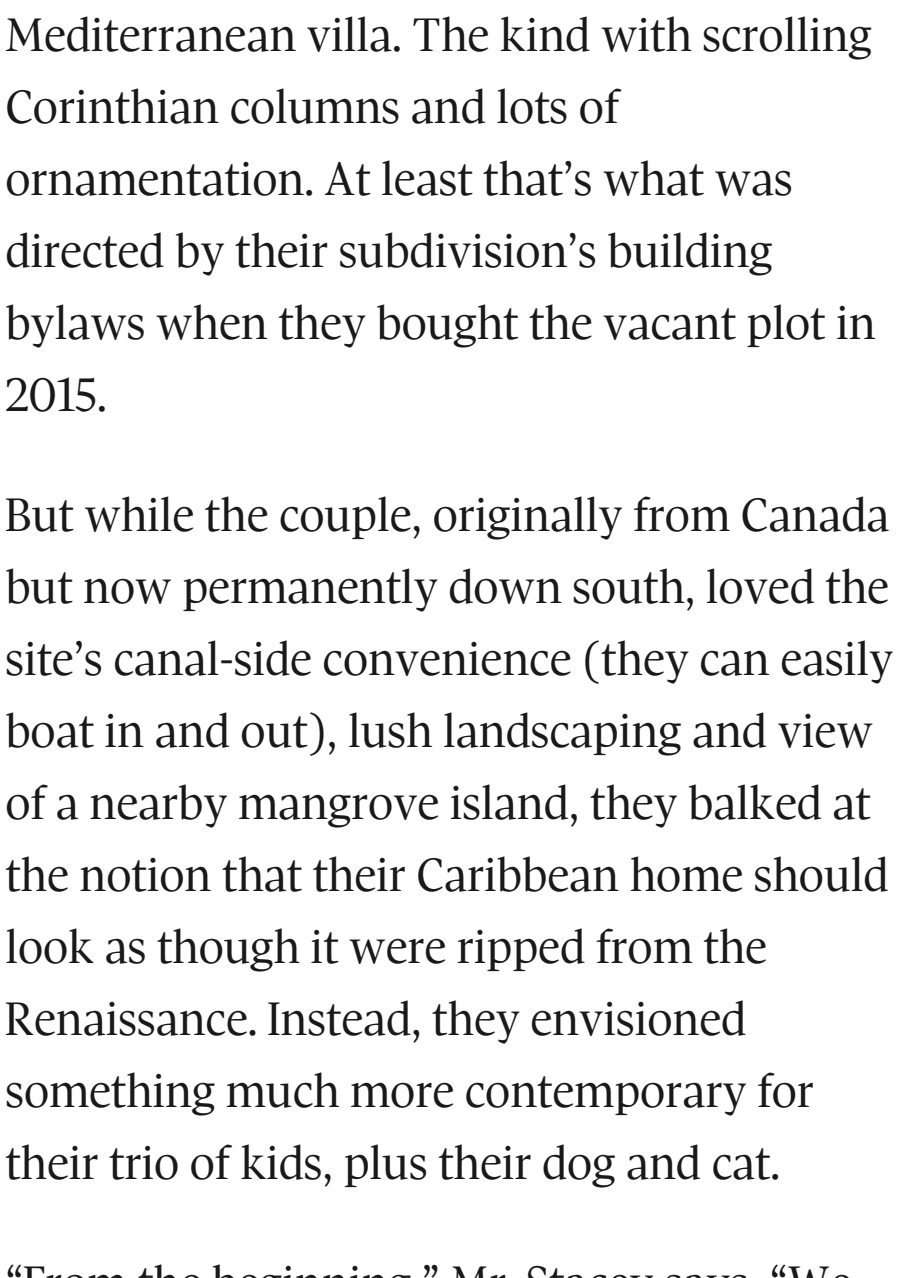


This Caribbean home is a spectacular mix of cutting-edge yet traditional design and sustainability

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Ashley Rushton and Pat Stacey's Grand Cayman home, designed by Ottawa-based architect Paul Kariouk.

