

AUGUST 2018

Chef Brandon Olsen's
Famous Fried Chicken

HOUSE & HOME

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LIVE SMALL THINK BIG

**TOMMY
SMYTHE**
REVEALS
A FUN &
FRESH NEW
MAKEOVER

**SMALL-SPACE DECORATING:
FOUR PLACES UNDER 900 SQ.FT.**

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HOME AND HOW
TO GET IT!** *Page 78*

Plus

**A Modern City
House That Brings
the Outdoors In**



A NEARLY
CENTURY-OLD
HOME INSPIRES
FAR-FLUNG
COUSINS TO GO
THE DISTANCE
ON A MODERN
MAKEOVER.

It's All RELATIVE

Text by CHANTAL BRAGANZA | *Photography by* STACEY BRANDFORD

ASIDE FROM HELPING HIS SISTER on a remodelling project a few years ago, Peter Pelsinski had never taken on family as a client. The New York-based principal architect and co-founder of Span Architecture was intrigued, then, when his cousin in Toronto called to ask for design advice. He and his wife had just purchased a house on a ravine that was surrounded by thickets of deciduous trees. The home was built in the 1920s, which meant the ceilings were lower and the rooms more compact than they liked. What were his thoughts on updating a nearly century-old house, they wondered?

They hoped to stretch the square footage to accommodate the many things they wanted their home to be: part private family hideaway, part workspace, part recreation centre. They loved yoga, table tennis and hosting dinner parties that turned into extended hangouts with friends and their kids. They also wanted to maintain the dwelling's original character, like the Tudor-style façade and the home's intimate relationship with the ravine. Soon, their casual phone calls turned into serious talks about revitalizing a sought-after house in a striking natural setting. "It was an opportunity to make something amazing with fantastic clients," says Peter.



The living room's traditional seating arrangement carves out a cosy space within the main floor's open-concept layout. Generous windows take full advantage of the home's leafy ravine setting. **Armchairs**, RH, Restoration Hardware; **sofas**, Montauk Sofa; **throw pillow sewing**, Wesley Seto Design; **coffee table** by Martha Sturdy, Hollace Cluny; **white side tables**, Burnett; **table lamps**, Elite; **chandelier**, Residential Lighting Studio; **artwork**, Canvas Gallery; **floral arrangements** (throughout), Earthwork.



ABOVE: Architect Peter Pelsinski and designer Allison Willson stand by the home's showstopping staircase, which is framed by slivers of walnut and steel. "The stairway is our thumbprint on the house," says Peter. "There's a drama to it when you enter, but it's not ostentatious and it enhances the house's vertical flow of space."



In the serene front entry, a colourful painting of flowers by Montreal-based artist Lucie Leduc adds a pop of colour and drama. **Artwork, Canvas Gallery.**



He began by setting the three-storey house deeper into the earth to raise its ceilings from eight and a half to 10 feet, a task that involved lowering the foundation and demolishing the interior floors while keeping the original structure intact. He also modernized the layout by enlarging the second-floor bedrooms, designing the basement as a recreation space and arranging the main floor into open-concept living, dining and kitchen areas.

New square-paned windows recall the home's original style; mixed with picture windows, they frame leafy views down into the wooded ravine. The final effect is that of living in a tree house, albeit one with a custom staircase set off by slatted walnut walls and a modern, pin-thin steel railing. To further enhance the union between indoors and out, Peter used understated colours and materials such as walnut and marble — the latter honed to avoid the manufactured shine of a polished finish.

It's a move mirrored in the interior design, headed up by senior designer Allison Willson and designer Laura Fremont of Sarah Richardson Design. "At SRD, our mandate is to deliver a soulful expression of modern style with interiors that collaborate with the architecture, and celebrate the views and natural environment," says Sarah Richardson. Linen pillows, mohair throws, bouclé upholstery and blown-glass light fixtures were selected with subtlety in mind over look-at-me colours and patterns. "This house needed the texture and interest natural materials give, to help layer and soften the space," adds Allison.

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Simple cabinetry, free of knobs or pulls and finished in a pale olive-beige, creates a soothing look in the minimalist kitchen. Long expanses of white Caesarsstone countertops are warmed up by the island's walnut base and the oak floors. **Pendants** by John Pomp, Primavera Interior Furnishings; **stools**, Sarah Richardson Design. **OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT:** Comfort was top-of-mind when Allison and Laura pulled together the furniture for the house. The breakfast nook's striped banquette is paired with Eero Saarinen's iconic mid-century modern chairs in a walnut and cream bouclé, encouraging lingering over morning coffee. The table, with a steel base and walnut top, was custom made to fit the space perfectly. **Banquette**, Sarah Richardson Design; **chairs**, Design Within Reach; **table**, Cabinet; **artwork** by Michael Adamson.



