



Floor-to-ceiling glass sheathing acts as the quintessential backdrop for the open-concept family room, adjacent to the kitchen.



LEFT: To create warmth, Leslie embraced textural components like rough-hewn brick and wooden shelving crafted from 100-year-old walnut. **BELOW:** A mixture of woods, including Hawaiian Koa capture a richness that contrasts beautifully with the white backdrop. **BOTTOM LEFT:** The third-storey features a loft-inspired art studio and design space that extends to a roof top deck. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Leslie Mannix relaxes on a grey velvet sectional in the family friendly and inviting living room. "This is an easy house to live in," says Leslie.



CONTEMPORARY Bliss

BY ANDREA COX
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES MCMENAMIN

After 13 years of living in Calgary's funky northwest inner-city borough of West Hillhurst, the Mannix family was ready to make the move to a neighbourhood on the other side of the river. "We just couldn't deal with the traffic on Crowchild. It would take seven minutes to get across and 45 minutes to come back home," recalls designer **Leslie Mannix**, a busy mom with her own design firm – **Leslie Mannix Design Consultants**. And with two active girls involved in activities mainly in the city's southwest core, the logistics of driving were becoming increasingly more frustrating for this involved family.

So Leslie set to work finding the perfect lot, knowing that she wanted to design and build a contemporary home to meet the needs of her growing girls – one is enjoying her teenage years and the other is not far behind. She was drawn to the gentrifying area of Altadore as it offered some of the same sensibility of the community in West Hillhurst – it's an inner-city, eclectic and historic neighbourhood with a huge walkability factor and a great vibe.

But that wasn't such an easy task. "It is almost impossible to get a reasonably priced tear down in this neighbourhood; the builders pretty much have it nailed down," says Leslie, who wasn't deterred.

As fate would have it, during the winter of 2011, a blinding snowstorm hit the city precipitating the serendipitous events that led to the purchase of the perfect piece of land.

Leslie had just dropped her daughter off at an extracurricular activity in Altadore, when the snow started to fall. "The thought of driving home and then back again was far from appealing," she says. So she waited and while waiting a realtor friend called with news that a 67.5 foot lot with a duplex had just come on the market a few blocks away from her daughter's practice. "There wasn't even a sign on the lot. We bought it and signed the deal in four hours," says Leslie with a laugh, adding that as they were walking out the door after signing the papers, contractors and builders were starting to circle. *Continued on page 30*





LEFT: An architectural ceiling cloud in the home's dining room creates a sense of intimacy. **BELOW:** A carved, curved countertop crafted from walnut supports a glass vessel sink framed by a mosaic stone tile backsplash. **BOTTOM LEFT:** The open-riser staircase extends organically from the architecture like an artistically inspired sculpture.



The first order of business was to subdivide the lot into two parcels. The 25 foot inside piece was sold leaving the 33.5 foot lot to become the blank canvas for the family's dream home.

On the corner lot, Leslie created a three-storey, open-concept design with a roof-top deck and lots of windows. "One of the things that I love about a corner lot is the light," she says, adding that the other element that a corner lot allows for is design flexibility. "The home's layout changes exponentially. You can enter into the middle of the hub, rather than from one end, so there are fewer corridors. It flows really well."

To help with the project management and construction process, Leslie hired **Helmut Scholz** of **Calgary Home Design and Construction**. "It was a collaborative effort. I am realistic about what I know and what I don't know. We were doing a flat roof and that was a little scary especially when it comes to things like exterior drainage."

The design goal was to keep the home visually interesting by using setbacks or step outs to change the linear planes, while incorporating three distinct levels for living – the main floor as public space; the second floor as the private bedroom spaces and the third floor as Leslie's art studio and design work space. A great example of visual interest is the second floor hallway. "I could have made it just a straight hallway, but instead it jogs and grooves and you go wow that's kind of a little off and totally cool," she says, adding that from a design perspective it allowed the bedrooms to exude personality. "They didn't have to fit into this straight line structure."

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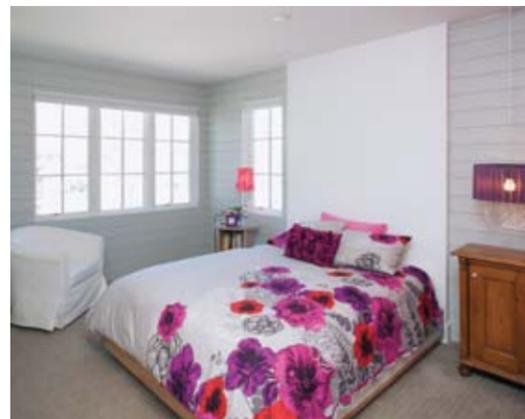


ABOVE: The master en suite exhibits clean-lined simplicity and detailing. **RIGHT:** In her daughter's room, Leslie refinished and painted a wood door infusing it with the texture and patina of a Parisian antique. **FAR TOP RIGHT:** The master bedroom is at once elegant and romantic; a perfect place to delve into a Jane Austen novel. **FAR RIGHT, MIDDLE & BOTTOM:** The girls' bedrooms are linked by pops of pink in the bedrooms, en suites and by a common (secret) lounge room with TV and couch, accessed by sliding doors from each bedroom.



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Another example is the dining room, which features a cloud ceiling to provide a sense of drama and intimacy within the context of the open plan. Metallic-blue leather, mid-century-style kitchenette chairs juxtapose against the warmth of a wood harvest table. Adjacent is a sideboard hewn from an antique Hawaiian Koa wood dresser. "I like to take something contemporary and something traditional and something really weird and just throw it into the mix," says Leslie, adding that she just doesn't feel any pressure to follow prescribed rules. And it works – beautifully.

The room invites interaction. That's why the family eats dinner together at the dining table every night – despite their busy schedule and the ease of eating in the kitchen at the central island eating bar.

"I like to sit across from my kids and have a conversation," says Leslie, adding that there are no expectations with this home.

For the most part she kept the interior palette white and added pops of colour that could be changed out. To counteract the "flatness" that often accompanies the use of white as a backdrop, she added texture with brick and pine beadboard planking on the walls. "What I tried to do was take really traditional and historic finishes and use them in a more contemporary format," says Leslie, noting that contemporary design "falls short in that it can be quite cold." For example, the beadboard panelling offers a twist on the traditional – it's placed horizontally instead of vertically and isn't embellished with any mouldings.

As a result, the home exudes a refined elegance but with a comfort and warmth not often found in contemporary design.

"Some houses bring along some pressure," she says. "This is an easy house to live in. It doesn't seem so pristine that you feel that you are going to wreck it." **OH**

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