



these pages: Within the sliver of the new house, small and narrow vertical spaces interlock as do those within an ant colony. Window openings follow the flow of new spaces and meander around the façade. A third of the deck is a sliding roof that opens onto the garage. The narrow 1.2m wide entry yard and the light-box skylight extend the garage space.

ANT FARM HOUSE

location: Taipei, Taiwan
 architecture / design: Xrange, Taipei – www.xrange.net
 interior design: Grace Cheung
 photography: Scott Morgan, Ruen Wei-Min

THE DESIGNERS OF THIS RESIDENCE IN TAIPEI DESCRIBE IT AS: 'A HOUSE OF OUTRAGEOUS LIVING PROPORTIONS INSPIRED BY ANT FARMS'. THE SITE IS SITUATED WITHIN THE PROTECTED PERIPHERAL AREA OF A NATIONAL PARK AND THE ORIGINAL STONE HOUSE ON SITE, BUILT FROM STACKED GRANITE BLOCKS IN THE MID-50s, COULD NOT BE DEMOLISHED. DESIGN / CONSTRUCTION: SPANNED 2004 – 2006.



below: The bar space connects the foyer to the deck where 7m tall doors open into a study just the width of a desk.

opposite: Double-volume study as viewed from the master bedroom.

opposite below: For the avid car-collector owners, quirky detailing includes Porsche GT3 exhaust manifolds as a door handle. Art in the foyer: a pair of Porsche fenders with personal graffiti added.



Design and construction took two years. On a site of just 350m², the architects used close to maximum coverage allowable to create a living space of 500m². The only available expansion area for the project was relegated to a space between the exterior wall and the roofline of the existing house, which varies between 80cm to 180cm. Not wanting to merely re-skin the old stone house, Xrange devised an architectural strategy to in-fill the new house onto the old stone structure wherever gaps were available.

What resulted is an enveloping layer of 80cm to 177cm wide by seven metre high living space around the existing indigenous stone house. Indeed it's an extreme yet innovative solution. Say the architects: 'The added programs of pantry, bar, study, library, dog house and bathrooms are new rooms averaging about four square metres in footprint, but with a soaring seven metre headroom. Ant farm toys became the spatial model of this super-thin house, where sequences of small narrow vertical spaces interlock.

'The addition is constructed out of two steel box-frames anchored onto the front and back of the old rusticated stone house. This sandwiching design concept provides lateral structural stability to the old rubble walls, built entirely from 40cm thick rough granite blocks, which have an otherwise indeterminate and likely poor seismic performance. >

below: The dining table is custom-made from a tree root and topped with Corian.

opposite: Original openings of the stone house are converted into a skylight shaft, nook and window.



left: Within the old stone walls is a built-in, 9m² upholstered seating area.

'This form strategy creates a found interior for the new house from the internalised exterior of the old stone structure. Original windows, doors and air conditioner openings are transformed into actual exterior windows, interior windows, doorways or display recesses, depending on their location and orientation. Views of the surrounding mountains and city below are revealed through the overlapping of new external and old internal windows. The resulting irregularity introduces an unexpected spatial signature to the house.'

Apart from views and privacy, internalising the old stone house creates a heavy thermal mass for the new one. This is taken further by the expansive grass lawn – a green haven with a view from the roof-top. The result is that temperatures within the stone house stay cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

The 3m² study is accessed through a set of 7m tall, cross-hatched wooden doors with authentic Porsche GT3 exhaust pipes as door handles. Inside this soaring reading space with an entirely upholstered floor, there is a work desk and tall, transparent Perspex shelves for books and



above left: *Sculpted fibreglass vanities in the master bathroom are placed on a herringbone parquet floor, in this light-filled space.*

top: *The master bathtub is located between the master shower and the balcony beyond; lit by a continuous skylight which extends along the entire length of the rear wall.*

above: *The bedroom features a leather-clad platform bed and mirror sliding door; a bamboo-clad corridor accesses the bathroom area.*



artwork display. On the edge of the study, rubber seats access the foyer bar, which serves as the main connection space of the house. It opens onto a generous deck, a third of which is actually a giant operable roof for the five-car garage below.

The ant farm house is a multitude of intricate living spaces carved out between the old and the new houses with a simple and uncluttered clarity that is intentionally kept understated and raw. The exuberant spatial irregularity of the new narrow living spaces resulted in an intimate and modest dwelling without the expected conventional luxury. □