MARTYN POYNOR/MARTYN POYNOR

The Grand Cayman home of Ashley Rushton and Pat Stacey, who co-run a software company, was supposed to be a classic Mediterranean villa. The kind with scrolling Corinthian columns and lots of ornamentation. At least that's what was directed by their subdivision's building bylaws when they bought the vacant plot in 2015.

But while the couple, originally from Canada but now permanently down south, loved the site's canal-side convenience (they can easily boat in and out), lush landscaping and view of a nearby mangrove island, they balked at the notion that their Caribbean home should look as though it were ripped from the Renaissance. Instead, they envisioned something much more contemporary for their trio of kids, plus their dog and cat.

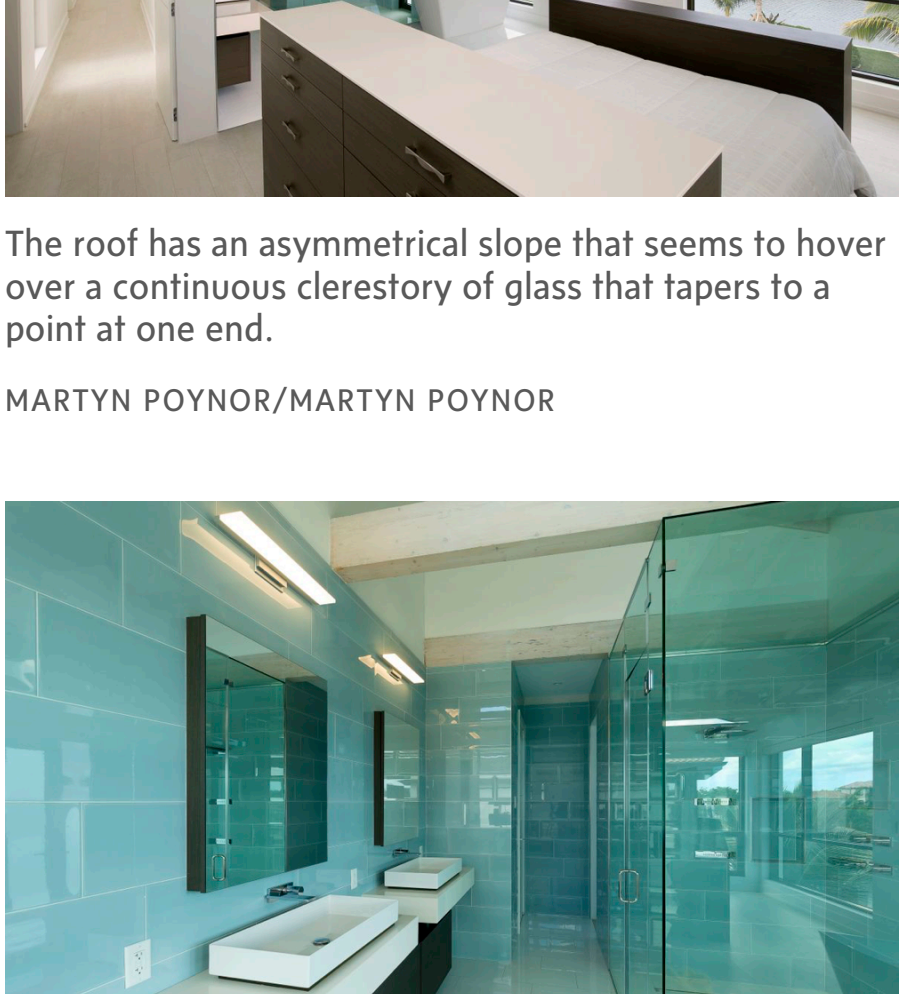
"From the beginning," Mr. Stacey says, "We wanted three separate pods connected together by way of outdoor space on the ground level and by a unifying upper floor above." Not exactly a look the Medicis would recognize.

