

BELOW Extensive use of glass ensures a seamless merge of interior and exterior design.
RIGHT A blooming lotus conveys beauty and peace.



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building ikebana

ARCHITECTURE IS ALWAYS ABOUT THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE SIMULTANEOUSLY, SAYS GARY TURTON, WHO REMAKES THIS MINIMALIST HOME

HIGH IN THE GREEN MOUNTAINS OF THE CARIBBEAN I WAS FORTUNATE TO SPEND A MORNING IN A VERY SPECIAL SPACE. The house, white on white, sits high on a bluff overlooking sea and mountains, a classic example of minimalist contemporary design. When senior architect Gary Turton was approached to lead the design team, he recognised that his client had clear ideas, an eye for detail, and a passion for sleek and sophisticated minimalism. The relationship between a homeowner and an architect depends much on the symbiosis of ideas and an understanding of execution. The house that I am visiting on a beautiful breezy Caribbean morning is clearly the product of a highly successful partnership.

The new structure was to be built on the site of a much loved family residence. The original house was flat with high ceilings, indoor gardens, and extensive use of glass. Practical details such as eastern facing bedrooms, large windows to capture panoramic views and sunshine, as well as

the novel idea of bringing outdoor spaces into the living areas all proved to be sound concepts. The building that I am standing in now features many of these design elements. My hostess explains that the original architect had shown such foresight and vision in building the first home, that part of the brief to Turton contained the mandate to recreate the aspects of the home that they all loved. Turton's challenge would lie in finding the balance between reproducing the strengths of the old design while imbuing them with new levels of Caribbean contemporary design.

The four-year project is a well-crafted addition to modern Caribbean architecture. It is more than the sum of its parts; and it is clear that each space has been thought through with great precision. I enter by crossing a bridge over a large reflecting pool that showcases a blooming lotus clump. This unusual entrance is flanked on the right by a dramatic rock garden designed and executed by talented landscaper Peter Milne. There is more



ABOVE Artichoke lights and a dramatic curved staircase are perfectly placed for maximum Ikebana effect

RIGHT TOP The curved staircase rises above the water feature planted with bamboo

RIGHT MIDDLE A collection of Buddha statues survey the terrain from custom designed niches

RIGHT BOTTOM Water forms the backdrop of an interior bamboo garden

IKEBANA IS A DISCIPLINED ART FORM THAT BRINGS
HUMANITY AND NATURE TOGETHER IN A WAY
THAT INCREASES APPRECIATION OF NATURE BY WORKING
WITH AN ADHERENCE TO SHAPE, LINE, AND FORM.
THIS IS CLOSELY LINKED TO THE PREMISES OF MINIMALISM

than a nod here to the Eastern influence. This is mirrored in the art and accents that are spotted throughout. The owners lived in the Far East for a number of years during which time they acquired interesting and unusual art from different countries in the region including Japan, China, Cambodia, Thailand and Tibet. It was with these pieces in mind that every space in the house was detailed before ground was ever broken. Each niche was designed for a particular piece of art or sculpture in their collection. The conversation moves to the art of Japanese flower arranging or Ikebana, of which my hostess is a keen disciple. It is the disciplined practice of arranging flowers, stems, and foliage in a manner that is meant to increase nature appreciation within the context of a strict adherence to shape, line, and form. The links to minimalism are overt. The practice is usually conducted in silence to allow for greater appreciation. "I do it for relaxation and I get the cuttings from the garden."

I see evidence of the Ikebana principles everywhere I turn. It is the cool, clean lines and the defining spaces that make room for beauty. The lack of clutter and congestion is very pleasing to both the eye and the spirit. When I ask if the minimalistic style of the home relates in any way to the wild greenery of the tropical landscape, perhaps a subconscious contrast that throws each into greater relief or a way of pushing back against the forest, she thinks for a while before answering. "I think it is a way for me to create serenity, a respite from the clutter of everyday life." She admits that she was influenced by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies Van der Rohe, Le Courbousier, Richard Meier, and Arne Jacobsen. The effect of managing the space with such precision allows each detail to be appreciated and the house hums a soothing energy. In the main living and dining space, the horizon is a seamless blend of infinity pool and ocean. The light created by white on white throughout the house (the only exception is a brick red wall in the guest bathroom) is effective





ABOVE Ocean views become part of the guest room's design

RIGHT TOP Clean lines create a relaxing ambiance in this fully detailed spa bath

RIGHT BOTTOM Careful placement of every item is seen in mirrored art

pieces are thrown into relief. Signature pieces such as the large "artichoke" lights that hang at strategic points appear almost silver tinged creating an effective visual illusion that is directly related to the light in the room. The cool palette also allows the few coloured accent pieces such as the geometrically patterned Isfahan rug, and the few coloured details such as the art on the wall to "pop."

One of the most dramatic features of the design is the introduction of a partial second floor that houses the guest suite. The real tour de force of

this is the magnificent curved wall that rises from floor to ceiling as you enter the home. The wall adds a curved feature that juxtaposes against the straight clean lines of main living area. Turton has nothing but praise for his client's meticulous attention to detail, which he says "rivalled even my own." I stand for a long time looking at the sweeping curve of the wall and the staircase that wraps its way to the partial second floor. It is a beautiful addition, with its cantilevered spiral curves and dark, local hardwood floors. My gracious hostess says, laughing, that: "Since we

were building a home that would last through our old age, we of course, resisted the idea of going up with another storey, but with Gary's advice, we decided it would in fact enhance the design and so the upstairs guest suite with its own jacuzzi and entertainment room was created." The curved staircase stands out as the focal point of the great room, rising above the water feature planted with bamboo. Close friend and designer, Gino Fusco, was the first one who saw the possibilities of a partial second floor, and this has proved to be one of the stellar features of the design.



