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ABOVE Chris and Annabel's kitchen is positioned so they can see all around the house – the playroom, study, dining area and garden – from the breakfast bar. The dining table is by Table Makers and the Eames Eiffel dining chairs are from Aram; the orange RAR rocker by Charles and Ray Eames is from Vitra.

HEAD FOR THE HILLS

Bringing the glamour of Hollywood to the rolling Surrey countryside, Chris and Annabel created a Californian-style home – in Guildford

Words **Emma Kilbey** Photography **Jake Curtis** Styling **Stephanie Powell**



THE PROPERTY

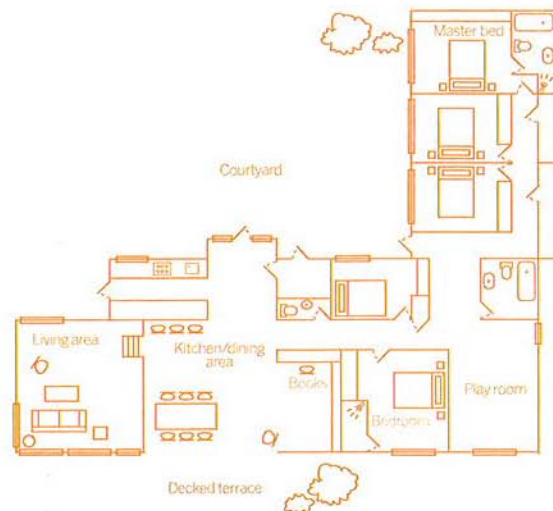
TYPE Single-storey rebuild from an original Sixties bungalow.

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

LOCATION Guildford, Surrey.

COST Bought for £650,000. Estimated £460,000 on renovation.

ABOVE The blue circles painting by the window is by Terry Frost. **RIGHT** Chris goes for a spin in his Mark II Jaguar.



Breathing in the serenity of Chris and Annabel Agace's unique home, with its views of the rolling countryside, it's quite a leap to remember we're 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's a long-cherished dream come true. 'Our first builder went bankrupt halfway through, so the costs rose and it took over a

year to complete,' says Annabel. 'But we've ended up with exactly what we'd imagined.'

The Agaces and their children, Matilda, 11, Luke, 9 and Kitty, 5, moved here 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 – we're 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 to flow in and makes the best use of inner and outdoor space,' says Annabel. >



The large picture on the wall and the one propped up on the floor are both by Frank Beanland. The pendant lights on rods are from Luceplan – Ikea Stockholm does similar. The blue jug and glasses are from Graham & Green.

KITCHEN & DINING ROOM

'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 filtering 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.

WHAT THEY 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 under-floor heating.



HOME TRUTHS

Who's your favourite artist?

Chris: Jiro Osuga, for the humour in his pictures, and the actor Steven Berkoff, for his passion.

Annabel: Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth for being brilliant pioneers of abstract art in Britain.

Secret vice? *Chris:* my polluting Mark II Jaguar. *Annabel:* abebooks.co.uk.

Dream dinner party guests? *Chris:* Tilda Swinton. *Annabel:* Thomas Heatherwick (artist/architect) and the designer Margaret Howell.

What's the best view in the world?

Chris: The Star Mountains of Papua New Guinea from the air. *Annabel:* The one from our living room.

Who would play you in the film of your life? *Chris:* Lee Majors.

Annabel: Cate Blanchett.

In the glass-roofed hallway, a Habitat console sits below Chris's collection of Papua New Guinean bows and arrows. The drum belongs to their son, Luke.



Their L-shape home is made up of two corridors – one with three bedrooms and two bathrooms; the other with an open-plan living/cooking/dining and study space with a playroom for the children. 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 group, Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, 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 >

LIVING ROOM The elevated living room with 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.

'Friends say being here reminds them of homes in places such as California or South Africa, where outdoor living is the norm'

ABOVE Kitty hard at work. BELOW The patchwork sofa is from Squint at Liberty. The lime rug is from The Rug Company and the glass standard lamp is from Brissi. The white unit is a Habitat buy, and the zinc cube and yellow vase are both from The Conran Shop. For a purple chair like this, go to Espacio.



limestone courtyard there's 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 pond weed 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.'

For further information on property updates and art, visit chalk-hill.co.uk.



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MAIN BEDROOM As well as feeling almost as if they are sleeping on the decked terrace outside, Annabel and Chris's calm and tranquil bedroom gives them a bird's eye view of the rest of the house. 'I can see what the kids are up to without getting out of bed,' says Annabel. The wood adds warmth and texture.

'A single-storey design around a courtyard allows maximum light to flow in and makes the best use of inner and outdoor space'



ABOVE Pictures in the bathroom are by Carey Born. The bath is by Bette with a Vero basin and taps by Duravit. **BELOW** In the bedroom, the bedlinen and throw are by Habitat, the cushions from Monsoon Home and the lamp from Best at The Conran Shop. The wall of wardrobes is made from rich red elm.