



**KITCHEN** Everything old is new again. Schoolhouse pendant lights, a chalkboard wall, a harvest-style dining table and aluminum Navy chairs are all handsome classics that designer Andrew Barker says bridge the gap between old and new.

# A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

BY BARB SLIGL

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
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RESPECT. THE WORD KEEPS popping up as the homeowners, Tracy and Francis, describe their reno of a 100-year-old heritage house in Vancouver's Kerrisdale neighbourhood. Yet owning a 1913 home wasn't on the agenda when they went househunting two years ago. "We always thought we were concrete, glass and steel people," says Tracy. On a whim, they looked at this story-book house, complete with boxwood-lined gravel drive and classic front porch—and bought it the next day.

What captured them was the warmth of this long-lived-in home. And the view, which ran from the front door to the backyard, right through a floating-tread staircase. The open stairs also offered another vision—through the

A Vancouver couple makes a century-old house relevant again.



**OFFICE** Barker added modern touches for the digital age to the former formal dining room. The office houses two bright-red desks by Blu Dot, placed back to back, centred under a bold, industrial-looking pendant from Restoration Hardware, and a power outlet in the middle of the floor for easy plugging in of laptops. **KITCHEN** Caesarstone counters, glossy subway tile and a sculptural faucet give a modern edge to the more traditional elements of the room, like the refinished hardwood floors and off-white Shaker cabinets.

framework, the couple could envision a modern reinterpretation of the space.

The stairway had been the crux of a previous reno (featured in the April 1996 issue of *Western Living*) that dramatically opened up the main floor of the original house, but the 15-year-old postmodern take was now dated. (Think '90s-era glass blocks.) A second reno would bring the home back to its roots.

Enter designer Andrew Barker. A friend of the couple, he shared their modern aesthetic, and corralled their creative energy. (Francis is an art director; Tracy, a graphic designer.) “We drew inspiration from the house,” says Barker. “The overall look and feel respects the traditional character and architectural mouldings of the house but infuses it with a modern sensibility.”

After Barker built a personality profile of the couple, he pulled together a look book of recommendations. The project went from “tarting up” the kitchen to a rethink of the entire home. The kitchen was gutted and reconfigured, a pass-through to the formal dining room was closed up to create an office and a living-room wall was removed to unite the main floor.

Certain elements were musts from the start. She wanted the chalkboard wall in the kitchen and the Christian Woo-designed king-size bed. He wanted the built-in espresso machine and gallery-style lighting for artwork. And, with twin toddler girls, they both wanted the space to be open and playful, with pops of colour—from the yellow-and-chrome pendant over the kitchen island to pink plastic chairs in the twins’ play area in the living room.

The whimsical colour palette (against a backdrop of gallery-white walls) actually stems from stained-glass windows original to the home. “The house spoke





**LIVING ROOM** It's in the mix: the sofa with rolled arms is a more traditional piece, but it's paired with edgy art and a contemporary carpet and lighting. **OUTDOOR ROOM** The raised deck, overlooking the *Secret Garden*-like backyard with towering Douglas firs that are among the city's tallest, is one of the homeowners' favourite spots. Bifold sliding doors offer instant access to the outside from the kitchen and dining area for seamless indoor/outdoor living.

to us a lot," says Francis. "We wanted it to be modern, but to keep the original feel of the house, too." Case in point: the ceramic antler chandelier in the front hallway, which sums it up for Barker—a "modern-rustic" style that's a twist on tradition.

The play between new and old is reiterated everywhere. Kitchen shelves, custom-designed by Barker, incorporate a minimalist take on corbels. The master bath has contemporary large-format tiles laid in a subway pattern, and the modern walnut vanity has a quartz countertop that looks like marble.

Throughout, the reno reveals details from the home's past. The mirror above the fireplace mantel is mottled, its age-old patina now a showpiece. The fir floor, patched up, shines with a darker stain. Old-school crystal knobs—many original—adorn each heritage door.

"We stripped away anything superfluous, even paint colours," says Barker, "and the house acts as a bit of a gallery for the couple's objects. It's a great canvas for them to play with." The couple even uses the home as gallery space, hosting parties alongside exhibitions of artwork on their walls.

The end result is bespoke—it's a century-old home tailored for a modern family. "We like the feeling of saving a piece of heritage and evolving it," says Francis, "rather than tearing it down and building something new." *wl* See SOURCES



**MASTER BEDROOM** Christian Woo (named "one to watch" in our 2010 Designers of the Year Awards) custom-designed the king-size bed with designer Andrew Barker. With no space for side tables, Barker put in a niche that takes the place of a traditional headboard.