

Hidden Gem

A Toronto couple finds that transforming ho-hum into high-end is all in the details

By Wendy Helfenbaum | Photography by Tomasz Majcherczyk

After visiting 80 homes as they prepared to move to Toronto from Montreal, Stéphane Latreille and Rémi Benoit knew exactly what they were looking for. The problem was they just couldn't find it.

"We wanted a house that was in great repair, but in Toronto, many of the homes we found were old and needed to be gutted, or

they'd been renovated but have been poorly done or not to our taste," explains Latreille.

Eventually the couple's realtor, Christian Vermast, found them a solid house that didn't require total demolition. Built in 1932, it offered up the space they had been searching for, and was located in Riverdale, a trendy, upscale residential neighbourhood with tree-lined side streets and a thriving arts community.

"The first time we saw it, Rémi liked it and I didn't," recalls Latreille. "The space was dark, cramped and dated, with low-

end finishes and an awkward layout. I felt there was too much to be done. But as the housing market dropped, the price dropped; I started seeing the potential and thinking maybe we could make this work."

Vermast referred the couple to designer/builders Sandra Kenney and Meshach Lavender of Boulevard Design Build Inc.

"We wanted their opinion on what we were getting ourselves into before we made an offer," recalls Latreille. "What kind of changes could we make? We wanted something open, airy and more modern."

Spread over nearly 2,000 square feet on three floors plus a basement, the home's potential shone through when Kenney first walked through it.

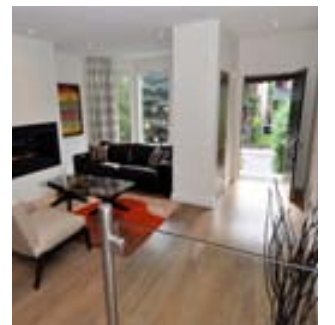
"Rémi and Stéphane were very articulate about what they were looking for, and I saw it becoming an open, funky, contemporary yet elegant and comfortable living space," says Kenney, whose team would oversee all stages of the project from concept to completion. "As it was an older property, you have the initial challenge of how to blend old with new construction," explains Kenney. "You

complicate that further when you open up an enclosed space. We took out load-bearing walls, rebuilt the structure and bulkheads, and re-routed plumbing and electrical. Until you start the tear-out, you don't know what's behind the walls. The original renos hadn't necessarily been done to code, so there were a lot of things we had to address, like adding insulation."

The couple chose to forsake the existing main floor powder room, which chopped up the floor plan, in favour of better flow. The old parquet floors throughout the home were replaced with wide-plank custom hardwood milled from reclaimed maple.

"The wood was salvaged from trees that had been killed by beetles," explains Kenney. "The markings from the beetles, as

The living room is anchored by a beautiful gas fireplace, which provides a welcoming feel as you enter the home.



The home covers nearly 2,000 square feet. Sandra Kenney's aim was for an open and contemporary, yet comfortable, space.

transform | hidden gem



Before



TOP: The main floor was dramatically opened up with the removal of a powder room.

BOTTOM: The old parquet floors were replaced with wide-plank custom hardwood, milled from reclaimed maple.

well as small pinholes, are quite visible, giving the hardwood a very unique look. We have the boards cut in random widths – three inches to eight inches wide – and the planks are 10 to 12 feet long, which gives the floor a very dramatic look. We also created a unique stain colour: a medium grey with a very slight green undertone.”

In the living room, a horizontal gas fireplace makes a stunning focal point, and the glass banister leading upstairs further opens up the floor plan.

The kitchen’s original L-shape was transformed into a cleaned galley-style space that showcases two types of cabinet finishes: natural rift-cut walnut, and high-gloss lacquered grey. A full-height glass backsplash adds sparkle and complements the quartz countertops.

At the back of the house, custom double glass doors lead out to the new back deck and allow sunlight to wash through the entire floor.

“Now we have an extension to our living space when we entertain in the summer,” says Latreille.

Upstairs, part of a claustrophobic third floor sitting room was turned into a functional attic office, and the remaining space used to create a 15-foot vaulted ceiling for the master bedroom below.

“We wanted to create a gorgeous master suite, and saw a great opportunity in taking that ceiling out,” explains Kenney.

Kenney used pocket doors to streamline the walk-throughs



The kitchen changed from an L-shape to a galley-style space, aiding the flow of space through the main floor.



A new deck leads out to a yard that provides the couple with extra living space in which to entertain in the summer.



The luxurious en-suite has beautiful Italian faucets and a limestone-tile floor.



Before



The second bedroom now doubles as a guest room/den.



Kenney created a vaulted ceiling in the master bedroom. A cramped third-floor sitting room was sacrificed to provide the space above.



Before

from the master into the dressing room and en suite bathroom, where the smallest of the three bedrooms was sacrificed to create a lovely 11-by-9-foot space. The remaining smaller bedroom now doubles as a guest room/den.

"The en suite was very tricky," says Kenney. "We felt that the best way to tackle it was to ignore the existing layout and start fresh, so we completely reconfigured it."

Kenney used natural limestone tiles for the bathroom floors and shower walls. The space features a six-foot soaker tub, custom glass shower enclosure, and a floating vanity with integrated countertop and sinks. But the real bling comes from the imported Italian faucets and hardware.

"Rémi absolutely fell in love with those faucets," says Ken-

"The en suite was very tricky, we felt that the best way to tackle it was to ignore the existing layout and start fresh"

ney. "This was the jewelry. They're very beautiful, but also have quite a price tag associated with them. It's about managing the total budget that you have, and making sure you're tracking the construction costs very carefully so that you've got the dollars available for your finishes."

But Latreille and Benoit haven't finished renovating quite yet. They plan to give the 'hideous' basement a much-needed facelift – including a new bathroom and guest bedroom – next fall. **HC**