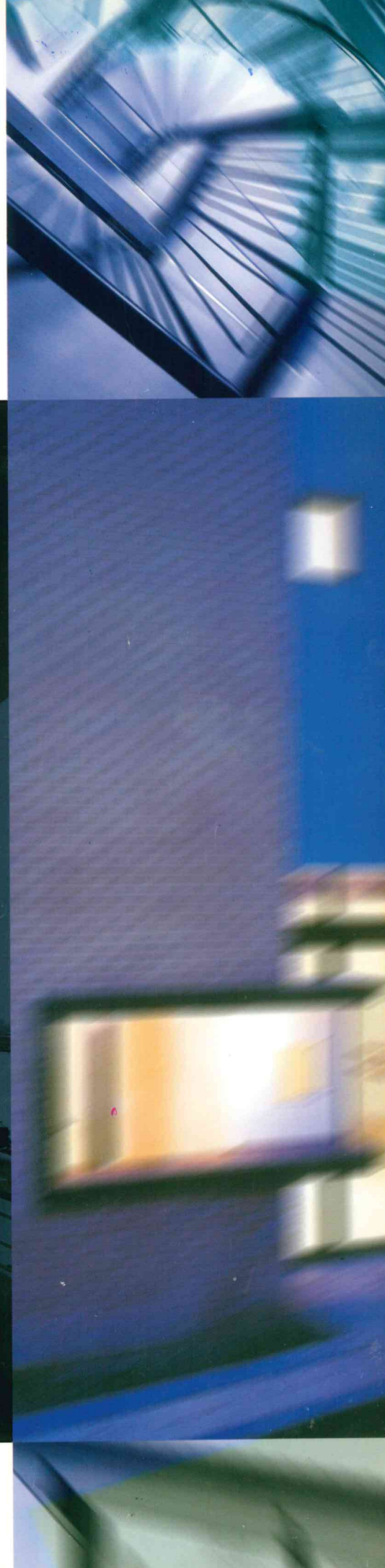


the best of british homes

2003

£10.00

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Seen without its neighbours, and not shielded by its high wall, the house sits well in the mature landscape

Egged on

Drop House, 42 Firs Wood Close, Northaw, Hertfordshire EN6 4BY

Anthony Hudson and Sarah Featherstone launched their architectural practice eight years ago on the success of their award-winning design for Baggy House, near Croyde, Devon, for Gavyn Davies, chief international economist for Goldman Sachs and now chairman of the BBC. Since then they have designed a sunken pool garden for that amazing house, complete with a large swimming pool and a cascade. Now in separate practice, Drop House was one of their last one-off house designs working as partners.

This house is one of a number of large detached houses built on land that once formed part of the Northaw Estate, though all its neighbours are unashamedly traditional in appearance. However, Mr & Mrs Bolger, the clients for Drop House, wanted a family house that would give them the best value from modern technology and practical energy-saving construction and services. They also wanted a building that related to their lifestyle and represented the best in modern architecture.

The site is in the Green Belt, on the edge of what is now a suburb of Potters Bar. It is a compact five-bedroom family

house of 285 sq m (about 3070 sq ft) that cost around £700,000 to build. It is called Drop House owing to a drop-shaped form that has been inserted within the main frame of this timber and steel-framed house. The drop is visible over the parapet and by the entrance to the house, where it acts as an orienting device and draws people inside. In addition to this drop, the building has a number of other sculptural elements, including an inclined wall that acts as a light scoop around which the main staircase wraps.

“Despite the playfulness of Drop House, the design is not different for differences sake, but a challenge to how housebuilders are now working,” says Anthony Hudson.

“This is very evident when comparing Drop House to its neighbours. There are no grand halls, no bay windows and no separate formal dining rooms. Instead, less immediately visible elements of the house are all about making spaces comfortable and attuned to how people live today.”

Thus the stair hall doubles up as living space and a spill-over area from adjoining rooms. These rooms are not designated for one purpose, however. They can have different functions at different times of the day, thereby avoiding the feeling of unused space. There are open spaces, double-height spaces



(Above from left to right)

- ▲ The drop, clearly visible behind the parapet and by the entrance, houses the main bathroom and the utility room
- ▲ Drop House is an uncompromisingly modern addition to its traditional-style neighbours, its lower rooms being shielded by a high wall and gates
- ▲ Clean lines and uncluttered spaces make an adaptable house for today's lifestyles

and enclosed spaces. Sliding partitions give flexibility of use, allowing some spaces to be visually and acoustically separated when specific needs arise. Ramps, hatches and balconies create a sense of transparency. Rooms extend and open out to views and different parts of the landscape. The windows and external shapes of the house relate to achieving a pleasant environment inside, with large expanses of glass to enjoy the south-facing aspect of the building, with views over the garden to the woods beyond, and

