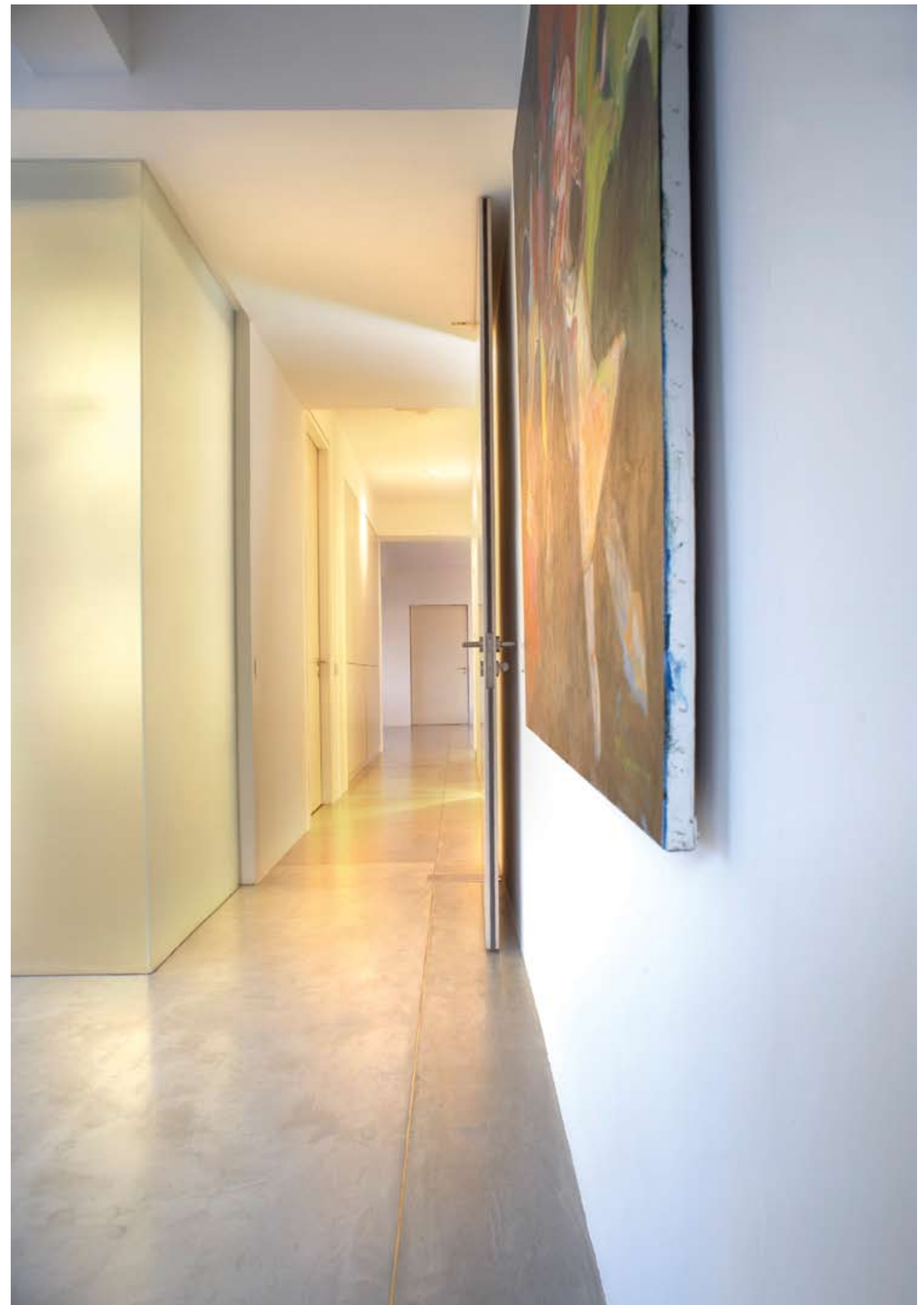


The Bare Essentials Cavenagh House

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Cavenagh House is a quiet hideout that surprisingly manages to avoid the hustle and bustle despite being right smack in the middle of the city. Residing amidst greenery and accessible by a relatively small two-way road, it would be hard for anyone who didn't know the area well to imagine that the Orchard Road shopping belt is less than ten minutes away by foot.

The serene feel of Cavenagh House is also reflected in one of its units, designed expressly by Nicholas Burns as a calm and still retreat within the city. Upon entering, the bareness of the interior strikes you at first – an expanse of space, a few white walls, tones of brown and grey from the furniture, and nothing much else. But walk around and you soon realise that the house is not sparse; it just does not have the fancy and deliberate frills that most residences indulge in and perhaps, most people have come to expect. This apartment has nothing more and nothing less. As Burns himself says, "It has this honesty and integrity – it is what it is."

Burns reduced the place to its structural bones, clearly exposing the structure of the apartment. Almost all the walls were knocked down and everything unnecessary to the client was taken away. One of the bedrooms was converted to additional living space (there were three bedrooms in the initial layout of the house, and now only two remain), and the bathroom was moved further to accommodate a more spacious master bedroom, complete with a walk-in wardrobe.

Fewer walls and rooms have made the flat more spacious and open, and that was one of the main intentions – bringing in light and allowing for cross-ventilation. The house is flooded with sunlight bouncing off its pristine walls in the day, and a windy breeze can be felt circulating throughout when the windows are open.

The seamlessness of Burns' design makes it seem like the individual spaces just flow into one another.

The kitchen is designed without the physical presence of a door so that anyone cooking would not be shut off from the rest of the party. A concrete cantilever table at the side of the kitchen can also be used from within the house or from the balcony, creating more shared space.

Part of the fluidity of the space stems from how the nitty-gritty of a house – essential elements that unfortunately also add to the clutter at times – is cleverly and skillfully concealed from sight. Pipes are hidden in cupboards and cabinets, which are also slipped nondescriptly behind doors and walls, providing extra room for storage. The glass door that separates the balcony from the house also slides behind the walls and cannot be seen from inside the house when it is completely open. This, Burns says, is to add to the openness of space, and visually, it does seem like there is nothing separating the house and the view outside. The frames of the windows too, can barely be seen as the surrounding walls have been



built a little higher to cover them up, letting the view beyond the glass take centre stage.

This clean, uninterrupted line of vision is what Burns paid particular attention to in his design. Even the handles of the doors are adjusted 100 millimetres lower than usual, so that they would be below eye-level when you are seated, and would not be a distraction in the entire seamless fluidity of the house.

There is also the absence of any lighting on the ceiling – Burns explicitly wanted it to be a pure, uninterrupted plane. Instead, lamps extend from the walls, reducing the glare and allowing the light to reflect off the ceiling and the surroundings for a more indirect effect. Lighting is also concealed along the edges, between bookshelves and walls and behind shelf panels, lending a glow to the house when switched on and accentuating the design of the house without being too prominent.

Like the lighting, the materials used in the house are also an important yet intentionally played-down feature. Burns chose simple materials with texture and depth and let them "interact with each other in a subtle way". Concrete was used for the bathroom sink, kitchen table and even the flooring of the house, to "rough it up a little"; sand renders were used instead of paint so as to avoid the glossy made-up look; and crystallised glass was used for the bathroom door, so that there would be a translucent interconnectedness between the bedroom and bathroom. The only slightly more elaborate material used was the Turkish marble on the bathroom floors, which were cut from slabs and placed so that the grey and white grain would be aligned.

The meticulous attention to detail paid to all the subtleties of the house undoubtedly enhances its design of simplicity and puts the spotlight on its most evident intangible characteristic – an open, seamless and spatial quality.

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