

FEBRUARY 2016

# HOUSE & HOME

THE MAGAZINE OF HOME & STYLE

Hot Pot Party with the  
Best Dumplings Ever!

## *Cool meets* **COZY**

DECORATE WITH WARM METALS,  
CHIC ACCENTS AND LAYERS OF  
RICH TEXTURE

13 OF THE BEST  
LOG HOLDERS

PLUS!

WEEKEND DIY:  
MAKE YOUR OWN  
BATIK WALL ART



# SHINE

**S**OMETIMES, IT'S the old stuff that gets you in the gut. The crackle of a wood fire, the deep, oaky browns that only come with an old floor, polished to perfection by decades of socked feet, or the delicate plaster ceiling medallion handcrafted 100 years ago.

Veteran renovator Allison Willson knew updating essentials — the floors, floor plan, and heating and ventilating systems — in her new home would mean saying goodbye to evocative original features like coved ceilings and cast-iron radiators. After falling hard for her home's time-honoured charm, she didn't want to renovate it in a way that would make the house feel drastically different from its original style.

"It's why we fell in love with this house — I love old architecture," says Allison of the 3,000-square-foot, midtown Toronto home she and her husband, Tony Willson, bought three years ago. A senior designer at Sarah Richardson Design, she quickly adds, "Of course, ultimately I prefer to see those elements in the backdrop, mixed with modern-day updates. I knew we'd lose some of those special elements, so we did everything we could to add in enough details throughout the house that it would feel like it flowed."

The 1906 Edwardian semi had been occupied by the same family for 65 years and exuded a cosy warmth and classic family vibe. But after a year in residence, the couple found themselves pregnant (their

son, Oliver, is now 1½) and decided they needed to do a larger renovation than they'd initially anticipated. "We bought the house thinking it needed a new kitchen and some bathroom updates. Before we knew it, we were gutting the main floor and totally redoing both bathrooms," says Allison. "Despite that, I wanted the house to have a nice balance of new and old — of clean lines and original detail."

And so, after those essentials were addressed, the coved plaster ceilings were lovingly recreated, chair rails and wainscoting were added to the dining room, and ceiling medallions were handcrafted and installed throughout — each layer of architectural detail helping to instill a lovely sense of history and sanctuary.

On the decorating front, vintage pieces are mixed with sleeker



**ABOVE:** As a senior designer at Sarah Richardson Design, homeowner Allison Willson is adept at mixing styles and eras to create striking vignettes, like this one in her dining room. **Sideboard**, Michael Thomas Antiques; **mirror**, Vintage Fine Objects.





**ABOVE:** Allison welcomes guests with a bang in the front hall: bold cabana-stripe wallpaper and herringbone-marble floors are paired with an antique Italian console and a vintage bench covered in shaggy lambswool. **Console**, Decorum Decorative Finds; **mirror**, Of Things Past; **wallpaper**, Block Print Stripe (BP 753), Farrow & Ball; **tiles**, Saltillo Imports; **tile installation**, Strongback Masonry; **light**, Universal Lighting.

**RIGHT:** In the living room, an airy brass and glass étagère is filled with artfully placed vignettes of accessories, coffee table books and photographs. It's balanced by a tall mirror on the opposite side of the fireplace (shown opposite). **Étagère**, 1698 Antiques; **photographs** by Tony Koukos; **boxes**, **bookends**, West Elm.

**OPPOSITE:** A heavily patterned antique Heriz rug warms up the cool, crisp greys and ivories that balance out the rest of the room. Allison went easy on the recessed lights, opting instead for table lamps and ceiling fixtures to create a layered lighting effect. When she couldn't find just the right piece to hang over the mantel — something that wouldn't overwhelm the room — she painted a canvas herself. Filling the open shelves with textures like shagreen, bone, shell and stone adds depth. **Chairs**, Vintage Fine Objects; **throw**, **large vase** (on coffee table), Elte; **wall colour**, Cornforth White (228), Farrow & Ball; **mantel colour**, Special Edition (P5221-14), Para Paints; full-length **mirror**, Hardware Interiors; **flowers**, Earthwork.

furnishings, for a fresh, young take on traditional style. "I try very hard to work vintage pieces into every space, but too much of it makes me feel like I'm living in Granny's house — it's a constant balance," says Allison of her trad-meets-contemporary style.

In the living room, a vintage Murano light fixture casts a soft glow over an übertraditional antique Heriz rug in deep reds, pinks and greys. To bring the space into the 21st century, Allison paired these old world classics with a pair of clean-lined chairs, covered in a simple grey upholstery — a nice contrast to the rug's intricate pattern.

Of course, Allison also needed to ensure spaces would be comfortable and durable enough for her young family: "Practicality was top of mind. I didn't want anything to feel precious or stark." So she made moves like using a grey tone on the kitchen cabinets instead of white so they won't show fingerprints and adding judicious hits of wallpaper to fill in where architectural elements were in short supply. "There's a lot of wall space to cover here; adding wallpaper and grasscloth meant we could go lighter on artwork."

In the end, it's Allison's deft ability to knit together these dynamic elements, like graphic pattern and oversized accents, with the storied Edwardian "old stuff" that really gets you in the gut.





*“Now that it’s done, the house feels comfortable, functional and, most importantly, like us” — Allison Willson*





Allison wanted one element that tied everything together in the kitchen, even the appliances. Her solution was the majestic stainless steel range hood trimmed in brass. The island is anchored by two huge brass lights that give the space a fun nautical-industrial vibe, while pale grey on the cabinets keeps the kitchen feeling homey. **Cabinetry**, Altima Kitchens; **hardware**, The Door Store; **hood**, Stainless Solutions Plus; **pendants**, Ginger's; cabinet **colour**, Mennonite Grey (Tint 1, P2111-04), Para Paints; **backsplash**, Saltillo Imports; **tile installation**, Strongback Masonry.





