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Clockwise from above: the elevated living room, with its own balcony, is borrowed from the original bungalow; the kitchen is where the family congregate, says Annabel Agace; the white décor in the family area is broken by a colourful painting; the kitchen is positioned so that the whole house can be seen from it

California dreamin'

A love of Hollywood and villa-style courtyards gave one couple inspiration when they demolished a Sixties bungalow and built a glass-walled Californian-style family home — in the heart of Surrey. By **Emma Kilbey**



Chris Agace (left) heads for nearby Guildford in his Mark II Jaguar

In the bedroom (below) rich elm wardrobes make the room feel warm

BREATHING in the serenity of Chris and Annabel Agace's home, with its views of the rolling Surrey countryside, it is quite a leap to remember it is only five minutes from the middle of busy Guildford. "It's so quiet because we're fairly high up," says Annabel. Set on a hill where a Sixties bungalow once stood, this villa-style home centres around a courtyard.

For Chris and Annabel it is a long-cherished dream come true. "Our first builder went bankrupt halfway through, so the costs rose and it took more than a year to complete," says Annabel. "But we've ended up with exactly what we had imagined."

The Agaces and their children, Matilda, 11, Luke, nine, and Kitty, five, moved to Surrey nearly five years ago from Islington. "We came to Guildford on a whim really," says Annabel, a former chartered surveyor.

"Chris was here on business and spied the original bungalow with a good plot of land up for sale. It's close to town yet set in the countryside — on the edge of the beautiful North Downs." Initially, the couple investigated extending the bungalow. "Sadly it wasn't worth salvaging but we had no problem getting permission for our new-build," Annabel says.

She and Chris, a barrister-turned-property developer, had long admired villa-style courtyard designs, as well as Modernist Californian homes, and this was the basis of their brief to architect Elspeth Beard. "A single-storey design around a courtyard allows light in and makes the best use of interior and outdoor space," says Annabel.

Their L-shape home is made up of two corridors — one with three bedrooms and two bathrooms; the other with an open-plan living/kitchen/dining and study space

with a playroom for the children. "The kitchen is where we all congregate," says Annabel. She chose the purity of glossy, stark white units from German company Systemat and Corian worktops to reflect the light that filters into the house through the glass doors.

"I wanted a streamlined space with everything tucked away, that echoed all the light bouncing around the house," she says.

The elevated living room, which has its own balcony and steps, is borrowed from the design of the original bungalow. With floaty curtains and a wooden floor, it has a softer feel than the rest of the house. "We wanted one room where we could be cosy, and this is where Chris and I relax together when the children are in bed," says Annabel.

The couple's own calm and tranquil bedroom gives them a bird's-eye view of the rest of the house — as well

as feeling almost as if they are sleeping on the decked terrace outside. "I can see what the kids are up to without getting out of bed," says Annabel.

A glass-roofed section, the "elbow" of the house, is where the two corridors connect and where Chris's display of Papua New Guinean bows and arrows — collected on his student travels — takes pride of place.

With the children growing up, Annabel has embarked on a new career, opening a gallery space, Chalkhill Contemporary Arts, within the house.

The main open-plan living areas are the perfect environment to showcase the abstract art. "Buying and collecting is my passion. I especially love the St Ives School: Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth and Alfred Wallis, plus their contemporaries, Terry Frost and Patrick Heron — and their ability to convey light and space," she says.

A clever balance of inside and out is struck with two garden zones — as well as the decked and limestone

'A glass-roofed section is where Chris's display of Papua New Guinean bows and arrows take pride of place'

courtyard, there is a lawned front garden, with spectacular views of the North Downs.

With all rooms facing the courtyard, the Agaces have taken great pains to create an eye-catching vista. Architectural planting, including olive trees and phormiums, provides strong shapes against the white walls. A waterfall is lit from behind at night and projects swirling pondweed against the walls. "It's like a moving picture," says Annabel.

Ultimately, the Agaces have created a stunning sanctuary from the outside world, despite being so close to town. "We're so lucky," says Annabel. "It feels as if we're on a constant holiday."

■ This feature appears in the July 2007 issue of Livingetc, on sale now.

How the Agaces achieved the look

What: Single-storey new-build on the site of a Sixties bungalow.

Space: Five bedrooms, open-plan kitchen/dining area/study, elevated sitting room, three bathrooms, playroom. Outside office.

Where: Guildford, Surrey.

Cost: Bought for £650,000. Estimated £460,000 on renovation.

What the Agaces did:

- Demolished the original Sixties bungalow, retaining one wall to support the elevated sitting room.
- Built a single-storey glass-fronted L-shaped building, plus elevated sitting room, facing out onto a central courtyard.
- Created two corridors in the L-shape, one with a bedroom wing, the other with living areas and a playroom.
- Laid hardwood and limestone in the courtyard, continuing the limestone flooring in the house.
- Installed underfloor heating.

For further information on property updates and art, visit chalkhill.co.uk.



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As with the kitchen, the bathroom has been kept in neutral white, with colour provided by pictures



Matilda, 11, and Kitty, five, cuddle up on the sofa in the "cosy" lounge — a space designed with relaxation in mind



Tucked away in a corner of the living room is an area where the children can draw and write by themselves