



Most homes are built to keep nature at a distance. But most homes aren't designed by **Bradley Skinner**. The principal of London's **Skinner & Skinner Architects Inc.** is known for creating clean open spaces with plenty of natural light and a connection to the great outdoors.



TOP: Darren and Cindy Smyth with Maddy, 9, and Cameron, 6, at the family's favourite gathering place. **BOTTOM:** Comfy, slip-covered bar stools add textural contrast to linear elements in the kitchen work space. Vivid art (supplied by Thielsen Gallery) in the dining area and striking walnut woodwork pop against white walls. **OPPOSITE:** Open, light-filled space defines the home, in the foyer and throughout.



BY NICOLE LAIDLER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON HARTOG

SERENE SIMPLICITY

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And that is exactly what Darren and Cindy Smyth were looking for when they decided to move their young family from a traditional country home near Aylmer, southeast of London, to a modern oasis in the city.

"I was always a fan of minimalism," says Darren. "Living in a space that is so open feels different from living in a more traditional house." It was a big change, he says, but one that the family has embraced.

Although the couple purchased the empty lot in the spring of 2011, Skinner had been sketching ideas for the property for about a decade. He knew the property because he used to live across the street. He had also built other homes nearby. "It's a funny lot," he notes. "Not only was it a challenging shape, but there were other obstacles in the way."

Located on a quiet cul-de-sac, next to the Thames Valley Golf Course, the lot is long and narrow with a steep incline. "You couldn't put any sort of standard house here," says Skinner. "But I always knew if someone was willing to make opportunities out of the challenges, the results would be fantastic."

The Smyths were happy to give Skinner free rein to come up with a design that would work. "It needed to be family friendly. We have two small children, so we had to keep that in mind," says Cindy.

The Smyths moved into their new house in May, 2012, and as in any family residence, the kitchen, great room and dining room are at the heart of daily life.

Those three living areas make up almost the entire ground floor of the 2,600 sq. ft. house. But thanks to the use of floor-to-ceiling commercial grade windows, installed by **Glass Canada Limited**, and a sleek floating staircase encased in glass and featuring a custom railing by **Roestenberg Welding Ltd.**, the impression is of one continuous open space.

In fact, Cindy can stand at her kitchen sink and see right through her home to the front door porch, or the backyard fence.

White walls, painted Benjamin Moore Chalk White, complete the sense of openness and tranquility, while wide, white oak floorboards, supplied by **Townsend Lumber Mills**, and installed by **Roth Design Inc.**, warm the space. **Todd Gregg Carpentry** did the trim work throughout.

The kitchen, designed by **Martin Jesko Custom Cabinetry**, is anchored by an oversized centre island in white and grey quartz from **Bernardo Group Ltd.**

TOP LEFT: Glass and exterior brickwork establish a commanding street presence. **TOP RIGHT:** Mid-century Herman Miller dining chairs were found at an auction and the table, also Herman Miller, at Facility Resources. Andy Roth's wood-tread stairway is an architectural stand out. **BELOW LEFT:** An antique work bench, and a period fan make an unexpected statement in the modern space. **BELOW RIGHT:** A unit between the foyer and living areas features plenty of storage. **RIGHT:** The living area is handy to the kitchen, great for family time or casual entertaining. **FAR RIGHT:** Architect Brad Skinner (left) with Darren and Cindy Smyth.



The open-concept design means there is no separation between the cooking area and great room, although a dropped ceiling in the kitchen defines the space and creates a sense of intimacy.

Appliances, from **Goemans Appliances**, are cleverly tucked away, with a Thermador refrigerator hidden behind white panelling, and a Bosch dishwasher camouflaged behind walnut veneer. The microwave and other kitchen appliances are kept in the large pantry along one wall.

Upholstered bar stools and the family room sofa, all from **Lilly Home & Design**, made the move from the couple's old home, while an antique school-work bench, recently purchased from **Lucan Architectural Antique Market**, does double duty as a wine bar and toy storage. An abstract painting from **Kingsmill's** provides the great room with a visual focal point. *Continued on page 34*

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One thing that seems to be missing from the Smyth home is storage, but in fact there's plenty of space for knick-knacks and winter coats, thanks to an ingenious dividing wall between the entrance hall and dining room (Martin Jesko Custom Cabinetry).

"Martin tucked in cupboards wherever he could," says Cindy. "We even have drawers for our shoes."

