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Homes Townhouse refurbishment

AT A GLANCE

Names Simon and
Jessica Sampson

Ages 37 and 40

Location Toronto, Canada

Property Victorian townhouse

Bedrooms 3 **Bathrooms** 3

Project started 2010

Project finished 2012

Size of house 172sqm

this picture
The rear of
this Victorian
property has been
transformed with
the addition of a
contemporary
black-clad facade
punctuated by
large windows

BLACK MAGIC

A contrasting monochromatic scheme has reinvigorated the Sampsons' Toronto townhouse, creating the illusion of more space without increasing its footprint

Words Duncan Hayes **Photography** Tom Arban/Bob Gundu



From the moment you enter it's clear that the gloom has been banished



above The new layout provides a view through the dining space to the kitchen and garden

left Black shelving that's both structural and practical shields the stairs, which form a central spine up through the house

When the owners of a tall, 120-year-old townhouse in Toronto approached Dubbeldam Architecture+Design to refurbish their home, the brief was simple. Having moved to Canada from warmer climes, Simon and Jessica Sampson, a filmmaker and a graphic designer, wanted a light and airy property that would be the ideal space for their family to grow into. 'This was no small challenge,' says architect Heather Dubbeldam, 'as the period property was only just over three metres wide at the very back, with a long, thin footprint and a cramped layout that was starved of natural light.'

Although the property had a south-facing facade, the interior still had its original floorplan, which meant that there were no sight lines from front to back, adding to the confined feeling of the internal spaces.

This problem was compounded by planning restrictions, which stipulated that the practice was not allowed to extend to increase the footprint, meaning that the project was all about making the most of the existing house by creating the

impression of greater space rather than by physically adding square metreage. 'But this was a sentiment that fits well with our ethos as architects,' says Dubbeldam, 'as we strongly believe that people often don't actually need more room, they just need a better designed space.'

Natural light was key to meeting the brief, and consequently the design focused on a reworked layout on the ground floor in conjunction with maximising the available daylight that penetrated into the centre of the house. Outside, the original Victorian front elevation was restored, with the period detailing, such as stained-glass panes in the windows, retained to maintain the home's pedigree. Planning restrictions forbade the addition of any windows to the side of the house, despite it being a corner plot, so the architect devised a plan that would bring in light from the rear of the home.

In order to get the most out of the available footprint, the back of the property has been completely reinvented with the addition of a monolithic elevation with enlarged windows, including a sliding door to the garden to help →

above A run of units and appliances plus a large breakfast bar was a practical choice for the kitchen in this long, narrow house



Dark, imposing elements act as a foil to the crisp, white walls

this picture
The caves in the master bedroom create bold geometric shapes, while built-in furniture makes the best use of the space

unify indoors and out. This modern interpretation has been clad in vertical black-stained cedar boards that create subtle variations in shade and texture, and makes a bold statement compared with the Victorian front.

'This treatment caused a few problems locally though, as the neighbours disliked such a contemporary take on a period building,' says Dubbeldam. 'However, the clients love it as they were visionary in what they wanted out of the house; they value design quality and had a very open mindset that helped us understand what they wanted out of their home.'

Internally, the brief was achieved in two ways. Physically, walls were removed to open up the ground floor and create new sight lines running right through the house, so for the first time the rooms had light entering from both the front and back. But the scheme also draws heavily on the concept of contrast, with the introduction of dark, imposing elements whose sole purpose is to act as a foil to the crisp, white walls. 'This was more of a perceptual approach – a

means of brightening the internal spaces without direct access to natural light,' says Dubbeldam. 'We used contrasting elements next to each other to intensify the visual effect of the available natural light.' In fact, so important is this monochromatic palette that the property has become known as the Contrast House.

From the moment you enter the property it's clear that the gloom has been banished; the bright living area with its restored Victorian windows opens on to the dining room, with views right through to the kitchen adding to the impression of space and light. Beyond this, the streamlined kitchen features the home's signature dark and light tones, with the long, slimline breakfast bar drawing the eye to the view outside.

