

# [architects]

VOLUME 1

MORRIS AND STEEDMAN



HISTORIC SCOTLAND  
ALBA AOSMHOR

James Morris and Robert Steedman rose to the forefront of Scottish Modernism with an extraordinary series of bespoke private houses during the 1950s and 60s. Perspective gained over the passing years has led to a wider understanding and appreciation of their architectural legacy, now firmly established, and confirmed by a number of their buildings being listed.



## [A PARTNERSHIP IS FORMED]

The formative years of both men followed a rising trajectory. Robert Steedman (b. 1929) and James Morris (1931-2006) qualified as architects at Edinburgh College of Art in 1955 during which time they won travelling scholarships to Europe. In Zurich, they met Alvar Aalto and Sigfried Gideon, author of *Space, Time and Architecture*. On separate occasions they visited Japan and were influenced by the intrinsic simplicity and functionality of the houses and their close relationship with their formal gardens. They went on to study further at the University of Pennsylvania under Philip Johnson and Louis Kahn whose approach was similarly fuelled by the idealism of the age. During the young architects' travels they were also introduced to other key contemporary architects and theorists whose ideas had a bearing on their own early designs, including Marcel Breuer, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Richard Neutra. Both architects were elected Associates of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1955. James Morris and Robert Steedman set up their practice formally in 1957 with an office at 37 Young Street Lane North, Edinburgh, later expanding into 38 Young Street Lane North.

ABOVE: Nichol House, Gullane, East Lothian, 1964 (left). Staff Houses, University of Stirling, 1966 (right)



## [THE MODERN SCOTTISH HOUSE]

Mainly built for young professionals on modest budgets, the early houses by Morris and Steedman were bold statements of intent and, together, they form arguably the most important series of 20th century houses by a single practice in Scotland. They used the requirements of their enlightened clients as a springboard for ideas, their designs seeking to maximise the functionality and practicality of the home. Key considerations were transparency, solidity and the articulation of movement between public and private realms. The houses were direct responses to the constraints of the site and also to the wider landscape in which they are set, always with the vagaries of the Scottish climate firmly in mind. To this end, inspiration was sometimes taken from traditional Scottish architectural forms. Prominent roof lines and bold use of geometric shapes were considered to best complement the comparatively low Scottish light, bringing a formalist architecture to life.

By 1963, *House and Garden* magazine were describing the practice as 'specialists in super houses'. Collectively, Morris and Steedman's early houses adhere to a set of clear principles which provided the foundation to allow remarkable diversity of form and treatment and continue to prove influential and enduring to successive generations.

## [LEADERS IN THE PROFESSION]

Having cemented their reputation in the 1960s, Morris and Steedman embarked on a rich and diverse series of large commercial and public commissions in the 70s and 80s including a headquarters for Salvesen plc (now demolished), the Student Centre at Edinburgh University and the addition to the Princess Margaret Rose Hospital (also demolished) as well as working with many outstanding historic buildings providing additions to Edwin Lutyan's 'Greywalls' in East Lothian and the conversion of Perth Waterworks to form an Art Gallery rotunda.



ABOVE: Wilson House, Lasswade, Midlothian, 1958-9 (left). Rodger House, Edinburgh, 1961-3 (demolished) (right)  
 RIGHT: Salvesen PLC Headquarters, Edinburgh, 1969 (top). Wolfson Bio-engineering Centre, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, 1969 (bottom).

