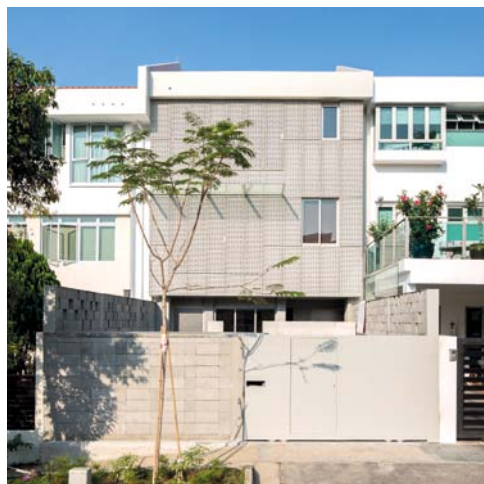


HOUSE AS FILTER

ALTERATIONS BY BREWIN DESIGN OFFICE TO AN EXISTING TERRACE HOUSE INTRODUCE A FILTERED MODE OF HABITATION AND VARIABLE DEGREES OF PRIVACY.

TEXT » PATRICIA CHIA
PHOTOGRAPHY » DARREN SOH



Left: From the street, the house takes an unassuming appearance

Right: Screens of expanded steel mesh can be manipulated to control privacy

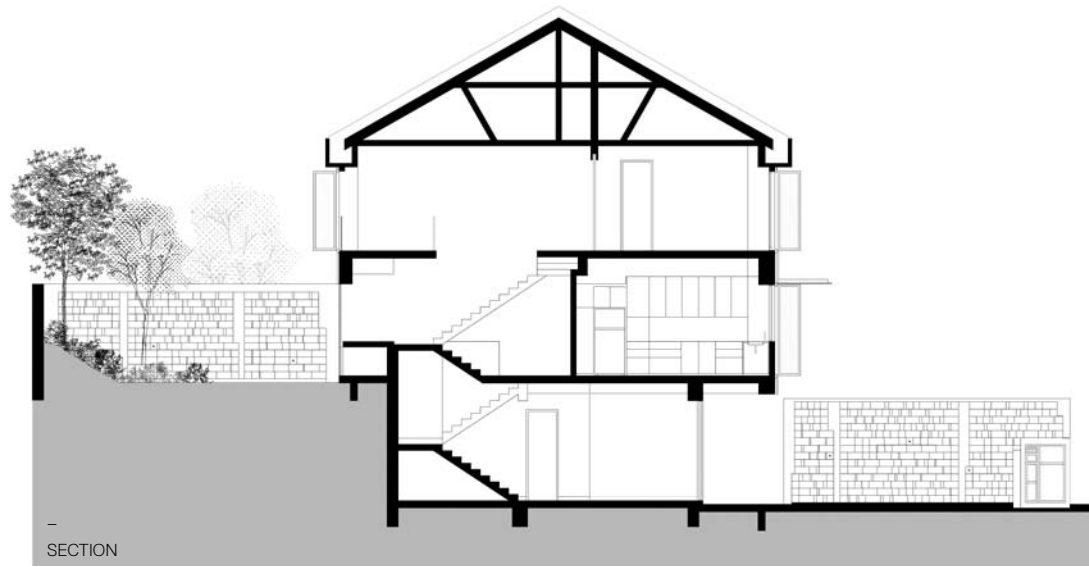


THE SCREENED HOUSE IS AN INTRICATE privacy apparatus consisting of a series of what designer Bobby Cheng calls “filters”. He explains, “The client emphasised that she is a very private person, wanting to live in an inward-looking house with the possibility of being detached from the exterior.” Cheng’s addition and alteration work on her existing terrace house cerebrally addresses these demands.

Cheng’s translation of the client’s demands into an intelligent series of design gestures becomes clear to me when he explains how the screening machine operates. “The house is meant to be a sequence of spaces with different levels of privacy. By altering the relationship between the interior and the two exterior gardens, the house can be reprogrammed and adapted to different scenarios based on the client’s lifestyle preferences.” On approach, the expanded steel mesh panels of the front facade render the volume nondescript; the muted grey and consistent volumetric form blends the house unobtrusively with its neighbours. What lies behind, however, is a complex sequence of architectural devices that allow for the modulation of public and private space.

