



Chiam's favourite nook of the whole house is in the master bedroom, where one can sleep under the dormers

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# Quaint home on Happy Avenue East seeks 'right' owner

| BY CHARLENE CHIN |

On Happy Avenue East, off Macpherson Road, there is a home that peeks over its two-storeyed neighbours. Adorned with a red roof, gently curved, the house boasts a facade of floor-to-ceiling windows on the first and attic level, and a brick exterior on the second floor. "Very unassuming", is how Eric Chiam, owner of the home describes it.

Chiam was charmed by the neighbourhood of terrace homes in the Happy Avenue enclave as it was "untouched", he says. Both he and his wife, Lisa, found it "really nice and quaint because the area has the character of the old, and the name 'Happy' has a nice ring to it", Chiam says. "Down here, unlike other newer

estates, you get 80% of the homes in this estate which are quite old."

The original house was a double-storey terrace, which Chiam tore down and rebuilt to its current glory. He had purchased the home in June 2013. Construction happened four months later, and the new house was ready within 16 months. "We actually built it all the while with plans to put it on the market, but in the end decided to keep it for a season." He now plans to sell it at a guide price of \$3.38 million.

## House with character

The most noticeable feature of the house on Happy Avenue East is how raw it looks. The interior of the ground floor is made of off-form concrete, which gives off an industrial vibe. For

added interest, the concrete flooring is embedded with a colourful array of wine bottle chips. "We collected about 10 garbage bags of wine bottles, smashed them, and mixed them into the concrete," Chiam shares.

He recounts that construction was a "very painful" process: "The floor was actually built thick, ground down about 2-3 centimetres, and polished." Over the long run, the areas that are frequently walked on are already smoother than the rest of the floor, which Chiam holds to be the "charm of concrete".

There are three tiny plots carved out for plants on the living room floor. These spots are completely uncovered, says Chiam, "You can [plant] a half-indoor-half-outdoor kind of tree as there is light in the house," he adds.

Next to the living room, a maid's room

marks the centre of the ground floor, and beyond that, the space leads to an open kitchen with full-height windows. If the windows in the living room and kitchen are opened up together, wind can be funnelled from one end of the house to the other.

## Using natural light

Another draw is how the design allows natural light to shine in, a feature that is commonly tricky for terrace homes. To achieve this, Chiam commissioned Ling Hao, award-winning architect of the eponymous Linghao Architects to design the house. Ling is behind Satay by the Bay, a project he co-designed with Shanghai-based architecture firm KUU. The project won Singapore's President's Design Award in 2013. Ling's designs are known for accentuat-



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There are three tiny plots carved out for plants on the living room floor – one of the ways to fully utilise the natural light allowed into the house



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The second storey has a meandering shape to allow views as well as light through from the attic



The open kitchen has full-sized windows; once opened up together with the windows in the living room, wind can be funnelled from one end to the other



Ling Hao, the architect who designed the house, prioritised ventilation and natural lighting

ing natural light and ventilation.

For the Happy Avenue East home, Ling gave the second level a meandering shape supported by concrete pillars – this means that the first floor, 4.8m in height, actually reaches up to the third floor to allow light through. During different parts of the day, the sun would be able to shine through the skylights and gaps between the rooms, casting different patterns of shadows on the floor. “You literally get to see the house in different kinds of lighting, in different parts of the day,” Chiam says.

The floor plate of the second floor was reduced to fit the wavy design, achieving both air ventilation as well as views from the second floor. One bathroom in the centre of the second level offer views of the neighbouring homes opposite it, a feat that Chiam believes other ter-

race homes are not able to pull off.

Altogether, the second level, at 2.8m in height, has three bedrooms – one junior suite, and two common rooms which share a bathroom. Although the bedrooms are small, this lends to Chiam’s belief that personal rooms should be tighter and communal spaces should be bigger, “because that’s where everybody gathers for common activities”. He explains: “If the rooms are large and comfortable, then the children will stay there and not come out.”

#### ‘A different way of living’

The third level, or the attic, holds Chiam’s favourite nook in the house – the master bedroom. It features teak floors and a ceiling in walnut veneer, which “recreates the atmosphere that you get in a Parisian attic where there are dor-

mers and overhanging arched roofs”, he says. The ceiling is bent gently, following the curve of the roof, and features dormers and eaves which allow the windows to be opened without letting in the rain.

Even the owner himself admits that the house is unorthodox. “It takes a lot of getting used to, like having a cupboard in the middle of the master bedroom. For the typical lady of the house it’s not going to be adequate, but it’s a different way of living,” he says. The wardrobe, covered with mirrored exteriors on all four sides, is right smack in the middle of the walkway of the attic floor. At the end of the master room, there is an open bath with tiled flooring, overlooking a window with blinds. “When you shower, you get to see the outside world even though

you are in a terrace house,” remarks Chiam.

Due to the quirky nature of the house, it is apt that the property was able to attract an art collector, who paid around \$6,000 in monthly rents for three years from 2015 to 2018. The tenant ran an art gallery out of the house, hung his art pieces on its walls and occasionally hosted parties there, shares Chiam.

#### Humble beginnings

Chiam’s penchant for building houses started with his first home, an HDB flat. “For the early home that we had, it was the usual – using Ikea hacks to make the space beautiful,” he says. “We would travel to Rome on a budget and stay in a room with floral wallpaper, and the next thing you know, our home gets wallpaper with flowers on it.”

Having three children also helped him understand home-building in terms of designing efficient layouts while getting the aesthetics right. This house on Happy Avenue East, however, had for him a “different learning curve”. It is a “huge recalibration to accept smaller rooms, sacrificing the floor plate for the intent to capture Ling Hao’s design concept”, which steers away from more cookie-cutter fittings such as lifts and marble slabs, while focusing on aspects like ventilation and natural lighting, Chiam says.

Is he sad to part ways with this house? “I’ve been here many times... every time I come here, I do like a different aspect of it. Will I be sad? I have had enough memories.”

Due to how unconventional the Happy Avenue East home is, Chiam believes it will be more of a challenge to sell it as it attracts a niche market. “A house like this, you really do have difficulty finding the right person to sell it to,” he remarks. Building the house was “a leap of faith”, he adds, but he is convinced that the right person who is willing to own it will enjoy it.

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