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# Calm, Cool & Collected

Professional and personal life intertwine as a designer sets out to redesign a home for her family.

WRITTEN BY Meryl Schoenbaum  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY Niamh Barry  
DESIGNED BY Olivia Botrie, Dart Studio





After being in a state of disrepair, the fireplace in the living room was transformed with a poured-limestone mantel that suits the historic home's décor. New built-in bookshelves flank the fireplace, giving the space a timeless, period-appropriate feel.

Layered patterns, colors, shapes and textures combine to add warmth and interest to the home, as seen here.





When taking a home tour, it's always a treat to find out that the featured house belongs to an interior designer who brought their expertise and style to their own home project. This home belongs to Olivia Botrie, creative director of Dart Studio, based in Toronto, Ontario. Olivia and her sister, Jenna Botrie, collaborated on this very special project with the rest of the Dart Studio design team. It involved the transformation of a three-unit rental property into a warm, functional home for Olivia and her family: husband, Tim Dawson; children, Louisa & Toby; and dog, Magnus. Their home is a classic Toronto Edwardian built in 1914.

The design team approached the renovation with a deep respect for the home's historic character, restoring original trim, reintroducing architectural details and incorporating vintage-inspired fixtures, while updating the layout for modern family living. The result is a home that feels classic yet personal to the family.

The Dart Studio team made sure areas with wood elements were softened and brightened with light colors and cozy textiles. The hidden jib door above is a family favorite.





Storage was sorely lacking in the kitchen when the family moved in, so Olivia added lots of it, from floor-to-ceiling built-ins to bins on the island. She chose a calming, earthy color for the cabinetry: Treron by Farrow & Ball.

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Olivia had lots of opportunities to showcase her talent and style in her home's renovations and redesigns as it sorely needed a new lease on life, but the transformation from a three-unit rental property to a family home was not without its challenges. "It was in a terrible state of disrepair," Olivia recalls. "The house had been used as a rooming house, divided into four suites, each with its own kitchen and bathroom. Awkward walls had been hastily built to carve out narrow hallways and it felt unloved and neglected. There was an addition at the back that housed the main-floor kitchen and bathroom, and I quickly realized it would be the perfect space to reimagine as a mudroom and powder room, especially since we park in the back and use the rear entrance every day. A few remnants of the home's original charm remained, but most of the character had been stripped away. I knew I could bring it back to life and restore it to its former glory."

Olivia encountered an unexpected challenge in this project: being both homeowner and designer! "I was involved in every aspect of the renovation, from space planning and permitting through furniture selection and styling, but my biggest challenge was designing for myself! It's always easier with a client; their feedback and parameters help guide the process. In my own home, with endless possibilities and inspiration around me, it was tough not to second-guess or change direction a hundred times. When things got hectic, I leaned on my amazing team to help keep me on track. Their input and perspectives were invaluable."





The photos illustrate the organic way all the design elements coexist, from the solid wood plank floors and chest of drawers to the delicate flowering plant in the window and framed floral prints on the wall.



## DESIGNER DREAM HOME

Olivia had clear ideas of how she envisioned her home to look and perform in a respectful historic-home renovation. “I wanted a warm, functional and beautiful family home for my kids to grow up in,” she explains. “I wanted to reintroduce the home’s original architectural details in a way that felt authentic, as though they’d always been there. My goal was to open up parts of the main floor while preserving distinct, defined spaces that are characteristic of Edwardian homes. Storage was virtually nonexistent, so I made it a priority to integrate as much as possible without compromising the home’s charm and character. In the foyer, for example, we installed a harlequin-patterned tile floor, added beadboard and wrapped the wallpaper up onto the ceiling, a small touch that makes the space feel immersive. I also relied heavily on layered lighting to create a warm, cozy atmosphere. I used a mix of wall sconces, pendants and table lamps to add depth and mood. I have such strong memories of my childhood home – the wallpapers, the fabrics, the little details – and I wanted to recreate that same sense of nostalgia and comfort for my kids.”





Olivia explains her thought process for the home's color palette. "I found an image of a vintage rug I loved and its varied color palette became the foundation for the entire home," she says. "Each hue is softly muted and slightly cloudy, giving it a subtle, timeworn quality rather than something crisp and new. The result is a palette that feels relaxed, lived-in and warmly layered, bringing a sense of calm and quiet timelessness to every space."

## ROOM REVEAL

The designer's pragmatic approach to her aesthetic view is apparent as soon as you enter the home. "We kept the original layout of the foyer and added beadboard paneling around the room. Paired with the harlequin floor tile and patterned wallpaper, the space has a distinctly vintage charm. A wood armoire, repurposed for shoe storage, brings warmth and character while adding much-needed function."

The living room is a favorite place for the family to gather. "We love spending time together over a board game or puzzle, and the square coffee table in the living room is perfectly scaled for both," Olivia says. "On cold winter days it becomes a gathering spot for laughter, conversation and friendly competition framed by the warmth of the fireplace. The original fireplace had suffered years of neglect and despite our best efforts to restore it we decided to start fresh with a poured-limestone mantel that felt timeless and perfectly scaled to the space."

