

Redesigning HISTORY

CLASSIC ROSEDALE MANOR GETS A NEW LOOK



Photos by Ted Yarwood.

How does one undertake a renovation that is both new and original, while preserving the history and integrity of a classic residence? This is a question that I often encounter in downtown Toronto, where we have so many historic neighborhoods. Most people don't want to reside in a musty old home, yet much of the appeal inherent in purchasing these properties lies in their character, ambiance and Old World charms.

By Theresa Casey

In bridging these seemingly competing interests, my approach is fourfold: Develop a functional floor plan that respects the original plan and vision; conduct a material analysis of the space to see what is of value and its current condition; review the scale and proportion; and resolve how one wants to live in the space in accordance with the clients' interests and lifestyle. This is key to making the home your own. This featured project from a classic nineteenth century Rosedale home provides an ideal case study to illustrate these points.

FUNCTIONAL PLAN

I always tell my clients, whether building a dream home or sprucing up a laundry room, have a professional lay it out. Without a plan that works, it will never feel right. This is how I first came to work on this historically important drawing room, originally constructed in the 1850s. It simply didn't work – friends would arrive for an evening, wander in and out, ultimately winding up in the kitchen. Because of the size of this room, 40' x 20', we created two seating areas and a dining area in the main room, as well as a cozy seating area in the inglenook, while moving the grand piano to the window.

Creating zones or smaller rooms within the larger space broke down the unwieldy scale of the room, making this enormous area approachable and inviting. Large groups can gather in the back sitting area where chairs are easily pulled up, while more intimate gatherings can be had in the inglenook or around the fireplace. Dining was included with a friendly round table for six. This approach creates an experience of exploration as you navigate the room, enticing visitors to enjoy one area at a time, and rewarding the journey by piquing their curiosity as they move throughout. One of the preliminary plans featured a dining table for ten, but after much discussion we chose instead to incorporate an exquisite 1930s pedestal table with a starburst pattern on top.

Theresa Casey is the principal of Casey Design Group, an award-winning interior design firm specializing in personalized interiors that are comfortable and sophisticated. Theresa and her team practice a creative design process informed by careful observation, and nurtured through close collaboration with the clients, architect and contractor. caseydesignplan.com.



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MATERIAL ANALYSIS

This room features a fireplace from Scotland, an inglenook salvaged from Toronto's St. James Cathedral renovation, and a plaster ceiling design modeled on a manor house in Kent, England. The ceiling was in a poor condition so the contractor re-screwed it to the original ceiling and had three plasterers repair it to its original character. The challenge was how to address lighting, as there were no ceiling mounted fixtures. We could have attempted to carefully add pot lights, however this would have detracted from the beauty of the plasterwork and would have risked damaging the ceiling. We chose to add wall sconces and various table lamps around the room. This worked for the clients who were comfortable with the warm ambiance this provided. We also added lighting into the Palladian style cabinets to provide focus for the objects d'art, while offering a secondary light source.

We did alter the original plaster walls, covering them in rich ochre velvet panels. The room was originally painted white, and by adding the textured walls, we increased the warmth and coziness, while addressing issues with sound, as it previously had a cavernous feeling.

The art collection of this client was an important element that we carefully installed with a custom wire system hidden in the crown moulding by adding a simple cove moulding. This preserved the fabric walls as well as the original plaster walls should the clients ever choose to remove the fabric.

The original pine floors were sanded and stained. A more obvious choice would have been to put in new white oak hardwood, but we would lose the character and warmth of the soft pine. Boards this wide would have also been very costly to replace.

SCALE AND PROPORTION

The grandness of this room has obvious appeal, but lacked connection to a more human scale. Elements were added in order to give the room a balanced framework by breaking up very strong horizontal planes and adding vertical emphasis. We framed the bay window, French doors and large leaded glass window with 12' velvet corduroy drapes, softening the windows and adding a vertical columnar emphasis. Adding the large Tony Scherman encaustic portrait of Abe Lincoln created further intimacy in the dining area. This technique is mirrored with the grouping of art above the carved wall console, as they work together to create one large art piece.

CLIENT INTERESTS

My projects are ultimately a reflection of the clients' families and lifestyles. My first priority in developing a home for a client is to create a unique environment that you won't see anywhere else. What struck me about these clients was that they both had a passion for collecting, their lifestyle involved a lot of traveling that exposed them to a variety of aesthetics, and they were on two ends of the spectrum as to how they envisioned this room coming together. The wife leaned towards a traditional aesthetic and the husband wanted to move to something more contemporary and edgy. Differing points of view often occur



when working with a couple, but if it is worked through to resolution, it can be the turning point to make a project rich and unique.

The solution for this couple was to draw inspiration from the 1920s, '30s and '40s. These decades incorporate a traditional history of design, while simultaneously developing a contemporary core, drawing on a range of inspiration from African art and Eurocentric sensibility. The craftsmanship of this period was exemplary. My hunch was that these clients would enjoy the process of scouring the globe for key pieces of furniture from that period.

The results speak for themselves — the original Meret Oppenheim “Tracca” ostrich table, combined with an iron table from Paris master Rene Drouet, chairs from the collective “Dominique,” sconces by ceramic master Georges Jouve, and an outstanding Italian deco buffet with shagreen door panels, original vintage mirror top and elaborately carved legs mix together to create a room that is inviting, intriguing and endlessly satisfying. Each piece was chosen for its unique qualities and how they interact with each other. Of course, they have the added benefits of becoming part of this family's own history, ensuring that the story of a home once-mired in the 1850s continues to find a place in the 21st century.