

Helen Cadien's house (far left) is built on a horseshoe design around a three-storey atrium, with living areas off to each side. The atrium fulfils Cadien's desire for a large social area filled with daylight (left). It also has a window in the floor that looks onto the pool.

The staircase (centre) is enclosed as it moves upwards from the more public areas to the bedrooms, giving a sense of privacy.

Pictures by Nicholas Kane

Who dares, wins

Interior designer Helen Cadien cleared the way to build the home of her dreams, as Fay Sweet discovered

BUILDING a unique home in London is a rare feat. Those who are lucky find a small plot of land tucked away in some forgotten place. Those who are seriously visionary find a house they can demolish and start again. Taking the bold step to demolish and then build from scratch, interior designer Helen Cadien teamed up with architect Shahriar Nasser to realise her dream family home. Where once stood an unexciting 1970s house in Hampstead, north London, now stands a dazzling 21st century home full of sunlight and views, cool living spaces, a swimming pool and terraced gardens.

"The very earliest ideas were for a house in a familiar London style, something inspired by Georgian, Victorian or Edwardian homes," says Cadien, adding that the house is in a conservation area. "But local planning officers made it clear that they would look more favourably on a contemporary design than a period pastiche. So, suddenly we had the possibility of creating something really exciting."

The house stands at the end of a road lined with homes built in a mixture of styles during the past century. But as the surrounding area contains post-war properties, the council considered a contemporary-style replacement building suitable for the location.

The impetus to build anew was to create an exciting and spacious home designed for contemporary living. "While the house is unmistakably contemporary in style, it does respect its neighbours and context while also meeting the client's wish for more space — especially a large social area filled with daylight," says Nasser.

Cadien's dream was for a comfortable family home drenched in sunlight, with plenty of room for entertaining and generous guest accommodation. Nasser's solution was a house in a horseshoe shape set around a cascading three-storey glass atrium. However, from the street, there are few clues about the exciting and dramatic spaces inside.

The house is a polite newcomer on the block: it echoes the scale and roof height and pitch of its two-storey neighbours — a requirement of the planners — but is radically different in style. Instead of brick and tile, it is dazzling white, with steel-framed windows and a zinc roof. A bow-fronted and aluminium-clad garage flows towards the entrance; the sheet aluminium tucks inside the porch and guides visitors towards the front door, where a tall slot of a window provides the first exciting

glimpses of the spaces beyond. Stepping inside, the wood-lined lobby holds you for a moment as the glass atrium bursts open before you with views upward and outside. Floors are in glistening white limestone, walls are painted in a soft, pale grey, a glass-and-steel stair floats in space to the left and a large glass panel set in the floor provides a window on the swimming pool below. "Whether it is day or night, sunny or overcast, this is always a wonderful place to be," says Cadien. "It works like a courtyard and is great for parties." The drama of this space is offset by flanking rooms: to one side is a kitchen and dining room with in-built units, including one wall of white-lacquered cupboards. To the other side is a long living room with study area. "These wings are calmer and cooler in style, very restful spaces, but again with great views," she says.

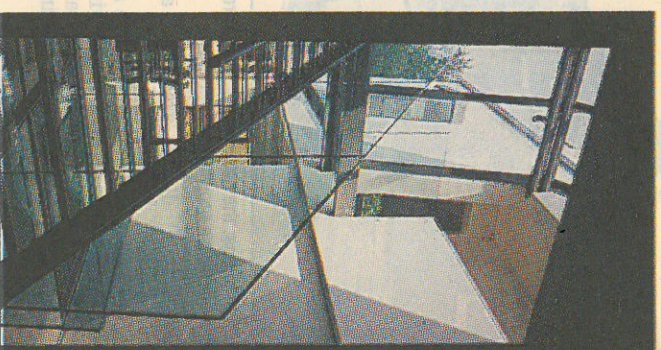
Reached by the glass stair, the two upper floors contain bedrooms and bathrooms arranged around the atrium.

The bedrooms are neat and unflashy with built-in wardrobes; bathrooms feature intriguing long, trough-like white sinks set under the counter top. In the basement the swimming pool nudges into the garden and opens onto a small sunken terrace.

Furnishing throughout is restrained, but luxurious. "I like minimal styling, but I also like comfort and colour and interesting textures," says Cadien. "I can't stand places that are so precious you are afraid to sit down; after all, this is a family home."

The garden has yet to come into its own. The design is simple, incorporating borders of shrubs and heathers and a lawned area.

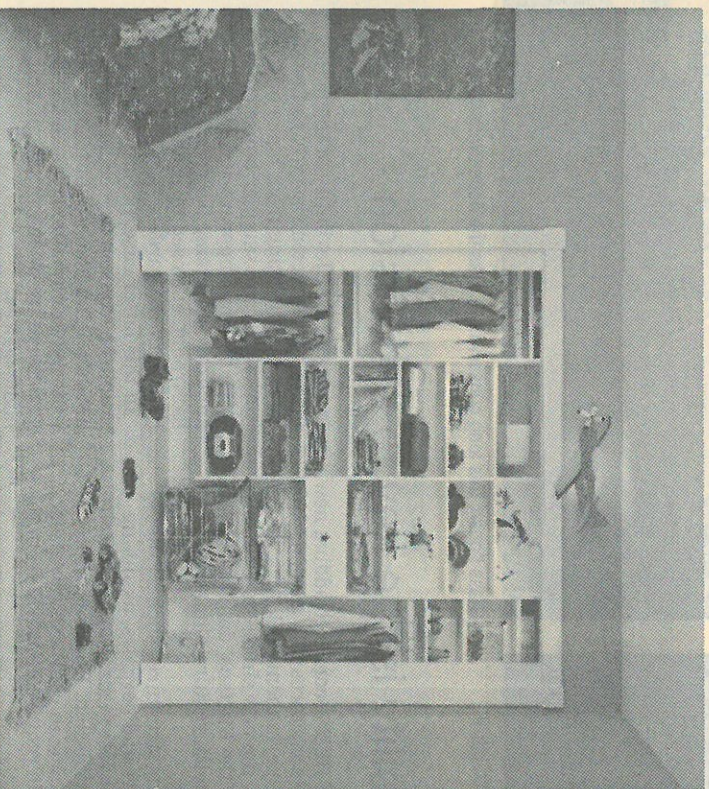
Glass balustrades allow light to flow through the property from the atrium



Where to get the look

- Architect: Beisize Architects (020 7482 4420)
- Reynobond aluminium exterior sheeting, £145 a sq m. Made by Eternit (01763 260421).
- Steel-and-glass atrium, approximately £50,000, by Culmax (020 7498 2026).
- Glass stair, balustrading and floor panels, £20,000, by Ardlam Sheet Metal (01923 236627)
- Swimming pool, approximately £30,000, by Swimco Ltd (01761 432 838).
- Portuguese Molianos limestone flooring in 600mm by 600mm tiles, £120 a sq m, by Stonemasters (020 856 8222).

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