

The image shows a modern, single-story house with a textured stone facade. A large, dark-framed window is the central focus, reflecting the surrounding trees and sky. Below the window, a set of wide, light-colored steps leads up to the entrance. The house is set against a backdrop of tall pine trees under a clear blue sky. The VELUX logo is prominently displayed in the top right corner.

VELUX®

A VERNACULAR BEAUTY
A Single-Family House in the Karst Region, Slovenia





ROOTED IN THE REGION

It does not happen every day that a mock-up of a house becomes an acclaimed and awarded project on its own. That is the history of the Compact Karst House, named after the region on the border of Slovenia and Italy.

The Compact Karst House is a prototype of the initially planned home: the first project the client ordered with Dekleva Gregorič has had a vast programme, with all the rooms one would expect in a single-family residence. Because of other investments and the 2008 crisis, the construction of the large house has been delayed. The client followed the architects' idea to construct a mock-up for testing the materials as a temporary residence on the corner of the site. After ten years, the client-designer team, which has realised more than one successful project, proceeds with a new project for the large house, satisfied with the tested ideas, with heads full of innovative ideas on the optimal use of space.

Dekleva Gregorič, an internationally renowned and acclaimed office, is rooted in the region of Karst; it is where Aljoša Dekleva grew up. A profound knowledge of the building typologies of the area, combined with an innovative approach, resulted in an award-winning piece of architecture. The Compact Karst House has been nominated in 2015 to represent Slovenia in Mies van der Rohe Award and has received much publicity.

On 300 square meters of land, thought initially to be an extension of the garden, a tiny house, with 60sqm on the ground floor and a half of it in the attic, with an innovative space programme has been built.

"The Karst region spans across the Slovenian-Italian border which has always been open for the local inhabitants. The influences were always strong: as Venetians used virtually all the region's oak trees to build their City, persistent erosion left the landscape bare, with only limestone left as building material. Traditional houses were made entirely out of stone becoming small built manifestos of mono-materiality. With contemporary architectural approach we did not want to repeat the historical ways of building - instead we set out to explore tradition's transformation apt for today."

Aljoša Dekleva, Dekleva Gregorič Architects



Left: a traditional Karst house in Repentabor, Italy. The same kind of houses are found on the Slovenian side of the border.

Right: The small house stands in a curve, on a piece of land that can be detached from the main plot. A curved wall is following the street, mimicking traditional site borders. Dotted line indicates the initially planned building.







NEW SOLUTIONS

"As we were building a "sample house", we were free to experiment with the distribution of functions and the size of individual spaces. We often test new ideas in small houses to translate them later in collective housing projects. Tina and I were exploring the topic of housing for years, starting with our collective master thesis at the Architectural Association in London titled "Negotiate My Boundary!", where we have addressed mass-customisation in collective housing, responsive environments and the importance of the human body ergonomics - which played a role in spatially modest Karst house accommodating a family of four."

Aljoša Dekleva, Dekleva Gregorič Architects

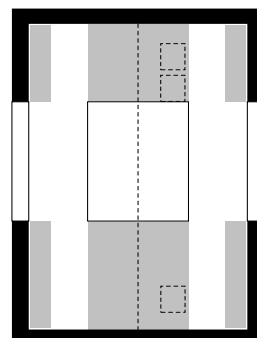
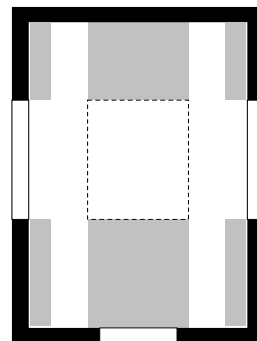
Aljoša Dekleva was aware of the region's building tradition from an early age; he grew up in a stone house designed by his father.

