Hannes Lárusson

THE ICELANDIC FARMSTEAD

Íslenski bærinn, The Icelandic Farmstead or The Icelandic Turf House Institute is an exhibition site and a cultural and research centre concerned with the Icelandic turf house tradition and green architecture. The Turf House Museum, founded and run by Hannes Lárusson and Kristín Magnúsdóttir, preserves one of the few original turf farmsteads still to be found in the country and features the one and only comprehensive exhibition displaying the development, variations and subtle beauty of Icelandic turf houses. Aesthetic analyses and visual presentation of this unique architecture of the north is the focal point of the Turf House Museum.

The present article was written by Hannes Larusson in 2014 with the aim to decipher the underlying principles and ideology of the Icelandic turf house heritage. This is the first English publication of the article.

* A building is an existential shell, a musical instrument echoing the life of its inhabitants; it is a biological and social necessity. Through a building, man converses with the land and with other buildings. Meanwhile, a building obliquely references both the past and the future to establish an aesthetic style and a worldview.

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From the time of first settlement up to the 20th century most Icelanders lived in farmhouses scattered around their country. They had to learn how to sur-
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vive, build shelters, provide for themselves and turn conditions in their favour in order to exist on a cold and wet island. Villages developed late; the biggest housing clusters can barely be referred to as villages, in the conventional sense, until the late 20th century.

Still, up until the present time, any division between the urban and the rural has been diffused. A typical Icelandic village is dispersed; its outer limits are unclear and the middle fluctuates. If a gas station, a harbor or a church are the places around which urban life presumably revolves, then these structures often happen to be on the outskirts or beyond actual centres of the villages. This notable lack of symmetric middle is one of the major characteristics of how Icelanders develop their buildings and their environment and can be widely observed in all their undertakings. It is easy to see this characteristic as the Icelanders’ aesthetic archetype and basic orientation.

The art of shaping space and creating a visual whole using asymmetrical and organic compositions is, upon a closer inspection, based on highly developed aesthetics found in vernacular architecture of many nations. This type of aesthetics is perhaps more natural and accessible to Icelanders than a principled classical one or strict modernism and more likely to succeed as new communities of villages and towns develop. This very attitude towards buildings can be traced throughout the history of how the nation settled the country and erected its dwellings called bær.

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The Icelandic concept of bær expresses an intrinsic perception that a dwelling first and foremost exists as part of a cluster or of an irregular but interconnected unit. A group of buildings are either called bær (-by, [see Grimsby], farm) or þorp (thorpe, village) in Icelandic. Bær is a cluster of houses where the division between them is unclear and each unit connects to another to form a whole. It is not clear if the traditional turf house is one house or many. Where the turf house - or houses - connects there are often man-sized lees, sheltering corners or covers, spaces big enough to accommodate some activity. If the farm is viewed from enough distance it becomes obvious that the organization of houses is not based on visual symmetry. Instead, it creates an organic whole that converges on itself and creates a subjective, existential middle, based on an operative need. Seeing front or backsides becomes an uncertain proposition. It is a widespread notion that the most important house of any cluster also forms a visual frontal focal point. An Icelandic bær, however, does not conform to this notion.¹ Curved paths around the houses get

¹ Baðstofa usually turns its gable forward in the south of Iceland. This is also the most common orientation in the west of Iceland, although there this most important and central part of the farm also turns its longitudinal side to the front, as is most common in the east of Iceland. In the north, it is most common that the baðstofa turns perpendicular to the front and it is situated at the back of the farm, visible from the courtyard. Here, the description is of the arrangement and characteristics of houses as they appeared in the middle of the 19th-century and into the 20th-century.
inventively trodden, sometimes on top of the houses in grown alleys where roof and walls meet. (il. 1)

Seen from the area of the main entrance, the courtyard, bær, the farm appears as an interconnected row of houses, majority of which feature the gables facing the entrance, the number of gables depending on each farm’s varying wherewithal and functional needs. Varying gables might have different orientation to the courtyard. However, doors of Icelandic turf houses rarely faced north, unless the lay of the land, mountains and valleys necessitate such positioning. Turf houses frequently had ovate turf gables with deeply recessed windows; the turf gables subsequently became one with the roof. With time, gables made of timber became more common. Nevertheless, soil material - turf/grass, dirt, stones - have been the most dominant material used in Icelandic buildings. However, the gabled, pitched roof house, burstabær, the 19th century’s contribution to Icelandic architecture, can hardly be referred to unless implying a row of gables covered with timber or variegated iron. Approaching the turn of the 20th century, around 1900, painted corrugated iron gables became popular in some parts of the country and in the beginning of the new century poured concrete gables began to appear. Roofs were usually steep and pitched. As the use of corrugated iron increased, gently slanting roofs became more common; they were used on outhouses, work and storage spaces, entrances or annexes. Such roofs were never used in living quarters, living rooms or kitchens. Completely flat roofs were never used in Icelandic farmhouses. Grass or corrugated iron was mostly utilized for roofs, whereas timber was seldom used. Often any available material was

2 Undoubtedly, the relatively heavy rainfall in Iceland is the main reason for the steepness of the roofs in Icelandic turf houses; roofs are obviously steeper in parts where it rains the most. In Greenland, where the weather is considerably dryer and colder than in Iceland, the grass roofs in traditional houses were almost flat (see, for example, pictures from the Fox expedition of 1860). Traditional adobe houses also usually have flat roofs; unburned clay was best for building in dry and hot regions of Africa, Asia and the Americas.
used, sometimes mixed together. All gables but one might utilize corrugated iron, the exception being turf wall used, most commonly, in the kitchen or the long walls of the living quarters. Sometimes the gables were partly timber, partly corrugated iron, with concrete applied somewhere among those. This use of material enhanced the variety but seldom affected the general impression or ambience of the farm, nor did it significantly lead to a visual or stylistic breach.

If the farmhouse, *bær*, is entered on the ground level through a centrally located entrance, what follows is a tunnel or a corridor: *göng* winding its way to the central living area, *báðstofa*. In the *báðstofa* there are inbuilt beds: *rekkjur*, lining the longitudinal walls between the posts and occasionally the gable walls as well. One would also find a storage room, *búr*; a formal living room: *stofa*; hearth kitchen: *hlöðaeldhús*; dung storage room: *taðkofi*; general storage room: *skemma*; smithy; covered hay storage: *hlada*, along with outside hayrick; more passages; latrine and cowshed: *fjós*. In the neighborhood, there are buildings or structures sometimes attached to turf houses or just a stone throw away. These would be horse stalls, hay storage within low turf walls, sheep houses, lamb houses, ram houses, hen houses, potato sheds, well covers, lees and shelters.

