


GRAND VISION

A RAMBLING MODERN HOME EMBRACES FAMILY LIVING IN A BIG WAY.

By AMY VERNER | Photography by STACEY BRANDFORD



Reddish sapele wood panelling and automated natural linen window coverings bring warmth into this entertaining space. **Sofa**, Minotti; **Eames stool**, Quasi Modo; **Hans Wegner by Carl Hansen lounge chairs**, Kiosk; **rug**, Elte; **embroidered throw pillows**, resin bowl, Hollace Cluny.



Pause to consider that a family of five (including three teenagers) actually lives in this übermodern house; as in, they loaf around, share meals, throw parties, and hold band practices. While it may look like a showhouse, there's certainly a lot of living going on beneath its roof.

It's a stunning example of what happens when contemporary design is scaled to accommodate a series of intimate and luxurious livable spaces.

Situated on a one-acre property north of Toronto, the sprawling 14,000-square-foot residence is surrounded by sweeping gardens and serene water installations.

The homeowners had been living down the street when the original circa-1960s home went on the market. "My wife and I went for a walk and saw the For Sale sign," one owner recalls. "By evening, we owned the place."

Next, he called up an old high-school

The family of five eats most of their meals in the kitchen at this elegantly simple European oak table that seats up to 10, reserving the dining room for more formal occasions. **Table**, Klaus by Nienkämper; **light**, Artemide; **chairs**, Kiosk.



Used judiciously, colour punches up an otherwise minimal aesthetic. Here, the soft red of the island's cutout adds contrast to the white lacquer and steel kitchen. **Kitchen, Bulthaup; faucets, Franke; BDDW stools, Hollice Cluny; white bowls, Elte.**

friend from South Africa, Trevor Abramson, whose firm Abramson Teiger Architects is located in Los Angeles.

"Trevor's father, Dennis, was one of the top architects in South Africa, and when I thought of the perfect house, I knew I wanted one like his," says the homeowner.

When Abramson came for a visit, he felt the house wasn't ideally oriented on the double lot to maximize light and views, and he suggested tearing it down.

"Particularly in winter, the sun is important," says Abramson. "We do bright, open and airy spaces. That only works if you can get good light."

The homeowner offered little resistance, putting his faith in Abramson's designs. "We didn't really know what we wanted, but he said, 'I'll do a beautiful modern house; you just have to leave it up to me.'"

Abramson kept his word. Spread out over three storeys, the house has all the markings of West Coast cool — light-filled, open concept, clean lines — yet it's also tailor-made for an all-weather climate. In warmer months, the home spills easily into the garden with large doorways and windows for seamless



LEFT: In the studio, 3rd Uncle principal designer Arriz Hassam covered a key wall (it wraps around into the breakfast area) in black slate mosaic tile and included a flat slab in the

centre for chalk writing and drawing. The quarter-sawn white oak workstation injects texture and interest. **ABOVE:** Views to the vast gardens are framed by large doors and picture windows,

creating a gallery-like feel. A bank of skylights and recessed lights in niches of the dropped ceiling offer ample lighting levels. **Contractor, Ross Gilmore, SCE Construction.**

"The biggest challenge was how to make such a large home habitable and to create intimate moments and spaces that could be ritualized"

—ARRIZ HASSAM, principal, 3rd Uncle Design

Tactile materials and organic shapes add to the drama of the sunken double-height living room. Onyx is used in two ways, crushed and layered above the aquarium and polished for the extended hearth. Leather floor tiles are a sumptuous touch. Pony rug, Angus & Company; sofa, Minotti; white bowls, Elte; black resin bowl, Hollace Cluny.



Handmade African tiles form a dramatic feature wall in the principal bathroom, where a Japanese-style wood soaker tub invites Zen-like relaxation. The graphic colour-blocking injects loads of character into the minimalist space. **Tub**, William Garvey; **faucet**, Lefroy Brooks; **floor tiles**, Stone Tile.

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indoor-outdoor living. And, in cooler weather, well-considered sightlines keep the space connected to the outside. Wide hallways and ample breathing space add to the sense of luxury.

