

# It's all relative



Family affair: Jon Friedrich, Martin Friedrich, Martin's wife Claire and toddler Ariel (Baby Vivienne has since arrived).

The family of a renowned architect discovered just how small Melbourne can be when tackling a tricky site in Brighton.

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**W**hat do you do when your neighbour's high-side wall threatens to dwarf your new house? Think positive and make it an asset.

Architect Martin Friedrich recently designed and built two townhouses in Brighton, one to live in and one to sell. Concerned that the tall, dividing wall would dominate his home, he commissioned landscape designer Jack Merlo to create a laser-cut metal screen to sit against the wall and make it a feature.

A bed of tall, clumping bamboo beside the living room also helped with the disguise.

Friedrich is becoming known for maximising small sites and canny problem solving.

Peeping above the back fence was a tired, shadecloth-draped, barrel-vaulted skylight on the rental property behind. Friedrich mounted narrow strips of mirror on top of the fence to reflect the new house and hide the old one. Problem solved.

Well, sort of. The house was designed by Friedrich's father, architect Jon Friedrich, in 1982. "Dad was fine with it," he says.

But it does highlight the difficulties of making it as a newbie when you have a high-profile dad in the business.

"I was in third year architecture before I told anyone who my dad was," Friedrich says. "I got on well with a lecturer and confided in him. He said he respected me for wanting to make it on my own."

Friedrich, his wife Claire and their two-year-old son Ariel moved into their new home late last year. Baby Vivienne arrived more recently.

Each three-level house (the first sold before it was finished) is only nine metres wide and has three bedrooms and en suite bathrooms on the top floor, with a gallery-like hall with a skylight.

Friedrich ran the skylight above the roof beams to save costs, creating a dappled, shadow effect which highlights art on the walls.

The kitchen/living area, with its dark oak floor and an island bench capped in toning Pietra Grigio marble, is on the ground floor, along with a den, study and laundry.

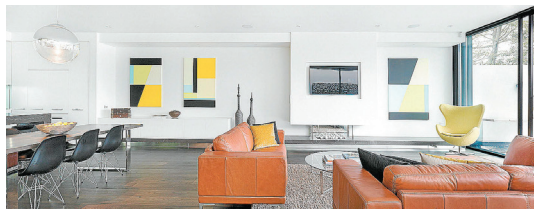
The focal point of each house is a sculptural, curved, Guggenheim-inspired staircase under a high skylight.

"The staircase is painted plasterboard. It's a plasterer's nightmare," says Friedrich, who can't speak highly enough of the builder, Matt Trihey, who calls his business 1186.

Each basement includes a gym, wine cellar, theatre, garaging for three cars and a turntable.

Skylights and walls of windows throughout the house enhance the spacious feel. "I guess I've grown up in houses with





Sleek and sumptuous: the focal point of the house is the Guggenheim-inspired staircase topped with a skylight.



double-height entry spaces and clean lines. I love two-storey spaces," says Friedrich, who was on building sites from about the age of nine and labouring in his holidays.

He and his father discuss design but he says he is more "contemporary and progressive" and his father more traditional.

An angled pool, built on the boundary, needed additional piers to support it. Rather than viewing them as a drawback, Friedrich lowered them to create a long, underwater ledge which made the pool look wider.

"People love it," he says. "Dad said I should have put the pool against the back fence to save money.

"But because it wraps around the house it's visible from the front door."

To get seamless window walls at the back, he hid the downpipes in internal columns, concealing chains to mask the sound of water.

"You don't hear a thing," he says. "Dad was dead against that. Now I think he'll use the idea."

A series of external fins provides privacy and filters the sun. That was also a source of discussion, but Friedrich says his father has conceded the design looks good and is practical.

Friedrich is a minimalist when it comes to exterior finishes so the house is simple white render to highlight the shape. He and Claire lived in the UK for five years where he says he learnt about making a house adaptable for future needs. So he's made provision for a future lift and en suite in the den structure.

Friedrich opened his St Kilda office four years ago. In the early days, if work was slow, he says he would go to auctions and if he liked a house, he'd do a scheme for the site and offer it to the new buyers.

There's no need for that now. He and his staff of six have four apartment blocks and several townhouse developments under way.

LINK

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