A “house” can be finished; it will then take on its finished structure. *Bær* is a process that spins its continuum from inner necessity. Therefore, *bær* cannot be finished. A house can be drawn and then built according to that drawing. *Bær* cannot be drawn beforehand; its outlines continue to develop in an organic process as the needs for changes or improvement arise and in that manner it creates its own ongoing three-dimensional drawing. The Icelandic turf house, *íslenski bærinn*, is an organic cluster of buildings that orbit around its core, which however is neither spatial nor visual, but can be characterized

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3 *Íslensk orðsifjabók*, the Icelandic Etymology Dictionary, establishes a relationship between the word *bær* meaning house, farm, residence, to other Nordic languages: e.g. Faeroese *baur*, New Norwegian *ba*, (homeland, field), Old Swedish *byr*, Old Danish *by* (farm, village). The word *búð*, a hall or tent (for a temporary stay), is also closely related to words with similar meaning in these languages, e.g. Faeroese *búð*, New Norwegian *bu(d)*, Swedish and Danish *bud*, Middle German *bode*, Middle High German *buode* (tent, cottage). The same applies to *búr*, (storage space, residence): e.g. Faeroese *búr*, New Norwegian, Swedish and Danish *bur*, cottage, room, Old High German *bur*, house. The Middle High German *bur* (New High German *bauer*) *bändi* [derived from *búa-andí*] and Old English *néahgebur* (Modern English neighbour) are of the same origin. Also, The Icelandic Etymology Dictionary indicates that the word *búa* means to live, be or dwell (somewhere) for a long period of time; to farm; to cloth, prepare, decorate,: e.g. Faeroese *bügva*, New Norwegian *bu(a)*, Swedish and Danish *bo*, Old English *buan*, *buwan*, Old High German *bu(w)* an “Modern High German *bauern*, Gothic *bauan*. Classical Latin *fui*. (I) was Greek *phýo*, produce offspring’, *phýma*, a plant,’ *phýsis*, nature’ Sanskrit *bhávati*, is, becomes, ’bhuti-h, existence, dawn’ Lithuanian *buti*, to be, Old Slavic *byti*, to become, to be’. Of Indo-European root there is *bheu* - to grow, thrive, to exist; see also English be, German *bin*. Deriving from these ancient origins but not mentioned here are the related words *ból* (building) and *byggja* (build). The English word *byre* is of the same origin, and in Scotland and Northern England it is mainly used over the warm space of *fjós* (cowshed). In Iceland, the cowshed was usually a part of the house-cluster and often accessible from the *báðstofa*, sometimes it was located on the floor below it.
by the magnetism of a living presence. Bær is built on a natural blueprint, the language of the arms and body. Old men refer to the height measure for the turf walls in the outhouses as “shoulder height”. Sometimes the stacked turf walls would reach to a double shoulder height, such as in double height living room quarters or in the inner support walls of hay storage buildings. People have a natural tendency to experiment with the innate resilience of the material they hold in their hands.

With regard to the baðstofa, the proportions and sizes depend on one hand on the body laying down, i.e. the beds, on the other hand from the proximity or distance between people sitting in these beds opposite each other. The distance is no more than that of a small table, the latter the only unattached piece of furniture in the room, with the possible exception of occasional garment chest functioning also as a table or a seat and placed along the bed. There might be a random chair. The height of the abutment, where the rafters meet, is just a bit higher than male average height. The overall space is such that a baðstofa, if suitably populated, gets heating generated from body heat alone. Within the space, there is no other heating element to be found, just the collective heat generated from young and old alike. While the walls are low, the pitch of the roof is relatively high. In such a closely fitted all-purpose room everything has to be in its right place and lifestyle patterns must be set. Carders and spindles would be under the joist, knits in caskets and containers, garments and keepsakes in trunks, chests and under pillows, perhaps a psalm book on a shelf, a potty under a bed, and the light would be extinguished at the designated time between nightfall and midnight. (il. 2)

In the baðstofa the length of a bed is a relatively set measurement called stafgölf, stave-floor. The name can be traced back to a time when a bed length was
marked between inside staves, or posts, of lodges with ásaþak, ridge-beam roof. In all baðstofas from the latter part of the 19th century the roof type is sperruþak, spar-roof, built with rafters. Still, studs or pillars were often used between the bed gables in the baðstofa although they no longer had an integral role in supporting the roof. One stafgölf, stave-floor, is therefore one bed length. This standardized length unit was usually around 174 cm with minor variations. Often stafgölf, stave floor, is approximately three ells. Danish ell, which is 62,7 cm, was proclaimed a legal unit of measurement in the years 1776-1910 and continued to be used in the 20th century. However, whatever bed length in baðstofa was concerned people seem to have used an older measurement, the German/Icelandic ell, the so-called Hamburg-ell, the origin of which dates back to the interaction between Icelanders and the German Hansa-league merchants in the 15th and 16th centuries. The measurement was 57,8 cm and seems to have been used along with the Danish one well into the 19th-century. Bed length or stafgölf, stave-floor, is usually three Hamburg-ells, 3x57,8 cm or around 174 cm. However, in most instances other house measurements inside the turf house cluster are based on the Danish ell, which is two feet. There are three ells in one fathom. As regards the span of the beds, they are frequently just over 90 cm wide. The distance between the beds is, appropriately, around 130 cm, with just enough space for people to easily pass each other or, as mentioned, for an unattached table. The total width of the baðstofa is therefore around 315 cm or five Danish ells. There are instances of two beds placed at the gable marking its width, which would make it 350 cm or approximately 5,5 Danish ells. Then there is the placement of a door or ladder opening. The entrance to a baðstofa is usually at one end beyond the row of beds, unless it is centrally placed as when the baðstofa is the house furthest back, perpendicular to the ends of the corridors. A baðstofa of three stafgölf is therefore three bed lengths, 9 ells, or around 520 cm which with the addition of entrance will be around 630 cm or the equivalent of ten Danish ells or eleven German/Icelandic ells. The height of the ceiling varies, but it is always in accordance with the length and width of the space and never greater than such that an average man would not be able to reach the highest point. Baðstofa could be longer than three stafgölf and sometimes shorter. In such instances, especially in the baðstofa in northern Iceland, houses or living rooms would be added, using a panel for separation at each end. Names like mið(middle)-baðstofa, hjónahús (couple’s room), north house, privy, boys-house, etc. refer to these. If measurements and geometrical proportions

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4 In the article titled "Inside Four-corner Pillars" in Hugur og Hönd from 1975, Guðmundur Jósafatsson puts forth the proposition that it is possible that a bed’s length or stafgölf (stave floor) in baðstofa was built on even older length-measurement, the ancient Icelandic aín, or ell. This ell equalled circa 19-20 Danish thumbs and originally the stave floor would have been 3,5 Icelandic ells or just over 180 cm. According to Guðmundur’s measuring of the 19th century baðstofa located in Húnavatnssýsla (those still standing in the beginning of the 20th century) most stave floors (bed lengths) were 68 (176 cm) or 70 (182 cm). The thumbs are the Danish measurement and equal approximately 2,6 cm, a bit longer than the British-American thumb which equals 2,54 cm.
bring us closer to the soul and spirit of a space, then, as concerns the baðstofa, it is measured in ells, feet, fathoms, thumbs and spans.

