

# THE STAR

## This Upper Beaches loft got the pop-art renovation it deserves



If Daniel Charron had his way, he would live in a tiny, glass lakeside house with only the barest of essentials.

“Sometimes I go on Dwell and see a dreamhouse,” he says of the inspirational website for architects, designers and home enthusiasts. “There’s always nothing in it.”

Former residents of Montreal’s world-renowned minimalist modular housing complex Habitat 67, the advertising creative director and Dominique Morin, his wife and freelance account director, were hard-pressed to find the same aesthetic when they moved to Toronto in 2007. “We thought we’d

never get anything similar because it was so unique,” says Charron, 60.

An exhaustive nine-month search almost proved them right. But when they stumbled into a fifth-floor unit of a new and unassuming five-storey building in the Upper Beaches, a wall of windows and an open, industrial feel spoke to the couple. The suite’s extraordinary 1,200-square-foot private rooftop terrace with a treetop view of Lake Ontario sealed the deal.

“A lot of people like a cottage. I can’t see myself driving for three hours every Friday and Sunday afternoon. When I found the upstairs, I thought it was just perfect. It solved all our problems,” says Charron.

Well, except one. With builder’s basic finishes everywhere, the two-bedroom loft “looked like every other condo in Toronto,” says Morin, 54. They hired designer Eva Healy, owner of Avenue Design, Inc. to re-imagine the entire space with them.

“Daniel and Dominique like being funky and different, and this was a home that definitely did not reflect their personalities,” said Healy. “We decided to create a graphic space with a pop-art vibe that made the most of every nook and cranny.”

The shell of the loft, with its polished concrete floors, exposed HVAC and floor-to-ceiling windows served as the starting point of the design. They added texture to the entire length of the open concept space with hand-made, black-and-white bricks, sourced and installed by Horrocks & Co. At \$11,000, it was the biggest splurge of the renovation — and one they don’t regret.

“What we were trying to make out of this space was that it wasn’t new. Daniel really liked that (the bricks) didn’t look perfect. They were installed completely at random, one by one,” notes Healy.

The brick wall fit perfectly with the plan to design a larger, minimalistic kitchen with open shelving and no upper cabinetry. Beams that had been previously boxed over with drywall were exposed and painted a vivid red to match the staircase. A \$5,000 solid, white-oak butcher block anchors the room and offers plenty of space to create in the kitchen.

Healy custom-designed storage under the staircase, which she calls “part storage, part sculptural art piece.” With open shelves and grey acrylic trian-

gular cupboards and drawers, it's a discreet spot to store dish towels, dog paraphernalia and other household items. "It's a functional design but still in keeping with the minimalist aesthetic," she said.

Design plans took a sharp turn when Charron stopped by after the entire loft had been gutted, He was blown away by the light streaming in without the second bedroom, which they'd been using as an office. "I called Eva right away with a change of plans for no bedroom," he said.

This allowed the kitchen to steal more space and custom closets to be added at the entryway. The open-concept area is now home to Daniel's music and DJ equipment and offers a better acoustic experience.

The master bath received a huge overhaul as well. The existing bathroom had an unused tub and very small shower with virtually no storage. Working with the constraints of existing plumbing locations, they were able to redesign the flow of the bathroom to include a new large shower, vanity with storage and a semi-recessed five-foot-tall medicine cabinet.

The final nod to eclecticism is the bold choice of red they chose for the stairs. "The idea was for it to immediately boost the neutral tones of the cabinetry and newly reupholstered, authentic mid-century-modern furniture, resulting in a bright, fun space," says Healy.

They even had a matching red slipcover custom-made for the couch to protect it from the exuberance of Hudson, their five-year-old borzoi.

Up the stairs to the rooftop terrace, a turf-covered wall holds their bicycles and acts as the transition to the outdoors. The turf reappears outside as an area rug in their lounge area.

Happy with the clean, modern lines of their Toronto loft, Charron still thinks fondly about their previous home in Montreal. He remembers seeing Habitat 67 come into view from the family car on the way to the Expo 67 world's fair when he was a child, and telling himself: "One day, I will live there."

In 2000, he went to see a Habitat 67 unit for sale — and fell in love on the spot. "I came home and told Dominique, 'Start packing, we're moving to Habitat 67!'"

If history repeats itself, the couple may one day find themselves in that tiny, glass, minimalist lakeside house. Right now, they're enjoying their answer to Habitat 67 in Toronto.

## **THE NUMBERS**

\$635,000: Cost of condo, 2008

\$150,000: Cost of renovation; 2016

7,000: Handmade black & white bricks

60: Panes of glass fronting the condo

4 months: Length of renovation



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