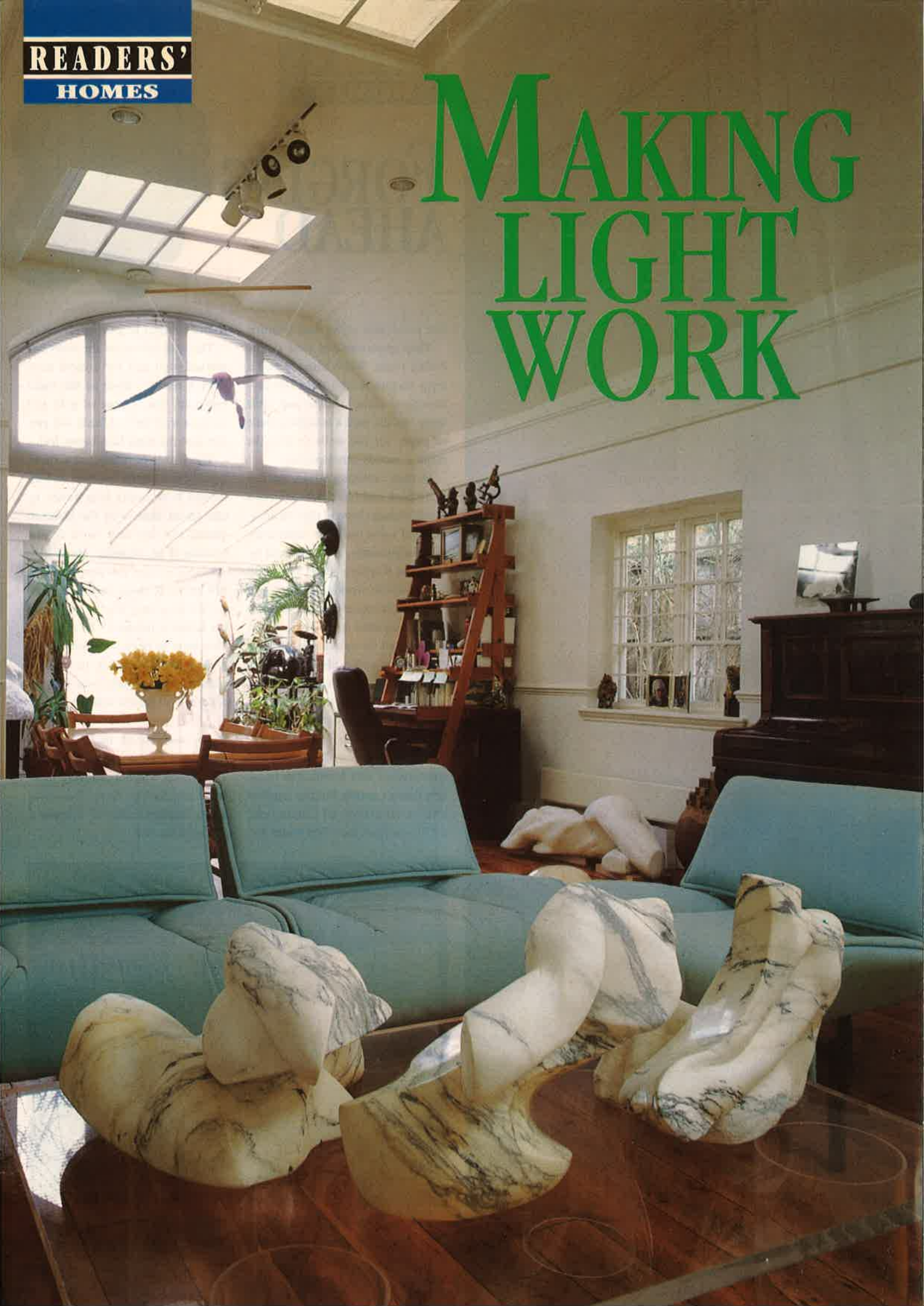


READERS'
HOMES

MAKING LIGHT WORK



With its high ceilings and huge windows, sculptor Richard Mitzman's house is an ideal place for him to exhibit his finished work, as well as being a relaxing home for his family.