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Baðstofa\(^5\), the essence and center of the bær, is a dwelling that took more than twenty lifetimes to shape and polish, entrench with protocols and imbue with quietude. It is all at once, simple and quiet yet a complicated converging lens and a deep wellspring. A classic baðstofa only shows off the shades of the wood, marked by veins and knots and the gleaming polish of repeated touching, and then the endless variety of light, ranging from the sharp rays of the summer sun to the interplay between the cotton-grass wicker flame in the oil lamp and the midwinter gloaming. Soft shadows play in the rafters, ledgers and roof. Behind the timber walls, a thin shell of panels, there is a simple frame, an air pocket, and then stacked wall of earth materials, beyond the sloped timber roof is thatch, peat, and turf. This insulation renders all sounds, whether inside or outside, muffled. The size and placement of a window is one of the important elements in the atmosphere and personality of each baðstofa. Usually, there is one window in the middle of the front gable but often a little dormer window has been placed in the roof, often over each bed. Inside, darkness - of varying degrees - is more prevalent than light and creates the background for the inhabitants moving from one lit setting to another; any particular light source only illuminating a limited area.

The most visible elements are: a carved bed board, a spinning wheel, multicoloured, patterned bed covers (woven, crocheted, or knitted), clock on the wall, perhaps a spoon of horn with carving on the handles, askur (wooden eating bowl) with a carved lid as well as numerous other distinctively formed everyday objects, serving spoons, knives, fire pokes, rolling pin, rollers for making kleinur, all well shaped to fit in the working hands.\(^6\) Pictures are rare; one may come across framed color copies of Holy Mary, The Good Sheppard or perhaps Jesus,

\[5\] Íslensk orðsifjabók, (Icelandic Etymology) states; bað, (bath), ‘to bathe (oneself), laugun (bathing with water)’ see also Faeroese bað, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish bad, Old English bað, Old High German bað. Originally these related words referred to laugun, bathing in hot water (or steam), see also New Norwegian bade ‘high heat’ Swedish badda, to warm, give off heat. From the same root is the noun baka, to bake. In the online Dictionary.com the English word bath is chiefly traced to old Germanic roots; bátha, bajan and bheH which all mean ‘to heat or that which is heated’. Stofa, ‘a prime room of a house, house with the shape of baðstofa’; see also Faeroese stova, New Norwegian stove, Modern Swedish stuga, Old Swedish stuva, New Danish stue, Old Danish stuwæ, Modern English ‘oven’, Middle Low German stove, bathing room, heated bathroom. The word also appears in Romanic languages, see Italian stufa, Modern French étuve. Ancient French estuve ‘bathing room’ and is perhaps of Roman origin, see Italian stufare, ‘to heat with steam’, French étuver, ‘to heat, to roast’ and étouffer ‘to choke’, Latin extufore, ‘to emit steam’, see also ex out and Italian tufo adopted from Greek τύφος ‘smoke, steam’. It may be concluded that the word baðstofa is used to refer to a house which is warm and comfortable, but not necessary connected to bath and steam, although bath and steam go together.

\[6\] Interior furnishings and household objects belonging to the Icelandic farm culture are to be found, in plentiful numbers, in the Icelandic National Museum and other local museums around Iceland. It is important to interpret these objects, including carvings, handiwork and pictures, according to their role in the architecture and experience of the baðstofa space and, as appropriate, other turf house spaces.
set in places of honour. There might also be pictures of Hallgrímur Pétursson (the poet), Jón Sigurðsson (independence hero) or Fjallkonan (a symbolic Woman dressed in Iceland’s most exclusive national dress) placed over people’s bed in the company of black and white photographs of families or relatives. Books are so few that they achieve a symbolic aura, as if they were icons.

The Icelandic turf house is imbued with warmth; it is mild in its quiet beauty and modesty. In the baðstofa warmth was evoked as soon as awareness of cold appeared. Warmth is a concept that encompasses a peculiarly three-dimensional sphere, a presence on the border of the supernatural, and a phenomenon easy to understand but hard to explain. Its presence can’t be delivered on order. The darkness, the dimness has been domesticated, especially the dusk, rökkr. Dusk is darkness of the gentlest kind, transparent, living, soft darkness that flows through and envelopes the turf house. In the dusk, the shadows come alive, light gains importance and the oil lamp, týra, gains power. The dusk and the warmth are siblings descended from the turf house.

The space, baðstofa, is so idiosyncratic in the way it looks, is arranged and used, that it is hard to imagine anyone sitting down and making a blueprint for it. Dwellings like this happen as if by themselves. A creator of the baðstofa would have had to be a mutated specimen of craftsman, architect and artist who had been able to snap fingers or pull the turf house out of a hat. Instead, its development and origin remains rather obscure. Even the name is as if self-woven, made of hidden fibers of the language, perhaps twisted together from an ancient bathhouse, a sauna, a long-hall and women’s quarters. The meaning is not constant yet it has settled into the subconscious and seeped into every bone. It is the common area where people dress and undress, are born, eat, work, busy themselves, play, lay in infirm, let themselves be heard in; it is also where the inhabitants die in their beds. This quiet, multidimensional dwelling is the axis, the heart, the womb of the housing cluster and also Iceland’s most important contribution to three-dimensional art. Without the baðstofa the Icelandic bær would not exist.

