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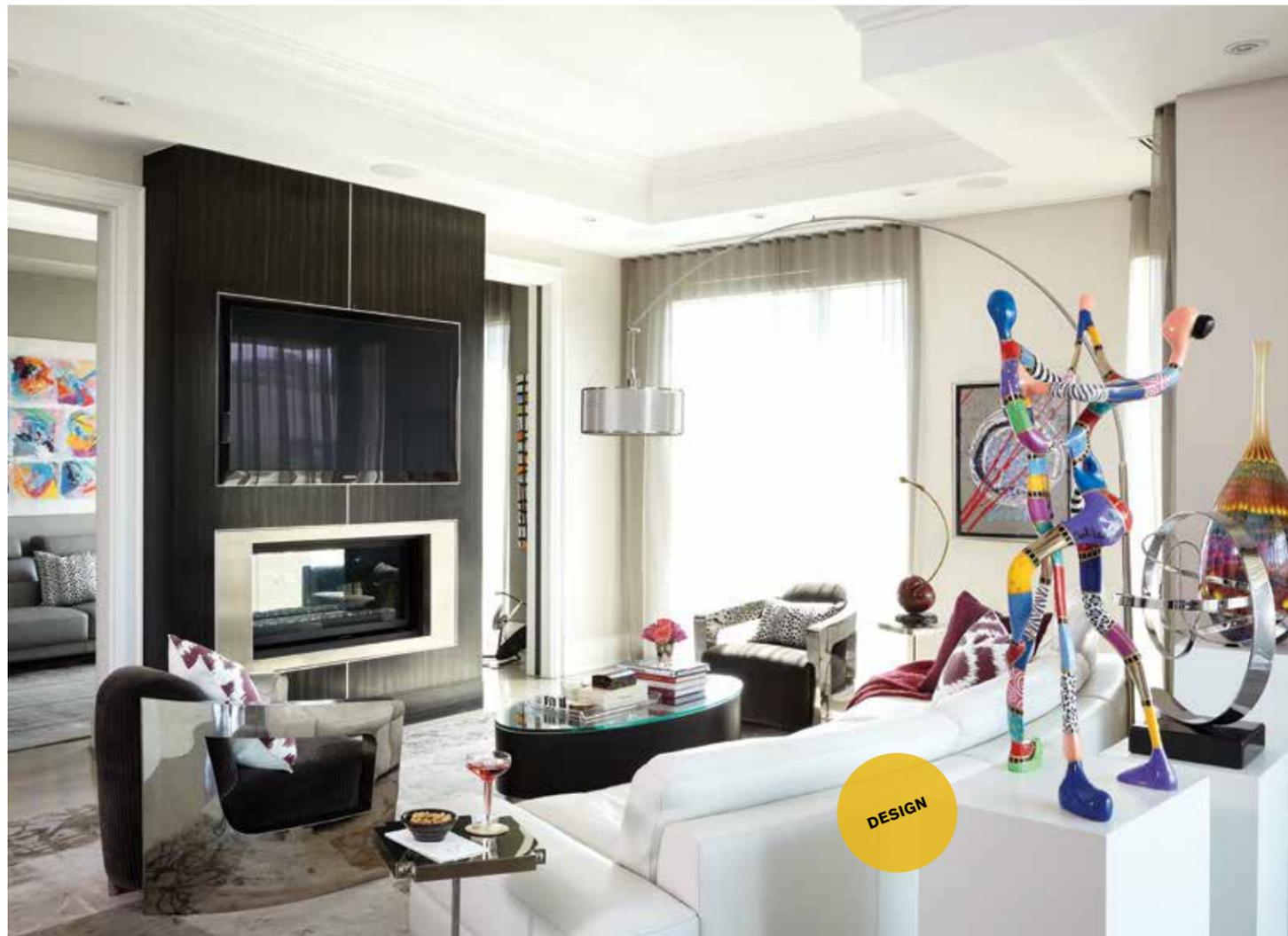
DECADE OF DESIGN

A couple spends 10 years getting their home just right

OBJET D'ABODE

Experienced nesters transform a condo into their dream home

BY LESLEY YOUNG • PHOTOGRAPHY: ARISTEA RIZAKOS • STYLING: CHANELE COTE



IF YOU'D ASKED THESE TWO EMPTY NESTERS where they thought they'd live in their golden years, they would never have said "in a condo." And yet, here they are, relishing their elegant, modern 2,500-square-foot home, which is an eminently liveable art gallery, showcasing personal treasures, in the heart of one of Toronto's trendiest and busiest districts: Yorkville.

