

# IT'S COOL TO BE SQUARE

How awkward can be renovated to awesome

BY *Connie Adair*. PHOTOS BY *Ray Williams/Perfect Pixel*

**I**n early 2013, this couple was drawn to their home by its proportions and shape — it was more square than the usual Toronto home. “It also had an awkward enclosed front porch and was painted a weird purple that we loved. It had a quirky charm to it. That’s also why we were attracted to it,” the owner says.

The home had been divided into three units and needed a lot of work. At first, they planned to renovate, live in one suite and rent out the others. But they changed their minds. Once they started thinking about the possibilities the home had, they felt it would be easier and result in a “more cohesive vision” if they did everything at once.

The 30-foot-wide home was gutted and an addition built at the back to house the kitchen and above it, the master suite. The home has three bedrooms, four bathrooms and a total of 4,500 square feet on three levels.

Instead of creating one big open space on the main floor, the original back wall of the home was retained and separates the kitchen from the living and dining area.

Both sides of the brick wall and the living room fireplace were lime washed, a process that gives the red brick a white-washed look. It exudes original charm but is in keeping with the home’s Scandinavian design, says general contractor Michael Lawrance of M-Squared Contracting in Toronto.

Solid oak is featured prominently throughout, on floors, cupboards, doors and even a wall. The owner says they opted to go without pigment so they could see the natural grain of the warm golden oak.

Rather than traditional cupboard doors, which are about three feet high, the kitchen has massive solid slab oak doors that are eight feet tall.

However since solid wood can buckle →



## Renovation

*"My wife introduced me to the Danish word hygge," the owner says. Applied to décor, it means something familiar, warm natural materials, and simple and sturdy craftsmanship.*

with changes in humidity throughout the year, special brackets were placed on the backs of the doors so they can be adjusted to keep them flush.

The cabinets provide plenty of neatly hidden storage space. "I like to surround myself with nice things, but some things will never make me feel good," the owner says. To that end, the kitchen has two large panels that retract to reveal a breakfast nook. Everyday kitchen implements, such as a toaster and coffee maker, can be hidden inside. "I'd rather see avocados and oranges

in bowls on the counters."

In the adjacent mudroom, panels hide a powder room. The panels throughout the home have square cut-outs instead of handles or knobs.

The back wall of the kitchen features accordion doors that fold open to link indoor living space and the backyard deck. Rather than take the doors up to ceiling height, they are about a foot below, which creates a more intimate feeling in the room.

The staircase was custom built from scratch and has a bookshelf tucked



**LEFT**  
Bar stools that can tuck underneath the breakfast counter are ideal for saving space.

**RIGHT**  
The owners opted to go without pigment for the wood so they could enjoy seeing the natural grain.



## Renovation

### ABOVE

Floor-to-ceiling closets were customized to fit into the irregular space.

### BELOW

The renovation also included the lower level which has radiant-heated polished concrete floors to make it comfortable year round.



beside it. At the top of the stairs is an open sitting room. The owner says they toyed with the idea of creating a double volume space from the main floor to the second floor, but decided against it because it would have stolen space from the sitting area.

Instead, the second floor has a cathedral ceiling and skylight to create volume and a bright, airy feeling. Behind a wood wall are two bedrooms and a bathroom. "It's like the floor folds up and extends across the house. It's almost a house within a house," the owner says.

The doors are flush with the wall which was no easy feat to accomplish. It was challenging to create the solid core doors on hinges, concealed and recessed to make them appear seamless. Everything had to be plumb and square to fit perfectly, Lawrance says.

The ceilings, purposely lowered in the kids' bedrooms and bathrooms to create



### Zen En suite

A large barn door, with its track recessed into the ceiling, slides open to reveal the en suite bathroom. When open, the door hides the wall-mounted television. "I don't like looking at TVs but enjoy watching them. The barn door is a neat way to hide it," the owner says.

A Zen delight, the en suite bathroom has twin sinks, a soaker tub and a large walk-in shower. "I had a real desire to have a luxurious big space for showering." A skylight brightens the shower, which is finished with textured Italian Pico tiles in blue on the floor and white on the walls. Lawrance says it was a massive procedure to cut and mitre the four-by-four foot tiles. The tiles come in specific dye lots so breakage was a concern.



## Renovation

### RIGHT

At the top of the stairs there is an open sitting room for reading or relaxing. The sunny space was ideal for growing plants and adding softness to the room.

a cosy retreat feeling, create a triangular loft space above.

The master suite has two walls filled with floor-to-ceiling closets that were completely customized. Not only were they constructed to fit into the irregular wall space, they offer a place for everything, including a laundry chute. The space is so customized that it meets the owners' specific needs down to the length of their clothing, Lawrance says.

The renovation also included the lower level, which has radiant heated polished concrete floors, a media centre with an automatic screen, a mechanical room, a laundry and extensive built-in millwork.

The owner says he has no design background but reads about it, and that his wife has a Danish design style. They share a similar sensibility, both wanting a clean, minimal but warm living space.

"My wife introduced me to the Danish word hygge," the owner says. Applied to décor, he says it means something familiar, warm natural materials and simple and sturdy craftsmanship. "Lots of surfaces are unfinished. The oak shelves pick up natural oils. Where they are touched, they are darker. It's part of something looking used and familiar."

As for the front of the house, it's still purple, but was restored to take it back to its original charm. **HC**