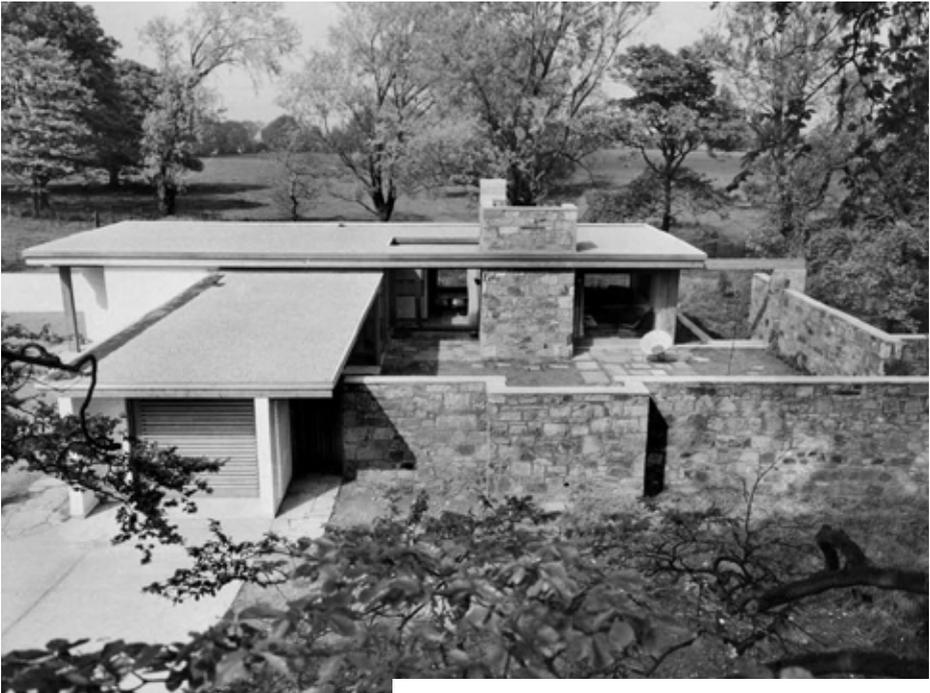


### [AWARDING SUCCESS]

The practice won a number of prestigious awards including Saltire and Civic Trust Awards, European Architectural Heritage Medal and two Royal Institute of British Architects Awards for Scotland. At the 2006 Scottish Design Show, five of their commissions were selected among Scotland's 100 best buildings of the last century. Morris's own house at Woodcote Park was ranked number 17, the Sillitto residence (Charterhall Road, Edinburgh) was 42. Most of the houses which have been preserved close to their original form have become listed, an accolade the practice regard as a mark of personal success after a long and fruitful career.

Morris continued in his architectural practice until 2005. In his lecture to the 20th Century Society in 2002 he noted that "the architect has great responsibility to absorb the latest scientific, social and technical innovations of our age. Our wish is to express the dream of beauty, proportion, and the music of our inner self." He died in 2006 aged 74. Robert Steedman continues as a consultant at Morris Steedman Associates.

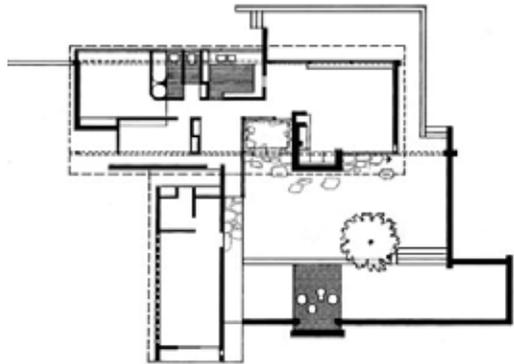
TOP: Rodger House, Edinburgh, 1961-3  
L-R: Cheyne House (Minaki), North Berwick, 1961  
Winkler House, Loch Awe, 1961  
Houses for Prof Hunt and Mr Steedman, Edinburgh, 1961-4



Courtesy of RCAHMS

### AVISFIELD, EDINBURGH (designed 1952, built 1955-57)

Their first commission was this house for Robert Steedman's dentist. Influenced by Japanese forms and the early houses of Philip Johnson and Marcel Breuer, Avisfield is one of the first great Modernist designs in Scotland. Contrasting natural rubble walls with smooth rendered white walls, the house is composed of a series of layers including a Japanese inspired courtyard. An opening in the roof allows additional light into the core of the house and focuses on the large rubble fireplace.