Never once had the two considered the neighbourhood, or style of living, in their

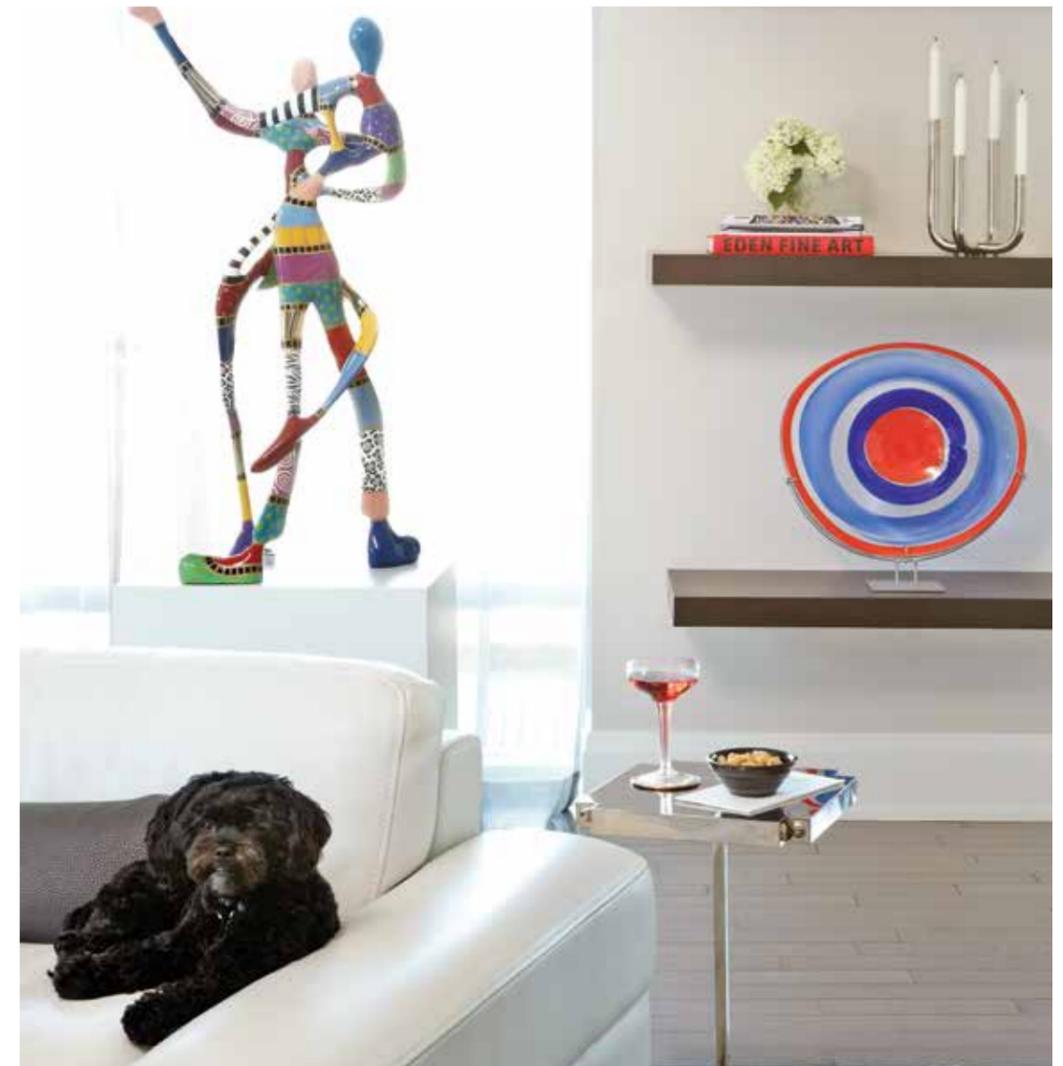
future while raising their two children in a built-from-scratch home in the tree-lined streets of the Yonge-York Mills area. But change was afoot. Their kids were growing up, spending less time at home. They were also spending most of their winters at their home in Florida, and much of the Canadian summer at the cottage.

