

HOME *by* design™

DECOR | GARDEN | TRAVEL

AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | 2009

A bright, airy dining room with a white table, woven chairs, and a large chandelier. The room features a large window with a view of trees, a white vase with a plant on the table, and a white door with a glass panel. The floor is light-colored wood or tile.

SMALL-SPACE LIVING

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Designer Céline Pitre transforms a mid-century track home into a brilliant gallery and spot for parties.

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LIGHT FANTASTIC

A MID-CENTURY TRACK HOME IS TRANSFORMED
INTO A BRILLIANT GALLERY AND SPOT FOR PARTIES

Vancouver, BC-based interior designer Céline Pitre has big vision and a vivacious personality that gets things done. So when two close friends—a married couple without children—kept asking her to review new homes for potential purchase, she obliged. But after the sixth house was rejected by the couple, she came to the conclusion that they were actually quite happy in their own neighborhood—but they hated their house. “Well, never mind,” said Pitre. “We can fix that.”

WRITTEN BY ROBYN ROEHM CANNON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HEATHER ROSS



And so began a year-long journey of revitalizing the potential of their simple mid-century bungalow. Thanks to Pitre's vision combined with the design talents of her architect husband, Alan Endall, it's now the perfect house in the perfect neighborhood for these two active professionals.

The wife, a southern California native, missed the sunshine and wanted to maximize the light, even on cloudy Northwest days. She craved a home that opened to the outdoors and easily accommodated gatherings of up to a hundred friends and colleagues throughout the year.

The couple also desired a space that felt like a small private gallery, with a grander sense of volume, high ceilings, dramatic lighting sources, and wall space on which to display their collection of contemporary paintings.

Achieving this airy, uncluttered, and connected environment required some drastic changes from the rabbit warren of small rooms that made up the home's original floor plan. So the

architect and designer proposed that their friends become clients, and on December 26—Canada's Boxing Day—they interviewed the couple, photographed the house inside and out, and took hundreds of as-built measurements.

"We talked to them extensively about what they wanted to achieve in their new home, and they both shared the same vision," says Pitre. "Then we worked around the clock over the next week to see what we could get out of the existing space.

"It was a lot of fun, because Alan and I worked across the desk from one another and played off each other's ideas. Our process was like: 'Well, what if we did this?' 'And if we do that, look at the opportunity it creates.' 'And, oh, what about this?' 'Yeah, let's do that.'

"One idea just led us to another, and when we were finished, we had created a beautifully connected floor plan that moved gracefully from front to back and really worked for all their requirements."





CÉLINE PITRE'S TIPS FOR SURVIVING A MAJOR RENOVATION

1. Move out of the house while renovations are underway. These clients moved to Australia and, therefore, didn't have to panic when the roof was being ripped off and bulldozers destroyed the backyard.
2. Install a Web cam on site to see action every day while you are living somewhere else.
3. Assign only one person to communicate with consultants/general contractor/trades.
4. Ask your architect to prepare a Master Plan, and include all the work you want to complete, even if you intend to do it in phases. Then, order all goods while available. This will allow you to get what you want while product is available and prevent delays, last-minute panics, and compromises.
5. Budget for everything in advance, in addition to the construction, including design and engineering fees, landscaping, lighting, furniture, area rugs, accessories, artwork, dishes, linens, etc. Prioritizing between your wants and your needs will allow the end product to be consistent.
6. The type of contract you sign is important. Often, a "cost-plus" contract is the only way a contractor is willing to do the work, which allows him to make a percentage on everything you build. You should be aware that it does not encourage him to keep the budget down.
7. Scrutinize the general contractor's budget. Look for the requirements that have not been addressed, and don't be afraid to ask for clarification.
8. Be consistent in your communications. If you say your budget is \$400,000, stick to it or no one will respect your budget guidelines.

On New Year's Day, the couples met again in the old dining room, a small space in the front of the house with little natural light. The revised design concept placed the new dining area next to a dramatic NanaWall of four eight-foot-high glass panels, which slide open along the entire back of the house to connect to a spacious deck and garden terrace on warm days.

A streamlined kitchen with professional-grade appliances, ample counter space, and a prep island sink that doubles as a wet bar and beverage cooler is just steps away in what was once a bedroom office. At the end of the counter, a resin "slot vase" by renowned Canadian sculptor Martha Sturdy receives various floral arrangements throughout the seasons.

The dining and living rooms now have a twelve-foot-high ceiling ringed by clerestory awning windows that ventilate as well as flood the room with natural light. "I call it California north," says the wife. "The sun just radiates the interior. It glows."

Small, clever details abound: A travertine wall encases a fireplace with a combination hearth and seat wall the length of the living room to accommodate more guests, and a large contemporary painting slides on a hidden pulley system to reveal a television niche behind.

"Our clients were shocked at all this space could yield," says Pitre. "I remember the husband jumping out of his chair during

our presentation and exclaiming, 'You mean I can have that?' When we told him that indeed he could, he was ecstatic. 'That's exactly what I want! Do it!' And that was it. Today, they're thrilled. It was one of our most gratifying projects ever."

"Every house has some basic structural elements that inform how you go about replanning it," comments Endall. "By enlarging the openings on both ends, we maximized the light. The lower wall outside continues right through the house, acting as a strong organizational element, reinforcing the line of sight and connection to the garden. It's a formal approach to designing on an axis."

Subtle changes such as entering the house from the side instead of the front and lowering the ceiling in the entryway to emphasize the main room's scale provide interesting counterpoints in the contemporary layout.

"When guests enter, we want them to feel like they're in a secret spot," says the wife. "Then, go around the corner, and bam—there's the whole space. It's cozy and dramatic all at once." ■