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Before & After: There's a Light in the Attic of This Reimagined Toronto Row House

A triangular window was just the start—once this revamp got rolling, it transformed a family home from top to bottom.

Text by [Stacey McLachlan](#) Photos by [Riley Snelling](#)



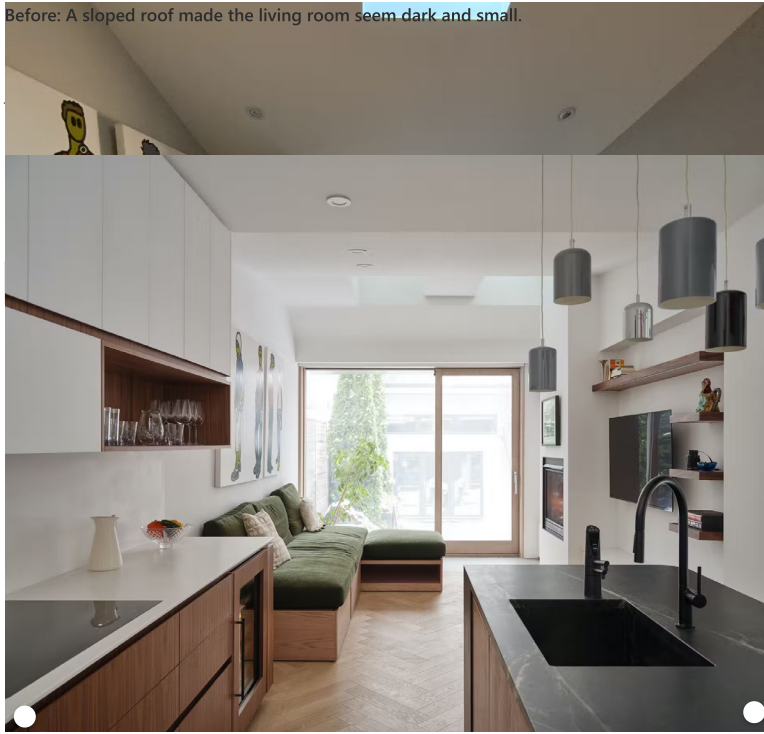
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There are a million design lessons to be learned from this Toronto renovation. But the most powerful may be this: Always get a second opinion.

After all, Shelley Simmons and Paul Haley (a creative director and a realtor, respectively) wouldn't be living in their dream space—a contemporary retrofit of a classic Victorian three-story row house—if they hadn't asked their friend, Claudia Bader, for her thoughts on their already-approved plan for finishing their third floor.

Before: Living Room

Before: A sloped roof made the living room seem dark and small.



Bader and team removed the slope-roofed extension at the back of the home and rebuilt it to full height. Bauhaus sliding doors connect the living space directly to the garden.

Photo Categories: living room, sofa, medium hardwood floors



The family sat on two dozen different sofas trying to find the right mix of comfort and sleekness before deciding custom was the way to go. A deep-cushioned, slim-backed piece—built by Luke Parsons Millwork—fits just right, and somehow makes the whole space just seem bigger. It also features pull-out footstools, a coffee table, and concealed storage for blankets. The custom upholstery is by The Big Stuff.

Photo Categories: living room, sofa, medium hardwood floors

Bader is the creative director of the local firm Creative Union Network, and as it turns out...she had some opinions. "There was no spatial quality, no real consideration for light, and no consideration for what they wanted from the space," she says. And so, Bader took over the project with a far more ambitious game plan.

The former attic would become a 650-square-foot multipurpose oasis that would serve as Shelly and Paul's bedroom—but also a yoga studio, office, and lounge, complete with a spa-like bathroom. The couple were so inspired by Bader's work that soon the renovation plans expanded to include the second floor, which holds the bedrooms of kids Finn and Inès, and the ground floor, where the main living areas are located.

Before: Kitchen



Before: The home's flow needed a vast improvement.



Before: The kitchen had fresh cabinets, but a strange layout.

After: Kitchen



Super-matte white plastic laminate upper cabinets blend with the walls to give the illusion that the space is wider than its 16 feet. The lower cabinets are finished with a rich walnut veneer, and topped with Glacier White Corian countertops. Concealed sockets from Bocci add to the sleek, minimalist effect, while a soapstone slab on the island adds a welcoming warmth. "The island is where everyone sits—for breakfast, for snacks, for working," says Bader. "You don't want a surface that's polished and cold."

But it's that third floor—the one that kicked off the whole project—that really is the crown jewel. "We call it the apartment," laughs Shelley. "When we close the pocket door, we escape from the kids. We're self-sustained—it's a separate sanctuary." Since there's no attic anymore, the rain isn't muted when it comes down—a surprise sonic feature that Shelley says adds to the coziness.

Before: Stairwell



Before: A traditional staircase led to the second floor.

