







## THE PROPERTY

### LOCATION

Pasadena,  
California

### BUILDING

Northern  
European-style  
split-level cottage,  
built in 2002

**ROOMS** Hall,  
great room,  
kitchen, 2 libraries,  
music room, office  
3 bedrooms,  
4 bathrooms

**MOVED IN** 2002

# California dreams

Cynthia Bennett and Ed de Beixedon's environment-friendly home is the fulfilment of a long-held wish to have a house reflecting Dutch family life

Words and photography SARA ESSEX

1 For an ornate chair similar to the one in the hall, try The Odd Chair Company (01772 691777)

2 & 3 The great room is impressive viewed from above. The colours in the painting over the fireplace inspired the scheme for the whole house. Try Porta Romana (020 7352 0440) for chandelier-style lights



## THE OWNERS

Cynthia Bennett and her husband Ed de Beixedon

### OCCUPATIONS

Cynthia is a building contractor and Ed is a stockbroker

### FAVOURITE ROOM

'The great room,' says Cynthia. 'It's a wonderful feature of Dutch family life that I've long yearned for.'

Though it looks as if it's been there forever, the villa Cynthia Bennett designed for herself and her husband Ed in the genteel Californian town of Pasadena is truly a house for the 21st century. Built in 2002, but designed to blend with the traditional architecture surrounding it in the town's oldest residential district, the house is light years ahead of its neighbours with its raft of environmental features.

Before specifying a host of energy-saving measures, the couple first had to address a problem that might have stopped less-determined people from building on the awkward quarter-acre site. 'We were obliged by the deeds to leave three existing large oak trees, which significantly limited the width we could build on,' says Cynthia. 'There was also the fact that the plot was very uneven, sloping 10ft down, both at the front, towards the street, and to the stream at the side.'

In spite of that, Cynthia eagerly embraced the challenge and built an energy-efficient and totally accessible house that she and Ed will never have to move out of. 'I felt I could do it, and at half the price of someone not in the contracting business,' she explains.

It was important to Cynthia to build not only for the here and now, but also for the less certain years ahead. 'Right now, there aren't enough working hours in the day for me,' laughs Cynthia. 'But thinking ahead, it made sense to plan for our old age by having our master suite, as well as our living space, on the ground floor and making every doorway 3ft wide to be capable of accommodating wheelchairs.'

As well as their own future, Cynthia and Ed built with the future of the planet in ►







mind, zoning their heating and air conditioning so that energy is only consumed by the parts of the house actually in use.

Although dark wood and warm colours give Cynthia and Ed's house a cosy, cottagey feel, it's deceptively spacious, with 3,500 sq ft of living space. Much of this is given over to a 'great room' with beamed vaulted ceilings and a huge fireplace giving the room a dramatic air. This area comprises living, dining and food-preparation areas. 'This is a common feature in Holland, where I lived with a Dutch family after college,' explains Cynthia. 'I loved the way the whole family gathered together there. It was different to

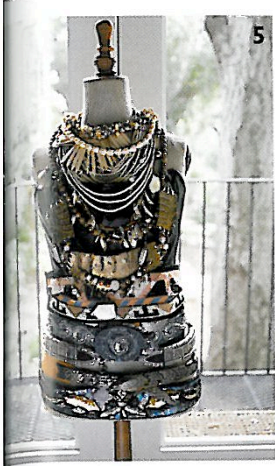
how I'd grown up and I vowed to myself that one day I'd live that way myself.'

Light was also a main consideration in the design. In the great room French windows let the light in, while the kitchen has 'sun pipes' in the ceiling to draw in natural daylight. Situated in the middle of the ground floor between the living and sleeping areas, it has no windows. Being constantly on view, it's an elegant kitchen, and can be kept that way as behind it is a butler's pantry where messier chores can be performed out of sight.

A panelled library and office near the front entrance can be closed off for meetings. While upstairs, overlooking the great room,







is a galleried library-cum-playroom designed by Cynthia for the couple's grandchildren. 'I call it the children's library because it's full of children's books, which I collect,' she says.

The loft idea was also imported from Holland. In fact, Cynthia's greatest satisfaction is derived from how her Dutch influences have made their mark. 'I'm known for my great room concept because many older houses round here were built by midwest-erners who didn't like the sun,' she says. 'They built closed-off rooms – sitting rooms no one used and kitchens that didn't lead out to the garden. We've created a house that's as different from that as you can get.' ■■■



1 & 2 There are two libraries: the adult one features traditional alder wood panelling, while the children's library has elegant bergere chairs. Ronald G Chambers (01798 342305) sells similar



3 Try Courtney Pianos (01865 790400) for a period piano like the one in the music room

4 The kitchen units were custom-built in antiqued birch. The chandelier was converted from an old Dutch weighing scale

5 A tailor's dummy livens up a neglected corner. Morplan (01279 435 333) stocks a selection

6 An American reproduction four-poster bed is the centrepiece of the master bedroom, along with an English 19th-century chest. Try Gideon Hatch Rugs and Carpets (020 7223 3996) for a similar antique Oriental rug

7 The bathroom mural is copied from one of the couple's favourite paintings

## CYNTHIA & ED'S STYLE SECRETS

Inspired by Cynthia and Ed's impressive cherrywood bathroom furniture, we went in search of three of the best **vanity units**



Stylish yet affordable, Vanity unit, including basin and fittings, £179.99, from Freemans (0800 900 200, [www.freemans.com](http://www.freemans.com)).

### LAST WORD

'If you can, vary your ceiling heights,' says Cynthia. 'Our great room is 17ft high and dramatic, but the low ceilings upstairs give a cottagey feel.'



Smart in fashionable black, Linea curved-fronted vanity unit, £560, and Westminster slab basin, £282, from Imperial Bathrooms (01922 743074, [www.imperial-bathrooms.co.uk](http://www.imperial-bathrooms.co.uk)).

A modern classic in solid teak, Class-X basin cabinet, £660, and basin, £385, from the Bath collection by Indian Ocean (0870 780 4861, [www.indian-ocean.co.uk](http://www.indian-ocean.co.uk)).