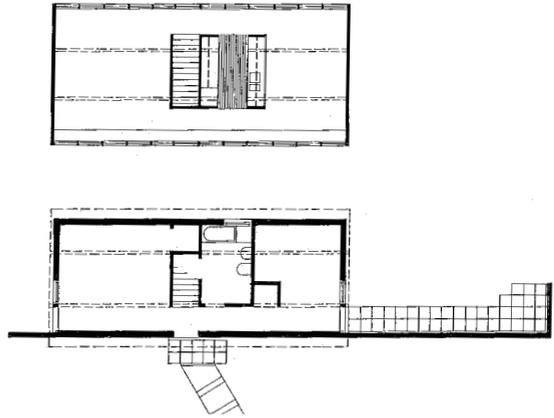




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**CHARTERHALL ROAD,  
EDINBURGH (1959)**

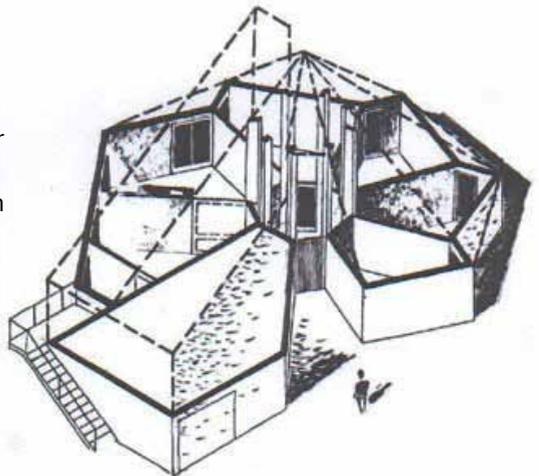
This house consists essentially of two cellular boxes, one sitting on top of the other. The timber and glass panelled upper level contains the light and airy, open plan living area with panoramic views across Edinburgh. The plain white horizontal expanse of the lower level is interrupted only by the front door and contains the sleeping areas. Robert Steedman has described the design as “a determined young man’s house, in all its starkness”.





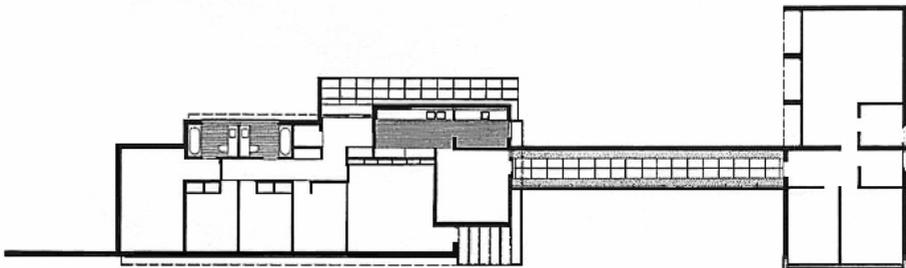
### CALDERSTONE, SOUTH LANARKSHIRE (1964)

Built on lands rich in clay and designed to incorporate a pottery studio, Calderstone is a house remarkably in tune with both the surrounding landscape and the ideas and requirements of its inhabitants. Its spiralling plan-form comprises wedge shaped rooms stepped around a double-height, octagonal central hall. The first floor studio is entered separately from the house to allow a degree of isolation as requested by the client. Similar size windows look out in all directions rather than favouring one aspect, lending a sense of parity and providing protection from the elements. The massing of the principal elements of the building are suggestive of traditional Scottish agricultural buildings.



**MEADOWLAND, PERTH (1964-66)**

A relatively compact but distinctively long and linear house with its principle expanse of glazing and brick running parallel with the river Tay taking full advantage of the light and views. The guest bedrooms are separated from the main living space by way of a glazed linking corridor/conservatory while the sweeping raised roof with a clerestory window, providing additional light to the living area, takes its inspiration from the contemporary ideas of Aalto and Neutra.





