



The architectural message delivered on the exterior of Prue and Michael Gibsons' home rings loud and clear internally, too – strong lines, simple materials and a surprising warmth considering minimal furnishings. →



## LESS IS MORE

SEEKING SUBTLE SOPHISTICATION AND A SENSE OF DISCOVERY, THIS FAMILY HOME'S TRANSFORMATION AVOIDS THE USUAL SUSPECTS

WORDS & STYLING KAREN COTTON PHOTOGRAPHS PRUE RUSCOE



The idea was to build on the things they loved, even if it meant bucking the accepted rules for making the most of existing architecture, block and outlook. For the Gibsons, the home's discreet position, well-hidden from the road, was one of its most convincing points of appeal. They decided to capitalise on the structure's 'secret' quality by building lower into the block, despite the promise of enhanced views if they extended upwards.

"We wanted to avoid anything glitzy or showy," says Michael. "We wanted strong architecture and we liked the idea of using natural exposed materials. Jorge suggested using rammed earth alongside concrete, which we loved."

The design footprint and materials were decided on first and foremost, while much of the internal fittings were left until the structure was in place. Decisions such as the colour of the internal concrete floors were left until the rammed earth had time to weather, when its final tones became evident. This made it tricky for builder Anthony Maruncic, of Berlina Projects, but ultimately meant small decisions could be made as the building progressed.

American white oak joinery lights up the finished space and also lines the ceilings. Many pieces of furniture, such as banquettes and the kitchen's four-metre-long island bench have been custom designed to maximise the internal space. Study nooks were also purpose-built in the children's bedrooms.

One of the home's most striking features is the beautiful rough texture of the concrete pillars – achieved by imprinting grainy timber onto the surface while still wet. (A glitch occurred in the drying process, when the wooden formwork buckled and an extra 8000 nails were needed to secure it.) →

**(Opposite page)** Texture plays an important role in the dining room, where a weighty bluesstone slab rests on a French oak table base from Parterre, surrounded by The Country Trader assorted metal chairs. Above, a chromed ball light reflects furnishings and the mottled timber ceiling. Linking the dining area with the entry is *Black Sallee*, an oil on canvas by Jo Bertini. Seating takes the form of a banquette with Marimekko-fabric cushions **(above)**, Porch Furniture white beech 'Paddlepop' chairs overlooking the pool **(right)** and old milking stools **(above right)** as the ideal alternative to modern bar chairs.





Whatever the headaches, the painstaking attention to detail and considered architectural approach have paid off with the final configuration of the house. The reallocation of space encourages harmonious family living, with Michael and Prue able to entertain friends in the main living spaces or work in the upstairs study while still remaining connected to the children, who spend time in the pool or media room. The home is also designed to capture good cross-ventilation, so the place stays cool without the need for air-conditioning.

Prue and Michael also love the mix of old and new and have filled their spaces with existing pieces of furniture from their collection – many family hand-me-downs – and pieces accumulated over their years together.

Prue, a professional arts writer, visits lots of exhibitions in the course of her work, but succumbs to surprisingly few pieces, so any painting that makes the cut in the Gibsons' personal collection is really very special and highly prized. An abstract landscape by friend Jo Bertini in the dining room is a favourite, and the subtle greens and moody atmosphere of the painting suit the house while echoing the colours of the exterior surrounds.

Whole walls of uninterrupted glass open up views to the garden, which was designed by Myles Baldwin. The outdoor spaces were considered essential in the overall redesign concept, and local natives, river birches and juniper trees were chosen to complement the home's strong, simple design.

With the house now finished, Prue has settled into her next book, *The Catastrophes of Love*. Her written words may focus on emotional calamity, but the surroundings in which she is writing them is a triumph of serenity. ❖

Inside and out, the spaces have been carefully considered. Nothing is crowded or overembellished, but it all comes together as an elegant whole. As an art writer, Prue is exposed to some of the best and loveliest works, but she edits them down and only hangs a select few. The bedroom is home to two striking paintings – *Abstract 1* (above left), by Stuart Watters, which is positioned above a bespoke chair by Cloth, and *Writing 2004* (above and opposite page), which is a portrait of Prue done by her friend Jo Bertini. Louvred clerestory windows set high above the bed are strategically placed to encourage cross-ventilation.

