



Less is more

A minimal design with flexible spaces and site-specific materials makes this house an ideal home for a young West Coast family.

—By Janet Collins





The open plan and generous use of glass enables natural light to penetrate the entire house. Clean lines help the building exude a modern, minimalist aesthetic, while natural materials and neutral colours ensure the overall vibe is warm and inviting. The palette complements the natural elements (rocks, trees, sky, etc.) of the site, thus producing a strong visual transition between outdoors and in, while also providing an excellent backdrop for a few strategically placed pieces of art.

When asked to design a home for an active young family, Nigel Parish of Vancouver-based Splyce Design/Build opted for a minimalist aesthetic infused with references to the building's West Coast locale. The result is a laidback elegance that can easily adapt to the changing needs of the residents.

The general plan of the irregularly shaped structure is at once open and highly flexible. The hillside site is mimicked in the undulating wall planes and varying floor levels. While the building is essentially a two-storey construct, recessed and raised floors add visual interest, helping to define the separate interior areas without resorting to the addition of walls. This effect is best appreciated when looking from the sunken living room that anchors one end of the main level, stepping gently up to the far end of the open space where the open staircase is located.

Movable partitions, such as those found on the transition level halfway up the stairs, add to the flexibility of individual spaces. These movable walls allow this level to function as a single open space or separate rooms as required by the family. This enables the boys to commandeer an area for use as a media/hangout room, where they won't disturb their father working in the adjoining office (situated down the hall from the master suite, the girl's room is large enough to include its own play space).

In the master suite, on the second-storey, another moveable wall affords varying amounts of light and changes of the exterior view past the freestanding tub and the bathroom window beyond. (The glass-walled shower is also positioned to take full advantage of the exterior views without compromising privacy.) This ability to change the size and aesthetic of individual rooms not only provides for the ever-changing needs of the young family today, but will enable the house to readily adapt to future requirements as well.

Views are an important feature of this residence; so much so that large windows were installed at the front of the house to give ample views of the nearby ocean while accessing the maximum amount of natural light. The long, narrow window might, at first glance, seem an odd choice for the dining room, but it was strategically placed low on the wall to give diners unobstructed views of the surrounding forest, while foiling the efforts of any nosy neighbours.

In homage to the West Coast aesthetic, Parish designed the home so there is a natural flow between the interior spaces as well as visual dialogue between indoor and outdoor areas. Similarly, materials used in the construction and interior finishes resemble the natural materials found on and around the site. For example, the cedar siding detail gives a nod to the surrounding trees. The flow of the wood (albeit in a different grade and finish) continues to the soffit covering the upper level's outdoor room and deck. Inside, the effect is echoed in the white oak flooring that is used to cover the stair treads and the side of a hallway cabinet. By extending the use of the same flooring material along the underside of the upper-level bridge, which couples with the exposed stairway to cross the breezeway "spine," Parish connects and defines the two main sections of the home. The continuation of materials in this way emphasizes the horizontal plane. Glass inlays in the bridge deck let light from the skylight above flow into the breezeway below.

The bridge and railing that surrounds the double-height breezeway bisects further, establishing a connection between upper and lower levels thanks in large part to mesh railing panels. Glimpses of the open-concept kitchen just off the dining area can thus be seen from above, despite the permanent wall that separates kitchen and living room.

Radiant heating may warm the concrete floors of this 2008 IDIBC Award of Excellence gold recipient, but the wood details and occasional hits of wall colour enliven the minimalist aesthetic. □

Movable partitions, such as those found in the master suite and media room, increase the flexibility of the interior spaces. Changing the size and layout of the rooms in this way also alters the light level of the adjoining spaces as well as sightlines of both interior and exterior vistas. Visual connection between the upper and lower levels is established with the double-height "breezeway" that is the spine of the house.



