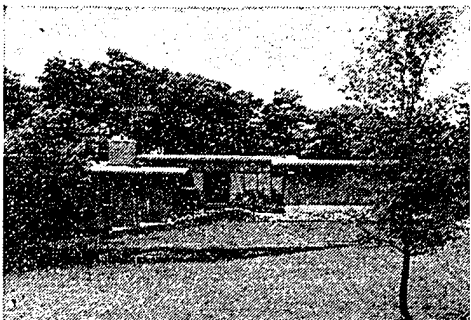
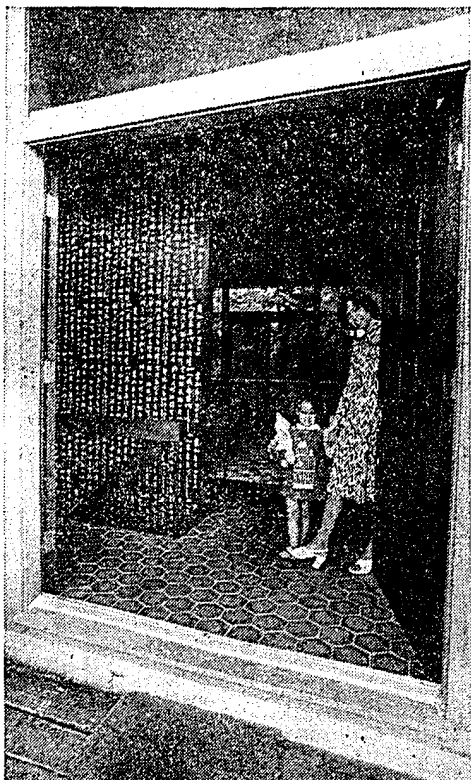


Home of the week Sunshine gets top priority



The Blaine home, built into a hill, was designed with energy conservation in mind.



Meredith, 4, and Donna welcome visitors to their home, built of natural materials to blend with the rustic surroundings.

By Linda Lee Landis

EVERYONE HAS a list of requirements for housing. Location, cost, number of bedrooms, and storage all assume varying degrees of emphasis in the housing formula. Donna and Davis Blaine put sunshine right at the top of their list when building their home on a 1½-acre lot in north suburban Tower Lakes, a small unincorporated community near the village of Barrington.

Raised in Georgia, Donna particularly hated Chicago's long winters and overcast days. Accustomed to a profusion of plants, easy access to outdoors, and a freer lifestyle, she wanted a sunny home with an open design to give her the same feeling of freedom she had enjoyed in the south.

Rays of sunlight now stream through skylights, windows at cathedral ceiling height, and vast expanses of glass on the south side of the multilevel house designed by Jean Wehrheim of Lombard. The living room, kitchen, dining room, and family room are on the top level for maximum exposure to light, while the bedrooms are on the lower level, darker and more conducive to sleep.

"We picked this area because it's a good place to raise children," Donna said. Their site is a two-minute walk to the lake where four islands are used by the residents as rallying points for Halloween parties, Easter egg hunts, sailing races, and beachcombing. The islands are connected by suspended bridges. The Blaines' house is surrounded by grassy fields, and a creek runs through the wooded back yard.

THE cathedral-ceilinged kitchen is the hub of the house, undefined by walls and open to the family and dining room. Glass walls over the sink and countertops allow Donna to watch the squirrels cavorting and provide a view of the deck where the Blaines' two young children play. A strip of electrical outlets is set into the countertop eliminating the need for even a splashboard to interfere with the immediacy of nature.

Hanging pots and pans serve as a partial divider between the kitchen and the family room. Tan plaid wallpaper covers the two walls of the kitchen, blending well with the fir beams in the ceiling and quarry tile on the floor.

Contemporary furnishings in the family room have been chosen to resist the sticky-finger stage of both Meredith, 4, and Ryan, 18 months. A Bentwood rocker is convenient when nursing Ryan, spills wipe up easily from the medium-dense patterned carpet, and the wall unit of cabinets stores stereo, drafting paper,

books, television, and a few diapers. A Chesterfield brown leather sofa easily withstands the children's jumps and somersaults.

To make the dining room multifunctional, the Blaines have made theirs a solarium with plants basking in the sun from both the windows and skylights. A quarry tile floor, impervious to drips and puddles, eliminates wipeups.

A FEW STEPS down from the upper level is a separate living room, hidden from the main activities of the house. Its windows and location make it seem tucked in the treetops.

As a respite from the profusion of color Donna sees in her work every day as an interior designer, this room is sleek and elegantly monochromatic in a bisque color. A low-slung brick fireplace in this room is two-sided, also serving Davis' den on the other side of the wall.

