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By this point, shipping-container architecture is fairly standard fare, having been incorporated into houses, shops, offices and cultural projects. The question always emerges, however: to what extent does the use of these ubiquitous steel boxes submerge them into something quite different, or stick to their intrinsic limitations and qualities? There are fine examples of both approaches. On a number of levels, this residential project in Dhaka targets both opposing aims, and comes up with something of a hybrid.

Situated amid rural farming plots some distance from neighbouring buildings, Escape Den acts as an urban retreat, a place to get away from the city's dust and chaos and enjoy the idyllic environs nearby overlooking greenery amid relative quiet. The scheme erects a metal skeleton and then populates it with four shipping containers, leaving spaces and platforms in between. The house operates on four different half-levels, from ground-floor parking bay to top-floor bedrooms. The steel frame, which is left raw and rusty, lifts the main living space just off grade. The plan lays out two principal sides organised across an open space between them... a planted atrium courtyard that will, once the vines grow in all round it, become a cool void in the middle of the building. Open staircases crisscross this atrium, climbing up the frame via open terraces. Above the parking bay is an internal lounge space.

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## ESCAPE DEN

Dhaka, Bangladesh  
River & Rain

Photography as indicated

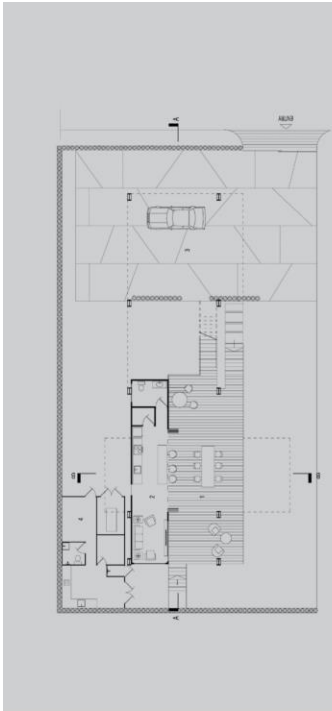


On the interior, the containers are the most transformed. Bedrooms and living space feature walls of finished panel or veneer, and openings cut into the steel walls are fixed with modern metal windows. But from without, there is no doubt that these are relics from the shipping industry. All the metal - containers and steel frame - is painted an earthy red/brown, while the new window frames are black. This palette enhances the contrasting greenery and landscape elements of the scheme, changing things up through opposition of hard and soft, natural and industrial.

It is noteworthy that the largest living space is actually the terrace in front of the container. And the most prominent architectural component of Escape Den may be the latticed canopy floating over the top of two-thirds of the house, resting upon the steel beams. Undoubtedly, the containers are the supporting players here: it is the frame in all its robust grandeur that steals the show. But what's wrong with that? Indeed, it is the attitude of the architects to integrate the containers into something larger and let them play more subdued roles in the form of Escape Den, and to the benefit of both frame and box. This integration is the reason the scheme succeeds, beyond being simply an eye-catching







use of reclaimed metal pieces. What's more, the overall massing and arrangement of solid and void is sophisticated; the parts of the house that are not, strictly speaking, built, are among its most compelling moments. A green terrace atop the smaller container wing, below the trellis, is an ideal shaded loggia space to take in surrounding views and enjoy breezes. And that central void, defined by the different runs of stairs, is a wonderful visual and practical amenity for residents. River & Rain have delivered a small essay here on how to compose with volume and space, adjust proportion, and appreciate materials.



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