

A LEGENDARY  
ARTHUR ERICKSON  
HOME IS GIVEN NEW  
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# THE COMEBACK

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**The Water's Edge**  
Architect Arthur Erickson's Eppich House in West Vancouver was first built in 1972. Extensive work on the property—including repairing major leaks—brought the home up to modern-day standards.





#### Historic Record

Architectural firm Battersby Howat was charged with restoring the property, which included installing a window off the main entrance and creating a terrace (above). The original stairway had no handrails; the architects installed visually subtle (but much safer) steel rails (opposite). The Fipkes' sons, Zane and Elias, lounge on a Tufty Time sofa by B&B Italia (opposite).

Asaph Fipke doesn't do anything the easy way. Back in 2002, the acclaimed cartoon producer was rapidly climbing the corporate ladder at Mainframe Entertainment (now Rainmaker) when he decided to launch his own venture. And over the course of the next decade, Fipke helped turn Vancouver-based Nerd Corps into one of the largest children's animation studios in North America, with Emmy-award-winning franchises such as *Shogun* to his credit.

So it should come as no surprise that when the now-44-year-old entrepreneur and self-described architecture buff went in search of a new house for his young family in 2010, he wouldn't settle for what he calls a typical "matchstick and drywall" abode. Indeed, he abandoned plans to build his own custom home and instead purchased one of the most acclaimed—and challenging—homes then on the market: architect Arthur Erickson's iconic Eppich House in West Vancouver.

"I'd seen this house in architectural books before," says Asaph as we sit on cedar stools at the home's new kitchen island, staring out at the expansive deck, heated pool and, beyond, the 1.2-acre property's verdant garden and forest. "At first I just wanted to gawk, but when I came and walked down the stairs, and I stood here and looked out—I fell in love with the space. It was so unique; there was nothing that I'd stood in before quite like it."

But there were issues with the house—big issues,



*"I decided to protect it," says homeowner Asaph Fipke, "by putting in the efforts that would make it so it would never need to be looked at as a teardown again."*



#### Master Architecture

The kitchen was originally a galley, which the architects opened out to the living area and upgraded with quartz countertops and Corian veneer cabinetry. Asaph Fipke is an art collector: a piece by Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun hangs just outside the kitchen (below), a Gordon

Smith painting hangs in the nearby lounge area (opposite, top); and a Shawn Hunt mask rests in the master bath (opposite, bottom right). On the lowest level of the terraced home (opposite, bottom), the master bedroom and bathroom look out on the reflecting ponds.



*“We did everything we could to bring the house up to a modern standard,” says Fipke, “while still retaining what was the hope and purpose of the building in the first place.”*

including the endemic problem of so many Erickson properties: it leaked. What makes the late architect so revered is the sense of connectedness his buildings have with their surroundings. The terraced Eppich House is built into a steep incline in long, lateral bands: the fourth floor, where there’s a modest carport, is at street level, with two of the four bedrooms and Asaph’s office on the third floor, the kitchen and living room on the second, and the master bedroom at the lowest level, facing reflecting ponds. That connectedness invariably comes into conflict with the rainy West Coast environment, however. The house, built in 1972 for Helmut and Hildegard Eppich, features exposed concrete beams that run from the terrace on the roof through the inside of the house—making it virtually impossible to rain-screen.

When Asaph and his wife, Hemsä, bought the house, it had been on the market for over six months. Many prospective buyers were intimidated not only by the price (it was listed for \$5.695 million, ultimately selling for \$4.75 million) but also the amount of work and money

that would be required to rehabilitate the property. Not the Fipkes. “I decided to protect it by putting in the efforts that would make it so it would never need to be looked at as a teardown again,” says Asaph. “We did everything we could to bring the house up to a modern standard while still retaining what was the hope and purpose of the building in the first place.”

To help with that, the Fipkes called in Vancouver architectural firm Battersby Howat. For David Battersby, who was first introduced to architecture at the age of 16 when flipping through a coffee table book of Erickson’s work, the Eppich restoration project was both thrilling and nerve-racking. “We were excited to be doing this, but we also knew that all eyes would be on us—seeing what we’d done and not done.”

Beyond the leakiness (which was addressed by adding a membrane to the top terrace, covering the exposed beam, and adding a drain tile to the back of the house), there were a variety of smaller fixes required. “The architecture is very robust, but the details on the house were very, in a







#### Great Outdoors

Homeowner Asaph Fipke, with sons Zane and Elias (above), plays around the pool, newly lined and updated. A new membrane on the top terrace addressed the leaks that had plagued the original design. The outdoor space shown above exists on the mid-level of the home; the master bedroom and bath are below.

way, crude and simple,” says Battersby. Wood doors and door frames were replaced with steel frames and floor-to-ceiling doors, aluminum grilles supporting a new central air system replaced aged ones, and quarry tile flooring was replaced with polished limestone. And then there was the lack of certain modern-day elements—like handrails on the staircases. (“When I first walked in here, I just saw death,” says Hemsal, laughing.) Steel handrails and cables were added throughout to make the home safe for the Fipkes’ two young boys, Zane and Elias.

There was also a desire from the homeowners to unlock unused space in the 4,500-square-foot home—particularly in the kitchen, which was critical for Hemsal, an avid cook and entertainer. “The kitchen was enclosed and cut off,” says Battersby. “It was from an era that hadn’t quite swept off the idea that spaces had to be differentiated.” The galley kitchen was opened up and upgraded with new quartz countertops, Corian veneer cabinets and stainless steel appliances. The Fipkes also converted storage rooms in the lower level into a toy room for the kids and a media

room for the whole family. (“It has no windows and great acoustics, so it makes for the perfect theatre,” says Asaph.)

And then there’s the rooftop patio on the top level, just off the carport and mud room, which had been closed off since the house was built some 40 years ago. “You couldn’t even see that the roof was there,” says Hemsal. “It’s the one place where you get a view of the water and the whole property.” The Fipkes punched in a window and door off the mud room and converted the crude pebble roof into a stone-tiled terrace, where Hemsal now has a small garden.

Both Asaph and Hemsal talk about being “custodians” of the Eppich House—and acknowledge that work remains to keep it livable for another four decades. Still, already they are seeing dividends from their investment of time, money and love. David Stouck, who wrote a 2013 biography of Arthur Erickson, happens to be the Fipkes’ next-door neighbour. “One day he saw me on my rooftop garden,” recalls Hemsal, “and he said, ‘Arthur would be very proud of what you did here.’ That’s when I knew this had all been worth it.” *HL*