

HOME AND
ARCHITECTURAL

Volume 20 No 5

\$9.95

Trendsideas.com

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A village atmosphere

When converting this contemporary home into the footprint of a house previously on the site, the architect designed a disparate series of towers and boxes





Previous pages: This home has been built to look like a series of separate towers from the street. The left tower has a garage partly below ground level with living spaces above and the master suite on the top level. A double-height office space is provided in the tower on the right.

Above: Landscaping is used to draw attention to the front entry of the house.

As our cities grow, so too does the pressure on finding land suitable for building on. Add to this council restrictions imposed to safeguard the rights of residents, and it's easy to see why contemporary urban architecture is becoming increasingly challenging.

The original home constructed on this site had burnt down and council by-laws required that any new building would be restricted to using the existing footprint.

Architect Dion McCarthy of Designarc had previously designed a house for the owners of this site when they asked him to take on the project.

"The husband is an enthusiastic admirer of modernist architecture, but his wife prefers a house with a warmer, more comfortable feel. She wanted her home to be a safe haven, rather than a wide-open, glass showcase," says McCarthy.

"To address her concerns, yet still adhere to the contemporary theme, we came up with a design that includes four disparate towers and boxes – a village concept where the different elements speak to each other."

The design loosely draws its inspiration from the hill villages of Tuscany with their many towers. In this case, each structure contains a living



space with a different function and is defined by the materials it is finished in.

Two plastered towers flank the front entrance, living rooms and the upstairs master suite to the left and an office on the right.

In the French limestone-clad tower in the center of the house – and representing the village square – is a double-height entry foyer and the main hallway and staircase. Hidden from the street, behind the three other the structures, a shorter, plastered tower contains spare bedrooms and bathrooms.

“A limited palette of materials and colors contributes to the contemporary appearance of the

Above: French limestone tiles are used to clad the interior and exterior of the central tower with its double-height atrium. The light fitting was custom-designed. The stainless steel blades reflect light around the space.

Left: The foyer flows through to a small courtyard on one side of the house. This opening helps introduce additional light into the center of the space.



Above: The living room is above ground level, but with floor to ceiling windows, the room feels close to the landscaping. The tall wood pillars are centered over the garage below and create a feature of the living room from the street.

house," says the architect.

"However, materials were chosen to ensure it feels warm and welcoming, rather than formal and antiseptic. This simplicity also helps to tone down the active layout of the house."

To maintain the theme, interior and exterior finishes are the same throughout the house.

For the walls of the plastered towers, the architect chose warm, earthy Tuscan colors, which complement the warmth of wood cabinetry built into most rooms. Cabinetry and floors are all in Anegre – a light-colored wood with a distinctive grain pattern.

To introduce light and air into the house, most rooms have large sliding or French doors that open onto courtyards. Few of the rooms have opening windows, instead relying on air circulation through the doors from the courtyards.

"Because the site was hemmed in by neighbors, and we had to work within the existing footprint, landscaping was very important to ensure the whole concept worked," says McCarthy.

"We worked closely with the landscape architect to create a seamless whole. A large proportion of the experience of the house is the expression of the landscaping," he says.



Above: This kitchen includes several, separate preparation areas, including a large square island in the center.

Far left: In the family room, the large wood panel slides away to reveal a plasma screen and home entertainment center.

Left: Anegre wood features in the kitchen cabinetry, flooring and other built-in furniture in the house.





Above: Built-in wood cabinetry and the wood floors add warmth to the dining room. Soft tones, reminiscent of the Tuscan landscape, are used on the plastered walls.

Facing page above: Glazing and stainless steel straps are combined to create a staircase in the center of the house. Its light, transparent nature ensures it is unobtrusive in the space.