BELOW Each plant is complemented by its companion, a tribute to an impeccable eye

BELOW RIGHT This sleek kitchen is a perfect combination of function and form

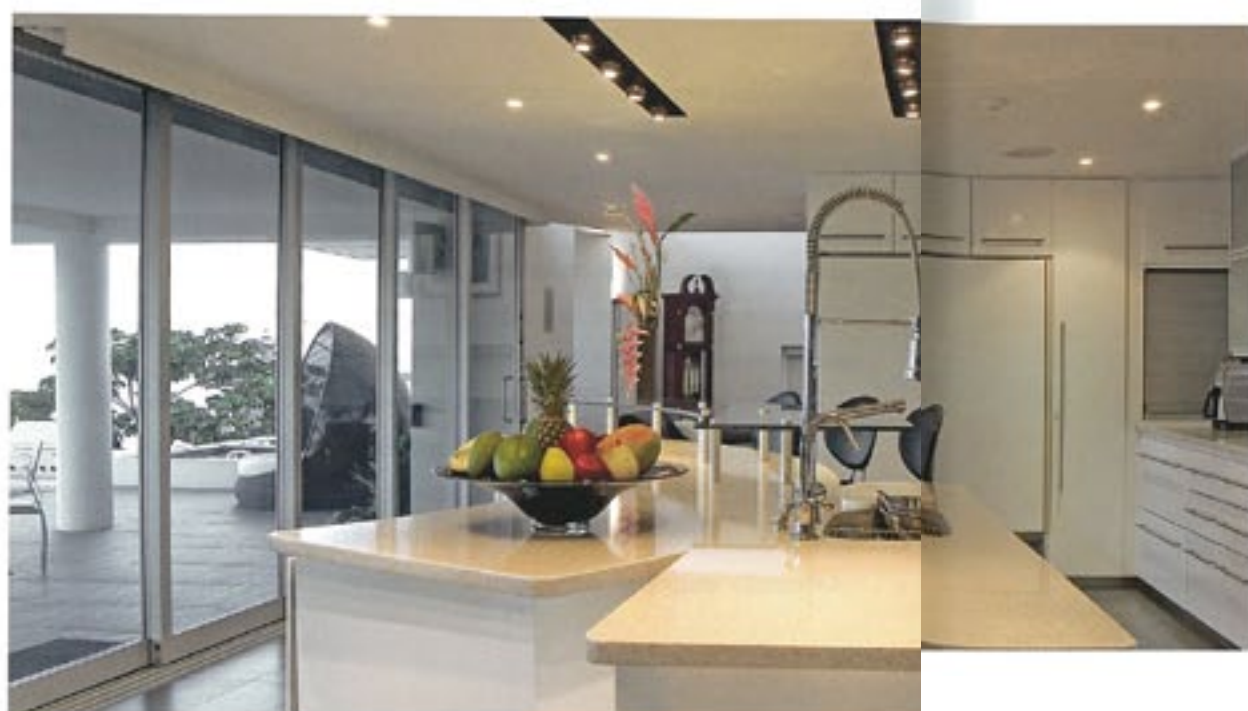
RIGHT The brise soleil is a dramatic architectural feature for both day and night vistas

This deep appreciation for harmony and nature is carried through as one walks out onto the deck. On the left of the property lies a stream that meanders down a steep hill. This area was once an orchard but it has been beautifully landscaped by the late landscape giant Chris Talma who was known for his sensitive management of gardenscapes. Much of his deeply held love for beauty and nature is reflected in this gentle landscape. Heliconias and gingers thrive near the water, and while the surrounding area is interspersed with dramatic foliage there is no sense of clutter or crowding. Each plant is complemented by its companion, a tribute to an impeccable eye. There is even a small wooden bridge, perfect for end-of-day reflections. A large ylang ylang tree and a datura plant, heavy with pendulous bells, guarantee an exotic night perfume. I also spot an unusual and beautiful tree, the *Amherstia nobilis*, thriving on the waterside. About the garden, my hostess says, "This is for my Ikebana. I get all my cuttings from here. And it's where I come when I want to get away."

Back on deck, there is an unusual sunken area. A star-gazing pit. I've never seen one and I am captivated by this paradoxical idea of climbing down to look up. By climbing down into the space that looks similar to water-less jacuzzi, the light pollution from the nearby city is extinguished, allowing the sky to release its galaxies. It is a simple design but one that is extraordinarily effective, like so many other things in this beautiful house. On my way back inside, I am struck by the way in which the harsh tropical sun is mitigated by deep roof overhangs and a *brise soleil*, literally a "sun breaker", with clean geometric lines that work in conjunction with tinted glass to minimise unpleasant glare and heat. I see much of the modernists in this home; there is evidence of Le Corbusier's free facade, the non-supporting walls that can be designed as the architect wishes, in this case, a curved wall; but there is also the open floor plan without concern for supporting walls that is still so distinctive of modern design and it's hard not to be reminded of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's aphorisms "less is more" and "God is in the details" when walking through the cool spaces.

This building of energy makes this home more than a sum of its parts. By observing the careful placement and meticulous attention to detail, I understand the aphorisms a bit more.

It's all about building Ikebana. M



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