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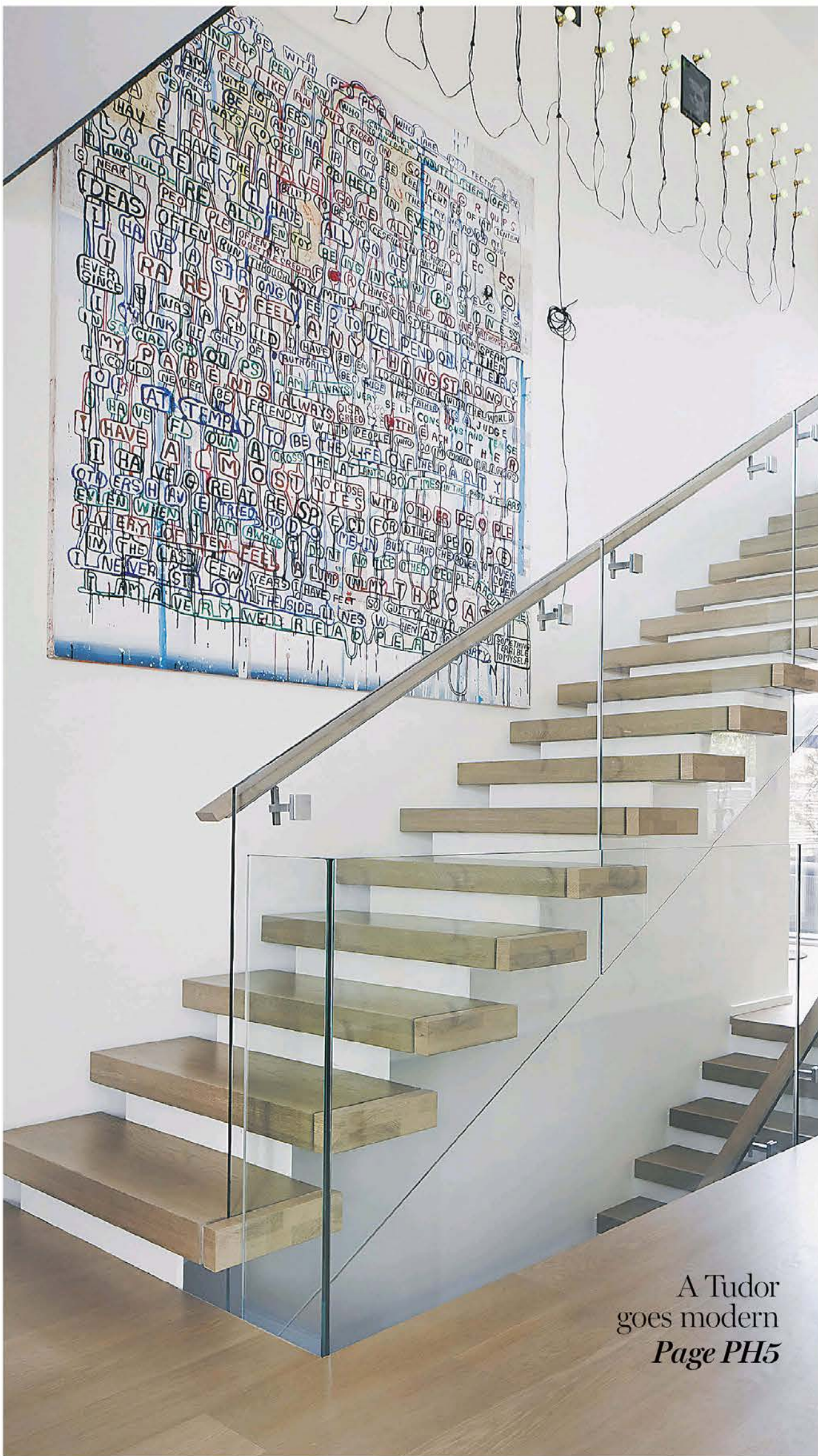
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Maybe they're too lazy to use their own spots. PH4

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A Tudor goes modern
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VIRGINIA MACDONALD

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Life Storeys

“ I like that there’s an element of surprise in the house. There’s an interesting use of materials, and a real sense of discovery and delight as you move through the spaces. And it works well for the family. It’s a happy house — *Michael Taylor, architect* ”



ART LESSONS

A gloomy faux-Tudor is recreated into a sleek home-cum-gallery
By Martha Uniacke Breen

Can a traditional home, in style and function, be transformed into a showcase for art, without compromising its original intention as a comfortable and inviting place to raise a family? Taylor Smyth Architects' renovation to a Tudor Revival house in the Forest Hill area shows it can be done.

The couple had been living in the house for a decade or so before they called the architects in, says principal architect Michael Taylor. Though it was built in the '60s, the home had been designed to harmonize with older neighbouring homes, with large Tudor gables, a deeply slanted roof and rough stone piers. But the interior featured a lot of dark wood and was a warren of rooms and hallways.

