

FALL 2021

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ourhomes

L O N D O N A N D M I D D L E S E X C O U N T Y

LOVELY
LUXURIOUS
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AN ARTIST'S HOME
Delights

HEARTY
AUTUMN SALAD

GLAM
TABLE SETTINGS

WHAT'S NEW
IN GLASS

AN

STORY **MARY HATT** | PHOTOGRAPHY **JASON HARTOG**

ARTIST'S

vision

There's a kind of creative disruption going on in London's Soho neighbourhood. On a tiny street just off Horton near Wellington, a new house has quickly become the talk of the town. Its unique shape and tiled exterior, reminiscent of buildings in southern Europe, is attracting curious onlookers from the neighbourhood as well as cars from other parts of the city slowing down for a quick peek.

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Architect Brad Skinner enjoys a morning coffee with homeowners Susan Day and Rob Hodson.





***“MY HOUSE EXTERIOR IS
THE MOST SUCCESSFUL
THING I’VE DONE.”***

– Susan Day

Brad and Susan worked together closely on design details for the one-of-a-kind exterior. Once the house was built, Susan and Rob spent days on a hydraulic lift adhering Susan’s handmade tiles to the concrete block surface, freestyling the mosaic pattern as they went.

BUILT FOR LONDON CERAMIC ARTIST SUSAN DAY

and her husband Rob Hodson, the house and its eclectic surroundings couldn't be further in style from the couple's former ranch home in suburban Oakridge. They had long wanted to apply their creative talents to a large-scale project, and are grateful for that opportunity with this new space.

"My house exterior is the most successful thing I've done," Susan says proudly of the home she now considers a work of art. She started the exterior tilework by making blocks out of raw clay. She then carved the blocks with a variety of images, including silhouettes, abstract flowers, birds, owls and stars. After they were fired in her kiln, the tiles – 22,000 in all, some big, some tiny – were painstakingly installed by Susan and Rob using a hydraulic lift to reach two storeys high. Tiny mirrored tiles from **Stylistic Glass & Mirror Inc.** were also installed, adding a shimmery finish in sunlight. "The wall now looks ancient. It could have been there for a thousand years."

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The main living space includes the kitchen, dining and living areas. Artwork adds zesty colour to the neutral walls (Benjamin Moore Cloud White). Rustic tile, chunky door pulls and smart black lighting fixtures (Maison Sylvie) work together as decorative accents. **OPPOSITE, TOP AND BOTTOM:** Clerestory windows allow natural light without compromising on usable wall space in the compact kitchen. Susan's handcrafted plates and bowls, plus sturdy mugs by other local makers, make an artistic impression, while open wood shelves complement the tiled backsplash. **BOTTOM LEFT:** A narrow trough sink topped by a floating mirror (Strand) makes sense in the small powder room.



***“NOW WE HAVE
AN ENVIRONMENT
THAT IS US.”***



The eclectically furnished living room suits Susan and Rob's personal style, working beautifully with the sleekness of the concrete floor and large-scale windows. **OPPOSITE TOP:** The woodburning fireplace (Guildwood Lighting & Fireside), shelves of books (built-ins by Strand) and commanding woodcut by Jeannie Thib make this a favourite corner. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM:** Fur friends Lucy (on sofa) and Gabby.

Brad Skinner of **Skinner & Skinner**

Architects says the idea for the home's facade was fundamental to his plan for its architecture, including the concrete block exterior by **Ross Brick & Stonework**. "Concrete block serves as an ideal substance for the application of mosaic tiles," he explains. "I think it was the interaction of the architect and the artist that allowed both forms of art to adapt to each other."

"The juxtaposition of this completely utilitarian material with an over-the-top handmade material is really interesting," Susan observes.

A modern flat-panel exterior door with sidelight from **Cameron Window & Door Inc.**, and horizontal Maibec wood panels supplied by **Copp's Buildall** complement the tiles and mirrors, and signal a stylish entryway to the home.



Inside the 1,200 sq. ft. home – built by **Brodco Construction Ltd.** after owner **Brodie Watson** and his team tore down the property's uninhabited condemned house – the open-concept main floor belies its small footprint. Efficient space planning created a galley-style kitchen that features stone-look Corian countertops from **Bernardo Group Ltd.** and chunky wood door pulls from Lee Valley to complement sleek Ikea cabinetry. Susan's handmade plates and bowls are on display, as are mugs and vessels created by other local artists.

