

# FUSION OF IDEAS

*New home brings the  
outside inside, melds Asian  
with modern and provides  
space for large family*

BY ALEX NEWMAN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BRANDON BARRÉ  
STYLING ANDREW HACHEY  
FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS TEATRO VERDE

*It's easier to see the wing formation and hipped roof construction from this backyard vantage point. As architect Christopher Simmonds points out, the master bedroom has the same expansive glazing and views to east and south as the living area.*



*The front entry makes a strong statement. There's a sense of ceremony in its long, narrow construction, supported by Douglas Fir posts with cedar ceiling and granite-slab flooring. Cedar slats along the north side break the winds from the west and north and screen the garage and parking area from the house and drive, while the other side is open for views over the gardens.*

*"There's a real feeling of moving out into the landscape."*

**MICHAEL PEARSON HAS LED A PERIPATETIC LIFE.** A mechanical engineer whose expertise in design, and operation of power stations takes him all over the world, he arrived in Canada from England in 1979 as chief mechanical engineer for steam and power plant consultants in Niagara Falls. Within a couple of years he left for Vancouver after being head-hunted by B.C. Hydro. He later joined China Light and Power and lived in Hong Kong for 12 years.

But Ontario drew him back in 1994 to start a power plant design and operation services business. He especially likes the rural people, "descendants of original settlers, (because) there's a kindness and empathy about them. They're private but often, even before you realize you need help, they're there," he says.

Michael first lived in a modernist home on a 23-acre parcel of land in the Caledon Hills. But by 2000 he chanced upon an exquisite three-acre property for sale near Georgetown with conservation lands and Silver Creek falls to the south and east, and the escarpment rim weaving through the landscape. He snapped it up within a day, the perfect spot for a home for him and three of his six children. He also wanted to display his collection of Asian artifacts and glass sculptures by Jeff Goodman.

Architect Christopher Simmonds recalls that Michael came to him in a "quandary." The home in Caledon didn't work either with the artifacts, or with the comings and goings of grown or nearly grown children, now that he was a single father again. The new lot, with its exquisite views, would need lots of windows and a very open interior. "I told him we could make it all work—the children, the artifacts, the desire for interior space that felt like it was outdoors—by fusing modern and Asian."



Photo by Gordon King



*"I design houses as a way of experiencing the landscape. And so I like to shape the views you will see from inside."*

Walking the land—including the 43 acres of conservation area immediately to the east, ownership of which is shared by Michael and his neighbours—showed Simmonds a sublime view. The architect also knew he could restrict views to the west and north to lose sight of "pseudo European villas off in the distance."

The design was a central form with four wings that allowed the various components—bedrooms and living space especially—to capitalize on views with the sense that nothing stood between the inhabitants and the outdoors.

"I design houses as a way of experiencing the landscape," Simmonds says. "And so I like to shape the views you will see from inside."

His inspiration was Japanese architecture, one aspect of which is reinforcing a connection between inside and out, often through verandas, for viewing the gardens.

There are two such structures on Michael's home. The first is the long and narrow front entry that begins outside with a cedar-lined ceiling and granite walkway that comes inside with the addition of solid walls, and culminates in a glazed cherry wood interior front door. This makes an intentionally strong statement about entry and arrival, Simmonds says. It is emphasized by the gardens designed by landscape architect Juergen Partridge to resemble riverbeds, or what's called a dry water feature. Long grasses, dwarf evergreens, ribbons of flowering shrubs, and a Japanese maple, coupled with pebbles and rocks, work to create a dry stream, which Partridge says is definitely an Asian influence and incorporated because of Michael's stay in Hong Kong.

Moving inside, there's the same exterior orientation. At the front door, there is no step and the granite slab tiles are continuous inside and out. The ceiling at the front door and foyer is nine feet, but rises once inside to a height of 10 feet 6 inches.

Three steps up is Michael's elevated home office, where he can see over the conservation lands and all living areas of the home as he works. Simmonds jokes that given Michael's line of work in power stations, it's his "central control room."



*The grand piano has a dedicated area to the side of the living room. Above the piano: Glass works by Jeff Goodman.*



Around a curved wall, is the kitchen—modern, but warm in a cherry wood veneer. Beyond that, there is a six-inch drop in the maple floor to the living room, increasing the overall ceiling height there to 11 feet. Moving further into the living room, the ceiling becomes vaulted above the light shelves, increasing an additional three feet at the skylight shaft, and bestowing an effect of increasing volume as you move through the space from front to back.

This feeling is heightened by the bank of windows—frameless at the corners—overlooking the back yard. Since they rise to the ceiling, which aligns with the wide external soffits, the windows further enhance the feeling of being outside, Michael says. When open they take advantage of the breeze that blows over the escarpment, eliminating the need for air conditioning—except in extreme heat, he adds.

Access to the loggia is through the dining room's sliding glass doors. As ground level decking advances to a square screened porch, a visual connection between the house and outdoors is created. But physically, too, "there's a real feeling of moving out into the landscape," Michael says.





Blue grey sofas, with colourful toss cushions (acquired in Britain's Lake District), face each other over a glass and chrome coffee table. The fireplace is distinctive for its use of stone. The larger piece of granite wraps around to the dining area behind to simulate a solid cube form. The inset cube of black granite is the same material as the kitchen counters. On the mantel and in a wall niche, Jeff Goodman glass vases add more touches of colour to the neutral background palette.

Cherry veneer cabinetry confers warmth on the sleek modern kitchen. The proportions are large and the layout is straightforward.



The other major design influence was the children. "I started out this project when I was single and intending to stay that way, so I could manage my life as a single father," says Michael. Although the master bedroom suite is on the main floor, close to the home office, he wanted enough space for all his children to stay when they wanted. So the lower level, which is built into the steep esker hillside, has 10-foot ceilings and the same floor-to-ceiling glazing that makes it open to the back yard. It accommodates the children with four bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a large area for entertaining.

One thing Michael hadn't anticipated, though, was gaining a life partner. In fact, he wasn't even looking, quipping that all his "marriage lives were used up." But after construction of the house had already started, along came Angela—a soft-spoken, petite and pretty widow with three grown children of her own.

And the rest, as they say, is history. ☺



Michael acquired the solid black oak dining table and chairs when he arrived in Canada in 1979. It's sturdy and a happy reminder of the children who have grown up around it.