"The house wasn't the right vessel for what they had in mind," he says. "It was so dark and with so many walls — it wasn't right for art at all, which of course you need a lot of light for."

And what art it is: The husband and wife, who maintain careers in business and the arts respectively, had amassed a beautiful collection over the years, which included works by Jack Bush, the arts collective General Idea, and many others. But the house, with its dark corridors and multiple rooms, made it hard to enjoy the art.

"They had some pieces that simply didn't fit in the house, and others just leaning against walls," Taylor recalls. Opening up the interior and letting in light was crucial, as well as creating open areas and wide walls to provide a home for the pieces. Moreover, their three school-age kids were growing bigger, and needed better spaces for doing homework and hanging out with friends and family.

"I was amazed at how laid-back the parents were," Taylor laughs. "They had one large canvas leaning on the wall near the back of the house, and one of the kids was riding around near it on his tricycle. I would have been nervous, but these kids had grown up around art and so they knew to treat it with respect, even if

they were playing nearby." The transformation started with the front hall, which went from a cramped and rather dour vestibule clad in dark oak panelling, to a clean, open space with a floating side closet and limestone-look porcelain floor tiles. The original front door, after some thought, was retained and painted black, and a glazed sidelight installed to bring in light. On the wall opposite the closet, Rodney Graham's "Light Boxes," a series of four illuminated panels, adds to the wash of natural and man-made light.

From the foyer, the interior breaks open to a soaring two-storey central space, bisected by a giant installation by General Idea entitled "365 Days of AZT," which divides the dining and gallery space on the right from the main corridor and hallway, without any sense of enclosure. (The piece, which features multiple repeating rows of gigantic embossed pills, represents the typical annual therapy for an AIDS patient in the '80s.) On the left side, a light, simply designed glass-and-oak staircase leads past works by Graham Gillmore, Claude Tousignant and others. While most of the pieces lean toward modern design, a fig-

side are floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the garden; the other leads to the open family room and kitchen area, where expansive windows on two sides fill the area with light. "It's a little unusual to have windows along the back wall of the kitchen instead of cupboards, but there's a whole wall of pantry cupboards at the inside end, so we were able to provide enough storage to make that possible. And it makes a huge difference to this area to have windows on this side as well."

The materials in the kitchen add to its beauty as well, from leathered-marble countertops (the slightly rougher surface of a leathered finish, Taylor explains, adds to its resistance to dirt and marks) to the lightly bleached oak floors that are used throughout the interior. In fact, well in keeping with a house where such a premium is paid to visual artistry, the choice of finishes is subtle but continuously interesting.

This is particularly the case in the master bathroom, which is a study in black: "pinstripe" black tiles in the shower in alternating matte and glossy sheens, oversized black acid-etched glass tiles, honed black marble counters, and black fixtures bring out the subtler

“ These kids had grown up around art, so they knew to treat it with respect, even if they were playing nearby ”

ure at the top of the stairs by an unknown Roman sculptor adds a sense of historical context to the surroundings.

Naturally, lighting and careful placement of the works was a prime consideration. In certain cases, such as with "365 Days of AZT," the dimensions of the art actually influenced the dimensions of the interior; also, lighting designer Suzanne Powadiuk specified museum-quality lighting, tracks and filters to get just the right angle and cast to show and protect the works. Interestingly, despite the abundance of natural light in the space — a hazard for art as much as it can be for furniture and fabrics — the space was flexible enough to allow the works to be hung where they would not be vulnerable to direct sunlight at any point.

At the end of the main-floor hall, a giant, luminous photograph by Jeff Wall of a rustic backyard with a wooden shed presents an entrée to the less formal parts of the main floor, and also acts as a witty prelude to the actual backyard. On one

contrasts of texture. It's hardly a gloomy room though: A large corner window and circular skylight bring in plenty of natural light. (The owners added a lighthearted finishing touch of their own to temper the clean, somewhat hard-edged design, with an ornate wood-and-leather chair, with nailed and elaborately carved details.)

At the top of the house, Taylor knew when he first saw it that the master bedroom was an opportunity lying fallow. Although the room faced directly over an expansive backyard and a vista of trees and sky beyond, the view was cloistered behind narrow French doors and a small exterior deck, making the room feel dark and cramped. The deep gable of the Tudor design meant there was ample space to steal a few feet out of the attic, adding several feet to the ceiling height; the exterior deck was also removed. Now, with a large wall of windows framing the beautiful view, it feels more like a house in cottage country than a home in the heart of the city. "I like that there's an element

of surprise in the house," Taylor says. "There's an interesting use of materials, and a real sense of discovery and delight as you move through the spaces. And it works well for the family. It's a happy house."

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Clockwise from top left: The home had been designed to fit into its neighbourhood; the family room with large windows; the master bedroom with a new wall of windows overlooking the pool and garden; the art piece "365 Days of AZT" in the central hall; the black master bathroom. VIRGINIA MACDONALD

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