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DWELLINGS

PROJECT: HERTZ/FONG RESIDENCE

ARCHITECT: DAVID HERTZ, SYNDESIS, INC.

LOCATION: VENICE, CALIFORNIA

Story by Allison Arieff
Photographs by William Howard

THE KIDS FIT RIGHT IN

“It’s easy to see that we have kids living here and we’re not telling them to get out of the living room,” says Stacy Fong of the Venice, California, house that her husband, architect David Hertz, designed for them and their three young children. “We don’t want to make anything off-limits to them. If you don’t want the kids around, what’s the use in having them?”

Colin, nine, Sophie, seven, and Max, three, relax in the sunken family room, where architecture monographs, Noguchi lamps, and vintage photos coexist with Tamagotchis and spill-proof juice cups. Throughout the house, storage is incorporated into everything. Here, pull-out cabinets built into couches (designed by Stacy) store CDs, toys, and videos. Stacy found the small armchairs at IKEA and had an auto upholsterer wrap them with Naugahyde so the kids could have their own appropriately scaled furniture.

Max stands in the pocket window, which leads into an interior courtyard that contains a sandbox, slide, and barbecue.

Next year, construction begins on an addition and a lap pool that will extend out from the space.







In designing the house (front façade, right), David Hertz “wanted to utilize a lot of roof spaces and open the buildings to the outside. I also wanted to make it a working laboratory for the environmental ideas and materials I’m interested in.” The house has optical skylights, for example, which open and close based on temperature, and radiant heating in the floors.

The house is also a showplace for Syndecrete, a solid surfacing material (precast lightweight concrete) developed by Hertz as an alternative to limited or nonrenewable natural materials such as wood and stone.

The dining table (bottom center) is made from Syndecrete, as are the sturdy benches, which provide more flexible seating options for the family and their guests. Bordering the main stair is a Syndecrete-clad trombe wall that contains all the house’s plumbing as well as a Tansu chest-like storage system off the kitchen.

The wall was inspired by Colin’s fascination with dinosaurs, in particular the dimetrodon, whose big fin oriented it toward the sun for cooling.

The functional kitchen (bottom right) opens to the dining room, but the counter is designed so that “you can’t see the dirty dishes when you’re at the dining table.”

At left, David, Stacy, and Sophie relax on the screen porch upstairs. “We wanted a little privacy without locating ourselves on a different floor from the kids,” David explains. “So we made a master bedroom on sort of a half level. In the summer, we keep all the doors open so it really functions as an outdoor living room. There’s a lot of privacy up here, but we can look over the walls and see what the kids are up to down below. We’re not separated from them up here.”



The burnished-concrete floors slope so “you could literally squeegee out the house,” David explains. “It’s virtually indestructible. They can skateboard in here and we don’t care. We didn’t want something precious. We wanted something elegant and durable.”





When asked what she likes best about her bedroom, Sophie answers, "I don't have to share it with my brothers."



The kids essentially have their own building at the rear of the house, but neither of the kids' rooms have doors. "I didn't like the idea of them slamming or locking doors," David explains. "But they are already asking for them." Stacy suggests a beaded curtain as an interim solution. "I know at some point the kids will need their privacy," she says, "but for now I'm glad we don't have doors. It gives them a different attitude about community. The house is teaching them in a way that I think is good."

Stacy's collection of lunchboxes and wind-up toys (bottom left) is displayed on the shelves she designed for her daughter's room. An architect who handles the business end of Syndesis, Inc., Stacy also designed the trundle bed and desk—but has no plans to produce her furniture.

Below, center, Colin tends to his hamster, Boris, in the room he shares with his little brother. Their toys (bottom right) are (usually) stored neatly in wooden boxes.

The family works and plays together. In the home office used by the whole family (above right), computers are in high demand. The family collaborated in the design of their house, too. "The kids were often on site during construction," David explains. "You'd ask Colin, 'What's that?' and he'd answer, 'Joist hanger!' They definitely have a sense of ownership and pride because they were involved."





At left, Sophie takes advantage of the plentiful natural light to finish her homework. "We wanted to take the center of the house and open it up to the sky," explains David, who worked for John Lautner while at SCI-Arc and then for Frank Gehry before opening Syndesis in 1983. Both iconoclastic architects have been a big influence, as have the furniture and architecture of R. M. Schindler. David is also inspired by environmental entrepreneurs Paul Hawken and Doug Tompkins, clients and friends who, as David explains, "have developed the idea of commerce in a different way, more as a positive agent of instituting fundamental change. They've been core to my philosophy of developing restorative products. I grew up surfing and hiking and have always had a connection to the natural world and have always been interested in the intersection between the built and natural environment. All of this has really informed my architecture."

At right, Max takes a cue from dad and "surfs" in his favorite spot in the house. At bottom left, he fights cavities while standing on a removable stair that functions as a step stool while also blocking off the storage area under the sink. When the children get older, it can be taken away.

The bathroom sink and shower stalls are made of Syndecrete. "When they were babies," David says, "we bathed these kids in the sink. Now it's wide enough so that two or three of them can brush their teeth at the same time." As Stacy explains, "Everything that we've done here is to try and make the kids more self-sufficient. Everything is within their reach so they can do things on their own. The whole impetus is to make everything easier for all of us."

Allison Arieff is the senior editor of dwell.



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“The house is always changing,” Stacy says. “We’re always adding things, taking things away. This house isn’t done yet and that’s kind of nice. It really is living, breathing, and evolving.”

