

toronto

white out

A TORONTO TV PRODUCER PROVES THAT LIVING IN AN ALL-WHITE ENVIRONMENT NEEDN'T BE STERILE: IT'S THE PERFECT BACKDROP TO HEDONISM AND FUN


words **Dominic Lutyens** photography **Stacy Brandford**



Above In the living room includes is a 'Smoke' chair by Maarten Baas for Moooi, available from Greenwich Village (gvuk.co.uk).

Opposite This 'Rosy Angelis' lamp by Philippe Starck for Flos is available from Geoffrey Drayton (020 8320 2672, geoffrey-drayton.co.uk).



A modern living room with a large window overlooking a garden. The room features a dark brown modular sofa, a white coffee table, and a white armchair. The floor is dark wood, and the walls are white. The window provides a view of a lush garden with stone steps and a wooden bench.

a ppealing though the union may sound, relationships between architects and their clients are not always hunky-dory. Architects often want to push the envelope creatively, leaving their clients aghast at their crazily radical ideas. However, in the case of Toronto-based Abbey Lynne and her architect Pat Hanson of local architects gh3 (who worked closely with colleague Anthony Provenzano), client and architect got on like a house on fire – without such a fate literally befalling the house itself.

In fact, if anyone was likely to cause any friction, it was Abbey, as she cheerfully admits. Two years ago, she bought a '1970s, late brutalist building' ripe for renovation and, as the owner of a massive collection of architecture books and magazines, she could have been the nightmare, know-it-all client. 'It could have been very tedious for Pat to work with me because I have a gazillion photo references in my head and at my fingertips,' she says. 'But she's a good listener, and very patient and encouraging.' >>

A modular sofa forms the centrepiece. Try Living Divani for a similar one – available from Twentytwentyone (020 7837 1900, twentytwentyone.com)

'THE HOUSE PROVIDES A SIMPLE BACKDROP TO THE PEOPLE IN IT. I'D RATHER

PEOPLE – THEIR PERSONALITY, THEIR VIBRANCY – DOMINATE THE ROOM'



Above left Abbey's kitchen mixes marble worktops with Corian sink and drawer fronts. For a similar tap, try Dornbracht. **Above right** a chair by Norman Cherner at the top of the sweeping staircase offers an island of natural colour amid the expanses of white. Places and Spaces sells these, from £1110 (020 7498 0998, placesandspaces.com)

In fact, the only difference of opinion between them was over the swooping, sweeping, swirling staircase that creates a strikingly sculptural focal point in the house's all-white, ultra-streamlined interior. 'It was originally curved in form but I wanted to replace that with something straight-edged and boxy – and I had a million pictures to show Pat to persuade her,' recalls Abbey, a TV producer. 'But Pat dug up some references of beautifully curvaceous, sculptural staircases, which sold the idea to me.'

There are good reasons for this marriage of minds. 'I contacted Pat in late 2005 because a friend had bought her old house, which she had designed, and which I loved,' recalls Abbey. 'When I met Pat, we had such a similar sensibility. It was the perfect fit.' The fact they both liked the idea of an all-white interior – a look many people would run a mile from – is in itself an indication of this. When Pat is quizzed about how they agreed on this, she seems taken aback, almost as if this had happened telepathically. 'It was never discussed,' she observes. 'Abbey and I just assumed it would be all-white.'

Despite being in downtown Toronto, the 2,300 sq ft house is in a relatively unpopulated ravine and so its surroundings are rural in feel. To maximise this sense of being close to nature, Pat has glazed the entire rear of the house. True, it's a little ironic that muddy wellies would be most unwelcome in this all-white interior, yet Abbey asked that the house be 'a celebration of the big outdoors and have as wide-angle a view of the ravine as possible'. This acknowledgement of the property's setting has a knock-on effect of providing 'natural wallpaper' for one wall in almost every room, and adding colour to the otherwise predominantly monochrome house.

