



Accentuate the positive

Limitations imposed by the city location of this house have been overcome with innovative design solutions

The old cliché that necessity is the mother of invention can easily be applied to architecture. For rather than being a deterrent to good design, a location's unusual size and shape can have a beneficial influence on the creative process.

The challenges imposed by the long, narrow site of this house were compounded by the lack of a rear alleyway for parking. This meant that the garage had to be built out front.

Architect Richard Blender limited the visual impact of this strictly utilitarian area of the home by cantilevering the house over the garage door.

"The garage sits in shadow so you don't notice

it. The primary focus is on the balcony," he says.

Positioned beside the front entrance, the balcony is defined by linear panelling. From the road, the wooden bifold doors appear to sit inside a picture frame.

The doors open onto the kitchen for a seamless indoor-outdoor flow. The balcony also provides homeowners Giacomo and Kristyn Caliendo with an outdoor space and a view of the sculpture park across the road.

"We wanted to blur the lines between inside and outside," says Giacomo Caliendo, whose company built the house.

Facing page: Balconies on the first and third floors of this four-level house provide the homeowners with outdoor living space upon which to enjoy vibrant inner city living.

Above: The open doorway leads onto the balcony from the kitchen. This area can be shut off from the main entrance with bifold doors.



Above: The pared-back, linear appeal of the kitchen is in keeping with the homeowners' desire for a geometric look both inside and outside.

Right: The homeowners spend most of their time in the kitchen so it was decided to place it in the front of the home. The room flows out to a balcony that looks onto a sculpture park across the road.



Inside the first floor, a progression of gradually descending rooms creates a telescoping effect, the floor dropping by two steps, so that the kitchen is 10ft high, the dining area 12ft and the living room 14ft.

"The stepping down from room to room is connected through the ceiling plane. By the time you arrive in the living room, it has a kind of loft-like appeal," says Blender.

"We have been able to achieve an expansive feeling on a narrow site by emphasising the verticality of the design. In architectural terms, this is called using the section of the building."



Although one living space opens onto another, a variety of hard and soft barriers – such as bifold doors and curtain screens – ensures each area can become separate and enclosed.

In a city location with close neighboring properties, natural light can sometimes be sacrificed for privacy. Blender solved this design conundrum by creating glass panels on the top floor balcony which allow the light to shine in from above.

This light illuminates the second floor, an area of the home that is traditionally the darkest level in a city townhouse. The open stairwell then carries the light through to the lower living room floor.



Above: The living room is located at the back of the house, ensuring a quiet, calm space. Its 14ft high ceiling creates an open, expansive area.

Left: A photographic gallery on the second floor is illuminated by light from the glass panels on the courtyard above. These panels let in natural light, which shines through the stairwell and onto the main living areas below.



Top: The master bedroom is located beside the courtyard on the top. A transparent fireplace can be used from the master bedroom and bathroom, as well as the courtyard.

Above: A generous soaking tub looks out onto the third floor courtyard. The bath surround, is made from the same material as the kitchen countertops, to provides continuity in design.

The top floor courtyard balcony is accessed through the master suite. As in the rest of the house, design continuity is achieved by using a similar material palette inside and outside. For example, the bathtub's cast concrete surround echoes the look of the stone panels on the exterior facade.

On the other side of the house, a wooden walkway with steel balustrades leads from the main living floor to a sunken garden.

Blender says that because there is no garage out back, the space can be used as an private outdoor area. One that contrasts nicely with the public view enjoyed on the other side of the house.



Architect: Richard Blender, AIA, Wilkinson Blender Architecture (Chicago IL)
Interior designers: Giacomo & Kristyn Caliendo
Kitchen designer: Jose Torres Moguel
Kitchen manufacturer: Poggenpohl
Builder: G.Corp Development
Structural engineer: Matrix Engineering Coporation
Siding: CEP Claddings and S&S Panel Sales
Roof: GAF Rubberoid membrane
Windows & doors: Quantum Windows, Loewen Windows
Paints: Regal wall paints from Benjamin Moore
Lighting designer: Jill Mullen, The Morgan Group
Heating: Furnace and air conditioning from Payne, boiler from Burnham
Blinds: Sheerweave, Natural Window Shade Co
Drapes: Basia Frosard Design
Kitchen countertop: Soupcan
Backsplash: Bilsky Glass
Sink: Franke from ABT
Faucets: Grohe
Oven, cooktop, dishwasher and ventilation: Miele
Refrigerators: Miele and Viking
Bathtub and faucets: Kohler
Flooring: Terrazzo & Marble

Photography by Jamie Padgett and Jamie Cobedlick



Left: The linear stairway linking the house with the garden emphasises the house's geometric design

Above: A sunken garden features concrete planters and wooden seating. As the homeowners are musical, this can be used as a space for intimate concerts. The neighboring property is partly obscured by a timber trellis.