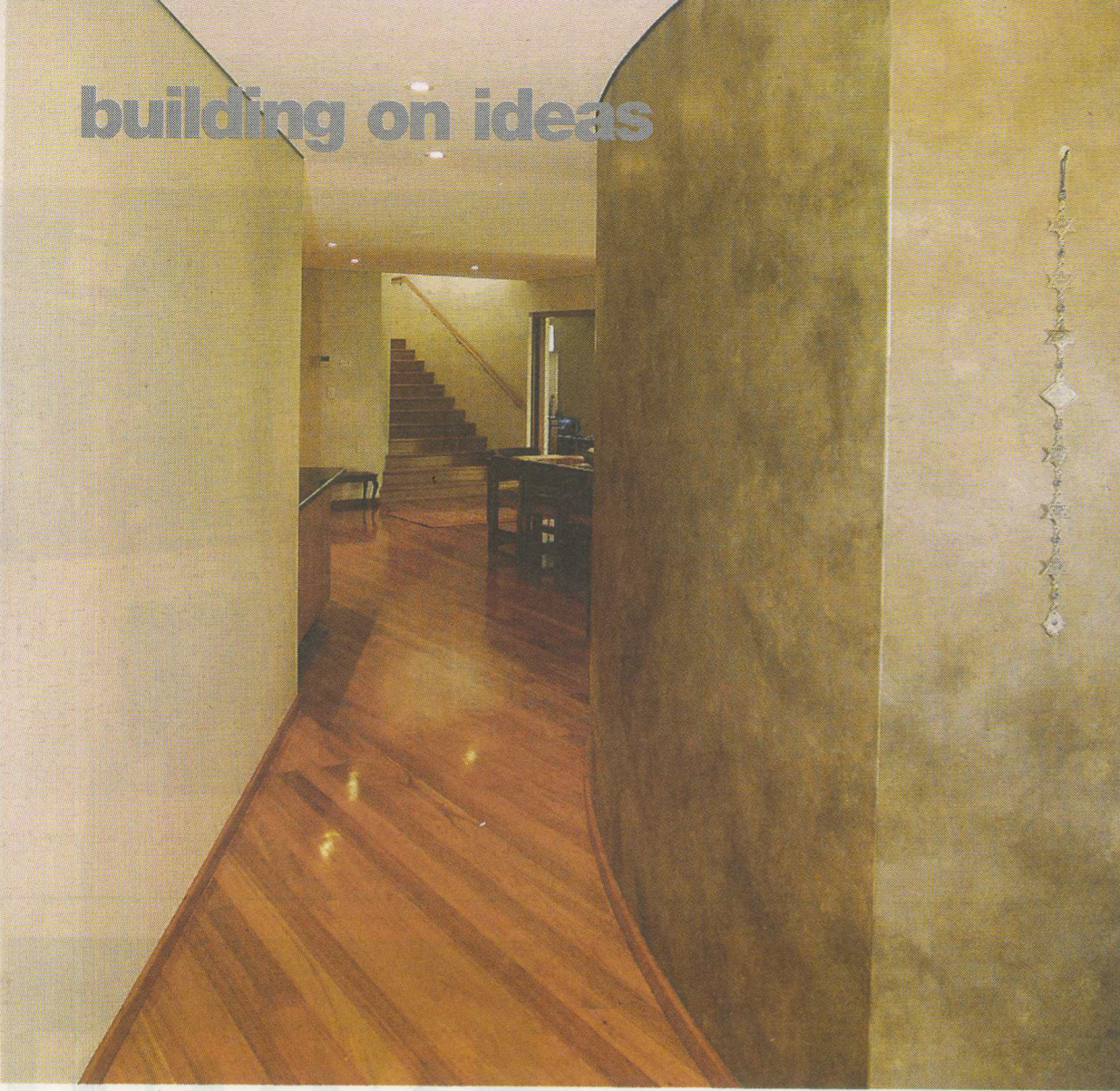


building on ideas



Wall to wall

ANYONE who has renovated will appreciate that it's a real bonus if inside walls can come down without the need for complicated engineering and structural solutions.

Moving walls to add space is a growing trend and built-in flexibility, therefore, is becoming as important as built-in appliances.

Using a minimal number of load-bearing walls in the home's design is one way to ensure its internal space can be reconfigured relatively simply later.

More Perth homes are being built with only the external walls providing support for the roof.

This means owners can be safe in the knowledge that any alterations to the floor plan in years to come should have no impact on the structural soundness of their home.

Once the children have flown the coop, for example, surplus bedrooms can become a huge home theatre, or be turned into a small hobby room plus a spacious guest room.

Richard Szklarz of Richard Szklarz Architects agrees that smart design today can mean relatively fuss-free renovations tomorrow – especially as rising

flexibility

house costs will rule out the option of moving for an increasing number of people.

"People are already saying that they can afford to modify their house but cannot afford to build or buy a new one, while many people love where they live and don't want to move but their needs have changed," Richard said.

He said some homeowners who found themselves with space to spare were happy to close off unused rooms, while others were keen to find a fresh use for the space.

"We are making clients more aware of the options. We think it's part of good design," he said.

One builder who is familiar with changing walls is Steve Nafte, whose innovative family home in Dianella won him the Master Builders Association's Best New Builder Award earlier this year.

Steve worked with John Kannis of John Kannis and Associates to create a flexible family home that has a single-storey and a two-storey section.

The roof trusses over the single-storey teenagers' bedroom wing and the entire upper storey are supported only by the outside walls of the house.

"This means the internal walls in these sections can

be moved or removed at a later stage, without any impact on the overall structure and engineering of the house," Steve said.

"Using prefabricated roof trusses is a good option as they are designed to be supported only by the external walls."

Steve said the concept was increasingly popular in the US where people were reluctant to move and wanted to adapt their existing home to meet changing needs.

Michael McLean, director of the Master Builders Association in Perth, said removable walls were a big bonus and a great feature when the time came to sell.

"The cost of renovations is usually higher a square metre than the cost of building new so it's a bonus if walls are easily removable," he said.

But Michael warned against tackling demolition work yourself – whether walls were load-bearing or not.

"Don't contemplate doing the work yourself; get a qualified builder in to do the job for you," he said.

PAULA AUBIN



Award-winning builder Steve Nafte, above, and some of the flexible, open-plan designs that make modifying a house easier. Pictures: Richard Polden