

A HOME FOR ALL SEASONS

BY NANCY BELGUE // PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON HARTOG

White, bright and dramatic, the
main floor is filled with light.

“After three years, I still don’t know which season I like best,” says Fran, the homeowner, referring to the view from the glass enclosed living room of her “tree house.”

“Yesterday there was a gush of wind and I yelled at the kids to come see,” she says. “It was cascading orange and yellow all around. It was phenomenal. But winter’s magical as well. In winter we see the sparkle of downtown through the bare branches. We don’t get grey, slushy views. It’s always a winter wonderland.”

By 2007, with the addition of two children, Fran and her husband Mark had outgrown their 2,000 sq. ft. home in the suburbs. When they began house hunting they knew they wanted something different. “I’ve always wanted to live in a glass house,” says Fran.

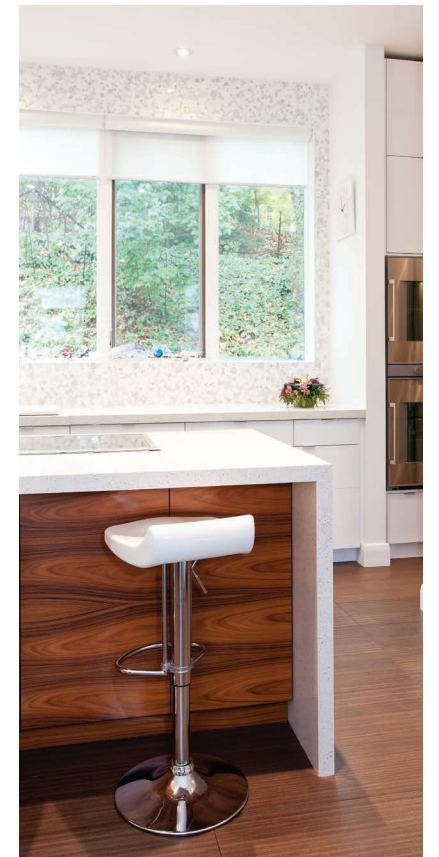
When they saw the forested property in London’s west end, they loved the setting but could see that the original house wouldn’t work for a growing family. As soon as the deal closed, they began the search for the right people to help them realize their vision of a futuristic, family-friendly home that maximized the unique landscape. Their search led them to an open house kitchen tour where they were introduced to architect **Brad Skinner** of **Skinner & Skinner Architects Inc.** by builder **Scott Brown (Brownstone Design and Build)**. Slowly but surely the dream team came together. “We had interviewed four builders before Scott and couldn’t find the person we wanted,” says Fran. “Clearly the

lot was a challenge and the original house needed a total renovation, but all that any of the other builders could see were the roadblocks. Scott was different.”

“I do a lot of listening,” comments architect Brad Skinner. “My goal is to understand and hear what the owner wants to achieve. The design process evolves over time. Sometimes it can take months to get to a final design.”

Originally, Mark felt he needed another 1,000 sq. ft., but Skinner advised against expanding the original footprint. “And he was right,” says Mark. “Not once since I moved in, have I wished I had more space.”

It’s clear that the natural world had a starring role in the re-invention of what started out as a traditional, dark and chopped up 1970s raised ranch. “The site is so fantastic,” says Skinner. “There are views and light from all directions and I wanted to make the most of what the property has to offer. The most difficult thing about renovating is creating a cohesive design. It’s about working to blend the existing structure with the new.” *Continued on page 39*



A night view highlights the home’s unique exterior architectural details to perfection. **OPPOSITE TOP LEFT:** The dining room chandelier is like a giant snowball. **BOTTOM LEFT:** The homeowners and their architect Brad Skinner (seated, on right) enjoy a moment in the sun-filled living room. **TOP RIGHT:** The kitchen window provides views of deer, rabbits and wild turkeys. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** The remote controlled skylight helps create a “stack effect” that eliminates the need for air conditioning.





The master en suite has floor to ceiling teak in the shower area. The sleek faucet is by Zucchetti. All floors are heated. **OPPOSITE TOP:** An inviting nook on the ground level. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM:** Each bedroom has at least one floor-to-ceiling window.



The first phase of the renovation addressed how the home was set into the property. The original home was reduced to the foundation and joists. Not one interior wall on the main floor was retained and the footprint was reconfigured so that the home was turned back to front.

The exterior, constructed of glass, white stucco and accented with ipe, a tropical hardwood, strikes the perfect balance of modern, sleek and warm. "The kids know we live in a different house," says Fran. "They draw pictures of a square box and say we live in a forest." Also outside, a cabana by the pool constructed of clear cedar from **Copp's Buildall** is a favourite summer spot.

The interior is stark and yet warm at the same time. The white walls form a perfect backdrop for art (**Thielsen Gallery**). "I love white," says Fran. "I can't get away from white. But with white it's really important to add texture."

Texture is added through the use of wood – rosewood in the kitchen by **Martin Jesko Custom Cabinetry**, spalted maple in the living room's fireplace bench and walnut in the entryway staircase by **Roth Design Inc.** Quartz countertops (**Bernardo Group Ltd.**) add a natural, organic element to the kitchen while sleek European-design appliances like a Gaggenau cooktop and a Liebherr refrigerator make cooking fun and energy efficient.

The main floor is divided by a two-sided fireplace (**Guildwood Lighting & Fireside**) built into a chimney wall that artfully contains the home's electrical, plumbing and ventilation systems (**Accu-Heat/Cool Heating & Air Conditioning**). It's an example of the type of design solution that allowed the homeowners to adhere to the purity of their minimalist esthetic, but it's also a clever structural feature that grounds the space and keeps the dining room and living room private all the while maintaining the open concept layout. *Continued on page 40*



TOP RIGHT: The main floor playroom has an entire wall of chalkboard for creative play. **MIDDLE RIGHT:** Fran decorated Isabella's bedroom for her eighth birthday. She created the art from a photograph of her daughter and the help of SCL Digital Print in London. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** The main floor powder room sink was a creative design solution. It is four feet by nine inches and wall-mounted to meet the challenges of a small space. **BELOW:** When she couldn't find what she wanted, Fran made the headboard in her daughter's room after watching a "how-to" video on You Tube.



The homeowners are also thrilled with their state-of-the-art sound system. There are no cables in the living room. There is an iPod docking station on the wall and one remote that controls everything. They credit **Mike Philbrook** of **Multi Media Systems** for his "out of the box" solutions to the many challenges of wiring the home upstairs, downstairs and outside from a single source.

The décor is the couple's very personal statement. "We wanted a blank canvas," Fran says. "We wanted to bring the outside in." With that in mind, the home is sparsely furnished. Each piece of furniture, such as the wooden sideboard in the dining room, has been selected with care and a view to longevity.

Fran has just finished decorating her daughter's room with hand-sewn bunting and an Andy Warhol-esque photograph. "I did it all myself," she says when asked if she had help with her interiors. "My philosophy is buy what you like. Everything matched in my first house but my attitude has evolved since then. I know now that I want my home to look curated. I want it to reflect us. I want it to contain things that have meaning for me and my family."

It's a home that does just that. It's a home not only for all seasons of the year, but also for all the seasons in a family's life together. **OH**