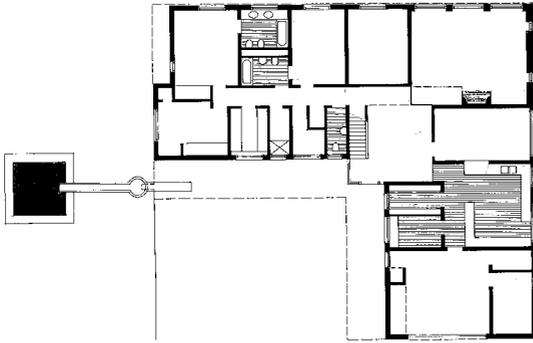
### **MARCHWELL, MIDLOTHIAN**

**(1964)** This house has a continuous spiral plan designed with the micro climate of a bare hillside in mind, echoing the form of the traditional circular sheepfold. The outer bulk of the wall of the house shelters the garden area from the sweeping winds. The inner spiral arm gives way to a glazed concave colonnade, central to which are the living and dining areas, with the focus directed in the first instance to shifting views of the garden courtyard, designed for the convenience of a family with young children, and then out over the exposed landscape beyond.



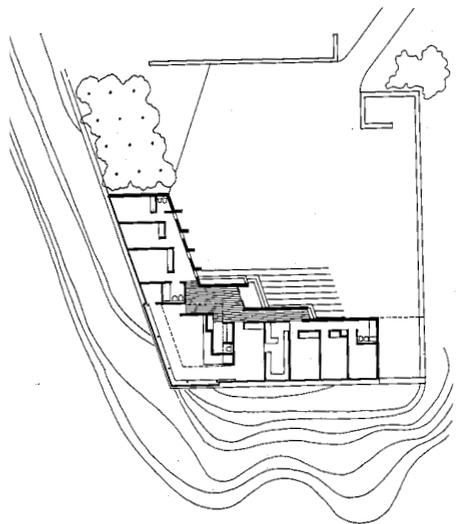
### SCADLAW HOUSE, MIDLOTHIAN (1967)

Located in the foothills of the Lammermuirs, the design of this house emphasises warmth, comfort and privacy, drawing a clear distinction between its windowless entrance front with only a horizontal slit with timber slats over, and the garden front with its regular fenestration and large windows to just above floor height. The weathered cedar shingles covering the high pitched roofs contrast with low wall heights providing echoes of earlier Scottish domestic building traditions.





**PRINCIPAL'S HOUSE, STIRLING UNIVERSITY (1966-7)** Considered by Robert Steedman to be one of their most successful designs, this innovative house features a large over-sailing roof and makes the most of its elevated cragside position. It is organised around a central suite of entertainment spaces as requested by the first principal at Stirling University. These spaces are carefully conceived to reveal both internal and external vistas, a device recurring throughout their work. The nearly windowless entrance elevation contrasts markedly with the open-plan glazed aspect of the garden/campus elevation.



## [HISTORIC SCOTLAND]

*This booklet is the first in a series celebrating the work of Scotland's architects. Each volume will focus on influences and key buildings, and give an indication of what makes them special.*

Historic Scotland is an executive agency of the Scottish Government. We are charged with ensuring that our historic environment provides a strong foundation in building a successful future for Scotland. One of our duties is to compile and maintain statutory lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. We have a dedicated team which researches and assesses listing proposals.

To find out more about Morris and Steedman and their listed buildings you can search online at [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk)

Historic Scotland  
Listing and Designed Landscapes Team  
Longmore House  
Salisbury Place  
Edinburgh EH9 1SH  
0131 668 8701/8705  
[hs.listing@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:hs.listing@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

### WEB LINKS AND FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Dictionary of Scottish Architects  
[www.scottisharchitects.org.uk](http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk)
- Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland – Morris and Steedman Papers. (Accession Number 2009/92)

### ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations unless otherwise noted are from the archives of Morris and Steedman Architects Ltd.

Cover illustration: Addition to Princess Margaret Rose Hospital, Edinburgh, 1966 (demolished after a fire in 2002)

*Please note that not all buildings mentioned in this booklet are listed, nor does their inclusion mean that they are open to the general public. Please respect an owner's privacy when exploring Scotland's architecture.*