

Courting Light

ARCHITECT ROBERT PASHUK REDEFINES THE INFILL WITH A COURTYARD THAT BRINGS THE OUTDOORS INTO HIS HOME.

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Calgary's harsh winters and often blisteringly hot summers make for confused spaces. Are our dwellings supposed to provide cozy shelter for cocooning in winter or should they boast ideal outdoor areas to maximize summer living?

Unfortunately, our homes can rarely accommodate both extremes. The backyard gets full-time status come summer, yet becomes a barren wasteland in winter. Conversely, the inside sees use all winter but becomes merely serviceable sleeping quarters during the warm summer months. Architect Robert Pashuk saw a perfect opportunity to create duality in his own northwest home. Along the way, he also revolutionized the traditional infill concept.

By their very definition, infills are long, narrow and lean on light. Typically 25 feet

wide, infills challenge architects to provide the same functional rooms as most typical homes. The constraints are exacerbated by a city bylaw stating that infills may cover no more than 45 per cent of the lot. Pashuk confronted these difficulties head-on and came up with a novel solution: fewer rooms situated around a courtyard.

Granted he had a bit more room to play with (his lot is 32 feet wide) but even so, the house is a tribute to ingenuity. By building his infill around the open courtyard, Pashuk solved the traditional lighting dilemma. He also examined city regulations and found a loophole. Raised decks aren't considered part of lot coverage so he chose to treat the courtyard like a deck. The result is a wood-floored space that looks like a deck but which has far more uses than the typical backyard fixture.

Three sides of the home open onto the courtyard, allowing light to filter through the entire house. Building bylaws limit the area of exterior walls that can be dedicated to windows but, because Pashuk's courtyard does



The courtyard allows ample light into the home. A fireplace gives the space a living-room feel.

Architect and homeowner Robert Pashuk, inset, and the view down the hallway into his kitchen.



A Japanese-inspired cedar screen forms the fourth wall of the courtyard and helps create a private oasis.



The living room is a flexible space with pleated drapes that help transform it into a sleek martini lounge. Below, the courtyard provides for elegant al fresco dining.

not run along the property line, he was free from these strictures. Large windows and sliding doors face the courtyard, comprising about 60 per cent window-coverage instead of the 7 per cent allowed under the bylaw.

A Japanese-inspired cedar screen forms the fourth wall of the courtyard (what would normally be the outside wall of the house), helping to create a private oasis by screening out a neighbouring home as well as muffling the sound of cars from nearby Kensington Road. One end of the exterior space features a dramatic fireplace with grey metal siding reaching heights of 24 feet. Plants, shrubs and flowers are grouped in each corner and frame a centre table and four chairs. The setting is intimate enough for summer al fresco dining, but large enough to host a casual outdoor

party with guests comfortably milling about.

Come winter, a seasonal garden can be viewed from all angles of the house. White Christmas lights twinkle all season long and, as Pashuk explains, the fireplace can extend the patio season. "I often light the fireplace in winter which allows enjoyment on even the coldest of days."

Inside, a fireplace in the living room sits directly behind the outdoor fireplace. The living room is a delightful interplay of mood and chameleon-like style. By day, it serves as a casual family area with a 50-inch TV cleverly tucked away behind a cherry veneer cabinet. At night, Pashuk can draw the heavy pinch-pleat curtains that run the length of the room to transform the space into a bona fide martini lounge, complete with music and



The kitchen was designed around the Berloni cabinets that extend the home's soothing atmosphere.



The serene look of the house is carried over to the bathroom.



Pashuk has completed a similar design for the more traditional 25-foot lot. For more on the architect and the products used in his home, see page 89.

Passionate attention to detail is apparent throughout the home. Niches in the stairwell create unexpected resting places for sculptures and paintings. A basement painted in the same muted tones as the rest of the house creates the illusion of an entire third level. An eight-foot-tall front door with a frosted transom appropriates more light from the outside. The master bathroom features kitchen-height counters for added drama. Having only two bedrooms upstairs (instead of the typical three), allows for a convenient laundry room with the same style cabinets as the kitchen. Again, the rooms and connecting hallway overlooks the courtyard,

allowing light to spill throughout.

By keeping a contemporary and spare aesthetic throughout his home, Pashuk fosters an open and airy feel. Fluidity between the outdoors and indoors is achieved through the use of myriad windows and doors, all pivoting around the inspired courtyard. The home's originality is symbolized by the miniature garden along the front walkway where a row of corn grows almost six feet tall. Instead of the geraniums and petunias one might expect, Pashuk chose corn for its hardiness and vertical drama. Like the house, the effect is unyielding and brilliant. **F**