

enters through a low-lying glazed strip. This runs along the room's external-facing wall, leading onto a shallow glass terrace.

The fifth floor is the heart of the home, which can be accessed by stairs or the courtyard lift. The elevator skips the building's work and sleeping levels, opening directly into this living area, where a semi-outdoor bathroom of weathered timber is the first space seen as its doors open, introducing Briffa's fidelity to Japanese author Junichiro Tanizaki. "When we were laying out the building, I said to my team that we should make a folly at the entrance to the lift because it's a dark space," says Briffa. "So I took Tanizaki's book, *In Praise of Shadows*, and literally transformed it into an interior."

Walking past the bathroom, you find an Arclinea kitchen tucked around a curved concrete corner, its stainless-steel configuration shimmering in the light that flows in through flanking glass-block walls. Above the kitchen, a solid-oak mezzanine, dubbed the "three-house", was built for the children to climb up to and occupy, safe within a bordering netted lining. A timber-and-metal stair system – part rungs, part rails, part shelving – connects the two levels. Across the kitchen, a multi-directional sofa becomes the soft centrepiece of the room (Piero Lissoni's Extrasoft for Living Divani, to be precise). Throughout the day, peachy rays of sunlight enter through breezy curtains that separate the space from the deep terrace that looks out onto the street.


Briffa grew up in his father's carpentry workshop before studying in Malta, at Virginia Tech in the US and the Politecnico di Milano. This early experience has informed his obsession with how things fit together, his concern for how they are used and the need to design elegance into every object or experience. Like the whole building itself, many of Casa Bottega's features are intended to do, or be, more than one thing at once. Off the kitchen area, a timber bench serves as a seat for nightly family meals, before extending downwards to become a stairwell, which leads to a laundry room. Beyond that is a half-height den holding and hiding all of the building's services.

Perhaps the most defining architectural feature of Casa Bottega is the most challenging to see, unless viewed from the upper levels of the building across the street. Its new



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floors in concertina concrete are held up by two nine-metre-long beams. They are made from precast concrete, produced off-site with factory precision to satisfy the sharp articulation that Briffa envisioned for their external profile; their folds are as crisp as bent paper. This is one of countless design decisions that he nursed tenaciously over the years. "You do become attached to places that you design, especially when you design them for yourself," he says. "There's a need, almost, to continue understanding oneself; it's an introspective process."

The final levels of Casa Bottega – its terraces and roof – are what bring the building's private world back into the city. Aside from extending interiors out into the beating sun, they intentionally added a garden to St Paul's Street – a piece of the city otherwise dominated by limestone, a road and sky. It's here, in this new green space, that the family spends days and balmy nights with friends; where the separate functions of city life, work and play merge inexorably, allowing Casa Bottega to set a new benchmark for live-work spaces in Valetta and beyond. — 
chrisbriffa.com

1. Reception area on the ground floor
2. Living level terrace shielded by foliage
3. Concrete concertina beams denoting the building's two new upper levels
4. Timber panelling conceals a laundry room and services
5. Hanna and Chris

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1 Agenda

- Take-off time in Nuuk?
- Seoul has a comic turn
- On the road in Singapore
- Plus: a holy show in Saudi

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3 The Concierge

- Nairobi's must-see enclave
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