

THE STAR

How this Leaside family's reno plans pivoted for an unexpected addition



Melissa and Brian Finley had a perfect plan.

With two rambunctious little boys, they were outgrowing their semi-detached, three-bedroom with the tight galley kitchen and short basement. The couple debated moving to a bigger house, but in the 2016 real estate bubble, that would have meant forking over upwards of \$2 million to stay in their beloved Leaside neighbourhood.

Renovating was the only logical choice. Working with [3 Stones Custom Homes](#), they designed a new layout that would add 800 square feet to the main and second floors, and dig out the basement so the marathon mini-

sticks tournaments could continue as their sons grew up.

Melissa, 33, who works in marketing at OLG, was especially thrilled to imagine the master bedroom of her dreams, including a spacious ensuite bathroom and huge walk-in closet featuring an island and a laundry room. They hired designer Andi Wheelband, co-owner of [Two Birds Design](#) to help get all the details right.



After much consultation, plans were drawn up. Contractor [Rovimat Group Inc.](#) was on deck. All that was left was to apply for the building permits and get started.

Then the family got some unexpected, but happy, news: Melissa was pregnant. “All of a sudden we had to decide whether to leave the plans as-is, and have two boys bunk together, or put in a fourth bedroom.”

Melissa and Brian, 37, a detective with York Regional Police, chose to go back to the drawing board — literally — to squeeze in a nursery. Melissa credits designer Wheelband for making it work without sacrificing the elements she wanted. The island in the closet was scrapped, the laundry room became a closet in the hallway with a stackable washer and dryer and the

ensuite bathroom became more compact but still features a tub, shower with bench, large window and two sinks.

Today, they have a master closet that's not far off from what Melissa imagined and 7-month-old Camden slumbers under a skylight in his very own bedroom next door. (The room abuts the shared wall and the master closet, so there was no option for a window.) Brothers Emmitt, 5, and Paxton, 3, each have their own rooms facing the front of the house and a three-piece bathroom at the top of the stairs is designed for the boys to share.



Downstairs, Melissa worked closely with Wheelband to create a spacious and functional main floor. The original house positioned the living room at the front of the home and the galley kitchen with a cut-out to a dining room just behind it.

With the expansion at the back of the home, they were able to create a generous living room with plenty of seating and a wall of windows that flood the open space with natural light. A powder room and wide mud room is adjacent to the back door, allowing for an out-of-the-way place to hide hockey bags and outerwear. It also serves as the entrance to the unfinished basement play space/guest suite.

At the front of the house, a formal dining room seats eight and boasts an electric fireplace at table-level for added ambience, a wine fridge and bar.

But the real showstopper on the main floor is the kitchen, which sits between the living and dining rooms. Flanked by two pathways and custom white Shaker cabinetry, a massive four-by-9-1/2-foot quartz island with Blanco Silgranit sink takes centre stage. It's where the boys eat their meals and guests socialize. "When we were designing, I knew I wanted the kitchen to be central. We entertain a lot and people tend to migrate here," says Melissa. "I love it."



Wheelband worked with [Impressions Kitchens](#) to create a classic space that's dressed up with cladding and brass elements. The appliance triangle dominates one side of the island while the other acts as a buffet and is set off by the original brick wall.

"We worked to maximize space as much as possible with deep and shallow cabinets and drawers. We even tucked some below the overhang in the island," said Wheelband.

Melissa considers the \$40,000 for the kitchen and dining room money

well-spent, and chose to draw the eye to the island with three pendant lights from [Crate & Barrel](#), which came in at \$700 each.

She was inspired to undertake her own DIY design project late in pregnancy, creating a custom media console for the living room by adding doors, baskets and cupboards to two Ikea Kallax bookshelves and resting them horizontally. She finished them with brass hardware from Amazon and Greek-style decals from Etsy shop [O'verlays](#).

“When I came in to see the renovation in progress, I realized how long and bare that living room wall would have been. I wanted a white media console, which is hard to find, and I couldn’t find one long enough,” she said.



After the initial planning hiccup, the renovation began in October 2017 and finished in April 2018, just ahead of the birth of Camden. The family lived in a rental down the street during the six months of construction.

The pregnancy added some urgency to the operation, but Melissa says they were pleasantly surprised by how smoothly construction went. “People told me horror stories of renovations in older homes, but we had no major issues. The only unexpected thing was that we had to run new beams. It put us a month behind, but it was fine.”

Sometimes the best-laid plans get even better endings.

THE NUMBERS

\$670,000: Price the Finleys paid for their house in 2009

\$400,000: Cost of renovation

1,200 sq. ft.: Original 3-bedroom, 1-bathroom semi-detached home

2,000 sq. ft.: Size of new main and second floors, with four bedrooms and four bathrooms



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