



## SECOND TIME'S STILL A CHARM

*Beauty outdoors, bright airiness indoors*


BY SARAH B. HOOD • PHOTOGRAPHY: STEPHANI BUCHMAN

*(Opposite) Heather Miller's painting "Early Morning Walk," showing a goat on a leash, provides a touch of humour in the living room.*

**IMAGINE THIS.** A young couple with two children find a dream home and live through an extensive renovation to make it perfect. Then the stork comes calling again... with twins! This is exactly what happened to clients of Shirley Meisels, the principal designer and owner of Toronto's MHouse Inc.

When the couple moved into a larger space, they turned to Meisels for a second time. The designer was already familiar with their tastes,

and working with some of the elements of their first house, has given them a new home that's elegant and a little daring, with a few familiar touches and plenty of room for growth.

The gracious 3,500-square-foot Edwardian house in the Casa Loma neighbourhood showed promise from the start. "The bones and the structure of the home were really great," says Meisels, "but it was starting to look a little dated and tired, and a bit disjointed." 



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Originally, the clients, still recovering from renovation fatigue incurred in their previous home, were looking for simple, cosmetic changes that they expected they would redo in the near future; however, they loved the results so much that they may not feel the need to update for several years.

To solve the sense of disjointedness in the house, Meisels unified the floor treatments. On the ground floor, she stained oak and pine flooring one colour.

Next, clean white walls offered a blank canvas against which to curate a collection of art and design pieces for this pair of sophisticated urban professionals who are, in Meisels' words, “cool” and “willing to take risks.”

A notable feature of the home is its grand and welcoming foyer, suffused with oblique natural light. It's dominated by a unique art piece that, at first glance, resembles a huge encaustic painting, but which is actually a pair of cupboard doors, executed by Murray Duncan of Hardware Interiors; the graffiti-like inscriptions are a jumble of important family names and dates. *✍*

*Small changes to the existing kitchen design, including repainting the window frames charcoal updated the look.*





*(Opposite) The transparent plastic display cases would look at home in a modern art museum; here, they provide chic storage for placemats.*

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A simple storage bench—one of several custom pieces from Commute Home dotted around the house—and a rug, dyed in a rich purple, complete the space. “When you walk into the hallway, you get a good feeling for what else to expect; it’s edgy, modern, exciting, bright,” says Meisels.

The foyer leads into a living room that combines the simple clean lines of Mid-century Modern-inspired furniture with colourful accents: an indigo Bensen armchair and

footstool; an aubergine feathered African juj hat over an ornate antique fireplace (painted a matte charcoal); and the acid greens and yellows of a Murano glass collection.

The adjoining dining room is grounded by a solid, massive harvest table with eight chairs. Their classic lines hardly conjure up their original location: the cafeteria of a seniors’ residence. Meisels had them dipped and reupholstered; like the table, they gleam with subdued reflections. Above these earthbound pieces soars a seemingly fragile custom chandelier from Commute Home that draws the eye as it illuminates the space.

Beyond the dining room, the 445-square-foot kitchen is family central. Clever shelving that cuts across the side windows was already there, but Meisels transformed the room from its French country decor to industrial modern. She updated the backsplash and cupboard hardware and added a custom walnut storage unit that provides an intimate laptop nook. The central focus is a Paola Navone table with a weighty slate top, surmounted by a graceful ceramic light fixture, retained from the family’s previous home. *EF*





The master bedroom is simple and dignified with its earthy tones and a bold wallpaper resembling African mudcloth. A spare, rectilinear Jens Risom leather-topped table and Saarinen chair stand in for a working space. “Everybody uses laptops now, and everything is wireless, so we didn’t need to set up an office in the home, but they’re both working professionals, so I thought that would be a nice little writing desk for them,” Meisels says.

It is in the children’s rooms on the second and third floors where whimsy is really apparent. Fanciful wallpapers, candy-shop colour schemes and cartoon-like art create playful spaces where young imaginations can run free. “Children’s bedrooms are a chance to be as crazy as you want,” she says. “That’s one place where I really like to have a lot of fun.”

For the boy: a black and white forest, a Sputnik light fixture and a Darth Vader clock. For the girls: pinks and springy greens, with oversized floral prints and a profusion of brilliant throw cushions they can mix and match.

“The homeowners really trusted me and let me guide them,” says Meisels. “I think we ended up with the best product for them because they had respect for my experience and knew I was going to deliver the look they wanted.”

*Few children are lucky enough to have design pieces in their bedrooms, such as the Mozia clock by Giovanni Levanti (Right, top) or the Saarinen Tulip chair (Right, bottom).*



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