

## ON LOCATION



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1. Don and Sylvie Murphy built their house in the suburbs of Amsterdam for around \$1.4 million, creating a structure "that looked as monolithic as possible," Mr. Murphy said.

2. Orange Corian, a nonporous material, was used throughout the kitchen — where Ms. Murphy makes tea — on the counters, the sink and the stovetop. "Orange is our color," she said.

3. The Murphys' son Edan, 3, watches TV on a leather beanbag-style chair purchased at Villa ArenA, a furniture store in Amsterdam, for about \$140.



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8. The beech-wood moose trophy head by Big-Game, a European design collective, was \$250; Mr. Murphy designed the fireplace.

7. The bathtub was made by H2B, an Amsterdam company, but "the most luxurious thing about the bathroom," Mr. Murphy said, "is the view."



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4. A spiral staircase leads down to the main entrance; the ball-shaped chair is from Villa ArenA. "I like furniture that works as a design object on its own," Mr. Murphy said.

5. The Joe chair, bought at BeBoB, a store in Amsterdam, was designed by Jonathan de Pas, Donato D'Urbino and Paolo Lomazzi in 1970.

6. The Murphys' zebra-wood bed was custom made by Dauwe Den Hertog, a Rotterdam sculptor; the photograph by Willem van den Hoed, a Dutch artist, was purchased at the Amsterdam Art Fair.

# That's Some Serious Whimsy

Monolithic from the outside, a Dutch dream home contains lots of quirkiness.

By GISELA WILLIAMS

THE kitchen in Don and Sylvie Murphy's home, on the suburban edges of Amsterdam, is orange, about the same shade as their goldfish, their food processor and Ms. Murphy's car, a vintage Fiat 500 parked outside. It could be seen as a sign of national nationalism — orange being the color of the Netherlands — but it is not: Mr. Murphy is from Ireland, and Ms. Murphy is British.

"Orange is our color," Ms. Murphy said. Her husband explained: "Sylvie was wearing an orange dress when I first met her."

Having a signature color is not the only way

the Murphys stand out. Their house, a futuristic bunker-like structure that Mr. Murphy designed and built for about \$1.4 million (or around a million euros), is surrounded by traditional thatch-roof bungalows.

"People have shouted abusive things at us," said Mr. Murphy, a founding partner of VMX Architects in Amsterdam, referring to neighbors who have voiced their disapproval of the modern design. "They've written notes that say, 'How is it possible to build this house here?' and left them in our mailbox."

But like the house he built, Mr. Murphy, 44, has a tough facade. He and his wife, a stay-at-home mother to Oscar, 14; Ava, 13; and Edan, 3, said that their vision for the home was more important than what the neighbors thought.

"If we just produced another thatched cottage, we might as well still be living in caves," he said.

As it happens, Ms. Murphy, 40, once lived in a thatched home — she grew up in a 15th-century house in England — and she was particularly intent on maintaining their modern, urban aesthetic.

"Having a modern house in the country is the best of both worlds," she said.

Their two-story house, on a tiny island overlooking a canal, was completed in August and has about 5,300 square feet of living space. The structure — which is made of concrete block, insulation and a metal cage — was sprayed with concrete, an extremely labor-intensive technique that "created a building that looked as monolithic as possible," Mr. Murphy said.

The top floor — the designated living area — is a long loft-like space divided into three areas: a living room with a piano, an open kitchen and a casual sitting area with a fireplace and flat-screen television. It has slate-gray floors coated in an epoxy, a finish often used on museum flooring, Mr. Murphy said; the walls and ceilings are made of a similar-colored plaster.

Sloping glass walls offer views of snow-covered fields and one of the neighboring thatched houses.

Throughout the top floor, they have installed a constellation of bare incandescent light bulbs in different shapes and sizes that screw directly into the ceiling, creating a night-sky effect.

All four bedrooms are on the ground floor and have glass walls facing east, so they get plenty of sunlight in the morning.

"We get so much light in here," Mr. Murphy said, "that some mornings when I bring Sylvie her tea, I have to bring her a pair of sunglasses as well."

But the teenagers, he said, love the basement — a 1,335-square-foot space that doesn't get any natural light, but does have a home theater, a spinning disco ball and a set of drums. The Murphys plan to add a fitness area, office space and a library.

Only six months after moving in, everyone seems content. Mr. Murphy recalled something a friend told him just a few weeks ago. "This house is so like you — on one hand, it's strange," the friend said, "and doesn't appear to fit in. On the other hand, it's comfortable and charming."



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