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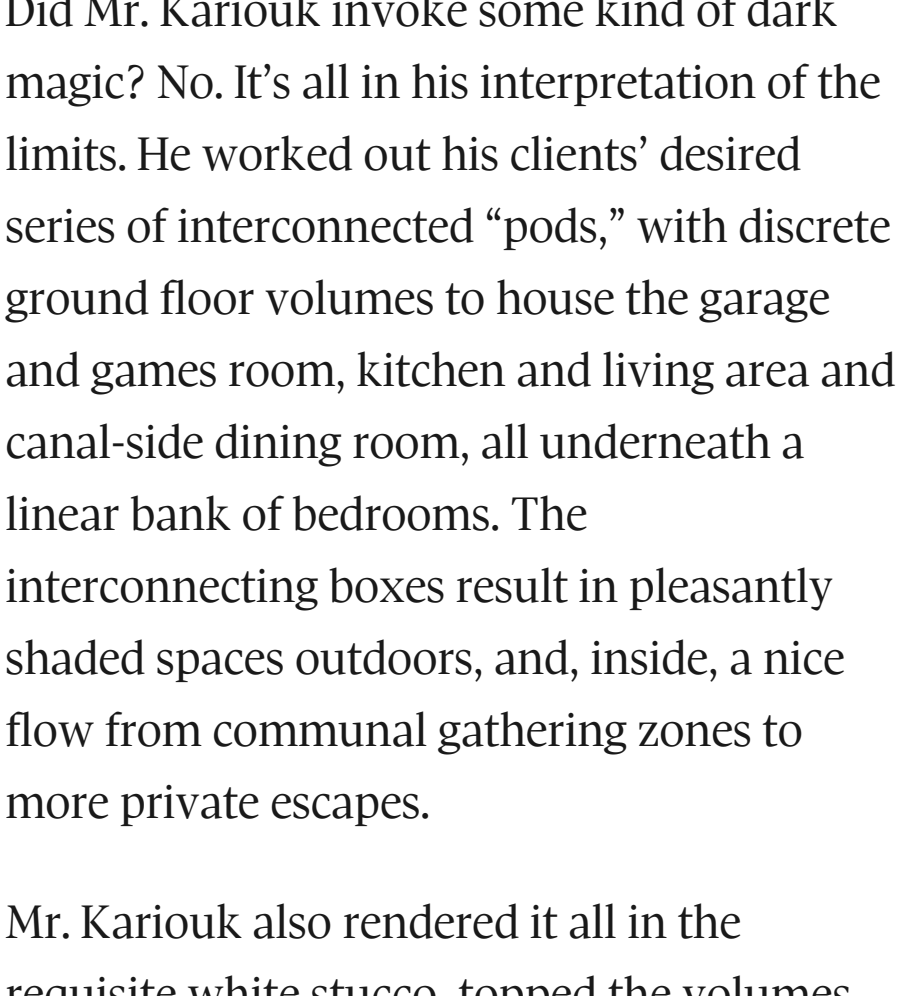
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A view of the kitchen and living area.