Linda Horsfall finds out how he manages to mix his work with a happy home life. Photography by Tommy Candler



Main picture: The walls in the main room were painted white and the original wooden floors were uncovered to make a comfortable place to live and work

Left: Richard's maquettes, his preliminary sketches for future pieces, fill the studio
Below and bottom left: In the living area, the white inglenook fireplace and simple furnishings complement Richard's work

Work and family life blend perfectly in the London home of sculptor Richard Mitzman. He sculpts in the studio or on the patio, while his family—Jodi, nine, Luke, 10, partner Brenda and her daughter, Layla, 11—share the rest of the house with him.

When Richard gave up his job as a dentist to make his sculpting hobby a full-time career, finding a suitable studio was important. And as it was light and spacious, this house seemed the perfect place to set up an artist's studio. When he first looked round, however, it was a different story. "The house was



very oppressive and dark," he says. "The walls were deep red, the windows were hung with heavy curtains and there was dark, ornately carved woodwork everywhere. Even so, I could see its potential immediately. There was room for a work studio and a patio where I could sculpt out of doors, plus an area for displaying my pieces. All this, and room for the whole family to relax in, too."

It took the builders six months to transform the house for Richard. A conservatory was built as an entrance hall which also doubles as an exhibition room. The main room was divided into a study and a living/dining area, while in Richard's work studio the conventional windows were replaced with new, French windows opening on to a patio. Only then could Richard start on the decoration. First, the heavy

drapes were taken down, the dark red wallpaper was stripped and the original stone and wooden floors were uncovered and restored. The whole house was then painted white to make a light, clean background for Richard's sculptures. "The idea was to make my home as habitable and useful as possible—for me and my family—and to do it as quickly and cheaply as I could," he says.

Far from objecting to having the children at home while he works, Richard says that having them around somehow makes everything more relaxed. The whole of the first floor of the house is given over to them. Alongside their bedrooms, the children have their own small bathroom and a playroom filled with miniature green furniture.

All over the house you can see examples of Richard's work—in ▶



Left and below right: Richard uses the combined entrance hall/conservatory, with its high, arched roof, as a light and airy exhibition room for his pieces

MAKING LIGHT WORK



Main picture: The kitchen reflects the atmosphere of the rest of the house—crisp, functional units are offset by the artistic touch of patterned ceramic tiles
Above: The family often eats alfresco on the patio. “We practically live out here in the summer,” says Richard



Left: Space is maximised in the bathroom, with neutral colours, artfully placed mirrors and slatted blinds that let the light flood in

fact the pale coloured furniture and decor were chosen to display the sculpture in its best light. Natural daylight streams into the living area, highlighting the simple shapes of the cool blue chairs and cream sofa in front of the fireplace. The original fireplace was too ornate, so Richard changed it to a plain white inglenook with a black fire surround.

If the weather is good enough, Richard works outside on the patio. And he makes a point of working a 9 am to 5 pm day—he never carves outside office hours because his work can get quite noisy. Usually, he works in the studio, with its

huge arched French windows that let the light stream in. “Replacing the original window with these dramatic doors was fairly simple, but it’s made an enormous difference to the look of this room,” he says.

Arches are a recurring theme in the house—leading out of the studio into both the main part of the house and the kitchen. In this room the

original intricately carved unit doors were transformed with a coat of white paint. And the patterned tiles give the kitchen a bright, colourful look. Even the conservatory, that acts as both an entrance hall and exhibition room, has an arched roof. Plants thrive here in the light and glass doors open on to the paved area that the family uses for alfresco

meals. “We practically live out here in the summer,” says Richard.

Despite the house being both an artist’s studio and family home, it has a relaxing, calm atmosphere. “Every house I’ve lived in has ended up with the same feeling,” says Richard. “They’ve been light and relaxing to be in, and I try to make the most of the space. There’s nothing over-decorated, I make sure the basics are right and then put together the things I’ve chosen over the years because I like them. I find that with houses—as with sculpture—the more you simplify, the better they work.” ☆