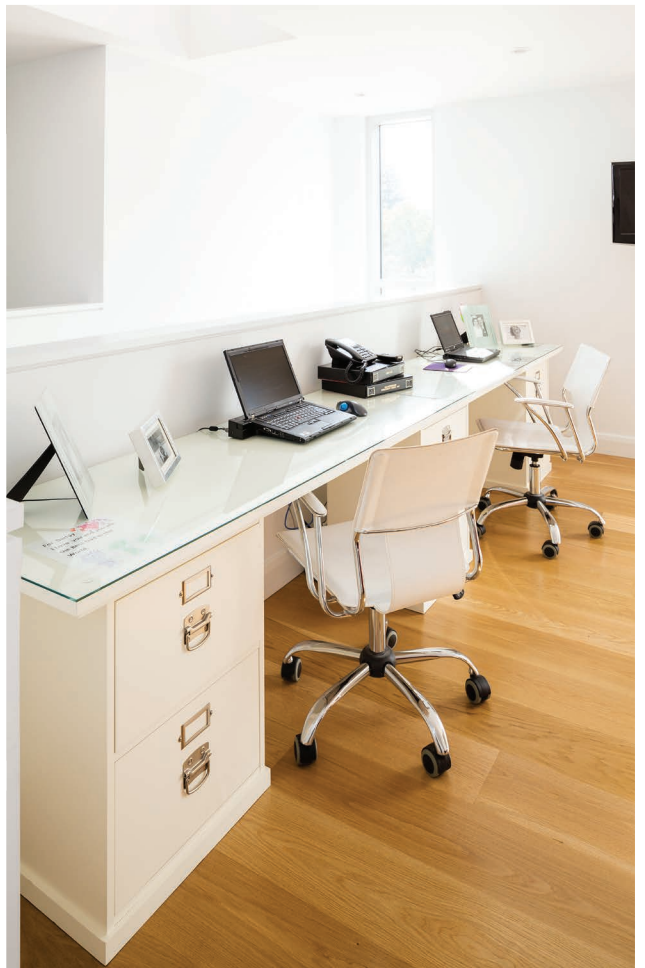
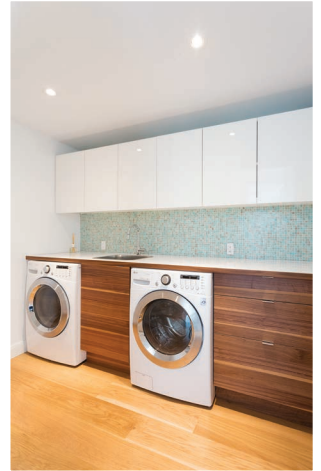
The couple needed a home office, which is found at the top of the stairs. The large space feels like a loft and leads directly into the children's wing, which features a bathroom, large laundry room, and two light-filled bedrooms.

"Brad (Skinner) wanted to make sure that both bedrooms had a window facing out front and a window that faced the golf course so that they each have a nice view," notes Cindy.

The master suite, located on the opposite side of the office area, provides plenty of privacy and wonderful views over the backyard.

A turquoise, brown and grey ceramic tile backsplash gives the master bathroom, with fixtures by [London Bath Centre](#), a Mediterranean feel. The wall features a clever cut out, providing an external view and natural light. "We tried to create a high-end boutique hotel feel," explains Cindy.

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TOP: Simple, clean lines and luxurious yet practical finishes continue in the kids' bathroom as well as the upper level laundry room, handy to the bedrooms. **ABOVE LEFT & LEFT:** Skinner designed the kids' bedrooms, which both feature floor-to-ceiling windows, to be light-filled spaces with ample room for play, homework, reading and hanging out with friends. **ABOVE:** Darren and Cindy's upper-level home office at the top of the stairway neatly separates the master suite from the other bedrooms.



LEFT: The colourfully accented master bedroom overlooks the living room below, as well as the home's treed backyard. **BELOW LEFT:** The master bath is high on style and function. There is a cut-out in the tiled wall that allows for extra light, and a practical two-sink vanity offering plenty of storage underneath. **BELOW:** The Smyth residence is stunning after dark when the interior's glow heightens architectural beauty inside and out.



The bedroom loft overlooks the great room, where the cut-out ceiling soars to 18 feet. The king size platform bed from **EQ3** is nestled between two Jesko-designed floating end tables. Wiring for the flat-screen television is buried in the walls, completing the sleek, uncluttered look.

The home's grey brick exterior, laid by **Franssen Bros. Masonry**, is just as sleek, with rain pipes and gutters that run through the house. A large cement patio provides ample space for al fresco dining in the summer, while **Eden Gardenworks** designed a landscaping plan featuring pyramidal hornbeam trees and a patio stone walkway. The Smyths love the sense of privacy in the backyard as well as the wonderful sense of space inside.

The couple enjoyed the design process so much, they've decided to sell their new home and take on another project nearby. Nevertheless, Darren adds, "We've loved this house and it has proven great for our family."

"People in the area thought the lot was not buildable and would just sit vacant," says Skinner. "It just shows that a client with some imagination can take a challenge and turn it into something wonderful." **OH**