

A photograph of a modern house at night. The house features large, multi-paned windows that are brightly lit from within, showing a living room with a sofa and a dining area. The exterior of the house is dark, and the sky is a deep blue. In the foreground, there is a wooden deck with a dining table and chairs. The overall atmosphere is warm and inviting.

Discovering Your Place
Called Home

Creating
THE
Inspired House

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Urban Innovation

In seaside communities, it's not too surprising to find a boldly modern house in the pageant of styles lining the beach. But the Los Angeles suburb of Venice isn't just any shoreline town, and the home of architects David Hertz and Stacy Fong isn't just any modern house. Certainly the design is beautiful and the spaces are sublime. But the thing that really distinguishes this house is the widespread use of a building material that David invented. The house represents more than the couple's commitment to making a healthy, creative place in the city where they can raise their children. It's also a kind of research-and-development lab in David's quest for greener, more sustainable architecture.

Instead of rooms, tranquility. Even in this unrestrained space, there are well-defined areas to pause for a meal, a book, or a quiet conversation. This kind of design accommodates large groups or intimate gatherings equally.



Doors with duties. The massive garden gate is the equal of any challenge lurking in the city streets. Inside the courtyard, however, entry doors are fashioned from welcoming wood and sized for the age group that might be visiting.

Quiet on the set. In a city neighborhood renowned for cars, it may be nightfall before you get a clear view of the street side of the house.

UP REALLY CLOSE

Signs of Progress



Custom tiles, which can be made in any size and with remarkable accuracy, were among the first and easiest experiments with Syndecrete[®], the concretelike synthetic building material invented by David Hertz.

Like a talisman for the entire project, these prototype tiles remind Stacy and David that their lifestyle is embossed into the very fabric of the house.

Inspired Prototype

In 1994, when a tiny splinter lot came up for sale in Venice's historic canal district, David and Stacy threw in a lowball bid. What they won was the opportunity to work like dogs for 90 days to nail down financing and win a zoning variance that would allow them to convert a city parking requirement into a courtyard.

Clearly from the "cake-and-eat-it-too school," David envisioned a new kind of urban, family architecture and a showcase for the couple's design practice. The house would also be a live-in R&D project for their company, Syndesis Inc., which David launched in 1983 to market a line of environmentally sensitive building materials. The star product, Syndecrete, is a blend of specially formulated cements and recycled industrial waste that can be cast into almost anything. The Venice house allowed David, an experienced builder, and Stacy, a furniture maker, to test this new material in many applications, including bathtubs, counters, showers, tiles, sinks, and furniture.

When Rooms Aren't Just Four Corners

Materials by themselves, even innovative and very interesting ones, don't guarantee quality architecture. The modern feel of this house comes from David's skillful use of planes and surfaces to define spaces without separating them. Walls start and stop to create a sculpted flow of space rather than traditional room boundaries. In this composition, walls don't contain space so much as organize movement.

This is the thinking behind a wall clad in Syndeconcrete tiles that starts to the left of the front door, runs all the way to the back of the house, and extends upward through the roof. Because it does so much on so many levels, David calls this the Fanatical Wall. In addition to defining the stairs and organizing traffic flow around the house, this central wall contains the water pipes, waste lines, and electrical cables while also providing the thermal mass needed to maintain even air temperatures. Because the wall eliminates the need for ducts, ceilings can be higher and the flow of space more fluid. What might normally be a simple mechanical wall has been turned into a central design element that establishes architectural themes and spatial relationships throughout the house.



The power of space. Planes and surfaces seem to float and slide in the fluid space of this house. A central "Fanatical Wall" clad with a material invented by the architect anchors the entire design.

Following the Fanatical Wall

As they arrive, guests confront a hint of the Fanatical Wall teamed up with a Syndeconcrete gate heavy enough to discourage unwelcome intruders. But just inside this formidable entry lies a cozy little courtyard focused on two front doors: a standard size for adults and another, Alice-in-Wonderland size, for children. This whimsical entry opens directly into the social center of the house: kitchen, dining room, a formal fireplace area, and a sunken media den. A central hallway leads to a rear courtyard.

