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First Look: Tonkin Liu aims high with 'organic' cliff-top Dover house

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Tonkin Liu has received planning consent for a new family house in St Margaret's Bay, Dover.

The 400sq m building is sited in a triangular, sloping plot, currently occupied by a 1930s house in a conservation area on the edge of National Trust-owned land. The area is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a European-designated Special Area of Conservation.

"Our first impression was that the site itself is incredibly sculptural," said Mike Tonkin. "It required a response that was all about the landscape."



The site in St Margaret's Bay.

The two-storey, white-brick building nestles into the hillside, its organic form covered with an angled, green roof, planted with chalk-land grass, that slopes down to a low garage entrance at the corner of the plot.

"When you approach the cliffs, all you see are the rolling green planes," said Tonkin. "We wanted to echo that form in our design, so the building disappears into the landscape."

The practice arranged rooms in an open-plan configuration with partition walls not quite meeting the undulating facade. This allows circulation along the highly glazed wall, as though you are traversing the cliff edge.

South Elevation

The same configuration is used upstairs for the bedrooms: "Kids always like a house where they can run in a circle," said Tonkin, "and it means the bedrooms aren't dead spaces during the day."

A top-lit, double-height gallery runs along the rear of the building, providing extensive wall space to display the client's art collection.

The project is due to start on site in January 2013.

