

Armstrong Avenue Residence

With himself as client, architect Michael Taylor had the chance to treat his own home renovation as a laboratory to explore new ideas and materials to use in his practice. Tucked into a Toronto laneway, the two-storey brick building was built as a dairy in 1912. The raw, gritty industrial exterior, in a graffiti-marked laneway, remains basically untouched. All the more delightful then, is the discovery of the hidden, contemporary, light-filled interior revealed after passing through the unmarked metal entry door.

Taylor opened up the living room to the garden by installing a glass wall with sliding doors. The exterior deck, made of sustainably harvested ipe, folds up at the far end of the garden to become a bench, extends inside the house, appears to slide under the glass wall, then folds down again to become steps in the living room. In addition, the stone on the side walls of the garden reappears inside, flanking the steps. Particularly at night, with the exterior brick walls illuminated, the garden seems to extend into the living room.

Inside, gypsum-board walls peel back to expose portions of the original brick, further tying the interior to the garden. A 4-by-8-foot skylight opens the ceiling over the kitchen island, emphasizing its role as the symbolic centre of the house. In keeping with the prevailing continuity-of-materials concept, Taylor wrapped the island in bamboo veneer to make it look like a seamless extension of the bamboo floor.

A gas fireplace, enclosed within a cantilevered shroud of blackened steel evoking the building's industrial origins, slides out from the kitchen and into the living room.

Various materials have been brought together in unexpected ways: anodized aluminum trim creates crisp edges at the ipe wood steps; stainless-steel wall tiles reflect the strip LED lighting and walnut and blackened steel frame a dining room table topped with Panelite, a translucent honeycomb fiberglass material, lit underneath by LED lighting recessed flush into the floor.

Designer: Michael Taylor



(Click on the image for published article)