GLOBAL HOMES
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CALIFORNIA DREAMING

Stairs lead to the roof and a hot tub, the greenhouse, and a sea of solar panels. 'We produce enough surplus power to sell to the electricity company during the daytime,' says David.
When architect David Hertz set about creating his dream family home, he had two aims: to make it eco-friendly and to make it a whole lot of fun – for small children and big kids alike.
Kids rule in the home of David Hertz and Stacy Fong. The first clue is literally on the doorstep, where side-by-side adult and pint-size front doors open into the home. David, an eco-architect, built to be as environmentally friendly and sociable as possible.

“We like to think of our home as a day spa,” he explains, leading the way along a glass bridge that connects the upper floor of the two houses that form the U-shape basis of his home. It overlooks the delightful outdoor living area, where children and friends congregate at weekends.

“People come by to go to the beach or just hang out,” Stacy says. “It feels like we’ve all gone to Bali for the day.” Not that Venice Beach, California, is an area you’d want to escape from — in the past decade it’s become a holiday destination in itself. But it wasn’t always like that, says David, a surfing nut who chose the area because in the Eighties it was the only affordable place within reach of the waves.

“Venice was scary when I moved here — there were gangs, robberies, even the occasional murder. Today, it’s still the most diverse community in LA, with a...”
Instant ways to detox your environment

- Poison-absorbing indoor plants are great for creating a calm, clean vibe in your home.
- Opt for non-toxic paints (water-based instead of solvent-based) and use old-fashioned cleaning products such as vinegar and baking soda, rather than chemical-packed hi tech sprays.
- Cut exposure to synthetic chemicals by using eco-friendly washing powder on bed linen. Also keep electrical items in the bedroom to a minimum – the less electrical static in the air the better.
Home truths

What are your design influences? We love combining classical designers like Eames, Starck and Le Corbusier with ethnic pieces, set against a background of simple, humble materials.

What about your entertaining style? It's always informal, always outdoors and there's always music.

Are you messy or tidy and how did this affect design decisions? Stacy is compulsively organised, so storage was top of her list. I fight my tendency towards chaos and we try to teach the kids without being unreasonable.
sense of “anything goes” in the architecture. You can be as experimental as you like.’

It meant David, who once worked for California’s most famous innovative
architect, Frank Gehry, could build an unusual glass and concrete home without
any fear of offending the neighbours. And Stacy worked with him, designing
furniture and fixtures in what they call ‘humble’ materials — pine, glass and
Syndecrete, the mix of concrete and recycled material David invented 20 years ago.

The house has a surprisingly small footprint. ‘We fitted our home onto a
40 x 90ft plot 10 years ago’, explains David. ‘When the plot next door became
available, we were able to expand and create the outdoor play area we’d always
dreamed of.’ Although you can’t see the sea, it’s close, and David designed the
house to take advantage of the marine air and brilliant light that saturate the
neighbourhood. High windows and screened doors let in cooling breezes, while
solar panels, which feed into tubes beneath the concrete floors and benches,
assure toasty feet via underfloor heating on chilly evenings. ‘It’s completely clean,
there are no wires. We don’t even need a booster for hot water.’

TOP LEFT Food is
served from an
open kitchen,
separated from
diners by a high
counter: ‘It allows
for conversation
while keeping
cooking clutter
from view,’ Stacy
explains. She chose
professional
caterers’
shelving, but
Wards does
stainless-steel
shelves for £77.22. The
stools are by
designer Lisa
Krohn, but
Chair Maker can
do bespoke.
ABOVE On the
first floor, sliding
glass panels can
turn guest rooms
into a huge play
space for the kids.
The ground floor of the original house is a large, open-plan living area divided into quarters. You enter into the ‘formal’ living room – not that life is ever anything but informal in this busy home – with a more intimate TV room behind it housing downsized armchairs for the Hertz’s children, Max, eight, Sophie, 11, and Collin, 12. Clutter is kept out of the small corridor leading from the living area to the back door thanks to fitted cupboards, occupying every inch of space under the stairs.

Upstairs, the extension provides the guest rooms the family home had lacked before, with sliding glass panels to allow the new rooms to be used flexibly – which means that when there are no overnight visitors, the top floor can be turned into a huge playroom for the kids’ large-scale models.

The children’s rooms, along the long glass bridge that connects the two buildings, also bask in light thanks to large windows and more translucent sliding doors, and there’s even a child-scale bedsit where the kids have friends to stay.

But despite the innovations and clever use of light and space, it’s the al fresco life his family love that David had in mind when he created their flexible, fun home.
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