

A photograph of a modern, glass-walled house at dusk. The house features a prominent glass facade that reflects the interior lights and the surrounding environment. A large, white, rectangular chimney-like structure rises from the roof. The house is situated next to a body of water, which reflects the building and the sky. The sky is a deep blue, and the interior lights of the house are on, creating a warm glow. The title "Cool & Confident" is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.

# Cool & Confident

Modern comforts  
abound in an  
artistically inspired  
custom home

BY **MARY HATT**

UNTIL YOU SEE IT, it's difficult to comprehend how a wine cellar could have been the inspirational starting point. But once you do, it's easy to understand why the owners of a sensational new London home envisioned this stunning, glass-walled cellar that commands attention from all corners of the open-concept main floor.

They'd seen the likes of it while vacationing in the Southwestern United States and were determined to replicate a similar design as an artistic focal point for the home of their dreams. Architect Brad Skinner and designer Myra Tuer worked with them over a two-year period, incorporating their ideas and challenging them to new levels of sophistication. The couple responded eagerly.

The result? A place that's as much a piece of art as it is a home. "It's not often that we in the design profession have the opportunity to work as a team in this way—with clients who are so open and able to involve such creativity," Skinner says. "It was fantastic to see this dream realized."

Tuer, who chose all interior finishes and furnishings, adds, "I have been absolutely



PHOTOGRAPHY: LESLIE COATES, SKINNER & SKINNER ARCHITECTS INC.

On the owners' wish list was a wine cellar that would also stand as a piece of art. They got it in the form of a glass and mahogany room created by Toronto-based The Wine Establishment. Interior lighting was tempered to conform with temperature requirements for correct wine storage and the mahogany stain was specially prepared to prevent the chance of cork damage from chemical off-gassing

passionate about this house. We were a full team of four, meeting once a week for months. We all loved this project just like the birth of a baby."

And a very special "baby" it is, artfully crafting a blend of clean-lined elegance and high-performing functionality both inside and out. Constructed by Aleck Harasym on an infill lot in Old North, its massive stone piers set at regular intervals on the exterior walls create what appears as a very modern façade. But, as Skinner notes, the piers are elements of classic architectural style that set rhythm and proportion for the entire home.

Inside, that rhythm repeats subtly in the structure of walls and skylights and in the dimensions of open spaces. There are Warton stone floors cut to the look of hardwood planks, dense and rich Sapele mahogany trim and bold furniture pieces designed by Tuer and handcrafted by William Tyssen Furniture and Millwork. Gutsy floor to ceiling windows line the back outside walls, allowing light to flood the L-shape floor plan and opening it to the garden and decorative infinity pool.



PHOTOGRAPHY: ISSUE COATES, SKINNER & SKINNER ARCHITECTS INC.



ABOVE: Art Lierman provided the landscape architecture. Simple lines continue in the design of the infinity pool as well as the large stone patio

LEFT: The wide-bed gas flame fireplace forms the wall at the end of the room opposite the wine cellar, matching its strength. The living room opens from the front foyer, for which Tuer designed a three-foot square glass-topped mahogany table with legs tapering to the floor and a base below the glass on which to display art. The room's taupe-influenced cream palette gets a hearty blast of colour from David Sorensen's stunning Red Orange—Green Divide, one of two of his paintings in the home purchased through the Michael Gibson Gallery. Tuer chose white wool to cover William Tyssen-built seating in the living room. Tyssen also built the coffee table using a cut of Wiarton Eramosa limestone grounded by Sapele mahogany and a multi-layered cream shag carpet



Proportions in the home are comfortable and restful. But it is a simplicity that belies meticulous planning on the parts of Skinner and Tuer. Skinner started the process by using Lake Huron's magnificence for inspiration, sketching his initial plans at a beachside cottage. He then went on to months of refinement using 3D architectural design software. Tuer recalls jumping through hoops to plan the lighting perfectly. For instance, she had to know well ahead of time exactly where to place ceiling pots designed to cast light on the objet d'art sitting on a base under the glass-topped mahogany hall table. Then, working with Michael Gibson to choose art for the entire home, she had to know in advance which pieces would hang where so she could specify correct illumination in her

plans. Tuer wanted up-lighting set into the front foyer floor to show off Harold Klunder's massive abstract, *Machines of Change* (The Germ and the Seed). It meant careful jockeying around the in-floor heating system. "I'm sure the electricians just rolled their eyes," Tuer chuckles. "My lighting plan may have looked like a bad case of the measles on paper, but lighting just can't be an afterthought."