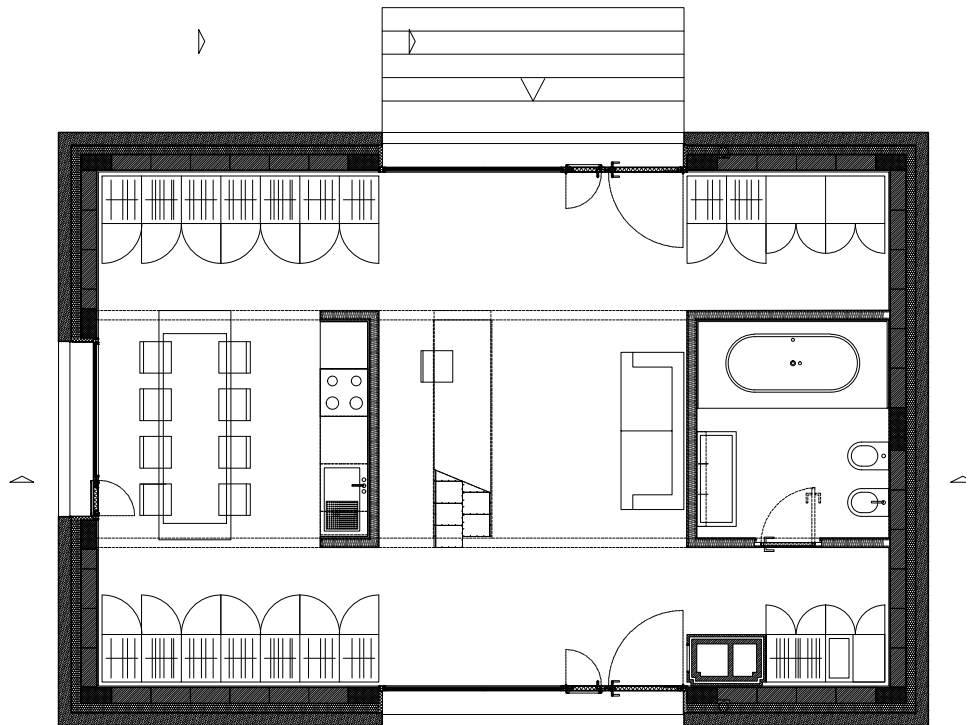
A profound knowledge of vernacular building technologies leads Dekleva Gregorič to architectural discoveries in the field of vernacular architecture.

For example, old houses in the surroundings used to be plastered, so the stone walls were layered in the most efficient way, with no regard to the aesthetics. Only the corners would have been executed in proper masonry. They reflected this principle in the design, casting concrete corners and opening frames, and filling the rest of the wall with brick.

Nowadays, people who seek a traditional look at their property dismantle old houses and reuse the material. The architects chose a different way: they cast concrete facades with randomly lined out stones against the formwork to reflect on the appearance of traditionally built stone walls. The roof is also made out of concrete, with plates mimicking traditional limestone tiles; so is the wall surrounding the site.

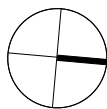
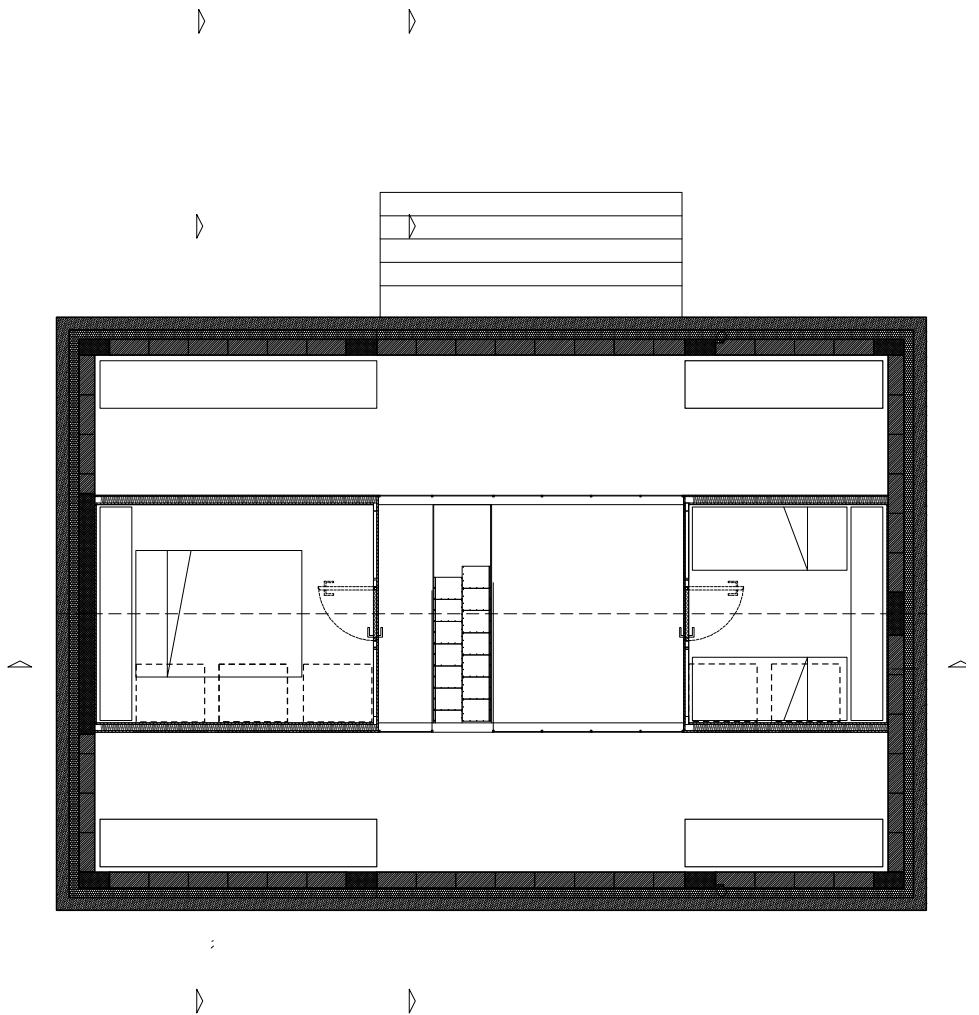
The facade is sleek, modern, and traditional at the same time. The steel cladding is framing three prominent openings, the glazed entrance door, the panoramic window towards the valley and the window of the dining area.





