



Framed black and white family photos add a personal touch in the dining area.  
**Ceiling fixture, RH; dining table, LD Shoppe; dining chairs, Ton Canada.**

# Staying Power

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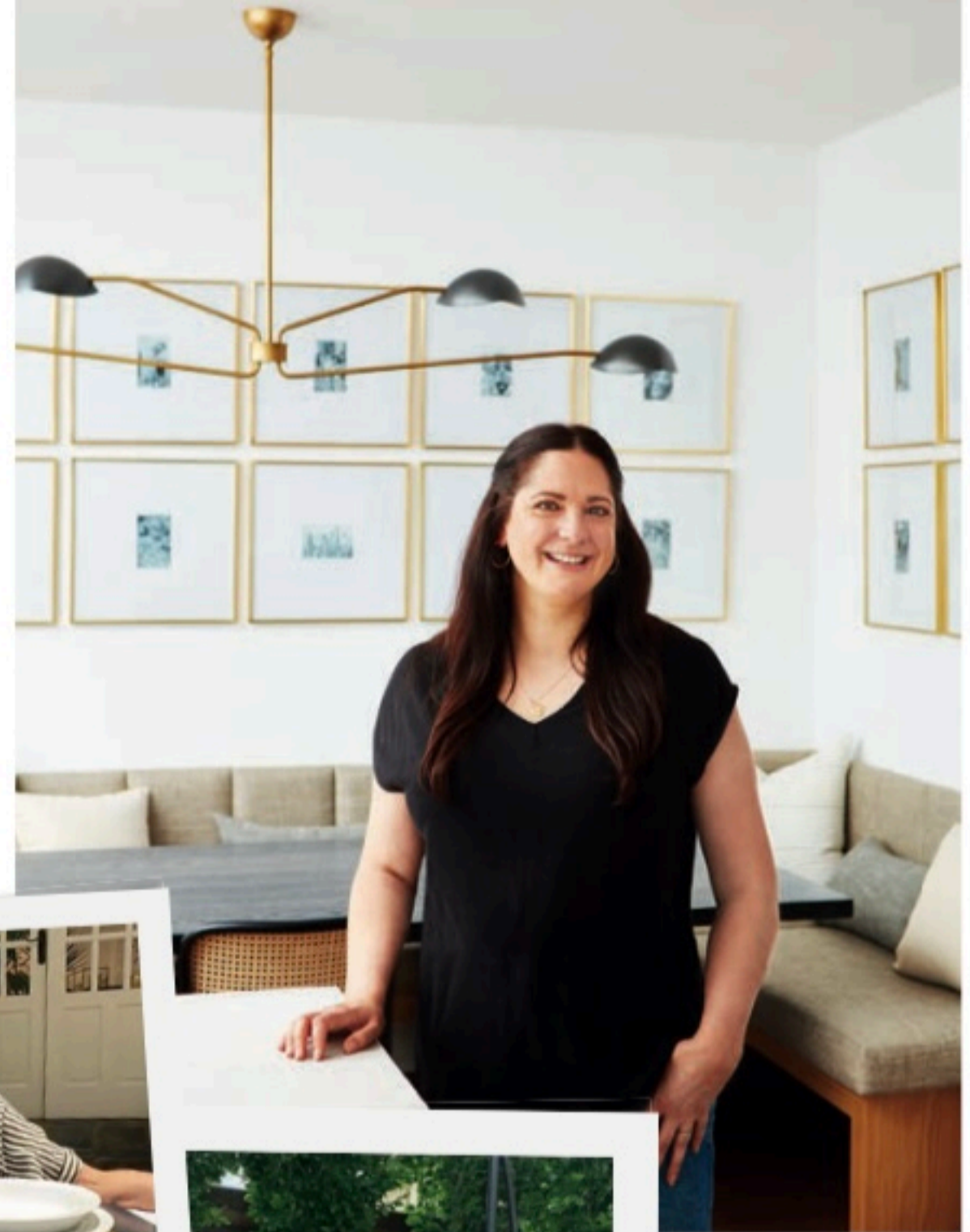


## A GLOBAL JET-SETTER PUTS DOWN ROOTS IN A WELCOMING RETREAT THAT'S AS UNIQUE AS A FINGERPRINT.

**HOME, THEY SAY, IS WHERE THE HEART IS.** But for Yolind James, a chic, spark plug-sized woman and self-described “bohemian,” home is simply wherever she is at the moment. Yolind enjoys a peripatetic life, spending spring in Singapore where she was born and grew up, the winter months in Palm Beach, Fla., (until Covid curtailed her travels) and summers in her Toronto condo. But there comes a time when even the most ardent traveller tires of the world of jet lag and connecting flights.

Two years ago, more than a few eyebrows flew up in disbelief when Yolind, a retired health-food pioneer, decided to swap her luxurious condo (with a private elevator!) for a slightly larger

**TOP:** Yolind’s grandkids love to make forts from the cushions on the limo-length sectional in the living room. **Sectional**, Camerich; **coffee table**, CB2; **art** by Florence Victor, Canvas Gallery.



