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CONDOS

MARKHAM N'
THORNHILL

These twin towns
are boomin'.

PH6

DESIGN

THE RULES

Samantha Pynn's
pointers on
wowing wee
spaces.

PH10

COVET



Light coloured wood and off-white walls better accommodate the couple's spectacular art collection.

Tucked into the side of a North Toronto ravine, architect Julian Jacobs' house provides not only a fine gallery for his and his wife Gail's art collection, but there's a Chinese puzzle at the heart of its design: It follows a simple three-by-three grid structure, both vertically and horizontally. The underlying orderliness of the form makes for a pleasing sense of comfort, like a resolved chord. And while Modernist in sensibility, the house is as warm and inviting as any of the early 20th-century homes that share the street.

If you live or work in the Yonge-Eglinton district, you're probably already familiar with Jacobs' work. One of my favourite buildings in that area is one of his early jobs, the Royal Bank on the corner of Orchardview and Yonge. The exuberant outward curve that crowns the top, he once explained to me, replicates not only the spread of the mature trees in the neighbourhood (look closely at the windows of the upper storey and you can see, ostensibly planted to keep pigeons from roosting, steel bars with tiny blossoms at their tips), but the arms-up exuberance of receiving money — the idea being that the bank is there to help you reach your dreams.

You might say that Mr. Jacobs designs Modernist build-

ings for people who don't like Modernism. There's an artful, populist touch to some of his work that's instantly appealing; given a free hand, as with some of his private house commissions, his version of form-follows-function can include using construction materials in unexpected and often highly creative ways, external curtain walls that swivel on axes so that the division between inside and out disappears, and using rhythmic visual repetition to pull the design together. So I was fascinated to see, in a neighbourhood known for its strong opinions on architectural conformity in new-build houses, what kind of home he would build for his own family.

The first, and perhaps clearest, deployment of the grid occurs in the way the house sits on its lot. Vertically, the grid divides the front elevation into a recessed portico flanked by two protruding towers, and topped by a mansard roof. ("I've always loved churches with twin towers," he says.) The windows vary the tic-tac-toe theme slightly with Prairie-style large central panes surrounded by smaller side-lights, but there's a vaguely Georgian regularity to the façade that allows it to fit comfortably with its neighbours.

Inside, the grid helps to organize flow through the house.

The entry foyer forms the centre-front square (flanked by the garage on one side and a front music room/study on the other), with a lateral hallway directly beyond. Among other things, this layout serves to obscure the inner sanctum, a concept he says is inspired by the Renaissance concept of *piano nobile*. "The main floor of the house was really the public space, where the peasantry and workers could enter and move about, while only invited guests were allowed inside or upstairs." In this case, it serves a privacy function, so that deliverymen and other strangers don't have visual access to the living areas.

The hallway is open on either side, directing flow into the rear two-thirds of the main floor. Directly behind it is the kitchen, which takes up the centre of the house and is open to a sheltered side deck, which forms the centre portion of an exterior triple grid. "The kitchen is the heart of the home, and it's the centre of this house," Mr. Jacobs explains. "It's designed to function as a kitchen, but also the modern definition of a kitchen as an entertainment centre of sorts, far more than just a place to cook. Perhaps this room needs a new name." Sleekly fitted with stainless steel countertops and rift-

SUBLIME continued on PH14

SUBLIME DESIGN: JULIAN JACOBS

From the
Renaissance to
Modernism in one
harmonious home
*By Martha
Uniacke Breen*

Three-by-three grid structure: like a resolved musical chord

SUBLIME

Continued from PH1

sawn oak cabinets, the kitchen features slide-out and touch-latch everything, so there's little detail to break up its seamless look.

The final third of the main floor is organized into two-squares living room and one-square dining room, divided by a wall that appears to "float" on an overhead track. While the rooms are designed as discrete centres, each outside wall mirrors the other: floor-to-ceiling display/bookcases surrounding a fireplace (in contrast to the traditional idea of a central, two-sided fireplace with a single chimney), and a configuration that includes a closed cabinet with amber stained glass — a reference to the stained glass used in the front windows.

Throughout the house, the interior design is light and neutral, with light-coloured wood and off-white walls, the better to accommodate the couple's spectacular art collection. (The interior design was done by Gail, who works in partnership with Julian at the firm.) On the dining room side of the inside wall is a mural by Sylvia Safdie, the sister of Habitat architect Moshe Safdie; there are also works by Cosgrove, a print by the native Canadian artist Pitseolak, and a large black-and-white diptych of trees by Deborah Carroll. On the rear wall, a pair of Abstract Expressionist concentric-circle paintings by Claude Tousignant particularly appeals to the engineer in Mr. Jacobs: A reproduction of an installation originally shown at Expo 67, it's a simple design that is technically very difficult to execute.

Upstairs, three bedrooms carry the grid theme across the front of the second floor; a lateral hallway, corresponding to the first floor hallway and featuring a laundry area

and bathrooms on either side, forms the prelude to the master bedroom taking up the back third. With its expansive, sundrenched view over the ravine and the city, this room "grids," in turn, into a sitting area at one end and bedroom proper at the other, and like the rest of the house, is filled with arresting artwork. (One I particularly liked was a "reverse-technique" oil painting by Gentile Tondino, in which an overlay of black paint is scratched away to form the image. "I sometimes design buildings that way," quips Mr. Jacobs, "by blacking out the whole building and designing with light, using an eraser.")

With the rhythm of the three-by-three grid so plainly established, what's interesting about the house is how the basic pattern varies to accommodate specific requirements: open where openness is called for, enclosed where definition is preferred, stepped back or protruding out. That's the intrinsic beauty of modern architecture, Mr. Jacobs observes, especially with houses. "Corbusier's greatest contribution to 20th-century architecture was to shift interiors away from a succession of rooms based on structural considerations, to a design where the framework is the only structural element. So freedom from structural-support considerations became possible, and the balance shifts from space versus structure, to privacy versus openness and flow."

In other words, when all possibilities are open, the art lies in combining the expected — such as a modified-Georgian façade — with more considered solutions to the standard questions of arranging space. Or, for that matter, with conveying new ideas: such as the notion that a neighbourhood bank is not an intimidating, grey-faced monolith, but a downright friendly place.

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Floating walls define the living room and dining space, top. Lack of hardware in the kitchen creates a seamless look.