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Many things are still unknown about the evolution of the baðstofa before it appeared as a fully developed residence in the mid-19th century. Written documents as regards the existence of baðstofa in Iceland are the most copious in the Middle Ages as referring to a special house for bathing. Archeological excavation has revealed several houses that could have been bathing houses (e.g. Gröf i Öræfum, Kúabót in Álftaver, Forna-Lá in Snæfellssnes). No intact oven has been found in Iceland but definite remains of ovens have been found and in some cases likely set-

7 See V. Guðmundsson, Privatboligen i sagatiden paa Island samt delvis i det øvrige Norden (Private Dwellings in the Saga Period in Iceland as well as in Parts of Other Nordic Countries, 1889), pp. 240-244 and A. Sigurðardóttir, Híbýlahættir á miðöldum (Living Arrangements in the Middle Ages, 1966), pp. 69-79.)
tings for ovens have been identified.\(^8\) According to sources, such medieval *baðstofa*, or bathing huts, would have been un-insulated, perhaps dug down quarters of small proportions, with low walls and a steep roof. It would have been placed behind, but attached to, the main living and utility buildings of that period, namely *skáli* (lodge), *stofa* (reception or living room), *búr* (storage room) and *eldhús* (kitchen). Often these ancient *baðstofa*, or bathing huts, had benches or stalls along the walls and had some sort of stone-oven. There are also examples of this sort of huts standing apart and at a distance from the main house cluster. Evidence (written and archeological sources) also indicate that these huts made a rather late appearance in the late 12th century, had their prominence in the Age of Sturlungar, and disappeared fast, in the original role, as the 15th century advanced.

Many have speculated about how it is that this ungainly *baðstofa*, or bath hut, turns into a main dwelling place. Already in the early 16th century the *baðstofa* has taken on a central role in the housing cluster. Valtýr Guðmundsson, who based his study almost solely on written documents, maintained that after the custom of live fire on the living room floor had been abandoned, people gathered around a stone oven in the *baðstofa* and sometimes stayed there night and day. When those stone ovens were later moved to the old *stofa* living room, the name got transferred to the place where people now mainly stayed. Valtýr asserts that the name transferred with the oven while *baðstofa* as a bathing and steam house eventually disappeared.

Arnheiður Sigurðardóttir for the most part supports Valtýr’s ideas. She concludes from written documents from the 16th and 17th centuries\(^9\) that ovens or fireplaces were used in *baðstofa* and that the so-called *ónhús* (heat houses) were, as long as they lasted, part of the *baðstofa* space but not a separate room. In his book titled *Fortidsminder og nutidshjem paa Island*\(^10\), Daniel Bruun does not say much about the development of *baðstofa*. In these matters he seems to follow the lead of Valtýr and asserts that somehow, inexplicably, the ancient steam-*baðstofa* became the conventional and all-encompassing *baðstofa*. Daniel seems to equate *eldhús* (kitchen) and *baðstofa*, the only spaces which were heated by fire by the end of the Middle Ages, both having gone through this radical change of roles.\(^11\)

In his essay, “Húsagerð á Íslandi” (House building in Iceland) which appeared in *Íönsaga Íslands*\(^12\) (History of Icelandic Skilled Trade), Guðmundur Hannesson states: “In the ancient times there were “bath” living rooms [“*bað*” *stofur*] and toilets in nearly every farm. […] The ancient “bath” living room is frequently mentioned in the sagas, not the least in *Sturlunga Saga*, so it can be assumed it was

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8 The remains of a big stone oven, ón, were found in a small oven equipped *baðstofa* during archeological digs in Viðey in the years 1987-1995. See M. Hallgrímsdóttir, *Húsakostur Viðeyjaklausturs. Um byggð í Viðey fram á 18. öld.* (Housing at the Viðey Cloister. About habitation in Viðey up to the 18th century, 1993).

9 *Híbýlahættir á Miðöldum*, pp. 73-77.


11 Ibid., pp. 197-198.

widely used, although rarely found in ruins. As an example of the make and size of these houses, Guðmundur refers to a well-preserved baðstofa that has been excavated in the ruins of Norse dwellings in Greenland. It appears that the “bath” living room [“bað” stofa] usually was a small low walled house with a high pitched roof, not bigger than so that there would be room for the oven and a resting stall for several men, usually more or less dug into the earth. Guðmundur does not provide an answer to the question as to how could it happen that this small space became the main dwelling place in Icelandic farms and all along keeps this peculiar name, which seems to refer to another usage. Guðmundur concludes his discussion on the matter by pointing out that rafter roofs were taken into use early in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century “...and nowhere was there a bigger reason for their use than in the baðstofa [...] It can therefore be pointed out that the concept of “baðstofa” now relates first and foremost to the shape of the house: the low walls and the prominent slope of the roof on each side of the roof’s ridge.

It is not until 1987 that Hörður Ágústsson, in his book Íslensk húnafélag (Icelandic National Culture) and therein the essay “The Icelandic Turf Farm”, sets forth a comprehensive theory of the development and classifications of the Icelandic turf house. The attempt is to herd various turf buildings into familiar and rather narrow pens: the Settlement Farm, the Commonwealth Farm, the Passage Farm, the Short Passage Farm, the Long Passage Farm, the Pitched Roof Farm, the North Iceland farm, the South Iceland Farm, the Front-house Farm. Hörður’s theory, in short, assumes that there would have been a baðstofa behind each farm, behind typical medieval houses, skáli (hall), stofa (living room), eldhús (kitchen), and búr (food storage room). “The baðstofa is originally a house where people go for a steam bath. Because of its location, as it sits higher than other houses and furthest away from the entrance, people started, early on, to go there in order to escape the cold in other houses”. According to Hörður, little by little the inhabitants stopped lighting fires in for warmth in the relatively big stofa and skáli but fires were still tended in baðstofa. As the climate cooled people started to move their bedding and such into the baðstofa, which got bigger and finally served as a dayroom, workroom, eating room and sleeping room. Hörður’s main methodology is to analyze from conclusions derived by first backtracking from well preserved buildings, so far as they allow, and instantly fill in the picture and guess what is missing.

13 Ibid., p. 107.
14 Ibid., p. 109.
15 Ibid., p. 111.
17 Ibid., pp. 337-338.
18 Hörður’s methodology can be described as a revolution in the turf farm research. See especially H. Ágústsson Laufás við Eyjafjörð: staðurinn (Laufás in Eyjafjörður: The Place), Reykjavík, 2004. In pictorial transcriptions and interpretations on his subject matters, Hörður’s talents as an artist were fully utilized and gave his conclusions great credibility. One problem with this method is that usable accounts are mostly of church sites and occasional large land estates. The foundation of the country’s architectural heritage is presumably no less to be found in bigger or smaller dwellings of the populace in general, although there is not much documentation to be found thereof. The variety and beauty in these houses is however evident in photographs taken by the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} and beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.
Hörður, similarly to other scholars, does not provide an explanation as for why an outlaying, small hut like baðstofa transformed into a centrally situated all-room. It would have been easier to rebuild the living areas and kitchen (stofas, skáli, eldhúss) with the same goal. It is hardly a forgone conclusion that a placement of baðstofa toward the back is best for heat retention. It is hard to see why locating a building in the northern part of the housing cluster, as common in the north, would lead to a better heat preservation. Heat, going to the baðstofa, would in such an instance be expected to arise from the kitchen (eldhúss), which in most cases is located in an isolated outer building reachable through long corridors. It is interesting that building a fjós (cow house)-baðstofa, where the inhabitants utilize the heat from the cows in a cowshed under the floor, is traditional mainly in the Skaftafell region in the south of Iceland, the country’s warmest part.

