, a pavilion with pyramidal roof and a colonnade on two sides, gives the house a certain formality towards the garden.

In keeping with the rest of the street, the house is made of a mellow red brick with timber windows and a slate roof. Internally, the walls are fair-faced brick painted white, the ceilings are boarded, the hall is tiled and the rest of the ground floor is made of hardwood. The timber ceiling and floor give a homely warm feeling in contrast to the walls .

The front door is celebrated by a generous flight of brick steps from a gravel courtyard. This is surrounded by a brick wall with a smaller square building along one side. This contains garages and a flat above, similarly organised on the diagonal.

This building (Mount House) leads into a fan shaped studio that follows the skew of the site. It is a plan that has desks around the perimeter and is well suited to the working arrangement. The walls and floor are brick, and the roof is made of laminated timber beams with boarding between.

*NB this was Ivor Smith's architectural practice where six architects worked.*

The house and Studio work well: they fit in with the village and make the most of the sun and the garden, there is a sense of enclosure yet of openness, of privacy but also of welcome: the simplicity is enhanced by the use of materials and by the quality of light.

Ivor Smith

*Occupants of Mount House since it was used as Ivor Smith's architectural practice include others associated with the arts: a professional photographer, the renowned harpsichord maker David Evans MBE, and his 'Fine Art' gallery wife.*