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All in the Details

CLEAN-LINED LUXURY FOR A NEW HOUSE IN TORONTO



Architectural Design by Murakami Design/Interior Design by Powell & Bonnell
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For a Toronto couple, architectural designer Raymond Murakami fashioned a town house inspired by Louis XV-style buildings. ABOVE: “We faced the garage to the side—the front façade became like a garden pavilion,” explains Murakami.

ABOVE RIGHT: Designers David Powell and Fenwick Bonnell gave the residents a living room that serves multiple functions. Dark pillow fabric, Holly Hunt. OPPOSITE: The dining room. A 2002 work by Candida Höfer hangs at rear; a 1998 Igor Mitoraj sculpture is on the table. Powell & Bonnell Home chairs, with Donghia fabric.

David Powell and Fenwick Bonnell don’t so much design interiors for their clients as give them stories, fully fleshed-out spaces with history, meaning and, most of all, authenticity. Every choice is considered, every detail weighed. They conceived a new Toronto residence not merely as a European-style dwelling but as something far more specific: a 1930s or 1940s town house in a suburb of Paris that had been updated over the years.

The owners, a couple with grown children, were ready to leave their eclectically contemporary house in the suburbs and return to the city. “We wanted something very different from our other home,” says the wife. “We didn’t want any clutter; we wanted a sense of calmness and timelessness—but still functional.” Architectural designer Raymond Murakami, who’d worked previously with the couple, looked at the site and agreed that razing the existing structure would allow them to develop the property (they

split the 100-foot-wide lot in half and built two residences—one to live in and one to sell) while permitting them to put together what the wife calls “a very grown-up house.”

Murakami selected a buff Indiana limestone for the exterior, which, from the street, belies the structure’s generous proportions: In all, it encompasses some 9,000 square feet, from the third floor down to the basement. With its domered windows and French doors, the façade, he notes, is “very much like a contemporized version





ABOVE: More of the owners' art collection is in the study: An etching by Joan Miró is at left, and a 1975 Friedel Dzubas work is at rear. Sofa, Powell & Bonnell Home. J. Robert Scott pillow stripe. OPPOSITE: "Clerestory windows allow western light to flood into the kitchen," notes Powell. Barstool cushion fabric from Beacon Hill. Sub-Zero refrigerator. Wolf range; Thermador hood. Faucet, Kohler.

of the Louis XV vernacular." Setting the garage into a pavilion-like building along the street enabled landscape architect Ron Holbrook to devise a formal garden courtyard.

For the interiors, Powell and Bonnell listened to the couple's ideas, looked at the photographs they'd collected of houses (many with a definite Art Déco flavor) and came up with a concept evocative of the Moderne period. "The style had its roots in classicism," Powell explains, "but everything was pared back and

done in a restrained manner."

Intrinsic to their vision was the designers' desire to make the house look believable as a structure built some 70 years ago. "It was important that one wouldn't throw open the door and step into a very contemporary space," says Powell. The wood floors are a case in point. Wanting to replicate parquetry that would appear original to an older house, they installed milled reclaimed black ash. Adds Bonnell, "There was thought put into all the details."

The house takes on a more

informal attitude as one progresses from front to back. The marble-floored entrance hall leads to the dining room, where ebonized library cabinets and Italian crystal-and-brass chandeliers lend it a distinctly '40s sensibility. Holding art books and Lalique vases, the zebrawood table by the designers appears less a place for dining than for reading and conversation. Because the residents don't use the room for dining all the time, it functions more as a salon. "We felt strongly that we didn't want to walk in the

front door and see a room waiting for an event," says Powell. When the couple do entertain, the table is quickly put into service for 12, while on quiet winter evenings they can settle into two wing chairs before the fireplace for an intimate meal.

All along the rear of the house, the spaces, including the sleekly contemporary kitchen, open to covered terraces from which the residents and their guests can take in the views of downtown Toronto and Lake Ontario. But in the living room, where the owners





“David said, ‘The headboard is like Hollywood,’ and we said,

spend a great deal of time, the designers didn't want to show off the south-facing vistas all at once. They also wanted to create multiple conversation areas within what is a very ample space. Their solution was to place the sofas back to back and set a floating vellum screen between them. “Putting the screen on a pedestal was

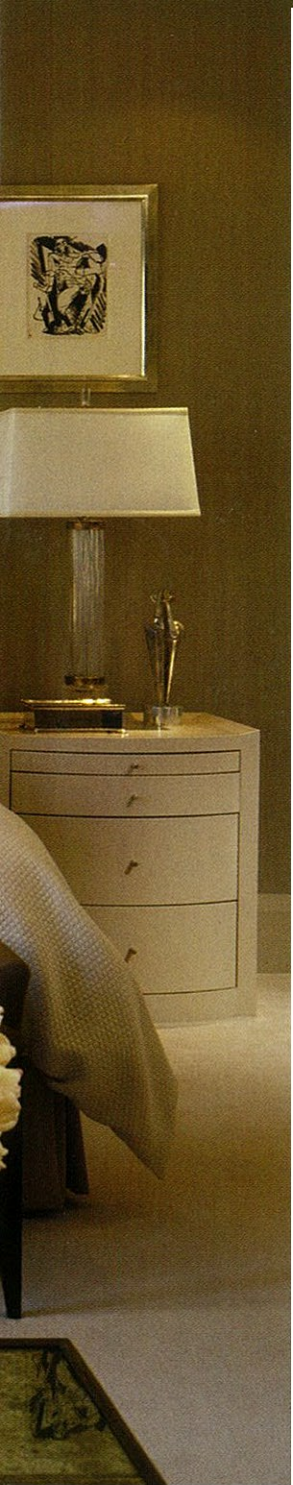
interesting: It's like a kimono stand—the idea of displaying something but also forming a backdrop,” says Bonnell. Continues Powell, “We're great believers in unveiling, to lead you through one space into the next. It was a fairly unusual thing to do, and it took a client with a rare degree of trust. We said, ‘People will always see the

view; it's just a matter of how you reveal it.’”

One of the best views from the property may well be from the wife's bath just upstairs, where an infinity-edge soaking tub ensures that it is also one of the house's most-used spaces. The adjacent master bedroom has its own enticements, such as cashmere up-

holstery fabric and a headboard framed in silver leaf. Recalls the wife, “David said, ‘The headboard is like Hollywood,’ and we said, ‘That's so not us.’ But it all came together, and the art is quiet.”

The couple are serious collectors of 20th-century works, and drawings, paintings and sculptures are displayed



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throughout—from the Joan Miró etching in the husband’s mahogany-paneled study to the Guy Dill bronze in the living room to the Hans Hofmann works on paper in the master bedroom. Furniture designed by Powell and Bonnell for the house or selected from the residents’ collection sits alongside antiques

and other objects. But whether purchased for the house or brought from the couple’s former residence, the hallmark is a clean-lined luxury that doesn’t detract from the spaces.

All agree that there was a free flow of ideas between the professionals on the project and that the clients provided a foundation upon which they could

build something special. After the house was finished, the owners hosted a midsummer dinner for friends. It was a chance for the designers to see that the story they’d conceived for the couple was complete. “It’s such a great place to entertain, and the guests were happy to be there,” Bonnell recalls. “It’s a very believable house.” □

ABOVE LEFT: “A massive silver-leaf-framed headboard adds a note of all-out glamour” to the master bedroom, says Bonnell. Drawings by Hans Hofmann, from 1933, flank the bed. Donghia headboard, drapery and bed skirt fabric. Chair fabric, J. Robert Scott. **ABOVE:** Travertine covers the master bath’s walls and floor. Tub and fixtures, Kohler.