

TIME WARP

*A condo unchanged since the '80s
gets a modern makeover*

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STYLING: PELOSO ALEXANDER INTERIORS



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NO ONE REALLY KNEW what to make of condo design 30 years ago.

At least, that was the conclusion Jamie Alexander of Peloso Alexander Interiors came to when a regular client introduced him to his downtown unit. Purchased from an original owner in the building, the space hadn't been touched in the three decades since the condo complex was built. Aesthetically, it was in a time warp, almost as though the original condo

designers had tried to replicate the look of traditional suburban development in an urban flat. It was a far cry from the lofty, modern condos that populate downtown Toronto today. The space was closed off, had bad drapes and Roman shades and a Victorian look. ↻

The staircase, a contemporary focal point in this condo, had to be lifted into the space by a crane. The designers brought it in through the windows of the rooftop deck.





“The original plan didn’t give our client the square footage, the feeling, or anything he was looking for,” says Alexander. “We ended up taking this condo to the bare concrete walls and starting again.”

One happy surprise when they tore the place apart was the discovery of a 12-foot section of windows that now bathe the sitting area, dining room and kitchen in light. One unhappy surprise was that the majority of the electrical system had to be redone to accommodate new

lights. The designers also had to crane in their contemporary feature staircase, as well as the 30-by-30-inch Italian porcelain floor tiles and oversized four-foot-by-nine-foot wooden doors, which were too heavy for the elevator.

Alexander had worked with his client on other residential properties, and says the condo owner allowed the design team to let the process happen. “He also realized great beauty takes time,” he says. The entire project took the greater part of 2012. 

The homeowner — a business executive who travels often — asked the designers to create a feeling “like a hotel” in his space; he wanted it to be “well-appointed, well-designed, and not overdone.”



The kitchen cabinets are faced in wood and black glass. Their doors open with a touch.





The wood-burning fireplace is among the few installations remaining from the original condo and something the designers “could not alter whatsoever.” To create visual interest around it, Alexander incorporated rubbed walnut shelving and an entertainment console.



Despite the unit's look, the bones and location were what the condo owner was seeking. The two-storey unit includes an area for entertaining and a 1,500-square-foot terrace overlooking the St. Lawrence Market, with a clear view of St. James Cathedral.

The homeowner asked the team to create a modern, minimalistic design, in which each element would have its appointed place, "like a hotel." So Alexander and design partner Glen Peloso got to work, which was "like bantering

back and forth through a crossword with another person... like having a conversation with your own head," says Alexander.

The eureka moment for the designers occurred when they decided to use walnut. The choice came out of a troubleshooting conversation; while an untrained eye could have missed it, they were acutely aware that the condo has ceilings of three different heights. "We thought about wood floors but they would have made things feel short and we didn't want that," says

Alexander. "Incorporating tiles the same colour as the ceiling gave [the space] a unified look and you don't pay attention to the heights of the walls.

"But we didn't want it to feel cold, which is when we decided to do these walnut touches."

The only thing worth keeping from the original build was the office bookcase on the second storey of the condo – done in a walnut stain – which they left untouched. "This was a saving piece," says Alexander, adding that it went with the motif throughout. 





Indeed, the wood confers a warmth in the shelving above the fireplace, in an entertainment console, in the horizontally panelled wall behind the master bed, and in a mirrored wall in the dining area. “What the walnut did was give every area a destination for your eyeball,” says Alexander, as the features “create a look and segregation without walls.”

Tearing down the walls and opening the space to light became a priority after the

discovery of the windows, so each oversized door – except for the front door and guest bedroom door – are pocket doors, installed to maintain flow from room to room. “We didn’t want anything to feel like there was a door in the way,” says Alexander.

The flow is especially apparent in the master bedroom with its ensuite walk-through closet – a former workout space that was nixed – that features open shelving. The closet leads to the

master bathroom, where a tub was removed to accommodate the request for a steam shower, built for two, with separate heads and hand controls. The trench drain along the back end ensures the shower base doesn’t appear sloped. The bathroom’s electrical outlets were concealed behind a wood panel above the vanity.

Alexander says the design required “thinking outside the box, while at the same time taking all the characteristics of the box outside the box.”



Replacing the “traditional Forest Hill home in the sky” with the modern ambience and soft palette of the completed project required a combined effort. “Our goal is to always work with these three elements: the hopes and goals of the client, the architecture of the space and our experience in the design focus,” he says.

The result is a condo that is livable, luxurious and no longer reminiscent of the '80s. ☛

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