

with **Roger Perry**



MICHAEL DINEEN talks to Roger Perry, chairman of Hitchambury Homes.



Taking one's shoes off just inside the front door seemed appropriate – after all we were entering a domestic cathedral, a luxurious suburban house with the kind of interior light that lifted the spirits.

If they think this seems a little over the top, than I suggest housebuilders with a desire to create airily cheerful interiors visit one of Roger Perry's Hitchambury homes around South Buckinghamshire.

There are not many of them, but they show very clearly what can be done to brighten the lives of those who live in them by generous fenestration, allowing the sky into the sitting room, the kitchen, the hall, the bedrooms and the stairwell.

I had heard about Hitchambury Homes – motto: 'Creating space and light' – and was curious to see how they achieved this.

The most obvious ways were by providing windows rising through two storeys. This you could see before you entered the house. But less visible was the way Perry and his designers had dispensed with tiles and provided a 40ft square glass plateau in the roof, allowing thousands of 'watts' of daylight to fill the floors below.

Leaning over a banister on the topmost floor I found myself facing the apex of a sharp inverse "V" sliced into the outer wall of the house. Needless to say it admitted light to this upper apartment, and also to the floor below. But it also made me think I'd sooner leave this kind of housebuilding to a structural engineer than to an architect, working on his own.

And that is what Roger Perry still is, although he seemed to me to be working happily with architects.

In fact it was constructing an hotel straddling a railway track in Cromwell Road, West London for the entrepreneurial Danziger brothers that was to lead him eventually from pure structural engineering work to construction and thence to the housing development he plainly relishes today.

Perry also heads a sister company called

Neatstone who are building and civil engineering contractors, and this, he jokes, keeps his feet on the ground. Among other products, Neatstone has provided a thousand affordable homes, a notable contrast to the suburban luxury he builds in Beaconsfield's leafy avenues. Here every house seems to be tipping the scales at half a million, while Hitchambury 'space and light' homes are mostly well above a million.

Part of the company's philosophy of space usage is the 1,000 square feet of kitchen, an area with room for a family to cook, eat, watch

core, and so nobody loses touch with the rest of the family; and on the top floor you can talk to somebody on the ground floor because of the central atrium."

Over the years since I started writing about houses I have occasionally thought it would be interesting to carry out a survey to discover the type of home most architects choose to live in.

My educated guess is that it is quite likely to be of a classical Georgian design, built in the Age of Reason – 200 years earlier than that modern architecture Perry, the structural

"All our rooms lead off a central core, a well-lit central core, and so nobody loses touch with the rest of the family; and on the top floor you can talk to somebody on the ground floor because of the central atrium"

television, play games – or just lounge.

Perry was happy to admit that the house we visited strongly resembled that classic suburban formula which used to be identified by the satirical tag 'Stockbroker Tudor'.

"It's Tudor with a modern twist. I admire fantastic modern architecture in London, particularly the way architects like Richard Rogers create a feeling of space and light, but I decided years ago it was possible to have all that in our traditional designs. Our criterion was, when you are inside, in the middle of a room, can you still see the sky?"

"Even some of our traditional single storey bay windows are given a modern twist when we put skylights above them, instead of roof tiles."

Another of Perry's concerns about domestic interiors is the corridor: "One of the things we really hate is the dead-end corridor. All our rooms lead off a central core, a well-lit central

engineer, admires.

Somewhat ruefully he told me: "I live in a Georgian style house and it's dark!"

So much for the 'modern twist' in his personal life, but to be fair he clearly enjoys the houses he has created in South Bucks. He enjoys his design input, the philosophy of "let there be light", as much natural light as possible because...because? Well, lack of it spells gloom. And, having built these houses he can't wait to re-visit them, as a guide. And reformer.

As an enthusiastic reformer, he makes a good salesman, which is just as well because all Hitchambury homes are built on spec. And he sees the internet as a welcome vehicle to explain his philosophy of domestic light to a new generation of suburban customers.

But no visual aid could surpass that first uplifting impression as I straightened up after removing my shoes. 