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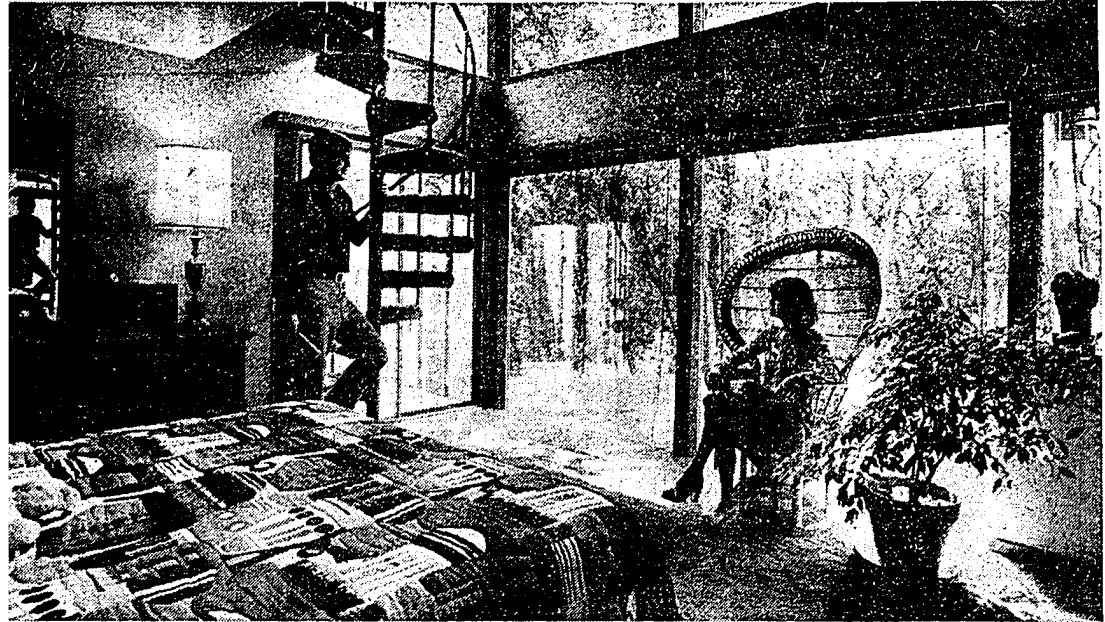


Both children and adults can enjoy the family room, centrally located in the house and casually furnished to withstand somersaults and sticky fingers.



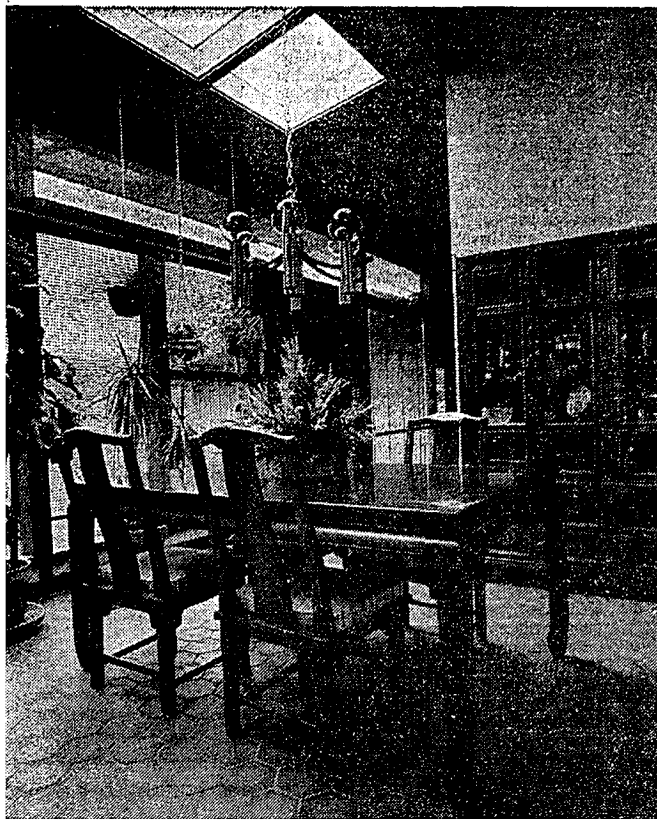
The open-space design of the kitchen and family room allows conversation to flow freely while meals are being prepared.

Tribune photos by Ray Gora



Tribune photos by Ray Gera

Master bedroom suite provides privacy. It includes a bathroom with sauna and a den, accessible by a winding staircase.



Sunshine gets top priority

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An iron spiral staircase connects Davis' den with the master bedroom suite below. The couple's busy schedules give them little time to talk, and with this arrangement the Blaines can converse even when Davis is working in the den and Donna is reading downstairs in bed. Off the master bedroom is the couple's bathroom, equipped with a sauna, which they say is a perfect unraveler after a taut day.

Another bathroom, a television room, and the children's bedrooms also are on this lower level.

Double doors under the main stairway hide a washer and dryer, conveniently located near the bedrooms, saving many steps for Donna who does 18 loads of wash the family generates weekly.

THE BLAINES have what many people want in a house today—proximity to work for husband and wife, maximum use of natural energy and materials, minimum amount of maintenance — in a natural setting complementary to the family's needs for recreation.

Although they originally planned to live in this house 10 years, they may build again.

"As hectic as they were, we look back on the days of planning and watching the house being built with so much fondness. They say you can't build the perfect house, but I'd like to try again," Donna said.

The dining room serves a dual purpose—as a place for serving food and a haven for plants. Skylights provide the sun, and quarry tile on the floor eliminates worry about staining the floor when watering and spraying.