



Home The Wright way

It takes a vivid imagination – and some professional nous – to turn a tired, old, six-level house into a family-friendly abode.

When long-term Hong Kong resident David Wright decided to buy a house in Sai Kung, he drew on his professional skills as a civil engineer to create a modern, light-filled family home for himself, wife Mary and their three children, Joanna, nine, Matthew, 19, and Tom, 23. Wright proposed to create a contemporary interior with industrial accents that would cater to his family's demands. He commissioned architect Edward Bilson of Original Vision (tel: 2709 7466) to renovate the 25-year-old property and the two soon developed a synergy.

"The good thing about working with David was that because he is an engineer he understood and was sensitive to what the architect brings to the project," says Bilson.

The two went back to basics to revise what was a tired 2,600-square-foot house spread over six levels. They gutted it, rewired and re-plumbed it, and opened up the space to produce a clean, fresh layout with quasi-industrial detailing. Understandably, the structure of the house was a focal point in the renovation. "Ed and I talked about structures and I said I wanted to use exposed steel. I worked on the construction of the Hong Kong bank and you can see a bit of that here," says Wright.

As befits its country location, the home's interior-exterior divide has been reduced dramatically. Huge horizontal paned windows fill the rear wall of the double-height living room and folding French windows lead out onto a large terrace. This is topped by a dramatic, four-and-a-half metre high Japanese-inspired glass and wood roof. With such a soaring structure, the family can retain the feeling of being outside without being exposed to the elements. To make further use of the high-ceilinged living room, Wright wanted to create a loft-like mezzanine level over one side to use as a study. "Originally there was a little gallery off the staircase over the living room, so we cut the handrail off and dropped in a steel frame mezzanine," says Bilson. "Then I incorporated a glass balustrade and the deck into one unit. It was all built in situ." The result is an open and breezy space "floating" above the living room and floor-to-ceiling views across the greenery below.

"Mary finds the mezzanine delightful and it has a nice studio feeling about it," explains Bilson. **1**

1 & 2 The bi-fold doors, which run along one side of the living room open into the terrace. The pair of white, ash-framed armchairs (with a matching sofa) were designed by the Wrights about 15 years ago and have been re-covered several times by Casson Curram (Sheep E, Kamwah Building, Sai Kung, tel: 2792 9825). In the centre of the room is a curved, low-level Indian dining table, \$3,500 from Shambala (2/F, Harison Plaza, 2 Lee Wing Street, Ap Lei Chau, tel: 2655 2977). Underneath is a 30-year-old Persian fabric carpet, one of David's favourite items. In the foreground is a Chinese barber's stool with a coin slot in the top, unearthed in a shop in Sai Kung town. The large carved armchair cost \$3,500 from a furniture dealer in Zhuhai.

3 The commanding, 1.8-metre-wide entrance door is made of silver-painted mild steel and etched glass. It pivots and can be kept open (it leads to a private courtyard) when required, increasing light and air through the ground floor. The floor is made of tiled stone, which is inexpensive, and dramatic when lit at night. To the right is the family room, where a sliding panel can shield the noise of the home-theatre system from the rest of the house.



Other key considerations in the renovation were making the kitchen the centre of the home and ensuring the younger members of the family (whose ages range widely) had their own space.

"We wanted the children to be able to do what they wanted without feeling someone would be always watching over them," says their father.

To achieve this they divided areas of the house - such as the downstairs family room and the kitchen-cum-dining room level - by using folding screens and sliding door parts that can be closed when privacy is desired.

"This kind of operable wall approach works well because there are times when you want the rooms to be more cosy to seal off sound when the TV is on in the family room," says Bilson. "It's nice to be able to do that without having doors flapping around."

The renovations have been a huge success. "The house is unrecognisable from what it was. I take my hat off to David for being brave enough to see the potential of the space. It has some nice moments now," says Bilson. ■



4 Joanna, nine, plays with Adelaide the spaniel in the spacious kitchen, which was supplied by Essentials (77 Leighton Road, Causeway Bay, tel: 2142 1499) and includes central unit with a Corian top. The Medusa hood cost \$9,66 by 10 Zone from Top Knowledge (Unit C, 2/F, 301 Lockhart Road, Wan Chai, tel: 2575 6999). The floor is covered with rough black slate with an oil finish and black grout, which was chosen for its hard-wearing properties and because it doesn't show paw prints.

5 To make the most of the double-height living room, a loft like study was constructed on a mezzanine. David Wright perches at a glass and steel desk designed by Edward Bilson, which runs along the left side of the room. Silk roman blinds (\$8,300 from Verlingports, 12/F Sun Hing Industrial Building, 46 Wing Chuk Hang Road, Aberdeen, 1 2518 7777), cover the floor-to-ceiling windows, offering protection from sunlight. The corner shelving units were installed by the contractor William Wu of American Asia Design (tel: 9600 3843). The silk carpet was found in a Shanghai factory a decade ago.

6 To the left (as you walk into the room) is a quasi-open bathroom - opaque glass was fitted for extra privacy - with



TRIED & TESTED Brain drain

Water drainage systems don't have to be run of the mill. Edward Bilson built an innovative, Japanese-style chain pipe in which water runs down lengths of chain to the ground. Bilson first saw the idea in Australian architectural magazines from the 1970s and realised it would work on practical and aesthetic levels.

"I had a gutter I needed to get the water out of somehow. Plus the drain was already installed in the ground and it seemed a logical thing to do," he says.

In a regular down pipe, water flows inside a solid tube. "I didn't want a solid pipe because it would have looked dreadful, positioned as it is on the edge of the terrace," says the architect.

The pipe, which is anchored at the corner of the wood and glass pergola, is part-practical, part water feature and blends into the natural surroundings.

"It's not obtrusive," says Bilson. "You don't notice it at first but when you do you think, 'Hey, that's rather nice.'"

rectangular double sink by Flamina (about \$4,000 from SpaceConcepts Asia, 6/F, 24/F Lockhart Road, Wan Chai, tel: 2802 0328) positioned outside.

Commercial Building, 33 Leighton Road, Causeway Bay, tel: 2891 9364).

7 In the centre of the master bedroom stands an Indonesian teakwood four-poster bed (\$17,000 from Tequila Kola, 1/F, Horizon Plaza, 2 Lee Wing Street, Ap Lei Chau, tel: 2877 3295; www.tequilakola.com). The wooden flooring throughout the house is American longstrip walnut, which is manufactured by Hahn and distributed in Hong Kong by Equal Limited (\$521.20 a square metre; 12/F, First

8 The central stairwell features glass balustrades topped with walnut wood handrails to offer safety barriers without restricting views and light. At the top of the stairs leading to the master bedroom is an antique Chinese washstand from Zhenhai; the Wrights are hunting for the perfect basin to fit it.

9 The outdoor terrace leads off the main living room and features a 4.5 metre-high pergola. Made of hardwood and

eight millimetre-thick toughened glass, which can be walked on for cleaning purposes. The pergola shields diners from rain, but because it is so high it creates the impression of alfresco dining. The kaila wood dining table and chairs (\$5,450/HK\$20,375), were bought four years ago from the Australian chain store Outdoor Furniture Specialists (Hills HomeMaker Centre, Victoria Avenue, Castle Hill, NSW 2154, tel: 612 9894 2888; www.outdoorfurnspec.com.au). The patio heater cost \$2,800 and was bought through Jaspas restaurant (113 Sha Tau Path, Sai Kung, tel: 2792 6388).