

## Lighting-up time

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Nestled among the sunny streets of Venice Beach in California, Paul and Cicek Bricault's home has a life of its own. That's because so much of it is actually living and breathing, from a large rooftop garden that has a highly productive vegetable patch to three outer walls that sprout sedum and other succulents.

'We feel quite protective, especially about the green walls,' says Bricault, who has two young children, a daughter, Melise, six, and a son, Destin, four. 'It is truly a living thing and does need looking after. I always say to my wife that the green walls are our third child, because we are constantly tweaking them or adjusting the water.'

Clad in preplanted panels that are fed with captured rainwater, these 'living walls' are not only naturally insulating but they also do their bit for the environment by converting carbon dioxide back into oxygen. From an aesthetic perspective, they soften the modern architecture that lies beneath. They generated so much interest among locals that at one point the Bricaults even hung up a small dispenser holding leaflets about the planting system that they had used.

But the walls are only part of a series of commonsense green measures, from natural ventilation to an array of solar panels on the roof that supply much of the Bricaults' electricity. 'Cicek especially has always been eco-conscious,' says Bricault, who teaches in the graduate school of film and television at the University of Southern California. 'But it accelerated when we saw [Al Gore's eco-awareness film] *An Inconvenient Truth* together. It was as though she had just found religion. It started with small things like recycling and composting but grew bigger. She would even check out the paint that the decorators were using when they were doing the house to make sure it was green.'

When the Bricaults bought the house 10 years ago it was an ordinary home that had begun life

## Growth area

Living walls and a thriving roof garden give a green tinge to a modern home in California. By **Dominic Bradbury**. Photographs by **Richard Powers**

Linking the new extension with the original house, the 'breezeway' doubles as a playroom and acts as a natural air-conditioning system, drawing in cool air and expelling hot air through a skylight at the summit of the sculpted stairway, designed by Marc Bricault









as a bungalow, dating from around 1910, which had just been extended by a developer. With a growing family, they began to think about extending further, and turned to Paul's brother, Marc, an architectural and furniture designer based in Vancouver, Canada, where the brothers grew up.

'Our parents worked for the environmental department,' Paul says. 'A walk in the woods with our father was always fascinating because he would point out bugs and insects, and give you the Latin name of every plant and tree. I don't think I really appreciated it until I was older and realised that it was quite an education. I was also my father's assistant in the back garden, tending to the garden, planting and watering.'

Marc came up with ideas for a dramatic two-storey extension – complete with green zones of all kinds – that would allow the house to extend into the back of the site towards a rear alleyway. The new elements of the house wrap around a courtyard garden that provides a secure play area for the children, while also leading into a long 'breezeway' through a set of opening glass doors. This open hallway sometimes doubles as a playroom, and also a natural air-conditioning system: it draws in cool air, while hot air is thrown out of



**'It is truly a living thing and needs looking after. I always say the green walls are our third child'**

**Clockwise, from above** light floods the master suite in the new extension through a window of glass tiles; living walls, planted mainly with sedum, cloak the extension; the sofa in the living area is by the Italian manufacturer Flexform; the dining table was designed by Marc Bricault, the chairs by Matteo Grassi



a skylight at the summit of a sculpted stairwell.

The new extension also holds extra bedrooms on the upper level, including a master suite complete with a large bathroom. The space is lifted by a window of glass tiles, designed in homage to the crystalline qualities of Pierre Chareau's Maison de Verre in Paris. Being right at the back of the house, the bedroom is a quiet haven, the old main bedroom at the front has been turned into guest quarters.

'It has its own entrance so guests can come and go as they please,' Bricault says. 'When we had our bedroom in there we did sometimes go to sleep with the sound of the traffic, even though it's not a busy street. Now we are up at the other end of the house it really is a sanctuary.'

But it is the gardens that have made the biggest





**Above** the playhouse at the side of the house was made from materials left over from the building work. The ground is coated in recycled, shredded car tyres. **Right** the sedum walls are naturally insulating and do their bit for carbon conversion



difference to the family's day-to-day lives. The green walls did take a battering last summer, when the irrigation pipes were left off following maintenance work. But they are now back to health, and the Bricaults are looking at using recycled grey water to help keep the living walls happy. The rooftop vegetable garden, meanwhile, has been a big hit with the whole family, taking

Bricault back to the days of his own childhood when he helped his father, as well as feeding into a love of cooking.

'Now my kids come up to the garden with me every weekend and plant things,' he says. 'They also like to eat the food that comes from the roof, and the great thing about being a gardener in California is that you can be pretty inept and still

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**By Janet Preston**

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**Thomas Sanderson**



## Paul Bricault's home truths

The 'living walls' push the envelope in eco-possibilities and serve as an inspiration for further inroads. They beautify not only our garden but also the public view.

The one thing that we would change about the house would be having a better view of the ocean.

Our favourite space is the breezeway, or garden room, that seamlessly connects the outdoors and interior.

We are putting in a fire pit – yes, it does get cold occasionally in LA – and a sandstone patio with succulent garden in the courtyard.

For the present our favourite designer is Marc Bricault, of course. For the past, it would be Charles Eames and Carlo Mollino, because of their holistic approach and their focus on innovation without sacrificing comfort.

Our top interiors tip is not to buy any major piece of furniture until you've lived in the space a little to get a sense of how you will use it and what will best conform to your lifestyle.

Our biggest investment was the sculptural steel and walnut staircase that winds up to the roof from the first floor to sweeping views of Venice on the roof. Kudos to my brother, who designed it.

Compromise to achieve balance, but never compromise your principles. In the context of home design, it's possible to be green without abandoning a core design aesthetic.



Paul and Cicek Bricault with their children, Melise and Destin

succeed. If I have something like eggplant bought from a store, the children will turn their noses up at it. But if I say that it came from the roof, then their eyes light up and they get excited and want to try it. It's been great for us to eat what we grow,

and it has dramatically extended the children's vegetable portfolio.'

*Bricault Design: bricault.ca. The Bricaults' home appears in 'New Natural Home' by Dominic Bradbury and Richard Powers (Thames & Hudson, £19.95), which is available for £17.95 plus £1.25 p&p from Telegraph Books (0844-871 1515; books.telegraph.co.uk)*

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