**ABOVE, FROM TOP:** Designer Olivia Botrie; Yolind James splits her time between homes in Singapore and Toronto.



2,150-square-foot, four-bedroom, century-old brick house on a tree-lined, midtown Toronto street. Two of her daughters have houses nearby (another lives in Singapore), and those who know this doting grandmother assumed the move was to provide more space, a pool and a backyard for her five grandchildren, not to mention her two beloved dogs, English bulldog Ruby Tuesday and Kirby, a pug-basset hound mix. But, as it turns out, the real draw was the price — and the home's location on a quiet, dead-end street just steps away from a beautiful park and network of ravines. "I prefer to have land beneath my feet," says Yolind, as Ruby Tuesday happily lumbers through the grass, chasing butterflies. "How could I not buy it? It was ideal!"

Or so she thought. The features that had lured her in were tempting: high ceilings, generously proportioned rooms suitable for entertaining, lots of natural light and a basement that could be transformed into a living space for her year-round housekeeper. But the previous owners had done a patchy interior renovation, and the dated, awkwardly designed kitchen was cut off from the rest of the house. "I originally thought I would just have the wall between the kitchen and dining room removed and move in," says Yolind. "I don't love formal dining or sitting rooms — they seem redundant to me!" Her contractor

Photography by iPhone Baba (Yolind at the table)/Hana McConville (Yolind with the dogs)

Where there was once a wall, a white oak-clad peninsula now defines the kitchen area and provides both storage and workspace. **Tile, Ciot; counters, Quartex Surfaces; range by Thermador, Appliance Canada.** **OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT:** The foyer's watercolour-like mural depicting palm trees reminds Yolind of growing up in Singapore. **Wallpaper, Eskayel; bench, Ikea.** **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT:** Flanking the living room fireplace, custom-made cabinets with caning are inspired by furniture from Yolind's childhood home.



*“I wanted a home where my family could feel comfortable, not a modern museum — Yolind James, homeowner*

Vinyl-covered stools are low-maintenance and grandkid-friendly. A chaise overlooking the backyard is a comfortable place for morning tea. **Stools**, CB2; **chaise**, LD Shoppe; **side table**, Crate and Barrel.

Olivia transformed a nook by the kitchen into a desk with built-in shelves to display Yolind's Chinese dictionaries and encyclopedias.

recommended Olivia Botrie of Toronto firm Dart Studio. "I knew Olivia would be perfect," says Yolind. "She was creative, flexible and understood my vision. She brought my ideas to life, something I couldn't do on my own."

In fact, Yolind was in Singapore during the entire six-month reno that included a down-to-the-studs reconfiguration of the kitchen, refinishing all the wood floors and adding custom millwork designed to resonate with her cosmopolitan tastes. Then, four months were spent decorating. "I wanted a home where my family could feel comfortable, not a modern museum — a place to relax, have friends visit and celebrate festive occasions," says Yolind. "I *live* in my homes. Sometimes, when you have a home designed, there's nothing there of *you*."

Olivia had the wall separating the kitchen and dining area removed and closed in an existing pass-through wall in the dining area to create a corner for a banquette. "The banquette comfortably seats lots of people and encourages lingering over dinner," says the designer. The kitchen revamp was another priority. "The space isn't huge, so we wanted to open it up and make it feel light and bright to better fit the style of the home." Olivia brought the marble tile up to the ceiling and even clad the vent hood to make the kitchen feel more expansive. In the living room, she selected super-comfortable furniture that fit the room to a tee. "Even when you have space, I love using large-scale pieces instead of small, bitsy chairs to create a casual yet cosy spot."

Yolind's heart, soul and personal history are still here in this house: souvenirs from her travels, family heirlooms, including treasured paintings and pieces of blue and white china from her grandmother in England, jade from her father's collection, 40-year-old Chinese dictionaries and encyclopedias from her days as a student at the University of Cambridge and, of course, family photographs.



Like all major moves, but especially now that the pandemic has allowed us time to contemplate our surroundings, this one offered a chance to reset. "I actually let go of a lot of my old stuff when I moved; I bought all new furniture," says Yolind. "Olivia was able to find things that intrigued me so that I could change and feel renewed."

This summer, Yolind's house was finally filled with the happy sounds of her new home life: grandkids cannonballing into the pool, friends and family chatting by the barbecue on the back patio or in the kitchen, and Van Morrison on the sound system. "For me, elegance at home is all about fun and being full of love and laughter," she says with a smile. Turns out, some of the smartest home design choices aren't about what you see but what you *feel*. As usual, come winter, Yolind will be packing her bags for the brutal 24-hour flight back to Singapore. "I've been a traveller all my life, and one day I'll have to consider living in just one place. But right now, this is perfect." **H&H**



**TOP LEFT:** Filled with accent pillows in soft, touchable fabrics, a daybed in Yolind's dressing room provides the perfect sleepover spot for grandchildren. **Wallpaper** by These Walls, Memo Showroom; **daybed**, CB2; **rug**, LD Shoppe.

**TOP RIGHT:** In the principal bedroom, a cabinet beside the fireplace elegantly hides AV equipment. Blackout curtains are layered over blinds to provide jet lag-soothing darkness. **Floor lamp**, **cabinet**, West Elm.

**BOTTOM RIGHT:** "Yolind wanted soft linens in a subdued palette that lend a relaxed vibe," says Olivia.





Amid the neutral palette, a vibrant rug and accent pillows add warmth and colour in the principal bedroom.  
**Nightstand**, Crate and Barrel; **scence**, Wayfair Canada; **rug**, LD Shoppe.

