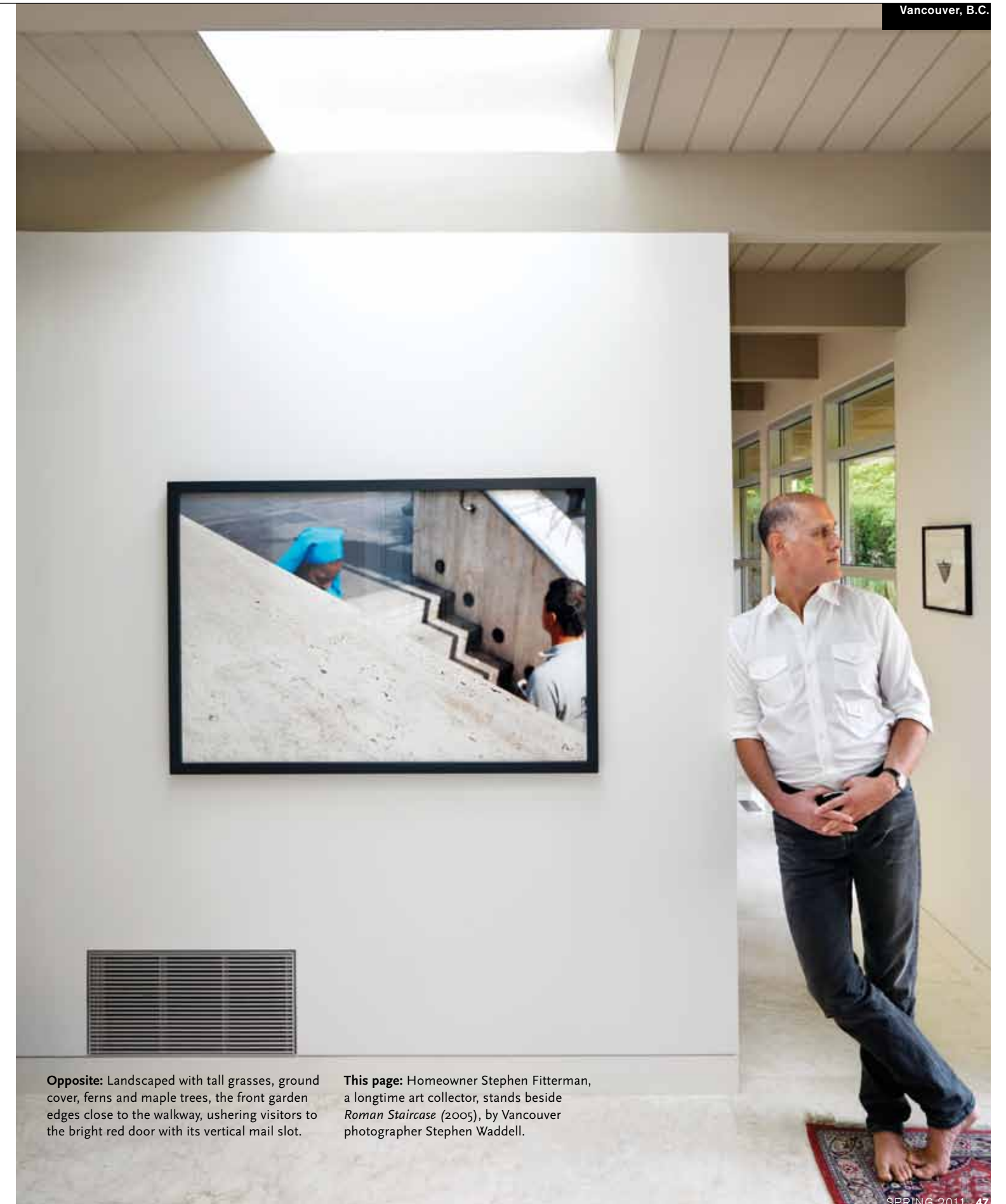


LIGHT AT HEART

AN OUTDATED VANCOUVER POST-AND-BEAM GETS
A COMPLETE CONTEMPORARY REVIVAL
WITH A MODERN COMBO OF WOOD, METAL AND GLASS.

BY LISA FITTERMAN
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Opposite: Landscaped with tall grasses, ground cover, ferns and maple trees, the front garden edges close to the walkway, ushering visitors to the bright red door with its vertical mail slot.

