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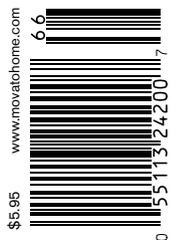
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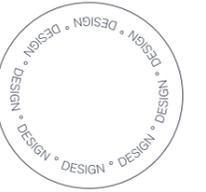
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# A GREAT FIT

*A century-old home is updated but remains architecturally true to its neighbourhood*

BY SUSAN SEMENAK • PHOTOGRAPHY: STEPHANI BUCHMAN • STYLING: DVIRA OVADIA





*“We want to be immersed in all aspects of family living, so we don’t need spaces secluded from each other.”*



**WITHROW PARK HAS MANY CHARMS:** early 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture, a popular farmer’s market, ample green space, colourful streets and easy access to public transit.

But the houses in this Riverdale neighbourhood tend to be on the small side. So when interior designer Dvira Ovadia set about renovating a beautiful old house for a couple of young professionals and their two children, her theme was to create the illusion of space.

Her clients, like so many other homebuyers who are turning this leafy enclave into a family-friendly urban village, dreamed of a space that would be modern and open, even if the house itself was a classic turn-of-the-century home, built in 1915. “This is a downtown neighbourhood and the people who are coming here to live are attuned to contemporary styles. They are gravitating away from the traditional interior footprint

of these classic homes,” says Ovadia, who worked on HGTV Canada TV shows with Debbie Travis and Scott McGillivray before starting her own Toronto design firm, Dvira Interiors, which specializes in whole-home renovations.

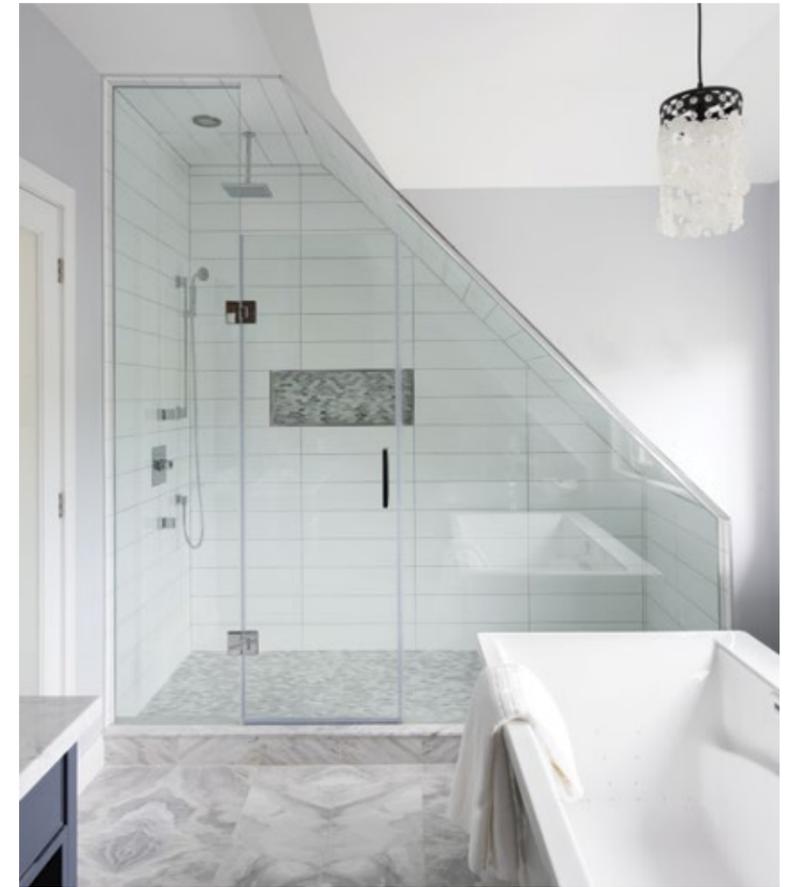
“What they want is a fresh, new look: rooms without boundaries, flexible spaces, less frill and more function. In today’s world, we are all very busy and so when we get home,

we want to see each other and be together,” says Ovadia, herself a working mother who moves at a fast pace. “We want to be immersed in all aspects of family living, so we don’t need spaces secluded from each other.”

This desire for proximity, she adds, is behind the appetite among young homebuyers for open-plan spaces. “The dining table isn’t for formal once-a-week dinners anymore; it’s the place for casual eating and doing

*The homeowners cook a lot, so designer Dvira Ovadia (preceding pages) organized the space for maximum efficiency. She says she asked a lot of questions before finalizing the kitchen design: “How many pots and pans do you have? Do you use a lot of spice? Do you want to keep your plates in a drawer by the dishwasher or in an upper cabinet by the stove?” These are the kinds of details necessary for understanding how a space will be used,” she says. Kitchen cabinets, custom-made by Dvira Interiors, are painted matte white and grey. The countertops and the backsplash are Carrara marble. The glass pendants cast warm pools of light over the peninsula but don’t take up too much visual space. Stainless steel oven: Jenn-Air; hardware: Lee Valley; lighting: Royal Lighting.*

*“When it was installed and we walked into the room, it was amazing, more than we expected.”*



*“What they want is a fresh, new look: rooms without boundaries, flexible spaces, less frill and more function.”*

*In the master bathroom, painted pale grey, a freestanding tub claims centre stage. It sits upon a marble floor whose large rectangular tiles are laid in a flipped pattern to create a butterfly effect. “We wanted this bathroom to have a serene spa feeling,” Ovadia says. “It’s an oasis that looks big even if it is small in size.”*

homework and coming together,” she says.