After: Stairwell

The streamlined design and storage has prompted the family to live in a more minimalist way. "It's so nice to live without so much stuff. There is more storage to put things—but because it feels so good to have a calmer space, it pushes us to lean in and declutter."

Photo Categories: storage room, cabinet storage type



The white oak hardwood staircase between the main and second floor were installed by RK Woodworking. A plywood, MDF-finished guardrail is painted white to match the walls, and the handrail features an integrated LED strip light.



A perforated-steel stair and a glass guardrail help make the skinny, second-floor hallway feel as open as possible.

Photo Categories: hallway, light hardwood floors



The perforated staircase is as steady as a rock.

Photo Categories: staircase, metal tread, glass railing



Before: The first floor was blocked off by a fireplace.

After: The Front Room

"This house has so many fireplaces," says Bader with a laugh. The team sourced two gas and one woodburning, fireplaces from Fireplace Stop.

Photo Categories: living room, ceiling lighting, sofa, chair

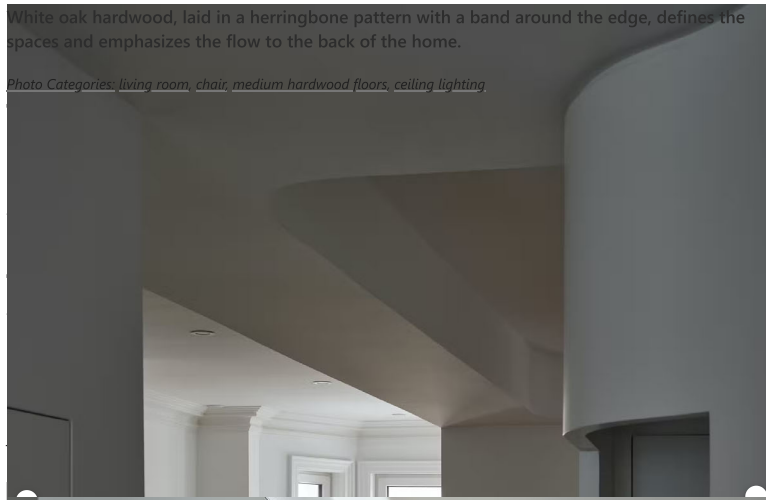


The woodburning fireplace on the main floor adds so much ambiance that Shelley says she finds herself wishing for cooler days so she can light it up.

Photo Categories: living room, wood burning fireplace, sofa

White oak hardwood, laid in a herringbone pattern with a band around the edge, defines the spaces and emphasizes the flow to the back of the home.

Photo Categories: living room, chair, medium hardwood floors, ceiling lighting



Corian countertops and super-matte white cabinets keep the powder room feeling crisp and clean.

Photo Categories: bath room, drop in sinks

This effect is enhanced by the LED strips that line the stairway. Bader (gently) pushed for the family to incorporate accent lighting like this as much as possible. "Paul was worried the place would be dark, but I said listen: It's a house, not an office," recalls

Bader. "You want overhead lights for cleaning your house, but otherwise, you want mood light."

You'll find a soft glow in the kitchen above the windows, integrated into the bathroom cabinetry, lining the fireplace and the staircase, and accenting other moments in the home. "The family only turns those strips on. That's their main lighting."

To round off the renovation, the team gave the kids' bedrooms on the second story a material refresh (with crisp white paint, new millwork, and white oak flooring), and they rebalanced the ground-floor living area by shrinking the oversized kitchen and establishing a cohesive open-concept layout.

After: The New Third Floor



At one end, there's a stunning view of West Toronto; the other side overlooks a vibrant alleyway. "We see garages and houses...a patchwork of people's interests," says Shelley.

This cylindrical fireplace has windows on the side, so the flickering flames are visible from multiple angles.

Photo Categories: bath room, drop in sinks



Paul pushed hard for a laundry chute from the third floor. The door is concealed in the custom bedside drawers.

Photo Categories: bedroom, bed, wall lighting



Since this photo was taken, the couple have placed a desk in the triangular window nook and use the perch as a workspace. "There's just something about it that hugs you," says Shelley. "I feel very focused and relaxed when I'm here."



The bathroom toward the front of the building had a greater width than the staircase. Rather than having a notch, Bader curved the wall. "It gave it flow instead of an abrupt change of direction," she says. The trick is replicated in the kitchen on the main level, where a curved ceiling disguises a pesky bulkhead.

Photo Categories: bedroom, bed



Photo Categories: [bath room](#), [enclosed showers](#)

Though the design of this home may have been sparked by a last-minute consultation, the results aren't simply a punch-up: They're a revelation. "When friends tour the space, every time without fail they're like 'Whoa,'" says Shelly. "It's so honest and profound...it's almost an overwhelming delight. And I get it."