This page: Homeowner Stephen Fitterman, a longtime art collector, stands beside *Roman Staircase* (2005), by Vancouver photographer Stephen Waddell.



For years Stephen Fitterman, a corporate litigator who has since refined his argumentative style from those days when he would win by bopping his older sister (namely, me) on the head, had been searching for a property on which to build something new. Stephen was a stickler, holding out for that perfect piece of land, preferably close to Vancouver's waterfront. But as he stood inside the classic post-and-beam structure with the dark warren of rooms and tacky colour schemes, on a 66-by-120-foot lot in a neighbourhood where he had never before considered buying a home, something clicked. "It was the house's bones," he says. "I saw the potential for an indoor-outdoor lifestyle."

Stephen loved the mid-century modern feel of the place. It reminded him of Palm Springs, where he had vacationed often. And the house's footprint—2,200 square feet on one level, including a rundown outbuilding—was larger than the zoning bylaws would allow for new construction. Why tempt fate, then, by tearing it down?

The first challenge was choosing an architect. Stephen needed someone who had done this kind of renovation before and would understand he didn't want a show house so much as a classic modernist home he could live in for the rest of his life. He wanted to do it once and do it right.

Above left: From the street, the three maple trees in the garden and the new skylight are barely visible over the yew hedge. On the boulevard, Stephen planted blue oat grass, honeysuckle, ironwood trees and a ground cover known as New Zealand brass buttons.

This page: The retro-style Hugues Chevalier sofa contains a drinks shelf that also holds a pull-out brass ashtray. The coffee table, by the same designer, comes with four multifunctional leather-covered footstools. An orange painting, *Crossing the Mirror*, by David Shapiro, provides welcome colour. Glass bowl sculpture (on the dining table) by Australian artist Cobi Cockburn.

A work by Graham Gillmore, *Save the Day, Fly by Night*, overlooks the dining area and living room, while a 19th-century West Coast Native headpiece sits on the coffee table. The painting on the right is by Etienne Zack. The Tabriz carpet is of Herati design.

Bottom: Leather club chairs in the living room face a fireplace of hammered limestone. Panels above the fireplace can be closed to conceal a 52-inch plasma television screen. To its right is another piece by Etienne Zack.



It didn't take long to find Stuart Howard, whose Vancouver architectural firm has done a number of renovations, ranging from heritage to contemporary. For hours at a time, the two men pored over tracing paper, figuring out how to integrate 21st-century materials into a mid-20th-century design with as few structural changes as possible. Stephen knew what he wanted, from the amount of hanging space for his suits to the horizontal placement of electrical outlets in the baseboards to make them less obtrusive.

For Howard, the relatively simple plan was a welcome change of pace. He knew that clients' wish lists—an extra bedroom, for example—can overwhelm what is already there and turn a project into a completely different

kind of house. "Not Stephen," he says. "He wanted to pare things down and he was meticulous about everything, even where the mail slot would go."

For the exterior cladding, they decided to forgo the typical stucco in favour of a more contemporary look. They chose SuperPanel, a low-maintenance fibre-cement board from Germany that looks like concrete but does not contain steel or gravel; it is supplied in four-by-eight-foot sheets and mounted with stainless steel screws. A new 48-foot skylight running the width of the house means that lights don't have to be turned on until the sun disappears, no matter the time of year. And before installing the skylight, Howard's team closely studied where light would hit the interior walls at various times of the day so they could position it in



The 13-foot kitchen island allows plenty of cooking space; lined with Cherner bar stools of lightweight moulded plywood, it takes the place of a breakfast table. The cup and saucer are from Hycroft, our grandfather's defunct china factory in Medicine Hat, Alta. By the entrance, a portrait of Herbert von Karajan by Derek Root gazes obliquely toward the door. Cherner bar stools, Bombast Furniture. Runner, East India Carpets. All millwork, Interior Craft.