Entry into the house is framed by a domestic fortification that constitutes the first layer of filters. A series of walls line the exterior garden. On the right and left are perforated block walls that stretch above the height of both neighbours’





boundary walls, increasing the sense of enclosure in the front garden. The size of perforations in these walls has been carefully controlled such that the holes above the sight line are larger and allow for visual porosity without compromising privacy. A full-height concrete feature wall fronts the ground-level portion of the facade, carefully blocking visibility into the owner's film-editing studio and private entrance vestibule. The skins of masonry are repeated around the rear garden, but there the facade is shielded by a timber screen with integrated bi-folding doors. This affords the choice of a living room that either opens up to the outdoors or is enclosed.

The next layer of filters was constructed through the careful arrangement of living spaces both in section and on plan. "The sloping site condition was an advantage in coherence with our concept of segregating the building based on the different levels of privacy," Cheng shares. The steep topography of the site is just enough to allow a

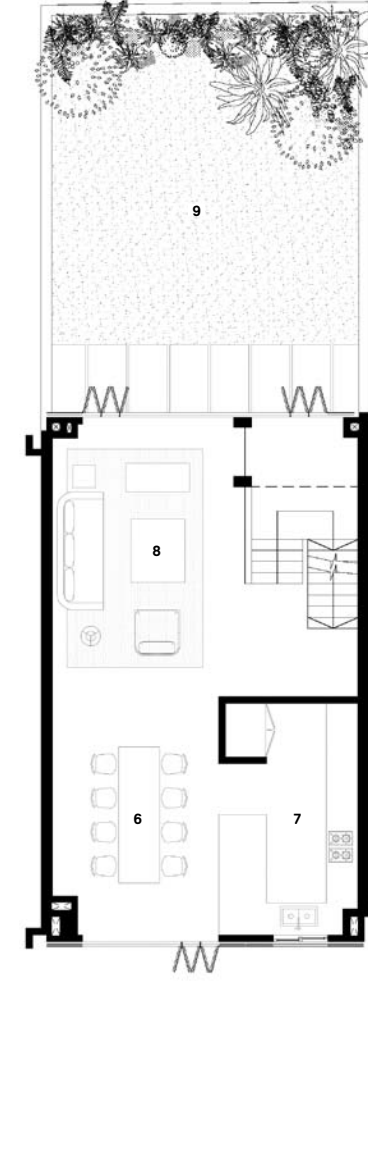


LEGEND

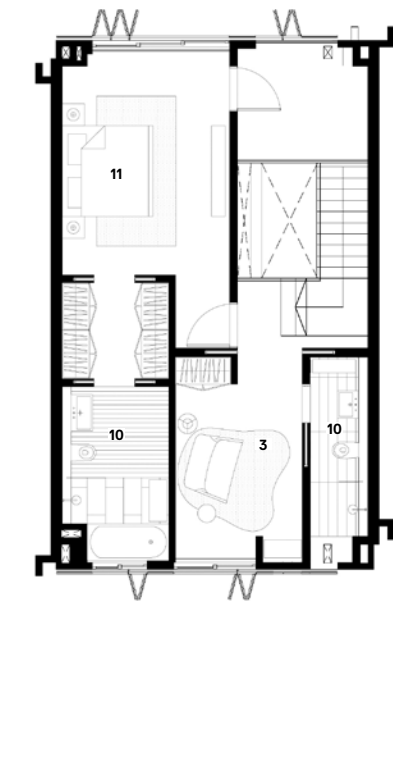
- 1 Front Garden | 2 Entry | 3 Study | 4 Powder Room | 5 Store Room | 6 Dining |
- 7 Kitchen | 8 Living Room | 9 Rear Garden | 10 Ensuite | 11 Master Bedroom



1ST STOREY PLAN



2ND STOREY PLAN



3RD STOREY PLAN

Left: A bi-folding timber screen at the rear filters views to the back garden from the living room

Above Right: Existing floorboards were re-used as stair treads in the minimal interior

“THE SLOPING SITE CONDITION WAS AN ADVANTAGE IN COHERENCE WITH OUR CONCEPT OF SEGREGATING THE BUILDING BASED ON THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF PRIVACY.”