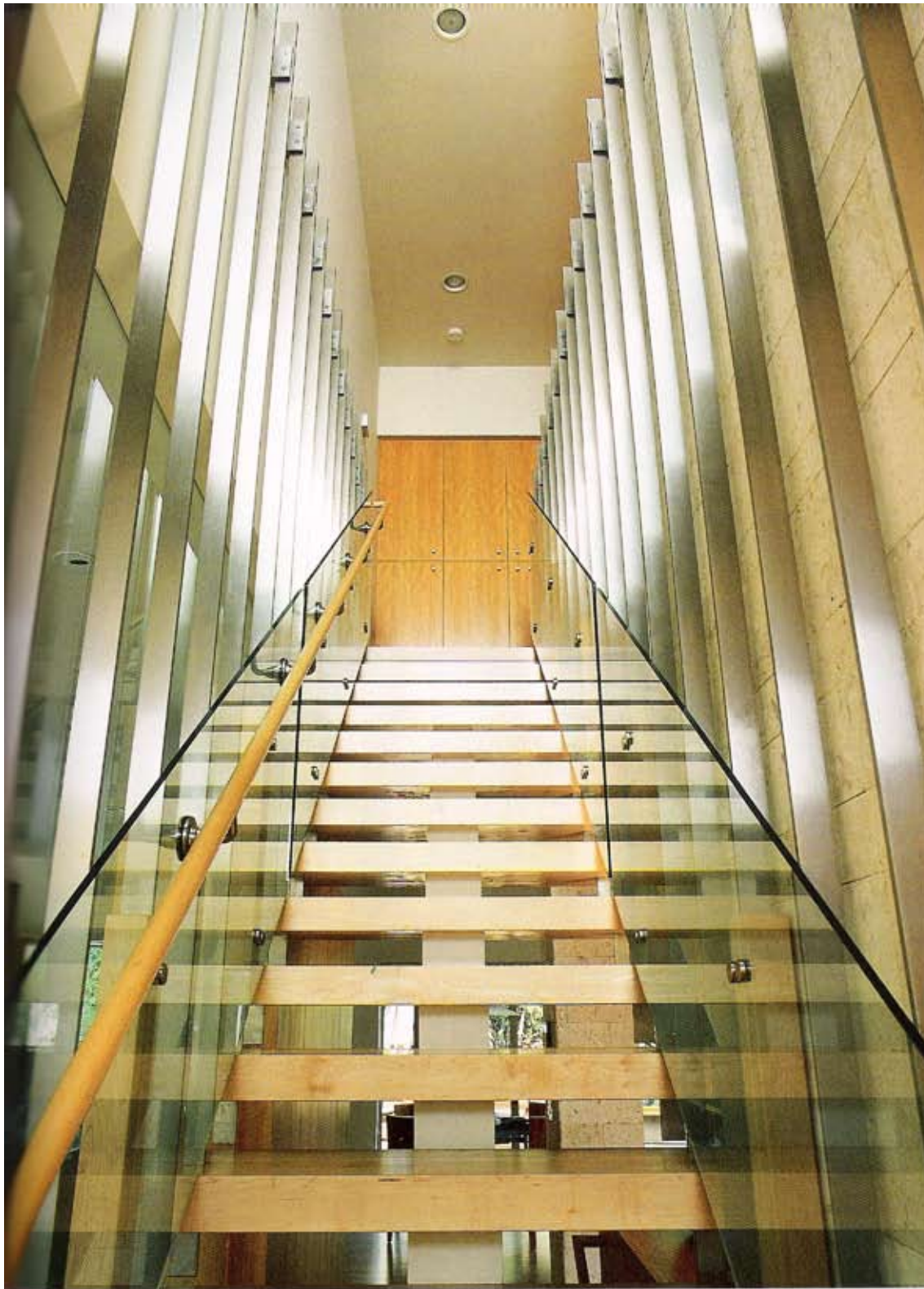
Landscaping introduces both formality and informality into different parts of the garden, adds texture and interest, breaks up the axis of the house, and creates and highlights the entry point.

"By working with the landscape designer, we have ensured that there are unobstructed views, both from inside looking out and from outside looking in. For example, by using fixed glazing and hidden window frames, nothing distracts the eye when looking into or out of the house.

"The effect is that wherever you are in the house, you feel close to and part of the garden," McCarthy says.

Even the staircase to the upper level is designed to maintain the transparency of the house. Positioned to one side of the stone tower behind the dining room, it is constructed from slotted stainless steel straps and fixed glass, and is suspended from the building structure of the upper level. Laminated maple treads add rigidity to the staircase.

Upstairs in the master suite a fireplace introduces warmth to the bedroom. Windows here are high enough off the floor to block out the street while at the same time framing distant views of skyscrapers on the city skyline.



Architect and kitchen design:
Dion McCarthy, Designarc
(Los Angeles)

Landscape architect: Michael
Schneider, Orange Street Studio

Main contractor:
Kambur Development

Structural engineer:
Dan Echeto

Roof: Elite Roofing

Door and window joinery:
Aluminum from Fleetwood

Tiles: Beige limestone from
European Stone Concepts

Flooring: Beech from
M&F Hardwood Floors

Paint: Benjamin Moore

Lighting: Halo

Heating: Split System from
Carrier Airconditioning

Home theater: Wraytel

**Kitchen and bathroom
cabinetry manufacturer:**
Pico Cabinets

Kitchen cabinets: Anegre

Countertops and backsplash:
Green granite from Roma Marble

Faucets: KWL

Oven, cooktop and ventilation:
Thermador

Microwave: Dacor

Refrigerator: Sub-Zero

Dishwasher: Bosch

Bathroom basin: Kohler

Bathroom faucets: Harden

Photography by
Kallan MacLeod



Legend for plan: 1 entry, 2 living
room, 3 dining room, 4 kitchen,
5 bedroom, 6 bathroom, 7
music room, 8 office, 9 family
room.

Far left: With a fireplace, the
master bedroom can become a
cosy retreat.

Left: Like the rest of the house,
the bathroom makes use of
stainless steel, glass and wood.