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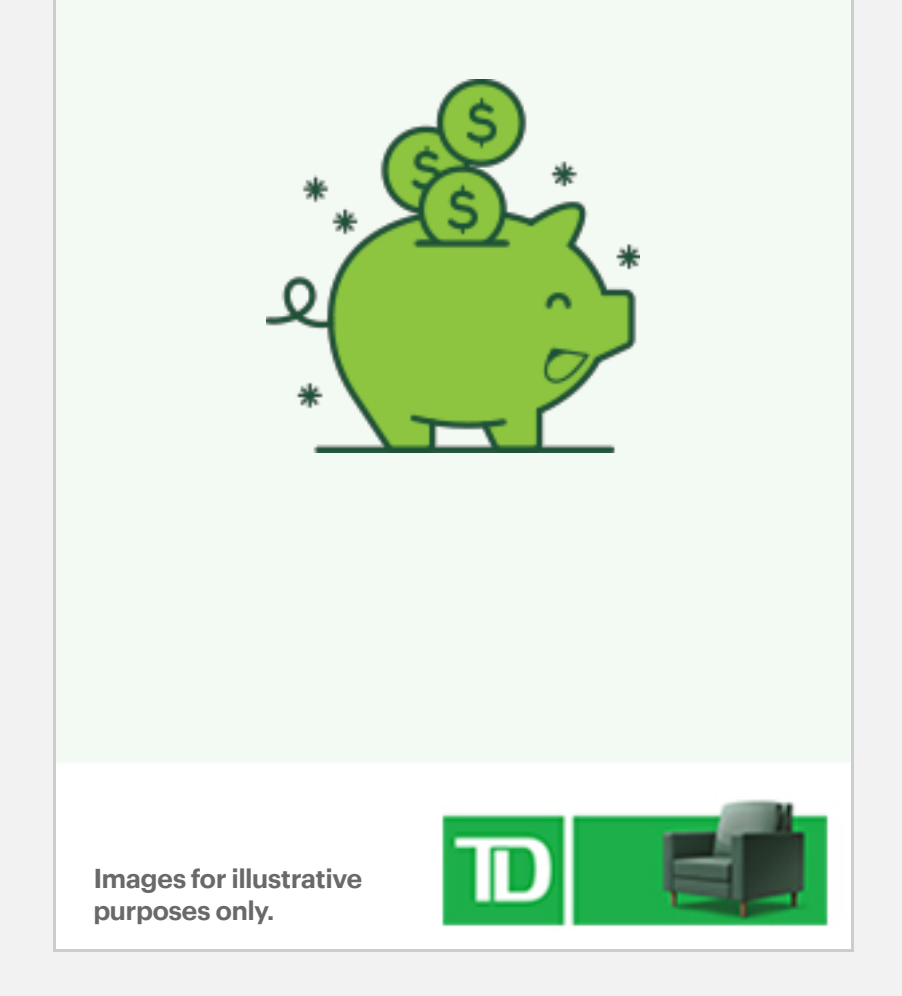
The Caribbean home has canal-side convenience, lush landscaping and view of a nearby mangrove island.

MARTYN POYNOR/MARTYN POYNOR

So the couple asked Ottawa-based architect Paul Kariouk to see if there was a way to achieve a cutting-edge design given their neighbourhood's traditional leanings. They previously worked with Mr. Kariouk on the interior of the beachside condo that they had outgrown. They also admired his contextually specific approach and "degree of patience and resourcefulness for creative problem solving," Mr. Stacey says – a necessity for this kind of job.

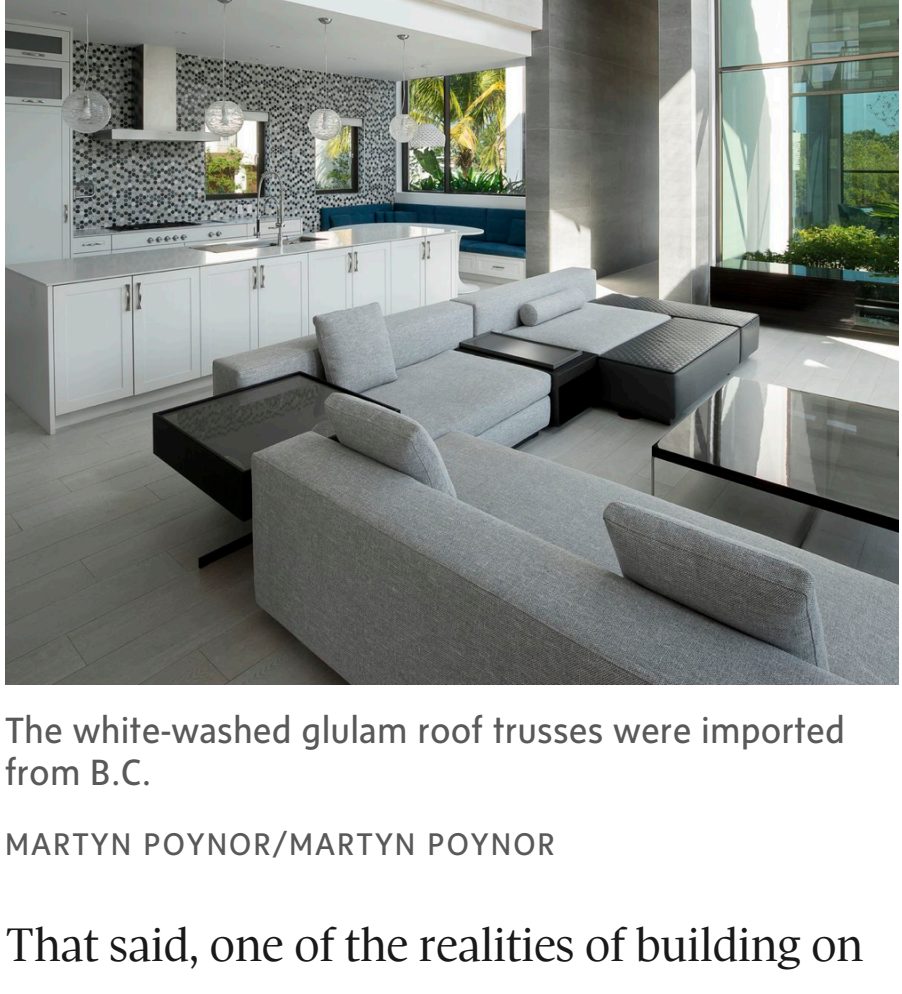
"The bylaws stipulated a sloped terracotta roof and pale stucco exterior walls," Mr. Kariouk says. "It also asked for separate windows on the front façade to suggest formal, individuated rooms on the interior." As in – like some kind of architectural censorship – there could be no walls of glass exposing an open floor plan within.

