

A SEAMLESS MESH OF OLD AND NEW

A 1925 home in Toronto gets an addition of a contemporary-style kitchen and bathroom

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PHOTOGRAPHY: SCOTT NORSWORTHY

VICTORIA BIRKETT AND DAVID CEOLIN were attracted to the home they bought in 2007 because of its amazing view. It sits on an expansive ravine lot in the prestigious Baby Point neighbourhood of Toronto, and has an intriguing provenance as one of the early homes built by renowned developer/businessman Robert Home Smith in 1925.

“We were attracted to this house because we felt that there was a lot of history here, and we liked the layout and overall feel; it was perfect,” Victoria recalls.

However, a few rooms – namely the existing dark kitchen and tiny master ensuite bathroom – were decidedly less than perfect.

The homeowners wanted to open the house up to the ravine view and fill the space with light, so they turned to architect Wanda Ely to design a contemporary-style two-storey rear extension that would be in keeping with the existing traditional home. Throughout the house, Ely created views that framed the space to thoughtfully link the old and the new.

“We were mindful that the renovation was going to be very new and we were tying it into a historic home; we weren’t going to make what we were doing look old,” says Ely, owner of Wanda Ely Architect. “They wanted it to feel modern and fresh while making sure it didn’t look too disjointed from the existing house.” →

The six-month renovation in 2018 transformed the stately home into a spacious, airy retreat for the couple and their two daughters. The neutral palette, accented with splashes of watery blues, honours the original blueprints for the property, which the homeowners still have.

For the new ensuite bathroom, the couple requested a soaker tub with a separate shower, which Ely laid back to back to allow for a magnificent wall of blue porcelain tile as the room’s focal point. “The tile was designed with tapestry in mind and that shows in the really rich colour and pattern. It almost has a textile quality to it,” says Ely.



The old ensuite bathroom’s tub had an oversized lip that made getting in and out difficult, but it’s easy to get into this clean-lined tub, which backs onto a glass shower.

Lighting: Fin Suspension grouping of five bone china pendants from Lightform; cabinetry: Harvest House Millworkers; countertop: Caesarstone (colour: Blizzard).

The show-stopping blue tiled wall was the departure point for the master bathroom

“When Wanda showed it to us, we immediately loved it,” says David. Flooring and main wall tile: Stonetile.



The floating vanity, crafted from white oak, provides space to store toiletries and contrasts with the cool watery blue tiles on the feature wall. Cabinetry: Harvest House Millworkers; countertop: Caesarstone (colour: Blizzard); wall tile: 24-by-24-inch Nomad porcelain (colour: Turchese) from Stonetile; faucets: Aquabrass Volare wall mount; sink: Kohler Ladena basin.

Victoria’s wish for a generous space filled with light was achieved, while David appreciates the streamlined storage in the floating white oak vanity and all the high-end finishes. “You feel like you’re walking into a luxury hotel bathroom,” he says, noting that the white quartz countertops and custom cabinetry carry through to their new kitchen. →

The homeowners spotted the porcelain pendant lights on a trip to New York City. “We loved them, so we tracked them down and ended up buying them here,” says Victoria.





In the kitchen, Ely laid the engineered oak flooring in a herringbone design to contrast with the sleek island and cabinets, and to delineate the new space from the original flooring in the dining room. “We didn’t want to match the floors of the old house, because they’re from a different era. They’re quite dark with a lot of grain in the oak, which suits the existing house,” explains Ely. “They wanted something quite bright and fresh-looking for the kitchen, so we chose a floor that had a lot of character in it, and the herringbone pattern has a nice richness and a very classic, Old-World feeling to it. So it works in the old home, but it was very clearly a new part of the home.”



“There’s a lot of really beautiful morning light coming in here,” says Ely, who also left the space above the white upper cabinets open to let in plenty of sunshine from the windows behind it. Flooring: Kafe Caramel herringbone engineered oak hardwood from Stonetile International; cabinetry: Harvest House Millworkers; countertops: Caesarstone (colour: Blizzard); faucet: Blanco Alta Dual with pull-out.



Wanda Ely made the transition area between the original dining room and new kitchen into a design element by building a serving and pantry space that’s ideal for hosting large dinners. Laying the new oak floors in a herringbone motif introduces the contemporary kitchen while keeping the warm wood featured elsewhere in the home.

Between the kitchen and dining room, Ely added a server and six-by-eight-foot pantry, which serves multiple functions, including storage for china and a space to serve coffee and dessert. “When you have larger gatherings in your dining room, sometimes you need extra space to put platters and other things,” David says.

Most important, a wall of black-framed floor-to-ceiling windows allows light to flood the 18-by-20-foot space, giving the couple the gorgeous ravine view they were seeking.

“The old version of the house didn’t have a lot of windows, so the ravine was not part of the interior perspective; it felt very closed off,” says David. “Now, every morning we see birds and leaves; the seasonality really comes in.” 🏡