

10322 shady river



Cathy Donaldson had driven past this house a hundred times before she finally persuaded her husband, Duncan, to take a look.

'We were renting a house on the same street, loved the neighborhood and **something about the low-slung, mid-century modern home pricked my interest,**' she says. Duncan was not so sure. The house was built in 1965 and like many houses of this era it turned its back to the street. Just a long brick wall with no windows and a simple gate greeted the dog-walkers on their daily round.



'It was only once we stepped through the gate that we really understood the house,' says Duncan describing the large, sunny, courtyard flanked by walls of glass that greeted them. Rather than projecting itself onto the street the house guarded the privacy of its occupants while allowing glass windows and doors to bring light and a sense of transparency to the home.

“ I've always loved mid-century modern architecture and this was our chance to create a modern family house bursting with character. ”

'Perhaps it appealed to our British sense of modesty,' laughs Duncan. At the time the courtyard was an overgrown jungle but today it is a spacious outdoor living room where the family gather around the fire pit or their three young girls play safely contained by the gate.

'When we bought the house it was like a time capsule,' says Cathy. 'It had hardly been touched in 60 years and there was cedar cladding everywhere.' The kitchen, with its dropped ceiling, linoleum floor and ancient appliances needed to be entirely replaced. The master bathroom was bizarre with cupboards plonked in the center of the room, the roof was shot, the two water tanks on the brink of a disaster and garish red patio tiles distracted from the amazing view of the backyard.

But, the Donaldson's could see the potential. 'I'd been itching to renovate a house for ages,' says Cathy, who is a design writer by trade.

Over a six-month period the family transformed the house moving walls and ceilings to create open, flowing, light-filled rooms with a floor plan that works brilliantly for both family life and entertaining. They fixed the house from inside out addressing the boring but expensive fundamentals like the new underground plumbing, water heaters and roof, while Duncan couldn't resist adding cutting edge appliances like the double convection oven and induction hob with an extractor fan that rises from the kitchen island.

There were further surprises for the contractor. The sleek modern master bathroom with its Italian over-sized tiles and suspended custom-built vanities has a gigantic walk in shower with a large window that looks out onto the garden. 'We put in a hidden blind, just in case, but the garden is very private,' says Cathy. 'And the kids love all getting in there together.' The original cedar cupboard has been transformed into a stylish desk nook with an inbuilt desk and books shelves, while they also installed a giant solid wooden pocket door between the kitchen and the den. 'Because of the weight of the solid timber it was a lot of work, but we love it,' says Duncan. 'It means that the house can be very open, or we can create more private spaces when we need them.'

When they asked the contractor to save the original bathroom heaters, despite the house having a modern integrated AC and heating system, again he raised his eyebrows. 'But by the time we put in the solid yellow front door, which was one of the final jobs, he got it,' laughs Cathy. 'He could see how through all our seemingly crazy decisions we'd modernized the house but kept it mid-century modern.'

The family designed the house from cradle to grave, meaning that it can be lived in comfortably whether you're a couple, young family, an empty nester or in your more advanced years. The entire house is easily accessible, there are no awkward steps and the master bathroom is planned to accommodate wheelchair users. 'It's an important design element in terms of sustainability,' explains Cathy. 'By creating homes that are suitable for all generations you save the money, labor and material resources needed for adaptations and alterations as we age.' Alas, having lived in the house for only a year a career move overseas means that they have decided to sell. 'It's really heart-wrenching,' say the couple who have poured so much thought into every detail of their house. Their only solace is that in an area where tear downs are prolific, especially after Harvey, they've saved a mid-century home that represents an important chapter in the architectural heritage of this city.

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