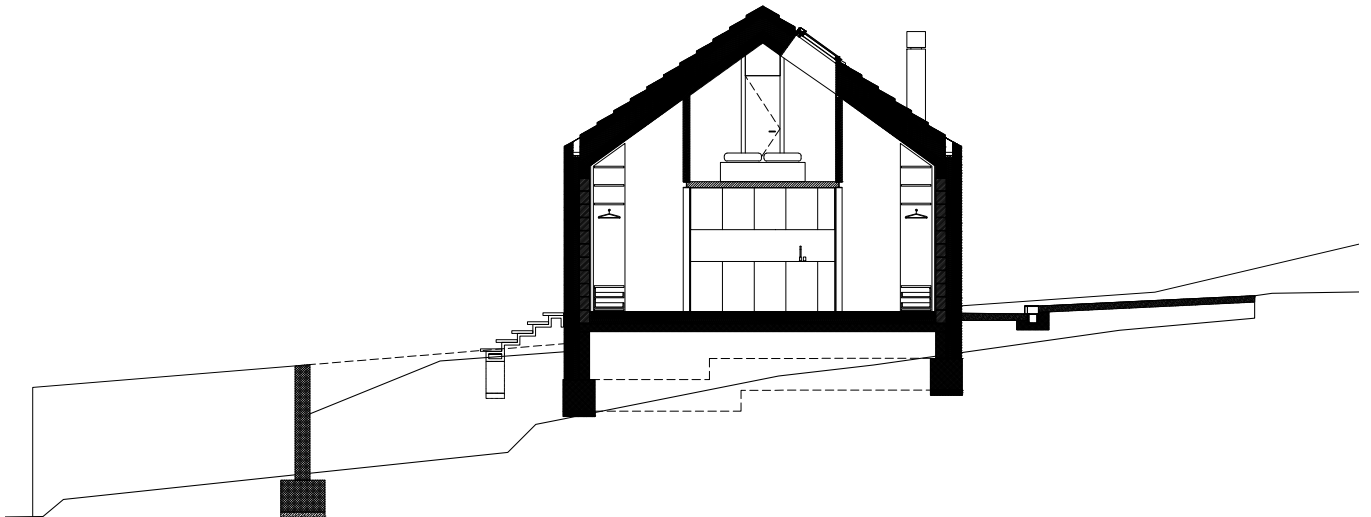
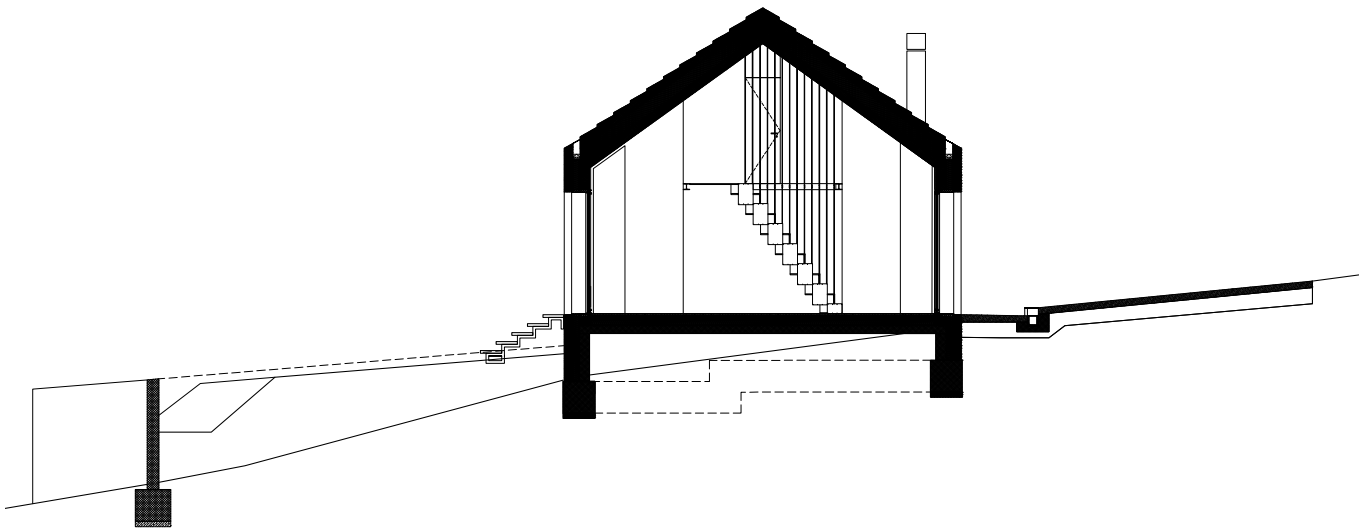
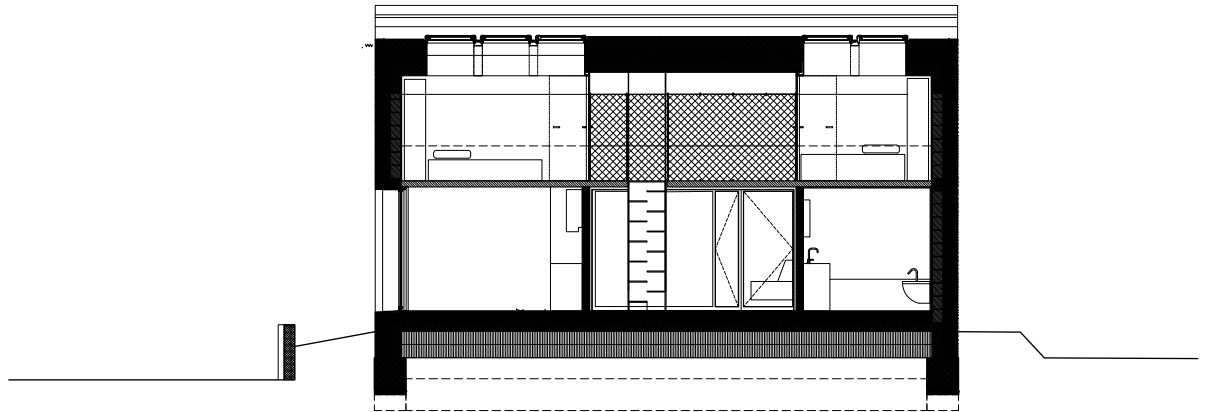
Ground floor: The entrance is located on the east facade, as part of an opening located symmetrically to a large glazing and a balcony door, connecting, via a stair, the house with the garden. The two boxes, closed one (containing the bathroom) and semi-open one with the kitchen correspond with the bedrooms above.