The late 18th century saw a publication by the reverend Guðlaugur Sveinsson from Vatnsfjörður titled Um húsa eða bæjarbyggingar á Íslandi (On House or Farm Buildings in Iceland)\(^{19}\), about the development of a turf-house. In Guðlaugur’s treatise there are three propositions concerning what he refers to as new housing arrangements. The most radical proposal shows a three gabled house and the baðstofa is meant to be situated inside one of these gables. Hörður Ágústsson considers this treatise to have instigated a “revolution” in house building in the country, especially as regards the look and organization of turf houses in the south of Iceland (Icelandic National Culture I). Hörður overemphasizes Guðlaugur’s influence and provides insufficient reasons as to why he was barely influential at all in the North and why the “revolution” succeeded only partially in the East and West. These changes, which seem focused on more conformity in gables and location of baðstofa up front, seem to have started a lot earlier and are likely to have continued without significant input from Guðlaugur’s ideas.\(^{20}\) In Ferðabók Eggerts Ólafssonar og Bjarna Pálssonar (The Travel Journey of Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Páls-
son) one comes across, for example, a general comment about housing which goes as follows: “The houses stand in a handsome row. They are green and overgrown by grass as if they were pavilions. The fronts are painted white or red with clay pigment from hot springs.” Of houses in Skaftafellssýsla it reads: “Houses are handsomely arranged on the farms [...]. The houses are attached and lined up in a row.” It is not unlikely that the main living space, the baðstofa, was in one of these houses, as common in other parts of the country. The book also features a picture of a three gabled farm, said to be an average farm.

It is possible that on specific church sites there could have been serious attempts to increase uniformity in the way buildings were organized and made to look. However, just as soon there would have been gables and pitched rooftops peeking up in internal disorder, thereby keeping the allegiance to the heritage, in appearance, spirit and material use. Wherever a spade is stuck into the turf house field of knowledge, what gets dug up is irregularity, variation and, at the bottom, a tough and traditional heritage. It is the sophistication of stagnation and the harmony of variations that defines this heritage. Its strength lies in the variety. Therefore, no two farms were the same and seldom did two buildings look alike in any village.

On the farms where there were no steam baths - and it’s a dubious proposition that those were common - it is natural to conclude that skálar (halls), stofur (reception rooms), eldhús (kitchen), or even women’s dwelling places had been the basis in the creation and formation of the baðstofa. It is easier to transfer the word, the house name, from one place to another than to move the house itself. If the ancient baðstofa used to be at the back it would have been pushed still further back and beyond the cluster of houses, but in other places it would have been moved or rebuilt up front. It is possible that they were always built as one of the front houses and never wandered elsewhere. The buildings in the eastern and northwestern Iceland, where two level, heavily turfed baðstofas lay parallel to the farmyard, might have been the oldest editions of a turf house, a legitimate offspring of the medieval skál and stofa. As time went by, the baðstofa got positioned to be the culmination in the experience of the farm.

In brief, most scholars – perhaps blinded by the steam mixed into a medieval smoke and irritated by documents’ dust - focused so much on the mystical journey of the baðstofa, “bað”- [bath]stofa, into modern daylight that they overlooked the intrinsic nature of the space and its magic.

22 Ibid., p. 131.
23 The chapter “The Bathhouse Transforms into Baðstofa” in a recently published Af jörðu (From the Earth) by Hjörleifur Stefánsson (Crymogea 2013), is focused on sources of warmth in the baðstofa and the potential of people and animals as sources of warmth (p. 72). For the longest time the human body, and sometimes that of animals, has been one of the main sources of warmth in Icelandic dwellings and in that way shaped it with regard to size and lifestyle.
The knoll is the farm’s home. The place for a farm was found in a rise in the landscape and in the lee of natural hills and then often partially dug into those hills to protect the farm from cooling and assaults of winter storms. This positioning also saved labour. If a farmstead is dug into a natural hill only the inner layer of a wall needs to be stacked. A mountainside serves the same purpose. Traditional turf houses are partially built with natural material with finite usability. With each rebuilding of houses or ruins there is an opportunity to move the buildings a bit, adjust them better to the place chosen for them with regards to wind, sun, approach, vistas, and the earth underneath the buildings. Usually the farm turns its gables towards the valley and away from the mountain, but the baðstofa turns towards the sun as much as possible. Settlement and regular rebuilding of houses with earth materials call for new supplies; little by little the farm site rises and takes on the appearance of a hill even where there was none beforehand.

A knowledgeable and inventive rebuilding, depending on the mastery, zeal and circumstances of the inhabitants, is an inseparable part of the turf house, woven into its essence and history, existential experience and chance to survive. It is obvious that the continuation and perseverance of turf buildings depends on cultivating comprehension of their underlying ideology as well as an organic knowledge of appropriate building materials and methods of working them. If this comprehension and know-how get lost, the inheritance and ontological connection get lost as well and what remains is but a pathetic stage scenery with an alien purpose. Strengur, a long piece, is cut into the soil with torfljár²⁴, a turf-cutter, and hnaus, a cube, is lifted out of the mire where thirty types of sedge, grass, moss and herbs grow and weave a tight, tough sward with their roots. Used and newly sourced stones, either lava cubes, cuboid slabs, sea worn stones or tuff are rearranged in walls or foundations. Turf and sod, bringing along a strong smell of iron infused mire, are nimbly stacked and the dirt tightly stamped with wall-mallets and stutull, a wooden rod shaped to access in-between spaces. The house-frame is complete, the roof

