

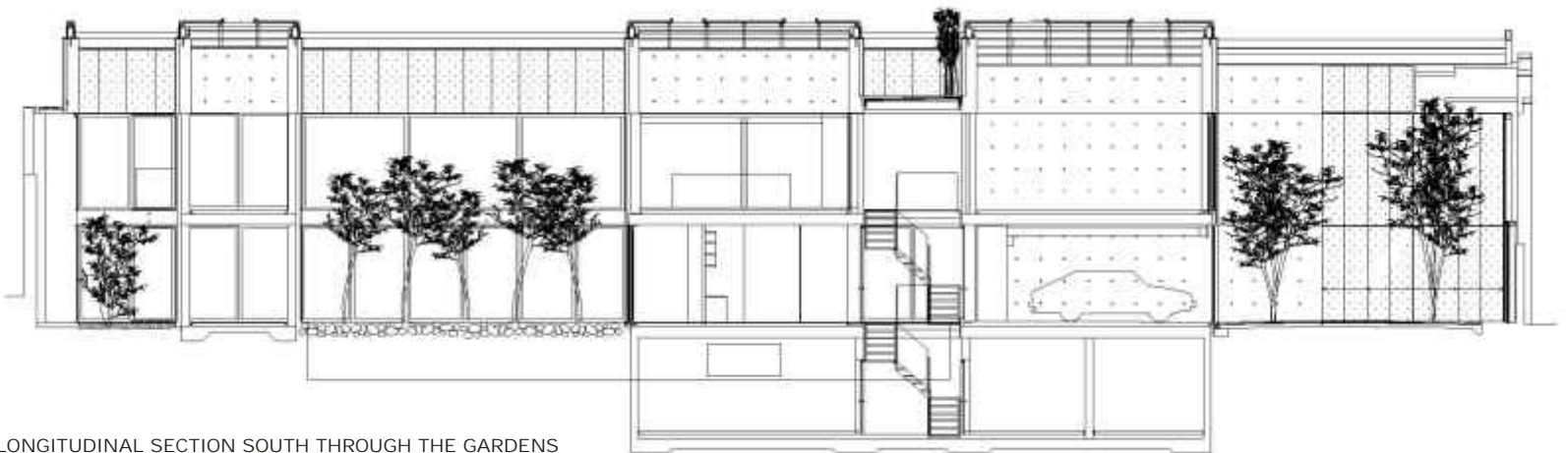
Quintessentially spatial...

You live in it, and you live around it. There is a sense of safety that only good architecture can provide. Architecture should be strong, strong in a way that it stirs emotions, evokes passion and ignites imagination. The architecture of Gianni Botsford does exactly that; assembling forms - correct and magnificent with a beautiful interplay of lights.

Text : Pragnya Rao
Photographs : Courtesy, Helene Binet

Startlingly original in form and function, the London house redeems the banality of residential architecture. The interior is a thrilling spatial adventure awash in natural light. Design here is not a plan for decoration, it is something more tangible, more like the definition Charles Eames preferred: "Design is a plan for action". The lucid, rectangular, unadorned form is a striking feature of the design scheme. The space reminds you of a 'Happy hour' on a lovely summer's day. The air is clear, the ambience magnificent. Panorama and height are overwhelming. Thanks to a glazed expanse unimpeded by balustrades and similar structures gazing out at a unique view of the skyscape extending into infinity is the charm of this space. The project is situated on an enclosed back-land site in Notting Hill, London. The orientation of the site runs almost east-west and looks towards the more open sides of the site to the south. However, the site is heavily overlooked and overshadowed on the south and west elevations and it was critical to maintain privacy, whilst optimising daylight and sunlight penetration into the house. The starting point for the project was to represent the empty volume of the site as a three-dimensional grid of voxel data points (3D pixels) each consisting of a range of varying attributes. The architects worked in close co-ordination with Arup. The quest for alternative means of natural light drove the project from the outset. A detailed environmental analysis for each individual voxel was carried out. This analysis produced a database of solar and daylight conditions throughout the year, taking into account weather patterns specific to London. Subsequently, the client's preferences and lifestyle were superimposed onto the environmental data. This led to the emergence of a project that was tuned to both the three dimensional environmental conditions and the brief. The inward looking nature of the site in

conjunction with the inverted section led to the development of a completely glazed 'sky facade' roof to the house. This 'sky facade', the only visible facade, was seen as an environmental moderator, filtering sunlight and daylight through layers of transparency and opacity. Solar optimised terraces and gardens created internal courtyard volumes into which the surrounding spaces face. "The design process was an experiment," says Gianni Botsford. "Usually architects design a building and then test it. Here we spent six months testing the solar geometry before the design was even thought about. This gives the building a different set of attributes and creates a design best suited to this unusual enclosed site". The extensive testing allowed the architect



LONGITUDINAL SECTION SOUTH THROUGH THE GARDENS

1. An interesting interplay of light and shadow dominates the entire space as is evident in the main stair leading to living room.
2. Glazed ceiling featuring automatic blinds and fritted glass for solar protection.
3. The interior is a thrilling spatial adventure awash in natural light.
4. A view of the lap pool and the garden area.
- 5&6. An outdoor terrace not only brings the outside inside, but also makes for a charming inward looking space.
7. The house is totally naturally ventilated, with low level grilles and high vents creating a stack effect. Seen here is the kitchen and external terrace.
- 8&9. Sometimes transparent, sometimes translucent, extensive use of glass and light dominate the design scheme.





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11



13



12

to plan the layout of the house starting with the best-calculated position for the outside space and daylight paths throughout the day and year. This resulted in the outdoor terrace being raised to the first floor level and the section being inverted to accommodate bedrooms on the ground floor and double height living spaces above. On entering the main volume, the radical design of the house becomes apparent. A long shallow pitched stair and towering 10m exposed concrete wall draw the eye upwards towards the living areas with the light pouring in from the glazed roof. Four light wells penetrate down to the ground floor, each planted to create a different atmosphere. The house is totally naturally ventilated, with low level grilles and high vents creating a stack effect. The thermal mass of the concrete structure will regulate the temperature within, while the lighting, heating and elements such as blinds are all controlled via a programmable system. The design approach is an attempt to avoid falling into pre-conceived solutions to design problems through a process of detailed analysis of site and brief. The building plays with the concepts of mass and transparency. Sometimes transparent, sometimes translucent, the result is a colourful play of light and shadow. The architecture is an assemblage of artistically composed surprises in space and form. There is never a predictable moment as one move through the spaces. Refusing to be bound by convention, the architecture retains the essence of rawness. ■

FACT FILE

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- Landscape architects
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10,11&13. The Master Bathroom is dominated by an extensive use of glass, which gives it a very ethereal appearance.

12. View through to the glass door above the basement.