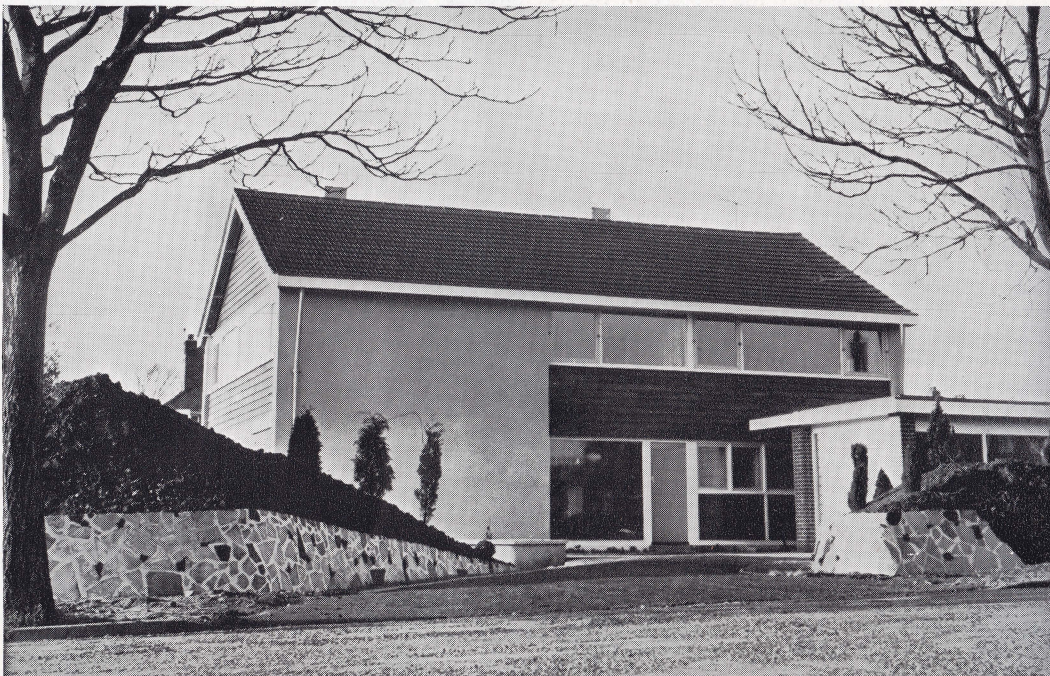


A DESIGNER'S HOUSE AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON

By H. DALTON CLIFFORD

WHEN Mr. Tibor Reich left his native Hungary before the war he had already completed the first year of a course in architecture. After the war he turned his attention to textile design, started his own mill, and, in due course, evolved the deep-textured woven materials for which he is well known. His interest in creative architecture remained dormant while building restrictions were in full force, but a few years ago he acquired a corner site in Stratford-on-Avon and began to design a house, 23, Avenue Road, for himself. Lacking the necessary experience and practical knowledge, he chose a young architect, Mr. Denys Hinton, A.R.I.B.A., to work with him on the design and supervise the erection of the house. Unhindered by the restraints of tradition, free from the discipline imposed by academic training, and by nature incapable of doing anything the obvious or fashionable way without first proving to his own satisfaction that there is no better way, Mr. Reich applied his inventive brain to every facet of house design. And it was Mr. Hinton's unenviable task to translate the resulting torrent of ideas into bricks and mortar.

The exterior, though manifestly "contemporary," is unprovocative, out of deference to the character of the neighbourhood and the proximity of Elizabethan half-timbering. The main load-bearing walls are of brick with a



A HOUSE AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON THAT RESULTED FROM A "TORRENT OF IDEAS." The exterior is deliberately unprovocative, though unmistakably contemporary



THE TWO-STOREY LIVING-ROOM. The vase-shaped free-standing fire gives a central focus to the room

textured rendering, but a framed construction is used elsewhere to give freedom for the placing of the windows. The pitched roof is supported by two latticed purlins running from end to end of the house carried on the cross walls, and is covered with interlocking tiles. The flat-roofed garage spans the drive with "up-and-over" doors at both ends, so that there is no need to back in or out; and the surrounding garden, which was flat and featureless, has been scooped into mounds and hollows with the aid of a bulldozer. There is now a large saucer-shaped lawn with a pond (and a drain) at the bottom and shrub-coved earthworks round about to give shelter and privacy.