The original floor plan of the house was changed only to open up spaces or to accommodate larger facilities. The kitchen, for example, now features a cozy sitting zone with open shelving to display art and mementoes. *Countertop, CaesarStone in Lagos Blue. Celadon Vessel (fruit bowl) by Josef Roschar.*



Above: The eight-foot-tall windows were carefully positioned so the light hitting the interior walls at various times of the day would not fade the artworks inside the house. *Windows and skylight, Craftsman Glazing & Skylites.*



Left: Before the renovation, the garden was little more than a few scraggly pine trees. Now it features lush, artful plantings, including three maple trees whose leaves drop at different times and turn different colours.



a way that would not fade the artworks inside the house. In the front, the eight-foot-tall windows are mullioned to create more of a visual barrier from the street, while the entry is flanked by a six-foot-high polished-concrete wall, which is softened by a dense hedge of yew shrubs. A water feature buffers sound from the street and proffers a special sense of arrival as visitors walk through the garden to the bright red front door with the vertical mail slot. The garden itself, once little more than a few scraggly pine trees, has been re-landscaped with tall grasses, ground cover, ferns and three maple trees, including an *Acer Sango-kaku*, with its electric-yellow leaves in autumn and bark that, in winter, turns ruby red. At the back of the house, the exist-

ing fence was clad in horizontal cedar bands, with evergreen magnolias planted alongside it to provide shade and privacy.

All electrical wiring and most interior finishes were torn out. The house was then stripped to its studs—leaving only the original posts, beams and tongue-and-groove ceiling—for a renovation that included joining the outbuilding to the house and transforming it into a second bedroom with walk-in closet and bathroom. Neutral tones are the rule. Save for the bedrooms, which are carpeted, the flooring throughout the home is a dense cream marble veined in taupe and grey. The ceilings are painted a green-grey taupe, beams and all, while countertops are in resilient quartz-based CaesarStone, in a taupe-blue that fits well



Opposite page, left: Stephen's office looks out onto the front garden and a lion's head maple tree. The custom credenza is of *anigre* wood and the African sculpture is from the family collection. *Credenza*, *Interior Craft*. *Eames office chair*, *LivingSpace*.

Opposite page, right: An expanse of wall underneath the skylight showcases a series of family photos from the 1940s to the 1960s. Reflecting the homeowner's meticulous attention to detail is the horizontal placement of electrical outlets in the baseboards to make them unobtrusive.

Above: The guest room also functions as a library, albeit one with a Missoni carpet and a sofa that unfolds into a bed. An original Eames LCM chair sits in front of built-in *anigre* shelves. *Pastel* by John Hartman (right, leaning against the shelves). *Photograph* by Ron Terada.

Stephen created a walkout to the pool and gardens from the large master suite, which he gave a wall of windows and doors with the intention of filling the room with light. The original ceiling beams are prized for their subtle character, especially the few that have slightly warped over time. *Matteo bedding, Bacci's.*



A SKYLIGHT RUNNING THE WIDTH OF THE HOUSE MEANS THAT LIGHTS DON'T HAVE TO BE TURNED ON UNTIL THE SUN DISAPPEARS, NO MATTER THE TIME OF YEAR.

with the home's cool aesthetic. The pièce de résistance is millwork in *anigre*, a hardwood from Africa, all on a horizontal grain with a light, natural finish. The walk-through closet on the way to the master bedroom is made of *anigre*, as are the boxes between the beams that hide the ceiling lights.

The furniture is a mix, recycled and new, testament to Stephen's commitment to comfort and style over building a mid-century shrine. A new 10-foot-long matte-black oak dining table is surrounded by award-winning base-head saddle chairs which he has had for years; they're from the defunct Toronto design collective Portico. Across the room, a new sofa by New York's Hugues Chevalier, which evokes the 1940s, sits adjacent to shelves that hold an antique West Coast First Nations cedar basket. Stephen's wide-ranging art collection includes a mask by Northwest Coast artist Beau Dick, photographs by Scott McFarland, multimedia work by Pierre Dorion, and paintings by Etienne Zack, John Hartman and Graham Gillmore. A specially commissioned raw-steel sculpture by London-based artist Cathy Azria sits in the gas fireplace.

There is also a series of family photos from the 1940s, '50s and '60s: our grandfather cutting cane in Cuba in a challenge against the Governor of Havana at the height of the Cold War; the three siblings, with me and my sister dressed in dirndls our grandmother brought back from Europe; a young Stephen perched precariously on the roof of a horse barn with his younger cousin, their arms outstretched to keep their balance on top of the world. ●

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A walk-through closet leading to the master bedroom is made of *anigre* hardwood, as are the boxes between the beams that hide the ceiling lights.



A Beau Dick portrait mask on the wall offers a counterpoint to the sculptures on the edge of the bath. *Faucets, Hansgrohe. Kashmir marble flooring, surround, Simply Stones.*