Despite being a Modernist building, the house's ground floor had, at some point, been carved up into smaller rooms. So Pat opened up the space completely, creating a sense of continuity from the back garden to the front of the house. Punctuating this are three main features: the staircase, a cantilevered 20ft-long bench-cum-fireplace and a slab of white Italian marble that morphs from kitchen island (with Corian drawers and sink) to a table that seats 12 comfortably. >>



A white Italian marble slab functions as either a kitchen island or a 12-seater dining table. The '.03 Chair' by Maarten Van Severen is available from Aram (020 7557 7557, aram.co.uk)

getting white right An all-white space can seem very appealing, but achieving the look with panache is no pushover. Fan of white, architect Richard Found of London firm Found Associates, offers his tips: **1** If you find brilliant white paint too clinical, an infinite number of off-whites can soften up a space. Farrow and Ball's range of whites is particularly good (farrow-ball.com). Try before you buy. **2** Different paint finishes and application methods (brushed, rolled, sprayed) create variety and prevent a space feeling sterile. **3** Oil-based paints tend to be more hard-wearing and so will age better. **4** Avoid white carpets, vinyl, rubber or painted wood if maintenance is an issue. Many white stone surfaces, marbles and screeds are more hard-wearing and create texture and variation in an all-white space. **5** Don't forget fixtures and fittings – these can be finished in white lacquer, enamelled steel, laminates, Corian, glass, fibreglass and acrylics. *Found Associates, 14-16 Great Pulteney Street, London W1 (020 7734 8400, foundassociates.com)*



Opposite a 'Light Shade Shade d95' chandelier from Moooi, as before, hangs in the stairwell. Beyond is a 'Womb' chair by Eero Saarinen for Knoll, available from knolleurope.com, 020 7236 6655. **Above** Durat is another good material for this kind of bath (00 358 2252 1000, durat.com); the office-cum-TV room, with an Apple G5 – in white, of course (0800 039 1010, apple.com). Arne Jacobsen 'Oxford' chairs can be bought from Skandium (020 7487 4646, skandium.com).

'I really wanted clean lines and a sense of open space,' says Abbey, a fan of arch-minimalist architect John Pawson, despite being a self-confessed 'pack-rat' – North American slang for a hoarder. No matter about the hoarding: the kitchen has an abundance of storage space, and on the ground floor is a series of near-invisible doors behind which are stashed bibliophile Abbey's vast book collection, wardrobes, the stereo and TV. This TV producer, incidentally, has a television in every room.

In contrast to the open-plan ground floor, the first floor is divided into an office-cum-TV room, two bedrooms and two bathrooms. The latter, says Abbey, is 'fitted with an over-sized Corian bathtub dominated by a gigantic chandelier,' suggesting that her apparently watertight minimalist taste does allow for the odd ornate element – a chandelier, by Dutch company Moooi, also hangs at the top of the stairwell.