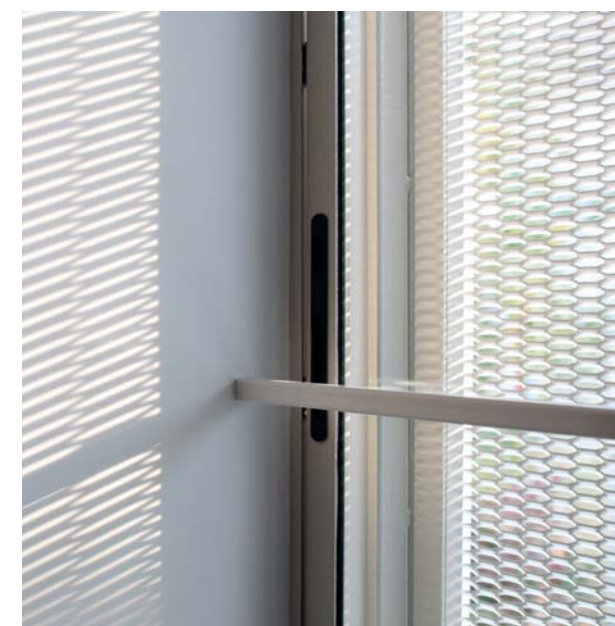
» BOBBY CHENG



one-storey height difference between the front and rear gardens. Through the dispersal of the more public programmes such as the living room, dining room, kitchen and studio on the ground and first floors, two degrees of privacy are achieved between these levels. The most private of spaces – the bedrooms – are located on the second floor.

Entrance to the house was also meticulously crafted. When asked to describe the sequence, Cheng discusses it in great detail, testament to the attention given to the more experiential aspects of the design. “One enters the house through the exterior ‘corridor’ defined by the space between the wall and the entrance glass facade. One continues through the vestibule and the staircase, all the way up to the semi-private living and dining area.” He defines the progression as one from “narrow and dimly-lit spaces” to “bright and large spaces”.

The final filtering mechanism is that of the operable expanded steel mesh screens. Foldable screens are inserted strategically on the mesh facade, such that they may be opened or closed depending on the resident’s needs. “We designed operable screens to allow for a change in privacy level if the client desired it. The placement of the operable panels suggests that public spaces like the dining and living rooms could be completely open to the neighbourhood at certain times,” Cheng explains. The result is quite delightful even from the exterior; the house presents itself as a grey



Left: The exposed existing roof structure brings elegance and an element of surprise to the stair core

Top Right: Polished concrete flooring bounces light around the interior

Bottom Right: Intricate shadows through the mesh screens indicate the daily path of the sun



box that opens or closes to the neighbourhood at different times of the day. The resulting geometric pattern of windows against perforated steel coincides artfully with the room partitions and lighting such that in the evenings the grey box appears strategically lit from within.

In addition to the attention given to the client's demands, thought was also dedicated to "crafting sculptural spaces into the walls, slabs and ceilings." This is most evident in the exposed existing roof structure above the stair core, which features as what Cheng terms "an element of surprise". He says, "The play of light and shadows projected onto the walls celebrate the elegance of the void space, and adds a warm feeling to the otherwise white and neutral surfaces."

Cheng summarises, "The house is a refreshing addition to the body of work that Brewin Design Office has been producing... As an addition and alteration project, it allowed us to explore the crafting of interior spaces within a semi-built constraint." «

SCREENED HOUSE

DESIGN FIRM Brewin Design Office (Brewin Concepts Ltd [Hong Kong])

PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS Bobby Cheng, Glynis Hong

BUILDER Straits Teamwork Pte Ltd

C&S ENGINEER/QP KL Cheong & Associates

M&E ENGINEER Straits Teamwork Pte Ltd

TIME TO COMPLETE 6 months

TOTAL FLOOR AREA 325sqm

BREWIN DESIGN OFFICE

(65) 6887 5917 brewindesignoffice.com

FINISHES

Screens are Expanded Mild-steel Mesh from Amber Metals Pte Ltd. Boundary Walls are Generic Hollow Concrete Blocks. Entry Wall is Reinforced Concrete. Timber Screen Wall is Solid Chengal with Black-painted Mild Steel Frames. Internal Flooring is Polished Concrete. Staircase Uses Existing Timber Floor Boards (Revarnished). Garden Paving Slabs are Shanxi Black Granite.

FIXED AND FITTED

Balustrades are 25x25mm Hollow Mild-steel Square Sections. Sanitary Ware is from Grohe. Ceiling Fan is Client's Own.

LIGHTING

Lighting Supplied by Light Basic Studio.

Amber Metals Pte Ltd (65) 6515 5005 amber.com.sg **Grohe Pacific Pte Ltd** (65) 6311 3611 grohe.sg **Light Basic Studio Pte Ltd** (65) 6256 2328 lightbasic.com.sg **Straits Teamwork Pte Ltd** (65) 6282 6580

"BY ALTERING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INTERIOR AND THE TWO EXTERIOR GARDENS, THE HOUSE CAN BE REPROGRAMMED AND ADAPTED TO DIFFERENT SCENARIOS BASED ON THE CLIENT'S LIFESTYLE PREFERENCES."

» BOBBY CHENG

Above: The timber screen brings an alternate expression to the rear facade