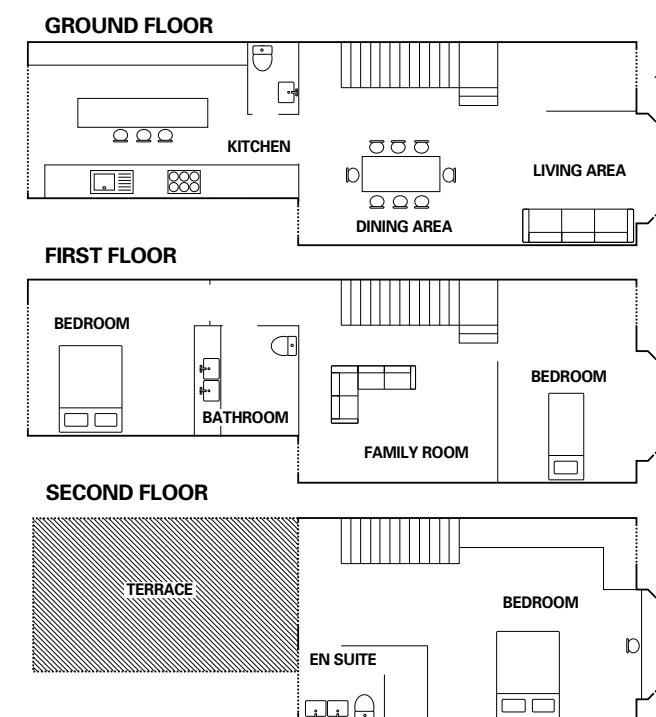
A key device in the scheme is the new walnut staircase, sandwiched between white walls and stacked vertically up against the party wall. 'The repositioned stair plays a defining role in the design, as its open risers allow diffused light from the large windows at the top of the stairwell to reach →

above Opening on to a secluded roof terrace, the master suite spans the house with views to the back and front

right Simple details, such as the recessed handrail and sharp roof angles, add to the contemporary finish



The layout: 172sqm ← N



the ground floor,' says Dubbeldam. 'It's one of my favourite features, as its dark timber treads appear to float between the walls; the recessed handrail creates the impression that it's just a shadow on the wall.'

In line with the philosophy of getting the most out of the existing space, the roof was rebuilt to allow the construction of a top-floor master suite, which has clever built-in furniture around the dormer window at the front. At the rear, this area has been completely opened up to provide a dressing area and en-suite bathroom, with sliding doors leading out to a concealed roof terrace – the perfect refuge from the city.

The resulting house is the perfect urban family home; its monochromatic interior that gives the illusion of more space inside is the perfect solution to the restrictions on adding floor space by extending. Now the house takes the best from its Victorian roots and mixes this with a contemporary element, providing the Sampsons with exactly the home they wanted for their family, as Dubbeldam explains: 'The new streamlined elements let the old features speak, while still having a voice and a character themselves. The contrasts within the house allow the light to shine through, giving life and energy to the building once more.' GD



this picture
Dark timber flooring contrasts with the white walls and the paler wood of the roof terrace



this picture
Clean modern lines characterise the en-suite master bathroom

Suppliers

PROJECT TEAM

Architect Dubbeldam Architecture+Design (+1 416 913 6757; dubbeldam.ca) **Builder** DDF European Design (+1 416 930 7311; ddfeuropeandesign.com) **Structural engineer** Blackwell Structural Engineers (+1 416 593 5300; blackwell.ca)

STRUCTURE

Staircase R&K Woodworking (+1 416 291 1394; rkwoodworking.com)

Windows & doors Just Aluminum (+1 905 602 5887; justaluminum.ca)

FIXTURES & FITTINGS

Bathroom taps Dornbracht (02476 717 129; dornbracht.com)

Worksurfaces Corian (0800 962 116; dupont.co.uk) **Flooring** A Peplak Hardwood Flooring (+1 905 238 8647; apeplakflooring.com)

Kitchen Boffi by Italinteriors (+1 416 366 9540; italinteriors.ca) **Kitchen appliances** Miele (0330 160 6600; miele.co.uk)

Lighting Kiosk (+1 416 539 9665; kioskdesign.ca); Artemide (+1 514 323 6537; artemide.ca) **Tiles** Stone Tile International (+1 416 515 9000; stone-tile.com)

Window shades Solarfective (+1 416 421 3800; solarfective.com) **Woodwork** Lakeland Interiors (+1 705 527 7691; lakelandinteriors.ca)

FURNITURE & ACCESSORIES

Lounge chairs Klaus (+1 416 362 3434; klausn.com) **Bed** Avenue Road (+1 416 548 7788; avenue-road.com)



this picture
Topped by a roof terrace, the rear of the property contrasts with the original red-brick front

STYLE FINDER

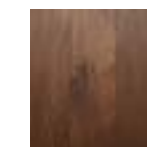
Pick rich wooden flooring and industrial accents
Compiled by *Emily Seymour*



▲ **Handcrafted steel** Japanese kettle (H21xDiameter18cm), £86, Sori Yanagi at Labour and Wait (020 7729 6253; labourandwait.co.uk)



▲ **High chair** Carisma bar stool in brushed steel (H70xDiameter34cm), £124, Dan-Form at Wayfair (0800 169 0423; wayfair.co.uk)



▲ **Dark finish** Oxo oak floorboards (H80-220xW18cm), from £68.85 per sqm, Ecora (020 7148 5265; ecora.co.uk)



▲ **Bright accent** Bobby lamp in metal in red (H54xW16xD25cm), £20, Habitat (0344 499 4686; habitat.co.uk)



▲ **Personal accessory** Wooden letter in mango wood (H15xW6xD2cm), £5, Nkuku at Selfridges (0800 123 400; selfridges.com)