

# INTERIORS

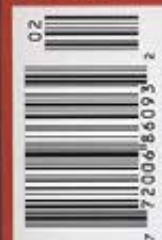
CANADIAN

Homes  
that define  
the good life



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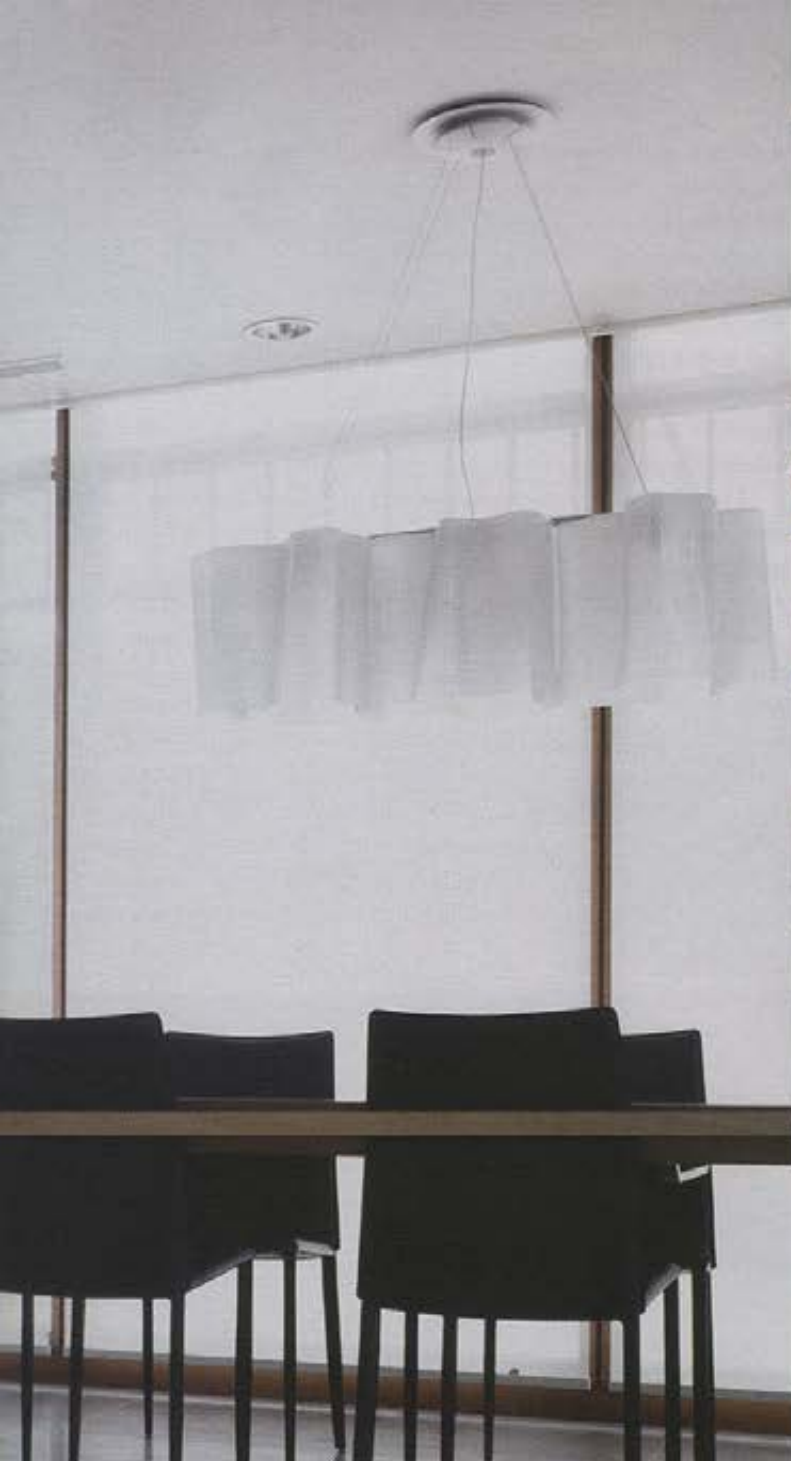


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About a life well lived





**Toronto's 3rd Uncle Design has designed a home for a family of six that is functional yet elegant, modern with a richness of architecture and materials that is much more than the sum of its parts.**

**By Peter Sobchak** Photos by Andrej Kopac

Every architectural firm wants to create residential spaces that are sensitive to the way the client lives. But for those practicing fashionable Modernism, is it possible to design a warm, organic structure that accommodates the evolving needs of a young family?