It might have sounded an impossible task. However, Mr. Kariouk's scheme has no resemblance to a European palazzo, and fulfills the bylaws to such an extent that it was accepted, without reservation, when it was reviewed by the neighbourhood planning committee. "In the end, they were very supportive," Mr. Kariouk says. "Which is important. You don't want to go through a whole building process fighting with the neighbours."



The roof has an asymmetrical slope that seems to hover over a continuous clerestory of glass that tapers to a point at one end.

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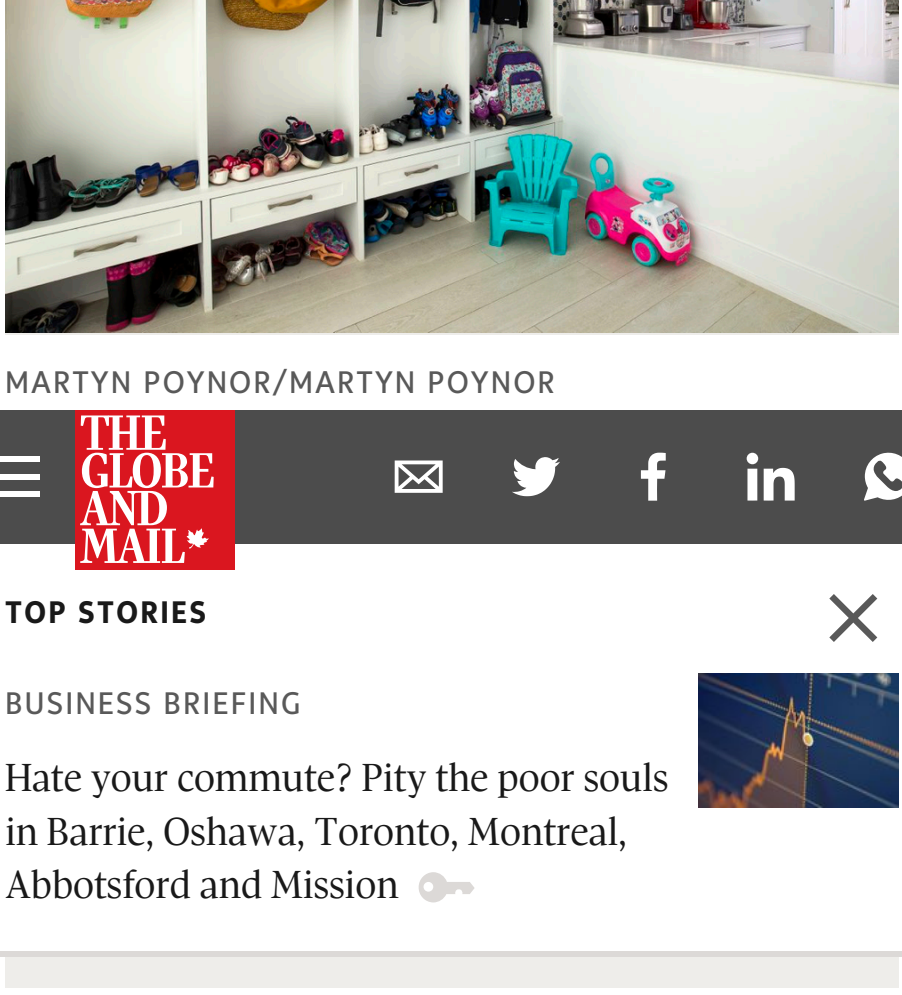


