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Controversy on COLUMBUS CIRCLE

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PIERO LISSONI

THE ULTIMATE NEW YORK LOFT

WORK

BRAD CLOEPFIL

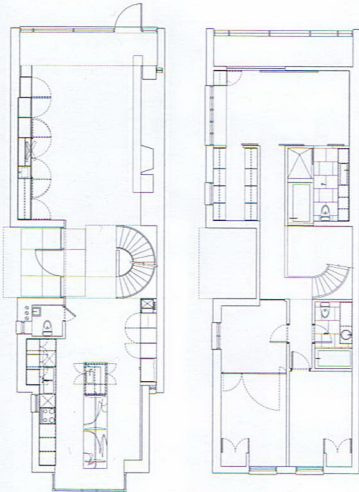
BERNARD KHOURY

KIERAN TIMBERLAKE

4 EMERGING STARS



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First floor

Second floor

A Kinder, Gentler Brutalism

A Toronto architect embraces the famously unforgiving style.

Every style of architecture arrives at a point when it's too old to seem current, too new to be chic again. These days the late Modernism first seen in the 1970s is in that awkward stage. So when architect Pat Hanson went to look at the home her young clients had bought to renovate—a Brutalist brick town house in a block of Arts and Crafts residences near downtown Toronto—she had to reassure them that they had made a good decision. “They were uneasy about the house,” recalls Hanson, principal of the local architecture firm GH3. “The potential was not at all apparent.”



Except to Hanson, who saw a “quite thoughtfully designed” 1975 house hidden by an unsympathetic renovation. A builder had imposed country-style ornament and a traditional floor plan on the modern plan interior, blocking views and creating an unattractive muddle of styles. “People lose their way in Modernism,” Hanson says. “They buy a house, build it and then just default to traditional styles of the house.”

By reverting to an open plan, Hanson was able to restore the 2,000-square-foot building to its original glory while suiting her clients’ desire for “livable minimalism.” Taking advantage of the clean construction and fine site, she opened up the first floor completely and installed a two-story wall on the back to reveal a verdant hillside view. In the living room, MDF-and-marble millwork hides the owners’ piles of art and architectural books and sundry housewares. And at the rear of the house Hanson carved a showpiece staircase that leads up to the central atrium.

The polished interior—dominated by dark-stained engineered oak, white Corian, and Carrera marble—seems at odds with the roughness of the exterior Kahn-ish volume of light-brown brick. But Hanson paid homage to the house’s simple construction by attending to space rather than fussy details. “I don’t like reveals,” she says. “Call it minimalist, but I prefer to hide it all.” In the master bedroom, a series of grand sliding doors floats on hidden hardware, but what’s magical is the view beyond them, which overlooks a wooded ravine and the double-height volume of the living room below. It’s the simple luxury of good space in harmony with the landscape.

And Hanson is pleased that her clients, who both grew up in architect-designed houses, were savvy enough to see those timeless qualities in the finished home. “It’s not about aesthetics,” she says. “It’s about context and understanding the time in which this house was built—and the moment we’re living in now.” —Alex Bozickovic



Pat Hanson’s interior for the 1975 town house—seen above from the rear—is austere but not anti-septic; Maarten Baas’s Smoke armchair for Moooi (foreground) and a pair of curvaceous Cherner armchairs (in the kitchen) add to the aura of simple, uncluttered luxury.