With Abramson's impressive backdrop in place — thanks to the skilled work of construction manager Ross Gilmore of SCE Construction — it was time to play up the wow factor. Toronto design firm 3rd Uncle Design was called in to complete the vision. Principal designer Arriz Hassam was sensitive to the practical, day-to-day requirements of the house and achieved a consistent visual flow throughout the home by installing built-ins in nearly every room. Working closely with the homeowner, Hassam guided the choice of all furniture, picking out strong pieces that would echo the cutting-edge design of the house and at the same time contribute to

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TOP LEFT: Well designed built-ins like this walnut console in the principal bedroom allowed Hassam to control proportion and scale. *Cesta lantern* by Santa & Cole, *OneTwenty Modern*. TOP RIGHT: In the upstairs den, photography by Colin Faulkner and a whimsical area rug suggest a more personalized context for iconic mid-century modern pieces like the Noguchi table and Arco lamp. *B&B Italia easy chair*, *Kiosk*; *rug*, *Weavers Art*.

ABOVE: With its wall of windows looking out onto the manicured grounds, the principal bedroom needs little in the way of decorative accent. The effortless style of the leather and walnut bed and timeless Saarinen Womb chair feel natural in the space. *Bedding*, *Elte*. LEFT: The 16'-long saltwater reef tank (left) separates the living room from the indoor pool area. At night, the pool lighting casts a gorgeous glow back into the house.

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its livability. Hassam also took care to repeat natural textures: wood panelling, onyx-covered walls, leather floor tiles, and cool slate.

For all the added recreational and entertainment value — including a squash court and a soundproof music room for the three teenagers — 3rd Uncle focused on reinforcing quality and functionality.

“The building itself is quite monumental in scale; it’s kind of like a showroom,” says Hassam. “So the idea was to bring in colour and texture, and create spaces of intimate interaction within the larger volume of space.”

One such dichotomy of surfaces plays out in the formal living room, which boasts a wall of rear-illuminated onyx — that the homeowner jokingly likens to the inside wafer of a Kit Kat — and a polished slab of the same material along the fireplace wall. Leather floor tiles and a ponyskin rug round out the decadent mix.

Far subtler are the punctuations of colour, which often appear in unexpected places — like the muted red on the underside of the kitchen island.

But while the palette goes light on vibrant hues and punchy prints, one feature makes quite a splash. The

homeowner knew he wanted both an aquarium and an indoor pool; he just had no idea that the 16-foot tank would ultimately double as both the living room centerpiece and a watery window into the double-storey pool area.

Indeed, the fish tank even makes an appearance in *Repo Men*, the sci-fi thriller from earlier this year starring Jude Law. The family moved out for a couple of days so that the home could play the role of a futuristic Toronto apartment.

In real life, the furnishings Hassam chose are less space age, more classic contemporary, from Wegner to Cherner to BDDW. But the homeowner, who works in venture capital and technology, says he’s less preoccupied with names than good design. “We have people coming over who say, ‘That’s a whatever,’ but we’re the opposite of that,” he says.

For Hassam, the point of including such recognizable pieces boiled down to creating a spirited mix and a classic elegance. “We were looking for pieces that had character, were made well and would complement the architectural style,” he explains.

“We looked at the proportions of everything being made or bought,” he says. “That’s why we needed to do so much custom work ... what we were designing was how the space was going to be occupied and experienced.”

“The biggest challenge was how to make such a large home habitable and to create intimate moments and spaces that could be ritualized — for dinners, gatherings and having conversations,” he continues.

Hassam considers the project, which took nearly a year to complete, an immense success, largely thanks to the seamless integration of architectural engineering and the aesthetic. And, four years after moving in, the homeowner is still able to discover new things. “That’s the interesting part,” he says, citing his newfound appreciation of the kids’ music room in the basement. “I went down there and realized that it’s such a great space.”

The house has exceeded his expectations. “In many cases, I didn’t have the imagination to see what it would be like in the end,” he says. “It’s a beautiful physical object, that’s what it is. It’s a piece of art.” **H&H**