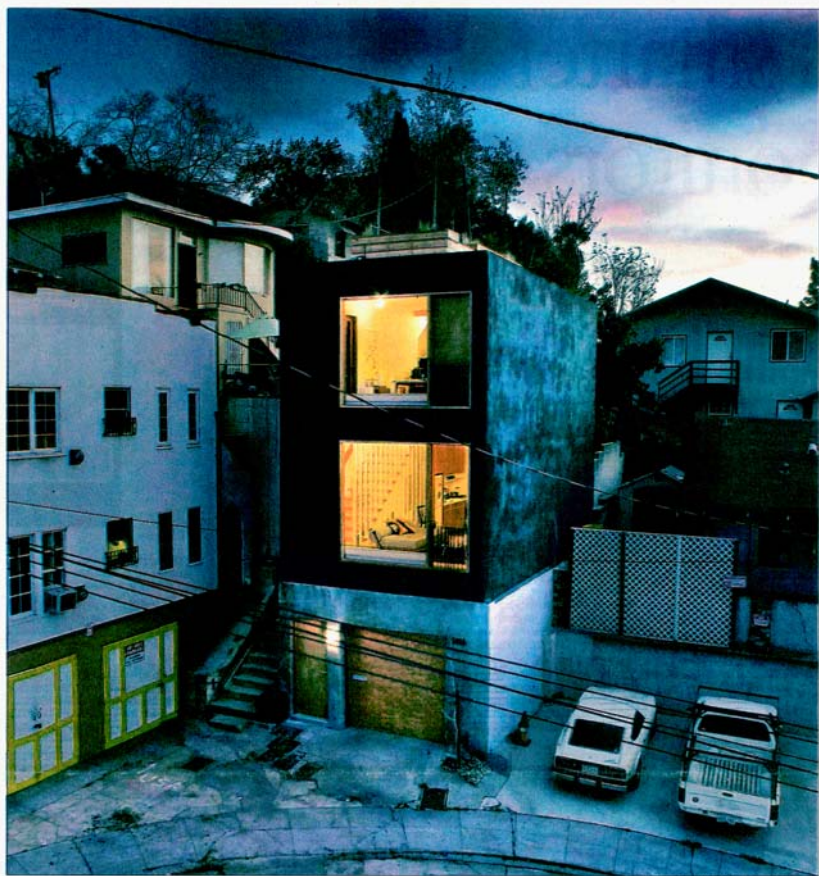


REAL ESTATE  
ADVERTISING  
INSIDE

## HOME

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 2012 ■ LATIMES.COM/HOME



Photographs by ERIC MCCOY Los Angeles Times

HOME OF THE TIMES

## STRAIGHT UP



Can you really build a house on a lot that's just 780 square feet? Two bedrooms, one bathroom, city views — and parking — all set on land that's one-sixth the size of a pro basketball court? One Echo Park architect delivers the answer with his experiment in compact urban living: a house that's just 15 feet wide but still aims to feel plenty big. Step inside the Eel's Nest. **E3**



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIC MCILROY FOR LOS ANGELES TIMES

**BUILT ON A LOT** measuring 780 square feet, Simon Storey's Echo Park home has 11-foot-high ceilings and simple white walls that help make it look spacious. The staircase between the second and third floor has floating steps and acts as a light well. Storey hopes the house will serve as a model for dense urban development.

### HOME OF THE TIMES

# DREAMING UPWARD

Simon Storey started with a small piece of land, but his Echo Park house rises to the challenge.

MARIBBA GLUCK

Just 15 feet wide, architect Simon Storey's new Echo Park house feels much larger than its 690 square feet. With oversized windows and skylights, the two bedrooms and one bathroom built above the garage are filled with plenty of light and air. On a clear winter day, the rooftop deck with olive trees and native grasses provides views of the snowcapped San Gabriel Mountains, the Griffith Observatory and the Hollywood sign.

But the biggest accomplishment: All of this has risen on a lot that's just 780 square feet.

"Every single person at the building department had the same reaction when they saw my plans," Storey said. "They would shake their head and laugh."

Given the challenge of building on a lot with such extreme constraints, the architect managed to get permission to build three stories high, essentially doubling the interior square footage. The house is now a live-work space with Storey's office, Anonymous Architects, in the second bedroom.

The interiors are helmed by 11-foot-high ceilings and simple white walls that help to create the illusion of spaciousness. The result is a surprisingly livable home that manages the property's limitations and retains some quirkiness. Situated on a hill, in the crook of L-shaped, one-way Fairbanks Place, the house and its custom windows let Storey know exactly when visitors are approaching.

"The cars look like they're coming straight toward you," he said.

Storey bought the lot and its tiny 1929 house in 2007, at the height of the boom, for \$270,000, nearly 10 times its selling price a decade earlier. He essentially tore down the home in early 2010 and rebuilt from the ground up.

With a construction budget of just \$30,000, he had to abandon his original plans for the exterior once he discovered that fire-treating wood would be prohibitively expensive. Instead, the tall house is sheathed in black stucco. Storey dubbed it Eel's Nest, a term inspired by the long but narrow buildings common in urban Japan. To control views and preserve privacy, Storey kept side walls solid and designed expanses of glass at the front and rear of the house. At the back is a massive glass door, opening to a small patio behind the kitchen. At the front of the house are doors that open (with guardrail) to allow a cross-breeze to flow through.

The staircase between the second and third floor has floating European beech treads and acts as a light well, filtering the sun's rays from top to bottom.

Storey designed many of the furnishings, including shelves, a stacked wood speaker for his vinyl



**DUBBED THE** Eel's Nest, Simon Storey's 2-bedroom, 1-bathroom home in Echo Park has oversized windows, above left, to let in sunlight. Storey designed many of the furnishings, as well as the sunken kitchen, above right, with its Douglas fir cabinets and Formica countertops, which provide ample storage and counter space. The deck on the roof, left, has olive trees and native grasses, plus views of the San Gabriel Mountains, Griffith Observatory and Hollywood sign. The second bedroom, below, functions as Storey's office, Anonymous Architects.



collection and bedroom wallpaper that recalls vintage brocade. He also designed the kitchen, including its Douglas fir cabinets and Formica countertops.

The result is a study in efficiency: a kitchen with ample storage and counter space and an open plan that allows him to prepare meals while entertaining guests.

Because it's sunken slightly below the dining area, the kitchen feels like a distinct room without walls that would have interrupted the free-flowing floor plan.

Storey hopes that the house can serve as a model for dense urban development. With fewer open lots available for development in Los Angeles, Storey and other architects continue to explore the potential of small lots and sites previously considered too impractical to build.

Born in New Zealand, educated at the Southern California Institute of Architecture in Los Angeles and influenced by the work of Case Study architects, Storey is trying to celebrate the vibrancy of neighborhoods shaped by what might be best described as decades of imprudent development. The goal: small but efficient spaces with a connection to the streetscape and locations near public transportation.

"I never thought of this as a

house," Storey said. "It was designed to be a 'container' of daily life. It made me realize there is work and there is life, but more often these are inseparable."

Storey had put his house on the market but has since decided to stay, living in it as he develops a six-unit town house design with Resourceful Developments. The Echo Park project draws on ideas from Eel's Nest and is in the final stages of approval, Storey said.

Mott Smith, a real estate developer who specializes in small lot projects such as the much-heralded Maltman Bungalows in Silver Lake, cited increasing demand for this type of housing, especially among young first-time home buyers.

"They don't see the small size as a sacrifice," he said. "The compactness and efficiency are an amenity, like driving a Mini Cooper."

home@latimes.com