First floor: the two bedrooms are located symmetrically at the south and north facades. To strengthen the feeling of privacy and seclusion, are lit exclusively through VELUX windows, letting in the morning sun. Lightweight walls of the two boxes create a contrast with the heavy concrete and stone outer shell of the house.









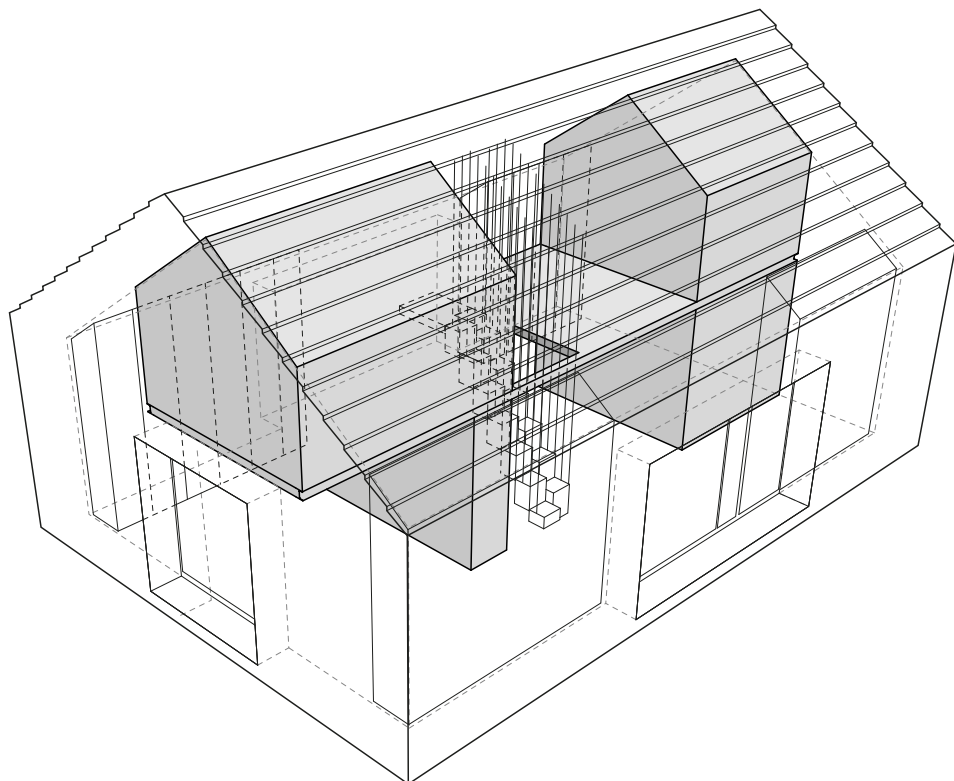
LIGHT INSIDE THE VOLUME


European historical farmhouses are usually very introverted, with small windows letting only a minimum of daylight to the interior to keep the interiors warm during the cold months and perhaps to create a cosy world within walls for farmers tired of working on their fields.

Dekleva Gregorič used this spatial feature also in other projects. They have collaborated with VELUX on several occasions including on the XXS House, where roof windows play a crucial role in the concept. In general – the roofs are essential in Dekleva Gregorič's architecture, as according to the architects, they are the essential element defining an object's identity. Anything concerning the top – choice of material, chimneys, and the position, size and the make of roof windows shall be designed with great care.

"The bedrooms are tiny private shelters with VELUX windows only and the walls are used for cabinetry. I think it's important in such an intimate space to forget the surroundings and only contemplate the most abstract form of nature: the sky - and thus connect with the universe."

Aljoša Dekleva, Dekleva Gregorič Architects





"It was crucial to integrate the roof windows with the rest of architectural elements: they align with the walls, so the light washes the vertical surface to the floor. Although the bedrooms are very small - typological mini version of the house - the inner spaces appear larger due to the zenithal daylight flooding in."

Aljoša Dekleva, Dekleva Gregorič Architects



"Inserting plentiful daylight in the middle of the house's volume contributes largely to the quality of the space. It can be a small atrium, a slit on roof's ridge or a roof window. Daylight provides both, materials to show their nature and users to enjoy the space."

Aljoša Dekleva, Dekleva Gregorič Architects





PROJECT DATA

Project: Single-Family House
Architecture: Dekleva Gregorič architects, Ljubljana, Slovenia
Team: Aljoša Dekleva, Tina Gregorič, Lea Kovič, Vid Zabel
Client: Borut Pertot
Location: Vrhovlje, Karst, Slovenia
Area: 90 sqm
Year: 2011 – 2014

Photos: Janez Marolt





VELUX Slovenia
Ljubljanska cesta 51a
1236 Trzin
Slovenia
+386 1 724 68 68

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