The bathroom interior.

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Did Mr. Kariouk invoke some kind of dark magic? No. It's all in his interpretation of the limits. He worked out his clients' desired series of interconnected "pods," with discrete ground floor volumes to house the garage and games room, kitchen and living area and canal-side dining room, all underneath a linear bank of bedrooms. The interconnecting boxes result in pleasantly shaded spaces outdoors, and, inside, a nice flow from communal gathering zones to more private escapes.

Mr. Kariouk also rendered it all in the requisite white stucco, topped the volumes with the necessary red Spanish tile and punched modest windows throughout. But the roof – which Mr. Kariouk admits was likely "the biggest challenge" – is very carefully conceived to not impede on the elegance of the architecture below, detailed in such a way to conceal the gutters that might otherwise add bulk to the streamlined composition. And it has an asymmetrical slope that seems to hover over a continuous clerestory of glass that tapers to a point at one end. This floating effect creates a clever, almost cheeky trick of the eye, giving the illusion that the volume it caps is actually a crisp, flat-topped, entirely modern space.



Dining room with canal-side view.

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Mr. Stacey says the light that floods through the clerestory, along with a series of tall strip windows hidden in the gaps between some of the volumes, helps balance their desire for an "abundance of natural light," with the neighbourhood requirement for small, discrete fenestration. And it turns out, that the requirement improves the performance of the house. "A wall of glass in this climate would be quite uncomfortable," says Mr. Kariouk, who did multiple light studies in the planning phase. "You would end up baking from the heat of the sun."

Sustainability was incorporated in other ways as well. The ultrathick glass is UV-tinted to improve efficiency. And while solar panels weren't allowed on the roof (again, for aesthetic reasons), Mr. Kariouk designated a place for photovoltaics within the landscaping to take advantage of the Caribbean's endless rays (otherwise, Grand Cayman's energy system is based on diesel fuel, "which is basically the worst for the environment," he says).

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The white-washed glulam roof trusses were imported from B.C.

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That said, one of the realities of building on the small island (it's a mere 35 kilometres long with a population slightly more than 50,000), both from an environmental as well as simply a logistics perspective, is that just about every building material has to be imported. "We had a great local contractor," Mr. Kariouk says. "But the basic materials just don't get fabricated in a little place like Cayman."

As such, the white-washed glulam roof trusses – "which we love," Mr. Stacey says – come from B.C., whereas the upholstered furniture, the windows, the tiles and countertops and the extensive custom millwork, fashioned by a company called Handwerk, were all made in Ottawa. "It all got put together like clockwork down there," Mr. Kariouk says. "But it took a lot of time and effort to coordinate to ensure it would come together perfectly. Our drawings were very detailed."

The energy expended will hopefully be worth it, though, as the owners consider it their "forever home." They've also gone to great lengths, with Mr. Kariouk, to ensure the whole structure is resilient in the event of hurricanes (such as 2004's Ivan, which decimated the island and many of its buildings). The floating roof might look delicate, but it is reinforced with steel. And the property sits within "a protected sound with as minimal risk to hurricanes as possible," says Mr. Stacey. In other words, while the house took a sustained, intense effort to erect, hopefully it isn't going anywhere for a very, very long time to come.

Children's play area overlooking the canal.

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