

THE STAR

Family's first Hanukkah in their new North York home after a year-long renovation



Hanukkah will be bittersweet for Julia Borins this year.

She and her family are beyond excited to celebrate the season in their newly-renovated North York home after a year of construction. She's especially thrilled to place the giant wooden menorah — hand-crafted by her grandfather — in the front window to honour the holiday, and also his memory.

A lifelong woodworker, Al Cornfield built tables, dollhouses, wooden airplanes and other toys and was the go-to guy for home construction projects. He created the Borins' unique, five-foot menorah, complete with electric lights, 30 years ago back in Montreal.

“When my grandparents sold their country house in Quebec, my mom took the menorah and put it in her house. I hoped that one day, when I had a house and family of my own, I would be able to have it,” says Borins, 37, a special-education teacher for the York Region District School Board.

A few years ago, her parents downsized to a condo and she brought the menorah to her home. Neighbours immediately knocked on her door, marvelling at the giant candelabra. “It definitely became a conversation piece,” she says.

This year, the menorah will take centre stage in the freshly-renovated home of Borins, her husband Larry, 40, a marriage and family therapist, and their three daughters Lyla, 8, Hana, 5 and Ruby, 2, when Hanukkah begins on Sunday, Dec. 2.



Julia Borins and daughters visit their home during its year-long renovation.

They’ll have room enough for all of their extended family in their spacious new living and dining areas — though there will be one empty chair. Cornfield passed away in April, but not before he saw the Borins’ vision for a home designed to be a gathering place for their families. “My mom would

drive him by the house so he could watch the construction.”

The extensive renovation of their 1,600-sq.-ft., three-bedroom, two-bath-room home required a complete gutting to transform it into the 3,000-sq.-ft. modern design with four bedrooms, three bathrooms, a basement play-room and guest suite and attached garage.

They bought the house, in the tightly-knit Summit Heights neighbourhood, in 2012 to bridge the distance between Larry’s job downtown and Julia’s in Vaughan.

As their family grew and they began to feel squeezed, they thought about a renovation. Their “three-page” list of wants included a bedroom for each of the girls with a shared bathroom, a loft-ceilinged master bedroom and spa-like ensuite, floating stairs that allow light to flow through the house, a functional kosher kitchen and plenty of room to entertain.



“We wanted to be able to host Friday night Shabbat dinners, organize parties and be a hub for our families,” says Larry. “That was hard to do in our old house.”

Their spacious home provides room to play with the three-storey dollhouse

the girls' grandfather made.

Designer Simon West, of In House Designs, took on the job of creating a modern and cohesive design. Julia enthusiastically worked alongside him to plan the kitchen of her dreams. With two sets of dishes and utensils — one for dairy, one for meat — she knew exactly how she wanted everything stored. The layout also needed to be open enough for her to supervise the kids while she cooks and private enough to hide the mess when they're entertaining.



West designed an airy living and dining room at the front of the house with a wall that separates the open-concept family room/kitchen at the back. “It’s perfect. I can see and talk to the kids while I’m cooking and prepping. And when we’re serving Shabbat dinner in the dining room, we don’t have to look at the pile of dishes in the sink,” says Julia.

A matte porcelain island, custom cabinetry, built-in Sub-Zero fridge and four ovens combine for a beautiful and practical kitchen.

The Borins family enjoy the open space of their new kitchen and family room.

The family put their new home to the test the day they moved in, hosting 25 people for Larry's brother's wedding Shabbat dinner. "We set up the whole dining room, everyone was out there having drinks and sitting at the table while we were cooking and working in the kitchen. That is exactly why we wanted this renovation," says Julia.

The kitchen/family room opens onto the backyard via 15-foot, German-engineered custom doors. At \$22,000, the doors blew the roof off the budget, but Larry and Julia say the ability to open up their home to the outdoors is worth every penny.

When life feels hectic downstairs for the couple, their master suite serves as an oasis. The ensuite features an ultra-deep claw foot tub and giant shower with an ingenious glass cut-out to capture the light from the master bedroom's wall of windows.



The Borins' master retreat includes a vaulted ceiling and glass insert that sends light into their large ensuite.

"There's etching in the glass that extends from knee to chest height to cover the wiggly bits," says West. "It's unique, functional and fun."

West's layered lighting plan includes LED floor lights under the vanity, tub and toilet. "It's just gentler in the middle of the night than turning on blar-

ing overhead lights,” he says.

EMBE Construction began the construction process in October 2017 and finished almost exactly a year later. The family alternated living between Julia’s and Larry’s parents’ homes. “It takes a village to raise a child, so we went back to that village,” says Larry.



The floating stairway and slat divider draw natural light down through the house.

Julia says they were pleasantly surprised at how smooth the entire renovation went. “We had heard horror stories about contractors, but everyone from Simon to Seth Mitchell, our contractor at EMBE, to all the people we worked with at [California Kitchens](#), [Stone Tile](#), [Vatero Bath + Kitchen](#) and [Royal Lighting](#) were absolutely amazing. We couldn’t have asked for more from any of them.”

And though they’ll feel her grandfather’s absence this holiday season, Julia says Cornfield’s legacy lives on. “Every time workers are missing a drill bit or screwdriver or need a small specific driver head, I have it, thanks to my grandfather,” says Julia. “He’s always with us.”

THE NUMBERS

\$750,000: Cost of house in 2012

\$790,000: Cost of renovation

\$3,600: Porcelain Venetian blue backsplash in kitchen

\$2,000: Two slabs of Laminam Tinta Unita porcelain for island

6 inches: The thickness of Julia's renovation binder complete with all plans and receipts



Heather Hudson is a Toronto-based writer and a freelance contributor for the Star. Reach her at heather@heatherhudson.ca