²⁴ Torfljár, the turf scythe, is the ultimate Icelandic tool, undisputedly forged by Icelandic men in their smithy, specially designed for a particular task that emerged when the inhabitants wrestled to extract building material from the wet and cold mires of the north. It is possible that this tool was used in the very first centuries of settlement, but it might also be that this tool came into use later. It is possible that in the earliest stages of habitation all turf was stung. Turf flakes could have been cut into short unit strips, which was a common cut for peat throughout the centuries in Northern Europe. Using a turf scythe to slice a strip of turf is, in many ways, a more effective method. It is peculiar that the oldest material specimens of this tool that are preserved in museums are only from the second half of the 19th century. In manuscripts of Jónsbók from the 16th century (AM 127 4to MG_3307 and AM02-0345_is_0052r), men are shown cutting whale using handsome knives with perpendicular handles; they look like turf scythes with short stock handles. Turf scythes were considered well suited for whale cutting; it is not a dissimilar sensation cutting strips of turf and cutting strips of whale blubber. The method could be such that first the end cuts are made and the piece figured, then a cut made from beneath with the turf scythe. An experienced turf cutter equipped with a well-made turf scythe would undoubtedly be a good whale cutter. It has always been considered a good husbandry to use the same tool for various tasks.
is made, windows and doors installed, furniture in place and so is the furnace, the chimney, and now the fire is lit. Handiwork performed from generation to generation evolves and is polished, variations become ever more diverse and more daring.

In the turf house’s building cycle, man and nature renew their agreement once or twice in each generation. One resident after another builds and rebuilds in the same spot, striving for harmony with the land and weather conditions. One can see this process as a ceremonial rite; the cleansing and rebirth of the site, the building and its inhabitants.\textsuperscript{25} Bærinn, the old farm, created the farm hill during its extended lifetime, became one with it while constantly vitalizing it. The Icelandic nation grew up on those hills; in the maze of farmhouses, the Icelanders became inhabitants of the land. Throughout the centuries, the green farmstead knolls served as a hallmark of the Icelandic countryside. The Icelandic farm is the messenger of the land, conveying vital messages.

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In the beginning the settlers built \textit{skáli}, a hall, the so-called \textit{eldaskáli}, a fire-hall. This was a simple hut with fire on the floor, meant for people as well as livestock. Centuries later the farm transformed into a complex, a mysterious and intricate cluster of houses, a part of the farm hill, dug into it wherever possible. At the end of the corridors \textit{baðstofa} came into being as a soft encasement around the warmth, although the fire had disappeared. Now, peat smoke rises from the stacked fire stead in a separate \textit{eldhús} (fire-house, kitchen) where the \textit{hangikjöt} (hung meat, smoked lamb) hangs from the smoke engulfed rafters and the flatbread flits on the embers. The \textit{Baðstofa} is always higher than the ground, the flagstones and entrance step outside. There are one or more steps into the \textit{baðstofa}, or a simple ladder leads to the \textit{baðstofa} loft. As the 20th century advanced it became just as likely that flatbreads, \textit{laufabrauð} (thin, crisp frybreads) and \textit{kleinur} (doughnuts) were baked on stoves and from ovens there would come the triplets \textit{jólagaka}, \textit{marmarakaka} and \textit{búnkaka} (variations on oven pancakes) - all this from a kitchen placed in the northern end of the \textit{baðstofa}, often with a window facing the west. When there is no heat from nearby chewing cows, pots are simmering close by the \textit{baðstofa}-roof and the kitchen window turns either to the front entrance or to the sun, in accordance with how clever the arrangement or the local customs.

\textsuperscript{25} The Shinto shrine in Ise, on the Honsu Island, Japan, dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu, was rebuilt for the 62\textsuperscript{nd} time in 2013. The shrine is rebuilt, from ground up, beside the old shrine every twenty years. It is exactly the same size, constructed from the same materials and using the same method. When the new shrine is finished, the old one is torn down and a new one erected there twenty years later, and so on. This process is part of a series of religious practices of the ancient Shinto religion in Japan. It is thought that the first shrine was built in 692. Regular rebuilding of clay houses in Africa is a feature of set religious social practices. The rebuilding of the Icelandic turf house and \textit{baðstofa} in the same place, approximately the same size, with the same materials, generation after generation, is part of a rebuilding custom existing in the vernacular architecture all across the world.
Glancing from afar or from above, one would see the smoke from a chimney and catch glimpses of green, a grey-brown or white roof over the cluster of houses, in itself being as if a second roof on the farm knoll. The colours of the farm-thorp derive from the colour variations of the grass, from juicy green summer colours acquiring grey-brown hue in the winter. Wherever the sward - a tight clump of dirt and roots - turns outwards in walls, one can discern multiple tones of earth-colours; ranging from yellowish, reddish brown, brown and reddish colours of earth mixed with clay, to gray-black veins of volcanic ash in turf from the volcanic regions of the country. In the stones there are variations of gray colour, from light gray to blackish gray. The texture of rock depends on varying effects of light and shadow according to its surface, whether it be smooth basalt, bubbly lava or sandy tuff. A rock might display colour variations due to shedding, chemical reactions and exposure - it might feature white deposits in fissures and smudges of reddish iron. The surface can be polished and smoothed from the friction with glaciers, water and sea. Multicoloured moss and lichen will have found a home on rocks. The surface of building materials is a key factor in experiencing dwelling spaces. Would it not be reason enough to preserve a house because the walls are stacked using sea-weathered lava rocks?

Where the colour on the gables is not grayish-brown shade of wood, they are tarred with blackish-brown wood tar; cemented gables as well as corrugated iron panels are light gray or light yellow. Inside, no surfaces are painted except the wooden panel in the stofa (formal living room) that is sometimes painted with linseed-oil paint in a classical colour scale, preferably gray-blue, but ceiling, casing, and baseboards are white (there you have The Blue Living Room, a symbolic prime refuge for the High Culture of European nobility and bourgeoisie!). In many houses stacked walls can be seen behind bare house frames. In the Iron Age style of the stone hearth kitchen the peat smoke left its traces in a soot-black trail up the chimney. Flora snow and ice is added to this colour. It should come as no surprise that most probably the Icelandic farm feels best when wrapped into the winter blanket.

A separate road slinks towards the farm until it reaches inside the farmyard walls where it turns into footpaths. There is a courtyard and its trodden surrounding bordered by cabbage and flowerbeds and a path leading to a well by the edge of the home pasture which then stretches to its boundaries, stacked turf and stonewalls. Along the buildings there are flat stones and slabs outside doors, the biggest by the main entrance; no farmhouse, no entrance is fully built until there is that handsome doorstep slab in place. On the horizon there are landmarks of time keeping, marking the passage of the sun and uniting time with the land and land with the farm: Midmorning Ridge, Noon Stone, Nightfall Peak. If this thread is spun it will weave a picture which shows the farm and its environment, and words which link the buildings to the earth: varpi, sund, rjáfur, skjár and skjól, ufsahella and gáttatorfa, tóft, halakekkir, snidda, strengur, torfusneppill, grútarlampi, hlóðir, rúmstokkur
og stafgól. The farm dwells in, or is swaddled in, the language. A vista showing a typical farm with all its attachments along with appropriate names and concepts would show the relation between the visual and the verbal, linking the word to the eye.