Thorough planning paid off again when it came to choosing interior finishes. Before getting started, Tuer decided on a simple palette from which most selections, with the exception of soft furnishings, were made: the Sapele mahogany, glass, metal and the Warton stone make an appearance in every room.

Organizing a functional kitchen that makes such an artistic statement also required considerable forethought. "It can be very challenging to bring practicality to a clean, contemporary design," she explains. "That's why we decided to include a butler's pantry adjacent to the kitchen."

The pantry includes a large refrigerator and lots of storage space for groceries. Functioning as a prep area with a coffee maker, trash compactor and second dishwasher, there is also a big sink for arranging flowers and handy storage for vases. Because the owners can come through the pantry from the nearby garage, it also acts as a drop zone when returning home from busy errands.

In the main kitchen, refrigerated drawers answer the need for utility without compromising style. There is also a drawer-style microwave below the counter and a sleek Wolf induction cooktop with downdraft in the island.

In the master suite, Skinner's creative touch is perhaps most evident in a wall of mahogany blocks by woodworker Tyssen, forming an entryway to the suite behind the living room fireplace. There are no doors.

"Doors are usually left open, anyway," Skinner reasons, adding that he tries to

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# Design

include as few as possible in all his work, creating privacy by means of careful design. "The look is far more sculpted without them."

"Brad is all about the lines," says Tuer. "But I make it work, hopefully doing justice to his design." Like she did in the kitchen, Tuer thoroughly detailed the master dressing area and bath with features including a steam shower, benches, heated floors, floor lighting and passageway to a concealed outdoor hot tub. More subtle details include shoe and handbag storage compartments in the dressing area, drawers to hide clutter, a salon-style metal well to hold hot hair appliances and a display case for her collection of special knick-knacks. Tuer's mantra: "A place for everything, and everything in its place."

Skylights, forming clean lines that echo in the kitchen cabinets and floor, bathe the room in natural light. Over the glass and mahogany dining table hangs a five-foot lead crystal rectangular chandelier. Dining chairs are covered in white wool and bar stools in white leather. Several Sub-Zero refrigeration drawers are installed under the stone counter-top. At the far end of the kitchen is the butler's pantry housing a refrigerator, a second dishwasher, sink and appliances

Architect Brad Skinner cleverly designed an entrance way without doors to the master suite in the form of a hallway that runs behind the living room fireplace. William Tyssen created the mahogany block wall using reveal lines that offer shadow and definition and complement the vein-cut Wiarton stone floor. Tyssen also built the bed and dresser over which hangs Roly Fenwick's Landscape Series - Equation from the Michael Gibson Gallery.

PHOTOGRAPHY: LESLIE COATES, SKINNER & SKINNER ARCHITECTS INC.



Creative planning also found its way to the home's electronic systems, recently profiled in *Electronic House* magazine. "When your entire house stands as a work of art," the article begins, "you don't want electronics cluttering the view." London Audio consultants took great pains to hide several big-screen televisions. They tucked a 65-inch plasma screen behind a retractable panel over the living room fireplace. In the master bedroom, a 42-inch screen lifts and swivels out of the bed's footboard, and in the master ensuite each vanity features an LG 15-inch LCD set into large mirrors.

And the electronic wizardry doesn't end with the entertainment devices. The owners can easily drop privacy blinds with the flick of a switch or remotely alter lighting to achieve desired moods in special places like the wine cellar or from the massive chandelier over the dining table.

Indeed, there's a seemingly endless list of oohs and aahs to uncover and marvel at in space that reaches out to include two impressive guest suites, a custom office, a screened-in porch and summer kitchen, a main floor billiards area and lower level exercise, craft and storage rooms. That's not even making mention of the heated, to-die-for garage.

But it's not bells, whistles and gadgetry that make this house really special. Like all artistic achievements, the many standout features, design elements and exquisitely planned spaces are best appreciated as a whole greater than the sum of its parts. It's a total space formed by what Skinner refers to as a layering process. That process created an elegantly simple and restful space, almost effortless to be in.

Tuer says her favourite time to appreciate the wholeness of this house is at night, when the infinity pool reflects the home's beautiful interior features and exterior lines. There's also the soothing sound of water spilling onto river rock. Now that's a total package. *ccc*

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