In the 2,500-square-foot house with its living and sleeping areas spread over three floors, the designer used a unified palette of muted greys and whites, marble and pale wood to illuminate, expand and unite the spaces. The custom cabinets in the bathrooms, for example, mimic the colour and style of those in the kitchen.

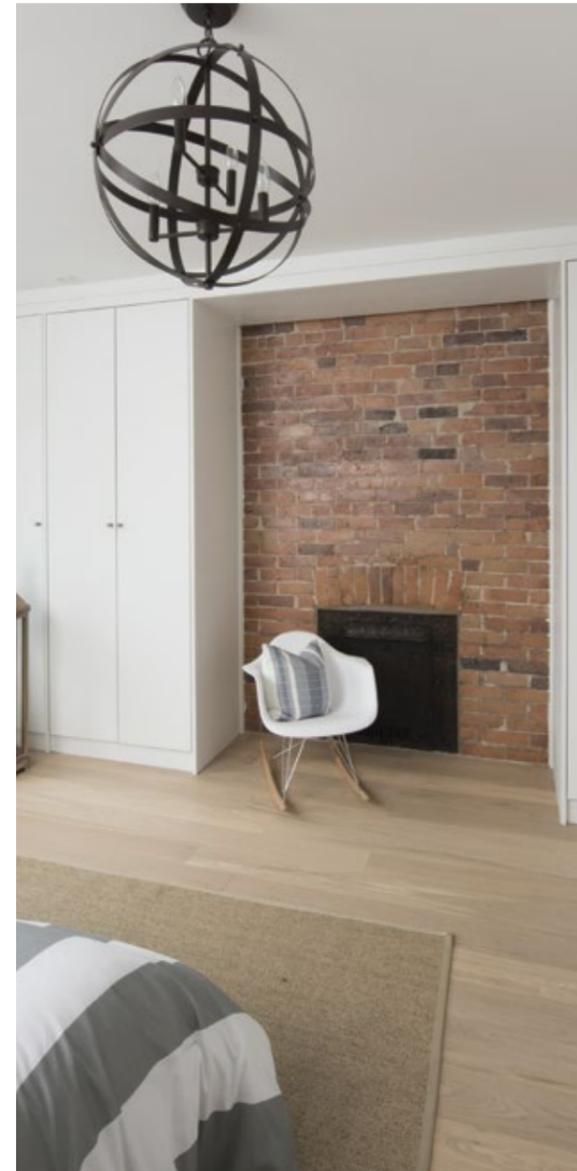
Because each of the floors is 900 square feet or less, Ovadia maximized every nook and cranny – fitting a glassed-in shower under the roofline in the third-floor master bathroom, for example, and creating a cut-out in the pantry to fit the microwave.

Everywhere, she kept architectural trim to a minimum so it would not interrupt the

visual flow. In the front entrance, for example, a coat closet is camouflaged behind a wall of flat-front doors. The stairways, too, got the same treatment: balustrades were replaced by solid drywall.

On the main floor, Ovadia and her team removed all the inner walls, adding structural beams flush with the ceiling, eliminating the need for columns, posts and partition walls. That allows light to pour in from the front and rear windows, and merges kitchen, dining room and living room.

Nowhere is her maximizing magic more evident than on the third floor, where a once-barely-used attic now houses a master bedroom big enough for a king-size bed and his and her closets, plus a luxurious ensuite



bathroom. Ovadia accomplished this by opening up the back facade with floor-to-ceiling windows and a walk-out to a rooftop deck.

But in all the modernizing and brightening, she never forgot the house's history. She pays tribute to its heritage in details large and small. The exterior architecture of the structure was maintained but painted a charcoal grey to modernize it while allowing it to blend seamlessly into the neighborhood.

Inside, Ovadia's modern designs are interspersed with architectural curiosities.

She left original brick walls exposed around the fireplace in the living room and in the bedroom above, for example. Even the original fireplaces are still in place, though they have been stripped of their ornate wooden mantels and given a flat, contemporary face. "So often, a big modern box will pop up in an old neighbourhood and stand out too much," she says. "We wanted to remain classic, and true to the community and to the house itself." ☛

*The former master bedroom is now a child's room that features a fireplace and a window seat. In the bathroom (above, right) a mirror runs across one wall above the sinks and vanity. Storage under the sink is left open to keep the cabinets from making the room feel "boxy." (Opposite) In the stairways, there are no balustrades, just the clean lines of drywall. Ovadia had a little fun with the undersides of the stairs though. Using drywall, she created an inverted effect instead of enclosing them with a typical sloped soffit.*