This corner of the kitchen is a perfect example of how juxtaposing elements can result in a beautiful composition. The dark colors of the cabinets look dramatic against the white wall; the hard lines of the wood are softened by the floral arrangement and sunlight.





## GET THE LOOK

OLIVIA'S ADVICE ON HOW YOU CAN RECREATE THESE ROOM DESIGNS.

- **START WITH A MOOD ANCHOR.** Find one piece you absolutely love (a rug, fabric or piece of art) and let its palette and mood guide the rest of your design decisions. For this home, it was a vintage-inspired rug that set the tone for the entire color story.
- **LAYER SOFT, MUTED COLORS.** Choose colors that feel slightly “washed out” or timeworn (what I call color-non-color). These tones feel calm, lived-in and timeless rather than trendy or overly crisp.
- **MIX OLD AND NEW.** Pair classic architectural details or vintage pieces with modern furnishings. The contrast gives a space depth and keeps it from feeling too polished.
- **LIGHT LIKE YOU MEAN IT.** Use layered lighting (scones, lamps and pendants) to create warmth and intimacy.
- **WRAP SMALL SPACES IN PATTERN.** Powder rooms, bedrooms under eaves or cozy nooks are perfect for wallpaper. Nondirectional prints work beautifully when wrapping sloped ceilings or tight spaces.
- **DESIGN FOR REAL LIFE.** Build in storage wherever you can (think hidden charging stations, closed cabinetry and multipurpose furniture). When everything has a place, the design can really shine.
- **TAKE IT PERSONALLY.** The most beautiful homes tell a story. Display books, art and objects that mean something to you. Those elements will make you feel at home.



Flanking built-ins frame the fireplace, offering both beauty and function: the lower cabinets discreetly store puzzles and board games while the open shelves display a curated mix of books, family photos and collected artwork. The walls, painted in Setting Plaster by Farrow & Ball, take on a beautiful warmth in the evening. The soft pink hue seems to glow in the firelight, wrapping the room in a cozy, nostalgic calm.”

The dining room was one of the design challenges faced by the Dart Studio team. “The original dining room had been converted into a bedroom and a dividing wall left behind a narrow 22-inch-wide hallway. The first thing we did was remove that wall to open up the space and create a large, cased opening between the dining room and the new kitchen, instantly restoring a sense of flow and light. We also restored the staircase and added decorative trim along the stair wall complete with a hidden jib door concealing the basement stairs. My kids love the secret door: it’s one of their favorite features in the house!”

If you have a penchant for a certain color when decorating, that doesn’t mean it will look boring: Just add different shades of it, as shown here with the variety of blue hues.





The powder room above was elevated with lively floral wallpaper (Lulie Wallace wallpaper, a playful floral in shades of brown, lavender and blue). The irregularly shaped mirror adds a quirky, whimsical touch that Olivia points out suits the quirky character of the house. The bedrooms at left have wonderful vintage-style furnishings, patterns and colors.

The kitchen was completely reimaged by Olivia. “The original main-floor kitchen was tiny, it occupied what’s now the mudroom, so creating a functional family kitchen that felt rooted in the home’s history was a top priority,” she says. “I knew exactly what color I wanted for the cabinetry: Treron by Farrow & Ball, a muddy neutral green that feels both earthy and comforting. Paired with Calacatta Sponda marble the combination strikes a balance between refined and grounded, timeless and lived-in. The millwork is finished with a classic crown detail that echoes the original window and door casings typical of Edwardian homes, giving the new space a sense of history and belonging.”

Olivia was excited to use wallpaper in the primary bedroom. “This bedroom features charming sloped ceilings typical of a Toronto Edwardian home, a detail I’ve always loved,” she says. “I thought it would be beautiful to wrap the entire room (walls and ceiling) in wallpaper. The trick is choosing a pattern that isn’t directional so it doesn’t appear upside down as it moves across the slopes. I hunted for the perfect small-scale, nondirectional print with a soft cream background and found a beauty by Schumacher. It adds texture, warmth and just the right touch of whimsy.”

## REVIEWING THE RESULTS

Olivia shared her family’s thoughts on their new historic home. “We absolutely love it here. The house feels so personal and so ‘us.’ Every detail tells a little part of our story,” she says. “We’ve already made so many wonderful memories within these walls, from cozy family movie nights to lively gatherings with friends. It truly feels like home in the best possible way.”

Olivia discussed some aspects of the project that stand out for her as both the designer and homeowner. “What I love most is how the house feels: warm, layered and full of personality,” she says. “Every room has its own character, yet the whole space flows together beautifully. I also love how comfortable and livable it is for our family. Nothing feels too precious and everything has a purpose. The lighting, textures and color palette come together to create a calm, collected energy that just feels like home.”

SEE SOURCES, PAGE 113

