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HOMING IT IN

THIS COUPLE CREATED THE ULTIMATE SENTOSA COVE ABODE FOR WORK, FAMILY AND PLAY.

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The alluring curved facade of the house is further enhanced by a waterfall quietly flowing by the side of the front door.

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There is an extraordinary sense of openness on the ground floor, with the foyer being a generous two-storey volume flanked by a curved staircase.



“We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.” Physically, this house on Sentosa Cove’s tony Ocean Drive appears thoroughly modern with its minimal detailing and sweeping curved walls. But surprisingly, what guided its design inside and out was in fact this timeless quote from late British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

These famous words – stumbled upon by owners Yen and Barbara in their research on their dream home – stuck, becoming the mantra for the couple as they sought to build an inspiring space in which they could start a family, entertain as well as work. “We wanted to structure the house in such a way that it would shape the life that we want to have,” says Barbara.

For this project, they roped in architect Aamer Taher to help them translate their thoughts into a new home. “His houses are always different,” says Yen. “He doesn’t use expensive materials unnecessarily. It is more about the ideas that go into it.”

Taher’s problem-solving skills were first put to test by the lie of the land. The property is long and narrow, bounded by the road in front, neighbouring plots on both sides and a waterway at the back – hardly the ideal plot to allow for long views of the seascape from every room that the couple yearned for. “Generally, the plots at Sentosa are very cramped with an allowance of only two metres on each side,” Taher explains. Maxing this out – a common pitfall – means settling for windows within shouting distance of the neighbours’. >

LAND SIZE

9,300 sq ft

BUILT-UP AREA

6,900 sq ft

ARCHITECT

Aamer Architects

INTERIOR DESIGN

Aamer Taher Design Studio

LANDSCAPE DESIGN

Nyee Phoe Flower Garden

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A curved and bulbous washbasin is the focal point in the powder room, set against walls and flooring made up of black and grey mosaic.

Opposite: The large, rectangular living and dining space on the ground floor is enclosed by floor-to-ceiling glass sliding doors that maximise the view outside.

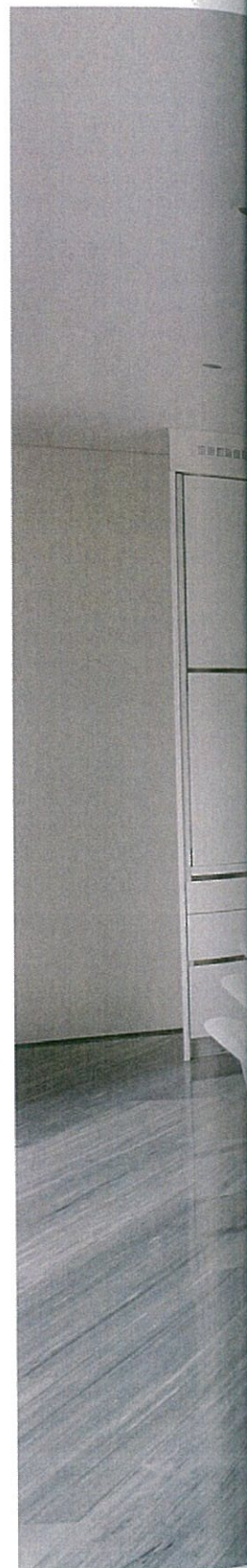
Ingeniously, he went with one of the most distinct aspects of the house: its "J"-shaped layout. Viewed from above, the structure is tilted about 30 degrees clockwise, which, together with carefully placed screens, opened up otherwise unattainable vistas while still maintaining privacy.

On the ground, this created a charming effect, with the unique form of the house unfolding slowly. Visitors are first presented with the bowl of the "J", which manifests itself as a curved facade that's both uncluttered and inviting. Adding to the beguiling mien is an unobtrusive waterfall quietly flowing on the right of the front door.

From this vantage point, an exterior feature wall in the form of a layer of "skin" appears to peel off from the main building, giving a three-dimensional effect to an otherwise flat surface. Yen is most proud of this feature and adds that the lights emanating from within impart a surreal night-time effect.

Past the doorway, you find yourself in a hallway lined with dark wood cupboards. It is small, intense – and deliberately created. "You start with the compression of space through this little foyer before you explode into the open space," says Taher. "It has that short and sensual transition that all entrances should have." This heightens the extraordinary sense of openness on the ground floor. The foyer is a generous two-storey volume flanked by a curved staircase to the upper levels and proceeds into a large, rectangular living and dining space enclosed by floor-to-ceiling glass sliding doors that maximise the view outside. A simple black-and-white colour scheme underlines the uncluttered effect.

Entertaining is a big part of the couple's lives so the idea for the ground floor was to create the ultimate space for seamless interaction. Physically, the entire level is a singular and continuous flow from the entrance to the edge of the deck at the rear. Even the grand piano located underneath >



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the staircase has its acoustics directed to the main living room area. "I don't play the piano just for myself. If I have guests, I want to play for them," says Yen.