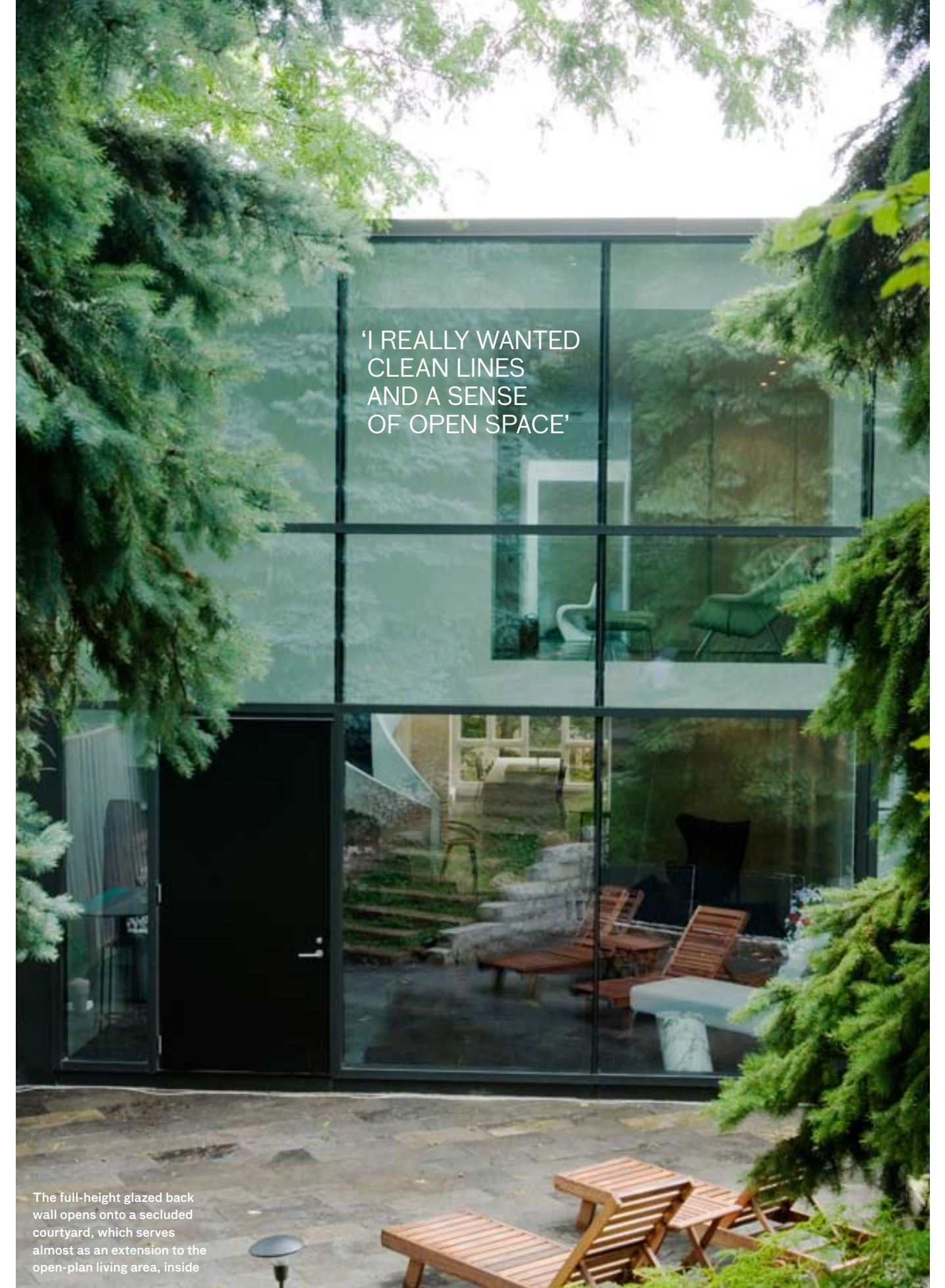
Although the snowy look is grounded by dark stained floorboards that run throughout the house, how does the space actually stand up to everyday living? Despite her pristine Persil-white surroundings, Abbey is

constantly entertaining in a casual way – in particular, during Toronto's hot summers, when guests fill both the house and garden – proving that you don't have to be too careful to live in an environment like this.

And while the walls are (so far) unadorned by art, Abbey's fantasy is to have projector screens in every room casting huge, changing images – wittily appropriate to each space – on to them: 'In the kitchen, for example, I'd have some great classic food-related moments from the movies, such as the spaghetti-eating scene from *The Lady and The Tramp*.'

It may seem paradoxical but, according to Abbey, an all-white space shouldn't feel inhuman or sterile. Instead, conversely, it should be conducive to hedonism and fun. You can see the logic: there's something ultra-glam, something splendidly decadent about all that white on white. 'The house provides a simple backdrop to the people in it,' she says. 'I'd rather people – their personality, their vibrancy, the colours they're wearing – dominate the room.' >>

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The full-height glazed back wall opens onto a secluded courtyard, which serves almost as an extension to the open-plan living area, inside