The farmstead, the house-thorp, the outhouses; the farm knoll... A living whole woven together, a three-dimensional understanding and material comprehension that has developed over the centuries of existing in the country, changing in accordance to the natural conditions and spirit of each era, but all along holding its own; among the most sophisticated contribution of the Arctic North to shaping the land and adjusting to nature.

It took the nurturing of twenty generations for the Icelandic bær to bloom. This blossoming of the Icelandic turf house heritage occurred from the 1880s up to 1920. During this time, Icelanders built their turf houses with confidence, affection, ambition and appropriate pride. The building skills were widely mastered and developed in accordance with the availability of building materials. When cultural inheritance and artistry bloom, people do not need a blueprint but rather know the methods intrinsically. They respect the silent agreement that each develop their own variation on a theme; the builders of the southern, western, northern and eastern turf houses all honing their intrinsic artistry while feeling the pulse of local conditions and materials. At the peak of this period there were such innovative contributions made that a newly built turf house built in this period can be said to have been the best dwelling place of all, by any standard. Corrugated iron was cleverly and tastefully adjusted to buildings in large parts of the west and south of Iceland. By 1900 most baðstofa and living rooms (stofa) in these regions had adopted corrugated iron to their roofs and even gables. A widely adopted novelty, giving good results, was to nail corrugated iron to beams and then cover them with turf. Along with the corrugated iron, colours got added to the farmstead. The colours were often pale yellow or gray on the gables, but Venetian red or moss-olive green on the casings, roof spoilers, doors and roofs. A brown black wood tar continued to be used on the timber gables, often turning a brown gray hue due to natural weathering. On the gables of the baðstofa and living rooms there were, by now, windows with six or nine window panes; the window frames were more often than not painted white. The measure of one stafgól (one bed length), was often added to elongate the baðstofa. Kitchen and stoves were installed, or, if the baðstofa was raised, a kitchen and stove were placed underneath. Additionally, coal stoves were sometimes added to the rooms. South or west of the farm knoll there were potato and cabbage patches, surrounded by turf walls, and in them grew rutabagas, cabbage, carrots, turnips and kale. Flower and tree gardens were established, shielded by the farmhouses, growing Rammfang (Tansy, Tanacetum...
vulgaris) Dagstjarna (Red Campion, Silene dioica), Næturffóla (Dame’s Violet, Hesperis matronalis), Sílfurhnappar (White Tansy, Achillea ptarmica), Kornblóm (Cornflower, Centaurea cyanus) and Eldlilja (Fire-lilly, Clivia mineata). At this point in time a farm is barely complete without rowan, red currant and black currant shrubs planted nearby.

In these blossoming times the picture is complete, everything is within reach, in its place within a balanced harmony. As expected in a place like this, the inhabitants are at their best, calm and centered. This is where the warmth resides. (il. 3)

During this time villages and individual houses developed and changed in tune with new possibilities but nonetheless in accordance with the country’s old building heritage or conversing with it. Front houses, replacing two or three gabled front houses, became relatively common in northern Iceland. These front houses were, in the north, usually one story, either built into a former site or with walls built at each end. Placed in the centre front were the front doors. Those were connected to the old corridors leading to a baðstofa and other buildings, the latter usually keeping their old form. In a front building there were most often a stofa (living room) and a storage room, one on each side of the front door; both had windows to the courtyard (hlað). In eastern Iceland people built two story baðstofa buildings with a side running along the courtyard; these buildings were often referred to as þverhús (perpendicular houses). In these buildings the baðstofa was usually upstairs, but a stofa (living room) kitchen, pantry, or storage room downstairs. Other buildings could in turn be accessed from this building. The high walls on each side were made with turf and stones. These front houses in the north and east usually had grass roofs and timber panelling. After the turn of the century þverhús
(perpendicular houses) began appearing in the southern and western Iceland as well. Eventually, there were hundreds of them, although today most have dissapeared. These buildings usually replaced the corridor building (gangnahús) and baðstofa and were built up in the gap created when those were torn down. In these newer buildings there were usually three rooms: kitchen, living room and baðstofa; the latter running along one end with a window to the courtyard, placed where the old baðstofa would previously have been. Towards the other end there was a short corridor leading to the kitchen and to the living room, but the baðstofa was accessible from the kitchen. All these rooms were paneled and painted. In the middle of the house there was a chimney, connected to a coal cooking stove on the kitchen side and a coal oven on the baðstofa side. Above was a storage loft, accessible by a narrow ladder. These houses were, almost without exception, clad and roofed with corrugated iron, and then painted.

In this last phase some variations in the building of traditional baðstofa become apparent. Free standing beds replaced inbuilt ones and, in some instances, people paneled the ceiling below the rafters, where before the spar-roof and a support beam had been visible. At times, this ceiling panel was painted. In population clusters most buildings were, for the longest time, turf houses or built in their style. These thorp, or village, buildings were often smaller than elsewhere, sometimes because of fewer options in keeping livestock. Buildings, such as storage-shacks, worksheds and huts, were often given a role related to fishing and the working of the fish. Frequently, in these thorps, homes were a cluster of two or three attached buildings, i.e. baðstofa, stacked fireplace kitchen, and a storage/workplace facility. In some instances the bær had become one house with the kitchen at the end of the baðstofa; a kitchen-house (eldaskáli); the development having arrived at its beginning point. One variation on the thorp buildings are the stonehouses. Here the baðstofa is in its place, surrounded by stacked stones; only cement has replaced the turf and the dirt.

All these variations and many others - which sprung from self-reliance, resourcefulness and desire for innovation- are an important part of the development and aesthetics of the bær and baðstofa. Once all data collection, analysis, interpretation and pertinent display of this period is complete, this evolitional history will reveal itself.

Each bær is different from the next even if both are unequivocally part of the same building style. Each building within the cluster has its own shape, differing from the other buildings in dimensions and size; however, they remain in inner agreement and harmony. This is the fundamental characteristic of the Icelandic farmstead, bær, and the key to its aesthetics. Each built its own way, in accordance with tradition.
A hundred years ago there were almost six thousand bær, farmsteads, built with turf, spread around the country. Each comprised ten to twenty other houses and outhouses and together eighty to hundred thousand turf buildings would have existed in this era. The heritage was so predominant and rich that there was almost one turf house, varying in age, for each person in the country. There is copious documentation for this last and most remarkable period of the Icelandic bær, and its swan song is still remembered by the oldest men.