Meals, homework, and art projects take place around the Syndeconcrete dining table (see the photo on p. 32) or at the polished concrete kitchen counter. Within easy earshot, David and Stacy can sit by the fire, read a book in the den, or work in the office overhanging the area. For those rainy days, protected space in the courtyard shares a large window with the media den. Can life get any better than working on your roller-blade moves while watching MTV?

Modern sidelights. Tempered glass, properly engineered, can support significant loads. This front entry design further the impression that the solid planes in this house are supported by the flow of space around them.



View from the courtyard. This view through a window in the den looks all the way through the open first floor to the front door. The den ceiling extends into a bookshelf.

At the top of the stairs, the Fanatical Wall is drenched in sunlight as it runs along one side of a bridge that leads to the kids' bedrooms and bath at the rear of the house. In the front, next to the office, the wall incorporates a final half-flight of stairs leading up to the urbanite's dream bedroom suite. A runway of closets precedes a master bathroom with custom-cast everything, right down to the tiles. In the bedroom, wraparound windows open onto a rooftop playground with sweeping views, a hot tub, fireplace, greenhouse, and even a little driving range. Stacy is passionate about golf, and David's favorite place in the whole house is the sitting area off the bedroom. From this urban eerie, Stacy and David can keep an eye on their family, their house, and their city, enjoying the rooftop vistas without any loss of privacy.

And that's just Phase One.

Growth Means Change

As teenage frenzy inexorably replaces the playgroup shuffle, the family faces a growing need for that rarest of city commodities—space. So when the neighboring lot came on the market, they snapped it up. Just as the first phase was organized around David's central wall, the second and final configuration will be two buildings organized around a central pool courtyard.



Deep space and warm materials. Generous natural light and the use of organic materials soften the cold mass of concrete. The contrast between concrete and wood brings out the best in each.

Half flight up to the master bedroom. Moving up through the house, the Fanatical Wall leads to the master bedroom suite and the rooftop playground.



Like a Polynesian hut. Motivation for getting out of bed includes lounging under the stars, sitting by the fire, or soaking in a hot tub. The wraparound windows and extended roof create the ambiance of an island hut.

