



ROOM

TO

MOVE



BY EMILY YOUNG

PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID TSAY



IN AN INNOVATIVE,
ECOLOGICALLY SMART
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
HOUSE, THE ADULTS
FIND SERENITY AND THE
KIDS SKATEBOARD IN
THE DINING ROOM



Airy aerie (clockwise from top left):
Glassed-in bridge connecting children's wing to master bedroom overlooks courtyard playground. Somersaulting Collin, Sophie, and friend in kids' bedroom, with underbed storage and chests designed by mom Stacy Fong. The cantilevered wall behind Hertz and Fong's bed conceals lighting and storage. The Hertz house from the street; outdoor sleeping porch is top right, kids' wing at rear of property. OPPOSITE: Sophie and Max at the kid-size front door.

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he sun has yet to burn the chill from the morning air in Venice, Calif. But in the dining area of their two-story house half a mile from the Pacific Ocean, 8-year-old Collin Hertz and his 6-year-old sister, Sophie, happily scamper barefoot on a floor made of industrial concrete.

Enter their father, architect David Hertz. Instead of insisting that his children put on shoes before their toes freeze, he kicks off his own sandals and pads around barefoot, too. "I planned the floors as both foundation and heat source," he explains. The burnished concrete is warmed by solar-powered radiant heat that keeps the surface toasty no matter how cold it gets outdoors. "The floors are also nearly indestructible. The kids can skateboard or eat Popsicles indoors, and we just clean up with a mop and squeegee."

The concrete floor is a perfect example of the everyday

practicality, energy efficiency, and minimalist good looks that distinguish the boldly unconventional house Hertz built four years ago as an architectural laboratory after he and his wife, Stacy Fong, and their kids outgrew their old place. "This was an opportunity to create a contemporary house friendly to human beings and the environment, in which the comforts of shelter weren't closed off from nature," Hertz says. For instance, a network of water-filled tubing maintains a constant temperature within the floors and a central wall, so carpets and drapes—prime sources of allergy-arousing dust and mold—weren't required for extra insulation. Even cooler, literally, are the numerous bottom-hinged hopper windows and French doors that channel sea breezes through the house in summer. In addition, three electric skylights are rigged with temperature sensors that order them to vent hot air when necessary. There's no air-conditioning, so there are no ducts where dirt might hide. And without ducts, ceilings can be two feet higher.





Moving experiences (clockwise from above): David (left), Max, and Stacy on outdoor sleeping porch with washable cotton pillows and glass lanterns. The kitchen features Syndcrete counters and stainless-steel shelving. A Japanese *tansu* chest built into the staircase provides storage. Flexible rubber-and-wood beehive kitchen stools were designed by Lisa Krohn. Max on the bridge; note classic Eames storage unit and Philippe Starck chairs. OPPOSITE: Stacy climbs from bridge level to master bedroom, past her collection of antique teapots.





Innovations (clockwise from top left): Sophie and Max step up to the bathroom sink. Black wooden-slat cabinet in courtyard stores toys; the top can be used for serving. Vases are of Syndecrete. Family room is visible through window. In the step-down family room (seen from living room), Collin sits in kid-size chair; built-in seating stores videos. Stairs (left) lead to loft office (top). OPPOSITE: Max (far left) and Sophie (far right) with friends in the kids' wing; the wall holds artwork by the children and family friends.



Turn any corner, and you'll find more smart choices: energy-saving laminated glass, special low-pollutant wall paint, space-efficient sliding doors, even a staircase that doubles as a Japanese *tansu* chest. Hertz, who once worked for the architecture legend Frank Gehry, has punctuated nearly every wall and ceiling with windows, skylights, and mitered-glass corners that flood the rooms with natural light and convey an intriguing sense of transparency. High exposed-beam ceilings accentuate the loftlike character of the open floor plan, making the 2,700-square-foot space seem much larger. The airiness and openness are balanced by chunky tables, counters, sinks, tubs, and showers cast in Syndecrete, a lightweight concrete made from cement and recycled natural materials, invented by Hertz in 1984.

Despite the durable surfaces and other kid-friendly touches—including a pint-size front door next to the conventional entrance—Hertz has managed to assemble a sleek, sophisticated, and adult-pleasing interior. “We didn’t feel we had to dumb down the way it looked just because of the kids,” he says. So, while the décor does include one brightly colored Eames storage unit, most of the other furniture, such as the Le Corbusier chaise and reupholstered Ikea children’s armchairs, wears chic basic black.

The master suite on the second floor features a shaded sleeping porch just outside the bedroom, and beyond that a rooftop fireplace, shower, hot tub, exercise deck, and greenhouse. “It’s a quiet place for us to get away, and it has



a great view of a palm grove,” Hertz says. Collin, Sophie, and their 3-year-old brother, Max, have a separate wing over the detached garage, linked to the master suite by a glassed-in bridge. An interior courtyard sandwiched between the house and the garage serves as a safe play space. “We can watch them from the bridge,” Hertz says.

In the children’s quarters, a playroom, bathroom, and shared bedroom are designed to be modified easily to meet the kids’ changing needs. The playroom will soon be reconfigured as Sophie’s bedroom. Temporary wooden steps will help the kids

reach the sink until they grow tall enough to do it on their own. Fong, who was trained as an architect, designed platform beds with deep drawers for clothing and, in the playroom, easy-access cabinets and cubicles for books and toys. “With three kids, we need as much clean and simple storage as possible,” says Fong, a partner in Hertz’s Santa Monica design, architecture, and manufacturing firm, Syndesis, where she heads the Syndecrete division.

Putting all his theories into practice in a single project was a bit risky, but Hertz’s gamble has paid off handsomely. “I have a more complete understanding of how everything in it works together, so it’s a great showcase to use as a calling card,” he says. “And my family has a house with room to grow.” **B**

Emily Young, a former style editor of the Los Angeles Times Magazine, writes frequently about home and landscape design.

