



MEMORY- MAKING

NEW HOUSE DESIGN 2016



It is said that private houses are vessels for family memories; that children have deep and enduring associations with the houses they grew up in (if they did grow up in houses). Many clients decide to build custom houses largely for that reason: to make a place where their children will create experiences they will then recall for decades. In that sense, a house is familial unifier, serving a vital social – and psychological – role. And if that is the case, how should architects approach their task?

In a way, it is unfair to ask of a building that it predict or specially modify itself to accommodate or encourage formative experience. In another way, that is essentially what architecture has always done. If houses hold unique importance within the context of family life, isn't it more because of what their occupants do there, than because of which spaces they do it in? Houses have living rooms, kitchens, bedrooms, perhaps a 'family' room... but it's hardly possible for these spaces to anticipate social and personal dynamics after the fact. And yet, architects of houses are involved in the most intimate genre of design. Their relationship with client-owners is nearly always intensely personal; after all, they are dealing with the private needs of particular individuals, and trying to realise aspirations that may be contained within relatively few square metres, but which are passionately held. The cooks in the family have strong ideas about the kitchen; the gamers in the family are adamant about the media room, garage, or 'man-cave'; the infants need safe and lively play rooms or nooks; the scholars or work-at-home types demand tranquil retreats; the adults want views; the kids want gadgets or toys and places to use them; the teenagers want what teenagers have wanted since time immemorial... whatever that is. And the one writing the cheques wants it all at a lower cost, completed early. It's a colossal recipe for contradiction, which the designer must turn into a dish of cohesion.

We see it every year when we do this annual story: the diversity of house architecture is infinite, the imagination brought to bear is exorbitant. Given the similarity of programme and the general limitations of size, it is a category that is astonishingly rich – arguably the epitome of architectural expansiveness. The smallest weekend cabin, the average 3-bed/2-bath, the indulgent mansion... they all keep getting refreshed, rethought, rebooted. And because houses are virtually the only building type that laypeople have direct experience in constructing (even clients who commission them clamber over the building sites), they are also the most familiar, the best comprehended. People can see how they are put together, can know the component parts that make them up, must understand directly what their money is needed for.

In many parts of the world, of course, houses are produced in large part by the hands that will live in them, sans architects or contractors. And even in these buildings, created without the benefit of fancy educations or highly technical skill sets, great practical invention occurs. But we are not focussed on those examples here. We are interested in the other houses, the ones that represent collaborative achievements by teams of people, tradesmen, clients, consultants and, especially, the architects who keep it all heading in one direction. Let's see what those people have thought up this year.



J House

HERZELIYA PITUACH, ISRAEL
PTISOU KEDEM ARCHITECTS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMIT GERON

This ample house in Israel by Pitsou Kedem is ambitious on many levels. Spread over three floors, with the central ground level an expansive entertainment zone that spills fluidly into the landscaped gardens, the house plays multiple games with the definitions of privacy and openness. Whilst quite concealed from the street, presenting merely an ambiguous, abstract wall to the sidewalk, J House opens up in full transparency within its enclosed garden world. It is a sanctuary even while it is informal in personality.

The all-white building keeps its surprises to itself, doling them out in bits and pieces as you move through the plan and section. There are always multiple view lines, usually through layers of transparency – the use of glass panels is sophisticated – and the eyes have nowhere to be bored. The lower level is devoted to bedroom suites, and the top floor to the master bedroom area. It is the central ground level that is the culmination of the composition, and it is