The powder room is suitably sculptural, dominated as it is by a curved and bulbous washbasin, set against walls and flooring made up of black and grey mosaic. "We wanted each bathroom in the house to be distinctly different," says Yen. "Bathrooms are like ties. Everybody can have a classic suit, but you wear ties to differentiate yourself and to show your character."

The outdoor area is similarly serene and orderly. A 25m lap pool on the left dominates the grounds; adding interest to the picturesque setting are bamboo plants, frangipani trees and weeping willows. The last is particularly close to Barbara's heart, found in abundance in Cambridge, UK where she was an undergraduate.

"This house is very photogenic. From the front, it's like a sculpture. From the back, you see this telescopic floating box facing the waterfront," explains Taher, referring to the triangular structure that houses the second-floor master bedroom hanging over the swimming pool. When viewed from the downslope leading to the waterway, the house appears to be sitting on clouds, adds Taher, thanks to a row of white bougainvillea.

Moving upstairs, the mood distinctly changes. Through the use of warmer colours and teak-panel flooring, the second level has a cosy and inviting ambience that facilitates family bonding. The main activity area has a custom-made light brown sofa set that blends nicely into the surroundings. It faces a sliding wall that hides the television, the only one in the house, and everything else that goes with it, such as the digital set >



The second floor is a marked contrast from the first with its warm colours and teak-panel flooring. Vertical louvres provide shade as well as privacy.

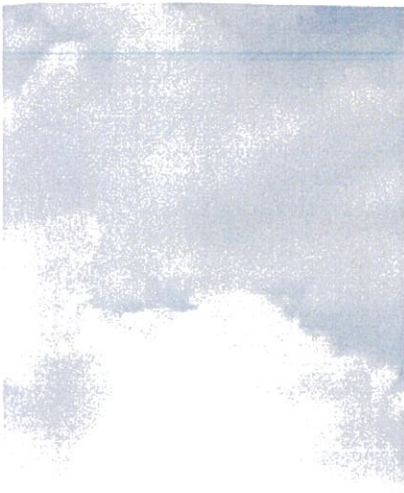
Opposite: Apart from a custom-made sofa set, the main activity area is decorated only with a Voido rocking chair by Ron Arad for Magis and a Lladro figurine of a robed woman, in keeping with the house's sculptural theme.

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“It is important for us to have a place where we can calm down and have the right state of mind.”





Above: A Zen garden, accessed from the home office, is an oasis of tranquility where Yen and Barbara destress.

Right: Located in the attic, the home office has two separate workstations, a daybed and a communal area for brainstorming sessions.

top box and DVD player. This maintains the uncluttered nature of the house.

A Voido rocking chair by Ron Arad for Magis and a Lladro figurine of a robed woman decorate the common space, keeping congruence with the sculptural theme of the house. The vertical louvres on the side are tilted to provide shade as well as privacy for the second floor. They also put on an artistic shadow show whenever the afternoon sun shines into the house.

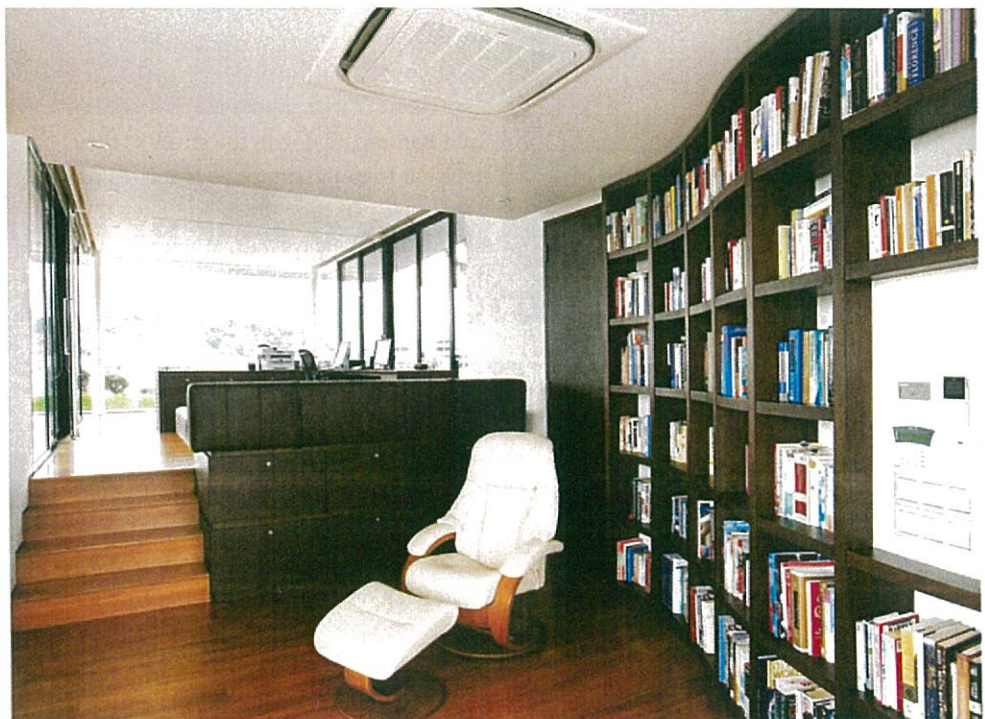
When it came to the master suite, Barbara was clear that the space is reserved just "for the two of us". It comprises a bedroom that overlooks the sea, a walk-in wardrobe and a large spa-themed bathroom that leads out onto a private balcony. The last is one of their favourite spots in the house, featuring a little table with chairs and a lone frangipani plant that colourfully breaks up the monotony – a perfect place

