

Charmed Life

BY Tracy Hanes.
PHOTOS BY Tomasz
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This home's exterior had historic charm, but the interior needed a total makeover

A Toronto baby boomer couple, who had long entertained the idea of buying a waterfront property in the Niagara Region where they both grew up, fell in love with a charming Craftsman-style home overlooking the Niagara River.

Built in the early 1900's, the home's exterior was loaded with character, but the interior had an outdated layout that didn't

function well. Sandra Kenney, president of Boulevard Design Build (a boutique design firm with offices in Toronto and Niagara-on-the-Lake) was asked to create a plan for the house that was true to the original exterior architecture but provided a contemporary open concept, light-filled interior.

"The lot is about half an acre and has plenty of natural beauty. It reflects the

serenity of the escarpment. The home had really lovely historical features, such as a bell-shaped roof with three-foot overhang," Kenney says. "It was somewhat deceiving. When you opened the door, the house was much larger than you were expecting."

The home's former owners had updated the house to some extent, but their plan was to tear it down and build a new house at some point. The new owners wanted to maintain at least part of the original heritage home.

"The second floor ceilings were only seven feet high, the flow was not very good through

the house and the layout was very chopped up with a series of small rooms indicative of that era," Kenney says. "That made the house very dark. It had a spectacular view at the back, but you really couldn't see it."

One of the main objectives was to open up the house to see the river from the living room and to bring light in from all four directions. They also wanted to address the low ceiling height on the second floor.

Other must-haves on the homeowners' list included a home office, large master suite with luxurious en suite bath, large closets with ample storage and walkout to an intimate terrace, overlooking river. They also wanted two guest bedrooms and a guest bath, a large open-concept kitchen, a great room and dining area. Other needs included a high-end custom kitchen, a

LEFT
The exterior of the home remains true to the original style.

ABOVE
Large windows and doors were designed to maximize the natural beauty of the half-acre lot.



Making an Entrance

"The original front door was on the north side of the house but that was awkward as you had to walk across the yard to get to the front door," Kenney says. "One of challenges was in creating a more formal entrance. Because we changed the front entrance from the north side to the south, we wanted to reverse the staircase as well. You don't want to sit at the dining room table and look at the big open space leading to the basement."

Guests now enter the new foyer through a dark stained, custom solid wood Craftsman-style front entry door. Custom stained glass panels with bevels added reflect the natural light and provide a degree of privacy.

dramatic powder room, and a walkout to a large terrace from the kitchen at the back of the home.

That meant that the house would have to be completely gutted and rebuilt, internally and externally. Its original size – 2,800 square feet – would remain about the same.

"Doing the design was a challenge because we wanted to maintain the beauty of the original architecture as well as create a contemporary interior. We wanted a juxtaposition that was seamless and elegant," Kenney says.

The exterior hadn't been touched and was pretty much in its original condition. To stay true to the Craftsman-style architecture, new energy-efficient fiberglass windows were

custom designed for the house. The third floor was removed, the second floor ceilings raised and a rear dormer addition added.

The original cedar shake siding was in excellent shape so it could be retained. By integrating the dormer addition with the original roofline and rafter tails and adding design details such as corner caps, Kenney maintained the more traditional style. The roof overhang was restored with a new roof, eaves and downspouts.

The heating and cooling system was changed from hot water to forced air gas. Two systems were used (one for the second floor, and one for the main floor and basement) to avoid bulkheads or build-outs in the walls.

Inside, the house was "an absolute blank



canvas," Kenney says. "We spent a lot of time thinking through the design and how to best optimize the space that was there."

It's calm and Zen-like to reflect what's going on outside

Some water damage that wasn't evident until the walls came down had to be remedied, then Kenney changed her plan to add a large steel beam to the main floor that allowed it to be completely opened up with no obstruction.

"We kept the main floor ceilings at eight feet but the staircase design was part of the strategy to create a feeling of higher ceilings," she says. "Open staircase risers, a glass catwalk to a guest bedroom, and a large

skylight, created an illusion of more height."

The floating staircase includes grey stained oak treads, grey-stained clear maple

stringers, a glass stair rail and stainless steel handrail. When more than natural light is required, the staircase is lit by a Medusa chandelier.