Inside the house bedrooms, bathrooms and working areas have been kept small, with minimum permissible ceiling heights, and as much space as possible has been given to areas used for relaxing and entertaining. The plan is focused on the kitchen, from the middle of which, when the sliding doors are open, Mrs. Reich can see what is going on in all the principal rooms on the ground floor and all four sections of the garden, a convenient arrangement when there are four children to keep an eye on. In addition to the usual up-to-date kitchen equipment (which includes an electric cooker with an enviable degree of self-control, a rotating delivery hatch, a garbage disposal unit and an extractor fan) there is a refrigerated food file.

This invention of Mr. Reich was obtained by crossing a filing cabinet with a heat pump. It comprises six metal drawers, each of which is kept at a different temperature according to its proximity to the cooling source, an ice-making compartment and an eye-level cupboard fitted with wire trays for bread, cakes and vegetables. The heat which the pump draws out of the food file is used to maintain a large storage cylinder of water at the proper temperature for baths and washing up. The whole apparatus fits beneath the upper flight of the stairs.

The kitchen is designed to serve food in two directions, either into the formal dining-place, or into the family room. The dining-place is under the gallery in the two-storey-high living-room, which takes up the whole south end of the house and, apart from its normal use, is a testing ground where Mr. Reich can see the effect of his latest designs under various lighting conditions. There is a double curtain track all round the room and it is possible, by rearranging the curtains, to change the colour scheme according to the occasion, the mood or the weather.

General lighting comes from coloured glass panels flush with the ceiling and from a constellation of bulbs let into the mahogany underside of the gallery, but there are also a number of spotlights which can be focused on the fabrics or on the table tops. The fireplace, shaped like a spring onion and covered with a mosaic of broken tiles and pottery, has an underfloor draught and a large sunk ash-bucket. Unlike some free-standing fires it is extremely efficient, its firebrick body and encased

stove-pipe flue (which penetrates the gallery) radiating heat all round. Background heating here, and throughout the ground floor, comes from electric elements under the floor.

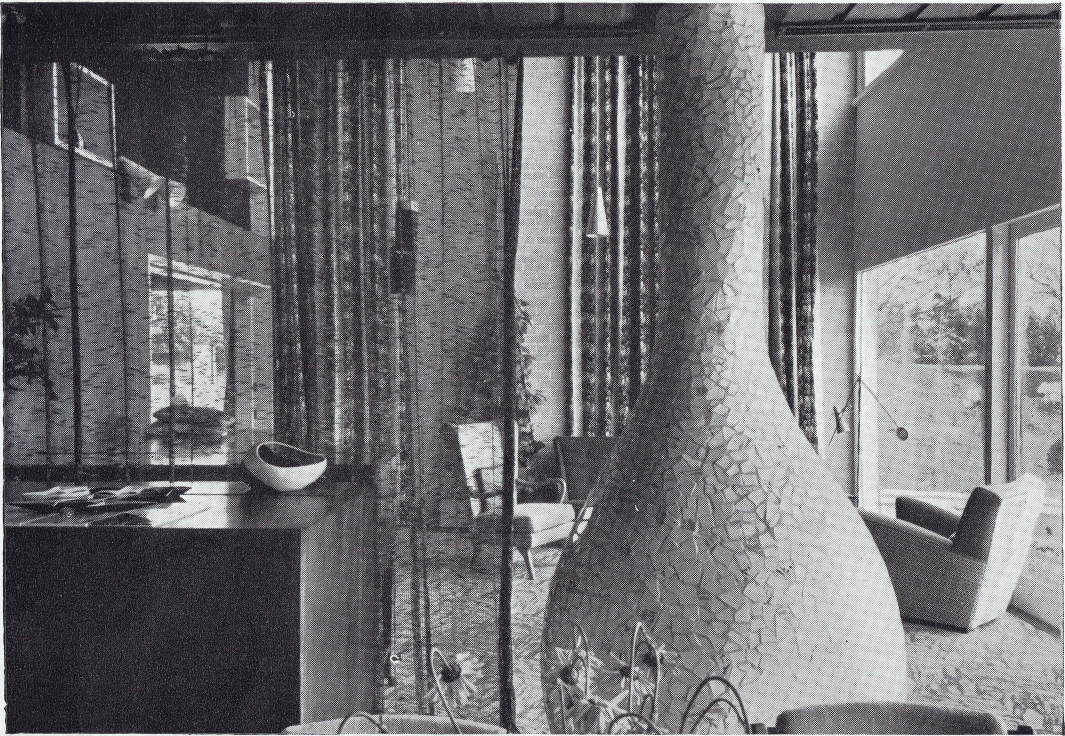
Incidentally, the only fixed piece of furniture in the living-room is a large rectangular sideboard, a veritable Pandora's box, for it contains within its inoffensive flush-doored exterior seven of the ills which beset the human race to-day—drinks, cigarettes, a television set, a wireless, a telephone, a record player and a tape recorder.

