

THE NEW FARM



CONTEMPORARY
RURAL ARCHITECTURE

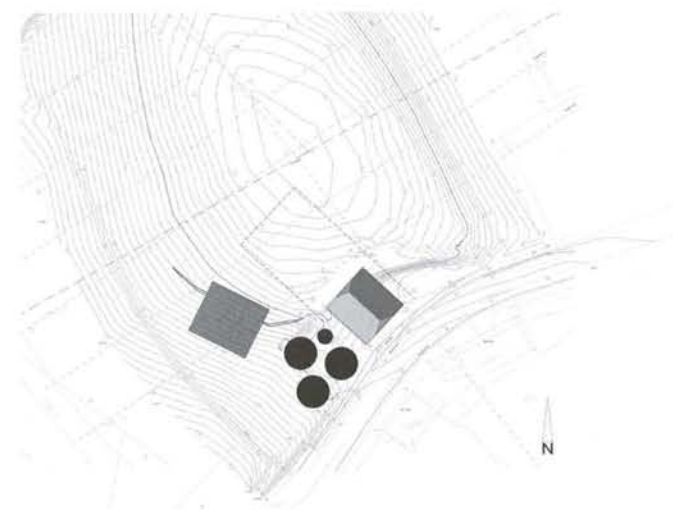
DANIEL P. GREGORY



In the Dolomites, the rugged mountain range that straddles the Austria–Italy border, steep, forested slopes meet luxuriant grassland along the valley floors. The road and railway tunnels, bridges, and towering peaks recall European travel posters from the 1920s. I drove south from Innsbruck, first along the fast and efficient autobahn and then on a winding two-lane road into the agricultural Val Pusteria, to the picturesque village of Rasen-Antholz, a collection of mostly traditional wood-and-stucco chalets. I was looking for the farm of Thomas Prugger, who owns the local lumber company, but I missed the turnoff and had to ask for directions at a local hotel. The proprietor said in perfect English, “The Prugger farm? That very modern building? Go back to the main road and turn right onto the driveway by the apple stand.” And there it was, behind an imposing square barn, which Prugger later told me dated from the Napoleonic era. The farmhouse is a dramatic modern cube that was designed by Innsbruck architect Reinhard Madritsch, of Madritsch Pfurtscheller, to function both as the Pruggers’ home and as the barn to support their small herd of Scottish Highland cattle. Wrapped in darkly weathered vertical wood strips, the three-story structure is set against a hill overlooking a wide pasture.

The driveway splits at the corner of the three-story structure: turn right for access to the bottom level and the stable, now holding farm equipment. Turn left and proceed partway up the slope to the entry on the middle floor, consisting of an L-shaped living-dining-kitchen zone that wraps around the hayloft. The top floor holds three bedrooms, a wide play hall, and a ramp leading up to a roof deck that’s hidden within the rectangular parapet. The cubist outline, wide window walls, open spans, and rooftop ramp bring to mind a modern icon like Le Corbusier’s 1930 Villa Savoye, near Paris. This barn-house is its country cousin—not just a “machine for living,” as in Le Corbusier’s famous phrase, but a “machine for living and farming.” Interior walls alternate between stone and eye-catching, horizontally layered recycled timbers.

The twenty-one-acre farm—five acres of pasture and sixteen of forest—grows potatoes and apples. Until recently the cattle grazed in the adjacent field. Prugger, a hang glider in his free time, has a very direct and no-nonsense approach to the farm. As he was showing me the hayloft, I asked him where the cattle were. With wry understatement, he said, “The cattle are in there,” pointing to the freezer. The pasturing didn’t work out as they had planned, but at least there was beef for the winter!



The cattle barn is also the house at contemporary and cubic Prugger Farm in the Dolomites of northern Italy. You pass the gabled Napoleonic barn to get to the house.



The area is historically important, which affected the siting; for example, on the little hill behind the house is a Mussolini-era bunker, where the children like to play. The existing farm buildings were too dilapidated to be saved, so starting over was necessary. Prugger and Madritsch wanted to build a structure that would quietly and closely fit into the landscape as a single element and not signal its use to the outside world. The resulting simple, geometric design draws inspiration from the big square Napoleonic barn across the driveway. You can make out the stable's vehicle entrances at the bottom and the wide window wall in the living room on the floor above, but from a distance the building reads as a single unit. The topography helps separate living and working, with the kitchen-dining area opening to outdoor living space on the hillside, away from the lower-level entrance to the stable. For another approach to combining functions in a single structure, compare this design to Oosterhout Farm, described in a later chapter.







Highland cattle used to call this modern farm home. Though wrapped in a contemporary package, the design is age-old: the stable digs into the hill at the bottom, while the floors above contain the living areas. At the top is a roof deck camouflaged within the building's parapet, like a twenty-first-century battlement.