to enjoy a cup of tea, take in the view and contemplate life.

The other side of the floor is space set aside for the children that the couple plan to have. One large area that can be separated into two rooms by means of a sliding door; the idea is to allow the siblings to play yet maintain privacy when necessary. "They can be one unit, but have the choice of retreating to their quarters if they need to," explains Yen.

The two en-suite bathrooms are almost yin and yang in their contrast. One has a masculine feel with dark grey, almost-black granite as the sink base while the other has a feminine vibe with creamy stone and an elegantly curved bathtub.

A spiral staircase leads to the attic where the home office is located. "We want to distinctly separate the family area and the workspace," explains Barbara. It is here >




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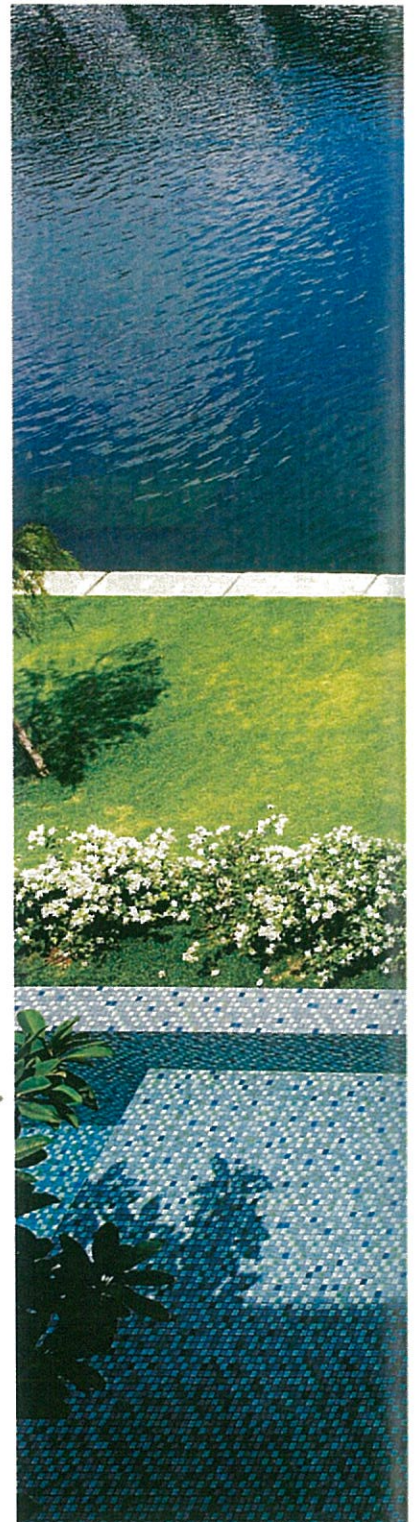


at the top of the house that the best views are to be had. The place has two separate workstations, a daybed and a communal area for the couple, both investors, to brainstorm and consolidate ideas. A curved bookcase aligns itself with the shape of the room, providing both form and function.

But what really astonishes is the unexpected Japanese Zen garden, accessed through glass doors from the home office and onto the rooftop. It's a study in carefully nuanced shades of grey, with the gravel raked to swirl in graceful ripples around artfully placed rocks, miniature shrubs and stone pavilions in shades of smoke, ash and slate. "We took quite some time to choose the trees and shrubs, as they have to look appropriate in a Zen garden and yet withstand the tropical weather," Yen explains. "We positioned everything to achieve a certain symmetry and order."

The effect is notable. The rooftop is a little oasis of tranquillity that helps both Yen and Barbara deal with the stress of their jobs. "It is important for us to have a place where we can calm down and have the right state of mind," says Yen. "Every night, we look at the garden for five minutes and it really does the job."

You could say that this house overall – with its sleek, sculptural lines and spacious, uncluttered interiors – has fulfilled its owners' original vision. Having succeeded in creating the kind of abode they dreamed of, Barbara sums it up neatly: "We put a print on the house and the house in turn has put a print back on us." 



The deck at the back of the house carries on the singular, continuous flow that defines the first floor. A 25m lap pool dominates the grounds.

Opposite: A triangular structure houses the master bedroom that hangs over the pool.



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