

**TRUE TO CHARACTER**

The original architecture of the house, including the facade, was retained during its recent renovation. Details in the house were also kept, such as the pink mosaic-tiled staircase (bottom right), and the metal gates (left), which were converted from swing to sliding ones. The window grilles with their floral motifs were removed from window frames and used on the perimeters of the newly constructed balcony (below).



PHOTOS BY YEN MENG JIN

BRIGHT IDEAS

The study (above) at the front of the house comes with a round skylight, so that the room is naturally bright. Large windows and full height glass doors were also installed around the home to let the light in. The top of the round skylight is in the balcony garden, where it can double as a table for the family to sit around and have drinks.

WHEN French expatriate couple Herve and Laetitia Barthe stepped into this terrace house at Serangoon Gardens, they knew instantly that it would be their home in Singapore for the next two years. "This is the only house that had soul. There was nothing spectacular about them. We came to this house and felt it had something," says Mr Barthe, a flight instructor and deputy head of training at ATR Singapore Training Centre.

The two-storey terrace home, originally built in 1955, was sold to an investor two-and-a-half years ago. The investor hired Creative Mind Design to handle the renovation, from the design, budget, and to the architect and contractor selection.

"The brief was that it had to be a unique home, and that it had to be suitable for leasing," says Constance Tew, director of Creative Mind Design, who did the interiors. She roped in architect Chin Kean Kok, design director at Envelope Architects, for the job.

Ms Tew approached property agents who said that

**OPEN HOUSE**

A small courtyard (with a tree in it) between the dining area and the kitchen (right) makes both areas bright and airy.

personal space |

Instant affinity

Herve and Laetitia Barthe knew that they had found their new home the moment they stepped into this well-lighted, two-storey terrace house in Serangoon Gardens. It felt almost as if the house had adopted them. **By Tay Suan Chiang**

homes in this area would be popular with expatriates. "A home with three bedrooms, a guest room, and a helper's room would be what most tenants are looking for," says Ms Tew.

The 57-year-old house was still in good condition when renovations on the home began about 18 months ago. "The house looked like a cottage and it would be a pity to tear it down. I decided to retain the original architecture, even though it would cost less to tear it down and rebuild a new house," says Mr Chin.

Apart from the facade, little details in the home were also kept in its original condition, such as the pink mosaic-tiled staircase. "It is difficult to find new mosaic tiles so we felt it was best to keep the original ones," says Ms Tew. The house's metal gates were given a fresh coat of paint, and Mr Chin converted them from swing gates into sliding ones. The home's back gate was also kept, and is now a front side gate to the home.

Even the window grilles which have floral motifs were given new life. They were removed from the window frames and given fresh coats of black paint. Mr Chin then used them on the perimeters of the newly constructed balcony.

Compared with other landed homes, terrace houses

tend to have dark interiors as there are no windows on the side of the house. Mr Chin had to find new ways to introduce light. At the front of the house, he created a study with a round skylight, so that the room is naturally bright. The paint on the walls of this study were stripped away to reveal the original bricks.

There is also a small courtyard which opens up to the sky, between the dining area and the kitchen, brightening these two areas. The original kitchen was turned into a guest room, while a new kitchen was constructed as part of the new extension built at the rear of the house.

Other ways that Mr Chin introduced light into the home included installing large windows and full height glass doors around the home.

"The house feels bright, and we still get our privacy, and the windows look into the home," says Mr Barthe. "We didn't like that some houses were built so close to each other, I could almost shake the neighbour's hand."

On the second storey, a bedroom has been turned into a family area which leads to the balcony and a small garden on the right. The top of the skylight is also in this garden. Ms Tew made the skylight round, "so that it can double as a table and the family can sit out here for drinks", she says.

In the front of the house, the false ceilings were re-

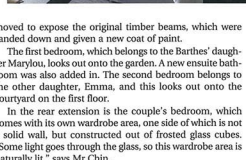


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Herve Barthe (below), with wife Laetitia and daughters Emma (in blue) and Marylou

**SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS**

The master bedroom (above), at the rear extension of the house, comes with its own wardrobe area. Marylou's room (left) looks out onto the garden, while Emma's room (below), with one of the family's two cats on the bed) looks out onto the courtyard on the first floor.



Mr Tew initially planned for the couple's room to be at the front of the house, but did away with the idea as "guests would have to walk through the bedroom to get to the garden, and the garden can only be enjoyed by two people", she says. With this new arrangement of a family area leading to the balcony and garden, everyone can enjoy that outdoor space, which is greatly treasured.

The Barthes used to live in the Caribbean. "We built our own home, that had no walls, so everything was very open. Laetitia would spend most of the time outdoors," says Mr Barthe. "Moving here, we had to get used to spending more time inside the house than outdoors."



While most of the home came furnished, one of the first pieces of furniture the family bought after moving in was an outdoor table and matching chairs, so that they could spend more time outside.

The family, including their two daughters, moved in about three weeks ago with their suitcases, two cats, and nothing else.

Even without much of their personal items, the family already feels at home. "Rather than us adopting the house, the house adopted us," says Mr Barthe. He is, however, eyeing some paintings and hopes to be able to take them with him when they leave.

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