



A Tale of Two Renos

Different homes with different problems and two different, livable solutions

By Judy Ross

Home renovations are as varied as the homeowners who undertake them. They can be one-room makeovers or complete, top-to-bottom transformations but large or small, their common goal is improvement.

The following case studies are classic examples of home renos that have ably met that goal. Two architects were brought in to tackle two different sets of design problems in two very different ways. But in each case, sound planning and clear communication between client and architect produced attractive, practical, lasting results. And the improvements speak for themselves.

A stately mansion classically restored

The house, an Edwardian classic in midtown Toronto, had superb proportions, great character and a certain grandeur. It had, after all, been built in 1905 by E.J. Lennox, the architect who designed such striking buildings as Old City Hall and Casa Loma, among other Toronto landmarks. The Lennox trademark of outsized rooms was evident when the owners bought the house in 1980, but it had been subjected to a heavy-handed redecorating job that cloaked much of its classic beauty. Dark heavy panelling and gaudy flocked paper covered most of the walls and the kitchen had been crammed with commercial-size appliances. Architect Julian Jacobs, of Julian Jacobs Architects Ltd., was hired by the owners to give the entire house a face-lift. Jacobs says it was a job "of subtle renovations. The basic structure was excellent so we didn't make any major changes—what we did was more like a finesse."

The finesse in this case is quite a remark-

able achievement. The renovation, completed seven years ago, has endured in both a practical sense (nothing has had to be replaced or refurbished) and a design sense (the timeless elegance of the space continues to appear fresh and modern). Jacobs' belief in the enduring quality of classic design is evident throughout the house. He prefers to use a "restricted palette" and wherever possible, repeat the same materials and decorative elements to provide continuity and

flow from room to room.

Jacobs says there was a three-part mandate when he began the renovation of the vast 9,000-square-foot house: make it a comfortable, livable family home for the owners and their three children; make the house suitable for entertaining large groups with ease; and at the same time, create a showcase for the family's extensive collection of contemporary art. The house itself had to fade into the background and allow



The kitchen was remodelled to simplify traffic patterns, add a centre island, and create a passageway between the maid's staircase and a back entrance. Ceiling pine carries into the adjoining breakfast room, as does the Mexican ceramic floor tile. The owners' basket collection adds interest above the white laminate cabinets



In the breakfast room (top), walls were cut down to just over 3 feet overlooking the back entrance so the owners can keep an eye on their children from the office nook. A new window brightens the stairwell. The room enjoys a garden view, space for a family breakfast table, and to the right a wide doorway leads to the kitchen

A gracious master bedroom suite (bottom) was created by combining two side-by-side bedrooms and moving the entrance to the sitting room area. Architect Julian Jacobs designed the lacquered headboard, cantilevered end tables and footboard. Echoing their curved lines are two Italian art deco wall lamps over the bed

the art to dominate. "A gallery for living in," is how Jacobs describes his aim. By choosing a crisp white paint to cover all the walls, ceilings, window shutters and wood trim, Jacobs achieved his goal of an unobtrusive backdrop, with repetitive design features reinforcing that desired sense of comfort throughout the house.

The repetition of design is, according to Jacobs, as important as the "choice of elegant details which will stand the test of time." To illustrate his theory he points to the handsome radiator covers which are repeated in every room. Jacobs designed these using a lacquered aluminum horizontal grill and a custom-crafted wooden casing with beautifully proportioned cornice and plinth details. The design of the home's four fireplaces is another unifying subtlety. Using the softly

curved white marble of the original living room fireplace as inspiration, the architect installed travertine surrounds, mantels and hearths for the remaining three fireplaces, interpreting the sensuous curves of the living room example to give each one a simplified art deco look.

Small details, sometimes barely noticed, make a big difference. For instance, all the doorknobs are made of white porcelain and on every window, the classic white lacquered shutters boast a scaled-down version of the same white porcelain knob. Deep layered baseboards and wide window and door trim, part of the original house detail and already in proportion to the room and window sizes, were restored throughout to perfection.

Although the basic room configuration remained the same, some doorways were moved or widened to improve traffic patterns, and heavy double doors inset with glass panels were removed to open up space. The newly installed lighting, much of it pot or track lighting, had to be flexible enough that a painting could be hung and highlighted on any wall. High-quality, commercial-grade carpet in a taupe tweed was installed throughout the house, providing a neutral backdrop for vivid area rugs from India and Persia.

The kitchen area again reflects the architect's "restricted palette" philosophy. Hand-made Mexican floor tiles continue from the kitchen into the breakfast room and down the basement stairs. Ceiling pine carries into the breakfast room as does the white Corian countertop and kitchen ledge detail. Baseboards throughout in matching 4-inch tiles are both practical and attractive and add to the sense of unified three-dimensional space.

The transformation of the kitchen from an unworkable, cramped space to an inviting one involved more structural change. "We wanted to create a feeling of spaciousness in what was essentially not a very large area," explains Jacobs. He centred the 15- by 11-foot space with a wood-topped island and moved the cupboard wall three feet forward to create a passageway from the basement door to the maid's staircase. A sheet of tempered glass behind the stove and open space above the cabinets give the illusion that the passageway, while separate, is part of the kitchen. The lowered cabinet tops add height to the room and provide a perfect display area for the owners' basket collection, and Jacobs converted a broom closet beneath the maid's staircase into a walk-in pantry.

Before the renovation the poky breakfast area had only one virtue—a commanding view of the garden. With a widened doorway from the kitchen, walls cut down