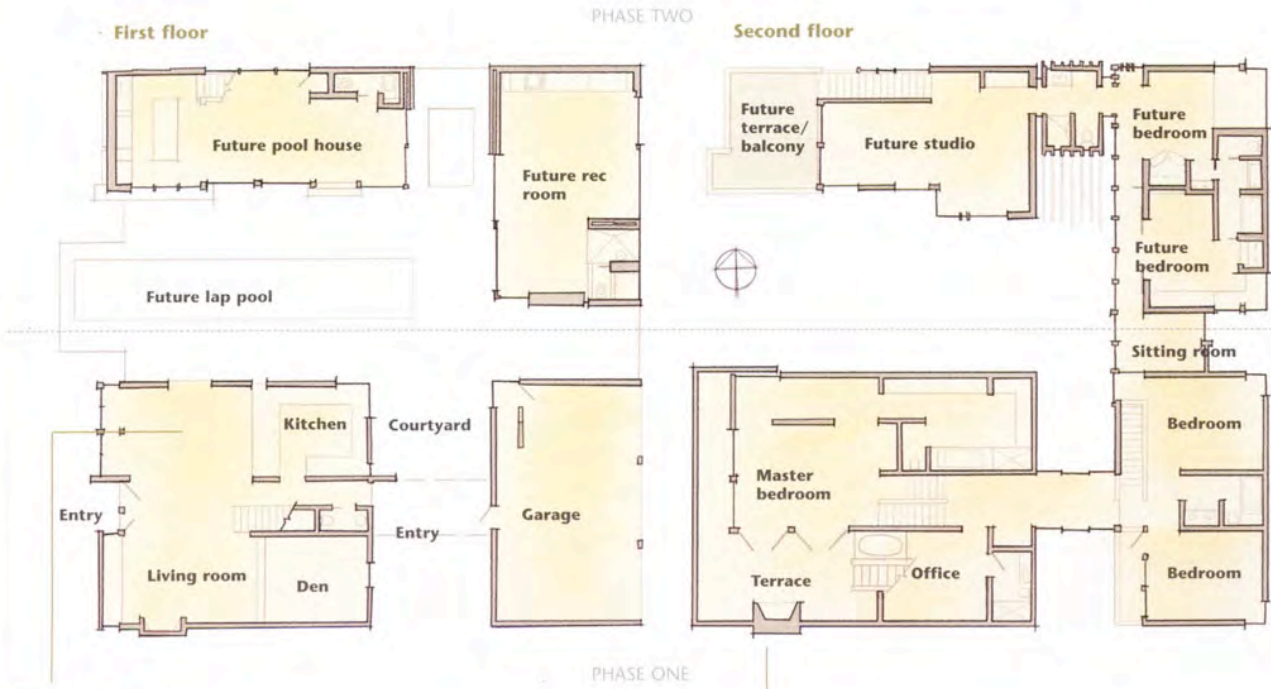


Floor Plan

Minimal Walls Shape the Flow of Space

This house is held up by the fewest possible walls. In a crowded city, open-ended space is the ultimate luxury, and this design is careful to preserve full front-to-back and side-to-side vistas within two small urban lots. In the soon-to-be-completed second phase, Hertz uses even fewer walls than in the original house and every room enjoys internal views of the courtyard and pool.

Entry



Dining room



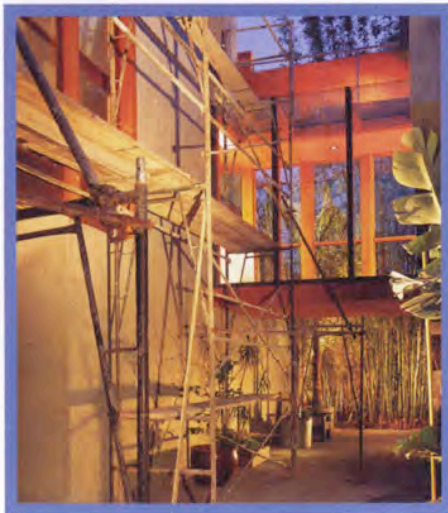
David credits a trip to Belize for this layout idea but it has just as much to do with family planning. From a big family herself, Stacy believes the best antidote for city temptations is creating better alternatives at home. In their expanded design, all ground-floor rooms will open onto the courtyard. To further blur the boundary between inside and out, walls will be a transparent weave of steel, glass, and ipé—a sustainably harvested rainforest wood. The goal is to create a place where teens have enough breathing space to hang even while adults are socializing not too nearby.

For David and Stacy, innovation will always be the inspiration. Whether it's a better way to raise an urban family or a new process for recycling industrial waste, these architects/inventors/builders will bring creativity and energy to the challenge. Such an exciting atmosphere might even influence the teenagers. Indeed, the most far-reaching consequence of these innovations may well be a new generation of pioneering designers/builders.



Architects do closets. If you allow them to make a closet into art, most architects will design beautiful storage, like this under-stair built-in.

ARCHITECT'S CORNER



LIVING THROUGH CONSTRUCTION

Construction brings dust, noise, and an inevitable disruption to normal routines. But for architects Stacy Fong and David Hertz, staying put as their house was enlarged seemed natural. David had grown up around construction—he helped his father build Hollywood movie sets and was used to tinkering and inventing—so there was only a little difference between what was on the drawing board and what was being assembled. Construction did not disrupt their lives so much as it validated them: Every dusty day brought them one step closer to the inspired house they had envisioned.