On the opposite side of the kitchen is the family-room, a general purpose knock-about room, robustly furnished and with easily cleaned floor and wall surfaces, where children and parents can work and play together. It is divided from the kitchen by a bar-counter long enough to take the whole family for informal meals, or seven children when there is a party. There are large cupboards for toys and sports-gear and a direct door into the garden.

Each of the children (there are two boys and two girls) has a cabin fitted with divan bed, built-in wardrobe, chest of drawers, book shelves and a drawing table or desk seven feet long. Sliding doors between the two pairs of cabins can be opened for combined operations, and there is a fifth cabin for staff or for a young guest. Walls and doors are covered with washable plastic cloth.

The children's washing facilities are combined with cloakroom and laundry to give three washbasins, a shower and a bath. There is also a drying or airing cupboard.

Upstairs there are two bedrooms, the gallery study (which also holds a spare bed), a studio and a most ingenious bathroom with two basins, a shower and a bath, and a sliding partition which can be used to divide it in two when there are guests in the house. From the studio a companion-way leads into the attic, where, between the latticed purlins, a seven-foot-high corridor stretches from end to end (about 42 feet) with storage shelves on either hand.

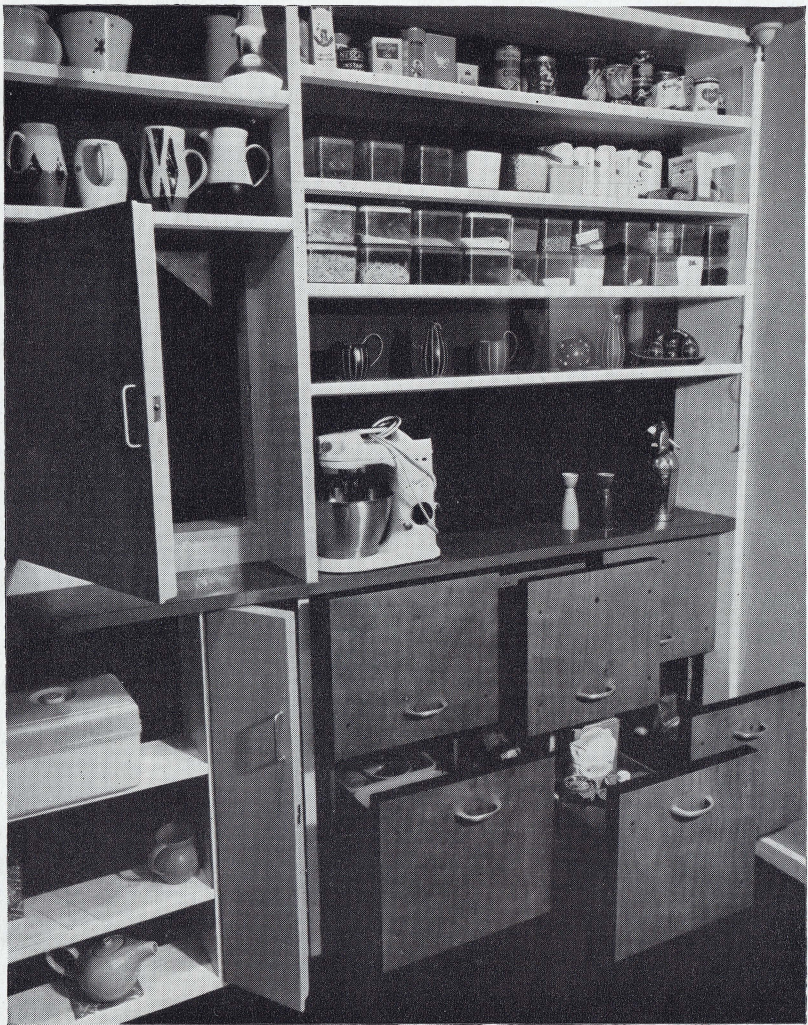
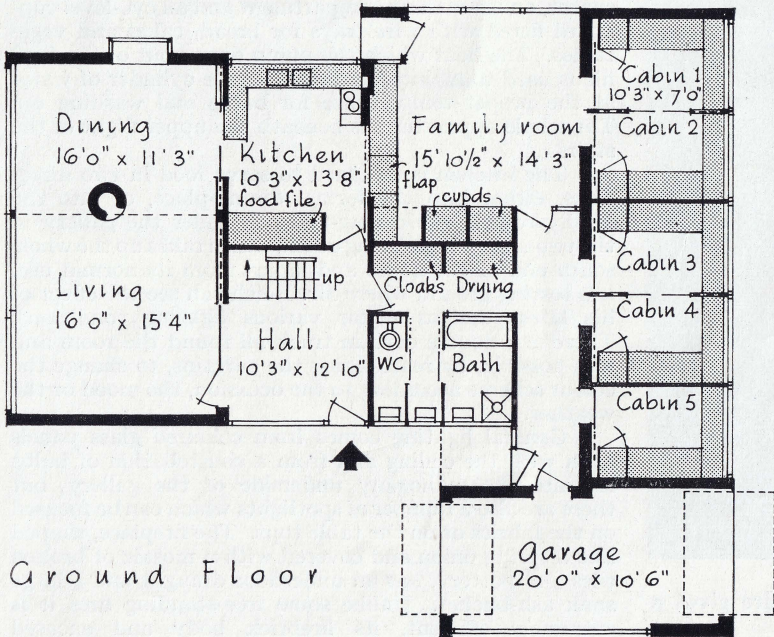
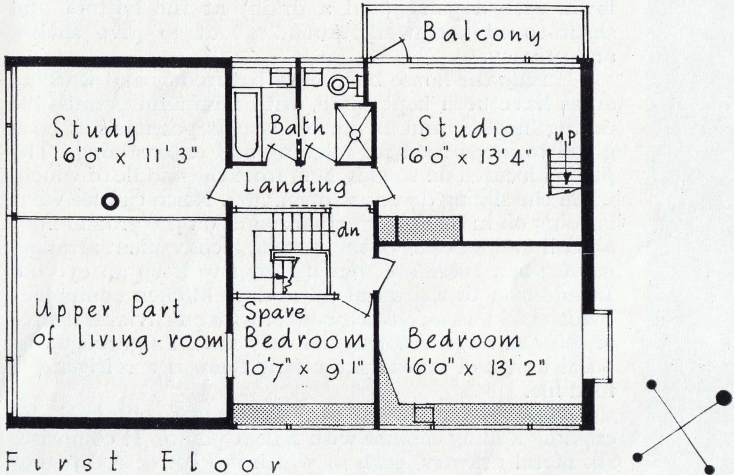


THE LIVING-ROOM FROM THE DINING END. A double curtain track round the walls enables the owner, a textile designer, to test the effectiveness of his new designs under varying conditions

The house has a quality not easily to be discovered from drawings or photographs, which can only be described as controllable interpenetrability. Ground-floor rooms can either be extended into each other—hall into living-room, into kitchen, into family-room, into cabins—or completely cut off by wide sliding doors. Glazed doors and internal windows make it possible to see through the walls—for instance from the spare bedroom one can look down into the

living-room or out across the staircase. And in some places wall to wall or floor to ceiling windows make the garden or terrace appear as an extension of the living-space.

The effect, perhaps, is inclined to be a little bewildering until one gets used to it, but unwanted peepholes can always be covered by the ubiquitous curtains, and it certainly makes the house easily adaptable for parties and other purposes.



(Left) PLAN OF THE HOUSE. (Above) THE REFRIGERATED FOOD FILE. In this a filing cabinet is combined with a heat pump. It fills the space beneath the upper flight of the stairs