

HOUSE & HOME OF THE MONTH

TOWNHOUSE

TEMPO

A DEVELOPER AND INTERIOR
DESIGNER TURN A DOWNTOWN
JUNKYARD INTO AN URBAN GEM.

BY BARBARA MCKAY PHOTOGRAPHY BY MASAO ABE

"I wanted to spice up one unit for myself," says developer William Moskalyk of his customized townhouse in downtown Toronto. Working with Christine Hains, formerly an interior designer with Plus Five Interiors, who now heads up her own firm, Environment by Design, he implemented structural changes and material upgrades to personalize his home. It is one of nine attached homes recently built on a private cul-de-sac by his company, Meadowhill Homes Ltd.

"New homes in the city are a rarity," Moskalyk says, but they needn't be. Although land is scarce, particularly in Toronto, it isn't impossible to find. Currently, the developer has his eye on another four sites in Toronto for similar developments, including a further 19 Victorian townhomes to be built adjacent to this development. "There's lots of land around," Moskalyk says. "It's just that no one wants to do what I'm doing because it's a tough grind getting approval from city hall."

The required approval amounts to a rezoning of residential areas to allow new housing, usually on private streets, to be built behind existing housing. Awaiting project approvals from city hall can seem "painfully slow" to developers who have already planned their visions. But adding housing to already-developed areas increases population densities and can put additional pressures on a neighbourhood. For example, residential parking is a constant problem in downtown Toronto.

While the new cul-de-sac developments do require municipal thought and approval, it's because they're new that they tantalize home buyers. These homes are not in need of renovations or repairs, they're usually convenient to downtown, and the central location is offset by a private street which is quiet and untroubled by rush-hour traffic. Underground parking is built-in for residents. In this particular development, all the units are "freehold" townhomes, not condominiums, so buyers receive deeds and don't pay condo fees, although there is a yearly maintenance fee for snow removal and groundskeeping.

According to Moskalyk, this downtown development was warmly greeted by most of the neighbourhood because the land was previously a vacant junkyard. As well, the new homes were designed to

Opposite: Custom metal stair railings are the perfect blend for streamlined furnishings of metal and leather in the living and dining rooms. The dining table is from Prismatic, Hoffman dining chairs from Intarc, overhead dining light from Triede, leather sofa and chair are Stanley Friedman from Bonaventure and the Alanda glass-top coffee table is from Intarc. **Near right:** Street plan of the development. **Inset:** Before and After.



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blend quietly with the existing home styles in the area. Their unified exterior design — similar brickwork, trim details, colours and stylish Victorian street lighting — identifies them as a distinct neighbourhood, but not an architectural aberration.

Customized upgrades in new homes can smooth the road to a completed interior design even before a home is finished. For Moskalyk, the path was made even easier by an interior designer who was well acquainted with his preferences. (Hains had decorated his previous home, a condominium.) “I trusted her judgment and so I gave her a pretty free hand,” Moskalyk says.

The major structural change to Moskalyk’s home was deleting one second-floor bedroom, a change he also made in two other units in the development. Although three is considered an optimal number of bedrooms for resale, Moskalyk says he has

The kitchen opens to the dining room and, beyond, the living room. The floors are gleaming black Absolute granite, the walls are textured with a faux-marble paint finish and a wall of glass blocks separates the kitchen from the entrance hall, also tiled in black granite. Kitchen table is from Intarc and chairs from Italinteriors.

started to design about a quarter of his developments with units designed with couples or single people in mind. In the case of his bachelor home, one less bedroom created an interior mezzanine, opening up the main-floor living room with plenty of height and light. Says designer Hains, “The effect is great, and the natural lighting is terrific.”

Light is a key element in the home. Hains suggested the unit be wired for halogen lighting throughout, because halogen is a more natural, whiter light than incandescent, and being more focused, will highlight key objects. In addition, halogen light fixtures and the quality of the light were well suited to Moskalyk’s preference for a very clean and contemporary style.

“I like a clean sweep — no clutter, or woodsy-type furniture, like overstuffed chairs,” Moskalyk explains. Hains selected sleek and contemporary furnishings and created a muted backdrop with accents of mauve, blue, green and charcoal. Textures include metal, glass and leather. The leather upholstery and metal are both matte finish. Visual interest is created more with shapes and textures than with colour variations and the overall effect is a cool, masculine interior.

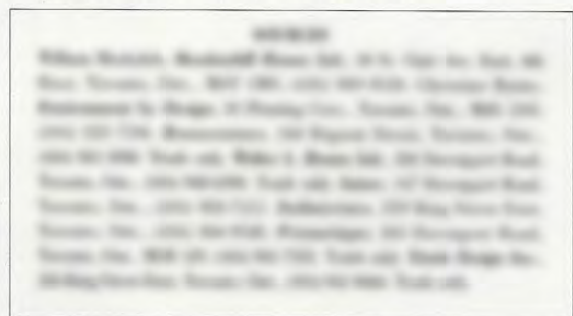
Typically Victorian, the exteriors of all the units in the development are slender and gracious buff brick. But Moskalyk wanted his home’s interior to be different from the facade. He didn’t want a shocking contrast, but a pleasant “surprise from the exterior.”



The surprises begin at the front door. Inside, the floor is tiled with black granite that continues along the entry hall and through the kitchen. The wall which divided the hall from the kitchen was replaced with glass blocks to brighten both kitchen and foyer. In the kitchen, blue was used on cabinets and walls, instead of standard white. Moskalyk describes the colour as a “masculine” blue, “that’s not too pretty, but is warmer than grey.” In addition to colour, the kitchen walls were given texture with a custom marbelized paint effect. The developer also upgraded all of his kitchen appliances and raised the kitchen counters slightly — at six foot two inches, he found standard counter heights were a pain in the back, literally. Living and dining room floors were also upgraded to a light, bleached oak and instead of wood balusters on the open stairways, metal railings were custom crafted.

Upstairs, the floors are covered in wall-to-wall carpeting, creating a warmer feeling for more private spaces, Hains says. On the top floor, a skylight is centred over the bed in the master bedroom and a slender window is framed in the peaked roof. The lean furnishings of the master bedroom are complemented by custom closets crafted in the style of a Japanese shoji (rice paper panels). In contrast to the sparse bedroom, luxury reigns in the master ensuite bathroom which is customized with Blue Pearl granite floors and vanity counter, mirrored walls and ceiling, and a whirlpool bath.

The design and decorating suited Moskalyk. In fact, this developer and interior designer discovered they were simpatico on all fronts and were married — after the home was finished. ♦



Above: The master bedroom has a skylight centred over the bed and a narrow window centred in the peaked roof. The uncluttered sleeping chamber with shoji (rice paper) doors on the storage closet is a study in Zen quietude. **Right:** A step up to the master’s ensuite bathroom accommodates the deep whirlpool bath, surrounded in Blue Pearl granite. A floating granite vanity holds an extruding pedestal sink bowl, without the pedestal. Mirrored walls reflect themselves and the cove moulding on the ceiling.

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