

# REAL ESTATE

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## A SEMI, TWEAKED

In renovating their Toronto home, Jennifer Jaspar and Martin McLaughlin found an ally who would ‘help to do stuff that we could never imagine’ ■ H4

In reworking the design of this Toronto semi-detached home, architect Wanda Ely focused on efficient space planning. SCOTT NORSWORTHY

### THE LISTING

Toronto’s attempt to regulate short-term rentals falls short, as ‘ghost hotels’ continue to operate ■ H2

### BRITISH COLUMBIA

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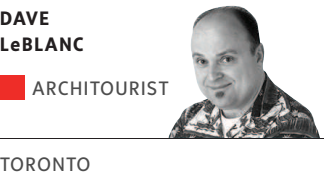




The homeowners of this house in Toronto's Brockton Village neighbourhood are music aficionados, so elements of music were incorporated into the decor. PHOTOS BY SCOTT NORSWORTHY

# Perfect partnership leads to smooth reno

Homeowners hired architect Wanda Ely to help them realize their dreams with her trademark touch



It pays to be curious. It also pays to know what one is good at, and what one should hire others to do. Indeed, that greatest of thinkers, Albert Einstein, once said, "I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious."

Passionately curious homeowners Jennifer Jaspar and Martin McLaughlin – she from Saskatoon and he from Peterborough, Ont. – would often take walks around Toronto's Brockton Village neighbourhood and pause, longingly, in front of other properties they admired.

One house was just a few steps north of their own, the other merely two streets over. In that two-streets-over house, easily spied from the sidewalk, was a sexy wooden screen dividing the entryway from the living room.

For Ms. Jaspar and Mr. McLaughlin, however, those golden slats were a siren song, a call to something better than the "flipped" house (with its safe, bland choices) that they'd purchased in 2014.

As she politely refuses a coffee from Mr. McLaughlin, architect Wanda Ely picks up the story: "And I don't remember how they ended up on my [web]site, but when they did get on they saw that both of those two projects that really resonated with them were by the same person, and so when they called me ... I thought, 'I know I'm going to be able to make them happy.'"

Ms. Jaspar confirms this: "We talked to another architect and it was that person's aesthetic."

"Yours didn't seem to be that way at all," Mr. McLaughlin says. "We wanted someone who would really help to do stuff that we could never imagine. ... We thought you might be a good candidate and [when] we started talking with you, yes, 100 per cent."

Ms. Ely, they say, asked all the right questions, challenged them



Above right: A wood slat screen divides the entryway from the dining nook. The layout, conceived by architect Wanda Ely and project manager Fabian Grieco, includes four distinct areas – foyer, dining, kitchen and living – with little in the way of walls or tall cabinets.

with others – such as "do you want big suburban bedrooms?" – and even talked them out of eating up part of their beloved backyard with an extension. Essentially, she made them realize they didn't need more room, just better space planning.

How Einsteinian to realize their talents lie elsewhere (to wit, Ms. Jaspar is a retired professional dancer, and Mr. McLaughlin, who works in the corporate world, a musician at heart) so better to leave things to the professionals! That's why, today, the three can't seem to drum up any negative memories of the renovation, which transformed the main floor and basement of this little semi into a spacious, light-filled abode tailored specifically to Ms. Jaspar's and Mr. McLaughlin's (and four-year-old son Jaspar's) lifestyle.

Sitting at the long kitchen island that dominates the centre of the plan, Ms. Ely reveals a few of her space-gaining tricks: spinning the entryway from a long

corridor reaching deep into the home to a horizontal one that spans its width; a winder at the bottom of the staircase to shorten it; dissolving the back wall into an enormous sliding glass door to bring outdoors in; and creating an outdoor room via a trellis.

"So, a couple little tweaks to the standard way these houses are laid out," Ms. Ely says. "Not that they're easy tweaks to make." So much space was gained, in fact, that Ms. Ely and project manager Fabian Grieco were able to create four distinct areas – foyer, dining, kitchen, living – with nary a wall or tall cabinet.

No, only a wood slat screen (like the one the couple had coveted) divides entryway from dining nook, with remaining transitions achieved through flooring and lighting changes, the low sheltering of the wood-clad kitchen ceiling and its gorgeous windowed backsplash, and a wall of warm travertine to denote the living area.

Below that travertine, Ms. Ely



took Mr. McLaughlin's love of music into consideration – specifically that recorded onto vinyl records – and drew up a piece of custom millwork that, at the flick of a switch, ingests the flat screen television so that attention is refocused onto the red turntable and the racks of LPs below it, or to the opposite wall containing thin shelves that display records currently enjoying high rotation.

"There's a real tactile feel [to vinyl], you're interacting with the music – don't get me wrong, I love Spotify, I like letting it just run – but you have to engage with the record player," Mr. McLaughlin says with a twinkle in his eye. "The way that we wanted it to be set up was we could sit here and have a glass of wine and listen to records and talk ... and Wanda really helped bring that vision [to life]."

In the newly dug down basement, the family room also speaks to the couple's love of music, since, on the wall hang electric guitars and a bass ... which

now get played because they don't have to be hauled upstairs to find a cozy spot for noodling.

Money was saved by installing standard IKEA cabinetry in some places, hacking it into a custom look in others, and saving the expensive, custom millwork for high visibility areas.

The couple also held back on renovating the second floor: "We couldn't afford the entire house," Ms. Jaspar says. "Right before we were supposed to start, we questioned if we were making the right decision. ... Wanda was a therapist one Sunday afternoon for us," she says with a laugh.

"That's not uncommon, either," adds Ms. Ely, who says the project took only eight months to complete last year.

"We have no regrets," Ms. Jaspar says. "It was the least stressful thing of the pandemic." Proof, then, that it pays to peek into a few open-curtained windows, dream, and then seek out the right person to turn those dreams into reality.