"To reclaim space on the second floor, we used the space from a back staircase that was cutting into an area where the master bath would be and tore out a third floor loft. The dormer addition didn't add square footage but added volume in terms of ceiling height," she says. ➔

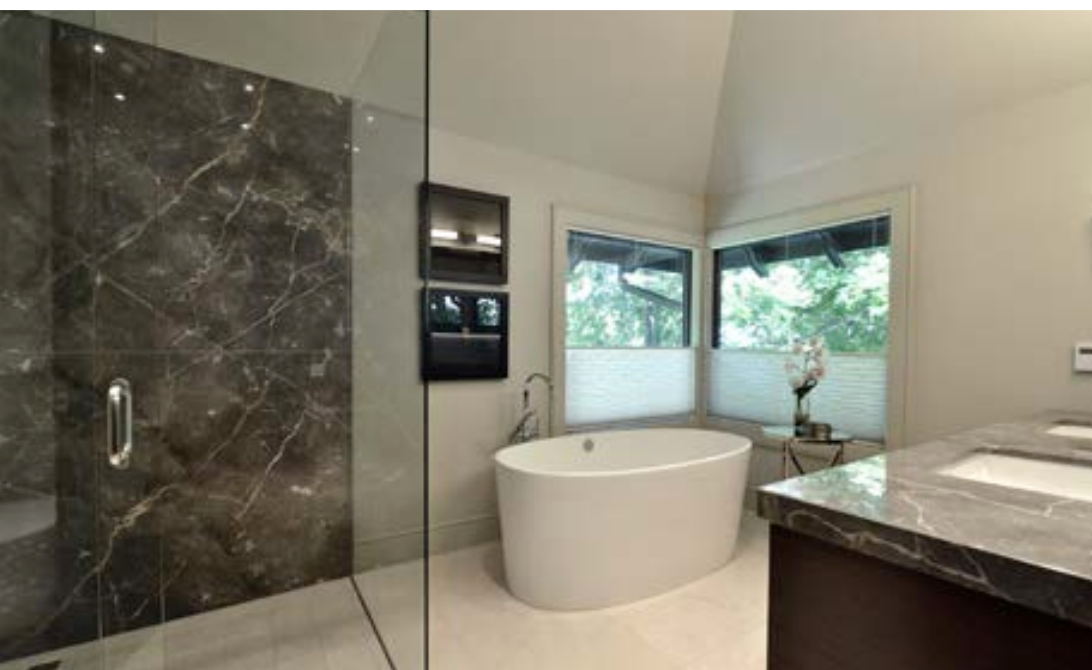
FAR LEFT

The kitchen has grey-stained walnut cabinets and Brazilian Arabescato marble was used on the kitchen island.

ABOVE

To save on space, the fireplace and TV screen share a wall.

Renovation



TOP

The back deck is well protected from the weather so it can be used frequently as an outdoor living room.

ABOVE

Windows in the master bath feature blinds mounted from the bottom to give privacy without blocking natural light.

RIGHT

The front door was relocated from the north side of the house to the south side. The staircase inside was also reversed.



The palette and finishes were chosen to reflect the natural environment surrounding the property and bring the outside in. Finishes included European white oak matte lacquer hardwood flooring with a light brushed surface and an oiled finish. Custom cabinetry is made of exotic materials such as walnut, Macassar ebony and Sapele mahogany.

The stunning kitchen has grey-stained walnut cabinets with steel glass front doors, a high gloss lacquered island, and commercial grade appliances. Brazilian Arabescato marble was used on the kitchen island with a waterfall end and 12-inch overhang for seating, while the other kitchen countertops are Organic White Caesarstone. The backsplash is custom back-painted Starphire glass. Blown glass Italian pendants dangle over the kitchen island.

The rustic grey dining table top, set beneath an Italian chandelier, is made from reclaimed wood mounted on a contemporary chrome base.

The homeowners got the dramatic powder room they wanted, with a hotel-style black onyx vanity, floor-to-ceiling mirror with high gloss lacquer frame, custom medicine cabinets in stained Sapele mahogany, and backlit LED lighting.

The sumptuous upstairs master bath has Grigio Fior Di Bosco marble slab walls in the shower and on the countertop, and a Cremita marble tile floor with a curbless shower. The cabinets are a stained Sapele mahogany.

The master bedroom includes luxurious touches such as a soaring cathedral ceiling and a Moooi Raimond chandelier.

Kenney said the Niagara Parkway house renovation, completed a year ago, successfully and elegantly blends traditional and contemporary elements.

"This is my preferred project," she said. "I love to take an old house and restore it, and create a completely modern interior. It's definitely a nice house to entertain family and friends in and it's calm and Zen-like to reflect what's going on outside." 