ABOVE: The stairwell's slatted walnut walls separate the formal dining area from the rest of the main living zones. For a playful touch, a cast-resin chandelier by Oly Studio floats above the wood table like a cluster of bubbles.

Dining table, Avenue Road; **chairs,** Sarah Richardson Design; **chandelier,** South Hill Home; **rug,** Elte; **artwork,** Canvas Gallery.

RIGHT: Extending the mirror in the powder room all the way to the floor creates the illusion that the vanity is floating in space. Likewise, two clear glass pendants appear suspended in the air and are less expected than sconces.

Wallpaper by Christopher Farr Cloth, Y&Co.; **pendants** by John Pomp, Primavera; **sink,** Klein International; **faucet,** Rubinet; **chair,** Ginger's.

OPPOSITE, TOP: For feet-up, watch-the-game-all-day comfort in the rec room, Allison skipped a traditional coffee table and instead paired a roomy sectional with a large leather ottoman. The low, linear fireplace and mod wing chair give the arrangement edgy attitude. **Sectional, wing chair,** Montauk Sofa; **ottoman,** Sarah Richardson Design; **floor lamp,** Angus & Company; **round side table, end tables,** Hollace Cluny; **rug,** Elte.

The designers' few colour indulgences include the twilight blue sofas and the dark grey marble fireplace surround on the lower level. "That room has so many functions: it's a rec room, a games room and a bar," says Allison. "It's a place to relax, so we had fun with the colour."

Throughout the redesign, the homeowners often joked that if a piece of furniture was comfortable enough to nap on, it was perfect for the house. The mantra started as a lighthearted quip, but it ended up informing the home's overall feel. "This is a hardworking couple who have an appreciation for living a well-balanced, chill life," says Allison. "The interiors needed to reflect that." She arranged the furniture to be as flexible as possible. Key pieces are rarely tucked into corners that force a singular view. Instead, seating offers options: someone perched on a club chair in the living room can face the fireplace and enjoy a quiet moment or turn to converse with people in the kitchen.

In a fun happenstance, the team discovered that, on seeing the home's address for the first time, Sarah's paternal grandparents owned the house until the mid-'80s. "There are still a few details that feel familiar to me, even after the dramatic transformation," she says. Perhaps by fate, the home's redesign was a true family affair. **H&H**





Allison combined a composite backsplash in the bar area with denim blue upholstery, walnut wall panelling and oak flooring to give the lower-level rec room a clubby, relaxed feel. A handsome Ping-Pong table further signals that this is a space for play. "The whole intention of the room is to gather people — whether it's family friends watching a hockey game or teenagers coming in from the pool," says Allison. **Ping-Pong table**, RH, Restoration Hardware; **armchairs**, Silva; **side table**, Design Within Reach; **barstools**, Hollace Cluny; **artwork** by Tony Koukos; **wall colour**, Collingwood (OC-28), Benjamin Moore.





Full-height windows give the principal bedroom breathtaking treetop views — and the furniture was placed to take full advantage. A calming palette of blue and almond easily blends with the outdoor scenery while textures and patterns mimic ones found in nature. *Bed, daybed, Sarah Richardson Design; throw pillow sewing, Wesley Seto Design.*



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— ALLISON WILLSON, DESIGNER

Book-matched Calacatta marble slabs create a dramatic backdrop for the principal bathroom's sculptural tub. The window is set low enough to see the view while enjoying a relaxing soak, and a decorative branch adds to the indoor-outdoor feeling. **Tub**, Klein International; **marble slabs**, Ciot; **artwork** by Tony Koukos.



OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT: In one owner's home office, leather club chairs in a rich caramel and a striped flatweave rug radiate an all-season cosiness. "We wanted the home to feel just as comfortable and appropriate in the summer as in the winter," says Allison. Charcoal leather piping on the herringbone linen sofa is a small touch that elevates the room. **Sofa**, Montauk Sofa; **armchairs**, Avenue Road; **coffee table**, Commute Design; **rug**, Lee Jofa; **chandelier**, Elte; **throw pillow sewing**, Wesley Seto Design; **wall colour**, Moonshine (OC-56), Benjamin Moore.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT: A pair of armchairs upholstered in creamy chenille are an ideal spot for taking in the view from the principal bedroom. Smoke tree branches laden with pink plumes make a unique accent. **Armchairs**, Sarah Richardson Design; **coffee table base**, West Elm; **coffee table top**, Cabinet; **tall vase**, Elte; **smaller vases**, Hollace Cluny.