

The 2010 Interiors Edition

OTTAWA

magazine

Natural
Advantage

Bring the outside in!

The Softer side of
Modern

Discover 17 houses
with style to spare

At home with
5 trendsetters

Design admiration
within the city

Echo House

In conversation with Paul Kariouk *By Daniel Drolet*

Moments after I arrive at Echo House, Paul Kariouk has me pull my shoes back on and follow him outside. We walk a few doors up the street and stop outside a solid, Edwardian-style brick house. This, he tells me, is what Echo House looked like before the renovation. For a moment, I am puzzled. Echo House doesn't look anything like this traditional house Echo House is extremely modern, with generous windows and a clean-angled top floor that includes a cantilevered extension jutting out from the facade.

That's when the extent of the transformation of Echo House hits me. Kariouk didn't just renovate the building; he completely reinvented it. Bye-bye to all those small rooms and the feelings of propriety and formality they were built to convey; hello 21-century informality in a bright, open and unique space.

We walk back to Echo House and settle down to talk in its office, a ceilingless pod suspended above the kitchen and completely open to the rest of the house. I ask Kariouk to tell me how the transformation came about.

The house, says Kariouk, had hardly been touched since it was built in 1924 as a conventional 2 1/2-storey brick home. Then, in 2007, a professional couple bought it and decided to do some simple renovations. They approached Kariouk, a New York City architect who now lives and works in Ottawa. The three of them started talking about what they perceived as the disadvantages of the house - four tiny bedrooms, just one bath-



OPEN CONCEPT: The main floor is centred on the kitchen, which has two facets: a sleek wood-paneled wall incorporating storage, an oven and a fridge, and a long granite counter, with a sink, stove and workspace

room, and a top floor with a ceiling too low for the very tall husband. They talked about preference and lifestyle and how a small renovation wouldn't address such major issues as a leaky roof and poor insulation.

"They started seeing the possibilities of the house," says Kariouk. "We came to talk about the way they live and how the old house didn't suit those possibilities at all. And they said, 'We might as well change this,' or 'we might as well do that.'" Soon a

simple kitchen and bathroom reno had morphed into an extensive project that involved gutting the interior, chopping off and then rebuilding the top floor, and completely changing the feel and function of the house. Kariouk says that throughout the process, the owners were dream clients who were ready to engage intellectually and creatively and able to let go of preconceived ideas of what a house should be. "They hired me to be their imagination."

Today Echo House is open - very open. There are a few interior walls and no real rooms, more like spaces on different levels that



LEFT: The most conspicuous feature of the house is the top-floor cantilevered extension that juts out of the facade. Within the master bedroom, with its huge windows, boasts a spectacular view over the canal and toward downtown

RIGHT: The front door (visible in the centre of the photo) opens directly into the open living room and kitchen area. Below: At the entrance, a grate in the floor has a drain underneath it. The hand-held shower can be used to wash muddy boots - or dogs



connect visually and audibly with one another. In fact, the whole interior from the main level to the top floor, can best be thought of as a single multi-level room in which various spaces have been created, suspended or delineated.

"Basically," Kariouk says, "this is a vertical loft."

The main-floor living space is centred on the kitchen, which is open on one side to the living room and on the other to the dining area, as well as to the floor above.

The three rooms on the second floor seem more like nests in a tree, since they are small spaces suspended above the living area and accessible via an open catwalk corridor. There's an office nest, a television/reading nest, and a book-vault nest.

The most conspicuous feature of the house is the third-floor cantilevered extension that juts out of the facade. The entire floor is given over to a mainly open-concept master bedroom, bathroom, and dressing area. Kariouk was adamant that this feature was necessary and says he worked hard to convince the owners to embrace his concept. He says he finally told them that "if you don't do this cantilevered thing, this house's exterior will be completely unmemorable." That did the trick; the couple had no desire to blend in with the scenery.