► **The house backs onto mature woodland**

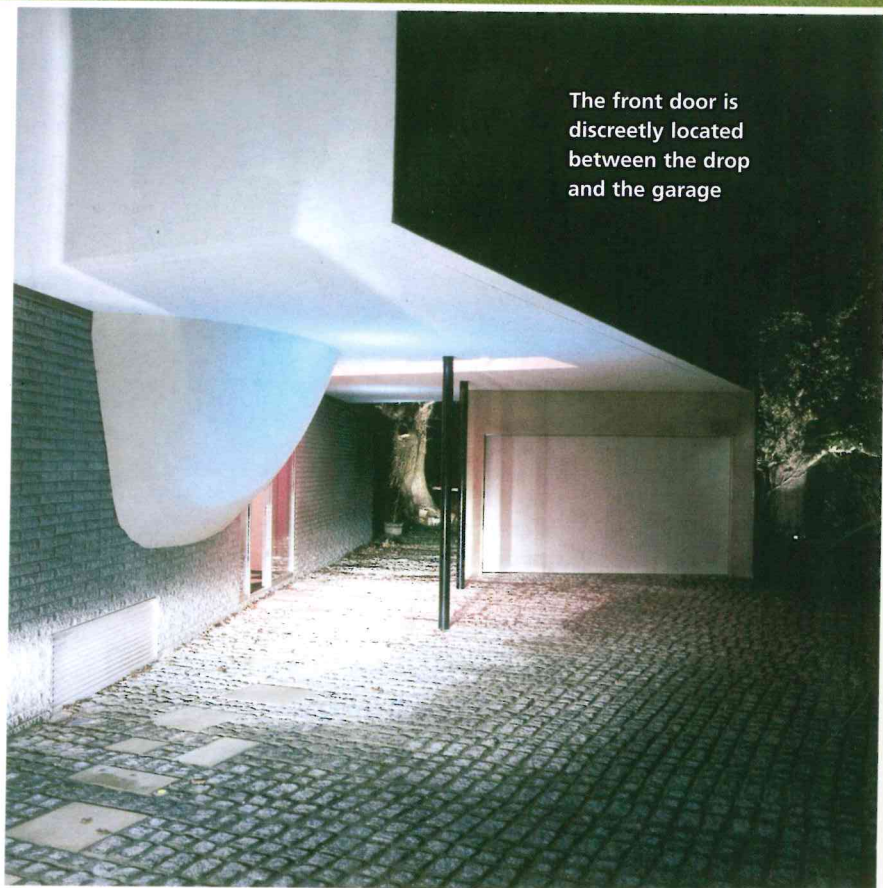




protected enclosures for privacy.

"This fluid and open use of space caters to the demands of modern family lifestyles while maintaining a certain level of intimacy," say the architects.

Around the house, the architects were determined to use ordinary materials in unusual ways. Standard building materials such as rusticated concrete blocks are used in unexpected ways to give an element of surprise to the spaces. Thin layers of insulating fibre make certain windows opaque in the daytime, but softly luminous at night. Bold carpets and neon lights add further contrast and colour. In its form and orientation, the house optimises its energy-saving performance by maximising solar gain in the winter months, while in summer the building overhangs its large glazed areas, thereby preventing excessive solar gain. Its low wall-to-floor ratio reduces overall

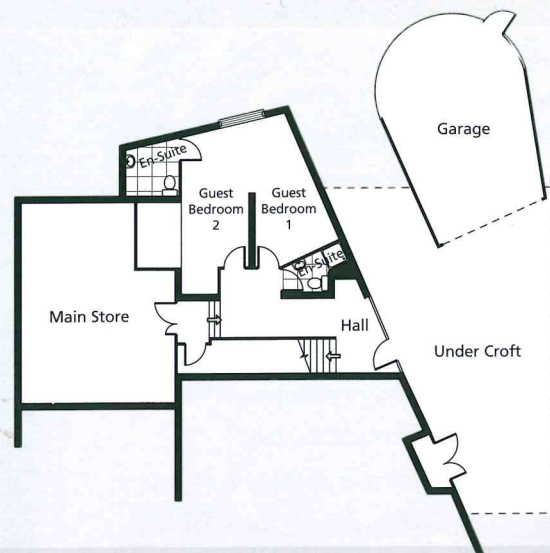
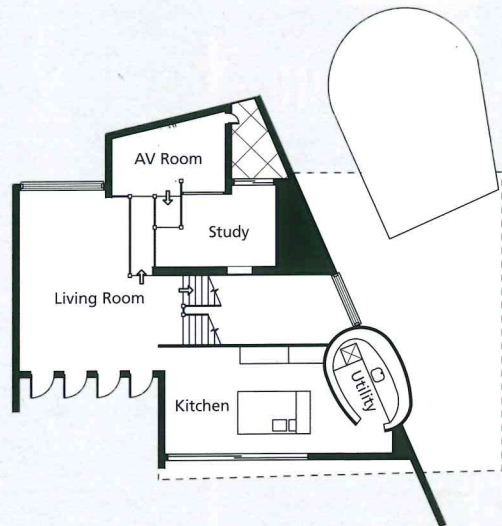
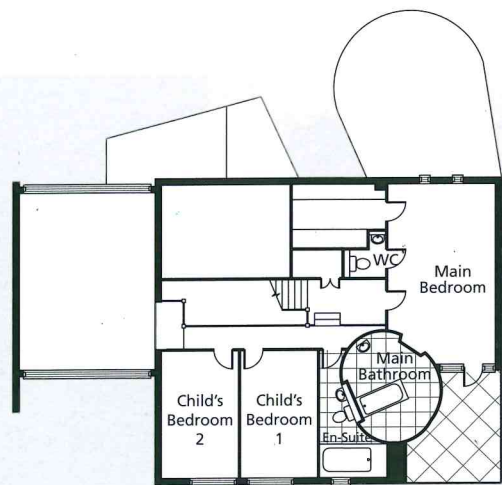


The front door is discreetly located between the drop and the garage



- ▲ (Top) The double-height stair hall doubles as living space and a spill-over area from adjoining rooms
- ▲ (Middle) Internal and external spaces are compatible
- ▲ (Bottom) Rooms are used for different purposes at different times of day, and spaces flow into each other

building, maintenance and energy costs. Other energy-savings aspects include highly insulated external walls (with cavity fill and external insulation, as well as double glazing) and a ventilation system that uses heat from expelled foul air to pre-heat incoming cold air. There is also a rainwater-collecting system and recycling of grey water.



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