"My husband suggested it was time to downsize, and he was the one who brought up 'condo.'

I thought 'No way,' " says the wife, who was still deeply attached to their home.

Then one day, they came home from a weekend away to discover they had been robbed, although "pillaged" might have been a more appropriate description.

Gentle curves, soft grays and floating shelves keep the small space from feeling boxy or cluttered. Art is the decor.





“The house was never quite the same to us after that,” she admits. Suddenly, the added security of ‘condo’ was enticing. So, too, was downsizing and starting anew. Still, the homeowner cites a number of condo-living negatives she was not willing to endure: “I didn’t want to have to park underground, or carry up groceries. I also didn’t want to feel claustrophobic.” Lucky then that this particular building under construction featured valet parking, concierge

services, and a happening little village right outside the front door.

Of course, it was the actual condo itself that sold the couple. Nestled in a boutique building (fewer than 25 suites), it was the right size, included a foyer entrance (instead of opening up right into the living space), offered oodles of light and a substantial kitchen. But most important, it had the possibility of feeling like a home to the couple, who were about to experience empty-nesting.

The only difference? There would be no infrequently used space: the two bedrooms, living room, dining room and library would be high-traffic zones and, in some cases, always within eyeshot of one another. And that meant two things: the design should feature and contain only things they needed. One of their most important needs is art by artists whom they appreciate with ardour, and art by interior design, which they also appreciate with equal fervour. 



“Our goal is to focus on our clients, their tastes, preferences and what is special to them.”



Inspired and passionate about the two, they chose to work with Ariel Muller Designs Inc. “We don’t have a signature look that we repeat over and over,” says Muller. “Our goal is to focus on our clients, their tastes, preferences and what is special to them, and to guide and create a beautiful palette and environment with that in mind.”

In this case, art and sculpture were among the few objects making the move with the couple, who have gained the wisdom through past moves

to know it is easier to design with new than to design around old. Their tastes hadn’t changed; both slant to a modern transitional sensibility. With those two aspects in mind, Muller designed by creating focal points of art and sculpture against a neutral backdrop of grey and taupe. Pedestals, floating shelves, nooks and strategically placed lighting were designed so the homeowners’ personalities could be reflected in their choice of art: eclectic, colourful, adventuresome.

Storage was a major consideration in the design of the kitchen and den. Frosted glass doors create interest and dimension against the sleek natural stone backsplash and counters.



The condo's circular foyer and main bathroom demanded focal-point chandeliers. A custom headboard of faux leather was designed to be crisp-edged but cushiony. Handy sconces provide light for the owner's favorite pastime: reading. Each of the panels in the wall behind the bed opens up, providing storage for magazines and books.

In both the living room and dining room, two design pieces served as starting points. The husband found a curved, oversized white leather sofa by Roche Bobois, which would seat plenty when they frequently entertained. That left an empty space behind it, perfect and protected for favourite sculptures set up high. Then both husband and wife spotted and fell in love with an Italian-designed (Terzani) chandelier of looped stainless steel chains. Muller designed a

one-of-a-kind oval walnut table in the Modern style to complement it without competing with it. (The stainless steel seam running through the centre was a creative innovation, and the only way to get such a large piece of furniture into the condo without renting a crane.)

"We buy only things we love," says the homeowner. That kind of confidence comes with experience. So, too, does the esprit that underscores such a major transition in lifestyle.

"We're not afraid to try things new, but at the same time, we're in our golden years, as my friend would say, so that means we bring with us a history of having lived in four or five different homes," says the homeowner. "We know what works, what is important to have and how to achieve a balance of what looks great and what works." ✎

Styling accessories provided by Chair Table Lamp.

