



The dining area is seamlessly linked to the living room and sports an acrylic world map on one wall that also serves as the lighting for the room. PHOTOS THIO LAY HOON

INTERIORS

Two staircases for the best of both worlds

Thinking out of the box allows a family to live together with lots of breathing space

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Building a discreet love nest when your mother-in-law lives with you, and family members from abroad occasionally troop through the house, can be tough. But thanks to a pair of staircases and a novel layout, a couple here has done just that.

Owners of a three-storey terraced house off Yio Chu Kang Road, the engineer husband and communications advisor wife have designed a home together that would allow inhabitants to have their own space — without having to cross into co-residents' domains or paths.

The 3,300-sq ft home acts like a dual-key unit. A "media room" on the ground floor turns into a guest room with an ensuite bathroom for a bachelor brother

whenever he is in town from his base in India. The room is then accessible via a glass side entrance with its own lock. And a pair of private staircases allows the couple — who wishes to be known only as Mr and Mrs Tom — to reach their second-floor master bedroom by climbing one set of steps; Mrs Tom's 64-year-old mother goes to her bedroom on the same floor by another, shorter flight.

"You have your own private space, but everyone is very much interconnected," says Mrs Tom, 35, pointing out that the airy, open living area on the first floor is where everyone congregates. Three skylights let in ample natural light, and there is an air well between the first and second floors. "Very useful for calling down to my husband," she jokes.

When the couple bought the 2,100-sq ft site in 2010, soon after they got married, a house built in the '80s had stood on it. To remodel it, they turned to architect Wu Yen Yen, 35, of three-year-old



The living room.



We want to live here forever.
Co-owner Mr Tom

architectural design firm GAD, whom Mrs Tom has known since primary school. The site was challenging, as it was 33m long and 6m wide — a narrow footprint. Says Ms Wu: "It's really about eking out the most space with the most efficient layout possible."

The architect's solution was to construct two separate but parallel staircases, stacked one on top of the other. Conventional staircases required landings and created odd corners that ate up space, she explains. "It was a very logical decision to a puzzle," she says. "How could we solve it to unlock the space within?"



A skylight sits above the dining area.



The dressing room is linked to the master bedroom, with a skylight that lets in ample natural light.



This flight of stairs leads to the rooftop garden on the third floor.

With the two streamlined staircases, she was able to turn the space saved into an extra room, roughly 5m by 5m, which is used by Mr Tom's parents when they visit once a year from Delhi. Mrs Tom intends to turn it into a nursery when the couple starts their own family.

A modest outdoor garden on the third floor is where she and her mother grow edible plants, such as basil, spearmint, dill and rosemary. Thinking ahead, the owners have run the necessary pipes and wiring up to the third storey, so that they can extend the roof and convert the space into another room as their family expands.