"I always wanted to live in a house where I made a lot of the stuff in it," she muses. "I really appreciate things made by industry but things made by serious makers enhance the way people live. We thought about all these details and we acted on them." *Continued on page 44*



The kitchen opens to the dining and living areas, which are made cosy by a heated concrete floor by **Masciotra Concrete Forming**, a mix of modern and vintage pieces and a wood-burning fireplace from **Guildwood Lighting & Fireside**, flanked by built-ins from **Strand Fine Art Services**. Fresh white walls painted Cloud White by Benjamin Moore make an ideal backdrop for Susan and Rob's huge art collection.

More of Susan's tilework details backsplashes in the kitchen and a small powder room, while upstairs her *Crazy Birds* series of plates adds drama to the main bathroom. Like the main floor, the upstairs sitting room and primary bedroom – with luxury vinyl floors by **London's Flooring Canada** – all showcase the couple's art. An additional pantry area is used primarily for entertaining on the rooftop deck.

Spruce stairways by **London Stair & Railing Co Ltd.** – with railings by Brodco – provide further architectural interest thanks to

slat-style partitions taking the place of solid walls. The slats offer safety while keeping the stairwells open and airy.

The rooftop deck, accessed by a clever pop-up doorway (sourced by Brodco from Dayliter Skylights) channels a slick urban vibe. When it's warm enough, the couple loves gathering their friends and family here for dinner parties around the sturdy table Rob built using wood off-cuts. At night, they enjoy overlooking the lights of the city, and in the daytime lush greenery is provided by surrounding treetops.

Back walls on both levels of the home are entirely glass (Cameron Window & Door Inc.), with doors opening to a private garden on the main level and a window overlooking it from the second-floor primary bedroom. Other windows are strikingly small. On the front wall of the main floor, one clerestory-style window shelters the home from the street while allowing morning sunshine to flood the kitchen. The small windows on the upper floor and in the stairwell – Brad calls them

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A pop-up door accesses the hip and urban rooftop. It's private from the street, with a seasonal green canopy during the day and city lights at night. **TOP LEFT:** The second level begins with an open sitting room, offering Susan and Rob another reading area and place to watch TV. **TOP RIGHT:** A second-floor pantry is convenient to the rooftop deck. **LEFT:** White wood slats add architectural style to the stairway leading to the roof.



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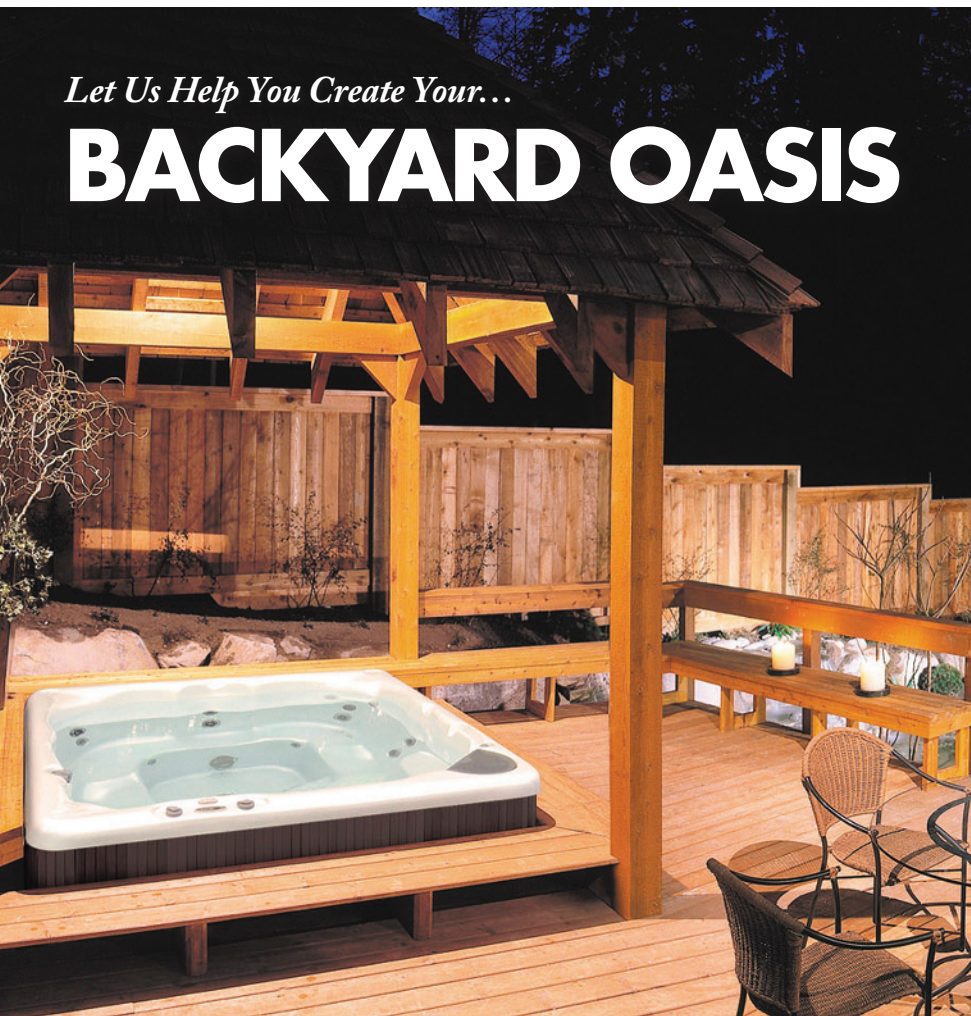