"People think it odd that this top-floor room - the room with the greatest amount of glass - is the bedroom," Kariouk says. "But that's where the best view is." He adds that even with the floor-to-ceiling windows, the way the house is sited keeps the top floor out of neighbours' sightlines.

Not surprisingly, the transformation of the house has excited passions in the neighborhood. "It's this love-hate thing," says Kariouk. "Some people are calling it an architectural crime, and then there are people - total strangers - who ring the doorbell and give the owners a hug when they open the door. Opinion is totally split.

"I don't think there's a particular style to my work, but we live in the 21st century, and I produce architecture that is of the period," he says. "I'm not interested in copying things. I'm interested in trying to invent things. If I don't find a beautiful way to package a client's practical needs, I'm not doing my job."

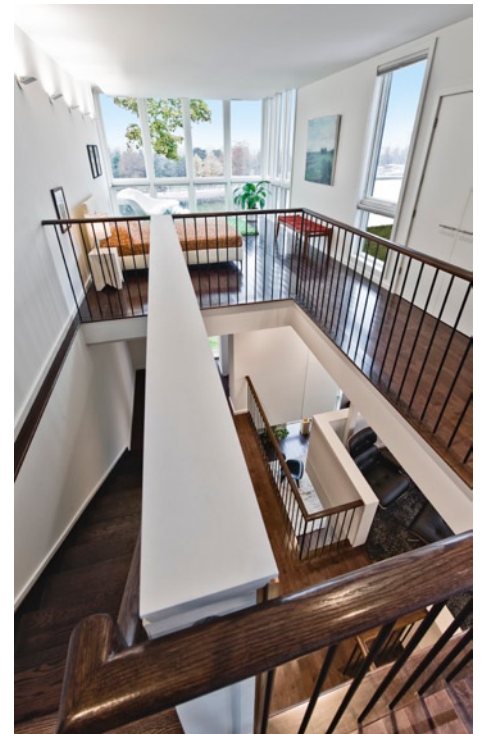
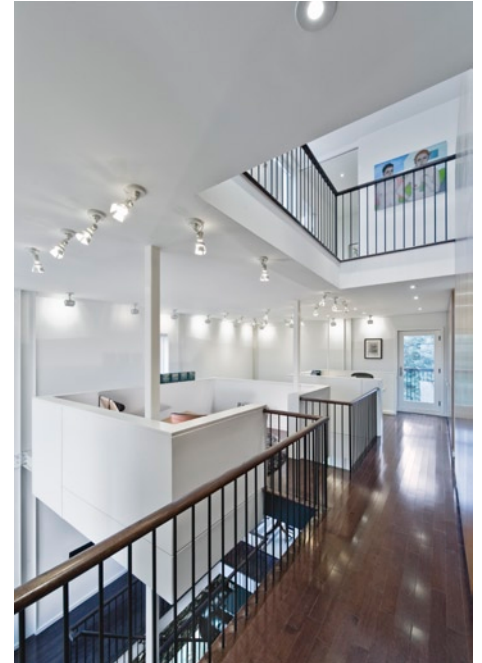




LEFT: The second floor is largely open to the main floor below. Its three "rooms" seem more like nests in a tree, since they are small spaces suspended above the living area below and accessible via an open catwalk corridor. There's an office nest and a television/reading nest (top). The library (middle and bottom) is the only one of the second-floor pods to be enclosed. The other two have half-walls, which increase the feeling of openness.



RIGHT: Paul Kariouk describes the house as "basically a vertical loft." This is apparent from the catwalk corridor (top), with views up to the bedroom level and down to the living room and kitchen. The bedroom (middle) links, via a catwalk, to a bathroom and dressing area. Says kariouk of the luxurious bathroom (bottom): "The bathroom is always the space I'm drawn to celebrate. It's the underdog of the house"



FACING PAGE: Even with the floor-to-ceiling windows, the way the house is sited keeps the top floor out of neighbours' sightlines. "The owners wanted privacy from the outside, but privacy was not a consideration on the interior" **END**