A new residential project by 3rd Uncle Design, who were selected by Toronto's Interior Design Show as its 2005 Designer of the Year, proves not only that this can be done, but that it can be done with aplomb.

A private residence for a family of six, the approximately 11,000-square-foot structure includes two stories and a basement. The original bungalow, situated along the Humber River in Etobicoke, a west end suburb of Toronto, was torn down and this new house built with its own distinct identity, yet respecting the alignments and height restrictions of other houses on the street. Modern in both spirit and body, the front of the house expresses a horizontal order, emphasized by the overhanging brow of the flat roof, wood siding and a continuous band of windows, which overlook a park. An exterior cladding composed of sapelli wood, copper, and glass provides a unique warmth and grace.

Inside, spaces are open, interconnected and defined by a skeleton composed of concrete floors and steel posts and beams, intended to maximize





the clear span between walls. The plan of the house, organized along a central axis which runs the length of the property from the entry to the end of the backyard, is really a series of exterior and interior spaces arranged in an L shape, providing views through the private garden and back onto itself.

"The goal was to create areas without creating walls," explains Arriz Hassam, principal in charge of the project. "The challenge then became, how do you define spaces within such an open plan?" The team solved this by using a combination of effects, for example having different materials like stone and wood converging to demarcate space, as well as raising or lowering levels a step or two to accentuate the transitions between areas.

The depth of the house is exaggerated by a raised Algonquin Ledge rock platform running along the central axis that forms a wide passage incorporating the circulation stair and the dining area stage. "We tried to prolong the experience of the space by extending lines right through the house from the front of the lot into the backyard," says Hassam. And while this plinth divides the interior spaces into mudroom, kitchen and living room areas on one side and the grand room, garden, pool area and backyard on the other, "spaces unfold, instead of flashing by," as Hassam puts it.

The core of the vertical atrium space comprises a two-storey African erimoe wood slab, counterbalanced by a lean steel and glass stair, (embellished by a graceful, continuous stainless steel handrail running like a ribbon from the basement all the way up to the second floor and into the master suite). A landing at the top of the stairs provides a common area for the







Previous spread left > The long dining platform and industrial-style steel and glass staircase are framed on two sides by glass which provides views both out to the yard and back in on itself, giving the house transparency and flooding the atrium with natural light. Previous spread right > An aluminum louvered screen provides shade during the day, while emphasizing the lantern effect of the house at night. Above left > While the exterior emphasizes the horizontal plane, the interior emphasizes the vertical dimension of the atrium, created by the stairwell and the etimoe slab. Below left > The children's hallway on the second floor has built-in benches with horizontal windows that frame a view of the garden and pool. All windows and doors in the house are custom-made using high-level thermal insulated glazing. Above > The majestic master suite bathroom features slabs of Algonquin Ledge rock on the floors and walls.

kids to play together. To the right of the staircase, clad in maple, is the children's hall and their bedrooms along the front of the house. To the left an intimate passage, created by a jatoba wood panelled full-height library, leads to the master suite and studio.

Storage and wardrobes concealed behind full-height millwork panels in the bedrooms and corridors are incorporated so seamlessly you can't tell the difference between closets or simple panelling. The team wanted to hide anything that could clutter or get in the way of the experience of the space, including door handles and even hinges. "The design of the house had to be sophisticated enough to discreetly hide the things you don't want to see but still need," explains Hassam.

The extensive use of glass, while helping to dissolve transitions between interior and exterior spaces, produced challenges in controlling natural light, which were resolved by crafting layers into the full-height curtain wall. The bottom part, made of clear heat mirror glazing, frames the garden and opens up relationships back to the inside, while the upper layer is

composed of a textured glass that diffuses light. Suspended about two feet in front of the glass is an aluminum louvered screen that provides shade from the sun while allowing natural light to enter and bathe the interior stairwell down to the basement. At night the house virtually glows, acting as a giant illuminated lantern for the garden.

It is invigorating to come across a project that so fully embodies a firm's philosophy. "If you just follow the idea of a flow chart of spaces that basically describe functions and solve problems, you will end up with shitty spaces," says Hassam. There's nothing rich about just solving problems, and this house has a richness beyond the sum of its parts.

"Architecture is more than solving problems," enthuses Hassam. "It is the vessel that inspires your life. Everything from the qualities of light to the feel of a handrail, framing views to the outside because they remind you of nature, running your hand along a wall because you like the feel of the material." Solving problems has nothing to do with desire, and this house extols the desire for a life well lived. □