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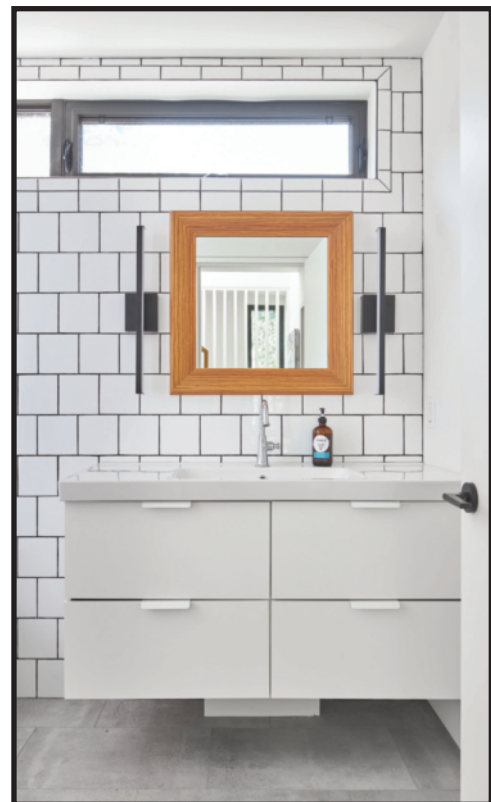
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TOP RIGHT AND BOTTOM LEFT: The main bathroom is a tile story by Susan, whose travels to Africa and the Middle East influenced her work. Gleaming white tiles, slim black sconces and a sleek vanity quietly complement the tub wall's rustic blue and white mosaic.

TOP LEFT: Luxury vinyl plank flooring (London's Flooring Canada), teak wood and a view to the garden add texture and colour to the primary bedroom.

“punched openings” – provide a variety of views to the street, as well as ambient light. These same windows establish a quiet exterior presence that allows Susan's tiles to do the talking.

The home also includes a lower-level suite. Now a work in progress, Susan and Rob hope to eventually offer it as a short-term rental. It too will showcase lots of Susan's tile, and offer handy access to downtown London.

“Susan has made her home a sight to see in the city of London,” Brodie says, adding that while he has worked on many unique projects for more than 20 years, “This one is the most unique!”

Brad adds he hopes this work of art they all helped create will contribute to ongoing efforts to revitalize an old, yet historic, part of town. Susan, who has done several major installations of creative tilework throughout the city, would like to inspire homeowners to consider using ceramics and mosaic finishes on their exteriors.

Meanwhile, Rob and Susan couldn't be happier about leaving the suburbs for London's gritty core and a personal space that truly engages their sensibilities. In Susan's words, “Now we have an environment that is us.” **OH**