

CONTRASTS HOUSE OF OF HOUSE CONTRASTS

A narrow, cramped house gets a bright new look, with help from one of Toronto's leading residential architects

By Will Jones

When architect Heather Dubbeldam was invited to tour a Victorian not far from Summerhill station, she asked the owners to consider selling rather than renovating it. While beautiful on the outside, the interior was cramped and dark. The central staircase took up valuable interior space, and the rest was divided into small rooms. "It was really run-down," recalls the architect, who's well-known for her modern renovations of historic homes.

But the owners were determined to get more light and space for entertaining – without moving. Dubbeldam conceded, and masterfully transformed the interior. The major changes were moving the space-hogging staircase to one side, adding windows wherever possible, and strategically contrasting white surfaces with dark ones. >



↑ Dubbeldam designed the kitchen wall unit to hide acres of crockery. The custom-built tapas bar serves as worktop and dinner table.

→ White walls and Boffi cabinetry contrast with the walnut flooring. Hits of colour, including a giant orange B, guide the eye from the kitchen to the stained-glass windows in the living room.

→→ With the stairwell moved to one side, the ground floor is now spacious enough for a floor-to-ceiling bookcase.





↑↗ Floating stair treads allow outdoor light to filter through the house, from the top floor down. Dubbeldam saved valuable centimetres in the stairwell by inseting the handrail right into the wall.



↑↑ A third-floor deck extends off the master bedroom, letting in lots of light.



Most of the ground floor can now be seen from the vestibule, and guests move easily through a white-walled living/dining area into the kitchen. Here, in the renewed two-storey addition, light pours in from sliding doors that open onto a patio and garden. At the centre of the galley kitchen, Dubbeldam designed a three-metre-long tapas bar, ideal for casual get-togethers and informal meals. Along one wall, a Corian countertop crowns white drawer units by Boffi, while on the other wall, full-length sliding doors hide an impressive amount of tableware.

Because storage is always in short supply, especially in Victorians, Dubbeldam cleverly utilized every spare inch throughout the house. The third-floor master bedroom, for instance, is a vision of uninterrupted white, but almost every wall is a cupboard. Just how effectively

Dubbeldam tackled the lack of light becomes apparent on this top level, where sliding doors open onto a private deck; sunlight streams in and is channelled down through the staircase's open risers.

Aside from strategic window placement, Dubbeldam utilized contrasting white and black tones on the walls and floors. "White reflects light," she explains, "while black absorbs or attracts it; it pulls light into a space." Throughout the house, these contrasting hues work magic. Dark walnut floors play off white-walled bedrooms and living areas; black walls in the vestibule and other living areas punctuate these pristine spaces.

"Light and space almost always top the wish lists on projects like these," says Dubbeldam. "If you can solve the light issues, then the home feels bigger already." □

↓ The back of the house is clad in vertical strips of black-stained cedar, while the front remains typically Victorian. The fence is made of raw cedar.



The front gable makes a perfect nook for a desk in the master bedroom. Whenever possible, bookcases and storage units have been added to keep rooms clutter-free.



A three-armed sconce by Serge Mouille is perfect for night-time reading (available at Hollace Cluny).





↑ Matte black Déchirer tiles (designed by Patricia Urquiola and available at Stone Tile International) contrast with the bathroom's white walls and fixtures.

↓ Modern classics, including Eames coat racks and chairs, are funky and able to take a playful beating from the kids. Twin bed available at Avenue Road.



IN BRIEF:
DUBBELDAM DESIGN

Dubbeldam Design Architects is a multidisciplinary firm best known for its modern home projects. Whether it's a new construction or a Victorian reno (a firm specialty), DDA also provides interior, landscape, lighting and furniture design. Focused on project clarity, detail and sustainability, DDA's projects often feature modernist rear facades, open-riser staircases and nearly invisible storage solutions. On the boards: a minimalist penthouse with a sustainable mandate. DUBBELDAMARCHITECTS.COM

