



BACK TO THE FUTURE

A carefully considered family home in Austria puts everything – work, family, even the kids – in its proper place.

WORDS **TOMMY HONEY** / PHOTOGRAPHY **KLAUS VYHNALEK**



These pages.
In the kitchen, white
cabinetry and Dinesen
Douglas floorboards
create a light and
bright aesthetic.
Colour is added with
books and objet d'art.



IN 2009, CONSULTANT Matthias Horx and his wife, author and fellow consultant Oona Horx-Strathern, began to plan construction of their home on a 3500m² lot, 20 minutes’ drive from Vienna, Austria. Their Future Evolution House, as they call it, was to be a manifestation of the philosophy to which the pair subscribes. They’re Futurists; that means they spend their lives predicting what trends will be important in the future and how they will change contemporary culture. Their business, Zukunftsinstitut Horx GmbH, educates companies about megatrends (such as individualisation, mobility and connectivity) and how they could affect their consumers’ behaviour.

The Horx’s finished house is a testament to their forecasting and is both home and working space for Matthias, 57, Oona, 49, sons Tristan, 19, and Julian, 15, and Isis the cat. Composed of four modular sections, it is designed to evolve and adapt to the needs of a modern tribe. The modules are separated architecturally but connected in terms of use and practicality. There are four spaces: LOVE – the parents’ wing; HUB – the heart of the house (which contains the kitchen and living areas); KIN – the children’s module (which will, once the kids have fled the nest, be turned into a guest wing); and WORK – the home office. In total, the house has 180m² of living space and 120m² of separate office space.

The couple worked with local architect Hans Peter Wörndl and interior designer Yarah David of YMMD in the United Kingdom on the project. They were interested in pursuing a modular approach, having been inspired by the Californian case study houses of the ’60s, particularly the Eames house in Los Angeles. Wörndl had worked with modular construction in previous commissions so was already adept at creating a system that was highly efficient, both in terms of cost and in terms of environmental economy. The modular element also added a sense of mobility – each structure could be linked to a truck that lifts container boxes and carried around the site.

The owners asked Wörndl to create a house that would serve as a hub to a “multi-mobile lifestyle”, Wörndl says. “They gave me a brief including a list of qualities for the house, to serve for my architectural ‘meta-design’. They were meant to overcome the stereotypical technological aspects of future houses, such as robotic technologies, and to develop more sociologically relevant aspects like flexibility and the social needs of the people who live there. There was a tight budget that needed to be kept and this was extended only because of additions; otherwise, there were more freedoms than restrictions.”

Matthias and Oona were involved in every decision to do with the Future Evolution House, which meant 140 meetings



“A BUILDING SHOULD NEVER BE FINISHED – HOUSES SHOULD BE ABLE TO GROW AND CHANGE”



Facing page.
The house is on the outskirts of Vienna Woods, which provide plenty of greenery.

Above.
The master bathroom is Oona’s favourite room.

Right.
The boys’ bedrooms are in the KIN module.

Far right.
In the boys’ bathroom, the outside is brought inside with grassy tiles.





with their architect and contractors. Colour was carefully considered by Oona.

“I chose neutral colours for the floors and walls so that I could bring colour in with pictures, curtains and carpets,” she says. “A neutral-coloured floor was very important as it works like a blank canvas for the room. The living-room sofa is a neutral beige so that I can add wild and colourful cushions as I please. The other thing I did was to have brightly coloured curtains in the bathroom, office and bedroom. I swap the curtains around into different rooms when I want to change the colour.”

The new house redefines domestic spaces – and embraces new technology. “A building should never be finished – houses should be able to grow and change, and adapt to new technologies, to new inhabitants and new circumstances,” says Oona. “The idea was to pull together all the research ideas and inspiration we had collected over the years and see if they could translate into a house. It was harder than it sounds as many things we found that are supposedly on the market are still a long long way in the future.”

The house is ecologically conscious but it’s not an eco or passive house. “Certainly not!” says Oona. “That sounds far too dull. We wanted the opposite. We wanted an active house:

Above.
The large portrait in the living room came from the closing-down sale of a boutique in Vienna, where it was part of the shop fittings.

Right.
The WORK hub contains the couple’s offices.

Following pages.
Put together, the four modules create HOME.

one that could produce more energy than it uses.”

To do that, Wörndl used a lightweight construction of steel and wood, which makes the structures low-energy. The walls are thin but have a high insulation value. There are photovoltaic cells on the roof which produce solar energy and are also integrated into the front façade. The Dinesen Douglas floorboards are from a sustainable forest. And the house needs no air conditioning during summer because the façades are shaded by trees and have a mono-skin surface of naturally vented fibreboards.

Oona’s favourite place in the house (which has its own website, zukunftschaus.at) is the bathroom. She wanted it to combine the functions of both a bathroom and a dressing room; in her words, a “sulking place, a place to relax and regenerate”. It also works as a sort of second sitting room – and a transition zone between the happily hectic HUB and the bedroom.

Matthias’ favourite room is his office, where he has his library and a projection wall for watching films. When it is not in use, the screen, made with an array of fairy lights covered with canvas, is used as a light source. Such a thing is an experiment in modern – or futurist – thinking.

As is the house. It’s also a dream of how we all might live in the future. 