**BELOW:** Putty-coloured grasscloth wallpaper by Thibaut brings instant texture and life to the second-floor den, while a travertine hearth and fireplace frame inject natural pattern. **Artwork** (over fireplace), Canvas Gallery; **architectural drawings, urn, lamp**, Vintage Fine Objects; **vintage cabinet** by Finlay Fine Furniture, Christie Antique & Vintage Show.



**RIGHT:** A trad crystal chandelier is a playful contrast to the big contemporary walnut table in the dining room. Vintage chairs recovered in a heavy grey linen are paired with a leather-wrapped bench that's easy to wipe clean. The space is brought to life by the watery blue tones of the overdyed Persian rug and throw pillows, while blinds in a shaded-back zebra pattern are a modern hit. A burst of evergreen at one end of the table is the perfect winter accent, even long after Christmas has passed. **Chairs**, Green's Antiques; **table**, Cabinet; **chandelier**, The Door Store; **bench**, Sarah Richardson Design; **vase**, Aero Studios; **greens**, Earthwork; **bowl**, Decorum Decorative Finds.



**LEFT:** A home office is tucked in a corner of the den, with supplies and files hidden in built-ins made by customizing Pax units from Ikea. **Desk**, Elte; **hide rug**, Ikea; **Stafford chair**, Sarah Richardson Design; **lamp**, Residential Lighting Studio; **white chest**, Vintage Fine Objects; **mirror**, Green's Antiques.





While Allison was thinking outside-the-box when she papered the lower walls in Oliver's room in a glam zebra print, the result is surprisingly fun and fitting — and will age well here. Keeping the rest of the palette quiet and neutral — save for the oversized chevron rug — makes it livable. Wall-mounted shelves work around the chimney breast and sloped ceiling — and keep breakable treasures out of little hands. **Wallpaper**, Thibaut; **rug**, Serena & Lily; **pouf**, Decorum Decorative Finds; **Coco rocker**, Sarah Richardson Design; **shelves**, Ikea; **brackets**, Anthropologie.





**BELOW:** In the third-floor bathroom, Allison forwent a standard vanity in favour of converting a traditional chest of drawers and topping it with a Caesarstone counter. The classic subway tile was given a youthful twist with a grey grout. Accessories in warm, burnished metals add historic character. **Dresser**, Burnett; drawer **fabrication**, Eurocraft Restoration; **mirror**, Of Things Past; **sconces**, Elte.



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**ABOVE:** Dormers knocked into an angled roofline give a room an instant cosiness and create a perfect spot for a crib. Here, Allison draws the eye to this feature with heavy navy trim on the curtains that echoes the chevrons on the dramatic rug. A huge rug like this is always a great idea for a child's room, inviting little ones to flop down and play in comfort. **Crib**, Ikea; **toy car**, Indigo; **Coco rocker**, Sarah Richardson Design; **mobile**, Ella+Elliot.

**LEFT:** A nod to the home's history, elaborate antiqued-brass fixtures are a highlight in the third-floor bathroom. With a window inside, the glassed-in shower stall feels bright and airy in the morning, while the bathtub tucked under the eaves has a cosier feel (Allison bought a vintage tub and had it restored for an authentic look). Standard subway tiles on the walls are offset by hex marble tiles on the floor. **Bathtub**, Legacy Vintage; **shower fixtures**, Rubinet; wall and floor **tile**, Saltillo Imports; tripod side **table**, Green's Antiques.



Allison and Tony lived in the house for a year before the reno, which let Allison study the amount of daylight that each room gets. The principal bedroom is really bright, so she knew it could handle the rich off-black grasscloth that envelops the space. She described the Indian banana silk rug as "heaven underfoot." The couple use the small sun porch off the bedroom as a sitting room. **Dresser**, Châtelet; Genevieve **bench**, William Birch **sofa**, Thomas **stools**, Sarah Richardson Design; **rug**, Elte; vintage Murano **pendant**, Resident Lighting Studio; floral **pillow fabric** by Hazelton House, Primavera Interior Furnishings; Charcoal (839-T-5040) grasscloth **wallpaper**, Thibaut.







Layered linens on the principal bed enhance the feeling of serenity, while a faux-fur throw adds instant winter luxe. **Eloise headboard**, Sarah Richardson Design; **side table**, Burnett; **linens**, West Elm; **mirror**, Châtelet; faux-fur throw, South Hill Home; **lamp**, Elte; **flowers**, Earthwork.



# TIME TO

DESIGNER ALLISON WILLSON TRANSFORMS HER TIRED EDWARDIAN INTO A CHIC, WELCOMING FAMILY RETREAT

Text by **SAMANTHA SACKS** | Photography by **ANGUS FERGUSON**



Big, cosy seating facing a roaring fire and walls covered in sand-toned grasscloth make the second-floor den an irresistible hangout for homeowners Allison and Tony Willson, and 1½-year-old son Oliver, while graphic artwork and nautical accents, like the striped blinds and dhurrie rug, bring a lightness and youth to the space. **Rug**, Elte; **Chelsea tufted ottoman**, Sarah Richardson Design; **sofa**, Montauk Sofa; **artwork** by Heather Schibli, Canvas Gallery; **greens**, Earthwork.