The technology of photography spans the entire prime time of the turf houses. First, photography was in the hands of professionals and foreigners and then, with the advent of mass-produced cameras, in the hands of the majority of population. It is not the least in family photo albums but also in drawings, pictures and accounts of people who lived in the farms that the heritage has been preserved. Now we have the last chance to record and collect living knowledge of this heritage. It resides, with few exceptions, with the oldest generation of living Icelanders. Here is an important endeavour that cannot wait, ideal for young architects, ethnologists, historians and visual artists. In order to be able to ask the right questions, understand the answers and follow them through, it is important to have a grounded knowledge of the ideology of a turf house. It is important to discern the various modes of recollection and giving accounts when people describe a farm from their youth. Some will go house to house and draw a clear picture of the entire compound, even the outhouses; other will begin with an event or an object and spin a spiral like web. Handled right, both methods can give an equally good picture of a location and its particulars. In order to process and restore verbal information it is important to be able to draw and to have visual acuity.

In archives, district museums, The Icelandic National Museum and the Reykjavik Photography Museum there is a large collection of photographs, under spell, waiting to be worked on and given new life. It is an important and necessary documentary task to make copies of these pictures, enlarged, to use as a resource. The most important, however, is that they be interpreted with sensitivity, knowledge and insight, to show with them the variety, scope, depth and beauty of the blossoming building activity. It is difficult to photograph turf houses and do them justice. The line of the farm can be very long, often 40-60 meters long, which will create a strange three-dimensional effect if the pictures are taken from the side and from the front perspective the size dimensions get

26 The book titled Af jördu (From the Earth, Crymogea, 2013) by Hjörleifur Stefánsson, presents a comprehensive illustrated description of circa twenty turf houses, houses and ruins, mostly under the guardianship of Þjóðminjasafn Íslands (Icelandic National Museum). This book is an important milestone in a journey to further understanding and interpreting the heritage that remains seriously neglected and forsaken.
distorted as well. It is difficult to give a credible image of the entire compound unless with systematic series of pictures, also difficult to convey the feel for details and idiosyncratic use of materials. Light conditions and light sources made indoor photography difficult in the years when these houses were in their prime. Then, colour photography was introduced. When looking at a black and white photography of a turf house it is necessary to mentally colour it in the appropriate earth colours. Yet, a photograph is still our best tool for interpreting the Icelandic bær, a bounty for its reconstruction, if done right.

Few baðstofa sites have been preserved; there are rare pictures and rare drawings and paintings. All in all, the number of these baðstofa examples might reach approximately fifty. If photographs of all the baðstofa were assembled, had they been measured, the drawings and models created, our sense of their aesthetic message, their quietude and warmth would have been much more potent. One fine day it could happen that a number of talented and determined individuals got their act together and constructed a full-sized baðstofa - a model in the scale of 1:1. It could be displayed as a sculpture, an installation, a happening where people might start spinning wool, eat out of askur (wooden container), roll around in the beds and pee in the chamber pots. (il. 4)

The heyday of the Icelandic turf house needs to be staged with the right dose of aesthetics, scholarship, insight and cultivation of workmanship. That way the turf house inheritance could be revitalized and reinstated into our consciousness and into its deserved context of the world heritage. That way this building legacy of the north could be rescued from misinterpretations and looming disappearance and, at the same time, it could be made contemporary, secured a smooth landing on the basis of new solutions. Everything else that relates to this heritage in the past and the present is just an addendum to the main project.

But for this vision to become reality, it is necessary to approach the bær and the baðstofa with one’s eyes wide open, to listen to the dusk, to breath in

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4 Tempest Anderson, Hruni, a farmstead in south of Iceland, 1893, Reykjavik Municipal Museum, no. TEA 1, photo from a copy film
the silence, to feel the warmth. And then, why not follow the nose to the hang-ikjöt (smoked meat), hárfískur (dried fish), söl (dried seaweed), flathökur (flat-bread), smjör (butter), grautur (porridge), slátur (liver and blood pudding), sætsúpa (sweet soup), and fjallagrasamjölk (lichen-in-milk-soup). The Icelandic bær is the body’s architecture that has to be grasped with all the senses and preferably the sixth one too, and hereby grasping its spirit. Only then one could hear the sounds of old ghosts and jólasveinar (Christmas pranksters) whenever something odd happened. Fylgia (a spirit who accompanies a person), listing along the path or announcing its presence in the corridors, would be given special attention; one would glare at apparitions crawling along rafters and slithering into alleys; and listen to the howling of a ghost dog, the clattering of a seashell monster, the humming of rhymes from a deceased poet...

Why not try to decipher the messages sent by huldufólk, the hidden people, in the neighboring knoll? A raven’s croak, a rooster’s crow, Huginn and Muninn.

Translation from Icelandic: Dagný Þorgilsdóttir

Islandzkie gospodarstwo rolne – streszczenie

Regionalna architektura islandzka jest mocno zakorzeniona w tradycji i wyjątkowo jednolita pod względem techniki budowy począwszy od pierwszych dekad osadnictwa (850/900 r.) aż do połowy XX w. W tradycyjnej islandzkiej architekturze (domach pokrytych darnią) na znaczną skalę wykorzystywane były naturalne materiały, takie jak darn, kamienie i ziemia.

W niniejszym eseju zamierzam przeanalizować z estetycznego i architektonicznego punktu widzenia typowe cechy dla ostatniego, a zarazem odznaczającego się największym dopracowaniem okresu (1880-1920) w dziejach tej tradycji budowlanej. Największy nacisk położony został na wskazanie na przykładzie reprezentatywnej grupy domów typowych elementów dla tradycyjnej islandzkiej zabudowy wiejskiej (bær). W centrum takiego domostwa znajdować się musiał wielofunkcyjny pokój dzienny (baðstofa), wysoce rozwinięta przestrzeń, którą charakteryzuje zarówno funkcjonalność jak i walory estetyczne. Prawdopodobnie jest to najznaczniejszy wkład, tej najbardziej wysuniętej na północ części Europy, w rozwój architektury ludowej.

Key words: Vernacular architecture in Iceland, architecture of turf buildings, planning of traditional farmsteads or bær, aesthetics significance of the living room or baðstofa.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura regionalna Islandii, architektura domostw pokrytych darnią, planowanie tradycyjnych gospodarstw rolnych (bær), estetyczne znaczenie pokoju dziennego (baðstofa).